

Preliminary assessment of needs of the Kazakhstan Parliament

(1) *The budget process, budgetary legislation and public hearings*

Many of the requests made by the Parliament were for highly technical information or for expertise found not in the Parliament of Canada but rather in Canadian government departments. It is fair to say that Kazakhstan's model of reform is closer to the Chinese model than the Soviet model. The former privileged economic reform over political reforms. The Soviet model undertook both simultaneously. The Parliament was therefore looking for support to the capacity of Parliament to conduct independent analysis of the government's economic reform legislation and play a stronger role in initiating financial reform legislation. This included economic and legal review of draft economic legislation by Canadian experts and strengthening the PKR's legislative drafting capacity (government-sponsored legislation is often poorly drafted). Many officials in Parliament pointed out the concerns about the poor quality of information provided by the Government, both in terms of the foundations of budget legislation and the quality with which bills are drafted. A recurring theme was therefore the desire on the part of the Parliament to develop its own capacity.

The Senate does have a Department of Economic Examination that serves to conduct economic expertization on all draft laws, looking at whether legislation observes all norms and whether proposed spending seems to be effective. They spend 2-3 months analyzing the budget code each year. They are looking for experience in how to deal with the fact that the government seems to deliberately underestimate revenues. As a unitary state, they are also interested in inter-budgetary relations (relations between the central and regional governments, and with local governments), macroeconomic forecasting (primarily inflation and the strength of the exchange rate), where Canadian political parties get analysis on the budget, modeling and budget forecasting. Demand was expressed that a similar body be created to serve it. A number of technical questions regarding the budget process were also put forth, including how to deal with extra-budgetary funds and how revenue forecasts can be set so as not to change them.

Representatives of NGOs underlined the importance of developing a more systematic approach to holding public committee hearings on important policy issues (both related to the budget and beyond). Some stated that they rarely feel heard by parliamentary committees. Others stated that while holding *ad hoc* hearings has been a practice since 1999, NGOs require training on how to make submissions and how to stimulate media interest. The participation of NGOs and their contribution in the discussions of major policy issues is not systemic due to the absence of an institutionalized dialogue between the Parliament and NGOs.

(2) Strengthening parliamentary oversight. At present, there is no system of parliamentary oversight in Kazakhstan. Parliament is not constitutionally-mandated to perform such a role, and with a strong autocratic President

Nazerbayev at the helm of the country, he appears unwilling to agree to such a role for Parliament. Similarly, there is no independent supreme audit institution in Kazakhstan. There is an Accounts Committee of the Republic of Kazakhstan, but most or all of its members are appointed by the President and it performs a fairly basic audit function. I requested through UNDP a meeting with the Accounts Committee, but regrettably it was not possible to arrange one.

A meeting with representatives of the NGOs stressed the importance of strengthening oversight of the government's execution of the budget, stating that individual requests for information are poorly received.

(3) Developing/strengthening a management board for the Parliament

Neither the secretary general of the lower house (the Marjolis) nor the Senate showed much interest in developing a management board. Both stated that the Presidential Administration controls the allocation of all resources for the Parliament, down to supplying pens and pencils. This was unlikely to change in the near future.

(4) Strengthening the Parliament's human resource framework.

No interest was shown in this area.