

NATION-BUILDING

PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION IN CENTRAL ASIA: PROGRESS, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Bakhodyr ERGASHEV

*D.Sc. (Philos.), professor,
deputy director of the Institute of Civil Society Studies
(Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan)*

Anyone wishing to study political modernization should not ignore the recent problems born by the party-building process. The institution of parliamentary opposition and its evolution are probably the most complicated of them for the simple reason that legislatures are a relatively new and fairly progressive phenomenon in the region able to stimulate democratic processes on their own. In addition, the parliamentary parties have enough political weight to promote the best possible laws.

According to the generally accepted definition, the parliamentary opposition is a group of parliamentarians or the parliamentary faction of a party not present in the Cabinet and opposing it on issues of fundamental importance.¹ Social and

political thought in Central Asia is paying enough attention to the opposition as the region's political reality.² So far, however, the parliamentary

1972, pp. 50-54; A.E. Kozlov, *Parlamentskoe bol'shinstvo i oppozitsia*, Fond razvitiia parlamentarizma v Rossii, Moscow, 1995, pp. 32-34; J. Blondel, "Political Opposition in the Contemporary World," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 32, Issue 4, 1997, p. 462; P. Cowley, D. Darcy, C. Mellors, J. Neal, M. Stuart, "Mr. Blair's Loyal Opposition? The Liberal Democrats in Parliament," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 2000, pp. 100-116; L. Nijzink, "Opposition in the New South African Parliament," *Democratization*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2001, pp. 53-68; N. Mironov, "Institutsionalizatsia politicheskoy oppozitsii," *Sravnitel'noe konstitutsionnoe obozrenie*, No. 4, 2004, pp. 41-44; L. Helm, "Five Ways of Institutionalizing Political Opposition: Lessons from the Advanced Democracies," *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 3, Issue 1, 2004, pp. 22-54; A.E. Chebotarev, *Oppozitsia kak institut politicheskoy sistemy (na primere respubliki Kazakhstan)*. Synopsis of the candidate thesis, Almaty, 2007, 24 pp.

² See: S. Olimova, "Politicheskoe partii i mnogopartiynost' v Tajikistane," *Tsentral'naia Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 1,

¹ See: T. Hockin, "The Role of the Loyal Opposition in Britain's House of Commons: Three Historical Paradigms," *Parliamentary Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 25,

opposition as the most complicated part of political opposition has escaped attention.

This article attempts to assess the experience of other countries and analyzes domestic phenomena and the meaning of the changes to reveal their hidden mechanisms and impact on the local po-

1997; I. Karsakov, "Osobennosty transformatsii politicheskoy sistemy Kazakhstana v kontse 80-kh-seredine 90-kh godov," *Tsentral'naia Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 1, 1998; Z. Kurmanov, "The 2005 Parliamentary Elections in Kyrgyzstan and Collapse of the Akaev Regime," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (33), 2005.

litical regimes and take a look at the future of parliamentary opposition. I proceed from the fact that this institution has been developing in countries "that have never known a multi-party system, professional parliaments, legal opposition, independent press, real freedom of conscience, or independent trade unions, and where non-governmental organizations have been terra incognita."³

³ N.A. Nazarbaev, *Speech Delivered at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, 3 April, 2001, available at [www.akorda.kz].

Prehistory

Late in the 1980s, when the Soviet Union was still alive, it became clear that the country needed an institution of opposition. Mikhail Gorbachev did not exclude the possibility that the CPSU might become an opposition party at some later point. He argued that political methods should be used to convince people to take part in elections of all levels and cast their votes for the communists. If this failed, continued the communist leader, the party should form a constructive opposition, support reasonable measures, and go against the government when the "interests of the working people demanded this."⁴

The Interregional Group of Deputies, a prototype of sorts of a legal parliamentary opposition, appeared in 1989; it comprised about 380 deputies of the Congress of the People's Deputies of the U.S.S.R. and was headed by Andrei Sakharov, Iuri Afanasiev, Gavriil Popov, Boris Yeltsin, and Victor Palm. They laid the foundation for a parliamentary opposition in the country.

The Central Asian leaders on the whole knew that they needed a civilized opposition at a time when the most odious CPSU groups were encouraging centrifugal trends.

Constructive, Loyal, and Healthy

The constructive opposition concept was planted in the local political soil not only thanks to the efforts of the architect of perestroika: any attentive student of the materials dated to the 1990s cannot miss the impact of the FRG's constitutional and legislative experience on political opposition practices.

In West Germany the term "constructive opposition" was used in many contexts; German parliamentary parties that lose the elections are duty bound to pursue constructive policies, suggest alternatives, and take part in public discussions. On the whole, the German parliamentary opposition, together with trade unions, cushions "popular unrest."

⁴ Quoted from: A. Brown, "Gorbachev, Lenin i razryv s leninizmom," *Polis*, No. 6, 2007.

An analysis of the writings of the Central Asian leaders shows that by a constructive opposition they mean an opposition that positively affects the pace, dynamics, and results of the socioeconomic and sociopolitical reforms. By “healthy” they mean parties and public movements that have realized that a civil society is the key guarantor of state independence. When talking about a constructive opposition, Nursultan Nazarbaev, for example, has pointed to social responsibility and elaborating “development scenarios for the country that would improve it rather than destroy everything that has been achieved” as its main traits.⁵

On the whole, this corresponds to the generally accepted opinions, however the parliamentary opposition models presuppose that a “general culture of responsibility and obligations” (of both the government and the opposition) is required for the parliament to be effective. Loyalty, a no less important historical side of the opposition, is seen, as I shall demonstrate below, through the prism of a “single and common aim of democratic development shared by all the subjects involved.”

“The Opposition is a Mirror Reflection of the Government; the Government is a Mirror Reflection of the Opposition:” Are We Ready to Introduce This Institution on a Grand Scale?

When talking about democracy and stability the Central Asian leaders invariably declared that they accept those political opponents that have constructive platforms and are convinced that evolution is the only way to the future. In the context of the “personnel crunch” there is a lot of talk about the dearth of leaders capable of establishing and maintaining a centralized government.⁶ The regional leaders referred to the difficulties of the transition to the market and democracy and the “highly strung situation” as factors that slowed down the development of a constructive opposition. In Uzbekistan, for example “the groups that rejected everything,” that “were proceeding from negative assessments of everything,” and that “were deliberately building up tension” were subjected to political criticism.⁷ In Uzbekistan, as well as in all its neighbors, the phenomenon of a “slighted opposition” appeared.

In Kazakhstan “boisterousness,” what is called “black PR,” “mutual mud slinging” and “using terms in relation to the country that can hardly be described as honorable,” was officially criticized. “The fairly small population of a multi-national country finds it hard to accept. This behavior is unreasonable and dishonorable.” In mid-2005 President Nazarbaev used these emotional words to answer his opponents.⁸ Other members of the ruling class of Kazakhstan also called on the public “to

⁵ N.A. Nazarbaev, “Nam suzhdano byt’ vechnymi družiami,” Interview to *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, May 2006, available at [www.akorda.kz]. Kazakhstan is a unique country where the institution of the parliamentary opposition is concerned. In the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation there was a parliamentary opposition headed by the Progress deputy group that laid on the table a packet of reforms entitled New Economic Policy. In the fall of 1994 the parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition joined forces on a platform of reforms alternative to the government’s course.

⁶ See: bbcussian.com. 25 March, 2005.

⁷ *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 12 February, 1993.

⁸ See: N.A. Nazarbaev, *Stabil’nost’—osnova nezavisimosti*, Interview of the head of state to the republican media, available at [www.akorda.kz].

draw adequate conclusions and keep in mind that these people are still part of our society and our citizens.”⁹

The political opposition in Central Asia developed according to its own specific pattern: in the 1990s it outstripped official structures intellectually, which can be explained by its professional level, skills, and experience.¹⁰ At the same, the experience accumulated by developed democracy says that the normal functioning of the parliament and opposition requires a certain level of political and legal culture and respect for the law demonstrated by both sides.¹¹

Risks and Challenges

Experience has taught us that, if realized, the plans of the most destructive and extremist forces operating in the Central Asian republics will cause political, social, economic, and cultural collapse, disorder, chaos, and crisis of governance. This is dangerous: social and political destabilization brings loss of life and deprivation; society will be thrown several decades back. We have seen this in Tajikistan.

In fact, this republic has provided us with important examples to be studied by those who look at the development of the political opposition as an institution.¹² Its leader has rightly pointed out that the most “sensitive” and “potentially painful” issues, which might offend the nation’s pride, should be discussed in the “most responsible way with due account of all factors—both domestic (caused, among other things, by the problems and shortcomings inherited from the Soviet period) and regional and international (connected, in particular, with greed and pressure from external forces and groups).”¹³

Tajikistan has offered us a unique example of how the government and the political opposition finally failed to reach an agreement about the “highest national aims.” In these conditions the head of state laid on the table the initiative of a “certain unique public institution,” the Public Council¹⁴ supported by a group of intellectuals. The National Agreement Treaty was aimed at “setting up a fair civil society and promoting democratic, legal, secular, and social statehood in Tajikistan.”

Social Spongers and the Former Party Nomenklatura in the Opposition System

Social sponging, egalitarian ideas, and envy of the better-off are some of the most typical features of our day and viruses of the destructive opposition. They appear where and when power ne-

⁹ *Verbatim Report of the press conference of Secretary of State of the Republic of Kazakhstan K.B. Saudabaev about Kazakhstan’s OSCE Chairmanship in 2010. 1 December, 2007*, available at [www.akorda.kz].

¹⁰ Nurbolat Massanov, prominent Kazakh political scientist, has pointed to this phenomenon (for more detail, see: “Novaia Konstitutsia i perspektivy ob’edinenia demokraticeskikh sil Kazakhstana,” N. Massanov’s Polyton discussion club, available at [www.club.kz]).

¹¹ The words “The opposition is a mirror reflection of the Government; the Government is a mirror reflection of the opposition” belong to Speaker of the Kyrgyz parliament A. Madumarov, available at [www.svoboda.org], 23 February, 2003.

¹² Back in 1992 a group under A. Ochilov that wanted to cooperate with the then President K. Makhkamov left the Democratic Party of Tajikistan; this group was seeking power through the normal parliamentary process.

¹³ E. Rakhmonov, *Lecture in Honor of the Day of Knowledge at the Tajik Agrarian University*, 1 September, 2006, available at [www.president.tj].

¹⁴ See: E. Rakhmonov, *Speech at a Regular Sitting of the Public Council* (Dushanbe, 7 April, 2006), available at [www.president.tj].

glects the material state of the masses and the inability of many to earn a dignified living. This leads to social passivity and marginalization (charities that “give people a chance to show the initiative and that connect people and the state”¹⁵ can cure this “opposition” ailment.

Democracy (parliamentary democracy included) is threatened by the “party nomenklatura and everything raised by the old ideological system,”¹⁶ as well as “civil servants removed from their posts,”¹⁷ who are another social stratum of the destructive opposition. The October 1993 events in Russia, when practically the entire legislature became the parliamentary opposition, were the finale of a political drama¹⁸ which encouraged opposition to the nomenklatura elsewhere.

Each of the Central Asian states fights its party nomenklatura in its own way in the context of the parliamentary opposition. In Tajikistan, for example, the then head of state Rakhmon Nabiev, who was forced to maneuver among the opposition forces and even seek compromises, rejected the orthodox stand of part of its elite that called the tune in the outlawed Communist Party. In Kazakhstan, the country’s leaders chose to restructure the government horizontally and vertically to set groups inside the old elite against each other and ignite stiff competition among them. The capital was moved from the south to the country’s north. Nurbolat Massanov has written that because of this “the old nomenklatura with its connections, authority, and influence, as well as the opposition, found themselves abandoned in Almaty and out of the running.”¹⁹

There Should Be Alternatives to the Parliamentary Majority Programs

As early as in the 1990s President Karimov clearly indicated that Uzbekistan needed a political alternative: “I think that the opposition should rely on very specific alternative program documents—let me repeat—alternative programs, or models, so as to be able to compete with official approaches and official programs. This can earn the respect or objection of the people.”²⁰ The already functioning parties were expected to play an important role in formulating political alternatives in the republic. In 1997 the president put into words the task of organizing the opposition into a force with a legal status that would “respect the constitutional and legal norms,” “feel responsible for the state and public order in the country,” and “offer alternative projects of state structure.”²¹

The president of Kazakhstan has pointed out that “an open society and market economy have no alternatives,” however “modernization and the mechanism of modernization are the key issues of the

¹⁵ D.A. Medvedev, *Otechetsvennaia blagotvoritelnost' vozrozhdaet svoi istoricheskie traditsii*, 12 April, 2006, available at [www.kreml.org].

¹⁶ I.A. Karimov, *My ubezhdeny v pravil'nosti izbrannogo puti*, 16 February, 1996, available at [www.press-service.uz].

¹⁷ N.A. Nazarbaev, “Nam suzhdeno byt' vechnymi druziami,” Interview to *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, May 2006, available at [www.akorda.kz].

¹⁸ By saying this I do not deny that at least certain groups of the old nomenklatura can change. In the early 1990s in Mongolia, for example, the ruling Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party initiated a parliamentary reform and competitive elections thus giving rise to a parliamentary opposition.

¹⁹ N. Massanov, “Politicheskaia i ekonomicheskaia elita Kazakhstana,” *Tsentral'naia Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 1, 1998.

²⁰ I.A. Karimov, op. cit. Later, on 29 August, 1996, speaking at the 6th session of the Oliy Majlis of the first convocation, the president of Uzbekistan said: “We understand political opposition as an alternative. An alternative is needed in all spheres of life” (I.A. Karimov, “Gotov sport's liubym opponentom,” *Trud*, 26 May, 1993).

²¹ I.A. Karimov, *Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka: ugrozy bezopasnosti, uslovia i garantii progressa*, 1997, available at [www.press-service.uz].

domestic dimension of national security.”²² The new president of Kyrgyzstan calls on the nation to look “for alternative ways out of the present situation; to show the road toward intensive economic development and cutting down the enormous state debt.”²³ While being aware that there is no alternative to capitalism, many of the local and foreign experts argued that “commercialization of human bonds and relations was not inevitable.”²⁴ In other words, it is commonly believed that in Central Asia the ability of all the political forces, including their left wing, to offer alternatives remained underestimated.

Studies of the political alternatives to the parliamentary opposition in Central Asia have two sides. On the one, domestic, side, many political scientists believe that the potential of the opposition in general (besides the already mentioned potential of the left) remains underestimated²⁵ and that there is an obvious shrinking of the most probable alternatives to those in power. On the other, external, side, there is what is known as an “alternative without alternatives” created by globalization and the threat of being “pushed away from the golden billion into a world of poverty and slavery.”²⁶

On the one hand, these two sides force the parliamentary opposition to seek other options inside the country (mainly the social-democratic approach to social, political, and economic reforms). On the other hand, the parliamentary opposition is losing some of its opportunities to seek a “third road,” “third model” or develop into a “third force.” This is amply confirmed by the recurrent world crises in the form of crises of foodstuffs, fuel, etc. and all sorts of “orange revolutions,” invasions of mass culture, and similar phenomena.

Parliamentary Opposition and Public Control: Interaction and Interrelation

The Program of Democratization, Social Renovation, Reformation and Modernization of the Country adopted in Uzbekistan in January 2005 envisaged that the deputy corps, political parties, and NGOs should develop into “the key instrument of public control of the state and power structures. The Constitutional Law of Uzbekistan on the Stronger Role of Political Parties in the Renovation and Democratization of State Governance and Modernization of the Country (the draft of which was published in November 2006) presupposed that the country should receive an effective system of public control of executive power and administration.

In Kazakhstan the draft Law on Amendments and Addenda to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan²⁷ President Nazarbaev presented to the parliament on 16 May, 2007 presupposed that the parliamentary factions could tighten their control over the formation of the Cabinet and its activities. In Kyrgyzstan the legislative initiative that introduced elections by party lists was expected to

²² N.A. Nazarbaev, *Speech Delivered at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs*, 3 April, 2001, available at [www.akorda.kz]

²³ *Verbatim Report of the Dialog between President Bakiev and the Readers of Vecherny Bishkek newspaper*, 6 April, 2007, available at [www.president.kg].

²⁴ “Mnogoobrazie politicheskogo opyta. Beseda s politologom, prepodavatelem Evropeyskogo universiteta (St. Petersburg) V.Ia. Gelmanom,” available at [www.politstudies.ru].

²⁵ This is the opinion of Ed. Schatz, Assistant Professor, University of Toronto (Canada). For more detail, see: N. Massanov’s Polyton Discussion Club, 9 December, 2005, available at [www.club.kz].

²⁶ “Na perekrestke politiki i nauki. Beseda s filosofom, politologom, chlenom Politicheskogo Soveta Souza pravvykh sil RF A.A. Kara-Murzoy,” available at [www.politstudies.ru].

²⁷ *Stenogramma press-konferentsii Gossekretaria i rukovodstva Administratsii Prezidenta RK*, available at [www.akorda.kz].

increase the responsibility of political parties and “public control of the politically active part of civil society over the legislative and executive branches of power”²⁸ (this means that the parliament, Zhogorku kenesh, in turn, becomes an object of public control).

In Tajikistan the government calls on the political parties and the deputy corps to exercise public control over the distribution of aid, the promotion of morality and spirituality, and the observance of rites and traditions that should correspond to the acting laws and legislative regulations.²⁹

The Uzbek Experience

In February 2005, when the new two-chamber parliament of Uzbekistan was one month old, the Oliy Majlis deputy factions of the following parties: Liberal-Democratic, National-Democratic Fidokorlar, and Social-Democratic Adolat in the parliament lower chamber formed the Democratic Bloc (a prototype of the parliamentary majority). The National-Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (NDPU), in turn, positioned itself as the “opposition party of the minority,” the “left wing of the reformist forces,” “a side in the healthy factional struggle,” and “supporter of political pluralism and competition in the parliament.” This created conditions for the further development of parliamentary democracy.

The Constitutional Law on the Stronger Role of Political Parties in the Renovation and Democratization of State Governance and Modernization of the Country enacted on 1 January, 2008, after a long discussion, offers the following definition of the parliamentary opposition: “factions of political parties as well as deputies elected from citizen initiative groups which disagree with the course and program of the newly formed government as a whole or its individual parts.”³⁰

What rights has the parliamentary opposition received under the Constitutional Law? The opposition can set up and strengthen the mechanisms for elaborating and introducing alternative draft laws at the same time as the report on the same issue by the corresponding committee of the lower chamber; and it has the right to insist that its special opinion on any issue discussed by the chamber be introduced into the verbatim report. Its members have the right to sit on a conciliatory commission set up to reach an agreement on laws declined by the upper chamber, etc.

From the Center to the Regions: Vertical Arrangement for the Parliamentary Opposition

The president of Kazakhstan is convinced that the center of gravity at the current stage of the reforms has shifted to the regions. He argued that the political parties should become “people’s parties” “concerned with the problems of all Kazakhstanis wherever these people are liv-

²⁸ K. Bakiev, *Vystuplenie na vstreche s professorami, prepodavateliami, studentami i rabotnikami vysshikh i srednikh professional'nykh uchebnykh zavedeniy g. Bishkeka 28 sentiabria 2007 g.*, available at [www.president.kg].

²⁹ See: E. Rakhmon, *Rech' na obshcherespublikanskom soveshchani po regulirovaniu provedenia natsional'nykh obriadov i religioznykh traditsiy, 24 maia 2007 g.*, available at [www.president.tj].

³⁰ The definition of factions, blocs of factions set up in the country’s parliament either as the parliamentary majority or as the opposition, was introduced into national legislation to specify Art 34 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan, which said that nobody had the right to infringe on the rights and freedoms of members of the opposition minorities in political parties or legislatures.

ing.” They should become “parties of not only large but also small issues,” they should “consistently uproot the shortcomings” and “work actively in the maslikhats.” The representative power in the center (the parliament) and in the regions (the maslikhats) should control the “local government represented by the akims,” “overcome latent bureaucratic resistance,” and control the “heads of executive power.”³¹

In Uzbekistan, the NDPU, as the party of the parliamentary opposition, has posed itself the task of identifying all the failures and blunders that undermine the social efficiency of the reforms and of subjecting those guilty of the failures and blunders to open and constructive criticism. The party is paying much attention to the practical execution of the laws, budget policies, and social and economic development of the regions, ensuring employment, investments, etc., in short, to issues related to the competence of the local state power structures.³² The party is convinced that the local representative structures should add vigor to the social vector of the reforms. The party members believe it highly important for the local structures to identify the failures and blunders that undermine the social efficiency of the current reforms.³³

Conceptual Issues

Those political scientists who write that Kazakhstan “lacks a clear idea about how the ruling party and the parliamentary majority can be distinguished, because some of the decisions require qualified majority of two-thirds to be adopted,” are quite right. The rights of the parliamentary minority should be specified during the formation of the parliament and the Cabinet. The country needs an easily identified mechanism of cooperation between the ruling party and the president and, in general, between the ruling parties and the president. The time has come to clarify the relations between the president and the parliament and the mechanism of consultations on forming the Cabinet.³⁴

We should bear in mind that no party is denigrated by its opposition to the prevailing course: in fact, its theses formulated in the heat of the power struggle are absolutely indispensable. Further development of the parliamentary opposition demands that the political parties, the social-democratic parties in particular, should take a closer look at the everyday problems of those who vote for them and serve as their social basis; they should identify their interests and find out where these people live. The status of the parliamentary opposition demands that it should elaborate a clear idea of close and effective cooperation between the party and its parliamentary faction.

The time has come to tap the experience of those social-democratic parties that have a long history of functioning as the parliamentary opposition: “Kazakhstan is not the only country that relies on this experience,” said President Nazarbaev. “The Social-Democratic Workers’ Party of Sweden, for example, with a membership of about a million remained in power for 56 years, throughout which the

³¹ N.A. Nazarbaev, *Vystuplenie na 3-em zasedanii Goskomissii po razrabotke i konkretizatsii programmy demokraticheskikh reform, 6 iyunia 2006 goda*, available at [www.akorda.kz]; N.A. Nazarbaev, *Vystuplenie na XI vneocherednom s'ezde NDP Nur Otan. 4 iuliia 2007 goda*, available at [www.akorda.kz]; N.A. Nazarbaev, *Vystuplenie na vneocherednom IX s'ezde RPP Otan. 4 iulia 2006 goda*, available at [www.akorda.kz]; N.A. Nazarbaev, *Poslanie narodu Kazakhstana. Mart 2007 goda*, available at [www.akorda.kz].

³² See: “Dobivat'sia neukosnitel'nogo ispolnenia zakonov. 24 noiabria 2005 goda,” available at [www.xdp.us].

³³ See: “Proiavliat' initsiativu v realizatsii sotsial'nogo vektora reform. 18 maia 2006 goda,” available at [www.xdp.uz].

³⁴ See: D. Nazarbaeva, *Vystuplenie na zasedanii Goskomissii po razrabotke i konkretizatsii programmy demokraticheskikh reform v RK, 9 oktiabria 2006 goda v Astane*, available at [www.iwip.kz].

country went to the polls during general elections with universal suffrage. The Swedish Social-Democrats are following a strategy designed to protect the interests of the majority by gradually improving the situation; they raised the standard of living and social security to heights that are everywhere described as the 'Swedish miracle'.³⁵

Westminster or Scandinavian?

The British (Westminster) model of the parliamentary opposition rests on the two-party system that clearly outlines the opposition's responsibility. This model, however, lacks, first, representation of large groups of voters and, second, makes it hard, if possible at all, to influence decision-making. The continental model, on the other hand, provides room for wide representation of political parties and a high level of legitimacy and support at the grass-roots level, but makes it hard to identify those personally responsible for any specific decision and its implementation.

In any case (each of the Central Asian models as a symbiosis of several models will be absolutely unique³⁶), it is important to secure equal rights for the parliamentary majority and the parliamentary opposition. We should take into account the Westminster and Scandinavian experience and learn to reject non-constitutional forms of opposition. The Central Asian parliamentary opposition, with due account of experience accumulated abroad, should offer alternatives through the media (TV in particular) and the expert community's largest and most respected sections.

The Central Asian parliamentary opposition can use other methods: Opposition Day in the parliament when the issues the opposition lays on the table are treated as priorities and Once a Week—Questions to the Premier. Grants designed to study and analyze current political developments are especially important as a means of funding the opposition structures. Regular consultations between the factions and the party leadership and its territorial units look like a promising suggestion that could develop into a tradition.

Why is the Road to the Shadow Cabinet a Long One and Why are the Laws on Opposition Premature?

Shadow ministers are expected to offer constructive criticism of the government and come forward with alternative strategies. The shadow cabinet, which can be described as a government-in-waiting, prevents frequent rotations of the government, thus adding stability to the political system and ruling out possible dramatic changes when the opposition comes to power ("there is a pike for every carp in the river").³⁷ Some people argue that in the Central Asian countries the presidential

³⁵ *Vystuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbaeva na VII s'ezde Grazhdanskoy partii Kazakhstana. 10 noiabria 2006 goda*, available at [www.akorda.kz].

³⁶ The unique nature of Central Asian parliamentarism is best illustrated by the fact that K. Bakiev, one of the leaders of the anti-Akaev opposition, became president with the help of the parliament, the results of the elections to which the opposition rejected. Earlier, K. Bakiev accepted the decision of the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan that annulled the election results.

³⁷ H. Schwartz, *The Struggle for Constitutional Justice in Post-Communist Europe*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2000, p. 24.

administrations play the role of shadow cabinets.³⁸ A wider approach will discover globalization's shadow cabinet in America.³⁹

If passed, the laws On Opposition will only partially solve the problems of growth of the institution of the opposition.

- First, these laws will never answer all the questions; they will not be watertight and will inevitably rely on the current legal culture.
- Second, when all opposition-related procedures are brought together in one law, cooperation between the executive and legislative powers might be constricted.
- Third, no law is needed if the government and the opposition do not want to legally formalize their relations: in politics informal mechanisms might be as, or even more, effective than the formal ones.

The National Idea and Parliamentary Opposition

It took several centuries to create a loyal opposition in Great Britain: while disagreeing with the Cabinet, the parliamentary opposition never moves against the Queen and the state as a whole. The two camps in the British legislatures—the majority and the minority—are pursuing the same aims: stability and well-being, although they might disagree over the methods used to secure these aims.⁴⁰

In Kazakhstan the leadership has called on the nation to set up “strong and competitive parties with wide and reliable social bases to enable them to identify and translate the people’s interests into practical deeds and compete in a civilized way for votes” “united by the national idea [to make Kazakhstan one of the 50 most competitive countries of the world.—*B.E.*] and competing among themselves in a constructive way.”⁴¹

In Uzbekistan the national idea—Peace for the Country, Well-Being for the Nation, Progress for the Fatherland—has been accepted by all five political parties (including those currently in the parliamentary opposition), which regard national interests as an absolute political priority. In Tajikistan the national idea dates back to 22 July, 1989 when the Law on Language was adopted.⁴² One of the national ideas of Kyrgyzstan has been formulated as Healthy Nation—Prospering Country.⁴³

* * *

In Central Asia the parliamentary opposition is not seen as an aim in itself. So far, it plays a small role hardly noticed by the man-in-the-street. All parties the world over, however, pull people to their

³⁸ [dw-world.de], 30 October, 2003.

³⁹ See: *Liberation*, 29 January, 2004.

⁴⁰ The unity of action and American patriotism that push back all contradictions can be detected time and again in the way the House minority votes in the U.S. Congress.

⁴¹ N.A. Nazarbaev, *Vystuplenie na vneochednom IX s'edze RPP Otan, 4 iulia 2006 goda.*

⁴² See: E. Rakhmon, *Vystuplenie v chest' 10-letia Dnia natsional'nogo edinstva, 5 noiabria 2007 goda*, available at [www.president.tj].

⁴³ See: K. Bakiev, *Zdorovie nashikh liudey—eto tot bestsenny resurs, bez kotorogo nevozmozžno razvitie obschestva, nevozmozžno budushchee naroda*, available at [www.president.kg].

side by active work in favor of their electorates outside and inside the legislatures. To be noticed and respected the party should work “not only during the election campaigns.”⁴⁴ Those parties that neglect the interests of the voters cannot count on sustainable popular interest in and support of their parliamentary factions.

⁴⁴ N.A. Nazarbaev, *Stabil'nost'—osnova nezavisimosti. Interview zhurnalistam respublikanskihk SMI (seredina 2005 g.)*, available at [www.akorda.kz].