

Institutional Renewal of Youth Policy in Uzbekistan: The Transition from The Komsomol To the Youth Union of Uzbekistan

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Abstract

This article examines the substantive renewal of youth policy in Uzbekistan on the eve of independence and during the early years of independence, the process of abandoning the Soviet ideological system, and the political, legal, organizational, and social factors that shaped the transition from the Komsomol structure to the Youth Union of Uzbekistan. The study analyzes the ideologically dependent nature of youth policy in the late Soviet period, the sharp transformation of the tasks facing youth organizations after the events of August 1991, the reform initiatives advanced by the leadership and regional branches of the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan, the resolutions of extraordinary plenums and congresses, as well as the programmatic foundations of the new youth organization. The article interprets social protection of youth, support for gifted young people, open dialogue with youth, international cooperation, and organizational independence as new directions in youth policy during the transitional period. It concludes that the emergence of youth policy in Uzbekistan as an independent direction of state policy was the product of historical necessity.

Keywords: Youth policy, Komsomol, Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan, Youth Union of Uzbekistan, independence, institutional transformation, social protection, youth organizations, historical process, political renewal.

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1. Introduction

The stable socio-economic development of any developing state is inconceivable without the participation of an intellectually capable, socially responsible, and active younger generation. In this sense, the youth question should not be viewed as a secondary dimension of public policy, but rather as a strategic factor determining the long-term trajectory of society's development. In Uzbekistan as well, the priority status of youth policy has been repeatedly emphasized, and young people are regarded as a decisive force in the future of the state and society. Historical experience further shows that societies that fail to pay sufficient attention to the

interests of the rising generation are more vulnerable to social instability and systemic tension [1, 2]. For this reason, the study of youth policy as a historical process is significant not only for reconstructing the history of organizations, but also for revealing an important layer of relations between state and society.

During the Soviet period, youth policy was constructed within the framework of Marxist-Leninist ideology, in which ideological loyalty, rather than the authentic articulation of youth interests, occupied a central place. Although official rhetoric emphasized the protection and support of young people, in practice their rights and needs were subordinated to political objectives. The All-

Union Leninist Communist Youth League (Komsomol) was formally presented as a structure representing the interests of youth, but in reality it functioned as an ideological and political instrument of the Communist Party; youth initiative and social activism were measured primarily through the prism of party interests. Consequently, on the eve of independence, the removal of youth policy from ideological dependence and its reorientation toward national interests, social protection, and the real needs of young people became a historical necessity [3, 4].

The events of 1991 sharply intensified this necessity. The political crisis of August cast doubt on the future of all ideological institutions within the former Soviet space, including the Komsomol. Within the leadership and lower structures of the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan, the central question was no longer how to preserve the old organizational framework, but how to create a new structure capable of genuinely defending youth interests, politically independent in character, and responsive to national needs. This historical turning point may therefore be regarded as the starting point in the formation of an independent youth policy in Uzbekistan [5, 6].

2. Methods

The methodological foundation of the study is based on the principles of historicism, objectivity, systematic analysis, and the problem-chronological approach. The sequence of events is interpreted in connection with the internal logic of political processes, while the activity of youth organizations is examined not merely as a matter of organizational change, but as a broader ideological, social, and institutional transformation. Press materials, resolutions of plenums and congresses, appeals, speeches by leaders, scholarly works, and dissertation studies were comparatively analyzed in order to identify both their convergences and divergences. In addition, the method of institutional analysis was employed to trace the dynamics through which the Komsomol evolved from a political auxiliary mechanism into a structure increasingly oriented toward the protection of youth interests.

3. Results

The Crisis of Soviet Youth Policy and the Need for Renewal. In the Soviet period, youth policy was subordinated to a unified ideological platform, and young people were treated not as an autonomous social

group, but as a means for implementing party objectives. Although the Komsomol was de jure a youth organization, de facto it became a political support mechanism of the Communist Party, which deepened the contradiction between the actual needs and interests of young people and the practical activity of the organization. At a time when, in a number of developed countries during the 1960s and 1970s, youth policy was gradually separating into an independent policy field, the totalitarian model of governance in the USSR, combined with low living standards, delayed recognition of youth culture and youth interests as a distinct object of public administration. Only in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet years did youth movements begin to emerge that were more conscious of their own rights and social role [2-4].

In the conditions of Uzbekistan, too, it became evident by 1991 that the existing system was no longer capable of resolving youth-related problems in the old manner. Statistical indicators demonstrate the considerable demographic weight of youth in the republic: in 1991, the population of Uzbekistan amounted to 20,962,909, while the 15-19 age cohort numbered 5,837,485, representing 27.85 percent of the total population. Other contemporary sources noted that children, adolescents, and persons under the age of 25 accounted for more than 60 percent of the population. Thus, on the eve of independence, the youth issue naturally became one of the central themes of state policy, both quantitatively and in terms of its socio-political significance [4].

The August 1991 Events and the Shift in the Political Position of the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan. The attempted coup of 19-21 August 1991 had a direct impact on the activity of the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan, just as it did on all socio-political institutions in the former Soviet space. At the meeting of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the organization on 27 August, the new political situation in the country was discussed, and Uzbekistan's firm course toward independence was clearly reflected. These materials indicate that the republic was moving away from the old form of relations with the center and that the Komsomol itself was beginning to be viewed not as a routine link in the all-Union political system, but as an organization seeking an independent path [5].

A notable ideological shift also appeared in the public statements of the organization's leaders. In particular, the secretary of the organization, Shukhrat Qosimov, described the August events as a rupture in the faith of

many committed people and argued that the Komsomol needed to change not only its name, but its substance as well. In his view, it should henceforth serve to unite young people, defend their interests, and free itself from party dependence, even if it did not withdraw entirely from public and political life. Such assessments expressed the need to transform the Komsomol from a communist political auxiliary mechanism into a social institution representing the interests of youth [6].

Changes at the All-Union Level and Uzbekistan's Position. On 4 September 1991, a plenum of the Central Committee of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League raised the question of reorganizing the structure into a federation of republican and other youth organizations. This plenum demonstrated that the centralized Soviet youth system was disintegrating and that there was an emerging need to move toward a more federative and relatively autonomous model of governance. At the lower levels, including the Tashkent City Komsomol Committee and the Komsomol committee of Tashkent State University, even bolder proposals were advanced: to transform the organization into a Democratic Youth Union, to replace narrow decision-making practices with broad-based discussion, and to bring youth themselves into the center of change as active subjects rather than passive recipients [7, 8].

At this stage, the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan was not confined to a simple organizational renaming. Even under the difficult conditions of transition, it continued to support talented youth, introduce changes to regulations concerning youth prizes in literature and the arts, and encourage initiatives aimed at preserving the social and cultural dimensions of work with youth. This demonstrates that even while the old ideological shell of the Komsomol was weakening, the social, educational, and moral dimensions of youth work did not come to a complete halt [7, 8].

The 12 September Plenum and the Steps toward the Youth Union of Uzbekistan. On 12 September 1991, the Third Joint Plenum of the Central Committee of the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan and the Republican Komsomol Control Commission took place. It considered the current state of the republican Komsomol, the election of delegates to the extraordinary all-Union congress, and the convocation of the extraordinary Twenty-Fifth Congress of the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan. The historical importance of this plenum lies in the fact that it openly demonstrated the organization's attempt to separate itself

from the center and adapt to new national political realities and youth interests. At this meeting, the idea was formulated of creating a new structure in place of the old organization – one that would not be subordinate to any party and in which all youth organizations could participate voluntarily [9-11].

The agenda of the plenum also preserved attention to research and initiatives serving science, the economy, and social development. At the same time, the leadership of the organization emphasized that in the context of transition to a market economy, unemployment among youth was growing and that social protection of young people should become one of the principal tasks of the new organization. These ideas clearly indicate that youth policy was beginning to move away from ideological upbringing toward the principles of social protection and practical assistance [10, 11].

The resolutions of the Third Joint Plenum put forward the proposal to rename the organization the Youth Union of Uzbekistan, to regard the political role of the all-Union structure as exhausted, and to establish new mechanisms of cooperation on a federative basis. At the same time, an appeal was adopted not to dismantle the existing Komsomol structures precipitously by administrative means before the congress. This reveals a preference not for sudden collapse, but for a managed transformation. The unfolding events made it unmistakably clear that there was a pressing need for a new organization capable of defending youth interests and social protection independently of any party ideology [9-11].

The New Substance of Work with Youth in the Transitional Period. Alongside institutional restructuring, significant changes also occurred in the substance of work with youth. Efforts aimed at restoring national historical memory, revisiting forgotten pages of the past, and fostering a more balanced understanding of national historical figures reflected an emerging reorientation of youth work toward questions of national self-awareness. On the international level, the meeting between the leadership of the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan and representatives of the Youth Union of Afghanistan on 19 September 1991 marked a new stage in youth cooperation. These developments indicate that youth policy was no longer defined exclusively by internal ideological upbringing, but was increasingly enriched by the principles of national self-recognition and international openness [12].

Support for gifted youth also remained on the agenda. In

September 1991, decisions were taken regarding the functioning of a foundation for supporting talented young people named after Ulugh Beg, and scholarships and awards for school pupils and students were envisaged. Such measures reveal that the emerging youth policy increasingly combined institutional reform with practical support mechanisms for educational and intellectual advancement [13].

At the same time, relations between the youth press and the organization became more openly critical. Demands intensified for greater openness, more honest coverage of social change, and direct engagement with the concerns of ordinary young people. The introduction of special working groups and hotlines through which young people could receive answers to their questions signaled a shift toward the principles of transparency and direct communication. Likewise, debates about renaming youth publications, support for vulnerable and disabled youth, employment assistance for unemployed youth, and help for those in need of medical treatment reflected the gradual formation of the central priorities of the new youth policy [14].

The Extraordinary Twenty-Second Congress of the All-Union Komsomol and the Dissolution of the Old System. On 27 September 1991, the Extraordinary Twenty-Second Congress of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League opened in Moscow. Sixty-seven delegates from Uzbekistan participated, and regardless of the specific decisions that would be adopted, it had already become practically inevitable that the Komsomol of Uzbekistan, as a federative subject, would withdraw from the all-Union structure. The organizational and symbolic atmosphere of the congress itself differed sharply from traditional Soviet ritual practices: the customary ideological attributes had largely disappeared, while discussions revolved around market relations, organizational property, legal succession, and the possibility of independent youth structures [15, 16].

During the congress, questions of property, legal succession, and the future of the central apparatus became among the most controversial issues. In the end, it was officially announced that the All-Union Komsomol had ceased its activity and that its central organs were to be dissolved. The adopted declaration and related resolutions signaled the political end of the Soviet youth organizational system and the creation of a new legal and political framework for the emergence of post-Soviet youth organizations [17].

The Legal Formalization of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan. On 4 October 1991, the extraordinary Twenty-Fifth Congress of the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan was convened. On the eve of the congress, young people expressed their views on the membership principles and lines of activity of the future organization, arguing that it should become a structure that provided real assistance and granted greater economic and organizational autonomy to lower-level units. This indicates that the new organization did not emerge solely as a top-down construction, but also corresponded to the needs and moods present in the lower branches [18].

The main issues discussed at the congress concerned the new name of the organization, its movement program, and its Charter. It was precisely at this congress that the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan was legally transformed into the Youth Union of Uzbekistan. Subsequent resolutions consolidated the powers of elected bodies and established the organizational and legal foundations of the new structure. In this way, youth policy in Uzbekistan entered a new institutional phase, breaking with Soviet ideological templates and adapting itself to the logic of national state development [18].

4. Discussion

The materials examined in this study demonstrate that the transformation of youth policy in Uzbekistan in 1991 was not an accidental development nor a simple matter of changing the name of an organization. On the contrary, its roots lay, on the one hand, in the internal crisis of Soviet youth policy and, on the other hand, in the intensification of political contradictions on the eve of independence and in the broader demand for social renewal. Because the Komsomol had long functioned as an instrument of ideological mobilization, it proved increasingly incapable of adapting to the genuine social, economic, and cultural needs of young people. During the transitional period, issues such as social protection, unemployment, education, support for gifted youth, and open dialogue came to the forefront. This substantive shift constituted one of the most important turning points in the history of youth policy in Uzbekistan [2-4, 10, 11].

At the same time, the Uzbek experience differed in important respects from many transformations in the broader post-Soviet space. First, rather than immediately abolishing the Komsomol, the Uzbek case was characterized by attempts to renew it step by step through plenums, congresses, appeals, and internal discussion.

Second, political change unfolded in parallel with continuing initiatives in social support, science, culture, education, media, and historical memory. Third, the new organization advanced the principles of ideological neutrality, voluntary membership, and service to the real interests of youth. These features laid the groundwork for the subsequent development of youth policy as an independent area of state policy [9-18].

Another important feature of this historical process was that youth themselves no longer remained merely passive objects waiting for instructions from higher bodies. Opinions expressed in the press, proposals advanced in local branches for a new organizational model, demands for new forms of work with youth, hotlines, and public discussion all testify to the growing political subjectivity of youth. Thus, the transformation of 1991 was not only an exchange of organizations, but also a restructuring of the relationship between youth, the state, and society [14, 18].

5. Conclusion

The renewal of youth policy in Uzbekistan on the eve of independence and in the early independence period was a complex but consistent historical process. The Komsomol, which had operated under conditions of ideological dependence during the Soviet period, lost its former substance under the impact of the political events of 1991. The August crisis, the September plenums, the extraordinary congress of the All-Union Komsomol, and the extraordinary Twenty-Fifth Congress of the Leninist Communist Youth League of Uzbekistan held on 4 October provided the political and legal framework for reorganizing youth policy on fundamentally new foundations [5-11, 17, 18].

The principal content of this new stage was defined by the rejection of party-ideological subordination and a turn toward the protection of youth interests, social assistance, employment, support for talented young people, the restoration of national historical memory, and the expansion of international cooperation. In this sense, the emergence of the Youth Union of Uzbekistan was not merely an organizational replacement, but a historical institutional renewal that elevated youth policy to the level of an independent direction of state policy.

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