



5 YEARS TOGETHER:

MOVING ON

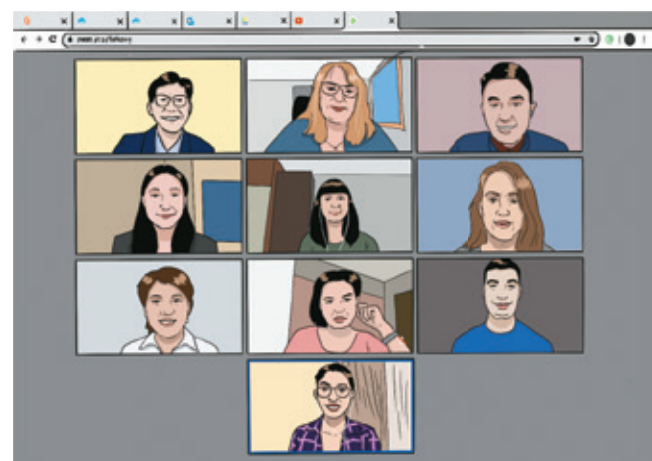
04	JULDYZ SMAGULOVA Opening Remarks
05	GEROLD BELGER Quotations
06	AIDA AIDARKULOVA Opening Remarks
07	NURBULAT MASSANOV Quotations
08	NOTA BENE A Changing Society
12	MURAT AUEZOV Heroes of our Time
16	MALIKA TOKMADI Life beyond Stereotypes
18	YEVGENIY ZHOVTIS System Effectiveness
22	IMPORTANT A New Reality: COVID-19
24	NADEZHDA KOZACHENKO The Requisite Credo
25	NARGIS KASSENOVA Time for Like-minded People



26	VITALIY KULIK Back to the Future
28	BAKHYT TUMENOVA Ready to Continue: A Letter to George Soros
29	KASSYMKHAN KAPPAROV Mama-Pro, Economics and Values
30	GUIDE Who Makes Decisions in the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan?
34	OPINION Modern-day Myths
36	SHOLPAN AYTENOVA Transformation Process
38	ADIL JALILOV This is Just the Beginning



40	VALERIA IBRAYEVA Fury and the avant-garde
42	GULNARA ABIKEYEVA Megaphone for a New Society
43	TAMARA KALEYEVA A Person with Rights
44	ASSIYA AKISHEVA Studying the Craft of Journalism
46	ANTON ARTEMYEV Reasonable Optimism



48	VENIAMIN ALAYEV About us but without our Participation
50	ROZA ABILOVA Theory and Practice of Success
52	IRINA SMIRNOVA Open Position
54	BERIK ABDIGALIULY This is our Right
55	ZHIBEK AKHMETOVA Intelligent Infusion



56	SAULE KALIKOVA Era and Education
60	ALIYA RUSTEMBEKOVA To see No Limits
61	ASSEL YESZHANOVA A Comfortable Urban Fabric
62	DOSYM SATPAYEV Shift the Focus to Millennials
64	AIGERIM KUDERINOVA Mutual Understanding
66	FACTS AND FIGURES Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan



JULDYZ SMAGULOVA,
CHAIRS THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE SOROS
FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN, AND IS DEAN OF THE
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND EDUCATION AT KIMEP
UNIVERSITY.

Dear colleagues and readers!

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Foundation’s entire staff and to the members of its Board of Trustees, the Foundation’s partners, grantees, and graduates of various programs for their contribution to the development of an open civil society in this country.

Over a period of 25 years the Foundation has supported a multitude of projects and initiatives—we have something to be proud of! As you know, the Foundation provides grants for projects in the fields of education, transparency and accountability, democratization, and the development of civil society. The Foundation works closely with the public sector, government, partner non-governmental organizations, and individual activists. Many of these projects have transformed our public discourse and have been able if not to change the situation, then at least to draw the attention of society and the state to such social problems as violations of the rights of vulnerable groups of the population or the lack of transparency in public procurement.

It was the Foundation that supported the country’s first palliative-care project. It supported partners that provide assistance to cancer patients and patients with AIDS. I am impressed by the project on developing financial literacy and business skills for mothers of children with disabilities. And what a wonderful project

the Action Literally inclusive theater laboratory is! I would also like to mention the Factcheck.kz project. Its work is indispensable in a situation where it is difficult for a reader to separate reality from fake, facts from conspiracy theories, truth from half-truths and lies.

As a scholar I believe in our training program for young researchers. Many of them have become true professionals after completing their training and are already carrying out serious analytical studies on a variety of topics. I would like to believe the participants in the educational initiative on promoting the Non-positional Teacher Leadership ideas are able to become local leaders unafraid of change and able to improve the educational environment for themselves and their students.

I have given only a few examples of projects and initiatives supported by the Foundation over the year. If there were more independent charitable organizations in the country, civil society would be more active and it would be possible to do a lot more. From my short experience with the Foundation, I have realized that it is one of the few independent charitable organizations in the country. Regrettably, many non-governmental organizations and foundations have proved to be financially unsustainable, and thus the need for budget diversification is particularly acute today.

It is impossible to develop an open democratic society without non-governmental organizations and independent foundations financing them. Last year, at the annual meeting of the national foundations in Berlin, Ms. Claudia Roth, Vice-President of the German Bundestag, inspired us in her welcome speech when she said:

“We are glad that Berlin has become the home of the Open Society Foundation after the closure of its office in Budapest. We very much need your help to solve many problems that cannot be solved without a strong civil society. But even more we need your criticism.”

I would very much like to hear the same message from our state.

We are celebrating our 25th anniversary at a time of significant, dramatic changes in the country and the world. But we are full of hope and confident that there are no insoluble problems and that together we can make our country and our world a little better. Otherwise, neither my colleagues nor I would be working for the Foundation.

I wish you every success!

QUOTATIONS



GEROLD BELGER (1934–2015)

AUTHOR AND FORMER CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN

“*The truth must be known if we are concerned about people’s spiritual progress.*”

“*Stability is not a cure-all. Life does not tolerate stagnation. Times change; therefore everything changes. And one must be prepared for this—even those in power who invariably consider themselves strong and wise. Anyone in charge is only a temporary ruler. He must not pin his hopes on permanency.*”

“*In my opinion self-awareness depends on whether in your soul you are a slave or a free man. A genuinely free person will never belittle, harm, or enslave another.*”

“*...the ‘special path’ of Kazakhstani democracy is troubling. It is the devil’s work. It is self-deception. Nonsense. Whenever they look for a ‘special path,’ we might as well consider it the end of everything. A dead end.*”



AIDA AIDARKULOVA,
CHAIR OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN'S
EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Dear friends, colleagues, and readers!

You are holding in your hands the history of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan for the past 25 years. Faces, facts, relevant information, and personal opinions of people who have been part of the Foundation's success at various times.

Anniversaries are a good occasion to look back, re-evaluate one's achievements and imagine the future. We totally understand it is not possible to recount each of the projects and initiatives implemented over the past years in the pages of this anniversary report, but we have attempted to provide an accurate picture that answers the main question: what is the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan?

Over the past quarter of a century our country has changed, and the Foundation and its priorities have changed along with it. We ask you to judge us by our deeds, which live on in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Examples include Juvenile Justice, Palliative Care, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, and the Urban Forum Kazakhstan. A new cohort of experts and analysts working in various fields and contributing to the development of the country is being formed thanks to our scholarship projects in the areas of public policy, budget transparency, journalism, and human rights. From the very beginning we have remained committed to a human rights-based approach, promoting

it through our various programs and initiatives. The Foundation is rightly proud of having been one of the first to develop projects in inclusive education and ensuring that society understands the importance of the principles of inclusiveness. It also pioneered work on social integration for people with mental health challenges.

We are celebrating our anniversary at an unusual time. This period will forever remain in history as a period of distancing and self-isolation. The Foundation has not for one minute stopped working and has shifted to remote operations. We are pleased that in adapting to the new reality we have found opportunities to support the most vulnerable groups of the population, those who are most in need of care and protection and often left unnoticed. To this end, our Board of Trustees has announced it is accepting applications for a competition focused on reducing the impact of the pandemic in Kazakhstan. With this effort the Foundation is once again demonstrating the flexibility and efficiency that are so essential for difficult situations.

As you can see, for all these 25 years the Foundation, as an objective, independent organization, has taken on a huge responsibility, sometimes engaging in risky projects that no one had ever been involved in before. We would always say, "Let's try it!" and after getting a satisfactory result we would watch other donors and business associations take up the initiative. Herein lies the essence of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan: we strive to improve life in Kazakhstan for everyone.

Twenty-five years of our work would not have been possible without the amazing people in our organization, including former and current employees of the Foundation, members of the Board of Trustees and expert committees, our civil society partners, experts from various industries in Kazakhstan and far beyond, as well as our colleagues from the entire network of the Open Society Foundations. We are incredibly grateful for their hard work and commitment to the values of an open society, and for the opportunity to work with each of them.

Beginning next year, after having passed the 25-year mark, we will start a new strategic cycle of activities. No matter what our project portfolio, our mission will remain.

QUOTATIONS



NURBULAT MASSANOV (1954–2006)

KAZAKH SCIENTIST, PUBLIC FIGURE AND PUBLICIST, AND FROM 1995 TO 1999 A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN

If we want to solve some problem we must first and foremost boldly diagnose it. This is a task for us: intellectuals and the intelligentsia.

If we lose the traditions of the second generation now and they are unable to pass them on to the nascent third, then the third generation will become the first again. The trajectory of scientific development will be disrupted, and everything will have to start over. Therefore, it is very important to ensure the continuity, transfer, and relay of second-generation traditions to the new emerging generation. This is one of the keys for the successful civilized development of our culture, science, and people.

The economy is like an engine, like a locomotive: it carries us all forward. However, the situation has now changed. If in the past everything depended on government policy and the state determined the priorities, pace, and direction of travel, this is now no longer the case. Each person individually defines their life goals for themselves.

Everyone has the right to have their own hero. But there should be no unique, universal heroes. One can immediately sense the hands of the state in this; one can sense the character's artificiality.

A CHANGING SOCIETY

TO IMPROVE, SOCIETY MUST CONSTANTLY CHANGE, DEVELOP, LEARN AND ABSORB BEST PRACTICES, REVIEW OLD APPROACHES AND LOOK FOR NEW ONES, SO AS TO GIVE A CHANCE TO THOSE WHO HAVE THE ENERGY AND CREATIVE SPIRIT TO TRY TO IMPLEMENT THEIR IDEAS AND IMPROVE THE LIVES OF EVERY HUMAN BEING



About every 25 years, a new generation of people is born. It is no secret that each new generation thinks differently. Working in the Republic for a quarter of a century, the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan team have witnessed the emergence of the new generation as a fact.

But the Foundation went further. With its work, it changed behavior and the way of thinking of several generations of Kazakhstani. While some, thanks to the Foundation, have become participants in or beneficiaries of changes, others have become their personification. These people can be proud that they have contributed to the development of the society and made it a little better.

Over decades of work in the country, the Foundation has also become the object of transformation: the Foundation’s managers and staff have changed,

the policies and programs were reviewed and updated, new partners joined the team, and budgets were increased and reduced. All that has remained and will remain unchanged is the focus on human rights, according to which all social relations should exist.



Under the auspices of the Foundation, artists drew cartoons highlighting the deplorable human rights situation in Kazakhstan, universities created student clinics where citizens could get free legal aid, and researchers for the first time began monitoring the rights of women, the LGBT-community, and HIV/AIDS patients. Without the support of the Foundation, the Republic would hardly have been able to create and establish an effective system of juvenile justice in the shortest possible time. At the same time, the methods included both training trips abroad for judges and the arrangement of rooms for detained minors in several police departments.

THE NEW GENERATION CHOOSES

Throughout the Foundation’s work in Kazakhstan, independent human rights organizations have been its strategic partners. Since the late ’90s, the Foundation has sponsored them for the compilation of alternative human rights reports and reviewing local legislation for compliance with international standards. Twenty years later, the graduates of the Foundation’s unique scholarship program in the region—“New Generation of Human Rights Defenders”—presented an alternative report on human rights in the UN Council.

The Foundation has always seen youth as the main source of positive change. From the very beginning it has not missed an opportunity to support its initiatives, whether this be a competition to create unique textbooks on the history of Kazakhstan or a trophy for law students competing with one another in a mock trial.

After the country gained its independence, it was critically important to open the world to young Kazakhstani. It is the Foundation that undertook to implement this task. Young people not only flipped through Rolling Stone magazine and watched movies in English, but also received information about opportunities for foreign education. Hundreds of students took advantage of these opportunities, and thousands became beneficiaries of other educational projects of the Foundation in Kazakhstan.

It is difficult to overestimate the Foundation’s contribution to school education in Kazakhstan. Now, pedagogical universities teach the basics of inclusive education, and a national standard has been developed and implemented for secondary schools. With the support of the Foundation, computers with Internet access were provided in schools, and schools understood their significance as local community centers. These changes were made possible because the Foundation’s



FOR MANY YEARS, THE TEAM OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN HAS BEEN FOCUSED ON IMPROVING UNIVERSITY CURRICULA AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS, IMPROVING SKILLS OF YOUNG TEACHERS, TRANSLATING THE BEST TEXTBOOKS IN THE HUMANITIES, AND CREATING NEW ONES



Participants in the “New generation of human rights defenders” coalition. Geneva, 2019

THE COLLABORATION OF THE SCHOOL AND ACADEMIC COMMUNITY WITH THE FOUNDATION HAS LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CULTURE OF DEBATE AND CRITICAL THINKING, AND THE PUBLICATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF TEXTBOOKS ON CIVIC EDUCATION

SUPPORTING KAZAKHSTANI ART, THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN HAS NEVER STRAYED FROM THE COURSE OF PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS. THUS, IN 2011, WITH THE HELP OF ITS PARTNERS, THE FOUNDATION ORGANIZED A FREE FILM SESSION FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES. AS A RESULT, IT INITIATED A LARGE-SCALE DISCUSSION ABOUT THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT AND THE RIGHTS OF THIS SOCIAL GROUP.

employees were never afraid to create precedents for open discussions on topics that were previously discussed exclusively behind closed doors.

ACCESSING THE MEDIA SPACE

The main assistance on this difficult path was received from free media, which the Foundation has been greatly supporting from its establishment. It supported seminars for journalists from Kazakh-language newspapers, and trips for young correspondents to festivals. It created an information center for the media and an independent production center, allocated grants to newspapers for additional circulation and tax payments, encouraged original approaches to election coverage, and invested in the institutional stability of the media. Such diverse projects ultimately contributed to the significant professionalization of Kazakh journalists and allowed the Foundation to shift its focus to media literacy and digital security.

However, the Foundation is not focused only on the improvement of media professionalism. Its employees invest much effort in strengthening the capacity of the local third sector. Thanks to the Foundation's employees, Kazakhstani NGOs have learned to create applications for attracting resources and to work with "mobile consultants." Over the past few years, they have polished their skills in the National Schools

framework, a large-scale project to activate the civil movement in small towns and villages. Among other topics, coaches explained to social activists the importance of involving citizens in the budget process. Years later, there were impressive examples of social auditing and self-government at the local level.

GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL BUSINESS

At the national level, the Foundation's efforts in this area are supported by dozens of young experts in the field of budget transparency, graduates of the Open Budget Fellowship. Thanks to the Foundation, monitoring the transparency of local budgets and social investments of mining companies, as well as the compilation of civil budgets by state agencies, has long been standard. At the same time, the participation of the Foundation in the economic life of the society was not limited to training to seek state assistance. In the mid-'90s, it was thanks to the Foundation that small Kazakhstani entrepreneurs learned about the existence of micro-loans and business incubators and effectively took advantage of new opportunities. Today, the Foundation, together with its partners, defends the economic rights of socially vulnerable groups.

However, it was not only small businesses that got back on their feet with the help of the Foundation's expert assistance. Even archivists and librarians have



learned to search for extra-budgetary sources of funding during the many years of the Foundation's work. With travel grants from the Foundation, representatives of the performing arts have made countless trips abroad, speaking about the Republic at festivals of jazz, puppetry, modern dance, and juggling.

Quite quickly, with the assistance of the Foundation, the urban environment became a place where many activists and enthusiasts applied their energies. Communities of like-minded people have begun to gather around improvement projects that not only upgrade a playground but also fight for clean air and the preservation of the architectural heritage. The Foundation has become not only a donor for Kazakhstanis but a resource of knowledge about the mechanisms of urban activism.

IN THE EARLY 2000S, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN, THE FIRST INDEPENDENT CENTER FOR THE ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC PROBLEMS WAS ESTABLISHED IN KAZAKHSTAN.



Moreover, the Foundation plays the same resource role in interaction with young researchers, introducing them to the world of public policy. The Foundation has consistently promoted a data-based decision-making culture. Since 2014, these efforts have become systematic, and the Foundation has begun not just to support separate research but also to form a new generation of experts with political and managerial competencies rather than academic ones. Today, these young people confidently promote the need for sexual education, organize large-scale forums to discuss the economic rights of vulnerable groups of Kazakhstanis, and speak about the problems of youth employment from the rostrum of the Mazhilis.

SYMPTOMS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

An important milestone in the history of the Foundation was the program for the development of public health. Over the years, the Foundation's

team has been promoting the adoption of the National Standard for palliative care, changing the perception of people with mental disorders, and proving the need for public monitoring of the drug-procurement process.

For many years, together with its partners, the Foundation faced obstacles that sometimes forced a prudent retreat, but more often became an incentive to search for new tools to promote the values of an open society. Despite all their formal diversity, in the absence of human will none of these values on their own would have led to systemic changes, and it is humanity whose interests the Foundation has always placed first, helping to take the first step to long-awaited changes.



HEROES OF OUR TIME

MURAT AUEZOV, CULTUROLOGIST AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN FROM 1999 TO 2003

The work of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan began two or three years before I joined it, but in the last 15 to 17 years, I have been more like an outside observer.

At different times, the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan worked with Gerold Belger, Nurbulat Massanov, Yevgeny Zhovtis—people whom I deeply respect. Therefore, when I received a proposal to take the position of Executive Director at the Foundation, I accepted it.

A wonderful person named Alisher lives in Uzbekistan. We met when I was working at the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan. Then I left the Foundation. However, throughout these years, we still communicate and meet occasionally. You can call this phenomenon “the old school of Soros,” and we its graduates are very close and always support one another.

GEORGE SOROS IS A VERY SPECIAL PERSON. FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, I APPRECIATED HIS WORLDVIEW. I THINK HE HAS MADE A REALLY SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF KAZAKHSTAN. REFERRING TO THE OPEN SOCIETY AND ITS ENEMIES BY KARL POPPER, HE INTRODUCED THE CONCEPT OF AN OPEN SOCIETY INTO OUR EVERYDAY LIFE.



IT DOESN'T MATTER IF IT IS GEORGIA, THE BALTIC COAST OR UKRAINE. SOROS FOUNDATION EMPLOYEES KNOW ONE ANOTHER QUITE WELL. EVERY PERSON I MET IN THE FOUNDATION WAS GREAT. EVERYONE FELT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE CONCEPTS OF "HUMAN RIGHTS" AND "FREEDOM."

The philosophical belief of George Soros is that the principles of an open society are necessary for every state, especially one that had recently gained independence and was looking for its own development path. Moreover, joint meetings in Kazakhstan, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Hungary also promote the formation of common interests and friendship among countries.

Nowadays, there are billionaires in our country too, but there are few of them who, like George

Soros, direct their money to something good: to the development of public education, medicine, and other areas where help is needed. George Soros, meanwhile, keeps following his own path. The Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan has had quite a few important programs. I would like to highlight the program for oralman ("returnees").

When for the first time our relatives began to return to Kazakhstan, they knew practically nothing about this country. The Foundation allocated funds and organized training courses in legal assistance and education for the returnees. I think the benefit of this was enormous. New citizens were able to feel secure and confident in their future.

The Literary Support Program called "Modern Kazakh Novel," which is close to me personally,



brought many benefits to the country. It was a vivid experience. First, the Foundation announced a competition, established a prize fund, and selected five talented writers among the competitors. They all had an opportunity to be creative. The Foundation held seminars for them and paid 300 dollars to everyone on a monthly basis. At that time, \$300 was decent money. Our financial assistance provided reliable support for the development of these authors and helped talented writers to spread their wings: Aigul Kemelbayeva, Talasbek Assemkulov, Nikolai Verevchkin, Ilya Odegov, and Didar Amantay.

How exactly did we choose those five writers? The Soros Foundation is against totalitarianism, authoritarianism, and the power of one. The winners were chosen by influential people in the literary environment of Kazakhstan.

A LOT OF WORK HAS BEEN DONE IN THE FIELD OF MEDICINE. PLANS TO COMBAT DRUG ADDICTION AND OTHER GLOBAL PROBLEMS HAVE BEEN IMPLEMENTED.

Have I any regrets about my work at the Foundation? To be precise, I regret those things that have not yet been done. There was one important project for me. My colleagues from the Soros Foundations who work in the region and I wrote a letter to George Soros that stated our willingness to become a consolidated Central Asia. This would have helped to preserve the independence of our countries, and raise the spirits and self-awareness of people. As a unifying link, we proposed the creation of a Regional Academy of Art.

The letter was written back in 2002. At that time, the presidents of our neighboring countries hardly communicated. It was a difficult situation. Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz have been close for centuries but there were also Tajiks and Turkmen, who usually remained on the side. Nevertheless, even the Turkmen joined our suggestion! It was a promising project, launched at the right time, which could have given Central Asia an opportunity of becoming a political force through culture. Unfortunately, it did not work out.





LIFE BEYOND STEREOTYPES

MALIKA TOKMADI,
RESEARCHER AND FOUNDER OF PAPERLAB

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Working with the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan is always an effort between equals. Each project is based on equal cooperation, a team effort where there is no hierarchy. Rather than being a cog in the machine, you feel like part of something big. Together with support one also receives the Foundation's full participation, which provides strong motivation for success. Perhaps it is for this very reason I always feel gratitude when referring to the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan.

I also feel respect for the Foundation, which it has earned through 25 years of work in Kazakhstan and its clearly articulated position: we are here to stay. Furthermore, time and time again it proves its resolve in its deeds: long-term projects aimed at long-term results.

Here they know the value of human capital—and I like this, too. The Foundation not only makes use of each person's potential, but also invests in, develops and cultivates it. I can say this confidently, as I am a graduate of the Foundation's scholarship program, a person in whom much has been invested.

I would like to say a bit about myself. I was accepted into the Public Policy scholarship program immediately after graduation. Graduates know that following graduation many are unable to get their foot in the door and find an opportunity to apply the knowledge they have. Moreover, I studied abroad and when I returned to Kazakhstan I felt as though I was in a vacuum. I simply did not know where to go and how to begin developing myself professionally. At that moment I came upon information about the scholarship program and I applied for it.

I think this decision was pivotal in my career, as it has been in the lives of many of my associates

PROJECTS WITH THE Soros FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN DO NOT END WITH THE DEADLINE. IT IS HARD TO BELIEVE WHEN YOU FIRST START WORKING WITH THE FOUNDATION. SOON, THE SUPPORT OF SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVES BY THE ENTIRE FOUNDATION TEAM BECOMES A NORM, AS WELL AS ITS HARD WORK TO ENSURE THAT THE PROJECT HAS A CONTINUATION.

who are engaged in research, human rights and journalistic activities. It has been a door to further career development.

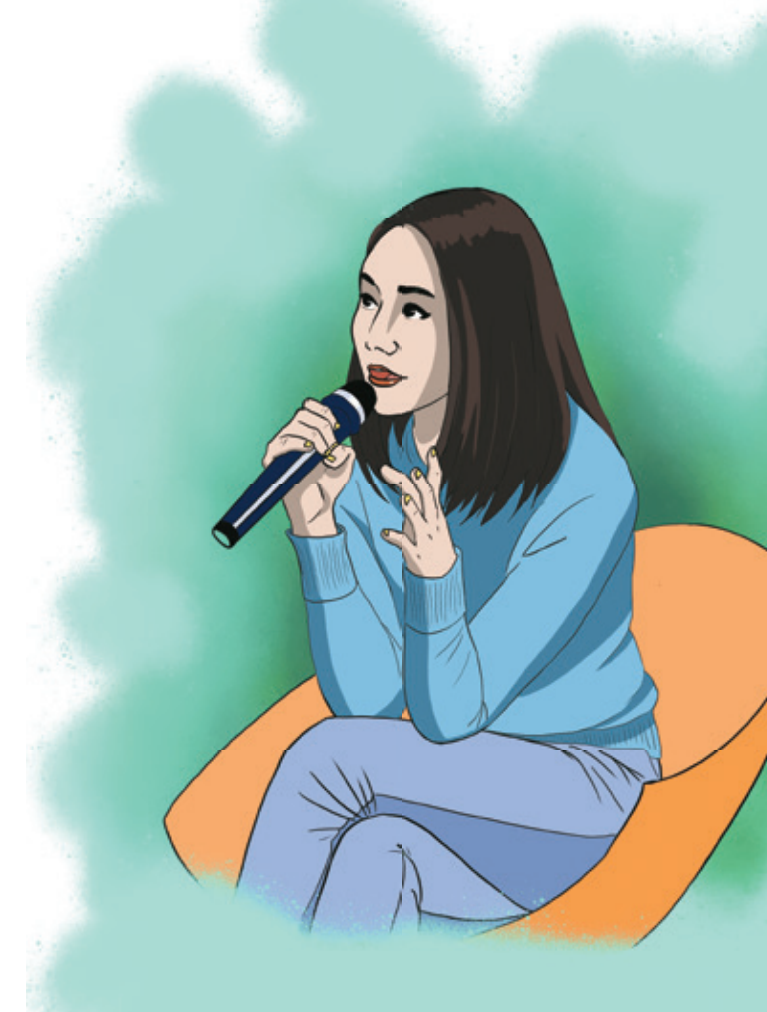
There is a reason I began to tell you about the Foundation's educational programs. I would like people to understand that they not only provide knowledge, but are also aimed at developing and empowering each individual. Such humanness makes them unique. Many programs offered by other organizations lack exactly something like this.

At the Foundation you not only go through a series of training courses, but are also provided with mentoring support throughout the project. You will never be thrown into the open sea and told to sink or swim. Comprehensive support is provided, thanks to which project participants are given the opportunity to enter their professional field and to participate in various professional conferences. Real opportunities become available to apply for grants and international scholarships.

Working with the Foundation, I met a pool of young researchers who had only just begun their professional path. We were so close not only professionally, but on a human level too, that we started working together. At first we conducted joint research, and later decided to launch our own PaperLab research center.

Since 2016 we have been conducting various discussions in Kazakhstan's capital. When we were just starting many people told us that interest in open public discussions on political and public issues would be modest. They tried to convince us it would be very difficult to find an audience, mainly because of a stereotype that people in the capital were mostly focused on their careers and not interested in politics. However, upon beginning to work, we quickly understood there was a demand for what we were offering. Moreover, in the city there was a thirst for open dialogue on vital issues.

I agree the project was for ourselves. We wanted young researchers to be able to speak on an equal



footing with their colleagues about their achievements and to raise political issues of concern to them. Kazakhstan definitely has a problem of hierarchy and there is no institution for inter-generational knowledge transfer, which makes it difficult for young professionals to fully develop their potential. Unfortunately, the older generation is not always ready to share its knowledge and wholeheartedly support young colleagues. I feel that within the framework of the discussion platform we are not doing a bad job at giving a voice to young researchers, both men and women, to enrich the public domain with new names and opinions, including through establishing an intergenerational dialogue.



SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS

YEVGENY ZHOVTIS, DIRECTOR OF THE KAZAKHSTAN INTERNATIONAL BUREAU FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RULE OF LAW, WRITES ON A WINDOW TO A NEW WORLD, CULTURAL DIALOGUE, AND THE EFFICACY OF A HORIZONTAL DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN CIVIL SOCIETY

It is probably difficult to assess the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan's activity separately from the development of the entire network created by George Soros. This is a multidimensional phenomenon. George Soros first and foremost promoted the idea of an open society in its broadest sense, without limiting the Foundation's work simply to the support of civil society. Thanks to this assistance we have seen an evolution in the areas of human rights, legislative reform, culture, and science.

It is extremely important that in its first 25 years in Kazakhstan the Foundation has done a lot to support international relations. The East–East and East–West programs have built connections between those representing Kazakhstani science, culture, civil society, and their foreign colleagues. Windows to Europe, Asia and America were opened.

I suppose I am not the only one to remember the avalanche of publications, translations of scientific articles, foreign books and works from that time. I also recall the scholarships provided to students, and the support for their visits to European universities. It was a large package with the help of which much was preserved. These 25 years are notable for the fact that the Foundation did not allow us to slide back into antiquity, as was the case with Turkmenistan, where the Foundation was unable to work. Thanks to the efforts of the Foundation in Kazakhstan, society, including science and culture, has managed to save face and in some respects even make progress.

THE FOUNDATION INITIATED ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF KAZAKHSTANI SCIENCE, WHICH AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 90S NEARLY DIED. MOREOVER, THESE WERE NOT ONE-OFF ACTIVITIES, BUT RATHER PROGRESSIVE STEPS, WHICH CONTINUED IN THE FORM OF AN ONGOING CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC DIALOGUE.

The Foundation's goals include the promotion of democracy, an open civil society, human rights, and the rule of law. To expect the Foundation to reach a breakthrough in reaching these goals is difficult in an authoritarian country. In order to achieve more success a transition to democracy is necessary, while for the time being continue to exist in a purely authoritarian environment. This was one of the most serious problems for the Foundation over the past quarter century.

It is difficult to promote the development of civil society when you have repressive legislation on public associations, assemblies, political parties, elections, and so on. That is to say, it is difficult to accomplish all of this in the context of the post-Soviet and rather authoritarian mechanics of relations between the state and society, and between the authorities and the people.

Nevertheless, in my opinion the Foundation has managed to achieve impressive results in some areas. A notable example is juvenile justice. In Kazakhstan, it was the Foundation that started to provide funding for the promotion of juvenile justice and to conduct the first series of discussions and roundtable meetings with the authorities.



A FEW YEARS OF SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS RESULTED IN THE EMERGENCE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE IN KAZAKHSTAN. THERE ARE NOW SPECIALIZED JUVENILE COURTS IN KAZAKHSTAN THAT DO NOT, FOR EXAMPLE, EXIST IN NEIGHBORING RUSSIA. AS A RESULT, OVER THE PAST 15 YEARS THE NUMBER OF CONVICTED JUVENILES IN KAZAKHSTAN HAS DECREASED MORE THAN TWENTYFOLD AND THERE IS ONLY ONE REMAINING COLONY FOR JUVENILES.

The Soros Foundation has a clear set of priorities. The main objective of George Soros's foundation and philanthropic activity is to promote Karl Popper's ideas about an open society. It is precisely this firm conviction that civil society is an indispensable tool of a modern state and society that is a strategic element of the sustainable development and competitiveness of the Foundation's work.

George Soros used to say that an open society is the most effective tool of government because it makes it easier to identify problems and receive feedback, and to make more efficient managerial decisions. Most importantly it helps a state to not intervene where it is not needed, since civil society is able to horizontally solve its own problems. This is why for all these years the Foundation's main objective has been to strengthen civil society and assist in its development.

It was the Foundation that invited us to think about the very possibility of an alternative. For people living in the post-Soviet space with a common set of ideas and behavioral patterns (particularly the power elite), with their understanding of what society is and how to regulate, manage and control it, this was a revolutionary step. The Foundation made it their mission to create an alternative and to help people understand that something can always be done differently, based on modern models that are being successfully used in the world. Perhaps in this regard the Foundation is totally unique.

One of the projects I have already mentioned is juvenile justice. I consider it to be one of the most successful projects as it was implemented on the institutional level. Thanks to this effort we now have a modern state institution, an

institute of criminal justice for juveniles that is in line with international standards with regard to the treatment of juvenile offenders.

For me systemic changes are very important, when they are evident in changes in legislation, in institutions, and even in people's outlook. Change is precisely what we can now observe in the mindset of juvenile court judges, of investigators handling cases involving minors, and of prosecutors. Whereas in the past a juvenile offender, particularly one who committed a serious crime, had to be treated as an adult and imprisoned, now, as in many other countries, deprivation of freedom is used as a last resort.

Another successful project is debate centers. It was the Foundation that created the first debate platforms. One rarely sees lively political debates on either central or regional television. Talk shows are for the most part watered down or do not address serious problems. The debate centers, on the contrary, have allowed mainly young people to participate in civilized, timely discussions with different points of view.

Among the latest projects is the New Generation of Human Rights Defenders. I was there at its

OF COURSE, LIKE OTHER DONOR ORGANIZATIONS IN KAZAKHSTAN DEALING WITH THIS SUBJECT, THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN HAS MORE THAN ONCE EXPERIENCED CONSTRAINTS DUE TO THE AUTHORITARIAN POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT. NEVERTHELESS, THE FOUNDATION'S EFFORTS ARE DISTINCT IN THEIR FAITHFULNESS TO ITS MISSION: TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE BROADEST SENSE. THE FOUNDATION HAS DONE A LOT FOR THE EMERGENCE AND ADVANCEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, JOURNALISTS, ARTISTS, AND OTHERS.

beginning; I prepared the teaching materials and was one of the first mentors. Thanks to the Foundation we had an opportunity to organize one-year courses that train regular civil activists, lawyers or ordinary young people to be professionals. Granted, before making it all the way through the course they will have to acquire knowledge on what human rights and international standards are, what human rights monitoring is, how to achieve results, and what advocacy is. During the project's implementation several dozen young people speaking both Kazakh and Russian were trained. It is gratifying to see how some of them have already become publicly recognized opinion leaders and how their own voices are growing stronger.





A NEW REALITY: COVID-19

THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN CELEBRATES ITS 25TH ANNIVERSARY IN A NEW REALITY.

Just a few months ago, the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan's team was actively engaged in preparations for its anniversary celebration and had planned during the course of the year to hold a number of events, exhibitions, and discussions dedicated to the occasion. However, COVID-19 changed everything. On March 16, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev declared a state of emergency. The nation, like the entire world, had to learn to live and work under new conditions. The Foundation reacted quickly and constructively: all its operations were moved online.

As a result, during quarantine 12 different online events were held on the Foundation's YouTube channel: weekly meetings as part of TALKovaya pyatnitza (Friday talk) and an online course on the basics of human rights. The purpose of TALKovaya pyatnitza was to discuss current issues related to the restriction of citizens' rights and freedoms during the state of emergency. Participants spoke, among other things, about public awareness during the state of emergency, as well as lawmaking and decision-making during that period. They also discussed the state's record of success in saving the population, privacy and personal data during the state of emergency, and doctors.

As part of the Human Rights program, the Foundation conducted an online course of seven lectures for almost 300 registered participants. The speakers were the human rights defenders Tatiana Chernobil, Rustam Kypshakbayev, Yevgeny Zhovtis, Zauresh Battalova, Sergey Sayapin, and Leila Duisekova.

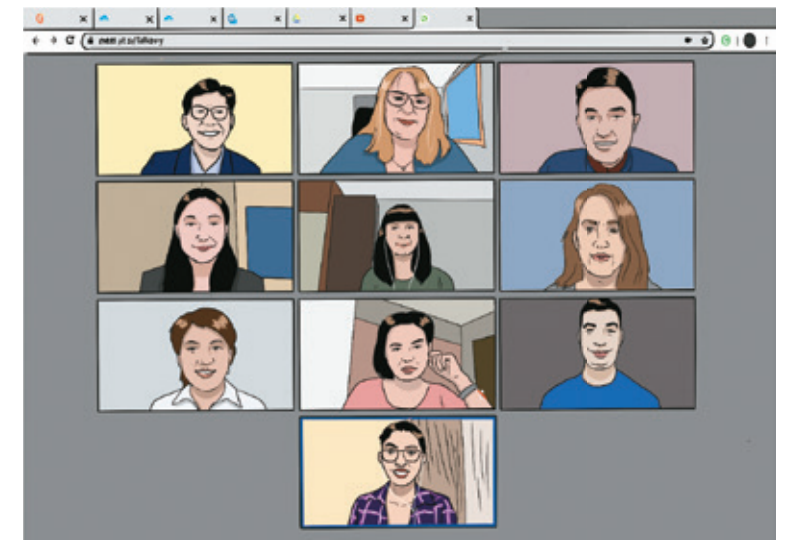
In addition, with the support of the Open Society Foundations, the Foundation hosted a

discussion scheduled to coincide with the release of the Russian translation of the report Kazakhstan: Tested by Transition, prepared by Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs. The report will soon be available in Kazakh. It was prepared by prominent foreign and Kazakhstani experts, who analyzed the transfer of power in Kazakhstan from several points of view: civil and political freedoms and human rights, foreign policy, issues of identity, and political and economic development. At the end of May, the Foundation discussed the report's release with some of the project's authors. Political scientist Dosym Satpayev, journalist Joanna Lillis, economist Kasymkhan Kapparov, and independent analyst and journalist Birgit Brauer participated in the online discussion. Nargis Kassenova, a senior researcher at the Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, moderated the discussion.

In a further response to the pandemic, almost immediately after the quarantine was announced in Kazakhstan, the Foundation's Board of Trustees made the timely decision to allocate \$500,000 in special reserve funds to assist the most vulnerable segments of the population during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kazakhstan.

"The scale of the pandemic has exposed a host of social and economic problems in society," said Chair of the Board Aida Aidarkulova. She continued: "The epidemic significantly expanded the list of socially vulnerable groups, and the state of emergency's restrictive measures at times lead to human rights violations. Through the end of May 2020, the SFK's Special Fund accepted non-competitive applications, the purpose of which is to protect society's most vulnerable groups during the pandemic. Adapting to new challenges, we were also prepared to re-examine our program activities in the context of the pandemic."

This initiative of the Foundation aimed to help the state improve the efficacy of its response in countering the pandemic and its impact on various aspects of our lives. In furtherance of the SFK's Special Fund, a decision was taken to call for applications in support of the rights of socially vulnerable groups during COVID-19. Among those groups were senior citizens, people with disabilities, palliative-care patients, children with special educational



THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN IS A PART OF THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS, A NETWORK OF OFFICES AND FOUNDATIONS ESTABLISHED BY PHILANTHROPIST GEORGE SOROS. IN TOTAL, THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS HAVE ALLOCATED MORE THAN \$130 MILLION TO FIGHT THE DEVASTATING IMPACT OF COVID-19 AROUND THE WORLD.

needs, prisoners, and migrants. Other areas of focus included countering disinformation, expanding access to online learning, monitoring the expenditure of state budget funds for combatting the pandemic, and the protection and promotion of human rights and freedoms in a state of emergency.

"The creation of a special reserve is our answer to the daily challenges arising from the epidemic, and the Foundation's contribution to the fight against the spread of the virus and its consequences for the country," said Ms. Aidarkulova, explaining Foundation's position.

Indeed, a new reality is upon us, and it demands different strategies and skills from all of society. Furthermore, what the new world will look like depends on decisions made by people, countries, and organizations here and now. It is obvious that in order to bring not only the virus but also its consequences under control, humanity will have to learn to properly react to the situation with little delay. Let us continue working!

THE REQUISITE CREDO

NADEZHDA KOZACHENKO, HEAD OF THE CREDO PUBLIC ASSOCIATION, ON PALLIATIVE CARE, HARM REDUCTION FOR HIV-INFECTED AND DRUG ADDICTS, AND HOW AN ORGANIZATION CAN MAKE A NAME FOR ITSELF

THANKS TO THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN WE HAVE MADE A NAME FOR OURSELVES AS AN ORGANIZATION. WE HAVE A WELL-KNOWN ORGANIZATION WITH A COMPLETELY HONEST APPROACH TO THE PROJECTS WE IMPLEMENT! THE WORK EXPERIENCE GAINED IN COOPERATION WITH THE FOUNDATION HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR OUR ORGANIZATION TO WORK SUCCESSFULLY FOR 21 YEARS.



At first we engaged in research work, which led to candidate dissertations being defended and patents being awarded. Later, we came to understand the necessity of preventing HIV and drug addiction. Our largest project came to be the Harm Reduction program, during which we organized needle-exchange points—two stationary and one mobile. This benefited not only society, but us as well. It helped us to learn the basics of medical and social support, and outreach work, and to educate numerous professional social workers, build relationships with law enforcement agencies, and understand the needs of families, both socially disadvantaged and low-income. And obviously, it helped us to engage in outreach and awareness-raising efforts with the public, medical workers, and law-enforcement officials.

What are we doing today? At the present time, under the aegis of the Kazakhstani Union of People Living with HIV (which falls under the Association of Legal Entities), quite a number of new organizations have begun to help people in Kazakhstan deal with the challenges of living with HIV. These organizations are quite ambitious, but not always professional, and since we work mainly on projects funded through state contracts for social services, such a variety of organizations and areas of work has led to difficulties. I am referring to the notorious dumping issue, which led to the emergence of “uneven financing” (when vital projects are supported, but for nowhere near the whole year), and many other aspects of the Credo association’s work. But here the experience we gained while working with the Foundation (including the ability to complete applications and work with government agencies) has helped us in such situations.

It is a shame that in recent years in Kazakhstan I have not seen any similar much-needed projects in our area. Nonetheless, I know for sure that the Foundation continues to change our reality every day, thanks to the democratic values its team believes in, and the benevolence and clarity of its work. It was the Foundation that first identified the absence of palliative care in Kazakhstan and initiated several research, informational and educational projects. Additionally, a working group was created, a standard for the provision of palliative care in the republic was developed and proposed, suggestions for developing health-care programs were made, and the first mobile brigades began to work. As a result, the Kazakhstan Association for Palliative Care was established.

Our organization, the Credo Public Association, was established in January 1999. It came into being because of an urgent need. How exactly did this happen? At that time I was in charge of the Department of Immunology and Allergology at the Medical Academy of the Karaganda Regional Center for the Prevention and Control of AIDS. Back then it was our doctors who examined HIV-infected convicts assembled from all over Kazakhstan for placement in two colonies.

It was a difficult time. There was practically no medicine to treat HIV-positive prisoners, who, in addition, had multiple concurrent inflammatory diseases. It was then that doctors of the AIDS center and the department’s staff came up with the idea of creating a non-governmental organization that could search for funds to treat inflammatory diseases. The Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan was one of the first to support us.

A TIME FOR LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE

POLITICAL SCIENTIST **NARGIS KASSENOVA** ON THE FOUNDATION’S PROGRAMS TO FOSTER AN OPEN SOCIETY IN KAZAKHSTAN, GEORGE SOROS’S DECISION TO MAKE THE NATIONAL FOUNDATIONS AUTONOMOUS, AND OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP DEMOCRACY IN KAZAKHSTAN

For a long time I was just an outside observer. I knew there was a Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan; I had heard about its scholarships, travel grants, the Center for Contemporary Art. But on the whole, I had very little understanding of what it was and did. I had my first proper introduction in 2009 when I was invited to become a member of the Foundation’s Board of Trustees. Before giving an answer, I tried to learn about its work and people. I was immediately impressed by the relevance and “liveliness” of the projects, and the professionalism of the team.

I am a strong believer in the need to have lively debates on issues of public importance. The Foundation is trying to enhance these debates through its Public Policy program. An open society should not be fragmented by economic inequality. The Open Economy program prioritizes this problem. The New Civil Initiatives program strives for a society whose members truly feel like citizens with all the ensuing rights and obligations. The main idea behind another program entitled Society for All, which the Foundation ran from 2013 to 2019, is that people should not be left on the margins of society because of their illness or other circumstances.

The mission of the Foundation to promote an open society in Kazakhstan, which I wholeheartedly support, is ambitious and difficult. At the same time, the Foundation has had such clear and important successes as the introduction of palliative care in the country, inclusive education, and the creation of excellent media projects. Such projects by their existence prove that there is not and cannot be a monopoly on the truth. On this point my views coincide with the Foundation’s.

Among the Foundation’s competitive strengths is its unique structure. It combines local expertise with best international experience. In other words, George Soros and his team gave substantial autonomy to their national foundations: they simply decided once and for all that people living in those countries know their problems better and can figure out how to solve them. This makes it possible to implement inspiring and effective projects.



Over the past three decades our countries (I am referring to those parts of the former Soviet Union where the Soros Foundation has worked and is still working) have become less alike: the Soviet unifying “glue” is wearing off, and different paths of development are being chosen and followed. Nevertheless, they remain young countries with unfinished nation-building processes and can pride themselves on having political institutions and the rule of law.

In general, for democracy to function, a strong state and a developed political culture within society are necessary. Merely adopting democratic procedures is not enough. In that connection, the training provided by the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan is vital for us. And do not believe those who claim people are not yet ready for democracy. It is precisely they who trample its fragile sprouts.

WE WERE FORTUNATE GEORGE SOROS DECIDED TO ESTABLISH FOUNDATIONS IN OUR REGION. KAZAKHSTAN IS OF COURSE FAR FROM THE IDEAL OF AN OPEN SOCIETY; HOWEVER, WITHOUT THE FOUNDATION TODAY WE WOULD BE EVEN FARTHER FROM THE IDEAL.



BACK TO THE FUTURE

VITALIY KULIK, DIRECTOR OF THE SOCIAL CORPORATE FOUNDATION ZUBR, A LEADING NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION IN THE EAST KAZAKHSTAN REGION, ON HOW OPENNESS AND TRUST CAN INFLUENCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NGOS AND WHY NOT DEPENDING ON PAST SUCCESSES PRODUCES EXCELLENT RESULTS

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The Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan is 25 years old. This means it is a straight-A student five times over. On the one hand, if you convert these school grades into conventional language you realize the organization's longevity commands respect in and of itself. On the other hand, I am impressed by the Foundation's very contemporary understanding of current developments and by its people, who are yet another strength of the Foundation. One is able not only to work with the Foundation's employees, but also to communicate with them: they are open, progressive-minded innovators. You can always call them with a question, consult them, share any problems, and find a compromise together. You do not feel alone in your work; you have someone to rely on. And most importantly, it is not a bureaucratic office that operates only for the sake of reports. At the Foundation people are focused on results.

The Foundation stands out from others in its flexible thinking. This also applies to the launching of new programs, identifying new areas of work, and searching for new partners. The Foundation is constantly experimenting and generating ideas. Other foundations are sometimes more conservative and closed in this regard.

The Foundation's flexibility can be seen, inter alia, in its day-to-day work. There are no deeply rooted norms for relations with partners. If the circumstances deem it necessary to act and act quickly, the Foundation always takes note and works to identify the most convenient solution for all concerned. They will not create obstacles simply because of a desire to check your reliability. On the contrary, the Foundation trusts the people with whom it works. This approach in turn increases partners' loyalty and their effectiveness.

This year the Foundation will turn 25 years old and our organization will be 21, which means we have been working together since our inception! It began with the summer schools. The Foundation organized them for Kazakhstani NGOs. We subsequently borrowed this idea from them (this is what should be done with good ideas) to create our own summer schools for the entire eastern region. We have held three of them, and each has left behind great memories.

Many of the people who attended our schools in the 2000s found their place in life and today are mature, successful individuals, whether they work in the civil service, remained with an NGO, or moved to the private sector. Anyway, in all modesty I can say the foundation we laid with our seven-day schools is clearly still bearing fruit to this day.

Looking back to the early 2000s once again, the first thing that comes to mind is the idea of civic engagement, which was actively supported by the Foundation. Back then the phrase was new to everyone. On some occasions we found ourselves thinking we might be ahead of our time. We proposed projects that most people did not understand. Of course, in such cases the Foundation took a big risk. At that time civic engagement was still an innovation that was not yet in demand. The foresight of the Foundation changed this, and civic engagement took off in the 2000s. Now we once again sense that this topic and these projects are becoming relevant, except they need to be implemented in a different way. We need to reconsider and reformat our approach because the government has changed, we have changed, and the current challenge is to find new avenues for civilized civic engagement.

In addition, in cooperation with the Foundation we initiated the development of standards for social services. In 2005 we made a first attempt to standardize NGO services. Many still believe that insofar as NGOs are doing good deeds, their efforts are from God or something like that. In fact, this kind of thinking leads only to confusion and misconceptions.

Many NGOs provide services, and while they primarily do so for socially vulnerable groups it is important to maintain the quality and high standards of their services.

PROBABLY FEW PEOPLE KNOW AND REMEMBER THAT THE E-GOVERNMENT SYSTEM WAS INITIATED WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN IN UST-KAMENOGORSK, WHERE THE PROJECT WAS FIRST TESTED. IN GENERAL MANY IMPORTANT INNOVATIONS ORIGINATED WITH THE FOUNDATION.



We attempted to work in this field together with the Foundation. The current standards for state/ social contracts are in a way a reflection of our first attempt to systematize the activities of NGOs. It was not the best, as much of what we suggested was not adopted, but, still, it was a start.

In general it is difficult to overestimate the Foundation's contribution to the formation of Kazakhstani NGOs. Later, when the situation changed and literally everyone began to engage in the development of NGOs, the Foundation stopped its support programs. Soon thereafter we also realized there was no point in continuing to devote resources to such activities.

We were sorry to part with our favorite project, but the decision was warranted. Meanwhile, the Foundation soon began to enhance the capacity of young researchers. This was not a fallback option, but rather a new far-sighted and wise decision: to work on the potential of an individual not an organization, which can be no less useful to society as a whole.



READY TO CONTINUE

To Mr. George Soros
Founder and Chair of the Open Society Foundations

Dear Mr. Soros,

The “Aman-saulyk” non-governmental organization has actively cooperated with the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan (SFK) since 2007. With the support of SFK, we have implemented 21 projects in many fields: the protection of patients’ rights; monitoring the provision of drugs; the transparency of budget expenditure in the national health system; the development of palliative care, which has made a significant contribution to strengthening the nascent civil society; protecting human rights; promoting the principle of social justice; and improving the quality and accessibility of medical care and drug provision, primarily for socially vulnerable segments of the population in Kazakhstan.

SFK’s 25 years in Kazakhstan have included a successful, fruitful partnership and cooperation with the non-governmental sector, full of important achievements in building civil society in the country. Over this time, thanks to the implementation of innovative and socially significant projects in various areas of socio-economic and cultural life, SFK has done much to form and develop civil society in Kazakhstan. It contributed to the creation of an open society based on access to information, transparency and accountability, the rule of law, and human rights. As a result, citizens of our country are now beginning to recognize their rights and responsibilities. The civil sector has grown and become an active participant in public life. Kazakhstan is moving towards becoming a tolerant society.

Please accept my heartfelt congratulations on the 25th anniversary of SFK. Let me wish you and the SFK team further creative achievements and inspiration, and new compelling projects and events. As a partner of SFK, I would like to assure you that we highly appreciate the work done by SFK and are ready to continue our fruitful cooperation.

With respect,
Bakhyt Tumenova
President of the Aman-saulyk NGO, Almaty, Kazakhstan

MAMA-PRO, ECONOMICS AND VALUES

KASSYMKHAN KAPPAROV, A KAZAKHSTANI EXPERT IN THE FIELD OF ECONOMICS, MANAGING PARTNER OF THE EMCG CONSULTING COMPANY AND FOUNDER OF THE ONLINE PLATFORM EKONOMIST.KZ, WRITES ABOUT THE FOUNDATION’S LOYALTY TO ITS IDEAS AND THOSE PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT HEARD BY SOCIETY.

Over the past 25 years the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan’s work has been one of the major factors in the development of Kazakhstan’s civil society, as the Foundation directed all its efforts toward the most significant projects in the fields of culture, education, and health. Of course, it has also instilled in us respect for such concepts as inclusiveness and tolerance in society. All of this was particularly important for a country that was in the midst of a transition from totalitarianism to the building of democratic institutions. Needless to say, not all of the Foundation’s initiatives were equally successful, which is to a considerable degree due to the fact that after the year 2000 Kazakhstan entered an oil boom. As a result, the repressive state apparatus grew larger and the early democratic reforms of the 90s were rolled back.

Nevertheless, the Foundation remains true to itself and keeps its focus on the development of democratic institutions and the value of human life. It assists Kazakhstan’s civil sector to tackle pressing but unpopular problems and deal with the issues of groups of people whose voice is not always heard.

Over a period of 25 years the Foundation has implemented hundreds of successful projects, of which the most significant for me personally was the Mama-Pro Foundation. Today I am one of its trustees. The project is unique not only for Kazakhstan, but perhaps on a global scale as well. It is special in that it focuses on supporting



mothers of special-needs children and their self-realization, including in the professional and entrepreneurial spheres, which consequently helps improve the quality of children’s lives. Moreover, the project has created a community that can defend its rights and advocate for much-needed amendments to Kazakhstan’s legislation in the areas of inclusiveness, benefits for entrepreneurs, and labor.

In the middle of last year, with the support of the Foundation, we launched a no less important and timely project— Ekonomist.kz. This is an open online platform for professional discussions on economic issues in Kazakhstan. The resource explains complex economic phenomena in simple and easy-to-understand language. The project’s authors hope to influence the quality of the decisions made by the state to provide for the growth of the population’s income and social justice.

THE MAIN PURPOSE OF EKONOMIST.KZ IS TO DEVELOP A VIRTUAL NETWORK OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERTS THAT CAN HELP KAZAKHSTANIS BETTER UNDERSTAND ISSUES RELATED TO THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY AND GIVE YOUNG EXPERTS A VOICE.



ANY QUESTIONS?

WHO ACTUALLY MAKES THE DECISIONS AT THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN?

More than 35 years ago the American philanthropist George Soros established the Open Society Foundation in Hungary, a non-governmental charitable organization that began to create a network of such foundations around the world. In 1995, the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan (SFK) began its work in a young independent republic in the center of Eurasia—Kazakhstan. Ever since then the billionaire alone has

made all decisions about the work of the Foundation's local offices. A common stereotype about SFK's decision-making process is that if it is not George Soros himself who has the last word, then it is certainly someone from his close circle, namely some American citizens who are unknown to the broader public. Such allegations (despite all their dubious appeal) have no factual basis.

WHAT IS WITHIN THE FOUNDER'S AUTHORITY?

The scope of authority of the founder, legally represented by the Open Society Foundations, is not very broad. Thus, the network's central office approves the administrative head and chair of the Board of Trustees. After consulting with the current members of the Board of Trustees, the founder appoints all its members when a change in its composition is necessary.

The founder also has the final say if a member of the Board of Trustees alleges a conflict of interest when reviewing an application. In such a situation, motivated by the desire to maintain impartiality, the central office may simply not endorse the board's decision.

In addition, the founder has the right to suggest that the SFK revise its current strategy before the end of a cycle. The updated strategy and budget must be approved by the central office. The SFK does not, however, coordinate with its founder on any public statements or decisions on applications that will receive funding.



WHO PROVIDES THE GRANTS?

The most common question the Foundation encounters is who makes the decision to provide grants and who receives them? The group of grant recipients is far from static. In order to verify this, one need only check the reports on allocated grants, which are available on the Foundation's official website.

The Foundation's staff members do not participate in the decision-making process. Program coordinators and a grant manager administer projects only after the decision to provide partners with funding has already been made. In addition to their routine tasks, they develop the part of the strategy that is within their area of responsibility, prepare a budget and determine prospective development paths.

In this context, it is important to note that all staff members are committed to the values of an open society and human rights while retaining the unconditional right to have their own opinions on less fundamental issues. The SFK offers everyone an equal opportunity to work in the Foundation, without subjecting them to any kind of discrimination when exercising their labor rights.

Expert committees evaluate applications and make decisions about them. Each program and initiative has its own separate expert committee, which typically consists of three highly qualified subject experts. To avoid any manipulation or pressure from the general public, their names are not disclosed.



HOW TO MAINTAIN OBJECTIVITY

According to the contract that experts conclude with the Foundation, a person cannot serve on one committee for more than two years. A regular rotation of expert committee members contributes not only to greater objectivity in making decisions but also to the influx of new ideas.

The selection of experts is an important process to which the SFK devotes considerable attention. It often takes several weeks, during which the members of the Board of Trustees engage in lively discussion of potential candidates. The main challenge when hiring for important positions is in agreeing not just on professional criteria, but also on finding people who are committed to the principles of an open society and the rule of law, who clearly understand the goals and objectives of the Foundation, and who have a proactive approach to social issues and the ability to work in a collegial manner.

RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Then what role does the Board of Trustees play in the decision-making process? First and foremost, the Board of Trustees is composed of Kazakhstani citizens. From a strategic point of view, it determines the Foundation's long-term policies. From an operational point of view, it monitors the effective, conscientious, and financially sound performance of the organization. In order to carry out this last function, members of the Board of Trustees have the right to refuse to approve an expert committee's decision about a particular grant if, for example, they have doubts about the feasibility of the project or believe the budget to be inflated.



ALL IS FAIR

Procedures play an important role in ensuring the transparency of the decision-making process. The Foundation has a two-tier system for approving applications. Prior to meeting, members of both expert committees and the Board of Trustees consider potential projects without any indication of the names of applicants. This is what allows them to make unbiased decisions, guided only by the quality of the application and its compliance with the Foundation's policies. Every year all the Foundation's staff, and members of the Board of Trustees and expert committees disclose details in a special questionnaire about family members, relatives, and friends who in any way cooperate with the Foundation or receive any kind of benefit.

VALUES AND IDEALS

The Foundation's decision-making system, which promotes the values of an open society, is fully in line with its ideals. The procedures formalized in the Foundation's internal documents bring us back to open society institutions, which embody a system of checks and balances. The Foundation's experience shows that a system in which no one can seize power, where the parties collectively reach compromise solutions, is not a utopian dream. And this means Kazakhstani society has a very real opportunity to take this unique real-world experience and apply it to many other social processes.

MODERN-DAY MYTHS

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF WORKING IN KAZAKHSTAN. GRANTS TOTALING 100 MILLION US DOLLARS IN THE FIELDS OF HEALTHCARE AND EDUCATION, THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS, THE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF PUBLIC FINANCES, THE PROTECTION OF THE INTERESTS OF VULNERABLE GROUPS, AND MEDIA SUPPORT. AND HUNDREDS OF FAKE NEWS STORIES, THEORIES AND HOAXES ABOUT THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN. WE HAVE PUT TOGETHER THE MOST COMMON ONES AND ANALYZED THEM.



“THE SOROS FOUNDATION SPONSORS PROTESTS IN KAZAKHSTAN.”

LIE Under Kazakhstani law all NGOs are accountable for literally each tenge spent, and any funds deposited into their accounts are visible to all oversight agencies. Moreover, on the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan’s website one can find not only annual reports, but also all information on current grants: the amounts, the recipients, and how the money was spent. That is the Open Society’s policy. And there are no revolutions.

Why, then, is this false information so tenacious? The fact of the matter is, most people are not used to searching for information in the public domain, and the myth of an external enemy is one of the most popular in the modern world, strongly careening to the right—from the Czech Republic to the USA. Such propagandistic narratives are mainly spread by the media in autocratic countries, citing expert organizations. An example is Georgia, where the funding for those publications is—in a mysterious way—Russian, and a significant number of them are based on conspiracy theories.

A curious linguistic fact: in connection with the narrative about the financing of protests, the new term sorosovody was added to the term sorosyata, which has existed since the early 1990s. According to the outcome of our research in Kazakhstan, the term appeared (or at least reached a large number of readers) thanks to the Central Asia Monitor newspaper.



“THE SOROS FOUNDATION PROMOTES HOMOSEXUALITY.”

MANIPULATION The Open Society supports vulnerable groups throughout the world, which naturally include representatives of the LGBT community. In addition, the Foundation also supports people with disabilities and terminally ill people (the attention of the Open Society Foundations to the issue of caring for terminally ill people contributed to the government of Kazakhstan’s 2013 decision to create national standards for palliative care). It also deals with the issues of minors and supports research on women’s issues. A list of all supported activities, research and researchers is available to any who want to familiarize themselves with it.

Conclusion: alas, at the heart of this narrative lies run-of-the-mill homophobia. It is a very convenient tool for evoking “high-minded anger” among people living under the thrall of traditional stereotypes, of which there are many in Central Asia. An example of this is the “Pushkin-Kurmangazy” scandal, after which an entire international advertising agency was forced to stop working in Kazakhstan. Fortunately, unlike in Russia, there is no “homosexual propaganda” law in Kazakhstan. Occasionally Kazakhstani politicians are more liberal than our northern neighbors.

Fact: The reason for the trial against the Havas advertising agency in the “Pushkin-Kurmangazy” case was a poster created for a competition among advertising professionals and not intended for real advertising.



“SOROS FOUNDATIONS WORK ON BEHALF OF WASHINGTON.”

LIE This is one of the most widespread anti-Soros narratives. Furthermore, what is meant by “Washington’s interests” and what they are in a particular region is typically not specified. Information on attitudes toward George Soros and his activities in the United States is simply omitted. On the other hand, it is the US that was the source of some of the first fake news stories about Soros. Republicans’ attitude towards him is, to put it mildly, cautious. When speaking of Trump’s attitude towards Soros we may say it is confrontational, while for the far-right it is simply hateful.

Fact: A petition against George Soros placed on the United States White House’s website in 2017 garnered nearly two hundred thousand signatures. The petition’s authors called for George Soros to be declared a terrorist.



“THE SOROS FOUNDATION IS RUN BY THE US STATE DEPARTMENT.”

LIE This is obvious from the debunking of the previous narrative. In all its efforts the Foundation remains true to its principles, which quite often do not coincide with the official position of the US State Department. In fact, interestingly, this narrative is relatively new. Even as recently as 15 years ago few people in the post-Soviet space could confuse, for example, the Soros Foundations with the Hivos Foundation or the British Council. Now this can be seen all the time, especially in 2019 propaganda publications.

The fake story is grounded in the idea that it is always easy to confer any kind of evil qualities on mythical Washington or the State Department. People in other countries are more focused on local problems and issues (which makes sense) and often have no idea what other countries’ government agencies are doing—for example, which functions the German Chancellor has and what the US President can actually directly influence. What is there to talk about if we often do not even know the names of our maslikhat deputies! Naturally, at the same time few people will recall that USAID allocates funds for HIV prevention in Kazakhstan and throughout Central Asia. And hundreds of young researchers get the opportunity to contribute to science using Open Society grants.

Fact: The Living Memory monograph was published with the support of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan. It examines the history of the Stalinist repressions in Kazakhstan in the 1930s and 1940s, and contemporary Kazakhstani society’s memory and understanding of them.



“MANY COUNTRIES PROHIBIT THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS.”

HALF-TRUTH The half-truth here lies in the word “many” but, at the same time, a troubling fact is present. A number of autocratic countries place legal restrictions on the activities of NGOs (including the Open Society Foundations), declare the Soros Foundations’ presence in the country “undesirable,” and/or facilitate their closure. Consequently, the Open Society ceased its work in Belarus in 1997, in 2004 in Uzbekistan, and in 2014 in Azerbaijan. In the Russian Federation the Foundation was deemed an undesirable organization in 2015 (despite the fact it invested some 950 million dollars in the country over a 15-year period according to a TASS dossier). One way or another all cases of closing or limiting the Foundations’ work are associated with countries that are, to put it mildly, not very democratic.

Fact: According to the BBC, at the end of 2019 the total amount money donated by George Soros and his foundations was 32 billion dollars.

TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

SHOLPAN AYTENOVA IS AN EXPERT IN PUBLIC POLICY AND MONITORING, STATE FINANCE, THE PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES, AND GOOD STANDARDS OF GOVERNANCE.



The Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan is one of the oldest charitable foundations in the country, a little younger than our independence. It is no exaggeration to say that its activities have contributed to the development of civil society in Kazakhstan. Its strategy and direction have always met the requirements of the times and contributed to the development of our country in various fields, from culture and human rights, to health care and the development of free media.

The Foundation itself has also changed over time. We can observe a development trajectory from quantitative to qualitative types of projects: from mass training projects, such as the Debate Center

and the House of Volunteers, to segmented ones aimed at providing support for networks and coalitions.

Over the years many projects have been implemented in the regions. The Foundation's work has reached villages and towns, going beyond Almaty and the capital. The Foundation has reacted flexibly to changes in the public agenda and continues to do so, finding relevant areas of focus in its strategy. Of course, a number of challenges remain. In my opinion, these include the institutionalization and sustainability of projects. Unfortunately, this is a problem not only for the Foundation but also for the entire public sector.

The civil sector has yet to solve important challenges: ensuring that organizations and initiatives are viable, independent and able to diversify sources of funding; having a constructive impact on processes; adjusting to change and keeping up to date; mastering technology; and introducing innovations.

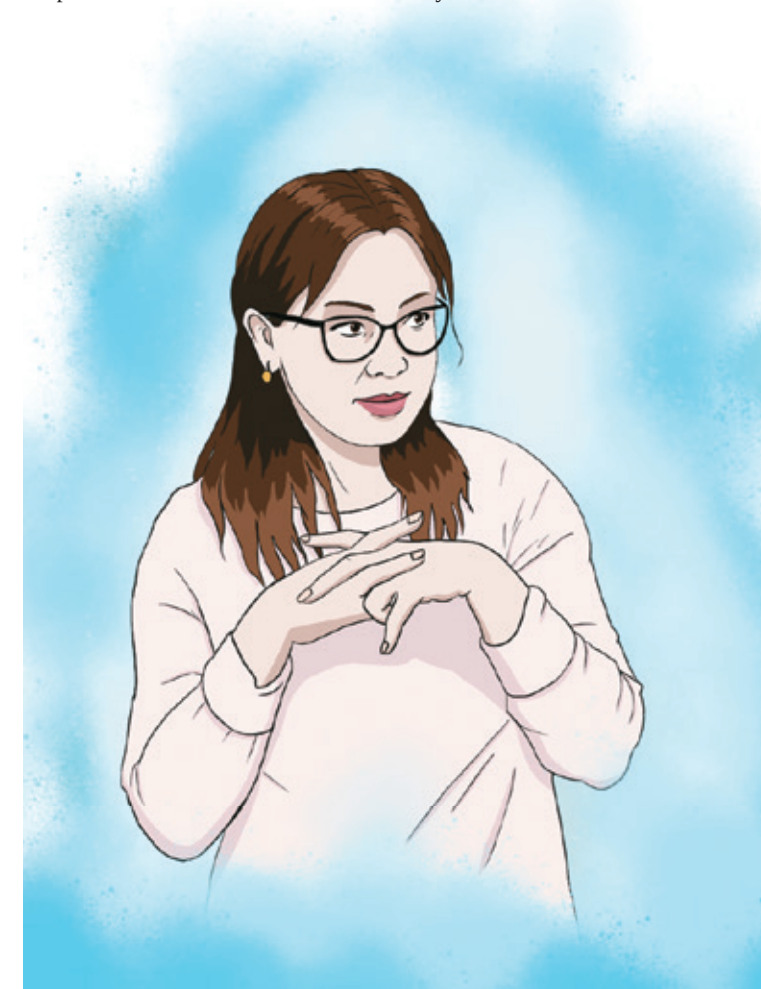
The Foundation has a long history and numerous impressive achievements. It is worth remembering such projects as the House of Volunteers, which was launched in 1998 when volunteering was not yet prevalent. Another example is the National Debate Center, which has trained thousands of debaters. The public hearing project on the cleaning of Komsomolsky Lake in Taraz, implemented by the Taraz Initiative Center NGO in 2004, resulted in funds eventually being allocated from the budget and the lake and the coastal strip fully becoming a part of the urban space. Another project, which was conducted by the NGO Angel from Atbasar, involved monitoring a drinking-water program. Among the most recent highlights are the Training Café, projects on palliative care, the development of urban initiatives and local self-government, the creation of a database of media recipients of state information orders, and travel grants for specialists of various sectors.

What distinguishes the Foundation is the transparency of its activities. There is no other foundation that publishes so much information about its grants and projects. The rotation of those in charge at the Foundation is impressive. I know funds where directors have not changed for more than ten years. The Foundation's current system of checks and balances is enforced by the board of trustees, which is changed regularly and includes well-known public figures.

Few people know that in the past Marat Tazhin, Nurlan Yerimbetov, Yevgeny Zhovtis, and Aida Dossaeva were members of the board of trustees. Such expertise enhances the credibility of the fund as there is confidence that decisions are being made impartially and objectively.

I have had considerable experience over 15 years of working with the Foundation. It was always a collaborative effort to increase transparency and accountability in public finance, even though the topic was only recently included on the agenda of the state and other donors. All these years, in cooperation with the Foundation, we have implemented projects to analyze and raise awareness of the budget, and to promote legislation and initiatives to increase budget transparency.

That is precisely how in 2018-2019, in cooperation with the Foundation, we implemented one of the most important projects, the Open Budget Fellowship. The project was an enormous success, despite its rather short time frame of two years.



GRADUATES OF THE OPEN BUDGET FELLOWSHIP PROJECT HAVE BECOME WELL-ESTABLISHED SPECIALISTS WITH A KNOWLEDGE OF THE BUDGET PROCESS AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL DIALOGUE WITH THE STATE.

The Open Budget Fellowship covered all stages of the budget process and provided an opportunity for civil society to participate in the budget. For the project each participant was invited to conduct his/her own mini research project on the budget. As a result, participants in the Open Budget Fellowship, earlier than the state bodies themselves, identified emerging problems in such areas of budgeting as lightweight rail transport, the public financing of research, and public transport.



THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING

ADIL JALILOV, DIRECTOR OF THE MEDIANET INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR JOURNALISM AND A MEDIA TRAINER, SHARES HIS THOUGHTS ON BEING SENSIBLE AND NOT INDIFFERENT, AS WELL AS ON IDENTIFYING THE MOST APPROPRIATE OF THE BUREAUCRATIC DONOR-GRANTEE MODELS.

The work of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan, its role in the country, and its contribution to the development of society cannot be overstated. In fact, it is incredibly difficult to imagine what Kazakhstan would have been like without the Foundation.

For example, many ministries appeared to be working and were renamed and restructured, but we can hardly remember them. Some state programs were launched that were more or less failures. They too are remembered only by the archives. And to think, huge amounts of money from the country's budget were spent on those projects!

Against this backdrop the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan, which is privately funded by the philanthropist George Soros, has provided significant assistance to the country, to socially important projects, and to entire industries, shaping generations of sensible and active people who are not indifferent.

Like any other active and vibrant organization, the Foundation has certainly had its successes and failures. But such a black and white perspective will not help one to assess the Foundation. Its work focuses on the development of civil society, on reforms and on supporting the initiatives of active citizens and NGOs. In the context of our country, this is essentially a mission almost doomed to failure. Merely maintaining the status quo by preventing the situation from becoming worse is already an achievement.

How, for instance, can we achieve the liberalization of legislation and respect for human rights if by default the state system is always opposed, viewing any reforms with hostility? This is similar to trying to install an application designed for a smartphone on a push-button phone. Nevertheless, it is amazing how much the Foundation succeeds in achieving.

Moreover, one must not forget that the Foundation provides support for projects that are subsequently implemented by grantees. The Foundation has one important, distinctive feature: strategic decisions are made by the board of trustees, and decisions on supporting specific projects are made by expert committees. These bodies comprise Kazakhstani experts in specific fields. This is markedly different from other organizations. As a result, we see a better informed and more competent selection of topics and projects. Most importantly, such an approach shows respect for the country.

Furthermore, the Foundation is perhaps the most daring of donor organizations, in both choice of focus and projects. This is appreciated by civil society and journalists.

We have been working with the Foundation intermittently since 2005. The Foundation both supported our projects and rejected them, which is completely natural. I was also on the Foundation's Board of Trustees for two years. It was a particularly good experience that allowed me to see for myself all the procedures and to ensure that they were balanced.

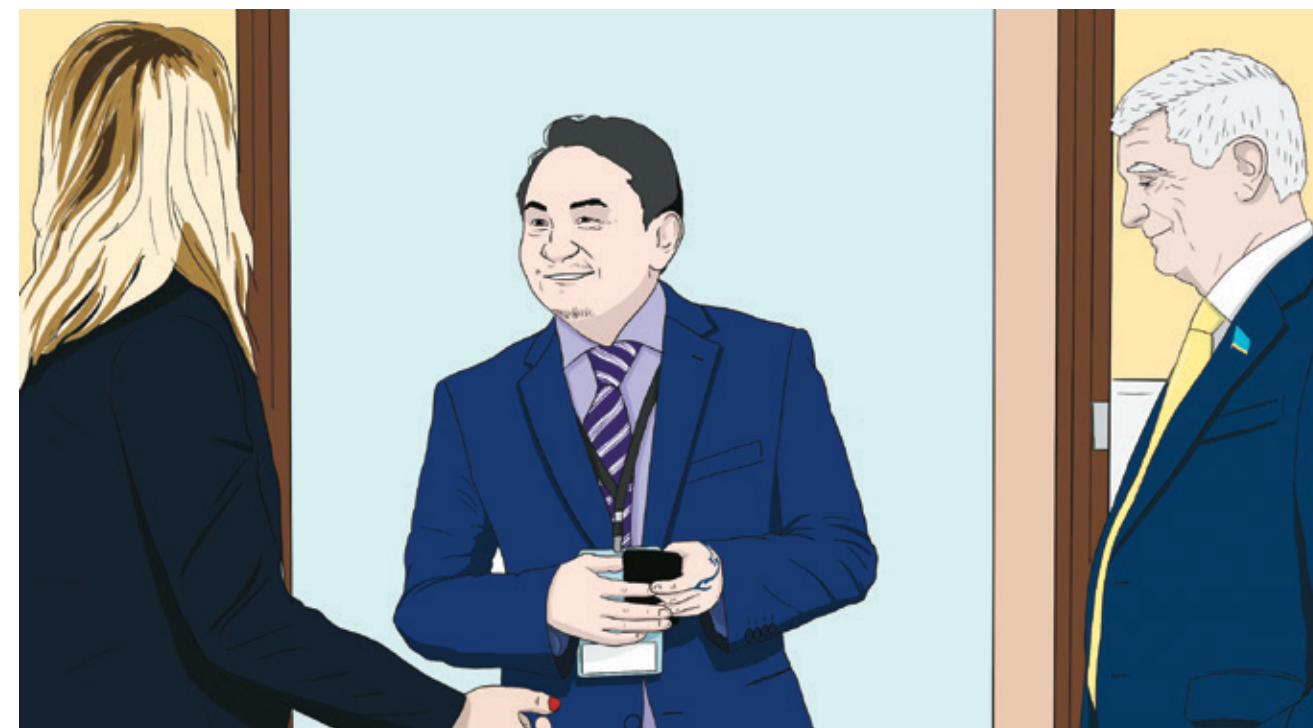
In recent years the Foundation has supported our Factcheck.kz project. We were the first in Central Asia to launch a fact-checking website for verifying

THE EXPERTS DO NOT SEE THE NAME OF THE APPLICANT ORGANIZATION, WHICH MEANS THEY ARE GUIDED BY THE QUALITY OF THE APPLICATION. SUCH A PROCEDURAL «ODDITY» SEEMS TO ME THE MOST REASONABLE AND APPROPRIATE OF ALL THE BUREAUCRATIC MODELS I HAVE ENCOUNTERED.

information. This is an important task, and the endless stream of misinformation during the pandemic has confirmed the timeliness of such a project.

Over the past years, the important issue of generational change in civil society has become more relevant. The older generation of human rights defenders, who have accumulated experience and knowledge, have lagged behind in technology. The new generation, by contrast, is more dynamic and technologically savvy, but obviously does not have as much experience. I would like to see the Foundation become a bridge between the generations, to provide for constructive symbiotic relationships. This area of activity is likely to prove fruitful.

To rephrase a famous line from a film, I would say that at the age of 25 life is just beginning. The Foundation has a lot of work to do: indefatigably to advance its noble cause, while continuing to be guided by its basic principles and values.





FURY AND THE AVANT-GARDE

ART HISTORIAN **VALERIA IBRAEVA** SHARES HER THOUGHTS ON THE FOUNDATION'S WORK, THE CREATION OF THE SOROS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, AND A PERFORMANCE BY GEORGE SOROS.

I respect and sincerely believe in the idea of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan. Its top priority has been to accustom people transitioning from a Soviet mindset to a new way of thinking enriched by the philosophy of Karl Popper. At first, the Foundation worked like a factory, from 9 am until midnight. In practice, to be a Foundation coordinator demanded much intellectual effort over an extended period of time.

It was necessary to study and acquire a lot of skills. This was interesting for us. At the time people could not believe they were being given money with no strings attached, with only the expectation that projects be implemented. It was rather difficult to establish trust. Well, you know the classic question, “Are you working for the CIA?” As a matter of fact, in 14 years of work, including my years spent at the Soros Center for Contemporary Art—Almaty (SCCA), I never met a single CIA employee—perhaps their cover was very good! But I did meet KGB officers.

As for culture and art, the situation was even more complicated. In 1996, we launched a pilot program with a simple title: Support for a Creative Initiative. We received lots of applications. The expert council worked tirelessly. About 15 projects received funding. Then, at the nexus of the publishing and cultural programs we initiated the Soros-Kazakhstan Debut competition, which had no age limit. The idea was that for the past ten years it had been impossible to publish anything, and in Soviet times it was extremely difficult to do so without the recommendation of the Central Committee. So we came up with a competition to help people with their literary debut, even if they were ninety years old. Almost all the winners are now respected authors, such as Didar Amantay, Yura Serebryansky, and the late Igor Poluyakhtov.

Which factors contributed to the creation of the Soros Center for Contemporary Art? First, it seemed to me that as an art historian I might be biased in my

decisions. Second, I am not an expert in music and theater, which means I cannot work with such projects. And third, I read somewhere that there were special institutions, each of which was called a Soros Center for Contemporary Art...

The notion of modern art has actually existed since the beginning of the 60s, but we had only a very vague notion of it. Art history textbooks ended somewhere around the time of Salvador Dali, and that is in the 50s. To put it mildly, there was quite a bit to work on. International experts came to visit studios and galleries, and to speak with artists. As a result, a decision was taken: there must be an SCCA in Kazakhstan! It was the only such center in Central Asia. We opened in May 1998, but in November, at a conference held in Amsterdam for contemporary art centers, Soros announced his decision to close all the contemporary art centers.

I will try to explain his logic. One day, at the opening of an exhibition at the Estonian SCCA, George Soros took the stage and began to speak in a completely unknown language. Those present at first thought it was Hungarian, but a Hungarian said it was not. Later in the evening over dinner, Soros said he did not understand modern art and therefore spoke in a language of his own invention. In other words, he gave a performance. Nevertheless, he had been supporting modern art for decades.

The period of the SCCA network's existence (there were some 20 centers) was accompanied by wild scandals. At that time there were such newspaper headlines as “Masterpieces from the Junkyard” and “Open Society of Naked Men.” In total, three centers remained, in Kishinev, Odessa and Almaty, because they were the newest and least experienced. The Director of the Culture and Art program begged Soros to keep funding the three new centers, and we were given three years to work towards self-sufficiency during a period of decreasing support. At first the budget was 100 thousand, then 80, then 60, then 40. Everything else was achieved by fundraising. We survived for ten years. Later, the Foundation began to cover only administrative expenses. I of course frantically searched for local funding sources, but unfortunately at that time businesspeople were not yet receptive to the idea.

Many people liked us; others did not. All the Foundation's directors came to talk in our warm artistic and intellectual environment. The collector Richard Spooner often stopped by to chat. In other words, it was the realization of the dream of Pirosmeni,



WITH SCANDALS AND ROWDY ANTICS, THE SOROS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART LOUDLY DECLARED THAT KAZAKHSTAN HAS ITS OWN INIMITABLE CONTEMPORARY ART.

who said: “I want there to be a house in the city, with a table in the house, and a samovar on the table.” We were that house with the samovar. On the other hand, we fulfilled our mission: we taught artists to organize projects, and personally I am not tearing my hair out about the fact I devoted ten years to this “hooliganism.” Everything must come to an end when the time comes.

Today, the novelty has disappeared from our modern art and the “hooliganism” has stopped. The avant-garde must disavow everything that preceded it. Now is a period of reconciliation. Back then was a frenetic period, and we dreaded the arrival of Thursday when the newspapers came out.

The advantage of the Foundation lies in its wide network of experts and members of the Board of Trustees. The Foundation deeply analyzes the situation in the country and hastens to the barricades that need to be put in order. By the way, in a private conversation George Soros once said to me: “You have a lot of rich people in Kazakhstan, why should I support your culture and art?”

MEGAPHONE FOR A NEW SOCIETY

CINEMA EXPERT **GULNARA ABIKEYEVA** ON THE ROLE PLAYED BY THE FOUNDATION ON THE CUSP OF TWO ERAS, FORMING A NEW IDEOLOGICAL PARADIGM AND PERSPECTIVE, AS WELL AS A POOL OF PROFESSIONALS



in the country for many years, and then everything changed. The Foundation was a vehicle for ideological change. It clearly defined the benefits of an open society and democracy—which some rejected and others accepted. Nevertheless, it seems to me the Foundation has become a megaphone for a new type of society.

Nothing here is ever dictated from above. Each Foundation program has an expert council. Next, national experts in a specific field meet to determine which initiatives are indeed worth supporting.

I was a member of the Media Support Program council and later of a program dedicated to culture and art. We were successful in both—for example, television in the 90s and news shows. The media program aimed at raising the standard of journalism—an ambitious goal it would seem, particularly when it includes television in general. But even this did not stop the Foundation. This is how the Television News Journalism project was created, one of the most costly and ambitious projects, in my opinion.

We organized training courses in ten of Kazakhstan’s regions and put together a strong team. We invited an American professional, a well-known broadcast industry professional, and two seasoned Kazakhstani journalists. When a request was received, the team would travel to the location and involve itself in the day-to-day work. A local camera crew and the trainers would shoot the story. It was on-the-go training in the best ways of shooting video, how to improve the structure of a piece, how to turn it into an interesting story, how to edit it, and how to work on the sound. These efforts yielded significant results for our television.

Unfortunately, the Foundation has not always had a positive image. There were rumors that it was providing money to those who were destroying the country. Time has passed, and we can see who actually influences the minds of Kazakhstan today: it is those who publish books, develop strategies, and work in the education system. Often these are the very people who were involved in Foundation programs. It is as simple as that.

At one point I worked with the Foundation when it was headed by Murat Aueзов, a man of culture, and so I was fortunate to discover the Kazakh Novel project. Although at that time it seemed impossible to raise the standard of the Kazakhstani novel, this turned out to be a totally achievable task. We held a contest of ideas for a novel among Kazakh- and Russian-language writers. Six winners emerged, among them Didar Amantay and Ilya Odegov (who at that time was only nineteen years old, can you imagine!).

It is no exaggeration to say that during those years, under Murat Aueзов’s leadership, I had a feeling the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan fulfilled the role of the republic’s ministry of culture. Its large-scale support with a broad reach was palpable. Although I have described only one contest, I remember having up to 120 grant applications on my desktop. We worked actively with all those people. Some were getting their books published; others were planning to go on a theater tour. The support may seem modest, but it was significant for those people.

Whereas other organizations work in a more limited way, the Foundation’s range of programs has always been very broad. It is difficult to overestimate the work the Foundation has done over these 25 years. Judge for yourself: it began working on the cusp of two eras, when Soviet civilization had been

DURING THOSE YEARS, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF MURAT AUEZOV, I HAD A FEELING THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN FULFILLED THE ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE.

A PERSON WITH RIGHTS

TAMARA KALEYEVA, PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR PROTECTION OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH ADIL SOZ, WRITES ON HOW THE SYSTEM FOR MONITORING FREEDOM OF SPEECH WAS FORMED IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT TO IMPROVE THE METHODOLOGY OF EXPERT RESEARCH ON CASES OF INCITING DISCORD.



Our organization was established 20 years ago, and for all this time we have cooperated with the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan. The very first grant we received in 1999 was from the Foundation. Thanks to this assistance we were able to create a legal service and begin to monitor freedom of speech. Since that time these areas have remained the main focus of our work. Naturally, our circle of partners and donors has expanded since then, but the Foundation remains one of the most important of them.

The Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan is unique, in that it is truly based in Kazakhstan. This means its employees are immersed in the problems, needs, and tasks of local civil society and respond appropriately to the needs of non-governmental organizations.

Let me give an example. With a grant from the Foundation we conducted a two-year project aimed at creating a framework for a new law on mass media. By bringing together national experts and researchers, combining their conclusions and recommendations, and formulating the concept, we developed model legislation. This was in 2016. At the beginning of this spring, representatives of the Ministry of Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan participated in a roundtable meeting in Nur-Sultan. Once again we discussed the model legislation, on which the ministry itself is now basing its work. In other words, the draft legislation created with the support of the Foundation formed the basis for our further action and the work of the media in Kazakhstan.

Additionally, some time ago together with the Ministry of Justice’s Center for Forensic Expertise and with the support of the Foundation, we developed a methodology for expert research on cases of inciting national, social, or religious discord. This is a pressing issue for Kazakhstani society at the moment, because people are receiving long prison sentences for crimes of which they are not guilty. What is the reason for this? Using old-fashioned practices, experts see “signs of incitement” in one or other published text. In contrast, our new methodology allows us to examine

whether there are signs, and which criteria make them such. A rigorous conceptual framework has been developed.

In April 2019 this methodology was adopted by the Center for Forensic Expertise, and since then we have been conducting training seminars for experts. These seminars have been in demand among lawyers, as it is their job to defend people. I believe this methodology will be used for a long time.

In general, we have had many projects with the Foundation that are worth talking about. They are implemented practically every year and always aim to support the most important social areas. It is difficult for me to understand why the Foundation has so many detractors. We have repeatedly seen many false assertions and public statements being made about it during its 25 years of work in Kazakhstan, including in the press. Absurd tax audits that have affected us as well deserve a particular mention. But all of this was followed by victories. The Foundation is working in full force, and to this day remains at the forefront of all progressive transformations, supporting democratic initiatives and the development of young civil activists, and helping to raise a new generation of human rights defenders. This is important. I do not know of any other organization in Kazakhstan tackling these issues so seriously.

AS LONG AS THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN EXISTS, AND AS LONG AS IT IS COMMITTED TO THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY, IT WILL REMAIN ONE OF THE MAIN ISLANDS FOR THE PROMOTION OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS.

STUDYING THE CRAFT OF JOURNALISM

ASSIYA AKISHEVA, A MEDIA EXPERT AND JOURNALIST AND A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN IN 2014-2019, SHARES HER OPINIONS ON THE REFORMATION OF THE INTERESTS OF A CONSERVATIVE AUDIENCE AND HERSELF AS A PROFESSIONAL IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE RAPIDLY CHANGING REALITY.

I first encountered the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan in the late '90s. As young journalists, we were invited to participate in an investigative journalism training course. The trainers and mentors were professionals from Europe with extensive experience in the field. It was an excellent opportunity for me! An opportunity not only to get acquainted with new trends in the global media industry, but also to try to use the acquired knowledge and skills in working with my readership, which at that time had the distinction of being exceptionally conservative.

Fifteen years later, the Foundation together with the Kazakhstan Press Club once again implemented a project that was unique and relevant and that resonated in my heart: the iMedia School of Multimedia Journalism. I am sure its graduates were able to transform their understanding of journalism, just as some time ago I was able to change my outlook. After all, journalism today is not just articles in a newspaper or on a website, or a story on a TV channel. It is, first and foremost, the ability to think critically, as well as instantly adapt to the new realities of scientific and technological progress. I am proud I was involved in the project, even if only indirectly.

I would not be wrong in saying that thanks to the Foundation's programs an entire generation has grown up in our country that managed to adapt to new challenges and realities, and to establish themselves as individuals and professionals in what they do. These days some of them have devoted themselves to civil service, some are successful in business, and others have become media personalities—real experts in one or other field. Thanks to the Foundation's support of debate

clubs for youths and students, who then become Bolashak Program graduates, many participants continue to prove themselves excellent speakers and polemicists.

Moreover, cooperation with the Foundation opened up for me as a journalist such topics as palliative care, access to medicine for people with grave health problems, and inclusive education.

Over the years the Foundation has also supported representatives of our creative intelligentsia: poets, writers, musicians, and filmmakers, as well as the unique Kazakh Traditional Music project of the Almaty-based Kurmangazy Conservatory, which was only made possible thanks to the Foundation. Archival and new recordings of Kazakh musical folklore, instrumental music, traditional music, and musical epos were released on four CDs.

It is difficult for me to comprehensively judge how well the Foundation has met its goals and objectives. But I believe it is thanks to the Foundation that Kazakhstanis have stopped being afraid of such simple—but at the same time complex—concepts as open society or civil engagement. That's right, philosophers and educators of different eras have conflicting opinions on this issue. As far as we are concerned, a simplified view of the very nature of civic life and the absence of mechanisms for shaping civil society as one of the hallmarks of a post-Soviet legacy are already becoming a thing of the past.

In our understanding, being an active citizen today means to not be indifferent to the fate of your country, and to be actively engaged in public life.

IT WAS A REAL CHALLENGE: I WAS GOING TO UNDERGO TRAINING IN INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM FOR THE KAZAKH-LANGUAGE PRESS! I ENDEAVORED TO CHANGE THE READER'S DEMAND. AND TO BEGIN WITH, I OFFERED THE AUDIENCE A NEW BUSINESSLIKE FORMAT.





REASONABLE OPTIMISM

ANTON ARTEMYEV, DIVISION DIRECTOR AT THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS' EURASIA PROGRAM, FORMER CHAIR OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN, ON WHY HE REGRETS THE CLOSURE OF THE CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART AND HOW THE TRAINING CAFÉ MANAGED TO CREATE A PRECEDENT OF NATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE

THE ABILITY TO SUPPORT A WORTHY PROJECT, OCCASIONALLY WITHOUT COMPLETE CONFIDENCE IN ITS SUCCESS, IS A FEATURE OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN. THIS IS AN ADVANTAGE THAT PRIVATE FOUNDATIONS HAVE OVER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS.

It is important to me that over these 25 years the Foundation has managed to build and maintain trust and good business relationships with partners from both the civil sector and the government. It has not been easy. The country has seen great changes over the years, some for the better, others for the worse. All this time, the Foundation developed dynamically along with the country, responding to new challenges, taking advantage of emerging opportunities, launching new programs and rejecting others. For example, in 2003, the idea that state revenues from the oil sector could be transparent and that oil companies, the government, and civil society should jointly discuss priorities

for using these funds seemed completely radical. Today, no one disputes this idea.

I admire the determination of the Foundation. It was not an easy task to help build a network of civil society partners to deal with this issue at a professional level. However, today our partners are involved in the preparation of government reports and developing mechanisms for data verification. What is standard practice today hardly seemed realistic in 2004.

Which projects do I regret closing? One example is the Center for Contemporary Art.



TOLERANCE, INCLUSIVENESS, AND CRITICAL THINKING ARE VALUES THAT NEED TO BE SPREAD THROUGH GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS.

The Foundation supported the project for ten years, but the activities of the Center had to stop in the mid-noughties. We hoped (and it was a strategic assumption) that within those ten years local philanthropy would have emerged to provide independent support for cultural projects, as happened in many countries of the former Soviet Union. However, in Kazakhstan, despite a significant improvement in the economy and welfare, this did not happen on a significant scale.

As a private foundation, the Foundation is completely independent. Besides its independence, the Foundation is characterized by a willingness and ability to support initiatives where results cannot be foreseen. The Board of Trustees and the team of the Foundation have always asked two questions: whether a project is close to the Foundation in terms of the values it promotes and whether it is important for the country. Quite often such projects were small, but important for society.

One example is the Training Café. There was no way of knowing for sure whether people would go to cafés where people with mental-health disorders work as waiters. Nonetheless, the Foundation decided to support the idea, which has now spread

to cities other than Almaty. Thus, a precedent for a project that actually worked was set in the country. Clearly, the Foundation simply could not refuse to support such an initiative. People with mental health disorders are probably the most stigmatized social group of people with special needs. Helping them socialize is a big deal.

As part of the “Social Inclusion” initiative, the Foundation advocated that people with disabilities should not be isolated. However, in order for social attitudes to change dramatically, it is necessary to increase the number of training cafés to between five and ten for a city such as Almaty, with a population of more than two million people. This was a scale that the Foundation could not achieve by itself. Only the state with its resources can significantly affect the situation. In general, it is very important that the state send the right signals to society.

What motivated me while working at the Foundation? The success of our partners, the success of my colleagues, belief in the values that underpin the Foundation—and, speaking of the example I have given, the smile of a person working in the Training Café.

ABOUT US BUT WITHOUT OUR PARTICIPATION



VENIAMIN ALAYEV, A KAZAKHSTANI HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER DEALING WITH THE ISSUES OF DISABLED PEOPLE IN KAZAKHSTAN, REFLECTS ON HIS SPEECH AT THE UN, HIS PERSONAL MOTIVATION, AND 700,000 CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES.

the program I was not left alone. Having received support from the Foundation, I launched a study on the employment of people with disabilities. That is how it all started. I joined a working group of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection on the employment of people with disabilities, and the Almaty Akimat's Coordinating Council. I also linked my public activity to the Foundation. Thanks to all of this, I became a non-staff adviser to the city's mayor on the issues of disabled people. Currently I am an adviser to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection on issues of disabled people. While working I realized that kindness will truly save the world. It is not pity that is most important in public life, but the realization of human rights, kindness and compassion. The best demonstration of this is the Financial Inclusion project, which is currently being implemented by our organization. The project focuses on the availability of financial services for people with disabilities. I am convinced this initiative could be relevant for other countries as well. Incidentally, thinking globally is also a distinctive trait of the Foundation.

THE SOROS FOUNDATION IS ONE OF THE FEW GRANTMAKERS FINANCING PROJECTS AIMED AT THE REALIZATION OF THE RIGHTS OF PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES.

Although not an employee, I maintain good relations with the Foundation, resulting in an opportunity to speak at the UN in June 2019. It was a chance for me to make new acquaintances in the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It was also an opportunity to enhance international ties, my personal visibility, and the visibility of the Kairat Imanaliyev Commission on the Rights of People with Disabilities. However, the speech itself was my initiative as a citizen and human rights defender and was part of the Sustainable Development Goals. In the speech I raised two important issues for Kazakhstan: deinstitutionalization and the enactment of a law on non-discrimination that includes, among others, people with disabilities. Of course, the last time I checked there

My time at the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan was a pivotal moment for me. This is simply because the New Generation of Human Rights Defenders program in which I was trained changed my life. I immersed myself in the study of human rights and began to understand not only the rights of my target group (people with disabilities) but my own rights as well. After all, we all strive for a common goal: to realize ourselves as citizens, as people who want to live a normal life. Moreover, even after finishing

was still such a thing as personal motivation. And I have it! I protect those like myself. I have a disability and I do not hide it, although unfortunately for many the statement "I am Veniamin, and I have a disability" still sounds like "I am Veniamin, and I am an alcoholic." The fact that we are not silent and do not hesitate to speak about our identity and right of belonging is invaluable, and we are no longer few in number. As a rule, people with disabilities are caged up within four walls watching television. But this is not enough. We have the right to education, employment, and participation in the social and political life of the country. We must get to the point where each of us has a voice and each of us must be heard. After all, there are almost 700,000 citizens with disabilities in Kazakhstan, and the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is only the minimum of what needs to be done.

Recently, a Facebook friend was called a cripple. It so happens that a person who had been offering to help my friend was the one who insulted him behind his back; in other words, he was discriminating against my friend. This outrages me more than anything. Let us respect one another and not accept the barriers that people with disabilities encounter. These must be eliminated. For example, everyone understands the obstacles hampering access to infrastructure (ramps, adapted toilets). In an office in a business center, there may be a ramp but no toilet adapted for use by people with limited mobility. This is what it is like everywhere. Business has no interest in us as employees or customers. Yet I

THE STATE REPORT SHOWS WE ARE EMPLOYED. WE SAY: YES, WE ARE EMPLOYED, BUT LET'S CONSIDER NOT THOSE WHO HAVE WORKED FOR JUST A MONTH, BUT THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN WORKING FOR AT LEAST A YEAR.

hope to change the situation. We are doing this deliberately, after analyzing the state bodies' report on this very topic. When you read it you think you live in some kind of alternate Kazakhstan. For example, the official report says we have inclusive education in our country. Together with the Foundation, we are preparing an alternative report on the rights of people with disabilities. In our report we emphasize that inclusiveness may be declared, but too few schools can provide high-quality education for disabled people, because there are simply no trained teachers. Even children with disabilities say they feel more comfortable studying in boarding schools. We are creating an inclusive society and we must live together.

Did you know there are virtually no employed people with mental disabilities? Currently every time a person with a mental disability is hired it is immediately covered in the media, whereas it should be the norm. Thanks to such reports the state knows about our life not only from the words of officials. We are presently working directly with the Ministry of Labor, which is supporting our initiative to create small working groups that are going to work on the issues reflected in our alternative report. The report, which will be presented in Geneva, has already been written, but we are updating and adding to it.





THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SUCCESS

ROZA ABILOVA, DEPUTY OF THE MASLIKHAT OF THE ILI DISTRICT AND A FOUNDER OF THE NGO "BOLASHAK," TALKS ABOUT THE TWO PROJECTS THAT INITIATED THE ADOPTION OF THE LAW "ON PUBLIC COUNCILS", AND ABOUT OPEN AND TRANSPARENT BUDGET DATA.

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How budgetary funds are spent is anything but a simple matter. Throughout the world the situation regarding the transparency and accessibility of budgetary information leaves much to be desired. Government officials, who have one hundred percent of all budgetary resources under their control, do not always consider it necessary to report to taxpayers on how the funds are actually spent. Moreover, the public is not in the habit of asking for this information, as for the most part people are convinced that officials do not care about the living conditions of ordinary people and that the government's interests do not coincide with those of society.

In order to find a middle ground between the government and society we launched two projects with the support of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan: Social Audit and Public Councils. Work on the projects began after we went on a social-audit study tour to India. India has an interesting experience of this area: five percent of its budget is allocated from the very beginning for social-audit purposes. In other words, anyone who starts a new project knows in advance it will be checked by public organizations.

WE HAVE HOSTED CONFERENCES ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS, WHICH INCLUDED THE PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT, MINISTRY REPRESENTATIVES, AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES. SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN REPRESENTATIVES HAVE ALSO ALWAYS TAKEN PART IN THEM.

We subsequently had an opportunity to observe the work of members of the German Bundestag. Through those examples we were able to understand how citizens should participate in local



self-government issues, in various localities: starting from cities with fewer than 40,000 inhabitants and ending with those with more than 300,000 inhabitants.

Arising from these efforts, we developed a model in the Ili District for how budget management should be carried out for small communities in accordance with local realities and needs.

As a direct result, the Ili District found itself among the leaders in rural regions, and the population learned how to boldly participate in budgeting processes. People began to treat the state budget as their own. They began to understand that they have a tool to influence the government, that it is their participation that determines how taxpayers' funds are spent and what the quality of work performed will be. Even the heads of the local executive bodies said they were grateful as they could not conduct such a high-quality audit as the active and concerned residents had done—and this was just the beginning.

The second project we were able to implement in partnership with and supported financially by the Foundation was the development of public councils. In all modesty I can say that the law On Public Councils adopted in November 2015 took most of its practical work from our district's experience. This was

confirmed in a speech by Serik Seidumanov, a deputy of the parliament's Mazhilis and the head of the group on the draft law.

Why do the Foundation's projects have such an impact on our country? First, the staff's professionalism plays a crucial role. Second, interaction with the Foundation is always very clear: there is a work plan, guided coordination, and a logical framework without any bureaucratic red tape. Moreover, comprehensive consultative and actual support are provided. The Foundation coordinator participates at all stages of the project. The Foundation's partners simply do not have to prove anything to anyone or convince them of anything. This really saves time and effort. The coordinator observes the stages of the project's development and gets actively involved in the work when necessary.

I hope the Foundation's 25 years in our country are just the beginning. I say this because the Foundation is providing truly positive, meaningful results, such as the availability of open and easy-to-read budgetary data that helps Kazakhstani citizens not only monitor but also participate in a decision-making process that truly reflects their pressing needs. All of this may support the continued fight against corruption and increase the population's civic engagement.

AT PRESENT THE MEMBERS OF THE TEAM FORMED IN 2015 AS PART OF THE SOCIAL AUDIT PROJECT ARE PART OF VARIOUS GROUPS AND COMMISSIONS THAT MONITOR NOT ONLY ISSUES RELATED TO THE ALLOCATION OF FUNDS BUT ALSO THE QUALITY OF WORK PERFORMED IN OUR COUNTRY. IT IS, AFTER ALL, THE POPULATION THAT IS THE BENEFICIARY OF THE SERVICES.



OPEN POSITION

IRINA SMIRNOVA, DEPUTY OF THE MAZHILIS OF THE PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN, SHARES HER THOUGHTS ON THE PROBLEMS OF SCHOOL EDUCATION, THE RIGHTS OF TEACHERS, THE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE STATE BUDGET, AND HOW THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN BEGAN TO FORMULATE ITS POSITION IN CIVIL SOCIETY.

Recently, while thinking about how long I have known the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan, I realized that I have been working with its representatives for more than ten years. Back then, I lived in Almaty and was head of a school and of the Almaty branch of the Association of Teachers Ar-Namys. This was around 2008-2010. It was a difficult time for the education system and for me personally, but in the Foundation I found the moral support and expert community that I needed so much.

I understood from the outset that this collaboration was important both for me and for the whole teaching community, and I was right. We learned so much from Saule Kalikova, then Director of the Foundation’s educational program, to whom I am personally very thankful.

Strange as it may seem, it was working with the Foundation that helped me grow as a citizen of my country. I understood how it is both possible and

EXPERIENCE HAS SHOWN THAT THE GOVERNMENT AND PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN TAKE THE OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE STATE BUDGET SERIOUSLY. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE STATE AND, MOREOVER, IT BRINGS REAL RESULTS.

necessary to talk about the rights of a teacher, a student, or a citizen of Kazakhstan—and, more importantly, what to do if these rights are violated.

The process was gradual. In particular, participation in meetings of the Kazakhstan Institute for Political Decisions, which cooperated with the Foundation, brought many benefits. We realized how important it is to speak the truth openly with the aim of improving people’s lives. I am sure I was not the only one to benefit when the Foundation team contributed to changing our perceptions of our own rights.

Another significant project of the Foundation is its support for the “Cyprus” discussion platform. It focused on the expertise of state legislative initiatives, business, social movements, the assessment of regulatory impact, and social research. The project team brought together active citizens, giving them an opportunity to speak out, and to seek the support of experts and the community. We can see the benefits of this project.

Another pivotal moment was my participation in the program about the openness and transparency of the budget. That my opinion might influence the country’s budget has greatly changed my attitude to my

own role in society. As a result, with the help of the experts and representatives of the Foundation, I was able to address the government of Kazakhstan, conduct an analysis of the country’s open budget and accordingly make recommendations to the ministries on what the budget should be. Now this initiative is yielding some dividends: I recently participated in the creation of a virtual map of open budgets in Kazakhstan.

EACH EVENT OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN HAS A SPECIALIST PRESENTATION, INCLUDING BY FOREIGN EXPERTS. THIS ALLOWS EVERYONE INTERESTED TO DELVE INTO THE PROBLEM AND SEE IT FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE. THANKS TO THE FOUNDATION’S VALUES OF RESPECT AND OPENNESS, THE RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS IN EACH DISCUSSION IS UNLIMITED, MAKING THE PROCESS MORE EFFICACIOUS.

The map was created with the assistance of the Anti-Corruption Agency. All organizations that receive state funding are marked on the map. If you click on the organization you are interested in, you will see detailed information about budgetary spending. This allows the public to control the expenditure of public funds. In other words, the goal of budgetary openness and transparency has been implemented.



THIS IS OUR RIGHT

POLITICAL ANALYST **BERIK ABDIGALIULY** ON CULTIVATING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND AN ENGAGED GENERATION



activists, whether they were involved in the social sphere or in journalism. Thankfully, as a result, an entire generation of engaged citizens living both in and for Kazakhstan has come into existence.

Over the past quarter century many important programs have been initiated. Without listing them all, I shall single out some I would definitely like to mention. For me, at the top of the list are the programs on the protection of human rights. After all, in our society, citizens unfortunately cannot yet be sure that their rights will be protected. In addition, even at the present time far from all of us can claim them in moments of need. But it was the Foundation that did much to enable people to understand that if they cannot act themselves, there are always opportunities to seek advice.

I would also like to mention social projects. It sometimes happens that people with disabilities are disregarded by the state. The Foundation comes to their aid as well. Its special distinction is that the Foundation helps citizens implement their projects without the participation of the state, and only after that do they help one another develop.

Among the Foundation's recent successes are projects involving work with the budget. It seems to me many Kazakhstanis do not understand the basics of this process and just how important the transparency, clarity, and reporting of the budget are, especially when it concerns the rural population. Thanks to the Foundation, citizens of Kazakhstan can now directly participate in the budget-allocation process. The Foundation also has an interest in fighting corruption. I sincerely hope these projects are expanded and improved, and that work continues on improving public literacy in regard to the budget.

Why do I work with the Foundation? It's very simple. Although other organizations in the country offer grants and help people realize their dreams and plans, many of them rely on support from the state or use the financial resources of various political forces. The Foundation draws on its own funds, as well as universal human values.

We were raised in a totalitarian communist society. For this reason understanding civil rights and cultivating civic activism was not our strong suit. In addition, we also had practically no experience of protecting human rights and solving social problems. Therefore today, looking back over the past 25 years, I particularly appreciate the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan's work.

The Foundation ushered in the development of citizen activism in the Republic of Kazakhstan and influenced the emergence of human rights professionals among the local population. Throughout this time it also provided support for Kazakh-speaking

ANOTHER IMPORTANT AREA OF THE FOUNDATION'S ACTIVITY IS SUPPORTING PROJECTS IN THE FIELD OF MEDIA AND POLITICAL SCIENCE, INCLUDING ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH KAZAKH-SPEAKING PROFESSIONALS. IN ADDITION TO DEVELOPING VARIOUS WEBSITES, NEWSPAPERS, AND MAGAZINES, THE FOUNDATION HAS WORKED TO IMPROVE THE PROFESSIONALISM OF JOURNALISTS, AND CONDUCTED SEMINARS, PRACTITIONER-DRIVEN CONFERENCES, AND WORKING SESSIONS.

INTELLECTUAL INFUSION

ZHIBEK AKHMETOVA, PRESIDENT OF THE CIVIL ALLIANCE OF MANGYSTAU OBLAST ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL ENTITIES, ON THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN'S ATYPICAL COMMITMENT TO LONG-TERM PROJECTS FOR DONOR ORGANIZATIONS, SOLVING COMPLEX SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS, AND PROVIDING PROFESSIONALS WITH A TIMELY OPPORTUNITY TO UPGRADE THEIR SKILLS



success: by making a concerted effort to accumulate capabilities, and eventually this produces results.

Another important feature of the Foundation is the close attention it pays to institutional development. As a result, we have an opportunity to attend lectures given by intellectually rigorous international experts, as well as to share experiences with foreign colleagues.

Among the projects of the past several years in the civil sphere, it is worth highlighting the Transparency and Accountability program, which has enabled our organization to implement several projects that have shown fairly good results, including the more active and informed participation of citizens in local government decision-making processes. People became convinced they could influence problem-solving in their villages by engaging interested parties. Members of the local community have learned to use their powers and rights to monitor the utilization of the rural budget.

The Open Budget Fellowship program, designed to train experts in state budgeting, also fulfilled an important mission. I myself am a graduate of the program and can say that, first of all, it gave participants an opportunity to gain considerable knowledge of state finance. Thanks to the program the participants came to understand the difference between national and local budgets, the functioning of the National Fund, and the significance of the state budget and the state debt. Secondly, we not only acquired knowledge but also learned how to analyze and examine budgeting procedures using open-source information.

At present I am successfully making use of the knowledge I received from the Open Budget Fellowship program in my work monitoring public procurement, conducting independent research in various fields, and preparing analytical reports, and this is a success: for me personally, for the organization I work for, and for the Foundation that allowed me to grow professionally.

Increasing civic engagement, expanding civic initiatives and promoting new laws that require openness and accountability from the state—these have all been part of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan's work over the past 25 years. However, no matter what issues the Foundation deals with, human rights were—and still are—the cornerstone of its public relations. The projects implemented with its support positively influence the development of society's respect for equality and justice, strengthen the rule of law, and raise awareness of the great importance of an open budget.

Observing these processes from a distance and immersing myself in them, I have come to the conclusion that the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan is the only foundation in Kazakhstan that is actually committed to solving the country's socio-economic problems. In this vein, the Civil Alliance of Mangystau Oblast strives to solve the most difficult social problems, and this requires considerable time. Harnessing our willpower, over the past several years we have been moving towards our desired goal. At the same time, we have been improving our professional skills and are learning to work closely with our colleagues. The Foundation helps us with knowledge, experience, and professional expertise. This is the only way to achieve

DURING OUR COOPERATION WITH THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN WE HAVE LEARNED TO WORK SYSTEMATICALLY. NOT A SINGLE PROJECT DEVELOPED UNDER A GRANT HAS REMAINED WITHOUT RESULTS AND PROSPECTS FOR CONTINUATION.

ERA AND EDUCATION

AN ADVISER ON PUBLIC POLICY AT THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN, **SAULE KALIKOVA** IS ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN.

“We are a Kazakhstani organization closely connected to the national context and local realities.” (Saule Kalikova)

The year is 1994 and the young republic embarks on the path of reform. Kazakhstanis are inspired by the spirit of freedom and democracy floating in the air. It seems it won't take long before these developments become tangible. That year, with the support of the Foundation, a large-scale project called Transformation of Humanitarian Education is being launched in Kazakhstan. Its idea is to take the reforms to a new level. The project's foundation and priorities are formed by an expert committee of three people, specialists in the field of education and science. One of them is Saule Kalikova.

According to Kalikova, she joined the Foundation as a «mature person with her values already in place.» In addition, she had a lot of experience in the field of educational policy.

«Before joining the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan,» recalls Kalikova, «I worked in various organizations of the education system: the Y. Altynsarin Scientific Research Institute of Pedagogical Sciences (now named the Y. Altynsarin National Academy of Education), the Ministry of Education and Science, and as an education consultant in the Republic of Kazakhstan's parliament.»

MORE THAN A THIRD OF THE TOTAL FUNDS USED BY THE FOUNDATION OVER 25 YEARS WERE ALLOCATED TO EDUCATION. THIS IS ALMOST 35 MILLION US DOLLARS.

A short time after working as a member of the expert committee, Saule Kalikova joined the Foundation in 1995 as an employee, becoming part of its team, and for many years headed the educational program cluster.

Ms. Kalikova, how do you assess the activities of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan in the field of education over the past 25 years? In which areas do you think this activity was most significant?

«Looking back, I can say that the activities of the Foundation in the field of education in Kazakhstan have become an important part of the reforms that were initiated in the country when it gained its independence. Over the course of 25 years we have initiated and supported many projects encompassing all levels of education, from preschool to university.

«Our most important contribution was in such areas as the development of critical thinking, equality and fairness in education, support for schools and the professional development of teachers, and support for the main areas of education reform. We have provided opportunities for training and research internships at leading foreign universities. Thousands of young people and university teachers from different regions of the country have taken advantage of them.

«A number of the ideas, concepts and approaches that were incorporated into the Kazakhstani context as part of our programs have become part the country's educational practices and now continue to develop on their own. Here I will mention only a few of them. When developing national standards for preschool education, the key ideas and methodological approaches of our Step-by-Step program were taken into consideration. Many teachers who had taken courses that were part of the Development of Critical Thinking through Reading and Writing program supported by us were included in the first teaching staff of the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools.



WE DEVELOPED OUR MOST SIGNIFICANT PROJECTS IN CLOSE COOPERATION WITH THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN AND THE REGIONAL DEPARTMENTS OF EDUCATION. TODAY I WOULD LIKE TO THANK EVERYONE WHO HELPED US IN OUR WORK WITH PROFESSIONAL ADVICE, TRUST, SUPPORT AND THEIR COMMITMENT TO CONTINUE WORKING WITHOUT US.

«The Akmola Region’s Vyacheslavka Secondary School in the Arshaly District is the center of active community life and the initiator and implementer of many social and educational projects. Back in 2003, its director Tatyana Nemtsan was among the first participants of the School as a Local Community Center program. In the late 90s and early 2000s, thousands of high school and university students participated in our program entitled Debates. Today, one of the areas of focus of the State Program for the Development of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2025 is the implementation of the national cultural and educational project called Debate Movement for Schoolchildren, Ushkyr oy alany. As part of the project, debate centers and clubs are slated to be opened throughout the country.»

There are many projects that have become sustainable and continue to develop. Could you tell us about those projects that were not implemented?

«The Civic Education (1996-1997) and Education in a Multicultural Environment (2000) projects were two areas in which our activities had no systemic influence. Despite the fact that in the first area we supported several promising authors of textbooks and manuals on civic education, we were not able to expand it. One of the reasons for this was the appearance of other donor organizations working on the same topic in agreement with the Ministry of Education and Science. We began working on the second topic with the goal of initiating the development of innovative projects in the field of multicultural education. As I understand it now, at that time against the backdrop of the pressing problems of the education system it was perceived as excessive. Yes, it was interesting, but there were more important things to deal with.»

What are the most memorable projects implemented by the Foundation that you can tell us about?

«I may be biased if I say that all our projects were equally interesting and significant, whether they

were systemic and large in budget, or modest in budget and scope, but nevertheless important for the education system. All of them were different. But since you have asked such a question, I will tell you about one project.

«In 1996, as part of the Training Book program, we announced a competition entitled Kazakh Language for Speakers of Other Languages. We invited to participate in the competition all those who were interested and could present conceptually new approaches to teaching Kazakh as a second language. It goes without saying we were worried: after all, it has traditionally been a field where a small group of specialists determined the policies and practices for the development and publishing of Kazakh language textbooks for Russian-speaking audiences. By opening this competition, we gave a signal to society: we need new ideas, new authors, new textbooks. We received a lot of applications from a variety of people: from philologists to artists and illustrators of children’s books. There was even a young researcher who had studied abroad and was convinced that it was time to develop textbooks for foreign students who want to learn the Kazakh language. As part of the project we published 18 textbooks and teaching aids. I will never forget the words of gratitude to the Foundation from Rafika Nurtazina, who at that time headed one of the leading Kazakh schools, school no. 12 in Almaty: ‘Your enthusiasm is contagious and you have shown that one should not be afraid to do what one believes in. I see a lot of new faces here that I would never have known about if I had not become a member of your program. Thank you for the new knowledge, ideas, and for the opportunity to communicate with like-minded people.’»

How does the Foundation differ from other organizations?

«I believe the uniqueness of our organization stems from the genetic code that is embedded in our values: justice, human rights and the rule of law; recognition and acceptance of diversity as the basis for an inclusive society; transparency and accountability as a basis for an inclusive society; transparency and accountability as a precondition for the democratic structure of the state and society. Commitment to these values determines not only the content of our program activities, but also the organization’s culture, management and decision-making mechanisms. What makes us unique is that while we are a



I DO WHAT I LIKE; I SEE THE REAL RESULTS OF MY WORK; AND, LAST BUT NOT LEAST, I AM SURROUNDED BY ABSOLUTELY WONDERFUL YOUNG PEOPLE—MY COLLEAGUES—WHO MOTIVATE ME TO CONTINUALLY GROW AND DEVELOP. THERE IS SIMPLY NO PLACE FOR ROUTINE!

part of the large international network of Open Society Foundations, we are also a Kazakhstani organization in both legal status and spirit, closely connected to the national context and local realities. These two ‘points of reference’ provide an opportunity to develop our program activities in a flexible and targeted manner, combining and cross-pollinating international and Kazakhstani experience and expertise.»

25 years is a long time in the service of one organization. Tell us what inspired you in your work, and prevented it from becoming routine?

«It so happened that the field in which I progressed throughout my professional career is educational policy. Here I should note that anyone who

is professionally engaged in public policy issues transmits to society not only subject-specific expert knowledge, but also, first and foremost, certain values. I understand and appreciate open society values on which our organization is based, and which I mentioned previously. I share these values and they inspire me a lot. I love the spirit of novelty and openness to innovation. I value flexibility and the willingness to respond to the real needs of the country, one of the important principles of our work. I am also inspired by the fact that our Foundation has always had strong ties with a wide variety of Kazakhstani organizations and people, together with whom we have made a significant contribution to the building of independent Kazakhstan.»

TO SEE NO LIMITS

HEAD OF THE PUBLIC ASSOCIATION BEREKE, **ALIYA RUSTEMBEKOVA**, ON THE CIVIL SECTOR IN RURAL AREAS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE STATE BUDGET



When it began working with the Foundation, Bereke had already for several years been making efforts to develop NGOs, but five of the South Kazakhstan Region’s twelve districts remained uncovered—Saryagash, Arys, Tulkubas, Suzak, and Ordabas. The non-governmental sector there practically did not function. As part of these projects, together with Foundation representatives, we conducted training courses on strategic planning, fundraising, community mobilization, project development and management, media skills development, and many other topics.

In addition, participating organizations were given a unique opportunity to implement their own ideas on the development of advocacy activities. They received mini-grants and became pioneers among rural NGOs in that sphere.

It has always been obvious to me that in addition to the Foundation’s vision, the goals and objectives it sets for itself are important and relevant to all of us. Among them its work on improving budget transparency and accountability, and strengthening civic engagement are particularly noteworthy. I am also glad to see the interest that the Foundation is fostering in the field of inclusive education.

The Foundation is proactive. Its team pays special attention to preventing problems, and the specialists working with the Foundation possess only the highest professional qualifications and are always ready to help each stakeholder. It is this desire to be useful, to work towards overall success that attracts people to the Foundation.

There is one more feature that is not immediately apparent: I believe all the areas in which the Foundation is working are of equal importance. I am convinced the correct approach is to deal with several current issues, not focus on only one. Speaking from experience, I appreciate the Foundation’s high degree of interest in new people, thoughts and programs.

On one occasion I traveled to St. Petersburg on a grant from the Foundation. The objective was to share experiences with the city’s leading public organizations. It turned out to be an excellent opportunity to learn from colleagues’ experiences and to gain new ones. Indeed, we all need to hone our knowledge to be able to work more effectively with people. This significantly improves our professionalism and thus our organizations’ potential.

From 2012 to 2014, with the support of the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan, the public association Bereke simultaneously implemented two projects:

- Developing Civil Society through Enhancing the Capacity of Regional NGOs in the South Kazakhstan Region, and
- Strengthening the Capacity of Regional NGOs in the South Kazakhstan Region to Achieve the Sustainable Development of Civil Society.

Both projects focused on working with non-governmental organizations in rural areas. Unfortunately, at that time many of the donors with whom we spoke were not even prepared to acknowledge the importance of developing the civil sector at the rural level. Probably for this reason they also perceived their work in rural areas as a one-off, ad hoc effort, nothing more than a flash in the pan. All this did not contribute to and at times hindered the development of civil society in rural areas, and necessitated comprehensive work on the institutional and organizational development of regional NGOs. An exception to this was the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan, which was—as we were ourselves—convinced of the need for the work.

MANY PERCEIVED THE WORK IN RURAL AREAS AS A ONE-OFF, AD HOC EFFORT. THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN WAS AN EXCEPTION.

A COMFORTABLE URBAN FABRIC

ASSEL YESZHANOVA, FOUNDER AND CREATIVE FORCE BEHIND THE URBAN FORUM ALMATY (NOW URBAN FORUM KAZAKHSTAN), DISCUSSES THE URBAN AGENDA AS WELL AS THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH AND ROLE OF THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN.

In 2015, a decision was taken to demolish the building of the State Planning Committee of the Kazakh SSR, located at the intersection of Mira and Kirov Streets in Almaty (now the intersection of Zheltoksan and Bogenbay Batyr). City activists attempted to protect the historic city center from modern development: they signed an online petition, organized flash mobs, held a rally and a sit-in, but... we all know what happened next.

The old building in the historic city center, where there is now a new shopping and office complex, is not the only case when an urban-planning decision hit a raw nerve that led to indignation among Almaty residents. That event actually became a turning point: to a large extent citizens’ minds were freed, people became bolder, more informed, and began to care about the appearance and life of the city.

At that time we came up with the idea of bringing together all those concerned and giving them an opportunity to speak their minds. We decided a dialogue was necessary: an opportunity to meet at an official forum with professional moderation where everyone would have a chance to express their point of view, thereby allowing residents and experts to make a difference in the city. Failing this, irritation would only grow and the situation would escalate.

Truth be told, our desire to create a culture in which government, business, and society could openly speak their minds did not immediately find a receptive audience. The Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan was the first to offer to look into the situation comprehensively. At that time we did not immediately understand what this meant. Now it is funny to recall how I came in and said: “Hello. My name is Assel Yeszhanova. We need to talk about architecture. We would like to organize an architecture conference.”

Thanks to the Foundation’s support, we have systematically moved toward our goal. We gradually grew from a “lowly” initiative into a public foundation. Only three years later, we were known as the Urban Forum Kazakhstan. From Almaty the movement has expanded to other Kazakhstani cities: Nur-Sultan, Atyrau, Shymkent, and Oskemen.

It was only after having looked into the issue thoroughly that we realized that although architecture is part of



the urban fabric, it is not the only reason our cities are not as comfortable as they could be. Now we are concerned not only about our historical heritage, but also about transportation, ecology, infrastructure, and urban development.

What is next? Together with the Foundation, we are holding a competition for social projects. In the years from 2015 to 2018 urban projects from Almaty participated, including those focused on the development of non-central districts. Last year, all Kazakhstani cities with the exception of Almaty took part in the competition. One of the competition’s winners was a very interesting collaborative project on designing a school that is based on one in the city of Issyk. A group of architects is trying to rethink the school-design process: students, teachers, and other users of the space are voicing their expectations and needs during the concept-creation stage.

Another of the competition’s finalists was a wonderful project in Nur-Sultan. It was submitted by the architect Temirtas Iskakov. The Fading.TSE project explores the issue of “memory of place.” It addresses the history of the city using photographs and recollections of its residents to show how the capital’s appearance has changed and to emphasize the value of architecturally significant buildings. The city has been renamed several times, but has its heritage been preserved?

The Foundation has played a crucial role in our country’s urban agenda, having placed its faith in the initiative of a group of architects who have grown from enthusiasts into a sustainable institution.

WE WERE UNDER THE ILLUSION THAT A COMPROMISE COULD BE REACHED AFTER ONE MEETING.



SHIFT THE FOCUS TO MILLENNIALS

DOSYM SATPAYEV, PH.D, POLITICAL SCIENTIST, ON CONSUMER “PLURALISM” AND WHY IT IS IMPORTANT NOT TO MISS THE “DIFFERENT” NEW GENERATION

IT WAS IMPORTANT FOR ME THAT THERE WAS NO GRANT SEPARATISM IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PARTNERS OF THE FOUNDATION AND THEY COULD IMPLEMENT THEIR PROJECTS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SIMILAR STRUCTURES IN VARIOUS REGIONS OF KAZAKHSTAN.

I remember in the 90s the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan actively supported various “travel grants,” including grants for young people. Back then, I was a graduate student at a university in Almaty and was working on my dissertation in political science. Fortunately, at the same time and with the help of the Foundation, I was able to go to Krakow in Poland, where I attended a practical seminar on my specialty that gave me a lot as a young researcher.

Later, in 2005, I was invited to join the Board of Trustees of the Foundation. I accepted the invitation, among other reasons because I was interested in learning about Kazakhstani civil society. I joined the Foundation at a time when the country was already actively tightening the screws on civil society, especially after the wave of changes of power in other post-Soviet countries (Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan). At the same time, with the support of the government, numerous GONGOs began to appear as a counterweight to independent NGOs. Despite this fact, the Foundation continued its active work with the Kazakhstani “third sector,” including those in regions inhabited by many who wanted to change the country for the better and help it move in different directions. While on the Board of Trustees of the Foundation, I supported the multiplier effect so that each grant would be considered not in terms of a short-term result, but as support for NGOs and activists to lay the foundation for their careers and independent existence, including cooperation with other participants in the grant programs of the Foundation.

A distinctive feature of the Foundation was that initially it worked on a large scale, trying to cover different segments of civil society in our country. This strategy has paid off, primarily in terms of the Foundation’s image in the eyes of the “third sector” of the country. Moreover, we can say that the Foundation has laid the basis of Kazakhstani civil society, which consists of well-known and active NGOs. Of course, all of this arouses interest in the Foundation’s activities.

At the same time, dynamic social changes at global, regional, and national levels require concomitant adjustments in the activities of the Foundation, owing to the fact that Kazakhstani civil society is changing.

I think the Foundation needs to take into account various trends that we now see in Kazakhstani society. First, there are changes in demography and in language. I am referring to the gradual shift of emphasis to a Kazakh-speaking audience of mainly young people.

Second, there is a threat to liberal values in many countries of the world, although in Kazakhstan today there may be fewer believers in such values than in the 90s. One of the reasons is that many Kazakhstanis who would like to live in a state where the rule of law and a strong civil society exist, and where human rights are protected, prefer to leave the country. They are not motivated to make any changes here. I think this is a crucial problem. After all, millennials are pretty cosmopolitan, global-minded, and easy-going people. Some of them want changes in socio-economic and political life, but do not know where to begin. Others have a limited perception of liberalism, seeing it as part of consumer “pluralism,” enabling them to listen to any music, watch any movie, or read any book.

Unlike my generation, who remember the Soviet Union and “how it should not be,” the millennials were born in a new country, where supermarkets were full and everything was available on YouTube. They do not realize that all of this, one way or another, depends on the economy and politics. Therefore, the Foundation clearly needs to shift its focus to filling the gaps in the system of political education, particularly in the current situation when conflict of different identities is growing in Kazakhstan. From the point of view of some patriotic nationalist groups, there is no Kazakhstani identity, but there is a Kazakh identity that should be based on ethnicity, emphasizing, in other words, the primacy of the “titular nation.” Members of various religious movements claim, in turn, that a person should identify himself with his religion, and then with an ethnic group.

There are also those who still believe that tribal identity should come first. At the same time, the point of view of the Kazakh authorities is that identity should be based on civic self-identification: people should identify themselves as citizens of Kazakhstan, regardless of their ethnicity. The struggle between these different concepts of identity will only get worse.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

AIGERIM KUDERINOVA, DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE FOR PRE-SCHOOL AND SECONDARY EDUCATION OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN, TALKS ABOUT THE JOINT PROJECTS OF STATE BODIES AND THE SOROS FOUNDATION-KAZAKHSTAN, AND THEIR BENEFIT TO SOCIETY.



“The lesson is conducted by A. Zhangazina, a coordinator of the regional Resource Center for the Development of Inclusive Education, school №19, Kokshetau (2016).”

MADE WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE PROJECT ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN KOKSHETAU.

It's all about the results. The issues discussed and investigated by the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan in the field of Kazakhstani education always result in actual proposals. The Foundation carries out a detailed analysis; then, the educational authorities receive detailed information. Consequently, the work is always practically oriented.

Although I worked together with the Foundation only on the development of inclusive education in Kazakhstan, I can say that thanks to cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Science and the Foundation, we are now going in the right direction, taking into account fundamental international approaches and standards in this area. With the support of the Foundation, representatives of our country participated in three International Summer Schools on Inclusive Education (two of which were held in Kyrgyzstan and one in Lithuania). It gave us a great opportunity to exchange knowledge and experience in the field of inclusive education with our colleagues—representatives of state bodies, non-governmental organizations, and experts from five countries of the Eurasian region. These professional meetings formed my vision and understanding of where we are all going and whether we are going in the right direction in Kazakhstan.

Each summer school of the Foundation has a strong teaching staff, professional coaches, and competent presentations. It is a unique opportunity to exchange experience and study the best international programs for children in the field of inclusive education. Since these meetings, for example, I have closely followed the development of the inclusive education system in Armenia. The regulatory laws developed and passed there are impressive.

As a result of these trips, Kazakhstan adopted several legal acts and orders, and made amendments and additions to existing regulatory documents taking into account international practice. For example, Kazakhstan has introduced the concept of a teacher-assistant. Gradually, tutoring, support rooms, and psychological and pedagogical support for children with special educational needs are being introduced into schools. We have

developed guidelines for inclusive education that were issued together with the Foundation. They contain step-by-step instructions and methods for working with children with special educational needs. Moreover, this manual is intended for teachers of all schools, without exception! After all, inclusive education means that children with special educational needs can study in any class of any school.

When we first started working on inclusive education, there were a lot of controversies, misunderstandings, and resistance, especially from the parents of other children. They used to ask: “Why should these children study with our children?” Five years later, we see approval in their eyes, because children with special educational needs coming to secondary schools do not prevent other students from learning. They enrich them. Studying together, ordinary children begin to help the weak, becoming kinder and more tolerant.

Currently, 70 percent of schools and 30 percent of kindergartens in Kazakhstan practice inclusive education. However, parents and children with special educational needs always have a choice. A child who feels more comfortable in and understands the system of special schools can choose that type of education.

It is worth mentioning that the words and actions of the Foundation have never gone against the general policy of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. They understand the direction of the education system in the country and help to effectively solve existing problems.

The Foundation team is not afraid to be an initiator. Thanks to this team, the Step-by-Step movement began to develop in Kazakhstan, and the debate movement began to form. Over the years, the Foundation has initiated projects aimed at the professional development of teachers and support of schools. All this happened thanks to competent specialists, many of whom are Kazakhstani, live in Kazakhstan, and know the problems from the inside. I think this is the undeniable strength of the Foundation.

THE FOUNDATION'S SUMMER SCHOOLS BRING TOGETHER LEADING EXPERTS IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. THEY DISCUSS EXISTING PROBLEMS AND THEIR POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS. AS A RESULT, KAZAKHSTAN PASSED NEW PROGRESSIVE LAWS AND MADE CHANGES AND ADDITIONS TO EXISTING ONES. ALL THIS HAS MADE OUR COUNTRY A LEADER IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN CENTRAL ASIA.

FACTS AND FIGURES



All Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan's staff, members of the Board of Trustees and the Executive Council are citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which in many ways helps the Foundation develop an agenda that is relevant for the republic.

The youngest Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan staff member is 25 years old; the oldest is 72.



The Foundation's staff members do not make decisions on grants. Decisions are made by expert commissions comprising professionals in the relevant field. Experts are unable to see applicants' names and work pro bono.

Though it is part of the international Open Society Foundations network (located in 60 countries), the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan remains, first and foremost, a Kazakhstani organization.

Each meeting room in the Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan's office has its own name. The largest one is called George Hall. Contrary to what many people believe, it is not named after George Soros, but rather in honor of George Zarubin, the Foundation's first director.



Soros Foundation-Kazakhstan staff members are presently raising 22 children and four grandchildren.

The Foundation is committed to the principles of green consumption, and all its staff members observe acoustic etiquette.



Foundation staff know how to provide first aid in emergency situations and semi-annually receive instructions on safety procedures.



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