

OPPOSITION IN KAZAKHSTAN: NAGGING PROBLEMS

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Today there are ten political parties in Kazakhstan but only one of them—the People’s Democratic Nur Otan Party—supports the government. The rest are regarded as the opposition.

The Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK), the Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK), the Azat Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, and the National Social-Democratic Party of Kazakhstan (NSDPK) can be described as the active opposition.

The camp of the moderate opposition is made up of the Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Adilet Democratic Party, the Party of the Patriots of Kazakhstan (PPK), the Kazakhstan Auyl Social-Democratic Party, and the Rukhaniat Party.

The parties' relations with the government, their political views, their actions, and the tone of their statements divide the parties into active and moderate.

The moderate are critical yet, on the whole, constructive when it comes to a dialog with the other parties and the government; the active are mostly driven by the idea consolidating the opposition bloc into a united front to stand opposed to the ruling elite.

Heated polemics about whether or not the opposition in Kazakhstan meets the standards political science has established in the West have been going on for some time now. The analytical and expert communities have more or less agreed that the answer is "No."¹

This approach is based on the critical/loyal attitude toward the government or, rather, toward the president. Some people mistake oppositional sentiments for an anti-system stance.

Political science claims that a party becomes oppositional when either it has lost an election or fails to achieve a parliamentary majority thus standing no chance of acquiring a place in the cabinet. This means that the degree of involvement in executive state power is the main criterion.

Several parties may win an election and form a coalition government while opposition parties might acquire seats in the parliament to form a parliamentary opposition.

- The first side with the government, while the latter criticize it; they might, however, side with the authorities on individual issues. They are described as the opposition because they have been left outside the government.
- The second constitutional reform made it possible to take a scholarly approach to the concept of opposition: before that the parties were excluded from cabinet-forming. The first years of independence (1991-2007) created a non-classical approach to the phenomenon of the opposition: it is commonly believed that in Kazakhstan the opposition stands against the government rather than the ruling party.

Today Nur Otan is the ruling party, the rest belong to the opposition; none of them have factions of their own in the parliament. Indeed, the one seat held by the PPK in the Senate cannot be taken seriously because it opens no doors to the executive structures. Below I shall proceed from this.

The opposition in Kazakhstan appeared in the 1990s at the dawn of pluralism in the former Soviet republic. Independence and economic reforms brought to the fore an opposition that disagreed with the radical changes that removed the old values. They are the CPK before its registration; the Alash Party of National Freedom; the Kazakhstan branch of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks; the Solidarity Workers' Movement of Kazakhstan, and others. At the turn of the 1990s, ethno-political alliances—the Azat and Alash civil movements of Kazakhstan; the Zheltoksan National-Democratic Party of Kazakhstan; the Unity inter-national movement, and others. They were all actively involved in defending ethnic values and worked toward the revival of national self-awareness. In the 1994 parliamentary elections the opposition acquired about 40 of 176 seats in the Supreme Soviet of the 13th convocation.

The opposition forces gained more weight when a multi-party system appeared in the republic. Today many of the former top officials belong to the opposition: P. Svoik, M. Auezov, and G. Abilsi-

¹ See: "Partiia 'Ak Zhol': ravenstvo, trud, dukhovnost," *Materialy "kruglogo stola" diskussionnogo kluba "POLY-TON"* im. N. Masanova, 13 July, 2007, available at [<http://www.club.kz/index.php?lang=ru&mod=discuss&submod=large&article=24>]; "Pochemu my ne uchastvuem v vyborakh," *Materialy "kruglogo stola" diskussionnogo kluba "POLY-TON"* im. N. Masanova, 3 August, 2007, available at [<http://www.club.kz/index.php?lang=ru&mod=discuss&submod=large&article=25>].

tov belonged to the Azamat public movement (1995); A. Kazhegeldin and B. Tursynbaev (1998), the founders of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK, 2002), and Zh. Tuiakbai (2004).

In Kazakhstan, prominent politicians frequently move over to the opposition: because of their unbridled ambitions some of them fell out of favor; while others were pushed out because they scorned the ruling elites' unwritten laws. In some cases this was Ak Orda's deliberate strategy designed to stir up political rivalry.²

Prominent Russian political scientist A. Kurtov is convinced that the opposition in Kazakhstan should be described as a "sham:" "Several top officials who used to fill high posts in the state structures, including the presidential administration, were appointed leaders of the opposition parties. In this way the people's opposition sentiments were channeled in a direction controlled from above. Today, the political struggle in the republic is a mere imitation."³

This is hard to accept; the opposition in Kazakhstan was formed both from above and from below.

At first, the former variant prevailed. In 2001 the power establishment was stirred into action; the economic reforms divided the elite and pushed the "Young Turks" of Kazakhstan into politics. Driven by economic considerations and encroachments on the reformers' freedom to do business they wanted continued political reforms and modernization. They insisted on qualitatively new structural reforms in the legal sphere and culture; this frightened the old elite, which resorted to its traditional measures: threats, repressions, and dismissals from civil service.

In the early 21st century, the national elite split and a new opposition appeared with much better organizational abilities and money sources than the opposition of the early 1990s.

The DCK was the first step toward a counter-elite and a "systemic opposition" with good material, organizational, intellectual, and information resources (newspapers and web sites).

The opposition learned a lot from the election campaigns: it learned how to attract thousands of active supporters and how to keep the government on tenterhooks so that it would tap all its resources.

Since the early 2000s, the opposition has been receiving support from influential international organizations operating in the republic, the OSCE in particular, which became much more interested than before in the way human rights and freedoms were observed in Kazakhstan. The external factor became another of the opposition's important resources, which means that the opposition is growing more aware of its civil duties and becoming more responsible. With time this will help to create a legitimate mechanism of power change.

The entire history of the republic's opposition (which goes back to 1991) speaks of its fairly fluid nature: the Communist Party of Kazakhstan alone has survived since that time as an organizational structure. It too, however, split and produced a clone in the form of the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan. Some other structures appeared, and became less active after a while, only to disappear under the pressure of the circumstances.⁴

At times the opposition seems to gain momentum but this is an illusion. Russian analyst A. Vlasov has aptly pointed out that "the Kazakhstan opposition thrives amid intrigues at the top;" instability inside the ruling elite creates the illusion of a strong opposition which disappears as soon as the opposition permits squabbles in its ranks.⁵

² See: S. Akimov, "Vlast i oppozitsiia v Gruzii i Kazakhstane," 1 April, 2009, available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/4335/>].

³ A.A. Kurtov, "Kazakhstan: Kontrevolutsiia parlamenta, ili Kratkaia istoriia izgnaniia oppozitsii," 19 August, 2007, available at [<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=5295>].

⁴ See: "Politicheskii krizis kazakhstanskoi oppozitsii," *Materialy "kruglogo stola" diskussionnogo kluba "POLYTON" im. N. Masanova*, 25 February, 2005, available at [<http://www.club.kz/index.php?lang=ru&mod=discuss&submod=small&article=145>].

⁵ See: A.V. Vlasov, "Shansy kazakhstanskoi oppozitsii zavisiat ot voli vlasti," 26 June, 2007, available at [<http://www.easttime.ru/analytic/1/3/236.html>].

Prominent civil servants who drift over to the opposition are seen as a positive and partly negative factor. Today, they prevail among the opposition leaders; the so-called “common people” are outnumbered.

People in general mistrust former bureaucrats turned oppositionists: the most determined of them spent their lives strengthening the political system they now criticize; some of them belonged to the president’s closest circle before they decided to move over to the other side. Their reasons are not always clear which causes justified doubts about their sincerity.⁶ For this reason people mistrust the opposition as a whole.

Political scientists and analysts rightly noted that since the 2007 elections the opposition has been in a crisis. This opinion is substantiated by the round table of the POLYTON Discussion Club held on 24 October, 2008.⁷ The following confirms the crisis’ very real nature:

- First, nearly all the opposition parties are highly inconsistent in their actions because they lack clear strategies; they are meandering along with the changing political situation. For example, the NSDPK election program of 2007 looked more like a patchwork of populist, whereby highly attractive, slogans. Had the party carried out its promises an economic collapse would have followed;
- Second, the opposition lacks ideas to attract new supporters; its ideologists cannot cope with this task, which calls for creative minds;
- Third, the opposition is unable to respond to social developments and use them in its interests;
- Fourth, its contacts with the man-in-the-street cannot be called anything but inadequate;
- Fifth, inadequate self-positioning as a real alternative to the powers that be;
- Sixth, the new political leaders lack authority; today none of the opposition leaders can compete with President Nazarbaev.

NSDPK Chairman Zh. Tuiakbai became a politician in the parliamentary corridors and has never developed into a public figure. His very short term as deputy chairman of Nur Otan during the 2004 election campaign revealed that he was no orator and had no charisma, two shortcomings television made even more glaring. In 2005, as the single opposition presidential nominee, he was revealed as a man completely dependent on his closest circle.

A. Baimenov, who chairs the Ak Zhol party, is not a strong leader either; he looks more like a cabinet politician.

Azat Chairman B. Abilov is too emotional and eccentric.

S. Abdildin, the experienced head of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, successfully ran against Nazarbaev in 1999; today he remains on the sidelines: the communist ideology is not that popular in the republic.

G. Zhakiiatov, the president’s most consistent and uncompromising opponent, has all the qualities of a public politician and is fairly popular among the people; for this reason he has been removed from active political activities.⁸

- Seven, for a long time the opposition remained disunited.

⁶ See: Ya. Butakov, “‘Troianskie koni’ oppozitsii,” 18 December, 2005, available at [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20051218225800313>].

⁷ See: “Demokraticeskaja oppozitsiia: krizis ili izmenenie strategii?” *Materialy “kruglogo stola” diskussionnogo kluba “POLYTON” im. N. Masanova*, 24 October, 2008, available at [<http://www.alternativakz.org/index.php?go=mnenie&in=view&id=145>].

⁸ See: A.V. Vlasov, “Nuzhna novaia oppozitsiia. Kazakhstan: rasstanovka sil posle vyborov,” 18 December, 2005, available at [<http://www.apn.kz/publications/article100.htm>].

“The opposition of Kazakhstan does not have a clear program of action and is organizationally disunited,” wrote one of the leading European analytical publications that covered Dick Cheney’s visit to Kazakhstan in 2006. The American diplomat suggested, in very moderate terms, that the opposition should create a program of real action and start looking for common points conducive to a dialog with the government.⁹

The opposition leaders admit that their ranks are disunited¹⁰ even though opposition parties regularly form coalitions and blocs: the Coalition of Social Protection (1992); Round Table of Political Parties, Public Associations and Trade Unions (1993); the Republic Coordination Council of Public Associations (1994-1997); the People’s Front of Kazakhstan (1998); the Forum of Democratic Forces of Kazakhstan (1999-2001); the Coordination Council of Democratic Forces of Kazakhstan (2004-2005); and the Bloc of Democratic Forces “For a Just Kazakhstan” (2005-2006).

They had their strong and weak sides but they all fell apart under the pressure of tactical disagreements and ambitions in the absence of a leader recognized by all the opposition forces. The opposition cannot agree on how to deal with various tasks or on how to change the political system and carry out democratic reforms.

A. Kozhakhmetov, a prominent oppositionist and head of the Shanyrak public alliance, promotes a most interesting system of views:

- (a) the “Westerners” are convinced that dictatorship cannot be defeated with domestic means and that foreign interference is needed;
- (b) those who describe themselves as close to the common people insist that the West is guided by the interests of big money and is, therefore, quite comfortable with the present regime. It is for the people themselves to remove it: they can and should do this;
- (c) those who believe that the regime can be talked into changes are out to prove that neither the West nor the people can change the present regime. It should be persuaded to start changing and will change after a while;
- (d) the “nihilists” reject everything and believe that nobody can do anything at all; everything will take its own course and arrive at the desired result. Everything that is or will be done, they argue, is nothing but petty intrigues that have nothing to do either with real changes or with the speed of the reforms.¹¹

The above calls for two additions.

1. While criticizing the government for its harsh pressure, the radical opposition repeatedly called on the people at the top to enter a dialog yet consistently ignored all the dialog alternatives suggested (a Permanent Conference, National Commission for Democracy, State Commission for Specifying and Programming Democratic Reforms, and a Public Chamber).

Not only the republic’s authorities (which could be described as prejudiced) but also independent Western experts are aware of the radicals’ hardly constructive approach. The foreign mission¹² that visited Kazakhstan on the eve of the 2005 elections minced no words when

⁹ See: A.V. Vlasov, “Pervye i vtoroe litsa kazakhstanskoi oppozitsii,” 23 May, 2006, available at [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20060523010547531>].

¹⁰ See: “Institut oppozitsii v Kazakhstane: realnost i perspektivy,” *Krugly stol v diskussionnom klube “Polyton,”* 26 January, 2007, available at [<http://www.club.kz/index.php?lang=ru&mod=discuss&submod=large&article=225>]; “Bulat Abilov: Nachnem peremeny s sebja. Vystuplenie na Forume demokraticeskoi oppozitsii Kazakhstana,” 11 April, 2009, available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/4418/>].

¹¹ See: “Politicheskii krizis kazakhstanskoi oppozitsii...”

¹² The mission consisted of Gerald Frost, CIC General Director, Kenneth Minogue, an emeritus professor from London University, Prof. Dennis O’Keefe, a social scientist at the University of Buckingham, and David Ruffley, a Tory MP.

accusing the opposition leaders of their unwillingness to talk to the government and of their inability “to take the first step toward clearer ideological and political statements.” The foreign visitors pointed out that “the most vehement criticism of the government comes from former cabinet members still nursing their grudges.”¹³

It seems that the opposition does not merely respond to the “pressure the government puts on the opposition” with the alleged intention of creating “another valve to release the steam of public discontent.” The opposition refuses on principle to be involved in any dialog with the powers that be in order to avoid sharing the responsibility for important decisions. Even if the suggested dialog structures were intended “to release the steam of public discontent,” this might have been useful. The opposition involved in a dialog, on the other hand, could no longer exploit social discontent.

In exchange the opposition could have realized some of its suggestions; in fact, this already happened in the past. On 1 September, 2005, when speaking at the opening of the parliament’s second session, President Nazarbaev mentioned that he intended to set up, under his chairmanship, a State Commission for a Program of Democratic Reforms staffed with deputies and members of the presidential administration, the government, public associations, and NGOs; the most radical of the oppositionists were not forgotten either.

The president instructed his administration to come up with a program related to the country’s possible OSCE chairmanship in 2009. The government, ministries, and departments were expected to work in compliance with it. In fact, these initiatives were first formulated by head of the Ak Zhol party A. Baimenov in a statement known as Twelve Steps of the Government Toward the People of Kazakhstan dated 12 April, 2005.

Today it has become clear that nearly all the initiatives suggested by the DCK related to political reforms have been realized. The president is obviously prepared to take notice of all the constructive suggestions coming from the opposition and to realize those that will not undermine political stability and may prove useful in the long-term perspective.

It should be said that the government never refers to the sources of its initiatives, which allows the opposition to accuse it of “stealing” their slogans and inspiring ideas. First, the ideas have never and nowhere been a subject of laws protecting intellectual property; second, “true democrats” should be rejoicing that “their” ideas are being realized at the national level no matter by whom.

A. Baimenov’s position can be described as fair: “We have said many times that the realization of our ideas is more important than their source. We think it important to raise the nation’s standard of living, carry out economic reforms, and improve the political system; we want our ideas to work in the interests of all.”¹⁴ He confirmed his position by his contribution to the State Commission for Specifying and Programming of Democratic Reforms and as a Majilis deputy in 2006 and 2007. Much of what Ak Zhol had written became laws.

On the whole, however, a constructive approach is much weaker than a radical one even if it is much more promising. On the other hand, the radical opposition’s unyielding tactics hold no promise. Take O. Zhandosov, for example, one of the country’s most talented economists: his rich experience so far remains untapped.

2. Unwilling to be involved in a nationwide dialog with the government, the opposition leaders are seeking contacts behind the scene to obtain all sorts of preferences (the NSDPK and Ak Zhol).

¹³ A. Grozin, “Dialog vlasti i oppozitsii: neobkhodimoe uslovie stabilnogo razvitiia demokrati v Kazakhstane,” 10 January, 2006, available at [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20060110215722303>].

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

“The specifics of the post-Soviet countries presuppose that any oppositionists, even those far removed from the system, are directly or indirectly connected with this or that ‘court’ group of influence.” The oppositionists themselves readily agree with this.¹⁵

Some of the opposition members are trying to join the power bandwagon no matter what (G. Kasymov, PPK). A. Chebotarev believes that “so far the opposition prefers to obey the rules the government has established for it and, strange as it may seem, is indulging in their criticism.”¹⁶ Some of the opposition leaders never bother to conceal the fact that this is a professional status which earns them their living and allows them to “haggle” with the government.

The government, in turn, demonstrates flexibility when dealing with the opposition: it flirts with some of the parties and their leaders. In 2006-2007, the president met the Ak Zhol and NSDPK leaders twice; no other parties or leaders were given this chance either before this period or later.¹⁷

This suggests that the government has also contributed to the weakness of the opposition.

We all know that the country’s leaders have never wanted a one-party system: its domination was never regarded as desirable. A two-party system looks preferable. A lot is said about an opposition that cannot be raised in a greenhouse but should take shape in natural conditions; the government, in turn, should assist this process.¹⁸

On the other hand, a civilized attitude (of the government in particular) toward the political opposition is just taking shape in the country. Today much is being done to present the opposition as a destructive or even extremist force; the opposition is not yet seen as an important guarantor of stability and the state’s sovereign democratic development.

The “opposition” concept should be specified together with its legal status, forms, and methods. This has been fully confirmed by foreign experience; in many countries the opposition, its status, and its rights are clearly outlined to ensure its continued activities. This can be realized either within stable political traditions (not all of them registered in laws) or within corresponding legal acts (the Constitution, laws, and rules of parliament).

Kazakhstan has not yet acquired the relevant traditions, therefore any law or new regulations in the already existing legislation (On Public Associations, On Political Parties, On Elections, On the Parliament and the Status of Deputies, and the rules of the parliament and its chambers) could speak volumes about society’s readiness to move forward toward even greater modernization of the political expanse. The people at the top agree that such a legal act is very much needed.¹⁹

The term “opposition” first appeared as an official term in the Conception of the Transfer to Sustainable Development for 2007-2024, in which the “political basis of Kazakhstan’s sustainable development” included efforts designed to foster the culture of political opposition, strengthen constructive opposition as a basis for competition among public figures and programs, and express the interests of all the public strata and groups.

¹⁵ See: A.V. Vlasov, “‘Ak Zhol’ pochti ne viden,” 3 September, 2007, available at [<http://www.ia-centr.ru/expert/132>]; idem, “Pervye i vtorye litsa kazakhstanskoi oppozitsii...”; “Institut oppozitsii v Kazakhstane: realnost i perspektivy,” *Krugly stol v diskussionnom klube “Polyton,”* 26 January, 2007; P. Danilin, “Kazakhstan: partii ‘vykhodiat iz pelenok,’” 12 December, 2005, available at [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20051218230359932>].

¹⁶ “Demokraticheskaja oppozitsija: krizis ili izmenenie strategii?” *Materialy “kruglogo stola” diskussionnogo kluba “POLYTON” im. N. Masanova,* 24 October, 2008, available at [<http://www.alternativakz.org/index.php?go=mnenie&in=view&id=145>].

¹⁷ See: A. Omarova, “A segodnia my dolzhny dvigatsia vpered,” *Megapolis,* No. 25, September, 2006.

¹⁸ See: D. Kaletaev, “Partiia dolzhna stat realnoi oporoi dlja svoego lidera,” 21 November, 2008, available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/3027>].

¹⁹ See: “Kazakhstanu nuzhen zakon ob oppozitsii,” *31-i kanal,* 20 August, 2005.

This means that the republic has already acquired a foundation for social relations as an object of legal regulation.²⁰

In 2007 the NSDPK put on the table a draft law On Opposition Activities²¹ that cannot be described as a panacea; it might have proven useful as the start of a discussion on the place, role, and status of opposition activities. In Kazakhstan, where democratic legal development has its own specifics, this draft law can be regarded as a political education project for the people, and for the government and the opposition in particular.

This law would have given the opposition the legal status of an equal entity of social and political life in Kazakhstan; it would have created clear rules to be followed both by the government and the opposition. Any violation of them by any of the sides would have incurred sanctions against the culprit; the law would have offered the opposition wider and, most important, real possibilities to be involved in state governance.

The government preferred to ignore the draft law; in view of its habit of taking its time before responding to the opposition's initiatives the republic might acquire this law at some time in the future. Since 2005 the government has not only been accepting the opposition as a much needed element of political life but has also been striving to enter a dialog with it.

At the same time, the authorities deal harshly with the opposition when they feel this is appropriate; in favorable conditions, however, they refrain from intrigues. In 2005, for example, the favorable situation in the country and the hopes for a better future associated with the president made the administrative resource unnecessary: the turnout of Nazarbaev's supporters was very high.

Most of the time the government fights the opposition with all the means at its disposal: it keeps the political expanse under control, persecutes the leaders or bribes them, refuses to register disagreeable political parties, organizes information blockades, and uses the laws as it sees fit.

Analysts have concluded that the opposition in Kazakhstan "was set up under the constant control of the Ak Orda strategists and is managed within the limits set by the presidential administration."²²

It should be said that the mechanism of power change at the presidential level does not work in Kazakhstan; this is one of the reasons why the opposition remains weak.²³

It is thought that there are two reasons for the absence of a social base for the opposition. Two factors must be taken into account.

- First, in 2000-2007 society felt comfortable with the social and economic circumstances and felt no need for an alternative political and economic course.
- Second, the level of the nation's political culture and activeness remains too low to breed opposition sentiments.²⁴

The economic crisis of 2007 could have changed this; it gave rise to the "people's opposition": social actions of those who lost their money invested in housing projects, those who could not pay mortgage, and those who have no homes, as well as strikes at enterprises. Coupled with the mounting unemployment and crime this may increase social tension. The political opposition could have prof-

²⁰ See: O. Romaniko, "Pravovye osnovy oppozitsionnoi politicheskoi deiatelnosti v Kazakhstane," 24 March, 2008, available at [<http://suv-demokrat.csu.ru>].

²¹ See: "OSDP prezentovala obshchestvennosti razrabotanniy eiu proekt zakona 'Ob oppozitsionnoi deiatelnosti,'" *Panorama*, 13 April, 2007.

²² E. Kovel, "Teni zabytykh partii," 2 December, 2008, available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/3095>]; A.V. Vlasov, N. Kharitonova, "Kazakhstan: rasstanovka sil posle vyborov," 12 December, 2005, available at [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20051218230359932>]; A. Nurmakov, "Gotovias k budushchei voine," 24 August, 2007, available at [<http://www.posit.su/site.php?lan=ru&id=100&pub=532>].

²³ See: A. Grishin, R.G. Abdullo, "Kazakhstan: ravnenie na fone ravnykh," 30 April, 2009, available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/4548/>].

²⁴ See: "Pochemu my ne uchastvuem v vyborakh..."

ited from this by joining the protest movement or even heading it; the opposition leaders, however, let the chance slip through their fingers.

Disillusioned with its ability to ignite the nation with its liberal and democratic slogans, the opposition sided with the loosely structured national-patriotic movement which has an impressive grassroots following.²⁵ The opposition leaders showed each and everyone that they were unable to sustain sociopolitical ideas and remain within the Western political standards of public political polemics. In Kazakhstan the opposition is constantly swinging from nationalism to social-liberalism and back, from the right to the left; its involvement in obviously staged information campaigns does not improve its credibility.

For these reasons the institution of opposition in Kazakhstan is still undeveloped.

Today the opposition can be described as a loose and amorphous entity which limits itself to public statements and declarations on the web; it has neither a scientifically substantiated long-term program, nor an electorate to speak of, nor strong leaders able to claim presidentship.

The opposition reached its peak in 2003-2004 and has been stagnating ever since. It became obvious after the 2005-2007 election cycle that it was being squeezed out of the political scene. This undermined its influence and badly affected its legitimacy. The opposition lost its chance to emerge as an alternative to the government; it proved too weak to sustain a prolonged political struggle, at least within the two-party system. Instead it preferred political propaganda.

All the analysts agree that the opposition forces should close ranks to form a common front in order to stand opposed to the ruling party and the regime. This would create a strong and politically active opposition. In fact, the ban on election blocs left the opposition with forming a common front as the only way of surviving as a political force.²⁶ So far there has been no progress in this direction.

In the last decade the opposition has formed all sorts of election alliances which fell apart once the elections were over. This is best illustrated by the NSDPK's failed attempt to set up, in January 2008, a people's coalition For Democratic Reforms by allying the Azat and Rukhaniat parties as well as the CPPK, CPK, Auyl, Ak Zhol, Alga, and the Civil Society foundation headed by G. Zhakiianov.

The Khalyk Kenesi public parliament set up in May 2008 crumbled under the weight of the "negative consensus" very much typical of the Kazakhstan opposition when people prefer to join "against something" rather than "for something." The parliament set up to demonstrate that an efficient structure can be created confirmed the opposition's political insolvency.

In April 2009, at a forum of the democratic opposition, the NSDPK, Azat, and Alga parties, together with the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, made another attempt to consolidate their forces; they set up an organizing committee of their leaders expected to formulate the ideology and organizational principles of the new structure and carry out inter-party consultations with an eye to making use of the previous positive and negative experience. It was announced that the new structure would acquire a short-term program of action based on the parties' personal, financial, and media resources; specific actions were also mentioned.

This was the first time the opposition was so clear about its intention to form a single political party and took the first organizational steps in this direction. All previous attempts were limited to alliances of independent structures, while intentions to consolidate forces within a single party remained on paper.

This is true of the idea of a united democratic party voiced in the early 2000s by the Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan, the People's Congress of Kazakhstan Party, and Azamat and of the 2007 election "mergers" of the NSDPK with the True Ak Zhol party and the Ak Zhol party with the Adilet Democratic Party.

²⁵ See: B. Shamekenov, "Natsional-oranzhizm po-kazakhstanski," 19 September, 2008, available at [<http://www.posit.su/site.php?lan=ru&id=100&pub=14255>].

²⁶ See, for example: A. Nurmakov, *op. cit.*

In fact, the problems that interfered with the April merger strategy are numerous.

- First, it could hardly be expected that the rightist Azat party would be able to live side by side with the leftist NSDPK and CPK.
- Second, the opposition set about the business of sharing power even before it acquired it.²⁷

If the opposition comes to power any time soon its numerous leaders will clash over who gets the highest posts. There are ample examples of this: Victor Yushchenko and Yulia Timoshenko in Ukraine; Kurmanbek Bakiev and Felix Kulov in Kyrgyzstan; and Mikhail Saakashvili and the elite in Georgia.

To avoid this, the opposition needs a leader superior to the other presidential contenders. So far there is no figure able to unite the opposition and lead it. Today there can be no united opposition in Kazakhstan. Elusive absolute unity should be forgotten in favor of a new party or a much stronger old structure able to dominate the opposition.

This suggests that real tasks should be formulated and consistently addressed: a clearer ideology and more active work with those population groups that profited less than the others from the reforms. Equal access to the media is just as important.

Today there is no opposition of this kind in the republic. Members of the opposition (O. Zhandosov being one of them) are convinced that this situation will survive “as long as an authoritarian regime remains one of the key characteristics of our society. By distorting the views on life in many minds, and in the opposition in particular, it interferes with normal development.”²⁸

In view of the opposition’s numerous internal problems, however, this kind of statement seems very disputable.

²⁷ See: A. Shaigumarov, “Vozmemsia za ruki, druzia, chtob ne propast po odinochke!” 15 April, 2009, available at [<http://ia-centr.ru/expert/4477/>].

²⁸ “Ob’edinenie demokraticeskikh sil: prichiny i perspektivy,” *Diskussiiia v klube “Polyton,”* 29 June, 2007, available at [<http://www.club.kz/index.php?lang=ru&mod=discuss&submod=large&article=246>].