

KAZAKHSTAN: HOW ITS MULTIPARTY SYSTEM CAME INTO BEING

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The discussion clubs, political circles, etc. which appeared in Kazakhstan (and elsewhere across the country) during Gorbachev's perestroika laid the foundation of political parties as an indispensable attribute of any democratic society. In Kazakhstan, however, the process acquired

its specific features because of the geographic location of the entire Central Asian region, the past of its variegated population, and its ethnic composition.

Along with the general crisis that had enveloped the Soviet Union, the events of December 1986 in Alma Ata, when the youth openly moved against the Soviet practice of appointing the republic's top Communist and state leaders by the Kremlin, were an important factor which sped up the emergence of these quasi-political organizations in Kazakhstan. The rally and the use of force to suppress it echoed throughout the republic and beyond. The pernicious ecological effects of the tests at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test ground and some other military objects which have been made public also raised political awareness among the Kazakhstani.

It was on a grass-roots initiative that the first informal political organizations appeared in the republic. Under conditions of a deepening economic and social crisis and weakened control over public sentiments, the so-called dissidents, especially from among the students, became more eloquent about the state of affairs in the country and quite frank about its future. Their discussions led them further away from the official line.

In October 1988, a public organization, the Alma Ata Popular Front, was created; in December, a historical-educational club called Akikat (the Truth) was set up. In December of the same year, historical-educational groups (which were in fact branches of the All-Union Anti-Stalinist Memorial Society) appeared in Tselinograd (today Astana) and Alma Ata and became fairly popular. The Memorial was engaged in rehabilitating the victims of the Stalinist repressions, helping those who survived and the relatives of those who perished in the camps, and fighting the remnants of totalitarianism in public consciousness.

The authorities of still Soviet Kazakhstan tried to split the Memorial movement by setting up its twin structure called Adilet (Justice), formally pursuing the same aims, with branches in Karaganda, Dzhezkazgan, Chimkent, and other cities. The powers that be tried to set the Memorial members (mainly politically aware intelligentsia of European origin) and the Adilet members, who were mainly Kazakhs, against each other.

While at the first stage, the Russians and Russian speakers of Kazakhstan limited their politi-

cal activity mainly to political clubs, the young Kazakhs expressed their political convictions and dissatisfaction with the political and economic realities in more active protest forms: occupation of landed plots on a mass scale to build housing for themselves (this happened, in particular, in Alma Ata in the summer of 1990). These people united into societies Shanyrak, Daryn, and Altyn besik. Early in 1990, the still ruling Communist Party initiated youth structures under its aegis of the Kazak tili (the Kazakh Language) type; very soon more youth national-democratic organizations appeared. The largest of them outside Alma Ata was the Chimket Union of Independent Kazakh Youth.

Like in many other regions of the former Soviet Union, structures and movements officially engaged in environmental protection also appeared in Kazakhstan. The first emerged in 1987 (in Pavlodar, in particular). At that time, an alliance called Initsiativa was set up in the society of environmental protection of Alma Ata; in November a Public Committee for the Problems of Lake Balkhash and the Aral Sea came into being. In 1988, the green movement gained even more strength; Taldy-Kurgan, Djambul and Chimkent acquired ecological organizations. In June 1988, all the corresponding organizations of Alma Ata united into the so-called Green Front.¹ Most of them, with their membership of mainly Russian-speaking intelligentsia, were small. Very soon, their political ideas became obvious and made them even more attractive to the youth.

The Nevada-Semipalatinsk international anti-nuclear and ecological movement played the most important role in the public and political life of Kazakhstan and Central Asia as a whole. It was probably initiated "from above," by the leaders of the still Soviet Kazakhstan. Later, President Nursultan Nazarbaev virtually admitted this by writing: "Without my support of the demand that nuclear tests be banned, without the support of the republic's leaders, and under the conditions of the still strong power of the Center, the anti-nuclear movement would have inevitably run up against ruthless opposition."² It looks as if the republican leaders

¹ See: V.A. Ponomarev, *Obshchestvennyye organizatsii v Kazakhstane i Kyrgyzstane (1987-1991)*, Glagol Publishers, Alma Ata, 1991, pp. 14-15.

² N. Nazarbaev, *Na poroge XXI veka*, Almaty, 1996, p. 170.

wanted to close down the nuclear test ground in Semipalatinsk and needed “strong support of the popular masses” to justify their intention in the Kremlin. The above-mentioned movement was set up on 28 February, 1989; it was the first officially registered public and political republican movement. It became even more popular when well-known writer and public figure Olzhas Suleimеноv became its head.

In June 1989, the participants in the December 1986 events in Alma Ata created a national-democratic movement called the Zheltoksan (December) public committee headed by Khasen Kozha-Akhmet, a dissident who took part in the December events. At the first stage, this movement formulated fairly moderate political demands (complete political and civil rehabilitation of the participants in the December protests). Later the demands became more radical.³

At the turn of the 1990s, the Social-Democratic ideas gained wide popularity in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet countries. There was even a Social-Democratic Association of the Soviet Union. In Kazakhstan, a similar structure appeared in December 1989 within the Memorial Society. On 1 March, 1990, there were over 100 registered and unregistered public organizations, most of which were political clubs. The following structures deserve special mention along with those mentioned above: the Civil Movement Sodruzhestvo, the Forum Society, the Public Human Rights Committee, the Russkaia entsiklopedia Club, the Assembly of Kazakh National Culture, the Kazakhskiy aprel Society, the Association of National Cultural Centers, an Independent Trade Union of Businessmen, Tenants and Cooperatives Birlesu (Unity), and others.⁴

On 14 March, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R. annulled the notorious Art 6 of the 1977 Constitution, which envisaged the leading role of the C.P.S.U. in the Soviet Union. On 9 October, 1990, the Law on Public Associations adopted in the Soviet Union stipulated the right of parties and other public and political organizations to take part in public activities. In fact, the law legal-

ized what was already going on in reality: during the perestroika years, numerous public organizations appeared, including those which called themselves parties.

On 25 October, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Kazakh S.S.R. adopted a Declaration on the State Sovereignty of the Republic which, according to Para 5, guaranteed all public and political organizations and mass movements equal legal opportunities to take part in state and public activities.⁵ The Law on Public Associations of the Kazakh S.S.R. adopted in June 1991 established the rules of setting up such organizations and their functioning. This was another step toward creating a legal basis for the republic’s multiparty system. The fact that this happened at the height of a grave political crisis in the Soviet Union and, more importantly, the content of the law reflected the dual nature of the policies pursued by the ruling elite of the Soviet republics. On the one hand, people at the helm in Kazakhstan knew that serious democratic changes were overdue (including political pluralism in one of its forms). The old political system had obviously compromised itself, while the internal opposition was stepping up its struggle against the totalitarian regime. It was necessary to “let off steam” in order to prevent this activity from spilling beyond the admissible boundaries, thus creating a serious threat to the elite. The ruling circles knew that the republic needed a favorable image abroad in the form of a quasi-democratic multiparty camouflage. It was, in fact, a political imperative. On the other hand, the people at the top were afraid of possible radical political reforms. Uncontrolled democratization might sweep away the increasingly tottering, but still standing, political system together with its residents. The elite had to opt for very moderate political reform in order to create an outwardly democratic political system, remain afloat, and preserve its control over the renovated structure. No wonder that some time later President Nazarbaev had to admit: “The fact that the party system of Kazakhstan was built ‘from above’ is its most specific feature.”⁶ He has probably forgotten that the powers that be began building the system from above after the people had already started building it from below.

³ See: *Political Organization in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Sources and Documents*, ed. by V. Babak, D. Vaisman, A. Wasserman, London, 2003, p. 180.

⁴ See: S. D’iachenko, L. Karmazina, S. Seydumanov, *Politicheskie partii Kazakhstana, 2000 god* (handbook), Almaty, 2000, p. 289.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁶ N. Nazarbaev, *op. cit.*

The First Political Parties

The slogan of national revival, which sounded quite natural while the Soviet Union was disintegrating, led to the appearance of democratic-national political parties and movements in all Union republics. Kazakhstan was no exception. These political parties did not limit themselves to demands to do away with the totalitarian system and build society according to democratic principles—they also insisted on privileges for the titular nations. In Kazakhstan, they demanded that the Kazakh language be made the republic's only state tongue. Some of the national political elite and those groups of Kazakh intelligentsia who considered themselves unjustly treated used the parties and movements to secure a leading political and economic position in the republic for themselves.

In 1990, the first public and political organizations appeared, which called themselves parties. In April, the Party of National Independence Alash⁷ was set up. Its membership, though not large (between 80 and 200 members in the beginning), was extremely radically-minded. They professed the synthesis of Muslim solidarity and Turkic unity, its publication, also called *Alash*, carried the slogan of “Turkism is our body, Islam is our spirit.” The party expressed sentiments common to the nationalist- and radically-minded part of the titular nation; its slogans were hailed among the marginal groups, especially among young people who considered themselves pushed to the wayside. The party was especially popular in the rural areas of Southern Kazakhstan. According to certain data, by mid-1992 it had acquired 5,000 members.⁸ The party was never registered.

Late in May 1990, the Social-Democratic Party of Kazakhstan appeared in Alma Ata; it was created mainly by the Russian-speaking urban intelligentsia; by early 1991, it had 200 members, half of them living in Alma Ata, the republic's old capital, and its environs.⁹ This party was not registered either. The party patterned its ideals after socialism of the Swedish type. In 1991 it split; its radical wing founded another party—the Independent Social-Democratic Party.

In May 1990, the public organizations Adilet, Akikat, Azamat, Zheruyk, Kausar-Bulak and others held a constituent congress in Alma Ata, at which the National-Democratic Party of Kazakhstan Zheltoksan¹⁰ was founded on the basis of the public committee of the same name. In January 1991, Khasen Kozha-Akhmet became its chairman; the party declared its aim to be separation from the Soviet Union and an independent democratic state of Kazakhstan ruled by law.

On 1 July, 1990, the Civilian Movement of Kazakhstan Azat (Freedom) met in Alma Ata for its constituent conference. It described its aim as “achieving complete state sovereignty of Kazakhstan based on international norms and a new Treaty on the Commonwealth of Free and Independent Republics.”¹¹ It should be said that the demand for “complete state sovereignty of Kazakhstan” was typical of all other national movements and reflected the sentiments common to a considerable part of the republican ruling elite. People directly connected with power played an important role in the new movement: Mikhail Isinaliev, former Foreign Minister of Kazakh S.S.R., was one of the co-chairmen; Communist Party functionary Marat Chormanov, who worked in the Alma Ata city committee of the republic's Communist Party, was another. This made the movement a moderate one. In September 1991, it split; one of the parts formed the Republican Party of Kazakhstan under the chairmanship of Sabetkazy Akatay, the leader of the radical wing of Azat. In May 1999, the party acquired a new name—the National Party of Kazakhstan Alash.

The national movement of the Kazakhs mounting in the republic in the late 1980s and early 1990s was accompanied by an increase in anti-Russian sentiments. Some of the nationalist-minded leaders tried to use the ethnic “trump card” to advance their own political interests under the guise

⁷ The name was selected with the aim of symbolizing continuity with the Alash party active on the territory of present Kazakhstan early in the 20th century. Following the October 1917 Revolution, it announced wide autonomy for the Kazakhs and Kyrgyz within the former Russian Empire as its aim.

⁸ See: *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2 June, 1992.

⁹ See: V.A. Ponomarev, op. cit., p. 46.

¹⁰ See: S. D'iachenko, L. Karmazina, S. Seydumanov, op. cit., p. 290.

¹¹ *Political Organization in Central Asia and Azerbaijan. Sources and Documents*, p. 116.

of the need to consolidate the titular nation for the sake of national revival and rebirth of national culture, language, and religion. These slogans were accompanied by mass discrimination of Russians and Russian speakers.

The newly adopted laws—on languages, citizenship, and immigration—put the Kazakhs, the titular nation, in a privileged position. They, and the campaign to replace Russians and Russian speakers at the top and medium administrative levels with Kazakhs encouraged from above, triggered mass emigration of Russians and the Russian-speaking population. On the other hand, those who stayed behind (primarily Russians) began setting up political organizations of their own to protect their civil and social rights. On 29 August, 1990, Edinstvo, a public organization of the non-titular, mainly Russian, population, held a constituent conference. It was not the first of its kind in the Soviet Union: by that time similar political structures were already functioning in other republics. The conference adopted a document that said: “The main aim of the new inter-ethnic movement is to harmonize ethnic relationships, prevent violence provoked by the separatists, chauvinists, and nationalist forces, as well as protect citizens’ political and social rights.”¹²

In 1991-1992, other political organizations appeared; they tried to prevent ethnic and linguistic discrimination of the non-titular population groups: the Slavic Movement of Kazakhstan (a politicized structure set up to protect the civil and social rights, as well as the Slavs’ cultural interests); and the Russian Community, which pursued more or less the same aims as Edinstvo, later it split and the breakaway group formed a public association called the Russian Alliance.

In September 1992, a Slavic movement called Lad met in Pavlodar for its congress. It united several small cultural Slavic societies and became the largest Slavic movement in Kazakhstan during the first years of its independence. Its constituent conference took place on 27 March, 1993 in Akmola (now Astana); by the spring of 1994, it had over 8,000 members (mainly Russians and Ukrainians) and 16 regional organizations. It openly opposed the official nationalities policy.

There are a large number of Cossacks (descendants of those who came to Kazakhstan before the revolution) living in Kazakhstan. In the early 1990s, numerous spontaneous Cossack organizations of various political orientations appeared, the largest of them being the Society for Lending Help to the Semirech’e Cossacks (the Alma Ata and Taldy-Kurgan regions), the Siberian Community of the Gor’kaia Linia Cossacks (Petrovavlovsk), the Verkhni Irtysh Old Believer Cossack Community (Ust Kamenogorsk), etc.¹³ All of them were acting under slogans calling for a revival of the Cossack culture and traditions, while some of them went even further: they suggested that certain regions should be separated from Kazakhstan and be united with Russia as a South Siberian Republic.

I have already mentioned that the first public and political organizations were set up according to the ethnic principle, which affected their ethnic composition and their programs. There were serious objective reasons, mainly of a historic nature, as well as subjective factors for this, mainly the desire of part of the national elite to take advantage of the situation created by the Soviet Union’s disintegration to consolidate its own power in the republic.

Large Political Parties

Kazakhstan inherited the Communist Party (which was the ruling party in the past) from the Soviet Union. After the aborted coup of August 1991 in Moscow, the Communist Party not only lost its power, but also actually split into two massive opposition leftist parties: the Socialist and Communist parties. Their memberships were approximately equal: about 47,000 were members of the former and over 48,000 of the latter.¹⁴ In their program documents, the Socialists point out that they concentrate on protecting the inter-

¹² *Partiynaiia zhizn Kazakhstana*, No. 12, 1990, p. 63.

¹³ See: *Delovaia nedelia*, 19 June, 1998.

¹⁴ See: E. Babakumarov, “K chemu prishli i k chemu idem?” *Mysl*, No. 11, 1994, pp. 48-49.

ests of the working people, irrespective of their social status, origin, nationality, or confession. The Communists described a society of freedom and social justice based on the principles of scientific socialism and the priority of human values as their aim.¹⁵

In October 1991, another large party—the People’s Congress of Kazakhstan—appeared and was officially registered on 31 December. It was set up by the following public organizations: the International Anti-Nuclear Movement Nevada-Semipalatinsk, the International Public Committee Aral-Asia-Kazakhstan, the Union of Women, the Independent Trade Union Birlesu, the Kazak tili Society, the Association of Young Builders of the Republic, and several national-cultural centers. The party described its aim as “contributing to shaping a humane democratic society and an independent and unitary state ruled by law—a Republic of Kazakhstan which will consider its people, their life, freedoms, and inalienable rights its highest value.”¹⁶ (This was the first democratic party registered in the republic.) In October 1994, it announced that it was in constructive opposition to the president.

The Union of Industrialists and Businessmen of Kazakhstan was an obvious sign that the country had entered into a new, post-Soviet era. In June 1992, this new class held a forum in Alma Ata attended by President Nazarbaev, who even addressed the forum with a speech. The organization was obviously blessed “from above.” In February 1993, it acquired a new chairman in the person of Akezhan Kazhegeldin, who was later appointed prime minister.

Very soon after that President Nazarbaev blessed another political structure—the People’s Unity of Kazakhstan Union. On 6 February, 1993 he spoke at its constituent conference. Its program was very close to the program documents of the People’s Congress of Kazakhstan, while according to Charter, the new party should acquire a leader. The constituent conference invited President Nazarbaev to fill the post. In March 1995, the Union was transformed into a party of the same name. In January 1994, speaking at its extraordinary congress Kuanysh Sultanov, chairman of the party’s political council, outlined an idea which the ruling elite found attractive and important: “There is a real opportunity to form a republican political party with a massive membership and constructive ideas. This party will probably be a presidential one...”¹⁷ This statement and the fact that President Nazarbaev attended the constituent forums of many political organizations testify that in the early 1990s the republican leaders were controlling the process of party building and channeled it accordingly. In other words, although the process began “from below” and the first public and political movements and parties appeared spontaneously at the turn of the 1990s, the top crust actively intervened in the process to start building the multiparty system from above. The ruling elite was both the customer and the chief architect.

In April 1994, the Socialist Party initiated an extra-parliamentary bloc of parties and public organizations called the Coordinating Council of Public Movements Respublika, which united over 20 parties and movements. The scattered structures of opposition closed their ranks to set up a powerful opposition movement which could rely on the parliamentary factions of the Council members.¹⁸

Two more political organizations were formed in late 1994-early 1995: the People’s Cooperative Party of Kazakhstan based on the Union of Consumer Cooperative Societies, and the Party of Revival of Kazakhstan, which relied on agricultural workers, people engaged in cooperative structures, and the sphere of material production and services. It guided itself by the political interests of the budding middle class: medium and petty businessmen, engineers and technicians, people working in education, health, science and culture, and civil servants. The active start soon ended: by mid-1996, the Revival Party had obviously lost some of its ground.

Two more parties were formed in 1995. On 1 July, the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan held its constituent congress; in September, the second congress of the Union of Engineers of Kazakhstan reorganized the Union into the Republican Political Party of Labor.

The first parliamentary elections according to the new constitution were held in December 1995. Thirty parties and movements competed for the seats in the Majilis; the following parties divided the

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ S. D’iachenko, L. Karmazina, S. Seydumanov, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 303.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 306.

majority of seats among themselves: the People's Unity of Kazakhstan Party got 27 seats, the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, 12 seats; and the Agrarian Union of Kazakhstan, 7 seats.

In April 1996, the public movement called Azamat (Citizen) held its constituent conference in Almaty; from the very beginning it was obviously critical of power; spoke in favor of democratic changes in the country's public life and was, therefore, in opposition to the regime of presidential power which had taken shape in the republic by that time.

In April 1997, another public organization appeared on the right flank. The Liberal Movement of Kazakhstan gained instant popularity; early in 1998, this party and 17 more political structures loyal to power set up an Advisory-Consultative Alliance called the Popular Union in Support of the Reforms; it can be best described as a round table of political organizations. On 7 January, 1998, its first meeting adopted a Memorandum on Mutual Understanding and Cooperation of Political Parties and Public Associations. Analysts believe that in this way the authorities responded to the efforts of the Azamat movement and other opposition organizations to close ranks within the Popular Front of Kazakhstan.

Later, in February 1998, the Azamat leaders held a constituent conference of the opposition Popular Front of Kazakhstan; the conference attracted several other large political structures—the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, the People's Congress of Kazakhstan Party, the Azat Civilian Movement, the Lad Movement, etc. The Popular Front was intended as an opposition bloc of political organizations with similar or identical views on the republic's main problems. In March 1999, the Azamat Movement served as the basis for the Azamat Democratic Party; for some time it remained part of the Forum of Democratic Forces it left in April 2000.

It should be said that before that, on 31 May, 1996, the parliament passed a decision On Public Associations; a month later, on 2 July, it adopted a Law on Political Parties, which banned parties created on the religious basis, as well as those that "aimed at, or worked toward the use of force to change the constitutional order, violate the integrity of the Republic of Kazakhstan, undermine its security, or fan social, racial, ethnic, religious, and clan strife" (Art 5). Pursuant to this document, "political parties have no right to receive money or other property from religious associations. Political parties should not be financed by foreign legal entities or physical persons, other states, international organizations, or legal entities with foreign participation" (Art. 16).

The Year 1999: Presidential, Parliamentary and Municipal Campaigns

Elections to practically all the representative structures tested the republic's democratic nature, its political leaders, and their readiness to fulfill their numerous declarations about granting all political parties and movements equal rights in administering the country.

In the latter half of 1998-early 1999, several more political organizations appeared: in October 1998, the Party of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan was formed to be shortly united, in May 1999, with the Otan Party. In November 1998, the Kazakhstan Civilian Party, one more openly pro-presidential party, held its constituent congress. It was attended by President Nazarbaev, who agreed to become its ideological and political leader. Since the day of its creation, the party has been playing an important role in the life of the country. A month later, the republic acquired a highly oppositional Republican People's Party of Kazakhstan with former premier Kazhegeldin as its chairman. The party's political memorandum, published to mark its five years on the political scene, said: "The party was set up as an alliance of representatives of the democratic public of the Republic of Kazakhstan in response to the country's rapid retreat from its initial democratic course and concentration of political power in the hands of one man."¹⁹ Since its very

¹⁹ [<http://www.gazeta.kg/print.php?I=4042>].

first day, the party has been strictly oppositional. Early in January 1999, it was announced that an Agrarian Party of Kazakhstan would be set up. It described its aim as protection of the interests of the agrarian workers; in fact, the new party became a political instrument to be used by the country leaders in Kazakhstan's countryside.

On 10 January, 1999, pre-term (two years before term) presidential elections took place; this undermined the position of the opposition, which had no time to get ready for the election campaign. By the fall of 1998, the authorities had already tilled the soil: the corresponding articles of the country's constitution and of the Law on Elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan were amended to suit their purposes. During the election campaign, the country's leaders made purposeful use not only of the media, but also of an army of propagandists and the juridical system. It helped President Nazarbaev remove, in the crudest way, the potentially most dangerous opponent—Kazhegeldin, leader of the Republican People's Party and former premier. According to official figures, Nazarbaev received 79.78 percent of the votes; the undemocratic nature of this campaign was criticized on all sides; a statement issued by the U.S. State Department said that this election was a step back in the democratization process in Kazakhstan.²⁰

After the presidential election, the parties began preparing for the parliamentary election: the pro-presidential parties were striving for more seats in order to deprive the opposition of any real possibility of taking part in state administration. On 19 January, it was announced that the Republican Staff in Support of the Presidential Candidate N. Nazarbaev Public Association would be transformed into the Republican (Homeland) Party Otan of the social-democratic type. The chairman of the Republican Staff, former premier Sergey Tereshchenko, became the temporary chairman of Otan (the party of power from the very beginning). Several pro-presidential parties held their congresses and conferences in January and February to announce their willingness to join the Otan. Their official statements said that it was their aim to promote economic and political changes in full accordance with the reform program presented in the Address of the President to the People of Kazakhstan of 30 September, 1998. In fact, they were only seeking closer affiliation with the party of power.

On 1 March, 1999, the Otan Party held its first congress, at which the president of the republic made a speech. The congress adopted the Program and Charter and elected President Nazarbaev its chairman with membership card No. 1. Since, pursuant to the constitution, the president cannot be a party member, President Nazarbaev suspended his membership and transferred his duties as chairman to Sergey Tereshchenko. On the same day, the unifying congress passed a decision on joining several political organizations with Otan: the People's Unity of Kazakhstan Party, the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, the Liberal Movement of Kazakhstan Public Association, and the Movement "For Kazakhstan-2030." In May, the Party of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan announced its intention to join Otan.

In this way, on the eve of the parliamentary and municipal elections, the country's leaders consolidated their forces by hastily knocking together a powerful party able to win the majority in the parliament and in the municipal structures of representative power. New members were admitted on a wide scale; civil servants and students joined the party en masse. The fact that Otan was created "with the direct participation of the local executive structures, the heads of which occupied high posts in the local branches and offices of the new party,"²¹ emphasized the party's special nature. No wonder it came to be known as the "party of nomenklatura." Executive power mobilized its administrative resource (primarily the state-owned media) and the potential of two other pro-governmental parties (the Civil and the Agrarian) to help Otan.

The pro-government structures won the expected absolute majority on the party lists: 8 out of 10 in the Majilis (the lower chamber): Otan received 4 seats, the Civilian Party, 2; and the Agrarian Party, 2. The opposition represented by the communists had to be satisfied with 2 seats. In other words, legal and outwardly democratic means were used to preserve power; and the results created a parliamentary screen for future decisions and steps.

²⁰ See: *Delovaia nedelia*, No. 2, 1999.

²¹ S. D'iachenko, L. Karmazina, S. Seydumanov, op. cit., p. 84.

No lull followed the 1999 presidential and political elections: in 2000, the Peasant Social-Democratic Party Auyl and the Patriot Party of Kazakhstan held their constituent congresses. The latter paid particular attention in its program to environmental issues. In this respect, it stood apart from all the other parties, which limited themselves to paying lip-service to environmental protection (the Party of Environmental Protectors Tabigat was the only other exception). In March 2002, the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan Ak zhol (Clear Path) was formed on the basis of the public political movement of the same name which had been functioning since November 1998. The intelligentsia formed its core, while its program, Development Strategy of Kazakhstan until 2030, was formulated by President Nazarbaev.

In April 2002, the Russian Party of Kazakhstan was registered; it united the numerous regional and republican Russian, Cossack, and Slavic organizations which had united into an association in the latter half of the 1990s. The party defended the rights of the Russians and Russian speakers; its program said, in particular, that the party was fighting “for recognition of the Russian people living in Kazakhstan as a state-forming nation and for recognition of the Russian language as the state language along with the Kazakh.”²²

The New Law on the Parties and the Parliamentary Elections of 2004

On 15 July, 2002, the president signed a new law on political parties. The opposition and democratic intelligentsia were convinced that the number of members needed to register any political structure (50,000) was unjustifiably large. All parties were expected to have regional cells with no less than 700 members each across the country. The law demanded that, to be registered, a party should submit a personal list of its members to the Ministry of Justice. In a country with a 15 million-strong population, this meant that small political parties representing small groups with special interests could no longer take part in the republic’s political life. The opposition actively protested against the clause which made it possible to liquidate a party “if it missed two successive election campaigns to the Majilis of the parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan.” Experts believe that this played into the hands of large political parties. The opposition, which was convinced that the law would not contribute to the country’s further democratization, called it “the Law Against Political Parties.”²³

In 2002-2003, political parties were re-registered according to the law; in the past, by 1 September, 2002, there were 19 political parties in the country registered according to the old rules.

By the deadline of 20 January, 2003 established by the new law, only 11 parties had submitted their requests for re-registration to the Ministry of Justice. Seven of them passed the test: the Democratic Party Ak zhol, the Kazakhstan Civilian Party, the Republican Political Party Otan, the Agrarian Party of Kazakhstan, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, the Patriot Party of Kazakhstan, and the Peasant Social-Democratic Party Auyl. The following parties were denied registration for different reasons: the Alash Party (the former National Party of Kazakhstan Alash), the Compatriot (the former Russian Party of Kazakhstan), the Republican Democratic Party El Dana (the former Democratic Party of Women), and the Party of Revival of Kazakhstan. Another 6 out of 19 parties never applied for registration within the law-stipulated period.²⁴

The Rukhaniat Party (Spirituality) was the first political organization formed after the law had been adopted. It was formed on the basis of the Party of Revival of Kazakhstan functioning since 1995. Its proclaimed aim was preservation of the nation’s historical and cultural heritage and protection of the working intelligentsia’s social and civil rights. The party is extremely loyal to the powers that be.

²² [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1027742460>].

²³ [<http://www.gazeta.kg/print.php?l=4042>].

²⁴ [<http://www.navi.kz/articles/?artid=3125>].

In December 2003, another pro-presidential party Asar (All Together) was formed with Dariga Nazarbaeva, the president's daughter, as its leader. She announced that her party was following the course of further modernization and deeper democratic changes. The opposition is convinced, however, that the president was just raising a successor to be sure of the best possible alternative of a transfer in power.

At first glance, several pro-presidential parties in one country might look excessive and even puzzling, yet in the case of Kazakhstan this was caused by objective factors, the main one being the superficial nature of the multi-party system and the clan nature of the Kazakhstani model of power.²⁵ Azhdar Kurtov, prominent political scientist and president of the Moscow Center for the Public Law Studies, agrees with this.

In February 2004, the oppositional Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan People's Party was set up on the basis of the opposition public movement of the same name functioning since November 2001. Soon after that, it was registered. In January 2005, the Almaty court of justice banned it for its sharp criticism of power. Its leader, Galymzhan Zhakianov, who earlier served as the akim (head) of the Semipalatinsk and Pavlodar regions, was sent to prison.

The parties of power enjoy considerable advantages over the opposition structures, which are not limited to the use of administrative resource alone. These parties have more money, which is very important. Otan, the party of bureaucrats, lives on local funding, the money coming mainly from the regional akims. Since in Kazakhstan, and in many other post-Soviet countries, power and money are inseparable, the party's financial basis is firm enough. The Civilian Party gets its money from mining and metallurgical companies, and the Agrarian Party lives on the money of agrarian enterprises. The Asar Party, headed by the president's daughter, relies on the administrative resource and is supported by the republican and local administrations. The moderately oppositional Ak zhol Party, which expresses the interests of national bourgeoisie, is not poor either. The openly opposition parties, such as the Communist Party and the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan People's Party supported by the protest part of the electorate, are much poorer.²⁶

On 19 September and 3 October, 2004, two rounds of parliamentary elections took place in Kazakhstan, in which 12 registered political parties (mainly pro-presidential ones) participated. Naturally enough, they remained dominant throughout the election campaign: they nominated the largest number of candidates and won the absolute majority of seats. As a result of voting by party lists, the radical opposition was left without seats in the Majilis, the Otan Party received 7 seats out of 10, along with 35 out of 67 seats reserved for deputies elected in single-member districts. On the whole, the party received 42 out of 77 seats.

The opposition parties came forward with numerous facts of violations registered on election day and falsifications revealed during vote counting. In its statement about the results of the election campaign, the European Union pointed out that it had not corresponded to the OSCE and international standards.²⁷ This was fully confirmed by the protest action headed by Majilis speaker Zharmakhan Tuiakbay, one of the three co-chairmen of the Otan Party. Even though he headed the party's election list, he rejected his deputy mandate in the newly elected Majilis and discontinued his party membership. By way of explanation he said: "The 2004 elections went on amid continued pressure by the local executive structures on the people's consciousness and on the election commissions, which was highly varied, sometimes concealed, and sometimes quite obvious."²⁸

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The process of forming a multiparty system in Kazakhstan exhibited many features typical of similar processes taking place in post-totalitarian countries during the transition period. At the same time, in Kazakhstan the process was marked by its own specific features rooted in the country's past and its na-

²⁵ [<http://www.novopol.ru/material534.html>].

²⁶ See: D. Dashkov, "V poiskakh 'zolota' partiy" [<http://respublika.kz/index.php?art=2004030507>].

²⁷ [<http://www.zhakiyanov.info/inner.php?menuid=24&show=3834>].

²⁸ [http://www.dpkakzhol.kz/2004/monitor_191004_1.htm].

tional traditions. In addition, its social composition, its polyethnic and poly-confessional nature, and the clan character of power were also responsible.

The absolute majority of parties differ from each other not so much in their programs and social makeup, as in their leaders' closeness to certain powerful groups and the latter's closeness to "supreme power." It should be said that this more or less stable system cannot be compared with the multiparty systems of the old democracies. This system can, and should, be compared with the situation that existed in the republic under Soviet power, or with the current situation in the republic's neighbors. This alone will provide an insight into the meaning and complexities of the current processes of democratization in Kazakhstan.