



ANTI-CORRUPTION REFORMS IN KAZAKHSTAN

“Corruption” is a socio-economic problem prevalent in today’s societies. It is accepted that corruption occurs with the state. Overcoming corruption requires a careful and systematic approach, since it is an important problem that threatens the democratic, moral and ethical structures of societies. Corruption, which is seen in all societies, is considered one of the global problems in terms of its social reflections today. According to the data of the “Transparency International” organization, no country in the world is free from corruption. At the same time, 68% of the countries in the world have serious corruption problems.

Corruptions can be divided into different categories in terms of time of occurrence. The first is corruption between citizens and government officials. The second is commercial corruption between government officials and business enterprises. The third is political corruption between leading politicians and high courts.

In the “Anti-Corruption Law” of the Republic of Kazakhstan, corruption is defined as “a responsible public official, using his powers to obtain benefits and advantages for himself or third parties from a citizen who tries to benefit from public services”. In the first year of the foundation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in 1991, it was discussed that corruption was a very dangerous phenomenon. A number of Presidential Decrees have been published, including the first regulation on the fight against corruption, the “Decree on the Strengthening Measures of Organized Crime and Fight against Corruption” dated March 17th, 1992.

We can examine the anti-corruption process in Kazakhstan in two main stages. The first period is from 1998 to 2015, when the “Anti-Corruption Law” of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated July 2nd, 1998 and numbered No267-I was valid. The second period is from 2015 to the present day. In the first period, measures were taken to eliminate the conditions that caused daily corruption that citizens faced more frequently while using local public services. The people of Kazakhstan were faced with corruption cases mostly when obtaining various documents from educational and health institutions, as well as law enforcement and accelerated public services. In order to prevent bribery among government officials, the “one-window” principles, through which any citizen can receive the necessary public service in a few minutes, have been actively implemented in the country. In the meantime, other public services (obtaining a residence permit, national identity card and passport, registration of business, etc.) have also been transformed into an online format within the framework of the “e-government” program. Nowadays, more than 80% of public services are provided through the “egov.kz” portal and public service centers.

In the second period (since 2015), the main principles and methods of combating corruption in Kazakhstan were reviewed, and

the “Anti-Corruption Law” No410-V dated November 18th, 2015, became the main regulatory document. The new law inevitably made it possible to move from a strategy of struggle to a comprehensive strategy aimed at eliminating the causes and conditions that led to corruption. It should be noted that the duties of detecting and preventing corruption crimes were previously within the authority of Prosecutor’s Office, the National Security Committee, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, the Military Police of the Kazakhstan Armed Forces and the National Security Committee. With the entry into force of the new law, a new institution serving to prevent corruption has been established. This new institution, established under the name of “Anti-Corruption Agency” acts directly under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and within its responsibility. “ANTIKOR”, the sub-unit of the agency, has offices in almost all regional centers of the country. Today, the concepts of dignity, cooperation and prevention have been determined as the basic principles of the Agency. In line with these principles, first of all, the agency aims to raise the awareness that corruption is a crime within the public and at the social level, secondly, it aims to create a culture against corruption and finally, to foster active participation of citizens in the fight against corruption in general.

Currently, programs and plans for the implementation of the aims and objectives of Kazakhstan’s anti-corruption policy are carried out within the framework of the “2015-2025 Anti-Corruption Strategy” adopted in 2014 with the initiative of the President. The anti-corruption strategy has radically changed the conceptual priorities of the anti-corruption policy. In this strategy, anti-corruption and the participation of all stakeholders, such as public institutions, business and civil society, in the fight against corruption have been brought to a new level. 2017 was the last year of the implementation of the first phase of anti-corruption measures, and the first results of the implementation of the revised anti-corruption policy in Kazakhstan within a three-year period will be evaluated. It should be noted that in the analysis of the anti-corruption strategy and practical results, such as reviewing the effectiveness of its implementation, external audit mechanisms are put forward to increase objectivity. For this purpose, a special monitoring group consisting of representatives of non-governmental organizations, media, public institutions and political parties was established in 2017.

It is seen that successful results have been achieved in the first phase of the implementation of the 2015-2017 Action Plan in relation to the Anti-Corruption Strategy. For instance, 63 of 64 activities planned for 2015-2017 were completed. According to the data of the Legal Statistics and Special Accounts Committee of the Attorney General of the

Republic of Kazakhstan, a gradual decrease was observed in the corruption crime rates in Kazakhstan between 2009 and 2019. While the highest number of corruption cases were recorded in 2009, which is the beginning of the period analyzed, it is seen that the corruption rate was reduced to a minimum in 2015. It can be said that the sharp decline in corruption cases in 2015 is directly related to the new regulations, methods and the anti-corruption approach put into practice. By gradual increase after 2015, in 2019, the level of 2015 was reached again. Experts describe the fight against corruption in 2020 as the “President Tokayev effect”, because the anti-corruption efforts in Kazakhstan entered a different phase with the appointment of the new president.

According to the information of the Attorney General’s Legal Statistics and Special Accounts Committee, 1,416 registered crimes were committed in 2019 in accordance with Articles 366, 367, 368 (giving and receiving bribes, mediating bribery) and 361 (abuse of duty) of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan. A year ago, this number was 1,588, 10% higher. In 2019, Nur-Sultan was the leader of the three regions with 198 corruption crimes, followed by Almaty with 152 crimes and Mangystau with 100 crime cases. Apart from these three regions, there is a decrease in corruption crime rates in the cities of Shymkent, Pavlodar and Jambyl.

According to the data of the Transparency International organization, Kazakhstan climbed 19 steps and ranked 94 with 38 points in 2020. Compared to 2019, it went up by 19 positions, getting four points more. It can be said that Kazakhstan achieved good results in the fight against corruption. In October 2019, Kazakhstan joined the GRECO (anti-corruption group of states) international organization. The organization considers the dismissal of corrupt judges as an important step in Kazakhstan’s judicial reform. Kazakhstan’s position in the Corruption Perception Index 2019 ranking is the best indicator of all time. One-year progress is equal to the previous seven-year progress and almost equal to the planned value for five years, and according to Kazakhstan’s Strategic Development Plan, the Corruption Perception Index indicator is predicted as 35 points in 2025.

Consequently, corruption that crosses national borders requires global cooperation. Corruption not only erodes democracy and human rights, but also undermines trust in public officials and hinders economic development. Today, Kazakhstan is increasing the necessary measures to prevent corruption and improve the business conditions in the country. In conclusion, we can say that important steps have been taken in the fight against corruption compared to other former Soviet Union countries.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The Vice Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, Ravshan Sabirov, participated in a meeting of the country's parliament. Sabirov mentioned that Sadyr Zhaparov, a newly elected President of Kyrgyzstan, planned to make his first official foreign visit to Russia, where he would have a meeting with Russia's President, Vladimir Putin. It is expected that the parties would discuss gas issues, in particular discount on gas prices for Kyrgyzstan (Yahoo.news, 25.01.2021).
- According to the report by the Transparency International, the Corruption Perception Index in Central Asia remains low. In 2020, Tajikistan ranked 149th out of 180 countries. Ranks of other Central Asian countries are comparatively better. Uzbekistan ranked 146th, while positions of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan were 124th and 94th, respectively. In terms of corruption, Turkmenistan is the region's worst performing country. According to the ranking, Denmark and New Zealand are top corruption free countries (Asia-Plus, 28.01.2021).
- Turkmenistan opened the International Year of Peace and Trust. Turkmenistan's officials, members of parliament, representatives of international institutions and missions attended the event. According to the UNICEF Representative, Christine Weigand, the event is important in terms of maintaining peace, stability and mutual understanding. Other participants of the conference stressed its timeliness. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, Rashid Meredov, emphasized that Turkmenistan permanently called for peace and trust in international relations (Kabar, 30.01.2021).
- The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Peter Szijarto, paid a visit to Kyiv, where he met with the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba. Minister Peter Szijarto assured the Ukrainian side that Hungary only wanted to improve the bilateral relations between Ukraine and Hungary by supporting the Hungarian community in Ukraine's Zakarpattia region. Earlier, Ukraine had accused Hungary of interfering in internal affairs of Ukraine. The Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed his hope that the sides would stop the deterioration of bilateral relations and reverse the process (Ukrinform.net, 27.01.2021).
- The draft of the new Constitution of Kyrgyzstan was approved unanimously by all 67 members of the Constitutional Council. The draft version of the Constitution will be further submitted to the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic). The new Constitution increases Presidential powers, as well as his responsibilities, which also abolishes the office of the Prime Ministry and increases the accountability of the Parliament to the people (En.kabar.kg, 28.01.2021).
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, Mohammad Javad Zarif, arrived in Georgia for talks about a number of bilateral issues after visiting Baku, Moscow and Yerevan. He held separate meetings with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, the Prime Minister, Giorgi Gakharia, and the President, Salome Zurbishvili. Minister Javad Zarif tackled bilateral relations and regional cooperation in various fields, including a transnational corridor leading to the Black Sea and issues of regional security (Tasnimnews.com, 28.01.2021).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- According to the press service of the Labor and Social Protection Ministry, Kazakhstan is implementing 6,700 socially significant infrastructure projects through the Employment Road Map for 2020-2021. The Road Map increased employment by creating additional 239 thousand jobs with an average salary of 130 thousand tenge. Almost 50% of new jobs were created in rural areas. New employment opportunities allowed Kazakhstan to keep the unemployment rate at 5% (Kazinform, 25.01.2021).
- In 2020, trade in agricultural products between Russia and China increased substantially and broke a historical record. Bilateral trade flows amounted to \$5.6 billion. Russia exported agricultural products worth \$4.1 billion to China, which was 13.7% more than in 2019. China became the leading importing country for Russian meat products. In 2021, Russia and China plan to increase bilateral trade to \$200 billion. In 2020, total trade between two countries equaled \$107.8 billion decreasing by almost 3% compared to 2019 (TASS, 28.01.2021).
- According to the press service of the Russian government, the Prime Minister of Russia, Mikhail Mishustin, plans to visit Kazakhstan, where he will hold a meeting with his counterparts from other countries of the Eurasian Economic Union on February 5th, 2021. The parties will discuss issues of domestic markets, customs and tariff regulations and innovation projects. Moreover, Mishustin will participate in the Digital Almaty 2021 forum, which aims to strengthen digital cooperation (TASS, 30.01.2021).
- Recently, The Presidents of South Korea and Uzbekistan, Moon Jae-in and Shavkat Mirziyoyev, had a virtual summit, where they agreed to launch negotiations on a bilateral free trade agreement. In 2020, trade between two countries amounted to \$2.1 billion. Uzbekistan plans to attract up to \$400 million investments from South Korea. The parties also plan to jointly implement 55 projects worth \$3.4 billion. Uzbekistan and South Korea have signed several important agreements, including a \$1 billion agreement with the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) (UzReport, 29.01.2021).
- Kyrgyzstan plans to reform its mining sector. Recently, President Sadyr Japarov signed a decree on reforming the mining industry. The document aims to increase the role of government in the sector, improve its productivity and create a transparent system of legal regulations. It also pays special attention to the environmental and safety issues. According to the new regulation, mining companies will have to purchase at least 80% of goods and services in Kyrgyzstan (24.kg, 30.01.2021).
- Turkey plans to increase its exports to Russia and China through railways. According to the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure of Turkey, the first export freight train consisting of 15 wagons will depart from Ankara via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway to Russia on January 29th, 2021. The distance of almost 4.7 thousand kilometers will be covered in eight days. On the same day, a block freight train will depart to China and run almost 7.8 thousand kilometers (AzerNews, 29.01.2021).

Society and Culture

- According to the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat), the population of Russia declined by 510,000 people in 2020, which is a record decline over the past 15 years. The main reasons of the demographic decline in Russia include high death rate, low number of births and decreasing rates of immigration. In 2020, the problem was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused additional 116,000 deaths in Russia (Asiaplustj.info, 29.01.2021).
- The International Turkic Academy organized an event titled "Zhambyl is a Kazakh-Kyrgyz common poet" in Bishkek. Several literary masterpieces were presented in Kazakh and Kyrgyz languages during the event. One of the works presented to the public was the famous Kyrgyz epic "Manas" in Kazakh, prepared by the Turkic Academy. Moreover, an academic collection of selected works of Abai in Kyrgyz, prepared by the Academy for publication, was presented to the readers during the event (Twesco.org, 28.01.2021).
- The President of the International Turkic Academy, Darkhan Kydyrali, met with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan, Ruslan Kazakbayev. The sides exchanged views and discussed prospects of further intensification of bilateral cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and the Turkic Academy. Minister Kazakbayev expressed his gratitude to the Academy for its efforts and reiterated his readiness to provide support in implementing mutual projects and organizing events (Twesco.org, 29.01.2021).
- Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan to Turkey, Kubanychbek Omuraliev, met with the Deputy Minister of Family, Labor and Social Services of Turkey, Ahmet Erdem. The sides discussed issues of protecting the rights and interests of Kyrgyz citizens in Turkey. One of the issues that was detail with was the implementation of the Social Security Agreement between Kyrgyzstan and Turkey, which would allow citizens of two countries, working on a legal basis, to receive pensions and benefits both in Kyrgyzstan and in Turkey (En.kabar.kg, 28.01.2021).
- The President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, signed a resolution on establishing an interdepartmental commission to develop the National Program of Turkmenistan for the Aral Sea for 2021-2025 and monitor its implementation. The main objective of the document is to improve the socio-economic and environmental situation in the Aral Sea region. The document also envisages creation of the Concept of the National Program of Turkmenistan for the Aral Sea for 2021-2025 (Turkmenportal.com, 30.01.2021).
- During the second meeting of the Interstate Council on Space of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), held online, at the suggestion of the CIS Executive Committee, Kazakhstan became the chairman of the Interstate Council on Space in 2021. The participants discussed the agenda for 2021 that included 18 topical issues on cooperation in the field of space exploration, including the issue of creating optical and telecommunication satellites on the basis of an assembly and testing complex in Kazakhstan. Following the meeting, the Council approved a work plan for 2021 (Inform.kz, 28.01.2021).