Korean Case: Role of civil society in the strengthening of public consent
(CICA perspective)

Thank you for giving me the floor, Mr. Tuimebayev, Deputy Chairman of Assembly of People of Kazakhstan.

Currently, my Government is seeking to strengthen cooperation with Eurasian countries through its New Northern Policies. We are committed to laying the foundation for mutually beneficial cooperation with Central Asian countries. I believe that for this purpose, Korea and Kazakhstan have jointly hosted the 12th Cooperation Forum between Korea and Central Asian countries last month in Nur-Sultan. We are certain that our strategy will create a mutually reinforcing effect with the CICA process.

Undoubtedly, CICA has become the genuine locomotive in having the exchange and cooperation for confidence-building in Asia. The leadership of the Republic of Kazakhstan has always shined in the formation and operation of CICA.

I am happy to take this opportunity to share my view on the CICA activities, especially on the role of the civil society in strengthening public consent.

I am of the opinion that it is very meaningful for the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan to organize today’s conference with this wonderful theme.

As well all know, Kazakhstan is a society which consists of 130 ethnic minority groups. For such a multiethnic society, it goes without saying that it needs a firm foundation of social unity and integration for its internal stability and peace. This necessity is not only confined for internal purposes, but for the external too, especially considering that its neighboring countries are the origins of many of its ethnic groups.

Kazakhstan’s policy of national integration through the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is most successful in the recent world history. I find that APK threaded the elements of possible discords and conflicts into the strength of unity and mutual respect.

Isn’t it remarkable how the Korean Diaspora is currently serving as a rainbow bridge connecting Kazakhstan and Korea, after having settled as exemplary citizens
of great Kazakhstan? I believe that other ethnic groups of Kazakhstan are also accomplishing this task. This is what Kazakhstan's policy has achieved.

Allow me to tell you about my personal experience. As the Korean Ambassador, I have naturally met many representatives of the Korean Diaspora. They have always wholeheartedly expressed their profound gratitude to the Kazakh Government and Kazakh people, as well as to the people of other fellow ethnic groups in Kazakhstan.

As a third party observer, together with other members of the diplomatic community in Nur-Sultan, I have become closely familiarized with the way the policy of the APK works and I have personally witnessed its ultimate result: pledged unity and solidarity among its ethnic groups, as I see it from the Korean Diaspora.

As solid fabric is essential to firmly sew a durable tapestry, so is civil society crucial for national development of any country. Without national unity, there will be no stability, which is the basis for national economic and social development.

I have been so impressed with the success of the integration policy of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. As a token of my appreciation for this wonderful policy of APK, I invited the folk music performers of the Tatar and Russian ethnic groups to perform together with the Korean Diaspora group, at our recent National day reception in October.

As today's topic suggests, I would like to share with the Korean case of civil society's role in strengthening public consent. But considering the time limit, I will do it very briefly.

Civil society is generally accepted as something desirable to have, for promoting democracy and achieving a healthy society. It is also considered as an important measuring tool for assessing modernity and social progress. It is well perceived in the modern world that civil society plays an important role in having the function of checks and balances to the works of the government, from the perspective of a non-governmental actor.
Roughly speaking, the role of civil societies, as explained by modern terminology, was not so visible in Korea until full-pledged liberal democracy was achieved in 1987. As Korea achieved rapid industrialization in the past four decades, accompanied by a rapid expansion of the middle class, the attention and interest of the people had become diversified into nearly all areas, including labor welfare, social equality, environmental protection, role of media, political corruption, educational reform, traffic problem, campaign against excessive consumption and so on. The demands and voices of the people were directed towards the pluralism, diversity and respect for different ideas and opinions.

As our government was able to gain more public consent by gradually accommodating such proposals of our people, our society became more tolerant and mature. Listening to the voices of the civil society was one of the most effective ways to strengthening public consent. Occasionally, their voices and demands were reflected in laws or reform measures. But in the course of handling the demands of our civil society, social disruption and turbulence were sometimes unavoidable. It was the cost for us to pay in order to have a more mature society.

Each and every country has a different social environment and is followed by a varying historic background, where its people’s interests and daily concerns naturally differ. Therefore, the focus and function of a civil society of any country should be discussed and evaluated from different perspectives, other than mere comparison among civil societies.

From our experience, I can draw the assumption that the voices of the civil societies of the CICA member-counties will be raised and heard more strongly and frequently as their countries becomes more advanced with economic and social achievements.

Nevertheless, whether the CICA member-counties are developing rapidly or gradually, it is expected for them to eventually get to the stage, where they had better to pay more attention to the expansion of their civil society. At the early stage, the demands of the civil society might seem to be unpractical and bitter from the government point of view. Sometimes such demands will come as challenges. To cope with them – is not an easy job.

I would like to simply point out that member-counties should pay certain attention to their stages of national development where the presence of civil societies gets
stronger and where these civil societies can start playing a constructive role in strengthening the public consent instead of being harmful for social cohesion. That is why I think that it is very relevant and timely that CICA adapted this topic in advance before it becomes acute in societies.

Korea has and, currently, is still going through these processes of social development. It is now generally accepted that the civil society serves as constructive channels in strengthening public consent.

Korea is known as a country which has gone through many dimensions of national development in a rather short period of time in recent history: from economic reconstruction to liberal democracy. We are ready to share our experience in any fields involving civil society with our CICA member-countries.

I would like to close my remarks by briefly mentioning our activities in CICA. Korea has been participating in CICA since 1993, becoming a formal member in 2006. Since then, Korea has become more active in the CICA activities by hosting, as a coordinating country, the expert meetings in the fields of energy security and IT in 2009, and a seminar on e-Government in 2010, while continuing to make a voluntary financial contribution since 2011.

CICA is important for the Korean people who have long suffered from the national division and constantly faced the North Korean nuclear weapon program. No doubt, the Korean peninsula is one of the very places where interaction and confidence-building is definitely needed. We appreciate the support that CICA has extended for the peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.

I wish this event a fruitful result for the benefit of enriching the activities of CICA. Thank you for your attention!