

# New Politics in Kazakhstan

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The following two articles on Kazakhstan provide insight into political and social developments in that country that are little known in the West. The discussion with two top government officials and the report by a trade union leader reveal the complexities of this highly diverse country, which remains a nuclear power after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Both pieces reflect the fundamental conflict that exists in the country between the desire for political stability and economic development and the desire to avoid ethnic conflict. Economic growth and political stability have been chosen over rapid democratization—what President Nazarbayev suggests is an “Asian” model of development.

Over one hundred different nationalities, many of them residing in Kazakhstan as a

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result of the Stalinist purges, presently live in this resource rich country of seventeen million. President Nazarbayev, seen by many Western observers as one of the most capable leaders to emerge in the former Soviet states, has increasingly assumed an authoritarian hand. Having assumed presidential powers into the next century, he has done this with the explicit intent of democratizing without the ethnic conflicts known in

the Caucasus or other parts of Central Asia. Ruling in a country where Kazakhs comprise approximately 40 percent of the population and Russians another 40 percent, there is a delicate balancing act required if social and political stability is to be maintained in this transitional period. The financial difficulties of the transition, as alluded to in the interview, are made all the more difficult by the problems of high-level corruption and the exportation of large amounts of capital by the political elite.

The interview with Kairbek Suleimenov and Zharmakhan Tuyakbayev provides a fascinating insight into the reasoning on the topic of the Kazakh leadership. As this discussion reveals, presidential power far outweighs that of the governmental apparatus or specific legal institutions. Suleimenov, Nazarbayev’s legal advisor and one of the most powerful figures in Kazakhstan, dominates the interview rather than the attorney general. The conflicts between the presidential staff and the legal apparatus, as revealed in the human rights report, are reflected in the discussion with Suleimenov and Tuyakbayev. The conclusion of the human rights report contains a letter by Tuyakbayev protesting the

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protection of a corrupt governmental official, a problem to which Suleimenov refers to in his remarks.

The statement by the trade union leader describes the great financial difficulties of workers in Kazakhstan. In parts of the country, workers have not been paid for months. Yet many in the working population appreciate the strong leadership of President Nazarbayev that has prevented the ethnic conflict and highly visible criminal violence that has characterized so many of the successor states.