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Bridging Scholarship and Practice in International Law: The Establishment and Prospects of the Kazakhstan Branch of the International Law Association

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between international legal scholarship and practice in Kazakhstan and the institutional significance of establishing the Kazakhstan Branch of the International Law Association (ILA) in 2026. It analyses the role of international law associations in connecting academic research with governmental activity and professional legal practice, as well as the ILA's contribution to the development of international law. The study demonstrates that Kazakhstan possesses substantial academic and professional capacity in international law, while institutional links between scholars, governmental authorities, and practising lawyers remain insufficiently sustainable. Against this background, the Kazakhstan Branch is examined as a potential platform for connecting existing professional communities rather than replacing existing institutions. Particular attention is given to institutional sustainability, academic independence, and the development of cooperation within Central Asia.

Keywords: international law; International Law Association (ILA); Kazakhstan Branch; scholarship and practice; international legal expertise; institutional development; academic independence; Central Asia; professional networks.

Халықаралық құқық саласындағы зерттеулер мен практиканы ұштастыру: Халықаралық құқық қауымдастығының Қазақстандағы бөлімшесін құру және оның болашағы

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Аңдатпа

Мақала Қазақстандағы халықаралық құқық ғылымы мен практикасының өзара байланысын және 2026 жылы Халықаралық құқық қауымдастығының (ILA) Қазақстандық бөлімшесінің құрылуының институционалдық маңызын зерттейді. Авторлар ILA-ның халықаралық құқықтың дамуына қосқан үлесін және халықаралық құқық қауымдастықтарының ғылыми білім мен құқық қолдану практикасы арасындағы байланысты қамтамасыз етудегі рөлін талдайды. Қазақстандағы халықаралық құқықтың академиялық және мемлекеттік инфрақұрылымын зерделеу оның елеулі әлеуетке ие болғанымен, ғылыми орта, мемлекеттік органдар және заңгерлік практика арасындағы тұрақты кәсіби байланыстардың жеткіліксіз екенін көрсетеді. Осы тұрғыда Қазақстандық бөлімше қолданыстағы институттарды алмастырмай, оларды байланыстыратын кәсіби платформа ретінде қарастырылады. Мақалада бөлімшенің тұрақтылығы, академиялық тәуелсіздігі және Орталық Азиядағы ынтымақтастықты дамыту перспективалары айқындалады.

Түйін сөздер: халықаралық құқық; ILA; Қазақстандық бөлімше; халықаралық құқық ғылымы; құқық қолдану практикасы; институционалдық даму; Орталық Азия.

Соединяя исследования и практику в международном праве: создание и перспективы Казахстанского отделения Ассоциации международного права

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Аннотация

Статья посвящена исследованию взаимодействия науки и практики международного права в Казахстане и институционального значения создания в 2026 году Казахстанского отделения Ассоциации международного права (ILA). Авторы анализируют роль международно-правовых ассоциаций в обеспечении связи между научными исследованиями, государственной деятельностью и юридической практикой, а также вклад ILA в развитие международного права. Исследование институциональной инфраструктуры международного права в Казахстане показывает наличие значительного академического и профессионального потенциала при недостаточной устойчивости связей между соответствующими профессиональными сообществами. В этой связи Казахстанское отделение рассматривается как потенциальная платформа для объединения научного сообщества, государственных органов и практикующих юристов. Особое внимание уделяется вопросам институциональной устойчивости, академической независимости и развитию сотрудничества в Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова: международное право; ILA; Казахстанское отделение; наука и практика; международно-правовая экспертиза; институциональное развитие; Центральная Азия.

Introduction

Over recent decades, the significance of international law for Kazakhstan has increased substantially. The State's participation in international treaties, the development of international economic relations, engagement with international organisations, participation in international mechanisms for the protection of human rights and the settlement of disputes, as well as the increasingly complex relationship between international and domestic law, have generated a sustained demand for specialised expertise in international law. International law is progressively ceasing to be a subject confined to academic inquiry and is becoming an important component of public administration, judicial practice, legislative activity, and professional legal practice.

At the same time, the relationship between the academic study of international law and its practical application has itself become increasingly complex. Academic research can do more than explain existing rules: it may contribute to their identification, systematisation, and progressive development. Practice, in turn, provides material against which doctrinal approaches can be tested and from which new research questions may emerge. Yet interaction among scholars, public authorities, and practising lawyers does not arise automatically. These professional communities operate according to different institutional logics, are oriented towards different time horizons, and have different expectations regarding the nature and function of legal knowledge. This creates a need for institutional mechanisms capable of facilitating sustained knowledge exchange and of connecting academic research with practical needs.

International law associations have traditionally performed precisely this intermediary function. Among them, a particularly important place is occupied by the International Law Association (ILA), founded in 1873. The history of the ILA demonstrates that professional

associations can serve not merely as forums for scholarly debate, but also as institutions connecting academic knowledge, governmental practice, and the development of international law. Reports, resolutions, and draft instruments prepared by ILA committees have been drawn upon by the United Nations (UN), the International Law Commission (ILC), international courts, and States in the development and interpretation of international law. The work of the ILA thus illustrates the capacity of professional associations to create a distinctive space in which scholarly ideas acquire practical significance, while practical problems become subjects of collective scholarly reflection.

For Kazakhstan, this issue is of particular relevance. The country possesses a developed yet fragmented international law infrastructure, comprising universities, academic journals, governmental units dealing with international legal matters, and a number of professional associations. An important example of the institutionalisation of interaction between the academic community and the State is the International-Legal Council under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (MFA). Its activities have demonstrated the practical value of drawing upon academic expertise in the formulation of governmental positions on questions of international law. At the same time, the existing mechanisms have not yet produced a permanent, inclusive, and sustainable professional network bringing together scholars, governmental experts, practising lawyers, international organisations, and early-career professionals.

It is against this background that the establishment of the Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA in 2026 assumes particular significance. Founded by representatives of academia, public authorities, international organisations, and legal practice, and subsequently approved by the ILA at its 82nd Biennial Conference in Vienna (International Law Association, 2026), the Branch creates a new institutional opportunity to foster sustained interaction among the different professional communities engaged in the study and application of international law.

This article addresses three principal questions. First, what functions can international law associations perform in facilitating interaction between scholarship and practice? Secondly, to what extent does the existing institutional infrastructure of international law in Kazakhstan facilitate such interaction, and what gaps remain? Thirdly, how can the Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA contribute to addressing these limitations, and what conditions will determine the effectiveness of its activities?

Materials and Methods

The study draws on primary and secondary sources. Primary materials include publicly available documents of the ILA, including materials concerning its branches, committees, reports, and activities; relevant UN and ILC documents; and national legislation and institutional materials concerning international law in Kazakhstan. The analysis also uses documents and publicly available information relating to the establishment, organisational structure, membership, and proposed activities of the Kazakhstan Branch. Secondary materials comprise academic books, journal articles, and institutional publications addressing the role of international law associations, the development of international legal scholarship, and the scholarship-practice nexus.

The study employs a qualitative doctrinal and institutional approach. Doctrinal analysis is used to examine the contribution of international law associations to the development and dissemination of international legal knowledge, while institutional analysis is applied to map Kazakhstan's international law infrastructure, including universities, research institutions, governmental bodies, academic journals, and professional associations. A comparative perspective is used to consider the ILA's institutional experience and the emerging regional dimension of international legal scholarship in Central Asia. The analysis focuses particularly on institutional sustainability, active membership, academic independence, engagement with governmental and professional communities, and regional cooperation as key conditions for the Kazakhstan Branch to function effectively as a bridge between international legal scholarship and practice.

Results and discussion

I. The International Law Association as a Forum for Scholarship and Practice

International law associations are necessary, above all, as institutional mechanisms that connect the production of academic knowledge with the practice of international law. Unlike

individual scholarly work, the activities of such associations make it possible to bring together the perspectives of researchers, practising lawyers, governmental advisers, and other specialists within a collective expert process. It is precisely this capacity for **collective scholarship** that gives their work particular significance: while the outputs of such associations are not sources of law in the formal sense, they may contribute to the identification, systematisation, and development of existing rules of international law. In this respect, the work of the ILA is of particular interest (see, e.g., the ILC's reliance on the ILA Committee on the Procedure of International Courts and Tribunals) (UN Doc A/72/10, 2017), as its committees and working groups have, over several decades, developed doctrinal positions and draft instruments that have subsequently been used in processes of codification, in the interpretation of rules of international law, and in judicial practice.

Founded in Brussels in 1873, the ILA is a global platform for the study, clarification, and development of public and private international law, as well as for promoting international understanding and respect for international legal norms. As of 2026, the Association comprises **68 branches and 5,333 members**, spanning all continents and representing a broad range of national and regional professional communities in international law [1].

The ILA holds consultative status with the UN, a number of UN specialised agencies, and UNIDROIT, thereby enabling it to participate directly in processes of international law-making (Torsten Stein, 2019). Throughout its history, the ILA has made a significant contribution to the development of international law: reports, resolutions, draft conventions, and model instruments prepared by its committees have repeatedly been used by the UN and other international bodies in the preparation of international legal instruments, and have also been cited by the highest courts of various States (Torsten Stein, 2019). The influence of the ILA can be traced in areas including State immunity, international watercourses and groundwater, transboundary environmental law, the law of the sea, diplomatic and territorial asylum, the recognition and enforcement of foreign judgments, and sustainable development (Torsten Stein, 2019). ILA committee and research group materials have also been cited repeatedly in the annual reports of the ILC and used in the preparation of draft articles, draft principles, guidelines, and other instruments addressing such matters as State responsibility, climate change and sea-level rise, the protection of the environment in relation to armed conflicts, water resources, human rights, State succession, and proceedings before international courts and tribunals (Angelika Kligos and Riley Garrison, 2021). In particular, the ILA's report on **due diligence** was used in the ILC's commentaries to the Draft Principles on Protection of the Environment in Relation to Armed Conflicts, while the work of the ILA Committee on International Courts and Tribunals contributed to the inclusion of the topic of evidence before international courts and tribunals in the ILC's long-term programme of work (Angelika Kligos and Riley Garrison, 2021).

Although ILA resolutions and reports are not, in themselves, legally binding, they may perform an evidentiary and systematising function in determining the content of existing rules of international law. In this respect, the collective work of an association can overcome some of the limitations inherent in individual scholarship: a considered position developed collectively by an international community of specialists, based on an analysis of State practice, judicial decisions, and other relevant materials, may acquire considerable authority as part of the *teachings of the most highly qualified publicists* [2] [3] [4]. The outputs of the ILA have been relied upon by national and international courts as authoritative doctrinal materials in addressing questions relating, inter alia, to international rivers, jurisdiction, transboundary disputes, arbitration, and other areas of international law.

[1] International Law Association, 'Branches' <https://www.ila-hq.org/en_GB/branches> accessed 7 September 2026

[2] International Law Commission, *Report of the International Law Commission: Seventy-First Session (29 April–7 June and 8 July–9 August 2019)*, UN GAOR, 74th sess, Supp No 10, UN Doc A/74/10 (2019) p. 173

[3] International Law Commission, Identification of customary international law: Ways and means for making the evidence of customary international law more readily available, Memorandum by the Secretariat, 12 January 2018, U.N. Doc. A/CN.4/710, para72 and 73

[4] Paragraph (5) of the commentary to draft conclusion 14, Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventy-first Session, Supplement No. 10 (A/71/10), para 63

Finally, the institutional model of the ILA is itself significant for understanding its practical role. Historically, the ILA developed as a more open and inclusive forum than the comparatively closed model of the *Institut de Droit International* (Abrams, I., 1957; Chen, X., 2023). The participation not only of academic lawyers, but also of practitioners, governmental advisers, and specialists from diverse professional fields has enabled international legal questions to be examined with due regard to their practical application. The value of an international law association therefore lies not simply in creating another forum for academic discussion. Its institutional function is to create an intermediary space between **scholarship and practice**, where scholarly ideas can be tested against practice, practical problems can be conceptualised by the academic community, and approaches developed through collective work can subsequently be utilised by States, courts, and international organisations. It is precisely this function that makes the work of the ILA particularly significant for States and regions where professional communities in international law are still undergoing institutional development.

II. International Law Scholarship and Practice in Kazakhstan

Research and practice in international law in Kazakhstan are supported by a range of academic, governmental, and professional institutions. At the academic level, international law is taught as a specialised field at a number of higher education institutions across the country. Bachelor's and master's degree programmes in International Law are offered, inter alia, by Abai University (Almaty), Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (Almaty), KIMEP University (Almaty), Auezov University (Shymkent), Eurasian National University (ENU) (Astana), Kazakh Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages (Almaty), Kunaev University (Almaty), Maqsut Narikbayev University (MNU) (Astana), Turan-Astana University (Astana), and University of International Business (Almaty). The academic infrastructure, however, extends beyond teaching. Research in international law is also conducted within specialised academic units, including the Research School for Public and Private International Law at MNU [5]. Several academic journals also provide platforms for disseminating research in international law. These include the *Central Asia Yearbook on International Law* [6], edited by Professor Sergey Sayapin of KIMEP University; the *Eurasian Journal of International Law* [7], published by ENU; and the *Bulletin of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. International Relations and International Law Series*, [8], published by Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. Nevertheless, the existence of specialised university programmes, a dedicated research centre, and several independent publishing platforms does not, in itself, create a permanent professional network bringing together international law scholars from different institutions.

The academic community can also serve as an important source of expertise for the State. This is particularly significant given the increasing complexity of the international legal issues confronting Kazakhstan, including the interpretation and application of international treaties, international dispute settlement, human rights, international economic relations, and the interaction between domestic and international law. Effective engagement of academic expertise in these areas, however, requires institutional mechanisms capable of facilitating regular interaction between researchers and governmental institutions. International practice demonstrates that formal, state-convened advisory councils – similar to Netherlands' Advisory Committee on Issues of Public International Law [9] and the U.S. State Department's Advisory Committee on International Law (US Department of State?

[5] MNU Research School for Public and Private International Law, https://mnu.kz/en/scientific-school/the-research-school-for-public-and-private-international-law/

[6] Central Asia Yearbook on International Law, https://brill.com/display/title/76386?srsltid=AfmBOoqYyxdnSrStitf-GjQM6UwZo8vBk7KgcaaHEUwXQoeIdj6QPJMV

[7] Eurasian Journal of International Law, *https://eajil.enu.kz/index.php/main/index*

[8] Bulletin of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. International Relations and International Law Series, https://bulletin-ir-law.kaznu.kz/index.php/1-mo/ru

[9] Advisory Committee on Public International Law (CAVV), 'About the CAVV' https://www.adviescommissievolkenrecht.nl/english accessed 8 September 2026

2024) – are critical for translating independent legal analysis into actionable foreign policy and treaty compliance strategies.

At the level of State practice, the MFA plays a central role in shaping and implementing Kazakhstan's international legal policy. Its Department of International Law is the principal specialised governmental unit responsible for international legal matters. In 2024, the International-Legal Council was established under the MFA as a consultative and advisory forum. Among other functions, the Council was intended to contribute to the formulation of Kazakhstan's positions on current issues and challenges of international law; facilitate the exchange of information between the MFA and the academic and expert community concerning developments in international law; and promote education and professional activities in the field of international law. The composition of the Council was particularly significant from the perspective of bringing together representatives of the State and academia: of its 20 members, nine represented governmental bodies, while eleven were specialists from Kazakhstani universities.

The Council's activities were not merely consultative but also substantive in nature. During the period of its operation, the academic and expert community, working within the Council, prepared specialised reports on a number of topical issues of international law. These included a Special Report on the ILC's Draft Conclusions on 'Subsequent Agreements and Subsequent Practice in Relation to the Interpretation of Treaties'; a Special Report on the ILC's Draft Articles on 'Immunity of State Officials from Foreign Criminal Jurisdiction'; a *Special Report on the Draft Conclusions of the International Law Commission on 'Subsidiary Means for the Determination of Rules of International Law'*; a report on the introduction of a procedure for signing international treaties in electronic form using the DocuSign digital platform or through a dual-signature mechanism (*dual modality*); and a report entitled 'Legal Regulation of Engagement with Unrecognised Quasi-State Entities'. These materials provided an example of the direct mobilisation of academic and expert capacity in addressing issues of practical significance for the State's foreign and international legal activities and contributed to the formulation of governmental positions on the respective matters. The experience of the Council therefore demonstrates that interaction between the academic community and governmental authorities can extend beyond a general exchange of views and can directly contribute to the formulation of State positions on questions of international law. The establishment of the International-Legal Council thus represented an important institutional attempt to create a structured link between State practice and the academic community. In this respect, its composition and stated objectives directly reflected the scholarship-practice nexus in international law examined in this article. The Council, however, operated actively for only approximately one year. No meetings have been held since 2025. Accordingly, although the Council demonstrated the importance of institutionalised interaction between the State and the academic community and offered a potentially significant model for such engagement, it did not develop into a permanent and sustainable mechanism.

The Ministry of Justice (MoJ) also possesses specialised institutional capacity in this field. Its structure includes a Department of International Law. In addition, the Institute of Legislation and Legal Information under the MoJ has a Department of International Law and Comparative Law. These units participate in the development and analysis of legal policy and provide governmental expertise on matters of international law and comparative law. At the same time, their activities are conducted predominantly within the institutional framework of the MoJ and therefore do not constitute a professional platform bringing together the broader community of international law scholars, practising lawyers, governmental experts, and students.

According to the available information, other central State bodies do not have separate structural units specifically responsible for international law. Nevertheless, international legal expertise may be required across a broad range of areas of governmental activity. This further demonstrates the fragmented distribution of international legal expertise within Kazakhstan's public sector: the relevant knowledge and expertise exist across different institutions, but are not necessarily brought together within a permanent professional network.

Professional associations constitute another, albeit less developed, component of Kazakhstan's international law infrastructure. According to publicly available sources, the Kazakhstan Association of International Law was registered in 2005 as a public association. Information concerning its current institutional structure, membership requirements, and activities is not available from officially accessible online sources [10]. According to information available in the public domain, the Association publishes the *Bulletin of the Kazakhstan Association of International Law*. At the same time, publicly available information about the publication appears to be limited: the most recent issue that can be identified from open sources is the *Bulletin* published in 2020 [11]. Accordingly, on the basis of the available public sources, it is difficult to assess the Association's current membership, institutional capacity, or actual level of activity.

Taken together, these elements indicate that Kazakhstan does not suffer from a lack of institutions concerned with international law. On the contrary, its international law community is characterised by considerable institutional diversity, combined with limited connectivity among existing institutions. Universities educate specialists and conduct research; academic journals facilitate the dissemination of scholarly knowledge; the MFA and the MoJ possess specialised expertise in international law; and professional associations, at least formally, provide additional platforms for professional interaction. However, these components are not permanently integrated within a single, inclusive, and sustainable institutional platform capable of facilitating interaction among scholars, governmental experts, practising lawyers, international organisations, and students.

Such institutional fragmentation is particularly significant from the perspective of the relationship between scholarship and practice in international law. Existing mechanisms demonstrate that interaction between the academic community and practitioners is both possible and, in certain instances, capable of being deliberately institutionalised. The experience of the International-Legal Council under the MFA illustrates both the value of such interaction and the limitations associated with relying exclusively on mechanisms operating within individual State institutions. Once such a mechanism ceases to function, the academic and professional community may once again become dispersed across different institutional platforms.

It is against this background that the establishment of the Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA assumes particular significance. The Branch does not replace existing universities, governmental bodies, research centres, academic journals, or professional associations. Rather, its potential value lies in its capacity to connect them. Its institutional design and composition of founding members create an opportunity to develop a sustainable professional environment in which academic research, State practice, professional legal expertise, and international engagement can take place on an ongoing basis. In this sense, the Kazakhstan Branch may address not the absence of institutions concerned with international law in Kazakhstan, but rather the absence of a sufficiently sustainable and inclusive platform capable of connecting the institutions and professional communities that already exist.

III. The Establishment of the Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA

The process of establishing the Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA was formally initiated at a founding meeting held on **20 May 2026** at MNU in Astana, with participation also available online. Fifteen founding members participated in the establishment of the Branch. The agenda included the adoption of the Charter, the determination of the organisational structure and election of officers, subsequent registration and engagement with the ILA, and the identification of the Branch's priorities for its first year of operation. The founding meeting also established the Branch's initial leadership.

[10] Kazakhstan Association of International Law, 'About the Association' https://kazasintlaw.vercel.app/en/about accessed 8 September 2026

[11] Vestnik Kazakhstanskoy Assotsiatsii mezhdunarodnogo prava (2020) no 3 (51) https://www.academia.edu/47705554/%D0%92%D0%B5%D1%81%D1%82%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%BA_%D0%9A%D0%B0%D0%B7%D0%B0%D1%85%D1%81%D1%82%D0%B0%D0%BD%D1%81%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B9_%D0%90%D1%81%D1%81%D0%BE%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B8_%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%B6%D0%B4%D1%83%D0%BD%D0%B0%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B4%D0%BD%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE_%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%B2%D0%B0

Miras Daulenov was elected President; Abay Abylaiuly, Sergey Sayapin, and Roza Akshalova were elected Vice-Presidents; and Sauryk Abirbek was elected Secretary. The governance structure also provided for a Council of up to fifteen members. Under the Charter, the fifteen founding members constitute the initial composition of the Council for the first three years of its operation, thereby ensuring continuity between the founding membership and the Branch's first institutional cycle. Priorities discussed for the first year included the organisation of an international academic conference, cooperation with universities, international organisations, and legal institutions, the establishment of research working groups on specific areas of international law, participation in ILA activities and international events, and the implementation of publishing and academic initiatives. The final stage took place during the 82nd Biennial Conference on International Law in Vienna, held from 17 to 21 August 2026, at which the ILA approved the establishment of the Kazakhstan Branch [12].

Since its establishment, the Kazakhstan Branch has brought together individuals working across different institutional settings in which international law is studied, interpreted, or applied. The founding membership includes representatives of universities, governmental institutions, an international organisation, and private legal practice. For example, the group includes scholars affiliated with MNU, KIMEP University, ENU, and Coventry University Kazakhstan. The founding membership is not confined to academia. It includes a public official working in the Parliament of Kazakhstan, a specialist at a research institution under the Ministry of Culture and Information, a National Legal Officer at the OSCE Programme Office in Astana, and a solicitor engaged in international legal practice. Several founding members combine academic appointments with membership of the International-Legal Council of the MFA.

IV. From National Branch to Regional Platform: The Central Asian Dimension

The Central Asian dimension of the Kazakhstan Branch's activities is particularly significant given that the international law communities of the States of the region have developed predominantly within national universities, research centres, and professional associations. At the same time, many questions of international law that are of direct relevance to Central Asian States transcend individual national jurisdictions and require comparison of State practice, doctrinal approaches, and educational models across the region. The emergence in recent years of specialised academic initiatives focusing specifically on international law in Central Asia indicates the formation of a corresponding regional scholarly space.

Of particular significance in this regard is the *Central Asia Yearbook on International Law*, the first volume of which was published in 2026 by De Gruyter Brill under the editorship of Sergey Sayapin [13]. The *Yearbook* expressly addresses the role of Central Asia in the development of international law and brings together peer-reviewed research on public and private international law, State practice, regional cooperation, dispute settlement, human rights, international economic law, and emerging global challenges. A related objective, albeit pursued in a broader monograph format, is addressed in Sergey Sayapin's book *A Central Asian Perspective on International Law* (Hart Publishing, 2026) (Sergey Sayapin, 2026). One of its significant aspects is its examination of the state of international legal education and scholarship in Central Asia, including curricula, the institutional autonomy of universities, linguistic barriers, and the influence of different foreign schools of international legal thought. Of particular importance is the author's consideration of the integration of Central Asian schools of international law into the broader Asian and international context. This makes it possible to view the region not merely as an object of international legal inquiry, but also as a potential contributor to the academic and doctrinal development of international law.

[12] International Law Association, 'Kazakhstan' https://www.ila-hq.org/en/branches/kazakhstan accessed 8 September 2026

[13] Central Asia Yearbook on International Law, https://brill.com/display/title/76386?srsltid=AfmBOoqYyxdnSrStitf-GjQM6UwZo8vBk7KgcaaHEUwXQoeIdj6QPJMV

At the same time, the existence of regional scholarly interest does not, in itself, amount to a unified institutional community of international lawyers in Central Asia. In practice, professional and academic links among specialists from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan already exist, but they are largely formed around individual universities, educational programmes, research projects, and international events. One example is the dual-degree programme between MNU and Tashkent State University of Law in the field of international legal education (Dana Tugambekova, 2026). The implementation of dual-degree programmes creates sustained contacts between academics and students from the two States and thus provides an important foundation for further academic cooperation. However, such projects remain bilateral by their nature and do not establish a permanent platform bringing together a broader community of international law specialists from across Central Asia. Another example is the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition. Central Asian and national Jessup rounds [14], as well as Jessup summer schools [15], are held on a rotating basis at universities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. These activities are significant not only for legal education but also for the development of professional networks among young specialists in the region. They demonstrate that a transnational environment for interaction already exists, although such interaction currently depends to a considerable extent on particular events and the organisations hosting them.

The problem, therefore, is not the absence of regional contacts as such, but the absence of a permanent institutional mechanism capable of connecting existing national international law communities with one another while simultaneously linking them to the global network of the International Law Association. It is precisely here that the Kazakhstan Branch may perform a potential regional function.

The Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA should not, however, be regarded as a regional organisation. By its institutional nature, it is a national branch of the International Law Association. Its existence nevertheless creates an opportunity for it to perform a broader connecting function, particularly at a stage when corresponding national ILA branches have not yet been established in other Central Asian States. In this capacity, the Kazakhstan Branch could serve as a connecting link between the ILA and international law communities in other Central Asian States. Such a function would not entail representing the interests of specialists from other States or exercising any formal mandate of regional leadership. Rather, it could consist in providing specialists from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan with access to ILA events, research initiatives, and professional networks, while at the same time facilitating the representation of Central Asian issues within the activities of the international association.

This function may be particularly important until national ILA branches are established in other States of the region. Should such branches emerge in the future, the role of the Kazakhstan Branch could gradually evolve from that of an initial connecting link into that of one participant in a broader network of national ILA branches across Central Asia. Such a phased model appears to be the most institutionally realistic. It does not require the Kazakhstan Branch to be assigned a regional status that it does not formally possess, while at the same time allowing its existence to be used to foster regional connections.

In practical terms, this function could be pursued through the proposed Central Asian Outreach Programme. At the initial stage, its principal objective could be to establish an open platform for specialists from other Central Asian States to participate in the activities of the Kazakhstan Branch and, through it, in the broader professional community of the ILA. The programme could include regular regional seminars and round tables, joint research workshops, events for early-career researchers, invitations to academics and practitioners from other Central

[14] Tashkent State University of Law, 'The Central Asian Round of the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition has begun' (Tashkent State University of Law, 2026) https://tsul.uz/en/news/567/Study/The-Central-Asian-Round-of-the-Philip-C.-Jessup-International-Law-Moot-Court-Competition-has-begun accessed 8 September 2026

[15] Tashkent State University of Law, 'The Central Asian Jessup Moot Summer School concluded' (Tashkent State University of Law, 2026) https://www.tsul.uz/en/news/1203/Study/The-Central-Asian-Jessup-Moot-Summer-School-concluded accessed 8 September 2026

Asian States to participate in the Branch's research projects, and joint publication initiatives. Particular importance should be attached to activities that not only address international law in Central Asia, but also facilitate comparative examination of the national practice of the States of the region.

V. Challenges and Risks

The principal challenge for the Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA lies in ensuring its long-term institutional sustainability beyond the initial stage of its establishment. The formation of governing bodies, recruitment of members, and launch of initial projects do not, in themselves, guarantee sustained activity, particularly where participation is voluntary in nature. Sustainability requires a transition from founder-dependent activity to sustainable organisational procedures (Block, S. R., & Rosenberg, S., 2002), under which research groups, professional discussions, international connections, and the recruitment of new members continue independently of individual leaders. Accordingly, sustainability should be measured not merely by the formal survival of the Branch, but by its capacity to maintain continuous research, professional dialogue, and networks that enable it to perform its function as a bridge between scholarship and practice.

The second challenge lies in transforming formal membership into a genuinely active professional community. An increase in the number of members does not, in itself, demonstrate institutional strength if substantive activities remain concentrated among a small number of founders and office-holders. The research demonstrates that voluntary professional networks are most effective when they prioritize sustained integration through regular opportunities for contribution, such as working groups and mentoring, rather than focusing primarily on recruitment (Hager, M. A., & Brudney, J. L., 2014). The experience of ILA committees demonstrates that the significance of membership is determined above all by active participation in research, discussions, the preparation of documents, and professional projects [16]. The development of the Kazakhstan Branch should therefore be accompanied by the creation of regular opportunities for members to participate in working groups, research projects, publications, mentoring, and international events, as well as by efforts to broaden the circle of active participants beyond the initial membership.

The third challenge concerns the need to preserve academic independence while maintaining close engagement with governmental authorities and practising lawyers. The participation of public officials and experts affiliated with governmental institutions constitutes an important advantage, as it provides access to State practice and enables scholarly research to be connected with the State's practical needs. Excessive institutional influence, however, may constrain the scope for critical academic analysis and create the perception that the Branch's positions reflect the interests of particular governmental institutions. Conversely, excessive distancing from governmental structures would deprive the Branch of access to valuable practical experience. The optimal model is therefore one of 'structured independence' – a model structurally akin to the operation of the Sanremo Institute [17] or forums working under the Chatham House Rule [18]. Under this setup, governmental and practising participants should be able to engage fully in research and professional dialogue, but should not determine the final conclusions, since, as Helfer's concept of 'constrained independence' suggests, the value and authority of expert legal bodies depend in part on maintaining sufficient autonomy from the State institutions whose interests they may be called upon to advise (Helfer, L. R., 2006).

The fourth challenge lies in maintaining a balance between the academic and practical dimensions of the Branch's activities. If its work consists predominantly of conferences, academic presentations, and publications, the Branch risks becoming an ordinary academic society; if, by contrast, it is oriented primarily towards governmental consultations and the resolution of immediate practical issues, it may evolve into an expert advisory body and lose its independent and long-term

[16] International Law Association, 'ILA Committees' https://www.ila-hq.org/en_GB/committees accessed 8 September 2026
[17] International Institute of Humanitarian Law, 'Governance' https://iihl.org/governance/ accessed 8 September 2026
[18] Royal Institute of International Affairs, 'Chatham House Rule' https://www.chathamhouse.org/about-us/chatham-house-rule accessed 8 September 2026.

scholarly perspective. The differences between academics and practitioners—in their objectives, time horizons, and understanding of useful knowledge—should not be eliminated, since it is precisely their interaction that can generate additional value. The Branch should therefore employ a range of working formats, including academic events, practice-oriented seminars, expert discussions, and joint research projects. Its particular advantage lies in its intermediate institutional position, which enables scholarship and practice to be connected rather than substituted for one another. This dual approach directly aligns with established international models [19], which structurally treats the differing time horizons of jurists and scholars as a generative asset, and conforms to the sociological framework of 'boundary organizations' – which maintain systemic authority precisely by straddling, rather than merging, the academic and state domains (Guston, D. H., 2001).

Taken together, these challenges do not call into question the potential of the Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA to serve as an institutional bridge between international legal scholarship and practice. Rather, they identify the conditions necessary for this potential to be realised. The principal risk lies in formalism – the assumption that the mere existence of an organisation, the presence of members, the holding of events, and affiliation with an international association will automatically ensure its effectiveness. In institutional sociology, this dynamic is recognized as 'ceremonial compliance', where formal structures are decoupled from actual practice (Meyer, J. W., & Rowan, B., 1977). In reality, the sustainability of the Branch will require a transition from dependence on the founding generation to institutionalised practices... Ultimately, as demonstrated by research on professional associations (Greenwood, R., Suddaby, R., & Hinings, C. R., 2002), the success of the Branch must be assessed by its capacity to serve as a genuine 'knowledge broker' – constructing sustainable institutional channels through which legal knowledge moves dynamically between scholarship, practice, and the global community.

Conclusion

The establishment in 2026 of the Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA should be regarded not simply as a further expansion of the Association's global network of national branches, but as an opportunity to develop a new institutional mechanism for strengthening the international law community in Kazakhstan. The analysis undertaken in this article demonstrates that Kazakhstan does not lack specialists, academic programmes, or institutional expertise in the field of international law. On the contrary, significant capacity already exists within universities, governmental authorities, research centres, and the professional community. What remains considerably less developed, however, is the sustainable institutional interaction among these communities. It is precisely this gap between the production of international legal knowledge, its practical application, and its subsequent scholarly development that creates space for the activities of the Kazakhstan Branch.

In this respect, the experience of the ILA is of particular significance. Throughout its history, the Association has functioned not only as an organisation bringing together specialists in international law, but also as a forum for the collective development of international legal thought. The experience of the ILA demonstrates that professional associations can perform an autonomous institutional function by facilitating a two-way movement between theory and practice: legal practice identifies new problems and questions for scholarly inquiry, while the academic community provides practice with conceptual, comparative, and analytical tools through which those problems can be understood.

The fulfilment of this function, however, is not an automatic consequence of the establishment of the Branch itself. It will require institutional consolidation and the maintenance of a balance between academic independence and practical engagement. The Kazakhstan Branch must remain sufficiently independent to ensure open, critical, and academically grounded discussion, while at the same time maintaining sufficiently close links with governmental and professional institutions for its activities to respond to the actual needs of international legal practice. This constitutes its principal

[19] Société française pour le droit international, 'Structure de l'association' https://www.sfdi.org/structure-de-lassociation/ accessed 8 September 2026

institutional niche. The Branch should become neither an academic society operating predominantly within the university environment nor a quasi-governmental expert body. Its value lies precisely in its ability to connect these spaces without replacing either of them.

Ultimately, the principal outcome of the establishment of the Kazakhstan Branch should not be an increase in the number of institutions concerned with international law, but the creation of connections among institutions and professional communities that already exist. Its long-term significance will depend on its ability to transform fragmented academic and practical capacity into a sustainable community of international legal knowledge. If this objective is successfully pursued, the Kazakhstan Branch may become not merely a national branch of an international professional association, but an institutional bridge between international legal scholarship and practice in Kazakhstan and, in the longer term, one of the connecting points between the international law communities of Central Asia and the global professional network.

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Authors' contributions

The article was co-authored by Kazakh scholars.

1) Abay Abylaiuly analyzed the International Law Association as a forum for scholarship and practice, and Central Asian dimension.

2) Roza Akshalova analyzed international law scholarship and practice in Kazakhstan.

3) Sauryk Abirbek analyzed the establishment of the Kazakhstan Branch of the ILA, and challenges and risks.