DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY INSTITUTIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA: DISTINCTIVE CONTEMPORARY TRENDS

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Abstract. This article provides a comparative analysis of the historical and political foundations of the formation and development of civil society institutions in Central Asian countries, as well as contemporary trends in their development. It examines the stages of development of civil society institutions in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, their constitutional and legal foundations, their relationships and cooperation with public authorities, their participation in socio-political processes, and their role in the development of public oversight.

Keywords: Central Asia, civil society, civil society institutions, NGOs, public associations, cooperation, public oversight, social partnership, spiritual and educational values, institutional development.

Annotatsiya. Mazkur maqolada Markaziy Osiyo mamlakatlarida fuqarolik jamiyati institutlarining shakllanishi va rivojlanishining tarixiy-siyosiy asoslari hamda zamonaviy yo‘nalishlari qiyosiy-tahliliy jihatdan tadqiq etilgan. O‘zbekiston, Qozog‘iston, Qirg‘iziston, Tojikiston va Turkmanistonda fuqarolik jamiyati institutlarining rivojlanish bosqichlari, ularning konstitutsiyaviy-huquqiy asoslari, davlat hokimiyati organlari bilan o‘zaro hamkorlikdagi munosabatlari va ijtimoiy-siyosiy jarayonlardagi ishtiroki hamda jamoatchilik nazoratini rivojlantirishdagi o‘rni tahlil qilingan.

Kalit so‘zlar: Markaziy Osiyo, fuqarolik jamiyati, fuqarolik jamiyati institutlari, NNT, jamoat birlashmalari, hamkorlik, jamoatchilik nazorati, ijtimoiy sheriklik, ma’naviy-ma’rifiy qadriyatlar, institutsional rivojlanish.

Аннотация. В данной статье на основе сравнительного анализа исследуются историко-политические основы формирования и развития институтов гражданского общества в странах Центральной Азии, а также современные тенденции их развития. Проанализированы этапы развития институтов гражданского общества в Узбекистане, Казахстане, Кыргызстане, Таджикистане и Туркменистане, их конституционно-правовые основы,

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взаимоотношения и взаимодействие с органами государственной власти, участие в общественно-политических процессах, а также роль в развитии общественного контроля.

Ключевые слова: Центральная Азия, гражданское общество, институты гражданского общества, ННО, общественные объединения, сотрудничество, общественный контроль, социальное партнёрство, духовно-просветительские ценности, институциональное развитие.

The formation of civil society institutions in Central Asia is a process closely linked to long-term historical development, traditions of local governance, social relations, changes in political systems, and the experience of national statehood. It is insufficient to explain this process solely through the emergence of independent states at the end of the XX century. This is because the peoples of the region have long maintained traditions of communal life, mutual assistance, consultation, social responsibility, and the coordination of collective interests.

The development of civil society should be examined not only in relation to political and legal reforms but also in connection with the spiritual and moral foundations of society, individual social engagement, and relations between the state and public institutions. Indeed, civil society institutions can also be regarded as structures that contribute to social stability, represent citizens' interests, and participate in socio-political processes.

It is particularly important to examine this issue in the context of the historical and political development of the five Central Asian states: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

First, it is necessary to provide a brief explanation of the theoretical foundations of civil society institutions.

Civil society is a system of relationships and institutions that operate relatively independently of state authority and enable citizens to associate freely, express their interests, protect their rights, and participate in social life.

From the perspective of political science, the existence of civil society rests on three fundamental conditions: citizens' freedom of association, the ability of institutions to operate effectively, and the existence of public oversight of state authorities.

The formation of civil society is simultaneously a legal, political, economic, and spiritual process. From a legal perspective, it is based on citizens' freedom of association, freedom of expression, and the right to engage in social activities. Politically, it expands citizens' opportunities to influence government decision-making. Economically, it creates favorable conditions for the activities of

independent property owners, professional associations, and civic initiatives. From a spiritual and moral perspective, it strengthens the values of mutual trust, responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation.

It should also be emphasized that civil society institutions need to be classified according to their social functions into political, economic, social, and spiritual spheres. These institutions include public associations, non-governmental non-profit organizations, citizens' self-governing bodies, trade unions, mass media organizations, and spiritual and educational organizations.

This classification serves as an important methodological foundation for studying civil society institutions in Central Asia.

During the second half of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century, significant changes took place in the socio-political life of Central Asia. The expansion of the Russian Empire into the region, the introduction of colonial administration, the emergence of new economic relations, and the development of enlightenment movements influenced the activities of public institutions.

During this period, traditional local governance structures entered into complex relationships with the imperial administration. While some communal institutions retained their previous functions, others were compelled to adapt to new administrative and legal arrangements.

The political transformations of 1917 and the subsequent establishment of Soviet rule in Central Asia marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of public organizations in the region. During the Soviet period, trade unions, youth organizations, women's committees, cultural and educational societies, and scientific and creative associations operated throughout the region. These organizations performed certain functions in bringing together various social groups and addressing issues related to education, culture, labor, and social protection.

However, most of these organizations operated under the political leadership of the Communist Party and state supervision. Therefore, their organizational existence did not necessarily indicate the emergence of an independent civil society.

Within the Soviet political system, public organizations often served as instruments for implementing state policies, ensuring the political mobilization of the population, and promoting the dominant ideology. From a political science perspective, an assessment of this period leads to two conclusions. First, public organizations contributed to the development of certain organizational experiences and skills among the population. Second, restrictions on political pluralism, independent initiatives, and organizational autonomy from the state hindered the free development of civil society.

Therefore, from a scholarly perspective, it would be inappropriate to regard the number or scope of public organizations during the Soviet period as equivalent to the degree of independence of civil society.

The attainment of state independence by the Central Asian republics in 1991 marked the beginning of a new historical stage in the development of civil society institutions. Following independence, new constitutional systems, national legislative frameworks, political institutions, and non-governmental organizations began to emerge in the countries of the region.

We will briefly examine these processes through the examples of Central Asian countries:

The formation of civil society institutions in **Uzbekistan** has been closely associated with post-independence state-building, legal reforms, and the development of the local self-governance system.

Citizens' self-governing bodies, non-governmental non-profit organizations, public foundations, trade unions, mass media organizations, and other social structures have developed as the principal organizational forms of civil society institutions. In particular, the mahalla institution represents a distinctive social institution deeply rooted in the historical traditions and spiritual values of society.

During the period of reforms initiated in 2017, expanding the participation of civil society institutions in public administration, developing public oversight, and improving mechanisms of social partnership became important priorities on the political agenda.

In particular, as stipulated in the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan dated March 4, 2021, "On Approval of the Concept for the Development of Civil Society in 2021–2025" [1], the main objectives of the adopted Concept were to further develop a free civil society in the country, protect human rights and legitimate interests, safeguard democratic values, enhance the political culture and legal awareness of the population, strengthen social partnership and cooperation between government bodies and non-governmental non-profit organizations in addressing pressing issues, and increase the initiative and active participation of non-governmental non-profit organizations in reforms being implemented across all sectors of the country.

At the same time, the practical effectiveness of civil society should be assessed not merely by the existence of legal documents but also by the ability of organizations to operate independently, their financial sustainability, the level of public trust they enjoy, and their actual capacity to influence government decision-making.

Any public organization or civil society institution that has begun operating or intends to commence its activities within society must comply with the requirements of the existing regulatory and legal framework. As noted in the relevant scholarly literature, "The legislation of any country does not permit the activities of public associations whose objectives are inconsistent with the interests of society, moral norms, and universal human values" [2].

This, in turn, indicates that public organizations of any form or orientation established to promote social and spiritual well-being must, first and foremost, rely on and adhere to the interests of society and the generally accepted social and moral norms prevailing within it.

A noteworthy innovation of the revised Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan [3] is the introduction of a separate Chapter XIII entitled "Civil Society Institutions." Article 69 clearly defines the institutions that constitute the foundation of civil society: "Civil society institutions, including public associations and other non-governmental non-profit organizations, citizens' self-governing bodies, and the mass media, form the foundation of civil society. The activities of civil society institutions shall be carried out in accordance with the law." The significance of this constitutional provision lies in the fact that it consolidates the legal development of civil society institutions established in Uzbekistan during the years of independence and strengthens their position at a new stage of development. In particular, citizens' participation in public associations, the implementation of social initiatives through non-governmental organizations, involvement in resolving issues of local importance through the mahalla system, and the expression of public opinion through the mass media demonstrate the institutional characteristics of civil society.

Furthermore, the development of civil society institutions within the framework of the "Uzbekistan–2030" Strategy is closely linked to improving relations between the state and society, increasing citizens' socio-political engagement, strengthening public oversight, and ensuring transparency and accountability in public administration. The objectives outlined in the Strategy concerning the development of civil society can also be assessed in close connection with the improvement of the spiritual and educational environment of society. This is because the activities of civil society institutions encompass not only organizational and legal relations but also citizens' social responsibility, legal culture, political awareness, and collective cooperation skills. Moreover, Goal 83 of the "Uzbekistan–2030" Strategy is specifically dedicated to the development of a free civil society and the activities of the mass media. This goal establishes specific targets aimed at expanding the participation of civil society institutions in state programs and developing mechanisms of social partnership[4].

The provisions of this Strategy concerning civil society institutions are naturally expected not only to improve the organizational and legal foundations of cooperation between the state and society but also to create opportunities for enhancing citizens' political culture, spiritual and educational outlook, and social responsibility.

Thus, the formation of civil society institutions in Uzbekistan and their participation in spiritual and educational processes are closely linked to deep historical roots, the new legal foundations established during the period of independence, and the gradual transformation of relations between the state and society.

In **Kazakhstan,** following independence, the development of non-governmental organizations, public associations, trade unions, and other social institutions continued within a new legal framework. Civil society institutions in the country have been actively involved in cooperation with the state, the implementation of social projects, the representation of public interests, and discussions aimed at addressing social issues.

In Kazakhstan's experience, the relationship between state-supported civic initiatives and independent civic activities represents an important political issue.

In particular, the Concept for the Development of Civil Society in Kazakhstan for 2020–2025 defines civil society as a system of public institutions and relationships that operate independently of the state. This system creates opportunities for individuals to exercise their rights and freedoms, express the needs and interests of citizens, and realize the aspirations of various social groups.

The primary function of civil society is to establish interaction between individuals and the state, ensure the protection of the rights and interests of every individual, and exercise social oversight within society.

According to Article 2, Paragraph 1 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Non-Profit Organizations", civil society institutions include: 1.Political parties; 2.Religious associations; 3.Trade unions; 4.Non-governmental non-profit organizations; 5.Ethnocultural associations; 6.Local self-government bodies; 7.Public councils.

Each of these public institutions plays a significant role in establishing and strengthening the democratic foundations of the state[5, 124].

Furthermore, the Concept for the Development of Civil Society in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020–2030, adopted in 2020, is aimed at improving the institutional and legal mechanisms of cooperation with the civil society sector, as well as strengthening relations between civil society and public authorities.

The Concept envisages the implementation of the following objectives: 1. During 2020–2025, to improve the legal regulatory mechanisms governing the activities of civil society institutions and ensure the sustainability of civil society institutions; 2. During 2026–2030, to actively involve citizens and civil society institutions in the processes of determining strategic directions and planning the activities of government bodies.

As a result of the implementation of the objectives outlined in the Concept, a number of changes have been introduced to improve the legal and organizational framework governing the activities of civil society institutions. In particular, amendments and additions have been made to the laws "On Charitable Activities", "On Volunteer Activities", "On Public Councils", and "On State Social Procurement, Grants, and Awards for Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations".

Overall, the state has been implementing measures aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of civil society, expanding the participation of public institutions in government decision-making processes, and strengthening cooperation between the state and the civil society sector.

In **Kyrgyzstan,** political processes following independence had a significant impact on the formation of civil society institutions. Public associations, human rights organizations, independent mass media, and civic initiatives have played a certain role in the country's political processes.

At the same time, the large number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kyrgyzstan was recognized by the international community as an indication of democratization and the development of one of the key institutions of civil society.

Over the past decade, non-governmental organizations in the country have implemented projects aimed at supporting law enforcement agencies and have also participated in conflict resolution and prevention processes.

In order to ensure that the views of civil society are effectively taken into account, representatives of NGOs were included in national public councils under the President dealing with healthcare system reform, the development of science and education, and issues concerning persons with disabilities. They were also involved in the activities of interdepartmental councils under the Government responsible for implementing national development programs.

According to Article 4 of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, every individual has the right to freedom of association [6]. Citizens have the right to establish public associations on the basis of free will and common interests in order

to exercise and protect their rights and freedoms, as well as to pursue their political, economic, social, labor, cultural, and other interests.

In **Tajikistan**, the formation of civil society also demonstrates the importance of political stability, social trust, and the functioning of state institutions.

Tajikistan's civil society has undergone three main stages of development. Traditional public organizations were primarily associated with culture, beliefs, and religion. Traditional institutions of the Tajik people, such as hashar (collective labor activities carried out by neighbors), jamoamad or gashtak (gatherings of community members to address issues at the community level), and mahalla councils (representatives elected by community members to coordinate matters related to community welfare), have existed for centuries and laid the foundation for modern community-based voluntary activities.

These organizational forms influence political and social life at the local level. Even today, many of these traditional forms of voluntary activity have been preserved and continue to function in Tajik society at the village and neighborhood levels.

Following independence, civil society organizations operated under the 1990 Law "On Public Associations." This law regulated the activities of civil society organizations dealing with social issues, as well as political parties.

The new Constitution of the Republic, adopted in 1994, further strengthened citizens' right to freedom of association. By 1995, the number of non-governmental organizations had increased significantly, with the majority consisting of public associations.

According to the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan "On Public Associations" [7], which regulates the establishment of civil society organizations, public associations may be established in the following organizational and legal forms: public organization; public movement; and public self-governing body.

On December 19, 2007, the Decree of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan "On the Establishment of the National Development Council under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan" [8] was signed. The National Development Council plays a leading role in the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Its membership includes representatives of the Government of Tajikistan, Parliament, and civil society.

Civil society organizations participate in conducting thematic studies as part of the monitoring and evaluation of the Strategy, as well as in consultation processes related to monitoring and evaluation. During the same period, the need to establish an Advisory Council on the Improvement of the Investment Climate was also

identified in order to facilitate dialogue between the state and various domestic and foreign business stakeholders.

Civil society organizations are increasingly focusing on the needs of local communities and exerting a positive influence on public administration practices and legislation. They continue to unite around issues such as ensuring good governance and protecting farmers' land rights. They also cooperate with the Government of Tajikistan to promote positive changes.

In T**urkmenistan**, the constitutional foundations of the activities of civil society institutions are based on the provisions of the country's Constitution concerning citizens' freedom of association, freedom of expression, participation in social life, and protection of their rights.

One of the key regulatory legal acts governing the activities of public associations in the country is the Law "On Public Associations," adopted on May 3, 2014. This law provides the legal framework for the establishment and state registration of public associations, their rights and obligations, areas of activity, and relations with government bodies.

The organizational structure of civil society institutions in Turkmenistan consists of public associations, trade unions, women's and youth organizations, professional associations, charitable organizations, and socially oriented non-governmental organizations. Political parties, meanwhile, represent a form of citizens' political association, and their legal status is regulated separately from that of public associations.

Article 1 of Turkmenistan's Law "On Public Associations," dated May 3, 2014, defines a public association as a voluntary, self-governing, non-profit organization established by citizens united by common interests to achieve the objectives specified in its charter. Article 3 of the same Law stipulates that the activities of political parties, religious organizations, and trade unions are regulated by special laws [9].

An important characteristic of public organizations in the country is their close organizational ties with state institutions. In particular, youth organizations, women's organizations, trade unions, and other mass associations regularly participate in socio-political events organized by the state.

On July 23, 2018, the Institute of State, Law and Democracy of Turkmenistan was established by a decree of the President of Turkmenistan. The establishment of this Institute represented one of the organizational measures aimed at conducting scientific research on state–society relations, improving legislation, analyzing legal reforms, and developing the theoretical and methodological foundations for the development of civil society [10]. The Institute's contribution to the development of

civil society can be assessed through its research findings, proposals for improving legislation, and practical cooperation with public organizations.

Civil society institutions play an important role not only in political participation but also in the social and spiritual development of society. They contribute to strengthening mutual trust among the population, enhancing social responsibility, addressing collective problems, and promoting citizens' social engagement.

Within the historical and cultural context of Turkmenistan, the family, local communities, traditional forms of cooperation, and practices of mutual assistance play a significant role in ensuring social solidarity.

Civil society institutions constitute one of the important social foundations of a democratic political system. They create opportunities for establishing communication between the state and society, representing citizens' needs and interests, discussing social issues, and exercising public oversight.

The spiritual and moral functions of civil society also deserve particular attention. Public organizations and local associations contribute to strengthening mutual trust, cooperation, social responsibility, tolerance, and civic solidarity. Indeed, cooperation between state institutions and civil society organizations is closely linked to the development of social relations within society [11].

Thus, the future development of civil society in Central Asia is closely linked to strengthening the balance between the state and society, supporting independent civic initiatives, and developing effective mechanisms for public participation.

Considering the importance of improving not only the number of these organizations but also their qualitative performance indicators, it is necessary to strengthen their role in society at the new stage of development. This, in turn, will contribute to enhancing the participation of civil society institutions in socio-political processes, strengthening social partnership between the state and society, increasing the effectiveness of public oversight, and promoting citizens' socio-political engagement.

Conclusion. Historical analysis demonstrates that traditions of communal life, mutual assistance, local governance, enlightenment, and social cooperation in the region have constituted the socio-cultural foundations of civil society.

Indeed, civil society institutions should be studied not merely as organizational and legal structures but as a complex system of institutions closely associated with the spiritual and moral foundations of society, social responsibility, and political engagement. Furthermore, the sustainable development of civil society institutions in Central Asia depends on the harmonious integration of historical

traditions, legal guarantees, political freedoms, and modern institutional mechanisms.

Moreover, continuous cooperation among civil society institutions, such as public associations, political parties, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, and mass media, has two important dimensions. First, each social institution seeks to bring together particular social strata in accordance with its objectives and interests. Second, these institutions continuously influence citizens' awareness and contribute to fostering a shared understanding of the interconnected roles and common values of the family, the mahalla, society, and the state.

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