

Implementation of the SDG Targets, including the Fight against Corruption: Comparison of Argentina and Russia

Galina Menshikova^a, Isabel Morayta^b and Nikolay Pruel^c
Faculty of Sociology, Saint Petersburg State University, St Petersburg 199034, Russia

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Abstract: The purpose of the publication is to assess the quality of the Governments of Argentina and Russia activity on the implementation of the SDGs. It offers approach to assessing the results of the implementation of the SDGs: a comparison of the two countries. Taking into account the set goal, 10 parameters were singled out, and the “fight against corruption” was especially highlighted and assessed. The authors briefly described the existing assessment methods, indicating and confirming the popularity of this area of research in the world. Comparing the results of research, it was concluded that the outwardly activity of the Argentine government is higher. However, having the opportunity to assess the dynamics of changes in indicators – the country has been submitting Reviews and reports since 2017 – this advantage did not seem obvious, since for a number of the most important indicators, no positive dynamics was found. As a characteristic feature of the activity of the Russian government, which was revealed, we can consider its willingness to influence on the lower levels of government with minimal modernization of the upper ones.

1 INTRODUCTION


The relevance of the topic follows from the emerging discussion in Russia how to evaluate its Voluntary Report, presented in 2020. Opinions are divided: some speak negatively, others – on the contrary. It is clear that there is also an intermediate point of view.


A study of the literature on the topic showed an abundance of publications, which, however, does not diminish its relevance: the public is obliged to keep it in the focus of their attention. The number of publications contributes to the development of assessment methods, which is important, both for improving the movement of states towards the SDGs and for the formation of the analytical potential of comparative research in general.


The approach proposed by the authors suggests one of the possible options: to assess the degree of the SDGs implementation in public administration practice by comparing it with the results achieved by another country (in our case, Argentina). The choice

of countries for comparison is primarily due to the nationality of the authors of the publication.

Moreover, these states have much in common, which makes the procedure for comparing their results effective. Firstly, both countries stood at the beginning of the SDG course, initiating its implementation. Secondly, both are included in the G-20, which characterizes the overall high socio-economic status of the states. Third, countries are regional leaders. So, Argentina in many ways shows an example of development for the countries of the Latin American continent, Russia – for the CIS countries. Fourth, they are approximately at the same stage of political and economic transformation. Both are building a market economy and are trying (with varying success) to deepen the quality of democracy in governance. Fifth, it seems that despite the difference in tasks as the basis for the implementation of the SDGs, there is one common for both - the fight against corruption.

^a  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1381-3310>

^b  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0608-7747>

^c  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1468-1145>

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As the Voluntary Reviews are accumulated, all a large number of countries, there is a natural need for their analysis and comparison with each other. This line of research has become both relevant and popular.

We agree with the statement: “As a result of growing interest by academicians and practitioners in this subject, an increasing number of scientific and technical documents have been published from 2010 to 2020” (Sousa, Almeida, Cali, 2021). Its authors had counted 4606 scientific documents devoted to such an analysis since 2009 in the Scopus database, with a total number – 19.671 over two decades of the 21st century. Not only a huge number of articles have been published, but also about 70 reviews, assessing the implementation of the SDGs, for example (2,3).

Without dwelling in detail on the typology of criteria for evaluating countries according to the degree of implementation of the SDGs, let's name two, illustrating them with some examples. It seems that, first of all, two types of documents can be identified. The first one is the official materials of the UN (Handbook for preparation of voluntary national reviews, 2018; The United Nations System wide strategic document (SWSD) to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2019) and representatives of international organizations (Peiró-Palomino, Picazo-Tadeo, 2018; Measuring Distance to the SDG Targets, 2019; Begashaw, 2020; Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report, 2020; Towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the UNECE region A statistical portrait of progress and challenges, 2020), including various approved recommendations for the preparation of reports / reviews. The second is scientific publications dedicated to the topic.

Another criterion is the direction or topic of the assessment. Countries (regions) can be compared in general on the implementation of the SDGs (Weitz, et al., 2018; Xie, Wen, Choi, 2021; D'Andrassi, Paoloni, Mattei, 2021), in the activity of their states (Collste, Pedercini, Cornell, 2017; Governance as an SDG Accelerator Country Experiences and Tools, OECD, 2019), in the dissemination of ideas to business (Monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals in the CIS region, 2021), to regions (Bardal, et al., 2021; Ortiz-Moya, et al., 2010), in activity of the population (Chauhan, Jakhar, Chauhan, 2020), as well as within the framework of specific SDGs: for

example, in the area of climate policy (Zamani, Ali, Roozbahani, 2020); agriculture and food (Aldababseh, et al., 2018) etc.

It seems that it is worth highlighting the quality of the assessments of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) – professional experts in this procedure. It recognized the importance of assessing the results of the implementation of the SDGs, and most of its 194 members included it as a cross-cutting priority for action (Monteroa, Le Blanc, 2019). Thus it became possible to combine external assessment with expert knowledge of the real situation from inside. The INTOSAI assessment methodology was based on the main directions in the areas: gender inequality, health, education, human rights and domestic policy, as well as the quality of SDG process guidance: the creation of social institutions, distribution across territories, the development of specially focused programs. Its other positive advantage is the possibility of qualification based on assessing of budget reorientation for the SDGs implementation (both national and local) (Audit of SDGs implementation, 2021).

Russian researchers are also moving from calls to implement SDGs to assess the progress of the process and the quality of its guidance. Thus, the methodology of the Accounts Chamber of the country is based on seven main assessment priorities: legal regulation, strategic planning system, institutional organization and interdepartmental interaction, stakeholder interaction mechanisms, resource and methodological support, organization of monitoring, ensuring openness, accountability and transparency (Bulletin of the Accounts Chamber of the Russian Federation). The Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE) also conducts constant monitoring, regularly improving the assessment methodology. Its purpose is to assess the degree to which business is included in the course towards the SDGs (A responsibility. Openness. Effectiveness. RSPP Sustainable Development Indices, 2019).

3 GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE METHODOLOGY FOR COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF SDG COURSE IMPLEMENTATION IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Taking into account the formulated goal – to assess the degree of implementation SDG in public

administration practice, lets present possible approaches and assessment criteria. Its need to be specified that at this stage, not a quantitative, but a qualitative analysis of successes and failures seems to be important, therefore the authors do not set the task of qualifying the indicators.

First of all, it seems necessary to distinguish two groups criteria: evaluative and comparative. The first one aims to compare the level of implementation of the course in the policy of states, the second one is to identify common points and differences in implementing the SDGs in countries. Since it is the first group of criteria that corresponds to the set goal – to assess the activity of public administration of the two countries in moving along the SDG course, we present the results according to this criteria only. Instead of analyzing the second group, we shall only list possible criteria: the structure of tasks that were voiced by each country as the most relevant (1), the level and methods of disseminating the SDG ideas to the regions (2), public organizations that took responsibility for disseminating the SDG ideas to the business sphere and civil society (3 and 4), a comparative analysis of the successes and failures of countries on the SDGs. To save space, we present together the comparison criteria with the results obtained.

4 CRITERIA AND RESULTS OF COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF SDG COURSE IMPLEMENTATION IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM OF THE TWO COUNTRIES

We propose to refer to the indicators of the first group (estimated):

4.1 Places in the State' Rating (and Their Dynamics) According to the UN SDGs

Using The SDG Index and Dashboards Reports, prepared by Bertelsmann Stiftung specialists in cooperation with the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, we obtain the following data by year (the scores are shown in brackets): Argentina 2016 – 43rd place out of 145 countries (66.8); 2017 – 41 out of 157 (72.5); 2018 – 53 out of 156 (70.3),

2019 – 45 out of 162 (72.4), 2020 – 51 out of 166 (73.2).

The data for the Russian Federation looks like this: 2016 – 119 place; 2017 – 62 (68.9); 2018 – 63 (68.9); 2019 – 55 (70.9), 2020 – 57 (71.9).

Let us remind that the score assesses “the amount of distance traveled to achieve the goals of the Agenda”. Accordingly, given that its average is estimated at 60, both countries occupy positions consistently above average, however, Argentina's place is always higher than that of the RF.

4.2 Date of First Report, Availability of Other Official Annual Reporting Documents

Note that Argentina became one of 43 countries in the world and one of 11 – from the Latin America and the Caribbean region, which presented its Voluntary Review in 2017.

The country did not submit a report for the next year (and the following), but as a result of joint work with UNDP, a report was created, which provided systematic information on the work on the implementation of the goals considered as priorities. It described the course chosen and the specific measures taken to achieve them, and analyzed the budget allocated for programs that are consistent with the SDGs.

Argentina passed its second Voluntary Review – “Segundo Informe Voluntario Nacional” in 2020

The RF passed its first Review only in 2020. It is difficult to assess the degree of justification of such a delay, but one cannot disagree with the officially named reasons: having got used to strict planning and also having a developed institute of statistics, the Russian Federation found it difficult to draw up a reporting document. The UN experts themselves admitted that out of 232 indicators, only 82 (i.e., about a third) were understandable to statisticians in the world and data were collected, for 61 – the calculation methodology was clear, but data collection was not carried out, for 84 – there was no unified calculation methodology.

Let's briefly comment the general trend of reporting: 2018 – 46 countries, 2020 – 162! The growth of the UN's authority in the implementation of the SDGs is impressive, and the position of the Russian Federation, which has found itself among the outsiders, is alarming.

4.3 The Level of Government Participation in Political Actions accompanying the implementation of the SDGs

Starting with the development of the SDG course, Argentina not only supported its idea, but its leaders personally came to UN events, speaking with explanations of the country's position. In September 2016, Mauricio Macri (President of Argentina) personally came and spoke at the 71st session of the UN General Assembly. Vice President Gabriela Michetti attended and spoke at 72 sessions.

In 2018, using the status of the G-20 presidency, the representatives of Argentina insisted that the discussion of SDG ideas be included in this year's agenda as one of the priority items. According to its initiative, the goals and powers of the bodies regulating the implementation of the SDGs within the G-20 were somewhat transformed. Argentina insisted on including a paragraph on the Paris Agreement in the final declaration of the G-20 summit, stressing that it is irreversible for the signatory countries of the 2030 Agenda.

Russia also stood at the origins of the SDGs. The country's leader (V.V.Putin), supporting the idea as a whole, however, did not take personal part, even the procedure for presenting the Voluntary Report to the UN Political Council was entrusted to the Permanent Representative of Russia, Vasily Nebenza.

Copying the behavior of the country's leader, members of the government are not very active either. The most common form of their reflection on the SDGs is press commentary. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the RF and his deputies are especially active in this direction.

4.4 Reflection of the SDGs in the Legislation of the Countries

In both countries, a common line on the SDGs implementation is reflected in articles of Constitutions, thus denoting the social, environmental, economic and legal line of Governments responsibility. In Argentina, according to article 75, paragraph 22 of the Constitution, all included human rights treaties have a constitutional hierarchy, in Art. 37 enshrined political rights, and Art. 41 and 43 – environmental protection. The country has a law “On National Environmental Policy” (No. 25.675 / 2002).

In Russia, the ideas of the SDGs are reflected in Articles 7 (paragraph 1.2), Art. 8 (paragraph 1), art. 19 and 22, protecting the rights of women, Articles

34-41, as well as 43 and 45, which guarantee the fundamental rights of Russians, as well as in Art. 32, 33 – their political rights; in Art. 9 and 36 regulate the rights (and 58 – obligations) to use land and natural resources.

Both countries have signed major international treaties, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; Kyoto, Montreal, Paris and other protocols related to human rights and climate regulation. They have adjusted the legislation regarding the implementation of the SDG provisions and continue this work, however, both have not adopted a direct law positioning the importance of the SDGs and forcing all economic entities to focus on the adopted course.

Russian officials explain it this way: even before the SDGs, the country proclaimed a course towards sustainable development, understanding by this a balance in solving socio-economic and environmental problems. This idea is reflected in the Concept of the country's transition to sustainable development (1996) and other government documents. In our opinion, given the lack of proper control over the implementation of these calls, it is difficult to accept this argument. It is impossible not to see the difference in the methodology for the implementation of sustainable development and the "Agenda for the period up to 2030". The course towards sustainable development is a common appeal, without thought-out parameters and degree of responsibility.

Currently, as it was shown by the analysis carried out by the Analytical Center under the Government of the RF in the spring of 2020, all 12 national projects and the Comprehensive Plan for the Modernization and Expansion of Backbone Infrastructure directly or indirectly affected 107 of the 169 tasks identified in the UN document. The situation is similar in Argentina.

4.5 Leadership of Countries in the Regions to Advance the SDGs Course

Argentina is undoubtedly an actor actively promoting the ideas of the SDGs in its region. She not only herself tries to fulfill all the requirements of the UN, but also seeks to incorporate the course into the MERCOSUR agenda (MERCOSUR – the Common Market of South America, an economic and political agreement between Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay (membership was suspended on 29.06.2012 until April 2013) and Venezuela (membership suspended on 05.08.2017)), identifying potential

opportunities for cooperation between states. The MERCOSUR Social Institute, reorganized on her initiative, coordinates and controls them.

Russia is also a leading actor in its region (CIS), although many countries (Belarus, Kazakhstan, etc.) have a higher rating for the SDGs implementation. She is tasked with representing the countries of Eastern Europe on the UN committees on SDGs. She was re-elected as a member of the IAEG-SDGs (rotation – May 2017) and is a member of its working group. The main form of ideas dissemination is the inclusion of certain areas of the SDGs on the agenda of the Interparliamentary Assembly of CIS countries. This organization coordinates actions, but to a greater extent within countries, in particular, disseminating UN methodological recommendations on the SDGs. Another field of her activity is holding international scientific and practical conferences. At the same time, the participation of the CIS in promoting the ideas of the SDGs cannot be considered sufficient: the analysis of its website did not reveal the intention to develop a model law on the implementing of the SDGs. In the Commonwealth, the relevant standing commissions have not been created, no special meetings have been held on the SDGs implementation. True, when discussing specific problems: climate warming, ecology, education, raising living standards, developing production – SDGs are raised, but no more.

4.6 Powers of the Body Responsible for the Implementation of the Goals and Dissemination of the Ideas of the SDGs in Countries

In Argentina, activities to implement the SDGs are coordinated and guided by two bodies. The first is the National Council for the Coordination of Social Policy. It was created in 2002 as a platform for the development of plans, coordination and monitoring of state social policy. It has been entrusted since 2016 with responsibility for the implementation of the "2030 Agenda". The second body the National Interdepartmental Commission for the Implementation and Monitoring of the SDGs, which includes representatives of all ministries and secretariats. It was created in April 2016, and the following year, as the structure was agreed and the progress towards the SDGs was assessed, two working groups were created. Accordingly, the official monitoring and analysis of the results on the SDGs implementation takes place at two levels: in two working groups (usually meetings are held 4 times a year), as well as in two commissions. The

National Council is chaired by Victoria Tolosa Paz and the Coordination Group is chaired by Fernando Quiroga, both of which are directly subordinate to the President of the country. Tolosa Paz is very experienced in social affairs and currently plays a key role in government. She coordinates the work of all ministries with the aim of reducing hunger and solving social tasks.

In the RF, the coordination of the activities of various departments in the field of SDGs is carried out by the Interdepartmental Working Group under the Administration of the RF President on issues related to climate change and sustainable development. The commission was established in 2012, coordination of SDGs activities has also been included in her competence since 2016. It is headed by Ruslan Edelgeriev, who was also responsible for the preparation of the Voluntary Review. It seems that the personality of this young representative of the Chechen Republic is little known in Russia.

In general, comparing the organizational aspects, it seems that the activity of the Government of Argentina can be recognized as higher. Although even the high authority of the leader of the SDG course – Tolosa Paz is not always sufficient to ensure the fulfillment of obligations.

4.7 Dissemination of SDGs in the Regions of the Country

As it is written in the UN documents, the tasks of the government are not only in the movement of countries in the direction outlined in the "2030 Agenda", but also in the dissemination of the ideas of the SDGs both across regions and across organizations.

This activity in Argentina began to be carried out since 2017, when all regions were charged with the responsibility of compiling a report on the SDGs implementation. Each province and municipality has adapted its goals and objectives in this direction and is submitting annual reports.

In the RF, due to the lack of political will of the leadership, and as a continuation of this – the absence of relevant laws, such reporting is only being introduced. At the same time, in 2018, 2 regional reports were submitted from Russia to the UN (Moscow and the Sverdlovsk region), and in 2019 – 13. All of them are developing their projects for the SDGs implementation. However, the initiative of such activity belonged not to the Government, which itself did not submit the Review, but to the Russian Association for the Assistance to the United Nations, which has developed and is implementing a special

Program “Dissemination of SDGs in the regions of the Russian Federation”.

4.8 The Degree of Involvement of Enterprises, or at Least the Awareness of Their Managers about the Objectives of the SDGs

The level of awareness of enterprises (their leaders) about the SDGs in Argentina, as it is clear from the "Review – 2020", is – 90%, in the Russian Federation it is lower. Undoubtedly, large enterprises in Russia - exporters of raw materials, are well aware and restructure (or at least reflect this in the documents) their activities, but small and medium-sized firms do not do this, not seeing much sense in this.

4.9 The Degree of Involvement of Civil Society and NGOs in the Implementation of the SDG Objectives

It should be noted that part of the policy of the Argentine government is the desire to involve civil society and the private sector in the implementation of the SDGs, primarily through the organization of National Forums. For example, in December 2016, the Ministry of Health and Social Development organized a National Forum on Social Responsibility for Sustainable Development, which was attended by more than 500 representatives of civil society, companies, international organizations, scientists and government officials

In the RF, the holding of the Forums has also become the main channel for broadcasting the SDG ideas, but the fundamental difference is that they are organized by civil society itself, however, often with the help of individual members of the government. For example, the Chairman of the Accounts Chamber Kudrin A.L, starting from 2015, annually holds the Forum of Public Forces, and the Deputy Chairman of the Committee of State Duma on ecology Valuev N.S. has been organizing the Environmental Forum in St. Petersburg for the third year.

4.10 Comparative Analysis of General Quantitative Results

Speaking about the overall results of countries' activities in achieving specific SDGs, it is customary to group goals according to the level of success. So, in relation to Argentina, a successful group can be distinguished, which, first of all SDG No. 6 ("Clean

Water and Sanitation"), which may be due to the country's good supply of water resources and a large number of cities with a centralized water supply and sewerage system.

Accordingly, the second group (less successful) includes SDG 9 ("Industrialization, innovation and infrastructure"), since part of the territory is occupied by remote rural areas, but in general, there is an understanding that the introduction of innovations and improvement of infrastructure takes more time, SDG 10 ("Reducing inequality"), the implementation of which is one of the most serious challenges not only for Argentina, but also for the world as a whole, and SDG 14 ("Conservation of marine ecosystems"), which may be explained by the rather active fishing and extraction of other resources of the seas and oceans. Overall, according to the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Argentina is well positioned and relatively successful in adopting the SDGs course, albeit with success and failure. So the country has failed to achieve sustainability in the fight against poverty, and this is the core problem of the country. The 2020 review showed a deterioration in the indicator: at the end of 2017, 25.7% of the population was considered to be poor, and poverty covered 4.8%, the indicators for 2019 were 35.5 and 8%, respectively. It seems that, taking into account the pandemic, the situation in 2020 did not improve.

Russian and international experts note that since the early 2000s, the RF has achieved the greatest success in the fight against hunger (SDG 2) and poverty (SDG 1). It is making relative progress in providing quality education (SDG 4), using modern and clean energy (SDG 7), promoting employment (SDG 8), building sustainable cities and human settlements (SDG 11) and fighting climate change (SDG 13). Much work remains to be done on gender inequality (SDG 5), access to clean water and sanitation (SDG 6), sustainable infrastructure (SDG 9), sustainable consumption and production (SDG 12), strengthening partnerships between government, the private sector and civil society (SDG 17) and in the conservation of ecosystems (SDG 14 and 15). The most challenging issues for Russia remain access to health care and well-being (SDG 3), justice and building a peaceful society (SDG 16), as well as inequality and poor quality of life (SDG 10). The development of the country's economy according to the export-raw material model increases the load on the ecosystem, which has a negative impact on the health and well-being.

Summing up, we note that a comprehensive analysis of the SDGs implementation shows the

greater activity of the Argentina Government over Russian. Although there is no sustainability in it too: victories are combined with failures. The external successes cited in the RF' Review – 2020, when compared to Argentina, look little convincing.

5 FIGHTING CORRUPTION AS A CORE LINE OF ACTION GOVERNMENTS FOR SELF-DEVELOPMENT

Anti-corruption measures are viewed worldwide as a particularly relevant direction, in many ways, predetermining both: the overall success of the Governments functioning and their activities to implement the SDGs. Let's name the places that countries occupy in the Transparency International rating: Argentina – 66th place (45 points), Russia – 137th place (28 points). At the same time Argentina is slowly but improving its position, Russia is not changing it.

The Report of Argentina devotes a lot of space to this issue. It notes its special role, names the body that is responsible for achieving the goal – “The Ministry of Justice and Human Rights Protection”. As part of SDG-16 implementation, the task was set to “significantly reduce corruption in the sphere of interaction between the state and the population”. There was named the indicator “the proportion of persons in contact with a civil servant paid a bribe in the last 3 years or indicated that an official asked them to pay a bribe (for the last 12 months)”. It was planned to reduce it by 2% a year. In 2016, according to a survey of residents, it was 2.4%, but data for 2017-2020 was not identified. With regard to the solution of target 16.5, the Review identifies specific measures: carrying out research on the anti-corruption system (1), institutionalizing the integrity system (2), strengthening the system of officials' affidavits (3).

The country has adopted laws “On the criminal liability of legal entities” (No. 27.401 / 2017), as well as “On access to public information” (No. 27.275 / 2016). It had created the Agency for Access to Public Information. The National Plan for the Discovery of State Information is in force (Presidential Decree No. 117/2016). There was adopted Anti-Corruption Program for 2019-2023, which includes increasing the transparency of government information, strengthening control over government purchases and service contracts. The effectiveness of the measures made it possible to raise the country's rating

from 85 to 66th and increase the assessment by 5 points.

The Russian government has also shown vigorous activity. The Report states that “As a result of the work of the Russian Federation's system of combating money laundering, the volume of suspicious financial flows decreased by 33%” (p. 18). It shows the dynamics of positive shifts, although in comparison with 2010. Thus, “bribery” in general for the period from 2010 to 2018 decreased by 40.8%. There was formed a Public Committee for the Control of Corruption Cases in 2011. However, we did not reveal the membership of authoritative national leaders on its website. There was approved National Anti-Corruption Plan in 2018. Special attention in it is paid to measures identifying and solving crimes committed on a large and especially large scale or by organized groups. As the Report-2020 shows (see p. 87), with a general line aimed at reducing corruption, the number of crimes classified as major ones increased (there were 3.9 in 2015 to 5.4 thousand in 2018, i.e., the increase was 42%).

The review of the RF, thus, revealed a really urgent problem – the growth of large and organized corruption crimes, but did not identify ways to overcome it. Specialists thus identify measures named above as formal ones. Accordingly, the assessment of Transparency International – the Russian Federation in 2019 increased its status by one place, compared to 2018, but its assessment did not change (all the same 28 points out of 100 possible).

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Based on the research results it is possible to consider that cross-country comparisons give a new look on SDGs implementation.

2. It seems that 10 suggested criteria are fully allow, in general, to assess the level of SDGS implementation by the Governments of the countries, although the addition of them is quite possible.

3. Our analysis showed that in general the activity of the Argentinean government in this direction is higher than the Russian one. Leaders of Argentina demonstrate the political will to change situation, although it does not guarantee sustainability in the country's movement along the path of progress and the SDGs.

4. General assessment of anti-corruption measures based on information in “The review of the Russian Federation – 2020” reflects their, on the one

hand, formal nature and, on the other hand, focus on the grassroots level. The main problem – organized crime and the growth of major violations – is not being resolved: it is difficult for the government to fight against itself and its affiliates. Perhaps, the application of world practice on the affidavit of officials can facilitate this solution.

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