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**ENHANCING THE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION MAKING  
PROCESS THROUGH THINK-THANK ESTABLISHMENT**

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## 1. Introduction

Think tanks are kind of civil society institutions which can develop the public strategies for government institutions. In a democratic political system think tanks serve as important channels of the communication between the society and the government. They not only feed the authorities with information but also provide professional analytical assistance that should enhance the quality of the officials' decisions. However, think tanks are not only a source of alternative studies and independent expert opinions, but also provide an independent field of discussion, a source of innovative ideas and useful recommendations.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the Polish and Russian think tanks, their role in the policy development process and work out the recommendations for think tank establishment.

## 2. Historical background

### *2.1. Polish and Russian Think Tanks in 1950s-1980s*

Summing up the analysis of the Polish and Russian think tank history, we can conclude that the emergence of think tanks is influenced by social, political and economic transformations in society. Two periods of transformation were crucial in this regard: first, after 1945 and then since 1985.

The first transformation took place in the period after the World War II when Russia and Poland belonged to the socialist bloc. In this period analytical institutions of a new type were established in both Poland and the USSR—they were quite large and had permanent research staff. Polish institutions included two broad groups: those institutions focused on domestic policy and institutions addressing foreign policy, defense and security. In Russia the "thaw" of 1950s and 1960s gave birth to a group of research institutes. The newly proclaimed course for coexistence and competition with the capitalist world demanded objective analyses of the economy and politics of the capitalist countries. That was the background of the initiative by the USSR Academy of Sciences Presidium in April 1956 to start the world-class Institute of World Economy and International Relations and a





number of other research bodies. The government's policy of acceleration of the development of USSR's Eastern regions stimulated the growth of new research centers which included the Siberian branch of the Academy of Sciences in Novosibirsk, and the Institute of Economic Studies, Far Eastern branch of the Academy, in Khabarovsk (1).

The Polish and Russian think tanks established in that period had a number of common features. Those research institutions were affiliated to the state, had a huge staff and were funded from the state budget. The results of their work were mainly estimated by the number of books and publications in periodicals. Their independence was limited: they were influenced by the Communist ideology of the time since during the Soviet period a lot of officials and ordinary people had mentalities in line with the official ideology. At the same time, they were more or less autonomous in formulating their research programs. Most of the research institutes' directors had working relations with the government but they did not have the direct influence on the decision-making process.

## *2.2. Perestroika and Systemic Change: 1985-present*

The next transformation took place at the period of transition in Central and Eastern Europe, which was influenced by the program of Gorbachev's *perestroika* in the USSR initiated in 1985. With the political and economic reforms new Polish and Russian think tanks were established. They had some common characteristics, marking them off from their predecessors: they were created outside the academic and government structures. Polish and Russian think tanks appeared upon the public stage not simply as forums for the purpose of providing citizens with opportunities to "think, speak, and argue" but also as representatives of autonomous centers of power in an attempt to offer alternative mechanisms with which to strengthen the institutionalization of transition. Most of new think tanks were created and financed with Western assistance (especially from the USA).

Over the last two decades a new type of independent think tanks has emerged in Poland. The growth of European Union - oriented think tanks may be seen as a response to both the deepening and widening of the European Union itself and corresponding increase in the quantity and complexity of policy-making activities at the EU and member-state level.





The new wave of think tanks came about in response to the social transformations in the Russian society taking place as part of the *perestroika* and democratization and market reforms of the 1990s under President Yeltsin. Thus, we may state that think tanks and policy organizations underwent a brief blooming in Russia between 1985 and 2000. Since Russia has strong university traditions a large number of new think tanks were linked to universities. They remained separate from universities which hosted them as they could get support through governmental initiatives or the assistance of non-governmental agencies such as the Soros foundation (1). New think tanks often were formed around famous names of former top governmental figures or senior advisers such as Gorbachev, Gaidar and Yavlinsky. Some of them took part in formulating new domestic and foreign policies. Think tanks tried to develop the alternatives to the domestic reforms of the time.

A number of factors were unfavorable to the development of the Russian think tank sector. Among them were the financial crisis (1998), decline of support from politicians, private companies or individuals, and the saturation of the think-tank market. As a result, some of the Russian think tanks were closed. Those who stood closer to Kremlin have survived because they worked for the federal agencies. A small part of the remaining think tanks has begun to work efficiently in the sphere of electoral management, taking part in electoral campaigns of mayors, governors and political parties. Some of think tanks are headed by scientists turned to financial analysis and operate with business-structures.

As a result of the differences in the climate surrounding Polish and Russian public organizations various types of think tanks have emerged in these countries. On the one hand, Poland aimed to be a European Union country-member. The general societal transformation was influenced by the prospects of accession to the European Union. EU-oriented independent Polish think tanks were established to assist the reform development and European integrations. On the other hand, Russian think tanks were gradually incorporated into the vertical power structure. Many think tanks have been connected either directly or indirectly to presidential and governmental structures also financed by them.





### 3. Contemporary Polish and Russian think tanks: similarity and contrast

This paper identifies the main similarities and contrasts between contemporary Polish and Russian think tanks. The information is based on the meetings with the members of four selected Polish think tanks which belong to a new wave. The data on the Russian think tanks come from their web-sites. The think tanks are analyzed with respect to their creation history, age, mission, staff and activities. As Table 1 indicates, significant differences can be seen in all these aspects.

Table1. Overview of think tanks (\* web-site information)

Name	Location, web-site	Year founded	Staff
The Institute of Public Affairs (IPA)	Warsaw, <a href="http://www.isp.org.pl">www.isp.org.pl</a>	1995	21
The Center for International Relations (CIR)	Warsaw, <a href="http://www.csm.org.pl">www.csm.org.pl</a>	1996	12
The Sobieski Institute	Warsaw, <a href="http://www.sobieski.org.pl">www.sobieski.org.pl</a>	2004	12
Centre for European Strategy-demosEUROPA	Warsaw, <a href="http://www.demoseuropa.eu">www.demoseuropa.eu</a>	2006	3
The Institute for the Economy in Transition /IET/	Moscow, <a href="http://www.iet.ru">www.iet.ru</a>	1990	60 *
Carnegie Moscow Centre	Moscow, <a href="http://www.carnegie.ru">www.carnegie.ru</a>	1993	33 *
Institute for Urban Economics (IUE)	Moscow, <a href="http://www.urbaneconomics.ru">www.urbaneconomics.ru</a>	1995	38 (2)

In their study of the management experience of West European think tanks Jacek Kucharczyk and Piotr Kazmierkiewicz (3) identify several practices which – if employed – would help think tanks in transition countries to improve their operations and meet the stakeholders’ needs better. These practices are related to three aspects of think tank management: research, fundraising and dissemination. According to Raymond Strouk (2) these qualities are important because “beyond professional development, institutional and leadership issues have become essential to their (think tank) successful evolution”.





In this paper I analyze such think tank aspects as management (includes mission, activities, staff, independence), funding and dissemination (includes influence, transparency and feedback).

### *3.1. Mission*

Summing up the interview results we can say that international cooperation is an important part of the missions of the Polish think tanks. All of them have developed much close links with their European partners. Some focus on European integration for their home country or countries outside of the European Union, but none of them limits its agenda to European policy issues. Other areas of activities are, for instance, security; law; public finance and monetary policies; the political system and political discourse.

In contrast, Russian think tanks have strong focus on domestic issues. They address a very wide spectrum of policy problems. Many of them aim to “work independently on their own research in areas covering a particular range of contemporary policy issues”. For example, the Institute for Studies of Economy in Transition /IET/ consults the Russian government agencies on issues concerning the problems of economic growth in economies in transition, public finance, monetary and currency exchange policies, privatization policies, corporate finance, restructuring and institutional reforms. The Institute for Urban Economics (IUE) was created to identify and analyze the social and economic problems of urban areas and promote solutions to these problems.

### *3.2. Activities*

The activities of the selected Polish think tanks follow their mission statements. A relationship between the scope of activities and their age may be observed. Older think tanks conduct more research as well as analysis and publish the policy analyses and recommendations. For example, the Institute of Public Affairs (est. 1995) publishes the results of its activities in the form of books and policy papers. Its publications are distributed to members of parliament, government officials, the media and non-governmental organizations. The Center for International Relations (1996) prepares reports and analyses, publishes books and articles, carries out research projects and





organizes working groups, holds conferences and seminars. The Institute for the Economy in Transition (1990) conducts both theoretical and applied studies and has a lot of publications, focusing on some key analytical issues which involve foreign experience.

Younger think tanks initiate more public communications and public discussions through regular organization of conferences, forums, seminars and workshops. They encourage politicians, journalists and others to speak freely on the subjects of their work. For example, the Sobieski Institute (2004) formulates ideas for public life in Poland, initiating public debates and forums for academics, professionals, politicians, and other persons wishing to contribute to the discussion. DemosEUROPA (2006) publishes policy papers and reports formulated on the basis of interactive discussions, conferences and seminars.

Russian think tanks also organize seminars, conferences and lectures. However, these events do not inform public expectations and the public opinion because only a limited group of people from Moscow and the vicinity takes part in these events. Most of the think tanks are concentrated in Moscow, and all their conferences and events are organized there. On the contrary, many potential conferences' participants from distant Russian regions cannot pay for expensive air tickets, so they cannot take part in discussions and work out the recommendations. Usually the discussion participants represent only the Moscow-based organizations— however, these organizations do not know much about the realities of the Russian regions.

### *3.3. Staff*

Polish and Russian think tanks share some features with regards to their staffing. Research institutes and teams are often headed by famous politicians or former state officials who have direct connections in the government and the mass media. Basically this tendency of former government officials to form public institutes is positive: it gives these intellectuals an opportunity to freely state their own practical, state-level experience. Polish and Russian institutes may draw on a large population of young intellectual people who are interested in this type of research work.





The main difference is the number of the size of the Polish think tanks is related to their age (see Table 1 above). The older, more traditional organizations have about 20-30 researchers. The younger think tanks have smaller staff of fewer than 10 people. In addition to permanent staff, a number of external researchers are often hired when needed for specific projects.

Russian think tanks have large research staff as part of their structure. For example The IET consists of 10 research divisions, which are grouped according to four areas of research: macroeconomics, socio-economic studies, real economics and political economy. There are lots of consultative organizations with small staff named think tanks. But they are not the classical think tanks. They do not prepare conferences, seminars and reports. They work for current events (elections and so on) and do not give the recommendations for future development of country.

### *3.4. Funding and Independence*

In their early years, most of Polish and Russian think tanks were dependent on grants from international foundations and donors, such as the USA Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank and the Department for International Development in the United Kingdom (DFID).

Today Polish think tanks tend to diversify their funding by using several (five-eight) financial sources. The majority (60-80 percent) of their funds comes from the various international foundations and organizations. Contracted commercial research is another means to diversity the sources of funding (10-15 percent). None of the investigated Polish think tanks has any special programs for business. Private donors still do not contribute funding. Financing seldom comes from the state except for a few organizations such as the Polish Institute of International Affairs. European Union money although available in theory is difficult to obtain due to hard procedures of application and contract conditions.

In contrast, most of the Russian think tanks are funded by governmental structures. Financial support of Russian think tanks by international foundations and organizations (for example the US





and EU non-governmental bodies) is gradually decreasing. For example the financial support by USAID for 2007-2008 was cut in half. The decline was a result of the conviction of the Western public that the efforts to build civil society in Russia over the past 10 years brought no visible changes in the public field. Moreover, shift has been made to fund activities in the Middle East. Among exceptions are organizations such as the Carnegie Moscow Center that was established by Washington-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Diversification of finance source is the main reasons of independence. Polish think tanks can formulate an agenda without consultation with state government. No attempts are made by the government to influence its research agenda. Russian think tanks in most part depend on direct assignment by the presidential or governmental offices.

### *3.5. Communication (government, mass media) and Influence*

Public authorities at the national level constitute the main target group of Polish think tanks. Think tanks in Poland are independent and located outside of the government. Polish think tanks can affect policy decision-making through dialogue with government institutions. Moreover, they help to develop a new method for dealing efficiently with the various social problems. Polish policy-making process today is more flexible and open to external experts so think tanks and other Polish non-partisan organizations can influence on society opinion and promote greater democracy through discussions, conferences and seminars.

Journalists and Polish society in general are the other target groups to influence. Think tanks are visible in Polish mass media by providing opinions, information and advice on current events. Working through the mass media as well as the organizing conferences and seminars and publishing remain the most important ways of influencing the target groups. Another advantage of good communications is that Polish think tanks have public feedback through meetings, mass media, the Internet. None of the Polish think tanks under study have any formal ties with the political parties.

In comparison with their Polish counterparts, Russian think tanks have had limited influence on the social and political situation in the country. The basis of the problems is that serious government





decisions are too often made on the basis of inadequate information. Think tanks are connected to presidential and governmental structures cannot help solve social problems because they lack feedback from the society and the regions. For example, when the entry into force of the Federal law №122 resulted in public discontent and thousands of people went into streets. Also Russian think tanks have had insufficient access to mass media and other channels to discuss the current events and influence on a public opinion. There are not enough regional communications, forums, discussion places to formulate political and economic strategies and work out the recommendations for urgent social events.

#### **4. Discussion and recommendations**

The review of the Polish and Russian think tanks indicates that their stability and influence depend on the specific features of the state system – its openness, the possibility of government institutions to develop analytical capacity and the ability to generate the strategic visions for transition period.

##### *4.1. The Polish experience*

The Polish experience demonstrates a key feature of Polish think tanks —their ability to work closely with government institutions while retaining institutional, ideological and functional independence. They try to be independent of interest groups and have an image of non-partisan organizations that in parallel with the authorities can actively and efficiently influence on the decision-making process. The survey of different activities of these think tanks indicates that they can organize comprehensive policy research and consultancy on specific topic from international issues to urban development and local self-government.

Summing up, Polish think tanks can be characterized as independent organizations with small staff, diversification of funding that are able to react on urgent issues due to public communications and regional feedback.

##### *4.2. Russian think tanks and society*





Greater democratization of a formerly closed society, trade liberalization and globalization have contributed to the growth of Russian think tanks. At least 300 political-science organizations were based in Moscow (4). Such a phenomenon could only come in country that has one of the world's highest standards of education. Businessmen and politicians have set up policy centers to influence on a public opinion.

A rich variety of Russian think tanks have aimed to provide alternative sources of information, research, and expert opinion and to break down the state's monopoly over decision making process. The think tanks have tried to have a direct impact on the legislation and on individual government decisions. However, they have tended to ignore the public as an audience for their research while trying to target the state and political parties.

By downplaying the importance of reaching out to the public, independent think tanks have had little or no effect on the government and public policy. On the one hand politicians do not like to admit that they have to rely on the help of outside researchers. On the other hand many people do not hear about think tanks' activities and nobody actually knows much about them. In addition, the absence of a public sphere and free debate make the wide dissemination and open discussion of policy alternatives almost impossible. In effect, Russian think tanks nowadays play a small role in changing the "climate of opinion" in national political debates.

*Recommendation:*

The main audience for Russian think tanks should be the public, operating as a bridge between the public and the policy process. Thus, they would differ from Soviet-style think tanks that tended to ignore the public as an audience.

Today the most passive (and thus least effective) way to influence on the policy is through the scientific publications and books. One of the ways in which researchers can break this cycle is through activities such as writing opinion papers for the newsprint media, participating in press and Congressional briefings and so on. By working through the media to distribute their work widely



and in a form accessible to non-experts, think tanks should inform the public about the major issues of the day and enable it to participate more fully in decision making process.

Think tanks also have the potential to engage citizens in the management of society and to develop the democratic institutions. More attempts should be therefore made to involve civil society groups, for example through consultation exercises at the policy planning stage. This has increased the chance for think tanks to influence government thinking process.

#### *4.3. Russian think tanks and the state*

With the growth of the size and functions of the state; there is an increasing need for specialized policy expertise, which could not always be supplied by traditional civil servants. Think tanks should fill this gap by having well educated staff and acting as a source of good specialists and research to the government. This can increase the chances for think tanks to influence on government thinking process.

#### *Recommendation:*

Think tank's staff should in large part be recruited both from a pool of fresh graduates for professional policy training and high-qualified experts from the university faculties who really understand how the policy process works and how it can be influenced. Such an organizational flexibility allows to bring together people from a variety of intellectual disciplines and backgrounds and produces greater diversity, depth, and specialization of the research.

The staff members are expected not only to produce quality research but also to develop the research findings into policy recommendations and to disseminate them as widely as possible. It is important to stress that it is not possible to determine with any degree of certainty what impact think tanks have on decision making process.





There are six important points which policy knowledge specialists' think tanks can share with the state officials (5):

- carry out "basic research on policy problems and policy solutions";
- provide "advice on immediate policy concerns that are being considered by government officials";
- evaluate government programs;
- "serve as facilitators of issue networks and the exchange of ideas";
- "serve as suppliers of personnel to government and as a place for politicians and policy-makers who are out of power to recharge their batteries";
- help interpret "policies and current events for the electronic and print media."

#### *4.4. Stability and independence of Russian think tanks*

Diversification of the sources of finance is one of the main factors in maintaining a think tank's stability and independence. Most of the Russian think tanks might be described as "public policy research institutes or think tanks without research." In many cases such think tanks depend on a particular person (in most cases, the founder of the organization) and have one – three financial sources including state support. These think tanks rise together with their political patron and, in most cases, share his or her political fate. Many of them work around current events and do not stimulate the projects for the development of country or regions.

#### *Recommendation*

Think tanks should diversify their fund by building regional networks. Currently the Russian think tanks have been dependent mainly on foreign funds, with few sources of local financing. This has often limited the actual participation of these organizations in the state and regional policy-making process. Think tanks can become important regional policy actors or, at the least, they may inform the policy-makers. Think tanks should seek to establish more and more cooperative networks of local administrations, local companies and universities. These activities of think tanks on the local level can bring in commercial contracts as well as programs funded by the government.





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