

KAZAKHSTAN

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

According to its constitution, the Republic of Kazakhstan is a presidential republic with far-reaching powers vested in the president. The president submits to parliament a candidate for prime minister and appoints ministers by means of decrees and also the heads of the regional (regional, capital and Almaty) administrative authorities (Akeemes). Moreover, he submits to the senate (the upper chamber of parliament) candidates for the prosecutor-general, a candidate for presidency of the supreme court and a candidate for the chairperson of the national bank. All these candidates have formally to be elected by the senate. After nomination by the president, the prime minister calls for a vote of confidence before the Mazhilis (the lower house of parliament), but these procedures are more a formality. Kazakhstan has not seen a single case when the candidates proposed by the president have not been approved by the Mazhilis or the senate. *Political system*

The president can be elected for a period of five years. However, this regulation does not apply to the first president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, who can be re-elected an unlimited number of times (in accordance with the May 2007 amendments to the constitution). All future elected presidents can occupy the position for no more than two consecutive terms.

Any citizen of Kazakhstan who is at least 40 years old, who is able to speak the official language (Kazakh) and has been living in Kazakhstan for the last 15 years, can be proposed for the presidency. Since the Kazakh Republic became independent (16 December 1991), presidential elections have been conducted three times: 1 December 1991, January 1999 (the first alternative elections) and December 2005. All elections were won by the current president, Nursultan Nazarbaev. In the elections on 10 January 1999 Nursultan Nazarbaev won almost 80 per cent of the votes. The leader of the Kazakh Communist Party, Serikbolsyn Abdildin, gained 11.7 per cent of the votes, the chairperson of the Kazakh Party of Patriots, Gani Kasymov, 4.61 per cent and the independent candidate, Enguels Gabbasov, only 0.79 per cent.

According to the Central Election Commission of Kazakhstan, President Nazarbaev won the last elections in December 2005 with 91.15 per cent of the votes. Five political parties (Otan, Asar, the Civil Party, the Agrarian Party and Rukhaniyat) supported his candidature. The chairperson of the For a Fair Kazakhstan opposition association, Zharmakhan Tuyakbuy, attained 6.61 per cent of the votes, the leader of the moderate opposition party Ak zhol, Alikhan Buymenov, received 1.61 per cent, the candidate nominated for the presidency by the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan, Erasyl Abylkasymov, 0.34 per cent, and the independent candidate, the ecologist Mels Eleusizov, 0.28 per cent.

None of the presidential elections have been recognized as free by the international observers representing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and other international organizations.

Constitution The constitution of Kazakhstan was adopted by a referendum in August 1995. This is the second constitution of Kazakhstan; the first one was introduced in January 1993.

Since its adoption, the second constitution has been changed twice: on 7 October 1998 and 21 May 2007. In both cases significant amendments were proposed. The first amendments passed in 1998 increased the term of office for the president and the deputies for both the Mazhilis and senate. The amendments adopted in 2007, in contrast, reduced the (next) president's term of office, but – as mentioned above – the first president, Nursultan Nazarbaev, has been granted the right to run for the post as many times as he wants. Also, parliament's authority to control the government's activity was enhanced. In both cases the changes had been discussed and accepted by both chambers of parliament without submitting the amendments to a nationwide discussion.

The constitution confirms crucial human rights, which are approved in section II, called "The Individual and Citizen". In 29 articles in this section the following principal human rights are confirmed: the right to life (article 15); the right to judicial protection and receipt of competent legal assistance (article 12); the right to be free from discrimination due to one's origin, social, official and pecuniary status, sex, race, nationality, language, attitude to religion, beliefs, residence or any other circumstances (article 14); the right to personal liberty – arrest is allowed only with court sanction (article 16); the right to be free from torture (article 17); the right to privacy, personal or family secrets and honour, and the protection of dignity (article 18); the right to freedom of speech and creation, and the interdiction of censorship (article 20); the right to free movement (article 21); the right to liberty of conscience (article 22); the right to freedom of association (article 23); the right to private property and security of residence (article 26 and 25); a right to health protection and free secondary education (articles 29 and 30); the right to freedom of assembly (article 32); the right to participate in government directly and via its representatives; the right to access to the information of state authorities (article 33).

The constitution also defines that the rights and liberties of a human can be limited only by laws, and only insofar as it is necessary for the protection of the constitutional system, the protection of public order, the rights and freedoms of a human, and the health and morality of the population (article 39).

At the same time it is possible to say that the rights and freedoms as laid down in the constitution are not completely realized. The citizens of the country actually have only a limited right to freedom of peaceful assembly, and the rights of citizens to freedom from torture are violated. Furthermore, Kazakh and international organizations register violations of the right to legal protection, the right to freedom of association and the right to freedom of expression of opinions (Freedom House 2008).

Though the constitution does not assign special functions to political parties, three articles impose certain limits on their actions. Article 5 (4) states that "Activities of political parties and trade unions of other states, religious parties as well as financing political parties and trade unions by foreign legal entities and citizens, foreign states and international organizations shall not be permitted in the Republic". Article 23 (2) specifies that "[T]he military, employees of national security, law-enforcement bodies and judges must abstain from membership in political parties, trade unions, and actions in support of any political party." In article 51 (5) the electoral threshold is outlined: "Only those political parties which received not less than 7 per cent of votes of constituents who took part in the elections, shall be admitted to distribution of deputy mandates [seats for deputies]". All the other activities of political parties are regulated by the relevant legislation (see below).

State of democracy Despite the formal sings of liberal democracy and despite the constitutional guarantees of formal rights and freedoms, Kazakhstan shows significant shortcomings in the realization of full democratic standards. In the views of international organizations, Kazakhstan has never conducted free elections since its independence and has actually limited the right of its citizens to participate in government, which is the necessary element of democracy.

The basic changes in Kazakhstan during the last five years have been merely a “face-lift” of legislation and practices. In spite of liberalization and slight progress Kazakhstan is characterized by a one-party parliament and far-reaching presidential prerogatives, not to speak of the decision to give the incumbent an unlimited period in office. International organizations evaluating the situation in Kazakhstan specify that during recent years Kazakhstan has made only a few changes in a liberal direction. At the same time the country’s authorities have maintained their positions and the existing state of forces that do not allow them to make a major breakthrough in politics and public life (Human Rights Watch 2008). In accordance with the findings of the German Bertelsmann Stiftung, Kazakhstan is best described as a “defective democracy” or “autocratic government” (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2008: 15).

According to the constitution, Kazakhstan is a unitary state. The head of the state and the head of the executive is the president of the country. The president defines the lines of domestic and foreign policymaking. The candidature of the prime minister is approved by parliament at the suggestion of the president, all ministers and the heads of local administrations are appointed by the head of state. As a rule, the president appoints them without consulting with parliamentary deputies. The formation of a government does not depend on the outcome of parliamentary elections.

*Separation
of powers*

The highest legislative authority in Kazakhstan is the parliament, which consists of two formally equal chambers: the Mazhilis and the senate. The Mazhilis consists of 107 deputies of which 98 are elected by the voters via party lists. Political parties have to gain at least 7 per cent of the votes to gain a seat in parliament. Additionally, nine further deputies are elected from among members of the Kazakh Assembly of Nations (the authority which unites the national and cultural centres of the country’s nationalities; the head of the assembly is the president of Kazakhstan).

The senate consists of 47 deputies. Thirty-two deputies are elected by a simple majority vote: two deputies from each region, the capital and the city of Almaty, which is Kazakhstan’s biggest city. Elections are by indirect voting: the deputies from the Maslikhats (local representative authorities) of the corresponding regions elect the deputies to the senate. Fifteen senate deputies are appointed by the president. The term of office for the Mazhilis deputies is five years, for the senate deputies, six years.

The judicial system has a vertical structure with the supreme court (as the highest court) on the top. The chairperson and judges of the supreme court are appointed by the senate from submissions made by the president. The same is true for the prosecutor-general of Kazakhstan. Chairpersons of local courts are appointed by the president from submissions made by the higher judicial council. The chairperson and members of the higher judicial council are also appointed by the president.

Thus, the president of Kazakhstan, as the chief executive, has considerable influence over the activities of the legislative and judicial powers. The president participates in the process that forms the legislative and judicial power structure, which thereby cannot be considered to be completely independent of the executive branch.

The parliament of Kazakhstan is the legislative authority which carries out legislative functions (constitution, section IV, article 49–63). It discusses and adopts laws and submits them to the president for signature. The draft law considered and approved in the Mazhilis is submitted to senate. After consideration and approval by the senate the draft law is submitted to the president for signature. The president has the right to sign the law, object to the law and send it back to parliament, or veto it.

National assembly

Parliament – at the suggestion of the president – considers and makes amendments to the constitution and hears and approves the government reports. It decides on matters of war and peace and at the suggestion of the president makes decisions about the use of the armed forces to meet international obligations on international peace and the maintenance of security.

The Mazhilis confirms the candidate for prime minister, has the right to express a vote of no confidence in the government, and declares the next presidential elections. The senate elects and dismisses the chairperson and judges of the supreme court, and agrees to appoint the chairperson of the national bank, the prosecutor-general and the chairperson of the national security committee for the presidency. The president of Kazakhstan can dissolve parliament after consultations with the chairpersons of the chambers and the prime minister. However, the president does not require the compliance of the chairperson and of the prime minister to dissolve parliament.

Since the elections of August 2007, there has been only one political party in the Mazhilis. This is the People's Democratic Party NUR OTAN, which is headed by President Nazarbaev. According to official data, the party won 88.41 per cent of the votes in those elections. In the senate there is only one deputy from another party, who represents the moderate opposition Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan.

The latest presidential elections were held in 2005, parliamentary (Mazhilis) elections in 2007 (as shown in the table), and senate elections in 2008. Table 1 shows parliamentary elections (Mazhilis), as they are the only direct elections. Senate elections are by indirect vote (see above).

Table 1 | ELECTORAL RESULTS ⁽¹⁾

Party	Latest election (2007)		Present status
	votes	seats	
People's Democratic Party NUR OTAN ⁽²⁾	88.41	98	PP, PPM/GA
National Social Democratic Party	4.54	0	NR
Democratic Party of Kazakhstan Ak zhol	3.09	0	NR
Democratic Party of Kazakhstan Azat (its former name was Nagyz Ak zhol)	During the elections it was part of the National Social Democratic Party		NR
Communist Party of Kazakhstan	Boycotted the elections		NR
Kazakhstan Social Democratic Party Auyl	1.51	0	NR
The Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan	1.29	0	NR, (P/supp.) ⁽³⁾
Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan	0.78	0	The party leader was appointed by the president as a deputy to the senate, P/supp.
Democratic Party Adilet	During the elections the party was part of the Ak zhol Party		NR
Rukhaniyat Party	0.37	0	NR, (P/supp.) ⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ Percentage of votes and distribution of seats in the Mazhilis.

⁽²⁾ NUR OTAN People's Democratic Party is a successor of the Otan Party, which was reorganized in July 2006 after its merger with the other three pro-presidential parties: Asar, the Agrarian Party and the Civil Party.

⁽³⁾ Though the parties have no parliamentary seats they are supportive of the president in their public statements.

Abbreviations: PP = party of the president | P/supp. = parties that support the president on a regular basis
PPM/GA = party of the prime minister and sole party in government | NR = no parliamentary representation.

II. PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM

II.1 Party System

Political parties are permitted in Kazakhstan. The first political parties were formed in the early 1990s after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. At present there are ten officially registered political parties in Kazakhstan.

Legal regulation

The activities of political parties are regulated by the legislation "About political parties", which was adopted in July 2002. The most recent amendments were introduced in February 2009. This legislation regulates the rules for registration and financing. Participation of political parties in elections is regulated by the legislation "About elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan", which became effective in September 1995. Here too, the latest amendments were introduced in February 2009.

In order to be registered a political party has to have no fewer than 40,000 members (before the legislation about political parties was amended in February 2009, the requirement was about 50,000 members). At the same time there have to be no fewer than 600 members in each of the regions, the capital Astana and the city of Almaty. A constituent congress has to be called to establish a political party, and the decision to set one up should be supported by no fewer than 1,000 people. After that an organizing committee is formed, which is registered with the judicial authorities. After its successful registration the party has four months to collect the signatures of members. These are then submitted to the judicial authorities for verification and the government registration of the party.

All political parties can participate in all elections conducted in the Republic of Kazakhstan whether on the basis of direct or indirect voting. Political parties cannot form coalitions for electoral purposes with other political parties. When voting is by the party lists, a party has to reach an electoral threshold of at least 7 per cent of the votes in order to take seats in the Mazhilis. In other cases (the elections of Maslikhates deputies, the elections of senate deputies) candidates must win a simple majority of votes.

The finances for political parties come from the entrance fees of members and their subsequent regular contributions, from donations by citizens and domestic NGOs (provided that these donations are vouched for in writing and their source is specified), and from the income of business activities.

Party financing

Parties and their structural sub-divisions cannot receive donations from foreign states, foreign legal entities and international organizations; foreigners and persons without citizenship; legal entities with foreign participation; the state authorities and state organizations; religious associations and charity organizations; anonymous donations; as well as from the finances of Kazakh organizations received in the form of the grants from international organizations.

The majority of parties in Kazakhstan are able to function through donations from individuals, usually wealthy businessmen, and small membership fees, according to interviews with (anonymous) representatives of the three political parties. Parties report on their finances to the tax authorities, but do not publish information about their financing in the mass media and on their websites. All of these regulations are recorded in the law "About political parties" (see above).

Taken seriously, there is only one "relevant party" in Kazakhstan at present, since the president's party NUR OTAN controls all seats in the lower house of the parliament, the Mazhilis. However, in the past five years there have been many changes among the political parties. In 2004, two political parties were registered the day before the September elections for the Mazhilis: the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan and the Democratic Party Adilet. After the elections for the Mazhilis

Relevant parties

in 2004 there was a split within the Democratic Party Ak zhol and a new political party was founded. It was initially named Naguyz Ak zhol, but in 2008 it was renamed the Democratic Party Azat. At present there are ten registered political parties in Kazakhstan:

- People's Democratic Party (NUR OTAN);
- National Social Democratic Party of Kazakhstan (NSDP);
- Democratic Party Ak zhol (DP Ak zhol);
- Democratic Party Azat (DP Azat);
- Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK);
- Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK);
- Democratic Party Adilet (DP Adilet);
- Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan (PPK);
- Kazakhstan Social Democratic Party Auyl (KSDP Auyl);
- Rukhaniyat Party.

For the first time in Kazakhstan's history, the special economic court in Almaty decided in January 2005 to liquidate a party, closing down the opposition party Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan. This decision was later confirmed by the authorities. In July 2006 four large pro-presidential parties merged: Otan, Asar, the Agrarian Party and the Civil Party. They formed the People's Democratic Party NUR OTAN.

In 2007, the day before elections for the Mazhilis, the National Social Democratic Party and Nagyz Ak zhol Party (now Democratic Party Azat) decided to join together, as did the Democratic Party Ak zhol and the Democratic Party Adilet. After the elections the parties overturned these decisions. These electoral pacts (blocks) were only temporary and they split after their unsuccessful joint electoral campaign. Now these parties function autonomously.

Party families Most parties in the country can be labelled as liberal and conservative parties that declare the development of democracy, civil society, and the rule of law as their key idea. At the same time, there are three parties in Kazakhstan that adhere to socialist and communist principles that were widely supported by the population after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, as the latest electoral campaigns demonstrate, these parties no longer have this support.

Origins of parties The political parties reflect the processes which have taken place in Kazakhstan society. After the breakdown of the Soviet Union political parties blossomed and were formed mainly on the basis of a democratic ideology and values. At present the largest political party, NUR OTAN, has become rather conservative and traditional and defends the preservation of the status quo. The opposition parties, which were usually founded by people who left the government several years ago, support basic democratic ideas (for example, their slogans call for: tackling corruption; changing Kazakhstan from a presidential to a parliamentary republic; and electing heads of regional executive bodies).

A number of parties have been formed from traditional elements of society: they employ populist rhetoric (Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan) or defend the interests of particular target groups (the party of rural workers, landless Auyl). At the same time a group of political parties (Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan, Democratic Party Adilet) was formed as a counter-force to the opposition forces in order to win back some votes during elections. These parties were formed prior to the 2004 parliamentary elections. Their names, programmes and rhetoric copied those of opposition parties already operating in Kazakhstan although they were headed by political figures that had never been opposition activists. There are no documents proving that these parties were funded by the government, but many political scientists share the view that their goal was to confuse voters wanting to vote for the opposition but who did not understand what the difference was between the political parties.

Table 2 | IDEOLOGICAL COMPOSITION OF THE PARTY SYSTEM

	Name and founding year	Present situation	Situation prior to the present
Rural party (party of rural workers, landless)	Kazakhstan Social Democratic Party AuyI (KSDP AuyI), 2002	NR	NR
Labour party/parties communist, post-communist, social democratic	Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK), 1998	NR	NR
	Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK), 2004	NR, P/supp. ⁽¹⁾	NR, P/supp. ⁽¹⁾
	National Social Democratic Party of Kazakhstan (NSDP), 2006	NR	–
Conservative	People's Democratic Party NUR OTAN, 1999	PP, PPM/GA	PP, PPM/GA
	Rukhaniyat Party, 2003	NR, P/supp. ⁽¹⁾	NR, P/supp. ⁽¹⁾
Liberal	Democratic Party Ak zhol (DP Ak zhol), 2002	NR	O
	Democratic Party Azat (DP Azat), 2006	NR	–
	Democratic Party Adilet, 2004	NR	O, P/supp. ⁽¹⁾
	Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan (PPK)	NR, but one deputy in the senate, P/supp.	NR, P/supp. ⁽¹⁾

⁽¹⁾For an explanation of its status see Table 1.

Abbreviations: PP = party of the president | P/supp. = parties that support the president
PPM/GA = party of the prime minister and sole party in government | O = party is in opposition
NR = no parliamentary representation.

Political parties still do not play a major role in political processes in Kazakhstan. Except for several of the larger parties, they are mainly active during election periods while not functioning between election campaigns. Example of the former are NUR OTAN or opposition parties such as Azat and National Democratic Party, which are still active between elections.

General significance of parties

In spite of the fact that about 10 per cent of citizens are members of political parties (according to independent political parties' member count), their appeals to take action, protest, and become an actively involved society are not supported by the population. Most of the proposals put forward by political parties are also not taken into consideration by the executive power in its decision-making.

For the last two years the party of the president, NUR OTAN, has been playing a noticeable part in public life. The party has established advisory councils on many issues and gives recommendations to the government and local authorities. However, observers are rather sceptical about this activity, pointing out the insignificant effects of such activity and the lack of serious results from the party work.

An analysis of voting at the last elections states that citizens base their voting choices on the following:

Voter-party relations

- ideological preferences;
- preference for stability over change;
- knowledge of the parties' activities;
- pressure from their managers, forcing them to vote for a specified party (administrative pressure).

In view of the fact that no election in Kazakhstan was recognised as free by international organizations, it is impossible to draw unambiguous conclusions about the preferences of voters as there are some doubts about the correctness of the voting results.

Relations between parties and voters can be described as unstable. It is possible to say that the relations become more active during election periods, but they are practically inactive during the periods between elections when only members of parties and politically active citizens obtain information on the initiatives and actions of political parties.

During the last five years the relations between parties and voters have practically not changed. Despite the regrouping of political forces, the formation of new parties and the liquidation of others, the political landscape in Kazakhstan has practically not varied, remaining stable and based on the political decisions taken only by the president, without the participation of other forces.

II.2 Individual Parties

Party membership All political parties keep records of their members, but they extremely seldom update this information and provide it to the mass media and observers. The following data should therefore be treated with caution, but is the only available information.

Table 3 | MEMBERSHIP FIGURES OF KAZAKH POLITICAL PARTIES

Party	2000 ⁽¹⁾	2009 ⁽²⁾	Present membership density ⁽³⁾
People's Democratic Party NUR OTAN	35,000	608,000	6.83
National Social Democratic Party	party was only founded in 2006	140,000	1.57
Democratic Party Ak zhol	party was founded in 2002, 90,000 members (2002)	176,000	1.98
Democratic Party Azat	party was founded in 2005, no membership statistics	98,000	1.10
Communist Party of Kazakhstan	51,000	54,000	0.60
Communitistic People Party of Kazakhstan	the party was founded in 2004, 70,000 members (2004)	90,000	1.01
Democratic Party Adilet	party was founded in 2004, 72,000 members (2004)	70,000	0.79
Kazakhstan Social Democratic Party Auyl	150,000	62,000	0.69
Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan	51,000	172,000	1.93
Rukhaniyat Party	party was founded in 2003, 70,000 members (2003)	72,000	0.81

⁽¹⁾ Data given by political parties.

⁽²⁾ Data of the Central Election Committee of Kazakhstan.

⁽³⁾ Members/voters x 100.

Only one Kazakhstan party was originally set up as a party for a specific social group: Auyl was formed as a party to support the interests of villagers. However, over the years this party has also ceased to position itself as the party of a particular social group and now it tries to work with all strata of the population. Other parties also do not designate any particular social groups as their target audience and voters.

Political parties try to work with all social strata. NUR OTAN sets itself up as the party of the people, whose activity is aimed at aiding all social groups. Democratic parties Ak zhol, Azat and Adilet and Kazakhstan's Social Democratic Party Auyl designate the middle class as their target group and try to work with it. The Communist Party and the Communist People's Party work with pensioners and the citizens who support socialist and communist ideas. Rukhaniyat considers the intelligentsia as their basic target group and tries to work primarily with them. The Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan has a vague electorate, though originally this party was set up as a populist party for poor people and the middle class.

In addition to being divided by their purpose, the political parties can be divided between those that support and those that oppose the power of President Nursultan Nazarbaev. The pro-presidential parties are NUR OTAN and Rukhaniyat Party, while all other parties are formally in opposition. Yet, the Communist People's Party, the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan and Adilet are pro-government and pro-president. They support the government's and the president's policies and can be labelled as the moderate or "friendly" opposition.

To the radical opposition belong the National Social Democratic Party, Azat and the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (radical here means "not making concessions"; it does not mean "calling for violence or the overthrow of power"). Their rhetoric and actions depend first of all on their position in the relevant grouping.

According to the legislation "About political parties" all political parties in Kazakhstan, should have a charter. This should contain: *Party organization*

- the name, purposes, objectives and symbolic description of the party;
- the location of the political party's central office;
- the conditions and procedure for the acquisition and loss of membership in the political party;
- the rights and obligations of its members;
- the procedure for recording its members;
- the procedure for establishing, reorganizing and liquidating the political party and its structural subdivisions;
- the procedure for electing the managing and auditing authorities of the political party and its structural subdivisions (i.e. local branches);
- a term of appointment and the competence of the specified authorities;
- the procedure for amendments and additions to the charter of the political party and its programme;
- the procedure for nominating candidates from the political party (lists of candidates) for deputies and other elective offices in government authorities and local government institutions;
- the rights of the national party organization and its structural subdivisions (branches and representations) for managing money and property;
- the financial responsibility of the political party and its structural divisions and the procedure for party reporting.

The political party charter may contain other regulations which refer to its activities as long as they do not contradict the legislation (legislation "About political parties", item 9). Members of political parties voice doubts that all their members are familiar with the party charter, but the most active members of parties know its contents (according to anonymous interviews with active members of three political parties).

All parties are organized on a regional basis, in accordance with the country's legislation. The principle is based on the standard Kazakhstan administrative division. All political parties have to have no fewer than 600 members in each of the 14 regions of Kazakhstan, the capital of the country and the city which has republican status (Almaty). This condition is necessary for the registration of the political party.

Branches of political parties are not usually active between elections but become so during election campaigns. However, the branches of at least four political parties (NUR OTAN, Azat, Ak zhol and the National Social Democratic Party) remain active between elections: they issue statements, organize promotional events, or participate in political debates. Branches of other parties are practically inactive.

Only one party – NUR OTAN – has a youth organization, called Zhas Otan. It cooperates with many non-governmental organizations which, however, are headed by party members. Other parties have no youth wing and associated organizations, but they cooperate with some public organizations. For example, human right organizations defending the rights of specific target groups. They get support for their actions and statements from political parties.

Societal entrenchment Political parties in Kazakhstan actively cooperate with civil society organizations, human rights organizations, and social and public movements. This cooperation is in the form of joint actions (support of promotional events and protests, signing of memorandums and statements), consultations and cooperative participation in consultative structures (for example, in 2008 NUR OTAN developed the anti-corruption councils in which the NGOs are also included). Many members of public organizations are also members of a political party; the degree of cooperative activity between parties and civil society organizations depends on these joint members. Parties also take part in debating clubs (making reports to an audience, participating in discussions), as well as supporting the activity of research institutes and think tanks.

Parties usually say that the ideas submitted to them by public organizations will be considered when drawing up draft legislation in the parliament or government (if it is the party in power), or will be included in the programmes of the political parties. De facto, there are very few examples in Kazakh history of proposals or suggestions from non-governmental organizations having been the basis for the government's acts or the legislative amendments passed by parliament. It is a rare occurrence for a human rights organizations' proposals to be reflected in the government's agenda and legislation.

Internal decision-making Key decisions on party activities, approval of the party programme, changes of work directions and others are formally approved by the party congresses. Decisions on entering into alliances with other parties and the signing of memorandums are usually considered by the political council, or a party bureau which is elected by the congress.

At the same time the issues of current activity are dealt with by the party leaders. They also determine the strategy for party actions. In Kazakhstan, political parties are the parties of their leaders because voters above all know who is the head of the party but are less familiar with its programme.

In the leading party NUR OTAN, current management issues are not dealt with by the party leader, President Nazarbaev, but by his first deputy, Darkhan Kaletaev, as well as by the political council and bureau of the party political council, which has 15 members. Nonetheless, the first deputy, the council and the bureau execute the instructions and orders issued by the president. In other parties the key decision-makers are the leaders.

The decision on the promotion of candidates for deputies (on the party list) is taken by the party congress. The congress considers the list drawn up by the party political council or its bureau. Once approved by the congress, the list of candidates is sent for registration by the Central Election Committee.

The question of assigning quotas in the party lists at elections is not specifically stipulated in party documentation or in legislation. The majority of parties aspire to allocate a certain number of places to female candidates (up to 15 to 20 per cent in the party lists at the previous elections) and to candidates representing ethnic minorities (up to 20 to 25 per cent at the previous elections).

Internal relationships – such as participation, communication, decision-making – within parties could be characterized as hierarchical and based on patronage. Information on the decisions taken and decision-making process is transferred via a clear hierarchy from the chairperson of a party to the political council, chairpersons of branches, heads of political entities, etc. Each link on this chain is obliged to spread the information further and to inform all party members. At the same time it is impossible to say that absolutely all members of parties or even the majority participate effectively in the process of decision-making. Rather, the transfer of votes to delegates and especially to leaders is the rule.

The names of the Kazakh political parties are not usually based on their political activity or orientation (with some exceptions). Parties choose names that stand out and sound good and which can be remembered easily. So, Ak zhol translates as “light way” and embodies this party’s aspiration for changes that will bring more light. Adilet translates from Kazakh as “justice”, Auy! “village”, Rukhaiyat “spirituality”, Azat “freedom”.

*Stability of
party ideology/
programmes*

Only a few parties prefer to convey in their name the ideas which they propagandize: the National Social Democratic Party whose ideas are based on social democratic principles; the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and the Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan pursue communistic ideas, as their names indicate.

NUR OTAN can be translated from Kazakh as “beam of motherland”. Before integration with three other political parties in July 2005, another version of this party’s name was *Оман* (“motherland”, “the native land”). Some observers have pointed out that the first three letters of the name of its leader, the president of the country Nursultan Nazarbaev, are the first three letters in the name of the party “NUR”. Some observers think that the party used these letters on purpose to associate itself with the president.

In recent years two parties have changed their name: NUR OTAN, as sketched above, and Azat. In 2008 the party Naguyz Ak zhol was renamed the Democratic Party Azat. Naguyz Ak zhol seceded from the Democratic Party Ak zhol in 2006. The name Naguyz Ak zhol was taken to show that the party represents the ideas which were initially propagandized by the Democratic Party Ak zhol.

All the party programmes indirectly consider the integration of voters in the political process, but they usually specify that citizens should be involved in developing civil society. However, the parties do not specify the particular steps and mechanisms for such mobilization and the integration of voters. The programmes contain great volumes of information on the parties’ opinions about political, economic, social, cultural, international and other processes, but they pay less attention to involving citizens in political and decision-making processes as well as the process of the country’s government.

The programmes of political parties are usually developed by the party’s political council or a group of consultants who lay down the basic direction of the programmes. The leaders of political parties, who make comments and offer proposals for the content of the programmes and present them, are always involved in this work. The programmes are approved by the party congresses. Parties usually amend their political programmes depending on the situation in the country, and before elections. Additionally, prior to elections the parties prepare special programmes which are distributed among voters.

Political parties disseminate information about their activities through the traditional mass media. Several parties have their own mass media. So, by the end of 2008, NUR OTAN has established its own media holding, Nur-media, which included five newspapers (*Liter, Aikyn, Strana I Mir, Dala men Kala* and *Izvestiya-Kazakhstan*), one TV channel (*Astana*) and a radio station NS. In addition, all activities of the party are actively covered by the state mass media.

Communication

The opposition parties Azat and the National Social Democratic Party of Kazakhstan support the newspapers *Taszhargan*, *Svoboda Slova* and *Obschestvennaya Pozitsiya* as well as the internet newspaper *Zonakz.net*. This support is primarily financial. The Communistic People's Party of Kazakhstan publishes the newspaper *Communist of Kazakhstan*.

Parties quite often use advertising, usually in the printed mass media. These include proclamations and manifestos as well as appeals timed to coincide with notable days. They also use camouflaged propaganda tools (interviews in newspapers which are ostensibly not advertising but which contain propaganda).

Information about parties' use of special communication agencies is not disclosed. However, according to sources in the parties, they make use of agencies from Kazakhstan and abroad (mainly from Russia) which help them to develop information campaigns and strategies for carrying out advertising campaigns. Information on parties' current advertising budgets is also not made public and can only be disclosed during elections. So, in August 2007, during the last elections for the Mazhilis, each party could spend 1.2 million US dollars on advertising and every candidate for presidency in the 2005 elections, 2.3 million US dollars. According to the rough estimations of party members, the parties spend between 10 to 40 per cent of their annual budget on advertising.

A key problem for political parties is the lack of equal access to the mass media. The opposition parties are denied the chance to appear on the pages and in the television programmes of the state and pro-power mass media which, at the same time, willingly give representatives of pro-government forces (in particular, NUR OTAN party) opportunities to appear in the mass media. The activities of political parties are not sufficiently covered in all the mass media and thus they cannot inform a large number of voters of their opinions and judgements. This gives the voter the impression that only one political party stays active between elections.

Oppositional political parties are more active in the internet. However, even here they face problems. First of all, there is the limited number of internet users in Kazakhstan and, second, many internet sites are blocked in the country so their resources become inaccessible to users. Therefore, the only chance for opposition forces to inform the voters of their opinions and views is in the publications of the oppositional (mass) media, which, however, have only a small market share in Kazakhstan's media landscape.

Relationship between party and parliamentary groups The Mazhilis is almost completely formed on a party basis (98 deputies out of 107 are elected through party lists). Thus, the majority of Mazhilis members represent parties. At present, there is only one political party in the Mazhilis (NUR OTAN), which won the elections in 2007. Mazhilis deputies elected from the Assembly of Kazakhstan Nations (nine deputies) are allowed to be a member of a party or to join any parliamentary group (if they are not a member of a party). Today there are nine MPs in the Mazhilis who are not affiliated to a political party. Yet, it is hard to call them independent as they represent the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan headed by the president.

Party members as well as independent candidates, who can subsequently join parties, can be elected as deputies in the senate. As practice shows, members of parliament prefer to join parliamentary factions and groups of political parties, rather than operate as independent deputies. Formally, in the Mazhilis as well as in the senate, there are independent MPs, but these de facto all support the president's and the government's policies.

There are no independent deputy groups in parliament, and the majority of MPs are members of NUR OTAN. Parliamentarians are actively involved in activities undertaken by their political party and advocate their policies and ideas. The party, in turn, regulates the activities of their deputies and discusses particular documents (legislative acts, government decisions) prior to their consideration by the parliament and gives their conclusions to the MPs for guidance.

III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The present situation of party democracy in Kazakhstan remains difficult. Parties do not fully conform to the standard principles of active involvement in the political process and they do not work actively to involve their members and voters in the process of discussion and decision-making.

There are several reasons for this. The first is the deficiency of democracy in the Republic of Kazakhstan and the concentration of power in the head of state. Parties and politicians have never been completely involved in the political process in general. Second, there are non-transparent elections, which do not allow the real results of election campaigns to be confirmed. The third reason is the lack of easy access for political parties, especially for those in opposition, to the mass media. Fourth, there is an absence of systematic democratic work inside the parties. At present, political parties actually limit their activity to the periods of elections; between elections they are not active. The fifth reason is the absence of any considerable interest in the political process among citizens, their passiveness and lack of involvement in the activities of youth parties, which could be the driving-force of political parties in the future. The sixth reason is the conservatism of Kazakhstan's elite, who prefer stability to change and thus resist the involvement of new forces, including oppositional ones, in the political process.

Political parties in Kazakhstan only partially realize their functions. They participate in election campaigns, but they are deprived of the opportunity to represent political alternatives or to act as centres of political expertise.

In recent years parties have managed to build organizational structures which are not fully used to mobilize voters and involve them in the political process. These structures have instead been set up in response to the requirements of legislation ordering parties to have a large number of members and representation in all regions of the country. Parties also do not systematically work with their members and voters, who remain passive in political movements and campaigns, and do not answer the appeals of parties to actively work for them.

At the same time, for the last few years, parties have paid much attention to civil society organizations, inviting them as experts and appraisers of their programmes and actions, and supporting the initiatives of NGOs. However, it is impossible to say that there is a close partnership between political parties and civil organizations in general. It is more likely that those organizations which are involved in the political process have been formed by party members in order to elaborate on particular political, economic, and social proposals and to create analytical support for political parties. The majority of the organizations of civil society, as well as citizens in general, are politically passive and think about political activity with caution.

The activity of political parties between election campaigns remains weak. It is possible to say that only a few parties (NUR OTAN, the National Social Democratic Party, Azat, Adilet, Ak zhol to a lesser extent, and the Communist Party) remain active during this period, organize events, make statements, carry out information campaigns and initiate speeches. Other political parties do not show noticeable activity between election campaigns, providing only comments from their leaders on some events. This gives voters additional doubts about their efficiency and whether it is reasonable to support them. Finally, it results in the situation where during elections some political parties win a smaller number of voters than the number of their respective members.

In their programs and their objectives parties do not pay enough attention to societal problems. Usually they do not react to changes in society, leaving them obscure or outdated and out of touch with reality. Parties do not explain their programmes to the voters, who consequently are unfamiliar with them. As a result voters support the better-known parties, being guided by their slogans and statements, rather than by their programmes.

The basic obstacles to the development of party democracy in Kazakhstan are the serious legislative restrictions which are imposed on parties, for example, the necessity of having at least 40,000 members in order to be registered. This makes it extremely difficult, for example, for the Green Party, which can not find such a huge number of organized supporters. Moreover, the electoral threshold of 7 per cent to obtain a parliamentary seat is still an obstacle. Kazakh political parties have several times suggested reducing this threshold to a maximum of 3 per cent, which would allow the majority of parties to win parliamentary seats, but this decision has never been taken.

Another problem is restricted access to media to inform voters of the party's opinions. The present mass media do not give political parties other than the party in power the space to spread their messages. Another obstacle is the absence of professionals in the parties and the absence of actions by the party to involve new leaders and activists in the political process. There is no visible updating of political forces, which makes politics in Kazakhstan a conservative "black box". And the last obstacle is the political parties' misunderstanding of their functions and the consequent absence of systematic political work inside the parties. Many parties have rigid hierarchical structure and within the parties there are no democratic procedures and instruments, which leads to the situation where decisions are taken only by leaders or small groups without the support of party members.

As a whole, political parties in Kazakhstan need to update their strategies. They have to focus on free elections and fair competition, which is not now always possible. Some parties have already turned to such approach and are developing their work, heading for these principles; others remain quiet participants in the political process, in which they have little effect and influence.

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