

IWPR Organized an Online Discussion on “The Problem of Public Administration Efficiency in Kazakhstan During the Global Pandemic”

On June 26, 2020, an online meeting was held on the topic “The problem of public administration efficiency in Kazakhstan during the global pandemic.” The discussion was held by the representative office of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in Central Asia (IWPR CA) in partnership with the Kazakhstan Council on International Relations.

Follow us on [LinkedIn](#)



Experts from various fields, including from leading analytical centers, gathered for discussion. Participants discussed issues of public administration in Kazakhstan, digitalization and opportunities in the event of a crisis.



Iskander Akylbaev

The moderator of the online platform was **Iskander Akylbaev**, Executive Director of the Kazakhstan Council on International Relations (KCIR).

The event was opened by the representative of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in Central Asia, **Nargiza Muratalieva**, editor of analytical materials CABAR.asia. After her welcoming speech, Ms. Muratalieva briefly talked about the organization’s activities and emphasized that the problem of the effectiveness of public administration in Central

IWPR Organized an Online Discussion on “The Problem of Public Administration Efficiency in Kazakhstan During the Global Pandemic”

Asia has always been on the agenda, but the pandemic made the issue of governance quality even more relevant in times of crisis.

The first presentation was made by the director of the Alternative Research Center **Andrey Chebotarev**, who talked about countering coronavirus infection in Kazakhstan and the consequences of the pandemic.

“At the first stage of the fight against coronavirus infection COVID-19, Kazakhstan was able to restrain its entry into its territory. The authorities promptly took the necessary sanitary, control and other measures. However, on March 13, the infection was first recorded and then began to spread actively in the republic.



Andrey Chebotarev

Considering that anti-crisis actions in Kazakhstan in the conditions of a pandemic have been the first experience, various types of failures took place in the activities of various state bodies. This is especially observed and visible in the medical sphere. If we consider other spheres of the life of society, the situation under discussion has greatly affected the economy, leading to a reduction among individual entrepreneurs, employed citizens, and the income level of the population. However, there are also positive aspects, such as a decrease in the growth of crime indicators by its various types.

The largest growth rates of infection occur in megalopolises of the country and in certain regions where high population density is noticed. It is also affected by an unfavorable environmental and sanitary-epidemiological situation. An important role was played by the introduction of a state of emergency, which was an unprecedented measure in the history of sovereign Kazakhstan. Although this measure caused a mixed reaction among the population. However, much depends on the responsibility and awareness of the citizens themselves. In my opinion, non-observance of personal hygiene, social distance and the quarantine regime by many citizens have become serious factors in the spread of the virus. Unfortunately, the removal of the state of emergency, on the contrary, led to even greater growth in the number of infected citizens. The quarantine measures currently being applied are still insufficient to bring down this growth.

Kazakhstan has mobilized all kinds of its own resources and interested civil society institutions. The state helps the population as best it can, in particular in the form of

minimal financial assistance and assistance in obtaining postponements in the repayment of loans. The number of jobs under the Employment Roadmap is also growing. Someone can call all this half measures. However, for the people most affected in these critical conditions, these actions can serve as a good assistance.

In such situation, it is possible to evaluate the activities of the public administration system in Kazakhstan in various ways. However, it should not be assessed as weak, but rather as unprepared. As well as due to the lack of a clear plan of action in cases of an epidemic, which is the case in the practice of some foreign countries. Serious complaints in society are caused by the work of medical institutions at all levels, which led to a change in the leadership of the Ministry of Health. It should also be noted that the police failed to eliminate obvious violations by citizens and commercial structures of various restrictive measures.

In general, Kazakhstan in one way or another, has used all kinds of measures to counteract the spread of COVID-19, which provides a good basis for preparing for the possible onset of the second wave of the pandemic. Nevertheless, the country’s leadership needs to pay close attention to the weakest links in the public administration system and take the necessary measures to improve their work.”

Alua Zholdybalina, head of the Department of Social and Political Studies of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies (KISS) under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in turn, outlined the possible risks and opportunities in the socio-economic sphere during a pandemic.



Alua Zholdybalina

“The first possible risk is the sector of small and medium-sized businesses, which employed a large amount of labor, especially in Almaty and Nur-Sultan. The second possible risk, also noted by international experts, is the loss of jobs and a reduction in wages. In our case, there will probably be a decrease in wages or a reduction in working hours, as shown by the trends of post-Soviet countries. The third risk is a decline in consumer activity. There will be changes in the structure of consumer activity and objects of trade will probably switch to the online format. The fourth possible risk is an increase in investor distrust in markets, which may also affect Kazakhstan.

But there are also certain opportunities, new areas that can be used.

The first is the development of the digital sphere, which will affect science, education, medicine, the provision of services, etc. The second is distance work, which changes the approach to organizing work (even in the public sphere). Third – a chance for self-sufficiency and the path of import substitution. Now, in the framework of the pandemic, there is international isolation; accordingly, emphasis is placed on domestic resources. Fourth, healthcare and science: many studies now show that trust and support in these areas have increased.

As part of our topic, I would like to note that the public administration system is also changing. Experts point out three main points: trust, technology and transparency. The first point according to experts is trust in institutions, including state ones, on the level of which depends further development of the situation. The model of public administration will be modified and modernized. I believe that it is the value of trust that will be the main postulate in the relations between the state and taken decisions.”

Gaukhar Nurgalieva, head of the Eurasian Research Laboratory of the Institute for Emerging Market Research at the Moscow School of Management Skolkovo, discussed the problems of digitalization in Kazakhstan and their possible solutions.

“In the UN ranking on the development of e-government for 2018, Kazakhstan ranks 39th out of 193 countries of the world. These are amazing results for Kazakhstan, which is considered as a developing country. However, there are certain points that require urgent attention today.

First of all, technical problems associated with an increase in data volume and load due to a sharply increased number of requests: poor quality of digital public services (sites are not always available, they may “freeze”, difficulties in navigation and use), servers are often overloaded, need own cloud storage, etc. There is a need to prepare appropriate infrastructure and services. This indicates the underdevelopment of own IT market and IT solutions in Kazakhstan.



Gaukhar Nurgalieva

State policy in the field of digitalization is focused on the entire economy. The analysis shows that only 3 of the 17 tasks set in the state program “Digital Kazakhstan” are under the state control, all the rest are independent of the state. In addition, digitalization is implemented “top-down”, that is, without an analysis of what citizens and businesses need in digital form.

Another problem is the lack of personnel capable of providing technical support, which indicates the need to train our own specialists. To this day, there is a low awareness of the population about how to use digital public services, and there is a lack of work with the population in this direction.

It is also appropriate to talk about the “digital divide”: there is a problem of the lack of high-quality Internet in the regions, especially in rural areas. Slow digitalization is taking place in areas that are most susceptible to corruption (land allocation, natural monopoly services, public transport fare payment systems).

In this vein, what solutions to these problems can be offered?

Firstly, providing Internet access to the entire population, to get rid of the digital divide. It is necessary to work on improving the IT literacy of the population: it is necessary to train not only schoolchildren and teachers, but also ordinary adult citizens who use the services. All interested parties should be involved in the development of state digitalization policies. Personnel retraining on digitalization of civil servants and employees of national companies is also needed.”

The final report of this discussion was made by the director of the Center for Applied Research “TALAP” **Rakhim Oshakbaev**. Mr. Oshakbaev spoke about the problems of public administration in the country and tried to answer the question of whether there is now a “window of opportunity” for restarting public administration in Kazakhstan?



Rakhim Oshakbaev

“Obviously, government at the moment does not meet the main challenges, even without considering the pandemic. And the spread of the virus shows the unavailability of our systems more clearly. We see that the management that we have, experiences a number of significant limitations affecting the efficiency.

First of all, the civil service is becoming less and less attractive for active and successful professionals. This is due to the decline in the authority of the civil service, and the fact that the alternative opportunity for employment and building a career in public service in Kazakhstan loses to all the other options that exist for successful professionals. The recruiting system does not attract professional, and fulfilled people.

The system of strategic planning and goal setting is definitely too cumbersome and has

many elements. Ultimately, this leads to the fact that it is hard to say what key goals the government sets. We see that the GDP indicator is dominant, and the system of metrics embedded in the state planning system does not make it possible to assess and set indicators more widely. The system of state planning is very much brought about by an excessive number of documents and levels.

The strategic plans of government agencies are loosely tied to performance indicators and the key document by which one can judge the real priorities of government is the budget. Accordingly, despite 10 years of trying to implement a result-oriented budget, the relationship between budget spending and efficiency is very low.

We do not have a clear focus and indicators, without which it is very difficult to effectively implement strategic documents. This conclusion can be supported by an assessment of the state of various fields, starting with health care or education. We have been engaged in reforms for years, but there is no objective assessment of where we have moved. As a result, we often just stomp in one place.

Government effectiveness requires accountability. Public administration should be accountable to citizens in whose interests this management is carried out. The key underlying accountability mechanism is still electoral. In our political system, these electoral mechanisms are critically lacking.

Thus, do we have a “window of opportunity” to improve the efficiency of public administration in Kazakhstan? There is a high demand that has been greatly exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. Large-scale reforms are being declared, but the barrier that we are facing is related to the fact that we have not formed the basis for a new generation of state managers who could come and implement the declared reforms. There is a lack of competency and mandate. Therefore, I think that without further modernization of the managerial structure, opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of public administration will not appear.”



If you have found a spelling error, please, notify us by selecting that text and pressing *Ctrl+Enter*.