

THE ROLE OF LEGAL CULTURE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

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Abstract: This thesis provides a scientific-theoretical analysis of the role and significance of legal culture in the process of developing civil society. Legal culture is examined as an important factor ensuring that citizens know the laws, treat them with respect, understand their own rights and obligations, and actively participate in social-legal relations. It also reveals the significance of raising the legal awareness of the population, ensuring the rule of law, and enhancing civic activity for the development of civil society institutions.

Keywords: civil society, legal culture, legal awareness, rule of law, civic activity, human rights, democratic values, legal education.

Civil society is one of the important constituent elements of a democratic rule-of-law state, in which relations among the individual, society, and the state are formed on the basis of the principles of legal equality, mutual responsibility, and the rule of law. The sustainable development of such a society depends not only on the existence of a well-developed legislative system, but also directly on the degree to which citizens comprehend these laws and their culture of adherence to them.

Legal culture is not limited merely to a person's knowledge of their rights and obligations. It also encompasses respect for law, lawful conduct, legal responsibility, recognition of the rights and freedoms of other persons, and active participation in social life through lawful means. From this standpoint, developing legal culture constitutes an important social-legal condition for shaping civil society.

The essence of civil society is determined by citizens' activity in social life, their expression and defense of their interests through lawful means, and their participation in the activities of various non-governmental non-profit organizations, public associations, and other civil society institutions. The effectiveness of such activity, in turn, directly depends on the population's level of legal knowledge and legal awareness.

The first important function of legal culture is to ensure that citizens comprehend their rights and obligations. A citizen who knows their rights is able to give a legal assessment of the decisions and actions of state bodies and officials, and to defend their interests through lawful means. At the same time, legal culture enables a citizen to understand not only their rights but also the obligations established in the Constitution and legislation.

The second aspect is the role of legal culture in ensuring the rule of law. The rule of law is ensured not only by the conformity of state bodies' activities with the law, but also by the conscious observance of laws by members of society. The formation of respect for law and legal responsibility among citizens serves to prevent offenses, strengthen social stability, and establish legal order in society.

The third aspect is enhancing civic activity. A citizen with a high level of legal culture is not indifferent to the processes occurring in society. Such a citizen strives to actively participate, within the

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framework of the law, in public discussions, citizens' appeals, and local and other social initiatives. As a result, mechanisms of public oversight over state governance and social responsibility develop within society.

The fourth aspect is the protection of human rights and freedoms. One of the main criteria of civil society is the practical guarantee of individual rights and freedoms. A citizen must not only know their own rights but must also respect the rights of others. For this reason, legal culture manifests itself as a factor serving to ensure a balance between personal interests and public interests.

Legal education and upbringing hold special significance in the development of legal culture. Legal education should not be limited to the teaching of legal disciplines in educational institutions alone, but should be conducted in forms that are understandable and practical for various segments of the population. In particular, raising the legal literacy of young people and shaping in them respect for the law and civic responsibility are of great importance for the future development of civil society.

In today's digital society, developing new forms of legal culture is also an urgent matter. Citizens' use of electronic government services, submission of electronic appeals to state bodies, use of open data, and ability to defend their rights in legal relations within the internet space are becoming integral components of modern legal culture. Furthermore, for the development of civil society it is necessary to strengthen legal dialogue between state bodies and citizens. Effectively reviewing citizens' appeals, taking public opinion into account, and expanding the population's participation in the discussion of normative-legal documents are among the practical manifestations of legal culture.

In sum, civil society and legal culture are social-legal phenomena that are intrinsically interconnected. For the sustainable development of civil society, it is necessary — alongside the existence of democratic institutions — to shape a body of citizens who understand the law, know their rights and obligations, treat the law with respect, and actively participate in social life. By raising legal culture, citizens' legal awareness and social activity increase, the rule of law is strengthened, and opportunities for using mechanisms to protect human rights are expanded. For this reason, it is advisable to regard the development of legal culture not as an auxiliary direction in the formation of civil society, but as one of its essential institutional and social-legal foundations.

From the standpoint of developing civil society, particular attention should be paid to the following directions:

- Expanding modern and interactive mechanisms for raising the legal literacy of the population;
- Developing the legal awareness and civic activity of young people;
- Expanding opportunities for citizens' lawful participation in state governance and public discussions;
- Ensuring the openness of legal information and its delivery to the population in an understandable form;
- Developing openness, accountability, and mechanisms of dialogue with the public in the activities of state bodies;
- Strengthening citizens' skills in using lawful mechanisms to protect their own rights. Thus, the elevation of legal culture strengthens citizens' responsible participation in the life of the state and society, and creates the social-legal environment necessary for forming an active civil society grounded in the rule of law.

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