PUBLIC MANAGEMENT REFORMS IN THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
РЕФОРМЫ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО МЕНЕДЖМЕНТА В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ АРМЕНИЯ

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This paper analyses the major public sector reforms in the Republic of Armenia: analysis the following research questions: What are the features and priorities of the Armenian public management reforms and what are the ways these reforms have been carried out? The findings of the article suggest, firstly, that public management reforms in the Republic of Armenia (RA) have been comprehensive and included process such as organizational structure and functions of the partnership, IT sector, etc.

Keywords: Public reforms ♦ public and private partnership ♦ government ♦ government relations (GR) ♦ effectiveness ♦ e-governance ♦ e-government ♦ e-services ♦ new public management ♦ e-signature.

В данной статье анализируются основные реформы государственного сектора в Республике Армения (РА): рассматривается следующие вопросы: Каковы особенности и приоритеты реформ государственного управления в Армении, и как эти реформы были проведены? Результаты статьи предполагают, во-первых, что реформы государственного управления в РА были комплексными и включали такие процессы, как организационная структура и функции правительства, государственная служба, государственно-частное партнерство, сектор информационных технологий и т. д.

Ключевые слова: государственные реформы ♦ государственно-частное партнерство ♦ правительство ♦ отношения с правительством (GR) ♦ эффективность ♦ электронное управление ♦ электронное правительство ♦ электронные услуги ♦ новое государственное управление ♦ электронная подпись.

Introduction

Every country represents different traditions and single-reform approaches. Several major reform efforts have been made in the public sector of the Republic of Armenia (RA). In case of most reforms, the Armenian government has had a leading role at state and local levels. Accordingly, the leading role of the government in the RA has two main reasons. First, since its independence (1991) Armenia has had a political culture where the state (the president and executive body) plays a central role in managing the society. The second reason lies in the fact that the initiative does not come off the "upper level". The developed local-self-government system and the idea of "free community" haven't rooted in the consciousness of the Armenian society yet. It is no coincidence that public reforms started with structural and functional reorganization of the government. The point in focus of the reform efforts in-

cluded also HR management practices, public finance, service delivary, decision-making etc. The overall process of public management reforms in Armenia isn't over yet. The continuity of reforms is evidenced by the programs developed and implemented for public and private partnership measures, and especially the IT-sector. According to the Government Program since 2008, these two fields are among the top priorities of public management reforms in the RA [1]. Amongst the things stated, it should be underlined that public management reform policy is designed based on decentralization and effectiveness. It is a fact that public institutions and organizations perform better and are effective if they adopt the strategy [2, pp. 367–394]. We have sought to provide comprehensive answer to the question of strategy in the public sector by exploring the underlying the programs on public sector.

Reforms in Public and Private Sectors

Democratic states periodically introduce reforms into public management in order to adapt the government machinery to changing needs [3, pp. 1–13]. The measures are adjusted and interpreted to fit the national culture and tradition, but political initiatives appropriate to the particular situation of an individual country are also important. During its first years, the Republic of Armenia lacked effective public management mainly in terms of service delivery, effective government organization and functioning. The social need for more effective government and smart customer was critical. Public sector reforms in the RA occur at all levels of administration, both contextual and functional. The Concept of Reforms was elaborated by the Public Administration Commision of Reforms, which was established by the decision of the Prime Minister in 1999. Among the reforms were reorganization of administrative machinery, creation of civil service, organization of territorial government and local-self government etc. [4, p. 7].

The overall process of public management reforms according to several studies in Armenia consists of three stages [5, pp. 11–12]. The first stage (1999–2003) was known as the period of government reconstruction. During the second stage (2003–2008) all government programs focused on service delivery, mechanisms of civil participation and effective, transparent public relations. Finally the third stage (2009–2014) aimed to introduce international (mostly european) standarts of effective governance. In the 2000s, a group of Armenian scholars and public figures published recommendations to improve the public sector, reorganize the government [6, pp. 15–17]. Although many reforms have been implemented since then, however, several have irrelevant and limited in scope. The continuous efforts of public management reform would provide efficient and high-quality services to the public and establishing a legal framework and mechanisms for effective and well-defined regulation [7, pp. 56–65].

The international concept of public management reform and guidelines for good organization proposed by New Public Management (NPM) doctrines was adapted and modified. Typical NPM focuses on issues such as collaboration and coordination within the public and private sectores, mergers, digital or e-government, and citizen participation [8, pp. 1–10]. In many academic workings, definition of public reforms is broad, because it covers many aspects of organizations that provide public services. However, during the implementation of public reforms, all states pursue the same goals. Among them are reduction of public expenditures, effectiveness of state decision-making, Civil Service improvement and quality of public services. Reforms of processes include also changes in the system of budgeting, in the recruitment of public officials, in the management of information etc. [9, p. 3]. Our interpretation of public reforms, in the wide sense, implies that public management is the activity of authorities of the RA in general, the national reform program and normative framework for its successful implementation.

Though all states pursued the same goals during public management reforms, as we mentioned above, there are different priorities of policy agenda for every country. In the 1980–90s in developed countries, those were cooperation between *public and private sectors* and *e-governance*. One of the mechanisms to promote Public and Private Partnership (PPP) in the New Public Management paradigm was the introduction of government relation technologies (GRT) to public sector [10, pp. 1–9]. It aimed particularly to strengthen cooperation among private and public organizations for more effective implementation of laws and regulations and also to bridge the interests of both stakeholders in terms of creating public goods and providing public services. More generally, the outcome of such policy would be the reduction of public spending on public services and goods. In most modern public systems, governments are trying to use GRT, and many alternative mechanisms to ensure the normal functioning of their institutes and to meet the demands of the society. This is crucial for any state-led system, where the government is the key actor of public relations.

According to international practice, public and private sectors jointly use their assets and capacities to provide services to the society. The benefits of PPP are obvious in many post-Soviet European countries. From 1990 to 2006 48 and 13 programs were implemented in Poland and Slovakia accordingly within the framework of PPP [11, p. 9]. They not only share their resources, but also the risks and benefits generated by public service delivery. The state (mainly government) gets the following benefits:

- ***Risk-sharing that create accountability:*** Both public and private organizations explore new opportunities in the market. Only by beeing accountable to each other they can overcome the risks and threats they face;
- ***Reduction of intervention by transferring functions***: Through this tactics government can keep its leading role in the society and all sectores of its life;
- ***Multi-site accessible features:*** Unlike private organizations, governmental ones do not compete on the market. Hence, private enterprises tend to explore multiple resource utilization opportunities that are profitable for society as a whole;

Stable cash flows: By encouraging investments, the government has the opportunity to guarantee stable cash flows into the budget.

Taking into account also the fact that the third Armenian republic is young, the more important thing for the government has been to create a constructive relationship with private (business) and third (non-profit) sector organizations. The development of small and medium entrepreneurship (SME) has a particular importance within the framework of PPP. The government of Armenia has proclaimed this field one of the main priorities in public management reform since the 2000s. In 2002, based on the SME support program, the government of the RA made a decision to establish a special institutional body, the *Small and Medium Entrepreneurship Development National Centre of Armenia* (SME DNC), for strategic planning and implementing policy [12]. The main responsible body to address the problems in this area and elaborating policies and strategies, programs is the Ministry of Economic Development and Investment of the RA. From economic perspective, SMEs play an important role both for the government and the society as a whole. They aimed to create the middle class of social hierarchy, the absence of which can lead to polarization of the society and lack of democratization. The government of Armenia has emphasized the key role of SME in the public management reforms several times. Highlighting thier significance as a key actores in business, the government of Armenia adopted a new list of priorities in this sector, focusing on promotion of entrepreneurship, reduction of legislative barriers, enhancing access to finance, markets etc [13]. According to official data, the number of active taxpayers SMEs in the RA has increased [14].

The overall picture of the situation can be obtained after getting acquainted with the results of the research recently conducted by one of the private organizations in Armenia. The goal of the research was to reveal the key factors hindering entrepreneurial activity in Armenia. The results of the survey showed that among those factores are unequal and unfair competition (54 %), legislative adjustments (23 %), tax system (44 %), corruption (48 %) [15, p. 4]. At the same time, Armenia have improved its rating in the international arena in this field. In pursuance of the World Bank's data (2016), Armenia ranks 35th out of 189 countries in the total business run index. This index shows that business-state collaboration is more efficient as compared to 2009, when Armenia was ranked 43 out of 183 countries in the same index. It is important to mention that in 2009, the government of the RA signed the Anti-Corruption Strategy and Action Plan 2009–2012, which required new methods and tools to reduce the corruption and to solve other problems [16].

Table 1

The official numbers of active taxpayers SMEs of RA form 2014 to 2016

SMEs	2014	2015	2016
Small	1139	4905	5272
Medium	5109	1112	1368
Micro	68117	69939	71606
Total	74365	75956	78246

To improve business and investment climate in the RA in 2011 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the OSCE, the government of Armenia, the Austrian Development Agency, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Development Program [17]. The program provided tools for creating a better state regulatory management system. All unsubstantiated and unnecessary from legal point adjustments were eliminated immediately. All regulating provisions hindering the improvement of the business environment were simplified. On October 13, 2011, the State Agency National Centre for Legislative Regulation Project Implementation Unit by the Government Staff of the Republic of Armenia (NCLR) was established by the Government Decree of the Republic of Armenia [18]. The aim of the NCLR is to significantly reduce the regulations burden on businesses and citizens. During four years of the regulating guillotine, the Armenian government adopted 170 legal acts, of which 120 occured during 2014–15 and reduced budget expenses by 70 % [19].

E-governance Reforms and Their Evaluation

The roots of e-government concept were put in place by the end of the preceding century when electronic sales and business services were launched. However, this proccess reached its peak when governments began reforms toward e-governance system. It implies the use of information technology which improves the quality of public services provided to employees, citizens and businesses [20, p. 8]. In order to make public and private partnership more transparent, the programs of e-governance and e-signature have been introduced. Castells summarized the process of such innovations and transformations under the ideal type of the network society going beyond the sphere of social and technical relationships of production [21, p. 507]. According to him, the concept of network plays a central role in his characterization of society in the Information Age.

Combined with organizational and functional reforms in the public sphere, e-governance was introduced to improve public services and political processes in many countries, including Armenia. This mechanism of public reforms increased transparency, accountability,

publicity, effectiveness and oversight over the public system leading to democratization in the Information Age. In the current information society, it is impossible to have an effective public administration system without advanced information technologies (IT) and e-governance. Thus Pippa Norris noticed that the core institutions that linking citizens and the state has been transformed in the modern societies because the public has become more knowledgeable about public affairs through IT. The author's assumption was that in the US and Western Europe the Internet strengthened democracy [22, pp. 96–101].

After evaluating the democratic functions of the Internet, her conceptualization focuses on primary mechanisms of governments' accountability and participatory democracy. In general, the Internet invests in forms of service delivery and communications via digital channels. More it promotes greater public confidence in the policymaking process and maximizes accountability. The criterion of transparent information is important to representative government. Thus many countries have recognized this issue and developed initiatives designed to tackle social access, involving a combination of state, nonprofit and market initiatives.

Since independence, serious steps have been taken by the government of the RA to modernize IT sector in the public administration system. One of them is open access to information as one of the fundamental human rights. It is enshrined in many legal acts of the Republic of Armenia. The regulation of the information governance of the RA implies a number of legal acts: the Constitution of the RA, the RA Law on Freedom of Information, the Information Security Concept of the Republic of Armenia, the Official Program of Promotion of IT Services and so on [23, pp. 108–112]. The Information law, as a set of legal norms, plays an important role to evolve the information society and IT sector. Citizens' access to information available through digital means can provide feedback to government and it is one the most important requirements of e-democracy. For that purpose, the public system needs efforts to create a common information space, besides economic and political integration, implies a common information system. Obviously, as an integral part of Armenia's public administration reform and democratization processes, the creation of an information society can contribute to the establishment of a civil society. Naturally, the formation of an electronic society is a serious and long-term process, so it does not end with any program or concept.

Effective governance emphasizes on regulating the operation and safety of electronic information to provide citizens and organizations with free access to information. The development of information governance based generally on IT and socio-economic strengths. Development of the IT sector is among the Armenian government's priorities. Since 1998, IT sector has grown at a remarkably steady average rate of around 25 %, which has make it possible to introduce the e-governance. The Armenian government has allocated about AMD 80 million from the state budget per year since 2011, to support the development of IT [24]. According to the Decree of the President of the RA adopted in 2001, the Information Technology Development Council was established chaired by the Prime Minister. The mission of the IT Development Support Council is to become a bridge between the public and private sectors [25]. In 2008, the Government approved the concept of IT development and develops annual programs for promoting services in that sector.

The public administration system of the RA needs positive reforms to overcome the gap between public and private sectors to make governance more effective. These reforms have underscored public services that are high in quality, efficient, transparent, continually improving and responsive to the needs of the people. So mostly the public demands stimulated the need for e-governance and effective government. The mechanisms of e-governance system makes the government's activities accessible to the public, regardless of place and time boundaries. It provides a direct dialogue between the citizens and the government but also control over state institutions and various subjects. In that context, public reforms imply reducing corruption risks, which directly raises the effectiveness of governance.

In the development context, we observed that e-governance was adopted in the RA in 2008, and after a short time, in 2010 the concept of digital society was approved. E-government development has gained a significant momentum. The decision to join the e-government system reflects the government's commitment to the "principles of effective governance" based on the President's Pre-Election Program (2008). The program stipulated full implementation of e-government in accordance with the best international standards and policies. E-governance in the public administration system intended to solve the following problems:

1. **Electronic document circulation**, meeting the up-to-date requirements and especially overcoming bureaucratic delays, as well as accelerating the decision-making process, thus greatly contributes to reducing costs. If government agencies in Armenia used 95 tons of paper in 2009, growth AMD 67 million, in 2010 they saved half the sum. When we take into consideration the fact that the electronic documentation increased by about 30 percent in 2010, then the savings would be even greater [26]. Today, savings in this sector are significant.

2. Increasing interactions between the government and citizens, political officials and businesspersons, making the government more accessible and available. At the same time, e-government tools may reduce the risk of corruption.

3. Ensuring transparency of public administration and local self-governing bodies, which makes the activities of governing bodies more controllable, bringing the government closer to the society [27, pp. 18–19].

Since then, the government of the RA develop annual activity programs of promotion of IT services. The RA government's decision on "Electronic Society Formation (from 2010 to 2012)" concept was also a serious step towards public reforms. It includes strategic provisions for the schedule of events planned in the IT sector. One of the aforementioned events was called the "Computers for Everybody" that intended to foster the expansion of informations resources, and, in the longer perspective, public and private partnership. Citizens often face serious problems when using public services, such as corruption, bureaucratic excuses, inefficient public institutions, long queues, difficulties in getting information, weakly developed communications etc. These and many other problems are in the focus of public policy that suggests the following solutions through IT technologies:

a) provision of high quality services in compliance with international standards;
b) comprehensive and convenient services;
c) interoperability
d) free access to services
e) availability of electronic services (for about 80 % of the population);
f) electronic document management system;
g) information exchange between the state bodies
h) integrated state information system
i) formation of the information society [28].

Many citizens in Armenia use the Internet in their daily life and there is a need for constant access to public services. The Armenian government adopted "the Strategic Program of e-governance" that aims to provide new mechanisms to meet the public demand. It serves also for the provision of electronic services to local self-government bodies (LSGB) [29, pp. 48–49]. Despite existing problems, the LSGBs are slowly but consistently developing newest models of effective management.

One of the effective mechanisms for providing transparent qualified services to citizens through raising public awareness is introduction of information technologies in all areas and levels of governance. Based on that commitment, the government of Armenia has conducted policy of reforms also in the local self-government system. IT serves not only as a tool process but also determine the competitiveness, advantages and capabilities of local government

bodies. Informatization of local self-government bodies in Armenia didn't start immediately after the local self-government system launched (1996). The Armenian government adopted the Concept of Informatization of Local Self-Government bodies and the development of local information society by the Government Decree of March 19, 2014 [30, pp. 1–4]. Over the years, information systems have been introduced in different communities, and the number of computers has increased. As a result, the quality of the work of local government has improved data collection, development, documentation and decision-making accelerated. Public authorities are responsible for the successful implementation of any program. However, the wide use of IT creates favorable conditions for the improvement of the local self-government, efficiency and quality of their activities. An important issue is the introduction of e-governance and e-democracy, which poses certain problems because of the low level of computer literacy, especially in rural communities, where not everyone is ready to take advantage of the opportunities of e-governance.

The approved IT-2016 program, for instance, focuses on a number of key issues: development of the IT sector and improvement of mechanisms to electronic society, creation of a qualitative and competitive educational environment, continues professional development with numerous diverse opportunities for staff trainings in accordance with international practice, difficulties concerning investments and involvement of supranational organizations, positioning in the global markets, lack of modern infrastructure and etc. [31]. The main goal of the program was to ensure Armenia's reputation among developing countries that have advanced IT infrastructures and e-services. It should be noted that Armenia has been a center for software development, industrial manufacturing. Armenia still maintains a great potential for IT development and continues to be a leading country in the region compare to Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran due to a number of factors, like highly competitive labor and workforce, its share in the GDP, number of companies operating in the sector, total circulation growth rates [32]. The availability of qualified Workforce is the first important factor that should be secured primarily through the development of the educational system. Starting from September 2015, there have been five pilot programs in the curriculum of Armenian schools with specialization in physics and mathematics. Over the years, the number of such schools should increase, which will contribute to the further development of the IT sector. To provide the qualified and educated people for the public sector initiatives should be carried out exclusively beginning with schools. This year, target groups in the sector, as analysts expect will reach the following levels (see Table 2) [33, p 54–55]:

Table 2

IT development targets (2018)

Computer equipment of state and local self-governing bodies	100 %
Official public expenditures on domestic IT products in total domestic budget	> 1 %
E-services share in total services provided by public bodies	80 %

The main outcomes expected from this program were: to analyze IT development trends and challenges, to raise public awareness, to make new investments, to expand collaboration with the Diaspora, International organization and countries.

Under the loan agreement signed between the RA and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, in 2011 "E-Society and Innovation for Competitiveness" (EIC) Project for Armenia was launched [34]. Despite substantial improvements in e-governance, Armenia is still far behind EU countries in terms of public e-services. There are many things to do in this direction. Armenia should pay attention to innovative policy, human capital, financial, tax policies as well as investment projects in this area. Analyzing the main achievements of e-

governance and e-democracy according to "Armenia Development Strategy for 2014–2005" and the prospects for the development of e-democracy, we can state the following outcomes [35, pp. 137–140]:

- provision of e-visas;
- introduction of ARCA electronic payment system;
- implementation of "Mulberry" electronic management system (designed for efficient management of document flow, centralized storage of electronic versions of documents);
- use of electronic (digital) signature and documentation;
- electronic system to submit tax documents;
- electronic licensing system, shopping;
- e-business register (Electronic Register of the government of the RA)
- Identification cards (ID) for Armenian citizens;
- electronic system of receiving applications of the Intellectual Property Agency
- legal information system of the RA, electronic database of legal acts of the RA
- electronic system of the Real Estate Ceadatser of the Government of the RA [36].

It should be noted that democratization of the public management is not a unilateral process. It is necessary not only to carry out reforms at the international and state initiatives, but also to come up with active public initiatives. In many countries, there are several examples of civic initiatives creation of websites by scientists, civil activists, students, or ordinary citizens for example. They are quite active and are able to raise specific issues and take steps to address them. However, such initiatives in Armenia are still few, and not very independent. More frequently social sites become a platform for the RA citizens to raise and discuss different issues. In this context, the portal e-citizen.am portal is worth mentioning; through it every citizen who has an identification card (ID) can receive free e-mail from the state and correspondence from government agencies. The main goal of this program is to ensure the participation of citizens in the public administration process and the elimination of barriers between the state and citizens.

Taking into account the development processes in the public management, contemporary public needs, as well as the IT system we can state that these are the components of public reforms and development of public administration system policy. IT have a serious political and economic role. Their widespread distribution qualitatively transforms social life and leads to changes in political, economic, social and other areas. It is difficult to imagine effective public administration without IT introduction, so many states have already started initiating their own systems. This insures effective managerial functions, strengthens the link between private and public sectors. It contributes to the economic development of the country, as well as the increase of productivity and productivity and efficiency of public servants by saving time, financial and labor resources and so on. It provides also favorable conditions for the development of civil society, as citizens have access to extensive information about the activities of the public administration system. The introduction of the electronic governance system ensures changes in relations between the government and the society. It can provide a direct and open dialogue between citizens and the government. Armenia tends to become a regional IT leader because it has competitive advantages over its neighbors. The development of this sector is one of the priorities of the Armenian government. The IT investment policy is implemented by the Ministry of Economic Development and Investments of the RA within the frameworks of several programs and concepts ("E-Governance Strategic Plan", "E-Society Concept in Armenia", etc.). Today, government agencies have their official websites, and many services are now available electronically. Undoubtedly, financing of programs implemented in Armenia is rather small, but this does not prevent the sector from achieving quite serious results. IT introduction is a serious advancement for Armenia. Most

of information about the public administration system is available in electronic form. And this, in turn, should stipulate the government's next step toward public reforms should indicate the key role citizens play in the decision-making processes. The work done by the government is immense, but insufficient because of the lack of civic initiatives. Reforms in the sector should be continuous, relying on the best international practice. For civil initiatives, it is necessary to raise the level of awareness and the level of literacy, to provide feedback. Because of continually increasing use of computers in our daily life, computer literacy and competency become an essential requirement. As long as citizens do not have adequate knowledge and awareness, they cannot take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the e-governance system. The low level of computer literacy is also an issue for public service. The government proposes to promote school, university and post-graduate e-education in Armenia, which will help raise awareness of the use of IT among Armenian citizens. In line with objectives outlined above the government should institutionalize mechanisms to ensure effective feedback between citizens and government as an integral part of every stage of the policy cycle.

Conclusion

The public administration system of the newly independent Republic of Armenia after the collapse of the USSR in the 1990s failed to meet the international standards and requirements and inefficiency was remarkable, indeed. It was conditioned by the specific heritage of the Soviet system of governance on the one hand, and by the "hard starting" point on the other. As a result, the need for public reforms became an agenda item in the RA.

Since 2000, the government of the Republic of Armenia has adopted the public management reforms and policy. This policy has been implemented in stages. In the first two stages, the task was to form and reconstruct the public administration system as a whole. The third stage, on the other hand, conditionally must be considered the period when a proposed and implemented program can be met with the effectiveness of public administration. Since 2009, the adoption of public and private partnership instruments and anti-corruption strategy has been indispensable. It is noteworthy that part of the programs implemented at the national level has been approved within the framework of international cooperation. Since 2009, public reforms have been aimed at promoting public and private partnerships and participatory democracy. In these terms, the introduction of e-governance and other tools to public administration system of Armenia had had crucial importance. The government of Armenia has allocated huge financial resources to support the development of IT sector. Though, since 2009 several pilot, long-term programs and strategies have been launched, international and national indicators of effective governance are still low.

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