
THE 2005 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN KAZAKHSTAN: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS FOR POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION

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In recent years, the world's attention has been riveted on the fairly inordinate political trends in some of the post-Soviet states. The Color Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan surprise no one; experts are talking about their recurring nature against the background of elections, similar plots, the technologies used to launch the sociopolitical developments, and similar results.

This has created the fashionable habit of discussing every CIS country getting ready for another round of elections as a testing ground for another “color” syndrome of its political democratization. As soon as this fashion reached Central Asia, Kazakhstan became the target of expert speculation: would the republic, due to hold its next presidential election in 2005-2006 (it took place on 4 December, 2005), experience a Color Revolution? The country’s geographic proximity to Kyrgyzstan, where democratization has been very painful, and Uzbekistan, where the authorities promptly suppressed a similar attempt, stirred up interest in Kazakhstan even more.

Kazakhstan’s geopolitical situation can be described as strategically very advantageous and very complicated at one and the same time. On the one hand, the republic is part of a very contradictory region prone to destabilization; and on the other, the state’s geostrategic and geo-economic potential is high enough to attract the attention of the leading global players—Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union as a whole, along with its individual countries. This largely determines the republic’s behavior on the international scene. Today, the geopolitical situation in Central Asia and across the post-Soviet space has created a potentially explosive environment. For this reason, the election period could potentially trigger any domestic political scenario.

Experts could not agree on the possibility of a Color Revolution in Kazakhstan. Time has demonstrated that none of the scenarios tried out elsewhere could be applied here. The country does not belong to the classical group of post-Soviet states—its political and socioeconomic specifics set it apart from other states.

Astana has set itself the long-term aim of becoming an open democratic society. In the context of the fairly complex international situation and security threats, this ambitious aim is hard to realize. The well-substantiated strategy and flexibility of the republic’s leaders allow the country to consistently resolve its tasks. It is going on with its political modernization, the progress of which affects all spheres of the state’s functioning. This is amply testified not only by numerous commentaries by foreign politicians, but also by the country’s high level of investment attractiveness and its high economic development rates.

Thanks to its achievements in the sphere of political liberalization and democratization, the republic is candidate No. 1 for OSCE chairmanship in 2009, since the international community has already positively assessed the republic’s chances of building an open democratic society.

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There was no agreement on the time when the nation should go to the polls to elect the president. According to one source, the election was to be held in December 2005, according to another, in December 2006. The Constitution stipulates holding the election “on the first Sunday of December of the corresponding year.” Since the last presidential election took place in January 1999, some politicians insisted that the next election should be held in December 2006—eleven months after expiry of the president’s power. This means that the country would have lived without a president for nearly a year.

This urged the Majilis of the Kazakhstan parliament to ask the Constitutional Council for an explanation. The Council ruled that the election should take place on the first Sunday of December 2005. On 7 September, the Majilis announced the date—4 December.¹ The public was prepared to accept this and waited for the exact date to be announced, so there was no discontent or a political crisis.

¹ Kazinform Information Agency, 7 September, 2005.

The election campaign was needed to strengthen the current democratization trends and to consolidate the country's international image as a progressive democratic state, even though this created certain risks and was fraught with destabilization. The campaign unfolded against the background of the Color epidemic in the post-Soviet expanse and the domestic political crises this epidemic created. In view of this, Astana took all the necessary precautions to ensure national security and preserve domestic stability. At the very beginning of the election campaign, the president said: "I would like to repeat that any interference by foreign organizations and diplomats in our domestic affairs in the form of consultations of political parties and lobbying their interests is absolutely unacceptable. This contradicts our laws and we shall take all the necessary measures. Any violation of the law on the part of the election participants will be stemmed—no democratic rhetoric will help those guilty of such violation."²

An open and fair election required a stable election campaign—all efforts to radicalize the situation or interfere from the outside were to be curtailed. The republic's leaders undertook all measures to carry out the campaign within the republic's laws to prevent uncontrolled developments similar to those that had taken place in other post-Soviet countries during the Color Revolutions.

The candidates were nominated from 8 September to 3 October, 2005; there were 18 of them: 4 were nominated by republican public organizations; and 14 people nominated themselves. The Central Election Commission established that 13 of the candidates either did not meet the demands of the law or failed to register according to the legal requirements. The Commission registered five candidates: E. Abylkasymov from the Communist National Party of Kazakhstan (CNPK), who ran for the opposition; A. Baymenov, another opposition candidate, who represented the Ak zhol Party; M. Eleusizov, leader of the Tabigat ecological movement, who nominated himself as a neutral candidate; N. Nazarbaev, nominated by the Otan Party, the country's president; and Zh. Tuiakbay, nominated by the democratic forces bloc, Za spravedlivy Kazakhstan (ZSK) (For a Fair Kazakhstan), who described himself as the one candidate for the entire opposition.

They were the main personalities of the election campaign, who determined the course of the election race and the key events that unfolded around it. Kazakhstan has developed conditions conducive to transparent and alternative elections. From the very beginning, the country's president stated that he would do his best to ensure absolutely open and fair elections.³

On 9 September, 2005, a decree was issued which instructed the Central Election Commission, the ministries, and all the other central and local authorities to take certain steps with respect to the election.⁴ This greatly improved the election procedure. The republic has been making changes in its political sphere for some time now, therefore the 2005 election was regarded as a test of the republic's political maturity. By 2005, the Elections Control Committee staffed with neutral public figures had been functioning for quite a while; its task was to ensure unbiased and objective observation of the election campaign and voting procedure.

The country's leaders borrowed the most progressive methods of democratic development from abroad and actively cooperated with international specialized structures, the ODIHR/OSCE being one of them.⁵ On the basis of its recommendations, in particular, several new norms were introduced into Kazakhstan's election laws,⁶ including a Constitutional Law on Introducing Amendments and Changes

² The Khabar Information Agency, 21 October, 2005.

³ See: Speech delivered by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbaev at a special congress of the Otan Party [www.akorda.kz/page.php?id=lang=1&article_id=917].

⁴ According to information supplied by the Central Election Commission [www.election.kz/press_208?_new.htm].

⁵ See: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights at OSCE [www.osce.org/odihr/].

⁶ See: "ODIHR/OSCE Assessment of the Constitutional Law on Elections of the Republic of Kazakhstan" [www.osce.org/odihr-elections/13442.html].

into the Constitutional Law on Elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The following key amendments were introduced:

- election commissions are now formed by the local executive structures of power (*maslikhats*);
- the possibility of an election without alternative candidates is excluded;
- the rights and guarantees of the candidates are considerably extended, while the registration process has been simplified;
- an exhaustive list of possible violations of registration rights has been compiled to rule out possible abuses;
- the rules and conditions on which candidates are given TV and radio air time and space in the press are strictly regimented to ensure equal access to the media for all candidates;
- the rights of observers, journalists, and the candidates' representatives are extended to grant them the power of observers of the voting procedure;
- the poll boxes are made of transparent materials;
- the Election Commission can be brought to court in the event of law violations.⁷

The changes in this sphere were designed to upgrade the role of the parties in the election process, create equal conditions for all participants, and extend the possibilities for citizens to take part in the voting.

It should be said that the Constitutional Law on Elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan did not stipulate any infringements on human rights and freedoms, apart from a ban on all forms of expression of public, group, or personal interests and protest designed to put pressure on the voters or the election commission members.⁸ In November 2005, on the recommendation of the OSCE observers, the Central Election Commission suggested that this provision be annulled. This was done. On the whole, the country's leaders took maximum account of the OSCE's experience and recommendations with the aim of creating a wide liberal legislative election platform.

As distinct from the wave of the Color Pseudo-Revolutions that engulfed Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan and the reaction in Uzbekistan, the political elite of Kazakhstan demonstrates different behavior and different sentiments conducive to the republic's stability. This is explained by the fact that while modeling public conduct during the election campaign the top leaders gave the opposition a chance to speak out and refrained from putting it under administrative pressure.

The fact that the country's political environment is essentially unexposed to foreign influences played an important role in the election process. Russia and the United States are two actors involved to the greatest extent in Kazakhstan's proceedings; the European Union and China are involved to a much lesser degree. Compared with the other post-Soviet states, this can be described as an extraordinary and unexpected policy which meet the interests of all sides.

- First, as distinct from its behavior in other countries, the West placed its stakes on the republic's leaders and completely supported their democratic efforts. At the very beginning of the election campaign, the world's leading politicians, primarily from the U.S., Russia, and the EU, unequivocally supported President Nazarbaev. During her visit to Kazakhstan, U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice made public for the first time Washington's unequivocal support of the political and economic reforms in Kazakhstan by saying that the repub-

⁷ See: Information of 12 September, 2005 of the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan on fulfilling its obligations to the OSCE in the sphere of democratic elections [www.election.kz/portal/page?328_osce.html].

⁸ *Ibidem*.

lic had a chance to lead the democratization processes in Central Asia. She added that the President said the Central Election Commission had made a corresponding statement. The United States, concluded the U.S. State Secretary, believed that this was a positive step allowing everyone to hope that the election would be fair and honest.⁹

- Second, representatives of Russia, China, the United States, the EU, the OSCE, and others supported the democratic changes in Kazakhstan while criticizing its leaders for certain failures in their dialog with the opposition. On the whole, they all agreed that the political opposition was not yet ready to rule the country. This means that the hopes the opposition pinned on support from abroad were not justified.

The country was running the danger of damaging its multi-vector policy if the above scenario failed. In this case, the world would be split into President Nazarbaev's supporters and opponents. The West, however, unequivocally supported the domestic political balance. Throughout the election campaign, the world never left the republic out of its sight; some prominent political figures visited Kazakhstan (President Putin, U.S. State Secretary Rice, former U.S. State Secretary Kissinger, Jordan's King Hussein); others (Premier of Great Britain Blair, President George W. Bush, former premier of Malaysia Mahathir, to name a few) were closely following the local developments.

Significantly, many of the international players placed their stakes on stability in Kazakhstan as the key condition in which they could realize their national interests; the radical opposition obviously lost this round, while the country's leaders were left free to mold domestic policies in order to preserve stability. This was more evidence of Kazakhstan's stronger international position.

The 2005 election was held in the context of considerable economic growth, which inevitably affected its outcome. As distinct from the 1999 elections, which took place amid a worldwide financial crisis with the republic just embarking on the road of economic reforms, today the republic leads the region, the post-Soviet space, and most of the transitional states as far as socioeconomic and political changes are concerned. The state has become a model of democratic development and sustainable economic growth. It was between 1999 and 2005 that the country's leaders launched an efficient economic mechanism: every year the economy grew by 9-10 percent; the GDP by 75 percent; the state budget revenue rose 3.5-4-fold; the per capita GDP increased 3-fold—from \$1,130 in 1999 to \$3,400 in 2005; the country's foreign trade turnover 4-fold; and personal incomes rose 3-fold. The same applies to average monthly wages, monthly pensions and scholarships, while personal bank deposits increased 18-fold. Today, the economy is stable enough to demonstrate an annual growth of 8-9 percent. In the past five years, the GDP has been growing by an average of 10.3 percent.¹⁰ According to the World Economic Forum in 2005, Kazakhstan was the 61st country out of a total of 117 and outstripped its CIS neighbors in this respect.¹¹

This progress created a favorable background for the presidential election and boosted the nation's political activity. The public familiarized itself with the election programs and displayed a great interest in the course of the election campaign, therefore the turnout on election day was high. Throughout the election campaign the nation demonstrated positive social feelings; the people had obviously identified their political and other priorities: they clearly realized that the country's economic growth was the result of the reforms and policies associated with President Nazarbaev. This provided a sound basis for his success.

⁹ See: Visit of U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice to Kazakhstan [www.inform.kz/showarticle.php?lang=rus&id=135656].

¹⁰ According to information supplied by the Agency for Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan [www.stat.kaz].

¹¹ Kazinform Information Agency, 25 October, 2005.

This campaign differed from the previous one in many respects. In 1999, President Nazarbaev ran for re-election against one contestant, leader of the communists S. Abdildin. In 2005, the president ran against three main candidates who represented three main opposition parties: the ZSP, Ak zhol, and the communists.

This competition puzzled the opposition: its three competing candidates traveled along the same routes and found themselves in the same place at the same time; they addressed the same social groups, therefore their rivalry was growing fiercer.

During the election campaign the candidates enjoyed absolutely equal rights and could freely talk to their audiences about the problems—the government never tried to suppress the criticism. The opposition activists (mainly from ZSK and Ak zhol) were free to communicate with foreign offices, international observers, and human rights organizations, while the voters were free to assess the situation and the candidates and familiarize themselves with the election programs in order to make the right choice.

All the state structures, including the Central Election Commission and the committees set up to control the election process, closely followed the developments to make sure that the election process was genuinely democratic and open in full accordance with what President Nazarbaev had promised. Hundreds of observers dispatched by the EU, OSCE, CIS, and other structures arrived in the republic; the OSCE was especially active: its representatives met all the candidates, bureaucrats, and the Central Election Commission members, and visited the headquarters of the candidates many times. Falsifications, attempts to put pressure on the opposition, and use of the administrative resource, etc. were a clear impossibility.

The statements and protests that came from time to time from the opposition about “pressure and persecutions” added spice to the process. Intended for propaganda purposes, however, they hardly reflected the true course of events. On the whole, the election campaign demonstrated that the social and political situation in the republic was stable and that the government stayed within the legal frameworks.

It should be noted here that President Nazarbaev never declared that he would not run for another term in office. Even before the election date was announced he said he would run for re-election. The expert community, on the whole, interpreted this statement as President Nazarbaev’s determination to shoulder the responsibility for the country and described it as a strong political move.

Indeed, twelve months before the presidential election in Kyrgyzstan, President Akaev announced that he would not run for presidency again. For this reason he lost much of his political weight inside the country, which developed into his personal tragedy. In Georgia and Ukraine, the political changes also presupposed a change in president, thus tilling the soil for social and political destabilization, which ended in the pseudo-revolutions.

The Kazakhstani public was satisfied on the whole with the president’s intention: much of what had been done was associated with his name. Numerous sociological polls confirmed this, while many political and public organizations and labor collectives supported the head of state. This had nothing to do with the notorious administrative resource, political technologies, or cheating: society needed stability. The choice was a pragmatic one: people supported the strategy rather than Nazarbaev. He himself and his team are highly respected because he invariably demonstrates that he knows what he is doing and invariably acts faster than his rivals; individual manifestations of displeasure with the country’s leaders are signs of a healthy society. Indeed, you cannot be loved by everyone.

President Nazarbaev and his team entered the election campaign with a carefully elaborated platform which included many progressive measures. Made against the background of obvious achievements, the promises were widely discussed and approved of.

The team demonstrated moderation and consistency from the very beginning; it showed that it had no rivals when it came to state administration and subtle understanding of public sentiments and

political processes. President Nazarbaev himself offered the best possible description of his tactics: “As soon as the Majilis of the parliament set the date for the presidential election, I was often asked about the tactics of my election campaign. I am the president, therefore I need no special PR efforts: everything I’ve done so far should speak for itself.”¹²

His rating, which was high on the eve of the election campaign, remained high until its end. The president put together a team of the best political technologists who had a timely response to inordinate situations: the expert community commented on the president’s strong strategic move by saying that “the Kazakhstan government is highly technological” and knows how to control, flexibly and reasonably, the republic’s sociopolitical development. At the same time, the president refused to employ the administrative resource and proved able, despite this, to carry out alternative, fair, and open elections. Throughout the entire election campaign he looked sure of himself: he had obviously prepared well for the coming election and never lost sight of his aims and the roads leading to it.

It should be said in all justice that this time the opposition too was much better prepared and was much surer of itself than before: some of its structures were consolidated, there were attempts to nominate a single candidate, while the political and socioeconomic agenda for the republic looked much more sound. The opposition proved able to launch a wide-scale propaganda campaign across the republic, identified the social groups prepared to support it, and outlined the tactics designed to lure them away. I should say that the opposition was resolved to win and to disseminate its idea of the country’s future development.

These efforts bore little fruit because the three opposition candidates were competing among themselves. The ideological split destroyed the opposition’s competing potential. On the other hand, the opposition candidates failed to organize a logical and consistent propaganda campaign; they had no strong election programs able to compete with the president’s political line. Obvious populism and the overuse of unpopular slogans, aggressiveness, and scandal mongering frightened the voters away. The opposition leaders failed to elaborate a sound and competitive political strategy themselves, hiring instead foreign political technologists whose efforts failed to tip the balance of forces.

This probably explains the failures: the foreign political technologists could not adequately assess the situation in Kazakhstan; the nation’s majority rejected their line, while the opposition’s hasty, aggressive, and at times dishonest methods drove the voters away.

Under these conditions, the president, whose personal merits were obvious, had no real rivals; in fact, all the others were fighting for second place in the presidential race. It is believed that the second best stands a good chance at the next presidential election. Communist candidate E. Abylkasymov offered a perspicacious comment of the country’s political reality: “The nation will probably vote for President Nazarbaev,” and a critical assessment of his own merits and those of Zh. Tuiakbay: “You and I have not yet done anything really important for the state.”¹³

The communist candidate, however, failed to keep up the pace, leaving the other two opposition candidates—A. Baymenov and Zh. Tuiakbay—to compete for second place. They selected different tactics: while the former and his supporters tried to stick to the rules and keep within the legal field (that is, they were described as moderate), the latter and his team placed their stakes on social and political destabilization and tried to draw the authorities into a conflict (this opposition group was seen as radical). The teams’ approaches to the dialog with the country’s leaders also

¹² Speech delivered by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbaev at a special congress of the Otan Party.

¹³ L. Tusupbekova, “ErasyI Abylkasymov “vyzyvaet” Zharmakhana Tuiakbaia na teledбаты” [www.nomad.su/?a3-200509220030].

differed: in an effort to settle all problems peacefully, A. Baymenov concentrated on constructive statements, while Zh. Tuiakbay was uncompromising and peremptory.

Acting against the background of these dirty techniques and the radicals' aggressiveness, the government demonstrated its determination to make the election race open and fair. Even the ODIHR/OSCE confirmed this in its reports,¹⁴ which spoke of the opposition's obviously "antagonistic" rather than "critical" attitude toward the methods the government employed to deal with the radical opposition. Vice President of the European Parliament Alejo Vidal-Quadras Roca¹⁵ made an official statement about this.

Even though Zh. Tuiakbay knew he would not win, he insisted that he was a new type of politician and was different from the country's leaders; he tried to pose himself as a judge of the president's policies in an effort to demonstrate his advantages over President Nazarbaev. His campaign rotated around the thesis: "I have decided to challenge President Nazarbaev."¹⁶ He tried to convince the public that "the authorities fear him and are trying to suppress the ZSK." His team, in turn, tried to attract those dissatisfied with the country's leaders and play on the way the oil revenues were distributed. These efforts, fraught with a crisis, stirred up negative sentiments. Zh. Tuiakbay lost because his reform ideas lacked clarity and because he planned to carry out redistribution of property.

A. Baymenov, on the other hand, tried to present a positive image to the public and move as far away as possible from the radical opposition. Aware that he was no rival to President Nazarbaev, he concentrated on defeating Zh. Tuiakbay, his main rival, by trying to split his supporters. It seems that former civil servant Baymenov refused to burn his bridges in the hope that he might be called back if he came second in the presidential race. In other words, he posed as "a sincere fighter for the people's interests" disgusted with the provocative tactics of ZSK and its candidate: "Today I would like to say for everyone to hear that by exploiting people's justified discontent they (Zh. Tuiakbay's team.—*T.Sh.*) are working in the interests of a limited group of oligarchs. I am convinced that if they win, they will trade bad for worse: the old oligarchs will be replaced with new ones. This does not suit me—more importantly this will not suit the people of Kazakhstan."¹⁷ Unlike his opponent, he demonstrated much less zeal when criticizing the country's leaders and offered alternatives for dealing with social issues.

By the second half of the election campaign, the imbalance and sharp contrasts of the propaganda activities decreased and evened out, while President Nazarbaev emerged as the uncontested leader. The rising rivalry divided the opposition into favorites and outsiders. The election results surprised both the government and the opposition. According to the Central Election Commission, the turnout reached 70 percent (see Table).¹⁸

President Nazarbaev scored a convincing victory; Zh. Tuiakbay, who represented the radical opposition, came second, A. Baymenov, who ran for the moderate opposition, came third, while E. Abylkasymov and M. Eleusizov arrived at the finish as obvious outsiders.

As distinct from the OSCE representatives, most of the foreign observers accepted the election as democratic and open, this opinion confirming the political liberalization trends in the country: President Nazarbaev's vast majority demonstrated that the pragmatically-minded public wanted stability and progress.

¹⁴ See: "OSCE: 2005 Presidential Election in Kazakhstan. Interim Report 2" [www.osce.org/item/17040html=1].

¹⁵ Kazinform Information Agency, 21 November, 2005.

¹⁶ A. Dubnov, "Na prezidentskikh vyborah" [www.kub.kz/article.psp?sid=9942].

¹⁷ Statement of presidential candidate A. Baymenov [www.baymenov.kz/publ_rus.htm].

¹⁸ See: Press release of the Central Elections Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, The Kazinform Information Agency, 7 December, 2005.

Place	Name	Number of votes	(percent)
1.	N. Nazarbaev (Otan)	6,110,694	91.01
2.	Zh. Tuiakbay (ZSK)	445,047	6.64
3.	A. Baymenov (Ak zhol)	110,462	1.65
4.	E. Abylkasymov (CNPk)	25,330	0.38
5.	M. Eleusizov (Tabigat)	21,674	0.32

The opposition lost once more. As distinct from the 1999 elections, the 2005 elections demonstrated its inability to rule the country. The political status quo made the democratic prospects even more real. It seems that the country has acquired all the prerequisites for its OSCE chairmanship in 2009; it is for the organization itself to make the final decision.

Even before the election campaign began, experts agreed that Nazarbaev was destined to win because the nation had already accepted him as the re-elected president. There is the opinion that the absolute majority wants stability and development and that the electorate voted for Nazarbaev as a national leader able to bring the country to success.¹⁹ It was President Nazarbaev who in the immediate post-Soviet years preserved social balance and introduced modern elements into the country's social development. It should be said in this context that the opposition could not compete in earnest with the president, not only and not so much because of lack of time (some experts²⁰ insisted that any party needed at least two years to make its candidate known to the nation).

The question of the opposition's future has not lost its urgency: long before the elections, it split into several rivaling groups unable to compete with the president. In this context, the election campaign was seen as a test designed to identify an obvious leader among the rivals who had failed to formulate a united platform.

We should not rule out the possibility that for certain reasons the process of integrating the opposition into a single mechanism of power may gradually peter out mainly because the opposition blocs will resume their struggle for political leadership. For this reason, the ambiguous stagnation of the government/opposition relationship obvious in the previous periods may return.

An analysis of the situation in any of the countries that lived through Color Revolutions reveals that the errors of the powers that be and their regressive course aggravated the already grave domestic political and socioeconomic problems; this process created a wide range of latent and obvious contradictions. In each of the states the leader had already discredited himself morally and politically: Leonid Kuchma in Ukraine, Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia, and Askar Akaev in Kyrgyzstan. Even though the revolutionary transfers were not equally smooth everywhere, in these countries, the charismatic opposition leaders managed to unite the nation around themselves.

The election in Kazakhstan clearly revealed the opposition's faults:

- first, it failed to nominate a single and strong candidate;
- second, it split into several groups, each of which nominated its own candidate, all of whom competed among themselves;
- third, none of them proved able to formulate an attractive and substantiated election program full of specific political and economic ideas;

¹⁹ See: N. Nazarbaev campaigned under the slogan "Kazakhstan—Forward!"

²⁰ See: E. Ertysbaev, "Menia bol'she volnuet postvyborniy protsess," *Liter*, 19 July, 2005.

- fourth, the country's majority, satisfied with the current social and political situation, wanted no dramatic and unpredictable changes;
- fifth, the democratic changes and economic growth which the opposition promised the people were already a fact of life in the republic anyway.

There are several much more important results of the recent presidential election: changes in the political balance among the opposition groups, which began splitting into even smaller and highly polarized groups, something which does not bode well for the opposition's future. Being involved in a confrontation with the country's political leadership, the opposition distanced itself from the process of forming power relationships at the state level. Its further efforts to aggravate the sociopolitical situation may shift its conflict with the government to an area where the government might be driven to use force to preserve stability.

It seems that the opposition leaders should recognize their weaknesses and stop aggravating a dead-end conflict with the government. It will merely mar their political image and deprive them of the chance to develop into a constructive opposition, which is an important democratic institution. The opposition's incorrect behavior after the 2005 elections might trigger a process which will prevent it from developing into this kind of political institution integrated into the mechanisms of state administration. The radical part of the opposition loudly accused the government of persecutions which allegedly occurred during the election campaign. These statements and the strict control over mass actions should be regarded through the prism of the country's laws and the need to ensure national security. National stability and national security were two components which pointed to the logic of the official actions.

During the election campaign, the republic's leaders amazed the opponents with certain novel tactical moves born by the government's view of the political developments. This took the wind out of the opposition's sails, which was looking for aggravation; an unbiased observer might have discerned the desire of some of the opposition members to use the latest "revolutionary" technologies to bring about a shift in power.

Kazakhstan was the first to put an end to the destructive cycle and demonstrated that there was a third way of flexible administration. It prevented the advent of "color" chaos (evident in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan) and avoided harsh repressive methods (applied in Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan). While heeding the opinions offered by their political opponents and introducing reasonable changes into the election process, the country's leaders managed to follow their political course. This is what is called "taking into account the balance of interests."

On the whole, the desire to preserve the status quo should be described as a positive trend—after all, this is the only way to ensure economic growth, political democratization, and the republic's continued development as a cornerstone of stability and a reliable exporter of political-economic evolution in Central Asia.

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The 2005 election marked a turning point: the uncompromising relationship between the government and the opposition in the context of political liberalization should be revised. The leaders of Kazakhstan are prepared to enter into a constructive dialog with the opposition on mutually acceptable conditions. The country has reached the point of profound political changes which will separate the liberals from the conservatives both in the government and the opposition.²¹

The newly elected president described the country's future in the following way: "We are looking into a future which is in our hands. We believe in ourselves. Each and every citizen of our country

²¹ See: M.M. Tajin, "Strana nakhoditsia na poroge ser'eznykh preobrazovaniy" [www.otan.kz/publ040905.html].

should trust his strength and work for himself and for the Motherland. This will bring us great success.”²²

The presidential election demonstrated that Kazakhstan not only leads Central Asia economically; it is a pioneer of democratization in the region. Today, the world community regards it as a progressive state in which democracy and human rights are developed and protected. By carrying out a fair and open presidential election, the republic demonstrated that it can secure its aims and fulfill its tasks; and that it is aware of its political maturity and of its future.

The country has accomplished a historic breakthrough which will affect all spheres of its existence and raise the state’s social and political development level and the self-awareness of its citizens. In the foreseeable future Kazakhstan may join the ranks of the developed democratic states. This is confirmed by the comments offered by several world-famous politicians—Vladimir Putin, Condoleezza Rice, Henry Kissinger, and others. It should be added that the post-Soviet Color Democrats—Viktor Iushchenko, Mikhail Saakashvili, and Kurmanbek Bakiev—recognized Kazakhstan’s achievements. This shows that the world community has positively assessed President Nazarbaev’s politics, while information that arrives in Kazakhstan from all corners testifies that many of the political forces abroad pinned their hopes on status quo in the republic.

I have already written that Kazakhstan is consistent in its desire to strengthen its cooperation with the OSCE, while its future OSCE chairmanship will symbolize the country’s transfer to the category of developed democratic states with stable international prestige. This will mark a turning point in Kazakhstan’s recent history and will confirm that the country has chosen its road wisely. The OSCE believes that Kazakhstan’s chairmanship is very important for the organization itself, for its development and improvement. Kazakhstan’s experience will help this international organization elaborate patterns of ethnic and religious dialogs and correct its approaches to social-political problems and peaceful crisis settlement.

²² The Astana Information Agency, 26 October, 2005.