

Insights from ‘what works’ in policy making (and trying to improve policy making) in the EECCA region

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- Personality and personal working practices of ministers (in cases when ministers have decision-making capacity, rather than President/PM) play a big role in how policy decisions are made.
- In post-Soviet contexts, a top-down approach is often needed in order to make substantial improvements to policy making processes (e.g. Georgia’s government decree to mandate that all line ministries conduct public consultations as part of the policy making process).
- Even if they are not decision-makers, working level experts play an important role in development of policy and the policy making process, because it is unlikely that major changes to policy documents will be introduced as policies make their way through the decision-making levels.
- In Ukraine important decisions about policy are still made by a small group of people close to the President behind closed doors, but paradoxically, the policy-making processes have become more user-friendly and transparent through the rapid/increased digitalisation during Covid.
- Lessons from Ukraine about forming advisory councils during crisis and recovery periods show the importance of good coordination and planning for how to channel advice into the system, and also that councils shouldn’t be parachuted in or allowed to work in parallel without being embedded or connected to the public administration.
- Parliament plays little role in policy making in any of our countries and arguably shouldn’t do so, but should instead focus on effective and consistent scrutiny of government policy and its implementation (example brought from Ukraine of ministers relying on parliament to develop policy as they lack confidence in government departments’ policy making capacity).
- Despite broad similarities across the region, the extent to which parliament is expected to have a policy-making role will depend on the precise provisions of the Constitution as well as convention and practice.
- Public administration reforms are usually of little interest to politicians or the public and are often (at least initially) donor-driven. However, as politicians and the public understand that quality services (e.g. Ukraine’s ‘State in a smart phone’) are dependent on good policy making within public administration, they are genuinely trying to think how to improve the capacity of the civil service; therefore the drive to reform policy-making comes also from the national actors.
- Improving public administration is an ongoing and never-ending process – our countries are at different stages in the process.
- Segregation of policy making and politics: as policy making has become more sophisticated and politicians are not able to explain it to voters, the two are increasingly disconnected.
- Availability of data is a common challenge across our region and this of course hinders data-driven policy making; Covid-related digitalisation processes (in Ukraine) has had a positive influence on how much data is available to base decisions on.
- Importance of strategic communication vs reactive communication.
- Changing mindsets of post-Soviet civil servants takes time and therefore central leverage can be a good way to drive change.
- The best policy making comes from a combination of politically savvy decision makers and people experienced in public administration (preferably at different levels)
- How to drive change – people outside public administration can set the direction for the big picture change, but technocrats and policy specialists are needed to determine how that change is best brought about.

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