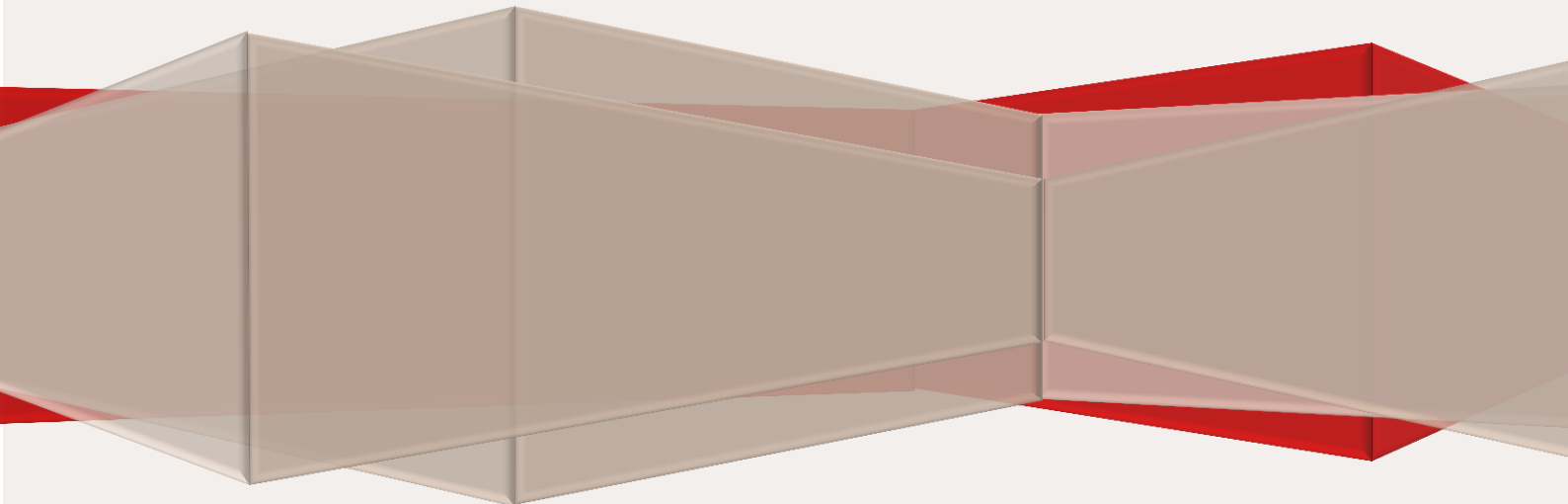# Security Sector Reform in Central Asia: Exploring the Policy - Practice Gap of Police Reforms and the Civil Society Factor in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

**Olivier Korthals Altes**
Associate Research Fellow
OSCE Academy, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
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**Abstract**

This research paper is an abridged version of my Master's thesis, that analyses the policy - practice gap of democratic reforms of the police forces in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and the role of civil society within it. This evidence-based assessment has been related to theoretical debates about Security Sector Reform, the current dominant concept within academic and international policy circles on security assistance that entails (re)building and professionalising security forces while creating democratic institutions and mechanisms to hold them controllable, transparent and accountable. In my research, I have suggested an approach to measure progress of democratic governance of the police forces through a number of qualitative indicators that include the creation of independent public oversight and monitoring bodies, battling corruption within law enforcement agencies, and transparency of official police reports and statistics. I have put the formulated policies by national governments and the OSCE annual reports on police-related activities next to my research findings gained from reports and interviews with local civil society representatives, to indicate the rather limited progress of police reforms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It also came forward that strengthening civil society alone will not be enough in a context where the Ministries of Internal Affairs, responsible for the police services and policing, are very resistant to any change, and public support for democratic reforms remains too narrow to make a difference.

**Olivier Korthals Altes** is an Associate Research Fellow at the OSCE Academy, and was an Erasmus Mundus exchange student to Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty in 2017-2018. He earned a MSc degree in Conflicts, Territories and Identities at the Radboud University Nijmegen and a BA degree in History at the University Utrecht. At the OSCE Academy, Olivier conducted research for his master thesis on the policy-practice gap of police reforms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

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# Introduction

From among all security actors police forces are the most prominent in Central Asia and are in dire need of reform. Since their independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the five Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – have dealt with political upheavals and security issues in reaction to their rapid economic and political transformations. Some of the security threats this region have faced are the result of the ongoing war in Afghanistan, such as international terrorism, refugee waves and drug trafficking (Boonstra, Laruelle & Peyrouse 2014, p. 5). It is argued that Central Asian states could benefit from police reforms within a broader agenda on improving internal security and development, in line with the comprehensive approach of Security Sector Reform, or SSR (Faltas 2010, pp. 16-17). This concept originates from the international fields of conflict, security and development, and generally includes the (re)building of state security services, controlled by democratic governments. It defines a process that should lead to more effective and accountable security forces while at the same time raising public trust, accountability, and legitimacy among the local population. Furthermore, experts and most international organizations acknowledge that if security assistance is not directly linked to human security, (liberal) peacebuilding, development, and sustainability, it will most likely fail in the longer term (Edmunds 2004; Ball 2007; EU 2005; OECD DAC 2005, 2007; UN 2008).

Although the concepts of SSR and democratic governance have been adopted in key documents of international and regional organizations, the impact of SSR programmes in Central Asia, like in a number of other regions and countries, remains rather limited. This discrepancy between advocated policies and actual results are known as the policy-practice or concept-context gap. Central Asian states are characterized by strong, unitary, post-Soviet, and authoritarian state apparatus, which brings about its particular challenges in terms of transitions to democratic governance. In this case, security is understood in protecting the regime interests rather than the people's interests (Boonstra, Marat & Axyonova 2013, p. 19). From all Central Asian states, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are the most deeply engaged in cooperative programmes and activities with the OSCE as the main external actor on reforming their police forces, or, at least, on familiarizing them with principles of democratic policing. Yet, their police institutions largely remain reluctant to any change, frequently accused of human rights abuses, unlawful killing of protestors or arresting and detaining suspects, and regarded as heavily corrupt and associated with organized crime (Lewis 2011b, p. 106). Apart from deficient funding and operational capacities, this lack of democratic governance results in police forces that are not held accountable for their actions. This, in turn, negatively impacts their ability to provide a secure and peaceful environment, necessary for sustainable political and economic development.

Initially, the OSCE Annual Report of the Secretary General on Police-Related Activities provides a basic overview of the programmes and activities related to police reforms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, there are less detailed sources or systematic data available on the actual effects of police reforms on the ground, or on which civil society actors are exactly involved in these processes. It is widely recognized that the sustainability of SSR depends on the willingness of major stakeholders and the active engagement of other (non-)state actors such as the judiciary, parliament and civil society. Especially civil society actors – consisting among others of community representatives, research institutes, human rights groups and activists, as well as local offices of international organizations – are seen as important actors in ensuring local ownership of SSR processes, because of their expertise, legitimacy and advocacy of local voices and needs (Caparini 2004, 2010; Gordon 2014; Mobekk 2010; Van Leeuwen & Verkoren 2015). Moreover, it is certain that democratic reforms of the police forces require deep changes of culture and behavior which usually take place over a longer period of continuous friction and contention. To the contrary, quick, short term fixes may undermine the diversity of opinions and perspectives that could otherwise have offered alternative or more tailored solutions (Marat 2018).

Therefore, my research is centred around two related main questions: To what extent is there a policy - practice gap of democratic governance of the police forces in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and what role could the civil society play in bridging this gap? Based on personal communication with local experts and the main principles of democratic policing, as also put forward in the OSCE Guidebook on Democratic Policing (2008b), I have selected six qualitative indicators to measure the democratic governance of police forces in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, respectively. These include: 1) the creation of oversight institutions and mechanisms of citizens and civil society to monitor the police and to cooperate with them; or 2) battling corruption within law enforcement; 3) Participation of citizens and civil society in policymaking, implementing and evaluating police reform programmes (generally described as 'local ownership'); 4) Transparency, or the degree of access to police reports and statistics; 5) Upholding the rule of law and human rights during policing, but also freedom of the press to report illicit police performances, and; 6) Responsiveness and trust from local people. I relied on various research methods, including a review of the relevant academic and policy-oriented literature, documents, and reports, (semi-structured) interviews. In this paper, I first describe the rise of the (comprehensive) SSR concept from the late 1990s, as well as the essence of the dimension of democratic governance within SSR, followed up by the concepts of police reform and civil society, and theoretical debates on overcoming the policy-practice gap. Secondly, I briefly sketch the socio-political and security context of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Civil society actors involved in police reforms will be identified as well. Thirdly, I analyse key documents of Kazakh and Kyrgyz policies towards police

reform. I also include an overview of police reform programmes and related activities organized for government officials, police officers, and civil society actors, based on the OSCE Annual Reports of the Secretary General on Police-Related Activities between 2003 and 2016. After that, I present here the main results of the practice of police reforms in two concise paragraphs for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Finally, I will provide the answers to the research questions and share some recommendations for both academics and policymakers on democratizing the police forces.

# Literature review

The end of the Cold War and democratization waves in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Latin America, and Southern Africa paved ways for the rethinking of security assistance beyond the traditional focus on the regime and its military (Ball & Hendrickson 2009, pp. 9-12). Consequently, the holistic concept of SSR became prominent on the international policymaking agenda during the 1990s, whereby the UK Department for International Development (DFID 1998) was the first to link SSR to debates on poverty reduction, human security, sustainable development, good governance, and democratization. Furthermore, this new concept strives for strengthening and professionalising the security services while improving their good governance, accountability, and transparency. Although formulations of SSR are slightly different in key policy documents of major organizations such as, for example, the OECD DAC (2005, p. 20), the EU (2005, p. 9),  and the UN (2008, p. 13), they contain at least two key normative elements: First, democratization and civilian control are considered essential in any process of SSR. Second, the importance of effectiveness and efficiency in SSR are emphasized in all conceptualisations. While related, these two elements of SSR can have their own particular demands, rewards and problems (Edmunds 2004, pp. 65-66).

Next to effectiveness and efficiency, democratic governance forms the third dimension of SSR (Stojanovic 2009, p. 91). In general, governance of the security sector specifies the ways of governing the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force from the perspective of both state and non-state actors. According to Schroeder (2010, p. 11), good governance refers to democratic norms of accountability, transparent decision-making processes and a security apparatus that is completely subordinated to the control of civil authorities. Compared with the other two dimensions, democratic governance requires deep, structural changes of culture and behaviour that should act on behalf of people's needs instead of regime security. It is stressed that without regard to the dimension of democratic governance, external security assistance not only leads to tolerating politicised and corrupt security forces, but also to a wide range of other negative consequences that include war as a tool of resolving disputes, disrespect for the rule of law by security forces and political elites alike, serious human rights violations, budget allocations skewed towards the security forces, and a diminished

capacity of security forces to carry out their constitution-mandated tasks of protecting the people and communities (Ball 2007, pp. 85-86). Consequently, lack of democratic governance in the security sector damages long-term stability and negatively affects other policy areas.

While traditional security literature focused on civil-military relations (CMR) and civilian control of the armed forces in the context of national defence, the recent emergence of SSR in academic and policy circles has given more attention to a broader range of security actors, such as intelligence agencies, border guards and, in this case, police forces as one of the most visible manifestations of security for citizens (Bruneau & Matei 2008; Lewis 2011a). In its latest Guidebook on Democratic Policing, the OSCE (2008b, pp. 9-10) identifies the main principles on police reforms.

First, it sets up objectives of democratizing policing that include main duties as a visible manifestation of government authority (maintain public tranquillity and law and order, protect and respect the individual's fundamental rights and freedoms, prevent and combat crime, and provide assistance and services to the public) and enhance the legitimacy of the state (responsive to public needs and expectations and use state authority in the people's interest). Second, the police must uphold the rule of law and act in accordance with domestic and international law. Third, the police must show professional integrity and perform in accordance with human rights. Fourth, democratic policing requires accountability to the citizens, the state, and law, and their activities must always be open to scrutiny by a variety of oversight institutions. In addition, international organizations emphasize the need for community-based policing (OECD DAC 2007, p. 167; OSCE 2008, pp. 30-31; UN DPKO 2018, pp. 7-10). This implies the permanent assignment of police officers to specific geographical areas or neighbourhoods, where they respond to and determine priorities in relationship with the local community. It is essential for the police to (re)build trust and legitimacy from the local people and to prevent the appearance of parallel societal or security structures.

Civil society too is a contested concept, in its definitions as well as regarding the question which actors should be included in the concept of civil society and its role in SSR. Basically, "civil society (. . .) encompasses a broad variety of associational forms that mediate the space between the family (private sphere), the market (economic sphere) and the state (political sphere)" (Caparini 2010, pp. 244-245). This variety of civil society organizations (or 'CSO's') can range from development organizations operating in an international environment to community-based organizations, faith groups, as well as professional and special interest groups such as the media, private business companies, human rights groups, independent consultants, and independent policy think tanks. A strong civil society forms an essential condition for good governance when participating in public affairs through a wide array of functions such as steering public opinion, reporting, legal aid, advocacy, research, representation, consultancy, and education. Research indicates that throughout the course of history, civil society actors

have many times vigorously strived for political reforms, challenging state control and emancipating citizens (Born & Fluri 2004, p. 103; Caparini 2004, pp. 172-176; Van Leeuwen & Verkoren 2015, p. 466). A sole focus on political elites and state-level authorities may undermine the extent to which SSR processes are locally owned and, consequently, hinder the improvement of security and justice at a community level and, ultimately, decide whether or not SSR programmes and broader peacebuilding efforts are successful. Ownership, in essence, "is the influence, capability and responsibility of the different phases of planning, implementation, policymaking and execution" (Mobekk 2010, p. 232). However, civil society organizations that are not broadly representative will often be doomed, as they no longer serve the intermediary function by which citizens negotiate with the state (Caparini 2010, p. 260; Gordon 2014, p. 15). Overall, promoting and maintaining civil society engagement throughout all levels (from national to local) and during all stages of SSR programmes (formulation, implementation, and evaluation) could significantly enhance the responsiveness, effectiveness, and legitimacy of the security sector.

Despite the success of its conceptualization in numerous key policy documents and academic literature, SSR policies are in practice often translated into small, rather ad hoc projects, characterized as rather typical train-and-equip programmes, without any coherence or sustainable impact, and more often than not unrightfully identified as SSR. It is important to realize that not even the most perfectly contextualised and coherent strategy of SSR can have complete influence on the course of socio-political processes that strive to transform societies from conflict to sustainable peace, or to shape security institutions into more well-functioning and democratically governed ones (Andersen 2011, pp. 15-16; Egnell & Halden 2009, p. 47). Rather, such reforms must be adapted to local conditions and pace, and should not install inappropriate institutional frameworks from other (Western) countries. This requires not only technical expertise but also a proper understanding of the local political and social context in which SSR programmes are being conducted.

The 'first generation' of SSR aims at creating legislative and institutional frameworks for democratic oversight and monitoring, which must be outlined in key documents such as the national security concept and could be done in time. However, the 'second generation' of SSR that relates to changing behavioural attitudes and culture, developing familiarity and expertise, and sharing the same democratic values between the security and citizens filling these frameworks, proves to be more difficult (Edmunds 2004, pp. 50-52; Hendrickson & Karkoszka 2007, p. 33; Sedra 2015, pp. 175-177). When it comes to police reforms, early evaluation research recognizes that it takes a long time before implementation effects can be measured. Police reform programmes will not make law enforcement institutions of concerned settings more democratic, unless those programmes take place in a broader societal context of democratization (Bayley 2000, pp. 75-77). When wrongly applied, these programmes

might even have negative effects on the democratic development of police forces by strengthening their capacities for repression. Rather, as police reforms are no quick fixes to address and solve security issues of recipient countries, they must also consider the choices of local stakeholders with respect to programme objectives, the substance of police reform programmes, and the way they are executed. When there is resistance of the host government or a lack of commitment from the law enforcement institutions, genuine police reforms cannot take place.

# Context

*Kazakhstan*

Since its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has been ruled by Soviet-era leader Nursultan Nazarbayev. From the start of his presidency, Nazarbayev prioritised developing the economy and political stability of Kazakhstan. At the same time, Kazakhstan still maintains strong ties with Russia that sees Kazakhstan as a key partner of any development or security issues in the region (Trenin 2011, p. 126). While Kazakhstan is formally a democratic republic, it practically functions as a consolidated authoritarian state with only one political party in power (Nur-Otan) and without any serious contenders or political opposition. Therefore, Kazakhstan could be seen as a "hybrid authoritarian state that seeks to both modernize and control its society" (interview Zhovtis, June 12, 2018). Beyond the official state structures as created by the Soviets and modernized by president Nazarbayev, it's the informal networks of power brokers, regional elites and financial oligarchs that constitute an important, dominating political presence in Kazakhstan (Starr 2006, pp. 6-8). Some of these networks originate from the pre-Russian period but have remained intact under the Soviet and current regime, and are based on kinship systems, economic and political ties, or control of resources in certain economic sectors such as textile, cotton or oil. Even when political transitions or regime changes take place, these complex systems of corruption and patronage are resilient and are usually able to rapidly reconfigure themselves (Lewis 2011a, p. 16). The political elites and the related networks in Kazakhstan also find it convenient to control the security sector and, as a result, have routinely used domestic security and intelligence services to oppress dissent and to arrest, torture, and imprison political opponents.

Kazakhstan inherited its strong security institutions from the Soviet Union, which have hardly permitted any significant democratic reforms and remain thoroughly and largely corrupt. The police forces ('militsia'), like the penitentiary system and other domestic security services, fall under the responsibility of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). Within Central Asia, the police forces in Kazakhstan have proven to be the most professional in solving and reducing crime, and are the least abusive. Yet, they are also effective in repressing alternative political voices and factions in what is

described as an "atmosphere of quiet repression" (Lewis 2011a, p. 23). The collapse of Communist Party control and the replacement of Soviet state organs by less powerful government agencies have emboldened law enforcement agencies to pursue their own agenda of illicit practices and choosing their own civilian and political targets.

Originally, the police forces and other security institutions of Kazakhstan were overseen by the so-called prosecutor's office ('prokuratura'), a powerful and multifaceted organ dating from the Stalinist period, responsible for implementation and observation of laws. In most cases, the prosecutor's office was too deeply entangled with influential politicians, the police and courts, to function as a truly independent control agency (International Crisis Group 2002, p. 1). In the meantime, Kazakhstan has developed a number of democratic institutions and frameworks to govern its police forces. Important government and legal documents include the 1995 Constitution, the 1992 law on Troops of the Ministry of Interior and the Concept of Legal Policy for the Period of 2010-2020, as well as many international treaties on human rights. It also created oversight institutions and mechanisms such as national and deputy police committees, advisory boards, monitoring commissions, and public councils. However, beyond the creation of these democratic institutions and frameworks, changes towards democratic attitudes in the particular context of Kazakhstan, characterized by entangled economic, political and strategic interests, a strong Soviet legacy, and the inconvenience to question the legitimacy of the regime and its security institutions, remain very complex, difficult and controversial (Peyrouse 2010, p. 19). Nevertheless, police reforms are possible if key persons within the government or security institutions show willingness to reform. For example, in 2002-3, a former head of the penitentiary system was able to move its institutions from the MIA to the Ministry of Justice. However, after he left his position, the system was transferred back to the MIA, returning to the same deficiencies and problems (Zhovtis, Skype interview, June 12, 2018). Far from being a mere technical exercise, genuine police reforms should not only be executed by the MIA but should also take place within longer-term processes of political reforms, with a broad popular engagement and organized by the civil society.

Most of the active CSOs in Kazakhstan are concentrated in major cities such as Almaty and Astana and comprise of many forms such as public associations, research institutions, human rights and anti-corruption organizations, mass media, community associations, and public foundations. According to main theories of democratization, political stability, the relatively high levels of tolerance between diverse ethnic groups, and steady economic growth that led to an emerging middle class, are certainly forming favourable prerequisites for a vibrant civil society, that, in turn, could foster and consolidate processes of democratic governance. However, a number of scholars point out that relations between civil society and the state in Kazakhstan are different, characterized as being more cooperative than contesting (Giffen, Earle & Buxton 2006; Kabdiyeva & Dixon 2014; Knox & Janenova;

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Saktagonova & Ospanova 2013; Ziegler 2010). So far, Kazakhstan has only undergone the initial stage of civil society development and, therefore, there are no established democratic traditions and well-developed civil society institutions, yet (Saktaganova & Ospanova 2013, p. 1278). Besides of that, most members of the new middle class in Kazakhstan turn out to be more concerned with maintaining political stability and its newly acquired wealth than with challenging the authoritarian political system, while civilian participation in social and political organizations is low and support for democratic values is relatively small (Ziegler 2010, pp. 804-806). Neither important CSO networks and umbrella organizations, nor key research institutions and universities in Kazakhstan are concerned much with SSR, let alone with democratic reforms of the police institutions.

However, there are some CSOs, particularly involved in one or more indicators of police reforms. For example, the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights (KIBHR) deals especially with upholding integrity and human rights standards during policing, while public foundation "Adil Soz" is actively involved in the freedom of reporting, paying attention to human rights violations by police officers concerning journalists. Moreover, the OSCE annual reports on police-related activities name a number of key CSOs closely involved with the OSCE Centre in Astana in monitoring police stations and organizing activities for local police officers to familiarize them with democratic practices, including the Charter for Human Rights and Penal Reform International (PRI). Yet, such CSOs experience financial troubles as they are not funded by the government, given their political nature, either by local citizens or businesses, out of their apparent concern for financially supporting politically motivated organizations (Zhovtis, Skype interview, June 12, 2018). Instead, they mostly depend on financial support from international donors such as the EU, the UN or George Soros' Open Society Foundations.

*Kyrgyzstan*

Compared to its regional neighbours, Kyrgyzstan is often being characterized as an 'island of democracy' or the 'Switzerland of Central Asia', thanks to its more liberal political climate. However, it is also argued that Kyrgyzstan was one of the former Soviet republics "least prepared for its independence" (Engvall 2011, p. 18). As the Soviet-controlled economic and political functions decayed, the Kyrgyz government was confronted with great challenges in formulating its policies, creating institutions of political authority and lifting the country out of its poor economic state. Unlike Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan has gone through some 'colour revolutions', as it experienced two regime changes in 2005 and 2010 and held its first fair presidential elections in 2017 (BBC 2017).

Similar to Kazakhs, the Kyrgyz were originally nomads organized in kinship systems, which remained significantly intact during the Soviet period. Consequently, these informal patron-client networks continued to play a dominant role in political power struggles in modern Kyrgyzstan. While

president Askar Akayev started to accumulate power and wealth for his family during the second half of the 1990s, this trend continued and even increased under his successor Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who privatized the state structures for his own economic benefits. The power changes in 2005 and 2010 that removed these rulers from office may not be as revolutionary as perceived, as the new leaders continued or were tempered by these same dynamics of corruption and informal networks. Initially, the constitutional reforms of 2010 strived at creating more equitable balance between the power of the president and parliament, actually created new opportunities for corruption (Akiner 2016, pp. 119-121; Starr 2006, p. 21). Buying and holding public functions such as MP are seen as an investment for businessmen or other persons involved in organized crime, to secure the benefits of immunity through informal police protection, and influence over the legislative system.

Like other Central Asian states, Kyrgyzstan inherited its security infrastructures from the Soviet Union, of which the police forces and the Ministry of Internal Affairs are the largest and least reformed parts (International Crisis Group 2002, pp. 7-10). The greatest problems of the MIA of Kyrgyzstan lies in its high level of corruption, the growing gap between police and society as a result of lack of trust, its links with organized crime and the elite's use of the police as a tool against its political opponents. This situation especially worsened under president Bakiyev between 2005 and 2010, who put the MIA under his direct control. He appointed his eldest son, Marat Bakiyev, as deputy head of the National Security Service, while his younger brother, Yanish Bakiyev, commanded a newly established elite security unit called "Arystan" (The Lion) (Engvall 2011, pp. 60, 70). The current legal and regulatory framework for the security sector and its democratic governance in Kyrgyzstan consists of a number of key documents, such as the laws on the Status of Servicemen and on National Security, both adopted in the early 1990s and the 2010 Constitution. Moreover, specialized public advisory councils (PACs), local crime prevention centres (LPC's), and reported meetings between police and local citizens have also been created as public oversight and cooperation mechanisms with the police forces in Kyrgyzstan.

Despite Kyrgyzstan's fragile political and economic setting, its civil society organizations are the best developed and most professional of all the Central Asian countries. They are involved in many activities including research, cooperation with international institutions, media activities, conducting joint events, lobbying or drafting of laws, and participation in government advisory bodies. Moreover, media and civil rights are in a relatively good situation, the academic community is relatively free and corruption remains low within the civil society community (Swanström, Cornell & Tabyshalieva 2005, p. 23). Nevertheless, the continued existence of most CSOs remains a grave concern because of their dependence on foreign donors, whereas the legal structure and living standards of Kyrgyzstan make receiving donations from its own citizens difficult (Bayalieva-Jailobayeva 2014, p. 370). While arguing against the idea that professional CSOs with liberal values often alienate themselves from local society

and are incapable to incorporate local needs and perspectives, researchers as Bayalieva-Jailobayeva warn for the sustainability of CSOs, that rather serve as temporary platforms for young professionals to move on to other, financially more stable sectors.

More than in Kazakhstan or anywhere else in Central Asia, civil society in Kyrgyzstan has also played an active role in putting the principles of democratic policing in practice through human rights networks and media groups to monitor police actions against dissidents, and a greater presence of international NGOs. Major umbrella organizations that have dealt with or are dealing with police reforms are the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society and the Civic Union "For Reforms and Results". In addition, legal clinics such as "Adilet" and human rights movements such as "Bir Duino" are focusing on the principles of upholding of integrity and human rights standards during policing. Their potential to influence processes of police reforms does not only depend on their capacities of performing their tasks, but arguably also on the attitude and political will of the MIA and the government to cooperate (Musabaeva 2013, p. 72). Where a large section of the police force remains corrupt and has few motives to change, just strengthening civil society would be futile.

# Policies of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan towards police reforms

*Kazakhstan*

Since the 1990s, Kazakh authorities have formulated a number of key policy documents towards reforming its economy, as well as its judicial and governmental structures, and, in particular also, its law enforcement agencies. These formulations contain essential democratic principles of accountability, integrity, professionalism, respecting citizens' rights and transparency, but also decentralizing the mandates and functions of the overburdened MIA. The 100 Precise Steps towards Realization of the Five Institutional Reforms, that articulates concrete measures to implement the National Strategy to 2050, includes step 14 "the adoption of a new law on public service in all government agencies, including law enforcement", step 30 "the accountability of the police to local executive authorities and communities", and step 31 "the establishment of a public review board by law to consider complaints against the police officers who violate ethical standards" (Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies 2015). Furthermore, the Concept of Legal Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the period 2010 to 2020 states that "the main qualitative indicator of law enforcement should be the level of citizens' trust in its services" (Supreme Court of Kazakhstan 2009).

Moreover, the latest amendments to the national law on Internal Affairs Bodies of the Republic of Kazakhstan, originally adopted in 1992, entail the same essential principles of democratic policing, but also states that, "to implement the public control in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the public monitoring commissions and the public council are established" (Adilet 2014). In addition, the government of Kazakhstan adopted the laws on Combating Corruption, on Civil Service, and the Ethical Code of Civil Servants in 2015 to tackle corruption. Based on these documents, the Kazakh government has allowed the PRI to lead monitoring commissions in police stations and detention centres since 2005, and created numerous oversight mechanisms for CSOs to consult and participate in law- and policymaking discussions. In a recent interview, the Deputy Chairman of Kazakhstan's Agency for Civil Service and Anti-Corruption, Alik Shpekbayev, further confirms important ongoing changes in the police services (Kenshebayev 2017). These include the establishment of local police services that are accountable to local executive authorities, the liberalization and humanization of criminal proceedings with the abolition of the prosecutor general's office, and initiatives such as the creation of online maps, that provide a better overview of all crime statistics in each region for improving governmental transparency.

Besides of national policy-making, the government of Kazakhstan also shows some openness towards cooperation with the OSCE and local CSOs in organizing activities on democratic policing in light of its chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010, and being the host to EXPO 2017. According to the Annual Reports by the Secretary-General on Police-related Activities from 2003 until the most recent one, 2016, the OSCE has not launched any all-encompassing police reform programmes in Kazakhstan, yet. From 2006 to 2007, the Kazakh MIA conducted its Police Development Cooperation Activities Project in close cooperation with the OSCE Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU), an OSCE focal point supporting all police-related field operations, that include study visits to the UK and Spain, the use of video surveillance to get them familiar with ways of improving public trust and cooperation with the police (OSCE 2006, p. 20). Furthermore, the OSCE has facilitated, together with the SPMU, the Charter for Human Rights and other CSOs as well as various embassies, training seminars on public safety and public assembly management in Aktobe and Almaty (OSCE 2015, p. 106; OSCE 2016, p. 112). Besides of that, KIBHR regularly facilitates events and activities on human rights, including so-called Master Class seminars for some 30 police instructors from across the country, and is responsible for providing courses on human rights as part of police training curricula (OSCE 2014, p. 137; Zhovtis, Skype interview, June 12, 2018). Based on these reports, the OSCE Programme Office in Astana hasn't structurally worked with key CSOs over a longer period of time, rather than just on a number of ad hoc projects.

*Kyrgyzstan*

Kyrgyzstan too has formulated some key documents to dedicate itself to reform its security services, in particular, its police forces. Its *National Sustainable Development Strategy for the Period 2013-2017* puts forward the "restoration of the confidence of citizens in the institutions of government as the main objective with regard to public administration" (National Council for Sustainable Development 2013, p. 16). On the policy level, the respective regimes of Kyrgyzstan have reformulated and adopted various concepts on reforming its MIA and police forces to adapt them better to face the post-Cold War security challenges and adhere to democratic principles. President Akayev adopted the Concept of Development of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic in 1998, while President Bakiyev reformulated and approved the Concept of Reforming the Bodies of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic for the period of 2005-10. Yet, it has been stated that these policies towards police reforms did not entail an overall strategy, and, above all, no genuine political commitment to reform the services (Lewis 2011a, p. 33).

After the civil unrests that resulted in the ouster of Bakiyev in 2010, the interim government under Rosa Otunbayeva tried to reformulate a concept for police reform. In response, a group of activists, that would later organize themselves as the NGO network Civic Union "For Reform and Results", initiated civil campaigns to formulate ideas and collect signatures on reform, which eventually became the cornerstones of The Alternative Concept on Police Reform (USAID 2014). After more than 10,000 signatures were collected, a meeting was held with both government officials and civil society on February 13, 2013. As a result, the government of Kyrgyzstan adopted all suggestions and recommendations for civic participation in the Measures on Police Reform on April 30, 2013. These recommendations included, amongst others, establishing an oversight council on the reforms and development of law enforcement bodies, and strengthening cooperation between the police and civil society. Following up, the Civic Union also put forward the essence of ensuring public security and civilian trust through local self-governance (Kazakbaev et al. 2015, p. 4). This notion of local self-governance (LSG) is closely related to community policing, where civilians actively cooperate with law enforcement and local legislative and administrative bodies have sufficient mandates to oversee the police. LCPCs and reported meetings between police officers and citizens are two prime examples of LSG in Kyrgyzstan. Besides of that, a number of anti-corruption laws and policies, specifically applied to government officials and state services, were introduced as well (Jorupbekova & Kachkynbayeva 2011, pp. 55-56). The main laws on fighting corruption are the Law on Fighting Corruption, adopted in 2003 and amended in 2009, and on Public Service of 2004, amended in 2010. Furthermore, in 2014 president Atambayev ratified the Law on Public Advisory Councils (PACs), which resulted in the establishment of numerous PACs, including one assigned to the MIA, to ensure citizen participation in the oversight of

police reforms, by taking into account public opinions and inputs in formulating, implementing and evaluating state policies.

Unlike Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan has allowed comprehensive police reform programmes to operate since 2003, with the initiation of the Police Assistance Programme (PAP) by the OSCE Centre in Bishkek (CiB) from 2003 until 2005. While PAP contained 8 main goals such as improving police capacities and communication systems, there were no priorities towards principles of democratic policing to be found (OSCE 2003, p. 30). Despite a shortage of staff and funds of PAP, the OSCE police-related annual report of 2005 points out how the political turbulence in Kyrgyzstan resulted in a certain political will and need to embrace police reforms for achieving and maintaining stability and security, while better protecting human rights of its citizens (2005, p. 38). In January 2007, the Police Reform Programme (PRP) became a separate part of the Unified Budget of the OSCE in Kyrgyzstan, which helped to increase the programme's sustainability and effectiveness in the planning, implementing and monitoring of its activities (OSCE 2007, p. 57). Consequently, the PRP could expand and consolidate the community-based policing projects to a nation-wide programme. Until 2010, the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, specialized in holding dialogues between government institutions and civil society, actively cooperated with and participated in these OSCE-led activities on various issues of police reforms. Later, the coalition changed its focus on issues and oversight mechanisms within the parliament (Oshurahunova, email interview, June 20, 2018). Despite favorable preconditions, such as more professional development and education, increased partnerships between police and the public and local capacity-building in order to ensure sustainability, the implementation of PRP still suffered from the shortage of financial, technical and human resources at all levels.

The renewed civil unrest in 2010 challenged the implementation of the PRP to such a degree, that police officers were no longer able to participate in all activities organized by CiB. As a result, in 2010 the PRP refocused its work on trust and confidence-building between the police and the population through community-based policing and maintaining its education and training programmes to professionalize the police services. According to the OSCE police-related annual report of 2010, the success of the police reform primarily depends on sustainable guarantees and commitment of the Kyrgyz authorities, the involvement of civil society and assistance from the international community (OSCE 2010, pp. 88-89). It further stated that the CiB was also involved in facilitating a number of discussions and evaluation events, engaging a broad range of stakeholders of parliament, law enforcement bodies, civil society as well as embassies and international organizations, that led to the adoption of new law Measures on Police Reform in 2013 (OSCE 2013, p. 133). In 2014, the PRP underwent partial restructuring and rebranding to become the Police Matters Programme (PMP). With this restructuring, the CiB strived for a more comprehensive approach of addressing law enforcement

support and reform through supporting the platform for cooperation of all relevant stakeholders. The CiB namely concluded that the MIA had lacked action plans for implementing any of the previous concepts and strategies to reform law enforcement bodies over the previous ten years. Furthermore, successive governments failed to fully support changes within the MIA. This lack of political will of the Kyrgyz authorities and the MIA's resistance to reform resulted in lack of transparency and accountability and a decreased trust in the police (OSCE 2014, p. 140).

Finally, in February 2015, the government of the Kyrgyz Republic ratified the Decision on the New Police Performance Evaluation Criteria, that was formulated with the help of OSCE experts. The adoption of this new law is a milestone in the police reform process because it enables citizens to assess and evaluate the quality of the work of the police with the purpose of improving police performances to better respond to their needs (OSCE 2015, p. 110). Throughout the years, the CiB has also given much attention to train and educate police officers on principles of human rights, such as roundtable discussions and seminars on Human Rights as a Way to Increase the Professionalism of Police Officers (OSCE 2007, p. 63), a series of training-of-trainers courses on human rights and crowd psychology (OSCE 2010, p. 96), and diverse courses on human rights and mediation skills, gender issues, police ethics and detainee rights (OSCE 2013, p. 141).

# Practices of police reforms and the civil society factor

*Kazakhstan*

While the government of Kazakhstan acknowledges its commitments towards modernizing and reforming state and security institutions in key strategy and policy documents, it effectively prevents the autonomous functioning of public oversight and monitoring bodies and, in turn, the accountability of government ministries and its executive bodies such as the police forces to those bodies. In the recently established public councils, including the one of the MIA, two-thirds of its members are supposed to be representatives of NGOs and CSOs and one-third state or local authorities. On the one hand, the roles within these public councils are too broadly defined and the engagement of civil society representatives in these public councils still has to develop in this initial stage. On the other hand, state representatives are able to put pressure on other council members through their high status and better institutional knowledge, which makes it easier for government officials to abuse (Knox & Janenova 2018, pp. 313-318). To a certain extent, civil society representatives in public councils that include the KIBHR and PRI, are able to participate in public hearings of the MIA on current issues and challenges of police forces and public assembly management. However, Kazakh state officials don't allow too much opposition during these meetings and become protective once the hearing becomes too critical (Zhovtis, Skype

interview, June 12, 2018). Important decisions are already made outside the public council, and critical remarks are only seen as mere suggestions. From the perspective of the Kazakh government, granting too much ownership to the citizens would create risks and lead to calling their political legitimacy into question.

Furthermore, while the latest Penal Execution Code (2014) provides legally binding rights for monitoring committees to oversee pre-trial detention centres and prisons throughout Kazakhstan, the government still limits their ability to operate effectively (Shambilov, Skype interview, June 18, 2018). The monitoring commissions have to report in advance that they wish to visit such pre-trial detention centres. Rather limited progress is indicated in the functioning of detention centres and prison systems as a result of these monitoring activities. Furthermore, there have not been established any effective mechanisms for local cooperation between local governments, CSOs and police stations on important issues such as crime prevention, maintaining law and order, and community outreach activities (for instance, searching operations for criminal suspects or missing people) either, yet (Aitykova 2017, p. 5). There is still a very clear gap between declarations on local cooperation during forums and seminars, and the actual practice. Not only are local administrations and executive bodies still depending much on decisions and approvals from the central government in Astana, but local police officers aren't familiar enough with the principles of community-based policing and the rule of law either. Local cooperation is often one-sided, as the local police remains largely unaffected to community outreach activities and need to create a more open attitude towards the society. Without public support or trust, police forces won't be able to effectively fight crime or address other needs of the local people.

At the 4th monitoring round under the OECD Anti-Corruption Network Action Plan in Istanbul in September 2017, experts and NGO representatives pointed out that the Kazakh government failed to demonstrate any concrete evidence of whether the anti-corruption activities listed in its policies have any anti-corruption thrust at all. They also reported that civil society members couldn't contribute much to the development of anti-corruption strategies and policies, as their access to the preparation process was heavily restricted and their feedback, comments, and suggestions were not sufficiently taken into account (OECD ACN 2017a, pp. 19-20). Moreover, the laws on Civil Service and the Code of Conduct fall short of specifying conditions and procedures of merit-based recruitment and promotion of police officers and don't contain proper definition of personal interest and conflicts with professional work (OECD ACN 2017a, pp. 38, 45). On the one hand, this monitoring round welcomed Kazakhstan's high degree of criminal prosecution of corruption crimes, including those committed by high-ranking officials, and its provision of the requested detailed statistics and analysis of criminal proceedings. On the other hand, experts are concerned about the emphasis of Kazakh prosecution offices on applying financial sanctions instead of deprivation of liberty for severe corruption crimes (OECD ACN 2017a, p. 168).

NGO experts also pointed out some major defects of the application of the law on Access to Information. These include the absence of measures for establishing an independent administrative body to handle complaints about illicit actions by public officials, lack of measures to protect whistleblowers, as well as no obligation for information holders and government authorities to put the law into practice (OECD ACN 2017a, p. 99).

Another study by Nurgaliyev, Ualiyev & Simonovich (2015, pp. 144-145) shows that the interviewed police officers of all ranks from Kazakhstan don't believe in the effect of the recent anti-corruption measures, nor in the potential complete eradication of corruption within law enforcement. Law enforcement agencies not only engage in everyday corrupt practices, for instance taking bribes from ordinary citizens, but they are also deeply rooted in informal ties with government officials, illegal business activities, and organized crime. Current measures are certainly able to solve petty, everyday corruption practices by individuals, not protected by informal ties (Zhovtis, Skype interview, June 12, 2018). As a consequence, higher ranked police officers enjoy more immunity against these anti-corruption measures. There is no radical breakthrough in fighting police corruption to be expected soon in a setting like Kazakhstan, where rule of law is subject to the elite rather than the people, and corruption goes all the way up, actually starting on the top of the society. Without a doubt, the prevention or reduction of corruption should start with strong leadership, based on zero tolerance for corrupt practices within the police.

Although the Kazakh government has developed a code of conduct within its security institutions, Mr. Zhovtis stated that human rights are still not at the core of policing. Neither have the regular KIBHR and OSCE-led events and seminars resulted in putting human rights in practice (Skype interview, June 12, 2018). Especially the Zhanaozen massacre, where in December 2011 police officers killed 14 protestors during non violent assemblies, illustrates the low record of human rights in Kazakhstan. Moreover, while the number of police officers convicted for torture might have increased, so has the number of political prisoners jailed for expressing their opinions (Zhovtis, Skype interview, June 12, 2018). It is important to realise that most media in Kazakhstan are either owned by the state or by government-related businessmen. Journalists are only to a certain extent able to report on police misconducts, as long as their news reports are based on irrefutable evidence (Karushina, email interview, June 19, 2018). For example, two years ago, one Kazakhstani journal published a main article about 10,000 citizens' complaints on the misbehaviour of police officers. In result, 65 officials engaged in illicit practices were fired according to this news article (Urankayeva 2016, June 14). However, there always remains the risk that journalists are attacked or sued by accusations of breaking defamation or libel laws. Over the past years, a number of independent and opposition newspapers and media outlets have been suspended. Especially after the Zhanaozen events, the government tightened regulations

regarding public demonstrations, leaving no room for any form of protest, assembly or demonstrations (NGO Coalition against Torture 2014, p. 24). Once again, government and security institutions allow the media to report on police behaviour to a certain extent only, until it does not clearly go against their interests or question their authority too much.

Finally, opinion polls could be an effective tool to measure people's trust in the police forces and to reveal their most urgent security needs that need to be addressed. According to the latest public opinion polls conducted by the Bureau for Express Monitoring of Public Opinion and Medianet, about 55% of Kazakh citizens responded that they do trust law enforcement bodies, while only 16% don't have trust in the police, due to their lack of professionalism or corrupt behaviour (Demoscope 2017). However, this overwhelmingly positive response of citizens participating in public opinion polls is in contrast with other surveys that are privately conducted by the Levada Centre (Nurgaliyev, Ualiyev & Simonovich 2015, p. 141). Those surveys reveal only 25 to 30% of the people more or less trusted the police; more than 80% noticed lawlessness on the side of the police; over 70% did not feel protected from arbitrary police actions, while 60% noticed a degradation of the system that can't be concealed. Experts and research institutions warn that these national opinion polls on Kazakh society and law enforcement are generally unreliable (Bertelsmann 2018). It is difficult to gauge sincere opinions in a context where the state is screening them and looking at people as potential threats, and the police consider themselves as investigators rather than servants to their citizens. In another example, the local government put a three-meter high fence around the police station after terrorist incidents in 2016 but wasn't thinking about the consequences for people, who now face more difficulties in reaching the police (Zhovtis, Skype interview, June 12, 2018). Overall, more work surely needs to be done to improve mutual trust between the police and local citizens and to better identify and respond to citizens' security needs and issues. Hereby, especially the culture of silencing and suppressing dissent must be challenged.

*Kyrgyzstan*

Overall, Kyrgyzstan's government branches and political system have been meeting better standards of democratic stability and legitimation, while CSOs have enjoyed relatively more freedom to participate in these reform processes. Several meetings with the MIA by the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society on creating a platform for systematic dialogue on the protection of citizens' freedoms and rights, resulted in the establishment of the PACs in 2010 (Oshurahunova, email interview, June 20, 2018). This platform has positive as well as negative aspects. On the one hand, the Kyrgyz state is obliged to respond to the suggestions and opinions of NGOs and CSOs through the PACs due to its legislative framework. On the other hand, the PAC of the Ministry of Internal Affairs remains underdeveloped and

too dependent on the state, in terms of finances and planning meetings or hearings (Shaikhutdinov, email interview, June 23, 2018). Moreover, the Kyrgyz MIA thinks that it is its right not to interact with civil society organizations through other oversight or cooperative mechanisms outside of the PAC. The director of legal clinic "Adilet", Mr. Osmonbaev (Skype interview, June 18, 2018) pointed out that the government doesn't seem to be interested in listening to inputs from engaged citizens and the civil society. Most decisions by CSOs in these public councils are merely seen as recommendations, while the government maintains control of real mechanisms for change. It is believed that frequent leadership changes within government institutions haven't ever given, and still don't provide sustainable opportunities for civil society actors to form effective oversight or cooperation mechanisms (Oshurahunova, email interview, June 20, 2018). It can be stated here that mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation between the population and (local) law enforcement agencies still remain underdeveloped in Kyrgyzstan.

Initially, the efforts of the Civic Union "For Reforms and Results" that led to the formation of the draft law Measures on Police Reform, adopted in 2013, are considered a significant victory for local ownership. However, Mr. Shaikhutdinov (email interview, June 23, 2018) states that there has been less success in the implementation phase of this latest law on police reforms. Factors that contributed to the rather meagre results are weak political will and understanding from the side of the government and parliament, strong MIA dominance during the decision-making processes, the lack of mechanisms for assessing and monitoring reforms in the country, and weak expertise among civil society actors. According to Shaikhutdinov, CSOs need more expert assistance for sustainable cooperation with state bodies in initiating and promoting reforms. Where the government and parliament lack vision or political will, it is more up to the civil society what police reform should be and how to conduct it.

Next to national policy-making, it is relevant that CSOs are involved in local self-governance to stimulate the police forces' accountability and the awareness of citizens. However, such local self-governance bodies don't always assume their active role in the maintenance of public security, and sometimes limit their functions to only assisting law enforcement bodies (Kazakbayev et al 2015, p. 8). In 2013, the Civic Union conducted field research on the practical implementation of two of the most widespread local cooperation mechanisms, namely LCPC and reported meetings between neighbourhood police officers and the public. This research showed that the LCPC and reported meetings aren't held regularly, while it is stated that they should be held every quarter. While the public is not always informed on these meetings, the vast majority of neighbourhood police officers perceive these meetings as merely about informing people, instead of a platform for improving dialogue with the local public (Papiyeva et al 2014, pp. 7-10). These reports summarized similar factors of limited results that can be divided into two categories. On the one hand, there is weak political will and understanding

by the government and parliament, a strong MIA dominance during the decision-making processes, and lack of mechanisms for assessing and monitoring reforms in the country. The police forces, in essence, remain isolated from the society within a hierarchy that hinders horizontal cooperation with local civilian representatives. On the other hand, there is low level expertise among civil society actors, including shortage of funds, tasks, and roles of participants in the provision of public security that isn't specified enough.

At the OECD 18th ACN Action Plan meeting in Istanbul on September 12-14, 2017, governmental and civil society representatives discussed the progress of anti-corruption measures in Kyrgyzstan as well. It turned out that from all institutions, the law enforcement bodies seemed the hardest to reform and, in turn, the least likely to show any progress in realizing anti-corruption recommendations (OECD ACN 2017b, p. 6). The information provided by Kyrgyz state representatives on reviewing the functions of law enforcement agencies was perceived as being too general, while it didn't show whether there had been any improvements in fighting corruption within law enforcement agencies, such as statistics on detection of corruption, based on the methods described in OECD policy documents (OECD ACN 2017b, pp. 37-39). Overall, the topic of transparency of security agencies in Kyrgyzstan is still politically sensitive as well. In line with its (post-)Soviet mentality, the security sector is traditionally unwilling to disclose state information to citizens (Musabayeva 2013, pp. 70-71). Transparency of law enforcement has not improved, as police reports are still not available to the public, journalists, human rights activists or other civil society actors unless the police make them available in the way the police wants (Osmonbaev, Skype interview, June 18, 2018). Whereas transparency of governmental statistics has possibly improved, the police still doesn't release many detailed statistics even if applying directly to the Ministry.

In a setting of a flawed democracy like Kyrgyzstan, political authorities and police officers are still able to act above the law, which, in turn, results in continuous suppression and harassment of political opposition and dissenters, human rights activists, and minority groups like the Uzbeks (Freedom House Index 2017). Human rights advocates such as Bakishbekov (2012, p. 115) point out that Kyrgyzstan's compliance with human rights norms seems to be more like initiatives or political statements from individual police officers rather than a genuine, comprehensive strategy from the government and the MIA. According to him, human rights and public order are seen in the Kyrgyz society as two contradictory terms: police forces justify the means of violating citizen's freedom or assumptions of innocence –until - proven, in order to reach their main objectives of public order and safety. In addition, a couple of studies done by "Bir Duino" shows that the Kyrgyz government doesn't fulfil its obligations to protect citizens' rights as guaranteed by the country's Constitution. It identified some important factors that could explain the policy-practice gap of democratic reforms such as the

absence of a specialized database of human rights defenders, lack of knowledge on the provision of security to CSOs under threat, as well as insufficient number of legal professionals, human rights defenders and other civil society actors (Bir Duino 2016, p. 11). Although human rights defenders are still facing severe problems as a result of lack of protection or, to the contrary, harassment by police officers, some do notice progress (Osmonbaev, Skype interview, June 18, 2018). Like Kazakhstan, the numbers of police officers prosecuted for torture have increased lately, and officers are no longer left with impunity. Therefore, there is a justified belief that real behavioural changes of police officers and governmental institutions could take place over the course of the next 15 to 20 years.

In line with the latest law on police reforms, the *Decision on the New Police Performance Evaluation Criteria*, the Civic Union "For Reforms and Results" has regularly conducted research on citizens' perceptions of trust and feelings of safety towards the police, and whether their security concerns are rightly taken into account. According to Shaikhutdinov (email interview, June 23, 2018), the local residents' opinion about the law enforcement sector can be divided into two types. The first type concerns the support of the selection of police officers based on competence rather than linkages of patronage or connections, a system of police accountability to the communities, as well as further development of the LCPCs. The second type of opinion concerns crimes and direct security problems: manslaughter, road accidents, school racketeering, extremism, and burglary. While this survey states that citizens have experienced relatively low levels of violent crime, it also shows how a large percentage of victims don't report crimes to the police, particularly when it comes to assaults, thefts, and briberies. The most important given reasons were that the crime was not serious enough, the police wouldn't have been able to do anything, and the police wouldn't have done anything (Civic Union 2015, pp. 36-40). Other surveys reveal that a majority of the respondents considered police officers as inactive and lacking an open attitude towards reported meetings and LCPCs. On the other side, neighbourhood police officers indicate that the public is 'closed' to cooperation and not willing to assist the police, sometimes even ignoring it (Papiyeva et al. 2014, p. 5). Through consulted reports from and interviews with the Civic Union, it is necessary that law enforcement agencies and decision makers at different levels draw more on these public opinion results to understand their citizens' needs, and base their work and policies on people's demands.

# Conclusions

To answer my central questions, I have identified clear discrepancies between formulated policies in key documents and the OSCE annual reports on police-related activities, and the practice of police reforms on the ground. Even though both the governments of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have stated their

commitments and engaged in externally-sponsored programmes and activities to democratize their law enforcement agencies, they and their Ministries of Internal Affairs, mainly responsible for democratizing the police forces and institutions, have proven to be resistant to any deep, structural change. While the OSCE Annual Reports by the Secretary-General on Police-Related Activities only show a series of events and projects on democratic policing, organized between the OSCE Programme Office in Astana, local authorities and the MIA, they hardly deal with the issue of their actual impact on police reforms. As these reports merely measure the 'practice' of police reforms by the sheer number of activities organized and the size of allocated budgets, it remains unclear, however, how these events attended by only a handful of officers or the curricula on best practices and international standards of democratic policing, could impact the MIA police institutions as a whole.

There are some important differences between the progress of police reforms in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and the role civil society plays in it. On the one hand, the presidential regimes of Kyrgyzstan have allowed OSCE-facilitated police reform programmes to operate, mostly in order to better cope with the repeated outbursts of anti-government and inter-ethnic riots. Well-organized CSO umbrella organizations and networks have been actively involved in police reforms, conducting evidence-based assessments among the local population and seeking dialogue and cooperation between citizens and the police at both national and local levels. Yet, in a fragile and conflict-affected setting like Kyrgyzstan, hard-fought progress could be as easily reversed. On the other hand, the Kazakh political regime and associated networks have used the plentiful economic resources to create and control public institutions and oversight mechanisms, effectively limiting space for opposing dissent on police-related matters. Some small improvements could be noticed such as the online availability of police statistics, monitoring activities in detention centres, and anti-corruption measures, as long as they don't go too much against the interests of the ruling establishment and the MIA. There is also stronger popular support towards democratizing the police forces in Kyrgyzstan than in Kazakhstan, where local citizens mostly prefer security and stability above democratic reforms. Furthermore, the respondents from civil society acknowledge the rather brief existence of public oversight or cooperation mechanisms, or a lack of expertise and finances as valuable explanations why civil society cannot operate at its fullest potentials in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. However, these respondents also admit that strengthening civil society will not be enough, as long as the attitude of the government, the MIA and the broader public (especially in Kazakhstan) towards democratic reforms don't change. Based on the amount of data that could be collected, civil society could therefore be seen as an important but not the only crucial factor in bridging the policy - practice gap of police reforms.

While democratic frameworks to oversee and control police forces can be created in considerable time, actual change of culture and behaviour takes a lot longer and is difficult to predict. If

the reluctance to change by political and security actors is mainly rooted in the perceived uncertainty of losing control over the society, more frequent discussions on SSR in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan could result in more confidence of higher government levels in taking a more favourable approach towards democratizing the police forces. Furthermore, while the literature on civil society praises bottom-up approaches, one can't easily ignore or reject the need for top-down initiatives to embrace a more open and democratic culture within security institutions. Within the academic sphere, the concept of SSR needs to be introduced and studied at research institutes, police academies and universities across Central Asia, so more (empirical) studies can be carried out on this topic and more practical recommendations can be formulated. Universal research methods should be developed to keep up the progress of democratic reforms in the security sector over time as well, that could provide more, essential data from which policymakers, programme managers, and any other stakeholders could draw for creating more realistic policies. As police reforms still depend on decisions from the top, the international community could be more effective in convincing the local elites that it is in their own interests of political stability and legitimacy to trust citizens to address security problems in a more effective way. While politicians and academics are known for their value-based language, police officers better understand practical and pragmatic language related to everyday problems. Therefore, higher scale of cooperation agreements and exchanges between police officers from Central Asia and other regions of the world would stimulate a climate of sharing a common language of pragmatism and best practices.

In the meantime, local CSOs must keep organizing themselves in better and broader associations, while defining a mutual agenda and strengthening interaction with the parliaments. With the help of the international community, they need to finance and develop themselves better to enhance the impact of their daily work and improve cooperation with police institutions and state bodies. Moreover, public oversight and cooperation mechanisms, such as public councils and monitoring commissions, need to be strengthened further, so that CSO representatives will be equipped with more knowledge and procedures to bring about necessary changes. Above all, CSOs have to keep on carrying out evidence-based research, for instance by collecting responses to questionnaires from local citizens.

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