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**STATEMENT BY MR. KANAT SAUDABAYEV,
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AT THE 680th PLENARY MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

20 September 2007

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished members of the Permanent Council,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address the OSCE Permanent Council for the first time as Secretary of State of the Republic of Kazakhstan. I am truly grateful to the Spanish Chairmanship in the person of the Permanent Representative of Spain to the OSCE, Mr. Carlos Sánchez de Boado y de la Válgoma, for this opportunity.

Today I should like to draw the attention of this distinguished forum and of all the OSCE participating States, which you represent, to Kazakhstan's candidacy for the Chairmanship of this Organization in 2009 and to the impressive progress that has been made by our country in building an economically powerful and dynamically developing democratic State.

The elections to the *Majlis* (Parliament) and the local representative bodies at all levels, held on 18 August, were the latest and most decisive step in our sustained movement towards the construction of a developed democracy.

The recent election campaign was the most transparent, open and fair in the entire history of Kazakhstan's independence according to both those who participated in it and the numerous observers. Seven political parties were battling for the electorate's votes. These parties presented their programmes for the development of the State and, most importantly, had absolutely equal opportunities to conduct their electoral campaign. The many public debates on television between the leaders of the political parties, which were conducted in an extremely competitive atmosphere and, at the same time, in a spirit of fairness and respect for one another and for the basic principles of democracy, were convincing evidence of the considerably advanced political culture of our society. I should like to mention in particular the role and civic responsibility of the representatives of the media — important and active participants in the recent election campaign.

Representatives of the authorities — both in the centre and in the provinces — also showed an unprecedented level of responsibility as they steadfastly implemented the President's directive to do "everything to ensure that the elections were free and fair". Not only did they not make use of the notorious administrative resources but, on the contrary, they did everything possible to ensure the genuine transparency and fairness of the electoral process.

The people of Kazakhstan increasingly believe that their voice plays an important role in determining the fate of the country. This can be seen from the 68 per cent voter turnout; this is 10 per cent higher than at the previous parliamentary elections and considerably higher than comparable indices in countries with established traditions of democracy.

These elections — held as they were in the eyes of many observers in a climate of peace, stability and respect for the law — demonstrated that the people of Kazakhstan fully share democratic values and that our country is moving confidently along its chosen path.

The victory of the *Nur Otan* party, led by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, was legitimate. Around one and a half years ago President Nazarbayev won the presidential elections with an impressive result of more than 91 per cent of the votes, and it was altogether logical given the continuing strong growth of our economy and increasing prosperity of all the people of Kazakhstan that our people would favour his party, which presented a clear and well-founded programme for the further acceleration of Kazakhstan's public, political, social and economic development.

The victory of *Nur Otan* with 88 per cent of the votes in an open, fair and competitive contest is an accurate reflection of the political passions of the people of Kazakhstan, a view that had also been confirmed by the results of exit polls. The *Nur Otan* parliamentary faction in the *Majlis* is fairly balanced; all segments of our multi-ethnic society are represented in it, and there has been a significant increase in the number of representatives of the fairer sex.

As you are aware, on the basis of the election results only *Nur Otan* entered Parliament. I should mention that in the history of such developed Asian countries as Japan, Malaysia and Singapore there have also been periods when a single party dominated Parliament. The defeat of the other parties can be explained by the absence of convincing alternative programmes for the development of the country and of clear-cut charismatic leaders. Furthermore, the majority of voters in Kazakhstan assessed not the parties' slogans but what they have actually done since they were established. This and not procedural irregularities of one kind or another is the reason for the failure of the opposition parties.

Nevertheless, parties other than *Nur Otan* jointly gained 12 per cent of the votes — this means the votes of around 700,000 people — and this is further convincing evidence of the genuinely pluralist nature of our society and the existence of real political competition. I should like to emphasize in particular that we remain interested in the development of a multi-party system and political diversity.

The elections justly received high praise from international observers. For example, Vladimir Rushaylo, head of the observation mission sent by the Commonwealth of Independent States, declared that "the elections were free and fair". The OSCE observation mission noted that the elections reflected "welcome progress", while recognizing that they did not meet certain international standards. The special co-ordinator of the OSCE's

short-term observation mission and head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation, Canadian Senator Consiglio Di Nino, stated that the elections were “a big step forward” and “continued to move Kazakhstan forward in its evolution towards and transformation into a democratic country”. David Wilshire, head of the delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, said: “Building a democracy is a long and hard task. However, the people of Kazakhstan are making real progress. I am not surprised that more needs to be done in some areas”.

The people of Kazakhstan are rightly proud of these assessments of the recent elections and of the fact that they represented the best parliamentary election campaign in all the years of our independence.

At the same time, we are aware that the elections were not ideal. But after all, even in the history of countries with an established democratic tradition it is difficult to find examples of ideal elections. This is quite natural, since democracy has a beginning but not an end — democracy means a perpetual search and development.

The elections were one of the most important events in the recent history of our country, initiating a qualitatively new stage in the development of our society. All of this is in keeping with the logic of Kazakhstan’s internal development and is based on the sound foundations of the social, economic, public and political reforms that have been carried out during the years of independence under the leadership of the first President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev.

Since the moment it gained its independence, our country forged its own path, introducing modern standards in the economy, in governance and in politics, taking into account international experience, the outside world, the realities of our country and our national interests.

Today we see two paths of development of transitional States in our part of the world: the one is the complete absence of reforms, as a result of which these States lag behind in the main areas of human progress, and the other is reforms that are artificially promoted through so-called revolutions of one colour or another, accompanied by social upheavals and economic crises. But there is another evolutionary approach to development, involving forward-looking economic reforms, systematically reinforced by the political liberalization of society. This is precisely the path that Kazakhstan has been steadfastly and systematically following throughout its years of independence. Today it is clear that we have chosen the right path. In terms of history 16 years is only a brief moment, but for Kazakhstan these years have been equal to an era in terms of the profound and radical nature of the transformations. During this period all of the attributes of a sovereign State have been created in Kazakhstan and the stability and integrity of the country ensured. Fundamental social, economic, public and political reforms have been carried out and the stable and systematic development of the country guaranteed. Thanks to this, for many years now Kazakhstan’s economy has been the fifth most dynamically developing economy in the world, and in the last five years alone Kazakhstan’s gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 80 per cent. Last year, Kazakhstan’s per capita GDP reached 5,200 United States dollars; this is a more than four-fold increase since the year 2000 and is equal to comparable indices for a number of Eastern European countries.

The constitutional amendments introduced in spring of this year imparted a powerful impulse to democratic reforms, having ensured the harmonization of the country's political and economic development. These reforms were the result of many years of discussions involving representatives of the Government, Parliament, political parties and public movements within various forums for dialogue. They were the quintessence of proposals made by all segments of Kazakhstan's society and constituted a nationwide programme for the democratization of the country.

I am sure that many of you are familiar with the essence of these amendments and therefore I shall mention only a few of the most important ones.

First and foremost, at our President's suggestion, the presidential term was reduced from seven to five years.

Second, Parliament's powers were significantly strengthened as were those of the representative branch of government as a whole. The system of checks and balances has changed quite substantially and this has strengthened the resilience and stability of our society. A proportional system for the election of deputies to the *Majlis* has been introduced, and their number has increased from 116 to 154. An important innovation was the election of nine deputies to the *Majlis* from the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, which is a unique instrument for strengthening inter-ethnic concord and peace in our country.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister is now appointed only with the agreement of the majority of the members of the *Majlis*. It is now possible to adopt a vote of no confidence in the Government by a simple majority of deputies rather than by a two-thirds majority. In addition, members of Parliament now make up two thirds of the Constitutional Council, the Central Election Commission and the Accounting Committee. These changes have dramatically increased the role played by the supreme legislative body in Kazakhstan.

Third, the role of political parties has increased significantly as has their influence on the system of governance and other aspects of public life through a strengthening of control over the formation and work of the Government. Political parties and non-governmental organizations now receive direct funding from the State, making it possible to dramatically accelerate the development of civil society.

Fourth, there has been a dramatic strengthening of the role of local self-government, the functions of which are performed by the *maslikhats* (local representative assemblies). The provincial, municipal and district *akims*, i.e., all levels of the representative branch at the local level, cannot be appointed without the agreement of the *maslikhats*, which have been granted the right to exercise a vote of no confidence in them and not only to approve local budgets but to oversee their effective implementation as well.

Fifth, there has been a breakthrough in strengthening the system for the protection of human rights. The death penalty has to all intents and purposes been abolished, placing Kazakhstan alongside leading European democracies. In the course of judicial reform, the judicial sanctioning of arrests has been introduced in Kazakhstan along with trial by jury.

As a result, Kazakhstan is now on the way towards a real transformation from a presidential republic into a presidential and parliamentary republic and has made still further progress towards international democratic standards.

Mr. Chairman,

As early as 2003, Kazakhstan — the largest Central Asian country in terms of territory, with a mainly Muslim population, which at that time was entering only its second decade of independence — put forward its candidacy for the Chairmanship of the Organization.

This was an ambitious goal, but one that we consciously assumed in view of the following considerations.

First, such a lofty goal undoubtedly also placed a high degree of responsibility on us in terms of the development of democracy and civil society. We understood this perfectly and consciously set about this task, for it is fully in keeping with our strategic course of development. What I have just outlined was achieved by us recently in the area of democratic development, and we believe that our “track record” in this area is an impressive one.

Second, as early as 2003 there were signs of a crisis beginning in our Organization, a division of countries into western ones and those “to the east of Vienna”. Our intention was to help overcome this division through our candidacy and chairmanship and find a new *modus operandi* for the Organization in these new circumstances.

We all need to take into account the realities of the present day. We fear that the dividing lines already existing within our Organization are growing stronger, the geographical imbalance is becoming ever more firmly established and the prospects for the development and strengthening of the OSCE are being called into question.

This turn of events is in no one’s interests.

We must not forget that the nature of the OSCE has changed considerably over the last 16 years. During that time, the Organization has acquired a new essence and a new dimension. It is now a fully fledged Eurasian institution. I believe that this is something that the OSCE must take fully into account.

We are firmly convinced that Kazakhstan is worthy of leading the OSCE. Our country has sufficient potential to perform the functions of the Chairmanship effectively and is ready to make its contribution to strengthening the positive work of our Organization.

Kazakhstan’s candidacy is based on its real achievements in maintaining security and stability, in economic reforms and political transformations, in its instilling of democratic values and in its commitment to the rule of law and good governance.

Committed as we are to the implementation of the OSCE’s ideas and principles, Kazakhstan is making targeted efforts to counter new threats to peace and security around the world and is playing an active part in the development of regional and international co-operation to combat terrorism, religious extremism, illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, organized crime and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Our country is playing a leading role in ensuring regional stability and co-operation in Central Asia as well as making a concrete contribution to the strengthening of peace and

security throughout the Asian region, something that is demonstrated by the initiative to convene the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

Kazakhstan is already Europe's equal partner in many areas. Clear evidence of this is the recent adoption of the strategy for co-operation between the European Union and Central Asia, which recognizes the great potential and key role of Kazakhstan in the region.

Mr. Chairman,

Like any State which aspires to the OSCE Chairmanship, Kazakhstan considers that one of its most important tasks is determining the basic priorities for its future work in that position. In this regard, our country is guided, first and foremost, by the interests of the Organization and its participating States. The specific areas of the Organization's work, which Kazakhstan can help to strengthen by virtue of its geopolitical position, the particular features of its social, economic and political development, as well as regional factors, are taken into account.

One of the most important priorities of the Kazakhstan chairmanship will be enhancing the effectiveness of measures to ensure human security. We take "human security" to mean the sum total of participating States' obligations concerning respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the rights of ethnic minorities and indigenous populations, contacts between people, protection of the family, children and women, and other questions common to all of humanity.

It would be difficult to name any other contemporary international organization which pays so much attention to "the human dimension". Precisely for that reason, we intend to continue the OSCE's efforts to combat all forms of racism, intolerance and discrimination. In our view, the time has come to summarize and systematize the OSCE's experience in this area, all the more so since there are now quite a few positive examples, including those provided by Kazakhstan.

We are further motivated by the goal of strengthening the OSCE as a bridge between West and East in the dialogue of civilizations, of which we are a consistent supporter. Kazakhstan's experience as a State that is successfully carrying out a policy of inter-ethnic and interreligious harmony, in which the principles of tolerance are implemented in real life, may be helpful and should be utilized.

As Kazakhstan is a politically stable and dynamically developing State in the critically important region of Central Asia, we feel that its chairmanship of the OSCE will help to resolve the problems of our region and significantly intensify co-operation between Europe and our region. Central Asia stands directly in the path of the flow of narcotic drugs, the spread of religious extremism, and international terrorism. The countries of the region are going through difficult and painful changes and are all the more vulnerable to such serious phenomena.

In recent years, the focus of attention of the international community has gradually shifted to the region. The international community is showing a sincere interest in building a secure, stable and prosperous Central Asia. Our country intends to continue the policy of maintaining stability in the region. We are prepared to finance OSCE extrabudgetary projects that have great significance both for our neighbours and for other OSCE participating States.

Long-term security in Afghanistan, an OSCE partner country, has consistently been a key item on our agenda. Kazakhstan could be one of the main champions of the initiatives aimed at strengthening the OSCE's role in the post-conflict settlement process in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Afghanistan must also be actively involved in the processes taking place in Central Asia. That is yet another means of resolving this important question.

With respect to Kazakhstan's priorities in the OSCE, I should also like to mention the continuing efforts within the Organization to enhance its effectiveness and status and strengthen its capabilities.

The OSCE has unique potential, as an organization with the widest geographical scope, a comprehensive approach to security, and equality among participating States, achieved through the consensus principle.

We believe that the Organization can continue to play an important and useful role as a forum for political dialogue, elucidation and harmonization of positions, and collective decision-making. It is called into play as a mechanism for regional implementation of universal and comprehensive instruments of international law in such areas as maintaining politico-military security, promoting conflict resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation, economic and environmental co-operation, defending human rights, and democratization.

Our overall task is to transform the OSCE into an organization that can actually overcome dividing lines and inequality, while demonstrating greater mutual understanding and trust among all participating States.

And in this sense, the question of Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the OSCE in 2009 is of the greatest significance, not only for our State, but for the Organization as a whole.

We are confident that the question of the right to hold the Chairmanship of the OSCE is part and parcel of the reform process. We take the principled position that the OSCE must be a genuinely egalitarian organization, in which the views of any State are taken into consideration and respected.

Ten months ago, in Brussels, the OSCE ministers for foreign affairs adopted a decision to defer consideration of Kazakhstan's candidacy for the 2009 Chairmanship until the Ministerial Council meeting to be held in Madrid in November this year. In our view, Kazakhstan has made full use of the opportunity it was given, carrying out, within this short period, decisive democratic reforms, as mentioned earlier.

We believe that if Kazakhstan's candidacy were given positive consideration in Madrid, that would make a very big contribution to the further development of democracy, not only in our country, but in Central Asia as a whole. Such a development would satisfy both our own interests and our partners' wishes. If Kazakhstan — an economically powerful, dynamically developing and democratic State — assumes the OSCE Chairmanship, this will not only be a positive assessment of our achievements during the years of independence, but it will also have a favourable effect on the general situation in the Organization, which will, in this way, demonstrate the equality that exists among all participating States and strengthen its reputation and authority in the countries "to the east of Vienna".

Certain Western political scientists are striving to present the decision on Kazakhstan's candidacy as a trade-off between the principles of democracy, which Western countries would observe by rejecting our country as, quote, "not fully meeting the OSCE's high standards", and the principles of realpolitik, which they would choose by deciding, quote, "to reward" an oil-rich, overwhelmingly Muslim State in the strategically important region of Central Asia (one that acts as an anchor of stability in the region, works to rebuild Afghanistan, and is an ally of the West in efforts to combat terrorism).

In our view, there is no insuperable dilemma here. Yes, perhaps Kazakhstan does not fully meet all democratic standards, but what is important is that Kazakhstan is demonstrating a firm commitment to building democracy and is moving steadfastly towards that goal.

Today, when there is no end in sight to the psychological and, if I might put it this way, "civilizational" divide between the West and the Islamic world, when the planet is constantly grappling with the problem of ensuring stable energy supplies, support for Kazakhstan's candidacy will satisfy both the principles of democracy and the principles of realpolitik.

We trust in the fairness, understanding and support of our OSCE partners. As the great Goethe once said, "Divide and rule, a sound motto. Unite and lead, a better one."

It may be supposed that in our troubled times, in an era of deepening confrontation between West and East, North and South, this wisdom is truer and more timely than ever before. And in our view, by supporting Kazakhstan's candidacy, you will be making a choice in favour of unifying and strengthening the OSCE.

For my part, I can firmly assure you that Kazakhstan will prove itself fully worthy of the high confidence placed in it and will, in holding the Chairmanship, make a fitting contribution to the development and improvement of our distinguished Organization.

Thank you for your attention.