

Kazakhstan: more powers for the president?

On 12 May, the Majilis of Kazakhstan (that country's lower house of parliament) put forward a plan to award Nursultan Nazarbayev the title of 'leader of the nation'. If the Senate and the president himself confirm this plan, it would mean granting Nazarbayev political powers for life, even if he retires. This would be tantamount to a formal change in Kazakhstan's political system.

The plan anticipates a need for negotiation with the 'leader of the nation' over any initiatives concerning the development of state policy, and also prevents Nazarbayev from being liable for prosecution for any actions taken while carrying out his duties as president or 'leader of the nation'. Moreover, in accordance with an initiative from deputies of the only party represented in parliament (Nur-Otan, led by the president), Nazarbayev and 'members of his family residing with him' are to be covered by material immunity.

It cannot be ruled out that work on this plan to endow Nazarbayev with the title of 'leader of the nation' (the project has been under discussion since last year, although its confirmation during Kazakhstan's presidency of the OSCE appeared doubtful) has been accelerated because of events in Kyrgyzstan. Accepting this plan should guarantee President Nazarbayev lifelong immunity, and would at the same time allow him to avoid forcing through his plan for a life presidency, or any need for him to stand in future elections. <wol>