

## **Non-Governmental Organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan: Principle Stages of Formation and Development**

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**Abstract:** In this article we take into consideration the experience gained by some aspects in the history of formation and development of nongovernmental organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan of various issues in society. The urgency of this research is determined by the alternative pattern of political system transformation in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The authors try to succeed in identifying principles of nongovernmental organization development as a phenomenon of political system in modern Kazakhstan. Global civil society must be formed according to either a western institutional pattern or have regard to main traditions and institutions in our state. Moreover, the authors mark that the concept of cooperation between the state and civil society institutions bears evidence of the strengthening role of the state in forming of social orientation of civil society structure. The authors of the article by performing analysis take into account the circumstance that the government gives a proper consideration and swiftly reacts to challenges arising during civil society development and by this means notably promotes its authority and legitimacy. Thus, formation of civil society in the Republic reflects objective terms of the changes aimed at shifting Kazakhstan society towards modern economic and political relations providing stability of the state development.

**Key words:** Political system • Nongovernmental organization • Social organization • Civil society • Foreign social institutions • Non-governmental sector • Social funds

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### **INTRODUCTION**

One of apparent tendencies of development in the modern world is strengthening the role of the non-governmental sector in social processes. We can notice that in a certain shrinkage of the functional area of the modern state as well as in growth of independence and clout of non-governmental organizations (hereinafter referred to as NGOs) towards the state authorities.

One of framework conditions for the mechanism of the democratic government is if there is a developed civil society and its institutions that ensure implementation of civic engagement in expression, protection and satisfaction of human rights, freedoms, interests and purposes. The process of formation and development of civil society is closely linked to development of the Third sector which implies the self-initiated and voluntary

sector involving freely uniting individuals that accomplish their non-profit purposes in religious organizations, hobby clubs, professional associations, unions, social movements and etc [1].

According to the Concept of civil society development in the Republic of Kazakhstan that was ratified on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July, 2006 by the decree performed by the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan to fulfill this function is a domain for “political parties, local communities, labor unions, religious communities, artistic, social and scientific unions and associations, mass media, as well as for nongovernmental organizations that provide a full range of services for society, perform various forms of activity, that are created as non-governmental funds, non-commercial organizations, unions (associations) of legal bodies, other organizations and initiative groups in order to solve issues of public utility” [2].

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All over the world the idea of civil society formation is one of priorities for the strategy of democratic reforms. The term “non-governmental organization” was the first to be legislated in 2005 in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “In the respect of state social procurement” [3].

It should be mentioned that since the beginning in independent Kazakhstan basic principles of democratic state formation were defined. The idea of civil society formation became one of priorities on the reform list.

The guidelines for civil society in Kazakhstan became recognition of diversification of religious and political views, separation of governmental and non-governmental institutions. As opposed to well-developed democratic states the Republic of Kazakhstan underwent only the initial stage of civil society development. Therefore in Kazakhstan there are no established democratic traditions and well-developed civil society institutions yet. However today we can claim that during its sovereignty in the Republic of Kazakhstan substantial progress in civil society formation was made.

One of prominent signs of democratic changes is citizens' activation in the country; we can see that in quickly increasing number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). One of main functions of non-governmental organizations is activity oriented to social stability in society. Figuratively speaking NGOs pass through themselves interests of social groups and aim the state at the target of solving topical social issues.

NGO activity supports expansion of democratic principles of the state and society as well as democratization of methods used by the government and allows to exercise control over its actions. “The age” of the civil sector in Kazakhstan is about 20 years. There was a quantity and quality growth of non-governmental organizations, charity agencies were diligently involved, the legal framework was formed and etc. Thus formation of the non-governmental sector coincides with the period in contemporary history of state formation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the period of development of Kazakhstan as a democratic, rule-of-law and social state with market economy.

Non-governmental organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan underwent several periods of their formation, gained the experience in their activity of interest as well as in civil society development. A lot of conferences, practical courses and seminars were held; brochures, journals and books were published.

In case history of NGOs in Kazakhstan we can single out several major periods of this civil society sector development:

The first period is stage of formation (from the end of the 1980's-1994). The beginning of this process is often associated with the beginning of “Nevada-Semei” anti-nuclear movement activity, the first human rights organizations and unions, women's organizations and etc. At that period about 500 NGOs were established for the most part they were human rights movements. Likewise, in economically developed countries voluntary work has significantly involved all spheres of the life of society. For instance, in the United States of America there are 500 local Volunteer Centers. The work of these centers conventionally consists in recruiting and allocating of volunteers to work in charity organizations and government agencies. The work of volunteers brings economic impacts. Thus, in 2001 83, 9 citizens of the USA (44% of the USA adult population) worked 15, 5 billion hours not for value. The cost of this time amounted to 239, 2 billion US dollars (considering 15, 40 \$ per hour) [4].

This period is characterized by infrequent cases of vigorous positive cooperation between NGOs and the state as a rule; NGOs were oriented to support from the state and private companies. The period is also described by: solving various momentary issues, uncertain distribution of efforts and resources, non-professional level of event organizations, lack of qualified workers, romantic mind and a lot of enthusiasm of the leaders, comprehension by target groups the ideas and purposes that NGOs set.

The second period is a quality and quantity growth (1995-1997). The number of NGOs increased up to 1600 [3], there was differentiation according to an activity type first of all due to a large-scale financial support of NGO activity by international funds through a grant system. Experts also claim that during this stage we can mention the formation of human resources and enhancement of NGOs' skill level, incipency of the first “pseudo-NGOs”, development of NGOs' project activity what is caused by grant distribution and as a consequence occasionally there was a gradual condemnation of NGOs that received grants by their rank-and-file members. (It is concerned with member organizations and public associations). From this moment specialization of activity types started and competition between field-oriented NGOs escalated [5].

The third period of time is acceptance of NGOs by the state and quality changes in their relations (1998 till the present moment). We can mark development of partnership ideas, formation of cooperation between state bodies and organizations, division of NGOs aimed at solving general issues (legislative development, changes in some field, etc). For NGOs to solve issues of a target group (a target area) is on the list of priorities. There are incipencies or attempts of entrepreneurial activity for the purpose of achievement of financial independence from grantors' conditions. We can see a decreasing tendency of NGOs' activity (especially regional) due to reduction of grant programs. Moreover the situation concerned with this reduction got better only since 2005 when mechanisms of state support of social procurement were established.

One more achievement is NGOs' lobbying professionalizing. Since the beginning of 2000 there is an increasing tendency of national chain organizations, unions and associations of NGOs. The number of NGOs since the end of 2001 (when 1767 organizations were registered) reached in 2003 up to 5000 organizations, 2000 of them took an active part [6]. Thus, in 2011 the implementation of the Concept of Civil Society Development for 2006 – 2011 was completed. Due to the measures taken by the state since 2006, the annual growth of NGOs amounts to more than 1000 organizations. The total number of non-profit organizations registered in the country is over 35 thousand.

Nearly all top-ranking organizations of the sector give weight to education as by means of cooperation with various academic institutions, as well as directly by means of teaching. 89% respondents cooperate with academic and educational institutions (colleges, schools, research institutes, scientific centers and etc). Nearly all equally use such forms as teaching (24%), theoretical and methodological plans (30%) and experimentation and expert review (23%). The subjects concerning NGOs' activity studies in colleges workers of 32% organizations have courses for students. These studies include working-out of education programs for courses accepted by the Ministry of Education, as well as giving lectures and holding seminars for students. By these activities leading organizations of NGO-sector, using the concept of scientific method, improve their skills as well as form basic knowledge and attitude to civil society for young generation and other groups of population [6].

For the last 4-5 years the state made a significant progress in development of cooperation mechanisms between state bodies and NGOs. First of all Civil Forum plays the role of nationwide communication platform between NGOs and the state. According to some researches 58% leaders and/or representatives of respondent organizations took part in one or both Forums. Today we can make a conclusion that the mechanism of Civil Forum really works and attracts more organizations of "the third sector" for participation.

According to the Concept of civil society development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2011 we can mention the following approaches and mechanisms of cooperation between state bodies and civil society institutions:

- Specialty committees under the Parliament and maslikhats (local representative bodies);
- Industry-specific cooperation systems (cooperation in solving socially important issues as part of some branch, for example: water resources management projects in cooperation with of NGOs, the Ministry of Agriculture and etc.);
- Involvement of NGOs in formation of new mechanisms of cooperation between the state and society to solve social issues;
- Participation in formation of mechanisms of public control over state authorities of different levels;
- Formation of mechanisms of report model by authorities for the public on the record;
- Direct public control over realization of state programs and etc.

"Round tables" are the most used method by the state in order to discuss various issues.

In general 48% respondents consider their experience gained in cooperation with state structures as good, 34% characterize it as average. However NGOs' leaders of "the third sector" also mentioned a negative experience such as: the ideas declared by NGOs are given to be realized to other so called "state NGOs" (NGOs that were created by the government); blockade of decisions agreed upon with administrative authority and state officials of initial level; inflexibility and bureaucratism of state employees and disinclination to exchange information. Moreover the most adverse feature is cooperation not on equal terms and usage of administrative resources by authority structures to promote their solution of an issue [7; 8].

According to the history of NGO-sector formation and its interaction with the state we can mention that almost till 2000 representatives of NGOs considered the state as a powerful bureaucratic structure that was not aware of the public needs, also it is ineffective in realization of social programs and does not provide a significant organizational and financial support. In its turn the state did not take the organizations of the public sector seriously. Since 2001 the situation started gradually changing. Moreover as it was mentioned above the state took a number of important steps in the form of formation and adoption of laws and conceptions aimed at cooperation with “the third sector” as well as with NGOs in particular.

At the present time there is mutual influence and active interaction between organizations of civil sector and state structures. It is carried out often in such forms: working groups on draft legislation, formation of state, industry-specific and territorial programs are created and perform work; Coordination Councils under the Parliament and Akimats (local administration) are organized and perform their functions; there are discussions of issues through “round tables”; the experience of “the third sector” in the process of draft and adoption of amendments, remarks and annexes in various state documents is vigorously used; the control by means of researches, analysis, monitoring and estimation of state, regional and local social, economic and other programs is performed; creation of Public Councils under state authorities and organizations of public hearings. Became an ordinary thing.

We should notice that the majority of the researches the data from which was mentioned above involved NGOs situated in cities. If we speak about NGOs in rural areas there is a specific situation. “The peculiarity of NGOs in rural areas is their priority of local rural community issues. Thus, for example, the most topical issues for them are social and economic development of the rural community and living standards of the rural population. Issues concerning civil society development in rural areas are not top-priority...” [9].

The results of the researches allowed to define a number of peculiarities in institutional development of rural NGOs on national and regional level. Today more than a half of rural NGOs in Kazakhstan (53,8%) small organizations represent, the number of staff of which is not above 3 persons. Average in size organizations that consist of 4-10 persons comprise 26,8%, the percentage of big rural NGOs (more than 10 persons) is 19,2%.

The most widespread form of rural NGOs in Kazakhstan is public organizations and associations (65,3 %), organizing stability of which vastly depends on the condition of their member basis. Rural public associations that have up to ten members comprise 26,4%, the percentage of organizations that have up to fifty members is 32,3 % and consisting of above fifty and one hundred members there is 41,1 % from the total number of all this kind of organizations. The biggest proportion of such large-scale rural NGOs we can see in southern region (39,1%) what is determined by the largest part of rural population in Kazakhstan living there (60% by the beginning of 2004), as well as by the lowest living standards in that region of the country”.

Zhumabekov N. claims that “material resources and financing of the half of rural NGOs (50,9%) is of an unsatisfactory level. If we consider state support of rural NGOs, then, for example, N. Zhumabekov defined the situation very well by putting in black and white “according to the researchers in spite of a lot of attention paid by the state to the issue of civil society development for the last years the level of rural NGO involvement in state programs is critically low” [9]. Rural NGOs have an urgent need for being taught new social technologies that support increase of civil activation of rural population. It is necessary to join efforts of state, international institutions and local community to revive the rural community as one of basic elements of a stable civil society development in Kazakhstan.

According to some experts in spite of the officially declared number 6 thousand NGOs, in reality there are not more than a thousand NGOs that work in fact and there are only 150-200 quite sustainable NGOs that simultaneously work at 3-4 projects, have a regular staff and organization structure. These NGOs show not only clear and complete missions, well-performed projects and management skills, but also a high level of expert group, monitoring and assessment. Qualification of some organizations allows them today to appear for national experts and partners of international organizations in realization of large-scale programs and projects. They begin to unite into coalitions and associations in order to by collective efforts to protect and promote their interests in executive legislative departments of government. One more feature of NGOs in Kazakhstan is the fact that the most developed and advanced organizations are in general NGOs of federal importance which define global goals and targets. Moreover there are

much less organizations that work at a local level, but the presence of organizations at an initial level is one of the most important characteristics of non-governmental sector development.

Development of democratic culture and civic engagement is required first of all in rural areas in towns of Kazakhstan where in fact it is on the initial level of development.

Development prospects of non-governmental sector are directly concerned with adoption of a number of statutes that are oriented to development of proper democratic processes and project realization in practice. The peculiarity of “the third sector” in Kazakhstan is an apparent prevalence of NGOs on social dimension. This fact proves social issue to be topical but during economic reforms the 1990’s it was not top-topical for the governmental policy.

Large-scale ecological problems inherited from military and economic activity of the former USSR and new technogenic threats that occurred in recent times caused formation of a large number of ecological NGOs. Many of national NGOs are organizations that deal with public health, culture, art, science and education issues which also have a permanent crisis.

Reflection of citizens’ insufficient legal safety and imperfection of legal and judicial system caused relatively widespread occurrence of human rights organizations in Kazakhstan. The form of protection for business interests is a large number of business associations and unions.

At the same time the segment of political NGOs looks weak in this situation what proves their poor position of being in demand because of political absenteeism of the population. Due to a lack of economic incentives there are also quite few charity and patronage organizations.

Thus NGOs’ development in Kazakhstan reflected a number of issues in internal policy from solving which the state until recently due to some reasons opted out. It is not surprising because activity of the most part of NGOs was aimed at society’s survival on their own and in general it was financed by foreign investments.

A lack of financing resources also caused the growth of national NGOs in volumes. Concerning this issue there is lag on the number of NGOs per capita not only from Western countries [10], Eastern Europe but also from a number of countries of Former Soviet Republics (Russia, the Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan).

Moreover the situation in terms of NGOs starts drastically changing. Due to highly increasing focus of attention on issues regarding cooperation with non-governmental organizations by the state and beginning of a large-scale financing socially important projects by the state NGOs are taking form of system-based, integrated, social structures exercising the function of social stabilization and civil interests’ promotion.

This tendency allows to claim that according to the most part of the criteria the level of NGOs’ development in Kazakhstan starts to charge towards international standards. At the same time we should mention disadvantages of NGOs. The most common of them are under-activity (among 6000 NGOs there are only 2000 NGOs that take an active part in fact [11]), non-transparency of financial flows, poor involvement of population, information closure and strong paternalistic views.

In addition development of non-governmental sector in Kazakhstan faces a number of problems. From the experts’ view in terms of NGOs they include:

- Misconception the role of NGOs by the state and society;
- Not well-developed information exchange system between state bodies and NGOs;
- Inferiority of regulatory and legal framework of NGOs’ activity;
- Poor social host liability in terms of business;
- Uneven Development of NGOs in regions (nearly a half of NGOs is suited in Almaty City while in rural areas they are nearly absent);
- Organization problems within NGOs themselves.

To sum up if we consider subjective nature of the problems mentioned above we can come to the conclusion that by rational approach to their solution NGOs’ sector will be able to have quite high dynamics of development in the future. Thereafter due to relatively large-scale involvement and self-discipline of NGOs the level of their influence on social processes including civil society development will constantly increase.

Thus prospects for civil society development in Kazakhstan first of all are determined by causality of this process. The main moving causes to develop civil society are:

- Intrinsic need to eliminate increasing contradictions between market bases of economy and the redundant, regulating role of the state;
- Necessity to create modern structure of productive power that is deformed at the present time by dominance of the bureaucratic and oligarchic capital including relations of power;
- long-term challenges to ensure national security, political and economic stability and social welfare.

In full conformity with civil society purposes in the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan [12] every human being, his life and his freedoms were declared the most essential values. As a basic law of the country being an economic foundation for civil society the private property institution was legitimated. In addition opportunities for economic self-reliance realization are provided to the citizens by means of their taking part in public forms of property, for example in joint-stock one.

The most essential characteristic of civil society is legal safety of citizens. Concerning this issue the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan defined a number of rights and freedoms and mechanisms of their protection which in general meet democratic standards. They include the right to life, electoral rights, the right to free choice of employment, the right to rest and leisure, the right to charge-free secondary education, the right to medical service, the right to social safety, the right to freedom of unions, freedom of opinion, freedom of worship and freedom of information etc [13]. The legal nature of the state is recognized in the Fundamental Law of the country.

We should mention that a well-developed civil society includes a high level of education, political culture, legal knowledge and civic engagement of population.

Commitment and competence of society for self-organization and self-activity without participating or interfering of the state are of great importance. In this matter civil society in the Republic of Kazakhstan is represented by institutions such as organizations including political parties, public associations, trade and artistic unions, NGOs, as well as religious, national and cultural organizations. After all one of main basic conditions of civil society is free speech provided by means of mass media.

A number of objective and subjective factors that can be both good and bad have influence on

non-governmental organization development in Kazakhstan. The following factors can be mentioned as good:

- Self-consciousness and political engagement of a large number people;
- Political will of the leaders of the state towards liberalization and democratization;
- Joint responsibility of the state and civil society institutions to fulfill nationwide interests;
- State support for civil society institutions;
- Strengthening social direction of the governmental policy;
- External exposure of Kazakhstan.

The factors that prevent non-governmental organization development are:

**In the Political Sphere:** 1) Inferiority of legal framework for development and functioning of the non-governmental sector; 2) limited capacity of public influence on governmental policy; 3) a report form, but not an account form of the social contract; 4) immoderate state interference in “tissue” of public relations, bureaucratism; 5) interest of bureaucracy with industrial and commercial capital that is affiliated with it in preservation of existing status quo and due to this fact opponency to establishment of civil control over their activity.

**In the Economic Sphere:** 1) crony and oligarchic economic model; 2) obstacles for medium-sized enterprises and small business; 3) poor financial base for civil society institutions; 4) uncertainty of the issue on the final legitimation of private property.

**In the Social Sphere:** 1) In the social sphere there are weak positions of middle class; 2) social inequality in society; 3) different level of development of cities and rural areas; 4) poor social and political (civic) engagement of population; 5) uncertainty of issues in social and labour relations; 6) low level of social liability in business activity.

**In the Ideological Sphere:** 1) Lack of a well-developed democratic way of thinking of population; 2) lack of common national idea based on democratic values; 3) spiritual and cultural degradation.

The factors the effect of which is uncertain now, i.e. they may have a good or negative influence on the general situation, are complication of the structure of public relations and purposes of development including the conditions of development under the influence of globalization processes; the growth of geoeconomic and geopolitical interests towards our region.

The most part of the issues mentioned above is quite well understood by state bodies and representatives of civil sector. Therefore the Concept of civil society development in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2011 was made up. It was completed in three stages [2].

The first stage lasted 2006-2008. During this period favourable conditions for development civil society institutions were created. In particular during this period of time proposed laws that were oriented to further development of civil society institutions were under development. At that time the mechanisms of cooperation of state bodies, business and civil society institutions were enhanced; industry-based and regional systems of constant cooperation were formed as social councils. Moreover working groups on law making projects, formation of state industry-based and regional programs and etc were created. These events caused an increasing number of public associations.

The second stage was the period 2009-2010. During this period quantum growth of civil society was reached. In particular in the country there was development of social partnership in labor relations, what ensured realization of rights of workers in Kazakhstan. Moreover the culture and mechanisms of charity and patronship were formed; local funds of support for civil initiatives were created. The mechanisms of civil control over state bodies' activity and their decisions in terms of protection of citizens' rights and interests were established. Models of reports of authorities for the public were accepted. In addition mechanisms of settling a dispute out-of-court were implemented.

During the third stage that began in 2011 "the situation of civil society institutions started to develop in a system-based and irreversible way" [1], what will allow to complete the transitional period of society transformation in Kazakhstan and to shift towards its democratic regime.

Disadvantages of the Concept include: a large number of too generalized, ambiguous statements, lack of measures for development of civil society economic base, in particular private property.

According to the analysis of these tendencies we can come to the conclusion that formation of civil society in the Republic reflects reasonable needs of changes aimed at transformation of society in Kazakhstan towards modern economic and political relations ensuring stability of governmental development.

Civil society development in Kazakhstan in general makes a constant progress. Its formation proceeds by following the way of gradually completing "niches" in the activity of the state that deliberately hands over a part of its functions in order to ensure target-focused support in realization of citizens' interests.

At the same time the mode of interaction between the state and civil society institutions proves the fact of strengthening the role of the state in social way of formation of civil society structure. On the other hand the circumstance that the authorities take into consideration in a proper way and react swiftly to the challenges in terms of civil society development increases its authority and legitimacy (from the point of view of the public trust).

The president of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev says that due to consistent reforms today Kazakhstan is changing the status of "catching up development" for the title "a well-formed state" that is ready to take an active part in competition in the international arena. In view of the urgency of issues of development and activity of non-governmental organizations the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan in his speech "Social modernization of Kazakhstan: twenty steps towards universal labor society" entrusted the government with the mission till the end of 2012 to make and introduce package proposals on enhancement of state control system of social processes including issues of planning, coordinating control, theoretic basis and cooperation with the non-governmental sector and etc.

In conclusion we should mention that for NGO development in Kazakhstan quite appropriate conditions were created what is a good basis for cooperation development between NGOs and the state. Moreover as in any dynamically developing society there are quite specific problems that should be solved by collective efforts of the state and "the third sector" as well.

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