

The role of the civil society institutions to create and implement the socio-economic development strategy of Russia's constituent entities (exemplified by the Saratov Region)

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Abstract — The process to create and implement the socio-economic development strategy of Russia's constituent entities is impossible without taking into account the views of entrepreneurs, the expert community and members of the public. However, at present, in the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, the development of strategic plans in the economic sphere is often left to the officials; this makes the plans sound biased and less realistic. The article examines the instruments with the help of which civil society institutions can influence the socio-economic development of the region and take part in developing such plans as well as the possibilities for their implementation. The authors single out the necessity for government authorities and members of the public to interact in order to develop strategic documents of socio-economic development of Russia's constituent entities. A wide range of possibilities and opportunities is proposed to facilitate the main types of such interaction: social expertise and public control over the activities of the authorities, development of various forms of expert discussion of socially significant issues on negotiation platforms, invitation of civil society representatives to be members of various councils created under the authorities. It is noteworthy that one of the most important conditions for the full interaction between the authorities and the civil society institutions is the creation of an atmosphere of glasnost that involves the use of information resources contributing to raising awareness of the region population about the measures implemented by the authorities including the creation of a specialized Internet resource that provides citizens with access to information about the implementation of the Strategy as well as discussion platforms that enable public interaction about the decisions on important areas of socio-economic development of the region. Thus, the procedure of adopting and implementing the strategic document of socio-economic development of the region should include an approved program of broad public

discussion, expert assessments made by the professional community and the plans to inform the population about it.

Keywords - economic development strategy, civil society, constituent entities of the Russian Federation

I. INTRODUCTION

Socio-economic development of the Russian regions implies the presence of a strategic management framework that includes a set of legal acts approved by the legislative (representative) or supreme executive bodies of state power of the Russia's constituent entity in accordance with the current legislation; these legal acts should consider the targets set in the program documents of the federal level. Such issues as state support for small and medium-sized businesses, improvement of the quality of life of the population, regulation of the regional consumer market, the formation of a favorable investment climate in the region are impossible to solve without taking into account the interests and needs of the main participants in these processes – entrepreneurs and their associations. The main characteristic of democracy is citizens' participation in managing state affairs at all stages including the decision-making stage. The functional potential of public control as a way to include stakeholders in the economic system of the Russian Federation should be disclosed at all stages of strategic planning and management. It is under this condition that political decisions will be transparent and effective.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS (MODEL)

Defining the role and importance of civil society to create and implement the strategy of socio-economic development of a Russia's constituent entity is determined by the necessity to combine the research tools used by both economic and law sciences. The method of structural and functional analysis allowed us to determine what main civil society institutions functioning as subjects are involved in the process of creation and implementation of the regional strategy of socio-economic development. The use of a systematic approach facilitated studying the process of creation and implementation of the regional economic strategy seen as a system of consistent, hierarchically organized interaction between public authorities and civil society institutions. The application of the formal legal method helped to reveal the main problems associated with participation regulation of the civil society institutions in the process of creation and development of the regional economic system as well as to determine the place of these institutions in this process; at the same time, it contributed to finding ways to improve the legal mechanisms to take the public opinion into account when determining the strategic development of the region in the economic sphere. The foresight method was used to assess the resource potential of the civil society institutions to monitor the implementation of the regional economic development strategy. The method of modeling enabled to justify the need to develop a single roadmap for the civil society institutions to participate in creation and implementation of the socio-economic development strategy of Russia's constituent entities at all stages.

Combining these approaches enabled to carry out a comprehensive study of the issues raised in this article as well as to formulate conclusions and proposals of a practical nature.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The need to build an effective model of interaction between the government and the business community makes it relevant to raise constant and wide awareness of the society and business about the tools and activities to form and implement the state policy in this area; this necessity also makes it appropriate for the civil society institutions to actively participate in the strategic management of socio-economic development of Russia's constituent entities which ensures protection of the entrepreneurs' rights and freedoms.

Thus, the Strategy of socio-economic development of the Saratov Region until 2030 indicates the necessity to consolidate the efforts of the government and all the components of civil society as one of the priorities and the basis to move forward. It is argued that a new standard of the relationship between the civil society and the state has been formed in the region: from a dialogue to a responsible partnership. A wide range of possibilities and opportunities is proposed to facilitate the main types of such interaction: social expertise and public control over the activities of the authorities, development of various forms of expert discussion of socially significant issues on negotiation platforms, for example, within the framework of the Civil Forum of the

Saratov Region, promotion of the efficiency of the Civic Chamber of the Saratov Region and public councils of municipal districts of the region [1]. However, such active actors of public control as public councils under executive authorities of the region that provide implementation of this strategic document have been left irrelevant.

Two main groups of actors involved in the creation and implementation of the regional socio-economic development strategy should be identified in the non-governmental institutional mechanism to represent the interests of the business community at the regional level:

1) public stakeholders - associations of manufacturers and entrepreneurs; their main purpose is to express the interests of the business community in the process of interaction with public authorities while determining key areas of integrated territorial development. These include, first of all, Chambers of Commerce, public organizations of manufacturers and entrepreneurs (RSPP, OPORTA Russia, and etc.) and their professional associations;

2) the subjects of public control created according to Article 9 of the Federal Law No. 212-FZ of 21.07.2014 "On the basis of public control in the Russian Federation" [2] and serving as the dialogue platform of the power and business to discuss the most important questions of regional socio-economic development. This group of public actors should include specialized committees and commissions created in the structure of regional civic chambers and public councils under the legislative bodies of state power of Russia's constituent entities, public councils under the executive bodies of state power of Russia's entities as well as public councils (chambers) of municipalities created for the purpose of broad discussion of socially significant problems, coordination and consideration of the interests of business circles to create and implement regional economic policy and ensure sustainable socio-economic development of the region.

All the above-mentioned subjects should seem to participate in the process of adoption and implementation of the socio-economic development Strategy at all stages without any administrative restrictions. A clear legal regulation of methods and forms of public control in the process of creation and implementation of this document is one of the most important factors of effective political participation. It should be noted that nowadays there is no single, multi-level and consolidated organizational and legal mechanism for the participation of the civil society institutions in exercising public control in the field of strategic planning. The solution to this problem could be a clear normative consolidation of the procedures for public discussion and independent evaluation of the regional strategy by non-governmental bodies and organizations as well as legal regulation and organizational and functional implementation of mechanisms to inform the population, to collect and analyze citizens' appeals aimed at improving certain structural elements of the Strategy.

Each stage of the Strategy implementation should be checked and discussed in order to achieve the stated indicators. Quite a long planning period and the actions of this document, as well as the direct dependence of the national economy on various external factors, primarily political and

international, determines the need for constant revision of the set tasks, and therefore the working groups created to correct the strategic document must include not only representatives of the public but also of the professional community, since often the insufficient degree of professionalism of social activists is to be attributed to the number of related problems of public control. Extreme importance is assigned to a high level of knowledge of the subjects exercising public control in order to carry out an objective assessment of a very complex and multi-dimensional sphere of socio-economic relations.

It should be noted that the role functionality and the indicator of involvement of the civil society institutions in the system of regional strategic planning is very diverse, and it is primarily due to the specifics of the socio-political design of interaction between the government and civil society in a Russia's constituent entity. The analysis of regional structures of public control in the field of creation and implementation of the socio-economic development Strategy of a Russia's constituent entity allows us to conclude that the main actors of these processes are the Chambers of Commerce, public councils created under the executive authorities as well as the Commissioner for Entrepreneurs' Rights seen as an exceptional feature due to the legal nature of this institution.

While exercising certain forms of public control, the current legislation permits the participation of the Institute of commissioners for the protection of the rights and freedoms of certain categories of citizens including the Commissioner for Entrepreneurs' Rights. Despite the fact that according to its legal nature it is a state body, the important role of this Institute in the implementation of measures of public control should be singled out; it implies joint actions with the civil society institutions aimed at protecting business interests while implementing the socio-economic policy. For example, the Commissioner for Entrepreneurs' Rights has the right to initiate a public audit and expertise of the activities and decisions that state bodies make and execute. At the same time, it should be noted that the above-mentioned forms of public control are practically not used or used very rarely; evidently it reduces the control potential of this institution. However, the active position of the Commissioner for Entrepreneurs' Rights while representing business interests is obvious and is supported by the empirical data. According to the Report "On the results of the activities of the Commissioner for Entrepreneurs' Rights in the Saratov Region in 2018", the business Ombudsman of the Saratov Region received more than 600 appeals whereas 476 appeals were received in 2017. Most often, businessmen complained about the monopolization of the market by retail chains, the actions of tax officers, employees of control and supervisory bodies, obstruction of business activities and late payment under executed state and municipal contracts. The number of economic crimes has increased almost twice, and the number of entrepreneurs' complaints against the actions of law enforcement officers has gone up five times.

Chambers of Commerce, which are the oldest associations of entrepreneurs in Russia, play a special role in exercising public control in the process of creation and implementation of the socio-economic development strategy of the region. According to Professor V.V. Gerasimova, Chamber of

Commerce is the most important subject of regional economic policy primarily due to its main functional purpose that is to assist developing trade relations and business in the territory of interest [3]. Indeed, the analysis of the regulated competence of these bodies allows us to conclude that they represent the interests of a wide range of domestic businesses from small to large covering all sectors of the Russian economic sphere. Chambers of Commerce directly contribute to the socio-economic development of the region representing the interests of the business community, taking a direct part in the improvement of sectoral legislation such as tax, land, civil law and arbitration, assessing the regulatory and real impact of legislation that affects entrepreneurs' rights. Providing methodological and advisory assistance to regional entrepreneurs, conducting economic research and monitoring law enforcement, promoting the development of foreign economic relations and international cooperation, these bodies directly affect the formation of a favorable socio-economic environment in the region, strengthen its investment potential and increase business investments in the territory. At the same time, it should be noted that in recent years Chambers of Commerce have been exposed to risks in the field of functional competition with other institutions operating in the field of representation and protection of entrepreneurs' interests. It is necessary to point out the obvious trend of modern Russian socio-economic development in terms of replacing the role of social structures in the socio-economic processes by state bodies or non-profit organizations created on the initiative of the government. First of all, we are talking about the above-mentioned Commissioner for Entrepreneurs' Rights as well as the Agency for Strategic Initiatives that is a non-profit organization established by the Government of Russia. These subjects almost completely copy the faculties belonging to Chambers of Commerce and create special risks for leveling their role in the system of socio-economic relations.

Public councils established under government authorities and ensuring openness and transparency in decision management play an important role in the system of public control over the implementation of the socio-economic development strategy of a Russia's constituent entity. Before the Law on public control entered into force, there was no single regulatory legal act that established the basis for the organization and functioning of public councils as subjects of public control. Public councils were established under the state and local self-government bodies on the basis of decisions made by the relevant authorities or officials. In addition, heads or other officials of the bodies under which these councils were formed were often included as members of these boards, which adversely affected their functional purpose, in fact neutralizing the independence of their activities. Currently, they are formed exclusively from representatives of civil society and on a competitive basis.

Public councils established under regional executive bodies should not only monitor the implementation of the socio-economic development Strategy of the region, but also make suggestions for its improvement and do it openly and transparently using modern means of communication.

The legislation gives the subjects of public control the opportunity to a) create special websites, b) use the official sites of bodies and organizations under which public councils are established. The legislator, apparently, proceeded from the fact that these information resources will complement each other: if the public council has an opportunity, a special website is created, if not, the public authority is obliged to create a page of the public council on its own website. However, in reality, this leads to the fact that many public councils have two information resources, and they exist as if parallel to each other. For example, a special website of the public council publishes detailed information about its activities and main events whereas only official minutes of meetings are placed on its page on the website of the executive authority. These two resources are not connected with each other, there are no links, as a result, citizens using one of the resources receive only part of the information about the activities of the public council.

An interesting form of providing information, which is important for monitoring the implementation of the socio-economic development strategy of the Saratov region until 2030, is presented on the websites of public councils under the Ministry of Territorial Entities of the Saratov Region and the Ministry of Finance of the Saratov Region. In addition to the official minutes of the meetings, a press release is published for media representatives and interested users as well as all the official documents prepared by the ministries for the meeting of public councils. This practice allows citizens to form their own informed opinion both on the issue of interest and on the position of the council.

However, the Federal Law “On the basis of public control in the Russian Federation” does not contain a list of the main forms (methods) of providing information. The Law refers only to the websites on which the information is placed. There could be utilized other forms: interactive polls, electronic voting, online civil monitoring over the solutions of the most urgent problems, blogs of the council members and information dissemination in social networks. All this would contribute to better coverage of the results of how the socio-economic development Strategy of the region is being implemented; this would also identify problems in the process of its implementation. For example, business analysts have placed a critical analysis of the implementation of the Saratov Region investment program pointing to the failure of the planned strategy indicators to attract investment to the region [4].

In general, both the legislator (federal and regional) and the civil society representatives significantly underestimate the need for constant, meaningful and diverse ways of providing the citizens with information on the activities of public councils under the executive authorities. That significantly reduces the effectiveness of these bodies of public control.

After all, one of the most important conditions under which the full interaction of the authorities with the institutions of civil society is possible is the development of an atmosphere of glasnost. To this end, the socio-economic development Strategy of the Saratov Region provides for the use of information resources that contribute to raising

awareness of the population of the region about the measures implemented by the executive authorities of the region and local self-government bodies; this includes the creation of a specialized Internet resource granting access to information about the implementation of the Strategy as well as providing access to discussion platforms that enable public interaction about the decisions on important areas of socio-economic development of the region. Indeed, such an Internet platform called “Strategy 2030. Saratov Region” (<https://strategy24.ru/64/management/news>) has been created [5]. However, its content is a story about the events and activities related to the implementation of the Strategy. There are no such reciprocal forms of interaction with the audience as blogs of the representatives of the economic and political elite and of the scientific community, multi-topic forums of professional users who are interested in discussing special topics or “hot lines” on the most pressing issues of the Strategy implementation, and etc. As a result, the newly created information resource is built on an outdated, linear (from the government to the citizens) rather than an interactive model of communication.

In our opinion, the Internet platform created to inform about the implementation stages of the regional Strategy-2030 should not only provide access to information, but also facilitate the organization of a discussion space, promote public dialogue, perform the function of consolidation and involvement of civil society to implement the Strategy.

IV. CONCLUSION

We have analyzed the main health problems of Kuzbass population. The most important of them are low LEB among men; men mortality rate exceeding women mortality in 45-64 age group; high infant mortality rate in countryside areas; suicide rate exceeding WHO limits by 30%; high mortality rate among Kuzbass people capable to work. All these problems have a negative impact on the socioeconomic development of the region.

The socio-economic development Strategy of the Saratov Region for 2030 formulates a general goal to ensure a stable improvement in the quality of life and improve the global competitiveness of the Saratov region on the basis of the transition to a knowledge economy in which the person is at the center. At the same time, the development and accumulation of human capital with a corresponding increase in its contribution to the socio-economic potential of the region is determined as an absolute criterion for the effectiveness of the economic growth. The economic policy regulates the environment in which this capital can find the most competitive conditions for self preservation, accumulation and use in comparison with other territories of the Russian Federation [1]. Only consolidation of the combined forces of the authorities and residents of the Saratov Region, who should not only take part in formulating this goal, but fully contribute to its achievement, will be able to contribute to achieve the general goal of this Strategy.

Thus, the procedure of adoption and implementation of the strategic document of the regional socio-economic development should include an approved program of broad

public discussion, expert assessments made by the professional community and plans to inform the population about it.

Differential and often fragmented approach of Russian regions to create and implement the socio-economic development Strategy in terms of the degree and forms of involvement of the civil society institutions leads us to the conclusion that it is necessary to develop a single roadmap that would provide public control of the regional strategic planning at all stages. The Strategy should reflect the main tasks related to ensuring and protecting the rights and legitimate interests of non-governmental socio-economic actors as well as the tasks connected with combating corruption and upholding the principle of legality; it should also increase the civil activity. The roadmap time period should be defined more broadly than that specified in the Strategy for socio-economic development as it is necessary to take into account the stage of the document development itself. The technological system of measures to complete the tasks set out in the roadmap should provide for the widest possible range of mechanisms to ensure public control in this area. These mechanisms can include public hearings organized at the panels of Chambers of Commerce of Russia's constituent entities, regional civic chambers, public councils under the relevant ministries whose members will include not only responsible developers of the strategic document, but also independent experts – representatives of the business community and scientific organizations who will be able to present their vision and their professional assessment of socio-economic processes in the region. Also, while developing the Strategy, it is necessary to organize public discussions of the project using electronic means of participation of the civil society institutions: the site specially created for the collection of public initiatives; the results of the latter will be accumulated and aggregated via introducing the blockchain technology in this process that will contribute to the objective and correct processing of incoming proposals and comments. All the civil society institutions should be able to carry out public monitoring over the implementation of the socio-economic development Strategy through the analysis of indicative criteria functioning as a tool of public control where the latter should involve representatives of commercial and non-profit organizations including public and independent experts. In this context, the use of the Delphi survey method based on expert, multi-level assessment of the professional

community of the socio-economic situation in the region will allow the authorities to form a clear and reliable idea of the problems and difficulties in the Russia's constituent entity; it will later facilitate adjusting the mechanism to implement the approved document and to establish and improve the correct strategic development line.

The proposed above process models of public control should lead to a high level of influence of socio-economic stakeholders in the field of strategic planning, they should ensure that management policy takes into account their interests and protects the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the state. The main and probably the only critical factor that represents an insurmountable barrier to implement the proposed roadmap can only be the risk which implies a lack of real interest and desire of the state bodies to cooperate and establish a partnership with the civil society institutions.

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