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D. Burkhanova

al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan, Almaty

E-mail: kuralay.avsydykova@kaznu.kz

**Features of determination of middle class in Kazakhstan**

**Abstract.** Topic of the middle class remains one of the most pressing questions of contemporary Kazakh society. This article focuses on the definition of middle class and the identification of criteria to determine its representatives in Kazakhstan. It provides an analysis of different approaches to define criteria. Expanding this theme, the author concludes that only the application of multiple criteria simultaneously, a multidimensional approach permits more or less accurately identify social groups that constitute today the Kazakh middle class.

**Keywords:** middle class, social groups, «comfort class», approaches to the determination of the middle class, criteria to the middle class.

The middle class is the subject of many studies and is regarded as a relatively adequate representation of current economic and social transformations. The presence of large middle class in the social structure ensures the stability of society is a symbol of resolution of a chain of latent economic problems. The middle class is the cornerstone of civil society, guarantee of its stability and its economic basis. Now in the majority of developed countries the middle class is a major part of society and is the engine of economic, social and political processes [1].

Being in the center of attention, middle class always is endowed with extremely positive qualities. But together with it, we must remember that the middle class - it's quite contradictory and incoherent mass. Thus, the identification of criteria for determining the middle class and its position in the social structure is rather ambiguous as on the one hand there is a continuum, where the middle class occupies a central position, on the other hand, it is regarded as a class that has a dual and an intermediate position in fundamental antagonism of the two "core" classes. As a consequence, there are a great variety of characteristics of concepts, approaches and opinions that has appeared on the definition the proportion of the middle class in a society.

The history of the middle class goes back to ancient antiquity, Aristotle wrote about it in his famous work "Politics." He said that in all states, there are three social elements: the rich class, poor

class and the third - the middle class. He considered the middle class as holders of a moderate level of prosperity as a key element in the social structure that balancing society. The middle class is the most solid basis of society and of social organization. The predominance of proportion of the middle class in the society over the rich and the poor according to Aristotle is the key to stability of the state.

Mentioning and description of the middle class also are found in the works of many Western scholars, such as Thomas Aquinas, Montesquieu, A. Tocqueville, Marx, Weber, Bourdieu, Giddens and others [2]. The middle class is often seen as a framework of society. It is believed that this is the main producer of wealth; economically independent people allow themselves to save more as well as to spend more. The middle class, as the main social group in the developed countries performs many important functions.

According to many western scholars and experts, the middle class is a guarantee of the stability of society, particularly because of its middle position in the social structure. The middle position allows concentrating on production of material goods and services. Thus, the middle class is interested in the stability and support of their social positions. And that's why the middle class is supported by existing state structure, which allowed them to obtain existing benefits, thus protecting the society from social upheavals. They soften the social

conflicts, and provide evolutionary development, as representatives of this class have economic independence, a certain way of thinking, set of values, quality and style of life, and have confidence in the future.

In the sphere of economic relations, the middle class plays a role of economic donor, as its representatives are the producers of the main part of the profits and income of society. At the same time, the middle class is the main consumer of the major part of products and services, is the creator of new jobs, representatives of middle class are major taxpayers and investors.

In the sphere of political relations, the middle class plays a huge role in the formation of normal political system. In developed countries, the middle class clearly understands its goals and objectives, and with the political institutions that support them, they can lobby for its interests and values in the political field of the state. The middle class is a social basis, the carrier of values, norms and attitudes that show high activity and high civic responsibility.

Moreover, the middle class is a cultural integrator that is a carrier and distributor of national values, norms, traditions and laws in society. In certain sense we can say that the middle class forms the ideology and moral foundation of society, because due to their sheer numbers it dominates in all spheres of public life. Also, middle-class performs a pioneering role in the transformation of models of behavior, accepting new models of behavior, which are typical to new cultural liberalism [3]. Thus, due to their sheer numbers, the middle class is an important social force in developed countries.

Over the past few years, the political, economic and social situation in Kazakhstan has changed. Kazakhstan has managed to create favorable environment for the private sector and the attraction of foreign direct investment, thanks to the decisive reforms in the economic and financial sectors, which led to the development of the energy, oil and gas sectors. During the twenty years of independence, the country has risen to a very high level of economic and today exemplifies a successful transition in the CIS [4].

Today in the context of stable economic development of Kazakhstan problem of formation and development of the middle class is very important and relevant. The government relies on the prevalence of the middle class in the society is which is regarded as the «comfort class», which provides political and

social stability in the developed world. As a result of this point of view, the creation of favorable conditions for the further successful development of the middle class in Kazakhstan is one of the main priorities of social and economic policy.

In the new economic environment Kazakhstan's middle class begins to develop, but it is very difficult to determine the boundaries and to identify criteria for its formation. The main difficulty in determining the fraction of Kazakhstan's middle class is that it should not be defined by the same criteria as the Western middle class.

At present the opinion of domestic experts and scholars on the proportion of the middle class in Kazakhstan society and criteria of its determining differs. Kazakh experts and scientists agree only that in a stable development of the economy of Kazakhstan middle class formed very quickly, and it can clearly be seen in the existing studies on the topic. But, of course, it is not a full-fledged middle class, but only a core. There are economically active groups: entrepreneurs (small and medium business), executives, managers, professionals, and highly qualified experts. Given that this core tends to increase, we can assume that in the next few years, the middle class will grow and will gradually form a very large part of the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

According M.S.Azhenov, high polarization of the population by material wealth, which is common to all countries that have passed the transition period, gradually leads to the crystallization of the elite and the formation of the middle class, and thus increases its quantity. In his view, the middle class today is about 20% of the population, and continues to grow [5].

D.Burminsky dividing Kazakh society into 7 classes, said that the foundation of the middle class was present during the Soviet era. According to him, the middle class has emerged in the USSR during the «perestroika» and the cooperative movement. [6] For today this class is in a stage of development and in the process of self-identification, it still does not have its thinking and vision, its representatives prefer to «go with the flow».

At present it is very difficult process give a specific definition of the boundaries of the middle class, or describe its members. There are a lot of different approaches. One can try defining the middle class socio-professional category, the level of income or education level. But, at the same

time, these approaches are not satisfactory, as they are only descriptive and try to piece together the different social groups.

There are three approaches to the determination of the middle class. First, economic approach - the definition of the proportion of the middle class is carried out through the income level.

The second approach consists in determining the socio-professional status of individual, its value orientations and lifestyles. This approach derives from classical sociology in particular Weber theory. Profession is an important criterion, which is also directly related to the level of income, to the values and the lifestyle. For greatest accuracy here should be taken into account such factors as the nature of work, skill level, etc. The middle class is particularly relevant to education because as higher education is seen as an effective tool for upward social mobility.

The third approach is subjective, based on taking into account the individual's perception of their own social position and a sense of belonging to the community [7].

Finally, by analyzing these approaches is evident that they are moving in the same direction. The middle class will receive diplomas of higher education, further high qualification and prestigious profession, and as a consequence they have access to highly paid job. Becoming highly-paid professionals, they form a certain style of life, all of this together leads to the identity, which enables them to identify themselves with the middle class.

The definition of the middle class, relying solely on economic indicators, is inefficient, because the middle class itself is not what is meant as a class according to Marx. Various categories in the middle class do not show solidarity towards the means of production. This evidence as a the level of income is not the only reliable, again, taking into account that the middle class in any society, it is quite heterogeneous economic entities and the salary levels can be very differentiated.

At the same time, it is possible to define the middle class as the owners of a property for income - business, education or diploma or any other qualification. This property allows them to face the future with some confidence. Possession of the property in some way gives middle-class opportunity to refer themselves to representatives of the wealthy class, but at the same time, ownership of the property itself does not bring profit, they need to work, and this allows them to refer themselves to the working class.

The middle class, while in the intermediate position, has the qualities of a wealthy class and the working class, which makes it difficult to determine its own borders. Thus it is clear that the use of purely economic criteria for the middle class is ineffective. It may be logical to speak on the use of multiple criteria for once.

For many years, the study of the middle class of its political behavior, image and lifestyle, values are the subject of interest from so many Western scholars. Bourdieu said that the different groups of the middle class are in the cultural and ideological dependence of the dominant group, they share the same desire to move up the social ladder.

Define the middle class representatives in terms of income is not an effective method, as well as the definition of by style of life. Lifestyle is very broad term that carries with it very clear and specific categories. Thus, it is very difficult to determine exactly where end the boundaries of lifestyle of the rich class, and begins life style common to the members of the middle class. Considering the features and functions conferred to the middle class, it is clear that it is composed of people who have certain social and psychological traits, as well as a certain level of income. These qualities of the middle class allow them to be highly active in all spheres of public life.

Seems logical to use multiple criteria to determine the representatives of such a complex and controversial phenomenon as the middle class, which is capable to perform all the functions assigned to it. Kazakh researchers believe that the main criteria for selection Kazakhstan middle class must stand the following four criteria: first, the level of education, and second, the non-physical nature of the work, and thirdly, the level of income that should be higher than the average wage in the region, and, fourthly, the identity individual in society. These criteria seem to be quite reasonable, as it involves, at least, the most basic characteristics of the middle class and not only as a purely descriptive approach, but also takes into account such important criteria as an individual's identification.

Thus, it is important to note that the middle class - is not only the level of income and of material security, but also it is a certain way of living and thinking, and is a political phenomenon, and its representatives carry the basic values of civil society, which together constitute the class consciousness that makes the middle class the basis of civil society [8].

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**Д.К. Бурханова**

### **Қазақстандағы орта тапты анықтаудың ерекшеліктері**

Орта тап қазіргі кезде қазақстандық қоғамының ең өзекті тақырыптарының бірі болып табылады. Осы мақала қазақстандық орта тап анықтамасына және оны анықтау критерийлерін табуға арналған. Мақалада критерийлерді анықтауға арналған әртүрлі амалдардың талдауы қарастырылады. Осы тақырыпты аша отырып, автор тек қана бір мезгілде бірнеше критерийлерді қолдану амалы негізінде қазіргі кездегі қазақстандық орта таптың құрамына кіретін әлеуметтік топтарды анықтауға мүмкіндік береді деген қорытындыға келеді.

**Түйін сөздер:** орта тап, әлеуметтік топ, комфорттық тап, орта таптың детерминациясы, орта таптың өлшемі.

**Д.К. Бурханова**

### **Особенности определения среднего класса в Казахстане**

Тема среднего класса остается одним из самых актуальных вопросов современного казахстанского общества. Данная статья посвящена анализу среднего класса и выявлению критериев для определения его представителей в Казахстане. Раскрывая эту тему, автор делает выводы о том, что лишь применение нескольких критериев одновременно, использование многомерного подхода позволяет точно выявить социальные группы, соизмеримых по всем признакам с составляющими «среднего класса».

**Ключевые слова:** средний класс, социальная группа, комфортный класс, детерминация среднего класса, мера среднего класса.