



DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES  
IN  
CENTRAL ASIA  
Indo-Kazakh Perspectives

Editors:

K. Santhanam

Baizakova Kuralay Irtysovna

Kukeyeva Fatima Turarovna



## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>About the Editors</i>	xiii
<i>About the Contributors</i>	xv
1. Reclaiming Eurasia: Eurasianism and Contemporary Kazakh Politics — Anita Sengupta	1
2. Evolution of Presidentship in the Republic of Kazakhstan — K.N. Baizakova	13
3. Democracy in Central Asia — Kh.Umarov	19
4. Democracy and Security in Identity of Central Asia — Rustam Burnashev and Irina Chernykh	26
5. The Growth of Democracy in Kazakhstan — K.N. Makasheva	42
6. Revived and Invented Traditions in the Political Systems of Central Asian States — A.A. Galiev	50
7. Traditional Legal Institutions of the Nomads of Eurasia: History and Modernity — G.A. Urozbaeva	62
8. Democratization in Central Asia and the US Experience — Kukeyeva Fatima	72
9. Political Transformations in Kazakhstan — M.Sh. Gubaidullina	80



identify democratic principles of civil society with the pre-revolutionary concept of 'society' which was the key concept in Russian liberal consciousness towards the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Society is the bearer of democratic ideals and stands in contrast to bureaucratic rule which became aloof to the needs of the common people.

In such a paradigm, democratic processes are contrasted against the bureaucratic machinery of the state which has moved away from reality. As far as the "classical" understanding of a democratic, civil society is concerned whose citizens as a community live with observance of rules, and supremacy of law, it can be said that consistent supporters of a civil society in Kazakhstan have lived well less than what they expected. However, to comprehend the situation is not so much unambiguous, it is necessary to examine more carefully what this formula interns.

Secondly, democracy, in the sense of "peoples rule" expects every member of society to be an active, with involvement in the political process and knowledge of its main participants. This is necessary for making a conscious choice in favour of a political party or some programme of action. In the United States the average citizen knows the names of Senators from their state, of country judge and the Sheriff of the town. On the other hand, in the post-Soviet space, political absenteeism is very large.

Thirdly, it is important to consider the social component of democratisation. Civil society cannot afford to be polarized in social stratification. The middle class forms the basis of democracy and civil society. In spite of being non-homogenous, it traditionally gives preference to political representation than to any other form of rule, and it favours evolutionary changes. That is why in the political systems outside Western political traditions, only a powerful middle class can form the basis for real institutionalization of democracy.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union 18 years ago, Kazakhstan declared its independence and sovereignty. Independence was the first step for resurgence provided a historical opportunity for the rebirth of statehood, and solve problems accumulated during the previous regime. It was only after independence that it was possible to decide on vital issues like closure of the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site, to start serious economic reforms, liquidate sharp structural imbalances in the

## 5

## The Growth of Democracy in Kazakhstan

*K.N. Makasheva*

### INTRODUCTION

Till today, there is no common view in the social discourse about the optimum form of political organization of non-western societies. The Russian scholar A. Volodin has noted that "The modern reality of democratisation with all its complexities is far ahead of the theory of democracy."

The concept of a non-liberal democracy which was put forward towards the end of the 1980s was promoted officially by USA. The United States, in fact, recognized the possibility of existence of special models of democracy for countries of the Middle East; and, hence, for all countries with non-western political traditions.

Today we can talk about diversification of democracy in the conscious absence of uniform political reforms in countries of the post-Soviet space. The question is: How are questions of democratisation perceived in these countries?

Firstly, the question of the development of institutions of a democratic society in Kazakhstan is one of the hottest topics among professionals; it is also discussed widely in the media, during election campaigns, and when burning political questions are taken up. Yet, there is no common understanding of the term "democratisation of society". A large part of the political class is of the opinion that civil society is one of the main attributes of democratic system, thereby meaning the maximum involvement of common people in the political process; and, first of all, in the election process.

At the same time, there is another equally widespread view of democratisation amongst the 'humanitarian' intelligentsia who



economy and to utilize the natural resources of the country for welfare. Independence made it possible to revive the Kazakh language and traditional culture. Kazakhstan is now full-fledged member of the world community and has been able to create a favourable international climate, establish cooperation in political, economic and cultural fields with leading countries of the world. Major international initiatives have been reflected in the Address of the President Nazarbaev entitled "A New Kazakhstan in the New World".<sup>1</sup> The future of any country is built upon three pillars - a legitimate state, market economy and democracy. The Constitution of Kazakhstan has clearly set the following aims: affirmation of Kazakhstan as a democratic, secular, legitimate and social state whose highest values are basic human, rights and freedom.<sup>2</sup>

Central Asia has as their neighbours the two largest populated countries of the world - India and China. Both are developing at a very fast pace. The expected growth of these two countries will also depend upon our attitude towards them.

In terms of territory, Kazakhstan is the biggest republic in Central Asia. It is rich in natural resources and has a bright economic future. At the same time, one cannot ignore the varied ethnic and religious composition of the Kazakh society and the disproportion between its area which is equivalent to Western Europe and the population of 15 million. These factors make Kazakhstan vulnerable to external forces.

Right from the time of its independence, Kazakhstan has pursued stable development. In economics, its natural resources are a dominant factor. Kazakhstan is the uncontested leader in chromites having one-third of the world's deposits. It has the second largest deposits of uranium. In copper, manganese and zinc its position is fourth; in deposits of lead and iron its position is sixth; in cobalt it is seventh; in coal and gold eighth; in aluminum tenth; and, in nickel its position is twelfth.<sup>3</sup>

Kazakhstan has taken a number of steps in integrating with the world community. One such step is to declare itself as a non-nuclear state. In fact, interest of other countries in Kazakhstan was not only due to its advantageous geopolitical location and natural resources. It had inherited from the erstwhile USSR the fourth most powerful arsenal of nuclear arms, and 104 SS-14 missiles with 1216 warheads. That is why, in 1991 itself the Secretary of

State James Baker, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Foreign Minister of FRG, Hans Dietrich Genscher paid visits to Almaty. They wanted Kazakhstan to give up this heritage in return for a guarantee of security and financial compensation. In his book "Epicentre of the World", President Nazarbaev recalls the arguments for retaining these weapons:

The nuclear umbrella by itself serves as a sort of guarantee of security and restrains the ambitions of any possible opponent. In the opinion of the authors of such arguments, retention of nuclear-strength could compensate for qualitative and quantitative gaps in conventional arms and ammunitions. It was also argued that with its nuclear weapons, Kazakhstan could be a regional super-power. But Kazakhstan was able to get guarantees of nuclear security from the Permanent Members of the Security Council. Western powers also gave the green signal to business circles for cooperation with Kazakhstan. In this way, Kazakhstan got the benefits of a number of programs which gave it access to technical, organisational and financial help from specialized international structures like the IMF, World Bank and EBRD.<sup>4</sup>

India's geographical area is seventh largest in the world and its population is second largest. It has a bourgeois-parliamentary regime with democratic fundamentals. Democracy lives along with very old historical and cultural traditions. This has evoked special interest in Western and Russian scholars. According to the US historian E.T. Embry, the beginnings of democracy in India go back to the 1880s when, interactions between the British rulers and traditional Indian systems, led to the formation of a society with structural properties typical of contemporary Western states. Actually, Indian society had inherent qualities conducive to democratic tendencies and political modernization which helped in the establishment of a civil society of a specific type. The national freedom movement of India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru had parliamentary democracy, human rights, freedom and promotion of the interests of the oppressed classes as main political elements in the anti-colonial struggle.

The system of parliamentary representative democracy has been existing in India for more than half a century with its highly diverse economic, ethno-national, socio-cultural and other relations. Since 1990s various economic reforms have been carried out in



India in order to modernize the industry, reduce inflation, encourage private business activities and attract foreign capital investments.

India has been showing interest in strengthening its relations with the Central Asian States (CAS) for a number of reasons. Though India and the CAS are not neighbours, they are closely connected by historical ties, trade and economic relations.

India in the CAS is interested in political stability, economic growth, democracy values, independence and reduce the possibility of being manipulated by external forces. For India, it does not matter which model these countries will adopt for their development and what would be the role of Islam in their political and cultural life.

The policy of Islamization that is being followed by countries of Central Asia is, on the whole, likely to strengthen Islamists in the region and promote and activate fundamentalist and separatist movements in the Muslim population of India. That is why the Indian leaders have expressed the hope that the CAS would follow the principles of secularism, pluralism and democracy.

The world community looks upon India as the largest and strongest democracy which has followed secularism and social justice as state policy. Through Non-Aligned Movement, India has played a leading role in establishment of close relations with the Third World and one of the Super Powers – the erstwhile Soviet Union. Finally, the pursuit of economic reforms from the 1990s has had a decisive effect on the role and place of India in the modern world.

In the new millennium India is in the list of ten major economies of the world with a GDP of US \$ 600 billion in the year 2004. The tempo of growth of the economy was maintained even during difficult climate conditions of the 1995-1996 and 1997-1998; and at the time of the Asian financial crisis of the same period. Delhi was also able to withstand the fallout of the international sanctions imposed on it after it conducted nuclear tests in 1998. Moreover, it is projected that by 2020, India's GDP would exceed the GDP of France by two times; and by the year 2035 it would surpass the GDP of Japan. In other words, India is likely to become third most powerful economy of the world after China and USA.<sup>5</sup>

Kazakhstan and India are multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural. Both are secular and committed to peaceful methods

for solving differences. Views of the two countries also coincide in realization of the objectives of the Conference on Interactions and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Congress of World and Traditional Religions whose initiative was taken by President Nazarbaev in 2003. The Ambassador of India to Kazakhstan, Ashok Mukherjee has pointed out that mutual understanding and mutual support in bilateral and international relations is, to a great extent, due to the good connections between the peoples of these two countries.<sup>6</sup>

India's experience in the fight against terrorism, religious extremism and separatism is of great practical significance for Kazakhstan. Taking into account the role and significance of India in the contemporary world, Kazakhstan supports the candidature of India for being elected as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Kazakhstan has welcomed the decision taken at the Summit Meeting of Heads of States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to give the Observer status to India. Kazakhstan side has taken the position that India would be able to give additional impetus to the activities of SCO, in particular in regional economic cooperation.

The process of democratization and development of civil society in Kazakhstan is proceeding smoothly and gradually. Yet, it is not practically possible "to measure" it quantitatively.

Formation of civil society is a necessary step in real democratization. In the post-Soviet space, the process of formation of civil society and the process of democratization would be going to different from the classical Western model. It will depend upon the prevailing environment and political stability. In this respect formation of a powerful middle class would be a necessary precondition. Therefore, the path chosen by Kazakhstan, the path of democratization through economic modernization, seems to be the correct path. President Nazarbaev has always emphasized a change from the economic component to political democracy is the most appropriate approach.<sup>7</sup>

For establishing a real democracy, it is necessary to ensure that the institutions of civil society are integrated into the economic and socio-political processes first. It is also necessary to ensure that all layers of society get harmonized around the reforms.

Kazakhstan has gone through various stages and models of political stabilization. After utilizing the potential of one model, it



was replaced by a new one. At present the search is for an optimal stabilization model, the so-called Kazakh model.

The first stage from 1991-1995 saw 'real' independence and adoption of the Constitution of sovereign Kazakhstan. During this period, attention was paid to arrest the disintegration processes, lay the foundation of Kazakhstan's statehood, move to political pluralism and create the foundations for democratic development.

The second stage from 1995-2000 was devoted to creation and strengthening of modern democratic institutions and, formation of a new political culture on the basis of the Constitution adopted in 1995.

The Constitution paved the way for economic and political reforms. The new national legislative acts enable real democratic institutions, where rights and freedoms of the citizens are guaranteed. It is remarkable that all this could happen under very difficult conditions when the country had to overcome the post-Soviet inertia syndrome and effects of the Asian financial crisis. The Presidential form of government helped the country to successfully come out of the post-Soviet economic and political chaos. Political stability made the Kazakh economy attractive to foreign investors. The infrastructure was being improved and agriculture got a boost. New employment opportunities also emerged, and a strata of "middle class" was also being formed.

The third stage of development began in 2001. In this stage, a socio-economic breakthrough was achieved. Our country became a regional leader. Democratic traditions of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious society of Kazakhstan took firm roots. The following years were marked by an active national dialogue on the most effective ways of furthering democratic reforms. Principally, higher social goals made up the agenda of the day. New challenges and threats persistently demanded more dynamic modernization of the whole system of socio-economic and socio-political relations. "Democracy is not something to be declared, it has to be experienced", said Nazarbaev in an interview to the newspaper "Geneva Diplomatique". The democratic principles developed by the Western world do not in any way clash with the traditional values of the Kazakhs, even though in form and genesis the two are different. Democracy is not just a system, it is a culture by itself. One may talk about the success of democracy only when its humane character gets properly synthesized with the ethno-

historical culture of the people. The standards of democracy are common but in different countries they acquire different shades. This does not mean that today's Kazakhstan should adjust itself to European standards.

In Kazakhstan the democratic principles are being consistently inducted into the state and social life by forming a legitimate state and a suitable political system. By properly comprehending the processes of democratization of society, we can formulate further reforms and initiate a wide-ranging social dialogue on issues such as: increasing the role of political parties, improvement of election legislation, local self-government, increasing role of non-governmental organizations, civil society, strengthening of freedom of the press, and introduction of private land ownership.

Recent events demonstrate that the international situation is becoming more and more complex and contradictory. New risks and threats origins are emerging which cannot be explained with our usual perceptions. But one thing is clear: problems of the modern world are multi-national in character which means that united efforts are required to solve them.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbaev "Novy Kazakhstan v novom mire" // <http://www.mfa.kz/rus>
2. Konstitutsiya respubliky Kazakhstan. – Almaty, 2006. – p. 7. – (Art. 46).
3. Kazakhstan v izmenyayushchemysya mire. Vystuplenie Ministra inostrannykh del RK Tazhina M.M. v Vashingtone, 8 May 2007 / <http://www.Acorda.kz/ru>
4. Nazarbaev N.A. Epitsentr mira. – Astana: Elorda, 2001. – p. 12.
5. Shaumyan T.L. Indiya – budushchee ekonomicheskoe chudo Azii / Indiya i mir. – M, 2000. – p. 34.
6. Ashok Mukherjee. Ekonomicheskie i gumanitarnie svazi RK smirovym soobshchestvom // Diplomaticheskii kurer. – 2007. – No.3. – p. 54.
7. Nazarbaev N.A. Kazakhstan osushchestvlyayet strategicheskoe dvizhenie k demokratii // RIA Novosti. – 2007. – 15 July.