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# Appraisal in the Republic of Belarus: Theory, Technique, Normative Regulation

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**Key words:** appraisal; selection of documents to the state storage; principles and criteria of the appraisal; expert services, expert committees; stages of appraisal, lists of documents with the indication of periods of storage; repetitive information.

*Appraisal is a basis of formation of the National Archival Fund of the Republic of Belarus. A set of regulatory legal instruments resolving the issues of organization and conducting of the appraisal in both the state archives and the organizations was elaborated by the State Archival Service of the Republic of Belarus. In order to deliver the quality appraisal the system of expert services (expert committees) has been formed in Belarus. The expert committees conduct the appraisal in several stages starting from the records keeping in organizations up to the state archives. They use the principles and criteria of appraisal, the most important of which are the criteria of the contents of documents and the importance of the organization in a management system. Nevertheless, archivists face a range of problems concerning the appraisal: the technique of appraisal and selection to permanent storage of electronic records (documents); development of specific selection criteria of documents reflecting new aspects of the Belarusian society life; the need to review the approach to the selection of documents with a repetitive information for the state storage.*

**RYBAKOU, Andrei, La selezione in Bielorussia: teoria, tecnica, normativa. Atlanti, Vol. 18, Trieste, pp. 257-264.**

*La selezione è la base della formazione del Fondo Archivistico Nazionale della Repubblica di Bielorussia. Una serie di strumenti*

## 1. Introduction

Appraisal of value and selection of documents for the state storage are closely connected with their use in the future. An increasing quantity of documents differing in value is created annually in the organizations. Therefore the primary goal of the appraisal shall be to reduce the quantity of the documents left for storage, providing at the same time the completeness of information necessary for the society, particular organizations and citizens.

At the appraisal selection of documents is simultaneously made for both the storage and the disposal; mistakes made while doing this work could be irreparable. For this reason the State Archival Service pays primary attention to the issues of the appraisal of documents.

According to officially accepted definition **appraisal of value of documents** is an establishment of the scientific, historical, social, cultural and practical importance of documents with the purpose to assign terms of their storage.

## 2. Legislative and Normative Aspects

Appraisal is a basis of formation of the National Archival Fund of the Republic of Belarus. Corresponding position is fixed in the Law of the Republic of Belarus *On the National Archival Fund and Archives in the Republic of Belarus* adopted in 1994 (an updated version was issued in 1999). According to Article 7 of the national Belarusian archival law *the inclusion of documents into the National Archival Fund of the Republic of Belarus is made on the basis of the appraisal of their value in the state bodies, at the enterprises, in institutions and organizations in the order set by the national state body on archives and records management.*

Functions of the national management body on archives and records management are fulfilled at present by the Department on Archives and Records Management, a part of the central office of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus (before May, 2006 it was the Committee on Archives and Records Management at the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus). The Department

has developed a set of regulatory legal instruments resolving the issues of organization and conducting of the appraisal in both the state archives and the organizations of the Republic of Belarus. These instruments are:

The Rules of Work of the State Archives of the Republic of Belarus (approved by Decision N. 7 of the Committee on Archives and Records Management at the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus dated November 25th, 2005);

Basic Rules of Work of Archives of the Central and Local Bodies of the State Government and Control, Institutions, Organizations and Enterprises of the Republic of Belarus (approved by Decision N. 5 of the Board of the State Committee on Archives and Records Management of the Republic of Belarus dated April 30th, 1997);

The Model Instruction on Record Keeping in the Ministries, State Committees and other Central Control Bodies, Institutions, Organizations and at Enterprises of the Republic of Belarus (approved by Order N. 13 of the Committee on Archives and Records Management of the Republic of Belarus dated May 23rd, 1995).

Please, note that the theory of appraisal in Belarus and the technique of conducting of the given work are based on the best traditions of the Soviet school of archival science. Principles and criteria of appraisal developed by Soviet archival science, are fixed in the regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Belarus dealing with corresponding issues.

### 3. Principles and Criteria of the Appraisal of Value

The rules of the work of archives in Belarus declare the following appraisal principles:

The historicism: at an appraisal concrete historical conditions are considered in which the documents have been created, formed and grouped in complexes;

Omnitude: the documents selected for storage in the process of appraisal should reflect all the aspects of material and spiritual life of human society;

Integrated approach: the place and value of documents in the structure of the historically developed complexes of documents, first of all archival funds are considered at the appraisal.

The basic appraisal criteria are:

#### 1. Criteria of provenance (i.e. origin):

Role and place of the organization in system of the state (non-state) government and/or functioning of concrete branch (system, association), the importance of functions performed by it;

Date and place of creation of documents;

#### 2. Criteria of the contents:

*legali risolutori delle problematiche dell'organizzazione e condotta della selezione sia negli archivi statali che delle organizzazioni è stata elaborata dal servizio Archivistico di Stato della Repubblica di Bielorussia. Allo scopo di tenere la qualità della selezione il sistema di esperti di servizi è stato formato in Bielorussia. I comitati di esperti conducono la selezione in più momenti, a partire dalla tenuta dell'archivio delle organizzazioni fino agli archivi statali. Essi utilizzano i principi ed i criteri di valutazione, i più importante dei quali sono quelli del contenuto dei documenti e l'importanza dell'organizzazione nel sistema manageriale. Ciò nonostante, gli archivisti si trovano a dover fronteggiare una serie di problemi riguardanti la selezione: la tecnica di selezione di documenti elettronici, lo sviluppo di specifici criteri di selezione di documenti che riflettono i nuovi aspetti della società bielorussa, il bisogno di rivedere l'approccio alla selezione dei documenti con informazioni ripetitive.*

**RYBAKOU, Andrei, Vrednotenje arhivskega gradiva v republikli Belorusiji: teorija, način izvajanja in zakonodaja. Atlanti, Zv. 18, Trst, str. 257-264.**

*Vrednotenje arhivskega gradiva spada v temeljna opravila arhivskih institucij v beloruski republikli. Da bi zagotovili kakovostno vrednotenje dokumentov, je bil osnovan komite strokovnjakov, ki je vodil delo na vseh fazah vrednotenja. Pri tem se je komite strokovnjakov srečal z mnogimi problemi vrednotenja kot je to postopek vrednotenja, izbor gradiva za vrednotenje in oceno, tako kadar gre za klasično kot za digitalno, obenem pa so morali določiti dokumentacijo, ki je pomembna za belorusko družbo.*

#### SUMMARY

*Appraisal is a basis of formation of the National Archival Fund of the Republic of Belarus. A set of regulatory legal instruments resolving the issues of organization and conducting of the appraisal in both the state archives and the organizations was elaborated by the State Archival Service of the Republic of Belarus. In order to deliver the quality appraisal the system of expert services (expert committees) has been formed in Belarus. The expert committees conduct the appraisal in several stages starting from the records keeping in organizations up to the state archives. They use the principles and criteria of appraisal, the most important of which are the criteria of the contents of documents and the importance of the organization in a management system. Nevertheless, archivists face a range of problems concerning the appraisal: the technique of appraisal and selection to permanent storage of electronic records (documents); development of specific selection criteria of documents reflecting new aspects of the Belarusian society life; the need to review the approach to the selection of documents with a repetitive information for the*

The importance of the information containing in the document;

Designated purpose, the type and the name of the document;  
Repeatability of the information of the document in the information of other documents;

### 3. Criteria of external features of the document:

Authenticity of the document;  
Legal reliability of the document (availability of signatures, dates, seals);  
Presence of resolutions and remarks;  
Specific features of the document medium and its physical condition.

The listed criteria are not equal in value. But such criteria of appraisal as the importance of the contents of documents and the importance of the organization in a management system, are applicable to any documents and are the principal ones at the appraisal.

## 4. System of Expert Services

Article 24 of the Law *On the National Archival Fund and Archives in the Republic of Belarus* states that *for appraisal of a historical value of documents in the state bodies, and also at enterprises, in institutions and organizations irrespective of the form of their ownership the expert committees including experts from these and other interested organizations are created.* Expert committee - a body within an agency (organization, institution, enterprise) responsible for appraisal decision).

The following system of expert services has been formed in the Republic of Belarus.

In the organizations not having a subordinate network, expert committees (EC) are composed. Members of an expert committee of the organization should know problems, functions, range of issues concerning the competence of both, the whole organization and specific structural divisions, scope of their activity, relations with other organizations. Experts should also have the information on the reorganizations, interrelations of structural divisions, etc.

In the ministries, other national state government bodies, in the organizations having a subordinated network, the central expert committees (CEC) are formed. CEC perform coordination and direction of activity of expert services of the subordinate organizations, hear at their sessions reports of chairmen of the expert committees of these organizations with the purpose of control over their activity.

The state archives carry out control over the appraisal of documents at enterprises, in institutions and organizations. With this purpose the expert control committees (ECC) or the expert methodological committees (EMC) are created. They consider at their sessions inventories of files for permanent storage subject to transfer to the state archives, regulatory methodological documents on the work of record keeping and archival services of the organizations, make corresponding decisions on their approval or coordination.

The central expert methodological committee (CEMC) operates in the Department on Archives and Records Management. CEMC is the center of the theoretical and methodological resolution of issues of the appraisal. At their sessions CEMC discusses and approves the basic regulatory methodological documents defining the organization and the technique of the appraisal. The CEMC decisions are mandatory for all archival bodies, the state archives and archives of state and non-state organizations of the country.

## 5. The Technique of Conducting Appraisal of Value.

The appraisal is performed in several stages.

The first stage: estimation of documents in the record keeping, conducted with the aim to define possible storage periods of various categories of files. The appraisal is made in every organization annually by the officers of the Service of Records Management together with the members of an expert committee under methodological guidance of the head of the organization's archive. The results of the appraisal in the record keeping are included in the filing plan (i.e. stock list of files) for the next year. Initially these results are preliminary since they set storage periods of files which have not yet been formed in the record keeping.

After the year is over the appraisal of the files formed in the record keeping is conducted for selection of documents for permanent and long-term (over 10 years) storage and transfer them to the organization's archive. These files are included into inventories and handed over to the archive by structural divisions. The remaining files are disposed according to the expiration of their storage periods.

The second stage of the appraisal is performed in the archive of the organization. At the transfer of files to the organization's archive the head of the archive shall control the quality of appraisal made in the record keeping.

The documents and files of long-term storage transferred to the organization's archive are assigned to disposal according to the expiration of the terms of their practical use. The documents and files of permanent storage are selected for transfer to the state archive. In the non-state organizations which do not transfer their archival funds to the state archives the documents and files of permanent storage are selected for further storage in the organization's archive.

The third stage of the appraisal is performed in the state archive. It starts with the study of the history of the archival fund holder and the fund, the composition and the contents of the documents. A complex analysis of the documents is made, the documents with a repetitive information are selected in order to their disposal or further storage.

It should be noticed that according to the Rules of Work of the State Archives of the Republic of Belarus the decisions to assign to disposal the documents put for storage before 1945 inclusive, are subject to the coordination with an expert committee (CEMC or ECC) of the superior archival body.

In the process of the appraisal the expert committees are guided by the regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Belarus in which periods of storage of documents are set. These legal acts are called typical and departmental lists of documents with the indication of their periods of storage. The names of groups of the documents formed in various directions of activity of the organization are included, the kinds of documents are indicated, the issues of their maintenance and their periods of storage are specified in this lists.

Lists of typical documents are developed by the Department on Archives and Records Management of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus. They are mandatory for all organizations of the country, including non-state organizations which are not obliged to transfer the documents for storage to the state archives. Typical categories of documents are the ones formed in the majority of the organizations (plans, reports, records, instructions, etc.) in the corresponding lines of activity: management, financing, accounting, reporting, etc. Lists of typical documents establish uniform periods of storage, obligatory for all organizations.

Two Lists of Typical Documents with the indication of their periods of storage are effective in the Republic of Belarus at present:

The List of Typical Documents of the Bodies of Government and Management, Institutions, Organizations and Enterprises of the Republic of Belarus on the Organization of Control System, Pricing, Finance, Insurance, Management of the State Property, Privatization, Foreign Economic Relations with the Indication of Their Periods of Storage (approved by Decision N. 38 of the State Committee on Archives and Records Management of the Republic of Belarus dated August 6th, 2001);

The List of Typical Documents of the Bodies of Government and Management, Organizations of the Republic Of Belarus on the Current and Statistical Account and Reporting, Electronic Information Resources, Labor Relations, Social Protection, Personnel Affairs, Education, Customs Control, Logistics, Administrative Activity, Record Keeping, Work of Archives of Organizations with the Indication of the Periods of Storage (approved by Decision N. 82 of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus dated December 14th, 2006).

The lists of typical documents with the indication of periods of storage include more than 2,000 names of documents and files which may be formed in the organizations of all forms of ownership and lines of activity. However, they do not contain some categories of documents formed in the specific organizations performing special branch functions and tasks. These specific kinds of documents are covered by departmental lists of documents with the indication of their periods of storage.

Departmental lists are developed by the ministries and other national state government bodies and approved after their coordination with the Department on Archives and Records Management of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus. More than 10 departmental lists are developed and approved as legal acts of the Republic of Belarus at present, including those on structure of:

The Ministry of Statistics and Analysis of the Republic of Belarus;  
The Ministry of Emergency of the Republic of Belarus;  
The Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Belarus;  
The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Belarus;  
The Ministry of Taxes and Charges of the Republic of Belarus;  
The Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Belarus;  
The Ministry of Industry of the Republic of Belarus;  
The Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Belarus;  
The National Bank of the Republic of Belarus, etc.

The periods of storage of documents set in the departmental lists are mandatory for all organizations included in the structure of or subordinate to the corresponding ministry or any other state government body.

## 6. Problems

In the sphere of appraisal of value of documents and their selection for the state storage at the present stage there is a number of problems connected with the changes taking place in the Belarusian society, namely, in the economy and management, in documenting, in the sphere of documentary information use, etc.

First of all it is a problem of appraisal of electronic documents, that is the documents created in an electronic format. In this case we have to talk not so much about the complexity of definition of the periods of storage of documents as about the absence of a well-defined technique of the appraisal of electronic documents and their selection for further storage or disposal.

The following regulatory legal and methodological instruments called to solve this problem are developed in the Republic of Belarus at present:

Methodological Recommendations on Appraisal of Value of Electronic Documents and Their Preparation for Transfer to the State Storage (approved by Chairman of the State Committee on Archives and Records Management of the Republic of Belarus in 2001);

Instruction on Appraisal of Value and Transfer of Electronic Documents and Information Resources to the State Storage (approved by Decision N. 3 of the Committee on Archives and Records Management at the Council of Ministries of the Republic of Belarus dated March 23rd, 2005).

The above said instruments define that the periods of storage of electronic documents are established similarly to the periods of paper documents storage. The corresponding provision is also present in the lists of typical documents with the indication of the storage periods adopted in 2001 and 2006, which establish that *the norms contained in the lists are mandatory for execution in the organizations irrespective of forms of ownership and also of the kind of media of documents*. However, the technique of appraisal and selection is not yet

absolutely clear to archivists and record managers in the organizations and at the enterprises.

Another important problem is the necessity of development of specific selection criteria of documents reflecting new aspects of the Belarusian society life. Considerable quantity of documents has already been accumulated in 15 years of existence of the independent Belarus in those fields of activity which earlier Belarusian archivists had practically not dealt with. The structure of the documents of many branches of economy has also changed significantly (the system of foreign economic relations, banking, international relations, informatization, etc.). Significant efforts shall be required for appraisal of scientific and historical value of these documents from not only archivists and record managers but also from experts in corresponding branches.

The third important problem of appraisal of documents at the present stage is the need to review the approach to the selection of documents with a repetitive information for the state storage. It first of all concerns branches of industry and is connected with current process of privatization (corporatization) of enterprises, changes of their management systems branch-wide and nationwide, as well as changes in mutual relations between non-state enterprises and state archives.

## Literature:

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