

APPLIED ASPECTS OF MEDIATION IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. In the context of growing civic engagement, social sensitivity, and political polarization, mediation in the Republic of Kazakhstan is gaining particular importance not only as an alternative form of pre-trial dispute resolution but also as an instrument for institutionalizing public dialogue in politically sensitive contexts. The article analyzes the applied aspects of political mediation in Kazakhstan at three interrelated levels – local, institutional, and national. Special attention is paid to how local incidents – from everyday and ethnocultural disputes to cases of mistrust between the population and local authorities – can escalate into systemic crises in the absence of effective early-response mechanisms. It is argued that political mediation is not merely a conflict resolution procedure but an essential element of sustainable governance and political participation that contributes to reducing tensions, restoring communication, and enhancing the institutional legitimacy of governance. The study emphasizes the importance of a preventive approach, multilevel coordination, cultural sensitivity of mediative practices, and the inclusive involvement of all citizens – regardless of their ethnic, religious, or social background – in peaceful conflict resolution processes. The article concludes that strengthening the mediation infrastructure as a tool of resilience and democratization of public governance is a necessary precondition for long-term political stability.

Keywords: *mediation; political conflict; ethnomediation; conflict prevention; trust; public dialogue; interethnic relations; local self-government.*

ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНЫҢ САЯСИ ҮДЕРІСІНДЕГІ МЕДИАЦИЯНЫҢ ҚОЛДАНБАЛЫ АСПЕКТІЛЕРІ

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Аңдатпа. Азаматтық белсенділіктің артуы, қоғамның әлеуметтік сезімталдығы мен саяси поляризациясының күшеюі жағдайында медиация Қазақстан Республикасында тек сотқа дейінгі дауларды баламалы түрде шешудің құралы ғана емес, сонымен қатар саяси тұрғыдан сезімтал контекстерде қоғамдық диалогты институционалдандыру тетігі ретінде ерекше мәнге ие бола бастады. Мақалада Қазақстандағы саяси медиацияның қолданбалы аспектілері үш өзара байланысты деңгейде – жергілікті, институционалдық және ұлттық деңгейлерде – талданады. Арнайы назар жергілікті деңгейдегі жағдайларға аударылады: тұрмыстық және этномәдени даулардан бастап халық пен жергілікті билік арасындағы сенімсіздік жағдайларына дейінгі оқиғалардың тиімді ерте әрекет ету тетіктері болмаған жағдайда жүйелі дағдарыстарға ұласу қаупі көрсетіледі. Автор саяси медиацияны тек жанжалды шешудің рәсімі ретінде ғана емес, сонымен бірге әлеуметтік тұрақтылықты қамтамасыз етудің және азаматтардың саяси қатысуын кеңейтудің маңызды элементі ретінде қарастырады. Медиация қоғамдағы шиеленісті төмендетуге, коммуникацияны қалпына келтіруге және билік институттарының заңдылығын арттыруға ықпал ететін басқарудың орнықты тетігі ретінде сипатталады. Зерттеуде алдын алу тәсілінің маңыздылығы, көпдеңгейлі үйлестірудің қажеттілігі, медиативтік тәжірибелердің мәдени сезімталдығы және азаматтардың — олардың этникалық, діни немесе әлеуметтік тегіне қарамастан – бейбіт жолмен дауларды шешу үдерістеріне инклюзивті қатысуының маңызы атап өтіледі. Мақалада медиация инфрақұрылымын нығайту қоғамдық басқаруды демократияландыру мен әлеуметтік тұрақтылықты қамтамасыз етудің маңызды шарты болып табылатыны туралы қорытынды жасалады.

Түйін сөздер: медиация; саяси қақтығыс; этномедиация; қақтығыстардың алдын алу; сенім; қоғамдық диалог; этносаралық қатынастар; жергілікті өзін-өзі басқару.

ПРИКЛАДНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ МЕДИАЦИИ В ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОМ ПРОЦЕССЕ РЕСПУБЛИКИ КАЗАХСТАН

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Аннотация. В условиях нарастающей гражданской активности, социальной восприимчивости и политической поляризации общества медиация в Республике Казахстан приобретает особое значение не только как альтернативная форма досудебного урегулирования, но и как инструмент институционализации общественного диалога в политически чувствительных контекстах. Статья посвящена анализу прикладных аспектов политической медиации в Казахстане на трёх взаимосвязанных уровнях: локальном, институциональном и национальном. Особое внимание уделяется тому, как локальные инциденты – от бытовых и этнокультурных споров до инцидентов недоверия между населением и органами власти – при отсутствии механизмов раннего реагирования могут эскалировать в системные кризисы. Аргументируется, что политическая медиация представляет собой не просто процедуру разрешения конфликтов, а элемент устойчивого управления и политического участия, способствующий снижению напряжённости, восстановлению коммуникации и повышению институциональной легитимности власти. В работе подчёркивается значимость превентивного подхода, межуровневой координации, культурной чувствительности медиативных практик, а также инклюзивного вовлечения всех граждан – вне зависимости от их этнической, конфессиональной или социальной принадлежности – в процессы мирного разрешения противоречий. Сделан вывод о необходимости системного укрепления инфраструктуры медиации как инструмента устойчивости и демократизации государственного управления.

Ключевые слова: медиация; политический конфликт; этномедиация; профилактика конфликтов; доверие; общественный диалог; межэтнические отношения; местное самоуправление.

Introduction

Kazakhstan's geographic position at the very heart of Eurasia has always shaped the complexity of its political and social landscape. The country lies between major geopolitical powers – Russia and China – and interacts dynamically with Central Asian states, Turkey, and the European Union. This position brings not only opportunities but also a constant need to balance diverse political, cultural, and economic influences. In recent years, as the international environment has become increasingly unpredictable, Kazakhstan's internal stability and ability to manage domestic differences have gained new strategic significance.

The evolution of civic activity, the diversification of social interests, and the rise of public awareness have led to a growing demand for dialogue between citizens and institutions of power. Traditional administrative mechanisms, designed for a more centralized governance model, often prove insufficient for addressing the new forms of social tension that emerge in digital spaces and multicultural communities. In this context, mediation – originally a legal tool for resolving private disputes – has begun to play a broader political role. It offers a way to transform confrontation into communication, to reduce distrust, and to create new channels for civic participation within an evolving political system.

For Kazakhstan, mediation represents not only a method of conflict prevention but also a pathway toward political modernization. The ability of the state to listen, adapt,

and institutionalize public dialogue is becoming an indicator of long-term resilience. In a society marked by ethnic and confessional diversity, mediation contributes to strengthening civic identity, promoting mutual understanding, and maintaining the balance between stability and democratic openness. Seen in this light, the study of mediation in Kazakhstan is not limited to the legal or sociological dimension – it touches upon the core question of how dialogue can become an instrument of governance and a source of social trust in a transforming society.

The purpose of the study is to identify, systematize, and analytically interpret the applied aspects of mediation within the political process of the Republic of Kazakhstan, taking into account the regional context and practical experience in resolving socio-political and ethnoconfessional conflicts.

The object of the research is the political process in the Republic of Kazakhstan, within which socio-political and ethnoconfessional conflicts emerge, evolve, and are resolved through the participation of various actors – the state, civil society, local communities, and informal leaders.

The subject of the study comprises the applied aspects of mediation as a conflict resolution tool within the political process, including mechanisms of interaction between mediators and conflict participants, the specificity of regional practices, the role of informal mediators, and the institutional and cultural context of Kazakhstan.

Research Methods

To explore the applied aspects of mediation within the political process of the Republic of Kazakhstan, this study employed a qualitative methodological approach combining empirical observation with theoretical analysis. The study relied on the following research methods.

1. Case Study

The case study method was applied to provide an in-depth examination of three situations reflecting different levels of politically contextualized conflicts in Kazakhstan. This approach made it possible to identify the specific features of mediation practices in the context of socio-political transformations and to assess the effectiveness of interventions by both formal and informal actors.

The following cases were analyzed within the framework of the study:

– Local level: the ethnopolitical conflict in the village of Pidzhim (Zhetysu Region, 2021), which illustrates the transformation of an everyday incident into an interethnic confrontation with the potential for escalation;

– Institutional level: social and everyday conflicts and the role of informal mediators – a generalized case based on field observations collected by the researcher in various regions of Kazakhstan during 2021–2024, demonstrating the importance of local entrepreneurs and community leaders as intermediaries between citizens and local authorities;

– National level: an analysis of social crises and protest movements in Kazakhstan as indicators of accumulated unresolved contradictions and the lack of effective mechanisms for early warning and political mediation.

2. Event Analysis

The event analysis method occupied a central role in the research. It was used to reconstruct the chronology of conflict development and identify trigger events that initiated escalation processes. This approach made it possible to trace the dynamics of the transformation of a local everyday incident into an interethnic conflict and

to determine key points of tension in institutional cases related to social problems and the crisis of trust in local authorities. Event analysis provided insights into how timely intervention by mediators and public institutions can alter the trajectory of conflict development and prevent its escalation into a large-scale crisis.

3. Expert Interviews

Interviews were conducted with representatives of local akimats (municipal administrations), ethnocultural associations, law enforcement agencies, NGOs, and direct participants of conflicts (under conditions of anonymity). The purpose of the interviews was to assess the perception of mediation as an instrument of de-escalation and to evaluate the effectiveness of the mediation practices applied.

4. Content Analysis of Normative and Media Sources

Official documents (Kazakhstan's legislation, governmental statements) as well as media publications were analyzed to compare public and expert interpretations of conflicts and mediation processes.

Main Body

1. Theoretical Foundations: Mediation as a Mechanism of Political Dialogue

In modern political systems, where societies are becoming more complex and diverse, traditional forms of governance increasingly face the challenge of addressing conflict without resorting to coercion. Kazakhstan, like many other post-Soviet states, is undergoing a gradual transformation from hierarchical administrative control toward more participatory and communicative forms of political management. In this process, mediation emerges as a key mechanism that connects the logic of governance with the logic of dialogue – turning confrontation into cooperation and disagreement into shared understanding [1].

The theoretical basis for understanding mediation as a political tool is rooted in several interrelated disciplines – conflict studies, political psychology, sociology, and international relations. One of the pioneers of modern conflict resolution, John Burton, proposed the Human Needs Theory, which argues that lasting peace is possible only when the basic human needs of the parties involved – identity, recognition, participation, security, and autonomy – are acknowledged and fulfilled. Burton's ideas were especially important for understanding conflicts in multicultural and multiethnic societies, where disputes are rarely about material interests alone [2]. Instead, they reflect deeper struggles over dignity, belonging, and the right to self-expression.

Another influential contribution came from I. William Zartman, who developed the Ripeness Theory [3]. Zartman argued that conflicts can only be effectively resolved when both sides reach a “mutually hurting stalemate” – a moment when the costs of continuing confrontation outweigh the potential benefits. For mediators, this stage represents a critical window of opportunity to transform hostility into dialogue. In the context of Kazakhstan, this concept helps explain why early engagement in emerging conflicts, before tensions become entrenched, is essential for sustainable peacebuilding.

Equally significant is the institutional approach to mediation developed by Jacob Bercovitch, who emphasized the importance of legitimacy, neutrality, and procedural transparency in third-party intervention [4]. According to Bercovitch, mediation succeeds when all sides trust the mediator's intentions and perceive the process as fair and predictable. His model is particularly relevant for societies in

transition, where public institutions still compete for legitimacy and where informal mediators often play a bridging role between communities and the state.

The practical dimension of political mediation was further enriched by the Harvard School of Negotiation, notably by Roger Fisher and William Ury, who introduced the principled negotiation model [5]. Their framework shifted attention from rigid positions to underlying interests, encouraging the search for solutions that create mutual gains rather than compromise through pressure. This approach laid the foundation for modern forms of political dialogue and consensus-building processes that aim to balance competing interests without zero-sum outcomes.

At the same time, John Paul Lederach proposed a transformative vision of mediation that goes beyond short-term settlements [6]. In his Conflict Transformation Theory, he argues that genuine peace requires a reconfiguration of relationships, social structures, and narratives of identity. From this perspective, mediation is not simply a method for ending disputes, but a process that fosters societal healing, redefines power relations, and integrates marginalized voices into the political discourse. This view resonates strongly with the Kazakhstani context, where building inclusive institutions and preventing social fragmentation remain key national priorities.

Complementing these approaches is the deliberative theory of democracy developed by Jürgen Habermas and John Dryzek. Both scholars viewed legitimate governance as emerging from rational, inclusive, and transparent public discussion rather than from hierarchical decision-making alone. Habermas emphasized the role of communicative rationality – the idea that social consensus can be achieved through open and reasoned dialogue among equal participants [7]. Dryzek extended this idea by stressing the need to include non-elite and marginalized perspectives in the democratic conversation [8]. Together, their works underline the democratic and ethical foundations of political mediation: it institutionalizes dialogue, equalizes access to participation, and transforms public discourse into a space of shared meaning and trust.

International experience clearly demonstrates that even the most advanced mediation systems function effectively only when grounded in transparent institutional procedures, a high standard of mediator professionalism, and broad participation from all parties involved. Equally essential is the sustained support of both state institutions and civil society, without which mediation remains a purely declarative mechanism. The true measure of mediation's success lies in the degree of public confidence it inspires and in the perception of its outcomes as fair, impartial, and legitimate. Empirical evidence drawn from the practices of the United Nations and civic dialogue platforms across Scandinavia, South Africa, and Canada shows that mediation becomes a stable and respected instrument of political governance only when these structural and ethical prerequisites are firmly in place [9].

In Kazakhstan, this dynamic acquires a distinctive character shaped by the country's historical and sociopolitical context. As a multiethnic and multiconfessional society that still carries elements of the Soviet administrative tradition and a pronounced centralization of decision-making, Kazakhstan continues to face limitations in civic participation and grassroots policy engagement. Nevertheless, the country has already developed an institutional and cultural groundwork capable of supporting the evolution of its own nationally adapted model of political mediation. This foundation includes the accumulated experience of ethnomediators,

the activities of public councils, the functioning of reconciliation commissions at the local level, and a growing system of preventive field initiatives designed to address emerging disputes before they escalate [10].

The construction of a national framework for political mediation in Kazakhstan should not depend on the mechanical adoption of foreign models but on the gradual formation of a hybrid paradigm that unites international best practices with indigenous approaches to conflict resolution. Western methodologies – such as facilitated dialogue, restorative justice, and interest-based negotiation – can serve as procedural benchmarks, while the local dimension must draw from traditional Kazakh forms of consensus-building [11]. These include the moral authority of aksakals (elders), the influence of informal community leaders, and long-standing conciliatory customs embedded within rural and urban communities alike. Within this hybrid structure, the competence of mediators extends beyond technical expertise to encompass sociocultural intelligence – a deep understanding of regional contexts, linguistic diversity, and the value systems that shape local interactions.

Ultimately, political mediation in Kazakhstan should be viewed not merely as a conflict-resolution instrument but as a strategic resource for strengthening state institutions, advancing democracy, modernizing political culture, and building durable trust between citizens and the government. These considerations call for further analysis of how these theoretical premises and challenges manifest in practice, and what applied mechanisms can ensure the sustainable development of mediation within Kazakhstan's political process.

2. Applied Cases of Political Mediation in Kazakhstan

The practical study of mediation in Kazakhstan's political and social environment reveals a complex system of interactions between formal institutions, informal actors, and local communities. Based on empirical data and field observations collected between 2021 and 2024, this section identifies three analytical levels at which conflicts most often emerge and are addressed: local, institutional, and national. Each of these levels reflects distinct causes, actors, and dynamics of escalation, but they all demonstrate one common principle — that effective communication and timely mediation can prevent the transformation of manageable disputes into crises of national magnitude.

2.1 Local Level: The Ethnopolitical Incident in Pidzhim Village (Zhetysu Region, 2021)

The incident that took place on October 30, 2021, in the village of Pidzhim, Panfilov District, Zhetysu Region, remains one of the most illustrative examples of how a minor local misunderstanding can escalate into a perceived ethnopolitical conflict. What began as a routine disagreement between schoolchildren quickly evolved into a confrontation interpreted through an ethnic lens. In the multiethnic context of the region, the rapid spread of emotionally charged videos and comments across social media platforms amplified the situation, framing it as a clash between representatives of the Kazakh and Uyghur communities [12].

Although the origins of the conflict were everyday and interpersonal, the digital circulation of partial and sensationalized information magnified the tension, creating a perception of group antagonism that extended far beyond the immediate locality. This case vividly demonstrates how information environments and social media dynamics can either escalate or de-escalate interethnic tensions. The speed and emotional tone of online communication made it difficult to separate fact from

interpretation, underscoring the need for both rapid institutional response and sensitive mediation efforts.

In the post-conflict period (2023–2024), the author personally participated in fieldwork in Pidzhim as an ethnomediator, focusing on post-crisis communication and preventive dialogue. A series of meetings and informal discussions were conducted with students, parents, teachers, representatives of local authorities, and members of ethnocultural associations. The aim was to restore mutual trust, reinforce social stability, and ensure that similar tensions would not re-emerge. Maintaining regular contact with community leaders and local institutions helped to create a sense of shared responsibility for sustaining interethnic harmony and to strengthen local resilience.

One of the most noteworthy outcomes of this experience was the pilot introduction of the function informally referred to as a “legal manager” in schools with a mixed ethnic composition. While not a formalized or legally recognized position, the initiative served as an experimental mechanism for preventing school-related and interethnic disputes. The legal manager provided consultations to students and their families on legal and social issues, mediated minor disputes, and acted as a bridge between pupils, parents, and teachers. The approach was particularly effective in supporting vulnerable families and promoting a culture of dialogue within the educational environment.

An integral part of these activities involved organizing joint cultural and sports events, such as football tournaments held annually with the participation of students and their parents from different ethnic groups. Teams were deliberately formed on an integrative basis, without regard to ethnic background, fostering an atmosphere of cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect. These initiatives contributed not only to improving interethnic relations within the school community but also to strengthening family bonds and enhancing communication between generations through shared participation in collective activities [13].

The Pidzhim case thus illustrates the dual nature of mediation — as both a reactive tool for managing crisis situations and a proactive instrument for preventing their recurrence. It also highlights the critical importance of community-based initiatives, local leadership, and trust-building efforts, all of which form the foundation for sustainable interethnic coexistence in Kazakhstan’s rural regions [14].

2.2 Institutional Level: Socio-Economic Conflicts and Informal Mediators (Field Data, 2021–2024)

Field research conducted across multiple regions of Kazakhstan between 2021 and 2024 has shown that the majority of conflicts at the local and regional levels are not primarily political or ethnic in nature. Instead, they stem from socio-economic and infrastructural disparities that shape people’s daily lives. Common grievances expressed during interviews included dissatisfaction with the quality of healthcare services in rural districts, the shortage of qualified teachers and outdated educational resources, limited access to agricultural subsidies and state support programs.

Residents often emphasized their inability to influence decision-making processes or to access information on how state resources are distributed. These frustrations reflect a deeper structural problem – the weak feedback mechanisms between local authorities and citizens. This communication gap contributes to a

perception of institutional distance and fuels skepticism toward official decision-making.

In this context, local entrepreneurs and informal leaders play an increasingly visible role as intermediaries between the community and the state. Their authority and trust capital enable them to mediate disputes, facilitate dialogue with local administrations, and even mobilize collective efforts for social support. Many of them assist low-income families, provide employment, or help resolve administrative issues through negotiation and persuasion rather than confrontation.

This pattern aligns closely with Robert Putnam's theory of social capital, which links community stability to networks of trust, civic engagement, and collective participation. Societies with strong horizontal ties, according to Putnam, are more resilient to conflict and more capable of self-organization [15]. Likewise, Seymour Martin Lipset's concept of local legitimacy suggests that governance is most effective when it is anchored in socially recognized authority – figures whose credibility derives not from formal status but from moral and communal standing [16].

In Kazakhstan's rural and semi-urban contexts, these theoretical insights find practical resonance. Informal mediation by respected local figures often compensates for the limitations of bureaucratic institutions and contributes to maintaining stability. This points to the need for a more structured inclusion of such actors in formal mechanisms of local mediation and self-governance. Establishing advisory councils at district administrations (akimats), involving business leaders in civic forums, and strengthening partnerships with NGOs could further enhance community participation and reduce tension in local governance.

These experiences show that mediation is not confined to formal procedures or state-led initiatives. It also operates through trust-based relationships that reflect the local culture of solidarity and mutual assistance – a feature deeply embedded in Kazakhstan's social traditions.

2.3 National Level: Social Crises and Protest Movements

The experience of the past decade demonstrates that unresolved local and institutional conflicts tend to accumulate over time, eventually manifesting as large-scale social crises. These crises do not emerge suddenly; rather, they evolve from the persistent absence of dialogue, transparency, and responsiveness within governance systems. When local grievances remain unheard or unaddressed, they converge into broader narratives of social injustice and inequality, creating fertile ground for mass protest movements. Recent studies demonstrate that the institution of mediation can function as an important instrument of preventive policy in the regulation of interethnic conflicts and in reducing the conflict potential within society [17]

Empirical data gathered from expert interviews and regional fieldwork (2021–2024) confirm that such grievances often stem from structural factors: limited participation of citizens in decision-making, unequal access to state support, non-transparent administrative processes, and a generalized sense of distrust toward institutions. These tendencies can be observed across different regions – from rural areas to large urban centers – revealing that systemic communication barriers, rather than ideology, are the primary drivers of social discontent.

Mediation, in this broader sense, becomes a preventive instrument of national stability. Its function is not limited to resolving individual disputes but extends

to institutionalizing feedback loops between citizens and the state. Through structured dialogue, consultations, and participatory platforms, mediation can transform spontaneous expressions of discontent into constructive engagement. Moreover, the emergence of digital media as a dominant communication arena creates both new challenges and opportunities. While social networks can amplify misinformation and escalate tensions, they can also serve as spaces for dialogue and public awareness – provided that mediators and civic leaders are trained to navigate these environments responsibly.

In the aftermath of large social crises, Kazakhstan's experience shows that mediation can serve as a bridge between post-conflict stabilization and long-term governance reform. Ethnomediators, ombudspersons, and civil society organizations have played significant roles in restoring communication, assisting in community outreach, and facilitating dialogue between citizens and local authorities. These efforts highlight the potential of mediation to evolve into a strategic component of the country's political architecture – one that combines early warning, trust restoration, and institutional adaptability.

Ultimately, the Kazakhstani case demonstrates that political mediation must be embedded across all levels of governance – from village councils to national ministries – and supported by clear legal frameworks, professional training, and sustainable resources. Only under these conditions can mediation contribute to building a resilient, participatory, and inclusive society capable of responding to the challenges of modernization and geopolitical uncertainty.

3. Challenges of Implementing Mediation in the Political Context of Kazakhstan

Despite Kazakhstan's institutional progress in promoting mediation – including the adoption of the Law on Mediation (2011), the establishment of professional associations, and the expansion of ethnoconfessional mediation practices – the effective integration of mediation into the political sphere remains constrained by a series of systemic and cultural barriers [18]. These challenges extend far beyond legislation or institutional design; they concern the sociopolitical environment itself – the levels of civic trust, administrative openness, and societal readiness for genuine, dialogic conflict resolution [19]. Since 2023, ethnomediators in Kazakhstan have helped resolve about 15,000 dispute situations, which clearly demonstrates the significant potential of mediation mechanisms in the prevention of social and interethnic contradictions and confirms their practical effectiveness in maintaining social stability [10].

A persistent deficit of public trust continues to be one of the principal obstacles to mediation's development. Among citizens, mediation is often perceived as a symbolic or decorative process that lacks real influence over decision-making. Many people question the neutrality of mediators, viewing them as either state-appointed figures or individuals without the authority to resolve issues of political sensitivity. This skepticism is deepened by the scarcity of publicly visible success stories that could demonstrate mediation's practical value in socially or politically charged conflicts.

The attitude within government circles is similarly cautious. For many officials accustomed to hierarchical decision-making, mediation appears as a mechanism that might dilute administrative control or embolden public activism. These anxieties tend to intensify in situations involving questions of social justice,

distribution of resources, ethnic identity, or procedural legitimacy. As a result, mediation is often tolerated as a supplemental activity rather than embraced as a legitimate governance instrument – a mindset that limits its institutionalization and erodes public confidence.

Another dimension of the problem lies in the low level of legal and political culture across large segments of the population. In many regions, citizens remain insufficiently informed about what mediation is, how it operates, and what outcomes it can realistically achieve. The absence of systematic public education and outreach on conflict-resolution mechanisms has produced a gap between the normative ideals of participatory governance and the everyday practices of local communities. Without visible role models or success cases, mediation continues to appear abstract and distant – a legal term rather than a lived experience.

A particularly acute institutional gap concerns the absence of an independent framework for political mediation. Existing mediation centers in Kazakhstan predominantly focus on private-law disputes – family, labor, and property issues – and typically operate within judicial or quasi-governmental structures. While these arrangements are functional for civil cases, they are poorly suited to the demands of political or ethnosocial mediation, where neutrality and public trust are paramount. As a result, mediation initiatives often remain administratively dependent, lacking the procedural safeguards and autonomous mandates necessary to handle politically sensitive matters in accordance with international standards. Establishing a distinct institutional model for political mediation – endowed with independence, clear ethical norms, and transparent procedures – would represent a critical step toward consolidating this practice as part of Kazakhstan's governance architecture.

The shortage of qualified professionals compounds the institutional weakness. Training programs for mediators working in political contexts remain sporadic, fragmented, and largely introductory. Most courses emphasize interpersonal negotiation techniques and emotional intelligence, while neglecting essential competencies such as political conflict analysis, ethno-political psychology, public facilitation, or the ethics of third-party neutrality. Academic programs in conflict studies are still rare, and opportunities for mentoring, advanced certification, and international exchange are limited. Consequently, the professional field lacks continuity and specialization, impeding the emergence of a robust community of experts capable of mediating high-stakes political and social disputes.

An additional constraint is the underdeveloped digital infrastructure for mediation, which has become increasingly significant in an era when social conflicts often originate and unfold online. Kazakhstan currently lacks fully functional digital platforms that would allow citizens to seek mediation, submit grievances, or follow the progress of conflict-resolution processes transparently and securely. Initiatives such as e-otinish.kz are important steps toward digital communication between citizens and government but remain administrative rather than deliberative in nature. Their bureaucratic design, limited interactivity, and low engagement levels prevent them from becoming genuine platforms for dialogue or conflict prevention.

At the same time, the expanding influence of social media adds a new layer of complexity to the mediation landscape. Digital platforms have become arenas where emotions, perceptions, and grievances circulate and multiply far more

rapidly than institutions can respond. Minor disputes – from school altercations to local administrative misunderstandings – can be reframed as symbols of systemic injustice, gaining traction through emotionally charged posts, videos, and commentary. In such a media environment, conflicts are no longer defined solely by facts but by how they are interpreted, narrated, and amplified. This dynamic often results in fragmented understanding, heightened polarization, and accelerated radicalization of public opinion, particularly among younger, urban, and digitally active populations.

The cumulative effect of these challenges is that disputes which could be peacefully resolved at the local level frequently escalate into broader political turbulence. Mediation, in this context, becomes not merely a procedural tool but a mechanism of political stabilization and communication management. To fulfill this role, Kazakhstan must respond with a comprehensive strategy addressing the intertwined issues of trust, professionalization, institutionalization, and digital transformation.

Such a strategy would entail cultivating a digital culture of mediation – training mediators to operate effectively in online environments, engaging journalists and social media influencers in promoting constructive discourse, and developing tools for early warning and moderation of digital conflicts. It would also require embedding mediation within the country's broader framework of participatory governance, ensuring that dialogue and cooperation, rather than administrative command, become the norm of interaction between the state and its citizens. Only through such systemic integration can mediation evolve from a symbolic practice into a genuine foundation of Kazakhstan's social stability and political modernization.

4. Prospects for the Development of Mediation

The further development of political mediation in the Republic of Kazakhstan presupposes a transition from predominantly reactive conflict resolution mechanisms to a systematic and preventive model of managing social contradictions. Such a model should be based on a combination of institutional support, educational initiatives and the expansion of public dialogue practices. In the context of the increasing complexity of the social structure of society, the growth of civic engagement and the increasing influence of the digital environment, mediation can be considered as an important element of sustainable management, allowing not only to respond to emerging conflicts, but also to prevent them at an early stage.

One of the key areas for the development of mediation practices is the formation of a sustainable culture of dialogue and peaceful dispute resolution. In this regard, the educational policy of the state is of particular importance. The inclusion of training courses in conflictology, interethnic communication, political psychology, and mediation in secondary and higher education programs can form the skills of constructive interaction, tolerance, and legal responsibility among the younger generation. Such educational initiatives make it possible to form a deliberative culture in which conflict is perceived not as a threat to social stability, but as a natural element of social interaction that requires institutionally designed regulatory mechanisms. International experience shows that in countries with a multiethnic structure of society, such as Canada, Switzerland, Malaysia, and Singapore, educational programs on intercultural interaction and mediation play a significant role in reducing conflict potential and strengthening civic identity.

Along with educational initiatives, an important area of mediation development is the support of cultural and social practices aimed at strengthening interethnic interaction. Inclusive projects, in which representatives of various ethnic groups participate in joint cultural, educational and social events, contribute to the formation of a positive social agenda and strengthen horizontal ties in society. Such formats of interaction make it possible to gradually overcome the "us–them" dichotomy, forming an idea of Kazakhstan as a common civil space, where ethnic and cultural diversity is considered not as a source of risk, but as a resource for social development.

Initiatives of ethno-cultural associations demonstrate significant potential in the development of mediation practices. In various regions of Kazakhstan, representatives of national communities – Uzbek, Tatar, Dungan and others – organize interethnic meetings, cultural and educational events, dialogue platforms and discussion clubs with the participation of youth, community activists and representatives of local authorities. According to the analytical materials of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, the activities of ethno-cultural associations are aimed at strengthening interethnic harmony, developing public dialogue and preventing potential conflict situations in a multiethnic society [20]. Such initiatives help to strengthen inter-group trust, create a space for open dialogue and allow identifying possible sources of social tension at an early stage.

The further development of mediation in Kazakhstan requires not only cultural and educational initiatives, but also consistent institutionalization of mediation practices. One of the promising areas may be the formation of a multi-level system of political mediation integrated into the mechanisms of public administration and public dialogue. At the local level, it is advisable to develop consultative and mediation platforms at the akimats of rural districts, districts and cities, which could perform the functions of early detection of conflict situations, organization of dialogue meetings between the population and government representatives, as well as mediation in resolving social and ethnic contradictions.

At the regional level, a possible development direction is the creation of public mediation centers based on public councils or regional public platforms. Such structures could bring together professional mediators, representatives of the academic community, leaders of ethnic and cultural associations, and experts from the non-governmental sector. Their activities could include expert analysis of conflict situations, conducting public consultations and developing recommendations for authorities on the prevention of socio-political contradictions.

At the national level, the formation of an independent political mediation structure, such as the national mediation center, seems promising. Such an organization could perform the functions of methodological coordination of mediation activities, training and advanced training of mediators, monitoring conflict processes and developing mechanisms for early warning of social crises.

The comprehensive development of these areas would make it possible to form a stable system of political mediation, focused not only on resolving existing conflicts, but also on preventing them. In the long term, such an institutional model can contribute to strengthening public dialogue, increasing the level of trust between society and the state, as well as creating a culture of constructive interaction in the political sphere. The proposed three-level model of institutionalization political mediation (local, regional and national levels) makes it possible to integrate

mediation practices into the system of public administration and public dialogue.

Conclusion

In contemporary political processes, mediation extends far beyond the narrow task of resolving disputes; it functions as a strategic instrument for transforming socio-political dynamics, institutionalizing dialogue, and strengthening trust between the state and society. In Kazakhstan – a country characterized by its multiethnic composition, growing civic engagement, and the increasing influence of digital environments on public discourse—mediation assumes particular strategic importance.

The analysis of applied cases demonstrates that local and institutional conflicts, if left unattended and unaddressed in a timely manner, can escalate into full-scale national crises. Consequently, mediation should be regarded not as a reactive instrument but as a structural element of the country's resilience architecture – a preventive mechanism within the broader framework of socio-political security. Mediation is thus called upon not only to resolve existing contradictions but also to reduce the risk of escalation through preventive engagement, the cultivation of dialogue culture, and the creation of inclusive participatory channels.

Realizing this potential requires the institutionalization of mediation across all levels of governance – from rural districts to central government bodies. Furthermore, the creation of an independent institution of political mediation with clearly defined mandates, professional standards, and systems of training and certification for specialists is imperative. Developing digital infrastructure for mediation, enhancing media literacy, and promoting a culture of constructive interaction in the digital sphere are equally critical.

At the same time, cultural and educational integration must accompany institutional reforms. Incorporating courses and modules on conflict resolution, interethnic relations, and nonviolent communication into the education system, as well as supporting local initiatives that engage representatives of different ethnic and social groups in joint projects, can greatly enhance social cohesion.

Political mediation in Kazakhstan should become an integral component of the national strategy for ensuring stability, modernizing political culture, and strengthening national unity. The success of this process will largely depend on the coordinated efforts of the state, academia, civil society, and the citizens themselves, united by the goal of building a just, inclusive, and peaceful future for the country.

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