

A contribution to the debate on Kazakhstan

by

Georgi Parvanov,

President of the Republic of Bulgaria (2002-2012)

Member of the Advisory Council of ECFA

The paper entitled: “Democratic Reform in Kazakhstan: A Model for Transitional States?”

The paper provide an in-depth review and analysis of the reforms undergone so far, the results achieved so far, the challenges and problems Kazakhstan faces and the perspectives of the country.

The accent put on the approach of the Kazakh leadership to sequence democratisation by adhering to a formula of “economics first, then politics” and tying political reforms to economic progress describe in a precise way the conceptual approach and political practice of the country, as well as the personal vision of its leader.

Kazakhstan’s high and steady growth rates, the pace of market transition, the economic and social achievements, so vividly illustrated by statistical data, are really impressive. The measures aimed at gradual democratization of society, promoting ethnic and religious tolerance and diversity, as well establishing pragmatic an constructive relations with foreign partners add also to the image of a “success story” that could serve as a model for other countries in transition as the author rightfully concludes.

The early presidential elections in Kazakhstan

The development of Kazakhstan is far from ordinary. The country has to deal with the inheritance of a long-lasting period of historical backwardness while working at an accelerated pace for the implementation of the ambitious goal to align with the most advanced nations and find a place in the forefront of world politics.

Kazakhstan, for a quarter of a century now, has avoided meaningless ideological confrontation and is conducting a pragmatic and multi-oriented policy. This is largely due to President Nazarbayev.

Under the leadership of N. Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan is steadily becoming a major factor in Central Asia and contributes to the strengthening of stability in the region. In his address to the nation on December 14, 2012, the President announced a new political direction – Strategy 2050 – in response to the key challenges of 21st century: the need to speed up economic and social development, ensure global energy security and food sufficiency, overcome demographic imbalances, preserve water and other natural resources, launch a new industrial revolution, fight against the growing social instability and the crisis of public values. This visionary agenda comes as a continuation of Strategy 2030, proclaimed in 1997.

Another strategic paper, approved by President Nazarbayev, is the new Foreign Policy Concept of Kazakhstan for the period 2014-2020, aimed at turning the country into a stable, economically prosperous state ranking among the 30 most developed nations in the world.

One may add the New Economic Policy and the Infrastructural Development Plan which are the Kazakhstan's reaction to the changes in geopolitical environment and the negative processes in world economy, the program for accelerated innovative industry development, the measures for improving the investment climate and business conditions and introducing an effective system of state governance.

On the other hand, the efforts to raise national confidence do not prevent open-minded communication with the outside world, neither do promotion of national traditions and religion impair the secular character of the state, nor do they fuel extremist trends. This is yet another big achievement of Kazakhstan and its President.

Undoubtedly, Mr Nazarbayev is and will be regarded as an historical leader of the nation, a prominent figure, a faithful son of the Kazakh people. The parliament has already granted him the right to remain a long-live president.

According to some criteria, this may be considered as a personality cult. In a number of societies it looks perfectly acceptable. What is important in this case is that Nursultan Nazarbayev is conducting a wise, well-judged, result-oriented policy which guides Kazakhstan to a higher international orbit without conflicting with the interests of other countries. This makes him not only an undisputed national leader, but also an influential regional and global factor.

One may surely ask the question: "What happens after?" But as long as creation remains the key characteristic of modern Kazakhstan, the long-term vision of the development of the country is preserved and suitable mechanisms and formats of cooperation continue to be applied, there could be no ground for worries.