

**INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF
THE PARTY SYSTEM
IN KAZAKHSTAN AND RUSSIA:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

Part II

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**Genesis and Institutionalization of
the Kazakhstani and Russian “Parties of Power”**

A government that has closed its ranks to form a party (the academic community has aptly tagged this “the party of power”) is another striking feature of the period under review. The party of power competes with all the other parties for the electorate’s votes.¹ This political phenome-

For the beginning of the article, see: Central Asia and the Caucasus, No. 6 (54), 2008.

¹ See: V.E. Fedorinov, *Politicheskie partii Rossii v usloviakh stanovleniia i razvitiia pliaralizma*, author’s synopsis of a doctorate thesis, Moscow, 2002, pp. 24-25.

non of Russia and Kazakhstan is a logical product of authoritarian democracy realized through the super-presidential form of government in both countries.

Since 1990 the Russian establishment has made several attempts to set up a party of power—the Democratic Russia Movement (1990); the Party of Russian Unity and Harmony—PRES (1993); the Russia’s Democratic Choice Party (1994); Russia is Our Home (1995)²—each of these structures being genetically tied to its predecessor which served its basis. The Russia is Our Home Party was based on the pro-governmental movements Russia’s Democratic Choice and PRES.³

Success came in December 2001 in the form of the all-Russia political party “Unity and Fatherland—United Russia,” which in 2005 acquired a new name—the All-Russia Political Party United Russia (UR) rooted in the election blocs “Unity” and “Fatherland—All Russia” which were set up for the 1999 Duma elections to support the course being steered by Acting President Vladimir Putin.

It was thanks to the nationwide popularity of President Putin, who, in turn, supported the new party at the 2003 and 2007 elections and to the much stronger position of the government in Russia (the elites consolidated around the president, who built up the vertical of power)⁴ that United Russia won the constitutional majority in the State Duma during both elections to become the strongest political party in the Russian Federation’s history. It left two other old-timers of the RF Federal Assembly (the Communist Party of the RF and the Liberal-Democratic Party) far behind.

In Kazakhstan, likewise, the phenomenon of the “party of power” goes back to the 1990s: a public-political movement, the People’s Unity of Kazakhstan Alliance (PUKA), set up in 1993 from above and supported by President Nazarbaev was transformed two years later into a party of the same name. It, in turn, served one of the cornerstones of Otan, the party of power set up in 1999.⁵

This was the most important and system-forming restructuring of the pro-presidential forces undertaken to prevent scattering of the pro-presidential votes that might leave these disunited parties outside the 7 percent barrier. To avoid this the Republican Public Staff set up to support Nursultan Nazarbaev as presidential candidate served as the basis for the Otan Party (which also included PUKA, the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Liberal Movement of Kazakhstan and the For Kazakhstan-2030 Movement).⁶

Otan, which from the very beginning enjoyed organizational, material, personnel, intellectual, information, and other resources as well as the support of President Nazarbaev, who previously kept an equal distance from all the political forces but in 1991 joined Otan and was elected its chairman, clearly became the “party of power” with good prospects. At the 1999 elections it left all the other parliamentary parties far behind.

Later, when all the parties had to reregister under a new law, Otan institutionalized itself in real terms. Deep-cutting revision trimmed its membership (even though the Popular-Cooperative Party of Kazakhstan [PCPK] and the Republican Political Party of Labor [RPPL] joined it) and made it much more compact and much more united. The 2004 elections were its first triumph; local analysts accounted the victory to the state’s sustainable development, the president’s support, and the fairly effective performance of the election staff.⁷

² See: V.E. Fedorinov, op. cit., p. 26.

³ See: *Politicheskie partii, dvizheniia i organizatsii sovremennoi Rossii na rubezhe vekov. 1999 g. Analiticheskii spravochnik*, ed. by I.N. Barygin, Izdatelstvo Mikhailova V.A., St. Petersburg, 1999, p. 105.

⁴ See: T. Stanovaia, “Chto takoe ‘partii vlasti’ v Rossii?” *RIA Novosti*, 8 June, 2005.

⁵ See: Yu.O. Buluktaev, S. Diachenko, L. Karmazina, *Politicheskie partii Kazakhstana, 1998 god: Spravochnik*, Almaty, 1998, p. 34; S. Diachenko, L. Karmazina, S. Seidumanov, *Politicheskie partii Kazakhstana. God 2000: Spravochnik*, Almaty, 2000, p. 79.

⁶ See: S. Diachenko, L. Karmazina, S. Seidumanov, op. cit.

⁷ See: D.A. Ashimbaev, “Politicheskie itogi parlamentskikh vyborov,” *TsKT Reputatsiia*, 6 October, 2004.

In July-December 2006, when President Nazarbaev decided to unite the pro-presidential forces (the Asar Republican Party, on the scene since 2003, the Civil Party of Kazakhstan [CivPK], and the Agrarian Party of Kazakhstan [APK]) under the Otan aegis, presidential support developed into patronage. The extended and somewhat renovated party assumed a new name—the People’s Democratic Party Nur Otan (Nur Otan for short); with a membership of about 1 million in a country with a total population of 15 million it became the heavyweight among the parties. Strengthened by deputies elected from the CivPK and APK, the Otan parliamentary faction (just like the United Russia faction in the State Duma) gained a constitutional majority in the Majilis. The off-year elections of 2007 held in the wake of the second constitutional reform gave Nur Otan all of the seats (98) in the lower chamber.

The fact that the government in Kazakhstan and Russia set itself the task of creating a united party with a vast membership and the nation’s massive support suggests that starting in 2003-2004 both republics have been clearly moving toward a multiparty system dominated by one party (the one-and-a-half-party system) in which for many years one party remains in power and carries the elections despite democratic procedures and the presence of other parties on the political scene. President Nazarbaev did not exclude this: he referred to the political experience of Sweden, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, India, and Mexico.⁸

The two countries have something else in common: they switched to the proportionate system of elections to the lower chambers of their parliaments. Kazakhstan introduced this novelty as part of the constitutional reform of 2007 that changed the status and boosted the role of the political parties. Russia did the same somewhat earlier, in 2005, by readjusting the Federal Law on the Election of Deputies to the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. The election laws of both countries have much more in common: the 7 percent barrier and no lower limits for turn-out; under Russia’s election law, which was amended in 2005 and 2007, the voters lost the opportunity to vote “against all” (the new rule has existed in Kazakhstan since 2005). Under the changed laws, the parties in both countries lost the right to form election blocs.⁹

The 2007 parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan and Russia produced similar results. The newly introduced proportionate system allowed the parties of power in both countries to triumph with stunning results: in Russia the United Russia Party left all the other contenders far behind; in Kazakhstan, Nur Otan found itself alone on the Olympus of power. The constitutional majority winning for the second time running offers a much clearer picture of the future party system with one dominant party that is taking shape simultaneously in both republics.

Competitiveness as a Specific Feature of the Party Systems of Kazakhstan and Russia

The fact that both countries introduced elections by party lists at essentially the same time in 2007 made the year 2007 the starting point of the new (fifth) period of transformation of their party

⁸ See: N.A. Nazarbaev, “Vystuplenie na IX s’ezde Respublikanskoi politicheskoi partii ‘Otan’ 7 iiulia 2006,” available at [www.akorda.kz], official site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

⁹ See: “Konstitutsionny zakon ‘O vyborakh v Respublike Kazakhstan,’” available at [http://election.kz/portal/page?_pageid=73,48269&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL]; “Federalny zakon ‘O vyborakh deputatov Gosudarstvennoi Dumy Federalnogo Sobraniia Rossiiskoi Federatsii,’” available at [http://www.cikrf.ru/law/2/zakon_51.jsp].

systems. The one-and-half-party system has become institutionalized, however the processes exhibit certain local specifics.

The constitutional reform of 2007 in Kazakhstan was a powerful modernization factor: it activated the reliable and enduring mechanism of an open system of governance with sustainable state and public institutions, thus smoothly transferring the Republic of Kazakhstan to the presidential-parliamentary system.

The constitutional reform changed the status of the political parties and boosted their role; once more Kazakhstan outstripped Russia as far as party legislation was concerned. From that time on consultations with the party factions and approval of the majority of the deputy corps became indispensable for the president when choosing the prime minister. In fact, the prime minister represented the party that held the majority seats in the parliament while his Cabinet was to implement the program of the party that won the elections. "Under present conditions, the political system," writes Sergey Diachenko, "develops into an ideological axis of the parliament-cabinet governing tandem; the party's political might and ideological potential are projected onto the parliament's law-making activities and the cabinet's executive efficiency."¹⁰ Today, when the country has switched to the party type of political production, so to speak, we have acquired a "ruling party"; the political parties of Kazakhstan play the role that belongs to this institution in developed democracies.

Russia has no similar legal regulation; to bypass it the April 2008 congress of United Russia amended its Rules in the part related to its chairman, the top party position. Two posts (Party Chairman and Chairman of the Party's Supreme Council), which until that time had belonged to Boris Gryzlov, were separated. The post of Party Chairman went to Vladimir Putin (later elected prime minister of Russia) along with the congress's decision that it could be filled by a non-party man.¹¹ This means that we can regard United Russia not merely as the party of power but also as the ruling (albeit not classical) party.

Political scientists have not yet agreed on what to think about the tactics the leaders of Kazakhstan have employed when building up the "party of power;" they likewise disagree about the party itself. Most of them describe Nur Otan as a "gloomy monster with a 'human face' and ideology of the 21st century set up to reap votes"; "a mass of people stirred up on command attached to corresponding party communication lines (branches, offices, and cells)"; an instrument for gathering votes at the presidential and parliamentary elections; a party of the nomenklatura rather than a party of voters; an element of the power system; the "fifth wheel" in the state system; an appendage of the presidential administration without claims to independence.¹² It needs urgent reformation. Its monopoly in the parliament puts the brakes on democratization in Kazakhstan.¹³ The Kazakh authorities spare no effort to convince the nation that "a single ideological platform of the parliament and government is required to promote operational and qualitative law-making of the new generation."¹⁴ While being fully aware of the anti-democratic nature of the current situation the authorities go out of their way to convince the public that Nur Otan's monopoly in the parliament "was what people wanted... It meant that what we had all been doing together during the years of independence was accepted." It is becom-

¹⁰ S.A. Diachenko, "Partiino-parlamentskiy fundament politicheskoi sistemy Kazakhstana: realii, vozmozhnosti i perspektivy," *Analytic*, No. 2, 2008.

¹¹ See: T. Moriakova, "Putin vozglavit Edinuiu Rossiю," available at [<http://www.utro.ru/articles/2008/04/15/730941.shtml>].

¹² See: A. Vlasov, "Partiinyi butik. Modeli ot AP RK. 6 marta 2008," available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/597>]; idem, "Kazakhstan 2012. Partiia vlasti 'X' protiv national-demokratov iz 'Y.' 12 marta 2008," available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/633>]; A. Kuanov, "My zhdem peremen," *Liter*, August, 2008, available at [<http://www.liter.kz/site.php?lan=russian&id=151&pub=11400>]; D. Satpaev, "Partiinye metamorfozy," available at [http://www.risk.kz/pages.php?id=12&id_m=12017], etc.

¹³ See: A. Sagadiev, "Vybory budut, kogda Tuiakbai na gore svisnet!" available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/2641>].

¹⁴ See: S.A. Diachenko, op. cit.; A. Kuanov, op. cit.

ing increasingly clear that the one-party Majilis is not fully suited to the new stage of “face-lifting” in Kazakhstan.

According to many experts the situation can be improved by setting up a two-party system.¹⁵ Some of the experts tend to believe that the National Social-Democratic Party (NSDP) may stand opposed to Nur Otan (that represents power) as a representative of the non-parliamentary majority (or minority). Others predict that the People’s Party of the Kazakhstans “X” (read Nur Otan) will compete with the National-Democratic Party “Y”; still others (who are probably looking at the Russian developments in the party sector) do not exclude a second “party of power.”¹⁶

As distinct from Kazakhstan’s “party of power,” which in 2006 swallowed all the other pro-presidential parties to find itself the sole opponent of the opposition, United Russia has a satellite in the form of the Just Russia Party; there is an opinion that the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia can be described as secretly pro-power.¹⁷

The assessments by Russian political analysts of United Russia do not differ greatly from what their Kazakh colleagues think about Nur Otan: it is described as an “electoral-administrative machine” without a position or freedom of action, a “palliative of the public political field; an institutionalized consensus of the political-economic and federal-regional elites”¹⁸; everyone knows that this is a pro-power party.

Outwardly, when compared with United Russia the Just Russia Party can be called the “party of power” with certain concessions: their administrative resources are incomparable while the relations between the two parties are hardly friendly. In this case, however, its inability to pursue independent political activity serves as the main criterion. Yu. Korguniuk, for example, describes it as an “artificial political body born by the Kremlin: the Motherland and the Russian Party of Pensioners, which have been doing quite well at the regional elections, would hardly want to unite; and they would be even less willing to join forces with the absolutely incomprehensible Russian Party of Life. They would also be even less enthusiastic about the latter’s leader as their head.”¹⁹

Nur Otan has no more or less strong rivals (either among the opposition or among the pro-power parties); United Russia, on the other hand, is confronted both at the federal and the regional level by real rivals. This is what makes the political systems of Kazakhstan and Russia different. There is another, and more important, factor: United Russia in the State Duma has rather influential rivals while Nur Otan has none in the Majilis.

The Present Day in Kazakhstan’s Party Landscape

The phenomenon of a one-party parliament called for readjustment; therefore in August 2007 Chairman of the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan G. Kasymov was appointed deputy of the Senate of the parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan by a presidential decree.

In November 2007 the Majilis set up a Public Chamber in which all interested parties could present their ideas about the country’s economic and political future and suggest corresponding mechanisms.

¹⁵ See: A. Sagadiev, op. cit.; A. Vlasov, “Kazakhstan. Eti vybory budut vechnymi... 11 iuliia 2008,” available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/1657>]; A. Kuanov, op. cit.

¹⁶ See: A. Sagadiev, op. cit.; A. Vlasov, “Kazakhstan-2012...”; idem, “Partiiny butik...”; A. Chebotarev, “V Kazakhstane vozmozhno polnoe razobshchenie oppozitsionnykh sil,” available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/2542>].

¹⁷ See: V. Martianov, “Mnogopartiinaia partiia vlasti,” *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, No. 3, 2007, p. 19.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 17; Yu.G. Korguniuk, “Zakat vtoroi partiinoi sistemy,” available at [<http://www.partinform.ru/colon.htm>].

¹⁹ Yu.G. Korguniuk, op. cit.

It has brought together deputies of the Majilis and Senate, representatives of five political parties (Nur Otan, the Adilet Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Rukhaniyat Party, the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan, and the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan), NGOs and public associations, and human rights and analytical structures. This is how public opinion is conveyed to the republic's legislature.

Nearly all the political parties in active opposition to the regime preferred to stay away from this public expert and consultative structure; they set up an informal structure of their own—Khalyk kenesi (people's parliament) under the aegis of the NSDP with representation from political parties, republican public associations, NGOs, and trade unions; politicians and public figures were also involved. So far the "shadow parliament" has found it hard to reach a consensus on the issues discussed.²⁰ This attempt to bring together all the opposition parties of Kazakhstan failed like all previous ones: the Azat Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, for example, refused to join the People's Parliament "on principle" even though earlier, in August, it submitted four bills drafted jointly with the NSDP for public consideration.

Throughout the history of the multiparty system in Kazakhstan the opposition camp has closed ranks and fallen apart so often that we can confidently say that over time the Khalyk kenesi will become a self-contained structure doomed to gradually disappear into oblivion.²¹

It should be said that neither one deputy elected to a parliament totally dominated by Nur Otan from any other party nor the Public Chamber can solve the problem of the mono-party parliament. The problem must be addressed however. In the absence of real political competition in the country today and in the near future President Nazarbaev suggested that "a legal mechanism should be set up to form at least a two-party parliament even if the second party remained below the 7 percent barrier."²² This is more radical than the suggestion to lower the barrier to 5 percent which regularly cropped up at the discussions of possible amendments to the election law. The 5 percent barrier can hardly remedy the situation since at the previous elections the most successful opposition parties remained below it: the NSDP received 4.54 percent and the Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan 3.09 percent of the votes. The October elections to the Senate likewise failed to improve the situation: the presidential party refused to allow members of other parties to be elected to the upper chamber to create a sham multiparty chamber.²³ The presidential amendment will at least create a two-party parliament.

In the wake of the 2007 elections, which created a one-party parliament, there was no shortage of predictions of new elections. The analytical community is still persisting with these presumptions even though the one-party parliament is already one year old.²⁴ Life has shown that despite the Majilis deputies' active involvement in law-making and in the anti-corruption campaign the potential of the parliament's new powers has not been fully tapped. The past has taught us that new elections are possible if and when "Nazarbaev's amendment" becomes part of an amended election law: Nur Otan will again reign victorious at the next elections—it is strongly associated with the president while the local leaders will hardly abandon the party to its fate.

²⁰ See: "Mnogie voprosy—slozhnye, trudnye, v nikh mnogo navorochoeno," *INTERFAX-KAZAKHSTAN*, 15 October, 2008, available at [<http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-200810150123>].

²¹ See: A. Chebotarev, op. cit.

²² N.A. Nazarbaev, "Vystuplenie na otkrytii II sessii Parlamenta RK 2 sentiabria 2008 g.," available at [http://www.akorda.kz/www/wwww_akorda_kz.nsf/sections?Open+Form&id_doc=98F2D256CA617479062574B8007238F0&lang=ru&L1=L2&L2=L2-15].

²³ See: "Polny tsikl izbiratelnykh protsedur," *Ekspert Kazakhstan*, No. 37, September, 2008, available at [http://www.expert.ru/printissues/kazakhstan/2008/37/vybory_v_senat].

²⁴ See, for example: A. Vlasov, "Kazakhstan. Eti vybory budut vechnymi..."

Diversification on the Russian Political Field: Present Stage

I have already written that just as in Kazakhstan the pro-power party carried the day in Russia too. The results, however, are not strictly identical: three more parties (Just Russia, the Communists, and LDPR) won seats in the State Duma. The liberals (The Union of Right Forces) failed once more (they lost the 2003 elections). It is thought that their withdrawal from the political scene spells the death of the second party system born at the turn of the 1990s.²⁵ Analysts are convinced, however, that the failure of the liberals should not be taken to mean that Russia is done with liberalism. The country needs a liberal party; recent developments have demonstrated that the liberal component will survive. Early in October a new liberal party was launched by allying the Union of Right Forces, the Democratic Party, and the Civil Force Party. (The new party will be probably called The Right Cause.)²⁶ It will probably move away from indiscriminating criticism of the government practiced by its predecessor; it insists that it stands opposed to undemocratic policies but not the Russian leaders—it supports much of what is being done.²⁷ The new party will quench its former radicalism on domestic and foreign issues yet, on the whole, the new liberals will remain on the right platform.

Earlier United Russia and the Agrarian Party of Russia announced that they would unite; the APR congress had already passed a corresponding decision.²⁸ Experts believe that both parties are profiting from this.

From the very first days (the party was formed in 1993) and throughout the 1990s the APR was balancing between the left in its ranks (moving closer to the communists only to move away from them) and the official course. Those who supported the latter were gradually gaining control: in 1999 APR joined the election bloc Fatherland—All Russia; in 2000 it supported Vladimir Putin at the presidential elections. In the last two election campaigns the party ran for the State Duma independently and lost with 2.3 percent in 2007 (even though it gained the largest share of votes among the losers). In December 2007 the Agrarian Party, along with United Russia, the Civil Force, and Just Russia, nominated Dmitry Medvedev for president. Its ebbing electoral support and financial troubles forced the party to seek alliance with a large political force. The choice was limited: either Just Russia or United Russia. The latter won.

This alliance will allow United Russia to build up its influence in the regions through the APR's ramified regional network and lobbyist structures. Part of the expert community, however, doubts this: the Agrarian Party carried no weight in the rural areas. They voted either for the party of power or for the Communist Party. This alliance played into the hands of the communists who said that in future "no one would steal their votes." The Agrarian Party is probably disunited on the alliance issue: in Russia agricultural workers keep mainly to the left and nurture socialist ideas far removed from those of the party of power.

On the whole, the trend toward larger parties set up by uniting smaller ones is accelerating in Russia. It seems that 5 to 7 parties will compete for seats in the next State Duma. It should be said that

²⁵ See: Yu.G. Korguniuk, *op. cit.*

²⁶ See, for example: *Ekspert Online*, 21 October, 2008, available at [<http://www.expert.ru/news/2008/10/21/pd>].

²⁷ See: V. Kholmogorova, "Kontratseptiv Kremliia," *Ekspert Online*, 3 October, 2008, available at [<http://www.expert.ru/articles/2008/10/03/kondom>].

²⁸ See: A. Rezhnikov, "Agrarii vybrali 'Edinuiu Rossiuiu,'" *Vzgliad*, 10 October, 2008, available at [<http://www.vz.ru/politics/2008/10/10/217502.html>].

the parties based on one idea or set up to look after the interests of one social group (the Party of Pensioners is an apt example) are leaving the stage. They mostly move either “right” or “left”—United Russia or Just Russia. It was announced that in the near future the ecological Green Party will join Just Russia; in September Just Russia had already accepted the Party of Social Justice into its ranks. The Patriots of Russia will ally with the Russian Political Party of Peace and Unity. Experts assess this alliance as ineffective and temporary, a step toward unification with Just Russia.²⁹ This means that after a series of alliances, only two of the registered parties will stand alone—the Popular Union and Yabloko.

This is a logical process: under the Russian laws smaller parties run the risk of liquidation because of inadequate size and failure to take part in the legally required number of elections. After all, unification with the heavyweights is a question of life and death for them. Significantly, the government is involved to a certain extent in the process. A source in Just Russia, for example, told *Ekspert Online* that “the Kremlin interfered in the unification of Just Russia and the agrarians even though it would have been much more logical for an agrarian party to join a socialist party.”³⁰ Those who head the organizing committee of the unification process are quite open about the Kremlin’s interference, yet they hastened to stress, “this does not mean that the new structure will be still-born: we shall have to work otherwise the democrats will never win votes.”³¹

So far there are no signs that Kazakhstan’s party field is undergoing reformation. The party of power was building up strength through unification in 2006 while the opposition limited itself to setting up a People’s Parliament. At the same time, just as in Russia, the government interfered in the party-building process in Kazakhstan too. There is a well-substantiated opinion that the opposition parties Ak Zhol, NSDP, and Azat were the results of Ak Orda’s projects.³²

A New Brand for the Ruling Parties in Kazakhstan and Russia: Can They Be Reformed?

Today the Russian and Kazakhstani authorities have similar concerns: no matter how their party systems differ they should reform Nur Otan and United Russia. They need a new brand of party of power: it is not enough to be the party of the president; they must become independent forces with important social functions to fulfill. The path traveled by other countries with dominating parties has shown that any attempt to modernize the party of power from the inside inevitably sends the tension up and might even cost it its monopoly on power or, worse still, start systemic destabilization. As a rule the crisis is caused by a transfer from the status of “party of people” to more specific program formulations. The quest for new meanings, in the process of which vague ideological formulas are dropped, leads to an inner conflict: the cementing principle (ideology for all, the people’s party, etc.) disappears. The moment when a charismatic leader, the political authority of whom served as the

²⁹ See: R. Fedoseev, “Esery reshili pozelenet,” *Vzgliad*, 16 September, 2008, available at [<http://www.vz.ru/politics/2008/9/16/208617.html>]; A. Rezhnikov, “Patrioty khotiat mira,” *Vzgliad*, 20 October, 2008, available at [<http://www.vz.ru/politics/2008/10/20/220923.html>].

³⁰ V. Kholmogorova, op. cit.

³¹ V. Kholmogorova, “Medved na sele,” *Ekspert Online*, 12 September, 2008, available at [<http://www.expert.ru/articles/2008/09/12/ap>].

³² See: A. Sagadiev, op. cit.; A. Vlasov, “Partiiny butik...”; “Kazakhstan: zhdad li uragana nad ostrovom stabilnosti. Partii strany nakanune vyborov glavy gosudarstva. 18 avgusta 2005,” available at [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20050818030149947>].

foundation for a cumbersome mechanism, leaves the stage is fraught with even more dangers for the reformers.³³

This might happen to the dominating parties of Russia and Kazakhstan if they move toward diversification. Both parties rely on the National Leader for their political actions, a typical feature of a state with a super-presidential vertical. During the last few years the parties of power in both countries operated not so much on clear ideologies or development projects as on the personalities of their leaders. For this reason it will be hard to transform them into a real channel of contact between the government and society.

The transformations in store for Nur Otan and United Russia as well as their systemic renovation devised by their leaders are expected to strengthen the contacts between the state systems and the budding civil society. It should be said that on the eve of its OSCE chairmanship Kazakhstan is attracting the attention of the Western public and the media more than ever. This means that Nur Otan should ensure the prosperity for the country it promised in its election program and boost the country's international prestige and status. For this reason, in January 2008 President Nazarbaev, who addressed an extended sitting of the party's Political Council, pointed out that to develop its influence on domestic policy the party should work actively in the parliament, live up to its election promises, step up its involvement in the regions, and promote consolidation of society for the sake of the republic's progress. It should also contribute to developing a national ideology. He deemed it necessary to stress that ideology should be rooted in the idea of a common Kazakhstani identity. The president went on to say that the party should form personnel reserves, encourage analytical and research activities in the party, and employ the latest models of political management.³⁴

President Nazarbaev developed these ideas at all sorts of forums, conferences, and sittings.³⁵ This means that the president pinned great hopes on the party and intended to transform it into a fully-fledged institution of civil society and tap its potential to address the social problems, corruption, etc. In short, it was expected to develop into something more than a political party.³⁶

This explains the shifts in the party's upper echelon: in 2008 President Nazarbaev as chairman of Nur Otan twice replaced his deputies: A. Dzhaksybekov was moved to this post in January 2008 from his previous position as head of the presidential administration. In October 2008 he was replaced with D. Kaletaev (formerly deputy head of the presidential administration). The very fact that members of the first echelon of power were moved to the party testifies that the party is regarded as one of the most important mechanisms for forming public opinion and a channel for explaining the decisions made at the top to society.

In July 2008 Vladimir Putin formulated essentially similar tasks. He called on the party to become a link between the people and the government, fulfill all the promises the party had made during the presidential and parliamentary campaigns, create an effective party ideology, improve the party's

³³ See: A. Vlasov, "Liubimaia igrushka postsovetskikh prezidentov. 1 ianvaria 2008," available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/220>].

³⁴ See: N.A. Nazarbaev, "Vystuplenie na rasshirennoe zasedanii Politsoвета NDP 'Nur Otan' 17 ianvaria 2008 g.," available at [http://www.akorda.kz/www/www_akorda_kz.nsf/sections?OpenForm&id_doc=6759A980371513CC062573D3003D12BE&lang=ru&L1=L2&L2=L2-15].

³⁵ See, for example: N.A. Nazarbaev, "Vystuplenie na zasedanii rasshirennoi kollegii Generalnoi prokuratury Respubliki Kazakhstan 25 ianvaria 2008 g.," available at [http://www.akorda.kz/www/www_akorda_kz.nsf/sections?OpenForm&id_doc=BF33517426D38930062573DB0050C78E&lang=ru&L1=L2&L2=L2-15]; idem, "Vystuplenie na vstreche so stipendiatami programmy 'Bolashak' 30 ianvaria 2008 g.," available at [http://www.akorda.kz/www/www_akorda_kz.nsf/sections?OpenForm&id_doc=85BC4DD375A91EF1062573E0003E21C9&lang=ru&L1=L2&L2=L2-15]; idem, "Vystuplenie na otkrytii II sessii Parlamenta RK 2 sentiabria 2008 g.," idem, "Vystuplenie na rasshirennoe zasedanii Pravitelstva 13 oktiabria 2008 g.," available at [http://www.akorda.kz/www/www_akorda_kz.nsf/sections?OpenForm&id_doc=A84F842492C1401C062574E1007CCEBB&lang=ru&L1=L2&L2=L2-15].

³⁶ See: "Ustoichivaia i gibkaia sistema," available at [<http://www.posit.kz/?lan=ru&id=100&pub=7962>].

performance in the regions, and look after the party's personnel policy.³⁷ The party should become more receptive to discussions and tap all its resources—its majority in the Duma and experts outside the party who should be invited for legal assessment of the bills. Modernization should fully correspond to the aims formulated by the Strategy-2020.

The first results are obvious and suggest certain preliminary conclusions.

In the case of Nur Otan, it should be said that most of Kazakhstan's expert community regards the re-branding idea as utopian.³⁸ It should be said that, contrary to the president's expectations expressed early in 2008, reform of Nur Otan (which was expected to democratize the republic's political system within a short period of time) has stalled. Inertia dominates; changes are hard to detect while the list of real accomplishments shows that what has been done is much less spectacular than what was expected to be achieved.

A network of public anti-corruption councils set up under the Nur Otan aegis has remained its main achievement. The party formulated its strategic aim to be turning the anti-corruption struggle into a nationwide movement. An anti-corruption forum is planned for the near future. It will be attended by the head of state and is expected to resound in all the regions to shape a nationwide negative attitude toward corruption and add an anti-corruption impetus to society.³⁹ We all know, however, that the "punitive sword" will hardly touch the bribe-takers in the upper echelons of power which means that the struggle will go on forever. This should not be taken to mean that no success will be achieved, but in order to undermine a system based on corruption different instruments and different powers are needed.

Nur Otan, which has opened offices to which local people can bring their complaints and offer suggestions, is moving in the right direction; to achieve the desired results these acts should be public and produce tangible results. The experience of the Asar Republican Party of 2003-2006 has already demonstrated that in this case political techniques have a limited shelf life.

Re-branding of the Nur Otan Party as a party free from patronage of the executive branch can hardly be achieved: it kills the very idea of the party of power. This cannot be realized for the simple reason that practically all the local branches are headed by local top executives.⁴⁰

United Russia has its share of similar problems even though its performance is described as more successful.⁴¹ It has already passed the test by replacing President Putin's support with the support of President Medvedev. Nur Otan is still seen as the brainchild of President Nazarbaev, which means that its re-branding cannot be accomplished if it fails to distance itself from the presidential administration and demonstrate its active and independent position in relation to the Majilis and the executive structures.

Life has shown that the set of professional means available to both parties is more or less the same (networks of public reception offices, the Public Chamber, and youth organizations are a pertinent example). Today, all governmental projects and programs realized in both countries can be regarded as projects of the dominant parties: they are headed by top figures responsible for the performance of the executive branch.

At the same time, United Russia is much better equipped: the numerous projects it is involved in (Our City, Our Parents, The Country's Best Children's Coach, Olympics for the Fam-

³⁷ See: R. Fedoseev, "Putin ozadachil 'Edinuiu Rossiu.' 4 iyunia 2008 g.," available at [<http://www.vz.ru/politics/2008/6/4/174375.html>].

³⁸ See: A. Vlasov, "Kazakhstan-2012..."

³⁹ See: D.A. Kaletaev, "Borba s korruptsiei stanovitsia vazhneishei sotsialno-politicheskoi problemoi. 15 oktiabria 2008 g.," available at [<http://www.nomad.su/?a=3-200810170324>].

⁴⁰ See: [<http://www.ndp-nurotan.kz/?ft=1&type=10>].

⁴¹ See: Yu. Susloparov, "Reanimator-2. 'Nur Otan' na vykhode iz politicheskogo komatoza. 16 sentiabria 2008," available at [<http://www.ia-centr.ru/expert/2307>].

ily, fast-assembled physical culture complexes, etc.) have set up the trend and are helping to address important practical problems.⁴² Analysts have pointed out that United Russia is developing inner competition and promoting a public discussion in its ranks as a substitute for the degenerate struggle between the government and the marginalized opposition. For this purpose the party set up discussion clubs—The Social-Conservative Policies Center, the 4 November Liberal-Conservative Club of Political Actions, and the State-Patriotic Club. They are engaged in informal discussions of issues suggested by the party center: the government and party conception of how Strategy-2020 should be implemented; legislative activities; anti-corruption measures; setting up an “all-Russia base of managers” within the Professional Team Project and involvement in municipal elections.⁴³

Inner-party polemics inevitably lead to confrontation among the supporters of diametrically different approaches. United Russia rejects the possibility of a split. Indeed, there are practically no objective prerequisites for this, yet sustainable inner-party trends might send the party along the road of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Japan that dominates the political field in its country. It should be said that so far Russian political tradition has not demonstrated a penchant for the unity/competition combination.

So far, no one in Kazakhstan or Russia can predict the results of the current efforts to create new party brands. Much may change in the four years that separate us from day X of the parliamentary elections. Both countries are moving little by little into another election cycle.

C o n c l u s i o n

The above suggests that the multiparty systems in both countries are developing along similar lines and that their genesis and institutionalization are mutually penetrating and unfolding in parallel. This is explained by the two countries common history of the 17th-20th centuries, as well as by the fact that they found themselves in a transition state at the turn of the 21st century. At the same time, their party systems demonstrate national and state specifics explained, in turn, by different development priorities in the political and economic spheres, national culture and mentality, and their geopolitical locations.

Today there are 14 registered parties in Russia and 10 in Kazakhstan. Taken in their entirety they represent a sustainable political institution, an inalienable feature of public life, one of the important factors of modernization of their political systems. They have found a social and political niche in the psychology and consciousness of part of Russian and Kazakhstani society. At the same time the multiparty system is still unfolding: society has not yet become completely stratified, ideological and political interests remain vague, the process of reforming the states is highly contradictory while the regimes remain authoritarian.

At first Kazakhstan trailed behind the Russian Federation as far as the dynamics of political reforms were concerned. Russia was the first to introduce proportionate elections to the State Duma. It did this in 1993, while Kazakhstan followed five years later, in 1998. Kazakhstan, on the other hand, was much more successful when it came to creating a legal basis for the multiparty system: it passed a law on parties earlier than Russia, while the constitutional reform of 2007 raised the political parties' status and role to the classical level; the Russian Federation has not done this yet.

⁴² See: R. Fedoseev, *op. cit.*

⁴³ See: “Rossiia poidet po iaponskomu puti. 29 iyunia 2008,” available at [<http://www.vz.ru/politics/2008/6/29/182094.html>]; “Partiinyi otvet na kadrovyy vopros,” available at [<http://www.vz.ru/politics/2008/7/29/191128.html>].

Starting in 2002 the similarities in the development of the party systems of both countries (practically indiscernible in the first years of independence) became much clearer. Both countries are developing the model with a dominant party that has proven its worth in some of the actively modernizing Asian and Latin American states. This role belongs to United Russia and Nur Otan with no rivals worthy of this name on the political field and with a constitutional majority in the parliaments; they are parties of power under the law (Kazakhstan) or as part of a deliberately created construction (Russia). They are expected to develop over time into supporting structures of the party and political system and regulators of the problems and already obvious and possible contradictions in both countries.

More likely than not they will acquire an even more obvious dominant position in the future, which means that the party systems of both countries will be described as systems with a dominant party in countries with a presidential form of government. Life has shown that this form of government needs party channels to communicate its decisions to society; this can be done only if the formally viable parties develop into independent political entities in their own right and are recognized as such (alliances of citizens set up to help them realize their aims).

The party systems of Kazakhstan and Russia are not identical: while in the former there is a one-party parliament, in the latter the dominant party competes with other (not only opposition parties but also with the second party of power) parties in the State Duma. This means that the Russian Federation might move away from the system with one dominant party to the two-party system.