



Adal Azamat

#2 (03-04) 2024

MAGAZINE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

THIRD SECTOR OF KAZAKHSTAN: NEW CHALLENGES AND HORIZONS





CIVIL ALLIANCE OF KAZAKHSTAN

THE MAIN MISSION OF THE CAK IS DEVELOPMENT
OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

The ALE in the form of association "Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan" is one of the largest republican associations, which covers more than 5,000 non-profit organizations throughout the country.

The Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan was established in 2005. Distinctive feature of the Alliance is its regional structures, which are represented in each region of the country.

MAIN TASKS:

- promoting the development of the non-governmental sector, improving the efficiency and quality of the work of NGOs in Kazakhstan
- ensuring favorable legal, economic and social conditions for the implementation of public initiatives
- development of mutually beneficial partnership between the society, business structures, international organizations and public authorities of the Republic of Kazakhstan
- support for the activities of Public Councils in the Republic of Kazakhstan.
- uniting the efforts of members and partners for sustainable development and promotion of democratic processes in Kazakhstan

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Content

- 4** Welcoming address by Banu Nurgaziyeva,
President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan
- 6** MAIN EVENTS
- 12** Kazakhstan's Civil Sector: a Key Factor in Building
a Just State and Society
- 16** *Elvira Azimova:*
It is up to us to ensure the supremacy of the
Constitution throughout the Republic
of Kazakhstan
- 22** *Gennady Shipovskikh:*
Civic engagement can lead a person to success
- 28** *Banu Nurgaziyeva:*
The Institute of Public Councils is becoming a
powerful lever for positive changes and reforms in
the country
- 34** *Tattygul Talayeva:*
There is a guarantee that the government will hear us
- 40** Grant financing of NGOs: current status and
development prospects
- 42** *Kathy Leach:*
Process of Transformation of Kazakhstan's Civil
Society is Evident
- 46** *Monika Iwersen:*
The Civil Sector is an Integral Component of the
Multifaceted Relationship between Kazakhstan and
Germany
- 52** *Anar Izden:*
Local actions are needed to solve global problems
- 56** *Sakan Aubakirova:*
Reviving rural traditions
- 60** *Roza Abdullayeva:*
Working together with the government, business
and society
- 64** *Gulmira Batpakulova:*
It is impossible to achieve inclusion without
creating a barrier-free environment
- 70** On the way to the barrier-free Kazakhstan
- 74** *Lyudmila Petrova:*
From local problems to global changes
- 80** *Makhabbat Yespenova:*
Become experts and professionals – there is very
little competition here
- 86** Quiz
Civil society is...

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DEAR FRIENDS, DEAR READERS!

It is impossible to imagine an independent and strong state without a developed civil society. It is based on non-profit and non-governmental organizations acting in the interests of citizens, charitable foundations, trade unions and professional associations, corporate citizens and activists of the country.

The Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan was established in 2005 as an association of legal entities in the form of association, uniting about three hundred NGOs of the country.

The Alliance's mission is to promote the creation of favorable conditions for development of civil society and strengthen dialogue between the government and society on the basis of an equal partnership.

Today, the Alliance is the largest public organization in the country, uniting about 6 thousand active NGOs, represented as an umbrella organization of collective self-regulation. It has established itself as a reliable partner of the Government, promoting many important initiatives of the state, including legislative activities. In particular, with the participation of representatives of CAK, recommendations were developed for amending the law "On Public Control". A package of amendments to the law "On Public Councils" has been prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Culture and Information. The main goal of the amendments is to expand the powers of public figures and enable Public Councils to work as efficiently as possible.

As part of its activities, the Alliance actively develops international cooperation. A number of memoranda have been signed with foreign partners.

In December 2023, at the initiative of the Alliance, the Center for People's Diplomacy of Kazakhstan was established. In this autumn, it is planned to hold a Forum of People's diplomacy of the SCO countries.

The Alliance is the organizer of the Civil Society Forum of Kazakhstan, which has become a traditional national dialogue platform. Representatives of all three sectors (government, business and society) gather at the Forum every two years and topical issues of concern to the citizens of the country are discussed. As we already informed you in the first issue of the magazine, a total of 11 Forums were held, where more than a thousand recommendations were developed.

WELCOMING ADDRESS BY BANU NURGAZIYEVA, PRESIDENT OF THE CIVIL ALLIANCE OF KAZAKHSTAN

The close relationship between the state and NGOs implies, first of all, an equal and full-fledged partnership based on mutual respect and trust, open and honest public dialogue. The President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has repeatedly spoken about this in his public speeches, always emphasizing that “only through constant dialogue between government and society can a harmonious state be built embedded in the context of modern geopolitics.”

In Kazakhstan, in recent years, the NGO network has increased to 23 thousand, of which about 18 thousand are active throughout the country. NGOs work in various fields and act as channels for representing a variety of opinions and interests of society.

It's no coincidence that the third sector is called a field of rapid changes in society, NGOs are able to set goals and find mobile ways to achieve them, work with the budget, interact with target groups and partners, and make proposals at the legislative level.

The role of non-governmental organizations, which should become strategic partners in the medium term in dialogue with government agencies, is also noted in the Concept of Civil Society Development approved by Presidential Decree in July 2020. The active involvement of NGOs in addressing issues of social protection of the population is becoming an indicator of certain maturity of civil society. Due to the ongoing changes in the life of society, there is a need to transform a strategic document for the third sector. The Sector Ministry has already started work on updating the Concept of Civil Society Development.

The difference between non-governmental organizations and others lies in the fact that NGOs solve the most pressing tasks of society – they help people, take care of animals, draw attention to socially important issues such as gender equality, environmental problems, human rights and so on.

NGOs are often the first to sound the alarm, looking for a way out of the current situation. For example, crisis centers for protection of women victims of domestic violence were opened for the first time thanks to the activity of NGOs.

At the same time, many issues of interaction between government agencies and NGOs remain unresolved. Unfortunately, there is still no separate law in Kazakhstan regulating the activities of non-governmental organizations. The lack of the law has a negative impact on the interaction of NGOs with government agencies, does not allow them to fully use the potential of NGOs in solving social issues and modernizing the country. Currently, the Alliance is working on preparation of a draft law “On non-governmental organizations of the Republic of Kazakhstan”.

We all want to live in a prosperous State where Law and Justice prevail. All we need is mutual trust and respect.

A full-fledged partnership between NGOs and government agencies is the only evolutionary path leading to a consistent and successful modernization of the political system of society.

*Banu Nurgaziyeva,
President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan*

The “Silent Revolution” for women’s rights in Kazakhstan

The law on criminalization of domestic violence signed by President Tokayev continues to cause controversy in Kazakhstani society. The sensational open trial of ex-Minister of Economy Kuandyk Bishimbayev, who brutally murdered his common-law wife Saltanat Nukenova, added fuel to the fire.

The “Saltanat Law” returned the criminal punishment for domestic violence, which was abolished in 2017. The law also provides for life imprisonment for pedophilia, up to nine years in prison for driving to suicide, two years in prison for beatings inflicted with extreme cruelty on children. In addition, serious fines and other penalties are being introduced for causing minor damage to health, suicide propaganda, bullying and cyberbullying of minors, and sexual harassment of children and adolescents.

According to Karlygash Dzhamkulova, head of the International Foundation for the Protection of Speech Freedom “Adil

Soz”, the law on criminalization of domestic violence is a victory for sanity and a great success in protecting the rights of Kazakhstani women and children.

The head of the “Adil Soz” Foundation believes that recently the demand for justice has sharply increased in Kazakh society, which has become especially relevant against the background of the ongoing process in Astana, which is constantly monitored by about three million people.

However, discussions around the adopted amendments to the law on domestic violence are still ongoing. A lot of criticism is caused by the timing of the legislation’s entry into force – two months after the official

publication of the law, and some articles come into force on January 1, 2025. According to activists of women’s movements, hundreds of young girls and women may suffer due to the actually delayed entry into force of all legislative changes.

In addition, after a detailed review of the text of the new law, a number of its supporters have the prevailing view that it is not about fully protecting women from beatings and violence. Moreover, the institution of public censure called “uyat” (shame) is still widespread in Kazakhstan, which categorically does not allow revelations from women in trouble.

“We certainly welcome this law. It introduces at least some responsibility for domestic violence. Mostly in relation to children. Whereas only about 30% of all articles are devoted to solving the problems of women in trouble. For example, there was no place in it to punish harassment,” said Moldir Zhumabayeva, a human rights activist from the SVET public foundation.

According to her, even the absence in the updated legislation

of clear definitions of what kind of public works abusers punished for domestic violence will be engaged in, suggests that the struggle for women's rights in Kazakhstan is far from over.

From the point of view of sociologist Ayman Zhusupova, the ongoing discussions in Kazakh society after the signing of the law are largely explained by the horrific situation related to violence against women.

"According to a UNDP study, in 2023, one in five women living in Kazakhstan reported a violation of their rights in family life. And the share of respondents who believe that a woman should give her earnings to her husband or his parents in Astana was 2,7%, in Almaty – 5,3%, and in Shymkent – 19%," the sociologist said.

The discussions gained such strength that well-known media personalities from abroad began to pay attention to them. Thus, a mixed reaction was caused by the arrival in Kazakhstan and participation of the Russian journalist Ksenia Sobchak in the trial of Bishimbayev.

She defined the observed activity of women in Kazakhstan advocating for their rights as a "quiet revolution" and a victory for civil society. "Before, through the "uyat", the conservative part of the population literally used to dictate to women: don't talk, don't take the trash out of the hut, keep quiet, endure – love. And now the girls have not only joined together in a campaign against domestic tyrants, but also achieved the adoption of a special law. In general, very interesting things are happening in Kazakhstan now against the background of the Saltanat case," Ksenia Sobchak shared what she saw in Kazakhstan with her subscribers on social networks.

It is sad that the impetus for this "quiet revolution" was the death of an innocent woman from beatings by her husband.

How to make science friends with practice

Discussions around the "long-suffering" law on science are flaring up in Kazakh society with renewed vigor. Over the years of the country's independence, this area has been repeatedly obstructed and attracted the attention of the public. But nothing significant happened, and things haven't got forward an inch. And now the Mazhilis adopted a new draft law "On Science and Technology Policy".

According to the deputy of the Mazhilis, Aidos Sarym, the current laws on science and commercialization of the results of scientific and scientific-technical activities have lost their relevance today and cannot meet the real challenges of the time.

"One of the main issues of concern to us all is the involvement of young people in scientific activities, in general, the prestige and authority of science. The Minister of Science and Higher Education himself also spoke about this last year. There are also questions about the financing of science. We know that there are various mechanisms, including state ones, that are heavily criticized. Our laws have a norm that large subsoil users must transfer 1% of profits for scientific purposes, but it is unclear where this money goes. Therefore, we have the opportunity to discuss the basic law of the industry, give our suggestions, and see which areas are not covered," says Aidos Sarym.

Experts suggest defining a separate status of a scientist by law, so that this is a truly respected profession, so that people go into science. The second priority is technology policy issues. The achievements of scientists should not be desk-based, they should go into production, industry, business, our business should be patent-intensive, there should be more innovations.

"It should be noted that the bill is being discussed in a new edition, a new document is being born, therefore many conceptual things

are provided for. This is a priority in the field of fundamental science, including the national standard, assessment of the quality of scientific research, the formation of scientific degrees, and so on. Applied scientific research is another important task of the draft law. We need to combine science with practice, with production, that is, with technology as well as bring them together. In terms of applied parts, we are considering issues of scientific infrastructure," says Deputy of the Mazhilis Ekaterina Smyshlyayeva.

Vice Minister of Science and Higher Education Darkhan Akhmed-Zaki highlights several novelties of the bill.

Firstly, it is the improvement of the structure of the science management system, including the approval of the amount of funding for science by the National Higher Scientific Council and the commercialization of research results.

Secondly, the expansion of the functions of the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan, contributing to the solution of scientific and technical problems of competitions for targeted financing of its programs. Introduction of new mechanisms for assessing the validity and technological readiness of scientific research.

Thirdly, strengthening the functions of the scientific foundation. This includes business acceleration, technological declaration of business, implementation of technology brokerage programs, as well as the



formation of mechanisms and infrastructure for venture financing.

Fourth, the introduction of a mechanism for collecting, processing and analyzing scientific and technical information. Finally, fifthly, the expansion of the package of social support for researchers, includ-

ing young scientists.

According to the President of the National Academy of Sciences Akhlybek Kurishbayev, in Kazakhstan, for 30 years, no effective strategy for the development of science has been proposed, aimed at results, with effective tools for its financing.

The status of the National Academy of Sciences under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan as the highest scientific organization has not yet been determined at the legislative level; its form of management, functions, areas of activity, as well as sources of funding are not regulated.

However, according to Akhlybek Kurishbayev, all these issues are reflected in the developed proposals to the draft law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Science and Technology Policy”, which were recently submitted to the Mazhilis of the Parliament.

The NAS President believes that due to the active position of the head of state, unprecedented attention is being paid to the development of domestic science today.

The same opinion is shared by many NGO leaders who closely follow the discussions, and sometimes actively participate in them themselves. If attention to science increases and its financing grows, then projects will open up for the third sector, without which any reforms in society are impossible today.

Ludomania as a threat to national security

In Kazakhstan, the requirements for the gambling business and the rules for the admission of citizens to gambling are being tightened. As well as criminal and administrative liability for offenses in this area. The relevant draft law is already in the Mazhilis and causes a lot of controversy in civil society.

The bill “On amendments and additions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on gambling, lotteries and lottery activities” was initiated by deputies on behalf of the Head of State.

In Kazakhstan, the Law “On Gambling” has been in force since 2007. But it did not solve the problems with gambling addiction in society. It is the amendments that should create tools so that ludomania does

not become a social plague.

The main goals of the changes are to protect citizens and, above all, the younger generation from ludomania, and to prevent its negative consequences for citizens, their relatives and loved ones.

Now elementary school students are already starting to make their first bets. It used to be slot machines, but now everything is online. In high school age, gambling

addiction worsens. And at university, it is gaining such momentum that by the age of 20 young people become experienced gamers. Subsequently, this addiction leads to suicides, divorces, alcoholism, explains the head of the working group, deputy of the Mazhilis Yelnur Beisenbayev.

If we talk about the general concept of the bill, it contains a number of new laws. These include raising the age limit for gambling and betting from the age of 21 to 25. It is planned to ban participation in gambling and betting by individuals, about whom information is available in the Unified Register of Debtors.

The largest number of disputes is caused by the ban on the Internet resources of foreign bookmakers, sweepstakes that do not have a

license to engage in gambling business in Kazakhstan. A mixed reaction is also caused by the creation of a list of foreign gambling business organizers whose activities are recognized as illegal in Kazakhstan on the basis of a court decision, a ban on the provision of services for making payments in favor of such entities.

There will be introduced the standard rules for the operation of a gambling establishment, a bookmaker's office, a sweepstake, betting, and conducted gambling and betting approved by the authorized body. It is mandatory to inform participants of gambling and betting about the risks and harms of participating in gambling and betting, which entail harmful consequences.

The requirements for the placement and distribution of advertising for bookmakers are also being significantly tightened. The concept of an "electronic lottery ticket" has been introduced.

Meanwhile, according to experts, about 440 thousand people in Kazakhstan suffer from ludomania. According to the data obtained by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the help of mathematical modeling, about 36 thousand people suffer from gambling addiction in Kazakhstan. As we can see, the figures vary, but this does not reduce social tension in society.

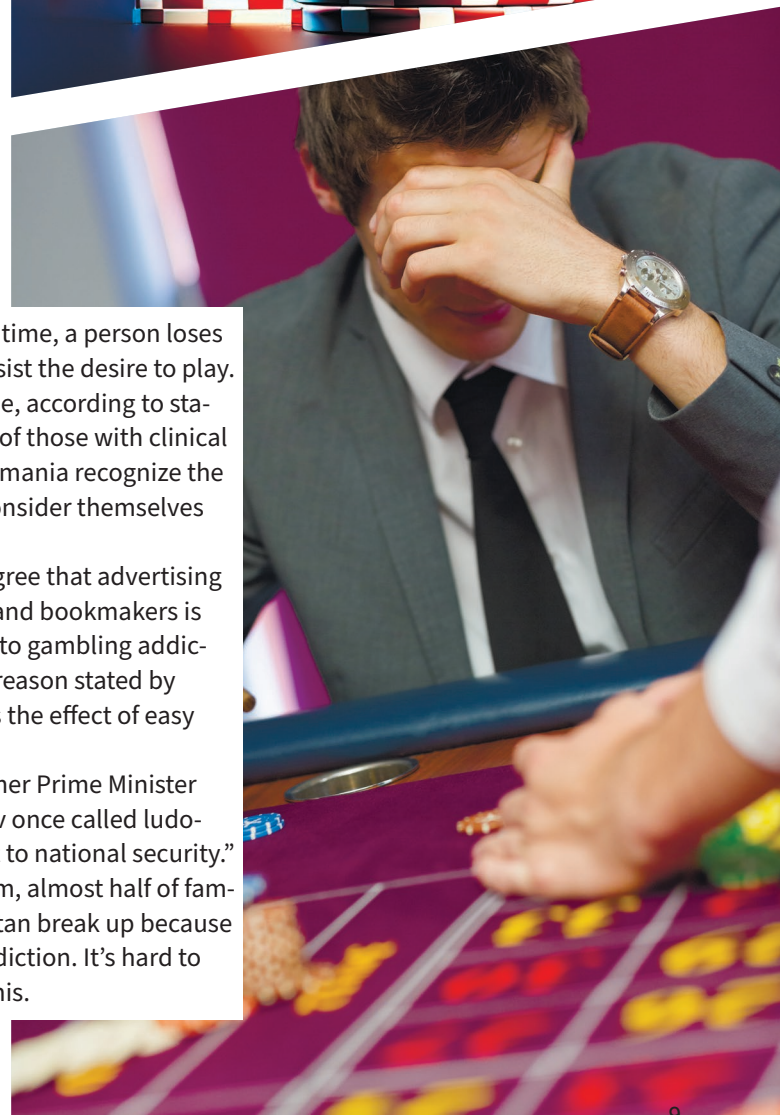
Absolutely anyone can become addicted to gambling. It does not depend on age, social status, or economic status. According to research by the US National Association on Gambling Problems, the average resident of any country can become a criminal with a probability of 6%, a drug addict – 32%, an alcoholic – 34%, and a gambler – with a probability of 48%.

Among the characteristics of ludomania, experts call a complete loss of interest in all other areas of life, aggressiveness, irritability, sleep

disorders. Over time, a person loses the ability to resist the desire to play. At the same time, according to statistics, only 8% of those with clinical criteria for ludomania recognize the problem and consider themselves addicted.

All experts agree that advertising online casinos and bookmakers is the entry point to gambling addiction. The main reason stated by psychologists is the effect of easy money.

Anyway, former Prime Minister Alikhan Smailov once called ludomania a "threat to national security." According to him, almost half of families in Kazakhstan break up because of gambling addiction. It's hard to disagree with this.



The law “On Mass Media”: eats shoots and leaves

Over all the years of Kazakhstan’s independence, passions have flared up and subsided around the law on mass media, but it has not been possible to create a final version. It is probably understandable: the media sphere is always in sight and it is it that forms public opinion. The state, on the other hand, never stopped keeping a tight rein on the fourth power and sought to keep it in under control. Apparently, therefore, none of the draft laws satisfied all parties.

The same thing has been happening recently with the new version of the media bill. Initially, the bill was discussed as part of a working group under the Ministry of Information, consisting of journalists, experts, lawyers and NGOs. The Working Group discussed the controversial points of the document for several months and proposed progressive norms.

However, the members of the interdepartmental commission approved a completely different bill and sent it to the Parliament. All this happened without the approval

of the working group. According to Gulmira Birzhanova, a member of the working group and head of the legal service of Media Koldau, several years ago the President said that Kazakhstan needed a new law on mass media, that it should correspond to the realities of our time and contribute to the development of mass media in Kazakhstan. “Now we do not see a new bill, we see a merger of two existing laws – this is the current law on mass media plus the law on broadcasting with slightly tweaked norms,” the expert says.

There are many problems in the

bill. For example, article 26 restricts the work of independent journalists, obliging them to coordinate materials with officials before publication. “Special conditions” means any emergency situation, military operations and regime of a man-made or social nature.

“In fact, any disaster that, for example, was in Ekibastuz, the same January events can be brought under these special conditions. Journalists cannot perform their professional duties without the permission of officials. It seems to me that this is excessive control over the media,” said Diana Okremova, head of the Legal Media Center.

Many experts and media representatives themselves consider this point to be hidden censorship.

The public is also not satisfied with other provisions of the new document. Thus, article 26 also prohibits the dissemination of information “discrediting law enforcement agencies, undermining public order and defense capability.” The compilers of the draft law want to mitigate

Social Code: innovations work to improve people’s well-being

A little over a year ago – on April 20, 2023 – the President of Kazakhstan signed the Social Code and the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On amendments and additions to some legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on social security issues”. The Social Code was put into effect on July 1, 2023. It is aimed at improving the well-being of citizens, as well as at refocusing the system on preventive measures and prevention of social risks.

The Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan can be called the first unified social document. And it is very important for NGOs, since it is the social sphere in

which the largest number of third sector projects are concentrated.

Today, in the country, there are more than 23 thousand NGOs operating. Most of them are engaged in

the provision of social services. The civil sector covers a wide range of issues, from science to ecology.

Yerkegul Kokey, Manager of the Social Projects Fund, notes several social initiatives aimed at supporting those in need. For example, such projects as “Happy Child”, “Do good”, “Health Trains” and others.

Today it is impossible to imagine any of the spheres of social life of the state without NGOs, says Aigul Solovyova, Chairman of the Association of Environmental Organizations of Kazakhstan. In her opinion, there is a surge of activity in Kazakhstan now, and a lot of laws aimed at supporting non-governmental organizations will be adopted.

So the new Social Code contains innovations that are important for

the punishment for obstructing the professional activities of a journalist. The rule on the statute of limitations on claims against the media for publications has disappeared from the draft. Initially, the text of the Ministry of Information and Social Development had a norm for a period of three years, it was proposed to reduce it to a year, as it is customary in developed countries. Now there is no such item at all.

Article 30 of the law, which refers to the new conditions for the introduction of a press card, a document confirming the special status of a journalist, is objectionable. Media representatives and human rights activists also fear that the state information order does not guarantee transparency and openness.

“We are afraid that this system will continue to remain secret, the commission will decide internally to whom and how much money from the media to give and for what. And there can be no talk about any development of competitiveness,” Diana Okremova notes.

Kazakhstani journalists and media experts have appealed to the President with an urgent request to take special control over the actions of the government, which is going to adopt the law.

“The text of the new bill does not protect the rights of journalists, but strengthens the state’s control over the media sphere, which contradicts international standards and slows down the development of the media sphere in Kazakhstan,” the appeal says.

A lot of discussions are raging around questions about foreign agents, about the rules of accreditation of foreign media and their journalists. The issue of financing NGOs by international organizations causes a lot of controversy.

According to the head of the International Foundation for the Protection of Freedom of Speech “Adil Soz” Karlygash Dzhambankulova, the fund’s means are attracted on the basis of very complex and open competitions with clear conditions and goals. According to her,

all donors of the fund are respected international partners, from whom not only Adil Soz receives funding, but also do the state organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

“There are dozens of strong NGOs in the country, whose level of transparency and openness of reports can compete with the level of transparency of the activities of many corporations, despite modest budgets. The actual contribution to the development of society, expertise and strict observance of ethics by such organizations are highly appreciated by society, government agencies and experts. In Kazakhstan, the activities of NGOs have become an integral part of society, whose contribution still needs to be assessed,” the head of Adil Soz notes.

In short, the situation around the media bill can be expressed in one well-known phrase: “eats shoots and leaves.” But we also need to decide together where to put a comma in a particular controversial point.

NGO representatives to know. For example, they establish the basic social rights of Kazakhstanis. With the adoption of the document, the social policy of the state has moved from the application form to a proactive format, which will improve the quality of citizens’ life.

It is no coincidence that the head of the Almaty Civic Center Altynai Kobeyeva paid attention to this important aspect. In her opinion, the Social Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan is aimed at improving the well-being of Kazakhstan citizens, preventing social risks, social support for families with children, promoting employment, and social protection of people with disabilities.

A digital family card is also being

introduced into the code. This is an electronic notifier informing people about the state support they are entitled to based on the social status and degree of well-being of family members. Now benefits and payments are assigned to citizens in a proactive format based on the data available in the information system.

Furthermore, additional social support measures have been introduced for families with children. These are the extension of child care payments to one and a half years, the monetization of a guaranteed social package for children aged one to six from among the recipients of the TSA. The assignment of the status of awarded mothers with pendants “Altyn alka”, “Kumis alka”

and an increase in the amount of benefits for them.

State benefits for certain categories of socially vulnerable segments of the population have been increased. The poverty line for the assignment of benefits is now determined by the median income instead of the subsistence rate. In addition, the availability of special social services has been increased both for people with disabilities and for individual assistants with pay and social contributions.

In general, all these innovations have been positively received by civil society and are already working to improve people’s well-being.



Kazakhstan's Civil Sector: a Key Factor in Building a Just State and Society

World NGO Day in Kazakhstan was widely celebrated with master classes, seminars, consultations with demonstrations of successful cases and honoring best practices. The main discussion unfolded at the site of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, where non-governmental organizations, together with representatives of the Ministry of Culture and Information and the Center for Support of Civil Initiatives, discussed their role in building the Just State, a United Nation and a Prosperous Society.

FOR STRIVING FOR COMMON GOOD

On February 27, 2014, the United Nations officially established World NGO Day as a recognition of the merits of public organizations in solving the most important problems of sustainable development, building peace and security on the planet. NGOs play an unsurpassed role in social and economic change, providing assistance to those in need, protecting the rights and interests of the population, and conducting large-scale campaigns on various issues.

The President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, Banu Nurgazyieva, noted that it is thanks to the active work of NGOs that new opportunities appear for our citizens, awareness of important social problems increases and real solidarity is created in society. Opening the meeting, she expressed deep appreciation and gratitude to all non-governmental organizations, activists and volunteers for their continued commitment to the public good.

– Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasizes the role of NGOs in building the Just Kazakhstan. Since the first days of his presidency, he has been saying that we need to form an equal and full-fledged partnership between the government and civil society. Only together we can build what we strive for and what we dream of,” – said Banu Nurgazyieva.

On the occasion of holiday, the CAK received many video greetings, including from international organizations. All of them are published on the organization’s social networks.

During the meeting, Svetlana Smirnova, First Deputy Secretary General and Head of the General Secretariat of the Assembly of Peoples of Eurasia, thanked the CAK for its partnership in such projects as “Leader of People’s Diplomacy”, “Heritage of Eurasia: Rural Communities” and others.

– In recent years, the role of civil society has changed, and organizations should strive for change, be creative, innovative, responsible, and use their unique knowledge in the implementation of social projects, – Svetlana Smirnova wished.

A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE PEOPLE AND THE GOVERNMENT

Civil society takes an active part in the political and economic life of the country. 11 Civic Forums have been held since 2003. The number of NGOs has increased 6.5 times in 15 years and exceeded 23 thousand in number, whereof more than 18 thousand are functioning.

According to the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the legislative framework is being improved in Kazakhstan, and the new mechanisms of state social mandate are being formed. Furthermore, the authorized body is carrying out comprehensive work to create conditions for their development. The law “On Public Control” and amendments concerning online petitions and public associations were adopted last year. The representation of the civil sector in public councils has been expanded. The number of volunteer organizations increased from 224 in 2019 to 680, and the number of functioning volunteers has grown from 50 to 240 thousand. At the same time, the state is quantitatively increasing the social mandate. The amount of state social investments has increased a thousandfold over the past 15 years. 59 billion tenge has been allocated for the implementation of social projects over three years. The project portfolio annually amounts to about two thousand social projects. More than a thousand of NGOs provide services, and over 400 government agencies are their customers.

Bibigul Zhexenbay, a deputy of the Senate and a Vice-President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, joined the meeting online, and announced the big news: the deputy group is taking on the development of a separate bill on NGOs. The senator called for active engagement in the discussion of the bill, stressing that civil society is developing rapidly and may well take over some functions of the state.

IN SOLIDARITY AND UNITY

Today, projects of non-governmental sector cover various areas – support for vulnerable social groups, development of youth initiatives and education, promotion of healthy lifestyle, strengthening social harmony and national unity, protection of citizens' rights and others. The World NGO Day gave an occasion to the leaders of public organizations to once again remind them of their activities. Moreover, many of them positively assessed the situation in the non-profit sector and spoke in favor of a constructive dialogue with the authorities.

Thus, the chairman of the Civil Alliance of Astana, Mahabbat Yespenova, advocated a sincere, rather than a formal approach of the state to non-profit organizations. In her opinion, this will be facilitated by such an institution for assessing the effectiveness of NGOs as regulatory impact analysis. She is confident that it is necessary to calculate the contribution of NGOs to the development of the country in monetary terms so that these figures can be operated in the relevant government agencies.

Gulnara Kurbanbayeva, Vice-President of CAK, President of the Association of Entrepreneurs of the Karaganda region, also agrees with Makhhabat Yespenova, who expressed another important initiative.

– Living according to the laws, we cannot be aloof from the adoption of any normative legal acts. The fate of those we care about depends on what they are and how they are implemented. Therefore, social NGOs should take an example from NGOs in business,” – she said, referring to the mandatory public expertise.

The chairman of NGO “Women’s Ray” Oksana Volkova-Mikhalskaya, who has been engaged in the prevention of domestic violence for many years, wished her colleagues new projects, lots of funding, the ability to

use the resources of the state social procurement and other development opportunities.

In such an urgent issue as domestic violence, it is important to work comprehensively, – the head of the “Women’s Ray” believes. Partnership work and building effective interaction between international organizations, government agencies and NGOs are necessary, and, according to the social activist, it is strengthening every year.

The head of the NGO “Small Country. Atyrau” Yerlan Kumiskaliyev told about the world’s third social village (there are two such villages only in the UK and Russia) .

– Our goal is to move children with extensive spinal cord and brain injuries from a small country to a large one, that is, their socialization and rehabilitation are important, – he noted and thanked the business representatives, thanks to whom this unique village exists.

Similar activity is carried out by the sports rehabilitation center in the Zhetysu region, which in 2017 for the first time won an international grant from the Embassy of Japan in Kazakhstan and successfully implemented it. Its head, Yeldos Bayalyshbayev, told about the recreation center at Alakol, where people with disabilities rest, and about the project of auto volunteers, within the framework of which more than eight thousand charity trips have been made since 2017.

Ruslan Zakiyev, director of the Diabetic Parent Committee, complained that communication with government agencies more often resembles a conflict than a dialogue. But a constructive dialogue is much more productive, and it is gradually being built up between the organization and the Ministry of Healthcare. The activist urged his colleagues to try to see ordinary people behind the officials and once again reminded the common



SALTANAT MURZALINOVA-YAKOVLEVA:
I AM INTERESTED IN WORKING WITH BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVES, THEY ARE WILLING TO FINANCE, MORE DARING IN THEIR DECISIONS THAN THE PUBLIC SECTOR. BUT THIS DOES NOT DETRACT FROM THE PARTICIPATION OF THE STATE IN THE LIFE OF NGOS

truth for social activists that it is difficult to solve problems alone.

He closely cooperates with international organizations, law enforcement agencies, and medical centers of the PF Meyrimdi Zhol from Almaty. This organization is only three years old, but it has already achieved a lot. Its leader, Madiyar Abdilov, shared successful cases on the implementation of grants and state social procurements.

The Public Foundation “Center for Social Inclusive Programs” and its head Saltanat Murzalinova-Yakovleva are widely known in Kazakhstan. Over the past six years, the foundation has managed to launch several major initiatives, mainly at the expense of entrepreneurs.

– I am interested in working with business representatives, they are willing to finance, more daring in their decisions than the public sector. But this does not detract from the participation of the state in the life of NGOs,” – the head of the foundation stressed. – We are engaged in the development of an inclusive community. Regardless of there is money or there is no money – we work smoothly and we cannot do otherwise, we have a responsibility to our wards. Inclu-

sion is necessary for all of us, and I am glad that it has ceased to be synonymous with disability. We promote a culture of acceptance and empathy.

Saltanat Murzalinova-Yakovleva expressed another important point for sector: all NGOs are slightly ahead of the existing situation and therefore invariably come into conflict with the legislation. Therefore, it is necessary to talk with all stakeholders in society, to involve the business community and citizens more actively, promoting ideas.

In conclusion, Banu Nurgaziyeva once again stressed that this event was a proof of solidarity and unity of NGOs.

– We have seen how non-governmental organizations are able to gather people of different ages, nationalities and professions, combine their efforts and direct them to the benefit of society. Of course, such events allow us to evaluate the results of the work of NGOs for the benefit of the citizens of our country. We hope that this day will be a starting point for even closer cooperation and strengthening partnerships between government agencies and non-governmental organizations,” -concluded the President of CAK.

Elvira Azimova:

It is up to us to ensure the supremacy of the Constitution throughout the Republic of Kazakhstan



At the initiative of the Head of State Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Kazakhstan has revived the Constitutional Court, which replaced the Constitutional Council. Elvira Azimova, the chairperson of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan, talks about the difference between these two bodies of constitutional control, the kind of challenges the Constitutional Court faces today, and the interaction of the CC and the CAK (Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan) in an interview with the correspondent of the magazine.

– Elvira Abilkhasimovna, what is the role of this body in the life of our society, and how does it differ from its predecessor, the Constitutional Council?

– Internationally, the bodies of constitutional control are recognized as the guardians of the legal sovereignty of the state. Undertaking an important mission to protect the constitutional order, fundamental human rights and freedoms, these bodies are called upon to embody in their decisions the ideas of the State about law, justice and humanism, which are enshrined in the Constitution of States.

The restoration of the Constitutional Court in Kazakhstan has become a significant step in strengthening the protection of the rights of Kazakhstan's people. This confirms the serious attitude of the state to the issues of improving mechanisms for the protection of citizens and the comprehensive provision, observance and enforcement of the Fundamental Law of the country. It is symbolic that the Constitutional Court started functioning in the year of the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which consolidated the universal concept of the protection of human rights and freedoms. The slogan of the United Nations jubilee year: "Dignity, freedom and justice for all" corresponds to the objectives of the Constitutional Court. The work of the Constitutional Court during this period has demonstrated that citizens in their appeals rightly raise problems of the constitutionality of certain provisions of laws.

Formerly, only the entities of government bodies applied to this constitutional control body, but these days the Constitutional Court of Kazakhstan is available to citizens, the Commissioner for Human Rights and the general prosecutor.

The Constitutional Court is not included in any of the branches of government, including the system of courts headed by the Supreme Court of the Re-

public, and is not the highest judicial instance.

Citizens can contact us when their constitutional rights have been violated in their opinion, or may be violated by law or other legal acts. Specifically, the Court deals with the laws and their compliance with the Constitution. It does not judge people. This is the key feature.

– Having become a reformer state, Kazakhstan has declared its priority which is, ensuring the protection of the constitutional rights of citizens. How this is ensured these days?

– The Constitutional Court is called upon to strengthen the human rights orientation of state policy. It helps to strengthen the legal culture in society. The decisions of the CC serve as a model and contribute to the formation of a unified legal space in the country. It has the right to check both national and international legal acts, before their ratification by Parliament for compliance with the Constitution.

As I have previously said, the Constitutional Court does not belong to any of the three branches of government, and still, its activities strengthen the system of checks and balances in the system of state power. This goal is achieved by checking laws and other regulatory legal acts for compliance with the Constitution.

As for the decisions of the Constitutional Court, they have a multiplier effect, since they determine the compliance of legislation with the basic principles of the Constitution. The decisions of this kind can influence the legislation and policy of the country as a whole. Therefore, I always say that even if one citizen applies to the Court, in fact it protects the interests of many people.

It is up to us to ensure the supremacy of the Constitution throughout the Republic of Kazakhstan.

**ACHIEVING THE GOAL OF A
«JUST KAZAKHSTAN» REQUIRES
CONCERTED EFFORTS ON THE
PART OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES,
CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS,
THE THIRD SECTOR AND CITIZENS
THEMSELVES.**

– As the Head of State noted at the first meeting with the members of the CC, the key task of the Constitutional Court is to ensure full compliance of all laws and by-laws with the Constitution of the country. Has it been possible to make an audit of the RLA (Regulatory Legal Acts) over the past year, and which of them were found to be unconstitutional?

– The first year was quite dynamic for us. Last year alone, we received appeals from 5,5 thousand citizens.

The number of applications received this year has already exceeded 600.

On the one hand, this suggests that it is very important for people to realize the right to protect their rights and freedoms.

On the other hand, it indicates that the existing protection tools are probably insufficient or the citizens themselves do not fully use them.

Last year, out of the total number of appeals, almost 40% concerned disagreement with court decisions, which is not the subject of consideration by our department.

The Constitutional Court, recreated with an expanded mandate, has been working for just over

a year. During this period, over 6,700 applications were received, whereof 99% were from citizens. Last year, 94% of applications (4,900) were returned to comply with the conditions of admissibility, with the explanation of the reasons of return for each application.

I would like to note that only a quarter (26%) of the total number of applications, concerned compliance with the RLA with the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In general, this trend has been maintained since last year.

39 final decisions were made based on the results of the constitutional review in 2023, where:

- 24 norms of law comply with the Constitution;
- 12 norms comply with the interpretation given by the Constitutional Court;
- 8 norms do not comply with it.

The subject of the audit was a number of codes (Criminal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, Code of Administrative Offenses, Code of Administrative Procedure, Tax Code, Civil Code), constitutional laws (“On the judicial system and the status of judges”, “On Elections”, “On the Supreme Judicial Council”), as well as regulatory decisions of the Supreme Court and other laws.

The legal positions of the Constitutional Court concerned the introduction of amendments to 29 RLA.

Last year, based on the results of consideration of appeals, we analyzed 558 norms of the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 55 norms of the Constitution, and 31 norms of international acts.

– The main innovation of the creation of the Constitutional Court is that now citizens can directly apply to this body. How many appeals have been applied over the past year and what areas of social development do they affect?

– The restoration of the Constitutional Court of Kazakhstan was among the results of the constitutional reform of 2022, for which more than 77% of Kazakhstan’s people voted in a national referendum. Therefore, from January 2023 to May 2024, the Constitutional Court received over 6,700 appeals, whereof 99% were from citizens. It seems



fair to say that there was no area that the citizens did not touch upon in their appeals.

A significant part of the appeals (39%) concerned disagreement with court decisions, which is not relevant to the subject of consideration by the Constitutional Court. Citizens often addressed issues related to housing and labor relations, social protection, bankruptcy of individuals, non-execution of judicial acts, execution of punishments, access to information and other issues. Only in 26% of the appeals, citizens asked to check the constitutionality of laws and other regulatory legal acts. Unfortunately, 4,900 appeals that do not meet the requirements of admissibility were returned to citizens with an explanation of the reasons for the return and an indication of their right to reapply. Examples include a review of a verdict, a court decision, the solution of social issues, the cancellation of a decision of an authority or official which does not have any signs of a normative legal act. Despite this fact, citizens have been given detailed legal explanations.

– According to the amendments to the Constitution, the Prosecutor General and the Ombudsperson can also apply to the Constitutional Court. Have they applied to the CC?

– Any citizen can apply to the Constitutional Court along with subjects of state power, and the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Prosecutor General can defend the rights of the majority. Since 2023, the Head of State has appealed to the Constitutional Court to verify the constitutionality of laws on the decentralization of state bodies related to the transfer of certain functions from the government to ministries and local executive bodies, on the return of assets and on issues of the Social Code. The Prosecutor General has sent three appeals related to the verification of the constitutionality of the norms of existing laws in the field of criminal and civil justice. For one of them, the Constitutional Court issued its normative resolution regarding the interpretation of the norms of the Constitution on the housing rights of citizens.

The Commissioner for Human Rights has not yet exercised the right.

**THE CONSTITUTIONAL COURT OF
KAZAKHSTAN HAS DEMONSTRATED
ITS OPENNESS TO CIVIL SOCIETY
SINCE THE BEGINNING OF ITS
ACTIVITIES.**

– According to the President’s idea, the Constitutional Court should become the main foundation of the human rights protection system in the country, and a byword of a Just Kazakhstan. Do you think it has become one?

– The concept of “Just Kazakhstan” probably refers to the desire for justice, equality and impartiality within the country. This implies a vision in which everyone, regardless of origin or status, enjoys fair treatment in accordance with the law and has access to opportunities for personal and social advancement.

Achieving the goal of a “Just Kazakhstan” requires concerted efforts on the part of government agencies, civil society organizations, the third sector and citizens themselves. This implies constant dialogue, cooperation and commitment to the principles of justice, equality and human dignity.

In this regard, in accordance with the Law “On the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kazakhstan”, a Scientific Advisory Council (SAC) was established. The Council included 36 representatives of the scientific community from the leading universities of the country, while 32 of them are

the doctors of law. Today, the Constitutional Court works to strengthen its expert base, including access to electronic legal resources of other countries and international organizations.

In other words, the mission of the SAC members is to assist in matters related to the preparation of scientifically sound proposals and recommendations to ensure the supremacy of the Constitution, expert opinions within the framework of constitutional proceedings, improving constitutional legislation, the practice of its application, and studying international experience of judicial constitutional control. This allows judges of the Constitutional Court to make more informed and high-quality decisions based on scientific data and analyses.

– For more than two decades, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan has existed in the country. In your opinion, what is the role of the third sector in reforming the country today?

– First of all, I would like to note the role of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan (CAK). The CAK itself is an example of the vital role played by the third sector in promoting democracy, human rights and social progress in Kazakhstan. As a non-governmental organization (NGO) for more than two decades, the CAK has played several key roles in the country’s development and reform efforts, advocating for reforms, strengthening civil society, empowering communities and interacting with international partners. The CAK contributes to building a more democratic, inclusive and accountable society in Kazakhstan.

If we talk about the third sector, it plays a multifaceted role in reforming the country, contributing to ensuring social justice, democratic governance and sustainable development. Today, the third sector acts as an intermediary between the Government and citizens, facilitating communication and cooperation. It should also be noted that the third sector empowers individuals and communities by developing their potential, encouraging leadership and civic engagement. In our country, through education, training and organization, they allow people to actively participate in decision-making processes, defend their rights and promote local development initiatives. In this way, the third sector strengthens democratic governance and promotes transparency and responsiveness.



–Can we expect that the Constitutional Council and the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan will find common ground for the development of dialogue between the state and society? What steps are you supposed to take above all to achieve this?

– Positive interaction between the Constitutional Court and civil institutions helps to consider a variety of points of view and expert opinions in its activities. This stimulates the development of progressive legislation that meets the requirements of modern society.

The Constitutional Court of Kazakhstan has demonstrated its openness to civil society since the beginning of its activities. We actively cooperate with civil society institutions, including human rights organizations, educational institutions, communities of professional lawyers and other structures.

In turn, the Civil Alliance can advocate for legal reforms and policies that promote civil liberties, human rights, and democratic governance. The CC and CAK, working in cooperation, can potentially identify areas where the legal framework needs to be improved to better protect citizens' rights and promote the development of society.

If we look at this through the prism of informing society, then the Constitutional Court can participate in information and educational work with the public aimed at increasing citizens' understanding of their constitutional rights. The Civil Alliance can complement these efforts by conducting awareness campaigns, organizing seminars, and providing resources to empower citizens to actively participate in civic life and interact with the legal system.

Accordingly, both organizations can participate in international cooperation and share experiences with colleagues in other countries. This cooperation can contribute to the exchange of best practices, the promotion of legal reforms and the strengthening of democratic institutions, ultimately contributing to the development and inclusion of our country into the world community.

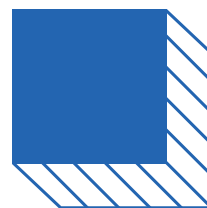
– Thank you for the interview!



Today, many people in Kazakhstan know Gennady Shipovskikh, a deputy of the Senate of the Parliament. The former train driver managed to radically change his life thanks to his social activism and excellent command of the state language. Now he defends the interests of his fellow citizens in Parliament. He is rightly called a «people's» deputy. As Gennady Gennadievich admits, the main launchpad for him was the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, a unique public institution. In an interview to Adal Azamat magazine, he spoke about his government and public work, as well as the role of civil society in the life of the country.

Gennady Shipovskikh:

**Civic engagement
can lead a person
to success**



– Kazakhstan, under the leadership of the President, strives to become an effective state with a strong civil society, when all citizens are involved in what is happening in their country. What is the role of an active civil society in a democratic and rule-of-law state and how far have we made progress on this issue?

– In 2022, the Head of State initiated full-scale reforms aimed at further democratization of society, increasing the responsibility of state institutions in matters of socio-economic development. Citizens of Kazakhstan have the opportunity to participate in the implementation of political transformations in the country. First of all, we are talking about a national referendum on amending the Constitution, as well as elections to the Mazhilis and the Senate of the Parliament. In the same year, people of Kazakhstan have been actively voting during Presidential elections. All these events, in my opinion, had a positive impact on the socio-political life of our society.

The pinnacle of democratic reforms was the adoption of a completely new law “On Public Control”. It focuses on the importance of citizen participation in public administration and suggests various mechanisms that allow the public to contribute to the work of government agencies. Thanks to the creation of independent public councils or control groups, citizens and non-profit organizations can analyze and evaluate the activities of ministries, akim’s offices and maslikhats, health facilities, education and other institutions performing state functions. Moreover, the control should be based on the interests of the population.

In my opinion, Kazakhstan is following a progressive path, and our main value is democracy and citizens’ rights. All necessary conditions are being created these days and new opportunities are opening up for the development and strengthening of the role of the non-governmental sector. The

state clearly understands that an active civil society stimulates innovation and social change, contributes to the successful implementation of reforms and transformations in our country.

– You became the youngest member of Parliament in 2016 and began your public activities with the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, one of the most important civil institutions in our country. Can you say, based on your example, that civic engagement can lead a person to success?

– Yes, in 2016, I was elected to the lower house of Parliament for the first time, and I worked for two convocations, that is, the sixth and seventh, and from January 24, 2024, by the Decree of the President, I was appointed a deputy of the Senate from the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. My social activism originated exactly in the depths of the APK at the time. In my youth, I was in KVN (humor contest club), or rather its Kazakh-language version called “Jaidarman”. Later on, I participated in events of the Assembly. In the APK anniversary year, I, then still a train driver, was assigned to drive the campaign train named “Menin Kazakstanym” from Karaganda to Astana. At that time, there were some large-scale events dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Assembly throughout the country. One of the events included a social campaign of the APK. In terms of the campaign, a train with doctors, deputies, lawyers who advised residents of cities and remote stations traveled around 29 settlements of Kazakhstan for 30 days and returned to the capital. At the 22nd session of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, I addressed the President in the state language, reported on the successful arrival of the train and the fulfillment of my mission. From that moment on, I began to be noticed and my path of ascent to the “political Olympus” began. Now I understand that such a unique platform as the APK has become an effective mean of social mobility for



me. Thanks to it my life has changed dramatically. That is why, I believe that civic engagement is really capable of leading a person to success. Participation in public life not only develops leadership skills, but also helps to understand the principles of democracy, improve communication and decision-making skills.

In general, the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan plays an important role in the socio-political life of people of Kazakhstan, because it unites all ethnic groups living in our country. Regardless of the ethnicity, whether you are Korean, Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Chechen or Kazakh, we are all, citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan first of all, and the APK is a reliable outpost of our stability and peace, the a cradle of unity and creation.

– In addition to your parliamentary work, you were elected as a chairperson of the Public Council of the Ministry of Culture and Information. What tasks do you set in this position and to what extent does the development of public councils help to establish the work of the state apparatus in our country?

– Last year I was elected as a chairperson of the Public Council of the Ministry of Culture and Information. Our job is to work closely with the Ministry, as well as to give our citizens the opportunity to be heard. At the meetings of the Council, we consider the issues of particular importance to the society. For example, we discussed measures to protect the media space from unwanted content. At the last meeting, some members raised the questions of providing aid to residents of regions affected by floods. The agenda may relate to a wide range of topics, including the adoption or amendment of legislative acts, and the announcement of initiatives. This open platform with the participation of representatives of civil society and professional experts contributes to solving the pressing problems faced by the people of Kazakhstan. The councils help to understand a specific topic or situation, develop and send their recommendations to government agencies. Each public council

established under a ministry or an agency plays an important role in improving cooperation between the state and society. Why? Firstly, their activities increase the transparency of government agencies. Secondly, they provide an opportunity to directly contact the public, and as a result, the efficiency of the public sector increases. But the main thing is that we strive to ensure that decisions taken at the level of government agencies reflect the interests and needs of society.

– You speak three languages and often say that the command of Kazakh is the most important mean of social mobility. That is why I cannot but ask you to dwell on this. In your opinion, how developed is the Kazakh-speaking civil society in our country?

– I am fluent in two languages, that is, Kazakh and Russian. I can hold some conversations in English. When I have to travel abroad or meet with foreign visitors, participants of foreign delegations, I can express myself without a problem and talk about the work of our committee in the Senate, about legislative initiatives, and opportunities for cooperation.

The Kazakh language has become an effective mean of social mobility for me, and, I think, not only for me, but also for many representatives of foreign ethnicities who are fluent in the state language. The great work of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is obvious here, it promotes messages about the importance of Kazakh language command in our society. In my opinion, the Kazakh language has received a very good impetus now, it is actively used not only in the civil service, but also in the creative industry. Speaking as the head of the project called “Kazakh tili – ethnosalaryk til” I see the huge potential of the creative industry in the development of the language. It is the APK project in terms of which we promote Kazakh language among other ethnic groups, popularize it and want to bring it to a new level. Through TV series, eSports and anime, our youth can be involved in learning the language at a high quality level. And I can say



**THROUGH TV SERIES,
ESPORTS AND ANIME, OUR
YOUTH CAN BE INVOLVED IN
LEARNING THE LANGUAGE
AT A HIGH QUALITY LEVEL**



for myself, this method is very natural and effective. I always say in interviews that at the moment we need to develop the Kazakh language not in a revolutionary, but in a evolutionary way. The evolutionary path always promotes progress, no matter what it concerns: language, culture, or nation. At the moment, the Kazakh language is gaining a new status. It is becoming not just the language of interethnic communication, as Kassym-Jomart Tokayev says, but also, the language of the New Kazakhstan.

As for the Kazakh-speaking civil society, there are positive changes. In many ways, the development of the Internet and social networks contributes to the flourishing of civil activism in our country. Citizens openly express their opinions, and we see an increase in the activity of public organizations and individual civil society activists. They are involved in various spheres of life, from human rights protection to environmental and social initiatives. This is an indicator that the civil society becomes more aware, wants to be heard and strives to contribute to the development of the country.



– Do you think that Kantar (mass protests in January 2022) and the request for justice that arose then became the impetus for the development of civic engagement in Kazakhstan? What is the role of non-governmental organizations in building a Just state, about which the President is talking about? And how else can ordinary citizens be involved in state governance?

– Kantar has become the starting point of large-scale reforms in our country. The foundations that used to be in force earlier have changed, and the policy of the state has changed in general. And of course, the non-governmental sector plays an important role in building a Just Kazakhstan. NGOs act as one of the mechanisms for expressing the

interests of civil society, protecting the rights and freedoms of citizens, and also contribute to the implementation of social and economic programs. Representatives of the third sector are included in the working groups of Mazhilis and Senate of the Parliament, central government agencies, and contribute to legislative activities. Moreover, the development of civil society is the main point of our democracy.

Today, the process of involving citizens in the public and political life of the country is progressing in a very dynamic way. Thanks to the reforms, our rural, district, and city akims are elected by the population, and not appointed from the superior authorities as before. And every citizen has the right to be

AT THE MOMENT, THE KAZAKH LANGUAGE IS GAINING A NEW STATUS. IT IS BECOMING NOT JUST THE LANGUAGE OF INTERETHNIC COMMUNICATION, AS KASSYM-JOMART TOKAYEV SAYS, BUT ALSO, THE LANGUAGE OF THE NEW KAZAKHSTAN



elected to this post and try to change something in their region. In addition, we have maslikhats, which are an important link in public life and contribute to solving the problems of the population. Now our citizens have great opportunities to participate in the state governance, make suggestions on improving the activities of government agencies or health-care facilities, and influence the implementation of laws. There are many mechanisms in the country to create a fair and open society, and the people of Kazakhstan successfully use them.

– The actions during the recent floods became a vivid example of unity of our people. You went to the flooded regions yourself, talked to people, and helped the victims. Isn't this a demonstration of a developed civil society? Please share your impressions.

– During the floods, people of Kazakhstan demonstrated a real solidarity and unity. Our citizens have shown that by working together we can counter the threats of a human-induced or natural. Ordinary people worked together with rescuers, representatives of local government agencies, the military, and volunteers in the emergency zones.

It has to be said that from the first days of the floods, the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan joined in providing aid to the population. The republican and regional headquarters of the APK were formed, and a pool of people who traveled to the affected regions was determined. Personally, I visited Kostanay, North Kazakhstan and Akmo-la regions, where, my colleagues and I met with the population, answered citizens' questions and listened to their wishes. I have also participated in the APK campaign called "Zhurekten Zhurekke". In terms of the campaign, 12 thousand volunteers helped residents of the affected areas to deal with the consequences of flooding. At the 33rd session of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, its Chairper-

son Kassym-Jomart Tokayev noted the coordinated work of the APK during the floods.

We will continue to provide people of Kazakhstan with aid through the APK. We were previously focused on collecting and sending humanitarian aid, but now we focus on work of our personnel, businessmen and patrons is focused on restoring damaged facilities in the regions, that is, schools, kindergartens, hospitals and other buildings, as well as infrastructure.

In a difficult situation, our society is able to unite and help each other. I think this primarily speaks to the high civil responsibility of the people of Kazakhstan and the productivity of civil society institutions.

– Thank you for the interview and good luck in your work!

**DURING THE FLOODS,
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The Institute of Public Councils has been developing in Kazakhstan since 2016. During this time, the activities of the advisory body have managed to show their effectiveness in expressing the interests of civil society. Today, there is an increased demand in society for an open dialogue with the authorities and a qualitative solution to systemic problems, which has intensified against the background of unprecedented floods that occurred in spring in most regions of the country. It is obvious that only strong and active public councils can meet the expectations of the population. Increasing the role and importance of this institution was discussed in Astana at the first meeting of the Coordination Center of Public Councils, which took place at the site of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan.

Banu Nurgaziyeva:

The Institute of Public Councils is becoming a powerful lever for positive changes and reforms in the country



Over the past seven years, the Institute of Public Councils has accumulated serious experience in implementing constructive interaction between the population and the state. It ensures the participation of citizens in the development and decision-making of state bodies and the quasi-public sector, as well as performs the functions of monitoring their activities. Today there are 260 public councils in the republic, 24 of them under central state bodies, 12 in quasi-public sector entities, 20 regional councils and councils of cities of republican significance, 37 city councils, and 167 district councils. The activities of this institute are constantly being improved, partly owing to the proposals of experts themselves and public opinion leaders who are members of the councils. One of the latest innovations was the creation of a permanent Coordination Center of Public Councils under the

auspices of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan. According to the department, the developers pursued the idea of increasing the effectiveness of councils and strengthening interaction between all participants in the dialogue.

“Public councils have been working in the country since 2016, and their third convocation is already in effect this year. Throughout this time, we have been working to enhance the effectiveness of the Institute’s activities. There are certain differences between the public councils of ministries and departments, they work in specific areas and spheres. The councils of the regions, in turn, cover a wider range of issues. The single problem that we all face in the process of solving common tasks is interagency cooperation. There are issues that are very difficult to promote, because the responsibility lies with several ministries at once. In



this regard, we have created a Coordination Center of Public Councils and propose to bring to the site issues of both interdepartmental interaction and country-specific issues that need to be addressed together,” explained Gulbara Sultanova, Chairman of the Committee on Civil Society Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The Coordination Center includes 58 heads of public councils at all levels: central government agencies, regional administration (akimat) and the quasi-public sector. The organizers of the first meeting of the Coordination Center paid great attention to the participation of public councils in flood relief and assistance to the population of the affected regions. It is noteworthy that the current situation in the country was viewed through the prism of solving problems for the long term.

“The state and society are working constructively to eliminate the consequences of a natural disaster and provide assistance to residents of regions where an emergency regime has been declared. Today it is very important that public councils actively conduct this work, take control of the distribution of incoming funds and humanitarian supplies, and

issues of compensation to residents. There are all the tools for this. In particular, the law “On Public Control” gives representatives of the councils broad powers in this direction. We must facilitate the implementation of the instructions of the Head of State so that none of the affected Kazakhstanis find themselves without support,” said Banu Nurgaziyeva, Chairman of the Civil Alliance, anticipating the speeches of the chairmen of public councils.

FLOODS AS A TRIGGER OF SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS

As expected, the regional public councils took an active part in organizing flood control measures from the very first days. First of all, they kept in touch with the local residents, helped them evacuate, provided them with essentials.

“We have already had experience in dealing with the consequences of emergencies. These are the fires in the Auliekol district that occurred in the Kostanay region in 2022. Therefore, the algorithm of work has been debugged. As for the current situation, we divided the members of the public council into several groups, some of them organized volunteers, the others were engaged in the reception and distribution of humanitarian supplies. It is very important in the early stages, when aid arrives uncontrollably, to quickly organize places for receiving humanitarian aid and establish its transparent distribution. There were cases when people visited across several humanitarian aid points. There were people who were not injured, but came to get help,” said Serik Bekturganov, Chairman of the Public Council of Kostanay region.

Now representatives of local public councils are conducting awareness-raising activities among the population. The biggest difficulty is the payment of compensation and the provision of housing to the owners of summer cottages affected by the flood. In accordance with the Government Decree, only the owners of the only real estate in which they lived can count on receiving housing. It turns out that a large number of summer residents remains without state support. In Kostanay alone, five



garden societies and five more in the Kostanay region were seriously affected. There are from 600 to more than 1 thousand plots in each cottage community. Almost all of these people have lost buildings, building materials, not to mention household items that cannot be restored. According to Serik Bekturganov, the public council of the region seeks to find a solution that will somehow help residents of suburban settlements belonging to a socially vulnerable category of citizens. Perhaps they will seek assistance from charitable foundations.

“Another problem is that government agencies do not have time to respond to comments and suggestions voiced by public figures. So far, we are not holding any meetings until the end of May, because we understand that state bodies are really busy eliminating the consequences of the flood. Later, we will hold a meeting, work on the mistakes and find out how else we can help,” says the head of the Public Council of Kostanay region.

As it turned out at the meeting of the Coordination Center, almost all regions faced the same problem of receiving and fairly distributing humanitarian aid to victims. In response to this challenge, the Public Council of Aktobe region proposed to digitize the process in order to en-

sure its transparency and reduce corruption risks. The initiative of the colleagues was supported by all participants of the meeting and stated the need to extend Aktobe experience to the whole country.

“In autumn, a project office was established in Aktobe region. It consists of members of the Public Council, analysts and experts. And actually, the work of the project office helped us a lot during the flood. Having discovered the problem of distribution of humanitarian supplies, together with the experts of the project office, we decided to develop an electronic platform and digitize all humanitarian aid coming to the region,” said Tattygul Talayeva, Chairman of the Public Council of Aktobe region. “This digital platform will be useful to us in any case.” How will the platform work? There is a 109 service in each region. It receives a message that humanitarian aid is coming, for example, from Kyzylorda. The car contains a motor, pumps, generators, blankets, mattresses. Turning to our database, we see that, for example, the Irginsky district needs a motor, pumps and blankets. We call each other, accept the cargo and mark the status “fulfilled”. Similarly, it will be possible to help ordinary people through a digital platform. We will launch it in the near

future. There has been digitized the data on the humanitarian aid that has been received by evacuation centers and city administration (akimats). The database contains the names of the victims and a list of what these people need. Clothes, groceries, or something else. The warehouse sees this data, and it forms an application. After that, we give the humanitarian cargo to volunteers or chairmen of cooperatives. The responsible persons who supplied and performed the logistics are indicated on the platform, and a photo report is necessarily uploaded. I think that such a system is needed everywhere in the country. This, firstly, will help to avoid corruption risks when receiving humanitarian aid, and secondly, to identify humanitarian needs.

At the same time, the social activist voiced other challenges that representatives of councils in the regions can and should work with. This is close interaction with the population, providing citizens with advice and legal assistance. In addition, according to Tattygul Talayeva, expert members of public councils are quite capable of monitoring current problems of the population, working with

state bodies to develop algorithms for solving them and boldly initiate amendments to legislation.

“Today, clear mechanisms are needed for the resettlement of people who live in floodplains. Flooding mainly occurs in these areas. There is no guarantee that floods will not affect us again next year. Nationwide, this is a huge problem and we, together with representatives of state bodies, need to seriously address it,” she added.

The spring floods exposed a number of systemic problems in the country, pushing the state and society to further consolidate efforts to overcome them. These are the unsatisfactory condition of roads, the lack of forecasting of natural accidents, violation of housing construction rules, bureaucracy, low level of public confidence in the activities of charitable foundations and much more. In all this, representatives of public councils see a great field for joint activities with the public sector and the active population.

**BECAUSE THE SITUATION IN OUR COUNTRY HAS CHANGED A LOT.
THE ROLE OF PUBLIC COUNCILS IS INCREASING EVERY YEA**

STATUS MATTERS

New challenges require new cardinal solutions. In this context, enhancing the role of the civil sector becomes an urgent necessity. Thanks to the persistence of active leaders of public councils, the state becomes “listening” and takes into account the interests of citizens. This is confirmed by the creation of a Coordination Center of Public Councils. According to the head of the Civil Alliance, Banu Nurgaziyeva, today the need to raise the status and activate the activities of the councils comes to the fore.

“Why are we raising the issue of activating the activities of public councils at all levels? Because the situation in our country has changed a lot. The role of public councils is increasing every year. In order to further develop this institution, we have developed a package of amendments to the legislation on public councils, which is now in the Ministry of Culture and Information. The main task of legislative changes is to increase the effectiveness of the work of public councils,” Banu Nurgaziyeva emphasised.

During the meeting of the Coordination Center of Public Councils, the leading figures of the new body were elected. As a result of the participants’ voting, Chairman of the Public Council of Internal Affairs Bodies Rakhim Oshakbayev became the head of the Coordination Center, Chairman of the Public Council of Astana Zulfukhar Gaipov was elected as a co-chairman of the Coordination Center.

Speaking at the site of the Coordination Center, Rakhim Oshakbayev announced several proposals to be included in the Action Plan to activate the work of public councils.

“First of all, it is the control of the budget process at all stages, starting with the identification of needs, cost reduction and ending with an overall increase in the efficiency of budget disbursement. It is necessary to mobilize all civil society activists to control the budget according to the open-budget principle. There should be

maximum transparent allocation and expenditure of budget funds, especially in the regions. In each case, it is necessary to have a resonance and conduct public hearings,” said the head of the Coordination Center.

No less important, the expert believes, is the issue of raising the status of such an instrument as the recommendations of public councils.

“Now, in fact, it’s just a protocol, it’s published somewhere in the bowels of gov.kz or kazkenes.kz sites. There is no motivation for state bodies and other structures to properly consider our proposals and provide reasonable answers. If our recommendations are received by the state e-Otinish system, then, consequently, state bodies will have to send an official notification of implementation. Thus, we could review the accepted proposals. It is necessary to raise the status of our recommendations to the level of citizens’ appeals, or even higher, because the recommendations of public councils are the only legal tool for us to influence the decisions of state bodies,” concluded Rakhim Oshakbayev.

Concluding the discussions, the President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, Banu Nurgaziyeva, expressed confidence that the public councils will be able to implement the functions assigned to them and will contribute to strengthening the partnership of society and the state in solving common tasks.

“Public councils consist of first of all experienced, active and competent people. Thanks to their participation, the institute of public councils is really becoming a powerful lever for positive changes and reforms in the country,” summed up Banu Nurgaziyeva.

Tattygul
Talayeva:

There is a guarantee that the government will hear us

The active work of the non-governmental sector helps the government to communicate more effectively with the population, identify shortcomings in work and pay attention to the citizens' needs. Tattygul Talayeva, a member of the National Kurultai (political and military council of Mongol and Turkic peoples) under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Chairman of the Public council of Aktobe region, knows this like no one else. She is one of those women leaders who initiated the development of civil society institutions in the region in the 90s. Today, Tattygul Talayeva, speaking at various dialogue platforms, openly talks about systemic problems and always suggests ways to solve them.



– Tattygul Zhaksybaevna, you were at the origins of the creation and headed two associations of Aktobe region – non-governmental organizations and businesswomen, and you probably know everything about the civil society of your region. How do you assess it quantitatively and qualitatively at the moment? What role do NGOs play in the development of the region?

– Yes, you are right, I was at the origin of the development of the non-governmental sector in the region. It was the late 90s and early 2000s. Times were hard. Having no state budget, grant support, NGOs developed on a whim. There were no clear standards of work. We solved social problems and counted only on grants from international organizations: the Counterpart Funds, Soros-Kazakhstan, the USAID Agency. Many NGOs that were open at that time are still developing, although there are some who simply exist on paper.

Now NGO representatives have the opportunity to study at various courses and attend master classes. At that time, everyone acted on their own. For example, I was looking for sponsors, sources of funding for my projects and ideas. Having headed the Association of Businesswomen of Aktobe region, I made a bet on fundraising training. I organized training seminars, sought out and invited trainers myself. So that rural women would not be left out of their lot, I organized seminars in the outback. When I was first invited to the association, I immediately warned that I was ready to work only if our activities were aimed at changing and improving people's lives. Together with like-minded people, we actively implemented projects,

involving more and more women in them, including those from rural areas. And, by the way, many of them have become successful entrepreneurs in the region.

Today, the non-governmental sector, having a solid body of knowledge, has become very literate. The very fact that NGOs actively participate in the public procurement system and win grants testifies to the professionalism of the representatives of the associations. In my opinion, there have been no significant quantitative changes, since there are many registered organizations, but there are significantly fewer of them actually working.

– For more than 20 years of public activity, your main tasks have been the fight against poverty, unemployment, corruption and crime in general. What else do you consider to be an indisputable social evil and how can and should it be combated?

– For a long time, I headed a special monitoring group at the anti-corruption service in the Aktobe region. Then, together with experts, we revealed many facts of fraud. For example, four years ago, computers worth 1,25 billion tenge were purchased for the Department of Education of Aktobe region. During the inspection, our group found out that the price was overstated by more than one hundred thousand tenge for one computer. And there were 5 000 of them. Moreover, the computers were not equipped with software, they were not covered by maintenance. After three years, according to the agreement concluded between the leaseholder and the Department of Education, these computers would remain in the ownership of the former. We forced to change the contract and

TAKE, FOR EXAMPLE, THE PRESIDENTIAL PERSONNEL RESERVE. IT INCLUDES PROGRESSIVE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE RECEIVED ADVANCED EDUCATION AND WHO HAVE HEALTHY AMBITIONS. THEY STRIVE TO BE USEFUL TO SOCIETY AND CONSCIOUSLY APPROACH TO THEIR CAREER BUILDING.

transfer the equipment to the balance of the Department of Education. Then this news spread throughout the country and similar cases of fraud in other regions began to be revealed.

Every time I see new cases of corruption in the news, I come to the conclusion that the principle of censure has not yet been formed in society. Caught in the machinations, one deserved universal condemnation. When acquaintances, relatives, and friends turn away from one, perhaps then the person realizes the extent of his guilt.

I also don't understand many of our oligarchs. I am comparing our country and Uzbekistan. The country next door is small, but how advanced! Business is developing in different industries. Tourism is booming and brings good income to the budget. Everyone who earned money outside the country is pouring funds into its economy. Factories, textile factories, and production workshops are opening. Accordingly, new jobs are being created. The tax base is growing, and large funds are being allocated to the social sphere. In our country, the situation is developing according to the opposite scenario,

those who can, are trying to take the last bit out of the country. Why do our people lack a sense of patriotism? This is a question that I don't have an answer to, unfortunately.

– The President speaks about the maximum involvement of citizens in the management of the state. What opportunities do Kazakhstanis have today to influence and participate in political life? Are they willing to use them? Being a deputy of the regional maslikhat of three convocations, what can you say about the development of the local government system in Kazakhstan?

– I think each of us has already appreciated the steps that the President of our country has taken towards improving the system of state power and management. Take, for example, the presidential personnel reserve. It includes progressive young people who have received advanced education and who have healthy ambitions. They strive to be useful to society and consciously approach to their career building. Such selection will encourage young people to improve their efficiency, express themselves and achieve changes for the better in society.

After the referendum in 2023, Kazakhstan is had great opportunities to participate in the political life of the state – to gather like-minded people and create parties. Or take the last elections of deputies in single-mandate districts. They showed that there are real leaders of public opinion in the country. The candidates for the deputy post acted as self-nominees, even if not many of them passed, but these people are ready to break the established foundations and work for the benefit of society. I am sure that the bet should be placed on such leaders, whom



the people will trust. The same can be said about the electability of akims. This principle is gradually being implemented in our country. First, we elected the mayors of rural districts, now we have reached the district, tomorrow we will elect the mayors of cities and regions. With the development of the local government system, Kazakhstanis realized that everyone's voice can become decisive and have a completely new approach to the electoral process.

– Public control significantly increases the role of NGOs and forms qualitatively new principles of interaction between citizens and the state. In an interview, you said that the public council is the voice of the people. And its task is to respond to the pain points of society. As the head of the public council of Aktobe region, explain the advantages and benefits of this institution of civil society? Are there any forbidden topics for discussion at the council?

– The benefits of public councils are indisputable. We do not have taboo topics, we raise the most pressing issues that need to be addressed. In my work, as a leader, I focus on the results of public hearings and public monitoring. Recently, together with

colleagues, industry experts, we conducted monitoring of private kindergartens, it received a great response in society. We did not expect that a lot of pain points would be revealed. As it turned out during an anonymous survey of parents, private traders overestimated the cost of their services and provided them poorly.

For one child, the state transfers 54 thousand tenge per month to kindergartens with a state order. In addition, parents pay an additional 40 thousand tenge per month to the kindergarten on average. At the same time, the kindergarten is located in a three-room detached house. There are over 50 children in three groups, so the entrepreneur receives an average of 5 million tenge per month. However, the conditions of keeping the children do not stand up to any criticism. Kindergarten students are in the same room all the time, they play, eat and sleep here. The approved menu differs from the nutrition that the kids actually receive. In addition, no classes are held with children.

Following the results of the monitoring, the Public council of Aktobe region sent letters to the regional Prosecutor's office, the Department of Quality Control of Education, the regional Department of Education. At the



There are 120 people in the National Kurultai

Ministry of Education, I raised the issue of licensing private kindergartens and tightening the requirements for their activities. The request was supported. At a meeting of the National Kurultai, Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Tamara Duissenova said that control over private kindergartens has been tightened and local education departments can initiate inspections of preschool institutions themselves, whereas previously they were carried out only at the request of parents. Furthermore, the Mazhilis deputies have developed amendments to the legislation on the introduction of licensing of preschool education. The Government's conclusion on this issue is currently being prepared.

We also conducted road condition monitoring in Aktobe region and studied the situation with school canteens in the region. Aktobe's general plan included 25 recommendations from experts of the Public Council regarding the preservation of the green zone of the city, increasing parks and squares. There were recommendations on the international airport, on the construction of roads in the new residential district "Altyn Orda". This year, the regional center will begin construction of a road that will connect Altyn Orda with the old neighborhood.

A very serious issue is the increase in cases of Internet fraud, I raised it at a meeting of the Public council and at the National Kurultai. Our proposal is that banks should conclude an agreement with customers for the provision of Internet services, check the debt burden of a person, his solvency. And by the way, we were supported. If the internal documents of the banks were executed in full, there would be significantly fewer

facts of Internet fraud. In the future, at the expense of grant funds, we plan to strengthen awareness-raising work on countering fraudsters on the web.

Another problem that we all had to join in solving this year is large-scale floods. Members of the Public council were the first to come to the aid of flood victims. We were personally addressed by the Residents of the horticultural collectives "Neftyanik" and "Hydrogeologist". We bought food for them, brought mattresses, and settled them in evacuation centers. The tenants were persuaded to be taken out before the tide turned. We have taken over the patronage of four horticultural collectives and provide them with targeted assistance.

In the course of work, we began to resolve the issue of humanitarian supplies distribution. In order for help to reach exactly those who need it, a platform with a single digital database has been developed and is already being put into operation. This is the idea of a project office, which is being implemented jointly with the Public council of the Aktobe region. The electronic platform allows you to form targeted assistance to victims and coordinate logistics in real time. The introduction of this digital system will reduce corruption risks and increase the effectiveness of analysis in the need for humanitarian assistance.

Today, the Public council acts as an important channel of communication between the government and society. On the dialogue platform, we have the opportunity to raise socially significant issues and jointly find ways to solve them. As practice shows, this is an effective tool that allows citizens to participate in government.

– Tell us about your activities as a member of the National Council of Public Trust and then the National Kurultai under the President. Are these bodies able to carry out the functions assigned to them? What does the fact of their appearance in our country mean in general?

– One of my recommendations, as a member of the National Council of Public Trust, was the monetization of a guaranteed social package. It was accepted. And now the recipients of the social package receive monetary assistance on the card instead of food. If you remember, previously poor citizens were given a grocery set worth 6 thousand tenge and a set of household chemicals worth about 2 thousand tenge. In fact, citizens had to pay one thousand tenge to Kazpost for transport services. Then I offered to transfer this amount on their card. Let everyone get what they need.

Another proposal concerned the activities of SK-Pharmacy. During the pandemic, the problem with the maintenance of CT and MRI machines has worsened in the region. Due to frequent use, they quickly failed. Maintenance specialists were called from different countries and paid a lot of money. To solve the problem, I proposed to open a service center on the basis of SK-Pharmacy, which would service all medical equipment in the Aktobe region, and the company itself would be engaged in its purchase. And the price of expensive equipment would be fixed, which would avoid corruption risks. But it turned out that the company only takes on the maintenance of the equipment that was supplied by it. It's a pity, such a recommendation would have a good effect.

Looking ahead, I will say that as part of the National Kurultai, I gave recommendations on the commissioning of state acceptance of construction projects. They were also supported by the Government.

The National Council of Public Trust has become an important platform where ideas and proposals for improving the life of society can be promoted. And if at least one recommendation has passed, then you have managed to do something that will change the quality of life of the population or solve systemic issues. This is the end result that each of us strives for. During the work of the National Council, more than 20 laws have been initiated, and over 100 legislative amendments have been introduced. There are 40 members of the National Council of Public Trust behind all this work, who are active initiators of all transformations.

There are 120 people in the National Kurultai. Until recently, I was the only representative from the Aktobe region. Since this year, Laura Karabasova, the rector of K. Zhubanov Aktobe Regional University has joined it. Each leader brings up thorny issues for discussion and seeks to resolve them. Is it bad? We have become the most necessary bridge between the President and the people. As members of the Kurultai, we get the opportunity to send recommendations and proposals to the secretariat, in the future they will be solved and possibly implemented. It does not matter which institutions have been established in our country and which platforms are operating. It is important that they work effectively. And if I am contacted with a problem, I will definitely send it to the Kurultai secretariat. Previous experience shows that there is a guarantee that the government will hear us and effective measures will be taken.

Samira KARINA

Grant financing of NGOs: current status and development prospects

In Kazakhstan, grant financing is the main tool for supporting the activities of NGOs, which allows non-profit associations to implement socially significant initiatives. The grant allocation mechanism was launched in 2016 and has been actively developing since then.

A single operator of the NGO “Center for Support of Civil Initiatives” is engaged in providing grant financing. From 2020 to 2023, it provided 417 state and non-state grants totaling 7,6 billion tenge to non-governmental associations. Over four years, the volume of state support provided has increased by almost 30%, from 1,7 billion tenge in 2020 to 2,1 billion tenge in 2023. This was made possible by attracting funds from local executive bodies.

Today, state grants can be provided by both central government agencies and local akimats at the expense of the republican and regional budgets.

For example, over the past four years, 295 state grants in the amount of 6 683,8 million tenge have been allocated through the Ministry of Culture and Information, while the local executive bodies have provided 96 grants in the amount of 757,7 million tenge. This separation has contributed to the diversification of sources of government funding for NGOs.

The Center for Support of Civil Initiatives also raised funds from representatives of the local business community and private foundations. From 2021 to 2023, NGOs received 26 non-governmental grants in the amount of 165,8 million tenge.

In the regional context, the public associations of Astana and Almaty are the most active in participating in grant competitions, accounting for 55,3% of applications.

NGOs from Astana, Almaty, Mangistau and Atyrau regions are also leading among the grant winners. It is noteworthy that the increase in the number of grantees from the western regions has been noted only in recent years due to the involvement of regional grants from local akimats and corporate funds. The smallest number of grants were implemented by NGOs from eight regions, including Turkestan, Kostanay, Zhambyl, Aktobe, Akmola, Karaganda, North Kazakhstan and Almaty regions.

At the same time, there is a positive trend – a gradual increase in the popularity of grant financing among the Kazakh-speaking part of the civil sector. The share of applications submitted in the state language increased from 16% in 2020 to 26% in 2023.

DIRECTIONS OF NGO FINANCING

According to the legislation on the state social order, grant financing is carried out in 16 directions. These are education, science, sports, protection of the rights and interests of citizens, culture and art, environmental protection, social protection of the population, health care, national unity, development of civil society, youth policy, family, demographic and gender issues, volunteer initiatives, historical and cultural heritage, social and legal assistance to persons from the probation agency records, public monitoring of public services.

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The priority areas of grant provision may vary depending on the region and the customer's requests. For example, in the Mangystau region, environmental projects or projects dedicated to the revival of traditions may prevail, while in other regions attention is paid to other areas.

In recent years, such areas as "Promoting the development of civil society, including improving the effectiveness of non-governmental organizations", "Supporting youth policy and children's initiatives" and "Strengthening social harmony and national unity" have most often become grant holders.

The main criteria for selecting projects are relevance and social significance, innovation and uniqueness of the proposed solutions. Special attention is paid to the issues of project feasibility and cost justification.

The analysis of grant funding areas shows the key needs and priorities of civil society, and also allows you to identify areas of application for further development and support of social initiatives.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF EFFECTIVENESS

Over the past four years, over 400 NGO grant projects have been successfully implemented through the Center, which has made it possible to provide a significant amount of social services to more than 11 million representatives of various segments of the population and civil society.

In particular, in the period from 2020 to 2022, as part of the implementation of grants, beneficiaries received assistance throughout the country through such activities as providing free consultations, training socially vulnerable groups, legal literacy, the creation of various services, centers, classrooms, as well as the development of methodological, informational, training materials for experts, state bodies and the population.

The Center for Support of Civil Initiatives regularly monitors the implementation of projects by checking and evaluating NGO reports, as well as traveling to the spots. Despite the obvious improvements in the field of grant execution, there are facts of termination of grant agreements and refunds due to misuse or violations of the terms of the agreement.

In terms of figures, for the period from 2020 to 2023, a total of seven contracts with representatives of the non-governmental sector were terminated.

According to the experts of the Center for Support of Civil Initiatives, in order to increase the effectiveness of grant financing of NGO activities, it is necessary to introduce a systematic approach, including:

- strengthening monitoring, evaluation and training at all stages of project implementation;
- strengthening independent public oversight;
- establishment of capacity development programmes for NGOs;
- attraction of additional sources of financing, including from international funds;
- development of intersectoral partnership between NGOs, the government and business.

In general, grant financing of NGOs in Kazakhstan is under active development. The increase in funding, the attraction of new sources and the diversification of support areas create favorable conditions for the activities of NGOs and the solution of socially significant problems. Further improvement of the grant financing mechanism, increasing the capacity of NGOs and strengthening independent control will make it possible to use this tool even more effectively for the development of civil society and improving the quality of life in the country.

Kathy Leach, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Kingdom to Kazakhstan:

Process of Transformation of Kazakhstan's Civil Society is Evident

Over the past decade, Kazakhstan's civil sector has undergone significant changes. The professionalism of civil society organizations in the country has markedly increased, and social entrepreneurship is flourishing. In an interview with Adal Azamat, Ms. Kathy Leach, the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United Kingdom to Kazakhstan, discussed the vital role of civil society institutions and the ways in which the state can enhance the effectiveness of the third sector.



② – **Ms. Kathy Leach, could you tell us about the role of the civil sector in the life of society in the UK? To what extent is it developed and how does it participate in public administration?**

This is a very big question because in the UK the role of civil society is enormous! The civil sector has arguably been an active part of social organisation for many hundreds of years, perhaps starting with charitable activities to provide welfare to the poor and unfortunate, often through the Church. The idea of charitable giving as a religious and moral idea and volunteering your time to help those less fortunate than yourself, has very deep roots in our culture. The first laws regulating charitable organisations date from the 1700s. There are currently over 160k voluntary organisations in the UK. Some are very big – for example, the National Trust, established in 1895 and now with over 3 million members across the country paying a yearly subscription fee, was set up to buy and protect beautiful or historically important landscapes and buildings and then open these places ‘for the enjoyment of the public’. It has a yearly income of almost £700m from membership subscriptions, donations, property income and investments, and running cafes and shops on its properties. It is also the UK’s largest farm owner, with nearly 250k hectares of land supporting 1300 tenant farmers who are managing traditional landscapes (e.g. sheep farming in the Welsh mountains) or demonstrating how to farm the land more sustainably. But most charities and voluntary organisations are very small. They are often set up by individuals in their communities to raise money from small donations to support facilities in a local hospital or renovate a local park, for example.

I would say that nowadays, civil society organisations roughly divide into those which:

- provide a charitable service or welfare provision. Nowadays, many voluntary organisations raise money to provide some kind of service, whether it is running a children’s home for disadvantaged children, providing support to people with disabilities, collecting and rehoming stray dogs and cats, or protecting an important green space. Sometimes they also receive a grant from government to provide these services – often charities demonstrate there is a need for action, and then government moves in to support it. We also have brilliant international organisations like Oxfam (‘Oxford Famine Relief’, established 1942) and Save the Children (est. 1919) which focus on raising money from individuals and government and providing humanitarian relief for people in desperate situations overseas.
- Or – the second category is those who are campaigning for political, social or environmental change. One of the first campaigning organisations was set up by the Quakers, a Christian group, in the 17th century to campaign for the abolition of the African slave trade. The Chartists were a political group in the 19th century campaigning for ‘one man, one vote’ at a time when only men with property could vote in the UK. Nowadays, we have some brilliant environmental campaign groups like Friends of the Earth or Greenpeace, which use campaign techniques, advocacy and lobbying to try to persuade the government to ‘green’ its policies. Women’s rights’ organisations fundraise and campaign on many issues, including to set up crisis centres for domestic violence and to change the law to protect women. These organisations attempt to influence government policy by sending in recommendations to Ministries, organising protests or public actions, taking part in government consultations, and some may have a more formal role as part of a Ministry’s panel of experts. And, of course, political parties and trade unions are also civil society ‘campaigning’ organisations, some with very deep historical roots.

The final category of civil society organisation which has become fashionable nowadays is the so-called ‘social enterprise’. This is a business, which must make a profit to cover its costs, but which is set up for a social purpose. For example, in my local town there is a small café which is staffed in part by people with learning disabilities, to give them a chance to have employment and lead a meaningful life.

In short, I would say that what civil society brings to public administration is challenge, fresh ideas, policy, and practical expertise, and sometimes the network and capability to provide a real service to people which government was not able to provide. Government cannot do or pay for everything – civil society often steps in to fill the gaps.

② – **Which institutions of civil society, in your opinion, should be developed first of all in any country? What does this give to the general public of citizens?**

The essence of civil society is that it is organised through the energy and commitment of citizens themselves – they set up an organisation because they see a need, or they see something they want to change to improve things for their fellow citizens. Civil society is about grass-roots activism – people trying to help themselves and their fellow citizens have a better life. This

THE FINAL CATEGORY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION WHICH HAS BECOME FASHIONABLE NOWADAYS IS THE SO-CALLED 'SOCIAL ENTERPRISE'



kind of energy and activism can make a huge difference in local communities. In that regard, it is not possible 'top-down' for government itself to 'develop' a real civil society. But government can certainly help or hinder civil society through its actions. For example, to be helpful government can:

- provide small grants to local, grass-roots organisations which are trying to do something useful to improve their communities.
- make sure that the laws and tax codes for civil society are appropriate for their activities and their purpose i.e. they should not be treated purely like any other business. In our system, there is a difference between purely 'charitable' activity, and more 'political' or 'advocacy' activity, and these are taxed differently.
- make sure Ministries' policy development process includes consultation with civil society organisations, and perhaps includes a panel of experts from different sectors to provide advice.
- allow civil society to publicise what they are trying to do through public gatherings, marches, public actions, and through fund-raising.

② – **Kazakhstan makes the development of a strong civil sector one of its priorities. How do you assess the reforms in this area, for example, simplification of procedures for organizing peaceful rallies and assemblies, and weakening of the qualification for registration of new parties?**

The reforms of recent years and particularly President Tokayev's reforms in the past 2 years have all made an important step forward towards best international practice in the civil society space. I think the government understands the huge benefit and importance to Kazakhstan of having a vibrant civil society. From what I observe, the challenge now is to make sure that those reforms are fully implemented. Civil society organisations complain that it is still difficult to organise a public rally or march, for example. I am surprised it seems to be so difficult for women's organisations to organise a public event on 8 March. I note that two new political parties were able to register for the last Mazhilis election, but I hope that more will follow. Depending on the business model, independent media may also be described to some degree as civil society organisations (or businesses with a social purpose). The current draft Media Law is a really important bit of legislation to get right to help encourage independent media, and again I would focus on the importance of encouraging small grass-roots local media organisations which provide an important social function.

② – **What changes in the work of the Kazakh civil sector could you highlight?**

What I definitely see now is an increasing range and professionalisation of the sector. Whereas in the past as foreign partners we focused on a lot of capacity building and training of 'know how' in the civil society sector, now I see that there are brilliant Kazakh organisations here which are taking on that training and capacity building work themselves. I also see the development of the



social enterprise model here in Kazakhstan, which is exciting to see, particularly in rural communities where opportunities for employment may be low.

② – In your opinion, how much is the involvement of the general public in public administration, civil control, and social activism in Kazakhstan? Which sectors of civil society are getting the most development?

This is a difficult question to answer – I often hear people complain that the general public is too passive, but I think those complaints are heard in every country! In every country, it is usually a small group of socially active people who make the really big difference. But I would refer to my previous answer and add that what I see now is a lot of young people coming in to the NGO sector, speaking three languages, with a great education, and with a determination to make a difference. One of the areas where I see a lot of change is in providing legal advice, support and crisis shelters to women – I have met some brilliant organisations who are taking forward work in this important area.

② – An important component in strengthening civil society is participation in elections. Elections of akims are already being held in Kazakhstan, pilot elections of akims of districts and cities of regional

THE GOVERNMENT UNDERSTANDS THE HUGE BENEFIT AND IMPORTANCE TO KAZAKHSTAN OF HAVING A VIBRANT CIVIL SOCIETY

significance have been held. How important are these changes and how will they help develop civic responsibility and awareness?

I think these changes are very important – if people feel their vote counts and doing something will change something in their lives for the better, they will become more active and motivated. Indeed, as I travel round the country and meet with akimats and local people to find out about different regions, there are places where the level of local consultation and partnership with akimats and the professionalisation of local civil society is impressive.

② – What initiatives in the field of civil society development are being promoted or in which are the British Embassy to Kazakhstan participating.

We usually have a small pot of money to support one or two good NGOs every year with a project they suggest. One of my favourite projects this year was with the media organisation Adil Soz, focused on ‘solutions-focused journalism’. Journalists around the country were given training and support to write a story about a particular issue or problem, but not just to focus on highlighting the problem but also on setting out the possible solutions. In doing this, they often engaged with Ministries and local authorities in a really collaborative and constructive way. I thought this was a great example of how journalism can help to point out new solutions and a different way forward.

Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Kazakhstan Monika Iwersen:



**The Civil Sector is an
Integral Component
of the Multifaceted
Relationship between
Kazakhstan and
Germany**



In an interview with Adal Azamat, Monika Iwersen, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Republic of Germany to Kazakhstan, shared her insights on the ongoing changes in Kazakhstan's socio-political landscape and outlined promising areas of cooperation between our countries. The diplomat emphasized that well-developed civil society institutions play a crucial role in bilateral relations, as their activities contribute to maintaining long-term and stable ties between Kazakhstan and Germany.

– At one of the meetings with the Kazakh establishment in 2023, you noted the importance of the political changes taking place in Kazakhstan, as they “will open the way for economic reforms.” Why do you consider the reforms taking place in our country important? Which of the reforms could you mention and why are they important for the development of Kazakhstan?

Germany supports the reforms undertaken by Kazakhstan, because they are important for the future economic and social development of Kazakhstan. I believe that the reforms initiated to strengthen Parliament, promote and strengthen the rule of law (for example by establishing the Constitutional Court and by important reforms in administrative law), to fight corruption and improve the business climate for domestic companies and foreign investors, for example through reducing bureaucracy and fighting corruption, are some of the most significant reforms in this context. An emphasis on women's rights and stronger representation of women in society and in decision-making, as well as a strong and vibrant civil society, which has a voice, will further contribute to the positive development of the country.

– Are German business circles interested in working in our country? Which areas are of particular interest and have prospects for cooperation?

Kazakhstan and Germany have always had strong economic relations, spanning a wide range of sectors. Over the past two years, and also due to geopolitical developments in the region, we have witnessed an even stronger interest of German companies in doing business in Kazakhstan and in exploring the opportunities this country has to offer. A significant number of German business delegations visited Kazakhstan in 2023, and this trend is likely to continue in 2024. When Federal President Steinmeier visited Kazakhstan in June of last year, he was accompanied by a large business delegation. President Tokayev also met with important German businesses in the course of his visit to Berlin in September of 2023. The interest to do more together undoubtedly exists.

Looking at current developments, I believe that sectors such as agriculture, logistics, industrial production, raw materials and processing, construction, health services, renewable energies and green hydrogen, as well as waste management and introducing environmentally friendly solutions for industry, with a view to reaching decarbonization of the economy by

2060, are particularly promising fields for an even stronger economic cooperation between Germany and Kazakhstan.

– As is known, Germany is one of the world leaders in the development of renewable energy sources. Are there any joint projects with Kazakhstan in this area and what are their prospects? How important, in your opinion, is the development of renewable energy sources in Kazakhstan?

In my view, the development of renewable energies in Kazakhstan is crucial for meeting the goal of decarbonization by 2060. This goes together with a need to build the corresponding energy infrastructure, i.e. grids. Renewa-

bles can make an important contribution to reducing emissions. In Germany, renewable energies currently make up 51,8 % of the energy mix, and are growing rapidly. Kazakhstan with its wind and solar possibilities, has such great potential to increase the share of renewable energy in its energy mix significantly over the coming years! I know that important projects by various stakeholder for expanding renewable energies in Kazakhstan are being implemented or are in the pipeline already, and I hope that they can be implemented quickly.

Along with existing German business ventures in Kazakhstan, such as the SES Saran Solar Plan, a photovoltaic power station near Karaganda, which produces 100 MW of solar energy, and is currently the biggest in Central Asia, green hydrogen is an important new opportunity for cooperation. The project developed by the German-Swedish company Svevind in Aktau is envisaged to produce hydrogen and ammonia from around 35 GW of energy, generated from wind and solar power. Green hydrogen – some call it the “oil of the 21st Century” – can strongly benefit “green” production domestically, and could be exported to Europe as well.

– One of the points of mutual interest between the business of Kazakhstan and Germany is agricultural machinery sector and the machine-building sector as a whole. In Germany, these industries are developed, and their achievement and developments can contribute to the qualitative development of the agricultural sector of our country. What prospects and main areas of cooperation do you see?

GERMAN COMPANIES HAVE BEEN COOPERATING WITH KAZAKHSTAN IN THE FIELD OF AGRICULTURE, INCLUDING AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY FOR A LONG TIME

KAZAKHSTAN WITH ITS WIND AND SOLAR POSSIBILITIES, HAS SUCH GREAT POTENTIAL TO INCREASE THE SHARE OF RENEWABLE ENERGY IN ITS ENERGY MIX SIGNIFICANTLY OVER THE COMING YEARS



Agriculture is definitely an area with significant potential for further cooperation between Kazakhstan and Germany. As we know, Kazakhstan is striving to expand its agricultural sector and the productivity of the sector. At the same time, climate change in Central Asia also requires water-efficient technologies and environmentally friendly solutions. Adaptation of seeds, modern irrigation technologies and state-of-the-art fertilizers play a very important role, as do modern machinery and equipment. German companies have been cooperating with Kazakhstan in the field of agriculture, including agricultural machinery for a long time.

In Petropavlovsk, for example, the German company Claas has set up shop and is assembling modern agricultural machinery from Germany, to provide Kazakh customers with the best available technology to increase yields and productivity.

In the machine-building sector in general, there have been long-established relations between German and Kazakh companies. In December of last year, when I visited Pavlodar and Ekibastuz, I saw several examples of excellent cooperation of very successful Kazakh businesses with German machinery suppliers. And I am convinced that in the process of decarbonizing big industries in Kazakhstan with a view

to the 2060 goal of a decarbonized economy, the prospects for even closer German-Kazakh cooperation on decarbonizing Kazakh heavy industry with environmentally-friendly, low emissions solutions will only be growing. The technology is available, and German companies stand ready to cooperate.

– Earlier, it was stated that companies from Germany were interested in cooperation in the field of healthcare. Are there any joint projects in this area already? What areas of healthcare can be further developed?

After the pandemic, many countries, including Germany and Kazakhstan, are now taking a close look at how to modernize and update their health systems and health services in order to make them resilient for the future and offer the best health services available to their citizens. The Kazakh government is undertaking strong efforts to expand health care for its citizens across the country, including outside of big cities. This is very important, and it is a challenge at the same time. In Germany, for example, smaller and rural communities, but also smaller towns have to undertake much greater efforts and be more creative today to ensure the availability of health services within

OUR ECONOMIC RELATIONS HAVE ALWAYS BEEN GOING STRONG. IN ADDITION, I HOPE THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO FURTHER DEVELOP EXCHANGES AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONTACTS BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES

reasonable distance, with a good standard of care and at reasonable cost. Big German companies such as Siemens Healthineers and Bayer, for example, are represented and very active in Kazakhstan already, cooperating with Kazakh partners, such as clinics or universities. Others have been shifting their focus due to geopolitical developments and are looking more closely at Kazakhstan and Central Asia in general, to assess opportunities for future involvement and cooperation. The better the business climate in Kazakhstan, the more opportunities I see for successful partnerships in the field of healthcare.

– One of the main partners of our publication is representative office of the Adenauer Foundation in Kazakhstan. Please tell us how the cooperation between the Embassy of Germany and the Foundation is built? How do you jointly build ties and partnerships with the civil society of Kazakhstan?

It is important to know that our political foundations are working independently,

supported by the Embassies where needed. We regularly exchange information about our respective work, and I would consider our work to be complementary in certain ways. One strong example of the important work the Adenauer Foundation is doing in Kazakhstan is its work with women, supporting them in preparing to become future leaders and political decision-makers. It is important that women are represented and have a voice wherever decisions are made, because they contribute a unique perspective and experience to the discussion.

– How do you assess the current development of cultural, humanitarian, and educational ties between Kazakhstan and Germany? Which areas have already been developed, and where else is there potential for strengthening contacts?

Over the two and a half years that I have been in Kazakhstan, I have seen our relations flourish. The reform process initiated by Kazakhstan after the January events, has opened up new opportunities for cooperation, for example with the Constitutional Court, on media or in education. People-to-people contacts are growing, as young Kazakhs study or work in Germany and bring back that experience. I hope that the positive trend we are seeing in even closer collaboration between universities of our countries will continue. The Forum of Rectors of Kazakh and German universities which took place when President Steinmeier visited Kazakhstan in June 2023, and a visit undertaken by the Federal Ministry of Higher Education and Research provided strong and essential impulses for building even more and closer partnerships between our universities, including in the area of research.



We are well aware of the goal of the Government of Kazakhstan to have international universities establish branches in Kazakhstan. I find it very encouraging that so many countries have responded to that by strengthening their presence in Kazakhstan. With the German-Kazakh Institute for sustainable engineering at Yessenov University in Aktau (which started its work in September 2023) and the envisaged cooperation with the East Kazakhstan Technical University (EKTU) in Oskemen in the field of mining, the Kazakh-German University in Almaty is initiating important new areas of expanded cooperation. As an Embassy, we strongly support these initiatives which aim to build and develop expertise together with our Kazakh partners, including in developing a green economy.

Our economic relations have always been going strong. In addition, I hope that we will be able to further develop exchanges and people-to-people contacts between our countries. Such contacts are not only mutually enriching for the participants, but also contribute to a deeper mutual understanding. This includes ongoing support for Kazakh schools with strong German language education, because, in many cases, this kind of education creates the basis for lifelong strong ties with Germany and contributes to our strong network of relations.


We also support regional cooperation on climate and environment in Central Asia, which is one of the regions most affected by climate change. I am delighted to see that regional cooperation is growing, for example within the Green Central Asia initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office, and implemented by GIZ. As environmental awareness in society increases, and Kazakhstan, together with its Central Asian neighbors is raising its profile at the international level as well – the joint presentation by

the Central Asian states at the COP 28 last year being one example -, I am convinced that our contacts with environmental actors, including associations and NGOs in Kazakhstan can and should be intensified. Citizens are important stakeholders in protecting the environment and supporting energy transition and energy efficiency.

As far as humanitarian cooperation is concerned, we will continue to work with those supporting and working with vulnerable groups.

– How do you assess the development of civil society and NGOs in Kazakhstan? What role could they play in the development of relations between our countries?

In my daily work, I meet many very active and committed civil society activists and NGOs. I commend their work, their active engagement, and their willingness to work for improving the situation of their fellow citizens, for example by supporting vulnerable groups, such as victims of domestic violence, persons with disabilities, or children. It is important that they are heard and can express themselves, also publicly. I welcome the fact that many of them are participating in international networks as well, and have established contacts with German partners in particular, so that best practices can be studied and exchanged internationally. They are an integral and strong part of the multi-faceted network of relations between Kazakhstan and Germany.



Since 2020, the coordinating council of Alliance of NGO for Kyzylorda region has been headed by Anar Izden, a well-known activist in the region. The Alliance includes 73 organizations, 70% of them are active civil society institutions. Our interlocutor has been engaged in public activities for a quarter of a century and is well versed in both the intricacies of the civil sector and the problems of her region.



Anar Izden:

Local actions are needed to solve global problems

– Can you tell us about the most active non-governmental organizations of the Kyzylorda region and their topics of concern?

– The most active in terms of implementation of social projects and NGO initiatives in the region are the Kazalinsk and Aral areas, where their qualitative and quantitative predominance is observed. This is probably due to the fact that in the late 1990s, the resource centers of the UN Mission worked here, which trained leaders.

For example, the organization «Aral tenizi» under the leadership of Ainakul Baimakhanova provides jobs for 200 people. «Shapagat» Rehabilitation Center, headed by Shynar Zhensikbayeva, has created 50 jobs. 30 people were employed by Indira Zhumasheva, head of Center for Support of Persons with Disabilities.

Laura Ibraimova's Women's Council is working effectively. The rural NGO Kamystybas, headed by Aldabergen Isayev, is very active in supporting



the local community and solving environmental problems. It is much more difficult to work in the non-governmental sector in the areas than in the city, where there are more opportunities: there are resource centers, experts, consultants, and a large number of events. Therefore, in the next three years, the Alliance plans to create NGOs in settlements and intensify the work of civil society institutions in regional centers. This is very important both for the development of the local community and for ensuring public confidence in NGOs.

Kyzylorda region is a region of ecological disaster associated with the drying up of the Aral Sea. The shallowing of the only major waterway, the Syrdarya River, is a huge problem for the region.

In 2021, as part of the Eurasia Fund project, we created a Club of environmental NGOs, which included 15 organizations. They are jointly engaged in implementation of separate garbage collection, elimination of impromptu landfills, the training of environmental consultants from among schoolchildren and students, explain the current norms and standards in the field of environmental protection.

As throughout the country, issues of domestic violence and an increase in the number of citizens receiving social benefits are relevant in the region. As examples of effective activities, one can cite the therapeutic and educational charity shelter for preschool children «Umai» (head Karakoz Yesbosyn), public associations and funds «Kyzylorda Women's Information Center» (Ayimkhan Moldakhmetova), Pro Bono (Pavel Gorbachev), «Support for Initiative» (Madina Tulepova), «Ak bosaga» (Zeynar Tazhiyeva), «Volunteers of Kyzylorda» (Olga Chebakova), «Zhomart» (Maya Karimova), «Agency for Sustainable Development (Maira Boranbayeva) and other organizations.

Recently, a regular meeting of the Alliance's coordinating council was held, where the results of the past were summed up and priority areas for the next two years were identified. Creating conditions for development of rural local communities, developing the social culture of citizens through the support of

creative unions and implementation of cultural programs, solving environmental problems, sustainable development of NGOs – these are the main activities that will be the focus of our efforts.

– What, in your opinion, is the role of the state in the development of the non-profit sector? How political will is manifested, because the President always focuses on this?

– Kassym-Jomart Tokayev clearly defined the position regarding NGOs: development of the state based on the development of civil society. This is a very important point.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable decrease in the activity of non-governmental sector in influencing government decision-making. I attribute this to the fact that NGOs are busier with project activities and finding funds: they need to maintain an office, permanent employees, pay for communication services, transport, and so on.

Unfortunately, the idea of NGO is being transformed when an equal sign is placed between the words «organization» and «leader». We call them «one-man organizations.»

In my opinion, the state should take steps to support not only the project activities of NGOs, but also the program mission of public associations. It is associations with a clear focus group focused on one specific topic, whether they are veterans of Afghanistan, liquidators of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accidents, members of the Nevada-Semey movement, residents of specific villages or students.

We also observe a decrease in the effectiveness of NGO participation in various coordinating and advisory bodies, commissions, and councils. Most of these groups work completely ineffectively, but this is the fault of social activists themselves. Many leaders have permanent jobs in commercial structures or individual entrepreneurship and excessive employment does not allow them to prepare for announced meeting agendas.



From year to year, we see how the principle of the presence of representatives of NGOs is distorted at all these hearings, conferences, meetings. The same pattern is observed in electoral processes: elections of rural akims have shown that most NGOs are not at all interested in observing the rules and achieving justice, as they understand the futility of social activity.

We absolutely cannot say that NGOs and the state are equal partners in protecting the rights and legitimate interests of citizens. We must strive to ensure parity.

– Is competition among non-governmental organizations increasing? What kind of help do they need most often?

– Rural and district organizations are not always competitive enough. To increase competitiveness, it is necessary for business to intervene, which would take over part of the NGO's costs. Because, ultimately, civil society intends to improve the quality of people's lives, reduce social risks, which effectively affects the development of the population's solvency, and therefore improve business conditions.

With the advent of the state social procurements, most of the companies left the territory of NGOs. Samruk-Kazyna platform has also appeared. But we understand that only large organizations with institutional resources can compete with each other on this platform.

Therefore, the state, together with NCE «Atameken», should create flexible conditions for local businesses to cooperate with the non-profit sector in their regions. This will increase public confidence in civil society entities, prevent risks associated with inefficient use of funds, and most importantly, help solve specific problems of specific groups in a timely manner.

Today, non-governmental organizations need information and educational support more than ever before. We live in an age of rapid technologies that are changing the social world, among other things.

All the leaders talk about the aging of staff as a personnel problem in the sector, the lack of youth in the volunteer movement, and the decrease in youth interest in social activity. There are few sports, creativity, and community service in schools, colleges, and universities that cultivate the importance of social activism and civic engagement. The State should draw appropriate conclusions.

– One of the areas of your public activity has become the solution of urgent problems in rural areas. In your opinion, how strong is the civic initiative among rural population and why is it so important to develop it?

– As a deputy of the city maslikhat, at almost every session or meeting of the standing committee, I raised the issue of rural districts development. The legal basis of local self-government in Kazakhstan is the Constitution and the Law «On Local Government and Self-Government in the Republic of Kazakhstan». The President signed a Decree «On approval of the Concept of development of local self-government in the Republic of Kazakhstan».

Law enforcement practice and the development of public participation in rural areas are huge problems. The task of the state is to support projects aimed at involving citizens in the process of local self-government through social procurements and grants. The task of NGOs is to train members of meetings, gatherings of the local community, to develop public control over the implementation of budget programs in the rural district, to explain the rights and opportunities of citizens in the field of local self-government.

We understand that social tension is also increasing due to migration processes: rural population, most often unofficially, move to the city, do not have a permanent place of residence, registration. In settlements, there is a risk of population aging, decrease in the number of able-bodied citizens. Today, it is necessary to unite the rural population together and create conditions for trust in the government and civil society institutions.

Today, non-governmental organizations need information and educational support more than ever before



Last year, with the support of CISC NJSC, we implemented an environmental project to support initiatives in settlements Kamystybas (Aral region) and Sabalak (Kyzylorda). This year, we won the CISC competition in this area, and the Alliance's activities will cover three settlements: Kamystybas, Gani Muratbayeva (Kazaly area) and Baimur Batyr (Kyzylorda).

The villagers are very active, positive, quite resourceful, open to discussions and dialogue. They make reasoned proposals because they are well acquainted with the territory and local problems. I always adhere to the principle that in order to solve global problems, local actions are necessary.

– Why did you personally take up public work? Is your play, which raises the problems of modern youth, also a manifestation of your civic position?

– My interest in social activities began with participation in the educational program «TASIS» of the European Council «Women's Rights. Educational program for women.» In 1999, I created the Umai Orphanage, which I am currently involved in as a founder.

Thanks to work in NGOs, I traveled a lot, participated in international conferences, seminars, trainings and saw many active people charged with ideas who achieved great results through small steps. I began to learn from them. The experience of my colleagues helps me to focus on the current problems of society.

Twenty years ago, we, representatives of NGOs, introduced amendments to legislation on social services, correctional support, and juvenile justice. Today, Kazakhstan has a good legal framework regulating the protection of legitimate interests and human rights, and we face new challenges – the development of sublegislative mechanisms, improving the system of interaction with public services in matters of promoting the interests and participation of citizens.

Two plays that I wrote were dramatized as part of social projects. Both of them are youth-themed.

«Zhanymnyn uyasy» is about the problems of gender inequality, manifested in the context of financial illiteracy and debt load of families. The project was funded by the «Eurasia» International Fund.

The second play «Zhuma keshi», staged with the participation of students of Korkyt Ata Kyzylorda University, tells about the influence of mass culture and traditional foundations from the point of view of ensuring human rights. This project was supported by Akim of the region Nurlybek Nalibayev and funded by the regional department of Public Development.

In October 2023, the NGO Alliance of Kyzylorda region initiated the 11th Regional Civil Society Forum and chose the theme «Civil Society and Culture: priorities and values for transformation of Kazakhstan». We discussed the possibilities of developing a social culture, a culture of democracy, and an ecological culture in society.

This is very important for me and my colleagues, because the development of the state is impossible without the development of civil society, which should be based on educated, purposeful, literate patriots of their country. This is my civic position.

As for creativity, I can't imagine my life without poetry and art. Art is a powerful resource and tool for shaping ideology. Unfortunately, we have not used it enough for many years of independence. The influence of mass culture, the departure from national identity leads to disunity. Language, art, religion, and identity, on the contrary, bring people closer together.

I have one principle: to teach people what I am good at. In 25 years of public life, I have learned how to write and manage projects. Since childhood, I have been writing poetry, singing, writing scripts, playing dombra and guitar. Therefore, after analyzing all the opportunities for development of my NGOs and the people working in these organizations, I decided to develop projects for development of human culture and society. It's such a clever, but very rational move.

Sakan Aubakirova: Reviving rural traditions

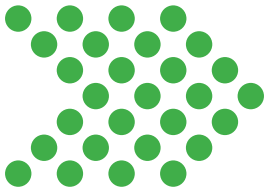


During the years of independence, there have been no significant changes in the agriculture of Kazakhstan. Moreover, there was a problem in land relations. Not only fertile plots, hayfields, but also pastures have passed into private hands. In most cases, these lands were not used for their intended purpose. Residents of many villages faced a situation where there was no land for grazing around settlements. The existing «patches» were quickly trampled down, exacerbating soil degradation.

THE FORGOTTEN OLD

Under these conditions, there was required the intervention of the Head of State Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who instructed state agencies to ensure the availability of pasture lands for farmers and rural population.

“I would like to pay special attention to the issue of pastures. These lands should be accessible primarily to the rural population. Local administrations (akimats) are poorly organizing this work, as a result, villagers are experiencing difficulties with access to pastures,” the President said, speaking at an expanded Government meeting on January 26, 2021. According to the President, 99% of the pastures were then owned by farms, but only 36% of them were used. As it turned out, 46 million hectares of pastures were empty. In this regard, the



President delegated to the Government, together with the Prosecutor General's Office, to return these pastures by the end of this year.

However, long before the presidential initiative, residents of Karabas village in Beskaragai district, at that time still in East Kazakhstan, and now in Abai region, found an effective way to solve the problem. Moreover, it did not require reinventing the wheel. They simply remembered the forgotten recent past, when state-owned cattle were driven to the offshoring areas, and there was enough land left near the villages for grazing private livestock. However, this method was widely used in ancient times by our nomadic ancestors, often changing pasture areas, allowing the land to recover.

What is very important to note is that a local non-governmental organization acted as the initiator of the initiative to drive private cattle to a driving area located 25 kilometers from the village. As Sakan Aubakirova, head of the public fund Birlik Resource Center for Rural NGOs, recalls today, the pastures located four to five kilometers around Karabas have been severely degraded. To reduce the load, it was decided to create conditions for the transportation of some livestock for seasonal grazing to more remote areas, where both the grass is juicy and the pastures are distinguished by different grasses.

Of course, it wasn't easy to get things off the ground. People feared for the safety of livestock, for offspring and for weight gain. The Birlik public fund, with the support of the GEF SGP, managed to instill faith in people in the work started in just one season.

It should be clarified here what the abbreviation GEF SGP means. This is the Global Environment Facility and its Small Grants Program, operating under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

TO REDUCE THE LOAD, IT WAS DECIDED TO CREATE CONDITIONS FOR THE TRANSPORTATION OF SOME LIVESTOCK FOR SEASONAL GRAZING TO MORE REMOTE AREAS, WHERE BOTH THE GRASS IS JUICY AND THE PASTURES ARE DISTINGUISHED BY DIFFERENT GRASSES

At the beginning of the year, the GEF SGP announces the acceptance of project applications for participation in the grant competition. Project proposals should be aimed at the implementation of activities in one of the two thematic areas:

- Mitigation of the effects of climate change;
- Reduction of land degradation processes.

Under the terms of the grant, project activities should be aimed at implementing measures that reduce the negative impact on steppe, semi-desert or desert ecosystems. Only projects focused on rural and suburban regions are accepted. Projects should include mechanisms and measures to improve the well-being of local communities (including groups such as women, youth, socially vulnerable groups) and their active involvement in the implementation of the planned. Projects based on network partnership and joint implementation of project activities by several NGOs are welcome.

"In the first year of the project, in 2019, it was very difficult – people were afraid to send their cattle so far, fearing that the animals would be stolen. Nevertheless, some villagers determined, and as a result, in the first year there were 300 heads in the herd, including small cattle. In autumn, the cattle came from grazing well-fed, the young ones grew up significantly and gained weight, people saw the result. And earlier, when cattle grazed near the village, the offspring was weak, and the percentage of deaths was too high," says Sakan Aubakirova.



Already the next season, the Karabasovites began to call ahead of time, back in February-March, to “stake out” a place to drive their cattle for distilling. In addition to relieving the load from the rural pastures and creating a favorable period for their restoration within four to five years, cattle grazing from April to October-November contributed to the fact that the villagers had more free time for gardening and other household chores.

Of course, the village was not completely without livestock for the summer. In the morning, you can hear the friendly mooing of the cows. The owners leave cash cows on the farmstead, which is about 200-250 heads. There are enough pastures around the village for them now. The changes, as they say, are obvious: the milk yield has increased, the calves have begun to gain weight better, the health of the offspring has improved significantly.


THE SECOND LIFE OF DEGRADED LANDS

It's a long time to wait for the earth to recover on its own. We need to help it, give it a boost. Therefore, the NGO Birlik decided to take the second step. To improve the soil condition, an area of degraded land of 150 hectares was sown with forage crops.

Wheat-grass has proven itself well in the arid steppe zone. The plant is unpretentious, drought-resistant, and quite productive in rainy years. The choice fell on it.

Seeding the emaciated land with perennial grass gives a multiplicative effect. People have the opportunity to stock up on plenty of hay for the winter. If earlier hay had to be bought from private traders for a lot of money, now the cost of winter food has decreased significantly. In other harvest years, it is even possible to sell surplus hay to other villagers.

According to Sakan Aubakirova, nearby pastures were sown with wheat-grass in 2019-2020.

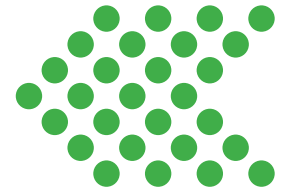


**SEEDING THE EMACIATED LAND
WITH PERENNIAL GRASS GIVES
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“Our project is aimed not only at combating the degradation of the pastures near the villages. It also contains a social part. Its goal is to improve the financial situation of several families. These are mostly large families, the disabled and orphans,” the head of the NGO proudly states.

According to the agreement, in the first year, those who mow this field are obliged to provide two large families with hay and also give them a calf. Next year they are obliged to buy two calves and give them to other families. And this will continue for more than one year.

“The project will work even after the end of financing, because we have partners. Besides, we are supported by the district administration (akimat), the local mayor (akim), the employment center, the department of land relations and the department of entrepreneurship,” Sakan Aubakirova emphasizes.



WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT THE PROJECT

If people were initially apprehensive about the project, now they are enthusiastically praising it. At the same time, it is positively assessed by both representatives of local authorities and residents themselves.

According to Deputy akim of Beskaragai district Baurzhan Zhekenovich Batalov, today the state is unable to pull out all projects and support socially vulnerable segments of the population.

“The non-governmental sector provides us with great assistance in this matter. In particular, the NGO “Birlik”, operating in our area. Ms. Sonya is a person who always shares her experience with the younger generation, promotes important projects and provides consulting support to young people.

And for our part, we also support her. At the level of organizational issues – allocation of land, provision of workers from the employment center, that is, we provide all possible assistance,” says the representative of the akimat.

And here’s what a mother with many children, a resident of the village of Karabas Makpal Zhunusova, says:

“I am a mother of many children, I am raising six children with my husband, a disabled person of the 1st group. We live on his allowance, we keep cattle. We are grateful to the Birlik Foundation for providing us with such assistance. Thanks from my whole family.”

All the villagers agree on one thing: after the implementation of the project, life in the village turned 180 degrees. The care of the cattle for the summer period now fell on the shoulders of the shepherds hired by the project, and people had other worries. You can do, for example, a household plot, start developing a small business.

But the most important achievement is that for the first time people have united to jointly solve the pressing issues of a single locality. It’s right – a stranger from outside will not come and solve their problems. Where there is a will and an NGO ready to shoulder the burden of responsibility and organizational problems.

Roza Abdullayeva:

Working together with the government, business and society



Roza Abdullayeva has worked in the NGO field for more than two decades. She was at the origins of the creation of the Bereke Public Association in South Kazakhstan, and now Turkestan region. Now she is a member of the Coordinating Council of the Association, takes an active part in its life. The editorial board of the magazine asked Roza Abdullayeva to give an interview and share her rich experience with readers.



– Roza Sarsenbayevna, you have been working in the NGO sector since 2005. How has your activity changed during this time and what changes have taken place in the civil society sector as a whole? Judging by the intense activity of Bereke PA, you are cooperating quite closely and successfully with the authorities. The experience of the public association is being adopted and disseminated among non-profit organizations in rural areas. What's the secret?

– I have been working in the Bereke Public Association since 2005, and in the NGO sector since 2002. In the period from 2002 to 2005, the international non-profit organization ACDI/VOCA implemented a Program to promote Public Initiatives (CAIP) in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan with financial support from USAID of the United States Agency for International Development. The program was aimed at increasing the capacity of the community in terms of mobilizing available resources, developing partnerships between community members, local authorities, commercial structures and non-governmental organizations through the implementation of social and economic projects. An office was opened in Shymkent and a local team was created. Partnerships were established with 21 communities in South Kazakhstan, Zhambyl and Almaty regions.

At the suggestion of local residents, the Program in Kazakhstan was named CAIP/ Bereke. During the three years of activity, 73 social and infrastructure projects were implemented within the framework of the Program, the beneficiaries of which were more than 238 thousand residents of the target regions. These were projects in the field of education, healthcare, water supply, equipping cultural and sports facilities, and others. All of them were initiated by the residents themselves, based on the needs of the communities and were aimed at their development. At that time, almost none of the residents had any idea about non-governmental organizations and their activities, therefore, within the framework of the Program, many trainings were conducted with the involvement of international and local consultants for the most active members of the communities, including women, youth and representatives of various vulnerable segments of

the population. The basics of the development, implementation and sustainable development of projects, the mobilization of internal resources of communities, the development of civil society and the protection of human rights, strategic planning and other relevant topics were explained to people. We, the members of the local team, trained and developed our skills in working with the public during the implementation of the CAIP/Bereke Program. And it was then that we realized how powerful any initiative coming from below and supported by local authorities, business, public organizations, the media and other interested persons and structures is. One of the striking examples of such a partnership is the project for the construction of a water pipeline in the area of the Old City of Shymkent, when the business, the akimat, and the residents of the district themselves took up this task together. Meetings of the population were held, during which decisions were made, i.e. the people took part in the management of the city's affairs. And this is not the only example, in all projects decisions were made jointly with residents, there was a contribution from the donor, local authorities, business and necessarily the population itself, in the form of labor, materials, and sometimes a monetary contribution. I think that's why the projects have been very effective.

And it is this approach to community development in one bundle that underlies all subsequent activities of our organization, the Bereke Public Association, registered by CAIP/Bereke employees in 2005 in the southern region of Kazakhstan, when the CAIP Program was successfully completed.

Since then, our organization has implemented about 40 major projects aimed also at community development, with financial support from both international (the European Commission, the Eurasia Foundation, BBC World Service Trust, Counterpart International, the Eurasia Foundation of Central Asia, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Soros Foundation – Kazakhstan, etc.), as well as Kazakhstani donors (SISC, SSC). During this time, the situation in the civil sector has changed, with more and more non-profit organizations appearing every year in both urban and rural areas. And if they had more



access to information and training in cities, the same could not be said about villages. That is why Bereke began to promote the organizational and institutional development of NGOs in districts and small towns, promote gender equality policies, the rights of women, children and other vulnerable groups through training, counseling, as well as funding NGOs to implement projects initiated by residents of communities, during which partnerships with state bodies, the media and business developed structures. By solving topical social issues within the framework of their small projects, organizations use the theoretical knowledge they have gained in practice, develop skills to work with their target groups, thereby increasing the real participation of the population in decision-making processes on issues related to the development of local territories.

Working as a Civil Support Center for OGOs in the Turkestan region, Bereke actively cooperates with the Civil Alliance of the Turkestan Region, the Department of Public Development of the Turkestan region within the framework of a trilateral memorandum of cooperation on strengthening the capacity of rural NGOs. Thanks to the joint work, information resource centers (IRC) have been opened in almost all districts of the region on the basis of the most powerful NGOs within the framework of the SSC of the Department of Public Development and our other projects. Our task is to train and strengthen these IRCs, which will further serve as catalysts for the development of civil society in their areas.

– Today there are more than 22 thousand NGOs in Kazakhstan. The State provides grants for the implementation of NGO projects. How easy, or vice versa, is it difficult to win a grant from a non-profit organization? What are the obstacles and is there competition among public associations? Many NGOs talk about the underfunding of the third sector. What is the real situation?

– As you yourself noted, there are more than 22 thousand NGOs in Kazakhstan today. The State provides grants for the implementation of NGO projects. And now several types of grants are being allocated – these are short-term, medium-term and long-term grants.

And this is correct, as it opens access to grants for all NGOs working at both the district and regional levels. Of course, it is quite difficult to win a grant. To do this, as I mentioned earlier, it is necessary to improve the professionalism of organizations in terms of project development, monitoring, resource management, writing applications, working with their target groups, building partnerships, etc. That is, it is necessary to increase the level of organizational development. And, on the other hand, it is also necessary to increase knowledge and, I would say, have practical experience in developing projects and writing applications and experts evaluating applications in the SISC.

From year to year, funding under state grants increases, and the number of NGOs implementing grant projects also increases, but, as far as I know, the number of customers of state grants is increasing in the SISC, one of which is local authorities transferring SSC funds to the SISC. And I don't agree with that. I believe that in each area it is necessary to cultivate one's potential, to enable local NGOs to implement projects in relevant areas, most likely, where necessary at first with the involvement of third-party trainers, consultants, thereby learning and developing themselves. And then it will be a long-term contribution to the development of the civil sector in your region. In a year or two, these local organizations will not have to involve outside experts, they will be able to effectively solve socio-economic and other issues themselves, involving the population in this, in partnership with local authorities. But for this, there must be complete transparency of activities on the part of both NGOs and the authorities.

I would also like to mention such a type of NGO financing as the State social control (SSC). I consider it necessary to further improve the mechanism for the formation and implementation of the SSC in order to make the whole process transparent and give priority to local NGOs for its implementation in order to develop local human capital.

– An adequate legislative framework is, perhaps, a prerequisite for the effective operation of the third sector. Last year, amendments to the law «On Public Associations» were adopted, which simplified the



registration of NGOs. The law «On Public Control» is being prepared for release with amendments. To what extent does the current legislation meet the goals and objectives of the third sector, or, relatively speaking, helps to develop? What is a mature civil society in your understanding?

– It is encouraging that new opportunities are being created in Kazakhstan to expand the rights of citizens and non-profit organizations, in connection with which amendments to laws are being adopted, in particular, those that you have indicated. I would also add a very significant Concept for the development of local self-government, which has been adopted to date, which also provides a real opportunity for citizens to participate in the management of local territories. And here the state recognizes the huge role of non-profit organizations in terms of educating the population, mobilizing them to solve a number of problems existing in rural areas and cities. But for this it is necessary, on the one hand, to improve the professionalism of NGOs, and on the other hand, the competence and accountability of local executive bodies, their desire and willingness to unite with non-profit organizations in solving many issues related to local development.

In general, many reforms have been carried out in Kazakhstan in recent years, but the question is how

they are implemented at the level of villages, districts, regions. A strong civil society is necessary for the real advancement of reforms. This means citizens, non-profit organizations, public councils, various unions, associations, business structures, etc., which actively participate in public and political life, are a link between society and the state. In addition, they express the opinion of the people through participation in various working groups, LSG bodies, organization of public control, making proposals to legislative acts, etc.

– For 30 years, a pool of the strongest NGO experts has been formed in the country. To what extent, in your opinion, does the state skillfully use the expertise of representatives of the civil sector to solve pressing issues?

– Yes, in recent years, a pool of the strongest NGO experts has been formed in our country. The State engages them to address issues in various areas of public administration both at the national level and in the regions. Of course, the degree of involvement varies from region to region, depending on the scope and willingness of state bodies to cooperate with NGOs.

– Thanks for the interview!

Gulmira Batpakulova:

It is impossible to achieve inclusion without creating a barrier-free environment



An inclusive society, equal rights and opportunities for all, and social protection are important priorities of the state policy. However, quite often the initiatives to improve the lives of people with disabilities remain unfulfilled. We spoke to Gulmira Batpakulova, the founder of the Arba public association in Uralsk, about the reasons why this is happening and what we need to ensure a greater protection and independence for people with disabilities.

– Gulmira, 15 years have passed since the formation of your Arba association. What has been done during this time?


– The history of our association began with the people with disabilities who came to me for psychological counseling in 2006, and I realized that not everyone treats their situation the way I do. Although I was injured, I never associated myself with my illness, which did not prevent me from continuing an active life. I wanted to help those who have lost themselves with disability.

I started my work by collecting information. Back then, it was difficult, as people with disabilities were simply invisible in society. I made lists of people with disabilities, went to their places to get to know them. At first, it resembled a social club, so to say. We arranged meetings, talked, discussed

some of our issues, and spent leisure time together. It was more of a moral and psychological support. Our goal was to get people out of the house and to bring them back to life.

However, in practice it became clear that this was not enough, and in 2009, we started the process of registration of our organization in order to continue its activities officially and on a systematic basis. On May 7, 2009, we received a document on the official registration of Arba. From that day on, a completely different job has begun for us.

I think we have done quite a lot in 15 years. Not to mention targeted assistance to people in solving specific problems, I would especially highlight our contribution to improving the legislation of Kazakhstan, which affects the issues of ensuring the rights and opportunities of people with disabilities.



THERE ARE ALWAYS MANY PROBLEMS WITH DISABILITY EQUIPMENT. TAKE FOR EXAMPLE, THE WHEELCHAIRS: ONE IS GIVEN FOR SEVEN YEARS, A WALKING ONE FOR FOUR YEARS. BUT IF WE TAKE WALKING PEOPLE, THEY OBVIOUSLY CHANGE THEIR SHOES MORE OFTEN THAN ONCE EVERY FOUR OR SEVEN YEARS, AND THEY HAVE DIFFERENT SHOES FOR DIFFERENT SEASONS

We participated in the promotion of the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Kazakhstan, which was ratified in 2015. In particular, the Social Code was adopted with our participation. We contacted members of Parliament, wrote letters, met with representatives of departments and ministries that deal with our issues. We have been telling them about the kind of problems that exist and how they can be solved, including the amendments to the legislation of our country, and justified our position. I can say that many changes in laws and regulations aimed at supporting people with disabilities and creating an inclusive barrier-free environment were adopted because they listened to us. These are the big steps that we can be proud of.

– What tasks do you have to solve on a daily basis? What worries people with special needs today?

– People with disabilities are the most vulnerable part of our population, because anyone can offend them, and they simply cannot fully exercise their rights. Consequently, there are problems for people with disabilities in virtually every field, whether it is education, healthcare, employment or leisure. Even in the penal system. There are no conditions in prisons for the detention of persons with disabilities.

Among the issues that we face on an ongoing basis, I would like to highlight the financial dependence of people with disabilities. This is one of the biggest problems. Every day we solve a huge number of the most banal issues, partly related to this. The cost of living is very low, it is impossible to live on disability benefits alone.

There are always many problems with disability equipment. Take for example, the wheelchairs: one is given for seven years, a walking one for four years. But if we take walking people, they obviously change their shoes more often than once every four

or seven years, and they have different shoes for different seasons. A person uses a wheelchair all year round, and quite often, it does not stand up for four years, especially if a person maintains an active lifestyle.

The issue of product quality, which is provided to people with disabilities through the public services portal, also remains one of the most acute. There are enough funds allocated for these purposes, but the quality of what is purchased for them leaves much to be desired. The work of the portal has now been made very convenient. It is very good that people have the opportunity to choose which equipment they need. But suppliers need to be monitored more carefully, not relying solely on their integrity.

There are many people with acquired disabilities as a result of an accident. It was only yesterday that a person was healthy, but now he or she cannot get up, sit down, eat on his or her own or use the bathroom. But the person can start receiving all the disability equipment, hygiene products, and benefits only after the disability was established, which takes months, maybe up to a year. How can a person exist all this time?

Besides, no one works with people after they “break down” in terms of psychological support. And it is absolutely necessary for a person! It is a shock: life as they knew, it ceases to exist, and they need to learn to live anew. We should not leave people alone with their pain and problems.

People with disabilities are incredibly vulnerable to domestic violence, any form of it, both physical, psychological, and economic. If a person with disability is the only one who brings income to the family, he or she becomes a victim of economic violence from relatives –this person will never get his or her allowance to manage it independently. Even hygiene products provided by the state may not get to them as family members can simply sell the products. Unfortunately, there are such cases.

There was a case when a father of the family, being an older adult, got into an accident and became a wheelchair user. His wife was at work, his children were at school, while he stayed at home



with his mother-in-law, who beat him. They found out about it by accident. The district police officers were involved and the issue was resolved.

If there is one such case, there are others. We must proceed from the fact that if there is a person with disability in the family, there is always a possibility that he or she may become a victim of violence in one sense or another, and we need to keep this issue in focus. We are now taking the initiative to have people with disabilities registered by district police officers and social workers so that they know in their neighborhoods how many people with disabilities live with them, what kind of family they are, how they feel, and what conditions they live in.

In general, people with disabilities should not be totally dependent on other people. It is necessary to create an environment that would give them the opportunity to act independently. Only in this case will we be able to talk about some kind of inclusion and equality in rights.

This is not the case now. Hotels are not adapted to accommodate people with disabilities. Getting on a plane is a problem. There is only one compartment for people with disabilities on trains.

It is all very banal, such ordinary everyday problems that many people don't even think about. But people with disabilities live with it.



– In your opinion, do people with disabilities in regions and large cities socialize differently? What is missing in the regions? And how can the situation be improved?

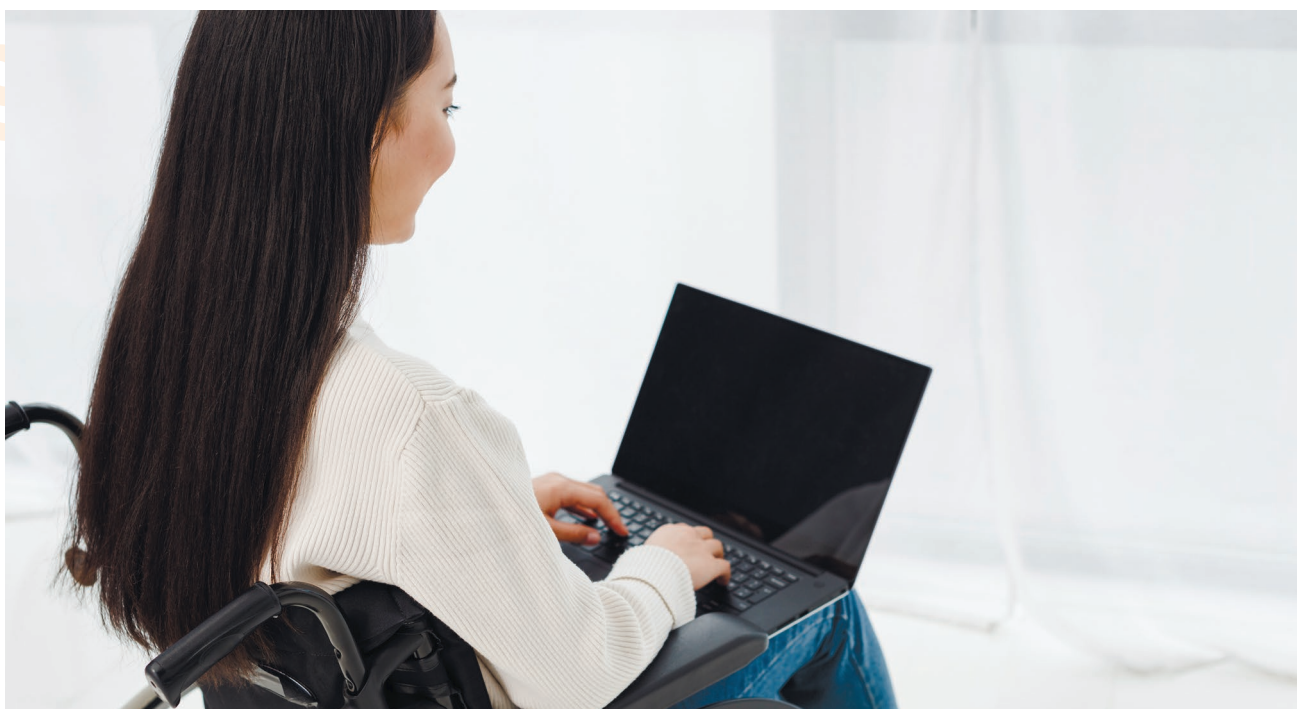
– Even without dividing into regions and the center, I can say what is missing in Kazakhstan as a whole and what is in the way. This is the physical inaccessibility of many things for people with disabilities, a stereotypical attitude in society, and a lack of empathy.

Even the social security staff themselves do not always understand how to communicate with people with disabilities, so as not to humiliate or offend. It is necessary to teach ethics in state institutions and to give certain psychological training. People with disabilities are very vulnerable, including morally vulnerable, they are very sensitive to words addressed to them, and they find it difficult

to socialize for many reasons. Even if, in the place where they are supposed to be provided with an assistance, a person encounters rudeness and insult, even if this is done unknowingly, it will be an additional trauma, after which he or she may no longer want to go out into society at all.

It is necessary to train not only civil servants and social workers, but also employees of other services. For example, public transport drivers need to be trained so that they understand the needs of people with disabilities and do not treat them as unwanted passengers. This is public transport and people with disabilities have the right to use it. But, for example, for wheelchair users, a bus ride is always a lot of stress, and during rush hour it is an unrealistic task at all.

Generally, I think it is necessary to work with the social perception of people with disabilities. So that they are not perceived as an alien element. They are the same citizens, with the same rights that all Kazakhstan's people have.



– The state strives to create an inclusive society and arrange an accessible environment for people with disabilities. Do you feel it on yourself? What has changed in society over the past 5-10 years?

– As for me personally, as an active person who knows her rights and is ready to defend them, I can answer: “Yes, I feel positive changes.” A person who is less socially active, who does not even have the opportunity to leave the house, once again, will say: “No, the situation does not change, the problems remain the same.”

Why is that? I see that a lot is being done at the state level to address issues of people with disabilities, integration, and protection of their rights and interests. I know that we have quite good, progressive legislation in this area. But many people only know what they encounter in practice. In practice, very often these good laws and regulations do not work in our country. Especially in remote areas and rural districts. This often happens because local executive bodies do not consider it necessary to pay attention to solving the problems of people with disabilities, and they themselves simply do not know about their rights and opportunities.

People with disabilities also need to be trained and guided so that they do not succumb to dependent and decadent moods, so that they do not believe that they should be treated differently

because of their illness. Disability does not release people from responsibility for themselves and their lives.

There is a lot of talk about inclusion, which implies the involvement and inclusion of people with disabilities in society on an equal footing with everyone else.

But what kind of equal rights are we talking about if many people with disabilities can't even leave home?

Many good initiatives and decisions of the state often “stumble” over this physical inaccessibility of many things for people with disabilities. What is prescribed in our laws and declared at the level of state policies does not exist in a vacuum, it must be based on an appropriate infrastructure, an ecosystem that would provide basic living conditions for people with disabilities. It is our way of life that is lagging behind; we have not yet created a truly barrier-free environment.

Therefore, unfortunately, it is now very difficult to talk about equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities, even where this is generally achievable.

– Is the issue of education and employment of people with disabilities still very sensitive? Perhaps digitalization has somehow been able to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities?

– The legislation of Kazakhstan provides for a quota of jobs for people with disabilities, which is a very important and necessary support measure. Unfortunately, as I have previously said, the solutions of this kind are often unrealizable due to the basic household inaccessibility of many things for people with disabilities. Workplaces are often not adapted to such workers. Besides, the level of competence of people with disabilities is often lower. This is logical: when people break down, they no longer can do the work that they did before, which they may have studied, in which they have experience, skills, and expertise. People have to re-learn an adapted profession.

I am afraid we have to admit that people with disabilities are not competitive in the labor market also because in our country they are not quite ready to accept such people as equal members of society.

Digitalization, undoubtedly, in a certain sense has expanded opportunities for both education and employment for people with disabilities, but there is also a problem of inequality in access. In remote villages without the stable and fast Internet, what kind of remote work or study can we talk about? People living there cannot fully use even such a good digital tool as the electronic portal of social services.

– What is the role of civil society institutions in helping to solve the problems of people with disabilities?

– The same role as in solving the problems of other categories of citizens. Civil society and NGOs have the opportunity to change systems for the better. They make the problems of certain segments of the population visible to everyone, achieve recognition of these problems, and this is already half the way to a solution. After all, while the authorities, people, and society do not see the problem, it seems as if it does not exist, and there is nothing to solve, consequently, nothing changes. The problems of people with disabilities are just the kind of problems that are not in sight at all and that people without disabilities do not even think about.

I see the role of both our association and all NGOs dealing with these issues in this. Many organizations in Kazakhstan unite people with various types of disabilities who have been working for many years. Each promotes solutions to the problems most relevant to the people they represent.

“Non-core” NGOs and civil society institutions are also involved in improving conditions for people with disabilities. In terms of our region, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, local representative bodies, maslikhats, and public councils are very actively engaged in this. There are many examples when, thanks to their actions, the targeted problems of specific people were solved and measures were taken to improve their lives in general.

I repeat, there are many organizations in our country at the national level and in every region working in this direction. We constantly communicate and work closely together, because we understand that we have a common goal, which is to make Kazakhstan a barrier-free country for people with disabilities and to improve the quality of life.



I see that a lot is being done at the state level to address issues of people with disabilities, integration, and protection of their rights and interests

Why is Public Association “Independent Life DOS” called a wish fulfillment center?

On the way to the barrier-free Kazakhstan



For many people with disabilities living in the capital city, the Public Association “Independent Life “DOS” has become a real wish fulfillment center.

It is here that they receive strong motivation that can inspire to an active life, despite diagnoses and life circumstances. Literally, they are brought out of depression, they open a path full of new opportunities, and they are inspired and branch out on their own. Someone finds himself in business, someone in sports....

The center has dozens of successful cases and hundreds of followers. The secret is simple. Those who once faced life difficulties themselves and went through a difficult path of self-acceptance and socialization in society work here.

In Public Association, 80% of the employees are people with disabilities.

Ardak Ortabayev joined in 2008, when the center was already established by its founder and main motivator Dina Yerdildinova and operated for two years. He stayed here, finding like-minded people, close in spirit, and his vocation. He remembers how difficult it was at the beginning of the journey. Gradually, working at the center brought peace of mind, confidence in the future, broadened his horizons and circle of friends. He was able to become independent and keep his family, bought a car, and later got his own apartment. There are many people like him who have passed through the center. After all, not only those who have been disabled since birth apply here, but also those who, due to circumstances, due to injuries sustained in an accident, are transferred to a wheelchair and do not know what to do.



“We train them, conduct psychological trainings for them, and provide legal assistance. We hire or employ in other organizations. Thus, we carry out socialization into our society. They usually work for us for several years. When a person finds his way, for example, an interesting job or chooses a sports career, he branches out on his own. We are happy for him that he has found his destiny and is starting to live an independent life.

So many people found their mate here, got married, learned the basics of driving and got their license, bought cars and apartments. When this happens, we always say that our center is a wish fulfillment center,” – says Ardak Ortabayev, executive director of the Public Association of the Disabled Center “Independent Life DOS”.

Smiling, charismatic, with intelligent eyes and a clear look, he proudly talks about the center and introduces the team. He is a confidant of Dina Yerdildinova, who has a busy schedule, many projects and worries. Moving slowly in a wheelchair, he shows one of the main achievements of the center – Inva Repair Shop, where for several years in a row they have been repairing and maintaining wheelchairs at the expense of the local budget.

Currently, about 500 people are served here by the government contract. For the center, it is a great help, an opportunity to earn and pay salaries to employees. For people with disabilities, Inva Repair Shop

has become a salvation in the truest sense of the word. After all, not all repair shops took up the repair of wheelchairs, which have many nuances, including technical ones. Tires, bearings, and tubes are replaced here. They can replace the seat backs, which eventually become unusable. Before our eyes, the expert took measurements of the old leather seat, stretched and torn in many places from many years of operation, in order to sew a new one. If the repair is difficult and takes a long time, they can temporarily provide a wheelchair free of charge so that a person does not get out of his routine rhythm of life.

The NGO also provides wheelchairs for rent. They have different modifications. There are standard ones for those who lead an active lifestyle. It also has canes, crutches and electric consoles that are attached to wheelchairs.

“They are like a motorcycle, you can move around the city. Many people rent them in the summer for a month or for the whole season. Tourists often apply. Very convenient. With the help of the console, you can drive through places where a car cannot pass. It has a charger that lasts for a whole day. It gives the opportunity to live independently from another person and from circumstances,” – Ardak Ortabayev emphasizes.

But before starting the operation of a technical device, persons with disabilities are instructed. Driving lessons are held in the courtyard of the center.



The NGO also has its own IT specialist. Bekzat Burkitov has become an indispensable guide to the world of electronic services for many people with disabilities. He teaches basic computer literacy skills, how to get the necessary certificates through the Egov, get in line for housing, kindergarten, choose health resort treatment. After all, those who were injured and faced trouble for the first time may not even know that the state helps in rehabilitation by allocating funds for the purchase of strollers, hygiene products, in particular diapers. IT specialist helps to figure this out.

“We provide assistance with the collection of documents, with their correct registration through Egov.

There is, for example, an individual rehabilitation program for people with disabilities, where there is a division by complexity of diseases, by category. Not everyone is provided with the same services. But let’s say those who were injured for the first time and have the right to receive a wheelchair for free may not know about it. We direct them and the person receives services from the state. And we even help with the choice of wheelchairs that are convenient to use so that a person can live and adapt to new conditions again,” – notes IT specialist Bekzat Burkitov.

And the selection of wheelchairs is conducted by a master clinician. Master clinician shows and tells about the types of wheelchairs, their functionality, so that a person chooses what he likes. Then he

takes measurements, and depending on the physiological characteristics, diagnosis, lifestyle, he suggests the right size of the device. This is also important, they say in the center. After all, the wrong choice can even cause harm and worsen health problems.

By the way, Dos Orthopaedy was founded on the basis of the center. It is the only manufacturer of wheelchairs and other rehabilitation products in the republic. Now, it is an independent organization that actively helps NGOs in the implementation of social projects, as well as sponsors events. The staff of the center, in turn, conduct test drives of new technical devices designed to improve the quality of life of people with disabilities, giving conclusions and recommendations on how to eliminate weaknesses.

The Public Association of the Disabled Center “Independent Life “DOS” actively cooperates with the Akim’s Office of Astana, participates in state programs. Recently, with the assistance of NGO “Center for Support of Civil Initiatives” and the Ministry of Culture and Information, it launched an inclusive project.

“That is, it is a resource center that will provide consultations to a master clinician, as well as psychological and legal ones. As part of the project, since Inva Repair Shop is already operating in the center, we will serve about 20-30 people free of charge. We will conduct a 3-day training in political law. This is also important today. Because





there are very few people with disabilities in politics, respectively, their rights are hardly promoted. In addition, as part of the implementation of this project, services will be provided to help people with disabilities find employment,” – said Nazgul Ilyasova, Director of Development of the Public Association.

She came to this center a year ago. After working in government agencies and large companies, she unexpectedly got into the social sphere and discovered a completely different world, which, unfortunately, she had not noticed before. I saw so many positive, independent people around that she, a person without a disability, began to have wings. After all, their whole life is overcoming difficulties, says Nazgul Ilyasova. When new tasks appear, they are determined to accomplish them.

Today, in her opinion, it is necessary to work more with society. The law introduces changes in the country concerning the improvement of the quality of life of persons with disabilities. But many people are not ready to accept them and sometimes react aggressively. In particular, when it comes to parking in public places, correct terminology in the treatment and communication culture.

“Now the state is doing a lot of work in terms of accessibility. But I would like to have interaction with our NGO as well. We could join the monitoring commission or do this work within the framework of the

project. For example, in the construction of buildings. Because we can do it. Now, of course, on the basis of construction, accessibility issues have been taken into account. If you take an already built house, then everything is deplorable there. Perhaps the current monitoring group from government agencies does not have enough time, experience and knowledge. The SNIP that needs to be studied and understood. We have such specialists who know everything down to the smallest detail. It is not just ramps and lifts that need to be taken into account here. But also the entrance units, the width of the doors, vestibules, the height of the reception tables. Why? Because when a person in a wheelchair comes for a service and cannot come to the table, this already discriminates against him, he feels awkward,” – Nazgul Ilyasova emphasizes.

So far, the Public Association has been working with entrepreneurs on a point-by-point basis, responding to their requests to inspect buildings for accessibility. This helps them to prevent fines and create an accessible environment at their facilities for people with disabilities. Businesses need to understand that we are not their enemies, we are friends, says Nazgul Ilyasova. After all, working together in one bundle, the whole society will feel equal to task of building a barrier-free Kazakhstan.

Saida Zharkinova

Lyudmila Petrova: From local problems to global changes



All initiatives and implemented projects of the Angel Public Association were born out of specific everyday needs. Even this NGO itself appeared because its creator and permanent head Lyudmila Petrova needed to solve the problem of heating in her own house. Well, by improving the life around her, an activist from the provincial Atbassar of the Akmola region contributes, in fact, to the development of civil society throughout the country.



Lyudmila Yevgeniyevna is a teacher of chemistry and ecology by education, graduated from Lev Gumilyov Eurasian University in 1998. Before that, she graduated from medical school, but quickly realized that she was not destined to be a doctor. After receiving higher education, Lyudmila Petrova returned to her native Atbassar, as then and now she does not think of her life outside this town.

While still studying at the university, she met with the organizers of the children's environmental club at a local boarding school, where she worked, among other things, as a Peace Corps volunteer. And she tried on the role of a volunteer and a social activist, getting carried away with creating school scientific projects with children on air pollution, tree felling and other environmental problems.

– There was no work in Atbassar at that time, but I didn't want to stay somewhere else. I love my town very much. To this day, when I'm away for a long time, I really feel like going home,» Lyudmila Yevgeniyevna admits. – Once I saw an advertisement in the Kazakhstanskaya Pravda newspaper that some Soros Foundation was giving away grants to solve social problems under the local government program. And our house had just been disconnected from the central heating, and we were dreading the winter.

The newly minted social activist wrote a letter on behalf of her apartment owners' cooperative. And to her surprise, very soon she received an invitation to study project development skills. For several days in one of the sanatoriums in Almaty, they were taught not only to make applications correctly, but also to develop local self-government – this was the global goal of the foundation.

But actually, the girl cared about her freezing house only. And she, without fear, came up with this idea, and it was on her example, in fact, that the training took place. So, at the end of the course, the application for the construction of a boiler house in Atbassar was almost ready. The project was among the ten that received funding out of 80 possible ones.

– We just wanted to survive! Lyudmila Petrova recalls. – As a result, they built a boiler room for us. But the goal was precisely to rally people, to organize self-government. It was hard. First of all, I'm only 24 years old! But I was very responsible. And I was so afraid that this money would be taken away for the construction of a boiler house that I decided to register an NGO and show that we would solve problems not only of housing and communal services, but also of the environment, that is, with a broader mission. I don't know how I did it, but I wrote down the rules very well. That's how the «Angel» appeared.

In February 2000, 10 people founded this public association, mainly Petrova's colleagues, teachers, and local activists. By the way, most of them continue this work.

We planned to become a resource center and provide a variety of support. And so it turned out: only the enumeration of the activities of the Atbassar NGO will take up a lot of space: work with young people – actions, flash mobs, exhibitions, surveys, information, explanations; promotion of healthy lifestyle and HIV/AIDS prevention; developing leadership skills and instilling a culture of volunteerism; strengthening the role of local communities in solving social problems; seminars and gatherings in rural areas; assessing the needs of the community and finding joint solutions; public monitoring; and advocacy.

The extensive experience of the public association and Lyudmila Petrova personally was very useful during the recent floods. After all, she has been conducting public monitoring of flood control measures for many years and knows the problem, as they say, from the inside. She constantly discusses with the local authorities the shortcomings and omissions that can still be done for the city in the best way.

But apart from the understandable difficulties, this situation has shown an excellent organization of the volunteer movement, which is very significant for the civil sector.

– We have a very developed volunteerism. After 2020, a large number of small grants were allocated for the development of volunteerism, targeted government work was carried out, and the guys began to come. The current floods have shown how well everything is organized. The measures were taken qualitatively,» Lyudmila Yevgeniyevna shares.

Another problem that Angel solves at the local level, and not only in its own town, is drinking water. And it solving began again from the native street of the leader of the organization, which had no water. In 2004, she organized the first public hearings on this issue. And at the expense of budgetary funds, the bypass water supply was repaired.

– We first solved this problem in our town, then people from other regions began to find out about it and seek help. Numerous complaints began to be received from villagers, where new water pipelines were being built, for substandard work. We realized that monitoring should be carried out not when the water supply has already been commissioned, but at the planning stage. We established a dialogue with all interested parties – customers represented by local authorities, contractors, and trained the population in monitoring mechanisms. As a result, for participating in the public monitoring of the implementation of the Akbulak state program, we received a state award and covered six regions with monitoring, – Lyudmila Yevgeniyevna says.

Already in the 2010s, she started talking about the need for legislative consolidation of public control in our country. And today she admits that the aspirations of public figures have always been taken into account. During the 25 years of operation of the «Angel» NGO, its head cannot remember any serious conflicts or problems, they were always listened to and tried to help.

– When requests were made for the very water, there were no problems with access to information, although at that time only the Aarhus Convention was legally referred to (note- Convention on Access to Environmental Information and Public Partici-

THE EXTENSIVE EXPERIENCE
OF THE PUBLIC ASSOCIATION
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pation). The authorities said there was no money. And I claimed that there is – in the republican budget. As a result, they saw that we want not just to control, but to help,» says Lyudmila Yevgeniyevna.

And once again emphasizes:

– All projects were born solely out of their own problems. And everywhere there were only positive results! And now we have good legislation, there are a lot of normative legal acts that make it possible for the public to fully participate in decision-making.

Water was brought to the district, a boiler room was built in the house. And when the activist's son was two years old, he was diagnosed with allergies, and had to abandon the usual kindergarten. Then the caring mother won a grant from the Bota Public Foundation and, together with the children's library, created a Center for Preschool Education and upbringing for children who do not attend kindergarten.

Moreover, in addition to urban children, they began to take them to this center from two nearby villages, and the poor were also paid extra for it. More than 200 children, including Lyudmila Petrova's son, were able to reach within two years. There was a vibrant life here, various events and celebrations were held. Over time, parents replenished their stocks of toys and educational books. And when Lyudmila Yevgeniyevna's son grew up and went to school, the center began to live its own life.

By the way, the boy can be said to be following in the footsteps of his indefatigable mother and actively participates in the social life of his school and the city. His school project, based on air quality monitoring data (air sensors were installed in Atbassar as part of a joint project of the US Embassy in Kazakhstan and one of the capital's NGOs), was highly appreciated.

These sensors could not stand the season, the air in Atbassar turned out to be so dirty. Activists were looking for sources of pollution – burning foliage, old cars, the small house suburbs. And thanks to this project, mother and son got to the UN Climate Conference in Egypt in 2022. So, it seems that the NGO leader has a decent replacement growing up.

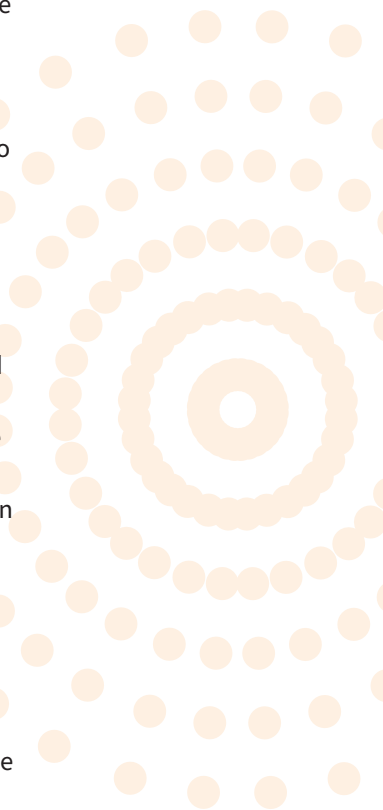
Lyudmila Petrova is a member of the public council of the Atbassar district, she is a member of the local community of the Atbassar town. Regarding civil society on the periphery, she says that there may be fewer opportunities there, and people's qualifications are lower. But there are also very active NGOs in the villages.

She is a vivid example of this. Back in 2004, she received a second law degree. And in 2017, she graduated from the master's degree in a topic that is relevant in the region – her dissertation was called «Studying the situation on the Zhabay River and developing measures to reduce flood risks». She did this consciously, because she understood that without certain knowledge and competencies, no one would listen to her, no matter what good goals she was guided by.

«I understand that before you take on anything, you need to study,» she says. – There was always someone on our way who we could ask for advice from. And I've always learned from someone.

Education is also one of the important areas of the «Angel». How is knowledge about the intricacies of working in the third sector transferred along the chain from metropolitan NGOs to regional and then rural ones.

In 2016, the Atbassar Public Association received a grant from the KAMEDA PF and, after graduating from the NGO school, became a resource center for supporting



rural activists. Now they are conducting a leadership school here, teaching how to write projects, make a needs assessment, form a team and an interested environment. They also distribute small grants of 100 thousand tenge to rural NGOs.

Angel has many partners today, including those involved in civil law matters. So, last year, as part of the SISC project «Improving the management system of apartment buildings», a resource center for the Association of property owners was created on the basis of the public association and seminars were held with local emergency services, tax and utility companies.

Lyudmila Petrova herself, of course, was one of the first to register an APO in her own house three years ago and does a lot for the comfort and safety of its residents. The house has renovated the sewer system, heating mains, installed an intercom, a playground. But, plunging into

the topic, she realized that the existing law is not always suitable for small towns and villages. And I have already accumulated a lot of specific proposals for legislators in this direction.

The project «Yard Initiatives» is being actively implemented with the district Department of Education, the Youth Resource Center and the CYC. Both the young people are in business, and the courtyards are being transformed right before our eyes!

– They say that a non-governmental organization should work only in one direction. It doesn't work out that way for us,» our heroine admits. – Firstly, because we are in a small town. Secondly, as I have already said, all this comes from our specific problems. Well, in general, we are innovators: we invent, develop, transmit, and then it works steadily without us. I've always liked coming up with something, looking for innovations, and implementing them. I only take on what I'm really interested in myself.

When asked whether the local government supports the public figures, Petrova answers in the affirmative. The situation began to improve especially with the arrival of Marat Askarov as akim of Atbassar in 2018.

The ongoing dialogue with the new government has allowed us to solve another bad-smelling problem. If you start from afar, the activists were outraged by the fact that teachers were constantly being recruited to perform functions unusual for them. Put simply, they bossed around to clean up the territories without a purpose as well. It's just some kind of disrespect, the teachers were outraged.

The director of «Angel» NGO came with a proposal to the Akimat: We are ready to work with the public! It's time to explain to the townspeople the banal truth: it's clean

SO, IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER
CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES, WE
ARE AHEAD IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF CIVIL SOCIETY

not where they clean, but where they don't litter.

We found a multi-year landfill in the private sector and agreed as follows: the Akimat provides equipment, clears garbage, and the public improves the territory. Of course, it was not easy to get people to help, because they were used to having teachers clean up the garbage they threw away. But gradually, seeing the example of others, the townspeople got involved in the common cause. The sewing workshop of the «Angel» PA sewed eco-bags as incentives. And the landfill was removed by joint efforts within two weeks. And in its place, a playground was put up at the expense of a grant from another NGO through USAID.

– Then, by the way, the President in some speech said, they say, stop loading teachers everywhere. Our pain has responded! Now our town has changed a lot. And contact with the authorities has improved since then. Everyone realized that we are not competitors and we are doing the same thing,» Lyudmila Petrova rejoices.

In 2021, Marat Sabyrovich took over the post of deputy akim of the Atbassar district, and Murat Yesmurzayevich Ismailov took over the post of akim of Atbassar town, who continues to work at the previously set pace and supports public involvement.

There are several NGOs per 30,000 people in Atbassar. There is a community of volunteers and animal welfare. Individual initiative groups are implementing their own small projects.

So, in comparison with other Central Asian countries, we are ahead in the development of civil society, our heroine believes. Even the fact that Kazakhstan, unlike its neighbors, has such tools as government procurement and government grants in the non-profit sector speaks

volumes. By the way, the state award of the «Angel» NGO was awarded twice.

Next year, the public association turns 25 years old, and Lyudmila Petrova herself turns 50. But a double anniversary is not a reason to relax. There are many tasks ahead. For example, we need to do something about a dozen boiler rooms clogging the air. It is necessary to clean and expand the local river, but there is no such money in the akimat, a republican program is needed. This means that you cannot do without social activity to attract attention.

– Why are you doing all this anyway? – I'm asking you one last time.

– First of all, it is a solution to their own problems, and others connect and become like-minded people, – the activist answers. – Well, my house needed repairs, and in 2018 we got into the UNDP project, thanks to which we repaired the facade, put plastic windows, even installed video cameras. The neighbors thought that the akimat was trying, and I achieved this, and for free.

Our heroine admits that she does this because she lives in this house. Because she has the opportunity, and she knows how. If everyone applies their knowledge, skills and capabilities at their own level, then life will get better, she is sure.

– In general, back in the mid-2000s, I worked for the UN structure for six months. The salary was bigger, the work was less. But I was very bored. I could hardly wait for the end of the contract! So, I like my job, and especially when there is a result. It seems that we have been working for 25 years, but there are still a lot of problems,» the NGO leader concludes our conversation with a smile.

Makhabbat Yespenova:

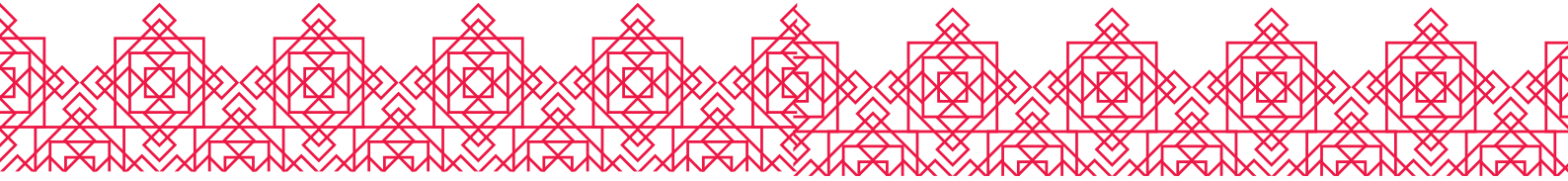
Become experts and professionals – there is very little competition here



The number of non-governmental organizations in Kazakhstan is growing every year. And many of them need help at first to understand the intricacies of the third sector. Over the past year alone, the capital's Center for Civic Initiatives, based on the KAMEDA Public Foundation, has helped register 23 new NGOs. And this is just one of the activities of the foundation under the leadership of Makhabbat Yespenova.

We met with the chairman of the Astana Civic Alliance in her small office in the old city center. There is a life-affirming slogan at the entrance, diplomas and awards on the walls. The desktop is littered with literature, and it is clear that all this is actively used: bookmarks and notes are everywhere.

To be honest, I have always been curious about what these special people, social activists, are guided by, giving so much effort and time to such a controversial business from the point of view of success and profitability. And the first question to Makhabbat Yespenova, whose activities have been focused on the development of civil society for more than 20 years, was precisely about this.



– When we, the founders of KAMEDA, gathered in 2006, we thought about what we could do to make Kazakhstan a prosperous and successful country, – Makhabbat Maksutovna began. – We all worked in international organizations and business structures and understood that we have certain knowledge and skills that can be transferred to other organizations in order for them to successfully build their processes. That is, we wanted to create something like a business incubator, but in a social environment.

«KAMEDA» is an abbreviation of the first letters of the founders of the organization (Kazakova Alexandra, Makhabbat Yespenova, Dana Amanova). At that time, they defined their mission as assistance to Kazakhstan through building interaction between business, the state and the third sector. And today we can say with confidence that they are coping with it quite successfully: over 18 years, the foundation has implemented more than 90 projects on a regional, national and even Central Asian scale.

If we talk about what the foundation is doing specifically now, then KAMEDA receives a state social order from the akimat as a civil resource center of Astana. At the same time, KAMEDA is implementing the project by the British Embassy in Kazakhstan aimed at strengthening the economic and political opportunities of women in the Ulytau region, a project for the development of rural non-governmental organizations within the framework of a state grant for NGOs, and provides paid services for businesses.


They always try to get «long» projects here, with financing for more than a year, because this is the key to consistency. For example, they have been working with UNDP for four years on a paid internship project for NEED youth, as well as with the

Global Fund for the Development of HIV/AIDS Service Organizations.

The organization's activities are structured in several directions. The first is capacity building, these are trainings, seminars, and various training events. The second is consulting, primarily for non-profit organizations and civil society activists.

– There are many people who have the desire and energy to change something, and they come to us for advice on exactly how to do it, – says the head of the foundation. – In addition, we offer business consulting, and it is encouraging that over the past 5-7 years more and more entrepreneurs have come in search of NGOs with whom they could work. We also provide consulting services for government agencies.

Another important area of activity is research, monitoring and evaluation. And



**«KAMEDA» IS AN ABBREVIATION
OF THE FIRST LETTERS OF THE
FOUNDERS OF THE ORGANIZATION
(KAZAKOVA ALEXANDRA,
MAKHABBAT YESPENOVA, DANA
AMANOVA)**

**THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO
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in this, the capital's public figures have made great progress: more than 65% of their recommendations and conclusions are reflected in the regulatory framework. Thanks to KAMEDA, many organizations have strengthened their position in the region, and some have even become the «voice» of our country on this or that problem in the international arena.

When asked how a non-governmental organization can achieve the desired sustainability, Makhabbat Yespenova replies that there is no secret here.

– I like Indira Gandhi's words: «Become experts and professionals – there is very little competition here». This is probably one of my personal mottos, and we try to apply it as much as possible in our work, – she says. – Our values are professionalism and consistency. Even the application must be executed clearly and competently. And when implementing a project, at each stage you need to think about how else you can strengthen it, which of the modern technologies to apply, which experts to invite. Of course, a very important point is just to keep being passionate about it. If you're interested, you can light up others too!

It's more about the philosophy of sustain-

ability. If we consider it from a practical point of view, then, first of all, it is the head who shares, you need to work hard, study documents, constantly improve your skills. In her organization, it is customary to undergo training at least twice a year, and not just any kind, but in accordance with what skills the specialist lacks.

The concept of a team is also very valuable for our heroine. Unfortunately, many NGOs practically rely on one single person, and this is already a factor of instability. There should be a team, Makhabbat Makhutovna believes, and one should invest in it, love it like a family, know and develop the strengths of everyone and always meet each other halfway.

That's probably why the KAMEDA Foundation does not have the staff turnover characteristic of the sector. But there is a difference in opinions and skills, as the age of employees varies from 21 to 53, the ability to replace each other if necessary, mutual assistance.

– In our work, we must not get tired of writing applications and letters. Many NGOs come to government agencies and simply ask for, and often require, help. But no one owes us anything! We are created because we proceed from our problems, desires, needs, and interests. Therefore, it is important that working together is beneficial not only to you, but also to those to whom you go to ask for something. Understanding the concerns of others helps to build an effective partnership. And when there is partnership, professionalism, and a good team, believe me, then financial resources themselves go to you, – Makhabbat Yespenova shares her experience.

She does not get tired of saying that there



The concept of a team is also very valuable for our heroine

are a lot of opportunities in Kazakhstan. And despite the fact that, by and large, the state owes nothing to NGOs, it does a lot for the development of civil society.

And Yespenova has a huge experience. At the beginning of her career, she worked for international organizations in Almaty. Today, she is a sought-after consultant, trainer and expert in organizational development, a professional mediator and a social entrepreneur. She managed grants for social projects and community development programs. For a long time she participated in the development and implementation of monitoring and evaluation programs, conducted hundreds of training sessions on NGO capacity development. But all this did not come at once.

– At the very beginning, we wrote a lot of applications, but we received the first funding only after writing ten! Right now, for «KAMEDA» to win, for example, seven grants out of 10 means not to finalize it. Only constant work on mistakes, analysis of opportunities, and improvement of interaction with those who are ready to allocate resources to solve socio-economic problems have yielded results, – she says.

A separate big topic for the civil sector is cooperation with government agencies. Makhabbat Yespenova is confident that NGOs can and should participate in shaping state policy. How can this be done? First of all, by the representation in the Mazhilis, the Senate of Parliament, maslikhats, as well as in various consultative and advisory bodies that exist at the level of central state and local executive authorities.

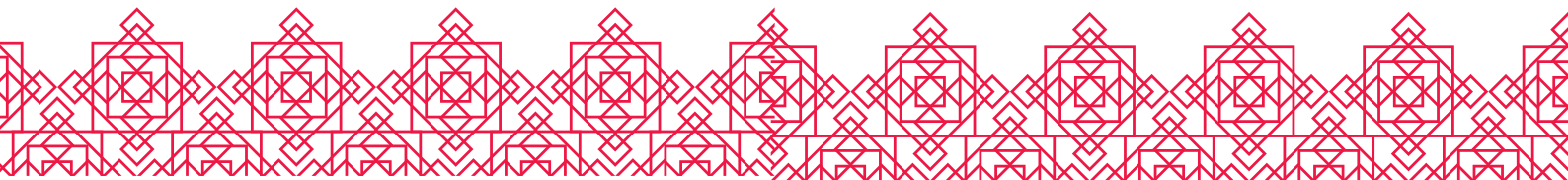
It is also important to participate in public and other councils – on family and women's issues, youth policy, drug addiction

prevention and other social problems. Since that's how you can influence public policy. And it is necessary not just to articulate, our heroine believes, but to document all the wishes. Unfortunately, many people know how to do it, but when it comes to preparing recommendations for the same laws, there are few willing ones.

– At the World Economic Forum back in 2016, it was said that not even the best public administration system will become effective if it does not see an equal partner among non-governmental non-profit organizations. That is, this is a trend at the global level, – says Makhabbat Yespenova. – We can also be used as a soft power. For example, I was invited as a mediator to negotiate with protesting mothers. And I am proud that many of them have now found their way, started helping other women with various difficulties. The women admitted that they simply did not know what opportunities there were for self-realization. We are pleased with our contribution to making civic activism a constructive and effective force.

Stating about the great opportunities for cooperation with the state, my interlocutor means four financial mechanisms, in addition to which there are other forms of participation that are not prohibited for NGOs. The first is a state social order, when the program administrator (akimat, central government agency) identifies a problem and, understanding how to solve it, formulates a technical task. And a non-governmental organization is already deciding whether it coincides with its mission, whether it will cope with it.

The second mechanism is government grants, which Makhabbat Yespenova com-



pares to a contest of ideas. The government agency identifies the problem and chooses whose idea to buy. But in its pure form, it does not work yet, she believes, changes to the regulatory framework are needed.

The third mechanism is the state award for NGOs. It is awarded to those who have already contributed to solving the problem. And, by the way, «KAMEDA» was the winner of this award.

– In July 2022, a new mechanism appeared – strategic partnership. So far, it is prescribed only at the national level – this is when the central government body announces a competition and chooses a partner for three years among NGOs to solve a range of problems. The mechanism is in the process of being finalized, but I am glad that it appeared at all, – the social activist states.

In addition, NGOs can participate in public procurement, tenders for the provision of certain types of services for the private sector. Separately, there should be noted the law on social entrepreneurship, which, despite the shortcomings, also opens up new opportunities for the sector.

All this indicates the attention of the state to the needs of public organizations. On the other hand, there is a formal approach on the part of government agencies towards NGOs. Of course, something is gradually changing, being overcome, but not as quickly as we would like.

– Once we decided to measure the average length of stay of civil servants at NGO events and it turned out to be 15 minutes. Is this an interaction, a collaboration? Not for me. The official conditionally came, said a welcoming speech or issued certificates and that's it. Of course, for many NGOs, especially beginners, this is also a kind of motivation and familiarity. But for quality-oriented organizations, meaningful interaction is needed, – she argues.

The formal approach, according to our interviewee, needs to be changed in several ways. The first is, of course, the training of civil servants at all levels. Secondly, it is possible to introduce a rating of akims according to the level of interaction with civil society. The third, of course, is the consolidation of partnership in the regulatory framework and strategic documents.

The fourth comes from the question: why are businesses considered, for example? Because it is easy to track their contribution by tax deductions. But public organizations also create jobs, attract social investments, and pay taxes. But no one counted their contribution.

**NGOs CAN AND SHOULD
PARTICIPATE IN SHAPING STATE
POLICY**



In July 2022, a new
mechanism appeared –
strategic partnership

So, in order to eliminate formalism on the part of civil servants, Yespenova considers it extremely important to introduce an assessment of the contribution of NGOs to the socio-economic development of the territory or the country as a whole. KAMEDA has been talking about this need for several years. At the same time, the methodology was developed within the framework of a state grant from the Center for Civil Initiatives by the 'ZUBR' Social Corporate Foundation. It remains only to implement and scale it everywhere. And then the third sector will be able to talk to the state, if not on equal terms, then at least not in the position of a petitioner.

– International experience shows that, on average, the contribution of NGOs to the development of the country ranges from 3 to 5%. For example, for several years the budget of the Ministry of Health was 5% of GDP. Hypothetically speaking, in fact, we maintain one ministry. If even now, based on the knowledge and experience of the third sector, we give 2-2.5%, then there is already a significant contribution, which can be increased provided there is an informal effective cooperation, – the civil activist says.

However, so far the dialogue is not easy, especially at the local level. Public figures there are often afraid to raise any problems due to possible administrative pressure. And often the capital's resource center and other NGOs in Astana have to be the mouthpiece of regional colleagues.

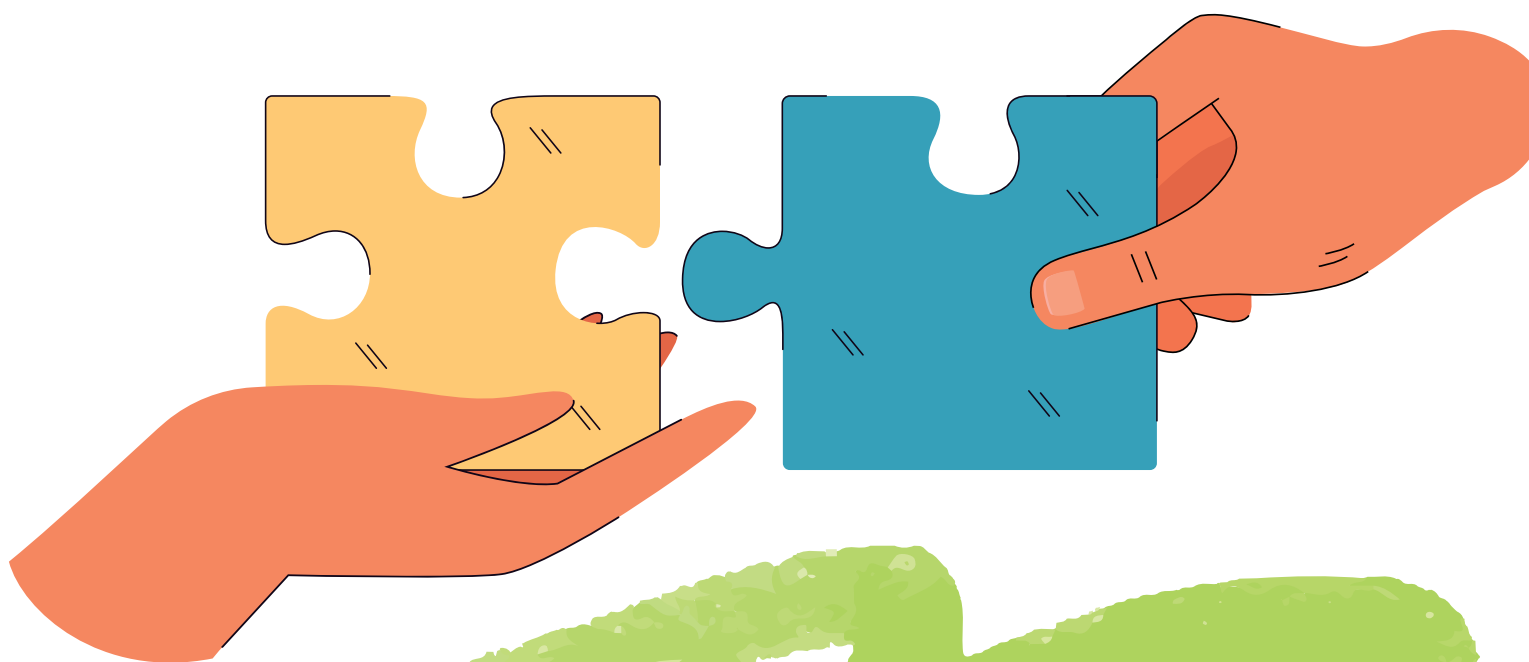
But in the opinion of a public figure, there is another problem: NGOs themselves sometimes do not work professionally, according to the principle – just to recapture the money received. And this is also a systemic problem.

– Many NGOs have their work set at the level of amateur performance. Unfortunately, there are very few professionals in our sector. We need to nurture them: the more leaders with proactive behavior are, the faster we will live a better life, – Makhabbat Maksutovna assures. – The state is also interested in this. For example, our resource center has been given a state social order for three years for training and consultations for NGOs.

Listening to her, I was wondering where the strength and desire to help so much come from. It turned out that this desire had been present since childhood, from the first dream of becoming a doctor, then a teacher, and later formed and manifested itself in social activities.

– «Engaged» people should work in NGOs. I consider myself «turned on», sometimes to the point of abnormality. Of course, when faced with formalism or inadequacy, it comes to burnout, you give up. And then suddenly someone will call and say: «Do you remember, I was at your training? You have changed my whole life! I have created my own NGO, and now I am doing this and that.» And you think you're working for a reason! – Makhabbat Yespenova shares. – And I've always been proud of my parents and thought about how to do this so that my children would be proud of me. Of course, you can't monetize your image or reputation, but our example helps our children a lot in life. And I have never regretted that I chose this path. I was tired, crying, angry, but I kept going. And I hope I can still do a lot for our civil society and the prosperity of the country.

QUIZ CIVIL SOCIETY IS...



**Rasul Rysmambetov, 46 years old,
financial expert, Almaty**

Civil society is a community of people who are not just worried about their neighborhood, city, region and country, but a community that is ready to take responsibility for their country.

Speaking as a financial expert, I think that Kazakhstan has already begun to take the first steps by introducing fourth-level budgets and participation budgets at the level of courtyards and small districts. Thus, the state and its employees should be accountable to the citizens of the country and residents of a particular region in their spending.

Besides, eventually Kazakhstan will come to full electability of state executives. For example, it is interesting that we choose the President, but we cannot choose the akim of our city or region. Most likely, with the development of a

participatory economy, elected akims and their work will be evaluated according to the index of comfort of living in a particular settlement. Then, an outsider region in terms of comfort will hold early elections and change their akim at its discretion, and the central authorities will help in this.

Moreover, given the active development of social networks and this kind of “partisan” political activity, eventually we will approach electronic voting almost to the extent of direct democracy, that is, a plebiscite on most topical country issues. At the same time, we will have to greatly increase investments in education and culture so that the votes given by our citizens are based on the opinion of an educated expert and a patriot.

**Tatyana Dancheva, 59 years old,
teacher, Karaganda**

We are all citizens of our state. However, few people think about the fact that we all form a civil society by entering into relationships with each other.

We are not endowed with state power, but we implement a huge number of necessary and right things. If every citizen recognizes himself or herself as a part of civil society, they will work honestly and responsibly, take care of the upbringing of children and the purity of nature, build moral relations with neighbors, colleagues, and friends.

If everyone realized that the prosperity of the state depends on their position, actions and deeds, then the country, and the whole world, would be in perfect order. But, unfortunately, this is not the case. The law does not apply to everyone, although civil society is a prerequisite for the creation of a state governed by the rule of law. There are law-abiding citizens, and there are those who are a law unto themselves. It is very frustrating when the law is violated by people who should have followed it in the first place.

That is why, sometimes the civil initiative goes out. But by and large, our people have very deep national, moral roots, which still allow us to keep a high bar of consciousness and responsibility to ourselves, our children and society. This can be seen in some examples when it is necessary to unite and help.

Take the recent events with floods: it was the citizens who were not endowed with power who demonstrated their civic position. And in general, our Kazakh people often unite and side against natural disasters, injustice, and a common misfortune. However, our society is not sure that it is the people in power who will become an example of the right civic position.

Roza Shetenova, 59 years old, retiree, Astana

In ordinary life, we never attach importance to what civil society is. I understand it as the unification of people in common interests and the manifestation of these people's awareness of their rights and responsibilities in order to achieve these common interests.

Civil society mainly includes non-profit organizations, political parties, and mass media. However, more recently, Associations of property owners can also be attributed to it.

APO (Associations of Property Owners) unite the residents of a certain house. Their common interest is to provide favorable conditions for comfortable living and recreation in it. A person spends most of their time at home. That is why it should be warm, bright, clean and safe.

In the APO, much is tied to the financial stability of this structure. Every person should invest in it in order to live well and achieve common interests.

In addition, APO does not exist by itself; you cannot shift every responsibility to APO. It has to cooperate with the state, and there have to be mutually beneficial relations between them. This is, for example, the establishment of minimum tariffs by the state.

In order for civil society to be mature and its goals to be achieved, individuals have to consciously approach this, know their rights and especially their responsibilities. Using the example of our APO, which has been in existence for the fourth year, it is clear that many residents still do not realize that in addition to the right to demand something for their money, they must have appropriate responsibilities.

APO are the same people who live in this house. Only some of its small leadership structure receives payment for their work. But at the same time, every resident should make efforts and demonstrate social consciousness. Everyone here invests for himself or herself, because it is for them to live in this society and in this house.

It would be good if at least 60% of citizens consciously approached their role in civil society. Using the example of the APO, it is still poorly developing in our country, because people are used to thinking that someone, the state, will take over all the maintenance functions.

**Akbar Khaseinov, 36 years old,
businessperson, Almaty**

Civil engagement is an important element of a democratic and developed society, as it contributes to the control of power, the protection of the rights and interests of citizens, as well as the dynamic development of public institutions.

The level of development of the country is closely correlated with the level of development of social institutions. Specifically, with the degree of their inclusiveness, that is, the availability of equal and free access to public goods for various social groups. This is one of the key factors in the well-being of the country and its citizens.

Since I am a businessperson, I will give you a simple example from my field. I will tell you about Kaizen, a Japanese approach that includes philosophy, theory and management tools aimed at achieving competitive advantage. In the management system, this approach is known as a continuous improvement process.

A continuous improvement process is achieved by constantly receiving feedback from employees about improving production processes, making them cheaper, increasing production speed, efficiency of various processes, and so on.

For example, at Toyota, management receives more than a million letters every year about improving a particular area of activity. Thus, the company has established a connection between employees and top management. This connection is mutually beneficial.

Our country attempts to create a “listening state”, and I welcome this. However, people often use inefficient mechanisms, and consequently, a good idea may not be fully implemented. It’s a shame that in 2024 we are still only thinking about the key factor of the country’s development, which is an active civil society, whereas it should already be working at full capacity.



**Vera Gavrilko, 54, journalist,
Petropavlovsk**

Civil society, as the name implies, is a society of citizens, that is, individuals who legally belong to a certain state (having citizenship). Both in the very definition of the word “citizen” its connection with the state is primary, and in the concept of “civil society” it is the ability of society to build and establish a competent dialogue with the state that comes to the fore.

They often try to pass off the so-called horizontal communication as civil society, which, as a set of non-political relations, take civil society beyond the framework of government structures.

This is wonderful when citizens unite and do something useful, e.g. arrange a collection of aids for flood victims or rescue animals in flooded areas, as it was recently in Northern Kazakhstan. It indicates a higher level of empathy, a higher level of civilization of society, but it is not a civil society.

The division roots in relation to the government. Civil society is a society that appeals to the government not as a kind of sacred force, but as a team of professional managers with whom it has concluded a social contract for public administration.

Civil society guarantees the indisputable fulfillment of rights and freedoms, and in return requires the fulfillment of duties not only from each individual citizen, but from the authorities as well. The government is accountable to civil

society, just as every employee, even the highest rank, is accountable.

So far, in Kazakhstan, in my opinion, there are only spontaneous manifestations of civil empathy and attempts at self-organization of society. Meanwhile, it is now that civil society in Kazakhstan has a chance. The devastating flood, unheard of in the last hundred years, which caused damage to almost a third of the country’s territory, huge national grief and protest sentiments in the affected regions can become a long-awaited impetus for the further development of civil society in Kazakhstan. People are left without housing and property, they are embittered, desperate, and their feelings can be understood. The overbearing rhetoric of threats of punishment for spreading false information does not help to build bridges in any way. The authorities should change outdated ways of communicating with the population, and the population should unite to make themselves heard.

Civil society begins with a metanoia (life-orientation shift), when the people cease to see themselves as a humiliated petitioner, and the government as an arrogant actor. I think a strong step now could be the organization of the most open Fund for attracting, accumulating and distributing funds to flood victims, which will be as transparent as possible. This is a real test of maturity, democracy, and the ability to have a competent constructive dialogue.



NGOs REGISTERED in KAZAKHSTAN

3500

23 335

1991

2003

2023

The number of NGOs has
increased 6.6 times
over a 20-year period



Almaty – **5017** • Astana – **3554** • Shymkent – **1512**
Karaganda region – **1237** • Kyzylorda region – **1217**

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