MASS MEDIA

THE POLITICAL INTERNET IN KAZAKHSTAN: TRENDS, PROBLEMS, AND PROSPECTS

Bakytzhan TEMIRBOLAT

*Ph.D. (Political Science), Independent Expert
(Astana, Kazakhstan)*

Introduction

The new wave of computer and communication systems has opened a new stage in the development of the information society; the Internet, one of the symbols of globalization, is developing into the main virtual arena of international business.

In the developed countries, the mechanisms of state administration and politics, along with the basic technologies designed to maintain stability and organize a dialog between the ruling structures and society, are undergoing qualitative changes: politics inevitably blends with technology, thus accelerating the development of electronic democracy. The state is rapidly losing its former monopoly on every kind of information; it is no longer capable of controlling the social and political processes unfolding on the Internet. Today, society is free to discuss any problem in virtual space; if it spilled over into real life, any such problem might trigger an avalanche of unpredictable events.

Today, the global processes are gradually making the Internet part of the political process of Kazakhstan; it has become an important arena of interaction of opinions and clashes of interests in the multi-pluralistic virtual community. New mechanisms of cooperation with public opinion are taking shape together with forms of self-organization of citizens and interest groups, namely, the electronic media, web portals used for political discussions, and virtual communities and groups united by shared goals, including political goals.

Today, the state structures, political parties, public movements, associations, NGOs, media, and private citizens of Kazakhstan are demonstrating a lot of dynamism in mastering virtual space.

The Internet
in Kazakhstan's Public Life

The problem calls for an integrated analysis of the potential of the Internet; I relied on a PEST market analysis (rarely used in political science) to identify the Political, Economic, Social, and Technological factors of the external macro-environment that might affect or are already affecting the topic of this study.[1] Although fairly limited in its applications, this method will become more pertinent when applied to dynamic electronic development which depends, to an equal extent, on social and economic indices and technological level. The PEST-analysis offers the fullest possible investigation of four closely interconnected factors which affect, to the greatest extent at the present development stage of the information community, the political process in Kazakhstan (up to and including representation of various interests).

The results of the PEST-analysis can be represented as follows:

P: Political factors	S: Social factors
E: Economic factors	T: Technological factors

P: Political Factors

1. The steadily growing impact of the Internet on real politics has already called for certain readjustments both in the functioning of the government and in the way the state power system is formed. The same applies to the entire structure of ties and cooperation with the public (higher efficiency of the government is directly related to the state's readiness to use information technologies to establish consistent feedback with the public).

2. Traditional ideological instruments are losing their efficiency to independent electronic information centers in terms of their impact on public opinion and the real sector of public politics. Today, it is much easier than before to evoke a public response to any issue—a factor readily exploited by interest groups.

3. State structures should be actively involved in cyberspace—this is an imperative of the information era. All decisions call for preliminary investigation of the social trends and problems and monitoring of the social networks, blogs, and portals where people express their opinions and formulate their interests.

4. In the Kazakhstani segment of the political Internet, the traditional interest groups (political parties, public associations, business, scientific and educational structures, individual politicians, and other entities of civil society) rub shoulders with the increasingly active yet little studied virtual network communities of a new type and format, each with a vast audience of its own.

5. There are attempts to set up a legal framework designed to regulate the Internet, such as the draft Law on Regulation of the Kazakhstani Segment of the Internet[2] and the amendments to the Law on the Mass Media related to the ways the electronic information resources and electronic media are used.

---

[1] See: J.W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 3rd Edition, SAGE, London-Los Angeles, 2009.
[2] See: Draft Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Regulation of the Kazakhstani Segment of the Internet, available at [www.zakon.kz/118785-dose-na-proekt-zakona-respubliki.html].

6. When accepted on a more or less wide scale in Kazakhstan, information technologies (IT) might become an important factor of democracy, civil initiative, and new level of self-organization of citizens. The electronic expanse is obviously developing into the quintessence of an idealistic model of civil society.

E: Economic Factors

1. The country's strategic course geared at high-tech production serves as a powerful impetus for the further development of IT; it also expands the country's virtual space.

2. Computers, services, and access to the Internet are becoming cheaper, while the communication zone is steadily enlarging.

3. Economic management and commercial services (flow of documents, logistics, banking, electronic money and payments, shopping, etc.) have moved into the virtual sphere, which means that IT and the Internet have been accepted as a legitimate and inalienable part of real life.

4. Despite the fact that the state has not yet created an adequate basis of legal regulation, the virtual economic sector with its vast financial resources is developing at a fast pace.

5. Today, Kazakhstan is living amid rapidly developing electronic commercial activities in the form of Internet shops, auctions, etc., and business activities (advertizing and services).

S: Social Factors

1. So far society cannot agree on how to treat the new information capabilities: on the one hand, paternalism is on the rise: people who learned to rely on the state have no use for the newly acquired "virtual freedom"; on the other, the older generation is somewhat puzzled by the new IT and the need to master them. The number of those who have resolutely rejected the traditional forms of life as archaic is likewise increasing.

2. In Kazakhstan, the growing virtual information expanse affects the Internet and its function as a sphere of public life; it is seen as a more or less customary way of social communication: the number of people visiting information resources and all sorts of forums at which ordinary people offer their views and opinions is steadily and rapidly growing.

3. The social sphere has acquired new trends: people who practically never leave virtual space (young city-dwellers, programmers, analysts, etc.) remain immune to official ideology. They create their own behavior models and culture; they might create new instruments for aggregating their interests for which the traditional system of representation is still not ready.

4. The Internet stimulates division into groups and integration by interests (from hobbies and professional interests to social development and political problems); this means that the Kazakhstanis are free to communicate in the person-to-person format and set up all sorts of communities. Today, people are free to translate their interests and aspirations into reality.

T: Technological Factors

1. Globalization, open borders, and the country's involvement in international processes are stimulating the demand for the developing IT in Kazakhstan.

2. The fact that IT have penetrated all spheres of human life affects the structure and organization of society, as well as the means and methods of social communication, while the fact IT are becoming cheaper is drawing more people into virtual space.

3. To further develop the means of information communication, Kazakhstan is determined to increase the latest technological infrastructures, set up a technological basis for the Electronic Administration project, and promote electronic democracy.

4. All official bans on the political Internet are doomed; the user can gain access to practically any portal: the latest technologies can easily bypass blocks.

5. To join the IT era, the country must systematically develop its technological infrastructure indispensable for electronic plebiscite as a future form of political representation of interests.

The analysis confirmed that the new information era is inevitably affecting the traditional lifestyle in Kazakhstan; the changes underway in the country have affected its political system.

The fact that the political Internet in Kazakhstan has no clear landmarks so far and cannot, therefore, find its place in the state's real social and political context complicates the situation. The absence of an adequate legal framework is another obstacle; the state does not have the experience needed to regulate the political Internet.

Despite the problems outlined above, the Internet is steadily expanding; the new aspects of the country's economic and social development and its involvement in international processes can be described as another contributing factor.

The analysis showed that Kazakhstan has acquired the primary technological basis needed for the politicization of its virtual space. But this is not enough: the technological infrastructure requires political legitimization of virtual activities. Today, the virtual political expanse in Kazakhstan is exhibiting a consistent trend toward dynamic development which, in the future, might become even more obvious.

Retrospection of the Political Internet in Kazakhstan (Kaznet)

As a segment of the World Wide Web, *Kazakhstan's Internet* has an important role to play in public politics (for several reasons it is functioning in the foreign segments of the Internet). Today, there are over 5,859 registered websites.[3] About 3.4 percent of its virtual field (about 200 sites)[4] are social-political and government sites: it is too early to describe the Kaznet as politicized.

We should also say about such categories as *news websites* (delivering political news) and *political websites* (they are platforms of purposeful political activity manifested in discussions of topical issues, calls, addresses, etc., and allow the users to express their opinions and identify their interests to familiarize the public, government, and individuals with them).

News websites play the role of agents of communication that actively retranslate information of the political events with no feedback potential.

Political websites, on the other hand, are not only vehicles of information—they are a public arena where ideas are voiced and public and narrow-group interests and conflicts are discussed.

The latest electronic technologies have given the user community the opportunity to become perceptibly involved in discussions, opinion polls, etc.

---

[3] According to the "Site.Kz" catalogue for 2011, available at [http://catalog.site.kz].
[4] According to analysis of resources [www.resurs.kz] and [http://catalog.site.kz].

To identify the specifics of Kazakhstan's virtual political expanse, it is advisable to analyze its chronology: the political Kaznet is barely 11 years old; its life span can be divided into 5 stages.

1. <u>1994-1997:</u> the Internet comes to Kazakhstan. In 1994, the SU domain (shared by all the Soviet successor-states) was replaced with national domains. On 7 April, the Russian national RU domain was registered with the IANA data base; on 19 September, KZ (Kazakhstan) was registered.[5] At the first stage, virtual space was barely developed; there was no political Internet at that time; the Internet was seen as a vehicle of globalization of the information expanse.

2. <u>1998-1999:</u> the political Internet is born and begins developing. The presidential and parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan, which raised a wave of information activities among all the political agents involved, coincided with an upsurge in popularity of the new technologies. This explains the rapid development of the Internet's information and political sector in Kazakhstan. Each of the election campaigns bred new responses to the electoral process.

    The election campaigns of 1999 affected the political segment of the Internet to the greatest extent; the information and propaganda potential of the World Wide Web was tapped to the full; information traveled far and wide with lightning speed, which meant that the latest "inventions" of the political technologists became immediately known to the user community.

    The Internet, still a rarity in many corners of the republic, was by far the public opinion leader, even though by that time information agencies and the press had already mastered the new technologies.

3. <u>2000-2003:</u> the republic acquires its information infrastructure. In March 2001, the president approved The State Program for Creating and Developing the National Information Infrastructure in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the first document intended to put the state administration system into the information context.[6]

    As a tool of the political technologists, the Internet attracted the journalist community; it was at that time that the first sociopolitical sites—Navigator (in 2000),[7] Kub (2001),[8] Nomad (2002),[9] and others, appeared. Considerable public interest forced practically all the political players to pay attention to them.

    Some of the political structures set up official websites of their own.

4. <u>2004-2005:</u> the political Internet becomes professional and poly-functional. On 10 November, 2004, the republic acquired The State Program for Forming an "Electronic Government" in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2005-2007[10]; this can be described as an important event. The Internet audience grew by leaps and bounds, which forced the political community to learn how to use IT to manipulate public opinion. Internet representation became a mass phenomenon; political parties and movements (probably spurred on by election campaigns) demonstrated a lot of zeal when setting up their websites. A large number of portals and media were intended to keep the public informed about political developments and transform the positions of their participants into public opinion.

---

[5] See: A. Liakhov, "KazNet predvyborny," *Internet i Ya* (Internet and Me), No. 9, 2004.

[6] See: "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan 'Gosudarstvennaya programma formirovania i razvitiia natsionalnoy informatsionnoy infrastrutury v Respublike Kazakhstan'," *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda,* 20 March 2001.

[7] [www.navigator.kz]—operates at a different address.

[8] [www.kub.kz]—operates at a different address.

[9] [www.nomad.su].

[10] See: "Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan ot 10 noyabrya 2004 goda No. 1471 'O gosudarstvennoy programme formirovaniia 'Elektronnogo pravitelstva' v Respublike Kazakhstan na 2005-2007 gody'," *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda,* 16 November, 2004.

5. <u>2006-the present:</u> the Internet has much more influence on politics and public opinion. Discussion platforms have appeared on which politics are openly discussed as well as virtual interest groups which formulate real questions and are geared at real activity. The Internet has finally become a legitimate field of political activities of the government and public.

This means that at the early stage, the political Internet depended on the election campaigns for the simple reason that politicians regarded the Internet and their involvement in it as one of the symbols of technical progress and the country's high-tech future. It should be said that the majority still doubted that Internet technologies could be of any practical use: they were seeking reputation gains.

Today, however, the Internet (until recently a virtual reflection of real politics) is developing into *an independent and influential field of public politics* which might affect what individual players are doing and makes it possible to manipulate public opinion.

The Internet as a means of political communication is much more than a source of information or a sum total of traditional sites (which offer textual or graphic information or e-mail services). Resources of a wider communication type make wide-scale information or political action possible.[11]

It should be said that while some people treat the Internet as an inalienable part of information and promo campaigns, others treat it as their natural environment, a field of political battles where information is used to put pressure on the government and where they can communicate and interact with loyal audiences or like-minded people.

The much stronger influence of the virtual political expanse in Kazakhstan can be explained by a certain imbalance between the desire to widen popular representation in the power structures and the insistent demand that the government pay more attention to what the people need. The present system of representation of interests is fairly limited; it cannot adequately respond to the much greater political involvement of the masses or cover the entire spectrum of public relations.

The Government and the Political Internet Community: In Search of Mutual Understanding

In the last five years, the political Internet has been developing at a much faster pace than before; some of its contours have become clear together with some of the points it shares with public opinion. The political Internet in Kazakhstan has already acquired considerable resources (technological and political) needed for its further development; its political influence has become fairly tangible.

Today, it uses extra-institutional forms of articulation and aggregation of public interests: electronic protests; information pressure on the government; provocative hack attacks; and slogans of political mobilization in real life. There are even more radical initiatives calling for civil disobedience; a struggle for civil rights; political confrontation with the government, etc. On the whole, the Internet helps preserve the democratic balance and actively contributes to the development of civil society in Kazakhstan (with active involvement of its citizens).

It should be said that the state and its structures have learned to be much more attentive to virtual political activity and the information supplied by the electronic media. This is fully con-

---

[11] See: N. Solenikova, "Politichesky Internet v rossiyskikh izbiratelnykh kampaniiakh," *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost,* No. 5, 2007, p. 71.

firmed by the gradually growing number of court cases against websites (political websites among others) and the administrative measures applied against them: temporary or complete technical block-outs.

Life has shown, however, that complete block-outs are impossible: the [www.svoboda.kz] site set up in 2005 by the public movement against the ban on RHD cars was blocked out; access was opened at a new address [http://svobodakz.blogspot.com]. Administrative pressure and the block-out attempts added a political edge to the public movement, a sure sign of the high level of self-organization of the citizens of Kazakhstan.

The case of the Young Professionals of Kazakhstan Society set up by young people with different ideas about the country's development model can be described as another pertinent example. The Society gained new supporters when it moved its blocked site [http://ompk.kz] to a new address [http://my.mail.ru/community/www.ompk.kz].

This means that the attempts to block out virtual information activity of Internet communities might cause tension between them and people in power, boost protest potential, and inflate the popularity of interest groups. The much stronger influence of virtual movements on public opinion and the political process as a whole means that, so far, the government and society have not yet created an adequate communication channel.

Here is what happened to Navigator, a highly popular site, which since 2004 has survived several block-out attempts. To remain on the web, it changed its address five times while gathering even wider audiences and much higher authority: "the officials responsible for the site's block-outs merely boosted its popularity."[12]

The fate of the [www.posit.kz] site offers another example of the same. Blocked for six months in the fall of 2007 by a decision of the Public Prosecutor General of the Republic of Kazakhstan and a court decision,[13] it was revived as a foreign domain [www.posit.su] to go on with its political activities.

The blocked-out site of the *Respublika—delovoe obozrenie* newspaper[14] was replaced with at least a dozen alternative sites.

This means that block-outs of political websites echo across the world and do nothing for the country's image as a democratic state.[15]

The above suggests that the Internet cannot be controlled through block-outs or administrative measures: politically they lead nowhere.

The government should respond to protest activities in virtual space (such as extremist movements): this much is clear. It is no less obvious that the government should go to the roots of such sentiments. On the other hand, adequate information services (very much in line with the culture of the local Internet users) are also needed; virtual challenges fraught with political destabilization should be promptly intercepted. It seems that the republic's authorities should pay much more attention to what is happening on the Internet and be much more actively involved.

The Internet's forums largely affect the republic's public life; the press, in turn, quotes their participants much more frequently (even if with a great deal of caution) than before.

To identify the structure and content of public opinion on the most urgent political issues, political forums conduct online polls on all sorts of topics. The very popular Nomad website, for example,

---

[12] A. Kustov, "Blok host IATs MGU ot 23 oktiabrya 2007 g.," available at [www.ia-entr.ru/archive/public_detailsa12e.html?id=934].

[13] See: A. Tynyshbaeva, "Internet v set?" *Liter,* 25 May, 2009.

[14] See: "Obrashchenie redaktsii obshchestvenno-politicheskogo ezhenedelnika 'Respublika' k chitateliam," available at [www.respublika.kz].

[15] For example: "Internet v Kazakhstane: protiv loma est priem!" Deutsche Welle, 11 February, 2009," available at [www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4020932,00.html].

organized regular polls to compile ratings of the country's political leaders; analytical publications familiarize the public with the results.[16]

Being unengaged and free from censorship, the online polls provide a much clearer picture of the dominating trends and political preferences, which traditional polls cannot identify. According to experts, the expert community pays particular attention to what bloggers think about the problem at hand.

It should be said, however, that because of the still low culture of the absolute majority of bloggers involved in virtual discussions, and the absence of the state's clear position on legal regulation of the Internet expanse some of the political sites develop into information battlefields among interest groups, accompanied by attempts to put political pressure on the government or spread negative information; conflicts among bloggers are not infrequent.

Today, *the expanse of the political Kaznet is open to discussions; it is a platform where individuals or interest groups are free to air their opinions, assessments, and positions*. An analysis of the political websites revealed that the most important social and economic issues (national relations, language policy, efficiency of the state, and interaction of the political elites), as well as Kazakhstan's mid- and long-term future, are widely discussed on the Internet (often in negative terms). The Internet community raises real and, sometimes, debatable issues; the absence of an adequate response from the authorities might create all sorts of risks and even threaten the state's stability. The obvious discrepancy between the public opinion structure and the traditional mechanisms and institutions of political representation of interests (including the results of sociological polls) shows that *a new superstructure and new instruments are needed to coordinate "input" requests and "output" decisions.*

The Kaznet and New Trends in Political Activities

Together with individuals and communities of like-minded people organized interest groups are also involved in virtual discussions. In Kazakhstan, for example, real interest groups (political parties, public movements, NGOs, all sorts of foundations, the media, etc.) operate in virtual space together with new groups that emerged spontaneously (or otherwise) on the basis of shared political views and interests.

The first category is seeking new ways of increasing their impact on public opinion. The activity of the second, still inadequately studied, category of virtual interest groups is unpredictable, while their aims and the real scope of activity remain unknown.

Political parties with their own websites, the main agents of political struggle, deserve special mention; this is primarily true of those registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan:

1. The Adilet Democratic Party [http://dp-adilet.kz]

2. The Akzhol Democratic Party [www.akzhol.kz]

3. The Azat Democratic Party of Kazakhstan [http://azat-party.info]

4. The Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan [www.knpk.kz]

5. The Nur Otan People's Democratic Party [www.ndp-nurotan.kz]

6. The National Social Democratic Party [www.osdp.kz]

7. The Rukhaniyat Party [www.rukhaniyat.kz].

---

[16] See: "Kto chelovek No. 2 v Kazakhstane," available at [www.nomad.su/?vt=1&vn=200910020002].

These political structures use web resources as additional channels of strategic communication to move closer to the voters and present their interests and goals. Life has shown that the parties with no chance of figuring prominently on the real political arena (because of inadequate financial resources, experience, or for other reasons) maintain contacts with their electorate through their websites and transfer their positions to the political expanse.

It should be said that the Auyl Party and the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan are politically passive; they have no Internet representations, which adds nothing to their competitiveness.

There is another interesting phenomenon: politically active parties not registered with the Ministry of Justice operate on the Internet. The following parties have demonstrated a lot of virtual political activity, at least during the time these data were gathered and analyzed:

1. The Alga People's Party [www.npdvk.kz]

2. The Green Party of Kazakhstan [http://greenparty.kz]

3. The Internet Party of Kazakhstan [www.iparty.kz].

Their clear aims and programs have attracted a more or less stable audience. These structures need neither considerable resources nor official recognition; for the same reason, they do not need offices or official registration, since they already have a substantial influence on public opinion.

From the point of view of political practice, these structures stand no chance of coming to power through elections; they probably do not need this; at least for the present, they are obviously pursuing different aims.

Still, some of the unregistered parties and their brands are recognizable—the state has to accept this.

There are stable virtual groups with shared, and clearly formulated, interests and goals (social, economic, ethnic or national, religious or confessional, cultural, ideological, political, etc.) which are determined to translate them into practice.

Some of the virtual communities are closely knit (even if not free from internal conflicts) to the extent that they succeed in ideological propaganda or mobilize large masses in real politics.

NGOs, public movements, and all sorts of associations, as well as national communities, trade unions, student and human rights associations, etc. are widely represented in the political virtual expanse. Their fields are extremely diverse: charity, development of businesses, gender issues, youth policies, ecology, veteran problems, employment, social security, etc.

More than 150 structures which represent the interests of all sorts of groups and social strata have their official sites; prominent politicians and even ordinary people have their personal websites.

It can be said that the political community and society as a whole are mastering virtual expanse, which is becoming much more adjusted to the institutional electronic plebiscite currently functioning in the developed Western democracies.

The official pages of central and local state structures make the Kaznet, the basis of electronic democracy, look more logical and more complete. At the early stages, these resources merely supplied official information. Today, a large number of state websites are equipped with feedback technology; the citizens of the country can address any official or service.

On the other hand, not all state structures are psychologically ready to communicate with the public, even though they may be equipped with departments designed to process information and maintain online communication. Not infrequently, online inquiries remain unanswered. According to the Kazakhstani expert community, "the state structures were obviously baffled by the new challenges of globalization and the scientific and technological revolution."[17]

---

[17] A. Morozov, "Vzgliad na globalizatsiiu media-prostranstva cherez prizmu obespechenia natsionalnoy bezopasnosti Respubliki Kazakhstan," *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 2, 2009.

There are positive shifts as well: the government is trying to keep in step with the times and is expanding its presence on the Internet in an effort to acquire more channels of cooperation with different audiences.

The site of the parliament [www.parlam.kz] allows people to address any of the senators or deputies of the Majilis; heads of departments and ministries have their own blogs.

Today, the blog-platform of the republic's government [http://blogs.e.gov.kz] is developing feedback with the public with more gusto than the others; in fact, it is the most frequented site. Local political scientists have pointed out that introducing new communication technologies into the state administration system is increasing the mobility and responsibility of officials and the interactive potential of the power structures.[18]

An online conference which brought together the president and heads of state structures and about 170 thousand Internet users[19] added vigor to the political segment of the Internet in Kazakhstan; public response was, on the whole, positive.

The electronic government project continues to develop; according to the latest report of the U.N. Department, in 2010, Kazakhstan occupied 46th place in terms of the development level of "electronic government" (obvious progress compared to 2008 when it held 81st place).[20] According to the RK Agency for Informatization and Communications, the number of users of the "e-gov" portal has been growing on an average of 20 thousand users every month[21]; this means that people need this sort of communication.

An analysis of the topics discussed in the government's blog has revealed that many questions and problems should be resolved at the local level, within the National Strategy of Decentralization of State Governance.[22]

Direct addresses to national structures speak, at least, of an absence of political mechanisms for dealing with regional problems and the inefficiency of the traditional communication channels (political parties are one of the actors of political communication). On the whole, people prefer to go directly to the top because their interests are not represented in the local communities.

Today the Kazakhstani Internet is a real political platform; as distinct from the official information expanse, it is a sphere of uncompromising ideological discussion of real social problems.

At the same time, neither the social institutions, nor the parties and organizations (to say nothing of the ordinary people) can, so far, tap the potential of the virtual network to the full in order to express and protect their interests. Today, extra-constitutional forms of political representation still predominate on the Kaznet.

With each passing year, the Internet will gather political weight which means greater risk of extra-constitutional (uncontrolled) mechanisms of articulation and aggregation of public interests.

The above suggests that the virtual political processes should acquire civilized institutional forms similar to those the developed democracies are acquiring.

The possibility of active, direct, and simultaneous communication among all the categories involved (society, interest groups, virtual network communities, and the government) is the key principle for organizing a new system of political representation of interests. This means that a new type of political system and assessment of its future development in Kazakhstan will call for non-standard methods.

---

[18] See: M. Kasen, "Perspektivy primeneniia interaktivnykh informatsionnykh technologiy v politike," *Analytic,* No. 1, 2007.

[19] See: Internet Conference of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbaev, available at [www.akorda.kz/www/www_akorda_kz.nsf/sections?OpenForm&id_doc=11AA8E023D73].

[20] [www.unpan.org].

[21] See: K. Esekeev, "'Elektronnoe pravitelstvo': tekhnologii ne sozdaiutsia radi tekhnologiy," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda,* 6 October, 2009.

[22] See: The official blog-platform of the heads of the state structures of the RK, available at [http://blogs.e.gov.kz].

C o n c l u s i o n

On the whole, the above analysis of the Kaznet's development has identified not only new possibilities, it has revealed a number of problems, challenges, and threats which, in the future, will largely determine the state's competitiveness as a political system. Kazakhstan is facing numerous problems and challenges; this is explained by the fact that the traditional political institutions have not yet acquired their final shape, while a transfer to a new level of civilizational development can be described as an imperative of the times. Developing an innovational political system proceeding along the traditional lines is greatly complicated by the fact that the state has so far not developed a new conceptual idea of its realization.

It seems that Kazakhstan might miss the opportunity to launch advanced development; the interests of the state demand that the government should be involved in virtual space in order to properly regulate it.

The Kazakhstani political establishment knows that Internetization of politics will develop at a fast pace; it will spread to new spheres and penetrate real politics. The process will not be limited to electronic voting or electronic government. The Internet is affecting, in the most profound and irreversible way, the principles and structure of relations between the government and those involved in politics and administration which have appeared thanks to virtual space; this can no longer be ignored.

On the other hand, the government is looking in vain for means and methods it can use to tame the political Internet and transfer it to a controlled legal area; this is hardly achievable.

The information era is exerting the strongest possible influence on international relations and the political systems of individual countries; this is testified by the processes going on at the global level and by scandals (WikiLeaks, the virtual activity of which caused non-virtual conflicts in some countries, serves as the best example).

The wide range of challenges (some of them shared by the information sphere and some of them related specifically to Kazakhstan) calls for resolute measures: the country's leaders should grasp them at the theoretical level and arrive at conceptual definitions and strategic planning to avert the dangers of disorganization and inefficiency of the reforms; they should minimize the risk of delays or malfunctioning of the program for setting up a technological infrastructure of electronic democracy.

It is not yet absolutely clear where "electronic democracy" should move; we know next to nothing about its limits and long-term capabilities. But it is clear that the developed countries have started moving toward mastering the vast expanses of the political Internet and that this process will accelerate.

The answers to the challenges of the information era will shape the mid-term political agenda; they will serve as the basis of an improved political system.

In Kazakhstan, the readiness of the people at the helm to operate in the new format, to transform political procedures, and to implement them on the basis of a consensus is the key to the successful development of electronic democracy.