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### **Development of environmental movements in Kazakhstan through the prism of social and political transformations: key trends and current issues**

**Abstract.** The purpose of this paper is to determine the political significance of the ecological movements in Kazakhstan through the analysis of NGO's activity, contribution of authorities and civil initiatives on the national level. Ecological situation in Kazakhstan is very tense and complicated: the environmental problems at the local level cannot compete with other social problems, particularly, problems of social-economic nature, and as a result, they are not perceived adequately. The unresolved environmental issues are a distinct threat to Kazakhstan's national security and challenging to the regional one in Central Asia. It is clearly visible tendency to ignore ecological imperatives and focus on the current fossil fuel based energy economy. In this regard, civil society initiatives on environmental protection are becoming notably topical.

The paper deals with the tendencies of modern ecological movement in Kazakhstan as a kind of associated interest groups. The authors give a brief history of roots and development of this movement and analyze its distinguishing characteristics as a new participant of political life. A special attention is paid on the analysis of the measures on improving the ecological situation and prove the necessity in reforming this sector. The authors conclude the article with possible mechanisms of a larger involvement of citizens and increase the efficiency of NGO's activity in the ecological sphere.

**Key words:** Kazakhstan, ecological movement, environmental issues, NGOs, social movements.

#### **Introduction**

The globalization of political and economic development of the world community raise the inevitable intensification of the devastating impact of mankind on the environment, outstripping the pace of natural self-regulation of nature. Man-made disasters, depletion of irreplaceable natural resources will inevitably entail a radical change of not only the environmental situation, but also of the social system of a society, and it also have an impact on economy and policy.

The ecological perspective is not limited with optimization and harmonization of methods of environmental management; it has a social and political focus. The states consolidate efforts on the international scene, focus a geopolitics vector towards the solution of environmental problems, allocating with ecological functions authoritative international institutes (the UN, the European Union, NATO, etc.) and at the national level bodies of the

state and municipal authority of many countries pursue ecologically directed domestic policy. And yet, despite the positive developments, comes the realization that the international institutions and the state in isolation from society are not able to change the negative dynamics of the global environment. Activation of the social-ecological movements at the international, national and regional levels became the answer to the inability of the authorities to reach high-quality changes in the solution of global, national and regional environmental problems. The main persons involved in movements are the international, national and regional non-governmental ecological organizations. Today these structures become important elements of civil societies and world civil society, they define the shape modern ecological the movement in many respects.

The ecological movement of the Republic of Kazakhstan, considering an adverse situation in the

region in the sphere of conservation since the 1980s – early 1990s, is an important subject of political transformation process that contributed to the solution of a number of important socio-political issues. In its turn this process allowed to consolidate and lift the civil society structure on a new step and to make the political importance of interests of the general population active, asserting a constitutional right to the favorable environment.

During the modern period of social development, the “green” movement of Kazakhstan should not count on strong international support so far, to the aid of the power. Accordingly, the ecological situation in Kazakhstan faces with increasingly heavy burden. These circumstances actualize the political analysis of the problem of environmental movements as an institution of civil society of modern Kazakhstan.

### **Methodology**

There are three key problems of political ecology as a branch of knowledge: limitation of resources and their uneven distribution; interconnection between industrialization and load on the environment; and, at last, pollution and production wastes. All these aspects are interconnected between each other and attached to such political component as development of the ecological movement. It assumes development of a political and public discourse, first of all on the national level, and also development of a network of NGOs and civil initiatives. Problems of environment and development of the ecological movement are viewed from different theoretical positions and mostly from the point of view of the concept of the Sustainable development. Along with it, for the analysis of problems of the ecological movement in system of the political relations the constructivist approach possesses the greatest heuristic potential. The constructivist treatment suggests to consider political process as a dynamic, changeable field of the conflicts, carried out by means of fight for the right to impose sense and legitimate value. All this also fits into constructivist approach which uses vision and the decision by means of social problems. Representatives of this approach see the social problem as a product of process of collective definition [1, p.53]. So, the American sociologists M. Spector and J. Kitsuse define a social problem “as the activity of the individuals or groups which are showing discontent and making requirements for any estimated conditions” [2, p.75]. Such approach, refusing understanding of socio-political problems as static conditions, considers them as sequence of certain stages of activity for promotion of statements and requirements. This treatment corresponds much

better to procedural, liable to transformations nature of socio-political reality.

Statements of social issues not only draw attention to the situation: they also interpret a problem in the certain ways. In this process both problems, and groups “advancing” them compete to enter and remain in the public agenda. Recognizing that mass media are one of the major “public arenas” and the most important institute of civil society on which social problems are constructed, it is clear that they in many respects define success or failure of social movements. The social movements wishing to affect public opinion and the political agenda partially depend on mass media in transfer of the messages of wider audience [3, p. 1398].

In the USA and Western Europe, the public ecological organizations enjoy much bigger support from institutes of civil society than in the Post-Soviet countries that, in turn, conducts to the solution of a considerably bigger quantity of environmental problems on places, providing these organizations with popularity and political weight.

In research of social movements, the central value of interpretation of questions is more admitted in understanding of success and failure of social movements [4]. All of them, or at least the majority of interpretations of reality are socially designed and, therefore, give in to attempts of social movements to form or manipulate them. On the public arena social movements compete in persuading people of importance of that problem they try to solve. Agents of social movements try to bring the questions in the agenda of various audiences. J. Best subdivides the actors participating in process of clame-making (promotion of requirements) into insiders and outsiders [5, p. 172]. The first are part of political system; the author refers groups of pressure to them, first of all. They influence the decisions of power bodies and can provide that their interests were considered. Unlike them, outsiders are out of political system. The author refers to them, first of all, social movements. Their statements and requirements belong to yet not recognized problems. Mass media is especially important for outsiders. They try that their statements reached the most general public since it is from mass media where people generally learn about social movements. Lighting in mass media can help social movements to put pressure upon the power by means of the public concerned by new social problems.

In Kazakhstan the ecological movements are not sufficiently integrated into political process. These movements have the weak resources of political influence which are only expressed in opportunity to

criticize anti-ecological solutions of state governing bodies and large corporations in mass media. It forms a tendency of the state environmental policy and large industrial corporations of ignoring of ecological imperatives that, in turn, creates the center of socio-political intensity.

Thus, relying on these arguments, article presents the ecological movements, their development through a prism of consideration of evolution of the main stages directed on fight against destruction of environment, counteraction to deterioration of ecological situation by means of political methods (information pressure and mobilization of public opinion, the requirements, open public hearings on environmental problems, formal and informal consultations, use of discussion platforms, attraction of expert estimates, scientific argument and forecasting, etc.).

#### ***Development of environmental movements in kazakhstan: key issues and prospects***

##### ***Background and key features of the ecological movements' formation in Kazakhstan***

Development of the ecological movement in Kazakhstan and its gradual politicization were caused by a difficult complex of the reasons of a social, economic and political origin passed through a prism of the developed system of relationship between society and environment. The special place among the reasons that brought ecological movement to life belongs to negative consequences of anthropogenous impact on environment. In the period of totalitarian regime economic factors became the priority tasks. And today's ecological situation is a result of the structural deformations of economy which are saved up for many decades – domination of nature capacious branches, high specific weight of resource-intensive and power-intensive outdated technologies, raw orientation of export, excessive concentration of production in the most developed areas. Among the environmental problems defining global influence are consequences of nuclear tests and activity of military-industrial and space complexes, iridizations of territories, decrease in availability and quality of water, air pollution, soils, vegetation and food.

The Aral Sea can be considered one of bright examples of ecological crisis of the second half of the XX century. The problem of pollution of water resources was one of the main for Kazakhstan for the 60-80th years of the XX century. The surface water polluted by harmful substances, negatively influenced the condition of underground waters, exhausted their pure stocks. Sources of pollution of reservoirs were gas-and-dust emissions of the

enterprises, sewage, household dumpings, places of warehousing of industrial and household wastes, and also large livestock complexes. The most striking example of negative anthropogenic impact on water resources is the problem of Balkhash. It is possible to distinguish the region of the Caspian Sea from those ecological zones of the former Soviet Union which are on the verge of crisis. Considerable sources of pollution of the Caspian Sea are sea oil fields in Russia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan.

Among technogenic threats to the nature and human health the most ominous was threat of environmental pollution of chemical and radioactive materials that became possible as a result of action in the territory of Kazakhstan of proving grounds. During the long period of time the territory of Kazakhstan represented testing ground for approbation of the latest development of allied scientific centers in the field of nuclear physics, power and military technologies. Militarization of the Soviet economy caused the forced construction of numerous proving, chemical and space grounds on the territory of Kazakhstan. By the end of the 80th years of the XX century there were twelve (the major were the Baikonur Spaceport, Semipalatinsk Test Site, grounds Azgir and Kapustin Yar). By the end of the 80th years of the XX century there were 300 places of burial of radioactive waste in Kazakhstan. Now all the territory of Semipalatinsk and regions of the Pavlodar, East Kazakhstan and Karaganda areas, adjacent to the ground, are recognized as a zone of ecological catastrophe.

It should be noted that the social and economic reasons were the basis of developments of the ecological movement. Besides, the environmental problems which arose in the middle of last century, evidence of their negative consequences, closeness of information also became the prime causes of origin of the ecological movement. Democratic processes of an era of reorganization gave opportunity of expression of a protest to all social movements, including the ecological ones. Scales of ecological crisis in many respects set scales of the ecological movement, defined its ability to attract initially multidirectional protest energy, gave it force and dynamism.

##### ***The main stages of the Kazakhstani environmental movements' formation***

In the history of development of the ecological movement of Kazakhstan it is possible to allocate some periods:

1. *The compelled cooperation with the authorities (1958-1985)*. Development of nature protection work under control of the state in the period of totalitarian regime.

At the first stage of the development the ecological movement was presented by various nature protection organizations, didn't possess any real power and any levers for change of an ecological situation. It was under complete control of the state and had no right to distribute the received information. No one could talk about the ecological rights of the public during this period. However even in such situation shy efforts of the nature protection organizations succeeded to draw attention of the state to some negative consequences of extensive economy. In the Main directions of economic and social development of the USSR for 1981-1985 and for the period till 1990 the special section "Conservation" was allocated for the first time.

### 2. *Petition-populist (1985-1990).*

Beginning of mass vigorous activity of the ecological movement. Having declared the reorganization in the mid-eighties of the XX century, the political elite of the USSR took some steps of pro-ecological character. However, this period was extremely unsuccessful from the point of view of an ecological situation in the country: On April 26, 1986 there was an accident on Chernobyl nuclear power plant. The second half of the 80th years of the XX century was marked by creation of a set of informal public formations – the nonconventional, alternative organizations and movements which worked outside official structures, leaning only on an initiative of citizens and without applying for the official status. The ecological movement during reorganization had attributes of the subject of environmental policy, which was impossible to ignore. Among ecological movements of 1985-87 the most known were such as "The green world", "the Social-and-ecological Union", "The green movement", "Ecological fund USSR", "Ecology and the world" and the movement of teams on conservation.

The ecological organizations appeared the most suitable form of large-scale social movement for institutional changes. Though in the years of reorganization the political regime was softened, the ruling elite continued to consider that by means of levers of the command car it is possible to rule everything: nature, people, own development.

### 3. *Cooperation with the authorities (1991-1996).*

At this stage of the ecological movement which coincided in time with formation of political and state institutes of the power many representatives start active cooperation with the authorities as this direction created possibility of realization of the nature protection purposes and tasks.

The anti-nuclear movement "Nevada-Semipalatinsk" created on February 28, 1989 by O. Suleymenov became the most popular. Activists of the anti-nuclear movement from Italy, Israel, Japan joined them and soon the movement assumed the international scale."Committee of a defense of peace", "Fund of the world", the movement "Doctors of the World for Prevention of Nuclear War", heads of areas and the republic actively joined the fight for closing of Semipalatinsk Test Site. In June, 1989 at the 1st congress of deputies of the USSR in Moscow O. Suleymenov stated the purposes, tasks and requirements of the organization – to close the nuclear test sites, plants making nuclear materials for the military purposes.

At the initiative of the movement "Nevada-Semipalatinsk" the Supreme Council of the USSR accepted the appeal to the congress of the USA with an appeal to begin the dialogue about the termination of nuclear tests on the parliamentary level. The movement organized numerous protest actions, meetings, world lessons. Offices of the anti-nuclear movement "Nevada-Semipalatinsk" were opened in Russia (Yakutsk, Moscow), in Kyrgyzstan – Bishkek, in the USA – Princeton.

As a result on August 29, 1991 when the President of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic signed the Decree on closing, the issue of functioning of Semipalatinsk Test Site was finally resolved. The president of Kazakhstan N. A. Nazarbayev characterized the international anti-nuclear movement "Nevada — Semipalatinsk" as the first originally independent, going from soul of millions of Kazakhstan citizens' political association which chose national diplomacy in fight against nuclear tests [6, p.2]

Activity of "Nevada-Semipalatinsk" awakened an ecological consciousness among society and politicians. There were active actions of the public countrywide, "Nevada-Semipalatinsk" brought a new wave of the ecological movement to life in political arena. If in August, 1987 in Kazakhstan the first independent organization – the social-and-ecological association "Initiative" was formed, then after gaining the independence the proliferation was observed.

In 1991 the non-state League of independent scientists-ecologists transformed in 1995 to National Academy "Ekologiya" was created in Kazakhstan. In the West Kazakhstan region in 1989 the social anti-nuclear movement "Naryn" which put the task recovery of victims of nuclear tests and giving to areas of tests of the status of zones of ecological catastrophe was created. And in total in 1997 in the

ecological movement in the republic there were 120 independent associations. In the first half of the 90th years many public ecological associations owing to lack of material and financial means had no opportunity to be engaged in the activity that led eventually to staff reduction and elimination. Along with such facts of short existence of the ecological organizations successful activity for two decades of such public ecological associations as ecological society "Green Rescue", "Ecocenter", "Caspian Sea of Tabi□ata", "Aral Tenizi", "Green Rescue" should be noted.

Mass growth of political movements at a stage of formation of the state sovereignty of Kazakhstan became historical and political regularity. The ecological organizations appeared the most suitable form of large-scale social movement for institutional changes. However, because of the economic situation, sharply worsened, being in long crisis, objective conditions for implementation of the main and fair requirements of ecological movements during this period didn't exist. It became clear soon that environmental problems are at the point of intersection of economic interests of the enterprises and the states, as their owner, on the one hand, and interests of the population in the pure and healthy environment, on another. As a result, conservation appeared in the center of political struggle, the ecological movement quickly became popular, turned into the influential social force which could mobilize a large number of the supporters for protest actions. Objective conditions for implementation of the main requirements of ecological movements during this period didn't exist. The crisis situation in economy, work loss threat, low salaries, fear of the future – all this conducts to derivation of attention of society from an ecological perspective and makes the most important task of simple people aspiration to survive, support the family.

#### *4. Reproduction in a "market" context (1996 – to the present).*

Estrangement was a common feature of the relation of the power and business to ecological NGO. The "rich" minority and the "poor" majority in their own way resisted greening of life of society and the state. Local eco-NGO remained face to face with power of the regional bureaucracy which is the main holder of resources. Gradually ecological movement was transformed to poorly connected network of the local cells going everyone its own way.

In the conditions of the increasing raw orientation generating new risks and emissions of energy of disintegration together with de-ecologization of

state policy the ecological movements were capable to reproduce themselves only as a network of professional NGO. The principle of this reproduction is a distance on the verge of marginalization. To adapt for "market" society, the Ecological movement has to be respectable and responsible, correspond to a competitive spirit of the age and make mainly applied knowledge. Orientation to these purposes means loss of initial nature of the movement: its key organizations were transformed into the formalized groups of activists who became administrators or were integrated into structures of business.

By the middle of the 1990th there was a decrease of the activity of the Kazakhstan ecological movement, and decrease in popularity of ecological movements and "green" ideas is observed today. The social base of the ecological movement was quickly dissolved, and they couldn't redistribute the political capital which was saved up by them to the constructive course.

It is also necessary to note that the period from 1994 to 2001 is characterized with qualitative and quantitative growth of non-governmental organizations.

The number of NGO for this period increased from 400 to 1600. Growth of NGO first of all can be explained with massive financial support from the international funds and the organizations through system of grants which were directed generally on holding seminars, "round tables", trainings, had the organizational and technical, training and methodical character.

The large cities, especially Almaty were the main centers of development of NGO, and with moving of the capital to Astana the non-governmental sector began to develop actively.

By the beginning of 2002 1767 really operating NGOs which worked in various spheres of activity were officially registered in Kazakhstan. Generally, they were such socially significant areas as, protection of human rights, ecology and environment, gender issues, protection of interests of socially vulnerable segments of the population.

However, most of political scientists and analysts noted that in the country for that period the developed civil society which would answer the criteria accepted in the developed states of the world wasn't created yet. Respectively the sector of NGOs also was at a development stage which didn't reach the logical end. Ecological NGOs also, respectively, did not receive proper development and assessment of the activity.

In general, loss of subjectivity of the ecological movement in Kazakhstan led to the environmental

policy which is equitable to interests of a narrow circle of political elite and contradicts wide social groups. Further the ecological movements began to act as a hindrance on the way of receiving excess profits by the large companies, first of all, of oil and gas sector. Among the acting actors the social movement “Tabigat” and “Green Rescue” should be noted. Activists of the movement consider that in the near future environmental problems of Kazakhstan can cover all other social problems. The movement supports serious infringement of interests of large business.

However, adequate and constructive criticism of ecologists was given for manifestations of ecological utopianism. Resource orientation of modern economy of Kazakhstan, coming to power of oil and gas elite did not improve the fundamental bases of all environmental policy of the country. At the present stage of development Kazakhstan is dependent on the hydrocarbons in the world market.

Such situation is followed by devaluation of the ecological legislation, non-use of political means of fight for environment. The resource focused national economy inevitably assumes a de-ecologization of thinking of ruling elite and deinstitutionalization of the state construction. The state and society whose welfare is based on super operation of natural resources, are opponents of any forms of ecological alternative to this course.

Negative influence of the large extracting companies in Kazakhstan isn't estimated and not traced properly. However, there are statistics on separate, obvious consequences of some of them. According to government bodies “Tengizshevroil” is the leader in pollution of Atyrau area where 70% of emissions of the enterprises of oil and gas sector fall to the share of the company. TSO is one of leaders in Kazakhstan on the sums of penalties for pollution of the nature. In 2010 the company paid about 5 billion tenge (about 34 million US dollars). For excess burning of gases in 2010 TSO transferred into the republican budget 1, 146 billion tenge (about 7,8 million US dollars). For the last one and a half years on TSO the cases of non-staff situations which are followed by emissions of the polluting substances became frequent, for what the Zhayyk-Kaspiysky department of ecology imposed penalties and instructions about compensations of damage on total amount over 14 billion tenge (about 95 million. US dollars) [7].

Today the agreement on Kashagan with the companies conducting development there doesn't provide payment of insurance compensations by them in case of environmental disaster, as well as

the agreement on Baikonur with “Roskosmos”. These projects aren't insured in the international insurance companies [8].

The government, in fact, doesn't hear ecological requirements of society which are also not issued completely because of separation of responsible structures. All this aggravates problems of environmental policy and potentially forms the powerful center of the protest movement which is in opposition to the state. In this regard subjectivity of ecological movements of Kazakhstan and parties should be looked for in the plane of protest potential.

In Kazakhstan the protest potential of social movements on an ecological platform keeps the value. Today the ecological movement passed into opposition to the state, seeks to impose the alternative point of view, but not political will as for this purpose objectively there are no resources of the power. Thus, if improvement of an ecological situation in the West was expressed in the political plan in opportunity of the “green” to impose their will to the state and large corporations, in Kazakhstan the ecological movement is pushed aside from the main centers of acceptance of political movements.

In the conditions of resource-oriented national economy, absence of effective structures of civil society, political apathy of most of the population despite a bad ecological situation in RK, possibility of political lobbying and influence on environmental policy of the state of the ecological organizations should be estimated as low.

Anti-environmental friendliness, statistic lack of alternative of a resource course of development of society marginalizes the status of ecological values and their carriers. All this forms a tendency of the state environmental policy on ignoring of “the remote consequences” of these or those decisions.

Preservation of environment has to become an imperative of environmental policy that assumes involvement of defenders of environment in the state institutes.

Absence of strong structures of civil society doesn't allow the ecological movement to get effective social support, and their slogans in such conditions, are perceived as manifestation or ecological extremism, or ecological utopianism. Actually today the ecological movements in system of the political relations don't possess subjectivity, having only weak resources of the power which are expressed, first of all, in possibility of criticism in mass media of anti-ecological solutions of state governing bodies. Possibilities of lobbying of ecological movement are very weak.

### Conclusion

Today social conditions of satisfying environmental needs often opposed to those that are necessary to satisfy the material needs, therefore environmental movement as structural elements of civil society in politics are mostly rely on protests. However, a lack of system of activities that adversely affect the overall picture of the environmental movement development in the country, organization of non-systematic, one-off events with no results have a less impact on the public involvement in such events.

State's course of development, which based on the exploitation of natural resources, greatly restricts the possibilities of political subjectivity of environmental movements and parties of Kazakhstan as the spokesman of citizens' right for safe and healthy environment. The absence of strong civil society does not allow the ecological movement to get an effective social support, and their slogans are seen as manifestations of environmental extremism or ecological utopianism.

Nowadays the current situation of environmental policy in Kazakhstan indicates the absence of an efficient algorithm for the interaction in the system "expert community – the state – the public". Therefore, the task of the state authorities and management, as well as the civil society structures of Kazakhstan is to prevent manipulation of environmental issues for political interests and material benefits. It is necessary to design a new and effective forms of interaction mechanisms between NGOs and public authorities at all levels, responsible for the environment protection.

Under this mechanism, we consider as appropriate to provide the following measures:

An infrastructure development in the cooperation between NGOs and state authorities, the establishment of and support for the work of Councils for cooperation with NGOs in Akimats (Mayor offices), meetings, working groups of other institutions of intersectional interaction with state authorities, the organization of discussions, public hearings, public receptions and other forms of dialogue and exchange between the government, society and business on a wide range of issues, including the environmental security of the region;

- Ensuring the participation of NGOs in the legislative activities, their involvement in the formation of sectoral target programs;

- The development of informational and educative and expert-consultation forms of interaction between NGOs and authorities, organization and provision of expertise-analytical activities of NGOs;

- The creation of mechanisms for public expertise and public control in the socio-economic development of the country and its regions;

- Extension of evaluation criteria for NGOs activity efficiency in the Republic of Kazakhstan, including their participation in cross sector social partnership;

- Making a monitoring research on the effectiveness of the NGOs, public authorities and business community interaction in solving various problems;

- Further study and application of foreign experience in social partnership and public self-governing.

Developments of these directions of Kazakhstan's environmental movements are promising and fundamentally feasible as some elements are already present in the movement. For instance, it is high professional and scientific level of some activists. Another point is a saved positive experience since Soviet period. Certainly the valuable experience of other countries, such as the development and effective functioning of feedback between civil initiatives and the authorities of countries, the establishment of the environmental lobby that, ultimately, can serve as an effective model for Kazakhstan's environmental movement. Very important is the awareness of the participants of the environmental movements their mission as not only to make the solution of environmental issues but also include real effective strengthening of Kazakhstan on the way of democratic development, creating in the country a functioning and effective civil society. This will also contribute to fostering constructive cooperation with Kazakh environmental movements with ecological parties and movements of developed and succeed countries in the field and follow the relevant documents of the United Nations and other international organizations.

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