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Civil society institutions crucial in securing human rights and freedoms

A roundtable discussion has taken place in Paris to deliberate on the experience of Uzbekistan and France in civil society development

The event was organized by the diplomatic mission of Uzbekistan in collaboration with the Institute for Forecasting and Security in Europe (IPSE). Representatives of socio-political, expert-analytical circles and non-state sector of France attended the occasion.

Event participants were familiarized with large-scale efforts undertaken in Uzbekistan in encouraging the development of civil society institutions, consolidation of their role and significance in public affairs, in augmenting the socio-economic activity and law culture of the population, ensuring human rights, freedoms and legitimate interests.

Organizational and normative measures approved in the framework of implementation of the Concept of Intensification of Democratic Reforms and Formation of Civil Society in the Country triggered keen interest among French experts.

The specialists attending the occasion stressed that the adoption of laws “Transparency in the activities of government and management bodies”, “Environmental control”, “On social partnership” and other legislative acts, which have bolstered substantially the legal guarantees of participation of the population, citizens’ self-government bodies, nongovernmen-

tal nonprofit organizations (NNOs) and other civil society institutions in public affairs, laid solid foundations for a new stage in the evolution of civil society in Uzbekistan.

French experts expressed appreciation of the measures implemented in Uzbekistan to promote and support the active participation of NNOs in addressing pressing issues of social, socio-economic and humanitarian development in the country, and cementing the regulatory-normative bases of their activities.

The roundtable participants paid special attention to the outcomes of the 4th National Forum of NNOs of Uzbekistan organized under the motto “With a sense of engagement in the boosting the prosperity of the Motherland” and attended by more than 2.5 thousand civic institutions.

Along with topical issues in the evolution of civil society in Uzbekistan, authorities of the field also discussed the role and significance of mahalla – a critical institution of local self-government, created on the initiative of citizens.

According to French experts, the civil society in Uzbekistan has deep historical roots and is built on the traditions and spiritual values of the people. They pointed out that democratic reforms in the advancement of civil society institutions ought to be implemented systematically, consistently and in an evolutionary way, with an eye to the peculiarities of the country’s development and the growth of political and law culture as well as social consciousness of the population, and that they must be tightly interconnected with processes of democratization and modernization of other spheres.

President of the Institute for Forecasting and Security in Europe (IPSE) Emmanuel Dupuy underlined that Uzbekistan’s leadership has been applying in practice the principle “From strong state to robust civil society” and providing for the rule of law and solid social support in accordance with Uzbek development model.

The political scientist suggested that the NNOs’ influence on the conduct of effective civic control over state bodies’ activities has been on the rise to the extent of consolidation of civil institutions’ potential. Back in 1991, there were only 95 NNOs operating in Uzbekistan, but by the end of 2015, the number of such organizations in the nation reached 8,300.

Thanks to the policy of reforms and modernization undertaken by the leadership of Uzbekistan over the years of independence, not only the state, but also the advanced system of NNOs and citizens' self-government bodies have been active in tackling urgent issues in securing environmental stability, public healthcare, education, physical culture and sports, settling household and economic disputes and conflicts, providing social services and legal support for citizens.

“The successful advancement of civil society in Uzbekistan – the central state of the region – has a positive effect on neighboring countries, exemplifies the implementation of democratic reforms, processes of modernization and consolidation of the rule of law”, E. Dupuy has insisted. “This exerts a long-term stabilizing impact on the entire Central Asia.

The expert stressed that Uzbekistan's leadership has been placing significant emphasis on issues of consolidating social security, providing for the rights of women, children and other categories of population, ensuring civil freedoms. Broad international attention has been drawn to initiatives of President Islam Karimov on this front, including the declaration of 2015 as the Year of Attention and Care for the Senior Generation, and of 2016 as the Year of Healthy Mother and Child, with the implementation of respective government programs envisaging the allocation of considerable financial funds and technical capacities.

Director of Paris Institute for Economic Perspectives of the Mediterranean (IPEMED) Amal Chevreau:

In the contemporary world, all states realize the growing role of civil society. It is a potent force in developed nations alongside with media and entrepreneurship. The state of civil society is an indicator of democratic nature of a country. The government is responsible for ensuring security, rule of law and social services for population. In my opinion, civil society is a barometer of citizens' sense of confidence in the protection of human rights and interests, including special groups of population such as women, children, the elderly, youth, ethnic and religious minorities.

In order to secure stability in the country it is important to enable the society to realize its potential, and this is well understood and taken into

consideration in Uzbekistan. Worth noting is that the country attaches great significance to shoring up civil society formation.

Another important factor is state support for the development of small business. Uzbekistan's economic policy contains a whole range of measures to encourage private enterprise – a powerful engine for any country's economy. Major companies have sufficient capacities to protect their interests, while small businesses, instrumental in raising the people's incomes, creating new jobs and providing for long-term employment of citizens, are in need of support from the government. This sector reflects the state of civil society and influences it. That's the reason why the efforts undertaken in Uzbekistan in this field deserve high appraisal.

It is remarkable that within the last five years, nearly 5 million new jobs have been created in Uzbekistan owing to the commissioning of new enterprises and advanced development of small business and private entrepreneurship.

The IPSE expert Patricia Lalonde focused attention on the reforms and programs implemented in Uzbekistan aimed at the protection of women's rights and interests, elevation of their role in public affairs.

“Uzbekistan is one of the world's most secure countries for women, both from the point of view of protection of their life, health and well-being, and in terms of ensuring their equality in rights and active participation in economic affairs and politics,” P.Lalonde noted. “Uzbekistan has ratified the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and joined other basic international documents regulating the principles and norms pertinent to safeguarding their rights in line with international standards. The national legislation for gender equality has been formed in the country, along with conditions for comprehensive advancement of women.

“The government has been taking serious and extensive measures to consolidate the institution of family and boost legitimate and socio-economic interests of women and children. In Uzbekistan, the problem of early marriages has practically been obviated, and the state and civil institutions undertake effective steps to ensure girls' and women's access to special education to obtain profession, assist their formation as harmoniously advanced personalities capable of creating sound families.”

Following the roundtable discussion Patricia Lalonde gave an interview to Jahon Information Agency, wherein she told that the representatives of the French expert community got familiarized with the results of the 4th National Forum of NNOs of Uzbekistan with great interest.

“We note with satisfaction that building a robust civil society on clearly defined democratic principles has been dynamic in the country. I would especially point out to the activity of newly established NNOs active in healthcare, education, women’s rights and environmental protection.

Particularly notable on this front are the endeavors of civic institutions on the way to secure women’s rights. This is principally important due to women’s invaluable contribution to the future of the nation and the entire human race. President Islam Karimov eloquently made this point in his statement at an official meeting occasioned to the 23rd anniversary of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Therefore, that Uzbekistan’s women demonstrate high political activity is worth noting. The acting legislation of the country sets a 30 percent quota for them in nominating candidates for deputyship in the parliament from political parties, which may serve a bright example for many developed nations.

Great attention is paid to bolstering the role of women in the business environment, entrepreneurship development, employment issues.

On the whole, Uzbekistan can serve as a model for many countries of the world in civil society formation and particularly in guaranteeing the active role of women in this process.