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«Forecasts and scenarios of political developments are often based not on professional policy analysis, but, in the best case, on intuition, and in the worst case — on the views of other more «itative» or more popular experts, usually foreign,» said Anar Musabaeva, a political analyst, in her article written exclusively for the Institute for Public Policy (IPP).

What is the role of the expert community in making important policy decisions in Kyrgyzstan? Is it possible for the expert community to act as a connecting link between the government and civil society, and what obstacles to this are there? This article discusses the key aspects of development of expert community in Kyrgyzstan and gives recommendations for addressing some of the problems identified.

Factors determining the role of the expert community in decision-making

The problem raised in this article has already been discussed earlier in connection with the role of the class of intellectuals in the development of the country and in development processes of civil society and the mechanisms of public (social) policy in the context of democratic institutions. Recently, the role of experts began to be regarded in terms of management processes and political decision-making.

The topic of the role of the so-called think tanks in the modern world has reached us, although its discussion in the analytical community of Kyrgyzstan is quite sluggish.

Given the poor quality of management decisions taken at the level of government and increasing number of careless decisions taken in various fields of the life of our society, the following questions become logical: Where are our intellectual resources? How are they used in decision-making system? Do public officials listen to expert advice and recommendations?

These questions are really puzzling, especially given that, in our country, one can observe the *expert syndrome*. There are so many various experts as well as expert groups, and yet it is hard to say that processes of political decision-making have some intellectual «recharge» and are based on recommendations of experts. Which factors affect the value and role of experts in management processes?

From my point of view, we can distinguish **several factors:**

- Distorted perception of the role and value of the expert community among participants in social and political processes;

- Problems of development of the expert analytical community and the issues of formation of intellectual products in the analytical services market;

- Traditions of political culture and lack of demand for expert services, or poor articulation of the demand

by decision-makers (DM);

- Lack of mechanisms for translating expert advice into the policy.

Each of these factors includes many aspects. We will try to consider some key features of the development of expert community of our country at the present stage.

1. Distorted perception of the role and value of the expert community among participants in social and political processes□

Who is an expert? How to distinguish experts from non-experts? Are there professions of an expert and an analyst? What is the difference? Such questions typically begin discussion on the status and role of expert community. Sometimes, they even talk about who is of higher rank — the analyst or the expert? All these questions and discussion suggest that people begin to understand the role of intellectual resources in the development of the state and especially in decision-making and that people are searching for answers to important questions related to the role of intellectual forces. On the other hand, these discussions indicate weak potential of the expert community and a lack of knowledge and understanding of what constitutes the policy analysis and analytical product. In its turn, this potential is understandable, given the level of development of political science in the country, particularly for applied policy studies that are still in embryonic state in Kyrgyzstan.

Professional use of political analysis is a very important factor in changing the process of policy-making. The problem is that in Kyrgyzstan, there are very few professionals who are professionally engaged in political analysis. It should be noted that forecasts and scenarios of political developments are often based not on professional policy analysis, but, in the best case, on intuition, and in the worst case — on the views of other more itative or more popular experts, usually foreign.

One of the important phenomena of expert analysis communities' development in Kyrgyzstan is the *expert syndrome*. It's no secret that now it became fashionable to be an expert in a particular area. It is even worse when people act as experts in

general, or when other people consider them as such. Due to these factors, the concept of «expert» has been devalued, and this circumstance plays against the expert community. For example, in the eyes of many public officials, an expert is a member of some NGO, and semantically, this word is rather dismissive.

The image of an expert as an NGO member was formed largely due to the fact that those organizations that offer various analytical services, engaged in applied research of various problems and offering some policy recommendations, are in most cases registered as nonprofit organizations. Such organizations receive financial resources for research from international donors, and in this sense, they are perceived by many people as NGOs.

On the other hand, in the NGO sector, there are really focused significant intellectual resources, which, being engaged in certain activities, indeed have information on their field and are well aware of trends and facts in the area of their research. Finally, some NGOs are engaged in advocacy of certain socially important topics, for example, gender equality, children's rights, public control over activities of state bodies, preventing the spread of AIDS, etc. These NGOs are engaged in advocacy and often present their activities as public expert activities. State bodies' reaction to their activities is controversial, and they have claims to the NGOs.

State structures tend to consider the public activities of NGOs as non-constructive activism, opposition to power, bravado, working for foreign audiences and even lobbying on behalf of certain groups and foreign sponsors. State structures express their doubts about the professional level of representatives of civil society. NGOs themselves sometimes give reasons for such attitude. Without false modesty, and without sufficient justification, NGOs often call themselves experts, just because, in their opinion, they have significant information in their field. Often, NGOs also show misunderstanding of state specific apparatus and intervene against its hierarchy, conservatism and bureaucracy.

In their turn, government officials have neglect attitude to NGOs and experts working in non-governmental sector, due to simple jealousy, because officials are reluctant to let NGOs in areas that are considered only «theirs». In addition, there are stereotypes that NGOs in no way should be involved in politics. There is also a fear among public officials to be not in the best intellectual form in public debates with NGOs, because officials do not always show the best example of professionalism.

There are also relationship problems between political and expert communities and representatives of the NGO sector. Actually, the task to distinguish clearly between these two groups in the context of Kyrgyzstan is complex enough. Most centers of analytical services in institutional and legal sense are NGOs. Many experts somehow interfere with NGO activities. Part of the NGO leaders are inclined to consider themselves experts-practitioners, showing distrust toward «desk» experts from their point of view, who know nothing about real life. Sometimes this criticism is not without foundation but can be a result of experts' stereotypical vision. Many NGOs are also trying to conduct their political-oriented studies, for example, on poverty, gender equality, access of the population to social services, and collect various information, i.e., they are implementing activities, which require certain analytical capacity and in a sense create self-importance of expert knowledge of NGOs.

On the other hand, experts for whom the analytical work is their profession show some snobbery towards NGOs and their pursuit of analytical work, considering the approaches of NGOs too simplistic.

Perhaps, there is also a feeling of experts belonging to the «elite» and proximity to high-level politics. Government agencies have an easier access to the best experts unlike small NGOs with their limited resources. This is not only the solvency problem of NGOs in obtaining analytical services but also partly NGOs' perception of experts as competitors in obtaining donor funds, short-sighted policies of the leadership of NGOs, skepticism about the usefulness of experts, and partly the closed nature of expert teams that are unwilling to work with NGOs.

Such an ambiguous image of experts is in many respects due to the habit of introducing many people of different professions as experts in the media space. Most often, we see how media «appoint» experts. Media find a good expert (and sometimes, not very good), interview him or ask for comments on various issues and then begin to invite him to various roundtables and conferences and make him a constant source of their . One gets the perception: «If the person is not on television, he is not an expert.» There is substitution of concepts, and it becomes unclear whether a media commentator is also an expert. Television fate of a columnist begins to live apart from him, and it becomes unimportant which education he has, whether his opinion is opinion of an expert, of a simple educated man or of the layman. However, I do not argue that all media commentators and observers are amateurs. It would be too simplistic. Commentators are also different. Some comment on only what they know, while the others comment on whatever topic possible, because they do not want to offend journalists. But this behavior only contributes to devaluation of the word «expert».

In summary, we may say that problems and complaints come from all parties involved in socio-political process.

2. Problems of development of the expert analytical community and the issues of formation of intellectual products in the analytical services market

The debate on development of analytical capacity in the country often revolves around think tanks. In various versions of the translation think tanks are called «factories of thought,» «brain centers,» or «analytical centers.» With reference to our country, I would prefer the term «analytical center.»

Have we the analytical centers? Surfing an online search engine, I found a list of organizations in Kyrgyzstan that provide analytical services on the website «www.open.kg». Having watched this list, we can conclude that it contains

multidirectional organizations: organizations offering a broad or narrow spectrum of consulting services, various research organizations, including those dealing with applied research (marketing, economic analysis), lawyer-type organizations, human rights and training institutions, and NGOs specializing in a particular area. Organizations differ in their institutional forms and perhaps in their sources of funding. In general, there is a quite versatile and large for a small country company of organizations that position themselves as think tanks. Even if we take into account the broader significance of the term «think tank», which most likely was used in the preparation of this list, one would seem to be only glad with presence of so many analytical institutions, providing analytical services. It seems that there is even specialization between them that logically should indicate the presence of market research services.

But are these centers analytic in reality? Can they be considered as think tanks? And is it possible to speak of the market of analytical services? What is the total impact of all these organizations on the processes of policy formation and implementation? Apparently, the answers to these questions depend on the impact of the arguments on the influence of expert analytical community on decision-making processes.

In reality, there are many development problems of the expert community. And in order to make those organizations that have relation to the expert and analytical work not fictional but real think tanks, there should be several pre-conditions.

First, the issues of development of analytical capabilities of expert structures themselves are important. In the current circumstances, analytical capacity accumulation is a matter of the will of representatives of the expert community. Some experts are trying to maintain their professional growth through trials and mistakes and self-education, sometimes with the support of international donor education programs and grants, but not all experts are doing this. Some of them do not even try to self-improve, because they do not see the demand in serious analysts, while the others have no chance to do it, because they do not know how and from whom to learn and gain experience of the analytical work. And there is a

category that does not perceive the analytical work as their profession.

As noted above, there are many problems with development of science, especially applied studies that are designed to use theoretical developments for specific solutions in problematic situations taking place in the current political and social practice.

There are many types and classifications of think tanks. But whatever typology we take, it is necessary to state that development of think tanks in Kyrgyzstan is weak. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, there are no scientific schools in academic institutions. In universities, there are virtually absent the areas of applied scientific research, particularly in the area of political analysis, i.e., there is no basis for development of brain centers at universities. It is also difficult to name the experts from the academic environment that would have the influence on public opinion. Intellectual works of representatives of the academia are oriented toward expanding the list of publications for obtaining academic degrees and positions and are not focused on solution of topical problems of everyday life. Theoretically, perfect for the role of incubators of ideas, universities so far face many obstacles on the way of development of analytical capacity. There is lack of human and financial resources and managerial skills, and there is dependence on government agencies in the form of obtaining official accreditation and, consequently, there is no desire to actively engage in politics.

Nonprofit analytical structures are forced to fight for the resources of donors, which does not allow them to specialize, as non-profit analytical centers have to survive. At the same time, the opposite situation is often observed when large donor organizations, by their long-term partnership with one or more organizations, create a kind of monopoly on the provision of analytical services in a particular area. Such monopolistic organizations jealously protect their own niche, which prevents normal competition and development of alternative solutions, and creates corruption and slows down the increase of supply in the analysis services market.

Another problem node is the question of independence and intellectual autonomy of think tanks. We must state that to date, our analytic centers do not formulate the agenda.

The agenda in this case means not the Soviet understanding of the agenda as a discussion list at a meeting. It means a set of themes and topics that are the most important in the current context and introduction of this set into conscience of the mass public audience. Who and how forms the agenda at the moment? Analytical community does it very rarely. Most often, the agenda is formed by international donors and government agencies. Donors have financial resources, and local analytic structures are trying to fit in the donor agenda.

Even if they have something to offer as an agenda for the country and its development, it is hard to do so, because the expert community has few resources to work on their own agendas. Sometimes, donors and government agencies jointly shape the agenda that meets their corporate interests but are not necessarily of relevance and priority issues for society. It also happens that donors are mistaken in choosing the areas of investment for various reasons — for reasons of their own ignorance, for reasons of corruption or incompetence of local players. As for the state, it shapes the agenda from its point of view, choosing the topics that help legitimize the chosen policy.

An essential problem of the expert community of Kyrgyzstan is the sluggish development of proposals of analytical products. According to the Global Index of think tanks, there are eight (8) such centers in Kyrgyzstan. However, it is difficult to see the work of such centers since there are limited opportunities to see the results of their work. Very rarely may one read the transcripts of expert meetings or presentations by the experts of think tanks. There are various «expert hangouts,» various debate platforms, and expert communities of a club type, organized by individual experts or expert groups.

But there is no exhaust of such sites in the form of ideas, concepts, public appeals to the officials, etc. The question of how experts are raising the awareness of general population, especially of active groups, is also important. In many countries, think tanks often broadcast their findings and developments for the population in the form of clear and concise reviews. Through such actions, think tanks play their role as an intellectual bridge between the government and society by initiating public discussion of acute problems of domestic and foreign policy and acting as a tool for civilian control. To date, our society is on its own, the expert community is on its own, and so is the government. Just like drifting icebergs.

Finally, there is a big problem with the promptness of expert-analytical community with the ability to respond to pressing current problems. This is due to the lack of general independence of the analytical community, including in the formulation of an independent agenda. But the poor efficiency of our expert community is connected with a fear of responsibility in critical situations, which is, on the one hand, connected with their weak potential to influence the public opinion, fear of the state machine and lack of confidence in their own skills. The tragic events in the south of the country last year showed the unwillingness of our expert community to respond to the situation and make recommendations that meet the current crisis. We are talking about a prompt expert response, not on preventing forecasts of the political crisis, which, without any doubt, is also extremely important. Non-readiness of the expert community to work more actively and efficiently, his detachment from the decision-making in the crisis contributed to the fact that politicians, journalists and NGOs took the reins in the issues of ethnic relations in the country.□

3. Traditions of political culture in the relationship between the powerities and the expert community. Lack of demand for expert services on the part of decision makers

A major factor influencing the role of the expert community in decision-making is the tradition of political culture. The political culture of our society has long been characterized by closeness of the political process and the lack of pluralism. In this

system, there was no place for mediating structures such as think tanks, which would play the function of a connecting link between the government and society. Political decisions were made by leaders, and influence on their decisions were made by a group of interests, and there was no clear and certain regulatory system of lobbying. Attitude toward intellectuals was in the spirit of the Marxist understanding — their function was legitimation of the political elite. Therefore, even if the state was interested in analytical support, it should have been done with the state affiliation. Analytical structures were not independent. This political tradition is largely preserved to this day.

Governmental structures are rarely interested in the products of truly independent think tanks. Government officials often consider themselves competent: they want to dominate and make decisions that primarily meet the interests of the ruling elite. Government agencies always think they know better the problems and needs of the population. Therefore, their attitude to independent experts is condescending and they follow the slogan: «If I want, I will let them be closer, and if I don't want, I will not let them approach.» This approach, of course, rarely implies the interest in independent analysis and objective findings and conclusions.

Kyrgyz politicians often overestimate their abilities to independently analyze the current situation, identify problems and predict events and processes. Experts are regarded as distributors of ready-made solutions. Some experts agree with such a role, while the others disagree. Many politicians publicly declare that they prefer to solve problems independently, without the involvement of experts. Sometimes, the elites resort to the services of analysts when they cannot make a decision themselves. But there is no institutionalization of these relationships, and there is utilitarian attitude to experts. As a result, we are seeing the consequences of hasty and inefficient decisions in different areas. The tragic events in April and in June 2010 were the results of mistakes: errors in making and implementing policy decisions.□

Take, for example, the sphere of foreign policy, which is extremely important for a country like Kyrgyzstan. Many steps in foreign policy are often made

spontaneously, intuitively, and are usually associated with personal preferences, private interests of politicians and the need for foreign financial support. However, there is no systematic information-analytical support of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs either within it or in the environment, since there are no think tanks dealing with foreign policy and international relations. Untrained and ill-considered decisions continue to be a problematic point of our politicians. Such actions weaken the system of government and give rise to distrust in government and politicians.

It is also early to talk about the development of party-affiliated think tanks in the country. This is connected with the nature of parties and their level of development. Secondly, it is connected again with political culture. To date, no one can truthfully say how a political party shapes its reaction to events and phenomena, for example, in foreign policy. Everyone is used to the fact that leaders say first one and then another thing.

Policy makers are interested in political technologists. Why? Because they are interested in manipulation skills of experts in order to achieve their own goals during election periods. Image-makers and PR managers are demanded by politicians but not serious professional analysts. Why should they worry about the basics of foreign policy in order to take into account the notorious national interests of the country? Why should they worry whether the country is to remain a social state in 5-10 years? And if they do not worry about it, why should they spend money for analytical services? It seems quite logical.

4. Lack of mechanisms for translating the recommendations of experts into policies

Lack of infrastructure for translating the recommendations of the expert community into policies, or, in other words, lack the mechanisms for the use of expert knowledge in decision making, is one of the problematic questions of the

expert community relations with the state.

The state did not build good analytical structures affiliated with the state and did not learn how to use the intellectual resources of independent think tanks. Government officials prefer to invite external advisers, and personal relationships and personal trust play the most important role here. With regard to local experts, they are invited occasionally for specific issues or projects, and usually personal connections also have the determining role here.

Formats of public policy have not yet become an integral part of decision-making. However, we must work in this direction, including think tanks. For example, think tanks could do more for political education, government and citizens through their analytical products, involving active citizens in the process of reflection and public discussion of important issues.

To be eligible for some kind of regularity and institutionalization of relations with the government, think tanks must be permanently active. The main purpose of think tanks is not to conduct basic and applied research, although many think tanks are involved in such work. The main purpose of think tanks is to play the role of mediator, sought to collect information and synthesize knowledge offering solutions for consumers. Lack of resources, both financial and human, making the task of continuing operation of the complex, prevents the structuring and expertise of think tanks. Donor organizations, aiming at developing democratic institutions, must avoid the temptation to invest their resources in the state structures while ignoring the need to support analytical resources and help them influence decision-making.

In the absence of public plural channels of influence on politics, selfish ambitions of the most influential groups and their lobbyists will prevail, and public policy will continue to be Italian and corrupt in its . Today, there are only a small number of donor programs with small budgets aimed specifically at the development of think

tanks and the capacity of their experts. Among these programs, there is a program of the Norwegian Institute of International Relations, Open Society Institute, which has been working in the country for several years.

There is no other way for the expert community to influence the process of political decisions making but to participate in this process. Therefore, we need to introduce various formats of interaction with power institutions through holding seminars and conferences and working through the media, in order to shape an agenda and determine the format and directions of public debate on important public issues. Think tanks should have access to politicians. In our reality, the access to policy makers is based on personal relationships and loyalty. However, they can be used in a positive way to get access to information and involvement in decision-making processes.

Taking into account the above said, it is possible to make a few recommendations.

Recommendations

Government agencies

— The state machine is conservative, hierarchical and slow. State officials do not have time or skills to quickly analyze all the facts, prepare an overview and discuss the implications of a decision. Therefore, resorting to the aid of expert-analytical structures is important and necessary in order to avoid errors and mistakes in policy, which are always too costly for the country and, above all, for its citizens.

— It makes sense to listen to alternative views of experts on the same subject to make the best decision. Public bodies should not focus on one, even if he is an «itative» and trusted partner.

— Think tanks should be involved in a variety of formal legitimate proceedings as

experts. Such procedures may include participation in the parliamentary committees, consultative meetings, or contract work.

- There must be provided legitimate channels of interaction of analytical structures with government agencies, including think tanks, opposing the power or having an alternative point of view.

- The state should develop a system of state orders for research products to local organizations on key policy areas on a regular basis. State leaders must finally pay attention to the development of local analytical capacity. It is impossible to keep on using «foreign brains.»

Think tanks

- To be a subject of politics and influence decision-making, it is important for analytical centers to conduct active policies, first of all, to advance their research products.

- It is necessary to publish their analytical works and analytical products to form a proposal in the form of regular or periodic analytical reviews on important issues of the country and offer them to important subjects of political processes.

- It is important to maintain multi-format types of dialogue and communication both with government institutions and civil society organizations, with individual politicians and other expert communities.

- Think-tanks can use any legitimate channels of access to politicians and decision makers, including personal contacts, media, contacts with political parties, etc.

- Think tanks need to be more active in formulating the agenda for the country. Even taking into account the dependence of many analytical centers on international donor assistance, if desired, media and electronic resources can be used as channels for shaping and setting the political agenda. Thus, analytical centers might become pre-act rather than reacting post factum to the agenda, which has already been formulated by other participants in political processes.

— It is necessary to develop the skills of prompt responding to various operational problem situations, especially in times of crisis.

Academic structures

- To develop special training programs of policy analysis and applied research.
- To form small think tanks in universities and invite part-time or contract specialists from proven analytical centers.
- Universities can serve as platforms for public debate on matters of public interest.

Donor organizations

- Provide targeted support to the development of analytical capacity in the country. The smaller the capacity of analytical centers, the smaller will be the space of public policy and the less there will be democracy.
- Do not induce the monopoly of even non-governmental analytical centers in a given area. On the contrary, where possible, promote alternative research products on similar problems in order to develop the market of analytical services and healthy competition.
- Donor organizations wishing to invest into think tanks and research institutions dealing with policy issues should accentuate the provision of institutional support and not focus only on results of short-term projects.
- It is advisable to try to support projects that would build bridges between academic institutions, NGOs and expert communities to institutionalize the mechanisms for public policy.

NGOs and expert communities:

— NGOs and expert communities must turn to each other and give up their corporate egoism. By preserving the autonomy of each other, civil and expert community, they can become allies in solving socially important problems. Competition for resources, of course, plays the role of an interfering factor in this context. Nevertheless, we must realize that there must be a certain division of labor, which will improve the quality of both NGOs and experts. Otherwise, everybody will be a little engaged in everything, but there will be no real influence on political decision-making.

— NGOs and think tanks can find ways to cooperate and implement joint projects, complementing their strengths. So, think tanks have an advantage in the form of skills, techniques, analysis technologies. They can make sound conclusions. NGOs also work with the population and have significant information about the needs and requirements of different population groups; they have operational information about different places. Kyrgyz NGOs are also much more active (in comparison with experts) in the field of dissemination of information and findings of political-oriented research, and they have advocacy skills and their own channels of communication with state agencies and with the public.