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MODERNIZATION AND POLITICAL PARTY DEVELOPMENT  
IN KAZAKHSTAN

МОДЕРНИЗАЦИЯ ЖӘНЕ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ СЯСИ  
ПАРТИЯЛАРДЫҢ ДАМУЫ

МОДЕРНИЗАЦИЯ И РАЗВИТИЕ  
ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИХ ПАРТИЙ В КАЗАХСТАНЕ

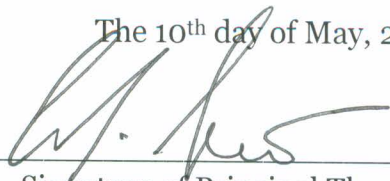
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## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Chapter 1: Modernization and Political Party Development. Theoretical Contribution and Research Design.....	1
Chapter 2: Modernization, End of Authoritarianism, and Political Parties as Factors of Democratization. Theoretical Framework .....	10
Chapter 3: Political Situation, Parties and the Process of Modernization in Kazakhstan.....	29
Chapter 4. Empirical Findings. How Much Is Nur Otan Loyal to Changes? .....	45
Chapter 5. Empirical Findings. Ak Zhol and Its Hopes for a Better Future .....	60
Chapter 6. Empirical Findings. Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan: When Words and Reality Do not Always Correspond .....	70
Chapter 7. Concluding Remarks, Succession Problem, and Limitations of the Study.....	78
Reference .....	83

## **Abstract**

Modernization is a unique process that in one or another way can contribute to democratization. However, the transition to democracy is not guaranteed and includes various factors, such as the development of civil society, the openness of political institutions, and the transparency of political processes. It should be noted that mass mobilization of society and the interest of ordinary people in politics are an essential part of the modernization process. Thereby, political parties take center stage setting up a dialogue between citizens and the state. However, not all parties are able to meet the requirements of modernization and increased mobilization. Thus, an important element of a party's readiness for modernization is its level of institutionalization. In this work, I measure the level of institutionalization of the three parliamentary political parties of Kazakhstan in order to understand how much Kazakhstan is moving towards democratization and can address the changes and challenges by which the modernization process is accompanied. Comparing the level of institutionalization of three political parties, I come to the conclusion that parties are not well-institutionalized in Kazakhstan and for modernization to succeed, the regime should be less personalized and more open.

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## **Chapter 1: Modernization and Political Party Development. Theoretical Contribution and Research Design**

In 1959, Seymour Martin Lipset proposed a new revolutionary idea of the process of economic modernization, which has created huge debates in the literature on this issue. Particularly, the general hypothesis of the modernization process states that continuous economic development leads to higher literacy and this, in turn, leads to democratization (Lipset 1959). This theory has been both challenged and supported by many scholars and still attracts a lot of attention.

In broad terms, states that experience modernization often face “occupational specialization, urbanization, rising educational levels, rising life expectancy, and rapid economic growth” (Inglehart and Welzel 2009, 34). All these factors with the cooperation and permission of the state can make modernization work. This process also demands the middle class’ mobilization as the driving force of political participation and that people should be willing and ready to make changes. One of the defining characteristics of the modernization process is that it can serve as the potential path to democratization, even though not always and not everywhere (Lipset 1959).

One the whole, any new process in a state is accompanied by changes and followed-up challenges and the result of this process often depends on the state itself. It is also worth mentioning that any process can lead either to positive or negative consequences, and the most important role in the process of modernization is played by the state and society. In other words, cooperation between the economic, political, and social spheres is necessary.

On the other hand, usually, there is a dilemma between a willingness to accept socio-economic changes in state affairs and at the same time an unwillingness to abandon the consolidated political regime. Thus, some leaders can be obsessed with enriching themselves and certain privileged people or segments of society and with destroying political opponents.



Not only do they try to preserve the current regime, but also such incumbents welcome socioeconomic changes (Carothers 2007). To put it simply, there is no real possibility for political development and liberalization, not to speak of democratization. Alternatively, actors included in the process of democratization should first of all focus on attainment and respect for the rule of law of a well-functioning state (Carothers 2007). In summary, the process of transition from an authoritarian regime to a democracy in the context of modernization is not easy and there is no guarantee of a successful transition.

Thus, democratization, as the positive outcome of modernization, is not a pattern, but rather a case. Since such an outcome is not guaranteed, the reaction and response from the state matters. However, while there is no direct connection between modernization and democracy, there is a direct connection between modernization and political participation, because citizens expand their cognition about the realities they are surrounded by and tend to diffuse this knowledge with increased literacy, communicational tools, and education (Huntington 1968). Thereby, one of the most important aspects of this process is the readiness, willingness, and abilities of political elites, institutions, civil society, etc. to accept changes and address the challenges of modernization. To be more precise, elites should try to control the process of modernization, so that it does not upset political stability. On the other hand, public participation should be met with an adequate response, and it should not be pressed. Political institutions play a vital role in directing this participation to the benefit of the state.

Thus, this study focuses on whether authoritarian elites are open to political-cultural changes associated with the modernization process and willing to embrace democracy. One effective way to study this is through the work of political parties. Indeed, the party system is a very important part of the political system as parties aim to decrease the gap between the government, elites, and citizens (White 2006). Besides, they serve as an arena for the political

participation of people who wish to express their opinions. Thereby, this study sets up a theoretical research question: “To what extent does the economic modernization process impact the development of political parties within authoritarian systems?” The empirical research question that I want to address in this research is “What is the nature of the relationship between economic modernization and political party development in Kazakhstan?” Using Kazakhstan as a case study, I consider the influence of the modernization process on the work of political parties under an authoritarian system of rule. In particular, I focus on three political parties in Kazakhstan that have representation in the Parliament: “Nur Otan”, “Ak Zhol” Democratic Party, and Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan, and I identify various levels of their institutionalization and openness to a potential democratic transition. In general, I hypothesize that mass mobilization in the society is running high through the economic modernization, increased literacy, and general awareness and political parties are becoming more popular among politically active citizens. At the same time, parties are supposed to become more open to mass participation as a result of the modernization process.

Since the very beginning of 2016, Kazakhstan has officially begun the practical stage of the Plan of the Nation stated in the “100 Concrete Steps to Implement Five Institutional Reforms”. 59 laws have come into effect and they will create a completely new form of the state’s development, its economy, and civil society (Kazakhembus.com 2015).

The above-mentioned institutional reforms include the following steps:

- Creation of a modern and professional civil service;
- Ensuring the rule of law;
- Industrialization and economic growth;
- A unified nation for the future;
- Transparency and accountability of the state (Kazakhembus.com 2015).

These reforms and included steps are going to be implemented through the control and guidance of the National Modernization Commission under the President. Consisting of 5 working groups, national and foreign experts will try to realize this national plan (Kazakhembus.com 2015).

There is room for argument that economic modernization leads political parties to develop because of the rise of a robust middle class (Lipset 1959). On the other hand, when the process of modernization is state-led, the party of power rules and controls this process (Huntington 1965). So, what is required from political parties is to become more open and receptive to public participation.

I am interested in this research topic because I want to identify how state-led economic modernization in Kazakhstan can influence parties' work and their readiness to challenges associated with the modernization. Potentially, this process can open up the party system of Kazakhstan. Moreover, the majority of the literature on modernization theory is aimed at Western or European countries and I would like to apply this theory to a Central Asian country with an authoritarian regime. Finally, I would like to learn about whether or not political parties wish to promote democratization.

### **Contribution of the study**

Despite the large body of literature dedicated separately to a discussion of the topics of modernization, democratization and political parties, in this thesis, I make an effort to unite these topics and to address a number of problems. In general, I am considering how economic modernization affects the Kazakhstani elites affiliated with political parties and whether it can lead to democratization and social liberalization.

Kazakhstan is the ninth biggest country in the world; it is rich with natural resources, and it is located in the heart of Eurasia (Thomas 2015). Proclaiming its independence on

December 16, 1991, Kazakhstan was characterized as one of the most fragile Central Asian states due to possible problems of large territorial fragmentation, ethnic issues, dependency on Russia, de-industrialization, and vanishing trade relations between the post-Soviet republics (Peyrouse 2012). However, governed by the first and only incumbent, President Nursultan Nazarbayev, this multiethnic state is considered to be one of the most stable and peaceful countries in the Central Asian region. Currently, it is one of the 50 most developed countries in the world and seeks to achieve serious improvements on the economic, political, and social levels; Kazakhstan hopes to enter the list of the 30 most developed countries by the end of 2050. Several programs and strategies were created to achieve this aim, including “Kazakhstan-2030” with the consequent continuation of the “Kazakhstan-2050” strategy, “Nurly Zhol” economic policy, and the “100 Concrete Steps”.

On the other hand, the question arises: how effective are all of these aims in the context of the authoritarian nature of Kazakhstan? According to the Freedom House Index from 2016, Kazakhstan is defined as “not free” and has a 5.5 rating freedom rating (5 for civil liberties and 6 for political rights) out of 7 possible.<sup>1</sup> So, Nourzhanov and Saikal (1994) argue that the political system in Kazakhstan has the features of “the absolute dominance of the executive branch of power, vested in the President and in the Cabinet, which is appointed by him and responsible solely to him” (Nourzhanov and Saikal 1994, 226).

However, civil society is also weakened in the state and is not representative of the citizens’ interests. Since political parties should transfer interests of the citizens to the state, and vice-versa, it is important to focus on the work of political parties represented in the Parliament of Kazakhstan. In conclusion, from the perspective of Kazakhstani development, this thesis presents a brief overview of how the process of economic modernization is perceived by the government in an authoritarian system.

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<sup>1</sup> Freedom House Rating, where 1 is the most democratic and 7 is the least democratic state. For more information follow the link: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/kazakhstan>.

## **Research design**

In order to answer my research questions, I used two qualitative methodologies in this thesis: in-depth interviews and textual analysis. These methods are the most suited for this study because they allowed me to look at the elites' perceptions of the economic modernization process and mass participation and compare the personal views of individuals with the existing literature. Initially, I aimed at conducting 30 interviews in equal proportions with deputies of the Majilis and party workers. However, I interviewed 15 party members: 4 deputies of the Majilis and 11 party workers from three political parties represented in the Parliament of Kazakhstan.

The questions for the interviews were designed with an emphasis on the political course of action of each party, the changes related to the modernization process and practices a party uses in order to lessen the gap between the government and the population. For example, respondents had to answer the following questions:

- "How would you describe the process of modernization in Kazakhstan?"
- "How does the modernization process affect the work of political parties?"
- "How do popular opinions influence the course of work in your political party?"
- "Which practices do you apply to listen to the preferences of the people and taking their opinions into consideration?"

Also, an important part of the interviews was dedicated to respondents' personal perceptions of the process, their expectations, and predictions, which is important to identify since elites have their share of the success of the modernization process. For instance, I asked interviewees the following questions:

- "Do you think that modernization can make a successful path in Kazakhstan? Why or why not?"

- “How do you think the changes and challenges which the modernization process brings can influence civil society in Kazakhstan?”

In addition, deputies of the Majilis and party workers shared their thoughts on the prospects for democratization and the current regime in Kazakhstan. This section shows the views of the elites on the processes happening in Kazakhstan and their attitude towards the rule of the President and the regime. This part of the interview included the questions:

- “It is often said that democracy is the best regime all countries should aim to emulate, do you agree with this?”

- “What factors do you consider as the necessary ones in order to make the transition from non-democracy to democracy?”

- “How would you define the current regime in Kazakhstan?”

- “What improvements could be made to Kazakhstan’s political system?”

I used a prepared set of interview questions. However, I also asked some follow-up questions that were based on the previous answers. Because of confidentiality concerns, I use pseudonyms in this study and do not reveal any personal information of the respondents, including age and job position of party workers (except for party affiliation).

In order to recruit participants for this research I used a verbal recruitment method and contacted human subjects either by e-mail or telephone. Sometimes, I recruited some respondents directly by visiting the official offices of the parties. During the first conversation I provided potential respondents with the necessary documents (i.e. verbal recruitment form and interview questions, if necessary) and if they agreed to participate, we scheduled a meeting. People always had time to think and to decide whether they wanted to participate or not, and in the case of not receiving any response from them, I had to consider it as a refusal to participate. Sometimes, I also used a snowball technique of recruitment and asked those people who had already been interviewed to advise me of other potential

respondents or, vice-versa, to refer me to them. When recruiting deputies of the Majilis, I contacted their secretaries in requesting the participation of the deputies and the necessary documents with the interview questions were transferred to the deputies by their assistants. Interviewees always had a right to determine the place of our meeting, whether it was in an office or in any other convenient place. With deputies, we always met in the building of the Majilis.

All the respondents were provided with a hard copy of the informed consent form at the beginning of the meeting, but they did not have to sign them due to confidentiality concerns. Respondents were able to contact me by phone or e-mail if they had any additional questions regarding research or other questions.

Turning to my textual analysis, I have analyzed newspapers of the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan and articles from the official webpages of the parties in accordance with the topics that are more or less related to different aspects of socio-economic and political issues in Kazakhstan and can be connected to the process of modernization.

In general, I find out that modernization in Kazakhstan is in a problematic situation and does not receive proper development. This is due to a number of reasons, and the main ones are the personalization of politics, the concentration of power and weak opposition. Moreover, parties do not show proper activity towards citizens' participation.

### **Chapter outline**

In this chapter, I outlined the main hypothesis of modernization theory and explained how I apply it to Kazakhstan. In Chapter 2 I present a review of the existing literature on three significant issues discussed in my thesis: modernization process, authoritarianism, and political parties. Then, I underline main theoretical framework for this study and based on it propose hypotheses. In Chapter 3 I describe three case studies and consider the process of

modernization in Kazakhstan closer. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6 I present my empirical findings from conducted interviews with politicians and party workers, as well as results of textual analysis. Finally, in Chapter 7 I summarize major theoretical arguments and empirical findings, raise the issue of succession problem in Kazakhstan, and point out some limitations of this study.



## **Chapter 2: Modernization, End of Authoritarianism, and Political Parties as Factors of Democratization. Theoretical Framework**

The literature review presented below is divided into three sections: modernization theory, authoritarianism, and political parties. Every part concentrates on a particular issue and stresses main arguments among scientists. It is worth noting that all the factors presented in this chapter separately are interconnected in this research. To begin with, de Tocqueville suggested a fundamental idea that “if men are to remain civilized or to become so, the art associating together must grow and improve in the same ratio in which the equality of conditions is increased” (Huntington 1965, 386). In turn, politically active society and freedom of expression, speech, and choice are determinant characteristics of democracy. The central issue of democratic rule is whether elites listen to the voices of citizens. Thus, a key factor influencing the transition to democracy is the establishment of a dialogue between the state and the people. Political parties, in turn, are institutional means enabling this communication to grow into a civilized dialogue (Downs 1957). In other words, joint actions between these actors depend on the work of political parties and the willingness of the elites to support democratic values.

The review of the existing literature proceeds as follows: firstly I introduce contentious debates on the modernization process, then I describe the features of an authoritarian rule, and afterward, I address the issue of political parties.

### **Modernization process**

To begin with, there are various theories, contradictory points, and debates among many political scientists in regards to modernization theory. One of the most important questions relates to identifying the relationship between economic growth and democratic transition. What is more, if this connection exists, the question appears: is it a positive or negative? There are two main variants of modernization theory: “endogenous” – rapid economic growth

can potentially result in a democratic transition, and “exogenous” – democracy can arise randomly due to the existence of different factors but it has more chances to survive in the economically well-developed countries (Przeworski and Limongi 1997). So, taking this theory as a foundation of the literature review, it would be relevant to turn to the debates on the correlation between the economic development of a state and the likelihood of it becoming democratic.

In 1959, Lipset presented a foundational work “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy” where he established a theoretical connection between socio-economic development and a state’s capacity to be a democracy. The author hypothesizes that “the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances it will sustain democracy” and presents some factors which are beneficial for a democratic transition: “industrialization, urbanization, wealth, and education” (Lipset 1959, 75). Moreover, these factors are closely related and act in a compartment. It is vital to mention that Lipset (1959) does not simply refer to the correlation between per capita income and democratic transition, but rather states that the above-mentioned conditions increase the chances for the development of democracy. In other words, a democratic culture arises through the changes in social conditions (Wucherpfennig and Deutsch 2009).

On the other hand, Przeworski and Limongi (1997) challenge Lipset’s assumption and believe that there can be absolutely various reasons for democracy to emerge and rapid economic growth is not the necessary one. The scholars support an “exogenous explanation” of this theory that states that democracies can arise absolutely in random order, but they have more chances for survival in economically developed and well-to-do countries (Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Thus, the connection between economic growth and democracy is not direct, but rather economic growth serves as a foundation for a democratic sustainability.

Boix and Stokes (2003), in turn, support Lipset's theory and "endogenous explanation" of modernization theory. The authors challenge the work of Przeworski and Limongi (1997) from both theoretical and empirical perspectives and make a more sophisticated statistical analysis to support their assumptions. First, Boix and Stokes (2003) claim that it is not enough to look only at the initial characteristics of democracy. Rather, it is also relevant to address the characteristics of a dictatorship (Boix and Stokes 2003). What is more, the authors replicate the statistical analysis of Przeworski and Limongi (1997) and make robustness test in three ways. First, the scholars argue that Przeworski and Limongi used a small sample size and it caused an influence of the "accumulated effects of development at lower levels" (Boix and Stokes 2003, 540). It is worth mentioning, that by doing this, Boix and Stokes show that both the "endogenous" and "exogenous" versions are valid. Second, the scholars expand the dataset from the time interval perspective. Thereby, if Przeworski and Limongi (1997) used the 1950-1990 period of time in their research, Boix and Stokes also add 1800-1959 years in order to look at the differential development of democratization (Przeworski and Limongi 1997; Boix and Stokes 2003). Finally, Boix and Stokes (2003) include new independent variables that Przeworski and Limongi (1997) omitted in their analysis. In conclusion, the authors conclude that the equality of income is the factor that helps democracy both to emerge and survive (Boix and Stokes 2003). To summarize, the scholars support modernization theory and argue that economic development has a beneficial impact on political liberalization.

Next, Bueno de Mesquita and Downs (2006) believe that modernization can be translated into democracy in some way, but it is not a linear, but rather a sequent process. To be more precise, the growth of income per capita makes the middle class more educated and entrepreneurial and, one day, increased literacy will make people stand for their rights and demand democratic values (De Mesquita and Downs 2005, 77). At the same time, economic

growth can be followed by suppression of citizens by controlling “coordination goods”, such as freedom of mass media and speech, civil liberties, and etc. (De Mesquita and Downs 2005, 84). This control definitely harms the establishment of a liberal democracy. To summarize, despite the existing theoretical link between economic development and democratic transition, it is worth noting that a democratic transition is never a guaranteed outcome.

Going further, there is another perspective in regards to the modernization process as the way to a democratic transition. For instance, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) also endorse the relationship between economic development and democracy, even though they do it from another angle. Broadly speaking, the authors point out that modernization leads to higher self-expression values of a population and, consequently, to the way how people treat current conditions in a state and their willingness to accept and make changes (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Thereby, there is a more or less predictable influence of economic growth on the values:

Industrialization leads to occupational specialization, rising educational levels, and eventually, brings unforeseen changes – changes in gender roles; attitudes towards authority and sexual norms; declining fertility rates; broader political participation; and less easily led publics (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

Instead of making a parallel between economic growth and rise of democracy, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) make a parallel between economic development and self-expression values, which can create links with democratization.

On the other hand, there is an opinion that an authoritarian system cannot control an “economically developed society” over the long term (Berman 2001, 433). According to Berman (2001) many characteristics of Imperial Germany, which were considered as pathological and inherent to autocracies at that time, nowadays can describe many developing states or even new democracies (2001: 455). However, the example of Imperial Germany is interesting not only because of this. The matter is that the necessary preconditions for a

democratic transition were present in the state: civil society was strengthening together with economic development, and conservative elites, vice-versa, were marginalized. However, the actors responsible for this transition were absent. Consequently, though citizens were ready to act – there was no arena for it because “Germany’s center and left political parties remained divided and unwilling to accept the compromises and responsibilities that forcing a regime shift would have entailed” (Berman 2001, 459). As a result, the conditions which could potentially lead to democratization eventually led to the destabilization of the state. In short, the fact is that modernization indeed leads to the socio-cultural changes in the society, but the outcomes of such changes can be absolutely unpredictable.

Another approach in modernization theory is proposed by Acemoglu, Simon, Robinson, and Yared (2009) who also do not support the idea that economic development can cause democratization. They argue that an increase in the levels of income per capita does not transform non-democracies into democracies (Acemoglu et al. 2009, 1044). The group of scholars accentuates their attention on the influence of “critical junctures”, powerful historical factors that impact the political and the economic course of the state (2009: 1057). Acemoglu et al. (2009) argue that these junctures, rather than modernization, serve as an influential factor for democratization. In short, “critical junctures” refer to a very specific period of time when a state experienced significant changes that eventually impacted the development of political institutions. So, following the argument of these scholars, there are some more influential factors leading to a democratic transition rather than per capita income or increased values.

Some authors argue that income equality is an important factor of democratization and democratic sustainability. Wucherpfennig and Deutsch (2009) point out that “democracies are found to be less stable when (1) they are more unequal, to begin with, (2) inequality increases, (3) when labor receives a lower share of the value added in manufacturing”

(Wucherpfennig and Deutsch 2009, 3). Boix and Stokes (2003), whose arguments were mentioned earlier, argue that economic growth can potentially lead to economic equality that allows democracy to flourish. According to their assumption, wealth redistribution is preferable for the middle and lower classes, while a lower taxation system looks more attractive for the elites. On the other hand, drawing on the insights of Acemoglu and Robinson (2001), economic inequality may be translated into unrest and in such conditions, elites would rather prefer to accept democracy than a revolution. In general, modernization can eventually lead to the decrease of socio-economic inequality.

Finally, Huntington's theory (1965) deserves special attention, because it represents the main theoretical framework of this study. The scholar emphasizes the role of mass mobilization as one of the main features of the modernization process. Besides, he states that the ability of political organizations, or parties, to deal with such mobilization speaks about the level of their institutionalization: the more institutionalized a party is, the easier it will meet the requirements of modernization and adapt to it, and vice-versa (Huntington 1965). Huntington (1965) points out four key criteria which should help to measure the level of a party institutionalization: "adaptability", "complexity", "autonomy", and "coherence". A more detailed discussion on Huntington's theory of party institutionalization will be presented later in this chapter.

In summary, the process of modernization at best can make a translation from an authoritarian system to a democratic one. On the other hand, many factors such as urbanization, economic growth, education, and others are included in this process and the type, as well as response of autocracies also matter a lot. In order to understand the nature of the regime transition, the next part of the literature review will be dedicated to a detailed analysis of an authoritarian regime.

## **Authoritarianism**

There is a great variety of political regimes in the world with their own features. However, the first step in determining a regime would entail dividing them into two major groups: democracies and non-democracies, and only then differentiation between subgroups and various types should begin (Linz 2000). According to Linz (2000), it is easier to determine the factors that represent democracy in order to understand the nature of authoritarianism. A democratic system is one where political preferences are allowed through free associations, informational and communicational tools, freedom of competition is ensured without any violent means, and not a single political office which meets the necessary requirements of participation is excluded from competition (Linz 2000). In short, the author underlines free competition and the superiority of the rule of law.

On the other hand, Lipset (1959) defines democracy as a social mechanism which resolves social decision-making problems between groups with contradictory interests. It allows the largest part of the population having an impact on these decisions through the ability to choose potential candidates for a political office (Lipset 1959). In addition, democracies are characterized by the presence of free and fair elections founded on universal suffrage; responsibility and accountability of the state apparatus to the elected representatives; and freedom of speech and association (Huber, Rueschemeyer, and Stephens 1993, 73).

According to Huntington (1991), regimes can be called democracies when the most powerful and significant decision makers are elected through free, fair, and periodic elections. So, a special place in democracies is devoted to transparent elections where candidates can freely compete for the office in order to represent the interests of society and where ordinary citizens can make their own indirect contribution to the state decision-making process.

It is important to mention, that if democracies are considered as superior regimes and many countries are seeking to become free, the number of non-democracies is still prevalent in the world. Indeed, autocracies deserve special place in the study of non-democracies and are in need of careful consideration.

Linz (1964) characterizes political systems as authoritarian when there is a limited, not responsible, and non-ideological political pluralism, political mobilization is not active, and when one incumbent or a group of leaders hold unlimited power with predictable aims.

Hadenius and Teorell (2007) state that various types of autocracies have different chances for a democratic transition or survival and preservation of its regime and emphasize five main autocratic regime types: “monarchy, military regime, no-party regime, one-party regime, and limited multiparty regime”. Talking about stability of the regimes, the authors emphasize that the “monarchies” are the most stable systems. “One-party regimes” are less stable than “monarchies”, but they are more stable than “military”, as well as “limited multiparty systems” (Hadenius and Teorell 2007, 152). In addition, the scholars argue that “limited multiparty authoritarian governments” have more chances for democratization than other political systems because they are fragile and occupy “unstable middle of the spectrum from autocracy to democracy” (Hadenius and Teorell 2007, 154). The level of personalization also varies from a regime to regime. Thus, “monarchies” are found as the most personalized systems, they are followed by “one-party regimes” and “no-party regimes”. Finally, “military regimes” and “limited multiparty states” do not have a high degree of “personalism” (Hadenius and Teorell 2007, 151).

There are also states with “competitive authoritarianism”, where “formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority”, but incumbents violate democratic rules so often that transition to democracy becomes impossible (S. Levitsky and Way 2002, 52).



Following the arguments of Schedler (2010), there is another type of autocracy – “electoral authoritarianism”, a regime which tends to organize periodic multiparty elections at all governmental levels but at the same time systematically and considerably violates founding democratic principles.

On the other hand, Diamond (2002) emphasizes “electoral authoritarian” regimes and distinguishes among them “competitive authoritarianism”, “hegemonic electoral authoritarianism” (undemocratic but with multiparty elections and with some degree of political pluralism) and a residual separate category for “ambiguous regimes”.

Diamond, Linz, and Lipset (1989) refer to “semi-democratic countries”, where competitive elections are practiced, but their fairness and freedom are under the question, competition between political parties is highly restricted, and the power of elected representatives is limited. What is more, popular preferences significantly vary from the outcomes of elections and civil and political liberties are constrained so that people cannot express their interests (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1989).

According to Geddes (1999), there are “personalist”, “military”, and “single-party regimes”. There are also “amalgams” or hybrid systems which contain features of these three main types (Geddes 1999). The author states that military regimes are very fragile, while personalist regimes have more chances for survival and, finally, one-party regimes are the strongest ones (Geddes 1999). So, as it comes from the discussion above, many authors point out that the number of hybrid regimes is increasing. They have some democratic features, but still, fail to be recognized as real democracies and tend to preserve an authoritarian rule. In summary, a list of the mentioned autocracies does not represent the full picture of various non-democratic regimes but it shows the diverse nature of authoritarianism.

How do autocracies prolong their existence and what tools do authoritarian incumbents use in order to stay in power? Schatz (2009) states that there are some tools, which a “soft

authoritarian” leader can use. For instance, a leader forms a core of people who support him/her and can help during crisis moments. Leaders also try to mobilize those people who are outside of that core by using the enticements or blackmail. As a rule, an authoritarian incumbent is good at controlling mass media and managing opposition (Schatz 2009). This is what Schatz (2009) calls “discursive preemption” and states that this “tool” allows an incumbent to hold the power.

On the other hand, there is an assumption that “the long tenure of some autocrats is attributed to their overwhelming monopoly of force” (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, 1280). Correspondingly, autocrats can rely on different tools for prolonging their rule, such as spoils (monetary rewards, perks, and privileges), force to limit the cooperation and eliminate the possibility of rebellion, and policy concessions (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, 1281–1282). It is worth mentioning, that policy concessions should work as legal norms. Moreover, such concessions demand institutional setting with the controlled access, where it is possible to reveal demands, to hammer compromises avoiding public scrutiny and to make the final agreements in a legalistic form (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, 1282).

Collier (2009) finds a justification for the fall of many democracies even in the condition of the proliferation of elections. His explanation consists in the reality that lying to the voters, intimidating the electorate, miscounting and buying voices, and threatening the opposition are much safer ways for an incumbent to stay in power, rather than proposing and accepting new reforms, even potentially successful ones (Collier 2009).

In turn, Smith (2005) investigates the robustness of some authoritarian regimes and the vulnerability of others. Especially, he underlines the vulnerability of single-party regimes, from the perspective of institutions functionality. The scholar concludes that origin of a single-party rule is more important than its presence in a state (Smith 2005, 449). In other words, the secret of the strength of some parties and fragility of others is determined by the

actions and decisions that elites make. For example, if a party faces fiscal and political crises in early periods of its life, and elites can successfully cope with this, then the party will be more robust and elites will be able to respond effectively to future crisis situations (Smith 2005, 449).

Schedler (2010) adds that efforts of some democrats in the postcolonial world to build strong institutions, in reality, led to the creation of military and single-party regimes instead of semi-constitutional monarchies or electoral oligarchies. Collectively, political scientists emphasize autocrat's abilities and willingness to control many spheres of coordination between citizens in order to stay in power longer.

Contrary to this, what can lead to the breakdown of an authoritarian rule? Drawing on the insights of Dix (1982), who explored six cases of autocracy breakdown, there is variation among different factors which can be either decisive or not very strong for the failure in different countries. However, there are some key features that all the cases shared: none of the regimes came to the power through the accepted and constitutional procedure; their already weak-established "secondary legitimacy" was offended with time, and any kind of support or acquiescence was later concentrated around an incumbent and close circle (Dix 1982). These factors, in turn, led to the rise of strong and united opposition and serious elite divisions. When it became clear that they would not face a danger under a new regime, the opposition stood up against their dictators (Dix 1982).

It is vital to mention, that the crash of autocracy does not automatically lead to the transition to a democratic regime (Hadenius and Teorell 2006, 18). Indeed, there is always a chance of transition to another authoritarian regime. For example, an authoritarian system can be replaced by a democratic one, or it can produce "a liberalized authoritarian regime (dictablanda) or a restrictive, illiberal democracy (democradura)" (Diamond 2002, 24). In

conclusion, just like transition to a democratic regime does not always follow economic growth, democracy does not always replace authoritarianism.

One important point is that democratization does not occur by a fixed scenario and that there is no linear path from an autocracy to a democracy. Rather, it is made by trial and error. For example, Color Revolutions that captured such post-Soviet countries like Georgia (“Rose” revolution in 2003), Ukraine (“Orange” revolution in 2004), and Kyrgyzstan (“Tulip” revolution in 2005). These consecutive events are united in one group because they share some common characteristics. Among them there are post-elections non-violent protests against vote fraud, unity of the opposition, and assistance of foreign actors (Way 2008, 56). However, the question arises: what impact did these electoral revolutions have on democratic development in the states? The matter is that such electoral revolutions do not endanger democracy and at the same time, they do not benefit it (Kalandadze and Orenstein 2009, 1418). In addition, Kalandadze and Orenstein (2009) argue that these countries experienced some structural problems which could not be eliminated by electoral revolutions. In conclusion, there is no guarantee that the “tools”, which are supposed to lead to democratization, in reality actually do.

### **Political Parties**

For the beginning, there is no universally accepted definition of a political party and many scholars define this concept in surprisingly different ways. For instance, Rye (2015) describes a political party as an organization that includes individuals simultaneously competing and co-operating; such an organization has the rational goals of having control or influence on the government; it is governed by formal, informal, and cultural norms, as well as supported by administration, and uses certain techniques and practices. Michels (1915) argues that every “party” has a harmonious decision regarding the common objectives and

aims, and when this is absent, the party becomes an “organization”. Another opinion, in turn, is that a political party is “a team of men seeking to control the governing apparatus by gaining office in a duly constituted election” (Downs 1957, 25). To put it simply, a party represents free association of people with a common idea and some general aims. It hopes to influence governmental decisions and gain political office.

In 1915 German sociologist, Robert Michels made a significant contribution to the study of political parties in his book, “Political parties”, where the author proposed an “Iron Law of Oligarchy”. According to this law, every organization, regardless of the level of its democratic development at the beginning, sooner or later will turn into an oligarchy (Michels 1915). Particularly, Michels (1915) claims that democracy demands highly developed social life and at the same time this leads to the domination of a particular class. Moreover, this process is inevitable, since even when a dominant class loses its power, another leading class gets power (Michels 1915). In other words, democracy has to accept a social activity in order to survive and to get stabilized, and there is always a certain group of people who hold the leading position above the masses. As a result, Michels (1915) claims that oligarchy captures democracy in a vicious circle.

There is room for argument that political parties make government closer to people. For instance, Ascoli (1935) states that political parties are similar to small and tentative reproductions of the state and organized in order to shorten the distance between individuals and community. In addition, Singh (1950) argues that parties help to relegate some minor issues and problems and to attract attention to more important issues. They also can filter and represent public moods (Singh 1950). Thus, parties work as representatives of the government and at the same time, they express the interests of citizens.

It comes as no surprise that there are some necessary factors or conditions that make the work of political parties effective. According to Singh (1950), political parties should have

three essential things: organization, fidelity to a particular principle, and adherence to constitutional rules for achieving its goals. On the other hand, Ascoli (1935) points out two major conditions necessary for the successful work of a party system: it should have organized minorities, and parties should try to preserve political stability. Indeed, the authors emphasize that in order to perform their initial aims efficiently, parties should establish a political agenda in accordance with constitutional rules and follow it without running to extremes.

There are debates in the literature on the “perfect” number of political parties and whether or not it influences the quality of their work. Dalton (2008) argues that the quality of party competition is more important than the number of parties in a country. According to Berman (1997), one of the reasons why the Weimar republic collapsed was highly fractionalized party system. Hadenius and Teorell (2007) argue that limited multiparty systems have more chances for democratization than others. In other words, referring to different party systems, the authors agree on the point that the qualities of a party system are preferable to democracy rather than the number of parties.

Parties are able to perform various functions. First of all, they are closely connected to the government and work as the prism through which people communicate with elites (White 2006). On the other hand, parties can help authoritarian leaders to guarantee the survival of their rule. For instance, they can “provide an infrastructure for delivering votes, buying support via clientelism, and when necessary, stealing votes” and encourage cooperation between elites (S. Levitsky and Way 2012, 870). Contrary to this, political parties can favor democratic rules by demonstrating what candidates seek to achieve and how they are planning to govern, as well as discipline politicians and “reshape politicians” incentives (Levitsky and Cameron 2003, 3). Some political systems, either democratic or not, find political parties as an important part of their successful performance.

## **Theoretical framework**

Huntington (1965) proposed a theory concerning “political development” or the institutionalization of political organizations as the componential part of modernization. “Political development”, he says, is characterized by sets of four categories: “rationalization”, “national integration”, “democratization”, and most importantly, “mobilization/participation” (Huntington 1965). According to the author, the last category is the most important and he provides a sequence of how modernization leads to popular participation and, then, how it is translated into political development (Huntington 1965).

Huntington (1965) refers to the level of institutionalization of political parties, and mentions that they can be measured by four characteristics: “adaptability”, “complexity”, “autonomy”, and “coherence”. Coming from this, it is necessary to consider each criterion closely.

First, the more challenges a party faces and the older it is – the more “adaptive” it will be and, as a result, more institutionalized. Besides, every organization is developing a set of responses to particular challenges or problems of the environment that arise during the years of its work, and “success in adapting to one environmental challenge paves the way for successful adaptation to subsequent environmental challenges” (Huntington 1965, 395). It is vital to mention that the age of a party can be measured in three ways: chronological, generational (the longer a party has the first set of leaders, the less “adaptive” it is), and from the perspective of the functional terms (some parties are created to perform a particular function but when that function is not needed, this party can disband) (Huntington 1965, 395-396).

Second, the more “complex” a party, the more institutionalized it is. “Complexity” in this context involves “multiplication of organizational subunits, hierarchically and functionally, and differentiation of separate types of organizational subunits” (Huntington 1965, 399).

Third, party “autonomy” in this context is connected to the exclusiveness or the distinctiveness from the social forces or groups of people connected by economic or social ties, such as family, churches, clans, and ethnic or linguistic groups (Huntington 1965, 401). Thus, a party is less institutionalized when it represents the interests of one concrete social group only rather than several. However, the author adds that when representing new social forces, a party should not lose its political integrity (Huntington 1965).

Finally, the institutionalization of political parties also depends on the level of “coherence” and unity inside of them. In addition, successful performance requires a “substantial consensus on the functional boundaries of the group and on the procedures for resolving disputes on issues which come up within those boundaries” (Huntington 1965, 403). To summarize, the ability of parties to successfully cope with modernization and, consequently, with the rise of mass mobilization, depends on the level of their institutionalization.

Thus, taking Huntington’s theory as the basis for the main theoretical framework of this work, I make an effort to apply his assumptions to the case of Kazakhstan and to consider whether or not they find support in the Kazakhstani party system. In other words, I evaluate the level of institutionalization of the three political parties in Kazakhstan that are represented in the Parliament. The above-mentioned criteria were addressed while interviewing deputies of the Majilis and party workers in order to identify the relation between the institutionalization of the parties and their willingness to initiate a democratic transition.

The factor of opportunism plays a significant role in the modernization process within an authoritarian system of rule. Thus, during the process of economic modernization small parties have the willingness to get more power and more representation in the Parliament in order to increase their influence in a party system. Besides, Downs (1957) hypothesizes that all the parties are “voter-maximizing animals” and all their strategies are related to the



gaining of power. The process of modernization is a brilliant opportunity for parties to achieve this aim, because, under the best concatenation of circumstances, the chances for democratization can increase. What small parties expect from democratization is free and fair elections, mass participation of citizens in politics and a transparent arena for political competition. As a result, opposition parties are more likely to welcome economic modernization and changes related to this process. What is more, small parties can become more open to mass participation in order to attract an electorate. Thereby, small opposition parties are more inclined to suggest and support political reforms which can lead to a more liberalized regime. Thus, I propose **Hypothesis 1:**

*Weakly institutionalized opposition parties within authoritarian systems of rule are inclined to endorse economic modernization and political liberalization in order to strengthen their political positions.*

On the other hand, the attitude of the party of power to the process of modernization can be a bit different from opposition parties. First of all, Nur Otan can be defined as the party of power because it presents itself as a centrist party and the image of the party is closely related to the image of Nursultan Nazarbayev. Moreover, Isaacs (2011) argues that the party of power is usually characterized by close relations with the executive branch of government which can use the party of power for the realization of its interests.

Following the arguments of Huntington (1965), I may anticipate that Nur Otan is more institutionalized party than Ak Zhol and the CPPK. Indeed, the party has a strong historical background and a determined political agenda; subunits and a variety of guided projects; it represents the interests of many social groups and, finally, Nur Otan has more representation in the Parliament, as well as sufficient financial resources. It comes as no surprise that Nur Otan gets much support from the government, as well as from civil community because of close association with the President. However, the party may not support democratization in

order to avoid a possible decrease in its power. Thereby, the party may constrain the initiatives of small parties and adapt reforms to its interests. As a result, **Hypothesis 2** states:

*A higher level of institutionalization of the party of power prevents small opposition parties from growing into genuine oppositionists and (as a consequence) political liberalization is delayed.*

Nur Otan can be characterized as a united party with high ambitions. This is the largest and the oldest party in independent Kazakhstan. Relying on Brownlee's argument (2007), dominant political parties contribute to the elite stability by ensuring cohesion of presidential backing that earlier guaranteed the durability of the authoritarian rule in the state. Thus, proclaiming itself a centrist party, Nur Otan works with different groups of society. However, in fact, the main ideology of the party can be described as the "faith in the President". In this way, the President's support and more or less unlimited power make Nur Otan's elites more confident in their success. In addition, the party members are united around the personalized ideology of the party.

Taking into account the role of the President in Kazakhstan, it is hard to neglect the influence of Nursultan Nazarbayev's interests and opinions on the political behavior of the parties. What is more, despite Ak Zhol and CPPK are supposed to be opposition parties, they are defined as "soft opposition" and, in any way, stay pro-presidential parties (Bowyer 2008). Moreover, Isaacs (2011) argues that the loyalty of opposition parties reflects the desire of these parties to have a guaranteed job, political office, and mandates in the Parliament. In other words, parties tend to vote to support the reforms that the President proposes or, at least, not to criticize them.

James Scott, in his book "Seeing like a State" (1998) proposes an idea of "high modernism" and argues that it can lead to unpredictable consequences in modern authoritarian states. Scott analyzes grandiose authoritarian plans (in other words, social-

engineering designs) which can be characterized as utopian aspirations or “high modernism” (Scott 1998, 88). To put it simply, Scott (1998) proposes an idea that “high modernists” tend to promote reforms that aim to build utopia. However, in the context of an authoritarian coercive power and weak civil society, these plans rather lead to a disaster. The author emphasizes four elements necessary for this disaster: (1) “administrative ordering of nature and society”; (2) “high-modernist ideology”; (3) “authoritarian state that is willing and able to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high-modernist designed into being”; (4) “a prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans” (Scott 1998, 4-5). To summarize, when civil liberties are constrained and coercive apparatus of an authoritarian state is actively used by the President and the government for achieving high-modernist aims, no modernization and political liberalization are possible.

This theory can be applied to Kazakhstan: state-led economic modernization is highly controlled by the government and the President, and reforms do not contribute to civil society development. Thus, I propose **Hypothesis 3:**

*Elites in a party of power within an authoritarian system of rule tend to be united around the authoritarian leader and to promote only those reforms of which the incumbent approves, thereby inhibiting political development to the full extent.*

In conclusion, these three hypotheses will help me to identify whether or not political parties in Kazakhstan are moving towards a democratic transition. The hypotheses will be addressed in the empirical part of this thesis.

### **Chapter 3: Political Situation, Parties and the Process of Modernization in Kazakhstan**

Before proceeding, it is necessary to describe current regime in Kazakhstan and its specific features. Schatz (2009) describes Kazakhstan as a “soft authoritarian state” that comprises five essential “tools”: a strong group of supporters, ability to mobilize actors outside of that group, use of coercion against opposition, media control, and “discursive preemption”. The last tool deserves special attention as it influences political life of the state. First of all, discursive preemption is “the staging of political dramas that undermine opponents’ efforts to gain popular support” with the information management and creation of new dimension of political debates (Schatz 2009, 208). This tool, according to the scholar, explains Nazarbayev’s power and popularity in Kazakhstan.

On the other hand, while the regime in Kazakhstan is widely accepted as an authoritarian, it is still not the same as a “traditional-patriarchal”, like it was under the rule of Islam Karimov in Uzbekistan, or Saparmurat Niyazov’s “familial-paternalist” regime in Turkmenistan (Dave 2005, 3). The image of Kazakhstan is promoted as an “oasis of stability” (Dave 2005, 4). If some would still characterize Kazakhstan as an “autocracy” it is relevant to look at other types of systems the Kazakhstani regime could belong to. Thus, for instance, Guillermo O’Donnell’s (1994) definition of a “delegative democracy” (DD) could be relevant here. According to the scholar, such systems “rest on the premise that whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office” (O’Donnell 1994, 59). However, in Kazakhstan, the President is not limited to the term of his office. Since DDs are characterized by a concentration of power and strong personalization, an incumbent is usually respected and not criticized publicly (O’Donnell 1994, 60).

In general, Adrien Fauve (2015) supports the opinion that Kazakhstan is “soft authoritarian” state and argues that this system allows an incumbent justifying his/her actions

in the views of citizens. However, the major argument of the scholar is that Nazarbayev relies on other individual actors for building a national image in order for the state to look like successful, open, and dynamic country (2015:109). Thus, besides “globalized Astanization”, promotion of the capital city, Astana, Fauve claims that elites work on its branding (Fauve 2015, 110). For instance, the name of Aleksander Vinokourov, a professional cyclist, who won the Summer Olympic Games in 2012 in London, and Nazarbayev University, the “intellectual hub for Astana”, which attracts intellectual elites from abroad, work for the benefit of nation branding (Fauve 2015, 117). Thus, patriotic feelings are used in an “attempt to invest the international public sphere so as to promote Kazakhstan while passing over the authoritarian dimension of the regime” (Fauve 2015, 121).

The matter is that not only the leadership is personalized in Kazakhstan, but opposition is also based on charismatic personalities (Satpayev 2016, 4). According to Kennedy (2006), there are some reasons for explaining opposition weakness in Kazakhstan. First of all, the scholar refers to the patriarchal nature of the President’s rule. Indeed, a big proportion of economic activities in Kazakhstan is controlled either by Nazarbayev’s relatives or a close circle of people to the president (Kennedy 2006, 51). Needless to say, these people are highly privileged. Second, as a matter of fact, Kazakhstan has grown economically since independence and Kazakhs are grateful to the President for that and tend to have more trust for future (Kennedy 2006, 52). Finally, the author argues that the media is highly constrained and there is no informational arena where the opposition can freely operate. The author makes a very important implication regarding the views of Kazakhstani citizens: the majority of people prefers to live in a controlled public order which results in peace, rather than have freedom of speech and media that could potentially increase tensions in the society (Kennedy 2006, 54).

However, in order to understand how the opposition is treated in Kazakhstan, one case is worth closer consideration, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party (DCK) which was created in 2001. This party, consisting of the government members, leaders, and businessmen was a serious threat and a surprise to the authorities, because “the DCK’s driving force to create a competitive political system was the desire to ensure that fair, transparent, and impartial laws would apply to everyone” (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005, 382). Former Prime Minister, Kasym-Zhomart Tokaev, spoke negatively about the party and demanded its resignation. Besides, some of the leaders were imprisoned while others were either frightened or attacked (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005, 380). As a result, some members of the party created a more moderate political organization, Ak Zhol. After much effort, the party was able to register only in 2003, while already in 2005 the DCK was closed by a court order. Nevertheless, this movement has left an important mark in the history of Kazakhstan as the sign of how economic development can embrace conflicting economic interests and challenge an authoritarian system (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005, 388–389).

There is room for argument, that patrimonial links are very strong in Kazakhstan (Isaacs 2011). Not going too deep, belonging to a particular juz (horde) still determines many family and business relations. It is not surprisingly if during a job interview a potential employer asks a candidate “What clan are you?” and, sometimes, the answer determines his/her decision. In addition to kinship ties, Kazakhs pay great attention to regional differences. For instance, people from the South are assumed to be hard-working and friendly, while people from the North are considered as colder and more closed. This is not the aim of this paper to find out whether these stereotypes are true or not, but it is worth mentioning them for the better understanding of relations-building in Kazakhstan. This is a part of the “clan” politics which characterizes Central Asian countries and significantly determines political agendas.

Rico Isaacs (2011) dedicated his book to explaining relations between formal and informal politics in Kazakhstan. According to the author, the transition from the Soviet era has significantly influenced the Kazakhstani political system. Isaacs (2011) uses the term “neopatrimonialism” in order to explain political system in Kazakhstan. Broadly speaking, neopatrimonial regimes are characterized by the interference of informal politics on the work of formal political institutions (Isaacs 2011, 76). Following Isaacs’s arguments, neopatrimonialism in Kazakhstan is rooted in the development of the state. Thus, the author claims that “Nazarbayev relied on informal politics to counter the political instability derived from institutional competition, pluralism, and electoral competition; all contingent processes specific to Kazakhstan’s post-Soviet transitional context” (Isaacs 2011, 75-76). In short, the President can use informal tools in order to influence politics.

Junisbai and Junisbai (2005) argue that there is no real possibility in Central Asia that people will revolt in order to embrace democracy, or that authoritarian incumbents unexpectedly will change their attitude towards political liberalization, or that economic development will one day simply lead to democratization. On the contrary, economic liberalization, which will promote more open and fair competition among elite groups with the respect to the rule of law, can become a potential outcome of political changes in the states (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005, 374).

Turning to the economic situation in Kazakhstan, according to the International Monetary Fund, Kazakhstan is characterized as “hydrocarbon-rich” (2007) exporting about 60% of crude petroleum from its total exports (Sakal 2015, 237). In Kazakhstan, oil production brought 7 billion Tenge in 2016 (Kazakhstan Forbes 2017). However, Sakal (2015) argues that successful indicators of the oil industry in the state do not contribute to improvements in the standards of living in rural areas and oil-producing areas. Nazarbayev’s personality and “globalization” have a negative impact on this issue. The first factor creates

“resource nationalism” and it fails to perform its aim to cover poverty and human development in the context of authoritarianism (Sakal 2015, 249). The latter one has both positive and negative effects. Among positive, there are that the increase in oil prices leads to the increase in GDP per capita in Kazakhstan; technological modernization; increase in foreign direct investments; development of the capital city, Astana, and general improvements in the economy (Sakal 2015, 249). On the other hand, such globalization factor still leads to the decrease in agricultural income and makes Kazakhstan vulnerable to a crisis (Sakal 2015, 249). In conclusion, Sakal (2015) argues that “resource nationalism” benefits the president and his surrounding elites, as well as the “one-man regime”.

Economic dependence on mineral resources in Kazakhstan makes the state highly sensitive to external critical situations and the major crises that occurred in Kazakhstan were directly related to such external shocks (Kapparov 2016, 3). In addition, after the crisis of 2007-2008, Kazakhstan had to invest a huge amount of money in several banks and companies in order to keep them afloat (Kapparov 2016, 3).

On December 16, 2011, during the celebration of the 20th anniversary of independence, Kazakhstan was hit by shocking riots in the oil-rich city, Zhanaozen. Oil workers demanded a raise in salary and better labor conditions for more than a half of the year and they eventually went on strike. Quite quickly it degenerated into serious unrest and a consequent clash between the governmental bodies and striking oil workers (BBC news 2011). Police opened fire on the protesters and at least 10 people died as a result of this clash. This event shattered the country's peaceful image and internal stability (BBC News 2011).

One of the biggest problems facing Kazakhstan is that many governmental bodies, businesses and other spheres of economic, political and social lives are highly corrupt. According to the Corruption Perception Index 2016, Kazakhstan is ranked at 131 out of 176



countries.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Kazakhstan has a score of 29 out of 100, where 0 is “highly corrupt” and 100 is “very clean”.<sup>3</sup>

Coming back to the political system, while proclaiming itself a democratic state, from 2007 to 2012, this one-party regime, represented by Nur Otan in the Parliament, seriously affected the “democratic image” of Kazakhstan (Peyrouse 2012, 353). Nowadays there are three political parties represented in the Parliament. Some may believe that it is because parties became stronger, but others think that it is only an illusion of multipartyism (Isaacs 2011, 33).

During the last Parliamentary elections held in April 2016, Nur Otan received 82% of votes, while Ak Zhol and the Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan received 7, 22% and 7, 17%. The Majilis consists of 107 deputies: 84 from Nur Otan, 7 from Ak Zhol, 7 from the Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan and 9 from the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. It goes without saying, that Nur Otan takes the majority of votes during elections and, consequently, has the majority of seats in the Parliament in comparison to the two other parties. It is worth mentioning that Nur Otan is headed by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Kazakhstan belongs to the dominant party regimes, “regimes with parties taking more than two-thirds of the vote” (Hadenius and Teorell 2007, 148). To say a couple of words about the party system in Kazakhstan, opposition parties of Kazakhstan are founded on the personal image of their leaders, in the majority of cases, those who were in close relations with the President in the past (Bowyer 2008). Bowyer (2008) argues that aggregation of the voters into the groups, setting particular goals and policy agenda based on the demands of these voters, is not the primary aim of the parties anymore. Elite mobilization in order to

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<sup>2</sup> Transparency International, where the higher the number, the more corrupt a state is. For more information follow the link: <http://www.transparency.org/country/KAZ#>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

support the individual leaders takes more important place in the agenda of political parties in Kazakhstan (Bowyer 2008).

All three parties have different historical backgrounds and have made different paths towards representation in the Parliament. In order to understand the specific features of each of three parties, this chapter will briefly describe each party separately.

### **“Ak Zhol” Democratic Party of Kazakhstan**

The ancestor of Ak Zhol is the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan civic group. Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan was the strongest opposition in Kazakhstan for 25 years of its independence. The DCK was created in 2001 when the party set up its goals: political authority’s decentralization, the establishment of a strong legislature and an independent judiciary (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005). According to Junisbai and Junisbai (2005), the founders of the party were driven by both personal interests and a specific ideology. The government responded quickly to this party and called their actions unprofessional, saying that they could bring chaos and lawlessness to the country (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005). The party members, who took governmental positions, were replaced. To be more precise, two opposition leaders, Galymzhan Zhakiyanov and Mukhtar Ablyazov were accused on the criminal charges and later jailed (Junisbai and Junisbai 2005, 380). So, the party did not achieve recognition and members felt serious pressure from the government, what made some people leave DCK. In 2002, former members of the DCK made a decision to form a softer opposition - Ak Zhol (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012).

In the Kazakh language, ‘Ak Zhol’ means ‘Bright Path’. Ak Zhol determines itself as a “constructive opposition” and an adherent of the “Alash” national movement. Before proceeding it is vital to consider Alash and underline its importance for modern Kazakhstan.

The beginning of the XX century in Kazakhstan can be characterized as a very important period of a national fight for the liberalization of the Kazakh people. A liberal-democratic movement, Alash, was created in order to make Kazakhstan independent. Kazakh elites, scholars, and political intellectuals made the first steps towards the defense of Kazakh rights, and the establishment of national and territorial integrity (Galick 2014). A set of significant factors led to the creation of this movement: revolutionary time, influence of Russian colonization on the Kazakh culture and lifestyle, and, contrary to this Russian influence, Muslim culture (Galick 2014). Galick (2014) states that “finding themselves between these ‘two fires’ Kazakh intellectuals were faced with the problems of national and cultural survival of the Kazakh people, i.e. the preservation of Kazakh culture and mentality - ‘qazaqtyq’ (Kazakhness)”. In other words, Russification and Tatarization posed a serious threat to Kazakh national identity, culture, and language. Thus, an effort to establish the first independent political party, the rise of debates in the “Kazakh” national newspaper, and fight for the interests of Kazakh nationality and territory contributed to the ethno-political consolidation of Kazakh society (Amanzholova 2011).

Ak Zhol was officially registered on April 2, 2002. Currently, the party has 255, 800 members according to the Central Election Commission of Kazakhstan (Akzhol.kz 2016). According to the party’s charter and rules, Ak Zhol supports the strategic course of the government aimed at improvements in the well-being and social health of Kazakhstani citizens (Akzhol.kz 2016). The party claims that the main treasure of the country is neither oil nor a goal, but rather citizens (Akzhol.kz 2016). Being followers of the Alash national liberal movement, Ak Zhol seeks to create all necessary conditions for the better life conditions of every citizen and the party hopes that Kazakhstan will achieve economic, social and political progress (Akzhol.kz 2016).

In 2004, Ak Zhol's leadership experienced a schism resulting in the creation of two groups opposing each other. The inner-party group led by one of the co-chairman of the party, Alikhan Baimenov, was considered as the initiator of this conflict. To be more precise, a presidium of the party's central council organized by Alikhan Baimenov was considered as a deliberate action in order to create a schism (Nomad.su 2005). During the plenary session of the party's central council, Baimenov announced mistrust to another co-chairman of the party, Altynbek Sarsenbaiuly (Nomad.su 2005). Some members decided to organize a new party and registered it as "Naghyz Ak Zhol" what in the translation from Kazakh means 'True Bright Path' and in February 2008 it changed to "Azat" (Nomad.su 2005). It is worth mentioning, that Azat belongs to one of the 'hard oppositional' parties (Bowyer 2008, 22). Another important point is that the creator and Chairman of the Naghyz Ak Zhol, the opposition leader, Altynbek Sarsenbaiuly, was abducted and found killed with his driver and security guard on February 13, 2006 (Radio Azattyk 2016). Society made an assumption that this crime had a political character and was organized by political authorities (Radio Azattyk 2016).

Returning to the party activity, Ak Zhol received 12.05 % of the votes in the 2004 Parliamentary elections and received two seats in the Parliament (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). However, the party claimed that there was a falsification of results and party co-chairman, Alikhan Baymenov, did not agree to take a mandate in the Parliament. Altynbek Sarsenbayev, another co-chairman, in his turn, decided to resign from the office (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). In 2006, a party congress made a decision to represent one member, Baymenov, in the Parliament (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012).

In 2007, the party received 3, 09 % of votes and did not receive representation in the Parliament (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). On July 2, 2011, a new

leader, Azat Peruashev, replaced Alikhan Baimenov (Radio Azattyk 2011). It is interesting that only one day before that, Azat Peruashev left the presidential party, Nur Otan. Vladimir Kozlov, the Kazakhstani politician, said that “Peruashev – the person of Ak orda, this is the person who absolutely supports and strengthens the President’s regime” (Radio Azattyk 2011). Joanna Lillis supported this opinion and argued that this party could not behave as real opposition; she also added that “Akorda will present two parties in the Parliament so that the West will not have a reason to critique Kazakhstan for the single-party Parliament” (Radio Azattyk 2011). Since then, the party has accomplished a cardinal renewal of the organizational, ideological, and intellectual basis of its work.

To summarize, in accordance with the results of the last Parliamentary elections which were held in 2016, Ak Zhol received 7, 18% of votes and 7 deputy mandates (Akzhol.kz 2016). Also, since 2011, Ak Zhol has been actively representing the interests of small and medium businessmen (Akzhol.kz 2016).

### **Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan**

The Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK) has the deepest roots in Kazakh society. The party was created as a result of a split in the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK), which, in turn, was the successor to the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR. This schism was caused by the election of a new Secretary. About 15,000 party members changed their membership to the CPPK (Bowyer 2008).

The Communist Party of Kazakhstan was registered in February 1994 and for the whole period of its existence, the party had only one leader, Serikbolsyn Abdildin. Until 2004 the party functioned as the only communist movement in Kazakhstan (Bowyer 2008, 24).

Several times the CPK joined different opposition movements or even created some of them. For example, in 1996, the party organized the unregistered "National-Patriotic

Movement-Republic" (Bowyer 2008). Also, several times the CPK joined opposition coalitions like "Azamat" or "Pokolenie". In 1998, the CPK joined an opposition bloc named the "People's Front of Kazakhstan" and in the 2005 presidential elections the party, in cooperation with the DCK and Naghyz Ak Zhol party organized a coalition (Bowyer 2008). This coalition led the "For a Just Kazakhstan" movement. The aim of this coalition was to support Zhamarkan Tuyakbai, a candidate in the Presidents of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Bowyer 2008, 24).

Regarding the electoral experience of the party, the CPK received two seats in the Parliament in 1995 and 1999 (Bowyer 2008). In 1994, it did not have the right to participate in the elections while in 2004 the coalition with the DCK did not provide the party with any mandate (Bowyer 2008). The CPK refused to participate in the 2007 Parliamentary elections in order to protest against the electoral system (Bowyer 2008). In 2015 the Ministry of Justice accused the CPK in the violation of the legislative requirements. As a result, the Communist Party of Kazakhstan was officially banned (Tengrinews.kz 2015).

In June 2004, the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan was officially registered in the Ministry of Justice of Kazakhstan, headed by Vladislav Kosarev. Kosarev argued that the members who preferred to stay with the CPK gave up Marxist ideology and the party interests (Bowyer 2008, 26). In 2004, the party received only 1.98 % of votes without any seats in the Parliament. In the 2007 Parliamentary elections, the party received 1.29 % of votes. Presidential elections in 2005 and 2011 also did not provide a positive result, when the CPPK candidates received around 1 % of the total votes (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace 2012). In 2012, the CPPK gained the required percentage of votes in the Parliamentary elections and was represented in the Parliament with 7 deputies (Bowyer 2008). In 2016 the CPPK also received 7 deputy mandates in the Parliament (Bowyer 2008).

Communist People's Party expresses the political will of the working class, unemployed people, retirees, and youth. The party aspires to achieve social justice, political equality, and democratization through fair democratic elections (Knpk.kz 2013). One of the major projects of the party is “Shapagat”. In the frames of this project, the party works with the labor class and helps the socially vulnerable segment of the population (Knpk.kz 2016).

Presenting itself as a “constructive opposition”, the party is more pro-presidential with Marxist-Leninist ideology (Bowyer 2008). Moreover, the party rejects the opinion that the CPPK is the “party of the older generation” and claims that about 30% of the party’s members are young people. Having strong anti-Western views, the party still agrees with the OSCE in one opinion that the percentage of total votes to become represented in the Parliament should be lowered to about 3% and that every party should have some representation in the Parliament (Bowyer 2008, 26).

### **“Nur Otan”**

The history of Nur Otan’s creation leads to 1999 when the party was officially registered under the name “Otan”. In the same year the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, became a member and the leader of the party (Celin.akmol.kz 2017). Otan quickly achieved acceptance and success in the society, mainly because of the presidential leadership. Otan was a very influential political force. It declared itself a reformist party with a social-democratic direction (Tarih-begalinka.kz 2017). In fact, Otan was established on the basis of the president’s pre-election staff and became the result of integration between pro-presidential parties: the People's Union of Kazakhstan, Unity, the Liberal Movement of Kazakhstan, and the "For Kazakhstan-2030" Movement (Bowyer 2008, 14). One can argue that these parties in reality never played any significant role in the Kazakhstani politics as separate bodies, and rather were created as a façade or image of multipartyism in the state (Isaacs 2011).

In 2006, another merge occurred and this provided Otan with exclusive power and 90% of mandates in the Parliament. This merger included the parties “Asar”, ruled by the daughter of Nursultan Nazarbayev, Dariga Nazarbayeva, Civic party, and the Agrarian Party (Bowyer 2008, 14).

In 2005, the “national coalition of Kazakhstan in the support of presidential candidate Nursultan Abishuly Nazarbayev” was created under the support of the party (Bowyer 2008). A year later the party changed its name to Nur Otan (Light of the Fatherland) Democratic People’s Party (Bowyer 2008).

In 2013, Nur Otan Democratic People’s party was renamed and now we know this part as just Nur Otan. Party elite argued that according to international practice, parties usually do not demonstrate their ideology in the name of the party (Zakon.kz 2013).

Coming to the party charters, “the goal of the party is to build an economically strong, democratic, secular, legal and social state with a developed civil society, modern and competitive political system by methods of political work” (Nurotan.kz 2017). Nur Otan sticks the course of building an economically stable state with robust social guarantees and innovations (Nurotan.kz 2017).

It is noticeable that Nur Otan does not pursue one concrete ideology, as compared to Ak Zhol and the CPPK. However, it seems that the party has a combination of various ideologies. This has the name of a “big tent”, an approach to address various interests of the citizens in order to broaden the target electorate. Such assumption finds its justification in the theoretical argument of Otto Kirchheimer, German-American scholar, who introduced the concept of a “catch-all party” in the 1960s. In general, “the catch-all party can be translated as a highly opportunistic vote-seeking party, a leader-centered party, a party tied to interest groups, or all of the above” (Wolinetz 2002, 146). In other words, Kirchheimer (1966) saw the catch-all party as an effective electoral machine which tries to get as many votes as



possible by addressing a great variance of issues and capturing many social groups. Taking it into account, one can make a parallel with Downs's assumption of a "voter-maximizing machines". Moreover, Katz and Mair (1995) state that "economic growth and the increased importance of the welfare state facilitated the elaboration of programs that were no longer so necessarily divisive nor partisan, but that could be claimed to serve the interests of all or almost all" (1995: 7). In other words, Nur Otan can be described as a catch-all party because its target audience is not limited to a particular class or social group. What is more, Nur Otan implements seven projects with the emphasis on different social groups. Among them are: "Take care of an older generation", "Happy family – happy childhood", "Future without barriers" aimed at people with disabilities, "Young people are for the Motherland" aimed at the younger generation, "Employment in rural areas", and "A country without corruption – a prosperous country" (Nuroatn.kz 2017).

### **On the modernization process in Kazakhstan**

As the topic of this thesis is concerning the influence of the modernization process on political party development, it is necessary to address some features of this process in Kazakhstan. On February 28, 2007, during his Address to the people, named "New Kazakhstan in a new world", Nursultan Nazarbayev announced the beginning of the modernization phase (Akorda.kz 2007). The first strategy accepted by the state was "Kazakhstan-2030". Originally, seven laid on the basis of the "Kazakhstan-2030" strategy in order to establish a stable social, economic, and political foundation for attracting foreign investments (Kudaibergenova 2015, 443).

"Kazakhstan-2050" strategy has become a logical and consequent continuation of "Kazakhstan-2030". With this strategy, Kazakhstan seeks to achieve "better governance, improvement of the welfare and tax systems, support for small- and medium-sized

businesses, and development of infrastructure” and to be ranked within the 30 most developed nations by the end of 2050 (Kazakhembus.com 2017). As a part of this strategy, the country aims to integrate economically with the global, as well as regional, environments, to increase its technological capacities, to use transit potentialities, to cancel the moratorium for the subsoil industries in order to attract new investors, to raise the agriculture share of Kazakhstan’s GDP, and to redistribute the power and responsibilities among governmental bodies (Kazakhembus.kz 2017).

However, Sullivan (2017) argues that economic modernization can be risky for the “bureaucratic-legal front” because changes may challenge “old and time-tested ways of doing business” (2017: 4). Indeed, are Kazakhstani authorities ready to get rid of the old-established and deeply rooted neopatrimonial regime and informal politics? If no, then the modernization process in Kazakhstan will be in trouble. Moreover, the 100 Steps program will likely fail unless Kazakhstan changes its bureaucratic and legal systems and if it is not going to decrease economic dependence on oil and to develop a stronger civil society (Sullivan 2017, 6).

On July 1, 2016, the law on the land use that was aimed at implementing five institutional reforms in the frames of 100 Concrete Steps was translated into conflict (Zakon.kz 2015). This law implied the stimulation of the transfer of agricultural land to private ownership. In other words, this amendment suggested that from July 1, 2016, agricultural land in Kazakhstan could be purchased by Kazakhstani citizens at auction. At the same time, according to the proposed changes in this law, oralmans (returnees) and foreigners without citizenship in Kazakhstan had the right on lease these lands for a period of up to 25 years (Zakon.kz 2015). However, the proposed amendments led to the unexpected reaction of Kazakhstani society and caused a number of meetings and protests. The matter is that for Kazakh people their land is an important patrimony and they have a specific attitude towards

it. In particular, citizens of Kazakhstan were afraid of the increased influence of China in the republic or, in other words, of “Chinese expansion” (Omarova 2016). In short, people have the fear that Chinese or any other foreign investors can come and occupy Kazakh lands. Such discontent of the citizens presented a threat to the stability of the state. As a result, Nursultan Nazarbayev had to impose a moratorium on this law (Tengrinews.kz 2016).

On January 25, 2017, Nazarbayev appealed to the nation with the announcement of constitutional reform that supposes the transfer of the President’s power to the Government and to the Parliament. This is a step towards the implementation of one of the five institutional reforms represented in 100 Steps (Primeminister.kz 2017). According to the President, such reform will strengthen public administration system:

It is important to strengthen the role of Parliament in the formation of Government, to enhance the responsibility of the Cabinet before the deputies. The winning party in the parliamentary election will have a decisive influence on the formation of the Government. On this basis, it will be logical, if the government will abdicate authority to the newly elected Mazhilis, not the President, as it was before (Seysembayeva 2017).

However, setting new goals and objectives for their implementation does not guarantee an effective modernization process. In order for modernization to succeed, the state should become more open and more receptive to the interests of citizens. The citizens, in turn, should express their opinions more actively and transparently. Moreover, political institutions, and parties, especially, should try to meet the requirements of the politically active population (Huntington 1965). In addition, modernization is impossible, while civil society is weak and repressed (Scott 1998).

## **Chapter 4. Empirical Findings. How Much Is Nur Otan Loyal to Changes?**

Nur Otan is the biggest party in Kazakhstan with around the million members and 84 deputies in the Parliament (Nurotan.kz 2017). Given a large number of Nur Otan workers, it was not very difficult to recruit them for the interview. However, I also found it difficult to approach deputies because they were either busy, or the process of contacting them took too much time, or some deputies simply refused to participate. In total, I conducted 2 interviews with deputies and 5 interviews with the party workers.

In the following section, I present an analysis of the interviews given by Nur Otan deputies and workers of the party, as well as textual analysis of party publications. The textual analysis helps to understand ideas and messages, which Nur Otan expresses through its publications. I analyze interview material in several sections. These sections include the respondents' views on economic modernization as well as democracy and political liberalization, their expectations and hopes about the upcoming changes. I use the following abbreviations to indicate the work position of the respondents, (PW) for party workers and (D) for deputies of the Parliament.

### **Interviews**

#### The role of political parties and the party system in Kazakhstan

In general, all interviewed workers and representatives of Nur Otan in the Parliament agree that political parties play an important role in Kazakhstan, as well as in the world. For example, Dauren (PW) says that political parties serve as a link between the government and its citizens; they can reflect the ideas and moods of the society to the government.<sup>4</sup> Kairat (D) claims that political parties are necessary for the existence of a “fair competition” in the state.<sup>5</sup> Aigul (PW) points out:

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<sup>4</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 15, 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 14, 2017.

Political parties are important because they serve as the symbol of the state's openness. They monitor the work of governmental bodies and make recommendations, maintain constant contact with the people and etc. Historical experience shows that political parties have a significant influence on the development of nationhood and national ideology.<sup>6</sup>

Respondents tend to provide a well-defined set of functions which should be ideally performed by a party. Moreover, according to the answers, it is possible to conclude that interviewees believe that “Nur Otan” is doing its work well and meets the basic requirements of party work.

Turning to the party system, the main trend among the respondents' opinions is that the party system in Kazakhstan is in the development stage and it still demands a lot of work and improvements. Thus, Bagdan (D) states:

There is a nucleus of the party system. We need time for people to change their mentality. Society should be more enterprising and in the future, it will have an effect on the party system.<sup>7</sup>

Being a deputy, Bagdan supposedly feels a responsibility to provide reliable answers. However, I assume that he did not want to provide too harsh a critique of the government. On the other hand, Olzhas (PW) argues that the party system in Kazakhstan is quite strong as there are three parties in the Parliament and they are able to represent the interests of different social groups.<sup>8</sup> “The Parliament should get more power”, argues Kairat (D).<sup>9</sup> Despite the opinion that the party system is ill-developed in Kazakhstan and political parties are often treated as a secondary political body, the answers reflect the point of view that Nur Otan is functioning as a democratic institution. The fact that respondents expressed a wish to have a multiparty system in Kazakhstan is the best example of their willingness to represent Nur Otan as a party, promoting democratic reforms.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, October 28, 2016.

<sup>7</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 20, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, December, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 14, 2017.

## Democratization

Aigul (PW) understands the concept of ‘democratization’ as being in “full compliance with the Constitution” and she states that people should obey the laws.<sup>10</sup> However, she does not believe that democracy is always the best regime, and at the same time argues that Kazakhstan is going in the right direction.<sup>11</sup> In turn, Iskander (PW) describes democracy as “governance by people”.<sup>12</sup> He also thinks that democracy is not the best regime, but nothing better has been created yet.<sup>13</sup> It is interesting that even though Kazakhstan officially declares itself a democracy, respondents, except for some cases, rarely define Kazakhstan as a real democracy. For example, Iskander (PW) defines the regime in Kazakhstan as immature democracy and he believes that Kazakhstan can adapt to democracy under its conditions.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Iskander supposes that in order to become a fully democratic state Kazakhstan should bring up a new generation in accordance with the democratic values.<sup>15</sup>

Bagdan (D) agrees with Iskander’s definition of a democratic system. However, he also argues that there is no universal democracy and, in fact, democracy can develop into chaos.<sup>16</sup>

He adds:

When there are too many opinions, it can slow down the work. From the perspective of progress and onward movement, democracy is not the best type of governance. It is better to have a mix – when there is a strong leader with necessary powers available to him which allow a state to develop. Kazakhstan needs to develop a civil society to become stronger and more free.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, October 28, 2016.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 11, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 11, 2016.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 20, 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Thus, the deputy does not support the opinion regarding the superiority of democracy and he talks about the importance of the people in the political processes which occur in the state.

Aigerim (PW) describes democracy as the regime that provides freedoms but at the same time, it demands a lot.<sup>18</sup> She claims that “a state should meet particular requirements and develop special conditions for democracy. It is not a matter of one or even two years.”<sup>19</sup> In addition, Aigerim defines Kazakhstani political regime as transitional.<sup>20</sup>

Kairat (D) thinks:

Democracy is when people live in compliance with the laws. Rank and status of a person do not matter. There are no violations of rights and freedoms of the citizens.<sup>21</sup>

He also believes that Kazakhstan has a democratic system and that there is a strong person on the top who soundly has the power and who is building the foundation for future prosperity of Kazakhstan.<sup>22</sup> It is worth noticing that both Nur Otan deputies refer to the President and the Chairman of the party, Nursultan Nazarbayev, as a strong leader and guarantor of the present and future Kazakhstani successes. These opinions support hypothesis 3 that states that the role of the President is highly important in the political decision-making process.

### Modernization

According to Olzhas (PW), modernization is an inevitable process if a country is developing well.<sup>23</sup> However, he thinks that it is a permanent process, not something that can

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<sup>18</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 9, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 14, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, December, 1.

be ultimately finished and that there is always a chance to become a better state.<sup>24</sup> Aigerim (PW) points out that she does not see the direct effect of this process, but she thinks that modernization is going gradually, step by step and that it has its effect on the political system.<sup>25</sup> Iskander (PW) believes that modernization is a new revolution and that exactly such revolution should occur in the political system of Kazakhstan: something completely new.<sup>26</sup> Besides, Iskander argues that every change should begin from the people, and they should be more open.<sup>27</sup> Respondents in unison talk about the importance of economic modernization for Kazakhstan, that Nur Otan is completely ready for the changes, and that the party can cope with the challenges of this process. It seems that only one respondent argues that many other processes happening in the state harm the modernization process. Thus, Aigerim (PW) claims that because of the lack of experience among officials, lack of knowledge among specialists, and persistent corruption in the regions, modernization is slow and state's investment into modernization of economy does not help to foster modernization.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, she is not critical of the President himself.<sup>29</sup>

Dauren (PW) characterizes the process of modernization in Kazakhstan as follows:

The process is going, but sometimes we have to step back in order to take several steps forward. Many Kazakhstani projects did not progress well because of several problems: a lack of money or circumvention of the rules and laws. On the other hand, modernization should not go out of the control. It should be accountable to the state.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, Dauren states that modernization has a positive impact on the party and that “the majority of the deputies in the Parliament is from Nur Otan”, he also points out that the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 9, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 11, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 9, 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 15, 2016.



party controls “Nurly Zhol”, “100 concrete steps” strategies, and Eurasian integration”.<sup>31</sup> Dauren finds an excuse for the slowness of modernization and, just like Aigul, points out some common problems in Kazakhstan, for example, corruption.<sup>32</sup> However, even though both respondents mention serious problems which affect the development of the state, they blame neither the government nor the President and this supports Hypothesis 3 regarding the importance of Nazarbayev’s opinion. They do not express any opinion in regards to how to address these problems.

Bagdan (D) argues that modernization is an adequate response to new challenges which stand in front of Kazakhstan.<sup>33</sup> Kairat (D) sees the main manifestation of the modernization process in the increased awareness of political realities among the citizens.<sup>34</sup>

#### Mass participation

Iskander (PW) emphasizes that Nur Otan has a lot of resources and practices to listen to the voices of the public and to meet their requirements, as well as to provide help and support.<sup>35</sup> Aigul (PW) is sure that people are becoming more active and that they try to make Kazakhstan better.<sup>36</sup> She also believes that

Our party does not simply listen to the national interests but Nur Otan itself represents national interests. I also think that it is good that there is a diversity of opinions, because the more opinions we have, the better we can understand the root of the problem and find the best solution to it.<sup>37</sup>

When answering questions about mass participation, Dauren (PW) asks: “Do authorities believe that they are responsible for the well-being of citizens?”<sup>38</sup> He argues that elites

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 20, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 14, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 11, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, October 28, 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 15, 2016.

sometimes lose the “feeling of home”.<sup>39</sup> “At home, people do not litter and do not hide trash under the carpet,” he elaborates and adds that the same should be in politics.<sup>40</sup> Dauren concludes that absolutely every opinion matters and should not be lost.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, if not to control the mood of the population it can lead to negative consequences.<sup>42</sup> Aigerim (PW) and Olzhas (PW) think that mobilization among the citizens has increased in recent time and is only going to increase.<sup>43</sup> Both respondents think so because people tend to visit their office more often and to express their opinions more active.

At the same time, both Bagdan (D) and Kairat (D) have noticed that citizens are becoming more active, especially because of social networks. Kairat argues that people begin to read political and the economic news and that they better understand the situation in the world and Kazakhstan.<sup>44</sup> Bagdan (D) also adds:

People appeal to the deputies with absolutely different questions: from those of the personal character to complaints and suggestions. Every week there are “open receptions” and meetings with citizens.<sup>45</sup> All these appeals are analyzed and systemized and then the information is collected and transferred to the necessary organs. Without people, the parties do not have any meaning. Getting information and feedback from the citizens is one of the most important aspects of the work of every party.<sup>46</sup>

In general, according to the respondents, people have become more active, and social networks play a particularly significant role in this. Also, the respondents say that Nur Otan is constantly expanding its capacities and that now it is possible to send a request, offer, or complain to the party online, or make an appointment with a deputy without leaving home.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 9, 2016 and Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, December, 1.

<sup>44</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 14, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> “Open receptions” are office hours, when every citizen has an opportunity to come to the party and ask a question, advice, or propose something.

<sup>46</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 20, 2017.

The respondents also were asked about the proposed amendment of the law on land privatization and the general mood of the answers was that it was the fault of the people that they were not able to understand the meaning of this bill. Iskander (PW), for example, states that the majority of the people who protested had a very poor educational background.<sup>47</sup> He thinks that in order to avoid such situations in the future, quality of education should be improved in Kazakhstan.<sup>48</sup> This may mean that the government, or at least the party, does not want to take the blame for the information gap that led to unexpected consequences.

### Expectations

Iskander (PW) believes that the modernization process in Kazakhstan can have a successful path and that the most important thing is to believe in the common idea, to follow the main principles, and to move to the common goal.<sup>49</sup> He also suggests that the people are the most decisive factor influencing the outcome of modernization.<sup>50</sup> Iskander also assumes that the hegemony of one dominant political party does not leave space for the real competition and that the weak opposition does not contribute to the general development of the state.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, Aigul (PW) thinks that modernization can be successful if all Kazakhstanis rally around one leader.<sup>52</sup> It is interesting, that one of the members of the party of power does not support the position of one party's domination and he suggests having more chances for the opposition to develop. At the same time, another member emphasizes the importance of the President in the process of modernization that can potentially weaken his power.

Dauren (PW), when asked about the “Kazakhstan-2050” and the “100 concrete steps”, explains:

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<sup>47</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 11, 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, October 28, 2016.

We are trying our best! Even if we successfully accomplish at least 50% or 30% of the aimed results - it is a huge progress, because we have long-term perspectives and a big plan of actions. Nowadays we have a multiparty system, but not developed one. Why is single-party system good? It is because this party can make the real decisions. When there are many parties, the decision-making process can take a longer time. Moreover, if we built a democratic system, similar to democracy in Germany, for example, it can lead to chaos, because we need to prepare for it. We should prepare society and institutions to a democratic system.<sup>53</sup>

Bagdan (D) says that Kazakhstan should completely get rid of the Soviet mentality and become more open to changes.<sup>54</sup> Then, modernization can occur successfully and smoothly, emphasizes Bagdan.<sup>55</sup> Regarding the duration of the dominant position of Nur Otan he says:

It is a question to other parties themselves. There is always somebody who takes the leading position and such kind of domination can go from one party to another. I expect parties to become stronger with time and that it depends on the people who want to support parties, their activity and initiatives.<sup>56</sup>

One of the most important evidence found in the answers regarding modernization is that the role of the President should not be decreased and that Kazakhstan is not completely ready to become democracy right now under the present circumstances. However, nothing significant was discussed and what is more, proposed about the real potentialities for a democratic transition and for the weakening of the patrimonialism in the state.

### **Textual analysis**

In the following section, I present my textual analysis of publications of Nur Otan. The choice of articles is justified by the overarching topic – modernization. To be more precise, I analyze the publications on the following topics: suggested amendments to the privatization

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<sup>53</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of “Nur Otan” party, November 15, 2016.

<sup>54</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 20, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

law, changes in the Constitution regarding the redistribution of power, and the floating rate of the Tenge.

On the official webpage of the party, any person can find a link to the news in Kazakhstan. It is worth mentioning, that many of them are borrowed from other news portals and informational sources. First of all, I analyze one article concerning the last Address of the President to the nation (January 31, 2017). This address is named as the “Third Modernization of Kazakhstan” and the President there shares with the nation about the achievements of the country for 25 years of independence. He also sets new goals, development trends, and priorities in front of the state. One of the central purposes is that “Kazakhstan shall join the world’s top 30 developed countries by 2050”.<sup>57</sup>

The first article has a strong heading: “Kazakhstan is on the verge of grandiose transformations”. What is special about this article is that it presents different opinions on the President’s Address not exclusively on behalf of politicians, also of ordinary citizens of Kazakhstan. All the comments have an exclusively positive character, the people praise the Leader of the Nation, and the respondents are excited within the temptation of the upcoming “third modernization”:

I am immensely happy that our leader has such a progressive perspective on economic trends. I have a strong feeling that our President has the unique gift of the seer. He is able to look into the future. This is confirmed by all the 25 years of the triumphant ascent of independent Kazakhstan. Special Address of Nursultan Abishevich is literally loaded by the new dynamics of development. No one knows how to inspire, as our President.<sup>58</sup>

Another article describes the series of meetings held by the deputies of the Majilis, traveling around the regions. They explained changes that occur in Kazakhstan to citizens and

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<sup>57</sup> For more information follow the link: [http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses\\_of\\_president/the-president-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayevs-address-to-the-nation-of-kazakhstan-january-31-2017](http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president/the-president-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayevs-address-to-the-nation-of-kazakhstan-january-31-2017).

<sup>58</sup> Article on January 31, 2017. For more information follow the link: <http://nurotan.kz/single-article?id=PwEWPNs3dMBPPy7fu&lang=ru>.

shared their interpretation of the Constitutional reforms with the public. For instance, Kuralay Galieva, a deputy of the Majilis from Nur Otan, stated that modernization is rather a bridge to the future for achieving the "Kazakhstan-2050" strategy than a way to fight with global challenges.<sup>59</sup> Another deputy of the Majilis, Baidilda Zhykyshiev, shared the same opinion and stated that the two previous modernizations brought significant results and while the world economy is experiencing difficulties, Kazakhstan was able to overcome economic difficulties and join the list of 50 countries with a competitive economy.<sup>60</sup> Finally, Farhad Kuanganov, Secretary of Nur Otan, stressed that this stage of modernization has a socio-economic nature and that it will lead to an increase in the standards of living of citizens, to political stabilization and economic development of Kazakhstan.<sup>61</sup>

Concerning the redistribution of power between the state and the Parliament, all the authorities unanimously support this amendment to the Constitution that is initiated by the President. Thus, one of the articles states:

The national coalition of democratic forces completely supported the new edition of the Basic Law, noting the crucial importance of maintaining a strong presidential power and fixing the special role of the founder of independent Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, in the updated Constitution.<sup>62</sup>

According to another article, the redistribution of power strengthens the role of the Parliament, as well as Nur Otan, in the legislative and political life of the state:

Earlier, the deputies of the Parliament were able to suggest their recommendations to the Government. However, they did not possess the

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<sup>59</sup> Article on February 24, 2017. For more information follow the link: <http://nurotan.kz/single-news?id=8mvBQptfGekSuGPHg&lang=ru>.

<sup>60</sup> Article on February 10, 2017. For more information follow the link: <http://nurotan.kz/single-news?id=hw5iLmdtAmhyq2pLF&lang=ru>.

<sup>61</sup> Article on March 14, 2017. For more information follow the link: <http://nurotan.kz/single-news?id=Bj8iwof9qw5nMJ6cF&lang=ru>.

<sup>62</sup> Article on March 10, 2017. For more information follow the link: <http://nurotan.kz/single-news?id=o4yaJKZZhyZ48ht79&lang=ru>.

real influence and power. Now, when amendments to the Basic Law have been adopted, the power of the Parliament deputies and their responsibility will increase. This means that their function will be fully realized.<sup>63</sup>

The articles described above tell about the positive changes in the country. However, in order to have a complete picture, it is important to take a look at how not the most pleasant news is reflected on the news portal of the party of power. For example, the proposed changes to the Land Code brought some troubles to the country. According to the interviews, it is possible to conclude that the respondents most often blame wrong perceptions of amendments to Land Code among citizens themselves. However, one of the articles describes the meeting of Mukhtar Kul-Muhammed with the teaching staff of the Kazakh National Agrarian University and points out:

The teaching staff of the Kazakh National Agrarian University absolutely supported the position of the state on the land issue. They also have paid special attention to the importance of attracting foreign investments to the country's agriculture, just like developed Western innovations in the field of livestock and crop production.<sup>64</sup>

This excerpt of the article sets the reader up for constructing a certain opinion on the amendments to the Land Code. To be more precise, it makes it clear that ordinary people supported the initiative of the government to make changes in this law. However, in the reality, many people did not support it. It can be connected to Iskander's (PW) opinion that the lack of education led people to revolt.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, regarding the devaluation of the Tenge that occurred in 2015, Galym Bainazarov, Ex-Chairman of the National Bank, said that the transition to a floating Tenge rate was a necessary action for Kazakhstan in order to adopt a new economic course. It also

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<sup>63</sup> Article on March 1, 2017. For more information follow the link: <http://nurotan.kz/single-article?id=ra8nKFCWE9T7GMXZ6&lang=ru>.

<sup>64</sup> Article on June 3, 2016. For more information follow the link: <http://old.nurotan.kz/ru/news/16037>.

<sup>65</sup> Interview, Central apparatus of "Nur Otan" party, November 11, 2016.

takes into account the real exchange rate of the foreign currency. Bainazarov also mentioned that such measures have already been practiced in Russia, Japan, and other countries.<sup>66</sup>

## **Discussion**

According to the answers of Nur Otan members, it is clear that respondents are confident in the party of power and in its influence in the state. Though some respondents said about the benefit of the real political competition, few people talked about other parties at all. Moreover, there is a settled opinion among the respondents that a dominant party should always exist, even if it is not Nur Otan. It is needless to say, that the majority of the answers emphasize the strong personality of the President. Indeed, many respondents, when asked about democratization and modernization in Kazakhstan, referred to Nursultan Nazarbayev, as the main core of processes in the state. They also argue that these processes can be successful only if citizens unify around the President. No one expresses a serious critique of the government or of the President either in the interviews or in the articles analyzed.

However, this observation comes as no surprise, because parties even in the liberal democracies behave in a similar way. For example, if to check the official webpage of Democratic Party of the United States, the same tendency of presidential support (now former President, Barack Obama) is noticed. In this way, the former President is praised throughout the texts that tell the reader how Obama administration contributed to civil rights, education, environment, national security and many other issues. Democrats highlight the progress of the country during the years of Obama's rule:

Democrats want to protect and build on President Obama's progress.<sup>67</sup>

President Obama made significant steps to keep America safe and restore America's image around the world by rebuilding strategic

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<sup>66</sup> Article on August 20, 2015. For more information follow the link: <http://old.nurotan.kz/ru/news/11252>.

<sup>67</sup> Official webpage of Democratic Party, USA. For more information follow the link: <https://www.democrats.org/issues/environment>.



alliances with countries that share our values and face common threats. Democrats will continue to build on and protect that progress.<sup>68</sup>

However, despite this similarity, there is one significant difference in these cases. In Kazakhstan, there is no possible way to criticize the President. Even opposition parties praise Nazarbayev and his rule. On the other hand, in the United States, the President can be publicly criticized. I used this comparison in order to demonstrate that it is usual thing when a party of power supports the President, especially is s/he is the leader of this party.

Turning to Huntington's discussion, Nur Otan is a "complex" party with the number of projects and subunits, and it is quite "coherent" as all the members are united around the President's personality. The party is "autonomous" from the perspective of addressing the interests of different social groups. However, it is not "autonomous" from the perspective of close connection to the President's personality. Nur Otan has a high proportion of representation in the Parliament and plays the dominant role in the decision-making process. At the same time, it makes the party not "adaptive" to subsequent environmental challenges, which, in turn, demand the share of power and transparent decision-making process in order for democratization to occur. In addition, the party is not "adaptive" as since the first year of the party's existence, Nur Otan still has been ruled by the first and the only leader, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Huntington 1965). To summarize, the level of institutionalization of Nur Otan is incomplete or partial.

Besides, many party members do not tend to express any thoughts that the party can lose its dominant position of power. In opposite, workers and deputies believe that under the best conditions the party will become only stronger. Also, interview answers refer to the unity inside of the political party. It is largely supported by the articles, which are written in the manner that Nur Otan and the Kazakhstani government can cope with any problems. This support Hypotheses 2 which states that the party of power is more institutionalized than small

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<sup>68</sup> Official webpage of Democratic Party, USA. For more information follow the link: <https://www.democrats.org/issues/national-security>.

opposition parties but it delays modernization by controlling the opposition and reforms aimed at political liberalization. Also, Hypothesis 3, which states that acceptance of democratic reforms depends on the wish of the President, seems to be supported.

## **Chapter 5. Empirical Findings. Ak Zhol and Its Hopes for a Better Future**

The main office of Ak Zhol is located in the center of Astana, which probably makes it easier for ordinary citizens to approach the party. It was not very problematic to recruit workers of Ak Zhol for the interview. On the contrary, it was difficult to approach deputies from Ak Zhol. Even if it was easy to find the contacts of the deputies' assistants, it took a very long time to schedule interviews with deputies. Speaking about my empirical findings from interviews, party workers can be divided into two groups: those who are satisfied with the current situation in Kazakhstan and those who are more critical of the system. However, neither of respondents criticizes the President of Kazakhstan. According to the interview answers, it is possible to draw a conclusion that the level of unity in Ak Zhol is comparatively lower than in Nur Otan. In the following chapter, I analyze 5 interviews with the party workers and one interview with the deputy of the Majilis. Later, I present results from textual analysis of publications found on the official webpage of the party.

### The role of political parties and the party system in Kazakhstan

Ak Zhol party workers agree that a political party plays a significant role in the political life of Kazakhstan and works for the benefit of citizens through mediating appeals of the society to the Parliament. However, Makpal (PW) adds that only those parties that have a real power to influence the course of events in Kazakhstan have seats in the Majilis.<sup>69</sup> Almas (PW) emphasizes that “political parties are necessary for Kazakhstan and if there is no political alternative to the dominant party, there will not be any progress, only stagnation. It is all about competition”.<sup>70</sup> Later, he adds: “The party system in Kazakhstan is only emerging because the country is young”.<sup>71</sup> In short, the respondents point out that competition between political parties is an important part of a multiparty system.

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<sup>69</sup> Interview, Café, November 3, 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, November 2, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

An Ak Zhol deputy, Nurzhan (D), claims that the party system is important for Kazakhstan, but at the same time, it is not strong. In general, he suggests that a two-party system is the best one as there is real competition between two parties, whereas others will try to enter the competition.<sup>72</sup>

Aidar (PW) emphasizes the role of Ak Zhol and points out that “today there is a party in the Majilis which represents the interests of people who are connected to business and this party is Ak Zhol”.<sup>73</sup> He also adds that Ak Zhol contributes to the development of small and medium business in Kazakhstan.<sup>74</sup> In addition, Nurgeldy (PW) believes that Ak Zhol brings benefit to people it represents and says: “In the Parliament, Ak Zhol representatives demand that there are no excessive requirements in the new legislation. We represent an alternative political opinion in Kazakhstan and by that protect people”.<sup>75</sup> In comparison to Nur Otan, Ak Zhol represents the interests of a concrete group of society and according to Huntington (1965), this party is less “autonomous”.

### Democratization

Azamat (PW) claims that freedom of speech is the central feature of a democratic system.<sup>76</sup> He believes that democracy is the best regime and that Kazakhstan will become a democracy with time, but now work of the opposition is restricted. He also adds that “rushing affects the quality”.<sup>77</sup> Almas (PW) argues that in order to develop politically, Kazakhstan needs to improve its economy.<sup>78</sup> He points out that Kazakhstan needs a “steady hand” due to its historical background and a big territory.<sup>79</sup> While Aidar (PW) says that in Kazakhstan there occurs a transition to a democratic system, Nurgeldy (PW) states that Kazakhstan is a

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<sup>72</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 8, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, November 10, 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, November 10, 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, October 28, 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, November 2, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

democracy.<sup>80</sup> However, he claims that the leading party has the dominant position in the political arena and only this party has a real impact on politics in Kazakhstan. He believes that such a situation constrains democracy in Kazakhstan and that there exists “a single fist: the President determines what to do and other parties have no chance to do something”.<sup>81</sup> This claim supports Hypothesis 2 which states that the party of power constrains opposition in making changes, as well as Hypothesis 3 concerning the importance of the President’s approval of reforms.

Nurzhan (D) refers to W.S. Churchill’s quote, and states that “democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the others”.<sup>82</sup> The deputy also says that there is de facto a single-party system in Kazakhstan and that other parties should have more chances for growth.<sup>83</sup> Again, it supports Hypothesis 2 about constrained opposition by the party of power.

### Modernization

Nurgeldy (PW) talks about economic modernization with a positive emphasis and sees good perspectives in the future of Ak Zhol.<sup>84</sup> He emphasizes that people, and especially businessmen, are becoming more and more interested in Ak Zhol since the party cares about their interests and tries to help them when it is possible.<sup>85</sup> Almas (PW) also believes that modernization has a positive impact on the society and the lives of people, and he states that “when people do not have to think where to find money for bread and do not have to limit themselves, they are more politically active”.<sup>86</sup> Azamat (PW) agrees with this opinion and shares his thought that the middle class is growing and it serves as a positive indicator of the

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<sup>80</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, November 10, 2016.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 8, 2017.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, November 10, 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, November 2, 2016.

improvements in life conditions.<sup>87</sup> He also tends to believe that modernization can lead to a more balanced political situation between parties in Kazakhstan.<sup>88</sup>

On the contrary, Nurzhan (D) argues that the process of modernization is developing poorly.<sup>89</sup> He adds:

There were too big expectations and hopes. However, this is the fault of the parties themselves, as they become active right before the elections, while they have to work continuously. Parties remember about the people only when they need their votes, and that is why people have apathy.<sup>90</sup>

When asked about perspectives of Ak Zhol after Kazakhstan is modernized, Nurzhan (D) answered: “It will be great if all political parties are funded from the state budget. Thus, they all will have the similar financial conditions at the starting point”.<sup>91</sup> Finally, he concludes, that parties are like organisms, which should work permanently and should always look for improvements and ways of development.<sup>92</sup> In conclusion, while party workers seem enthusiastic about the economic modernization, the deputy of the Majilis from Ak Zhol has a more critical view on the development of this process.

#### Mass participation

Azamat (PW) and Almas (PW) argue that political participation among citizens is becoming more active and that people express their interests more confidently. Thanks to that Ak Zhol has votes and seats in the Majilis.<sup>93</sup>

On the other hand, Makpal (PW), Nurgeldy (PW), and Aidar (PW) think that the general population in Kazakhstan is politically inactive and that people do not wish to participate in

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<sup>87</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, October 28, 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 8, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, October 28, 2016 and Interview, “Ak Zhol” party office, November 2, 2016.

politics.<sup>94</sup> Thus, they add that while many people express their thoughts in social networks, much less are ready to come to Ak Zhol with their suggestions.

Regarding the uprisings that happened in Kazakhstan due to amendments to the Land Code, Azamat (PW) argues that it is the fault of both the government and the people.<sup>95</sup> The former could not properly present the information to people, while protestors were not able to make at least some effort to understand new amendments.

Nurzhan (D) points out that meetings with the voters are the main indicator of the party's activity. Besides, the deputy underlines that when traveling around the regions, Ak Zhol deputies try to visit two or three regions instead of one necessary and to conduct as many meetings with people as possible.<sup>96</sup> It supports hypothesis 1 that small parties try to communicate with politically active citizens in order to receive more votes and power.

### Expectations

Nurgeldy (PW) claims that the political course Kazakhstan is decided by one person and the minor parties do not have the real influence to change something. He thinks that with time the political arena will become more open for competition.<sup>97</sup> Azamat (PW) agrees with this expectation and supposes that many parties themselves will be more active and get more opportunities.<sup>98</sup> In addition, Almas (PW) says that he has already noticed a positive impact of the process of economic modernization in Kazakhstan. He adds: "Politics is becoming more transparent and the interests of people are more often taken into account".<sup>99</sup> Contrary to this, Makpal (PW) challenges the opinion about the successful outcome of the modernization process in the nearest future. She thinks that there is only willingness to modernize, but the

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<sup>94</sup> Interview, Café, November 3, 2016; Interview, "Ak Zhol" party office, November 10, 2016; Interview, "Ak Zhol" party office, November 10, 2016.

<sup>95</sup> Interview, "Ak Zhol" party office, October 28, 2016.

<sup>96</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 8, 2017.

<sup>97</sup> Interview, "Ak Zhol" party office, November 10, 2016.

<sup>98</sup> Interview, "Ak Zhol" party office, October 28, 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Interview, "Ak Zhol" party office, November 2, 2016.

opportunities for this are limited.<sup>100</sup> In general, the majority of respondents believe that their party can become more powerful in the future and perform even better.

Nurzhan (D) believes in a successful outcome of the modernization process, but as time passes.<sup>101</sup> Answering the question about the “Kazakhstan-2050” he says that it will be better to speak about it in 2050.<sup>102</sup>

### **Textual analysis**

There are three articles that fit the topic of the last Address of the President to the nation. In general, all articles inform about the interpretation of the Address by the deputies of Ak Zhol. Two articles describe the regional trips of three Ak Zhol deputies: Arthur Platonov, Dina Espaeva, and Gleb Schegelsky, and their meetings with the people where politicians explained the prospects of economic and political reforms. These articles follow the same pattern: deputies support the initiative of the President and ensure citizens that this Address will have only good consequences for Kazakhstan. For example, Artur Platonov explains:

Today, in our democratic society, our primary interest lies in the political changes: redistribution of power between the Government and the Parliament. We are also interested in the reforms in education, and health care, about which the leader of the nation spoke during his Address.<sup>103</sup>

The second article combines the discussion of the deputies about two Addresses that the President made in the beginning of this year. Dina Espaeva elaborates:

The President transmits part of his powers to the Parliament and it means – to the people. And on your behalf, we, members of the three parties and the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, after hearing the report of the Government, can ask uneasy questions to its members. I

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<sup>100</sup> Interview, Café, November 3, 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 8, 2017.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Article on February 4, 2017. For more information follow the link: <http://akzhol.kz/ru/news/show/10852/118/127>.



think this is the progress of democracy, and we all have moved a step forward. However, this does not reduce the role of the President.<sup>104</sup>

Finally, in the last article Azat Peruashev, Chairman of Ak Zhol, shares his opinion and states that Nursultan Nazarbayev's Address to the Nation of Kazakhstan on eighty percent is dedicated to the questions of economic support and to the formation of a new economy for Kazakhstan.<sup>105</sup>

One article that is written by a journalist, Talgat Ibrayev, attracts attention in terms of its content. The article speaks about human rights defenders and argues that they are, probably, not objective. The article describes the riots that happened in 2014 in the USA. Then, the article turns to the question: why does Freedom House describe peaceful Kazakhstan as "not free", while Ukraine which is "embraced by a bloody civil war" as "partly free", and the United States as completely "free"? The article expresses extreme dissatisfaction with this definition of the Kazakhstani regime and it tries to reject such "labeling".<sup>106</sup> This article seems interesting since according to it the almost total absence of unrest (with the exception of some cases) in Kazakhstan is equaled to the presence of democratic regime. Thus, the author makes some comparisons with the uprisings in the United States and with the civil war in Ukraine. He argues that the international community is mistaken by defining peaceful Kazakhstan as a non-free country with constrained civil liberties. The article is written not by Ak Zhol workers but the fact that it is published on the official webpage of the party speaks about some support of the author's view.

Turning to other topics in regards to the modernization process, one of the articles speaks about recommendations to citizens related to the devaluation of the Tenge. Azat Peruashev

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<sup>104</sup> Article on February 7, 2017. For more information follow the link: <http://akzhol.kz/ru/news/show/10891/118/127>.

<sup>105</sup> Article on February 9, 2017. For more information follow the link: <http://akzhol.kz/ru/news/show/10873/118/127>.

<sup>106</sup> Article on February 3, 2015. For more information follow the link: <http://akzhol.kz/ru/news/show/5092/c127.html>.

advises getting used to the thought that devaluation is not the worst thing because the worst is yet to come if people do not change their approaches:

That is why we have to modify ourselves: change our habits, demands, and budgets. We should create a hierarchy of priorities, stay with the most important and give up the secondary. I completely support our government and the National Bank on this issue: we have to live within our means and should not spend more than we earn.<sup>107</sup>

The next article is dedicated to the issue of corruption. According to this article, Ak Zhol suggests prohibiting officials and managers of national companies to have bank accounts and other properties abroad. This measure is supposed to serve as a counteraction to corruption and withdrawal of funds from Kazakhstan.<sup>108</sup> In addition, a set of other improvements is suggested: to introduce an effective control over the external operations of second-tier banks; to reform the public procurement system, to organize public control over the operators of public funds, and have less state-owned companies in the Kazakhstani economy, where they replace private enterprises. Peruashev also thinks that it is necessary to cooperate more closely with international organizations that oppose money laundering and the transit of illicit capital.<sup>109</sup>

Finally, turning to the issue of amendments to the Land Code, one of the articles states that Peruashev's opinion on this issue is highly critical. Moreover, the Chairman of Ak Zhol sent a number of proposals to the Land Code suggesting a tightening of control over the proper usage of land. He also suggested withdrawing the land from the companies whose authorized capital includes foreigners.<sup>110</sup>

## **Discussion:**

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Azat Peruashev.

<sup>108</sup> Article on March 4, 2013. For more information follow the link: <http://akzhol.kz/ru/news/show/2743/4.html>.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

Like in the previous analysis of Nur Otan's publications, in this section I focus on the topics related to the modernization process. The most noticeable and important evidence is that the majority of the articles are built around the name of the Chairman of the party, Azat Peruashev.

Following the insights of Huntington (1965), it seems that the level of institutionalization of Ak Zhol is not very high. Indeed, Ak Zhol is not "autonomous" as it works in the majority with one social group: entrepreneurs. Also, it does not seem very "complex" because of the absence of subunits. On the other hand, according to the interviews, Ak Zhol is to some extent "adaptable" and more or less "coherent". Thus, for example, based on the historical background of the party I can assume that Ak Zhol could address some challenges: overcome the schism in 2004, increase its electorate and to get united around the common goal to improve conditions for business in Kazakhstan.

Interviews reflect that the party members are to some extent critical of the absence of opportunities for a strong opposition, but they also do not criticize the President. On the contrary, just like Nur Otan, Ak Zhol respondents emphasize the importance of a strong leader who can lead the country.

Both interviews and texts say that the party is absolutely open to reforms and tends to propose many suggestions to the government. From the textual analysis, one can see that Ak Zhol did not completely support amendments in the Land Code and that Peruashev, as Chairman of the party, was able to express his critical view to this issue.

I would like to elaborate on the issue of why can this opposition party (even though the party is considered as a soft opposition) criticize some state's policies, but never the President.

Due to Soviet socialism, people in Central Asian states have a special view on the relations between citizens and the state, on the role of the state in the economy and society,

and on the image of the “perfect” state itself (Liu 2003, 226). For example, in his article, Liu (2003) speaks about Islam Karimov’s ruling. Karimov was the first President of Uzbekistan, well-known for his harsh ruling. Liu (2003) describes his talk with an Uzbek man, “active democracy booster”, who found a plausible justification for Karimov’s ruling. To be more precise, this Uzbek man claims that taking into account the authoritarian nature of the state and Karimov’s regime, the alternative ruling could lead to chaos (Liu 2003, 227).

This can explain what the author calls “collective obsession” about the President and “state paternalism” that prevails in the region (Liu 2003, 228). Making a brief conclusion, Uzbek citizens (though I believe that it can be implied to other Central Asian countries) identify characteristics of the state with the personality of the incumbent; they also think that the state should play an important role in the economy and the society of the republic. People also tend to believe that the change of mentality is necessary in order to get rid of the Soviet past (Liu 2003, 230). In short, people in the region prefer harsh governance rather than chaos.

This discussion can help to understand why political parties do not criticize Nazarbayev. Also, it supports Hypothesis 3: that the implementation of many reforms in the state depends on the opinion of the President.

The fact that in three Parliamentary parties I could only interview a few deputies questions the party’s openness to public and readiness for mass participation. It does not support Hypothesis 1 that states that small opposition parties are going to be more open to mass participation. On the other hand, party members state that they do not have enough power to have a real voice in the political arena of Kazakhstan, even though the party proposes a lot of reforms. It supports Hypothesis 2. This hypothesis points out that Nur Otan constrains the work of opposition parties.

## **Chapter 6. Empirical Findings. Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan: When Words and Reality Do Not Always Correspond**

A follower of the main ideology of the former Soviet Union, the CPPK was the most difficult party to access. The problem was that the structure of the party supposes that the deputies of the Majilis decide whether or not party workers are authorized to do something. Taking into account the fact that the deputies were busy most of the time, the decision-making process was slow. As a result, I analyze two interviews in this chapter: one with the deputy of the Majilis and one with the party worker. According to the interviews, I can conclude that the party worker is more critical than the deputy, who rather seems loyal to the Kazakhstani regime and to the President.

### The role of political parties and the party system in Kazakhstan

Aidyn (PW) speaks about the importance of political parties:

There are no mistakes in the work of our President and there is no necessity to grab the power. However, there should be political parties which can point to some shortcomings. We serve as the wholesome criticism.<sup>111</sup>

However, he also provides a critique of the party system in Kazakhstan because there are strong restrictions, the absence of free access to mass media, and inability to compete against the ruling party.<sup>112</sup> Aidyn's arguments can serve as a strong support for Hypothesis 3 that parties are never critical of the President and rely on his decisions in the modernization process.

Saken (D) seems more loyal to party system in Kazakhstan. Indeed, the deputy of the Majilis argues that the party system in Kazakhstan is well-developed. Moreover, there are all the potentialities and conditions for a race for power.<sup>113</sup>

### Democratization

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<sup>111</sup> Interview, CPPK office, November 15, 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 1, 2017.

Saken (D) provides a detailed explanation of democracy:

Democracy can be characterized by political equality, a possibility to elect and to be elected. I would mention here the free and fair elections as a method of forming a government; guarantee of the rights and freedoms of individuals; equal responsibility before the law and protection by the law. I can broaden the list. However, these principles are the basic in my understanding of the concept of ‘democracy’.<sup>114</sup>

A deputy also emphasizes the key factors of the transition from a non-democratic to a democratic regime:

I would name several aspects of this process: firstly, economic growth and political situation in a state, the maturity of civil society to accept and to use democratic norms. It is also the ability of the state apparatus and power structures to exercise the power in accordance with democratic principles. The second important condition is the readiness of the ruling class as elites to accomplish such a transition.<sup>115</sup>

Finally, Saken (D) adds that Kazakhstan has a democratic system but it is necessary to determine which country serves as an orienteer of a “model democracy” and what the best example of this regime is.<sup>116</sup>

Aidyn (PW) argues that democracy is the regime when everybody has a right to say whatever s/he thinks and no punishment will follow.<sup>117</sup> When asked about the regime in Kazakhstan, Aidyn says: “We say that we have a democratic state – but today there is a restriction on mass media. There is no access to compete with the leading party”.<sup>118</sup> He also points out that all the countries should emulate democracy but political parties should not simply shout and criticize everything, but rather they should suggest solutions.<sup>119</sup>

### Modernization

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Interview, CPPK office, November 15, 2016.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

Aidyn (PW) believes that as time goes, Kazakhstan will become a real parliamentary-presidential republic and the power will not be concentrated exclusively by only person.<sup>120</sup> He also notices that there are positive changes in politics: people are becoming more active and feel a responsibility for their decisions.<sup>121</sup>

Saken (D) would describe the process of modernization in Kazakhstan as “smooth”, corresponding to the economic and political readiness of the state and society to the transition to a new stage of development.<sup>122</sup> He elaborates:

For 13 years of the CPPK’s existence, we have become organizationally stronger and ideologically more united. We have created the program of actions which unifies the plans and goals of the party with the realism of opportunities. Our party is represented in the Majilis, and the number of those who voted for CPPK as well as party’s supporters has grown. We have a staff renewal, young and active generation of partisans taking high positions in the central and regional departments of the party.<sup>123</sup>

In addition, the deputy adds that CPPK uses all the possible allowed by the legislature forms and methods of political activity to work with society and that is why modernization will broaden the range of opportunities for further political growth for the party.<sup>124</sup>

#### Mass participation

Saken (D) argues that the opinion of every member and supporter is important for the party. He argues that:

In our political party, the opinions of all the members are important and taken into account. We also listen to the opinions of our supporters, for example, while making the rebranding of our party symbols we had a broad discussion with the party members and even those who are not members. We conducted a competition in the public space for creating the slogans for the party and, in fact, outside participants presented the best suggestions.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 1, 2017.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 1, 2017.

Aidyn (PW) tells about the “open receptions” (hours when every citizen can come to the party with a problem or a question) and that the party tries to help people. One of the most obvious examples is the “Shapagat” project that is aimed to help people in need with clothes, food, or furniture. Aidyn also argues that usually those people who are interested in the political life of the state are more or less doing well. He adds that it is actually unnecessary for everybody to participate in politics.<sup>126</sup>

Regarding amendments proposed to the Land Code, and related to it protests, Saken (D) states that people were not able to understand this properly because they do not know the laws.<sup>127</sup>

### Expectations

Saken (D) is completely confident about the success of the modernization process in Kazakhstan. He believes that Kazakhstan is doing everything right under the wise governance of the President and for the years of independence it has achieved prosperous results. The deputy continues:

At any period there is some party that can occupy the dominant position. It is inherent to countries with strong democratic systems too. Too many features depend on the parties’ abilities to compete, show their importance to the citizens, and persuade people that their interests are connected with the party’s interests. Future success of the parties will depend on the wise combination of organizational and ideological work.<sup>128</sup>

Aidyn (PW), in turn, states that multiparty system is the best type of party system.<sup>129</sup>

### **Textual analysis**

To my knowledge, only one party, the CPPK, issues a regular newspaper and a journal. For this analysis, I have used online versions of these publications. The topics are the same as

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<sup>126</sup> Interview, CPPK office, November 15, 2016.

<sup>127</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 1, 2017.

<sup>128</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 1, 2017.

<sup>129</sup> Interview, CPPK office, November 15, 2016.



in the previous textual analyses and help to understand the attitude of party elites to some changes in the country.

One of the articles criticizes Gulzhan Karagusova, the deputy of the Majilis from Nur Otan and Chairman of the Committee on Finance and Budget of the Majilis of the Parliament, who suggested to “use pension funds to cover budget deficit”.<sup>130</sup> The author of the article argues that there is a strong feeling that hard earned money serve just as a tool for patching the holes in the budget and he advises to stay away from the pensions of Kazakhstanis.<sup>131</sup>

In the another article, Kainar Kapanov, the professor of political science, discusses the question of the absence of a “real elite” in Kazakhstan. In the article named “Headless Horseman” the author identifies the main problems of the Kazakhstani elites:

Our elites have not been able to consolidate the nation and could not understand their crucial role in this. Also, they could not establish a dialogue between the authorities and the people.

Our elites are bureaucratic, there is no political elite. The economic elite is absent either. The bureaucratic elite makes the Kazakhstani economy uncompetitive.

So far the Kazakhstani quasi-elites are unable to solve the main problem - the prosperity of the state, and the improvement of the lives of the whole population of Kazakhstan.

If the problem of the quality of the elite is not solved - Kazakhstan, as a society, will not have a future. Kazakhstan now is a country without elites.<sup>132</sup>

“Communist of Kazakhstan” newspaper publishes articles exclusively about activities of the party, party workers, and about the CPPK deputies in the Parliament. For example, the first several pages of the newspaper are dedicated to the discussion of the CPPK deputies’ working trips around the regions. Then, Vladislav Kosarev, the leader of the Parliamentary

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<sup>130</sup> “Tribune” newspaper. 125 (July 23, 2016). Article written by Nadezhda Leonova, Aleksandr Shirokov, Evgeniy Kochetov.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

"People's Communists" faction, tells about the results of the 25 years of independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan:

Let us look critically at our positions. We could not create a political union, which would strengthen the peoples' opinion in regards to the need for the unity inside of Kazakhstan.<sup>133</sup>

It is important to pay attention to the structure of the articles. To be more precise, many articles begin with emphasizing the initiatives of the CPPK deputies. For example:

Deputy faction "People's Communists" announced deputy request to the government: one of the most important social problems of Almaty region - the ecological situation in the Tekeli city that leads to deterioration of health and lower life expectancy of inhabitants of the region.<sup>134</sup>

Irina Smirnova, a deputy from CPPK, often raises the issues of national education.<sup>135</sup>

Besides monthly newspapers, I want to focus on some online articles written by CPPK's press office regarding the same topics of modernization.

One of the articles talks about the devaluation of Kazakhstani Tenge and argues that the state was looking for someone to blame while the state had to admit that governmental information policy was to blame for the existence of tension in the society. Those who trusted the national currency were presented as idiots and devaluation was a fine for it.<sup>136</sup>

Another article criticizes representatives of executive authorities and local employers in the Zhanaozen tragedy. According to the CPPK deputy, Vladimir Kosarev, they did not pay attention to the strikes which had begun in spring and this led to such consequences.<sup>137</sup>

### **Discussion:**

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<sup>133</sup> Communist of Kazakhstan, newspaper №22: 431 (January 23, 2017): 9.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>136</sup> Article on March 4, 2014. For more information follow the link: <http://knpk.kz/wp/64980/>.

<sup>137</sup> Article on December 20, 2011. For more information follow the link: <http://knpk.kz/wp/v-besporjadkah-v-zhanaozene-knpk-vinit-m/>.

Increased mass participation is one of the consequences of the modernization process, so the manner in which the state deals with it reflects its readiness to modernization. The CPPK members state that they are ready and happy to accept public participation. However, the party seems quite closed to the active participation of citizens. The Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan refused to participate in this research at all and besides one interview with the deputy of this party, I was able to conduct only one additional interview with a party worker. Even party workers were not allowed to talk to me. The Chief of Staff of the Central Committee of CPPK, after about three months of my attempts to contact the party workers and deputies, informed me about the rejection with the explaining reason "Due to the lack of time". However, this refusal highlights a certain result about the party's openness to the public. Sure, unwillingness to participate in my research is not the direct indicator that the CPPK does not want to communicate with citizens and I cannot generalize too much, but it can mean that the party is not open enough. In brief, this implication does not support Hypothesis 1 that opposition parties are more likely to welcome modernization through the participation of politically active citizens.

I suppose that the CPPK cannot be characterized as a well-institutionalized party: it is neither "complex", nor "autonomous", nor "coherent". It can be to some level "adaptive", as the party could gain the office in the Parliament and survived after the split of CPK.

Later, articles are highly critical of the government but not to the President. In addition, it seems that Saken (D) completely supports the "democratic image" of the state and did not say any negative words in the address of the government and the President.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, Aidyn (PW) begins with loyalty to the regime in Kazakhstan and the Leader of the Nation, but later he becomes more critical.<sup>139</sup> It again supports Hypothesis 3 and speaks about the personalized

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<sup>138</sup> Interview, Majilis Building of the Parliament of Kazakhstan, February 1, 2017.

<sup>139</sup> Interview, CPPK office, November 15, 2016.

politics of the state. Thus, all the main reforms are made only with the approval of the President.

## **Chapter 7. Concluding Remarks, Succession Problem, and Limitations of the Study**

In general, this thesis studies the effect of the modernization process on political parties in Kazakhstan and the readiness of the elites to promote democratic reforms. As a matter of fact, democratization can potentially, though not necessarily, arise when a country is experiencing socio-economic transformations that create a specific scheme of developments such as economic growth, change of public values, and better education. These processes, in turn, increase mass mobilization and public participation in politics. Thereby, political parties get additional power since politically active middle class tries to find a reliable platform in order to express their opinions. Certainly, initial regime features also play a vital role in the success of the modernization process – this process should not be suppressed and constrained. Otherwise, no political liberalization is possible.

In this thesis, I investigated this topic with two research questions: “To what extent does the economic modernization process impact the development of political parties within authoritarian systems?” and “What is the nature of the relationship between economic modernization and political party development in Kazakhstan?” In order to answer these questions, I conducted in-depth interviews with the deputies of the Majilis and party workers of three parties represented in the Parliament. Moreover, I analyzed textual materials found on the official webpages of the Parliamentary parties. The main theoretical framework of this research was built around Huntington’s (1965) theory of organizational institutionalization. Following his insights, I evaluated the level of institutionalization of three political parties in Kazakhstan based on data from interviews and textual sources. Summing up, I can say that Nur Otan’s level of institutionalization is partial, while Ak Zhol and the CPPK are much weaker with their levels of institutionalization.

Speaking about Kazakhstan in general, in this study it was described as a “soft authoritarian” state with one dominant party system. Moreover, “neopatrimonialism”, or

relations between formal and informal politics and government, is a specific feature of the Kazakhstani political system that, in turn, explains its authoritarian nature. In addition, Nur Otan can be characterized as a catch-all political party due to the absence of clear ideological agenda. Rather, the party aims to address and attract as much electorate as possible.

Kazakhstan is on the threshold of its “Third Modernization” and the state seeks to join the number of the 30 most developed states in the world by 2050. For the achievement of this goal there are several strategies and programs such as the “Kazakhstan-2050” strategy, the “100 Steps” program, and “Nurly Zhol” plan.

The main findings of my research show that political parties are still comparatively closed to public participation in Kazakhstan. Taking into account the increasing popularity of two small opposition parties (I can draw such conclusion according to conducted interviews), it is still quite early to say that a multiparty system is strongly developed in Kazakhstan and that the opposition has a chance to compete with the party of power in the context of the modernization process.

Hypothesis 1 that states that opposition parties are inclined to welcome modernization in order to increase power cannot be rejected completely and, at the same time, it definitely cannot be supported. Thus, according to interviews and informational resources, Ak Zhol and the CPPK try to propose and support democratic reforms, and elites claim that the parties are ready to a democratic transition and that the parties are open to mass political participation. On the other hand, the CPPK was extremely closed and deputies from Ak Zhol were closed as well. Hypothesis 2 regarding the restraining power of Nur Otan can be supported by my interviews and textual analysis: some members of small political parties claim that they do not have enough weight in the political arena and that some proposed reforms are rejected by Nur Otan. Hypothesis 3 concerning the President’s role in politics of Kazakhstan also seems to be supported because the opinion of the President is still the dominant one and suggestions

proposed by Nazarbayev are supported by the party of power. Moreover, even opposition parties do the same.

The level of institutionalization of the party of power is incomplete: Nur Otan seems “complex” and “coherent” and, at the same time, it can be characterized as “half-adaptive” and “half-autonomous” (Huntington 1965). The party relies on the opinion of the President in its decision-making process and proposes only those reforms that are approved or suggested by him. Similar work of the party of power, coupled with the comparatively weak level of institutionalization of Ak Zhol and the CPPK and constrained opposition lead to a slowdown of the modernization process.

However, it is also important to note that the “high-modernist” plans that is actively promoted by the President and the government has every chance to break about the unpreparedness of the system to the expected changes (Scott 1998). To be more precise, partially and weakly institutionalized parties are not able to cope with the requirements of modernization, civil society does not receive proper development and the transition to democracy in this context remains under the question.

If the situation continues developing in the similar direction in future, Kazakhstan may encounter a crisis when the promoted plans and strategies are not being implemented, but are moved and postponed for a further period. Citizens of Kazakhstan have already shown that they can stand up for their interests and openly express their dissatisfaction with the government (for example, the riots in Zhanaozen and protests against amendments to the Land Code). One of the worst possible scenarios is that if civil society does not receive a response from the state and their demands remain unheard by the government as well as weakly institutionalized parties and it can lead to unrest in the society. That is why it is important that “high-modernist” plans have the necessary conditions for their realization (Scott 1998).

The effectiveness of multipartyism in Kazakhstan also remains a controversial issue, as opposition parties are pro-presidential and do not challenge the government. One can assume that such behavior is associated with a simple desire to continue existence because the genuine opposition can be removed (for example, the DCK).

While Kazakhstan is experiencing various transformations, there is a serious issue on agenda: succession problem. To date, four of the five republics in Central Asia have faced power transition since the independence from the former Soviet Union. The only exception is Kazakhstan. The future name of a successor is defined neither by the President nor by the authorities. The general succession mechanism is also unknown. The problem is that naming a future successor by Nazarbayev himself could create a dangerous and risky situation because it is unknown whether elites will support this decision or not (Sullivan 2017, 7). In order to make a smooth transition, a future successor will have to continue the course of reforms established by Nazarbayev. If he or she does not – it can shake political stability in the country and the modernization process (Sullivan 2017, 7). There is an opinion that dynasticism is not the case of Kazakhstan, as Nursultan Nazarbayev does not have a direct male heir (Anceschi 2012). However, Anceschi (2012) also states that the succession based on family ties is widely anticipated in the state. On the other hand, Nursultan Nazarbayev announced that he is going to hold power until at least 2020 and that the presidential seat is not going to one of his children (Sullivan 2017, 7).

On the examples of the DCK and Zhanaozen oil-worker protests, and other critical moments, Nursultan Nazarbayev has proven that he is able to diffuse these and other challenges (McGlinchey 2016, 211). It is still unclear what political agenda future successor will choose and that is why political parties will have to address the interests of society and to decrease potential tensions. For modernization to succeed, Nur Otan, as the party of power,



will have a responsibility to stimulate economic development and incorporate social groups into the policymaking process in future.

Due to the lack of data, in this study, I have to rely on the responses of only those people who agreed to participate in this research and textual sources do not always reflect the real point of view of the parties. For example, some of the articles were borrowed from outside news-portals rather than written by party workers. Lack of data and inability to generalize are the main limitations of this study. The suggestion for future research would be to increase the number of interviews with the deputies of the Majilis.

Democratization is a complicated process which involves a lot of other processes and it can turn to any direction. While there is a room for debates that modernization can potentially lead to democratization, it is important to study the flow of this process in the authoritarian states. Moreover, such studies may serve as policy recommendations for the successful adaptation to changes and addressing the challenges of the modernization process. This thesis contributes to the investigation of the role of political parties in Kazakhstan, a country which is seeking to become more politically, economically, and socially developed and liberalized.

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