



Kazakhstan's Echo

A publication of the Embassy of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada
with views and comments on developments in and around Kazakhstan

www.kazakhembus.com

May 21, 2007

No. 40

Secretary of State Saudabayev: Constitutional Amendments Open New Stage in Kazakhstan's Development

Kanat B. Saudabayev, Kazakhstan's Secretary of State, held a press conference in the Ak Orda presidential administration complex in Astana on May 18, 2007, commenting on the approval of constitutional amendments by the Parliament earlier that day.

Following is the text of his prepared remarks:



**Secretary of State Kanat B. Saudabayev
speaks at the press conference**

* * *

President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan introduced a bill in the Parliament "On amendments and additions to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan" on May 16, 2007.

Today, as a result of thorough discussions, the Parliament of Kazakhstan passed the bill in its second reading.

This most important event in the modern history of our country opens a new stage in the development of our society. Of particular importance is the fact that these historic amendments to the Constitution are introduced in full accordance with the logic of Kazakhstan's domestic development and are based on a solid foundation of social, economic and political reforms conducted since independence under President Nazarbayev's outstanding leadership.

The special nature of these adopted amendments is that they are dictated not just by considerations of the current moment but are directed at Kazakhstan's future development as an economically strong and democratically developed nation.

As noted by President Nazarbayev, we have engaged in political reforms and constitutional changes without any pressure from outside but from a clear understanding and deep recognition of our nation's strategic interests.

You know well that since independence Kazakhstan has followed its own path and has not blindly copied foreign experience. Instead, we have been introducing modern standards in the economy, management and politics of our nation taking into account the world's experience, realities of our country and for our national interests.

Today, we see two paths of development for transit nations: one is characterized by complete lack of reforms and stagnation, while the other represents artificial hastening of reforms through quote-unquote "colored revolutions", whose results we now see. Yet, there is a third evolutionary way of development, the Kazakh way, with economic reforms leading and supported by continuous political liberalization of society.

These days, our head of state, being an outstanding politician and statesman, has grasped the need to give an extra boost to democratic reforms and harmonize economic and political development of the country.

Implementation of these constitutional amendments will reinforce Kazakhstan's economic achievements and its regional leadership in the political arena.

I would like to note that constitutional amendments proposed by the President came as a result of many years of discussions with the participation of representatives of the Government, the Parliament, political parties, the opposition, and public associations. These proposals are in a sense the essence of proposals and aspirations from all strata of Kazakhstan's society, in a way, a national program of democratic reforms.

I should also note that today's step is a sign of maturity of our society. It accepted these changes. Our people trust their first President who has again reconfirmed his leadership, extraordinary thinking and strategic foresight as well as the courage of a statesman and a human being.

This is a most rare historic example when a popular leader, with the support of 90 percent of the population, without any pressure from within or without, and at the top of his success, would share his power and relinquish part of his authority.

First of all, the President himself proposed cutting the presidential term from seven to five years.

Second, the authorities of the Parliament and the representative branch will be strengthened overall. The relation of checks and balances is changing very dramatically which will strengthen the sustainability and stability of our society.

As you know, a proportional system of electing members of Parliament will be introduced. The number of deputies will be increased from 116 to 154. An important novelty is the election of nine members of the Majilis by the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan which is a unique instrument of strengthening interethnic harmony and peace in our country.

Further, a Prime Minister will now be appointed only with the approval of the majority of the Majilis. Deputies will now need only a simple majority for a vote of no confidence to pass, as opposed to the qualified majority of two thirds of the deputies previously required. Moreover, two thirds of the Constitutional Council, the Central Election Commission and the Accounting Committee will be filled by the Parliament. All these changes will significantly strengthen the role of the legislature.

Third, a significant expansion of the role of the political parties and their influence on the state management and other facets of public life is in order through the strengthening of their control over the formation and activity of the Government. Direct financing of political parties and nongovernmental organizations will be introduced leading to faster development of our civil society.

Fourth, the role of local self-government will be radically strengthened. The maslikhats (local legislature) will now have that role, which is a most important innovation. Local representative bodies will have a qualitatively new role and will influence the appointment of all levels of executive power locally. Akims (governors) of regions, cities and regions will not be appointed without the approval of the maslikhats.

Fifth, we have made a breakthrough in strengthening the system of protection of human rights. Kazakhstan basically abolishes the death penalty which puts it on par with leading European democracies. Furthermore, in addition to jury trials, as part of the judicial reform in Kazakhstan we are introducing court sanctioning of arrest.

Therefore, as of today, Kazakhstan begins real transformation toward a combined presidential and parliamentary republic and has moved closer to international democratic standards.

These are the key points of the constitutional amendments introduced by the head of state to the Parliament.

As you know, in addition to them, the Parliament deliberated the legislation and approved it with one important addition. From now on, the constitutional provision stating that one person cannot be elected President of the Republic more than twice will now not apply to the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This means that, while preserving one of the main democratic tenets of the Constitution, the highest representative body of the Republic expressed the will of our people. This decision is recognition and a sign of respect and appreciation to Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's first president and the creator of our independent statehood.

Whether the first President uses this opportunity given him by the Parliament and the people is his right and privilege to decide.

In my turn, having witnessed the will, the courage and the wisdom of this man for many years, I am happy that he continues to be in remarkable intellectual and physical health and remains the driving force of the country's development. If he chooses to use this opportunity, this will benefit our young independent nation.

Thank you for your attention. My colleagues and I will be ready to answer your questions.

For more news and information about Kazakhstan visit us at www.kazakhembus.com
Embassy of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada
1401 16th Street, N.W. Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 232- 5488 ext. 104, Fax: (202) 232- 5845
Contact person: Roman Vassilenko