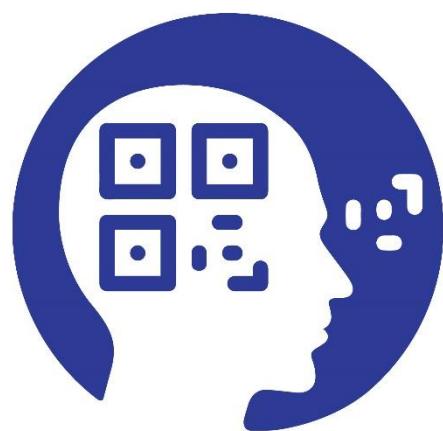


# Central Asian Experts' Potential to Influence Decision Making: CABAR.asia Discussion

*Dushanbe, 30 November 2018*



Cabar.Asia  
ШКОЛА АНАЛИТИКИ

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## 1. Overview of the Situation with the Expert Community in Central Asia

Overall, the expert community in Central Asia finds itself in a very peculiar situation: while the topics to be covered and occurring trends require much of the experts' attention, the analysts remain limited in conducting fair research and influencing the decision making.

The expert community of Central Asia as a subject is not well studied. For the purposes of the current report and preparation of the expert meeting, the IWPR staff attempted to gather literature on the topic of expert community, expert networks and collaboration between the experts of Central Asia; the search of the articles covering this topic proved to be of a little success, as topic remains understudied despite of the abundance of the analytical reports, papers and studies prepared by the experts and analysts of Central Asia.

It is only the authors of "A View on the Expert Community of Central Asia: Mogilyovsky, Paramonov, Olimovs" report published on Central Asian Analytical Network who tried to address the issue at hand.<sup>1</sup> While they have designed the article to analyse the expert community of the region, the article itself does not correspond to its design, as the authors took interviews with the analysts of Central Asian think tanks who solely described the activities of their own centres uncoupled from the description of the existing networks of experts and analysts on the regional level. Nevertheless, the interviews conducted reveal the typical path the interviewees took to become the acknowledged experts of Central Asia; for example, Vladimir Paramonov, the creator and director of the analytical project "Central Eurasia" said that after successfully defending his PhD, he started publishing his articles on his own, but he "simultaneously realized it became impossible to continue doing a serious research alone", so he formed a team and launched his analytical centre.

Despite the expert community of the countries of Central Asia has not been scrutinized as a whole, there are dozens of examples of the cooperation between the analysts, think tanks and research institutions of the Central Asian states. Naturally, such cases deserve to be paid special attention.

The Central Asia Knowledge Network is one of the most prominent cases of analysts' cooperation in Central Asia. The Network's goal can be summarized as "bringing together over 300 professionals with experience in water resource

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<sup>1</sup> Central Asian Analytical Network (2015). A View on the Expert Community of Central Asia: Mogilyovsky, Paramonov, Olimovs. [online] Available at: <http://caa-network.org/archives/1948> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

management across academia, and public and private sectors in Central Asia".<sup>2</sup> Developed and supported by World Bank, this initiative tackles one of the most important issues of the regional politics – hydropower. While the importance of the initiative is of no doubt, the limited scope of the cooperation within the framework of this Network has an impact on the breadth of experts' inclusion.

Other networks of experts are being supported by the governments of the countries outside the region, including those of Russia, China and the U.S. Russian Gorchakov Fund<sup>3</sup> and Politological Center "North-South"<sup>4</sup> often involve Central Asian experts to discussion of the issues of regional politics, however, such discussion tend to derail into advocacy of Russian actions in the region.

The approach taken by IWPR in its activities of boosting the capacity of the region's population to withstand Russian propaganda and foreign narratives of the life in the region is drastically different from what has been presented above. In June 2018, in cooperation with OSCE Academy in Bishkek, IWPR launched CABAR.asia School of Analytical Journalism,<sup>5</sup> where participants, a new generation of the journalists and analysts of Central Asia, were trained to create analytical content of a high quality covering regional political, social and economic topics in accordance with international standards. Ultimately, conducting these activities, IWPR seeks to create a full-blown independent network of analysts and experts of Central Asian states, members of which, in cooperation with each other, will be able to produce a high quality analytics, withstand the counterproductive narratives coming in from abroad, and influence the decision making in their countries. The latter, influencing decision making, is of particular importance for the states of Central Asia, where the analysts and experts lack the ability to directly affect the socio-economic trends in their countries with their work.

## 2. CABAR.asia Discussion

On November 30, IWPR conducted an expert discussion of the potential of the expert-analytical community of the Central Asian states to influence the decision making in socio-economic and political policies. The leading experts and analysts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan took part in the discussion

<sup>2</sup> Komagaeva, J. (2017). Central Asia Knowledge Network: Building Partnerships for Regional Cooperation on Water and Energy. *Central Asian Journal of Water Research*, 3 (1), pp. 1 – 5.

<sup>3</sup> Gorchakov Fund (2018). The Fund for Public Diplomacy named after Gorchakov. [online] Available at: <https://gorchakovfund.ru/> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

<sup>4</sup> PCNS (2018). Politological Center "North-South". [online] Available at: <http://pcsu.ru/> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

<sup>5</sup> CABAR.asia (2018). School of Analytical Journalism. [online] Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting. Available at: <https://school.cabar.asia/en/> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

conducted in “Atlas” hotel conference hall in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The participants of CABAR.asia School of Analytical Journalism were among the participants of the meeting.<sup>6</sup>

Shohruh Abdullaev, an independent researcher from Uzbekistan, Timur Toktonaliev, the IWPR Central Asia Editor stationed in Kyrgyzstan, Muslimbek Buriev, a political scientist from Tajikistan, and Askar Mukashev, an analyst from Kazakhstan presented their theses and delivered speeches on the status of expert community and think tanks in their respective countries. Each of the presentations was followed by extended Q&A sessions, during which the participants had an opportunity to clarify on the points the speakers presented.

Please see **Annex** for discussion highlights and speakers’ quotes.

### 3. Recommendations made

The discussion of the reports, Q&A sessions, comments made by meeting participants produced a number of the far-reaching recommendations for the expert community and think tanks of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to bolster status and improve capacity to influence the decision making in the respective countries. These recommendations are presented below.

#### a. List of Recommendations

##### Kazakhstan

The participants of the meeting agreed that the think tanks in Kazakhstan lack institutionalization or the relations with the political elite charged with making decisions. While the think tanks in Kazakhstan are the ones capable of conducting proper research and come up with solid recommendations for the elite, the contacts between the two are not taking place on a constant basis. On the other side, the researchers and think tanks sometimes find it difficult to properly communicate their work and the results they achieve to the broader public.

To address these limitations, the participants suggested:

- To institutionalize the relations between the analytical centres, think tanks, individual researchers and networks of experts with the official authorities of the country. Such an institutionalization should include creation of the working groups, forums and meetings;

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<sup>6</sup> CABAR.asia (2018). “Knocking on Heaven’s Door”: Experts and Officials Need Closer Dialogue. [online] Available at: <https://cabar.asia/en/knocking-on-heaven-s-door-experts-and-officials-need-closer-dialogue/> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

- To bolster the online presence of the think tanks and analytical centers to be accountable to the public and share the results of their work, generate new ideas in their relations with public.

### **Kyrgyzstan**

The discussion of the status of analytical research centers and their potential to impact decision making in Kyrgyzstan revealed that analytics in the country is frequently not institutionalized per se. As noted by Timur Toktonaliev, there are many think tanks in the country staffed only with one person, who is its creator, director, manager and etc. The potential of such 'analytical centers' is laughable. Bearing this in mind, it is of no surprise to see that the dialogue between the state actors and the functioning think tanks is weak.

Thus, the following needs to be done in the country context of Kyrgyzstan:

- To institutionalize analytics and expert centers and support their continuous performance;
- To establish and maintain dialogue between the state institutions, persons making decisions and analytical centers through official events, mailing, discussions in media and regular meetings.

### **Tajikistan**

In Tajikistan, the functions analytical centers perform depend on the nature of these expert centers; the state centers and independent think tanks are drastically different in the work they are doing. While the state think tanks perform analytical, mediation and HR functions, the independent non-state analytical centers are involved in analytical, mediating, academic and educational activities. As not all of the think tanks are performing all the entrusted functions, their overall performance and ability to influence the trends is limited. The work of the think tanks is often not transparent.

The experts participating in the discussion suggested that to improve the status of the think tanks in Tajikistan, one needs:

- To make sure each category of the analytical centers covers as many think tanks functions as the available resources allow;
- To increase the transparency of the think tanks' work by publishing the reports on their activities and their products online.

### **Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan's new regime welcomes reforms in many sectors of socio-economic life of the country. The experts note that this presents the think tanks with a valuable opportunity to improve their position, status and importance. To achieve this aim, the participants agreed that it is necessary to:

- To introduce business models to the work routine of the think tanks to raise their efficiency;
- To embed new technologies to the research conducted by the country's think tanks;
- To use innovative approaches to the production of political recommendations.

### **b. Viability of Recommendations**

The development of the analytical community happens in a time of a shrinking civil society space in Central Asia. A number of recent studies by the international human rights institutions note the worsening situation with a freedom of speech, press and democracy (see Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2018,<sup>7</sup> Freedom in the World 2018,<sup>8</sup> Reporters Without Borders Index 2018<sup>9</sup> ).

In such a situation, the success of the activities aimed at increasing capacity of the expert community to influence decision making depends on the attention given to the topic. If properly supported, the Central Asian networks of experts and analysts can gather enough momentum to become a solid power, whose position the political elites will have to take into consideration while designing policies.

The participants of the described meeting look forward to collaboration with each other, while IWPR continues to provide for such a cooperation to take place.

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<sup>7</sup> Freedom House (2018). Freedom on the Net 2018. [online] Freedomhouse.org. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2018> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

<sup>8</sup> Freedom House (2018). Freedom in the World 2018. [online] Freedomhouse.org. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

<sup>9</sup> Reporters Without Borders (2018). 2018 World Press Freedom Index. [online] RSF. Available at: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2018#> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

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## Annex: Discussion Highlights, CABAR.asia Report

### “Knocking on Heaven’s Door”: Experts and Officials Need Closer Dialogue<sup>10</sup>

Analysts and experts from the four Central Asian states have discussed the quality of expert materials and mechanisms of their implementation in the CABAR.asia discussion club.



The discussion has been held within the framework of the regional meeting of participants of the CABAR.asia School of Analytics. Young analysts from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have delivered their reports there. The event was organized with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway and the British Embassy in Bishkek.

Overall, regional countries have similar trends in the performance of think-tanks: availability of state and subordinate organisations, non-governmental centres and a stratum of independent experts and researchers.

<sup>10</sup> CABAR.asia (2018). “Knocking on Heaven’s Door”: Experts and Officials Need Closer Dialogue. [online] Available at: <https://cabar.asia/en/knocking-on-heaven-s-door-experts-and-officials-need-closer-dialogue/> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2018].

Think-tanks in Central Asia are institutionalising their activities, improving communications with state bodies and improving the quality of their analysis and expert examination.

## Kazakstan

**Askar Mukashev**, alumnus of the CABAR.asia School of Analytics from Astana, has reported that the Institute of Economic Studies at the Ministry of National Economy was established in 1961. Performance of think-tanks has been monitored since then. After the independence, in 1991, both government and independent think-tanks have emerged in Kazakstan.

According to Mukashev, think-tanks cannot be said to influence the decision-making process.



“However, Kazakstan faces a peculiar trend: many government and private think-tanks have their own pages in internet, where they publish their reports and statements. They have instant feedback and you can request analytical work from them. For example, media often publishes such work,” Mukashev said.

“Speaking about the problems faced by think-tanks, we can note that domestic think-tanks are rather young. Also they face a problem of insufficient resources: material, human, and organisational,” he added in his speech.

## Kyrgyzstan



Think-tanks do not have the decision-making monopoly in the country – the leadership of the republic and the rest of key officials have their inner circles, employees, close experts compare publications in the media, including materials of think-tanks, as participants of the CABAR.asia School of Analytics in Kyrgyzstan noted.

“A decision is made on the basis of the current situation,” Timur Toktonaliev said.

The main “think-tank” in the republic is the National Institute for Strategic Studies (NISI) at the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, which was established in 1994 by president Akayev. In addition to it, there are dozens of non-governmental organisations in the country, which identify themselves as research and analytical organisations, yet only few of them work continuously and routinely in offices and have regular office staff.

“Very often the performance of such think-tanks depends on grants, funding and orders they receive. In many cases, a representative of a think-tank is an expert, who is also a director,” Toktonaliev said.

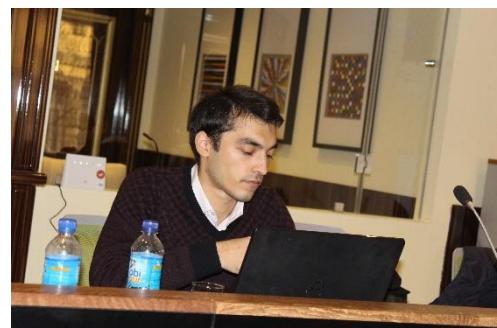
The Institute for Public Policy (IPP) was one of the largest independent think-tanks in the history of independent Kyrgyzstan and existed from 2005 to 2014. Its activity was based on various grants and was continuous – they discussed relevant issues of the republic, published articles on their website, compiled collection of articles dedicated to different problems and distributed them among government organisations.

Recently the president of Kyrgyzstan Sooronbai Zheenbekov has received a large group of representatives of the civil society, including many prominent experts in various areas of expertise. The president has claimed he needs an unbiased view on certain problems and recommendations to solve them. It gives a hope that the influence of experts, their products and their think-tanks will increase, that the role of analytics will be increased, and it will firmly take its place in the public sphere decision-making system, as reporters from Kyrgyzstan noted.

## Tajikistan

As analysts say, the number of think-tanks has been gradually increasing in this country lately. According to a Dushanbe-based political analyst **Muslimbek Buriev**, there were four think-tanks in 2014, and seven in 2017.

In his report, he emphasised that the cooperation between governmental and non-governmental think-tanks should be strengthened. Think-tanks should publish their researches and expert examinations in the public domain, political analyst said, so that the general public could have access to them and come to their own conclusions.



Deputy Director of the Centre for Islamic Studies at the President of the Republic of Tajikistan **Rustam Azizi** said that when authorities make official inquiries to them, they are determined to make a decision and they need their expert and analytical support.

“We send analytical notes and recommendations to the executive office of the president, different ministries and agencies. Sometimes they make decisions on the basis of our recommendations, and sometimes they contact us for additional information,” Azizi said.

## Uzbekistan



A Tashkent-based political analyst **Shokhrukh Abdullaev** noted that their national universities still have no political science departments, which affects negatively the performance of think-tanks.

After the death of the former Uzbek president, a few local think-tanks appeared in 2017, which identify themselves as “independent”. Currently, Uzbekistan has recognised governmental, subordinate think-tanks and least recognised non-governmental research institutions, research centres, which have been established with the support of international organisations.

“As to the influence on decision-making process, all information and analysis are provided by governmental think-tanks depending on the customer, i.e. the state,” Abdullaev said.

## Situation in Russia and Europe

As to the influence of Russian think-tanks (governmental and independent), four tools can be distinguished: maintaining informal contacts with decision-makers; participation in discussion forms of communication with politicians; participation in formal procedures: parliament hearings and “contract work”; participation in discussions in the media and within expert communities, Askar Mukashev said.

A Kyrgyzstan-based analyst, **Nurbek Bekmurzaev**, on the basis of his experience of participation in the studies of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, noted that there is no single success formula of influence on decision-making process because many things depend on the context and resources of such think-tanks.





**Farkhod Mirzabaev**, an Uzbekistan-based analytical journalist, told about his experience of work with foreign analytical outlets. According to Farkhod Mirzabaev, he initially wanted to convey the Uzbek point of view on certain regional issues in Central Asia to the global community. He explained that he wanted to provide alternative opinion in addition to the opinion prevailing in Western analytical circles about the countries in the region.

**Kahramon Bakozoda**, a founder and leader of Zerkalo [Mirror] think-tank (Dushanbe) with 25 employees, has summarised the discussion. His think-tank has been operating for 20 years and his team carries out studies in Tajikistan and neighbouring countries. Mirzabaev explained that he published materials in analytical outlets because he wanted to help decision-makers to better understand both regional and domestic policy trends in Central Asian countries.



Bakozoda in his speech told about the peculiarities of performance of think-tanks in Tajikistan and shared his practical experience.

“An analyst is a ‘universal soldier’, who should have a wide range of competencies,” Kahramon Bakozoda said.