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### SECTION 30. Philosophy

## MAKHALLA AS THE CENTER AND THE CONDUCTOR OF SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

**Abstract:** At the present article a brief outlook is given on the role and importance of such a traditional social institute for Uzbekistan as self-governing bodies or so-called "makhallas" while undertaking by Uzbekistan complex transitional reforms from "the strong state to the strong civil society". It is argued that in Uzbekistan traditionalism goes in a line with modernity which can fully be noted in the presence of makhallas being a bridge between the state and citizens, conductor of democratic values within the society, generator of the so-called "social capital", one of the drivers of social partnership and sources of emergence and further development of middle class. Alongside with this, there are some paragraphs with an analysis of other communities such as neighborhood associations in Japan and neighboring communities in Europe which have some similarity to Uzbek makhallas and whose experience could be implemented while improving makhallas' activities. Our general approach to the topic consists not only in studying common features of the makhallas but in considering these institutes as a crucial one in forming and development of the civil society in Uzbekistan.

**Key words:** Uzbekistan, civil society, modernization, Uzbek model, citizens' local authorities, self-governing bodies, makhallas, social capital, social partnership, third sector, non-governmental organizations, neighborhood associations, neighboring communities.

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### 1. Introduction

From the first days of independence Uzbekistan embarked on the path of democratic reforms, liberalization of political, socio-economic, informational, spiritual and other spheres of life. Progressively as implementing the reformations both ambitious by the scope and historical importance, the necessity has become more imminent in the implementation of the principle of transition "from the strong state to the strong civil society". Looking back and analyzing the established organizational and legal base of formation and development of civil society in Uzbekistan, functioning of many public associations, non-governmental non-commercial organizations (NNOs) and citizens' local authorities, as well as their direct and active participation in socio-political life of the country, in general says that Uzbekistan irreversible and progressively moves on the path of transit to the strong civil society. It should be noted that this path, going through and under the signs of modernization, has several distinctive features, that allows to detach it as unique "Uzbek

model" typical only for Uzbekistan (for more details, see Karimov, 1993).

Firstly, it is a step-by-step transformations. Today in the rapidly changing world and against the background of political and socio-economic shocks, experiencing by individual countries, the importance of phasing and sequence becomes visible stronger. The principle "Not having built a new house, don't destroy the old one" typical for the Uzbek people is, perhaps, the defining element of all the modernization processes in Uzbekistan.

Secondly, it is a special form of relations between the state and civil society, where the first one takes responsibility for ensuring the efficient regulatory and legal framework and conducting reforms aimed at the establishment and development of the second one. As Pekkanen points it out, "nothing is more central to the development of civil society than the framework of order provided by the state" (Pekkanen 2006: 6). And then he continues that "the relationship between civil society and the state is not one of pure opposition. This seems



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clearly true when we consider how many elements of social order, from property rights to infrastructure, that the state provides and that civil society needs to flourish” (Ibid. 2006: 6). A similar view is issued by some Russian scholars who see civil society and state being linked with many structural connections. They argue that the state, while realizing regulatory functions in social life, cannot avoid the relationship with civil values and institutes while the latter through its horizontal structure embrace all social relations. Thus, for their existence, civil society and state need each other. At the same time the relationship between civil society and the state is not only interdependent but also complementary (Abakumov 2005: 174-175; Mamut 2002: 101). In the case of Uzbekistan it is unacceptable to speak about the opposition and the separate existence of the state and civil society, as well as the opinion is unreasonable on that the state subordinates and/or absorbs the civil society. On the contrary, in Uzbekistan there is a growing awareness that the effective functioning of the civil society is the integral condition for the viability of the state, because only in the presence of the civil society the sustainable relationship with the society and the citizen shall be carried out. For the state it is just the contacts with the institutions of the civil society are the large-scale source of information about the state of society, its interests, moods and attitude to the power. However, it is important to emphasize that despite the enhanced role of the state, the independence and autonomy of civil society institutions in Uzbekistan while maintaining their partnership with state institutions is not undermined.

Thirdly, it is the successful combination of traditionalism with “modernity”, historical and cultural values with the international experience in the field of democratization. Being the opposites by definition and contradictory in nature and orientation, the tradition and modernity in Uzbekistan don't just coexist, but complement to and intersect with each other, which contributes to the successful development of civil society in the country. The traditions and principles such as good neighborliness and mutual respect, kindness and mercy, care for the needy people, education of the younger generation in the spirit of love to the Motherland, deep awareness of duty and responsibility towards the society, community and collective nature of human life activity, being the integral elements of Uzbek people, serve as fertile soil for the birth of civil society.

Fourthly, which is the continuation of the previous paragraph, there is the strengthening of the role and importance of citizens' local authorities or so-called “makhallas” which are traditional for Uzbekistan and, at the same time, vital for civil society. Being the reflection and manifestation of traditionalism, makhalla performs the functions important for the democratic society such as social

control, self-management, education of conscious and harmoniously developed personality, promotion of private business and entrepreneurship, and others. In addition, makhalla is the main source of the so-called “social capital”<sup>1</sup>, characterized by the presence of the high level of trust and communication in the society, which creates favorable prerequisites for the further development of civil society in Uzbekistan.

In our opinion, the consistency and functionality of the makhalla, its truly “national” character and scope, self-directed nature and structure, historical value and traditions, allows to speak about the special position and status of makhalla in the system of civil society institutions. This postulate has found its bright reflection in the Strategy of Uzbekistan development for 2017-2021 which was adopted in February 2017 and developed on the basis of comprehensive study of topical issues, analysis of the current legislation, law enforcement practices and the best international practices, and following public discussion. This strategy includes five priority directions of Uzbekistan development, one of which is the improvement of the system of state and public construction, which among others includes the development of civil society institutions, enhancing their social and political activism as well as increasing the significance and effectiveness of makhalla's activities in public management.

That is why the analysis of activities of makhalla in the light of deepening of the democratic reforms and formation of civil society in Uzbekistan is of great significance and relevance.

## 2. “Makhalla”, its features and role within the civil society of Uzbekistan

Makhalla is one of the unique institutions of the civil society, which have reached us from time immemorial. Historically it acted as public education, the subjects of which were interlinked by the place of residence, traditions, customs, forms of communication, legal, economic and family relations.

In sovereign Uzbekistan makhalla has obtained the new sound, having become the most important tool in the implementation of the fundamental principle “from the strong state to the strong civil society”, in providing the targeted social protection of vulnerable layers of the population in the conditions of formation of market economy oriented to the interests of the person. In the first years of independence the solid legislative basis was given for the functioning of the makhalla of the level of Constitution and legal regulatory acts. In particular, the internal governance of citizens as their independent activity on the decision of local value

<sup>1</sup> “Social capital” refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1995).

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questions of proceeding from the interests of citizens meeting, historical features of the development as well as national and spiritual values, local customs and traditions in our country is guaranteed by the Constitution (see Article 105, Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan). Along with this, today in Uzbekistan more than 100 normative-regulatory acts have been adopted regulating the activities and participation of makhalla in specific sphere of society. Only in the last five years the laws of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On local authorities” and “On elections of Chairman (aksakal) of the citizens meetings and his advisers” have been adopted and implemented in public life in the new edition, as well as about 20 regulations relating to the activities of makhallas and their social structures, and the last decree of the President “On measures for further improvement of the Institute of makhalla” dated February 3, 2017 identified such organizational and legal measures aimed at enhancing the role of local authorities in the effective decision of local value questions, realization of the rights to the joining in the Association representing the common interests of the citizens, strengthening their material-technical base and further development of their cooperation with the state bodies and civil society institutions.

Currently, at the territory of Uzbekistan there are about 10 thousand citizens’ local authorities (makhallas). In average each makhalla covers about 3 thousand people. They perform about 30 functions earlier included to the competence of local authorities at places.

In particular, the makhalla successfully conducts educational work among young people, makes the invaluable contribution to the formation of legal culture of the population, solves contemporary issues of territories associated with the landscaping, environmental protection, creation of social infrastructure, protection of the public order, development of family business, private entrepreneurship and carries out other activities. In addition, the makhalla plays the important role in the implementation of major state programs. Today it is even difficult to imagine the solution of any socially significant issues without the participation of the citizens’ local authorities.

Special attention is given to public Charity Fund “Makhalla” of Uzbekistan, the main purpose of which is to assist the citizens meetings in improving their activities aimed at the transformation of the makhalla into a center of targeted social support of population, development of private entrepreneurship and family business, as well as further expansion of the functions of citizens’ local authorities in the system of public control over the activities of state control authorities, the implementation of broad public awareness building for promotion of national and spiritual values, their development in order to

ensure the stability and atmosphere of high spirituality in the society.

The role of makhalla in the participation in social partnership is significant. Being the universal concept for countries going on the path of democratic development, it has its specifics in Uzbekistan conditions. On the one hand, considering social partnership through the prism of relations “state – civil society” the fact of perplexity and interdependence of these institutions becomes obvious. As mentioned above, in Uzbekistan, they do not exist separately but function together to achieve the national goals and objectives and the implementation of national idea. Moreover, in this tandem there is the great role of the state as the main reformer, creating organizational and legal mechanisms and conditions for the formation of civil society and the effective functioning of the institutions in the country. On the other hand, the specific character of social partnership in Uzbekistan is given by the participation of makhalla in it, able to become the main promoter of the paramount interests of citizens and to form in the effective public authority, aimed at the realization of these interests.

Makhalla as the social partner has the special status in the system of relations between state structures and civil society institutions, at least because it is closest to what this society is, namely, to the personality and to its essential interests. Thus, makhalla is not only the representative of the public interests, but also the body that implements these interests through the organization of self-government, the implementation of diverse and opposing functions assigned to it historically, the interaction with state bodies and other interested organizations. This shows not only the specificity of the makhalla in the structure of public institutions, but also its uniqueness. Moreover, turning to the center of development of entrepreneurship and small business, the makhalla, thus, makes worthy contribution to the formation and strengthening the country's middle class, transforming social partnership from bipartisan to tri-partisanship system of relations that includes, along with public institutions and civil society, the private sector with its strong middle class. The formation and development of the middle class the real owners, which is intended to become the backbone of not only economic but also political and social stability in the country, its development and prosperity, is the prerequisite and serves as a support for civil society being formed.

In conditions when in the sphere of small and private business over 75 percent of the total employed population work, and the share of small business in GDP is 55.8%, the importance of the private sector in national development is becoming increasingly evident. Makhalla in this respect makes a significant contribution. In particular, for the



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purpose of employment annually with the assistance of citizens' local authorities for about 1,000 new jobs are created.

Thus, in the process of becoming Makhalla the centre of development of small business and private entrepreneurship, at the same time the fundamental problems are solved on formation of civil society – further development of a strong middle class of owners in the country and strengthen of the institution of makhalla.

It seems that further improvement of the legal framework of the makhalla activities considering turning it into the center of realization of interests of personality and society, the development of small and family business, private entrepreneurship, strengthening of the social partnership aspect of its functioning shall be the important factor in the deepening of democratic reforms, increasing the role and significance of class of owners, and ultimately, the key in the formation of a strong civil society in Uzbekistan.

Along with this, the pressing question is to study the experience of foreign countries on improving the activities of local authorities or so-called community-based organizations, as well as its possible implementation, taking into account the national peculiarities of Uzbekistan. In this regard the Japanese neighborhood association "chonakai" are of the utmost interest. Their number currently comes to about 300 000 across Japan and which are essentially the most common form of civil society in this country, especially at the local level. Moreover, nearly everybody in Japan is formally a member of "chonakai" (Pekkanen 2006: 85). The specifics of their functioning is that fulfilling the political, social and cultural-educational function and being the social formations independent of the state, they act as the intermediary between people and state structures. As noted by some foreign researchers, "Neighborhood association serves as a conduit for demands, requests, and information that flow in both directions. The chonakai distributes information on government programs and regulations to residents and assists the government in record keeping, census taking, and conducting other surveys of local conditions." (Bestor 1985: 127). On the other hand, the neighborhood associations pass the requests of their members (residents) to the public authorities in the form of petitions and try their best to ensure their proper consideration and follow-up. Thus, the relationship between the neighborhood associations and the state in Japan has the nature of two-way traffic and has a pronounced social partnership form. The cooperation between NHAs and local governments in Japan shows probably the best example or model of how such collaboration can exist between civil society and state as a whole. Not

overvaluing this feature of Japanese neighborhood associations and at the same time, not compromising the dignity of citizens' local authorities (makhallas) in Uzbekistan in the implementation of intermediate functions between citizens and government, we believe that the example of Japan may be of some interest to Uzbekistan in the improvement of makhalla activities considering local specifics.

The European and the American communities or neighboring communities is also worth of study. In particular, their experience is interesting in as follows:

- in the implementation of social and humanitarian joint projects with public authorities;
- in the practice of issuing social grants to the neighboring communities by local authorities and subsequent targeted use of these allotted funds;
- in a broad discussion of issues on the improvement and reconstruction of residential houses and rural areas between the representatives of state authorities, construction companies and neighboring communities, and the adoption of the joint consensus solutions on practical realization of these works;
- in provision of advisory services (assistance in finding housing, legal consulting, informing about the news of local life, etc.);
- in conducting the sociological (questionnaire and interviews among the residents) works by communities to identify the requests, needs and desires of residents on the improvement of living conditions and enhancement of the activity of neighboring communities in the solution of different kinds of problems;
- in provision of referral information on various issues;
- in the development of volunteering and the youth branch of the neighboring communities, etc.

### Conclusion

Here it is appropriate to emphasize that some of the above features of activity of foreign neighboring communities are peculiar to the Uzbek makhalla as well. Moreover, we note that in its social orientation and social integration, the makhalla is one of the best forms of local self-government. However, it is clear that for transformation in a progressive agent of social changes in the society and the country in whole, makhalla should activate its work on all fronts of its extensive functional load and activities' tasks. It is important that makhalla can adequately and effectively use the created legal and organizational-technical conditions, and make comprehensive efforts to further improvement of its activities and enhancement of its participation in socio-political life of Uzbekistan.

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