

## Corporate Citizenship of Businesses: Kyrgyz Jarany - a Resource for Implementation of the Kyrgyz Jarany Concept: Living Voices of Business Forum

On November 13, 2024, a business forum was held in Bishkek at the Novotel Hotel, where representatives of the business community, government agencies, public figures and experts discussed the prospects for developing corporate citizenship of businesses in Kyrgyzstan. The idea is simple, but its meaning is deeper and more complex than it may seem at first glance: how can businesses become not just an economic engine, but also a resource for building social cohesion in the Kyrgyzstan's society? How can entrepreneurship serve the ideals of society and contribute to the development of the civil identity Kyrgyz Jarany? This was the first large-scale dialogue on the topic of Kyrgyz Jarany and businesses, which underscores its uniqueness and significance.

The main objective of the forum was to unpack the definition of "Kyrgyz Jarany" for entrepreneurs that it is not just a status or legal affiliation to the state. It is a symbolic image that unites Kyrgyz people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, where every citizen feels an integral part of the country. The business community, according to the forum participants, plays a crucial role in this process - as a role model, as an active participant and as a creator of an environment for the development of public trust. According to Mr. Isken Eshimbekov, Head of the Department of Interethnic Relations of the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sports, and Youth Policy of the Kyrgyz Republic:



*“This is our first meeting with the business community that plays a key role in the development of our society. Without its participation, the Concept will remain at the level of theory.”*



In her opening remarks, expert moderator Chynara Biyalieva identified the purpose of the forum as a platform for discussing the role of businesses in strengthening the identity and stability through the implementation of the Kyrgyz Jarany Concept. The forum is an attempt to create a common space for those who views businesses not only as a source of profit, but also as a tool for sustainable social development. The Forum was held on a key date marking the approval of the “Kyrgyz Jarany” Concept by the Presidential Decree in 2020. The main goal of the forum was to develop a common understanding within the business community of the importance of the Kyrgyz Jarany civic identity development for the stability and development of the country.

Nazgul Aksariev, Deputy Director of the PeaceNexus International Foundation in Kyrgyzstan, noted that businesses, as a part of society, can have a significant impact on social values and even shape them. She stressed that the Foundation, which specializes in peacebuilding, sees the Concept of "Kyrgyz Jarany" as the central focus of its activities. The unity and solidarity inherent in this Concept have become the foundation for a prosperous society, while businesses have become its main resource.



### **Businesses as an important part of responsible civil society**



The panel discussion was opened by Sanjar Tajimatov. "Political parties, like any social institutions, must have a base in society - otherwise they lose their meaning," he began, emphasizing that the real goal of the Kyrgyz Jarany Concept is to create this very social base. *"National identity does not emerge on its own, it needs a social base. If we rely on Marx's ideas, a civic nation cannot be formed without a middle class that unites people by common interests and tasks. Now we have a chance to strengthen Kyrgyzstan by creating a strong middle class that is socially responsible and engaged in public life."* Where the middle class makes up 60-70% of the population, people have a sense of common civic identity, he said. But in our country, only 10% of the country relies on ethnic identity, while most choose a civic identity, where common base is important, not origin. To implement "Kyrgyz Jarany", we need a national bourgeoisie - entrepreneurs who do not just do business, but do it with an understanding of their role in society. He noted that over the past four years there have been many discussions of the Concept with different groups, but business engagement has largely been neglected. *"Now it is time specifically for the business community to think about its role. If businesses participate, the Concept will become the basis for a new social contract. If not, it will remain just beautiful words."*

One of the central issues was the discussion of the ideal image of Kyrgyz Jarany - an entrepreneur who inspires all entrepreneurs to social and civic initiatives.

Tolgonai Baira, designer and founder of the Baira brand, presented an interesting perspective on cultural citizenship, when a business not only sells goods but also embodies the culture and traditions of its country. Her brand of modern clothing stylized with Kyrgyz ethnic motifs has become, according to her, a way to tell the world about Kyrgyzstan and to create a demand for this national style in the international arena.



Importantly, for Baira, Kyrgyz Jarany is someone who combines personal and national interest, who sees how their cause can strengthen the country's image and make citizens proud.

*"What makes my business different is that I promote the cultural aspect of our country so that clothes with the national Kyrgyz flavor become fashionable. Clothes are worn because they are simply beautiful. When I started, a lot of clothes were exported to us. We wore clothes and did not even know that they reflected the ethnic heritage of Italy or Turkey. Now I have reached a point where clothes with Kyrgyz ethnic elements have become stylish. That is why Kyrgyz Jarany is all about taking our interests into account. Not pseudo patriotism, but in the end, you are taking initiative and benefiting only yourself. New social values for the society."*



Another eloquent view was shared by Nazgul Kubakova, Director of the Creative Industries Association. She recalled the importance of personal identity, noting that every Kyrgyzstani abroad is an ambassador of the country and that the creative industry in which her colleagues work is an important component of the national brand. Kubakova observed that businesses should play an active role in shaping civic identity by supporting and developing Kyrgyzstan's cultural values through art and innovation. *"Our association aimed at retaining talented and creative citizens of our country so that they had the opportunity for self-actualization within*

*Kyrgyzstan. Issues have also been raised about how to improve the conditions for business development, and what place Kyrgyzstan can occupy on the world map, what can make it unique. Thus, a creative economy is a global trend in the state development, which is on the agenda of many countries given the rapid development of artificial intelligence and technologies. And precisely the unfolding of this trend will give an advantage to our citizens, especially to migrants. It seems to me that we should not divide us into businessmen and citizens. As we are, in the first place, all citizens of the country."*

### **New business ethics: developing citizenship through responsibility**

During the forum, thoughts have been shared that entrepreneurship is not only a source of income, but also a model of civic responsibility and civic behavior.



Mamasadyk Bakirov, Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, noted that many businessmen already realize their responsibility to society. It is important for entrepreneurs to realize that their duty is not limited to tax payments, but also concerns the formation of a positive image of the country and participation in its development. Bakirov voiced the idea that a “Kyrgyz Jarany” is an entrepreneur who works honestly, pays taxes and provides jobs for the citizens of his country. This entrepreneur views the development of the country and the people as part of his personal and professional mission.



Inessa Ter-Manuellants, founder of the iqkg network of private educational centers, has an interesting experience in developing civic identity. According to some statistics, Kyrgyzstan is in the third place from the bottom in terms of speed-reading norms and reading comprehension. The main objective of Inessa’s courses is to teach children to read quickly and prepare them for school. *"I can say that the adult generation has a well-developed commitment to their country, an awareness of the need to move forward as a whole. However, when observing the youth, I notice that many lack faith in the prospects within the country. This is due to the lack of systemic changes in education and upbringing.*

*It is necessary to change the approach in these areas, starting with the family. Personally, from the first days of living in the country, I started learning Kyrgyz and realized how important it is to update teaching materials, making them interesting for the young generation. For example, "Alippe" turned out to be of little interest to children, so I had to study all available options and start developing a new methodology for teaching Kyrgyz to children".*

As Mirbek Asangariyev, founder of the Bridges and Mountain View hotel chains, reminded us, it is not only the economic success of a business that is important, but also that entrepreneurs should serve as role models for society. He noted that his hotels provide an inclusive environment and use green technology, which in turn underlines the values of respect and caring. M. Asangariyev believes that all entrepreneurs should ask themselves: what value can they create for their people? A sustainable, socially responsible business can become the basis for trust and social stability, which the modern Kyrgyz society lacks. It is important that we discuss these significant issues.



*"At the country level, we face many challenges: the drain of entrepreneurs abroad, problems of trust in the authorities, lack of support to businesses. Successful entrepreneurs should be role models for the society. Businessmen create jobs, products, economic value, but face constant checks and distrust. The government needs to stop harassing businesses and give entrepreneurs more freedom to realize their potential. Entrepreneurship is not just about money. It is about scaling, creating new values and contributing to the society. Only then will our country become attractive not only to the outside world, but also to ourselves. We must build trust in each other and take pride in our achievements."*

The panelists discussed the problems of mistrust in business, bureaucratic barriers, and insufficient support from government agencies. The speakers called for improving the dialogue between the state and entrepreneurs, creating a conducive environment for free and successful businesses. It should be noted that the speakers, in their speeches, repeatedly highlighted the difference between the state and the country. They firmly perceive the state as the authority and state bodies, but not as citizens. The entrepreneurs also stressed the need to reconsider the role of businesses in society. The main message is that businessmen should be perceived as engines of progress, not as people seeking only material gain. It is important to change this public perception of businesses, to make them a part of national progress, where success of entrepreneurs is success of the entire country.

### **The Image of Kyrgyz Jarany: a model for society**

When asked what a portrait of the Kyrgyz Jarany looks like, many participants gave very personal answers. Businessmen see this image through the prism of their professional mission. In Tolgonai Baira's view, Kyrgyz Jarany are not just patriots, but active participants of cultural revival, who are proud of their country, who know their country's traditions and work for its benefit. Tolgonai emphasized that Kyrgyz Jarany is a person who is able to adapt the national traits to the modern times, giving the traditions new meaning and creating demand for them.



Her thoughts were echoed by Bakhtiyar Junushaliev, whose company recycles glass and household waste. Junushaliev sees businesses as a resource for creating a sustainable economy. He noted that a Kyrgyz Jarany is a citizen who appreciates the nature and cares about the ecology of their country. Bakhtiyar strongly believes that people who care about the environment and think about future generations, embody in

themselves the ideas of citizenship laid down in the Concept of Kyrgyz Jarany, but today entrepreneurs need support. *"This is not the first time we have talked about it, but the key task remains to build a dialogue between the state and citizens. We do not need rigid frameworks or permanent restrictions. Just create a favorable environment for businesses,*

*and we will do the rest ourselves. Entrepreneurs are ready to take responsibility, ready to develop themselves and to help the country, but they need a conducive environment and support.”*

### **The Civic mission of businesses: towards a new social contract**

The final words of the forum reminded the participants of the historical significance of entrepreneurship and how important it is to change the perception of businesses in the society. Mirbek Asangariyev pointed out that the role of businesses in today's Kyrgyzstan is not limited to personal enrichment and that entrepreneurs are those who can lead the country to a bright future. He expressed an idea that businessmen should be role models for young people, inspiring them to work, to create and to believe in their own strengths.

The forum ended with a call to unite the efforts of the government, businesses, and citizens to implement a common idea of civic identity, which will be the key to stability and development. Zaure Sydykova, consultant-facilitator expressed her hope that the Kyrgyz Jarany Concept will become a symbol for the society, uniting the Kyrgyz people around the idea of the common good. *"Each of us should be not just a citizen, but an active participant in shaping a better future for Kyrgyzstan.*



*The logo of the Kyrgyz Jarany Concept reflects its essence: despite the diversity of identities - religious, ethnic, cultural - we are united by a common circle. Kyrgyz Jarany is a symbol of our unity, our common commitment to the development of the country, love for our Homeland, and realization of our obligations to it. The slogan of the Concept "Unity begins with my deeds" reminds us that each of us is an active participant in the process. We should not expect someone to come and do everything for us. We need to change ourselves, to be an example for others, to inspire others and lead by example. Together we can achieve a lot!"*

The Forum served not only as a platform for discussions, but also presented an opportunity to ascertain that businesses in Kyrgyzstan are capable of becoming a force that will propel the country forward, building a society based on trust, mutual respect, and responsibility. The Forum has become a unique platform for interaction between businesses and government. It showed that successful implementation of the Kyrgyz Jarany Concept is impossible without active involvement of each business representative. It is critical to continue work on the popularization of the idea of civic identity among the business community and its integration into the economic and social processes of the country.

## Key Messages of the Business Forum

- Businesses are the main driver of change. Through their initiatives, they not only create jobs, supply the market with quality goods and services, but also shape social and civic values.
- Social responsibility of businesses: they are the foundation of corporate culture. Businesses actively participate in the implementation of projects and initiatives aimed at developing civic identity.
- In order to create a positive image of entrepreneurs, it is important to change the public perception of businesses. Entrepreneurs should be recognized as heroes of our time, actively influencing the development of society.
- The development of the "Made in Kyrgyzstan" brand, where the key is the quality of products, strengthens the unity and improves the country's image in the international arena.
- Educational projects and engagement of young people are the key to the long-term success of the Concept.
- Creating a conducive environment for entrepreneurs fosters their growth and development, which in turn affects the overall economic growth, sustainability, and social cohesion in the country.
- Necessity of dialogue: the forum supports open platforms for discussing problems and developing solutions for the actors.