

“Political and social stability today depends on the intensity and effectiveness of staff perturbations: the more active the positive processes in staff policy changes are, the more stable the country will be,” Valentin Bogatyrev said at the expert meeting organised by IWPR in Bishkek.

The staff policy issues in Central Asian states have always been on the agenda as an important factor of country management, strategic programme development and implementation. The quality and effectiveness of the staff, especially involved in public administration, influence the present and future of any country.



The Institute for War and Peace Reporting held the round table discussion on April 25, 2018 as part of the project to build the capacity of young experts and analysts to discuss the staff policy issues in Central Asian states. Opening the round table, Abakhon Sultonazarov, Director of the regional office of IWPR in CA, raised relevant questions: “what is more preferable for the effective national development – the staff that may work for several years in a row in the management system or high staff turnover? How effective is the parliamentary system in Kyrgyzstan, how reasonable is the staff policy, and how to find the golden mean in the promotion of valuable staff and the achievement of stability in the society?”

### Common Issues and Staff Policy Factors

According to V. Bogatyrev, director of Perspektiva think-tank, the first and most significant staff policy factor for Kyrgyzstan, and also for Central Asian states, “is the *regionally tribal*” factor. Moreover, it can contain the elements of sub-ethnic and even family genesis staff policy up to the regional and corporate policy.



The second basic factor, the expert continued, is *political*. It should be noted that it can be seen only in those Central Asian states where politics exists, i.e. the manifestation and existence of capacity significant in terms of power in the actions of various political forces.

In Kyrgyzstan this factor has its own peculiarities since it has specific quasi-political subjects that are called political parties, which they are actually not. These are political joint-stock companies that allocate parliamentary seats and assign rights to participate, via the parliament, in the distribution of the national (public) managerial fund.

The third factor determining the staff policy is the *professional* factor. It clearly belongs to a number of basic factors, especially at the same managerial level, where staff functioning is impossible without a certain professional competency.

There is the fourth factor in the staff policy development: *quota-based* factor that respects the interests of individual social groups. This factor involves the gender-based component of the staff policy, ethnicity, age, etc.



Medet Tyulegenov, Foreign and Comparative Policy programme manager of AUCA, has the same opinion referring to “autonomous leaderism and loyalty” as the inherent qualities of the staff in all the countries of the region. Moreover, according to the political analyst, “loyalty and professionalism can both accompany and contradict each other, which can be seen in modern Kyrgyzstan. As the recent transit of power has shown, expectations and loyalty cannot always work during the operation successor.

Also, as V. Bogatyrev rightly emphasises, we should take into account “the differences in the degree of dominance or presence of any given factor. In other words, they always exist, even in the strictest authoritarian regimes. But the hierarchy and the degree of impact of any given factor differ significantly both spatially in the field of management and in time”.

### **Focus on Ready-Made Models - A Failure**

The critical gap between the staff policy and the staff training system can be called a serious problem. According to V. Bogatyrev, “existing systems and formats of education fail to provide not only the future, but even today’s recruitment needs.”

Researcher Aidar Amrebayev highlights an important problem in the staff training process in Kazakhstan: “The hopes for modernization have been associated with the launch of the Bolashak programme, which turns 25 this year. It has trained about 12.5 thousand people in various foreign universities, think-tanks. According to the terms of this programme, its graduates should be employed at all costs. In particular, this applies to attracting graduates to the civil service. At the same time, it is



an a priori opinion that if they have received a Western degree, they are the carriers of the modernisation trend and new advanced knowledge and technology. They are clearly a valuable reserve of the government staff. But their actual practical skills, organisational skills and work experience are not always taken into account. Unfortunately, they have problems with the latter. This staff does not have experience in any industry, in production, does not understand the local cultural specifics. And frequently, if they are entrusted with the whole industry or agency without preliminary approval and a certain test at entry-level positions, such a technocratic management can bungle a job entrusted to them and raise doubts about the effectiveness and adequacy of the entire public management system. On the one hand, there seems to be a modernisation message: renewal of staff, introduction of advanced management technology. But, on the other hand, effective management suggests the availability of knowledge, background, moral authority in a society where one cannot do with advanced theoretical knowledge only. New staff getting “into the system” also often does not have personal immunity from corruption. The precedent with the case of ex-minister Bishimbayev from the new generation of managers is a clear example of it. The thesis that it is possible to replace the old Soviet or post-Soviet middle-ranking officials with the young ones, and everything will straighten out has not been justified yet.”



In Tajikistan, as Azimdzhon Saifiddinov, director of the Eurasia of Central Asia-Tajikistan Foundation has noted, “there is a similar training programme, which, unfortunately, has not paid off for several reasons. First, such staff fails to receive jobs upon arrival. Second, the established principles, approaches to solving problems at the local and central levels sometimes contradict the advanced and innovative approaches suggested by the young staff. At the same time, we should admit that young staff does come to state agencies, however, in Tajikistan, the power is getting more concentrated. Here I would like to note

that until the 2000s, the heads of local authorities had been appointed regardless of the region. This has led to the fact that the leaders appointed from the centre do not know the local approaches, the local specifics, which has also led to the high staff turnover. The central authorities determine the policy, but basically, the work is done at the local level.”

Bogatyrev raises a similar issue: “As we can see, the new generation of managers lacks the ability to work in the real environment, the real situation. They act on the basis of their perception, including the one acquired in advanced Western universities, of the models of design, organisation and functioning that have already been practiced and succeeded in other countries. However, they commit a common error that it’s enough to apply the available knowledge and experience to our situation and there’s no need to reinvent the wheel. But the experience of our country demonstrates that this is a profound mistake; moreover, this is a harmful statement and belief; foreign models are inefficient and often don’t work at all. We can see this in the very model of the state structure and in various private models of process structuring in various spheres.”

### **Price of Stability - Stagnation?**

Aidar Amrebayev, a researcher of socio-political processes, notes that “in Kazakhstan, the staff policy is shaped according to the established political regime, values, legal culture and business protocol of the civil service. In this regard, it is quite balanced, stable and has been functioning according to the established “rules of the game” for many years. Kazakhstan, as the other countries of the region, seems to preserve the “marks” of the Soviet era, on the one hand, and we are moving towards a new national identity combining the features of tradition, modernism and even postmodernism, on the other hand. Moreover, technocratic, liberal and pseudo-liberal and now-fancy elements of communism and populism serve as the tools of politics. Given that Kazakhstan has not yet encountered the “shift of power”, the staff policy is rather inertial: our politicians do not fight for power, but rather play into the hands of the authorities and are addicted to publicity stunts and populism. Development of strategies and a serious “political game” is a job for “political heavyweights” that stand at the bottom of the patron-client pyramid, which has been functioning for more than 26 years now. The main criterion for a successful career amid such staff policy is loyalty to power and formal conformity.”

In terms of stable countries, I would also like to cite the opinion of Nazima Davletova, a lecturer at the Department of Practical Diplomacy at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy of Uzbekistan, “Our country also has the analogue of the Bolashak programme, which was called Umid and was aimed at staff training abroad, and has been updated over the years. However, after studying at prestigious foreign universities, about 70% of the staff

usually did not rush to return to Uzbekistan. And in general, the staff was prepared not to bring improvements into the economy and politics, but rather to fit the existing political system. This is a current disadvantage since the new leadership has new requirements, they are trying to involve more progressive people. S. Mirziyoyev tries to attract people with Western degrees, as well as to count on technocrats in the new government of the state. However, it should be emphasised that the system itself is not developed for those specialists who have been trained in the West. Nevertheless, the defrosting period is evident, and young people are ready to work for the government.”

### **In lieu of conclusion**

V. Bogatyrev concludes that “if the new government rejects the staff modernisation, it will roll back to the staff policy that has resulted in the current situation in the country, and serious political changes will be awaiting us in the very near future.”

Azimdzhon Saifiddinov proposes to introduce new approaches to improve the staff policy, “First, it is necessary to give an opportunity to the staff that has been educated abroad to approve themselves. Second, we need to prepare a regulatory and legal framework enabling young people to use their potential, but taking into account their performance. The principle of work of state servants should be “performance-oriented activities”. Unfortunately, we do not see this today. The word “perturbation” is also relevant for Tajikistan, where many officials expect their removal at the end of the year. But, in my opinion, it would be more properly to first get a progress report, to analyse it in order to evaluate the performance of these officials.”

I would like to summarise by citing V. Bogatyrev’s conclusion that “political and social stability today depends on the intensity and effectiveness of staff perturbations: the more active the positive processes in staff policy changes are, the more stable the country will be.”

**This publication was produced by Nargiza Muratalieva, editor of [cabar.asia](http://cabar.asia)**

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