

# Kazakhstan Strengthens Democracy in Central Asia

Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev has called for a massive transformation of Kazakhstan's political life and strengthening of the country's leadership in building a democracy. His comments were made during a June 15 speech to the congress of the Otan (Motherland) political party in Astana.

According to the president's plan, the major step in this direction would be a significant strengthening of the role of the national Parliament. It is proposed to increase the number of deputies in both houses of Parliament, develop a new system of forming the government through the mechanism of a parliamentary majority, and of forming the Accounting Committee by the Parliament, thus strengthening its authority.

"Building a modern democratic state has been our strategic goal throughout all these years, to which we move step by step," despite a legacy of almost a "complete lack of democratic traditions and totalitarianism," the president noted.

Political pluralism has become a reality in Kazakhstan, with 12 national political parties now active. The basis of a civil society is here as well, with more than 4,500 non-governmental organizations. Independent news media outlets are developing rapidly, and Kazakhstan's Internet audience is the largest in Central Asia.

"Most importantly, after years of reforms we have tapped the people's civil initiative. The middle class, a key bearer of liberal values and a bastion of democracy, is growing rapidly," the president said.

Political stability coupled with rapid economic growth and significant improvement in the wellbeing of the people of Kazakhstan in recent years creates conditions for the new

stage of political reforms, he said.

"The country's modernization and ensuring our competitiveness in globalization is our most important policy priority for the near future. The biggest issue we will tackle jointly with the future Parliament is not how to survive, but where we go from here," he stressed. He announced that the next parliamentary election will take place on September 19, 2004.

In addition to strengthening parliamentary authority, also proposed are changes in how the Central Election Commission is formed by bringing the Senate in addition to the Majilis (Lower House) into the



*President Nazarbayev calls for new series of democratic reforms*

selection process. The Constitutional Council is to be formed in the same way, "to increase its authority and to strengthen its powers" to protect the Constitution.

Also proposed are changes to ensure "transparency of judicial procedures, fairness and judicial objectivity," and "greater democracy in the selection of judges."

All the above reforms would

require changes in the Constitution.

The president also proposed completing decentralization of state management by 2005, including raising the role of local assemblies, and introducing direct elections for mayors by 2007. He said it is necessary to further improve the civil service and aggressively pursue the ongoing fight against corruption.

Strengthening mechanisms for protection of human rights will be an important component of the proposed reforms and will include the introduction of jury trials, expanding the authority of the Ombudsman, giving more power to defense

attorneys in criminal litigation, and the ultimate abolishment of the death penalty.

The president announced creation of a permanent National Commission on Democracy and Civil Society to help develop measures for reforming the political system.

"You can't just declare democracy. You can only build it through hard work," President Nazarbayev said.

## Congress Looks To Kazakhstan's Future

Today the United States needs true friends like the Republic of Kazakhstan as never before and we should encourage and welcome their achievements for the simple reason that by strengthening themselves they strengthen us.

I have followed the development of a young Kazakhstan with great interest and I should note that since gaining its independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991, this country has undergone tremendous political and economic transformation. Reforming a former totalitarian society is not an easy task. Of course, there were some mistakes and drawbacks. However, one should acknowledge the fact that Kazakhstan is dynamically moving forward and is moving in the right direction.

We are talking about a country which achieved democracy and personal freedoms through tremendous suffering. A great deal of credit for Kazakhstan's coming of age should go to its leader, President Nursultan Nazarbayev. I fully share the position of the leadership of Kazakhstan that any reforms make sense only if they serve the people.

Many have criticized Kazakhstan for initially

**Twelve political parties are expected to field candidates in the Parliamentary election on September 19, 2004. They are:**

- Agrarian Party
- Ak Zhol (Bright Path) Democratic Party
- Asar (All Together) Republican Party
- Auyl (Village) Peasant's Social
- Democratic Party
- Civic Party
- Communist Party
- Communist People's Party
- Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan
- Democratic Party
- Otan (Motherland) Republican Party
- Party of Patriots
- Rukhaniyat (Spirituality) Party

"I congratulate President Nazarbayev and the people of Kazakhstan. They have worked hard to bring democracy to a part of the world that has seen too little of it. Kazakhstan is setting a wonderful example for others in the developing world to follow."

Rep. Patrick J. Tiberi (R-OH)

choosing a course of economic liberalization while putting deep political reforms on the backburner. However, the time has proven this course right. I praise the political foresight of President Nazarbayev, an architect of Kazakhstan's success, who, in spite of criticism, has managed to bring his country into the fold of economically strong nations and has now embarked on an even bolder set of political reforms.

I agree with President Nazarbayev, that "You can't just declare democracy. You can only build it through hard work." As a nation that has been building its democracy for more than 200 years, we should value the words of a leader of a young democracy.

I would like to wish the people and government of Kazakhstan success in their efforts. Future successes of a democratic and free Republic of Kazakhstan directly benefit the United States, as it will help ensure stability and prosperity of Central Asia, a region extremely important in our fight against international terrorism.

I have no doubt that the United States and Kazakhstan will continue to closely cooperate in ensuring stability and security in the world, and our cooperation, which has tremendous potential, will deepen and bring about fruitful interaction in an international situation that is increasingly complex. The U.S. Congress should play a key role in this endeavor.

We are at an important juncture in the relationship between the United States and Kazakhstan. We have an opportunity to remain engaged in the region. I strongly believe that we should acknowledge Kazakhstan's achievements and support them in their efforts to continue with reforms.

Rep. Chris Cannon (R-UT)  
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For more information contact: Embassy of Kazakhstan, 1401 16th St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036

Tel: (202) 232-5488, [www.kazakhembus.com](http://www.kazakhembus.com)

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