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**AZERBAIJAN EXPERIENCE IN USING THE POSSIBILITIES OF DIGITAL ECONOMY
IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION**

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Abstract

Eradication of corruption as a phenomenon is possible only by means of cardinal rearrangement of the principles of the government control system operation where officials will not have a possibility to take advantage of their office and place citizens in conditions when they have to pay an official a bribe in favor of their interests. It was hard to fulfill for a long time but the appearance of Internet and e-governments made it possible in many countries throughout the world including Azerbaijan. The objective of this paper consists in revealing peculiarities of using the possibilities of digital economy in Azerbaijan to fight against corruption having deep socio-economic roots.

Keywords

Azerbaijan – Politics – Corruption – E-society – ICT – Linguo-communicative approach – ASAN

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Introduction

In December of 1991 after the collapse of the USSR, 15 new states have become the entities of international relations with Azerbaijan among them.

New countries faced various challenges on establishing and developing their nationhood. It was required to resolve the issues associated with organizing a system of governance overstate bodies, transferring to market forms of operation of national economies, elaborating conceptual fundamentals of political development of the country and activity on the international arena.

For the Republic of Azerbaijan in addition to the issues, there was an necessity to settle the issues of military security because of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia.

By spring of 1994 the Armenian side managed to establish control over not only Nagorno-Karabakh where more than half of the population were ethnic Armenians, but also over seven adjacent regions that have never been within the administrative borders of Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region before and were populated by Azerbaijan people mostly.

Despite the adoption of our UN resolutions No. 822¹, No. 853², No. 874³ and No.884⁴ appealing to Armenia to withdraw troops from the occupied territories, peace was never achieved in the region. In May of 1994, Armenia and Azerbaijan hardly managed to reach an agreement on ceasefire.

By the time when active military actions were stopped Azerbaijan encountered a problem of forced migrants from the occupied regions, as well as refugees from Armenia where they dwelled densely before the conflict. All totaled according to the data of the State Committee on Work with Refugees and Forced Migrants of Azerbaijan, during the specified period the country dealt with arranging a fortune of a million of people⁵. The human issue of this problem was recognized in their nationally and in 1993 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the 85th plenary meeting "On Rendering Emergency International Assistance to Refugees and Forced Migrants in Azerbaijan (A/RES/48/114)"⁶.

Mentioning this fact in the introduction to the paper is intentional, since some of the plots that will be discussed further in the research are based on the problem of accommodating and arranging forced migrants and refugees.

At the same time, a contradictory and dramatic process of formation of new political elite took place in Azerbaijan that almost led to civil war. The process was accompanied by

¹ Resolution 822 (1993). Retrieved from: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N93/247/71/IMG/N9324771.pdf?OpenElement>.

² Resolution 853 (1993). Retrieved from: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N93/428/34/IMG/N9342834.pdf?OpenElement>.

³ Resolution 874 (1993). Retrieved from: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N93/557/41/PDF/N9355741.pdf?OpenElement>.

⁴ Resolution 884 (1993). Retrieved from: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N93/631/20/PDF/N9363120.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵ Sosialproblemlər. Retrieved from: www.refugees-idps-committee.gov.az/az/pages/18.html

⁶ BMT və Azərbaycan. Retrieved from: http://www.azerbaijan.az/_WorldCommunity/_InterOrg/interOrg_01_a.html

an actual dismantling of the legal system of the state, which contributed to a sharp growth of corruption. The situation is aggravated by the growth of petty corruption that eventually turns corruption into a serious threat to the national security system of the country.

The first serious steps of Azerbaijan political administration on this path did not achieve the desired results. Substantial progress began when the development of information technologies allowed introducing the elements of e-government in the fight against corruption.

It was noticed that the development of ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) had an effect and changed socio-political reality. The government started an active use of e-government mechanisms, regarded mostly as a tool of enhancing efficiency of state bodies performance, and in some cases as a method of strengthening control over citizens.

On the other hand, civil society considered the e-government as a tool of a direct political influence of citizens on the management processes where the government played only a technical role of implementing the requests of the majority of electorate. Anyway, it was obvious that in the emerging e-society one could observe strengthening of political mobility and appearance of new opportunities to counteract such common shortages of a red tape as corruption.

In this research, we stick to a traditional narrow understanding of the term “corruption” which implies ‘corrupt practices’ i.e. ‘forms of bribery. ‘Bribe’ is considered as ‘money etc. offered to procure (often illegal or dishonest) action or decision in favor of giver.’ Broad meaning of this term (for instance, ‘the abuse of public office for private gain’) not only seems too cumbersome and ambiguous to us, but also darkens the fact that corruption involves (often is interesting for) two parties.

The object of our research are the new forms of “virtual” or electronic fight against corruption in Azerbaijan coming from both the government and civil society.

Purpose of research: to determine possible boundaries of the influence of using new ICT tools and new communication networks created with their help on the decrease of corruption component in the activity of administrative bodies. We studied the influence of using ICT on the corruption level countywide on the example of contemporary Azerbaijan in order to understand how efficient is the restructuring of a system of state management from the top with the help of ICT in the fight against corruption.

Hypothesis: simple introduction of new ICT (e-Government) in the operation of existing administrative bodies will help decrease the corruption level only to a certain degree, in its maximum point corresponding to the level of “ubiquitous computing” of the population. Eradication of corruption as a phenomenon is possible only by means of major restructuring of operation principles of the post-soviet economy which differs by excessive state (official) control, closed nature, support of non-competitive productions, excessive legal control over the economic activity, presence of a large number of law-enforcement and regulation bodies having a possibility of making repressive decisions against the entities of economic and partly political activity.

Moreover, it is required to create communicative networks directly between the centers of decision-making and citizens, i.e. to form e-Society.

Materials and Methods

The methodology of our research flows from the theoretical approach. We separate methodology from methods. For instance, the procedure of using a certain tool for surface measuring is a method with the help of which we obtain quantitative data. However, the data requires further analysis, which is impossible without the knowledge of arithmetic (actually, just as a measurement itself).

Thus, the method of measurement cannot function without the methodology of a qualitative analysis of quantitative data. In social sciences, for instance, the structural-function al approach serves as both a theoretical basis and research methodology. The same concerns the lingo-communicative approach. Certainly, E-society by its essence cannot best u died by quantitative methods of exact sciences only, since the results obtained while using those methods should be analyzed in terms of social methodology.

However, using only quantitative methods in a social-communicative research his impossible, since any scientific research is based on analysis, synthase is and the general-logical methods (for instance, in our case we commonly use a hypothetic-deductive approach to the research).

Application of a lingo-communicative approach to analyzing empirical data. The methodology of a lingo-communicative analysis is based on the communicative function of a language, i.e. implies considering all social formations as communicative-language communities.

Also, it should be noted that to understand the core point of the processes under study the authors of the research will often have to address these or that historical events, in which respect the historical-genetic or also called retrospective method will be actively used in the paper enabling to consider cause and effect relations and regularities of development of events or phenomenon, and providing a possibility to reveal the peculiarities of subjective and objective factors including such as the specific nature of the formation of a system of state governance in post-soviet space in general, and in Azerbaijan in particular.

The empirical base for this research consists of a broad range of sources and literature with an open access.

Results

History of Fighting Against Corruptionin Azerbaijan (Cultural and Historic Background)

A problem of fighting against corruption for many years remains in the focus of attention of the governments of most countries worldwide including those that became the members of international community quite recently. This also refers to the states that emerge don the fragments of the Soviet empire.

Relying on the data of reputable “Transparency International” all these countries can be nominally divided into three groups: the first one in volves the states where the corruption component in life of economy and society is considerably low; the second group includes the countries with constant pressure on corruption with differentrate of success; and the third group involves the countries where corruption feels free.

The first group of countries undoubtedly includes Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Georgia to a large extent. In the second group, the most efficient state in resolving this issue seems to be Belorussia ranking 68 among 180 states of the world, then Armenia following it with a great gap and ranking 107, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan ranking 122. The third group of countries involves Ukraine ranking 130, Russia and Kyrgyzstan ranking 135 and, Turkmenistan ranking 167 and closing this list⁷.

For objective assessment of the processes under study, we should also note the corruption level in the countries neighboring Azerbaijan, but that have never been under soviet influence. This refers to Turkey that ranks 81 in this rating and Iran ranking 169⁸.

At first sight to these figures there is a feeling that governments of the second and third groups do not take any practical steps to resolve this problem in their countries, or steps taken are mostly demonstrative or declarative. In general accepting this assessment we have to appeal to scholars studying the factors of corruption distribution in post-soviet countries to take into account a number of moments that are often rejected as insignificant or negligible.

In our mind, one of such factors is a problem of mental perception of corruption by one or another social, national or religious group. In some cases, all specified levels of corruption are seen the sized and form sometimes unpredictable or illogic attitude to corruption on the part of an individual, or society as a whole.

In its turn, the historical experience that is often regarded by the population as traditions and customs plays a great role in formation of specified forms of perceiving the problem of corruption.

At the beginning of the XIX century, some of the Azerbaijani state formations became a part of the Russian Empire voluntarily, as was the way with Karabakh Khanate, and Baku Khanate in 1806, whereas others were annexed to the Empire by force of arms, as for example Ganja Khanate in 1804. Another part fell under the influence of Russia as are suit of peace treaties with Iran. Thus, in 1813 after signing the Treaty of Gulistan, Shaki Khanate and Shirvan Khanate joined Russia, and the Treaty of Turkmenchay signed in 1828 acknowledged Russia's control over Nakhichevan Khanate and Erivan Khanate. Assessment of the events of those years still bears pollinized nature and depending on the historic conditions is presented either in a positive way or in a negative one. However it is obvious that in efficient system of state governance covered southern regions of the Empire as well, that also included Azerbaijan.

Despite the fact that in Russia itself corruptibility and greediness of officials were criticized, remember at least the works of Nikolai Gogol or Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, any great success in this field have not been achieved, as the main tool for economy management remained officials of different level, who had great power for admission of goods and services to inner market, of own producers mostly.

When Bolsheviks came to power, the situation did not change dramatically as well. However, in public conscience of the majority of citizens of post-soviet countries born in

⁷ Corruption Perceptions Index 2017. Retrieved from: https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017

⁸ Corruption Perceptions Index...

USSR the soviet system was not so corrupted. Despite vitality of this myth, the facts indicate that practically from the first days of existence, the Soviet power tried to fight against bribery and economic crimes that cultivated it, but never managed to achieve any essential success in this field. For instance, already on May 8, 1918 there was issued a decree signed by V. Lenin “On Bribery” that stipulated severe punishment for individuals caught taking or giving a bribe⁹. However, peculiarities of the soviet economic model associated with the actual inability to meet the requirements of the population in consumer goods contributed to the fact that corruption penetrated into trade and sphere of services. It is noted that in “1930th the economic crimes were performed more and more often already not by individuals but by organized criminal groups... That is why in the second half of the 1930th there was established the service for Combating the Theft of Socialist Property and Speculation (BKhSS) which specialized on economic crimes namely”¹⁰.

However, even creation of the Department against Theft of Socialist Property and Speculation (OBKhSS) in the machinery of Militia Headquarters did not help neither to cope with economic crimes nor win corruption. It is this period when product shortage provoked corruption penetration into the service sector that never happened during the empire times. It is hard to imagine a customer in tsarism times who would agree to give extra money to the seller for payment of commodity only for him to sell the product. Exactly this way the foundation of petty corruption was laid that eventually became a normal state of thing.

After the end of the Second World War and death of Stalin, the soviet system adjusted for world perception and moods of one person, started to demonstrate its inefficiency even more especially in the economic sphere. Just as before, it was unable to meet the requirements of the population in consumer goods, but at the same time in the early 1960th the USSR dominated in exploration of the outer space, and had advanced developments in the area of different armaments systems.

Such ambivalence of the system became a nutrient medium for corruption not only in consumer sphere, but also in the system of state and party administration throughout the territory of USSR including Azerbaijan.

In 1969 the “Azerbaijan case” became known all over the Soviet Union. By that time the country’s top leadership realized that situation in Azerbaijan became explosive which was in the first turn associated with corruption in power authorities and administration of this South-Caucasus republic¹¹.

After change of the then leadership of Azerbaijan and assignment of Heydar Aliyev to this position, the latter voiced the facts of corruption in the republic on the closed meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Azerbaijan. Thus the position of the First Secretary of the District Party Committee cost 200,000 rubles, that of the Second Secretary – 100,000 rubles, Minister of Communal Services – 150,000 rubles, Minister of

⁹ Decree of the Council of People’s Commissars. OnBribery. Published in No. 93 of Proceedings of the All-Russia Central Executive Committee of Councils dated May 12 (April 29), 1918. Retrieved from: <http://istmat.info/node/29479>

¹⁰ S. V. Tishkov; R. R. Alaberdeyev and Yu. V. Latov, History of fighting against theft of socialist property in USSR (to 70-year anniversary of OBKhSS/DEB). Retrieved from: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/istoriya-borby-v-sssr-s-hischeniyami-sotsialisticheskoy-sobstvennosti-k-70-letiyu-obhss-deb>

¹¹ Lev. Askerov, “Accession of Heydar Aliyev to power. How it was. Retrieved July13, 2016 from: <https://haqqin.az/news/75210>

Social Security – 120,000 rubles, Rector of Higher Educational Institution - 100-200,000 rubles, Head of the District Militia Office – 50,000 rubles, and Public Prosecutor of the district – 30,000 rubles¹².

For comparison, the price of the VAZ-2101 “Lada” auto which production started in USSR in 1970 and which was a factual copy of the Italian “Fiat 124” was 5,620 rubles with an average salary throughout the country of almost 48 rubles¹³.

This poses a reasonable question – how such considerable amounts could be accumulated at such low level of official salary to “pay” for one or another state and party positions. The answer to this question is in the phenomenon of petty corruption about the origin of which it was mentioned above. Now it is time to tell how it happened in more detail.

Commodity shortage as it was specified earlier encouraged voluntary disposal of extra money in favor of a seller in addition to the product price established by the state. This phenomenon was observed in one or another form in many parts of USSR, but only in the South Caucasus, the population itself was willing to take part in these processes practically of its own free will. However, this is the first link of petty corruption chain that eventually covered practically the whole population of these republics. The second link is monetary disposals from the population to public sector workers – teachers, doctors, social service workers, junior and mid-level law-enforcement officers, whose official salary did not correspond to the actual minimum standard of living of those years. A peculiar term even appeared in Azerbaijan language that defined the payments of such kind – “Şirinlik” which means “Sweet.” In a while, using “Şirinlik” by the population when applying to services of the above listed categories of workers was of constant nature. At that the population did not consider it as something immoral, thinking that by doing so they show “Hörmət” – “Respect” to those whose labor was underestimated by the state.

It should be taken in to account that “Şirinlik” and “Hörmət” differ greatly from the internationally recognized notion of “tips” since the amounts of these payments could in some cases many-fold exceed the size of official salary of the mentioned category of workers.

Also it is curious from traditional view of corruption that “Şirinlik” was given not for the worker on one or another position and having certain powers of authority to violate the law promoting the interests of a bribe-giver, but on the contrary, to fulfill his/her direct duties with due diligence and in time.

The formation of such corruption system contributed to the fact that “Şirinlik” became a real base for “Dolce vita” of senior officials who received their payments covering the activity of their subordinates to whom the population applied for settling certain issues.

It is more likely that the fight against corruption that developed in Azerbaijan after 1969 has never eradicated this phenomenon from the economic and social life of society due to the reasons above. However, for fairness sake it must be said that opportunities for corruption among senior party and state officials were considerably limited.

¹²“Ministers caught in the crossfire. How were bribetakers punished in USSR?”. Argumenty i Fakty, num 19 (May 08, 2018). Retrieved from:

http://www.aif.ru/money/corruption/ministry_pod_razdachu_kak_v_sssr_nakazyvali_vzyatochnikov

¹³Car prices in USSR. Retrieved from: <http://back-in-ussr.info/2016/10/ceny-na-avtomobili-v-sssr/>

The collapse of the Soviet Union and severance of economic ties with traditional partners placed the economy of Azerbaijan in disastrous position that was aggravated by the war with Armenia, which raised territorial claims regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. The situation worsened even more by incompetent external and internal policy of the then leadership of Azerbaijan headed by the President, A. Elchibey.

Being rampant anticommunist and supported by the population he made everything possible to fully remove the communist organization men from control over the economy of the country. However, he did not take into account the fact that state officials who all of a sudden received additional power authorities would use their positions for personal enrichment mostly, rather than for resolving state issues. Such situation was essentially caused by the fact that the majority of ministers appointed during Elchibey period to senior public positions did not have even any in-depth knowledge about the political and economic order of the state. Therefore they applied to officials for management of affairs who understood that it were them, not ministers anymore who took managerial decisions and actively created artificial obstacles for the emerging business and even for state enterprises. They did not fear the law-enforcement bodies as well, since some of them –KGB (Committee for State Security), OBKhSS either ceased to exist or were under entire control of new authorities¹⁴.

Thus, corruption in the upper echelons of power actually gained support of the state. In such conditions already familiarities “Şirinlik” and “Hörmət” returned into use again. The situation was worsened by the onset of the war with Armenia, especially in 1992-1993 when the flows of internal refugees rushed inland from Azerbaijan regions occupied by the Armenian paramilitary forces. Some of them were accommodated in tent camps, some in freight cars, some in suburban health resorts, and some in the buildings of nursery schools and schools. Having realized that the conflict would not be settled soon, these people tried to settle down by all possible means, including the illegal ones, moving in one or another premises without the required documents for instance, or using buildings and constructions not meant for living.

Technical infringement of law by these people created new conditions for the growth of petty corruption. The officials of different departments and structures ranging from police to sanitary services demonstrated “willingness” to close their eyes on these violations receiving “Şirinlik” and “Hörmət” in return.

Thus, by summer of 1993 the interference of two corruption waves coming from the upper echelons of power and distributed in conditions of political crisis caused by incompetent management of Elchibey government that resulted in the economic crises and loss of a war with Armenia, threatened the destruction of nationhood of Azerbaijan. The people’s discontent with the situation created led to dismantlement of the political system arranged by Elchibey and accession of Heidar Aliyev to power.

Oil Strategy of Azerbaijan as a Foundation for Future Development

For a short period of time he managed to resolve a number of challenges: suspend war with Armenia, though the issue of occupied territories was not settled; recover control over the system of state administration including through the involvement of professionals

¹⁴ Z. Alizade, The end of the second republic. Retrieved from: http://azeribooks.narod.ru/politika/zardusht_alizade/konets_vtoroy_respubliki.htm

to the system of economic management. However, the most important thing achieved by Heidar Aliyev was the famous “Contract of the Century” signed on September 20, 1994 that stipulated the construction of oil pipeline Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan to supply Azerbaijan oil to the global markets.

It is noted that the “Contract of the Century” totaling to 7.4 bln. USD involved 11 international companies (Amoco, BP, McDermott, UNOCAL, SOCAR, Lucoil, Statoil, TyurkiePetrollary, Pennzoil, Ramco, Delta), representing 7 countries worldwide (Azerbaijan, USA, Great Britain, Russia, Turkey, Norway and Saudi Arabia)¹⁵.

After twenty year seven judicial observer shad to acknowledge that “in conditions of domestic discord and war because of Nagorno-Karabakh signing the contract ...helped to restore the required so order and political stability.”¹⁶On our part, we would note that political stability marked by the end of chaos partially contributed to weakening of the corruption environment. At least the fact of corruption was not perceived as a normal thing anymore, and both a bribe-taker and bribe-giver realized that they violate the law. Certainly, that was a tiny step forward, however it was impossible to achieve more that time.

From the point of view of a European approach in order to cardinaly change the situation the authorities should have advanced further democratization of public life, building of civil society, transparency of budgetary expenditures etc. Indeed all these methods are correct and even multifunctional; however, they do not take into account that the way of thinking of the majority of former USSR citizens even 28 years after the fall of the Soviet Union is based on double standards with respect to the Law and one’s own responsibility before the state. It appears in the fact that depending on one’s interests a person can violate many provisions of the Law motivating it by one’s own necessity, whereas when his/her rights are violated he(she) appeals to the Law demanding scrupulous fulfillment of the provisions thereof.

Such approach can theoretically be broken through the formation of civil society. However, in practice it requires decades and long-term awareness-building work. Moreover, the population should realize and refuse from many forms of behavior pattern, which was largely formed by the historical experience, traditions and customs.

With much regret one can state that tolerant attitude to corruption has practically become a part of those very customs and traditions in Azerbaijan as well. Any attempts to break the mechanism by means of strengthening of the law-enforcement system or investing in the officials’ income growth did not bring and could not bring any significant results since practically any appeal of a citizen to an official eventually ended by disposal of money for “Şirinlik” and “Hörmət.”

It seemed this problem would never be settled. But as the phrase goes, there is nothing permanent under the moon.

Serious changes in this sphere commenced after Azerbaijan’s entering an Internet-epoch which in the long run allowed making real steps away from “Şirinlik” and “Hörmət.”

¹⁵ Oil sector. Retrieved from: <https://ru.president.az/Azerbaijan/contract>

¹⁶ F. Guliyev, “Contract of the century” 20 years after: controversial benefit. Retrieved from: https://www.bbc.com/russian/business/2014/09/140919_azerbaijan_century_oil_contract_anni_versary

Internet Distribution and New Forms of Fight against Corruption in Azerbaijan

In 1995 when Azerbaijan has just started fulfilling its oil strategy, the American scholar from the Massachusetts University, Nicholas Negroponte talking about the advantages of information technologies in the economy used the term digital economy.

Nobody could assume that time for sure that digital technologies would not only change the production processes, but would result in creation of new materials with new properties, would accelerate the process of data transfer by thousands and millions of times, would cause serious modernization of the bank sector and entertainment sphere, and most importantly would become an efficient method for fighting against corruption.

By the boundary of the 1990-2000th under the influence of the USA experience, many countries started talking about the necessity to form “electronic governments”¹⁷, but Azerbaijan still was not among the states that were enthusiastic about new trends. Among the reasons was the fact that money that the country obtained from execution of “oil strategy” were directed mostly at modernization of the oil sector itself, improvement of archaic infrastructure, and most importantly at modernization of armed forces because of the lack of proper regulation of the Karabakh conflict. By the boundary of 2010-2012 Azerbaijan achieved remarkable success in resolving the above objectives¹⁸. However, the political administration of the country was aware that further successful development required to neutralize the inner threats, the greatest of which remained corruption just as before. It was required to break the vicious cycle of relationship of an official and citizen and refuse from “Şirinlik” and “Hörmət.”

It became possible only after the Internet has become as common for Azerbaijan people as radio and TV. According to the data of the International Telecommunication Unit (ITU)¹⁹, in 2000 the number of Internet users per 100 people in the country was assessed as 0.15 units, in 2005 the indicator grew to 8.03, in 2010 - 46.00, in 2013 - 73.00, and by the end of 2017 - 79.00²⁰.

Distribution of the Internet allowed the country making a number of important steps aimed at the fight against corruption.

In July of 2012 there was issued a Decree of the President of Azerbaijan on establishing “ASAN xidmət” at the Government Agency of Civil Services and Social Innovations at the President of Azerbaijan Republic.

According to Azad Jafarli, the Head of the Department of International and Public Relations of the Government Agency of Civil Services and Social Innovations at the

¹⁷ J. Ramon Gil-Garcia and J. Ignacio, Martinez-Moyano. Exploring E-Government Evolution: The Influence of Systems of Rules on Organizational Action. Retrieved from: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1016&context=ncdg>.

N.A. Khramtsovskaya, Origin and evolution of the notion “Electronic Government.” XI All-Russia Combined Conference “Internet and Modern Society”. Retrieved from: <http://www.ict.edu.ru/vconf/files/10369.pdf>

¹⁸ N.S Niyazov, Primary vectors of the military safety policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 1994 - 2010. (St. Petersburg: SPbGUPubl, 2010)

¹⁹ International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

²⁰ Country ict data (UNTIL 2018) // Percentage of Individuals using the Internet. Retrieved from: <https://www.itu.int/en/itu-d/statistics/pages/stat/default.aspx>

President of Azerbaijan Republic, “ASAN” stands for the English “Azerbaijan Service and Assessment Network”²¹. However, the abbreviation ASAN is in tune with the Azerbaijani word “asan” meaning “easy.” It is obvious that such coincidence was chosen by the founders of the service on purpose, for the population to realize that from then on it could obtain a number of state services in “ASAN xidmət”²² easily and without any “Şirinlik” and “Hörmət.” At that the objectives of the service were as follows: “reducing extra expenses and loss of time of the population; securing careful attitude and ethical norms in relation to citizens;...strengthening trust to state structures; enhancing transparency and fight against corruption; disseminating the use of online services.”²³

As for the list of tasks to be settled, or services rendered in other words, it turned to be quite impressive from the start of the service operation and included:

- civil registration of personal status;
- notary activity;
- issue and replacement of personal certificates;
- issue and replacement of regular passports;
- replacement of driver’s license;
- issue of certificate of conviction;
- issue of certificates of record of land registry and official registration of apartments;
- issue of work permits, temporary accommodation in the Republic of Azerbaijan, and documents required to receive the status of an immigrant for permanent residence;
- registration of commercial legal entities and tax payers;
- evaluation of labor pensions;
- issue of archive certificates to individuals and legal entities;
- acceptance of customs declarations, and documents for customs clearance²⁴.

ASAN-xidmət started its operation in January of 2013, and already in February of the same year in the interview to a well-known Azerbaijani journalist Kyamal Ali, the deputy head of the Department of International and Public Relations of the Government Agency of Civil Services and Social Innovations at the President of Azerbaijan Republic, AnarGuseinov noted that “there are organizations similar to “AsanXidmet” in Georgia, Russia, Estonia and Kazakhstan, but exactly the same is nowhere else. In Azerbaijan “AsanXidmet” covers 23 services of nine state agencies. Together with notary and some other services that we undertook the number of services reaches 50. In Georgia a “House of Justice” was established which deals with issuing of personal certificates and other legal documents only. They perform around 10 thousand of transactions - operations with documents per month. As for us, from January 15, the day of “AsanXidmet” establishment, we rendered services to over 21 thousand people”²⁵. The demand for new service encourages the expansion of the “ASAN-xidmət” network. Simultaneously with the expansion of a number and quality of services there appear mobile units of the service. The latter became possible only with the Internet expansion, being a medium where ASAN operates.

²¹ ASAN xidmət - is an innovative step of the state towards the business and citizens. Retrieved from: <http://www.biznesinfo.az/observer/infocus/params/ln/ru/article/83096>

²² ASAN xidmət literally means “easy service” (Azerbaijani).

²³ ASAN XIDMET Center No. 1. Retrieved from: <https://www.navigator.az/firm/13435/info/>

²⁴ ASAN xidmət - is an innovative step of the state towards the business and citizens. Retrieved from: <http://www.biznesinfo.az/observer/infocus/params/ln/ru/article/83096>

²⁵ Glassy walls of the “AsanXidmet” building is a symbol of transparency of the structure operation. Retrieved from: <https://az.sputniknews.ru/life/20130228/298567289.html>

By September of 2013 it was reported about rendering services to 475,000 clients in 14 regions of Azerbaijan²⁶. By 2016 the mobile units of ASAN rendered services in Bilasovar²⁷, Tovuz²⁸ and other regions of the country. The recent data demonstrate an obvious rapid growth of applications to “ASAN-xidmet” services.

The growth of parameters of the rendered services is shown in the table below made on the basis of the data of the Intellectual Monitoring System of ASAN system²⁹.

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
ASAN services							
Central (stationary)	842785	260778 1	3568180	5143807	5654933	671090 4	698388 30
Mobile	57798	65580	259863	532396	367522	379076	5354 ³¹

Introduction of ASAN-xidmet service made it relevant for Azerbaijan to introduce the electronic signature. The service was called “ASAN-imza” which means “easy signature.” It was declared that “ASAN Imza” provided an access to online services by means of mobile devices. It was straight away announced that “On the first stage ASAN Imza will be provided to foreign citizens living in Azerbaijan permanently”³².

It may seem illogical first sight to provide the opportunity of using the services of digital signatures to foreigners namely. However, in practice this step was associated with the fact that in the frame works of diversification Azerbaijan started devoting considerable attention to the development of its touristic potential.

Numerous cultural and sporting events being held in the country required to fundamentally change the approach to issuing of visas to foreign tourists arriving at the country. This issue was also to be settled by ASAN. A new service ASAN-visa commenced processing electronic visas via Internet. The official web portal of the service offers e-Visa processing for three steps. At that there is an option of making both standard visa and urgent one.

In the course of expansion of e-commerce in the world, including Azerbaijan, the need for broad introduction of the electronic signature becomes a necessity. Considering

²⁶ ASAN Xidmet' served 475,000 citizen. Retrieved from: <http://www.today.az/news/society/126437.html>

²⁷ Seyyar ASAN Biləcəriyəgedir. Retrieved from: <https://sputnik.az/news/20161012/407331177/seyyar-asan-xidmet-bileceri.html>

²⁸ Seyyar ASAN xidmət Tovuzda. Retrieved from: <http://www.azadliq.az/xeber/81632/seyyar-asan-xidmet-tovuzda/>

²⁹ İntellektual Monitoring Sistemini. HESABATLILIQ MODULU. Retrieved from: <http://vxside.gov.az/statistics/International>

³⁰ As of 5 February 2019

³¹ As of 5 February, 2019

³² ASAN Imza from ASAN Xidmet. Retrieved from: <http://vzglyad.az/news/5505/asan-imza-ot-asan-xidmet-.html>

that the contractors for e-commerce with Azerbaijan are European countries, a lot is being done for Azerbaijan electronic signatures to be acknowledged in EU. ElmirVelizade, Deputy Minister of Transport, Communications and High Technologies particularly noted in December 2018 at a round table on the subject “Electron Identification in E-Commerce: Opportunities and Challenges” that his department is interested in “acknowledgment of electronic signatures in other countries as well, European in particular. On the basis there of the domestic legislation in the sphere of electronic signatures was prepared a sing on European guidelines.”³³

Widespread introduction of electronic signature settles not only the problems of e-commerce and extension of the opportunities of digital economy, but is an essential condition for the development of information society. For instance, scholars note that “electronic government and development of ICT infrastructure are defined as priorities in the programs and strategies of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belorussia. At the same time the programs and strategies of these countries do not specify such important components of the information society as electronic identification and registration of citizens, as well as ICT in civil society. However these components are present in the programs and strategies of other post-soviet countries (particularly in Moldova, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan).”³⁴

Another step towards economy diversification in Azerbaijan was made by means of creation of ABAD subdivision³⁵ (“ABAD” - Ailə Biznesinə Asan Dəstək – literally means “Easily rendered assistance to family business”) at ASAN-xidmet service in September of 2016. Moreover, the word “a bad” has a meaning of “comfortable” in Azerbaijan language.

The efficiency and transparency of ASAN-xidmet operation contributed to the fact that in 2019 the authorities declared that a number of services will be rendered by this service exclusively. The exceptions will be made only for those regions of the country where ASAN-xidmet have not start edits operation yet in full force. For instance, at the beginning of 2019 it was declared that this year the country would entirely transfer to electronization of social benefits³⁶, that will again allow excluding the corruption component from a sensitive field of social life.

As it was noted above, the growth of possibilities of ASAN-xidmet is directly associated with the expansion of the territory of the country covered by Internet. For the last years Azerbaijan authorities have been actively investing in the development of this economy sector. According to the Minister of Communication and Information Technologies of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ali Abbasov, “in 2004-2010 the annual rate of development of ICT sector made 30-32%. During these years the volume of IT-sector of the country was expanded by 6 times, and the volume of products export – by 5 times.” Around 1.8 bln. Dollars was invested in this sector of economy³⁷.

³³ Round table on the subject “Electronic Identification in E-commerce: Opportunities and Challenges. Retrieved from: <https://haqqin.az/news/140751>

³⁴ Radomir Bolgov; Elena Zinovieva, and Vitalina Karachay, Information Society Development in Eurasian Economic (Union Countries: Legal Aspects)

³⁵ Haqqımızda. Retrieved from: <http://abad.gov.az/az/about>

³⁶ This year Azerbaijan will transfer to electronic social allowance. Retrieved from: <https://minval.az/news/123854025>

³⁷ A. Salayeva, “For 20 years around 1.8 bln. Dollars have been invested in ICT sector of Azerbaijan – Minister”. Retrieved from: <http://1news.az/news/za-20-let-v-sektor-ikt-azerbaydzhana-investirovano-okolo-1-8-mlrd---ministr>

Having achieved great success in distributing and providing online services on its own territory, which helped to make a heavy blow against corruption, Azerbaijan strived to share its experience with foreign countries as well. The first country Azerbaijan started an active cooperation with in this sphere became Afghanistan, which had been attempting to arrange peaceful life for a long stretch of time with the support of the world community.

Early January of 2019 the first center Asan-Khedmat, the counterpart of Azerbaijani ASAN-Xidmət started its operation in this country. It is noted that “the memorandum of understanding between the government of Afghanistan and that of Azerbaijan signed several years ago stipulates that the ASAN services should render technical support in all respects of this initiative. It includes an access to program decisions, exchange of strategic and legal documents, assistance with respect to the organizational structure, as well as an exchange of educational programs and methodologies. Also the agreement has been reached that Azerbaijan would provide an access to its training facilities during the development stage in Afghanistan.”³⁸

Addressing the official web-page of Asan-Khedmat, one can notice that it copies the portal of Azerbaijani ASAN-Xidmət in terms of structure and even design. Though the number of services rendered in Afghanistan is considerably fewer so far than that in Azerbaijan³⁹, we hope that in the near future the Afghan specialists will also manage to expand the capacities of their service.

Meanwhile Azerbaijani specialists start to actively attract other resources to anti-corruption activity, including the space ones.

In 2009 Azerbaijan announced its determination to acquire its own satellite. Two years later there was established OAO “Azerkosmos” at the Ministry of Communication and Information Technologies of Azerbaijan the shares of which belonged to the state. The purpose of a new structure was to place “a national telecommunication satellite of the country AzerSpace in orbit, regulate it and perform operation activities.”⁴⁰ The first Azerbaijan is a tell it was launched February 8, 2013⁴¹, and in early 2019 the country had already three satellites in orbit⁴². The main objective of launching the third satellite was to expand the satellite Internet coverage over the territory of the country, and provide a full access to Internet for hundreds of schools, especially in remote mountain areas of the country⁴³.

As the observations show, enlarging the number of potential Internet users encourages the involvement of a great number of people to discussions of urgent problems of society and state, mostly through registration of these people especially the youth in social networks. Among the social networks where it is possible not only to watch photos and video materials but also discuss one or another problem, Facebook ranks first in Azerbaijan and

³⁸ Azerbaijan brand name ASAN xidmətin Afghanistan. Retrieved from: <https://haqqin.az/news/142959>

³⁹ Asan-Khedmat. Retrieved from: <http://asan.gov.af/Eng/>

⁴⁰ A. V Salayeva, “OAO “Azerkosmos” was registered in Azerbaijan”. Retrieved from: <http://1news.az/economy/tech/20110304123443864.html>

⁴¹ The first Azerbaijani satellite was launched into orbit. Retrieved from: <https://lenta.ru/news/2013/02/08/sputnik/>

⁴² Azerbaijan to launch third satellite. Retrieved from: <https://www.azernews.az/business/130156.html>

⁴³ Azerspace-2 to provide satellite Internet to hundreds of schools in highland settlements of Azerbaijan. Retrieved from: <https://minval.az/news/123845371>

is visited by 81% of Internet users across the country⁴⁴. Making use of this circumstance and scouring the authorities, the representatives of the mass media, the electronic above all, raise a question regarding a mandatory presence of officials' accounts in Facebook so that the citizens could quickly respond to their activity⁴⁵.

The growth of space grouping of Azerbaijan satellites also allowed using some of their resources to follow the situation with illegal construction that traditionally has a strong corruption component. It was declared that "the project stipulates shooting of territories every 5 days and analyzing any changes on the Earth's surface which helps prevent illegal construction and usage of land plots"⁴⁶.

The enhancement of opportunities of using digital technologies in fighting against corruption encouraged Azerbaijan authorities for one more novation. In early January of 2019 with participation of Aliyev, the President of Azerbaijan, the opening of the "Real Estate Services of the State Committee on Property Issues" took place. It is reported that "The Committee already provides the citizens with online 40 services either directly or by means of the e-Government portal...The service "Electronic Statement" fully restricts the contact of a citizen with an official...a citizen having an electronic signature can apply to service through the e-Government portal from any place, send the relevant documents, and the electronic statement prepared by the Committee is sent to the personal cabinet in the portal."⁴⁷

Therefore, one more sector where the officials could achieve their mercenary motives by simple ignoring of the legislation requirements will soon be out of their influence which will be undoubtedly of great importance for the development of society in Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

When preparing this paper we also applied to the content of "DIGITAL PLANET 2017" in the hope to find interesting for us analytical or other information on the problem under study. However, in part of the paper called "DIGITAL EVOLUTION INDEX 2017" in section "SCORES AND RANKINGS" not only did not we find any data concerning Azerbaijan, which is actually quite logical from the point of view of the scales of this country in the global economy, but were astonished to learn that the Caspian sea with an area of 371,000 square kilometers no longer exists and Azerbaijan now borders overland not only with Russia, but with Kazakhstan and Turkmenia as well. To be honest the existence of such maps in the publishing devoted to digital development puzzles at the least⁴⁸

We made this remark on purpose in order to show that even availability of easily accessible digital data (digital maps) does not automatically ensure fully objective representation of the ongoing events.

⁴⁴ What social networks are most popular in Azerbaijan? Data and rating. Retrieved from: <https://media.az/read/1067721256>

⁴⁵ YaMadatova, "Will find a new way of making Azerbaijani officials to work". Retrieved from: <https://minval.az/news/123845457>

⁴⁶ I. Abdullayeva, Artificial intelligence keeps record of Azerbaijan lands from space. Retrieved from: <https://ru.oxu.az/ict/292285>

⁴⁷ The President Ilham Aliyev took part in the opening of a new Space of Rendering property services in Baku. Retrieved from: <https://news.day.az/politics/1078044.html>

⁴⁸ Digital planet 2017 how competitiveness and trust in digital economies vary across the world. Retrieved from: https://sites.tufts.edu/digitalplanet/files/2017/05/Digital_Planet_2017_FINAL.pdf

With regard to our research we cannot state that using digital technologies and services automatically resolves the problem of fighting against corruption in Azerbaijan. On the contrary, the data for 2018 in “Transparency International” demonstrates that despite all achievements and introduction of new technologies Azerbaijan for the first time for several years after incremental advance again lost points in the rating in index of perceiving corruption⁴⁹. Nevertheless it does not mean that one should refuse from the possibilities of digital economy both in this sphere and other spheres as well. As it is fairly reported in “The Report on the Global Development 2016: Digital Dividends” of the World Bank, the benefits of digital economy “do not emerge automatically and are not guaranteed, however, digital technologies in many cases can create significant advantages.”⁵⁰

It is noticeable that Azerbaijani authorities strive to actively use the possibilities of digital economy, not only to diversify the economy, but also to fight against corruption.

It is obvious they selected exactly this way as the most promising one in fighting against corruption. However, the said does not a tall meant hat this way will be easy and they will not have to meet with resistance of not only officials, but traditional views of the population on the issues of mutual relations of a person, society and the state.

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⁴⁹ Index of perceiving corruption — 2018. Final table. Retrieved from: <https://transparency.org.ru/research/indeks-vospriyatya-korrupsiy/rossiya-v-indeks-vospriyatya-korrupsiy-2018-28-ballo-iz-100-i-138-mesto.html>

⁵⁰ Report on the global development 2016. Digital dividends of the World Bank. Retrieved from: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/224721467988878739/pdf/102724-WDR-WDR2016Overview-RUSSIAN-WebRes-Box-394840B-OUO-9.pdf>

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