

Public Management Reforms in Kazakhstan

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1. INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan was formed as an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation in August 1920 and became the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic in December 1936. Kazakhstan declared its independence on 16th December 1991 and joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The years following independence have been marked by significant reforms to the Soviet command-economy and political monopoly on power. Kazakhstan is the second largest (after Russia) of the former Soviet Republics with an area of 2.7 million square kilometres and a population of almost 15.3 million people living in a geographically diverse country bordered by Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and the Caspian Sea (<http://www.un.kz/>) see figure 1¹.

FIGURE 1: Map of Kazakhstan



¹ Source: UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office

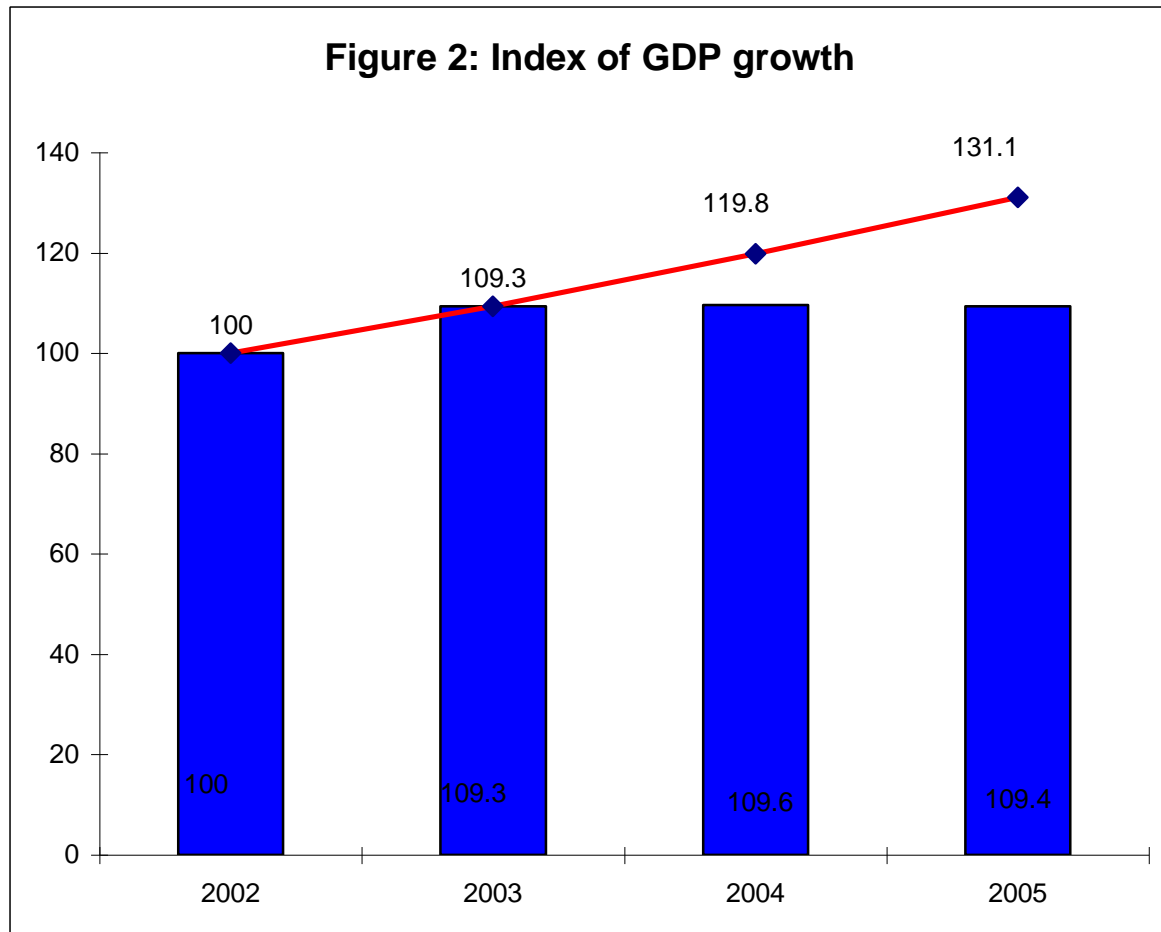
About 53% of its people are Kazakh, 30% Russian, and the remainder multicultural. Although approximately 60% of the population is Muslim, religion isn't strictly practised and Islam is not a major political force. Kazakhstan is a presidential republic. President Nursultan Nazarbayev, a hugely popular figure, was elected with 98% of the vote on 1st December 1991, and a referendum in 1995 extended his term until December 2000. In autumn 1998 he called presidential elections for January 1999 and was returned to office for a seven-year term. In December 2005 President Nazarbayev was re-elected for a third seven-year term receiving more than 90% of the vote. Although the elections attracted negative commentary (Keesing, 2005) from the Organisation for Security and Co-operation (OSCE), the Caspian Information Centre Election Observation Mission, led by the UK's Lord Parkinson, concluded that 'at this election, Kazakhstan has taken a major step forward in becoming a full democracy' (Parkinson et al, 2005). The first Kazakhstan Constitution (1993) promoted the separation of powers between the legislature, executive and judiciary with the President setting national policy priorities. The President is the head of state and appoints the Prime Minister (currently Daniyal Akhmetov since June 2003) with the approval of Parliament. The bicameral parliament is the supreme representative legislative body and consists of the Senate (39 seats) and Majilis (77 seats). Seven senators are appointed by the President; other members are elected, two from each of the 14 oblasts, the capital of Astana, and the city of Almaty. Ten members of the Majilis are elected from the winning party lists. Elections to the lower House are conducted by universal suffrage. Elections to the Senate are conducted by indirect private voting.

The Soviet legacy left Kazakhstan in a significant economic and social crisis with hyperinflation and a drastic decline in its living standards. Allied to this, it was necessary to create circumstances which moved Kazakhstan from where it was, following the disintegration of the USSR, towards its stated goal of democracy. The fundamentals for a market economy did not exist, nor did political pluralism, a multi-party system, and an independent mass media or civil society. Since independence, there has been a staged reform process: dismantling the previous Soviet control system; changes to the political system with its first Constitution; and a further evolution of the political structures through the 1995 referendum and new Constitution with the election of a bicameral Parliament (Kazakhstan Embassy, 2006). Kazakhstan is also working to modernise its legal/regulatory frameworks and standards with a view to joining the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in the near future. Many of Kazakhstan's laws which regulate external trade, for example, have been amended to meet WTO norms or are now under consideration by Parliament. Kazakhstan has bid for the OSCE chairmanship in 2009. If accepted, this will amount to international recognition of the achievements of the country's ongoing political and economic reforms. This is the context within which we now consider attempts to undertake public management reforms in Kazakhstan.

2. Global economic forces

Kazakhstan can boast the leading economic position in Central Asia. It is the first CIS country to be assigned an investment grade rating. The economy of Kazakhstan is characterised by a high growth rate and an improvement in the living standards and welfare of its population against a stable socio-economic situation. In 2005 the average

income of Kazakhstan's citizens increased threefold compared to 2003 (gross national income per capita is \$2,930). Minimum pension payments have reached \$70 per month and the average pension has exceeded \$95. Public expenditure on healthcare, science and education has increased significantly. These social improvements are happening within the context of an increasing population, a 9% increase since 2001, attributed to a baby boom and increase in immigration. The economy has been growing from 2000 at an average annual rate of almost 10%, one of the fastest in the world, and in 2006 GDP per capita is \$3440, more than 75% higher than in 2000 (Statistics Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan; see figure 2). Kazakhstan's economic progress is closely linked to the rich oil and gas resources in the west of the country. Oil is, and will continue to be, the driving force of the economy and oil production is expected to more than double by the end of this decade (3m barrels per days estimated by 2015) with some 80% being exported. Oil recently began to flow through a long awaited pipeline from Kazakhstan to China. Kazakhstan is also about to become a significant producer of natural gas – there are plans for a trans-Caspian gas pipeline taking supplies to Europe. The Government has created the conditions for attracting large amounts of foreign direct investment (over \$25b since independence) in its rich energy sector by restructuring its command-and-control economy to a more market based system. The World Bank has listed Kazakhstan among the 20 most attractive countries for investment. Kazakhstan has developed a strong banking sector with 35 existing banks, 16 of which have foreign involvement. The banking system has earned a relatively high level of trust amongst the population and aspires to reach European standards.



A European Union analysis cites several success factors in the transition to Kazakhstan's free-market economy:

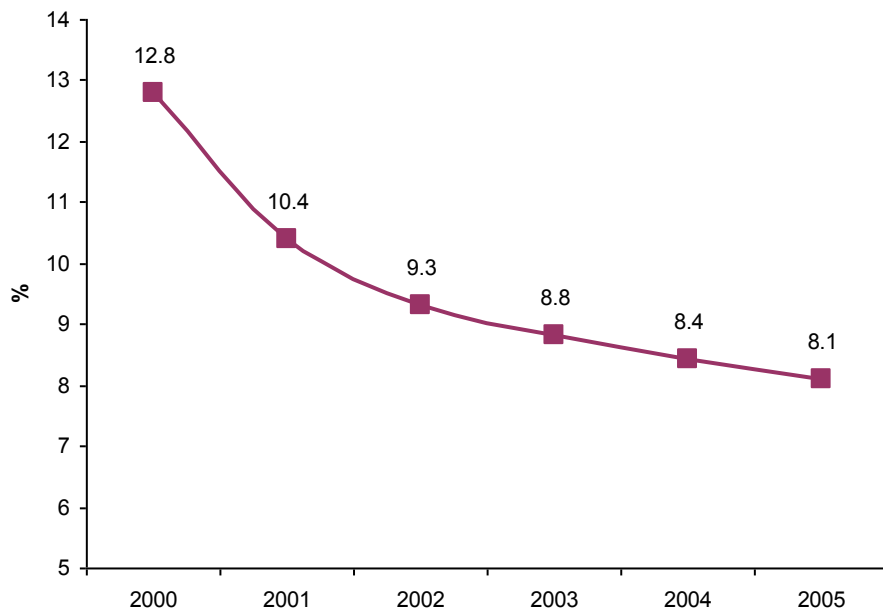
- The creation of a sophisticated financial services sector (the most advanced in the former Soviet Union).
- Introduction of a private pension plan.
- Privatisation of the electricity industry.
- Civil service reforms (these will be considered in more detail).
- Decentralisation to give greater autonomy to local government in its 14 administrative regions².
- Creation of a national oil stabilisation fund which accumulated more than \$5 billion in oil revenue savings (European Union, 2005).

² Kazakhstan 14 regions and two cities are: Akmola, Aktiubinsk, Almaty, Atyrau, East Kazakhstan, Zhambylskaya, West Kazakhstan, Karaganda, Kustanay, Kzylorda, Mangistau, Pavlodar, North Kazakhstan, South Kazakhstan, Astana City, Almaty City.

A World Bank assessment points out that the Government of Kazakhstan understands all the risks of its heavy dependence on oil and has developed a vision to achieve greater competitiveness and diversification of the economy with an emphasis on competition, investment climate, human capital and basic infrastructure (World Bank 2006). Kazakhstan as a small economy with a large fuel and mineral resource is not really an attractive location for investments in manufacturing industries, which makes the country vulnerable to fluctuations in commodity prices. With large proceeds from extracting industries, the state and private entrepreneurs are less motivated to develop new sectors. The challenge for the Government of Kazakhstan is not so much the availability of resources but more using public and other funds efficiently and effectively to improve and expand infrastructure, enhance the quality of education, move to a modern market economy, particularly in rural areas, and dramatically improve its health indicators. Kazakhstan's response to these challenges takes the form of a long-term programme of diversification and modernisation – the *Strategy for Industrial and Innovation Development 2003 – 2015*, with a budget allocation of \$245m for its implementation. The aim of this strategy is to strengthen its research and technological innovation and production capacity, thus contributing to future competitive advantage. The strategy firmly recognises that mineral resources are exhaustible in the long run thus jeopardising sustainable development.

The labour market is characterized by a constant increase in employment levels and the reduction of unemployment rates. The number of unemployed people decreased from 690.7 thousands in 2002 to 639.3 thousands in 2005. The level of unemployment dropped from 12.8% in 2000 to 8.1% in 2005 (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Unemployment Trend



In the budget for 2006, the Senate and Majilis (the upper and lower houses of the bicameral legislature) increased funding for education by \$40 million, health care by \$20 million, social welfare by \$10 million, and agriculture by \$60 million. The education system, in particular, has become a key priority. The state's budget for education expenditure in 2005 was \$2.05 billion or 3.85% of GDP. This is intended to provide universal access to high-quality primary and secondary education, and skills training for all industries. To complement this investment, social protection measures have been implemented for students to support them and their extended families during their studies. This is part of a wider reform programme entitled *Further Strengthening of Social Reform* aimed at improving social equity through a three-level social security system. Overall in public expenditure terms, spending has doubled since 2002 for social welfare and social security programmes from \$1.28 billion to \$2.89 billion.

3. The political system

The key components of the political system of Kazakhstan are the state, political parties and civil society. The 1995 Constitution provided for 'ideological and political freedom' and created a multi-party system. The most recent elections (September/October 2004) to the Majilis (the lower house of the bicameral legislature) resulted in an overall majority of the 77 seats for the *Otan Party* which secured 42 seats (55%) in Parliament. Aside from independents (who won 18 seats), the main opposition was the *Civic and Agrarian Parties* with 11 seats. Three other parties (*Asar*, *Ak Zhol* and *Democratic Party of Kazakhstan*) have limited representation (4, 1 and 1 seats respectively). *Otan* and *Asar* political parties have recently (August 2006) combined, exercising a much greater concentration of political power. The activities of the parties are regulated by the law entitled 'About Political Parties'. Modernisation of the Kazakhstan political system is an important topical issue at present. A reform agenda is underway and includes: the development of local self-governance; expansion of the authority of representative bodies; elections of local executive authorities (experimental elections in regional akims); greater independence of the judiciary and civil society institutions; and further strengthening/development of trade unions. All of these reforms are with a view to improving the legitimacy of the state and creating confidence in the authorities amongst ordinary citizens. At a general level, political modernization is a key aspect of legitimizing the state. The reform process itself is based on a number of principles: democratic reforms should be incremental; they should be consistent with maintaining stability, and have broad public support.

When President Nazarbayev convened his new Cabinet in January 2006, following his re-election in the presidential elections (December 2005), he set out the administration's priorities. He announced that the first of these was to modernise the country's economy; the second to accelerate economic development; and the third to develop and implement social policies which would protect and assist the most vulnerable, whilst at the same time supporting economic development. In addition, the President announced a process of democratic reforms. The *Commission on Democratic Reforms*, chaired by the President and comprising a wide range of civil and political representatives, was established with a reform agenda – the *National Programme of Democratic Reforms 2006 – 2011*. The programme is to be implemented in two stages. It will strengthen the system of checks and balances between the various levels of government; encourage decentralization; provide transparency and openness in state bodies; increase the number of elective institutions; and improve electoral legislation. Already elections have taken place to regional akims and further reforms are planned for the redistribution of economic and executive functions. Administrative reforms continue on reallocating functions across a multi-level governance system. All of the changes resulting are being included in more than 130 legislative acts.

Beyond the agenda of internal political reforms, Kazakhstan is an active international player. Given its geopolitical position, Nazarbayev has said that the country should be oriented to both East and West. He promoted the concept of Eurasia³, and Kazakhstan has joined the OSCE, United Nations, International Monetary Fund/World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Kazakhstan is also an active

³ Eurasian Economic Community was established in 2000 to include Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

member of the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation and the Central Asian Co-operation Organisation. Nazarbayev is keen to develop a good relationship with the West which he sees as a customer for Kazakh energy resources. In his State-of-the-Nation address in 2005 he emphasised Kazakhstan's continuing 'activist, multi-faceted and balanced' foreign policy, placing priority on relations with Russia, China, the United States and the European Union (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2005). In his latest address (2006) President Nazarbayev set out seven priorities for Kazakhstan to enter the top 50 most competitive nations in the second decade of the 21st century. These included economic modernisation and diversification, improved education and social programmes, and a strong national security policy, in co-operation with world super powers. Kazakhstan is working closely with international financial institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Asian Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank in the implementation of market reforms and structural transformation. The European Union has been particularly influential in the reform of public administration within Kazakhstan. There have, for example, been several successful EU-supported programmes in areas of performance based pay in the public sector, the introduction of budgetary reform, and the development of public service standards.

4. Elite decision making

Kazakhstan as a Presidential Republic is an example of elite decision-making writ large. Political indifference by the people of Kazakhstan can, in part, be traced back to bad experiences of the late 1980/early '90s. The Kazakhstan economy suffered significantly from the distortion effects of the Soviet Union collapse. It was further hit in 1998/9 by the Russian financial crisis, low commodity prices and a poor harvest. Since 2000, however, the significant growth in the Kazakhstan economy is firmly attributed to the President's strong leadership by its citizens. With a reduction in grassroots political activity, political and economic initiatives came mostly from the top. As the economy strengthened, elite decision making and the centralisation of power were consolidated. The Kazakhstan Embassy (2006) however, contend that political reforms are underway which will transform the role of the political elite to include measures such as: an enhanced role for Parliament, cultivating political parties and civil society, building a free media sector, a more fair and transparent judiciary, and strengthening local governance arrangements. Hence, they claim, there is a determination to broaden the base of decision-making and the only real issue is the speed at which these reforms can be implemented.

Kazakhstan was ranked 107th (out of 158 categories) in the Transparency International *Corruption Perceptions Index* (CPI, 2005) with a CPI score of 2.6 (10 = highly clean and 0 = highly corrupt). The index relates to perceptions of the degree of corruption as seen by business people and country analysts. Between 2004 and 2005 the corruption index shows an improving position (2.2 to 2.6) testament, according to officials policing corruption in Kazakhstan, that things are improving as the outworkings of the law

(*Struggle against Corruption*, 1998) take effect. In a similar positive vein, a UNDP report in 2004 acknowledged that Kazakhstan had made ‘significant progress over the past decade in transforming its economic and political systems’. The report continued that ‘establishing democratic government that is both equitable and effective has been one of the difficult and protracted components of Kazakhstan’s transition to democracy and market economy’ (UNDP, 2004: 28). Kazakhstan has created an anti-corruption legislative base and was the first country in the CIS to adopt a law *Struggle against Corruption*. Further amendments resulted in the ratification of a code of ethics for the country’s civil servants and a government programme to fight corruption (2006-2010). In addition, a special government agency (financial police) was created to tackle economic crime and corruption working alongside disciplinary councils which monitor the activities of civil servants in all regions. Another step taken to fight corruption has been regular increases in the wage level of civil servants to obviate the need for malpractice. At a recent meeting (June 2006) of the high level Security Council, the President dismissed several senior officials for their involvement in corrupt practice and created an interdepartmental commission on anti-corruption. Significant steps have therefore been taken in the fight against corruption within the public sector including widely publicised disciplinary measures and official ‘punishments’.

5. Chance events

The most obvious example of a chance or spontaneous event which has had lasting impact on the decision-making process in Kazakhstan relates to the controversial issue of nuclear testing. Shortly after independence a stark choice faced the people of Kazakhstan. On the one hand they could continue with the programme of nuclear testing which had inflicted significant environmental damage on the country and had long-term detrimental health consequences. There were key economic benefits to maintaining the status quo, not least at a time when the country was in recession. Importantly, retaining a nuclear capacity could well have placed Kazakhstan in an advantageous position relative to developed countries, some of which were in the market for such security options. On the other hand Kazakhstan could opt to stop nuclear testing and ignore the economic advantages of continuing. An unexpected development came in the form of the mass anti-nuclear movement *Nevada-Semipalatinsk* which radically opposed continuance. This movement emerged spontaneously and, for the first time, exemplified a bottom-up mobilization of civil society. Importantly for Kazakhstan, this impulsive outpouring of opposition against nuclear testing symbolized the strength of the country's independence and the potential of civil society to influence a major policy decision affecting the whole country. Nuclear testing was stopped and more widely this heralded the beginning of the NGO movement in Kazakhstan. Civil society has continued to influence the political decision-making process and bottom-up socio-economic reforms have grown, albeit slowly. Even though Kazakhstan has witnessed a growing number of parties and political movements, there is still a lack of political engagement. Citizens' dissatisfaction with public services and growing levels of expectation are not the main source of public

administration reforms in Kazakhstan. There are several strong interest groups such as the Council of Entrepreneurs and Council of Foreign Investors which act as a consultative body to the President and exert influence on national socio-economic policies and some key public management issues. In addition, the media sector has publicised cases of corruption and abuse or mismanagement in the public sector which have led to reforms.

6. The administrative system

Modernizing government has been a core element in the bid to reform the political process more generally. The aims of the public sector reform agenda, set within a long term vision for Kazakhstan, are described in the official development strategy entitled *Kazakhstan 2030*, and comprise the following:

- To increase the effectiveness of the government working collectively as a state organ and individually through the role of each minister.
- To implement modern information technology and eliminate bureaucracy in government bodies.
- To create an effective and optimal structure of state bodies.
- To restrict state interventions in the economy.

We consider each of these, accepting that these categories are not mutually exclusive, and the extent of reform implementation.

(a) Improving effectiveness: Central to the improvement of effectiveness in the public sector in Kazakhstan is the role played by the civil service. Alongside the streamlining of ministries, civil servants will be required to improve the quality of public services and

increase their professional skills, in return for which there will be a new system of job classification linked to rates of pay and greater social benefits for state employees. Productivity and effectiveness measures to capture the outputs of civil servants are under development and will be implemented in 2007 when salaries are expected to grow by up to 30% as a direct result of public service improvements. The uniform system of payments for state employees will be radically revised to reflect performance. All of this requires a change of mindset amongst public sector officials and a customer-orientation which has hitherto been lacking in Kazakhstan. Moving from a paternalistic system of public services where corruption and poor services are the norm to a customer-focused public sector will not be easy but there are promising developments. For example, service standards are being developed (with the assistance of UNDP and the European Commission) alongside customer charters setting out what the public should expect in the delivery of public services, including feedback on their experiences as recipients. Private sector quality standards are also being adapted for the public service (ISO 9000 – International Organization for Standardization). These standards will apply in areas which have attracted particular criticisms from citizens in the past and which have been prone to corruption such as licensing documents, registration of economic activities/businesses and the delivery of state programmes. A new code of honor was introduced for civil servants in 2005 demanding certain standards of ethical behavior and stricter penalties/disciplinary procedures imposed for officials found guilty of corruption. The government has also established the Agency for Fighting Economic and Corruption Crimes. To assist in the transformation to better public services, civil servants will be given new training and retraining opportunities. A National Management School,

attracting international partners and meeting quality standards, will be established within the existing Academy of Public Administration in Astana to train civil servants in contemporary public management reforms. A small but growing number of civil servants have also undertaken study trips and internships in European and American public sectors

(b) ICT and the elimination of bureaucracy: The government introduced an ‘E-Government Programme in the Republic of Kazakhstan 2005-07’ aimed at providing citizens and organizations with fast and reliable access to public services on-line. This has included the creation of a network of public electronic centres where people can be trained in accessing e-government services. This development is necessary because of the low number of people with direct access to the internet in Kazakhstan (estimated at only 450,000 or 3% of the population). Some \$400 million was allocated from the state budget to implement this programme. Most ministries now have an interactive web-site complete with information on their role/functions and offer a (limited) range of electronic services to the public. Examples of e-services include: filing tax returns and making payments, pension fund deductions, property registration, and setting up in business. To complement these developments, four pilot ‘one-stop-shop’ centres are now operating in Almaty and Astana offering citizens access to a range of public services information and services across several ministries and are proving to be both popular and effective in their role. These centres provide over 50 public services in one location including: the issue of identity cards, civil status statements, taxpayers’ certificates, and land ownership/registration. Not only has ICT been used to improve services to the public but it has also enhanced the internal operations of government. In January 2007 Astana will become a pilot ‘Electronic City’ directly connecting to the administration, departments

and services of the Akims. This will improve inter-agency working and ultimately make for a more coherent provision of public services at the various levels of government.

(c) Effective and optimal administrative structures: One of the reasons for the implementation of e-government is to minimize and simplify the interaction between state bodies and the public. This, in turn, has the potential to address corruption and criminality amongst officials – reducing personal points of contact lessens opportunities for corrupt practices. In a parallel move, the administrative structures of government are being rationalized both at central and local government levels. There is now a strengthening in the role of local authorities (Akims) through a shift in functions from the centre. The authority of maslikhats, particularly in providing oversight of the activities of akims will be expanded. All akims will have to report annually to their constituencies on the results of their work. The devolution of power from the centre to local level demands the election of akims as a necessary step in strengthening the democratic foundations of the republic. A new legislative framework Local Self Governing is being developed which will enhance the status, competence and responsibilities of local government and define the relationship with state bodies. These changes envisage central government having more of a regulatory role and setting the policy framework with functions decentralized to executive bodies for delivery. To this end there is an ongoing process of rationalization across ministries taking place to ensure a rational distribution of functions and elimination of duplication in central and local services. This is aimed at reducing bureaucracy and increasing the quality of managerial decision-making. The number of political state employees will also be considerably reduced. In the future, akimats and territorial departments of central executive bodies will play a greater role in public

service delivery. Kazakhstan is accessing international experience of organization design and strategic management in the public sector with a view of adopting or adapting the learning to its circumstances.

(d) Restrict state intervention: The role played by the state in providing services is under constant review. Public-private partnerships are developing as an alternative mechanism to state provision and the potential for NGOs in directly, or in partnership, delivering hitherto public services is being realized incrementally. Moreover, a review is underway which is examining, with reference to international experience, both the role and management of state enterprises deemed to be of strategic importance to the economy of Kazakhstan. The aim of this is to reduce the involvement of the state in functions/activities which could be provided within a competitive private sector environment. Current examples of privatizing erstwhile state functions include medical help enterprises, centres for healthy living and medical transportation. Regional akims have been asked to open up over 800 non-core functions of local state-owned enterprises to competition. The emphasis is in the state divesting itself of functions which it believes could best be delivered by the private sector.

Whether the public management reform agenda which is now in place in Kazakhstan is able to deliver the changes necessary to modernize government remains to be seen but there are encouraging signs of progress along the following lines:

- The state bureaucracy is being rationalized and attention focused on integrated service delivery (joined-up government).
- A review of pay and performance of civil servants which moves away from standardization to outputs and quality of services provided is underway.

- Allied to the above development is the adaptation of private sector quality standards (ISO) to public service delivery.
- The performance of state bodies (a rating system) is being devised to improve public accountability.
- Corruption measures have been put in place to detect and punish public officials involved.

7. Conclusions: the model of public sector reform

Is there a good fit between Pollitt and Bouckaert's model (2004) of public management reform and what is happening in Kazakhstan (see figure 4)? Kazakhstan has come a long way in a relatively short space of time. Economic reforms have been a priority and the quality of people's lives has improved as a consequence of significant macro economic performances from 2000 onwards. Kazakhstan people have placed an implacable trust in their President. They have been prepared, by and large, to delay democratic reforms for stability and evidence of improvements in their standard of living, with the prospects of future administrative changes. Public management reform is but one (albeit an important) element of a wider agenda for political change. Public sector reforms are now seen as a central to *Kazakhstan 2030's* long term strategy which is endorsed by the President. Because the President symbolises elite decision making, then public sector reform will continue. Larbi and Bangura (2006) have argued that the implementation of public management reforms is highly political because it redefines the power relationships between state and society, between politicians and bureaucrats, between service providers and users, and between different organisations. Public management reforms in

Kazakhstan illustrate this contention. There are moves towards broadening the base of elite decision making with the introduction of new consultative bodies and a greater sense of bottom-up empowerment. The decline in the number of political civil servants is evidence of greater professionalism in the public sector and long term stability in the provision of independence advice to ministers. There is also an increasing customer orientation synonymous with new public management, and a changing attitude amongst providers with the introduction of customer charters and performance standards. At central and local government levels, public bodies are now charged with rationalizing their functions to avoid duplication. In short, public sector reforms are catching up with economic advances. Quality public services are seen as an essential element in the improvement of people's lives. The magnitude of the changes necessary will require a quantum leap in both the pace and substance of reforms. There is evidence that Kazakhstan has embraced a public sector reform agenda, the challenge is to accelerate its implementation. Pollitt and Bouckaert's model is therefore a 'good fit' in tracking public management reforms in Kazakhstan which can be summarized as a top-down reform agenda, underpinned by a stable economic base, and a compliance administrative system amenable to change.



**Figure 4: Public Management Reforms Kazakhstan
Adapted from Pollitt and Bouckaert**

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