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A New Kazakhstan in a New World: President Nazarbayev's Strategic Vision

Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev delivered his annual state of the nation address, *New Kazakhstan in a New World*, on February 28, outlining the strategy of Kazakhstan's development for the next decade.

The most important messages of the address were:

- ensuring a major breakthrough in quality of life of the people of Kazakhstan;
- raising the quality of education and healthcare to best world standards;
- speeding up and diversifying economic development;
- joining the World Trade Organization (WTO); and
- implementing concrete measures to further democratize society which would strengthen the roles of Parliament and local representative assemblies. The changes will require amending the country's Constitution further.

Kazakhstan's foreign policy priorities have been determined as maintaining good neighborly relations with Russia and China, developing the strategic partnership with the United States and multifaceted cooperation with Europe.

"We are no longer a country of the Third World. This is the main result of our work for the past 10 years," the President declared in his speech listing Kazakhstan's economic and political achievements. These include the expected doubling of the country's gross domestic product by 2008 as compared to the year 2000. Accordingly, GDP per capita has grown considerably, reaching 5,000 dollars in 2006 with the forecast of 6,500 dollars in 2007.

"Today, having secured firm foundation for our economy and statehood, we are confidently moving into a new stage. This will allow putting Kazakhstan's continued development on a sustainable, modern and promising economic, social, political and administrative basis," the President said.

The economy's stable development has allowed for devoting more resources to social aspects of reforms. That is why the President instructed the Government to undertake a number of measures to improve social protection for motherhood and childhood, to increase pensions, and to raise government



Photo by Sergei Bondarenko

President Nazarbayev delivers his annual address in Parliament in Astana on February 28.

controlled wages. Specifically, as of 2008, one time government bonuses for the birth of a child will be doubled, working mothers will receive compulsory social insurance from employers during pregnancy, birth and motherhood, and other meaningful measures will be taken to improve quality of life for the most vulnerable strata of the population. The Government will spend an additional 108 billion tenge (US\$1 = 120 tenge) in 2008 for these purposes.

According to the speech, 100 new schools and 100 new hospitals will be built during the next three years in regions across Kazakhstan where they are needed most. "We must make the development of social infrastructure our strategic task," President Nazarbayev explained.

He said consistent implementation of the Kazakhstan-2030 Strategy, which was approved during harsh economic reforms in 1997 and which outlined fundamental dimensions for the country's development up to the year 2030, provided a solid basis for Kazakhstan's progress and comprehensive modernization.

"Having a systematic approach is the main formula for our continued movement forward in the modern world for the next decade. For Kazakhstan to become an integral and dynamic part of world markets for goods, services, labor, capital, and modern ideas and technologies, we should achieve the following ten goals," the President said.

The first goal is not just to ensure and maintain sustainable economic development, but to manage this growth. The Government will need to develop a new approach to Kazakhstan's industrialization, limit the areas of natural monopolies, strengthen the financial system, create an efficient stock market, ensure Kazakhstan's accession to the WTO on conditions beneficial for Kazakhstan, and implement international technical standards. "This is my main task for the Government," President Nazarbayev stressed.

Listed among other goals were turning Kazakhstan into a "regional locomotive" of economic development and a successful player in the world economy; raising the effectiveness of extractive industries; ensuring the development of non-raw materials sectors and the diversification of the economy; developing modern infrastructure in accordance with the country's new role in regional and global economies; swift implementation of administrative reform taking into account international practices; and promoting the achievements and opportunities of a new Kazakhstan in Central Asia and the world.

Another important goal will be ensuring modern education and professional training, creating foundations for a "smart economy," using new technologies, ideas and approaches. The most important criteria for success of ongoing education reform will be the achievement of a level "whereas any citizen of Kazakhstan, having received appropriate education and qualifications, can become a welcome specialist in any country of the world." Teaching all the people in Kazakhstan three languages will become one of the most important priorities for Kazakhstan in this connection. "Kazakhstan should be viewed in the world as a highly educated country whose people use three languages. These will be Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, and English as the language of successful integration into the global economy," the President noted.

Modernizing the political system will be among the ten most important goals, and its achievement will ensure political stability for the future. In 2007, Kazakhstan will start implementing further systematic democratic reforms based on proposals from the State Commission on democratization which brought together recommendations from political parties, public associations, experts and citizens.

The President noted, "It is important these proposals are not copying foreign experience or abstract theories. They take into account needs of our society, Kazakhstan's realities. We see our own model of political reforms evolving, the Kazakhstan Way of political transition. Features and specifics

of our way are the preservation of the presidential form of government, phased introduction of reforms, balance in decisions, and national dialog among and consolidation of main political forces.”

In order to provide a legal foundation for these proposals, a group of legal experts has already started work preparing proposals for key amendments in both the Constitution and certain laws. First of all, the powers of Parliament will be expanded, in particular, in the formation of the Constitutional Council, the Central Election Commission, the Accounting Committee and, as a whole, in areas governing the approval and control over national budget. The Parliament will also play a larger role in forming the Government.

Second, measures will be taken to increase the role of political parties. It is proposed to expand the powers of party factions in the Parliament and to finance political parties from the national budget. Kazakhstan will also review the possibility of expanding the party lists in the elections for Majilis, the lower house of Parliament.

Third, one of the major directions of reforms will be improving the judicial system. As of this year, Kazakhstan is introducing jury trials. Also, a decision was made to transfer the authority to issue arrest warrants to the courts. Kazakhstan will gradually move to legal proceedings of a modern and open type.

Fourth, local representative bodies will develop and maslikhats, local assemblies, will be strengthened.

“The overall objective of political transformation for us is a movement toward such modern democratic form of authority which can provide the most effective system of managing society and state, simultaneously keeping political stability in the country and ensuring all constitutional laws and freedoms of our citizens,” President Nazarbayev said.

Having accumulated strong economic and political capital, Kazakhstan also intends to assume greater responsibility internationally. It will continue to pursue multi-vectored foreign policy and take part in fighting global threats.

The President stressed, “Kazakhstan has been and will be an active participant in a broad international cooperation aimed at nuclear containment, the fight against international terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking and other modern threats.”

Working with other countries to solve critical problems ranging from energy security to fighting epidemics and environmental catastrophes, Kazakhstan will continue to strengthen its role as a reliable participant in regional cooperation and international community.

“This is manifested in our good neighborly relations with Russia and China, which are priorities, as well as in our interest and practical steps to develop strategic partnership with the United States of America and multifaceted cooperation with the countries of the European Union,” President Nazarbayev underscored.

Kazakhstan also intends to play an active role in ensuring regional stability, promoting economic integration in Central Asia and creating a dynamic market around the Caspian and Black seas. Such a policy course is already seen in Kazakhstan’s constructive initiatives to intensify cooperation in Central Asia, Asia in the general and the Middle East as well as to strengthen regional structures such as the Eurasian Economic Community, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building in Asia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Kazakhstan intends to negotiate with its regional neighbors a more favorable business climate in Central Asia which will allow Kazakh companies to freely invest in neighboring countries and remove bureaucratic and protectionist barriers to imports and exports, as well as to the movement of capital and the workforce. Efforts will be centered on implementing projects in countries of Central Asia with the participation of foreign financial institutions and Kazakh companies.

Finally, Kazakhstan intends to strengthen its position as a center of inter-cultural and inter-religious harmony to promote a dialog of civilizations.

Kazakhstan's policy of promoting tolerance and inter-religious harmony among ethnic and religious groups has been recognized internationally. "If there is a need, our country can serve as an international intermediary for finding mutually acceptable political solutions for conflict situations. Secondly, together with certain countries which are also interested in expanding and deepening the dialog of civilizations, we could jointly come forward with major international initiatives aimed at improving understanding between East and West on key issues of modernity," the President noted.

"In order for us to present a new Kazakhstan in a new world in 10 years, we must meet the challenges of the modern times in an adequate and timely fashion. History knows a lot of shining examples when people were able to lift themselves to a new level of development if they unite their will for realizing a project of a historic scope. Achieving our goals will require additional mobilization of our efforts, and in many cases new and untraditional attitude and approaches from all government agencies, business, scientific and expert communities," the President concluded.

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