

Strengthening the Eastern Partnership in Azerbaijan: Challenges in Implementing a Civil Service Training Capacity Program with a Focus on EU Affairs

Context

In 2003–04, European Union (EU) technical assistance helped establish the Civil Service Commission (CSC) in Azerbaijan. The EU launched an initiative in June 2009 to integrate Eastern European countries into the EU economy on the basis of shared values such as democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights and basic freedoms, market economies, and sustainable development. The EU's Eastern Partnership is designed to establish a deep and comprehensive free trade area under the framework of an association agreement among partner countries. The Comprehensive Institution Building Program provides support (in the form of grants) for partners to develop their human and institutional capacity.

The institutional setup of EU grants leaves limited room for changes and adaptation. The EU requires notification of even minor changes to a project's agreed logical framework or budgeting; extensive changes require modification of the contract.

Azerbaijan was one of six countries (along with Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) selected to participate in the first round of the Eastern Partnership in 2009. In 2010, representatives of the government of Azerbaijan and of EU member states selected Azerbaijani institutions in need of attention and developed three institutional reform plans. In 2014, Azerbaijan suspended negotiations on the association agreement.

Development Challenge

The development challenge for Azerbaijan was to improve its institutional capacities across ministries and agencies to bring about a more transparent and citizen-oriented civil service and, thus, to support good governance.

Intervention

This intervention was cofunded by the EU and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. It was implemented by the German Agency for International Cooperation (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit/GIZ*) and built on a 2009–13 GIZ intervention to reform the civil service in Azerbaijan.

The intervention was developed under the EU's Comprehensive Institution Building Program and addressed one of three institutional reform plans for Azerbaijan. Specifically, it aimed to strengthen the Azerbaijani CSC's capacity to develop and implement training strategies and policies better aligned with EU standards and to manage and coordinate civil servant training and professional development across ministries and agencies (Wiskow 2017).



PROJECT DATA

SECTOR:

Public Administration

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES:

Improve institutional capacities and transparency to support good governance

DELIVERY CHALLENGES:

Organizational capacity, change in priorities or lack of commitment

COUNTRY:

Azerbaijan

REGION:

Europe and Central Asia

PROJECT DURATION:

2009–2013

PROJECT TOTAL COST:

€2,128,000 (Cofunded by EU)

This note was produced by Darcy Gallucio.

For more information on this project, see <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv941tdt>.

It also aimed to contribute to several public administration reforms: (a) to strengthen the CSC's institutional capacity, (b) to develop a training and qualification system for civil servants, (c) to improve communications between the CSC and its clients, (d) to improve merit-based recruitment for civil servants, and (e) to advise on strategies and legal provisions for civil service reform.

This intervention was subject to the protocols for EU grants. The recipients were thus required to report on three key areas agreed upon in the initial framework:

- Development and implementation of a national civil service training strategy
- Development and validation of standard training models in EU-related areas and priority areas
- Establishment of a pool of certified trainers capable of conducting training in the priority areas

In 2014, Azerbaijan suspended negotiations under its association agreement, and the project found itself operating in a new formal environment. However, in practice, the direct environment of the project did not undergo noticeable changes; it continued to be conducive and enabling.

Delivery Challenges

This delivery note analyzes key implementation challenges and examines how they were overcome.

Organizational capacity. A major challenge to implementation of this intervention was that Azerbaijan's CSC had only 35 employees yet was responsible for training the whole of the country's government. Its limited administrative capacity delayed implementation of the intervention until five months after the agreed start date (December 2013) and forced the intervention's activities to be implemented in parallel. Another challenge was that although the Azerbaijani government had agreed in the grant's framework to undergo a Training Needs Assessment (TNA), it had no knowledge of or experience with that instrument. Government ministries and agencies, subject to dissolution at the president's whim, feared that the TNA would produce negative results; thus, most of them declined to participate in the TNA pilots. Furthermore, the few institutions that did participate in the pilots were reluctant to share data, for fear of reprisal.

Change in priorities, or lack of commitment. The project team for the Comprehensive Institution Building Program grant framework had researched and drafted a comprehensive TNA methodology for Azerbaijan's national civil service, focusing on how to better train ministries and departments to negotiate and implement Azerbaijan-EU projects. During a project implementation mission, however, CSC senior management indicated that the commission would not support the untested TNA methodology on a national level, which halted all work.

Addressing Delivery Challenges

The following steps were taken to mitigate the delivery challenges related to **organizational capacity**:

- Project activities were discussed and decided jointly by the CSC and GIZ.
 - Transparency was ensured for activity implementation.
 - CSC ownership and sustainability of the results increased.
- Training modules were developed in tandem with the training needs methodology because of the delayed start.
 - Experts were consulted, and fact-finding missions among stakeholders were carried out over a period of three months to select two pilot institutions: the State Motor Transport Service (Ministry of Transportation) and the Civil Service Commission.
 - Carried out pilots and discussed results in a workshop with CSC staff and local experts
 - Prepared a final draft of the TNA methodology to assess the Azerbaijani civil service and submitted it to the CSC for comments but, because of CSC staffing shortages, missed the EU project deadline
 - Transferred the publication and promotion of the TNA methodology to a United Nations Development Programme project
 - The project team and CSC management agreed on five themes for training curricula development.
 - Defined learning objectives, identified main training content, specified the terms of reference to develop the training curricula, and sought and received CSC clearance for the curricula

- Developed protocols for experts to develop standardized training curricula, thereby ensuring quality and continuity
- Discussed, adjusted, and approved the training materials developed by experts on the five thematic areas
- Validated the materials and revised the curricula and supporting materials on the basis of the pilots
- Produced a training toolkit fit for this project's purpose

The following steps were taken to mitigate the delivery challenges related to **change in priorities, or lack of commitment**:

- The project team and the Azerbaijani government decided jointly to pilot the drafted material on a less comprehensive and less threatening scale.
 - The methodology was limited to one to three selected tools targeting two to three organizations.
 - Held a decision-making meeting with CSC, GIZ, and TNA experts; solicited and received the backing of CSC senior management
 - A concept paper on the piloting process for the TNA tools was drafted to generate buy-in from ministries and agencies.
 - Softened the project's approach to telephoning and e-mailing ministries and agencies about potential pilots, but received the same dismissive response

References

Wiskow, Melanie. 2017. "Strengthening the Eastern Partnership in Azerbaijan: Challenges in Implementing a Civil Service Training Capacity Program with a Focus on EU Affairs." In *Transformation, Politics and Implementation: Smart Implementation in Governance Programs*, edited by Renate Kirsch, Elke Siehl, and Albrecht Stockmayer, 247–62. Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft. <https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/10.5771/9783845280516-1/titelei-inhaltsverzeichnis>.



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