

International Conference “prospects of EU-Central Asian Relations”

Paper title: Democracy promotion in Central Asia: Civil society development in post Soviet Central Asian countries-case studies of NGO development in the region

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Almaty 2014

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Introduction and aim

In democratic societies NGOs' activities are seen as supplementary for democracy promotion because most NGOs pursue law enforcement and application of the rule of law. In contrast to developing countries, Western society's well integrated active human rights NGOs, transnational and regional NGOs, actively participate in promoting action on social problems in wider areas and with regional scope. As the case of Europe showed, international and local NGOs in Europe play an important role in addressing current challenges of contemporary society such as racism, xenophobia, anti-semitism, minority rights, Roma rights, environmental issues, and others which require a trans-border network.

While discussing the democracy promotion it is vital to accentuate on the concept of civil society, which is synonymously accepted in academic area. When social scientists attempt to explain concepts such as democracy, liberalism, and cultural relativism in different parts of the world, it is clear that all of those concepts and ideologies require understanding the nature of civil society in the concerned region. One can not compare democratic reforms in the Middle East, Asia and in Eastern Europe without studying the nature of civil society in those regions. Therefore, while researching the case of civil society development in Central Asia it would be relevant to study first the nature of civil society in the concerned region. In this regard, this paper will focus on the nature of civil society and NGO development in Central Asian countries. Paper will answer questions such as: what is the public attitude towards NGOs activities? what type of social activities are covered by Local and international NGOs in the region? And What is the role of local NGOs in civil society development?

As most social scientists argue, civil society development is directly connected with the process of democratization, and therefore while analyzing democratic reforms scholars draw attention to the civil society sector. The civil society topic in Central Asia has been raising public debate over the role of NGO activities and their influence on civil society development. If human rights activists and a certain number of social scientists highlight the activation of civil society through Western launched projects, there are also scholars who draw attention to the suppression of civil society in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and the regulation of NGO activities throughout the region.

General information about civil society in Central Asia

In contrast to Central and Eastern Europe, post-Soviet Central Asia has its own unique society, which it inherited from the pre-Soviet period and from Soviet civic culture, which makes it completely different from Western and Asian societies. Moreover, the case of civil society in Central Asia requires addressing informal and traditional institutions such as the Mahalla structure, and clan and tribal networks which have strong influences on the social and political behaviors of Central Asian people.

It is argued that *“certain forms of traditional network or kinship structures are an intrinsic part of civil society that cannot be ignored or overwritten, and that including them within the definition of civil society makes more sense for certain non-Western contexts”* (Giffen & Earle, 2005:54). However, leaders of NGOs and Civil Society Support Centers consider that traditional institutions such as Mahalla, Avlod, Jamoat, Uru, Ru, and clan and tribal networks do not respond to Western donors’ civil society development demands.

While analyzing the nature of civil society in Central Asia, it can be concluded that traditional and informal institutions’ influence for social and political life of Central Asian society is very powerful. Kyrgyz Uru, Kazakh Ru and Tajik Avlods have similar functions in implementing social activities in rural area. These three informal institutions play significant roles in identity-building, organizational issues of social activities in cultural area, in celebrations of national holidays and other events. Although, Uru, Ru and Avlod do not carry official legal status in Kyrgyz, Kazakh and Tajik governmental systems, they have a strong presence in the civic and social life of these countries. Uru, Ru and Avlod are seen as a part of cultural heritage. It is also worth to note that Central Asians interpret the notion of civil society from different perspectives. When one goes to remote areas of Central Asian countries, civil society is mostly perceived through community-based societal terms.

Mahalla Structure

The next important point regarding traditional institutions should be given to the Mahalla structure, which has reasonable difference than Uru, Ru and Avlod. When one analyzes Uzbek and Tajik Mahalla structure, it has a unique social and legal structure, which has been functioning for centuries. In contrast to the Uru and Avlod systems, Mahalla structures in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have legal status and they are perceived as supplementary institutions for local administration in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Mahallas carry out activities in environment, culture, education, social protection and other areas.

As far as Mahalla functions are based on Islamic customs and traditions, women's role in Mahalla is also constructed from religious perspective. According to Samiuddin and Khanam in Mahalla structure of Central Asian society "*Women may carry out the task of organizing socially significant days (such as celebrations of holy feasts and weddings, funeral prayers and so on). Others may be responsible for the inhabitants of the Mahalla and should know the living conditions and problems of each family*" (Samiuddin & Khanam, 2002:339).

It is equally argued that Mahalla, Avlod, Uru, Ru, and Jamoat do not respond to the demand of international organizations' launched projects that are connected with strengthening civil society, and the democratization of society. Analyzing public attitudes towards NGOs and criticism towards traditional institutions, one should note that traditional institutions are an integral part of Central Asian civil society and civil society development in the region depends on the active partnership of NGOs with informal and traditional institutions.

Furthermore, when one carefully analyzes the objectives and missions of local as well as international NGOs, they aim at promoting democracy, gender balance, individualism, and human rights values. Traditional institutions, like the Mahalla, Avlod, Uru and clan structures see gender equality and issues of individualism from different perspectives. Traditional and informal institutions perceive individualism as a direct contradiction of the principles of community-based societies. Individualism as well as the Western version of gender equality is considered a threat to their community structures.

Why are NGOs important in civil society development?

While analyzing the socio-political context of Central Asian society, local as well as Western scholars acknowledge the fact that in comparison with European countries Central Asian states face challenges including human rights violation, ethnic conflict, poverty reduction, corruption, gender and unemployment issues. In this sense, the role of CSOs should be very significant in public life. There are many donors from the West, which have the overriding goal of poverty reduction and the betterment of the human condition in Central Asia. In order to implement international projects in the region, NGOs are very important. In contrast to informal institutions, NGOs on one hand respond to the current challenges of global civil society and at the same time their activities cover existing social problems in developing countries. However, public attitudes in Central Asia are not always in favor of NGOs.

While referring to the 'Millennium Development Goals'¹, one can conclude that all eight goals are very much present in Central Asia. With the fall of communism, all Central Asian countries have been facing problems in education and health care. When the World Bank, UNDP or other international institutions launch health care and educational projects (such as raising literacy) in Central Asia, their target partners are only NGOs or governmental institutions. However, it is argued that it would be inefficient to reach those goals without working with Mahallas, Jamoats, Urus and other informal institutions. The main reason is that those informal institutions have great influence on local people and their credibility is higher than those of NGOs or Public Funds.

Historical development of NGOs and independent movements in Central Asia

When one analyzes the historical development of NGOs in Central Asia, the literature states that independent and non-corporatist NGOs in Central Asia started their activities during the Perestroika period. However, their activities did not continue very long and most of them decreased their activities with the collapse of the USSR (Sievers 2003:103). According to Soviet and Western scholars, Central Asian NGOs which functioned at the time of USSR disintegration are divided into two types, those which were quasi-independent and those which were still pro-communist or state funded. As Eric Sievers emphasizes, "*Pro-communist NGOs, which were politicized with party ideology, were completely dependent on state funding, but at the same time they had no clear purpose for soviet people due to the Communist-era organizations which were ill suited to an independent existence*" (2003:106).

In contrast to quasi-independent NGOs, state funded ones were disinterested in real public concerns and ignorant of public opinion. For example, one can refer to Environmental issues connected with the Aral sea crisis, the Semipalatinsk case and other environmental issues which divided public opinion into two fronts. In the case of Kazakhstan, Sievers drew attention to Ponamarev's estimates, where independent NGO, Nevada Semipalatinsk, comprised already over a million members, and it collected over one million signatures for a petition to close the Semipalatinsk nuclear test-site (Sievers, 2003:104).

¹ At the Millenium Summit in September 2000 the largest gathering of world leaders in history adopted the UN Millenium Declaration, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and setting out series of time-bound targets, with a dealine of 2015, that have become known as the Millenium Development Goals. There are 8 MDG goals which aim at reaching universal primary education, poverty reduction, gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combating HIV and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop global partnership (retrieved from MDG project website on April 19, 2013 at <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/>)

Scholars give as an example the case of nuclear tests in Kazakhstan, which raised public pressure and triggered the creation of independent environmental movements against nuclear test. According to scholars' findings, "*since August 29, 1944, the Soviet government has conducted more than four hundred nuclear explosions at the Semipalatinsk test site in Kazakhstan*" (Mendelson & Glenn 2002:155). As a result, public concern on environmental issues did not coincide with communist party interests and it caused the creation of independent movements.

Generally speaking, independent NGOs in Central Asia during the Soviet period started their activities only in the late 1980s and environmental issues were a driving force for the emergence of NGOs and independent movements in the environmental sector of Central Asia. By Sarah E. Mendelson and John K. Glenn's view, "*it offered an entry point for Western foundations seeking to assist the development of a third sector in the Soviet Union*" (Mendelson & Glenn 2002:129). What can be concluded from the above mentioned is that the communist leaders' policy in Central Asia and particularly in Kazakhstan did not intersect with public concern on environmental issues. Therefore, the environmental sector appeared as the main motivating factor for the creation of independent movements which did not share a common view with the Central Committee.

In general the origins of Central Asian NGOs come from the environmental sector. Most scholars believed that NGOs from the environmental sector would continue their active role in civil society of Central Asia after the fall of communism as well. However, as Sarah Elizabeth Mendelson argues in the case of Kazakhstan emphasized "the environmental concerns that initially mobilized a large proportion of Kazakhstan's population, but later it was replaced by human rights issues" (2002:155). It can be explained with the entrance of emerging Central Asian countries to the international system. Not only Kazakhstan but also all Central Asian countries were confronted with human rights issues.

NGO development in Central Asia after the collapse of USSR

With the breakup of the USSR there were many environmental issues that would create independent movements in Central Asia. For example, Aral Sea crisis, Semipalatinsk, and different mining places throughout Central Asia were of high public concern and also brought disagreements. As scholars of Massachusetts Institute of Technology argue "*a growing number of evidence indicates that NGOs influence government decisions to develop domestic policies to protect natural resources and negotiate international treaties as well as how*

individuals perceive environmental problems” (M. Bestill & E. Corell, 2001:65). Ecological issues of Central Asian countries were on the agenda of intergovernmental meetings at regional and international level. However, Central Asian countries have been interplaying with major countries such as Russia, China, and Western countries which also benefit from natural resources and public concern was forgotten.

The next point in relation to the post-Soviet NGO sector development that should be addressed is institution-building. After the collapse of USSR the NGO as well as the civil society sector in Central Asia was confronted with two main issues:

- formal institution-building through the community development and NGO sector
- The revival of informal institution such as, Mahalla system, clan and tribal networks

As analysis of Soviet policy towards informal and traditional institutions reveal a twofold approach during the Soviet time. On one hand, for the Soviet Union it was important to develop formal institutions through the communist ideology, education and modernism. On the other hand, traditional institutions such as Mahalla system were also seen as a complementary part for institution building in rural areas of Central Asia. After the collapse of the USSR, post-Soviet Central Asian leaders also displayed very careful approach to informal institutions. If in the case of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan Mahalla became an integral part of their society, Kyrgyz, Turkmen and Kazakh societies incorporated clan and tribal networks for political and civic participation.

Furthermore, international NGOs (the US State funded project Counterpart International, Community and Humanitarian Assistance program, Norwegian Solidarity Fund, ACTED, Transparency International, Open Society Institute, Soros Foundation and others) brought a great impact for civil society development from western perspective. At the same time main goals of international in the region were to establish active civil society through NGO development. The number of NGOs which have been participating as recipients of Mercy Corps, UNV, Counterpart International, and other Western international NGOs increased very rapidly since mid 1990s. However, the NGO development in Central Asia had a heterogeneous picture, whereby Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan controlled NGO activities; while the other three Central Asian countries applied relatively liberal approach to NGO development.

Women-led NGOs of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan

Among Central Asian countries, Kyrgyz and Kazakh societies had a relatively more liberal approach from a gender perspective. While studying the gender issue in Central Asia one should also take into account not only socio-cultural difference between nomadic and sedentary population in the region but also Soviet equal opportunity policy on education and employment should be addressed.

With Soviet rule in Central Asia, gender policy overlapped with education and the labor sector. The first strategy, used by Soviet government towards all Central Asian countries was anti-patriarchal policy that aimed at changing the relationship of Central Asian society for women. At the same time, from religious, traditional and cultural perspective there was a slight difference among Central Asian countries. The nomadic culture of Kyrgyz and Kazakh societies provided women with certain privileges and equal rights, which did not exist in other Central Asian cultures. Although Central Asian countries had different relations for women, in general context the region was identified by the Soviet regime as a heavily patriarchal society. Therefore, the Soviet policy in gender issues aimed at promoting equal rights between men and women through industrialization, collectivization and equal opportunity for education and employment in the region.

When one analyzes the Soviet period of Central Asian countries, it can be concluded that the Soviet approach changed the relationship for women to greater extent. Women started to get education at primary school, pedagogical colleges, in higher education institutions, which significantly influenced the reconstruction of Central Asian society. However, it should be noted that there were quite remarkable difference among Central Asian countries. Mahalla structure, which existed in Uzbek and Tajik societies preserved traditional view towards women in the family structure.

With the collapse of the USSR, Central Asian countries faced great challenges surrounding gender issue. The first challenge came with the establishment of NGOs that oriented by gender policy, and the second came with the revival of informal institutions such as Mahalla and Avlods in Tajikistan and clan, and tribal networks in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. These traditional institutions revived old values, introducing the pre-Soviet attitude towards women. In contrast to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, in remote areas in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, Mahalla structure did not allow the activization of Women-led NGOs. Therefore, while

analyzing the activities of NGOs in Central Asia one can notice the remarkable differences in NGO development in gender issues.

In comparative studies of gender issue in Central Asia, a certain number of social scientists draw attention to traditional stereotypes. In Alla Kulatova's view, *"in Tajikistan, where 73% of the population live in rural area, the main barrier to equal opportunities are the traditional stereotypes about female and male roles"* (2000:129). She argues that women from urban area have more rights than in rural areas because in rural areas traditional stereotypes prevail in most families. When one compares the urban and rural areas of Central Asian countries, women in urban area particularly in big cities have opportunity for education and employment, whereas in rural areas women do household chores and their work is dedicated towards family members.

While analyzing the gender problem in Central Asia, one can conclude that the gender problem in region impacted through cultural and traditional differences. Among Central Asian countries, in Kyrgyz and Kazakh societies women are actively involved in political participation and female have relatively equal access to education and vocational training. It is argued that *"this traditional image of their unpaid non-productive labour at the household reproduces the steady stereotype of man as the breadwinner and woman as a dependent person"* (Kulatova 2000:129). As a matter of fact in rural areas of all Central Asian countries this traditional stereotype is identified as the main obstacle for the promotion of gender equality.

The next gender issue of concerns human rights activists is connected with domestic violence. As far as men are perceived as the breadwinners, women become vulnerable due to their dependency. Local NGOs have been identifying domestic violence as one of the main concerns of women. In this regard, Tarek Mahmud Hussain argued that

Since independence, traditional cultural and social values have become more dominant. The difficult transition has also resulted in the discontinuation of many state structures and benefits that supported women in maintaining their heavy responsibilities, such as child allowances and child care facilities. Today, women are more marginalized, due both to weak state protection and to lack of knowledge about their Constitutional rights and their rights under Islamic law (2004).

The prevailing role of cultural and traditional values are intimately connected with the revival of traditional institutions in the civil society sector.

According to Counterpart International, in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, Women-led NGOs have been working very actively on combating domestic violence. However, from a governmental level less attention was given to draft laws which were lobbied for by the civil society sector. For instance, in the case of Tajikistan *“a draft law on domestic violence has been pending since 2007”* (OSCE/ODIHR report on HDI, 2000:129). Women-led NGOs in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had more influence in government policy in gender issues. The active role of Women-led NGOs in Kyrgyzstan contributed to the government action plan so called the "Ayalzat" national programme, which aimed at addressing violence against women. This program was approved by President Decree in 1996 for the period of 1996-2000 and was a promising government strategy towards gender equality (UN Secretary General's Database on violence against Women, 2000). However, According Human Rights Watch the first crucial step on Kyrgyz government on women's Rights started with adoption of the Law on Social-Legal Protection from Domestic Violence in 2003. Human Rights Watch stated that *“during the hearing it became evident that the adoption of the law in 2003 was a significant step demonstrating the government's political will to address domestic violence as a serious human rights violation”* (HRW 2007:1).

Women's NGOs and Associations in Kyrgyzstan are comparatively active for Central Asia. Branch Offices of Women's congress are established in all seven regions in Kyrgyzstan while the Association of Women's NGOs serves to be the umbrella for all Public Unions, NGOs, CSOs and Public Funds which work on gender topics. Women's NGOs in Kyrgyzstan contribute enormously to the implementation of the Convention the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. As the preamble of the Convention acknowledges, discrimination against women still remains as the highest concern of the international agenda.

As the articles of convention highlights, *“the Convention takes an important place in bringing the female half of humanity into the focus of human rights concerns. The spirit of the Convention is rooted in the goals of the United Nations: to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity, and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women”* (CEDAW 1979). The Platform of Women NGOs in Kyrgyzstan and Women's Congress have been expressing their concern on the women's rights in Central Asia and they have been actively promoting the equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes in social and economic issues.

According to the Platform of Women's NGOs in Kyrgyzstan and the Feminist league, in order to reach the empowerment of women states should: 1) Include women and women's organizations into cooperation development actors; 2) To adopt and implement temporary special measures to increase the level of women's representation in all decision making positions, 3) To start gender budgeting initiatives and allocate state budget finances towards women's rights (The Platform of Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan, 2009).

The number of NGOs, which work under the umbrella Platform of Women's NGOs in Kyrgyzstan and the Women's congress, have increased during the last two decades. It is noteworthy to mention that the role of OSCE and UNIFEM appeared very vital in raising women's equal rights in inter-governmental agenda. UNIFEM as well as OSCE projects aimed at raising public awareness of the international standards of equal rights for women and men. Accordingly, Women's NGOs of Kyrgyzstan have directed their main activities towards fulfilling international conventions, which are based on Western values. As a result, most of these NGOs have identified the vulnerability of women within Kyrgyz culture and tradition.

Human Rights NGOs in Central Asia

While analyzing human rights NGO activities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, one should take into account two main issues: Government policy focused on human rights NGOs and public attitude towards human rights NGOs.

Human rights NGOs in Central Asia started their activities during early 1990s, when the U.S. State Department projects were launched via the NGO sector. From the mid 1990s the EU TACIS program and OSCE started active participation in promoting democratic governance and rule of law, which influenced the development of human rights NGOs. Human rights issues of Central Asia, connected with children's rights and gender equality, political and civic rights, freedom of association, presented great challenge for the newly independent states.

Regarding human rights issues and the role of NGOs in civil society development in Central Asia, OSCE argues that

For civil society to operate is permitted, but at the same time, the development of NGOs is controlled to such an extent that it raises doubts as to whether civil society has enough room or favorable conditions to be able to effectively promote human rights and democracy. One way of maintaining this control is through legislation (OSCE report, 2000:6).

Annual reports of human rights organizations (OSCE, Freedom House and HRW) have been emphasizing human rights violations in all Central Asian countries. Compared to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the other three Central Asian countries are assumed to be more liberal. However, OSCE and Freedom House have been reporting human rights violations in a whole region.

One of the Central Asian human rights activists Euvheniy Jovtis, while analyzing the early 1990s, wrote that *“the first signs of political and social pluralism appeared in Central Asia in the form of opposition’s political groups and parties and independent non-governmental organizations. Independent journalists and even independent mass media also emerged”* (Jovtis, 2007:1). At the same time he argues that each Central Asian country took a different approach towards independent movements and non-state actors. Among the Central Asian Countries, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan shares similar approach. Both countries did not leave a space for NGOs cooperation, which resulted expulsion of International NGOs and closure of local NGOs.

Historical analysis of the human rights NGOs in Central Asia shows how the Central Asian countries have been suppressing NGOs which carry out activities in the human rights area. As the International Helsinki Foundation stated *“Central Asian republics are increasingly restricting human rights activity through the adoption of new legislation, a trend that raises concerns about the possibility for NGOs to survive in an already hostile and obstructive environment”* (IHF report, 2006:2).

In contrast to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the three other Central Asian countries have been showing a relatively cooperative approach towards the development of human rights NGOs. Through OSCE, UNDP programs, TACIS and US State department projects, human rights NGOs could develop relatively freely. However, international organizations also have been warning the growing regulation of civil society groups, including human rights activists and international NGOs. International experts connect it with massive protests or so called democratic revolutions which started in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. For instance, after revolutionary waves in post Soviet region, one can refer to *“the Tajik government presented a new draft law on NGOs, which aimed to strengthen control over NGOs, in particular those that are funded from abroad and the Legislation adopted by Kazakh government in 2005 for the purpose of enhancing national security and countering extremism established new grounds on which NGOs can be closed down”* (IHF 2006:4).

When one analyzes the human rights area in Central Asian countries, for last two decades Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have been receiving the lowest score from Freedom House evaluation. Both countries are classified in the bottom of the list. As for Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, they did not suppress NGO sector like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, but they also have been violating human rights and ignoring NGOs. NGOs in these three countries were not suppressed by government, and they were not expelled like in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. However, when one analyzes the influence of NGOs for public policy and political reform, it appears very weak.

According to reports of Freedom House and other human rights organizations, Kyrgyzstan is the only country which is classified as 'partly free' while the rest 'not free' (Freedom House report 2012). Whereas the other Central Asian countries are criticized for government restrictions and the regulation of policy in regards to the activities of NGOs, particularly directed towards human rights NGOs.

Conclusion

What can be concluded is that CSOs gained popular topicality in global society and NGOs became an integral part of the international relations system. As analysis indicated, NGOs became very active in international peace enforcement, crisis management and humanitarian intervention in post conflict areas. Apart from that, the NGOs' consultative role for conflict resolution and peace building appeared crucial for implementing international conventions and common goals. Moreover, scholars and human rights activists are convinced that the NGOs' independent, apolitical and neutral views are very important to initiate peace and establish peace dialogues and agreements.

Furthermore, in democratic societies NGOs' activities are seen as supplementary for democracy promotion because most NGOs pursue law enforcement and application of the rule of law. In contrast to developing countries, Western society's well integrated active human rights NGOs, transnational and regional NGOs, actively participate in promoting action on social problems in wider areas and with regional scope. As the case of Europe showed, international and local NGOs in Europe play an important role in addressing current challenges of contemporary society such as racism, xenophobia, anti-semitism, minority rights, Roma rights, environmental issues, and others which require a trans-border network.

While analysing the case of developing countries, most social scientists and human rights activists have been critical of NGO regulation by governmental institutions. The post Soviet Central Asian countries showed slow democratic reform and a passive civil society. This is largely due to the short experience of some states in the NGO sector. On the other hand the nature of civil society in Central Asia differs significantly in terms of social and political behaviour.

In comparative studies of Central Asian civil society, one can conclude that Kyrgyzstan has relatively open and active civil society in the region. However, like in the case of Tajikistan, village habitants argue that most NGOs do not participate in identifying social problems and NGOs appear only after the eruption of conflicts, protests or after ecological calamities. Some of the village habitants acknowledge that NGOs and Public Associations are first initiators on conducting humanitarian assistance for vulnerable groups of people, however none of the respondents from villages of Tajikistan answered positively for NGOs role on decision-making process of social problems such as poverty reduction, illiteracy and education.

What can be learned from the analysis of local populations view on traditional institutions Uru, Ru, Mahalla and Avlod, is that they play influential role for solving existing social problems locally. Of course, their role should not be over-exaggerated but at the same time it should be noted that with the fall of communism the role of traditional institutions has revived in civil society sector. Therefore, NGOs as well as international organizations:

- Need to search possibility for communication channels rather than seeing them obstacle for civil society development.

In post-Soviet Central Asia, the Western version of civil society is promoted through NGO sector by international organizations. The number of registered and active NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan has increased for last two decades. However, human rights experts refer to the conflict of interest between NGOs and traditional institutions. Traditional institutions carry out protectionist policy in cultural and traditional terms. Moreover, NGOs in Central Asian societies still have not gained trust and still have not worked out effective communication channels to work with traditional institutions. Local experts argue that, on the contrary, traditional institutions are very important in fostering civil society. From, a local expert perspective, while ignoring the role of traditional institutions and

analyzing Central Asian civil society through NGOs activities, Western scholars tend to misinterpret the nature of civil society in the region. Therefore, the civil society topic in Central Asia has been raising public debate over the role of NGOs' activities and their influence on civil society development.

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