



#4 (07-08) 2025

Adal Azamat

M A G A Z I N E O F C I V I L S O C I E T Y

CIVIL INITIATIVES -
ARCHITECTS OF KAZAKHSTAN'S
SUSTAINABLE FUTURE





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

ADDRESS: 12/1, Kunaev str., Business centre on Vodno-Zeleny Boulevard, 12th floor, Astana

PHONE NUMBER: +7 775 274 22 69

E-MAIL: civilalliance20@gmail.com



www.civilalliance.kz

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FOUNDER: ALE in the form of the association «Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan»

EDITORIAL BOARD:

A. A. Kurmanova
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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: B. G. Nurgaziyeva

EXECUTIVE EDITOR: N. V. Shayakhmetova

DESIGNER: M. Yessenamanov

PROOFREADER: Ye.I. Shubina

AUTHORS: A. Mukanova, S. Zharkanova,
E. Zabolotskikh

TRANSLATION: S. Kanapina, A. Tyshkombayeva

PHOTO: V. Shapovalov

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EDITORIAL OFFICE ADDRESS:

The Republic of Kazakhstan,
Astana, 12/1 Kunaev St.
BC «On Water-Green Boulevard», 12th floor.
tel. +7 775 274 22 69
email: civilalliance20@gmail.com
www.civilalliance.kz

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DEAR READERS!

Warm greetings on behalf of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Office in Kazakhstan.

This issue is published at a time when civil society in Kazakhstan is playing an increasingly active and visible role in public dialogue and cooperation with government institutions. Strengthening this interaction has long been more than just an idealistic goal, a central condition for achieving inclusive and long-term development of society. Modern society thrives through the joint efforts of all its members and its ability to take different perspectives seriously and integrate them productively.

For many years, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation has supported this process in Kazakhstan by implementing projects in the fields of political education, promotion of the rule of law, and civic engagement. We see this work as a contribution to building resilient institutions that are not only stable, but also capable of learning, open to dialogue, and receptive to impulses from society. A strong democracy requires not only functioning structures, but also a critical and competent civil society.

Especially in light of global challenges and internal societal transformations, one thing becomes clear: cooperation must not be confused with uniformity. Constructive criticism and objective discussion are not obstacles, but requirements for progress. It is only in an open and respectful exchange of ideas that viable solutions can emerge. As Konrad Adenauer once said: «If two people always have the same opinion, both are good for nothing».

Our international experience shows that the quality of public dialogue depends not so much on formal structures as on the trust between the government, civil society, the economy and science. This trust grows where real participation is possible, where criticism is not only tolerated but listened to and transformed into productive processes. For this reason, we continue to advocate for a culture of listening, reasoned argument, and responsible interaction.

We thank all our partners for their openness, professionalism, and dedication. We hope that the articles presented in this issue will provide fresh impetus and contribute to a deeper discussion on the future of civil society in Kazakhstan and the regions.

Sincerely,
Viktor Frank

*Acting Director of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Office
in the Republic of Kazakhstan*



Over 150 Participants Attend the 5th EU–Central Asia Civil Society Forum

The 5th European Union–Central Asia Civil Society Forum was held in Almaty from 28 to 30 January. This event is a key initiative of the European Union's Civil Society Development Foundation in the region, financed by the EU and implemented by UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services). This year, the forum brought together over 150 representatives of EU and UN agencies, regional governments, and civil society organizations. Over the course of three days, participants discussed digital transformation, climate change, youth engagement, and women's empowerment.

On the opening day of the forum, Vice Minister of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan Aizada Kurmanova welcomed the guests and participants. She outlined the government's efforts to support the non-governmental sector, emphasizing the vital role of civil society in the country's development.

The Ambassador of the European Union to Kazakhstan, Aleska Simkic,

underlined the importance of civil society in promoting democratic governance and sustainable development.

«The European Union is committed to strengthening its partnership with Central Asia and supporting the invaluable work of civil society in advancing regional stability, social inclusion, and sustainable development. Through cooperation, we will be able to address today's most pressing challenges – from digital transformation to climate change – while empowering youth and women to take an active role in shaping their futures», – Aleska Simkic said.

She emphasized that the issues raised at the forum are not merely theoretical debates, but part of a living, evolving policy process in which civil society plays a central role.

Gurel Gurkan, Acting Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Multi-Country Office, spoke about the role of civil society in ensuring sustainable change.

«We believe in the power of collaboration and innovation to address

complex development challenges. Civil society is at the heart of this work, driving constructive change at the local level. Through our partnerships, we aim to strengthen civil society's capacity to promote inclusive development across Central Asia and support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The forum offers a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge, forge partnerships, and accelerate progress on issues that matter most to the people in this region», – Gurel Gurkan stated.

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Roman Vassilenko, noted that Kazakhstan sees civil society as an essential partner in its development agenda.

«This forum provides a platform for constructive dialogue between civil society organizations and governments, allowing us to align our goals and work together towards a more prosperous and inclusive Central Asia», – said Roman Vassilenko.

Over the following two days the forum featured panel discussions and thematic workshops.

Climate change emerged as one of the most urgent topics. Participants emphasized the need for coordinated efforts to address the growing threats of global warming, drought, flooding and water scarcity.

The safety of large-scale infrastructure projects and related environmental risks was also a key issue. Acting Director of the Multi-Country Office of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) Gurel Gurkan highlighted the agency's commitment to supporting nuclear safety in Kazakhstan, noting that UNOPS provides both financial and technical expertise to minimize risks and ensure compliance with international standards.

The Ambassador of the European Union to Kazakhstan, Aleska Simkic, commended Central Asian countries for progress in advancing women's participation in public life. According to her, in the Central Asian countries the role of women in society is gradually increasing, and the forum actively discussed measures aimed at improv-

ing the status of women, as well as ensuring their active participation in political processes.

«The discussions reflected a diversity of views. Some participants took a critical stance, offering strong arguments directed at specific government agencies in their countries. Others shared their experiences and practical solutions to pressing problems», noted Banu Nurgaziyeva, President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan.

Participants from Kazakhstan highlighted the lack of sufficient protection of personal data amid rapid digitalization.

«All speakers emphasized that engagement between opinion leaders from the EU and Central Asia reflects a shared commitment to strengthening civil society. The forum served as a demonstration of the European

Union's intention to support the development of a robust civil sector capable of addressing regional challenges through open dialogue, innovative proposals, and concrete recommendations for implementing the EU Strategy for Central Asia», – Banu Nurgaziyeva noted.

She added that such platforms are crucial for society, especially as the civil sector in Central Asia continues to evolve dynamically.

«The forum once again affirmed that the European Union recognizes the vital role of civil society organizations as a foundation for democratic governance, human rights protection, regional stability, and inclusive and sustainable development of the country», – concluded the President of the Alliance.

Kazakhstan adopted a National Plan to Reduce Emissions into the Environment

Kazakhstan has become the first country in Central Asia to adopt a National Plan aimed at reducing CO₂ emissions into the environment. With this step, the country supported the initiative of the ICAO (International Civil Aviation Organization) and made its contribution to the global effort to combat climate change. The initiative aligns with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those related to climate action, and supports ICAO's efforts to reduce the environmental impact of aviation.

The National Plan was approved by Kazakhstan's aviation authorities. According to the Ministry of Transport, the plan is designed to significantly reduce the environmental impact of the aviation sector.

«The plan provides for a number of initiatives, including measures to improve airport infrastructure through the use of energy-efficient technologies, coordinated steps to transition industry stakeholders to sustainable aviation fuel (SAF), and legislative amendments to support ICAO's Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme. The adoption of the plan became part of Kazakhstan's

commitment to implement international agreements on climate change», – the department said in a statement.

The National Plan will be implemented with the active participation of all stakeholders and civil aviation sector representatives. Its outcomes will be monitored regularly to adjust actions and enhance effectiveness.

In his speeches, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev consistently draws attention to ecological issues.

At a recent meeting on the socio-economic development of the Mangystau region, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasized that industrial enterprises must strictly adhere to environmental standards. He called for enhanced oversight to ensure full compliance.

It is worth noting that a new Environmental Code is currently in effect in Kazakhstan, introducing stricter requirements for industrial enterprises and mandating the use of best available technologies. Companies that fail to meet these standards are subject to increased environmental fees. One of the key components of the new code is the phased introduction of automated emissions monitoring systems, which enable real-time tracking of pollution levels.

In addition, the Ministry of Ecology has developed a national program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The country has set an ambitious target – by 2030, emissions are to be reduced by 15%. To reach this goal, enterprises are being encouraged to adopt emission-cleaning technologies, upgrade outdated equipment, and transition to alternative energy sources.



Kazakhstan Begins Work on Improving NGO Legislation

The Committee on Civil Society Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan has launched the development of a draft law «On Non-Governmental Organizations». A working group has been formed with the participation of civil society representatives to develop approaches and key directions for the future legislation. Currently, proposals from civil society actors are being collected and reviewed.

Earlier, Minister of Culture and Information Aida Balayeva, by official order, instructed the formation of the working group to improve the legal framework governing NGOs. According to the order, the working group must develop a consultative regulatory policy document by June 1, 2025, and submit it to the interdepartmental commission on legislative activity under the Ministry of Justice by August 1. The Committee on Civil Society Affairs has been assigned to provide organizational support for the working group's activities.

«All submitted proposals will be reviewed within the working group and incorporated into the draft Consultative Regulatory Policy Document (CRPD), which will serve as a foundation for further discussion. The public will be regularly informed about the progress of the draft law, including its key features», – the Committee stated. It should be recalled that during

the fourth session of the National Kurultai held in Burabay, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev proposed the development of a separate law on non-governmental organizations.

«Civil society plays a significant role in the implementation of reforms and the development of the country. Partnership between the government and NGOs contributes to addressing current challenges, promoting constructive values, and shaping a new quality of the nation. Therefore, in order to improve the effectiveness of state social order, a dedicated law aligned with current realities is needed. Naturally, the draft law must undergo comprehensive expert review. The authorized bodies, in cooperation with experts and civil society organizations, should address this issue», – the Head of State noted.

There are currently over 20,000 registered non-governmental organizations in Kazakhstan.

Civil society in Kazakhstan continues to evolve actively, and the role of NGOs in this process is essential. Close cooperation between the government and the third sector is necessary to successfully address the country's socio-economic challenges. Improving citizens' quality of life, supporting the middle class, and reducing social inequality are shared goals. Achieving these requires not only economic growth, but also legal reforms. President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan,

Banu Nurgaziyeva, emphasized the importance of adopting a dedicated law on NGOs.

Since its establishment, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan has worked to consolidate civil society and strengthen cooperation with government institutions. The organization also aims to engage active NGOs in the decision-making process to improve the lives of citizens.

«This year, the Alliance's experts began work on improving legislation affecting the non-governmental sector. Although, at first glance, the country has the necessary institutional and legal mechanisms for NGOs to function, there are still certain barriers limiting the effectiveness of public associations. Today, the third sector faces many challenges, including funding, expertise, and cooperation with government bodies. Systemic changes at the legislative level are needed to resolve these issues», – commented Banu Nurgaziyeva.

The Alliance highlights the need for a dedicated law on non-governmental organizations, similar to existing legislation for trade unions, political parties, and religious associations. Such a law should regulate essential issues, including taxation, registration, liquidation of NGOs, and international cooperation. Currently, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On Non-Profit Organizations» does not address these areas. As Banu Nurgaziyeva emphasized, modern legislation in this field will enhance the efficiency of NGOs and strengthen their role in cooperation with the government.



How to Obtain a License to Provide Special Social Services in Kazakhstan

Special social services are designed to support vulnerable population groups—people with disabilities, orphans, elderly citizens, and victims of domestic violence.

Since October 2024, the regional departments of the Committee for Regulation and Control in the Field of Social Protection under the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan have begun conducting pre-licensing assessments. In cooperation with local executive bodies and non-governmental organizations, preparatory work has been carried out for licensing all organizations that provide special social services.

As of January 2025, the provision of special social services in the field of population protection in Kazakhstan is subject to licensing. In order to improve the quality of such services, a Registry of specialists providing special social services was also introduced

on January 1. This electronic database, available through the Social Services Portal, contains detailed information on each social worker: personal data, education, professional development courses completed, certification results, work experience, and more.

«The registry will allow for the effective compilation of a comprehensive list of all specialists providing special social services, improve access to information about social workers, and enhance the quality of services delivered», – stated the Ministry of Labor.

As of the end of last year, special social services in Kazakhstan were provided by 502 government organizations and 122 NGOs – amounting to 1,023 facilities when including branches. These include centers for special social services, day care centers, rehabilitation centers, home-based social assistance departments, temporary accommodation centers, and crisis centers.

«Social workers provide eight types of services: socio-domestic, socio-psychological, socio-pedagogical, socio-legal, socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-labor, and socio-medical. Special social services are assigned based on individual rehabilitation programs, taking into account the recipient's age, health status, and living conditions», – the department noted.

All organizations, regardless of ownership, providing special social services are subject to licensing. According to the Ministry of Labor, licensing is intended to improve service quality and ensure safety for recipients. To obtain a license, organizations must have premises that meet sanitary and fire safety standards, appropriate technical equipment, qualified personnel, and accessible facilities for people with limited mobility, among other mandatory requirements. Organizations that fail to comply with licensing requirements will be prohibited from providing special social services. Both public and private organizations are subject to licensing, regardless of the form of ownership.

Applications for licenses can be submitted via the Social Services Portal at aleumet.gov.kz.

«TIME FOR GOOD DEEDS» MEANS NOT TO FEEL SORRY, BUT TO GIVE AN OPPORTUNITY

РОССОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО В КАЗАХСТАНЕ



The international forum «Time for Good Deeds» took place in several cities across Kazakhstan, focusing on the employment of people with disabilities. The forum sessions began in Astana and continued in Ust-Kamenogorsk, Semey, and Pavlodar.

The forum was held at the platform of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan.

Opening the discussion platform, President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan Banu Nurgaziyeva recalled the words of Head of State Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, voiced at the National Kurultai. The President emphasized that every child with special needs must have access to quality education, and that rehabilitation and development centers for children with disabilities should be established in each regional center of the country.



Banu Nurgaziyeva stressed that support must extend not only to children but also to their parents—particularly in the area of employment, as stable work allows families to meet their basic needs.

Support should be consistent and long-term, not occasional, say representatives of the Union of Parents of Children with Disabilities, which currently unites over 50,000 families across 20 regions of Kazakhstan.

«Parent communities are now moving beyond everyday initiatives. We are becoming experts, navigators, partners, and agents of change in shaping government approaches to addressing related issues. The response must be comprehensive, because support is needed not only for the child with a disability, but also for their healthy siblings and, of course, for the parents who must constantly find the resources to care for their families», – said Rauana Sagadiyeva, head of the Union.

According to her, difficulties in securing employment are experienced not only by people with disabilities themselves, but also by their parents – especially mothers, who are often the sole caregivers, combining the demands of care with the need to earn a living. She emphasized that the «Time for Good Deeds» forum has become more than just an event – it is a true platform that unites government, business, and society for a sustainable future. Most importantly, these families are not asking for pity – they need real opportunities to develop and to help their children realize their potential.

« Over several days, experts from both countries exchanged experience with their colleagues on supporting families raising children with disabilities and presented existing support measures.»

Inna Orlova, Chairman of the International community «About HER», spoke about how mothers raising children with special needs are successfully mastering new professions – such as food florists, gingerbread makers and SMM specialists.

She noted that the challenges faced by such families are similar in both Kazakhstan and Russia. Therefore, solutions must be found through joint efforts – in collaboration with the government and business – by creating conditions under which mothers can not only care for their children, but also work and rest. Inna Orlova believes that it is important to offer parents flexible professions with the option to work from home. For example, food floristry can be learned online, and sweet bouquets can be sold via social media without leaving the house.



As part of the forum, a «Cosmic Fashion Show» was also held, with costumes made from recycled materials.

Zhanna Shkatova, head of the inclusive children's fashion theater «Special Hearts KZ», shared that in just a few months of rehearsals, the children have become more open, communicative, and emotionally expressive. For some, participation in the show was a breakthrough – they began to speak, became more active, and gained confidence.

Over several days, experts from both countries exchanged experience with their colleagues on supporting families raising children with disabilities and presented existing support measures.

In Semey, women raising children with special needs shared their success stories of launching businesses. All participating mothers received personal consultations on how to start a business. Sectoral agencies pledged to assist with registering projects and finding investors. The program also included a masterclass on «Gingerbread Business», during which participants decorated gingerbreads and discussed how to monetize their culinary skills.

At Sarsen Amanzholov East Kazakhstan University in Ust-Kamenogorsk, representatives of the Moscow Region presented best practices



for engaging parents and ensuring effective collaboration between professionals working with children with special needs and their families.

On April 20, the final roundtable was held in the coworking space of Pavlodar's Toraygyrov University. Forum participants shared how they turned hobbies into businesses: rehabilitation centers, handmade toys, specialized massage services and more. Mothers showcased their handicrafts with national elements, which they now sell in other cities and even abroad. They also spoke about their experience participating in government grant programs for small business development.

It is worth noting that the first «Time for Good Deeds» international forum was held in 2022. Over the past three years, seven sessions have taken place in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. Key themes have included the creation of socio-cultural spaces, youth career guidance, inclusive education, the development of volunteerism, traditional crafts and creative industries, as well as rehabilitation for children with disabilities and special needs.



NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN FOCUS: A LEGISLATIVE RESET



On May 29, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan hosted a meeting of the «Ustanym» discussion club focused on the registration of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The agenda was directly linked to the instructions of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, who this year emphasized the need to modernize legislation on state social order and to draft a new law on non-governmental organizations.

Opening the event, the head of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan Banu Nurgaziyeva noted that large-scale work to update the regulatory framework has already begun.

Details of the work in progress were presented by Gulbara Sultanova, Chairman of the Committee on Civil Society Affairs under the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan. She reported that two working groups are operating under the Ministry, bringing together around 100 experts and NGO representatives. Two sessions have already been held. In addition, work is underway to address issues identified in a registry compiled last year.

Among the key challenges, Gulbara Sultanova highlighted the ambiguity of the legal status of various organizational and legal forms. For example, public associations are clearly defined by territorial levels (local, regional, national), whereas public and private



foundations and associations of legal entities are not tied to any particular territory.

Special attention was given to registration procedures. Despite the «one-stop shop» principle being in place, in-person submission of documents is still required, while the commercial sector has fully transitioned to electronic processes.

The speaker also noted a common trend toward vague formulation of statutory objectives. According to her, some NGOs are created solely to obtain funding, rather than to address social issues. Although statutory documents must contain clear goals and objectives, in practice they are often overly broad, sometimes listing as many as 50–60 goals.

«When objectives are vague, an NGO can work in any area, depending on the projects it applies for. Today it might be the environment, tomorrow – elderly care. This kind of universality affects the quality of work», – Sultanova emphasized.

As one of the solutions, she proposed introducing a limit on the number of focus areas allowed in an organization's charter to encourage the creation of professional, rather than universal, NGOs capable of effectively implementing specialized projects.

GRANTS AND CHARTERS

Lima Dias, Chairamn of the Board of the Civil Initiatives Support Center, noted that NGOs regularly face difficulties during registration and when applying for government grants. These issues most commonly arise during the verification of statutory documents.

For example, the technical specifications for grants often specify expected results within particular territories. However, many charters lack information about the geographical scope of the organization's activities.

«In fact, we often cannot determine the organization's status – whether it is local, regional, or national. Sometimes this is not mentioned at all. In other cases, there are inconsistencies between the stated status and the described geography. A charter might state the organization is local, while its goals cover three or five regions. Another issue is that charters often lack registration stamps or annexes, making it impossible to verify territorial affiliation. In some cases, the justice department in Astana issues the registration stamp, but the document lists «Republic of Kazakhstan» as the territorial scope. This creates internal contradictions», – explained Lima Dias.

As possible solutions, Lima Dias proposed the following initiatives:

- the introduction of an online charter verification module on the eGov portal;
- the implementation of methodological and awareness campaigns in the regions in cooperation with justice departments.



DIGITALIZATION IN THE NGO SECTOR

Venera Kalimova, Chairman of the Committee of the Registration Service and Organization for Providing Legal Services of the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, noted a steady increase in the number of registered public associations in the country. In 2022, 483 associations were registered; in 2023 – 576; and in 2024 – over 700. These organizations cover a wide range of areas, from healthcare and human rights to radio amateurs, astronomers and dog handlers, indicating the dynamic development of civil society.

According to her, the country has created all the necessary legal conditions for NPO registration and has made significant progress in streamlining procedures:

- registration timelines have been reduced from 15 to 5 business days;
- work is underway to introduce online application submission;
- the transition to electronic charters is currently being considered.

The Ministry of Justice is also developing a digital assistant capable of detecting common errors in charters before documents are submitted for expert review.

«We are currently compiling a list of the most frequent mistakes and key charter requirements. These parameters will be standardized so that artificial intelligence can process them. Final legal analysis will still be carried out by experts», – Kalimova explained.

She also confirmed the government's readiness for open dialogue with NGOs on improving legislation.

KEY PROPOSALS FOLLOWING THE MEETING

Participants proposed several initiatives to enhance the effectiveness, transparency, and accessibility of NGO operations:

- introduction of a classifier of NGO activity types;
- integration of a unified database with the Ministry of Justice system;
- removal of territorial limitations where they do not reflect actual activities;
- development of a model charter as a methodological reference;
- simplification of registration and liquidation procedures for NGOs;
- reduction of administrative barriers;
- expanded methodological and legal support from government agencies, especially in the regions.

THE ROLE OF STATE SYMBOLS IN MODERN SOCIETY: *EXPERTS WEIGH IN*



A regular session of the national discussion club «Ustanym» was held in Astana to mark the Day of State Symbols of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The event was dedicated to the theme: «State Symbols: Unifying Force and Contemporary Meaning».

The meeting brought together members of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, representatives of central government bodies, leading scholars, leaders of non-governmental and youth organizations, as well as international experts.

Participants discussed the significance of the State Flag, Emblem, and Anthem in shaping national identity, strengthening social unity, and fostering civic consciousness.

Kazakhstan celebrates the Day of State Symbols annually on June 4, the day in 1992 when the Flag, Emblem, and Anthem of the Republic of Kazakhstan were officially adopted.

Welcoming the participants, Banu Nurgaziyeva, President of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, noted that the Day of State Symbols marks an important milestone in the country's history. She emphasized that state symbols are more than just official attributes. A key question today is how to apply them meaningfully in the context of modern society.

Vice Minister of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan Aizada Kurmanova also delivered a speech, recalling that during the fourth session of the National Kurultai, held

earlier this year in Burabay, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasized the vital role of civil society in the implementation of reforms and the development of society. Citing the President, Kurmanova stressed that partnerships between the state and NGOs contribute to

«Our Flag has reached the peaks of the Himalayas and Pamir mountains. Our Anthem has been played at those heights. These are remarkable achievements of our national symbols. I would also note that the flag of the Air Force of Kazakhstan has orbited the Earth 156



addressing current challenges and promoting constructive values. Participants discussed the meaning and relevance of state symbols as well as the importance of respect for these emblems.

«State symbols are the foundation of our civic identity and national unity. We understand that without public support and engagement, any symbol loses its power and becomes a mere formality. A symbol is not just an attribute – it is an expression of our independence and unity. In today's world, young people do not respond to ideology through directives, but through dialogue. That is why participation, a sense of belonging, and meaning are essential in every word and every action», – Aizada Kurmanova stated.

According to the Vice Minister, civil society promotes patriotism through concrete actions. One example is the «Taza Qazaqstan» initiative, which began as an environmental campaign and evolved into a nationwide platform. Such practical efforts, she noted, reflect genuine care and love for the country.

«Our task is to ensure that state symbols become deeply respected values – values that are clear and meaningful to every citizen», – Aizada Kurmanova concluded.

Deputy of the Mazhilis of Parliament Amantai Zharkynbek stated that since independence, state symbols have become cherished emblems of national pride.

times alongside cosmonaut Aidyn Aimbetov», – the Majilis member added.

In turn, Mukhit-Ardagher Sydyknazarov, Director of the Institute of Modern Research at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University and

« State symbols are the foundation of our civic identity and national unity. We understand that without public support and engagement, any symbol loses its power and becomes a mere formality»



member of the Public Council under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasized the need for deeper academic study of state symbolism and raised current issues in the field.

«In 2016, under the «Rukhani Zhangyru» program, we established a national expert council at ENU. At that time, I raised the issue of state symbols. The situation was this: we had the symbols, but no scholars specializing in heraldry. That's why we saw the need to create an institution to systematically study heraldry. I submitted a proposal to the Executive Office of the President regarding the development of both heraldry and vexillology. Heraldry is a complex and multifaceted science that studies symbols, their origins, and meanings. Vexillology, meanwhile, focuses on the study of flags. Both fields play a key role in shaping national identity and state symbolism. Today, the Heraldry Institute is successfully operating under the National Museum, and scholarly work in this area is already underway», – he explained.

Mukhit-Ardagher Sydyknazarov also stressed that in countries with developed heraldic systems, there are official heraldists attached to key ministries. For example, Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense should have a national heraldic officer, but no such position currently exists. The same applies to the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which should have at least one full-time position responsible for heraldic matters.

«Unfortunately, we have yet to implement this structure. As a result, the Commission on State Symbols and the expert council under the Ministry of Culture and Information have not convened for 2.5-3 years. In the absence of

a coordinated heraldic policy, every time a government agency submits a departmental award for approval, we must explain the meaning of each color, symbol, or element. Yet in heraldry and color theory, every shape and color carries specific meaning. To this day, we lack a unified system and methodology in this field», – the scholar noted.

Particular attention was given to promoting state symbols among youth.

Akerke Iskanderova, Chairman of the youth wing «Jastar Ruhy» of the Amanat party, spoke about the various initiatives organized nationwide to mark the Day of State Symbols and to strengthen patriotic education overall.

«We want state flags to become part of everyday life, proudly displayed in windows as is customary in countries like Turkey and the United



States. Over the past three years, I've personally handed out more than 20,000 flags, encouraging people to display them prominently. Every year, on the eve of Republic Day and the Day of State Symbols, we organize the traditional flag-raising campaign. Regional activities are also in full swing. In Astana, volunteers have shown great initiative. For example, this year at the Khan Shatyr shopping center, we installed 80 flags. One of our proudest achievements – talented children assembled a mosaic of the national emblem using 3,000 Rubik's cubes in just seven hours. This is more than a campaign – it



is a gesture of respect for our country's symbols», – said Akerke Iskanderova.

At the conclusion of the discussion, participants presented a series of proposals aimed at strengthening the role of state symbols in educational, informational, and cultural policy. These initiatives will form the basis for future steps to foster national consciousness and increase civic engagement.

The «Ustanym» club session was held as part of a strategic partnership with the Civil Society Development Center «Adal Azamat – Belsendi Qogam».



Murat Abenov:

«IN KAZAKHSTAN, THE NGO SECTOR HAS BECOME MORE PROFESSIONAL AND MORE UNIFIED»



Deputy of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Murat Abenov, has for many years been actively engaged in the work of non-governmental organizations in the country and has a deep understanding of the challenges in this sphere. As a member of the working group tasked with improving the draft law «On Non-Governmental Organizations», he is committed to making a meaningful contribution to the sector's development. In an interview to Adal Azamat magazine, the deputy shared his views on the evolution of Kazakhstan's NGO sector.

– Murat Abdulamitovich, you frequently raise socially relevant issues through your work. The development of civil society is also an important topic for you. In your opinion, how actively are NGOs operating in Kazakhstan? Have you observed any positive shifts in their efforts to address societal challenges?

– The non-governmental sector holds a special place in Kazakhstan. It is a truly essential institution. Every country needs such organizations. Of course, different states use this institution in different ways, depending on their needs. For example, in democratic countries, NGOs are independent and have their own views on every issue. NGOs are an important democratic tool.



They are indispensable when it comes to addressing complex challenges. If only the government makes complex decisions, it can lead to disputes. NGOs, as analytical centers, understand the specific ways to solve problems in their respective areas. These organizations serve as a bridge between the government and the public. Lately, we have seen good progress in the NGO sector. In the past, NGOs were still taking shape, and in some cases, artificial groups were created under ministries. Today, civil society organizations are becoming professional. They view their work as a vocation and continue to grow in this direction. New leaders no longer want to deal with minor issues or compromise their standards. This is not the time for short-term positioning. NGOs in Kazakhstan are now structured and systematized. In this regard, I appreciate the work of the Civil Alliance. It has established its place in society and successfully brought together many civil society organizations. Since Banu Ganikyzy took office, we've seen systematic changes. Civil society leaders are now voicing their opinions on a variety of issues, and the Alliance has managed to build strong relationships with them. There is every reason to believe that we now have an active and functioning group of public organizations in the country.

– How would you assess the current state of partnership between the government and NGOs in Kazakhstan?

– The partnership between the government and NGOs is relatively new. In the past, the authorities viewed NGOs differently – they were often used based on specific interests. Today, things are different. We see real partnerships emerging. NGOs can now express their positions and defend them. Previously, public figures were more emotional and outspoken. Today, they are more professional and focused on their areas of expertise. They treat this work as a full-fledged profession. NGOs now have strong specialists, legal experts, and analysts. They are capable of communicating their ideas at the proper level. I've noticed that in addition to partnership, there is now mutual respect between the government and NGOs. That's essential for solving problems effectively. Reaching compromise takes time, but it is the right path – and one that ultimately simplifies implementation. However, responsibility now lies with both parties. NGOs also become co-authors of the decisions made.



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– There has been increasing discussion around the need for a dedicated law on NGOs in Kazakhstan, similar to the laws regulating trade unions, political parties, and religious associations. In your view, why is such a law important?

– There are still some ambiguities when it comes to the development of a separate law on NGOs. Some people still view them as a business, but that's not their purpose. NGOs are not meant to generate profit. Their objective is to achieve the mission they've set for themselves – regardless of whether or not they earn revenue. A true NGO chooses its own goals and pursues them. These organizations must view the government as a partner – not as a contractor. I believe

that the future law should clarify these distinctions. It should allow NGOs to be more active, in demand, and able to defend their positions.

– You are a member of the working group on improving legislation in this area. Has the drafting process begun? When do you expect broader discussions with experts and civil society representatives to take place?

– I believe now is the right time to gather ideas and proposals for amending the law. Of course, not all experts will agree. I cannot say that the draft law will reflect the consensus of everyone involved – each NGO has its own viewpoint. Personally, I intend to offer input and recommendations across several areas through the working group. Some may believe NGOs need tighter control. I don't agree with that, but ultimately we need to reach a shared position. Before the draft is submitted to Parliament, changes will still be made. As an active citizen, I will do my best to express my views. Parliament is a platform for discussion. We will listen to each other's positions and make a collective decision.

– What aspects of NGO development are not currently addressed in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On Non-Profit Organizations»? What areas of civil society still need further study?

– In general, even the term «non-profit» is somewhat limiting. This is an organization, but not a business.

I believe this reflects an outdated perception of NGOs as entities that operate like contractors or compete for tenders. We need to introduce conceptual changes in this regard.

– How effective is the current system for awarding grants to NGOs? Is the process transparent?

– The grant system is changing. Every organization now has the opportunity to present and justify its capabilities transparently. This wasn't always the case. The system is no longer rigid – each organization can work in its area of focus and compete for grants.

– The Civil Alliance has previously proposed a 30% advance payment for NGOs. Do you believe this would help improve the financial sustainability of the sector?

– Absolutely. NGOs don't always have the necessary financial resources. For large, systemic projects, advance payments are crucial. So we should support this proposal. In many cases, NGO leaders are fully engaged in this work. Of course, there are others who see it as a side activity. For this reason, I believe we need to distinguish between the two types.

– Finally, what is your view on the role of NGOs in fighting corruption?

– Civil society organizations play a vital role in anti-corruption efforts. It's important for individual citizens to express their views, but NGOs carry even greater responsibility. When an NGO raises an issue, it must be based on evidence. People can sometimes be emotional or overly accusatory. NGOs, however, speak on behalf of society and must support their statements with facts – and be accountable for them. If an organization spreads unverified information, it damages its reputation. But when the information is accurate, the credibility of that NGO only grows.

« Civil society organizations play a vital role in anti-corruption efforts. It's important for individual citizens to express their views, but NGOs carry even greater responsibility. When an NGO raises an issue, it must be based on evidence. People can sometimes be emotional or overly accusatory»



Zhanna Asanova:

«NGOs HAVE BECOME FULL-FLEDGED AGENTS OF CHANGE»



Over the course of her long career, Zhanna Asanova, deputy of the Senate of the Republic of Kazakhstan and member of the Committee on Constitutional Legislation, Judicial System and Law Enforcement Agencies, has never stepped away from civic engagement, viewing service to society as her principal mission. In this interview, she speaks about the role of civil society in social development and in addressing current challenges.

– Zhanna Beysentayevna, you are part of the working group tasked with drafting the law «On Non-Governmental Organizations». How is the work progressing, and what would you personally like to see reflected in the law?

– The development of this draft law has essentially become a focal point for the entire conversation around civic participation. Today, the non-governmental sector is a fully recognized stakeholder and driver of change – particularly in the fields of social protection, human rights, and inclusion. NGOs are no longer isolated entities; they now address complex issues in public life alongside government institutions. Therefore, I believe the law must reflect these realities.

Moreover, the legislation should not be restrictive, but rather constructive – protecting the freedom and unique character of NGOs while establishing transparent and mutually understood rules. This would help prevent overlap in responsibilities, as well as eliminate manipulations, infringements, and abuses.

Legal regulation of activities, financing, and reporting is also important in order to clearly define the boundaries between oversight and pressure. These are complex issues and are therefore being actively discussed in direct dialogue with the civil sector itself.

– At the fourth session of the National Kurultai, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasized the need to strengthen the effectiveness of state social order. In your view, what new provisions should be included in this legislation?

– Today, we are moving toward a model of social partnership based on trust, effectiveness, and digitalization. I believe the new law must include high-quality KPI indicators that focus on real social impact – not just the achievement of quantitative targets. It should also guarantee barrier-free access to NGO grant competitions, introduce modern and transparent financing mechanisms, and provide for the full digitaliza-



« Today, the most visible and vital practices of the third sector are being shaped in the areas of human rights protection, inclusion, support for women and children, and environmental advocacy, among others»

tion of procedures – from application submission to public evaluation of results.

In other words, the system of state social order should serve to strengthen civil society itself.

– In your opinion, in which areas are NGOs most effective? Are there any organizations you would highlight as exemplary?

– Today, the most visible and vital practices of the third sector are being shaped in the areas of human rights protection, inclusion, support for women and children, and environmental advocacy, among others. NGOs take on responsibilities that often fall beyond the capacity or mandate of the state. This is daily, human-centered work – responding to people's pain, vulnerability, hopes, and trust.

For example, the Information and Resource Center implements educational projects that build practical skills in self-advocacy. The NGO EN Social Part of Eco Network and the public foundation «Paryz» carry out environmental and cultural initiatives that promote individual and collective responsibility for our shared future. I would also highlight the Union of Crisis Centers of Kazakhstan, which provides professional support to women in difficult life circumstances.

In recent years, the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan has become an effective and vibrant platform that brings together NGO leaders from across the country. It is a space where concrete solutions are generated – solutions that strengthen the social fabric of our society. The real strength of the civil sector is found in these practices – in human connection, in empathy, and in daily social work. This is the kind of experience we should be learning from.

– At the 11th Civil Forum, you spoke about the importance of public diplomacy. Does it still carry weight today?

– More than ever. Public diplomacy is not a soft addition – it's a practical tool, especially relevant in times of geopolitical tension. It continues to grow in importance as a vector of international relations grounded in human connection, culture, and trust. Through academic exchanges, partnerships between schools and universities, arts, science, and environmental projects, as well as youth and volunteer initiatives, we build bridges between people that foster mutual understanding – regardless of political context.

For Kazakhstan, this is especially relevant. We are a country with a well-established culture of interethnic dialogue, tolerance, and civic



maturity. This enables us to share our experience and promote a constructive international agenda based on real human interaction. Public diplomacy positions Kazakhstan as a source of humanitarian stability, a trusted mediator, and a partner with whom others want to build the future.

– Which of your legislative initiatives in Parliament do you consider the most significant?

– Every initiative we put forward is a response to a specific challenge. On a daily basis, we are required to dive into new and diverse topics to address the needs of society. But if I look at it systematically, there are several areas where we can already speak of tangible results.

The first is the creative industries. We have developed a draft law that legally defines the principles for supporting creative work. It also includes provisions to address long-standing issues related to copyright protection. This initiative has already been taken up by the Mazhilis, and discussions are underway regarding the creation of a Unified digital platform to ensure transparency in the accounting and distribution of royalties.

The second concerns child support obligations. We have developed a bill aimed at overhauling the alimony system. It strengthens the institution of family by introducing mandatory prenuptial agreements, rethinking related

procedures, and implementing fairer accountability mechanisms.

Third is the reform of technical and vocational education. We initiated discussions on modernizing practical training programs and introducing new tools for the commercialization of student production. These ideas have been warmly welcomed by both colleges and students. The Government is currently reviewing possible solutions.

Fourth is protection from fraud. Our parliamentary inquiry brought the issue of combating telephone scams into the legal domain by proposing stricter controls over SIP telephony and SIM boxes. These measures have already been included in the draft law regulating financial institutions, now under Senate review. Last year, we also raised the issue of conscript soldiers being over-indebted – this concern has likewise been reflected in the same draft legislation.

The fifth area is the protection of the rights of children with maxillofacial conditions. I raised this issue last year, and since then a series of working meetings have taken place involving sector specialists, ministry representatives, and civil society. As a result of this ongoing effort, the Ministry of Health has approved a roadmap to revise existing approaches and service tariffs, and to enhance integrated rehabilitation support. The goal is to ensure that children with such conditions have access to comprehensive medical, surgical, cosmetic, speech therapy, and psychological care – at every stage, from early diagnosis to post-operative recovery. This is about more than health – it's about restoring quality of life and enabling full social integration and development for every child.

– What is the status of efforts to address domestic violence, which remains a critically important social issue?

– Major reforms in this area were implemented last year, resulting in comprehensive changes to the Criminal Code, the Code of Administrative Offenses, and other sectoral laws. These amendments covered both accountability measures and new approaches to victim protection and violence prevention.

It is especially important that new legal mechanisms have now been adopted and are in active implementation. In early June, our committee held a roundtable with representatives of government bodies, civil society organizations, and experts to analyze how the new provisions are working in practice and to identify challenges in their enforcement.

In addition, a model law on domestic violence

was developed at the initiative of the Senate of Parliament in partnership with the Institute of Parliamentarism. Kazakhstan submitted this document as a model legislative act within the framework of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly. It is currently under review by relevant commissions and expert groups. The final draft will be submitted for consideration at a CIS IPA session. In this way, Kazakhstan is addressing the issue both domestically and internationally – by proposing systemic solutions to domestic violence at the intergovernmental level.

– The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, one of the most important and effective institutions of civil society in our country, turned 30 years old...

– The Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan reflects our nation's social maturity and resilience. Peace and harmony in a multiethnic society are not a given – they are the result of continuous, diligent work: dialogue, mutual respect, trust, and shared goals.

Over the past 30 years, the Assembly has grown from a consultative body into a full-fledged public-state platform, bringing together hundreds of ethnocultural associations across the country. Today, it is not only a symbol of tolerance and interethnic harmony, but also a functioning space for cultural, educational, economic, and humanitarian cooperation. It is a forum where initiatives are born – initiatives that promote unity, support youth, develop languages, and strengthen social responsibility and solidarity.

The Assembly also plays a key role in civic participation and regional development. Its representatives serve in maslihats, public councils, and take part in implementing government programs. Five deputies in the Senate of Parliament currently represent the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan.

The Assembly also supports initiatives that promote family values, moral and spiritual development, and interreligious dialogue. In essence, it has become a uniquely Kazakhstani model of integration and cooperation – valued both domestically and abroad as an effective tool for peaceful coexistence and internal stability.

– Zhanna Beysentaevna, how do you evaluate the role of women in public administration today?

– I always say that women's leadership is not about competing with men. It's about balance –



and building a full, inclusive picture of leadership.

Today, female politicians, civic leaders, and entrepreneurs are increasingly raising topics that were once considered «soft» or «secondary»: child safety, health, mental well-being, environmental sustainability, access to social services, and everyday fairness. In reality, these are the foundations of public trust and societal resilience.

More and more women in public policy, law-making, and civil society are now emerging as initiators of change and drivers of reform in the national agenda. It is often women who ensure that social support systems go beyond rhetoric and become truly functional.

Over the years, I've seen firsthand how gender stereotypes complicate this path. It hasn't been easy – but it has taught me one thing: it's not just about standing your ground. It's also about creating an environment where other women can do the same – freely, and without fear of being undervalued.

Today, our focus should not be on merely «opening doors» for women in a formal sense, but on creating real conditions for their growth, influence, and meaningful participation in decision-making. This includes political systems, human resources policies, and the education sector. And this isn't about quotas for the sake of quotas – it's about enabling the full and equal participation of women in every process.

Marat Sultangaziyev:

«OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS, ALMATY REGION HAS DEVELOPED ITS OWN MODEL OF SUSTAINABLE GROWTH»



Almaty region continues to confidently strengthen its position as one of the most dynamic regions of the country. Following the 2022 administrative reform, the region not only adapted to new conditions but also developed its own strategic development model – focused on industry, infrastructure, human capital, and a high quality of life. We spoke with Akim of Almaty Region Marat Sultangaziyev about how the economy of the future is being built today and what changes people are seeing in their daily lives.

– Marat Eleusizuly, over the past three years, Almaty region has entered the top five fastest-growing regions in the country. What key factors have driven this breakthrough, and what is the development strategy today, especially in industry, logistics, and agriculture?

– As of the end of 2024, our region recorded a 109.6% growth in gross regional product, placing 4th nationwide are the results of systemic efforts in non-resource sectors. We made a deliberate choice to focus on sustainable areas: industry, construction, logistics, trade, and processing. In the initial stages, we prioritized industrial development; now, our main focus is the agricultural sector – particularly irrigation and the expansion of irrigated land. This is crucial for food security and for our farmers.

Today, industry accounts for a quarter of the region's GRP. Last year, 23 new enterprises were launched, including in processing and building materials. But development is impossible without infrastructure. The main challenge is a shortage of engineering capacity, especially electricity. That's why we're concentrating efforts on developing industrial zones: four are already

operating, and two more are on the way. These are ready-made sites with incentives, including within the Alatau SEZ.

Logistics is also expanding rapidly. The region's geographic location makes it ideal for enhancing transit potential: we're creating hubs, warehouses, and new routes that bypass Almaty. Another key focus is processing and the agro-industrial complex. International cooperation is expanding as well: the region's portfolio includes 34 projects with China, ranging from agriculture to «green» energy.

But for us, it's not just about numbers. Every project means jobs, new opportunities for people, and the development of local communities. Our goal is quality growth – with care for people, infrastructure, and the environment.

– **Quality of life means housing, water, roads, and heating. How is the region addressing infrastructure challenges, particularly in fast-growing areas?**

– These are precisely the issues that concern people on a daily basis. We see that infrastructure in several settlements is already under strain, particularly in areas where the population has grown significantly in recent years. Many of these systems were designed during the Soviet era and simply aren't built to meet today's demands.

That's why our top priority now is modernizing infrastructure and ensuring access to essentials like water, electricity, roads, and heating. For example, in the Karasai district, we're implementing a large project to upgrade electricity and water systems in 16 villages. The design and estimate documentation is ready, and some projects are in the budgeting phase.

Housing development is also moving forward: last year, nearly 1 million square meters were commissioned. We're prioritizing vulnerable groups. There are support mechanisms in place, such as bonds for apartment purchases and regional mortgage programs for public sector employees.

Water and gas are two other critically important areas. Water supply will be improved in 25 settlements, and by the end of the year, gas coverage will reach 80% of the population.

We're also paying close attention to roads. Already, 94% of regional roads meet standards. This is important not just for convenience, but for safety and economic activity in rural areas.

There's still a lot of work ahead. We understand that trust in government depends heavily on the state of infrastructure. That's why we're committed to maintaining dialogue with residents and responding to their most pressing concerns.

– **Ecotourism is a global trend today. How is Almaty region developing this area?**

– We have all the natural resources needed for it: mountains, lakes, canyons. It's a landscape worth both preserving and showcasing. There are already more than 270 accommodation facilities in the region, and the tourist flow continues to grow: last year alone, we welcomed around two million visitors.

We strive to develop tourism carefully – without compromising the environment. National parks are expanding, visitor centers are opening, and new trails are being developed. Some of them are quite unique: for instance, the apricot festival in Uygur district, which we aim to turn into a signature event for agrotourism.

New tourism products are emerging: a glass bridge in Black Canyon, modernization of the Oi-Qaragai resort, and development of cableways at Kolsai lakes. These projects not only attract attention but also create jobs.

We're also promoting the region abroad – through partnerships with international media, participation in exhibitions, and marketing campaigns in China and South Korea.

Our goal is to make tourism a sustainable driver of development, while ensuring that visitors leave with genuine impressions of nature – not just polished infrastructure.

– **In 2024, the unemployment rate in Almaty region fell to 4.6%. What impact has this had on people's lives?**

– Every number matters when it reflects real lives. Behind the 70,000 new jobs created are personal stories: someone got their first job, someone returned to their profession, someone started a business. Since 2022, more than 176,000 jobs have been created – not just in cities, but in rural areas as well: from a meat-processing plant in Kegen to the «Shin Line» factory and new RG Brands production lines.

One notable shift is among youth: the number of NEETs (young people not in education, employment, or training) fell by nearly half over the year – from 46,000 to 26,000. This is the result of career guidance, training, and entry-level job support programs.

To ensure targeted assistance, we use the «Digital Family Map» system – it identifies where support is needed most. As a result, the number of social assistance recipients fell from 61,000 to 17,000 – ensuring help reaches those who truly need it.

There has also been significant investment in basic infrastructure. Last year, 14 new schools opened, 17 more are under construction, and 20



older ones are undergoing major renovations. Over 69 billion tenge was invested in preschool education, reaching about 100,000 children. In healthcare, we've seen new rural clinics and upgraded equipment.

And of course – culture. We celebrated the 100th anniversary of Berdibek Sokpakbaev with events both in Kazakhstan and abroad. This year, we honor Nurgisa Tlendiyev – with concerts, memorial events, and activities in Beijing and New York. These are the kinds of things that make people want to live, work, and be proud of their region.

– What specific changes have digitalization projects brought to people's daily lives, and what technologies are planned for the future?

– Almaty region is carrying out consistent work on developing digital solutions and supporting innovation-led entrepreneurship. The core of this ecosystem is the Alatau Hub incubator, opened in 2024. It hosts projects that help integrate modern technologies into education, social services, and public administration.

One standout example is the QOL startup, which developed STEAM kits for learning engineering and robotics. Ten pilot schools are already using them. The startup attracted \$10,000 in investment and signed a memorandum with «Gylym ordasy» to launch a joint FabLab. The next goal is to enter the Central Asian and Middle Eastern markets.

Another promising project is OquMarket, an educational marketplace helping students and teachers personalize the learning process. It has already been tested, received initial feedback, and is ready to scale nationwide.

“ In January 2024, by presidential decree, the city of Alatau was officially established – with new boundaries and big ambitions. It includes parts of Konaev and areas from the Ili and Talgar districts»

One Alatau Hub resident also developed a module for the «Digital Family Map» system, commissioned by the regional prosecutor's office. This tool helps analyze data and improve the quality of public services.

Beyond supporting startups, we're also building out digital infrastructure. In partnership with businesses, we've installed 9,100 surveillance cameras and 325 integrated control systems and laid 2,554 km of fiber-optic lines.

Since 2023, we've implemented a Digital Twin of the region: 33 settlements (covering 582.1 km²) now have 3D terrain models and 1,919 km of digitized utility networks. This not only simplifies urban planning but also allows us to better respond to residents' needs.

– Marat Eleusizuly, what stage is the development of the new city of Alatau at, and are residents' views being taken into account when creating a comfortable environment?

– Not long ago, the G4 City project seemed like a distant concept. But everything changed after the regional capital moved to Konaev: the idea became tangible. In January 2024, by presidential decree, the city of Alatau was officially established – with new boundaries and big ambitions. It includes parts of Konaev and areas from the Ili and Talgar districts.

The city already has an approved master plan, and an interagency project office has been created under the leadership of Deputy Prime Minister Kanat Bozumbaev. Systematic work is underway: 13 growth points and anchor projects have been identified – locations that already attract investor interest, have infrastructure,

and are ripe for development. This helps avoid long «start from scratch» and accelerates progress.

Building a livable and sustainable city is a complex task. To make our approach not only ambitious but also practical, we signed an agreement with the China Regional Development & Planning Institute. Their experts will help adapt Shenzhen's experience to Kazakhstan's legal, economic, and infrastructure realities.

Project planning is already underway: transportation and utility networks are being mapped out, and sectoral development plans are in the works. Some early results are already visible: a 900-seat school and two rural health centers are being built in Alatau – and that's just the beginning.

Importantly, the new status hasn't affected social guarantees. For instance, more than 1,500 public sector employees retained their rural bonuses, despite the administrative change. This was a principled decision by regional leadership.

Simultaneously, we are modernizing water, gas, and electricity systems. Plans are under discussion for a House of Culture and sports complex. Documentation is being prepared for new clinics in the Zhetygen and Koyankus neighborhoods.

Alatau is already attracting investment: in the first four months of 2025, 14.4 billion tenge were invested in fixed capital. By year-end, that figure is expected to reach 107.7 billion. The investment portfolio includes 45 projects that are projected to create about 15,000 jobs.

Alatau is not just a new name on the map – it is an opportunity to build a space where comfort, development, and care for people go hand in hand.

– How would you assess the participation of Almaty region residents in the election of rural akims? How effective is this mechanism in practice?

– The direct election of rural akims is a crucial step in the development of local self-government and in realizing the «Listening State» principle put forward by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev. Since 2021, Almaty Region has held 166 electoral campaigns.

It's encouraging to see a growing level of political maturity at the local level. Increasingly, people are voting not based on personal ties but on the professional qualities of candidates. Competence and the genuine ability to solve local problems are becoming key criteria.

For example, in the May 4, 2025 elections in 11 rural districts, voter turnout was 64.1% – a figure that reflects strong interest in direct democracy.

That said, challenges remain. Roughly half of all rural akims across the country do not complete their full terms. There are cases where newly elected akims step down just months after taking office. But there are also inspiring stories – such as the recently elected akim of the Turgenskii district. Although not originally from the

area, she had worked in the akimat for nearly 15 years and was well known to residents. Thanks to her efforts, new playgrounds and sports areas are being opened, surveillance cameras installed, and everyday issues that matter to people are being addressed.

– Many citizens ask: what is the real role of maslihat deputies? Do they truly influence decisions, or is their presence largely symbolic?

– Our deputies are not just session attendees. They are active representatives who provide a real picture of what's happening on the ground. They work closely with residents, raise issues concerning specific villages, schools, and hospitals, and advocate for solutions.

Since the beginning of the year, deputies have submitted 174 formal inquiries – this is far from symbolic. Most of these relate to healthcare, water supply, and road infrastructure. Without waiting for directives, deputies visit sites, document issues ranging from poor materials to project delays.

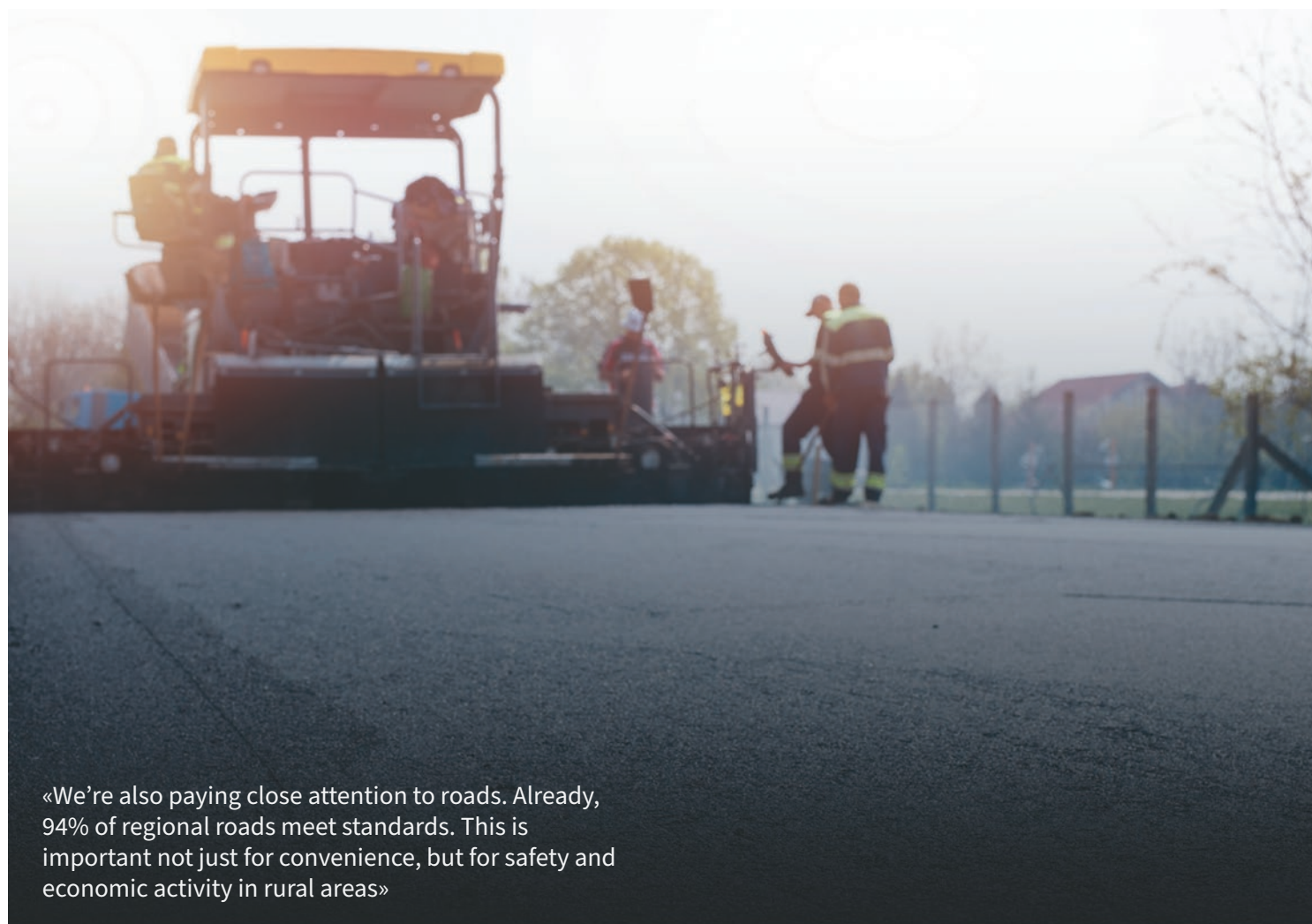
For example, field visits by deputies revealed serious problems with the construction of the «Kabandy» and «Shibut» dams in the Raiymbek district. Water resources are critical for farmers, and we immediately submitted the materials for examination and to law enforcement agencies. The contractors have already been issued compliance orders.

Similar work was conducted in Uygur and Kegen districts: identifying delays, deviations from project specifications, and unsafe conditions in recently commissioned facilities. Action was taken in every case: reports sent to the prosecutor's office, contractors blacklisted, and the regional department was instructed to tighten oversight. Disciplinary action was taken against the department head.

I firmly believe that an effective maslihat, working in tandem with the executive branch, is a powerful tool of public oversight. The more «uncomfortable» questions are asked, the more honest and productive our work becomes. People should see that if a construction project has started, it will be completed – on time and to a high standard. And if issues arise, they will be addressed openly.

– Matters of public harmony, public engagement, and sustainable development cannot be resolved without the active involvement of civil society. How do you assess the cooperation between the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan and NGOs in Almaty region? Which organizations would you highlight as particularly effective?

– Almaty Region is home to 105 ethnic groups, making it uniquely diverse. Together with the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, we're implementing large-scale projects aimed at strengthening public harmony, promoting a culture of dialogue, and building a toler-



«We're also paying close attention to roads. Already, 94% of regional roads meet standards. This is important not just for convenience, but for safety and economic activity in rural areas»

ant society. Councils of mothers, elders, and ethnocultural associations are active, as are public mediators. In just the first four months of this year, over 380 events have been held, reaching more than 40,000 people.

The partnership between the Assembly and NGOs is especially valuable. These are not parallel structures but complementary channels of civic communication. Currently, 515 NGOs are registered in the region, including 320 public associations and 195 foundations. We work closely with them on priority issues – from social support and legal awareness to gender equality and the prevention of domestic violence.

Among our most active partners, I would highlight three organizations.

First, the Civil Alliance of Almaty Region – a key mechanism for public feedback. The Alliance holds forums, hearings, and provides independent analysis. With the arrival of its new president, Kazybek Dautaliyev, its analytical capabilities have grown, new consultative platforms have been established, and civic participation has been expanded.

Second, the Public Foundation «Sustainable Development of Local Communities», which implements initiatives in rural areas. In 2024, they launched a women's empowerment program that reached more than 1,400 women from vulnerable groups – focusing on financial literacy, psychological resilience, and personal growth.

Third, the association of mothers with many children «Karasai Ana zhuregi», which provides humanitarian aid, education, and counseling. More than 3,000 women have received training, and over 100 families have received targeted assistance.

Together with NGOs, we've accomplished a lot: more than 7,000 children gained access to summer recreation and psychological services; dozens of mobile consultations were held in villages; and over 500 young people took part in volunteer and awareness initiatives.

Our goal is not just to fund one-off projects but to build a sustainable model of partnership – where government and society act as a unified team. The Assembly and civil society play a vital role in this process.

– What is the impact of the Public council in Almaty region, and what distinguishes its work?

– Public councils are a crucial mechanism, and here in Almaty region, they are functioning effectively. Every active citizen who wants to improve life in our communities has a voice and a place in these councils.

Public councils are an effective tool that ensures active participation of citizens in the life of the country and helps strengthen the relationship between the state and society.

Their core mission is to express public interests, exercise civic oversight, and involve people in shaping socially significant decisions. The effectiveness of the councils is manifested in the unification of various points of view, the advancement of initiatives and their promotion at all levels of government.

The councils operate on a multi-level basis. At the village level, this role is played by local communities – as stipulated in Article 6 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On Public Councils».

In Almaty region, such communities are active in 136 rural districts. They discuss local issues and propose solutions. If a problem can't be resolved locally, it is elevated to the district or regional level, and, if necessary, to the National Kurultai. This system ensures real-time feedback and allows for a prompt response to public needs.

A good example of this was the initiative to ease veterinary requirements for selling livestock during Kurban Ait. At the suggestion of the Public council, work was done with relevant departments, and a formal request was sent to the Veterinary Committee. As a result, the national livestock tracking system «Tort Tulik» was amended – allowing rural residents to participate freely in livestock sales in urban centers. This was especially important for low-income families.

Another key focus is preserving civic unity and inter-ethnic harmony.

We work closely with the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan on comprehensive projects involving Mothers' Councils, Councils of Elders, ethnocultural associations, and academic experts.

To strengthen public harmony and prevent social risks, over 380 events were held in the first four months of 2025 alone.

The Public Council of Almaty region is not a symbolic entity – it's a real force for civic influence.

Its strength lies in direct dialogue with residents, systematic work, and the ability to turn public initiatives into actual decisions and actions by government bodies.

– Residents of rural districts often turn directly to regional authorities, even though many issues could be solved locally. What is being done to strengthen local self-government, and what role do elected akims play in this process?

“

« We are working to build the capacity of akims and community members, with special focus on involving women, youth, and people with disabilities – so that local governance is inclusive and resilient»

– Strengthening local self-government is one of our key priorities. Almaty region has 136 rural districts, each with its own local community. These are real governing bodies – they make decisions about budget distribution, land use, and infrastructure. For instance, in Yenbekshikazakh district, road repair routes were determined, in Kegen, pastureland disputes were resolved, and in Talgar, a center for children with cerebral palsy was opened.

The cornerstone of this system is the district akim – elected by the people. This is not just a bureaucratic post, but a public mandate. Akims must solve issues at the local level and escalate them when necessary. This is how self-governance becomes truly responsive.

We are working to build the capacity of akims and community members, with special focus on involving women, youth, and people with disabilities – so that local governance is inclusive and resilient.

Public funding plays a major role. In 2024, 75 projects were implemented worth 1 billion tenge – from anti-corruption education to support for rural families and entrepreneurs. In Karasai district, microfinance training was offered for women, in Konaev, programs were launched for young leaders. In 2025, 901 million tenge has been allocated for such initiatives.

Currently, there are 12 public councils and 131 active communities, uniting over 1,400 people. Our goal is for every district to solve its own problems – without waiting for top-down intervention. That's what true self-governance is all about.

Ambassador of the European Union to Kazakhstan, Aleška Simkić:

CIVIL SOCIETY AS A DRIVER OF CHANGE: THE ROLE OF THE THIRD SECTOR IN EU–CENTRAL ASIA DIALOGUE



The European Union and the countries of Central Asia are taking their cooperation to a new level. In April 2025, Uzbekistan hosted the first-ever summit that marked the beginning of a new chapter in relations between the two regions. The focus is not only on trade and logistics but also on the development of green energy, digitalization, support for civil society, and the rule of law. The EU is already increasing its investments and launching specific projects in these areas, while Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, is increasingly defining its own priorities. In an interview with Adal Azamat, the EU Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Aleška Simkić, explained why now is a key moment for expanding the partnership and which initiatives the European Union plans to promote in the region in the near future.

1. In light of rapid geopolitical changes and global challenges, the expansion of interregional cooperation is gaining strategic relevance. In early April 2025, the first EU–Central Asia Summit was held in Uzbekistan. How would you personally assess the significance and outcomes of this event?

The first EU–Central Asia Summit in Uzbekistan was a timely and strategic step forward in interregional as well as intraregional cooperation. It showed strong mutual commitment, with Central Asian leaders warmly welcoming the EU's full engagement. Both sides aligned on key global issues, including support for the UN Charter and lasting peace in Ukraine, while also emphasizing the need to deepen practical cooperation.

The Summit made clear that the focus should now shift from dialogue to delivery—especially around the €12 billion Global Gateway Investment Package, which targets transport (€3 billion), critical raw materials

(€2.5 billion), water-energy-climate (€6.4 billion), and digital connectivity (€100 million). Key initiatives such as the first EU–Central Asia Declaration of Intent on Critical Raw Materials, the 2025–2026 Roadmap with Kazakhstan, and the planned Investors and Economic Forums in Uzbekistan reflect a forward-looking agenda that prioritizes sustainability, resilience, and economic diversification.

In parallel, the EU's expanding security dialogue with Central Asia, combined with tangible projects like the Sebzor hydropower plant in Tajikistan, digital connectivity initiatives in Kazakhstan, and the development of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor, demonstrate the concrete impact of this growing partnership. Major financial institutions such as the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) are playing a key role, with significant funding pledged for green energy, sustainable transport, and climate resilience across the

region. These efforts reflect a deepening EU–Central Asia relationship, grounded in shared priorities and long-term strategic significance.

Looking ahead, the EU should capitalize on this positive momentum by delivering on its commitments and sustaining high-level political engagement. And the Central Asian states need to identify and clarify their priorities and in constant dialogue communicate on them. With both maintaining strong interest, there is clear potential to transform this partnership into a lasting pillar of regional stability, economic opportunity, and sustainable development.

2. Among the areas for further cooperation with the EU highlighted by the President of Kazakhstan are green energy and digital technologies. Through the Team Europe initiative, the EU is already supporting us in the IT sector. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev proposed the establishment of a “Central Asia – European Union Innovation Campus” based at Astana Hub. The EU has also long been a vital partner for Kazakhstan in science and education. What role does civil society play in supporting these areas of cooperation?

The proposal by President Tokayev to establish a “Central Asia–EU Innovation Campus” at Astana Hub reflects Kazakhstan's strong commitment to deepening



cooperation with the EU in areas of strategic importance.

Certainly, civil society plays a crucial role in strengthening cooperation between Kazakhstan and the European Union, particularly in high-potential areas like green energy and digital innovation. While much of the institutional framework is led by governments and agencies, civil society – including think tanks, academic institutions, innovation hubs, and NGOs – brings flexibility, grassroots insight, and the ability to foster international networks that complement formal diplomacy.

Kazakhstan's participation in the Horizon Europe program is a strong example of how this cooperation can be made tangible. Through Horizon Europe – the EU's flagship research and innovation program – Kazakh institutions, including civil society actors, can engage in collaborative projects on climate resilience, sustainable energy, digital transformation, and more. Kazakhstan already has a growing presence in the program, with established National Contact Points and a track record of involvement in Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and Cluster 5 projects. This platform provides real, structured opportunities to connect researchers, innovators, and civil society stakeholders from Kazakhstan with their peers across Europe.

In addition, programs like Erasmus+ offers further potential to expand education and knowledge-sharing partnerships. Civil society has a key role to play here – not only by participating directly in projects, but

by raising awareness, building capacity, and fostering long-term relationships that help ensure these partnerships are inclusive, people-centered, and future-oriented.

3. March 2025 marks the fifth anniversary of the entry into force of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) between Kazakhstan and the EU. What positive outcomes have been achieved for our country during this time? Does the Agreement include provisions for cooperation with civil society organizations, and how are they being implemented?

“ These efforts emphasize the rule of law, good governance, and anti-corruption measures. EPCA has created conditions for advanced forms of cooperation – a process that is recently accelerating with, for example, cooperation on the Trans Caspian Corridor or on Critical Raw Materials”



4. Could you share more about the projects supported under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)? As far as we understand, EIDHR places strong emphasis on the role of civil society organizations and their operational independence, which is a key element of effective cooperation at the national level. How would you describe the EU's current dialogue with Kazakhstan's third sector?

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), now operating under the broader Thematic Program on Human Rights and Democracy (HRD), continues to be a cornerstone of the EU's commitment to advancing democratic principles and human rights globally. In Kazakhstan, the HRD program upholds the EIDHR's key features by supporting initiatives that promote democracy, the rule of law, and the universality and indivisibility of human rights. Through this program, the European Union places strong emphasis on empowering civil society organizations (CSOs), recognizing their operational independence and critical role in shaping democratic governance and defending fundamental freedoms.

Currently, the EU Delegation to Kazakhstan is managing five bilateral human rights projects under this program. These focus on diverse yet interlinked priorities: promoting human rights in the media, enhancing the capacity of CSOs to protect human rights, combating torture, safeguarding fundamental freedoms through civil society-led efforts, and strengthening the rule of law within Kazakhstan's criminal justice system. All these initiatives aim to foster stronger institutional interaction between civil society and public authorities, thereby contributing to a more democratic and rights-respecting national environment.

The EU's dialogue with Kazakhstan's third sector is active and multi-layered, reflecting a long-term strategic partnership. This dialogue is institutionalized through regular consultations held under the EU-Kazakhstan Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), the annual Civil Society Seminar, and frequent EU participation in civil society events and project monitoring activities. These engagements serve as platforms for open exchange and mutual learning, helping to address ongoing challenges such as restrictive legislation, limited funding access, and constraints on freedoms of association, expression, and assembly. Despite these obstacles, the EU continues to promote an enabling environment where civil society can operate independently and contribute meaningfully to national reforms.

Furthermore, the EU's support to civil society in Kazakhstan is part of a broader regional commitment in Central Asia. Through the NDICI

The fifth anniversary of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) between Kazakhstan and the European Union is a milestone that has brought notable progress across various sectors.

Since the EPCA's entry into force in 2020, Kazakhstan has strengthened its relationship with the EU, particularly in trade, governance, rule of law, and civil society development. The EU remains Kazakhstan's largest trading partner and foreign investor, supporting the country's economic reforms and political modernization efforts. These efforts emphasize the rule of law, good governance, and anti-corruption measures. EPCA has created conditions for advanced forms of cooperation – a process that is recently accelerating with, for example, cooperation on the Trans Caspian Corridor or on Critical Raw Materials.

As civil society cooperation is at the core of the EU's partnerships, the EPCA naturally includes provisions for cooperation with civil society organizations (CSOs). This commitment has been operationalized through initiatives like the EU Civil Society Facility for Central Asia, which aims to enhance the capacity of CSOs across the region. Implemented by UNOPS, this facility provides technical support and fosters dialogue between CSOs, governments, and international stakeholders.

Kazakhstan has actively participated in these initiatives, hosting events such as the fifth EU-Central Asia Civil Society Forum in Almaty in January 2025. This forum brought together representatives from EU institutions, UN agencies, regional governments, and civil society organizations to discuss regional cooperation on issues like gender equality, youth participation, digital transformation, and climate change. There was also a representation of the Kazakh government as the hosting party.

Furthermore, the EU has launched specific projects to support civil society in Kazakhstan. For instance, the «Coordinated Civil Society Action to Promote Rule of Law for All» project aims to strengthen the role of civil society in overseeing legal and justice reforms. This project provides resources and training to CSOs, enabling them to engage more effectively with the government and advocate for rights-driven reforms.

In summary, the EPCA has facilitated significant advancements in EU-Kazakhstan relations, particularly in empowering civil society. Through structured cooperation and targeted initiatives, both parties have demonstrated a commitment to fostering inclusive governance and sustainable development.

With this said, still much needs to be done. This is why regular dialogue in different formations will continue.

and the HRD program, the EU supports civil society initiatives ranging from legal advocacy and human rights education to environmental action and digital transformation. The Rule of Law Academy, a notable example within Kazakhstan, has significantly bolstered the legal and advocacy capacities of local CSOs. In 2024 alone, the Academy trained 42 representatives from across 13 regions and supported the creation of a National Network for the Rule of Law in Kazakhstan. These efforts, complemented by a multilingual online platform, demonstrate the EU's practical commitment to empowering civil society as a vital force for democratic change and sustainable development.

5. How is the EU working to enhance the capacity of civil society in Central Asia? Perhaps you could highlight examples such as the Rule of Law Academy for civil society representatives, the “ENABLE – Civil Society for a Sustainable and Energy-Efficient City” project, and other initiatives supported by the EU Delegation in Kazakhstan.

The EU supports Kazakhstan in green transition, digitalisation, decentralisation, local self-governance, and civil society development. It is crucial to involve civil society in decision-making at national, regional, and local levels to ensure these processes are transparent, inclusive, and responsive to citizens' needs. In Kazakhstan and across Central Asia, the EU provides targeted support to Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) through its two global thematic programs: the Human Rights and Democracy (HRD) program and the Civil Society Organisations (CSO) program. These efforts are central to empowering local actors to shape and influence public policy, while also ensuring accountability and sustainable development.

A strong example of this is the Rule of Law Academy, a strategic component of an ongoing EU-funded project in Kazakhstan. In 2024 alone, the Academy trained 42 civil society representatives from 13 regions, many representing organizations focused on vulnerable communities. By equipping CSOs with advocacy, monitoring, and legal engagement skills, the initiative has enhanced their ability to influence justice reform. It has also helped launch the National Network for the Rule of Law in Kazakhstan (NN-RLK) and is developing a multilingual Rule of Law Platform—an online resource to further support civil society's legal and policy engagement.

Another impactful initiative is the ENABLE – Empowered Civil Society for a Sustainable and Efficient City project, which promotes energy-efficient housing solutions in Astana, Almaty, and Petropavlovsk. Coordinated by the German CSO Housing Initiative for Eastern Europe (IWO), and implemented with Kazakh CSO partners, the project builds local civil

society capacity to analyze and develop solutions for the refurbishment of multi-family houses. This project is part of a broader portfolio of six CSO-led initiatives in Kazakhstan, each receiving €400,000 under the EU's 2023 Call to Support Civil Society. These projects range from improving environmental governance and monitoring state programs, to supporting local development through dialogue with government bodies and strengthening decentralized self-governance.

At the regional level, the EU is currently funding the EU Civil Society Facility in Central Asia, with a total budget of €4.5 million from 2024 to 2025. This initiative seeks to foster constructive engagement of CSOs across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Key activities include annual EU–Central Asia Civil Society Forums, technical training, support for youth-led organizations, and multi-stakeholder dialogues. The program, implemented by UNOPS in collaboration with the Danish Institute for Human Rights, aligns with the EU's strategic vision outlined in the Joint Roadmap for Deepening Ties between the EU and Central Asia (2023) and the EU–Central Asia Summit Declaration (2025)—affirming the central role of civil society in shaping accountable, resilient, and inclusive governance systems across the region.

6. Do you agree that there are areas where civil society organizations can deliver more effective solutions than government institutions? In funding NGOs, the state ultimately addresses the needs of its citizens, and thus, the country as a whole. In your view, how effective is the current NGO–government cooperation in Kazakhstan? What recommendations based on European experience could you share with us?

Yes, there are areas where civil society organizations (CSOs) can deliver more effective solutions than government institutions, particularly in fostering community engagement, advocating for marginalized groups, and implementing localized initiatives. CSOs often possess specialized knowledge, flexibility, and a closer connection to the communities they serve, enabling them to address specific needs more effectively.

In Kazakhstan, cooperation between NGOs and the government has made notable progress, though challenges remain. Arguably, in some areas, there are new elements, such as higher level of government's control over the independent NGOs. The government has recognized the importance of civil society organizations (CSOs) by allocating significant funding for initiatives supporting vulnerable groups and social development. Additionally, numerous collaborative social projects are implemented each year, focusing on areas such as assisting disadvan-



« Another impactful initiative is the ENABLE – Empowered Civil Society for a Sustainable and Efficient City project, which promotes energy-efficient housing solutions in Astana, Almaty, and Petropavlovsk»





tagged populations and promoting inclusive national identity. An important role is also played by the Public Councils at various levels.

To improve this cooperation, Kazakhstan could adopt best practices from Europe, such as enhancing transparency in funding and selection processes, strengthening the capacity of both government and NGOs, and fostering the independence of civil society. Regular dialogue platforms between the government and CSOs would also support more inclusive decision-making. These steps would help Kazakhstan better address societal challenges and strengthen democratic governance.

7. Public diplomacy is a powerful tool for building mutual understanding and a more tolerant world – especially relevant in the context of current geopolitical tensions and expanding global conflicts. In your opinion, are there unique characteristics in how public diplomacy is conducted in EU versus Kazakhstan? And how do you assess the potential of Kazakhstan’s civil society in strengthening international goodwill toward our country?

Public diplomacy in the European Union is deeply embedded in its broader foreign policy architecture and reflects the EU’s identity as a normative power. It is generally practiced through a wide, multilayered



network of institutions – including the European External Action Service, national cultural institutes like the Goethe-Institut or Institut Français, and various EU-funded academic and civil society programs. The focus is typically long-term and values-driven, emphasizing democracy, human rights, climate action, and multilateral cooperation. Importantly, EU public diplomacy often seeks to empower local actors in partner regions, not just communicate policy – which gives it a more horizontal, inclusive character.

Kazakhstan’s approach to public diplomacy, while still evolving, tends to be more centralized and focused on strategic messaging. The state promotes key narratives such as political modernization, interethnic

harmony, economic diversification, and its role as a geopolitical connector between East and West. In recent years, Kazakhstan has taken steps to strengthen cultural diplomacy, expand global academic partnerships, and improve its international media presence. However, much of this remains led by state institutions, and the space for bottom-up, people-to-people diplomacy is still emerging. This creates a certain asymmetry between Kazakhstan’s ambitions and its visibility abroad.

That said, Kazakhstan’s civil society holds meaningful – and still underutilized – potential to strengthen international goodwill. Young leaders, artists, academics, entrepreneurs, and grassroots NGOs could become vital carriers of Kazakhstan’s story, especially in dialogue with European counterparts. The country’s unique cultural identity, environmental consciousness, and multiethnic experience resonate with many global challenges today. If given more institutional support and international platforms, Kazakhstan’s civil society could play a much greater role in shaping a narrative that is not only strategic but also authentic, human-centered, and future-oriented – exactly what public diplomacy needs in these complex times.

Saltanat Esmagambetova:

A PROFESSION FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE HEART: HOW CHILDREN WITH ASD ARE SUPPORTED IN ASTANA



Like many other countries around the world, Kazakhstan is witnessing a growing number of children diagnosed with autism. On average, 1 in every 100 children globally lives with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). However, according to several controlled studies, the actual figure may be significantly higher. Just 20 years ago, autism was barely recognized in Kazakhstan. Today, more than 600 children receive support at the «ORDA» Public Association of Parents of Children with Autism in Astana. In an interview with Adal Azamat magazine, the Head of the Center, Saltanat Esmagambetova, shared insights into the challenges faced by parents of children with ASD, the shortage of specialists, and the situation in public kindergartens and schools.

– What are the main challenges parents of children with autism face?

– The biggest challenge is knowing where to turn – what specialists to consult, what autism actually means, whether there is a «pill», and whether to start with medication or focus on therapy and intervention. There are various correctional centers, medical treatments, and a wide range of alternative methods used around the world, such as biomedical therapy, chelation, electrical stimulation, and auditory therapy. Parents often get lost in this sea of options, not knowing what truly works. That's why it's so important for a parent who, say, walks into a clinic, to be given a clear action plan and a step-by-step roadmap for support.

As a child with autism grows, parents encounter new challenges at each stage – first with access to kindergartens and early interventions, then with school, college, university, and employment.

It's essential to determine the exact form of autism and what kind of support the state, commercial, and nonprofit sectors can provide. Time is our biggest enemy. Unfortunately, we see many cases where parents chase after questionable treatments and lose valuable time, missing critical developmental windows. Every parent goes through the emotional stages of «anger», «bargaining», «denial», and eventually, «acceptance». The sooner a parent accepts the reality of the diagnosis, the sooner effective support mechanisms can be put into place.

– How suitable is Astana for raising a child with autism?

– Astana offers many opportunities for children with autism. My own child is now 19. Back in 2006, when he was born, hardly anyone in Kazakhstan even knew what autism was, let alone how to help. Today, both public and private centers offer advanced Western methods of correctional education. While not all methods have proven scientific effectiveness, many do help improve children's overall condition.

As an expert in correctional pedagogy for children with ASD, I can confidently say that Astana is a place where every parent can find a method that works for their child – helping nonverbal children start to



speak, supporting home-schooled children in transitioning to school, and more. In my opinion, Astana is on par with our Western partners. As part of our «Orda Autism» project, we collaborate with partners from Europe, Turkey, Russia, and other countries. Our Center uses up-to-date techniques and correctional tools to improve the well-being of children with autism.

– Are public kindergartens and schools ready to accommodate children with autism?

– I believe that both in Astana and across Kazakhstan, the conditions are quite good. Most public kindergartens now include special correctional groups. Many schools have become inclusive, and more and more children are being integrated into inclusive education. Inclusive support rooms have been set up in schools to adapt curricula to students' needs. Many schools also have sensory-friendly spaces. Each child is assigned a tutor, which is essential for developing communication, social interaction with classmates, and integration into the school environment and broader infrastructure. Correctional schools also remain in operation for children who cannot attend mainstream institutions. Over the past five to seven years, access to education for children with autism has increased significantly. So yes, the conditions are solid—and we, as parents of special children, see and appreciate that.

– What is the situation regarding specialists? Is there a noticeable shortage?

– In our field, human capital is everything. It's very difficult to find trained specialists. Few people are willing to pursue degrees in defectology, social work, or special education. To be honest, there isn't a queue of candidates lining up to work with us. But we value

and hold on to those we have. We offer professional development courses, training sessions, and other forms of continuous learning. Some of our staff are educated not only in Kazakhstan but also abroad. We apply the best practices available in rehabilitation and social adaptation.

Part of our staffing needs are filled by mothers of children with autism. Every mother wants to help her own child and is motivated to master professional methods.

Among our specialists, some have worked with us for over five to seven years, while others are new. For newcomers, a lot of groundwork is needed – including professional immersion. This work is truly a calling.



Universities and schools don't teach people how to care. That comes from within. It's a deeply personal mission, a need to help others.

Words can't capture the emotional weight our staff carry – the way they internalize each child's journey, their pain, their victories. It's no wonder burnout is an issue. To address this, we conduct training, seminars, and team-building sessions to strengthen the team and offer emotional support. Still, some do leave – even after years of work. It's always hard to say goodbye. Many who leave this profession don't return, they change fields entirely. Sometimes, continuing just becomes emotionally unbearable.

– Are there programs in place to prepare children for independent living and social adaptation?



– We currently operate four branches in Astana and are planning to open a fifth one. It will focus entirely on youth aged 18 and older. It will follow a new instructional model and function more like a social club, where young people with autism can receive guidance and support. In 2024, we also opened a social cafe and pizzeria, where teens and young people aged 18 and over from our Center now work.

– How many children are currently receiving support at your Center? Is it difficult to access your services?

– At present, our organization supports more than 600 children in Astana. Accessing our services is not difficult. Families need to prepare a list of documents and submit them to the Public Service Center. These are then forwarded to the Department of Employment and Social Protection, which issues a referral. After that, we begin working with the child and their family. Each child receives support from speech therapists, special education teachers, psychologists, sensory integration therapists, play therapists, and art therapists. We also provide adaptive physical education. Services extend beyond the Center as well – group swimming classes, trips to the hippodrome, and other cultural and recreational events in the city are included in our service package.

– What kind of support is available for parents? Are training sessions or consultations offered to Astana residents?



– Our organization was founded in 2016 by parents of children with autism. At the time, all of us were stay-at-home mothers. Initially, our space wasn't even a correctional center – it was simply a safe and comfortable environment where we could begin helping our own children. Today, our centers are equipped with the latest technologies, and we work with the entire family – not just the child. Our social workers visit families at home and, depending on what they see, may take independent action. For instance, if a child is ill and the mother needs to take them to the hospital, the social worker might buy groceries or deliver medicine. If there are psychological issues within the family, we provide access to a psychologist. Last year, 365 families received such support.

We also offer psychological and educational training for parents, and arrange meetings with the Mental Health Center and leading psychiatrists and experts.

Just as important for mothers is the chance to take a break from the demands of caregiving. We organize creative workshops – soap-making, takiya-making, and more. When you're with your child 24/7, year after year, it's difficult to find time for yourself. That's why we've built a rich and varied program not just for children, but also for mothers – outings to the cinema, circus, theatre, ballet, water parks, and more. It's a comprehensive package for the whole family.

– Thank you for this conversation!

Vladislav Golyarko:

TURNING WASTE INTO PROFIT AND AN IDEA INTO REALITY



Civil society is, first and foremost, about active and caring individuals who are ready to make the world around them a better place. While major cities may already be home to many such change-makers, engaging in socially meaningful work in rural areas requires a different level of commitment. All the more telling, then, is the story of Vladislav Golyarko, a social entrepreneur and eco-activist from Turkistan region.

Even a virtual encounter with such a person is a stroke of luck for any journalist. When someone speaks with passion about their work – and when that work is already producing real results – you feel it instantly, even from afar.

That was certainly the case with Vladislav. Though our conversation took place remotely, after speaking with him and watching his videos on YouTube, I couldn't help but admire what he's achieved. People like him are the ones who keep the world turning. And while his work may still be focused on citizens of his native village, the model he's building has the potential to be replicated across Kazakhstan – and, in time, to inspire an entire generation of environmentally aware citizens.

It all started when Vladislav decided to tackle the massive garbage dump he saw every day outside his window at his native village of Aksukent, near Shymkent. The smell, the fires – none of it seemed to concern the local authorities. With no trash containers provided, villagers simply dumped their garbage on a fenced concrete platform, which kept growing in size.

There's a saying: «If you want to change the world, start with yourself». That's exactly what Vladislav did. He came up with a plan to set up a recycling system that would also benefit local residents. The idea was to combine the processes of separate waste collection and the acceptance of recyclable materials. This non-standard approach made it possible not only to sort waste, but also to sell it right there on the spot.

– Back in 2015, I realized that landfills could be transformed into secondary raw materials marketplaces, – Vladislav recalls. – If it's raw material, then it's valuable to someone – so why not sell it directly from our own yards? But it wasn't until 2019 that the idea came to life. The dump outside his house had already been cleared – thanks to the local government, which built a park in its place – but the containers that followed were Vladislav's doing. His team installed them and created a system where the proceeds from recyclables would benefit the surrounding apartment blocks.

With the first grant won by the founders of the Public Association «Istoki Dobra», where Vladislav serves as



executive director, the team launched the Eco Evolution project and purchased the first batch of sorting containers. They gradually expanded the operation, acquiring equipment such as baling presses, shredders, and sorting lines. In the beginning, the team personally educated villagers on how to sort waste and keep their environment clean.

– After discussions with residents, in November 2018 we set up four waste collection sites – one for every two apartment buildings. Each site had four containers: for glass, metal, plastic, and paper, and a separate one for general waste. Information boards in Kazakh and Russian explained exactly what goes where. We also held awareness sessions with the residents. And little by little, it all started to work, – says the eco-activist.

Having grown up without a father or brothers, Vladislav learned from a young age not to shy away from challenges – always moving forward. Encouraged by the first results of his efforts, he began seeking new development opportunities. That's how he ended up participating in Kazakhstan's first ecological reality show, «EcoMeken», aired on the «Khabar» TV channel in the fall of 2021.

Contestants of the reality show studied environmental issues on a national scale and learned how to build a business. Three finalists were selected, and 34-year-old Vladislav Golyarko won first place and a 10



« Back in 2015, I realized that landfills could be transformed into secondary raw materials marketplaces, – Vladislav recalls. – If it's raw material, then it's valuable to someone – so why not sell it directly from our own yards?»

million tenge grant! He presented the idea for a service company, «Eco Cashback», specializing in the collection and processing of recyclables – a company he launched in 2022.

Recognizing the advantages of digitalization in simplifying recycling, «Eco Cashback» developed a mobile app of the same name, available in the App Store and Play Market. For example, if you want to recycle plastic, electronics, or batteries, you fill out a form, attach a photo, and your request appears in the app. Then, a partner sorting company collects the waste for a set fee. No unnecessary costs or hassle!

Based on the same principle, Vladislav also opened a social store where people can exchange waste for discounted groceries. In March 2023, his company began accepting food waste, which is mixed with additives and vitamins to produce pet food.

– Kazakhstan faces a serious problem with waste processing and disposal. Around 80% of recyclable material ends up in landfills, where millions of tons



« But I'm really glad that in recent times, there's been support from the government. As part of the large-scale «Taza Kazakhstan» eco-campaign, we're invited to events where we can share our experience. We also collaborate with other environmental NGOs. As part of training and knowledge exchange, I've had the chance to visit the U.S. and several European countries»



of household waste have already accumulated, – says Vladislav. – We tried to find a comprehensive solution to the environmental issues associated with waste. The «Eco Cashback» project aims to sign contracts with companies, organize separate waste collection from households, and purchase and sell recyclables. The money that entrepreneurs and residents earn from their waste is transferred to a shared account for the building, and is then used for improvements, repairs, and landscaping. That's how the eco-cashback works – your eco-friendly behavior earns you a tangible reward.

What's especially important is that this mindful attitude toward nature has started to take root among local children. They already know how to properly sort waste into the right bins, understand why it matters, and are trying to keep their courtyards clean. Areas around apartment buildings have become noticeably cleaner, and residents have begun organizing more clean-up events. In fact, residents of buildings that haven't yet joined the project are now requesting for waste-sorting sites to be installed near them too – a good example truly is contagious.

Today, Vladislav runs a successful waste sorting business. He sells all types of plastic, metal, and glass to factories in Shymkent and neighboring cities that manufacture goods from recycled materials. But this isn't just a business in the traditional sense – profit is not the main goal.

– I could've just been an entrepreneur, without building this system, without investing in my village's



development, without helping people become more environmentally conscious, or doing landscaping work. But I chose a different path. Because I understand that through this waste management system, rural areas can be developed, investment attracted, and local budgets increased. A social entrepreneur focuses less on profit and more on improving the environment around them, – my interviewee shares.

There are many ways to benefit society and the environment. But doing so systematically and strategically – like Vladislav does – is far more effective. For example, in addition to Vladislav, the «Eco Cashback» company employs 19 people, 70% of whom – loaders, sorters, and drivers – were hired through a government employment program.

Vladislav is also committed to educating anyone interested in how to implement this system in their own communities, sharing the ins and outs and potential pitfalls. His main goal is to promote a successful environmental case study across Kazakhstan.

– We've submitted this proposal – to change the waste management system – to a variety of authorities more than once. Right now, our cities simply collect and sort trash, then send it to landfills. But this isn't efficient. Most materials that could be recycled are so contaminated by the time they get there that recycling becomes impossible, – says the entrepreneur, who seems more concerned with public benefit. – I'm not focused on growing a business as such – I want to spread this ecological model and show that it's more motivational, more effective, and more understandable for residents. I've seen it work in practice and get positive responses. Now people are selling their recyclables directly from their homes. But in the future, those payouts could be phased out, and the habit of sorting waste would remain. I think it'll take 10 to 15 years to get there.

Vladislav Golyarko is a naturally charismatic and outgoing person. And when he talks about his work, he can captivate anyone. People who've interacted with him and his business often go on to share his story, helping spread awareness and boosting his media presence.

He admits that his current capacity isn't enough to serve more private and public institutions or residents of single-family homes – even though interest keeps growing. His company's warehouse is just over 300 square meters, and with the prize money from the reality show, he was only able to buy two trucks.

– So in our case, demand exceeds supply, – Vladislav laughs. – But I'm really glad that in recent times, there's been support from the government. As part of the large-scale «Taza Kazakhstan» eco-campaign, we're invited to events where we can share our experience. We also collaborate with other environmental NGOs. As part of training and knowledge exchange, I've had the chance to visit the U.S. and several European countries.



« Vladislav is also committed to educating anyone interested in how to implement this system in their own communities, sharing the ins and outs and potential pitfalls. His main goal is to promote a successful environmental case study across Kazakhstan.»

However, to truly expand and scale this effective eco-project from rural southern Kazakhstan, the legislation needs to be improved. Vladislav Golyarko suggests a clear policy at the city, district, and regional levels: two companies should operate in the waste management sector – one that collects all recyclable materials from households, sorts and sends them to specialized plants, and another that deals with non-recyclable waste, handling its disposal and burial.

If such a law is passed, it could become widely implemented within just two to three years, the eco-activist believes. And this would undoubtedly improve both the environmental situation in Kazakh cities and villages – and the well-being of their residents. Because when a dump is visible and «felt» from your window, it doesn't always inspire personal growth, as it did in Vladislav's case – more often, it has the opposite effect.

Abylaikhan Abdrash:

«OVER TIME, NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS WILL BE ABLE TO OPERATE ON AN EQUAL FOOTING WITH THE GOVERNMENT»



Abylaikhan Abdrash is a young surgeon, public figure, and founder of the Republican Association «Medical Youth». In six years, he has built one of the most active volunteer networks in the healthcare sector. Today, he represents the interests of Kazakhstan's medical youth and shares his views on the role of civil society in the country's future with «Adal Azamat».

Abylaikhan Abdrash showed interest in medicine and health from an early age. However, it was his parents who had a special influence on his choice of profession. Following their advice, he chose to become a surgeon and entered medical university. In his opinion, medicine is a unique field compared to others. It requires thorough preparation and long-term education. The responsibility of doctors is very high. Today, he has no regrets about his choice and proudly says he has found his calling.

During his studies, Abylaikhan showed an interest in public work. As a student, he became seriously concerned with the development of medical volunteering for the benefit of the country and came up with the idea of creating a non-governmental organization in this field. At one of the national conventions of medical universities, Abylaikhan Abdrash delivered a speech and shared his idea with the student representatives. Soon, in 2019, the Republican Public Association «Medical Youth» was established, uniting university leaders. Its main goals became the development of medical volunteering, increasing public health literacy, protecting the rights of all citizens involved in the medical field aged 18 to 35, assisting with employment, and addressing problems faced during education and work.

Over the past six years, the organization has

implemented many projects. For example, in 2019, a group of 200 medical volunteers immediately began providing assistance after the explosion in Arys. They honorably handled everything – from financial support to first aid. This was their first major experience as young activists. The pandemic period also became a serious challenge.

«During the COVID-19 pandemic, which shook everyone, starting in February, about 500 medical volunteers fought the serious illness and worked tirelessly alongside doctors in the hospital «red zones», – said the activist.

Abylaikhan Abdrash received a grant through a special program and opened medical volunteer schools across the country to fight the pandemic. Experienced specialists trained about 2,000 volunteers and conducted a series of systematic seminars and trainings.

In 2021, under a grant from the Ministry of Culture and Information, volunteers participated in the Birgemiz: Saulq project and helped nearly 30,000 people. They assisted patients in hospices and oncology dispensaries and also provided legal support for hospitalized patients.

In 2022, the project «Dreams Come True» was implemented. It helped fulfill the cherished wishes of more than 100 seriously ill children. «Trees of Dreams» bearing children's wishes were placed in major shopping centers across the country. Alongside ordinary Kazakhstanis, philanthropists also took part in this campaign and made significant financial contributions.

According to Abylaikhan, when the organization first began its work, it didn't receive state support right away. For 2-3 years, the public activists operated without any grants. Volunteers in Shymkent, Karaganda, Semey, Almaty, Astana, and Aktope – where medical universities are located – had to rely solely on their own strength. But in the end, a strong team was formed, capable of overcoming any difficulties.

Reflecting on his student years, Abylaikhan says that youth then viewed public service as part of their social and professional path. There were many activists, and they all strove to benefit society. Although today it is slightly more difficult to attract students to public work, the number of medical volunteers has not decreased. Young people visit hospices and dispensaries – where their help is especially needed. And every activist understands that this work allows them to master all the intricacies of their chosen profession.

«This is invaluable experience. Our activities help develop volunteers' leadership skills. They also come to understand that their main life mission is to help others», – says Abylaikhan Abdrash.

In his opinion, the work of medical volunteers is priceless. Their efforts nurture love for humanity. That's likely why the list of volunteers grows every year. And thanks to social media, information is now available openly and transparently.

To attract young professionals to the field, last year Republican Public Association «Medical Youth» organized the first Republican Ball for medical youth. Five hundred students gathered together. At the forum, they not only discussed reproductive health but also showcased their talents. The event became a significant step in raising the prestige of the medical profession and promoting volunteerism. Abylaikhan plans to continue organizing similar events in the coming years to highlight and discuss the most pressing issues in the medical sector.

«Youth is a golden time when, in addition to studies, one can make the most of experience and search for something new. One must understand the value of every moment. Today, students mostly dedicate this time to earning money. I would advise young people to focus on other important things – to gain experience and actively participate in public life. This is when the foundation of life is laid. Don't be afraid – implement your good ideas. This is exactly the time to act without stopping», – he believes.

Abylaikhan has many plans for the development of public work. He dreams of creating a portal to unite medical youth. According to the activist, if this project is implemented, it will establish direct contact between the population and medical volunteers. This digital resource will undoubtedly

«Youth is a golden time when, in addition to studies, one can make the most of experience and search for something new. One must understand the value of every moment»

make a significant contribution to popularizing the work of the public association. Abylaikhan also believes the government should support medical students. That is, when young professionals enter residency or begin their medical careers, their public work should be taken into account and possibly counted as work experience. He is now working to bring this initiative to life. In his view, awarding additional academic points for volunteer activity in universities would also encourage students to participate in public service.

Over the course of six years, Abylaikhan Abdrash has accumulated substantial experience in the field of public associations. He has developed his own perspective on the development of NGOs in Kazakhstan. The activist believes that compared to previous years, working in civil society organizations has become easier, and the scope of available opportunities has expanded. There is support from the state, and the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan is organizing many events. Grants are allocated to NGOs, and conditions are being created for the implementation of innovative solutions by civil society groups. All this information is publicly available through social media. NGOs, seeing this, can determine their future direction. According to Abylaikhan, thanks to this trend, in 10 years NGOs in Kazakhstan will be able to operate on an equal footing with the government. He firmly believes that the status and prestige of public associations will only continue to grow in the future.

Ethnic Diversity in Kazakhstan

Under One Shanyrak

Total population

20,283,399
people

Population by ethnicity

Share of the total population

Kazakhs	14,456,709	71.274%
Russians	2,963,938	14.613%
Uzbeks	678,487	3.345%
Ukrainians	371,807	1.833%
Uighurs	305,648	1.507%
Germans	223,272	1.101%
Tatars	218,926	1.08%
Azerbaijanis	155,364	0.766%
Koreans	120,686	0.595%
Turks	91,732	0.452%
Dungans	86,067	0.424%
Belarusians	74,389	0.367%
Tajiks	58,712	0.289%
Kurds	51,171	0.252%
Kyrgyz	40,200	0.198%
Chechens	35,084	0.173%
Poles	34,173	0.168%
Karakalpaks	28,931	0.143%
Bashkirs	20,159	0.099%
Others	—	1.322%

Source: Bureau of National Statistics, ASPIR RK, 2023

Irina Terentyeva:

«MOBILITY AND HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION – THAT'S WHAT MAKES NGOS SO APPEALING»



The Association of Legal Entities «Civil Alliance of Akmola region» includes about 200 associate members, of which 90 are actively working and interacting with one another. For nearly 10 years – half the alliance's existence – it has been led by Irina Terentyeva, head of the public foundation «Development and Support of Psychological Culture».

– Irina Mikhailovna, your regional alliance began with just five organizations, and today it has grown into a serious and respected association. In recent years, the founding membership has changed significantly. What is at the heart of a civil organization?

– Most NGOs are born from personal experience. For example, a child is ill, or there's a specific environmental issue that needs attention.

The first illusion is: «Let's create an organization – then we'll be able to reach society, influence the law, and bring about change». But that's a long

road. What sets an organization apart from a lone civic activist is the ability not only to criticize, but to propose specific solutions.

Because of this, many organizations quickly experience emotional fatigue. «We thought forming an NGO would solve everything. But now we have to apply for grants, learn how to set goals and plan problem-solving mechanisms, form a team, develop recommendations...».

Why do you think there are so many sectors where NGOs are active? Because it's always about supporting citizen initiatives. The Civil Alliance simply creates the conditions – training seminars, consultations, information.

To avoid early burnout, we advise new NGOs to first take part in someone else's project – to handle just one piece of the work. At the same time, we have stable organizations like «Zhenskiy luch» led by Oksana Volkova-Mikhailskaya in Stepnogorsk and «Angel» led by Lyudmila Petrova in Atbasar. These groups have made NGO work their main focus and are constantly searching for resources to implement their ideas.

There are also mid-level organizations where people dedicate only part of their time to social activity. This means that existing programs cannot be equally useful to all organizations.

You also need persistence. One person might write ten project proposals a year and win only one, while another gives up after the first rejection. Some organizations work only with business – looking for sponsors, collecting donations, uniting people to solve local problems – and say: «That's enough for us to be heard».

The more we develop, the more we understand that NGOs themselves will continue to evolve, and everyone chooses their own path.

– At one point, there was an effort to register as many NGOs as possible, under the assumption that this would help civil society develop faster. Does quantity matter?

– Of course not. We now understand that numbers are not the main indicator. In fact, overpromising can mislead people – offering them a «bright future» through registration, but they

« What sets an organization apart from a lone civic activist is the ability not only to criticize, but to propose specific solutions»

end up facing a lack of funding, the need to find resources for their idea, endless meetings and having to justify their point of view. That's not something everyone is ready for.

We've come to realize that we don't need a large number of legally registered organizations. What's more important is knowing that many colleagues are working on similar issues. We can share experience and combine our developments – this gives us a stronger collective voice.

– In what other areas have you had to reassess your approach?

– Our main focus and responsibility lies with our target groups. We must

learn to help them solve their issues and teach them how to do it themselves – instead of endlessly patronizing them and cultivating what's known as «learned helplessness».

Over the last couple of years, we've managed to develop several directions in Akmola region. First, legal literacy.

We need educational projects for the population. To do this, we cooperate with ombudspersons for human rights and child protection, and we hold open-door days to identify residents' problems and better tailor our efforts.

The second thing that needs to be seriously addressed is measuring the level of satisfaction of the population's basic needs. Moreover, people themselves must specifically understand



« Still, as we choose our path, we often look for encouragement from the state. We want recognition for our work, which perhaps reflects some remaining immaturity in the civic sector. If we are truly partners, we should be moving toward one another – not just expecting to be recognized for our role in society»

what needs they want to satisfy.

Third is building an inclusive society. People in organizations supporting children and adults with developmental challenges often live and work in isolation, believing only they can understand each other. Fortunately, this stereotype is starting to change, and there's still a lot to be done to educate the broader community...

And fourth is overall societal development. The government has done much to meet people's basic needs. We've learned how to solve problems. But now we need creative people who know how to take the country further.

– How is the relationship between NGOs, business, and government changing?

– It used to be enough to approach a businessman and ask for help for a specific family – we were a bridge between the problem and the solution. But now everything is changing. Intermediaries are no longer needed. Businesses are becoming socially res-

sponsible and solving these problems themselves.

And we're moving toward them – providing commercial services, learning the basics of business planning, not just social project planning.

Today, we're competing in the same environment as business entities. We have to meet all the same legal requirements. When we apply for government order or grants, LLPs, sole proprietors, and NGOs all apply under the same terms. That's a serious issue.

For years, we told our target groups: come for a free consultation. But now we realize that's incorrect – someone paid for that consultation. Maybe the government, through social orders or grants, or another program administrator.

Organizations that provide social services now need a license from the state. They can't just gather vulnerable children or adults and provide help. They must prove to the government that they have the facilities, qualified staff, technology, and effective programs.

These changes are making our work more professional and transparent. We understand that to further develop and professionalize the sector, NGOs will need accreditation for many of their activities.

Still, as we choose our path, we often look for encouragement from the state. We want recognition for our work, which perhaps reflects some remaining immaturity in the civic sector. If we are truly partners, we should be moving toward one another – not just expecting to be recognized for our role in society.

Demands on leaders are also increasing. People in NGOs gain project management skills, and having gone through the school of civil society, they can later work in government or business – where those skills are equally valuable.

– But some people find their place and feel comfortable in NGOs...

– What draws people here is horizontal communication. I can only negotiate – there's no hierarchy, no

punishments or rewards. We talk and persuade. Horizontal structures like this exist only in NGOs, and some people find them very comfortable.

Flexibility is appealing too – for example, you can take a break from work while waiting for a new idea to form. At the same time, there are always deadlines and a need to find ways to implement those ideas. Otherwise, burnout is a real risk – when you don't see an endpoint to your efforts.

What attracts me personally is the mobility – we don't have to go through

complex approvals. We can try our ideas right away or drop them if they don't work.

– Tell us about the work on the NGO bill and changes to the state social order system.

– I've been included in the working group developing the advisory document for the new law. Our job is to present our vision and proposals, which legal experts will then draft. There are existing laws on public

associations, religious organizations, political parties, and nonprofit organizations – but there's never been a separate law on NGOs. Creating one is a big step forward in developing civil society.

The more people a law affects, the better it is. The NGO law should be clear not only for NGOs themselves, but also for government bodies and our target groups. Only then will it be truly effective.

– Is the issue of funding important in this context?

– Political parties are funded through the state budget and membership fees. The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan supports the work of regional cultural centers. But NGOs don't and won't have this kind of financing.

We are the foundation of society when it comes to self-organization and self-regulation. The state provides the framework – but it doesn't make promises or dictate terms.

That's why I don't think the law should regulate this issue – doing so would contradict the very logic of civil society development.



« The government has done much to meet people's basic needs. We've learned how to solve problems. But now we need creative people who know how to take the country further»

Inara Namazbayeva:

«A WOMAN WHO BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER» – THE POWER OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN TURKISTAN REGION



Kazakhstan's regions are seeing rapid growth of the non-governmental sector. Residents of towns and villages alike are actively engaged in public life and making significant contributions to the country's development. In an interview with Adal Azamat, Inara Namazbayeva – Chairman of the «Civil Alliance of Turkistan Region» and the Public Association «Association of Businesswomen of Turkistan Region» – spoke about how this sector is evolving in the region, the role of NGOs in the lives of citizens, and the impact of the organizations she leads.



– Inara Abdigapparovna, you are one of the most active public figures in the Turkistan region. What led you to choose this path?

– I was born in Turkistan. After graduating from high school, I enrolled at Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University and later transferred to the Kazakh State Academy of Management in Almaty. My professional journey began at the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Kazakhstan. I studied the specifics of business management and the nuances of entrepreneurship from an academic perspective.

In 2009, I returned to my hometown and started a business. Over time, I became more involved in public work. After being elected as a deputy of the regional maslihat, I wanted to take a more active part in improving people's lives and solving current challenges. I've always combined my duties as a deputy with work in the non-governmental sector. For example, I lead the regional branches of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan and the Association of Businesswomen in order to contribute to the development of this field.

What is the focus of the Association of Businesswomen of Turkistan Region? Which areas do you personally emphasize?

– The Association of Businesswomen of Kazakhstan is a republican public NGO uniting women who work in the business sector. These are women involved in politics, public administration, business, science, education, healthcare, culture, and other fields. Our community is divided into three major sections: the «Golden Fund», the «Core Membership», and the «Youth Wing».

We hold meetings with respected mothers from the «Golden Fund», listen to their instructive stories, and take note of their valuable advice. The «Youth Wing» is also very active, led by a dynamic leader. It includes young women aged 18 to 35 – entrepreneurs, doctors, preschool directors, and other professionals. We bring these women together in a supportive environment and highlight female leaders who successfully balance both professional duties and household responsibilities, setting a powerful example for others. These women are



energetic, beautiful, and strong in spirit. They not only run successful businesses but also bring joy and warmth to their homes.

– What were the backgrounds of some of the members? What have they achieved?

– The Association of Businesswomen of Turkistan Region aims to attract active women who can become the drivers of positive change. We work not only with businesswomen, but also with mothers of large families, single mothers, and women from various professions. We organize seminars and training sessions for them and hold charity events together. This has become our standard approach.

Thanks to this broad outreach, the Association is home to women who are loving mothers and caring wives at home, and tireless workers, leaders, and organizers in the workplace. No matter how strong or successful a Kazakh woman leader may be, she is traditionally seen as standing one step below a man. This is a matter of nature, tradition, and upbringing. And it is this cultural trait that distinguishes us from gender institutions in other countries.

– How actively are businesswomen in the Turkistan region involved in the Association's work?

– Women make a significant contribution to social development. This is a time for those who can successfully combine family and career. I can confidently say that women who have not only established themselves in a competitive, high-risk business environment but have also achieved success are very active in entrepreneurship. These women are leaders in both urban and rural settings, and others are inspired by their example. Today, many of them are united under the Association of Businesswomen of Turkistan Region. I should also note that in the past year, we established a branch of the Association in the Sauran district.

As Chairman of the Association and a regional maslihat deputy, I try to stay in close contact

with women and mothers, and I'm actively involved in addressing their concerns.

Among our core goals is to promote the life paths and achievements of mothers who've made a mark in the country's history, as well as of modern, successful women. We aim to foster diligence, resilience, and business acumen in every woman.

Running a business is a serious and demanding responsibility – our women entrepreneurs understand this well. That's why they give back through charity, create socially useful products, and treat high-quality service as a duty. The result of their hard work is progress and success. Our people have always shown deep respect for the image of a mother who could both rock a cradle and conquer the world. Today, women are actively engaged in politics, business, and all areas of the economy alongside men – distinguishing themselves through their competence, talent, and professionalism. They make an enormous contribution to our nation's prosperity.

– In which projects have you participated as a public figure?

– Since 2023, with the support of the Department of Public Development and within the framework of the state social order, the project «Supporting the development of civil society

organizations in rural areas and engaging them in the implementation of social ideas and projects» has been implemented in the region. As part of this initiative, citizens received small grants and were able to achieve their set goals. Their social projects were carried out in rural areas of the region.

With the efforts of rural youth, regular environmental campaigns were organized. At the initiative of local residents, solar-powered streetlights were installed in villages. In Tulku-bas district, seminars on tourism development were held. Within the framework of the project «Nature Cannot Speak for Itself», the shores of the Shardara reservoir were cleaned, and waste containers were installed. Under the «Ogem» project, a center supporting environmental initiatives is operating. The «Village Park» project of the district branch of the Council of Veterans and Afghan War Invalids of Turkistan Region in Sauran district became an initiative for the planned greening of rural settlements. The public association «Dara Urpaq» implemented a project aimed at creating conditions for the personal growth of 30 women. The district women's council of Ordabasy district is implementing the projects «Family Values» and «A Family Without Violence is a Happy Family».

– What measures have been taken and implemented within the activities of the Civil Alliance of Turkistan Region?

– First and foremost, it should be noted that the Civil Alliance of Turkistan Region provides legal consultations to civil society organizations and individuals both online and offline on various issues. Within the framework of the project «The Role of NGOs in the Development of Local Self-Governance in Rural Areas», the capacity of NGO initiative groups in 17 districts and cities of the region was strengthened. These initiatives provided support to socially vulnerable groups. We contributed significantly to the development of culture, the arts, and civil society.

We organized the 11th Civil Forum of the Turkistan Region on the topic «The Role of the Civil Sector as an Integral Part of the National Development Strategy in Implementing the Principles and Methods of Family and Gender Policy». During the forum, a comprehensive analysis of the situation concerning women's rights was conducted, and recommendations were developed for both non-governmental organizations and government bodies regarding gender policy. As part of the family and gender policy project, 13 seminars and training sessions were held.

Most of my parliamentary inquiries are directly related to the activities of non-governmental organizations united under the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan. They address issues of state support for the NGO sector, the implementation of new national-level projects by the Civil Alliance in our region, proposed changes to legal and regulatory acts concerning civil society, and the allocation of small grants for civic initiatives. Thanks to these grants, rural residents have been able to develop green spaces, build sports grounds, and improve entire streets.

– How would you characterize the current state of the non-governmental sector in Kazakhstan?

– The President of Kazakhstan places great emphasis on the development of civil society institutions, including NGOs. The volume of government support is increasing every year. The role of NGOs in solving issues of national importance – particularly at the regional level – is expanding. I would also note that their level of activity is visibly growing.

«Running a business is a serious and demanding responsibility – our women entrepreneurs understand this well. That's why they give back through charity, create socially useful products, and treat high-quality service as a duty. The result of their hard work is progress and success. Our people have always shown deep respect for the image of a mother who could both rock a cradle and conquer the world»



Islambek Dastan:

«A DROP CAN WEAR AWAY THE STONE»: ON THE ROLE OF NGOS, YOUTH, AND THE FUTURE OF CIVIL SOCIETY



Zhambyl region is home to many non-governmental organizations working in a variety of areas. These NGOs are brought together under the umbrella of the «Zhambyl Regional Civil Alliance», a platform for coordination and support.

In an interview with Adal Azamat magazine, Islambek Dastan, Chairman of the Civil Alliance of Zhambyl Region, shared his vision for the development of civil society in the region and the role of NGOs in this process.



– Islambek, how did you first become involved in the NGO sector? What inspires you to engage in public service today?

– I got involved in the NGO sector during my student years. Since then, I've felt a strong desire to help solve social issues, contribute to improving the well-being of our people, and make life more comfortable for them – that's why I chose this path. What inspires me most is seeing tangible results from public service. When you see those results, it gives you real strength and motivation to serve your country. That's something I've experienced personally.

– What kinds of projects have you already implemented?

– To date, we've implemented around 50 projects, including three at the national level. In 2019, we successfully carried out two national projects, and in 2021 – one more. I now focus on supporting initiatives that are important to citizens, especially young people.

For example, at the National Kurultai in Atyrau last year, the Head of State instructed that a National Book Day be established.

The President supported this initiative, emphasizing that a love of reading is one of the key values contributing to societal development. In line with this, we held the intellectual competition «Oi Sheberi» as part of the project «Aulieata – a Reading Region» in the ethnocultural complex «Kөне Taraz». It brought together 50 teams of schoolteachers and students from Taraz. The event was organized by the Association of Legal Entities «Civil Alliance of Zhambyl Region» on the initiative of regional akim Yerbol Karashukkeyev. The aim was not only to promote reading culture among young people, but also to encourage knowledge-sharing and critical thinking.

I'd also like to highlight the Jambyl Civil Hub project – a resource center for NGOs in the region. Through this project, NGOs received legal and consulting support. Three video lessons were produced on improving reporting, shutting down inactive organizations, and participating in government programs. A seminar was held on the topic of «Training of Civil Society Representatives». The seminar consisted of two parts: «Training in Financial Literacy» and «Organization of Events to Implement Civil Control over the Budget Process». We



« In line with this, we held the intellectual competition «Oi Sheberi» as part of the project «Aulieata – a Reading Region» in the ethnocultural complex «Kөне Taraz». It brought together 50 teams of schoolteachers and students from Taraz»

also organized an online meeting of the «Public Diplomacy Center» NGO network. The project reached 256 NGOs in the region and gave real momentum to the local civil society. Every activity was implemented effectively and delivered social results.

– Do you often face challenges in your work? What gets in the way, and how do you handle it?

– Honestly, I don't find it interesting when everything runs smoothly. I believe work that's too easy doesn't bring true satisfaction. There are always challenges – especially in the beginning. Over time, with experience, both colleagues and government agencies start to recognize your work. At first, I didn't have the necessary experience or communication skills. Bureaucratic delays were also an issue. Proving the value of NGOs takes real effort. But I still have the drive and plans to move forward. I'm especially interested in introducing new technologies into this field – they've made document management much easier.

– How would you assess the current state of NGOs in Zhambyl region?

– In developed countries, civil society is a widely established institution. We need NGOs that can stand against laws that go against the country's interests, and provide constructive platforms for dialogue, rather than stoking unrest. In practice, NGOs provide services across social, economic, cultural, and other spheres. They serve as a bridge between the government, social groups, and individual citizens – defending their rights and interests. I consider those people to be truly engaged who are ready to take part in addressing issues in the sphere of non-governmental organizations, who are willing to defend national interests and stand up for the rights of vulnerable groups.

As for our region, thousands of NGOs are officially registered, but only around 200 are actively functioning. In rural areas, development is slower. One reason is the decline in their capacity and level of growth. Under the current system of state social order tend to favor well-established NGOs with prior experience. This puts newly formed NGOs – especially in villages, which have a deep understanding of local issues – at a disadvantage. I know that this is primarily due to a lack of experience among rural NGOs.

In this regard, I would like to highlight several systemic challenges facing the civil sector. First is the weak sustainability of NGOs and a shortage of personnel, regional imbalances in the development of civil society institutions, the small

number and underdevelopment of rural NGOs, and the lack of long-term strategic planning. Second is the low level of legal and professional literacy among NGOs, an underdeveloped culture of public policy debate, and a lack of coordination between organizations. That's why we need more dialogue, cooperation, and experience-sharing. Third, there is currently no system for tracking the contribution of the non-governmental sector to the country's economic and social development. Fourth, government agencies still don't do enough to involve civil society institutions in addressing important issues. There is also weak coordination between citizen demands and targeted budget allocation.

I personally try to be as involved as possible in solving these relevant issues. As Chairman of the Civil Alliance of Zhambyl Region, I constantly raise concerns about the instability of newly established organizations, the difficulties faced by NGOs created by people with disabilities in obtaining licenses, and the recent reductions in the number of funded projects.

– What types of NGOs are most active in Zhambyl region – ecology, youth, human rights, etc.?

– The most active in our region are youth organizations. Some of them work in the fields of ecology, human rights, gender policy, and business development. What sets them apart is a fresh perspective and a new pace. I myself come from the youth sector, and I recognize and analyze the younger generation entering this field after me. We need more young people in this space. I admire their efforts to improve society and create a more comfortable environment for our citizens. It's completely natural for youth to strive for change – after all, a drop can wear away stone. Those who work in the NGO sphere are showing initiative and action.

– How can more young people be engaged in NGO activities?

– I've noticed that more and more youth are entering the NGO sector. These young people are helping to reshape society and contribute to building a Just Kazakhstan.

I believe they bring new energy and are living examples of values like «honest citizenship» and «academic integrity». One example is the project «Honest Citizen – Active Society», implemented by the Civil Alliance of Zhambyl Region with support from the National Center for Civil Society Development. The project aims to create an institutional platform for mobilizing and uniting society around ongoing reforms, supporting and developing the NGO sector and civic initiatives. The center will serve as a key hub for strengthening the capacity of NGOs and promoting mutually beneficial partnerships between civil society and the government. It will also play a central role in implementing social initiatives in support of a Just Kazakhstan, encouraging broader public and youth participation in civic processes.

– Do NGOs in Zhambyl region receive support from local businesses?

– I have to admit, it's still too early to say that local businesses are actively supporting NGOs in Zhambyl Region. At the 11th Civil Forum, we met with two local businesses – Talas Investment Company and Kazphosphate LLP – and signed cooperation agreements with them. There are some ideas for joint projects, but it's still too early to talk about concrete results.

– Do NGOs in the region have the potential to operate at the national or international level?

– Yes, they absolutely do, and we are working to make use of that potential. We are capable of implementing large-scale, national-level projects. We've invited civil society representatives from abroad and also participated in visits ourselves. For example, our youth have actively taken part in international volunteer initiatives. Many of our volunteers have traveled abroad and gained experience.

– How would you evaluate the effectiveness of cooperation between NGOs and government agencies?

– Right now, NGOs in Zhambyl region maintain direct relationships with local government authorities. There is genuine partnership. This was made pos-

sible in large part thanks to meetings held in cooperation with the regional akim. We regularly hold discussions with government departments. NGOs are able to send their inquiries directly to the relevant government bodies and receive responses.

We are working to further develop the NGO partnership network, strengthen cooperation with state authorities, establish connections with expert communities and international organizations, and promote the continued exchange of practical knowledge and experience in civil society development.

– What changes would you like to see in legislation or policy regarding NGOs?

– Fundamentally, we need a law. We should clearly define the term «civil society institutions». Often, the government equates this term with citizens, but I think it's necessary to explain that civil society institutions are organizations that comprehensively and institutionally protect the rights of citizens and function in cooperation with active non-profit associations in society.

In this regard, we are advocating for the strengthening of civic institutions to ensure the institutional development of the NGO sector and to advance democratic reforms in the country – in part through the establishment of the National Center for Civil Society Development. Currently, due to decisions made by executive authorities, excessive bureaucracy, and the lack of clear regulations and standards for both service providers and contracting parties, the work of resource centers for NGO support lacks systematic structure. To bring about real change, we need to resolve these systemic problems step by step, in accordance with the principle «A strong civil society – a strong state».

– How do you see civil society in Zhambyl region developing over the next five years?

– I believe that civil society in Zhambyl region will continue to grow in a positive direction over the next five years. I expect that more NGOs will begin using artificial intelligence as a necessary tool for a modern society.

REMEMBERING THE FALLEN BY NAME

This year holds special significance for us – it is an anniversary year. President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, noted: «Honoring the 80th anniversary of the Great Victory will occupy a prominent place in the national agenda this year. Kazakhstan made a significant contribution to the defeat of nazism. Our fathers and grandfathers fought heroically on all fronts. Kazakhstan also served as a reliable rear base, playing a vital role in supplying the army with weapons, goods, and food. The feats of the heroes of that war are an example for current and future generations. The names of many of our warriors are inscribed in the heroic chronicle of our nation in golden letters. Kazakhstan continues to preserve the memory of compatriots who displayed heroic deeds both in battle and on the labor front during World War II. The upcoming 80th anniversary of Victory will give new impetus to research in this field».

In this context, the efforts of the public association «Atamnyn Amanaty» are particularly noteworthy. Since 2019, the organization has been locating burial sites of Kazakhstani soldiers who died or went missing during the war (more than 271,000 in total).

To date, the association's website has received over 10,000 search requests, resulting in the identification of the burial sites and names of more than 4,000 Kazakh soldiers. The remains of

19 soldiers have been returned to Kazakhstan and buried with military honors.

It is worth emphasizing one of the main areas of activity of «Atamnyn Amanaty» – international cooperation. More than 100 agreements have been signed with foreign partners and are actively being implemented.

Together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, a comprehensive database has been compiled of Kazakhstani soldiers buried not only in the CIS countries but across Europe – currently listing around 28,000 names. Ongoing efforts aim to identify and reconnect with their living relatives in Kazakhstan.

Each year, the public association «Atamnyn Amanaty» hosts an international conference titled: «Ortaq tarikh. Ortaq zhenis. Ortaq kózqaras», which has become a platform for dialogue between NGOs and search organizations across the CIS.

The forum focuses on best practices in archival and field search efforts, and offers recommendations for international cooperation in the repatriation of soldiers' remains and preserving their memory.

We are official partners of «Search Movement of Russia» and «Victory Volunteers». Each year, joint search team of «Atamnyn Amanaty» participates in the international military-historical expedition «Western Front: Warsaw Highway» in Kaluga



« To date, the association's website has received over 10,000 search requests, resulting in the identification of the burial sites and names of more than 4,000 Kazakh soldiers. The remains of 19 soldiers have been returned to Kazakhstan and buried with military honors»

region, Russia. The delegation includes instructors and cadets from the Military-Technical Schools of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense.

As part of this expedition, a memorial plaque was installed to honor the soldiers of the 387th Rifle Division, which was formed in Akmolinsk in August 1941 and saw its first battle on December 27, 1941, near the village of Troitskoye. The division fought defensive and offensive operations throughout 1942, covering Kaluga and Tula directions, before being surrounded and almost completely destroyed. Only 800 soldiers out of 12,000 survived... According to the regional governor, five Kazakhstani divisions fought in the Kaluga region, and we have reached agreements with the local authorities to continue field research.

The association also organizes initiatives to involve youth in military-patriotic education. This includes round tables, conferences, citywide quizzes, sports tournaments, runs, quests, and games dedicated to World War II history. To date, these activities have reached over two million young people and have been widely covered in the media and social networks.

We have signed cooperation memorandums with most of Astana's colleges (there are 33 of them in total). As part of our «Atalar amanatyna adalmyz» campaign, each college conducted its own research into military units formed in Kazakhstan.

On August 19, 2023, at Astana's Triathlon Park, we held the first commemorative race (now an annual tradition) marking the 101st birthday of assault pilot, two-time Hero of the Soviet Union, and aviation Major General Talgat Begeldinov. Over 1,000 people participated, including service mem-





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why we invite veterans of the Armed Forces to run alongside young people, play volleyball, and participate in other sports.

For instance, from November 6–17, 2023, we held a volleyball tournament among Astana colleges to honor Hero of the Soviet Union, People's Hero of Kazakhstan, and Army General S. Nurmagambetov. This was the first event in Kazakhstan commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first Minister of Defense. Each team competed under the name of a distinguished Kazakh Hero of the Soviet Union, thus introducing students to the heroic legacy of our people.

We would also like to emphasize the selfless efforts of our volunteers and searchers. Tirelessly working in battlefields, archives, and online forums, their greatest reward is hearing words of gratitude and seeing tears of joy from descendants of soldiers who finally came home – even after 80 years...

By decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, a national Action Plan has been adopted to mark the 80th anniversary of Victory in the Great Patriotic War. This year, the country will also commemorate the 115th anniversary of Bauyrzhan Momyshuly, the 110th of Malik Gabdul-lin, and the 100th of Aliya Moldagulova.

bers from the Akmola garrison, the Border Guard Service, the National Guard, veterans, professional athletes, and sports enthusiasts.

This race received wide public support: it was supported by Kazakhstani youth working outside the country, as well as the Kazakhstani search team, which at that time was on an international expedition in the Kaluga region of the Russian Federation, cadets of military-technical schools of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Kazakhstan and many others.

We carefully tailor each event to the interests of the younger generation, bearing in mind that the best form of education is by example. That's



The public association «Atamnyn Amanaty» has prepared its own action plan aligned with these priorities and is ready to actively participate in national commemorative efforts.

Here are some of our proposed projects, which have been supported by deputy corps and are currently under review by government agencies::

1. Creation of an electronic database of Kazakh soldiers and officers who served in World War II. This national platform will preserve their names for future generations and ensure recognition of their contributions;
2. International military-historical expedition «Western Kazakhstan – Frontline of the Battle of Stalingrad». The aim is to recover the remains of fallen soldiers and civilians, identify them, and create memorial sites. There are 40–50 mass graves in Bokey Orda district that require study and commemoration;
3. Study of the history of evacuation hospitals in Kazakhstan during the war, establishment of hospital burial sites, their improvement and installation of memorial plaques and signs. During the war, about 150,000 wounded were treated in Kazakhstan, many of whom died and were buried in local cemeteries;
4. Search for Kazakh soldiers buried in Europe. Over 2.2 million Red Army soldiers, including Kazakhs, are interred as «unknown». This project aims to restore their names and reinforce global recognition of Kazakhstan's wartime role.

The mission of «Atamnyn Amanaty» remains unchanged – to support the state in preserving historical memory by fostering generational continuity through moral, spiritual, and military-patriotic education of the youth.

*Murad Moldagaliev
Chairman of the Board, «Atamnyn Amanaty» PA*

Zhanna Isingarina:

A BARBARIC DRAFT LAW OR GENUINE CONCERN: WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE LAW «ON RESPONSIBLE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS»?



Following the adoption of the Law «On responsible treatment of animals» in late 2021, animal rights advocates were filled with hope that society would begin to develop a more humane attitude toward our four-legged companions. The Head of State has repeatedly addressed this topic, emphasizing that how a nation treats its animals is a measure of its civilization. Thus, the authorities chose a humane approach toward stray animals: capture, sterilization, vaccination, and release. However, the joy was short-lived. Authorities soon stopped capturing or vaccinating strays, citing lack of infrastructure and budget. And now, three years later, Members of Parliament have proposed a simple solution: euthanizing

homeless animals – for the sake of children's safety, first and foremost. What exactly is wrong with the proposed amendments to the Law «On responsible treatment of animals», and what do animal rights defenders offer in their alternative draft law? We spoke with Zhanna Isingarina, President of the Corporate Communications Association of Kazakhstan, member of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, and member of the Zoo-Community Alliance for the Implementation of the Law «On responsible treatment of animals».

In October 2024, after a widely discussed interview with Mazhilis Deputy Edil Zhanbyrshin, the public split into two camps: those who supported euthanasia for stray animals and those who opposed it. Deputies justified their proposal by saying that the control mechanisms for the stray animal population prescribed in the law had failed. Animal rights defender Zhanna Isingarina believes that the deputies' initiative did not emerge out of nowhere.

«Since 2022, we've observed deliberate sabotage by local executive authorities in implementing the Law «On responsible treatment of animals». Upon analyzing the situation, we concluded that this sector involves large financial flows. Criminal schemes began to surface, including the sale of dog meat in food services, while public funds were simply vanishing. At the same time, no efforts were made to educate the public or promote humane attitudes toward animals. Of course, without a comprehensive approach, it's easy to stop capturing stray dogs on the streets. Those responsible claimed the law prohibited capture. But that's not true. The law allows for capture, sterilization, vaccination, and subsequent release or transfer to new owners. Some local authorities simply misinterpreted the law. No capture operations were conducted. As a result, citizens began filing complaints about stray animals. There were



«According to official data from the Bureau of National Statistics and the Ministry of Health, there have been no recorded cases in Kazakhstan of children dying as a result of stray dog attacks. However, there are documented cases of fatalities caused by owned pets»

reports of attacks. We believe the executive authorities are to blame for sabotaging the law – even though it was a direct instruction from the President», – said Zhanna Isingarina.

Speaking of complaints: at the time, some deputies claimed there had been instances of stray dogs mauling children or attacking residents. These allegations were later refuted by animal rights groups.

«According to official data from the Bureau of National Statistics and the Ministry of Health, there have been no recorded cases in Kazakhstan of children dying as a result of stray dog attacks. However, there are documented cases of fatalities caused by owned pets. At the same time, deputies oppose the expert-proposed provision requiring mandatory training for owners of particularly dangerous dog breeds», – animal rights advocates reported.

Animal defenders acknowledge that public safety is paramount, and that deputies must prioritize human well-being.

«However, the solution proposed by the Mazhilis member amounts to legalizing what is essentially the uncontrolled extermination of stray cats and dogs, without addressing the main issue – human safety. A proper law must

be carefully considered, grounded in scientific knowledge from various fields – natural and social sciences alike – and informed by international best practices. It is essential to incorporate recommendations from global organizations that have studied the harmonious coexistence of humans and animals for decades», – animal rights advocates said.

Zhanna Isingarina emphasizes that the law adopted in 2021 had been comprehensively developed, based on international recommendations and expertise. Some experts even called Kazakhstan's law the most legally sound in the entire Eurasian region.

Nonetheless, the deputies believe otherwise. All discussions boiled down to the idea that stray animals should be euthanized after a 15-day stay in a temporary shelter. During this period, animal rights advocates or residents may adopt the animal and cover the cost of vaccination, castration, sterilization, and microchipping. If the animal has an identified owner, the period may be extended to 60 days to give them time to reclaim it. According to the deputies, these amendments would lead to safer streets, reduce the number of strays, and lower the risk of infectious disease spread.

Zhanna Isingarina, however, maintains that the current provisions of the law are fully implementable – if approached holistically.

«Legal experts and practitioners agree on the need to clarify and detail existing provisions. But I'll say it again: the current norms are sufficient – if applied together, as a system. Why was this law adopted in the first place? The key phrase in its title is «responsible treatment». And what are the deputies now proposing? Capture healthy animals, hold them for 15 days, and then kill them. Why, then, did we include clauses on registration, mandatory veterinary care, and penalties for causing suffering? These aren't amendments. They are completely contradictory provisions that undermine the entire law», – said the member of the Zoo-Community Alliance.

It's worth noting that many developed countries prefer humane methods to address the issue of stray animals: capture, sterilize, vaccinate, and return. Animal advocates often cite Singapore as an example, where the CSV method has been effectively applied for over five years. As a result, public complaints about strays have dropped by 70%.

«This method is also used in India, Italy, Portugal, Thailand, and Bulgaria. In the United States, the euthanasia rate has fallen below 10%, thanks to an increase in adoptions, active efforts to reunite pets with previous owners, and the «No-Kill» strategy aimed at bringing euthanasia levels down to 0%», – animal rights advocates reported.

Examples from the Almaty city akimat further demonstrate the potential for humane solutions.

Civil society organizations, legal experts, and specialists in Animal Law have developed an alternative draft law, incorporating best international practices and legislative frameworks. Their recommendations offer a comprehensive strategy for managing stray animals, including:

1. regulating the breeding of owned dogs and cats, introducing mandatory sterilization (with certain exceptions), and establishing control mechanisms over commercial breeding;
2. implementing a system for counting and registering animals in a unified state database;
3. increasing owner responsibility for abandoned pets.



«The akimat has supported shelters, cooperated with individual volunteers, and implemented new initiatives. For example, cat houses have been installed, and cats caught in the streets are transferred to shelters. Of course, a lingering question remains: why were they captured in the first place? The real issue was that no public education took place. People weren't told not to harm these animals and were not encouraged to care for them. There should have been a system for preparing caretakers who would feed, clean up after, and sterilize the animals», – said Zhanna Isingarina.

Zhanna Isingarina herself joined the animal rights movement in 2022 to help coordinate cooperation between the state – represented by the Ministry of Ecology – the executive authorities (akimats), and the animal welfare community to ensure proper implementation of the law.

«I saw that cooperation between authorities and society was stalling. So I decided to apply my experience, competencies, and ability to engage with government structures and focus them on constructive, effective work. And we succeeded. The Almaty akimat responded positively and showed that it could indeed act as an enforcer of the law. We regularly met with animal protection organizations and volunteers, listened to their suggestions on how best to implement the law. Later, we founded the Zoo-Community Alliance for the Implementation of the Law «On responsible treatment of animals». We organized a roundtable with the Ministry of Education, Almaty akimat, deputies of Mazhilis, and the Georgian Agency for the Monitoring of Stray Animals. Almaty served as a pilot city to develop effective cooperation models between the animal welfare community and the executive authorities, with the aim of transferring those practices to other regions. Last year, the Zoo-Community Alliance became a member of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan», – Zhanna Isingarina shared.

In addition to improving the lives of four-legged companions, Zhanna Isingarina also delivers university lectures on responsible treatment of animals.

«These lectures are only possible thanks to the initiative of concerned professors. For instance, KIMEP employs an assistant professor with a PhD in Law, Maria Baydeldinova, who is a member of the World Animal Law Association and serves on the Animal Law Committee of the KazBar CLA. At her initiative, lectures were developed for each provision of the law, thoroughly explaining its content with references to corresponding norms in other legal acts.

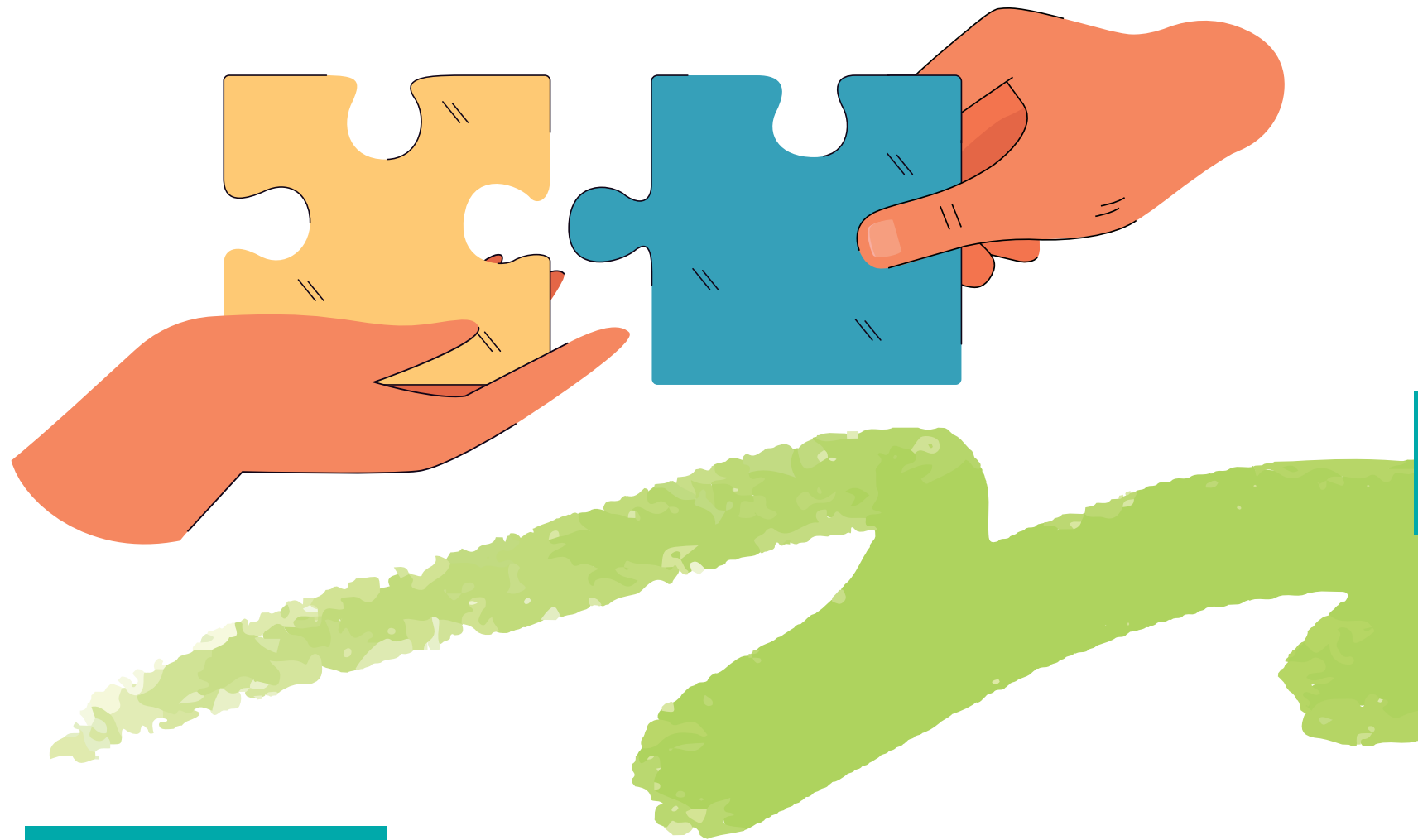


These lectures are available on the university's website. This kind of work helps improve public legal literacy. But here too, we need a systematic approach! Government involvement is essential! Anyone who wants to live in a lawful state and a stable society and who desires national prosperity understands that this is impossible without a more humane society. That's why, under the aegis of the Civil Alliance of Kazakhstan, we initiated roundtables to draw attention to the sabotage of the President's directive. We also appealed to the UN to draw international attention to this pressing issue», – Zhanna Isingarina added.

She believes that Kazakhstan can become a truly humane and friendly society – but only through adherence to the law. Both preventive and punitive measures must work in tandem.

«In Tbilisi, stray animals are regulated, and their numbers have declined five years after the Stray Animal Monitoring Agency began operating. But public attitudes began to change even earlier -because a comprehensive set of measures was implemented», – Zhanna Isingarina concluded.

BLITZ POLL CIVIL SOCIETY IS...



Bibikhan Serikova, PR Manager at Nazarbayev University

– To me, civil society is a thriving system where everyone is aware of their role and actively contributes to the life of the country. As a representative of Kazakhstan's youth, I believe it's important not only to vote but also to have the right to speak up, propose ideas, express opinions freely, and work with others for the common good. I am not just a citizen filling a staffing need for the state – I am its voice, its reflection. In a true civil society, every opinion is valued, people support one another, and together we learn from mistakes and strive for a better future.

Anyone who considers themselves part of society can contribute to the development of civil society. This is reflected in a drive for education, continuous skill-building, or even choosing to study abroad. I believe our generation should take full advantage of the opportunities the state provides. For example, we can apply for international study programs. We shouldn't miss these chances – we must always strive to improve. Sure, one could sit back and complain that everything is bad. But we can also choose to change our lives for the better. I live in a big city – the capital of our country – and there are so many opportunities for self-development! Language courses, sports marathons, book clubs, cultural events – it's all in our hands!



Aisha Yergenbai, student at L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, activist

– To me, civil society is a space where people can freely express their opinions, unite over shared interests, and defend their rights without government interference. It shows that society is made up not just of government institutions, but of citizens themselves, who can shape the course of the country. I believe civil society must be driven from the «bottom up» – from ordinary people, not «top-down» from the authorities. Civil society balances the relationship between citizens and the state.

I would include in civil society volunteer organizations, independent media, charitable foundations, public movements, and simply active citizens who care about what's going on around them. These groups help solve important social problems, uphold justice, and contribute to the country's development. Through civil society, people can feel that their voice truly matters.

Besides my studies at the Eurasian National University, I actively engage in student life. I'm part of a youth organization that works to improve student welfare and address key social issues. We've raised awareness on topics like domestic violence, ecology, climate change, and rejecting harmful habits. Once, we even conducted a social experiment to find out if

local stores really follow the law and refuse to sell tobacco and alcohol to minors or anyone under 21. We discovered that some shop owners knowingly break the rules just to make money. As a civic group, we try to change this situation and offer support. I'm really glad that such youth organizations exist in our university. They help us realize that we're not just part of society – we can actively influence it and improve the space around us.

My future profession is in nuclear physics. I didn't choose this field by chance. I studied the national context and listened to the President's speeches on TV.

The Head of State emphasized that one of the country's strategic priorities is the development of nuclear science and technology. As President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said, Kazakhstan has strong potential in this field. Nuclear medicine, hydrogen energy, water desalination, synthetic fuel production – there are so many areas we haven't yet mastered. After graduation, I want to contribute to this sector and help advance science. That will be my personal contribution to society's progress.



Zhantas Kairatov, HR Manager

Civil society, to me, is about the initiative and awareness of people acting independently of the state – citizens coming together to solve issues that matter to them. As someone who works in HR and people management, I see this every day in the corporate world. For example, when employees take initiative, suggest improvements, join volunteer projects, or raise socially relevant topics within our company – that's civil society at the organizational level. Today, the Sustainable Development Goals are becoming increasingly popular, and when it comes to universities, Goal 4 – Quality Education – is key.

People who voice their opinions, respect others, and care about their communities help build the kind of civic environment where everyone feels responsible not just for themselves, but for our collective future.

For me, civil society isn't about politics – it's about societal maturity, when people act simply because it's the right thing to do.

Rustem Aitkhozhin, entrepreneur

Civil society is about personal responsibility. Say you're walking down the street and see litter – you can just pick it up and throw it in the bin. Or clean up after yourself when you're out in nature.

If you want to change society, start with yourself. As an entrepreneur, I understand how important it is to be socially responsible, to care about environmental impact, to support employees, to create jobs for people with disabilities, and to donate part of your profits to charity. That's how we demonstrate our awareness and our engagement in public life.

To me, civil society is when each of us feels accountable for what happens in the country and can freely express our opinions.

I believe the value of civil society lies in raising active and responsible citizens. Sometimes I see schoolchildren getting involved in volunteer projects, inventing useful tools for the public, or discussing social issues – and it makes me hopeful. These are small but significant steps toward building a strong civic culture.



The Konrad Adenauer Foundation is a political foundation of the Federal Republic of Germany. With its programmes and projects, the Foundation actively and effectively promotes international cooperation and mutual understanding.

The Representative Office of the Foundation in Kazakhstan began its work in 2007 at the invitation of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Foundation works in partnership with government agencies, the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, civil society organizations, universities, political parties and enterprises.

The main purpose of the Foundation's activities in the Republic of Kazakhstan is to strengthen mutual understanding and partnership between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Kazakhstan through cooperation in the field of political, educational, social, cultural and economic development, thus contributing to the further development and prosperity of Kazakhstan.

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Address:
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V.
Representative Office
Kabanbay batyr Str. 6/3 - 82
010001 Astana Kazakhstan



Contacts:
Info.Kasakhstan@kas.de
+7 7172 92 50 13
+7 7172 92 50 31

<https://www.kas.de/ru/web/kasakhstan/>

