

## CIVIL SOCIETY

**POLITICAL PARTIES OF  
KAZAKHSTAN IN THE 2005  
ELECTION CAMPAIGN:  
LESSONS, CONCLUSIONS,  
AND PROSPECTS**

Sergey DIACHENKO

*D.Sc. (Political Science),  
Deputy Chairman of the Majilis of the Parliament of  
the Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Astana, Kazakhstan)*

Today, with the democratic reforms moving ahead, with domestic political stability due to an effective presidency, and with clear prospects for the country's social and economic development, the problem of sociopolitical consolidation has come to the fore, while political parties are tending to integrate into larger units.

In democratic countries, the political parties involved in various ways in state administration have an important role to play in shaping the power system. This stirs civil society into action, which, in turn, contributes to the way key sociopolitical issues are resolved. At the same time, it is commonly believed that elections are the main focal point of the political parties' activities: by their very nature they are designed to win state power and govern the state. The parties are expected to consolidate society and to shape public moods in a constructive way to avoid social disintegration at the most trying and far from easy times, such as presidential elections. For obvious reasons, different political parties use different instruments to influence electoral preferences.

Kazakhstan is moving ahead along the road of democracy and democratic traditions; its party system has already covered a short, yet dynamic stretch of this road filled with all kinds of transformations. The parties have already left the initial development stages behind; they have withstood the

test of several election campaigns and found their own niche in the republic's sociopolitical hierarchy. The country has already passed the time when the political parties operating on the domestic political scene could not be described as a party system.<sup>1</sup> It is commonly and correctly believed that at the earlier stages of party development, society mistrusted the new structures that overused bombastic declarations, unfeasible promises, and the administrative resource.

Indeed, the new state's first decade was a kaleidoscope of all sorts of political structures that appeared, split, disappeared, or merged before the nation's eyes.

Since that time the party system has obviously advanced much further.<sup>2</sup> All political forces are involved in a competition that calls for concrete and practical steps and rejects the use of the administrative resource and coercion. On the one hand, the party system has not yet acquired its final shape; on the other, the gradually unfolding political liberalization helps parties and public movements join the political-power processes underway in the republic.

In the last few years, Kazakhstan has finally established the "rules of the political game," which allowed most of the political parties to acquire their social bases, electoral, and even parliamentary history. Today, the parties do not limit themselves to elections—they also want to have a say in creating the rules of the election procedure.<sup>3</sup> We can agree with those who say that today the role of the political parties in an uncompromising and public power struggle is higher than ever.<sup>4</sup> Life has shown that some of the players proved unequal to the heat of the inter-party race.

Systemic democratization of the country's political field led to the emergence of serious political forces—large parties able to affect the political context across the republic. The changes in the republic's electoral legislation the parliament adopted made it possible to treat the formation and functioning of the political parties more seriously. On the other hand, the state needs a strong and stable multiparty system that would let it address problems in different ways and stimulate the country's political developments.

Objectively speaking, it should be said that party development is not free of certain problems. Thus, election campaigns stir up some of the parties, hardly visible at other times, into frenzied action.

Some of the parties are too small to have grass-roots cells indispensable for close ties with the people and mobilization of the masses; they are unable to perform other social functions either. Others, in the government and the opposition camp alike, have no stable electorates: the former survive thanks to the authority of the country's leaders; the latter, by criticizing the regime.

Many of Kazakhstan's parties are still unable to formulate, uphold, and translate into practice ideas, programs, and initiatives on a nationwide scale—something that could have helped them enlist new members. With no role to play in the sphere of political relations, they lose their political influence and, hence, the electorate.

What we need today is a developed, stable, and logical multiparty system the nation can understand and accept. This is a task of strategic importance for any country that wants to be recognized as a democratic state. Under the Constitution of Kazakhstan, all kinds of public and political alliances can develop and function—in fact, they are successfully developing. This means that all parties are vying for the nation's mandate of confidence within the republic's laws.

It should be said in this connection that the 2005 presidential election demonstrated the country's real achievements in the party development process and outlined its prospects.

<sup>1</sup> See: S.A. Diachenko, L.I. Karmazina, "O nekotorykh aspektakh partogeneza Kazakhstana v usloviakh perekhodnogo perioda," *Dnevnik Altayskoy shkoly politicheskikh issledovaniy*, No. 13/34, 2001, p. 262.

<sup>2</sup> See: D. Satpaev, "Partiynoe 'detstvo' Kazakhstana," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 2 April, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See: A. Peruashev, "Sdelat' vybor, adekvatnyi razvitiu," *Ekspress K*, No. 113, 22 June, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> See: B. Zhumagulov, "Liderstvo—eto otvetstvenno," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 20 April, 2006.

It seems the outcome of the presidential election was predictable for several objective reasons: with Nursultan Nazarbaev as its head, the country successfully passed the test of economic reform and achieved sustainable growth. In 2005 alone, the GDP grew in real terms by 9 percent; the volume of industrial production by 4 percent; average per capita monetary incomes by 9.6 percent, while real wages increased by 9.3 percent.<sup>5</sup>

Kazakhstan, a multinational republic, has escaped domestic upheavals and liberalized and modernized its society while preserving ethnic and confessional harmony and domestic stability. State development and modernization relied on stage-by-stage democratization and liberation of the initiative of all people irrespective of their ethnic and religious affiliation in the context of continued economic growth and prosperity achieved through competition. The country's leaders, not satisfied with the victories already scored, offered the nation a National Program of Political Reforms designed to synchronize political and economic changes, upgrade the parliament's role, introduce elective local administrators (akims), further develop freedom of speech and mass media, decentralize power, form effective bodies of self-government, and carry out legal and judicial reform.

This is expected to add flexibility and openness to the republic's political system, which would meet the demands and expectations of the people. Kazakhstan should adjust itself to the worldwide democratic trends. President Nazarbaev managed to consolidate the nation and orientate it toward achieving social progress at the most trying moment. This explains why the citizens actively supported the country's leader at the 2005 presidential election.

It is highly important to point out that, contrary to certain statements, Kazakhstan's parties were not an embellishment of the electoral process, which tested them for maturity and professionalism. To a great extent, the political parties' openness made the election process much more transparent and helped develop it along democratic lines.

The electoral campaigns extended the range of political subjects in Kazakhstan as well as offered them new places and roles on the sociopolitical arena. Few of them, however, passed the electoral test and seized the opportunity the elections offered to find their place in the country's political system, partly because Kazakhstan's political context was becoming much more competitive, which was a natural and healthy process.

The 2004 parliamentary elections changed the country's political landscape into a more dynamic and more satisfying scene, the changes being brought about by two key factors—the preparation for presidential election campaign and considerable liberalization of the republic's political system.

The two (parliamentary and presidential) campaigns produced a more or less clear idea of Kazakhstan's electoral map by identifying the electorates' party preferences as well as "floating" and "protest" votes.

Some of the parties tried to identify their electorates on the eve of the election—but it is only the election that confirmed or disproved their conclusions and the effectiveness of their election techniques.

Today there are obvious leaders and outsiders among the republic's political parties. The leading group is made up of Otan, Asar, and the Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, followed by the Communist Party, the Agrarian Party, and the Civil Party of Kazakhstan.

Some of the parties proved less stable than the others: on the eve of election, Ak Zhol and the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (which describe themselves as opposition parties) split because of profound and obvious ideological differences in the opposition camp, which was responsible, to a great extent, for the balance of forces on the domestic political scene.

<sup>5</sup> See: D. Ashimbaev, "Slagaemye uspekha," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 7 December, 2005.

Today, the opposition parties now working in Kazakhstan can be described conventionally as “moderate” (Ak Zhol DPK, the Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan, Rukhaniat, the Party of Patriots of Kazakhstan, etc.) and “active” (the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, the Genuine Ak Zhol DPK, former members of DPK-the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, etc.). Their contacts with the government, political convictions, practical steps, and the language of their statements divide them into “moderate” and “active.” The former are critical of, yet prefer to maintain a constructive dialog with the government and the other opposition forces, while the latter are inclined toward uniting all opposition structures to fight the ruling elite.

Recently a new trend became obvious: parties tended to form blocs and coalitions with ideologically close parties that share similar ideas about the government. This process, which involved both the pro-presidential and opposition camps, sped up as soon as the date of the presidential election was announced. It is commonly believed that such alliances differ in the form and degree of their cohesion. Some of them are poorly organized and short-lived: they are, rather, temporary coalitions formed to win elections, remove the government, or support it from time to time. There are stronger units with well-arranged infrastructures that survive for a long time and can even be described as “super-parties.”<sup>6</sup>

Party blocs and joint activities are an evolutionary process; at the same time, this is a sign of obvious weakness in some parties and of their inability to remain in politics on their own. Some of them join forces as a tactical step for elections, others, to survive the election and post-election periods.

In March 2005, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, former members of the Ak Zhol party, certain other sociopolitical structures, and prominent public figures with no previous affiliations set up a republican public association Bloc of Democratic Forces “For a Fair Kazakhstan” (FFK). This was the first time that most of the “active” opposition forces, represented by the leaders of the officially functioning as well as no longer functioning sociopolitical structures, pooled forces within one movement.

In September 2005, Otan and Asar initiated the People’s Coalition of Kazakhstan election bloc (PCK), which brought together the Agrarian Party of Kazakhstan, the Civil Party, and the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, as well as a fairly large number of other public associations.<sup>7</sup>

Both coalitions nominated their presidential candidates; both spared no effort to support them and rally as many social groups as possible around them.

Two “moderate” opposition parties—the Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan and the Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan—acted on their own; their candidates received relatively competitive organizational and electoral support. The Tabigat public ecological movement with M. Eleusizov as its candidate was the least competitive; it failed to rally enough supporters.

Other parties (Auyl, Rukhaniat, and the Patriotic Party of Kazakhstan) had neither adequate candidates nor clear electoral roles and aims. With no place on the Kazakhstani political scene, they were left outside the political process.

The PCK enjoyed the widest support: based on national accord, it unfolded a wide-scale propaganda campaign. The presidential camp demonstrated a high level of consolidation based on its firm ideological foundation. At the same time, the FFK could hardly boast of a similarly high level of ideological cohesion: it was kept together by its opposition to power, the members’ long-term interests and aims being different. The election results confirmed this.

<sup>6</sup> M. Duverger, *Politicheskie partii*, Moscow, 2002, p. 178.

<sup>7</sup> See: A.E. Azbergenov, S.A. Diachenko, A.O. Sapieva, “Rol’ obshchestvenno-politicheskikh institutov v period prezidentskikh vyborov 2005 goda,” *Prezidentskie vybory 2005 g. v Kazakhstane: fakty, analiz, kommentarii*, ed. by Zh. Kulekeev, Astana, 2006, p. 42.

As a result, the opposition forces failed to agree on a single candidate, which was their only chance to become more competitive. The pro-presidential front, meanwhile, rallied around one candidate (N. Nazarbaev); the opposition remained split by three candidates (E. Abylkasymov, A. Baymenov, and Zh. Tuiakbay), which baffled the voters. Besides, obvious rivalry inside the bloc undermined its members' positions still further.

The votes cast for the candidates are the best illustration of the parties' performance in the electoral campaign: N. Nazarbaev received 91.15 percent of the votes; Zh. Tuiakbay, 6.61 percent; A. Baymenov, 1.61 percent; and E. Abylkasymov, 0.34 percent.<sup>8</sup> The ideological disagreements among the opposition forces obviously undermined their positions.<sup>9</sup>

The party's image-making strategy is another factor of competitiveness during the election process: it is created to bring victory in the election and enlist more supporters. An image is the idea of the political party that individuals and the nation as a whole form in their minds.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, all the political parties in Kazakhstan resorted to new political technologies, which helped to greatly shape the nation's electoral behavior. At the same time, the presidential campaign demonstrated that the parties had qualitatively changed their approach to the latest political and information technologies and, consequently, to their PR campaigns: socially oriented promises, slogans and statements reflecting the nation's interests and hopes were lavished on the voters.

Another important factor was directly related to the election campaign: the results brought the parties up to a new mobilization level and changed their methods. The time-tested ones were enriched with new PR approaches and technologies: the party functionaries made frequent trips to the regions to organize rallies permitting the voters to meet the candidates' representatives, party congresses, all sorts of mass entertainments, exit polls on election day, cooperation with youth organizations, etc.

Political parties demonstrated a lot of ingenuity when dealing with the media; nearly all of the parties began their own publications and official Internet sites, and cooperated with the electronic media to reach the ordinary people through them. The Ak Zhol DPK and the FFK party bloc demonstrated the greatest activity, which showed obvious progress in the opposition structures' information policies.

By doing all this, the parties acquired much wider possibilities to lobby their interests: the wider range of information and propaganda vehicles brought more information about the parties to every home. It should be said that the parties were operating in a highly competitive information milieu as well as coping with the information vacuum in remote places. It is highly important to note that the political-technological struggle did not develop into mudslinging and remained on the whole within the legal limits.

The 2005 election taught the parties how to compete within a civilized framework. They acquired the valuable experience of working at the grass-roots level and with the media to stir them into greater election activity. The widely used new PR technologies not only allowed the parties to mobilize their electorates, but also to improve the performance of their grass-roots cells.

Victory was the ultimate strategic aim of all the parties; at the same time, the strategies of the pro-presidential parties, the "moderate," and the "active" opposition were different for obvious reasons. The pro-presidential forces strove to outpace their rivals while demonstrating much more political flexibility and the desire to talk to their political opponents.

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<sup>8</sup> Based on information supplied by the Central Election Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at [[http://election.kz/portal/page?\\_pageid=73,88928&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL](http://election.kz/portal/page?_pageid=73,88928&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL)].

<sup>9</sup> See: T. Shaymergenov, "The 2005 Presidential Election in Kazakhstan: Problems and Prospects of Political Liberalization," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (37), 2006, p. 50.

<sup>10</sup> See: G. Khanov, "Slagaemye politicheskogo uspekha partiy..." *Zhurnal o vyborakh*. Special issue, 2006, p. 110.

During the election campaign, for example, the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan invited the presidential candidates to join the Charter on Basic Principles of Political Rivalry during Elections, the main aim of which was to exclude “dirty” political technologies from the political struggle.<sup>11</sup>

The pro-presidential parties actively opposed the practice of paid articles and TV and radio programs designed to spread false information as well as abuse of ethnic and clan issues in the political rivalry. The pro-presidential bloc also did much to channel the protest sentiments of socially excluded groups in a more constructive direction.<sup>12</sup>

The “active” opposition structures did their best to discredit the government and undermine the nation’s confidence in the election process. They spoke of massive violations and falsifications, their allegations being nothing more than products of dubious political technologies. It seems that the aggressive and scandalous nature of the election campaign and the attempts to fan information warfare frightened off some of the opposition’s potential electorate. In the final analysis, strategic miscalculations and excessive radicalization defeated the “active” opposition.

As expected, the “moderate” opposition proved more cautious: potentially much weaker than the FFK, the Ak Zhol DPK defeated the “active” bloc by using progressive ideas and displaying a lot of political flexibility. It avoided the danger of being bogged down in political polemics; its criticism of the government was much more moderate, while its approach to the elections much more rational and conceptual.

Undoubtedly, all the opposition parties approached the 2005 presidential election much better prepared than before and much more aware of their potential. They obviously treated the presidential election more seriously: they consolidated the disunited opposition forces and made an attempt to nominate a common candidate.<sup>13</sup>

Aware of their electorate and of the correct electoral tactics, the opposition parties plunged into agitation in the regions and managed, after a while, to win some of the voters onto their side. The opposition was quite clear about the republic’s future as it saw it; it went as far as offering an election program of political and socioeconomic changes. The contradictions and the bitter rivalry among its members, however, undermined these positive efforts and defused what might have become a new impressive and competitive socioeconomic program.

For objective reasons, the opposition platforms remained mere statements of intention rather than action programs, which cost some of the parties rating points. If the opposition forces failed to formulate new conceptual political programs, they might be engulfed by larger and politically more progressive alliances or pushed to the periphery of the republic’s political field.

The pro-presidential sociopolitical forces followed well-substantiated strategies and tactics that allowed them to strengthen the president’s leading position and gain more rating points. The campaign’s main result was that the opposition obviously lost the election battle, while Nursultan Nazarbaev obviously won it. The opposition was clearly not ready to rule the country; the reasons for its defeat were apparent to all.<sup>14</sup>

The political parties achieved several practical results in the election campaign: first, a stable and predictable sociopolitical situation; second, a transparent and democratic election process; and third, high political activity of the population.

<sup>11</sup> Based on the information of the Khabar information agency, available at [[www.khabar.kz/index.cfm?tid=117&PrintID=5617](http://www.khabar.kz/index.cfm?tid=117&PrintID=5617)].

<sup>12</sup> See: A.E. Azbergenov, S.A. Diachenko, A.O. Sapieva, op. cit., p. 44.

<sup>13</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> See: A. Lobanov, V. Lukashev, *Pochemu proigrala oppositsia na prezidentskikh vyborakh v Kazakhstane v 2005 godu?*, available at [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20051229225355153>].

On the whole, the political parties became much more involved in the republic's sociopolitical processes than before. I hope that the political parties learned some lessons and drew the right conclusions. In the future, the parties might master new, more professional methods.

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The above suggests that after the 2005 election the party development process has moved ahead; the same can be said about the qualitative transformations in the nation's self-awareness. The country has acquired the prerequisites for a new political culture and clearer political values based on the people's adequate perception of social and political reality.

The election process demonstrated that the parties should play a more important role in the state political system; they should formulate ideas and concepts that will move the country ahead. The masses should become involved in the republic's political life to a much greater degree.

The relations between the government and the "moderate" opposition have become more constructive; depending on their election results, some of the opposition parties could gradually become involved in policy-making. The Ak Zhol Democratic Party of Kazakhstan has already demonstrated a rational approach, which gives it a chance to be represented in the power structures.<sup>15</sup> The "active" opposition parties, on the other hand, might lose what influence they have in society if they remain locked in a power struggle; this may even cost them the FFK.

The last parliamentary and presidential elections demonstrated that party coalitions based on shared ideologies have better survival chances in the country's political environment. This is explained, on the one hand, by the political weakness of some parties and the still weak electoral basis of others. On the other hand, there is a desire to reach all electoral segments and consolidate society within one ideological field.

Their electoral experience prompted Otan and Asar, two large parties, to unite into one, Otan party. This happened on 4 July, 2006. Today, it has over 700,000 members<sup>16</sup>—a true party giant unheard of in independent Kazakhstan's previous history. They merged because they actively supported the same candidate and shared the same ideological platform and practical cooperation experience within the PCK. The time has come to pool forces and resources for the sake of the national idea, "Strategy for Kazakhstan to Join the 50 Most Competitive Countries of the World."<sup>17</sup> There is information that the "moderately" oppositional Ak Zhol DPK and members of the still unregistered Alga Party are also negotiating a merge.<sup>18</sup>

Inter-party alliances are common in Kazakhstan—they are mainly associated with the electoral processes, while one party swallowing another party is a novel feature suggested by the 2005 presidential election.

Objectively speaking, the political parties of Kazakhstan are functioning under adequate conditions, yet not all of them have adjusted to the new environment, as the latest electoral cycle—the parliamentary and presidential elections—demonstrated. Parties should unite into more effective political structures.<sup>19</sup> It is also expected that the next parliamentary and presidential elections will be

<sup>15</sup> See: "Kazakhstan demonstriruet dialog vlasti s oppozitsiey," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 February, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> See: M. Shimanskiy, "Nadezhnaia energia dvizhenia strany," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 5 July, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> See: *Poslanie Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan N. Nazarbaeva narodu Kazakhstana. Strategia vkhozhdenia Kazakhstana v chislo 50-ti naibolee konkurentosposobnykh stran mira. Kazakhstan na poroge novogo ryvka v period v svoiom razvitii*, 1 March, 2006, available at [www.akorda.kz].

<sup>18</sup> See: Protseess konsolidatsii poshe!, available at [http://ompk.kz/portal.php?portal=1&cat=6&art=60].

<sup>19</sup> See: B. Zhumagulov, "Igroski eshche ne adaptirovalis' k novym usloviyam. Podoplioka ob'edinenia krupneyshikh politicheskikh partiy strany," *Liter*, 20 June, 2006.

more competitive and more interesting from the point of view of party activity. All the parties and coalitions should analyze their potential to be ready for them.

Looking back at the last election, it can be said that the republic has reached a new stage of party development at which civil society and the democratization processes will develop still further. The pessimistic forecasts of certain experts about the future of the democratic reforms in the country and their imitation instead of real advance seem unfounded.

It is expected that the coming systemic changes will affect the parties too—there are at least two factors that point to this. First, the 2004 and 2005 electoral campaigns helped the parties identify their weak and strong sides. I think that those parties which adjust their public and political activities accordingly stand a chance of becoming competitive political players.

Second, the newly formed State Commission for Elaboration and Concretization of the Program of Democratic Reforms in the Republic of Kazakhstan chaired by the head of state has set itself the task of developing and strengthening the institutions of a civil society. This means that in the near future the party system will be reformed. The State Commission is a logical development stage of the political reforms. In his statements, President Nazarbaev repeatedly emphasizes that the country is resolved to continue democratic changes and political modernization. The main aim remains the same: a stronger open and democratic state ruled by law.<sup>20</sup>

Today both the parties and the state need a strong civil society—the main driving force of future constructive developments in the right direction. Two key social sectors—the state and the entities of the party and political system—should become partners to ensure that the political order will remain democratic. A constructive dialog between them will help the country move on to a qualitatively new social model that will determine the Republic of Kazakhstan's democratic status. There is no alternative to the development of party culture through which each and every citizen will gradually identify his/her role and place in the fairly complicated intertwining of private and state interests.

We must admit that to be active and determined while operating in a transition society, the government should be strong enough to concentrate the political will of the majority and shoulder the responsibility for the country's sustainable development. Political parties might provide this strength. Under the new political conditions, when the political process becomes professional, it will be much harder to join the election process and be elected<sup>21</sup>: it will no longer be enough to brandish promises—it will be necessary to fulfill them,<sup>22</sup> otherwise the voters, the political culture of whom is gradually improving, will withdraw their support.

The latest election demonstrated that the people of Kazakhstan are not passive observers—they are actively involved in the process of systemic changes. This will bring the desired results: consolidation of the entire nation around the reforms. The political parties are mature enough to express public sentiments. In the course of transformations of the country's political field, their role during elections and the periods between them will gradually increase.

In the near future, it is critically important to develop a multiparty system to make the Republic of Kazakhstan a truly democratic state.

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<sup>20</sup> See: "Vystuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan N. Nazarbaeva na pervom zasedanii Gosudarstvennoy komissii po razrabotke i konkretizatsii programmy demokraticeskikh reform v Respublike Kazakhstan," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 25 March, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> See: G. Khanov, op. cit, p. 110.

<sup>22</sup> See: B. Zhumagulov, "Liderstvo—eto otvetstvenno."