

Reform of the Ministry of internal affairs in Russia: four issues and eight ways of tackling them

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In order to conduct police reform in Russia it is necessary to determine what problems such a reform must tackle. It is on this that the character, scale, and the sequence of reforms depend.

In this policy paper, we apply a problem-oriented approach to the reform. This approach is based on identification of the most salient problems, demanding immediate action, and a number of measures that could help solve them.

The problem-oriented approach is in a way a compromise between two extreme approaches. Approach number one is a program of radical reforms (recipes of the EU) , similar to those attempted by countries of the former Socialist bloc and republics of the former USSR who aimed at EU and NATO accession. On the other hand, the conservative approach to the reform, according the Ministry of Internal Affairs, is defined by a strengthening of internal discipline and an increase in financing. Such a track was undertaken by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan.

One of the advantages of the problem-oriented approach is that its goal is to achieve clear and tangible results, corresponding both to the societal demand and state needs. Reform of the police by tackling specific issues allows one to avoid excessive radicalism, which would be necessary in order to bring the police to a certain ideal standard. Aside from this, it is less vulnerable to departmental sabotage and imitation of reforms, since it contains clear measures and means of their implementation.

Currently, a number of acute problems plague the police in Russia:

- 1) Low quality of communication of police staff with the general population, which has led to the loss of trust on part of the citizens and absence of real help on part of the police. In certain regions, conflicts break out between the citizens and the police
- 2) Pressure on businesses, and commercial activities of police staff, which has turned the Ministry of Internal Affairs into a serious barrier to development of small- and medium-scale business in Russia
- 3) Bad “vertical” governance and absence of feedback mechanisms of governance. As a result, the level of arbitrary and unlawful activities of the police has grown, and quality of personnel has dropped.
- 4) Lack of accountability to the population on the local level, i.e. to taxpayers, which has led to alienation of citizens from the police, and to the situation in which interests of local communities are of low concern to the police.

Reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs must contain measures that primarily target these four issues. Tackling of these issues will result in a serious improvement in police work. In this policy paper, we identify eight measure of police reform:

- 1) Abolition of subdivisions for the prevention and combating of offences in the sphere of consumer market
- 2) Abolition of operational subdivisions for the combating of economic crimes
- 3) Withdrawal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs from the private security system
- 4) Reduction of the authority of subdivisions for juvenile affairs
- 5) Reform of the linear-territorial principle of governance
- 6) Reductions in the functions of headquarters
- 7) Creation of a system of accountability on the municipal and inter-municipal levels
- 8) Simplification of the system of evaluation indicators (the “stick” system)

At the same time, the general logic of the reform presupposes changes in several general characteristics of the law enforcement system which, as a rule, have benign influence upon the general situation around the police in all countries, that is – decrease in quantity, increase in financing, simplification of book-keeping, localization of the system of administration.

It is also important that the suggested measures be carried out independently of each other, since they represent not only a unified complex of measures, but also a set of separate focused solutions.

Implementation, albeit partial, of each of these measures, allows us to achieve significant progress, obvious to all the interested parties, and not only to mass media and experts.