

NEW KAZAKHSTAN: THE PATH OF RENEWAL AND MODERNISATION

March 16, 2022

Dear compatriots!

Dear friends!

Today's Address has a special significance. Its content and scope go beyond one year.

We have set ourselves ambitious goals.

Together we have begun the construction of a New Kazakhstan.

Last year, our country reached an important milestone, the 30th anniversary of its independence. This is a short period by historical standards.

Under the leadership of the First President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, we have come a long way, we have made significant achievements, but we can lose everything if we do not maintain unity. The upheavals at the beginning of the year have clearly confirmed this.

The events of January shook the society. Our people faced an unprecedented challenge, with the country's integrity under threat. During these days, we have deeply realized the lasting value of independence and how important peace, stability, and harmony are.

Thanks to our unity, we have defended our state. We have taken timely measures and have decisively repelled the terrorists.

I have never concealed anything from the citizens. I spoke openly about all the problems during the pandemic. During the days of "Tragic January" I made several speeches to the nation, giving details of the situation.

Every decision I made was based on the country's interests. And this approach was inviolable for me.

Unfortunately, during the January events many of our compatriots died because of the criminal actions of radicals and terrorists. Once again, I express my deepest condolences to their families and loved ones. We will do everything in our power to ensure that such a tragedy will never happen again.

It is our duty to bring to justice all the bandits and terrorists involved in these bloody crimes. We must learn important lessons from the January events.

We must no longer allow the peace and tranquility in our country to be disrupted and its security to be endangered.

Frankly speaking, there are all kinds of rumours and speculations in society, which mislead people and create a false picture of events. It is therefore essential to publish reliable information and give an objective assessment. We must do everything so that people understand the reasons for what happened.

Just yesterday, special hearings were held in Parliament, at which law enforcement agencies presented a full report on the results of the investigation. We have never had such a broad discussion.

Deputies and journalists received open answers to questions worrying the society. This shows that the authorities are primarily interested in a fair assessment of the January events. And I fully share this approach. We must tell the truth – this is my principled stand.

Investigations by the Interdepartmental Investigative Task Force are still ongoing. I am instructing the law enforcement agencies to publish the results of their work on an ongoing basis.

During the events of “Tragic January” and the subsequent state of emergency, about 2,000 people were detained for various offences. At that time, I instructed the Prosecutor General’s Office to determine the degree of their guilt and, if there were no aggravating circumstances, to mitigate the punishment of detainees. As a result, many citizens were released.

At the same time, those who have committed serious crimes will be fully accountable to the law. To do otherwise, to submit to the shouters, provocateurs and populists would be to betray the memory of the innocent victims.

Criminal proceedings have been launched against several hundred people. We have acknowledged the facts when law enforcement officers used prohibited methods of interrogation and even torture on detainees. These barbaric manifestations of the Middle Ages run counter to the principles of any progressive society. They are unacceptable to us as well.

As soon as the first cases were reported, I gave instructions to investigate them thoroughly.

In addition, the Human Rights Ombudsperson was actively involved almost from the beginning. A group of human rights defenders and members of the National Council of Public Trust freely visited the detention centres, examined the detention conditions of those who participated in the January events and assessed their complaints.

The Ombudsperson and independent public commissions led by respected lawyers worked closely with the prosecutor’s office, openly expressing and defending their positions.

This work demonstrated the transparency and democracy of the investigative process and made it possible to treat each appeal and each complaint individually. As a result, the risk of wrongful convictions has been significantly reduced.

In my opinion, this practice of open cooperation between civil society and authorised bodies should be firmly entrenched in our country. I would like to take this opportunity to thank public activists and lawyers for their active position and professionalism.

Provisional results of the investigation are already in. It is clear that the conspirators were trying to seize power. The question arises, what prompted them to take such a step? The answer is obvious.

In recent years, Kazakhstan has embarked on a path of radical modernisation and transformation. Far-reaching transformations have begun in various spheres. Some influential persons did not like this. They hoped to continue their years-long illegal activity. Moreover, they were eager to gain power.

The conspirators formed an underground group of professional mercenaries, armed bandits and traitors from among the officials. Internal and external enemies of our state joined together to seize power. They directed peaceful protests in a destructive direction and used the people for their criminal purposes.

Terrorists attacked government buildings, strategic infrastructure and businesses. They shot at peaceful citizens in order to blame the authorities. Foreign radical forces tried to exploit this situation. They wanted to turn Kazakhstan into a conflict zone, to tear apart our country, to destroy peaceful life and overthrow the President. It was an unprecedented challenge to our statehood.

Their criminal scheme failed, however.

I said openly at the time: no matter what happens, I will always be with my people.

It is not for nothing that the people say, “Ishten shykkan zhau zhaman” (“There is no worse enemy than a traitor”). Among those who tried to pull off a coup, there were well-known people who held high posts. They are state traitors.

Among the traitors there are leaders of military and special services, who have prevented the security forces from taking lawful actions, misinformed the leadership about the situation in the cities, took control of the government and other communication channels.

In a word, they used every possible way to destabilize the country. As a result, we had to ask for help from the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

We took that step in accordance with all domestic and international norms. Peacekeeping forces did not fire a single shot in our country, they only protected strategic facilities. All of this was clearly stipulated.

Two weeks later, once the situation returned to normal, the peacekeeping contingent completely withdrew from Kazakhstan. The CSTO is a collective organisation, of which our country is also a member.

We must not depreciate the important role of the peacekeeping mission, but in the end, we defeated the bandits with our own forces.

In this regard, I would like to separately address the following issue. The betrayal of the conspirators must not tarnish the reputation of the law enforcement agencies.

Our compatriots and our brothers are part of those agencies. They have proven that they stand by the people and are ready to fight for their motherland to the end. They have remained faithful to their oath, selflessly protecting the state. I pay tribute to the law enforcers who bravely withstood the threat at the critical moment.

At the same time, many of our citizens have voluntarily formed self-defense groups, thereby participating in protecting public order. I thank all who showed courage, unity and solidarity at the crucial moment.

During these days, our nation has demonstrated its unity and willingness to overcome any challenges. Through patriotism, we have preserved our sacred Independence.

The January events were the biggest test for our statehood. We were standing on the edge of a precipice. With one wrong step, we could have lost our state.

The investigation into the conspiracy by the security forces and their accomplices continues at an intense pace, and is classified.

There is a lot of work ahead with witnesses, expert examinations and the study of various information.

One thing I can say is that there was a large-scale, detailed operation aimed at overthrowing the top leadership and discrediting it in the eyes of the people and the foreign public.

To achieve this goal, the conspirators did not hesitate to use professionally trained militants, whose task was to spread chaos in Almaty, our largest city, to instill fear into people and make them believe in the fatal outcome of events and to destabilize the situation in the country.

Therefore, I assure you that all those responsible for these tragic events will be punished, no matter what positions they occupy in society.

During those days, there was no choice but to take tough and drastic measures. At the most decisive moment, I did everything in my power for the country. It is my duty as the President and as a citizen.

Distinguished members of Parliament!

My dear fellow citizens!

My main priority as President has always been and will be the implementation of the reforms needed by the people.

I am absolutely confident that a steady progress of the country and large-scale social and economic reforms are impossible without political modernisation.

In two and a half years we have achieved substantial results in this direction.

In the framework of the four political reform packages that I have put forward, a number of important initiatives aimed at further democratisation of the country have been implemented.

The extent of the positive changes can be judged by the fact that more than ten laws have been passed in the political sphere alone.

Take, for example, the new democratic law on peaceful assembly.

It allowed activists, including opposition-minded social activists, to freely hold rallies and freely express their opinions.

This initiative has strengthened the roots of a new political culture and increased mutual responsibility and trust in society.

Yet certain groups of provocative activists believe it is possible and even necessary to violate this law, which is democratic in nature.

I declare there will be no further concessions. This law, as well as others, must be strictly enforced.

Our law-abiding citizens have already paid too high a price for this kind of free-will and irresponsibility.

The law is the same for all, both for those in power and the public.

Political transformation has shown the willingness of citizens to make decisions at all levels, from local government to national issues.

The political transformation is aimed at forming fair and just “rules of the game”, eradicating favouritism and monopolies in all spheres of life.

But this logic and dynamics of events does not suit everyone.

Those who were used to relying on behind-the-scenes schemes are panicking about losing their privileges and their sources of income.

They decided that they should act without delay to undermine the foundations of our statehood. You could say they went against their own people.

After the “Tragic January”, many believed that there would be a rollback – the authorities would start to “tighten the screws”, reduce the pace of modernisation.

But we will not deviate from the planned path, but, on the contrary, accelerate systemic changes in all spheres of life.

I have been carefully considering the initiatives proposed today even before the January events.

Frankly, some experts and government officials have advised me to take my time and postpone these plans until better times. They say, why change the system if it can be used in the current situation to your advantage.

Others quite rightly feared rampant street democracy, predicting various negative scenarios like Gorbachev's perestroika, especially since the geopolitical situation has become extremely complicated.

But I am firmly convinced that our country still needs fundamental reforms. Otherwise there could be stagnation.

We have seen its devastating consequences in recent Soviet history. In fact, the January events to some extent were also the result of domestic stagnation.

Over the past two months, I have outlined a range of priority tasks in the socio-economic sphere, ensuring national and public security.

Today, I would like to present a program of comprehensive modernization of the country's political system. It is based on a long-standing public demand for radical changes.

It takes into account the recommendations of deputies of the Parliament, the Constitutional Council, the Central Election Commission, the Supreme Court, and reputable experts.

Fruitful discussions were held with members of the National Council of Public Trust on this topic.

When developing the document, specific proposals of researchers and public figures, political parties and non-governmental organizations were carefully considered.

In general, the proposed reforms reflect a wide range of views that exist in our society. They act as a logical continuation of the transformations that have already begun and solve two urgent tasks.

Firstly, they promote consistent democratization, and secondly, they ensure the stability and manageability of the state.

This is especially important against the background of fundamental social shifts taking place within the country, as well as growing geopolitical tensions.

The current international situation in many ways resembles the most acute phases of the Cold War.

But the current situation in terms of its intensity, tough sanctions stand-off and unpredictable consequences for the whole world can without exaggeration be described as unprecedented. In any case, this was not the case before.

Therefore, it is vitally important for us not to deviate from our goals, to maintain national unity and solidarity.

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I have repeatedly said that no one needs reforms for the sake of reforms. We do not implement them for the fun of the public, for the sake of some ephemeral goals, and beautiful but obviously unattainable indicators.

The practice of declaring success on paper when this is not the case in reality is a thing of the past. The people do not need abstract ideas and promises, but tangible changes for the better.

We must speak openly about existing problems and work together to find the best ways to solve them.

It is important to ensure fair and open competition, and to permanently eliminate all artificial monopolies both in the economy and in politics.

The growth of people's well-being is possible only in conditions of genuine competition. The management system focused on the over-concentration of powers has already lost its effectiveness. It is not able to consolidate civil society with its diverse views and beliefs.

Therefore, we need well-considered steps to restructure the political model of Kazakhstan's development.

First of all, we are talking about the final transition from a super-presidential form of government to a presidential republic with a strong Parliament.

Such a system will ensure an optimal balance of power institutions and contribute to the country's sustainable development.

We are faced with the task of strengthening the role of Parliament, which will be an important factor in the successful implementation of the "listening state" concept.

We have a clear vision of the future and the contours of a New Kazakhstan – an effective state with a strong civil society.

We must implement the key formula of our state-building – "A strong President – an influential Parliament – an accountable Government".

To this end, I propose a number of initiatives that, I am sure, will make this strategic vision a reality.

First. On the powers of the President

As I have already said, Kazakhstan has developed a super-presidential model of government.

At the initial stage of the country's development, it was justified. But we are not standing still – society is changing, the country is changing. And our political system must constantly adapt to new realities.

Today, literally everything is focused on the President, and this is fundamentally wrong. We need to gradually move away from this practice.

For me, the long-term interests of the state are more important than any additional levers of power and situational influence. Therefore, at the January congress of the Amanat party, I announced my intention to leave the post of its chairman this year.

Merging party structures with the state apparatus is highly undesirable. Monopoly in politics inevitably leads to various social diseases and degradation of the state.

Political dominance needs to be put up with a reliable barrier. I propose to legislate the President's obligation to terminate his membership in the party for the period of his term of office.

This provision will increase political competition and ensure equal conditions for the development of all parties. In doing so, we will save the country's future leaders from the temptation to take over the main political institutions.

Based on the same logic, it is necessary to introduce into our legislation a provision on mandatory withdrawal from the party of the chairpersons and members of the Central Election Commission, the Accounts Committee and the Constitutional Council.

At the same time, we see that the over-concentration of powers in the centre is also projected at the regional level. Therefore, it is necessary to prohibit by law akims and their deputies from holding positions in party branches.

Such decisions will make it possible to form a multipolar party system.

Today, it has become obvious to the whole society that it was the monopolisation of political and economic activity that played perhaps the most important role in the January events.

But an important lesson of the "Tragic January" is that the concentration of power in the hands of the highest official in the state unnecessarily increases the influence of those close to him, as well as of financial and oligarchic groups. And they perceive the state as a personal fiefdom.

Nepotism, in whatever country, inevitably leads to negative personnel selection and becomes a fertile ground for corruption to flourish.

The Head of State should act as an unshakable guarantor of equal opportunities for all citizens.

Therefore, a legislative ban on holding positions of political civil servants and managers in the quasi-public sector will be introduced for the close family of the President. I think it would not be superfluous to fix this provision in the Constitution.

The overconcentration of the President's power is also expressed in an excessive number of his powers.

The Head of State has the right to cancel or suspend actions of the akims of regions and cities of republican significance.

This rule helps to root out the excessive practice of “micro-management” and reduces the independence of local executive bodies.

Moreover, right now the President has the right to remove district and even rural akims from office.

Such legislative provisions should be abolished.

The rejection of excessive presidential powers will be an important factor that will ensure the irreversibility of political modernisation in the country.

The proposed initiatives will fundamentally change the “rules of the game” and form a solid foundation for further democratisation of our society.

Second. Reformatting the representative branch of government

By consistently reducing the powers of the President, we will significantly strengthen the role of the Parliament and thereby increase the institutional stability of the state.

The country needs a strong representative government, in which responsible deputies with a mandate of people’s confidence will play an active role in state-building.

First of all, in my opinion, it is necessary to review the process of formation and a number of functions of the Senate.

Currently, the upper house consists of 49 deputies (two elected senators from each region) and 15 senators appointed by the President.

This design made it possible to take due account of regional specifics and allowed the Head of State to directly influence the legislative process.

For its time, it was quite progressive and effective. But today we need to move forward.

The presidential quota in the Senate should be considered not as a means of control, but as a mechanism for taking into account the votes and opinions of social groups that are poorly represented in Parliament.

Therefore, I have decided to reduce the presidential quota in the Senate from 15 to 10 deputies.

Moreover, five of them will be recommended by the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (APK), and not elected by it, as is currently the case.

The Lower House of Parliament should reflect the entire electoral landscape of the country without giving anyone artificial preferences.

Thus, we will abolish the APK quota in the Mazhilis, which, in my opinion, is correct both from a political and legal point of view.

This quota is transferred to the Senate and reduced from 9 to 5 deputies. Accordingly, the total number of deputy seats in the Mazhilis will decrease. As they say, better less, but better.

This initiative will provide mandates and additional votes for various ethnic groups in the upper house.

In general, I consider the existence of the Senate as the upper house of Parliament to be natural and justified.

There are quite a few states in the world with a unitary structure and a smaller population than in Kazakhstan, but, nevertheless, they have bicameral parliaments, particularly in Europe.

Another thing is that our Senate should become a chamber that really represents the interests of the country's regions. And this will require a reform of its powers.

According to the Constitution, the Senate has the right to adopt or not adopt bills approved by the Mazhilis. In other words, the Mazhilis does not actually have the opportunity to overcome the objections of the upper house.

In order to create a more balanced parliamentary system, it is necessary to review this practice.

I consider it expedient to introduce a norm that presupposes the right of the Senate only to approve or reject laws that have already been adopted by the Mazhilis.

Consequently, it is the Mazhilis that has the right to adopt laws.

The powers of the Senate, in turn, should be supplemented with the right to approve candidates for the posts of Chairpersons of the Constitutional Council and the Supreme Judicial Council.

This initiative will significantly strengthen the checks and balances in the political system. And it will significantly simplify the legislative procedure.

Along with this, the functionality of the Mazhilis will also be expanded.

Many large-scale projects and programs are being developed in our country, but their implementation is often far from ideal for various reasons.

It is necessary to strengthen parliamentary control over the quality of execution of the national budget. To do this, I propose to transform the Accounts Committee into the Supreme Audit Chamber, whose chairman should report twice a year to the deputies of the lower house. This will further enhance the status of the Mazhilis.

To increase citizens' confidence in the representative government, special attention should be paid to the maslikhats (local governing bodies).

Strong maslikhats contribute to solving current problems and improving the quality of life in the regions (oblasts).

I believe that to strengthen their independence, the post of a chairperson of the maslikhat should be introduced.

In addition, in order to systematically strengthen the influence of maslikhats, I consider it necessary to change the current procedure for appointing regional mayors.

Currently, deputies of maslikhats agree or do not agree on the only candidate proposed by the Head of State.

It is necessary to make appropriate amendments to the legislation regulating the right of the President to submit on an alternative basis at least two candidates for the posts of akims of regions and cities of republican significance.

Thus, the President will appoint akims of regions and cities of national significance, taking into account the results of consideration in maslikhats.

Essentially, we are talking about indirect elections of regional leaders.

At the same time, the Head of State retains the right to dismiss the heads of regions without consulting the maslikhats.

All the presented initiatives on reformatting the representative branch of government are aimed at creating a New Kazakhstan with a strong parliamentary culture and influential people's deputies.

THIRD. Improvement of the electoral system

The key goal of the country's political modernization is to increase the role of citizens in governing the state, including through electoral processes.

Fifteen years ago, as part of the constitutional reform, we switched to the proportional model of elections to the lower house of Parliament. Then, in 2018, the proportional principle was introduced in the elections of deputies to maslikhats (i.e. local councils). These steps have given a serious impetus to the development of our party system.

However, along with this positive trend, the negative consequences of such decisions began to appear.

We must recognize that non-partisan citizens were actually deprived of the opportunity to be elected not only to the Mazhilis (i.e. lower house of Parliament), but also to the local representative bodies.

As a result, electoral processes have lost their former appeal to citizens, and political alienation has increased. People simply stopped believing that their vote matters and is able to change life in the country for the better. By and large, many voters today do not know what the members of Parliament look like.

Taking into account these negative factors, I propose to switch to a more harmonious – mixed electoral system, which fully takes into account the rights of all citizens.

A proportional-majoritarian model would better reflect the interests of voters at both the national and regional levels.

The members of Parliament corps of the Mazhilis will be formed according to the following scheme – 70% on a proportional basis and 30% on a majoritarian basis. In addition, a mixed model will be introduced in the elections of maslikhats of regions and cities of national significance.

The return to this electoral system version is a very serious step. It is a logical continuation of the earlier decision to lower the threshold for parties to enter the Mazhilis and maslikhats.

Now, in fact, each region will get an opportunity to elect at least one representative to the lower chamber of Parliament. The new model will form a wider palette of views in the Mazhilis and make it more inclusive.

At the same time, in districts and cities, where close interaction between members of representative bodies and citizens is required, I propose a complete transition to the majoritarian system. This would create a more competitive political environment at the local level and open up additional opportunities for the emergence of new authoritative politicians.

The connection between members of representative bodies and voters will also strengthen the transition to the imperative mandate. This is an additional lever of influence on people's representatives, because there will be a possibility to recall them in case of improper fulfillment of their electoral promises.

Such an approach would greatly reinforce democratic traditions and foster a new political culture based on mutual responsibility and trust.

The combination of proportional and majoritarian systems will preserve the role of political parties as one of the key institutions of civil society. It will create conditions for a fairer electoral process and effective governance.

I am confident that the introduction of a mixed electoral model will increase the electoral activity of citizens and their involvement in the comprehensive modernisation of the country.

FOURTH. Expanding opportunities for the development of the party system

The course to build the New Kazakhstan comes from the need to ensure fair and free political competition.

To do this, we must create the most favourable environment possible for the institutional and organisational development of political parties.

Party registration procedures will be greatly simplified.

The registration threshold should be reduced fourfold, from 20,000 to 5,000 people.

The minimum required number of people at regional branches will be reduced threefold, from 600 to 200 individuals.

The minimum number of citizens' initiative group to create a party will be reduced by almost a third, from 1,000 to 700 people.

In turn, the timing of the founding congress and the period of formation of branches will increase.

Liberalisation in this matter will greatly enhance the process of development of the political space in the country.

New parties will emerge, capable of articulating and effectively addressing the urgent problems of their electorate.

FIFTH. Modernisation of the electoral process

International experience shows that the system of organisation of elections is in constant change, the search for optimal solutions for fair and transparent elections is on-going.

In addition to information and technological factors, the coronavirus pandemic has significantly influenced this process in recent years.

In many countries, alternative forms of voting are expanding, including electronic, early voting, remote voting, and multi-day voting.

Therefore, it is necessary to study the world's best practices and, if necessary, gradually introduce them.

In the era of rapid development of communication technologies, the activity of candidates and parties in social networks is of great importance. But the current legislation does not regulate campaigning on social networks. In spite of this, during election campaigns it was conducted in one way or another.

In order to eliminate this omission, I propose to legally allow campaigning on social networks, fixing the relevant regulations and rules.

It is also necessary to legally formalise the activity of observers. This institution is an indispensable element of transparent elections.

The history of democracy is, first of all, the history of improving electoral procedures and control over their observance.

I believe observers should have clearly spelled out rights and a clearly defined area of responsibility.

Territorial election commissions also play an important role in the organisation and conduct of elections. With the introduction of direct elections of rural akims (mayors) last year, the electoral process throughout the country became, in fact, permanent.

The principles of operation of territorial election commissions should be reviewed, transferring them to a professional basis.

In order to eliminate the likelihood of double voting, as well as voting at any polling station, it is necessary to consider the feasibility of forming a single electronic voter database.

And in order to prevent individuals from influencing the course of the election, it is necessary to set limits on donations to election funds.

According to the Constitution and international law, any elections in Kazakhstan are strictly our internal affair. But this norm does not exclude potential attempts to influence their results from abroad.

Given these factors and the general increase in various hybrid threats in the world, including the use of electoral technologies, effective measures should be taken at the legislative level to prevent any possibility of foreign interference in our country's elections.

First and foremost, it concerns ensuring maximum financial transparency for all participants in election campaigns, be they candidates, observers or the media.

SIXTH. Strengthening human rights institutions

The Constitution has supreme legal force and is the basis of the country's entire legal system. But it is not uncommon that it is difficult to give an unambiguous answer as to whether certain legislative acts or decisions comply with its provisions.

In Kazakhstan, the Constitutional Council interprets various legal norms. However, citizens are deprived of the opportunity to appeal directly to it for clarification.

At the same time, in most countries of the world there is such an institution as the Constitutional Court, where everyone can send the appropriate requests. At the dawn of Independence, this body existed in Kazakhstan as well.

Experts agree that its activities are more effective in ensuring compliance with the provisions of the Basic Law.

Given these circumstances, I propose to establish a Constitutional Court. The Prosecutor General and the Human Rights Ombudsperson should also be granted the right to appeal to the Constitutional Court.

I am confident these initiatives will be an important step in building a fair and lawful state, institutionally strengthening the system of checks and balances and protecting the constitutional rights of citizens.

As you know, I pay special attention to the protection of fundamental rights of citizens.

In 2020, our country acceded to the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which provides for the abolition of the death penalty. And last year I signed a decree on further measures in the field of human rights, aimed at the long-term and comprehensive development of this sphere. A number of other progressive initiatives were implemented with the participation of the National Council of Public Trust.

However, the human rights issues require constant improvement.

I believe that in order to finally establish the decision to abolish the death penalty, the Constitution must be amended accordingly.

It is important to introduce a systematic approach to the investigation of crimes involving torture.

To date, there is no specific body responsible for this area. This practice is fraught with certain risks.

Therefore, I propose to assign these functions to the Prosecutor General's Office.

This approach will ensure the objectivity and impartiality of the investigation and will ensure punishment for failures in the sphere of law enforcement.

In addition, systemic measures should be taken to reduce the level of violence in society.

In this respect, an important role is played by effective counteraction to offenses in the sphere of family and domestic relations.

Today, there are increasing number of appeals from citizens and public activists regarding the need to toughen penalties for violence against women and children.

Previously, I gave instructions to determine the expediency of criminalising such offenses.

I instruct the Prosecutor General's Office to conduct a comprehensive study of this issue and solve this problem.

In general, in order to increase the rule of law and systematically strengthen human rights activities, I think it is advisable to adopt separate constitutional laws on the prosecutor's office and on the Human Rights Ombudsperson.

The rule of law cannot be guaranteed without truly independent, open and professional courts at all levels.

The state is doing a lot of work in this direction.

A new recruitment system is being implemented, and the transparency of judicial processes and procedures is being consistently improved.

The key role in this matter is played by the Supreme Judicial Council, which ensures the constitutional powers of the President to form courts and guarantees the independence and immunity of judges.

It is fundamentally important that its activities are fully transparent and open to public monitoring.

This can be achieved through the practice of online broadcasts of competitive procedures of the Supreme Judicial Council and the publication of detailed, reasoned explanations of their results.

Jury trials allow for greater civil participation in the administration of justice.

In Kazakhstan, jurors can render a verdict only for especially grave crimes. I think we should go further and expand the categories of cases subject to a jury trial.

This novelty will contribute to the democratisation of the judicial system and increase public confidence in it.

The state will pay special attention to the creation of an open information space and in-demand and strong media.

As an effective channel of communication between the authorities and the people, the media can and should raise pressing issues. But this should be done with great civic responsibility, not working on orders from outside, contributing to the polarisation of our society, and not for shady fees, participating in a hidden struggle of political clans.

Journalists should sincerely care about their country and its citizens. It is not for nothing that the media are called the “fourth estate” which is why you should exercise your influence on the minds and hearts of the people with great care. This is my special appeal to our journalists.

I am convinced that there can be no further democratic transformation without an independent and responsible media.

It is therefore necessary to revise the law on media to take into account the interests of the state, the demands of society, and the trends in the development of the media sphere.

Another important factor in the country’s sustainable and comprehensive progress is the activity of non-governmental organisations.

The non-governmental sector invariably raises important social issues and promotes their comprehensive resolution.

The challenges facing Kazakhstan today require intensified interaction between the state and non-governmental organisations and a systematic reset of civil society institutions.

We need wider and deeper involvement of NGOs and activists in the preparation and implementation of reforms. To achieve this, it is first and foremost necessary to ensure open discussions of all national projects and strategic documents.

In this matter, any kind of imitation, the creation of the appearance of dialogue is inadmissible.

We need to awaken civic activity in the country and launch a process of conscious and constructive partnership between the state and society.

It is for this reason that we are developing public councils under the central and local executive government bodies, as well as in the quasi-public sector.

I have repeatedly criticised their work, but overall, they have a great institutional potential that needs to be fully realised.

This year, at my initiative, it is planned to drastically renew their structure, as well as their work plans.

The popular proverb says, “A fur coat sewn together won’t be short.”

Our ancestors always discussed and made consequential decisions collectively. The great gatherings in Ulytau, Ordabasy and Kultobe are clear evidence of this.

We must revive this democratic tradition of the Great Steppe, which has laid the foundations of nationwide unity.

Therefore, I propose to create the National Kurultai (Congress) instead of the National Council of Public Trust, which has successfully fulfilled its tasks.

The new institution will continue the work of the National Council at the national level.

The Kurultai should form a unified institutional model for public dialogue. It will strengthen the interaction between the authorities and the people.

The activity of all the acting public councils will be systematised.

The National Kurultai will include representatives from all regions. In addition, it will include several members of Parliament, members of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, Civil Alliance, public councils and organisations, distinguished public figures, representatives of business, industry and agriculture, as well as other citizens.

In this way, we will have a body where a wide range of diverse opinions and views will be represented. Members of the Kurultai will meet on a regular basis to discuss important issues and problems.

EIGHTH. Improvement of the administrative-territorial structure of the country.

Changing the system of elections and the procedure for forming the Parliament, it is necessary to take into account the administrative-territorial system.

In the first years of independence, several regions were united in the country. There were political and economic reasons for that.

Today, Kazakhstan is entering a new stage of development. The socio-economic and demographic situation is already quite different; we are facing other problems and tasks.

Our country's progress depends directly on the prosperity of the regions. I emphasised this issue in the 2019 Address. The principle "strong regions – strong country" remains unchanged.

In this regard, it is very important that the administrative-territorial structure of the country is optimal.

Earlier, Shymkent was given the status of a city of national significance, and the South Kazakhstan region was renamed Turkistan, with the city of Turkistan as its administrative centre. These were the right decisions, supported by the people.

In my article "Independence above All" I wrote that this experience would continue, after which many proposals began to come from citizens.

On my instructions, all of them have been thoroughly studied. Taking into consideration the suggestions received, I would like to propose a number of new initiatives.

First and foremost, I propose to form the Abai region with the city of Semey as its centre.

I know the people of the region have been raising this issue for a long time. There are a lot of unsolved problems there now, for example, outdated infrastructure. The condition of Semey, once the centre of the Alash movement, is not good either.

We must restore historical justice and revive this sacred land which gave our nation many great sons of our people.

The Ulytau region must be formed on the territory of the former Zhezkazgan region. The city of Zhezkazgan will once again become the regional centre.

The creation of a separate region has not only economic, but also spiritual and cultural significance.

The Ulytau region, which is located at the heart of Kazakhstan's great spaces, holds a special place in our history. It has been the site of great gatherings which have taken momentous decisions for the people.

Located in the heart of Saryarka, Ulytau has enormous tourism potential. Its production and logistics capabilities need to be fully realised. Essentially, we are opening the way for the development of the Ulytau region.

There are also many questions regarding the Almaty agglomeration.

Residents of the region mainly live in the suburbs of Almaty. At the same time, it is not easy to solve problems of Uzynagash or Talgar, for example, from Taldykorgan. In addition, people have to travel long distances to get to the centre of the region.

Given these and other circumstances, I propose to divide this region into Zhetysu and Almaty regions. The centre of the Almaty region will be Kapshagai, and the centre of the Zhetysu region will be Taldykorgan.

I believe that these steps will give a strong impetus to the development of the region.

Overall, the issue of the formation of new regions concerns many people. It is no secret that in due course the regions that lost their regional status saw their population decrease and their quality of life deteriorate. The time has come to remedy the situation.

Administrative-territorial changes will optimise public administration, simplify commuting to and from the regional centre, and better regulate internal migration.

The proposed names of the new regions – Abai, Ulytau, and Zhetysu – have a special meaning.

We will continue to strengthen our national identity by returning the original geographical names and reviving the memory of our great figures.

For instance, Kapshagai town is closely connected with Dinmukhamed Kunayev, an outstanding personality in the history of our people. And if the public proposes naming the town after him, I will support such a position.

I am saying all this on the basis of suggestions and opinions of citizens. If local residents support these initiatives, they should already be put into place in the near future.

I instruct the Government to carefully study the issues of administrative-territorial structure and propose ways to implement these initiatives. This is not a simple matter; we must think through all the details.

The above-mentioned proposals also provide an opportunity to take measures to optimise civil servants in the offices of governors of regions and major cities in terms of their reduction depending on the population size in the regions.

In any case, governors should not have more than three deputies, in exceptional cases – four.

This Administration of the President must keep this issue under control.

NINTH. Decentralisation of local self-government

Successful political modernisation and the development of civil society are impossible without further deepening the process of decentralising power. We will continue to transfer real powers from the centre to the regions.

Above all, it is necessary to effectively separate the functions of the state and local self-government institutions.

It should be understood that a strong system of local self-government is the foundation for the direct participation of citizens in improving the quality of life in their home locality.

There is no doubt that the people of Kazakhstan have long been ready to take responsibility for their cities, districts and villages. We should not underestimate people and be afraid to hand over to them the powers they are capable of assuming.

As part of political modernisation, maslikhats should become a key link in local governance.

Today they have a hybrid nature, being at the same time an institution of local government and local self-government. Therefore, it is necessary to clearly outline the powers of the maslikhats.

It is necessary to radically revise the system of regional financing.

Currently, rural districts are completely dependent on the higher akims (governors or mayors) and receive support from leftovers.

Taking into account the introduction of the election of mayors, it is worth introducing a mechanism of direct financing of local governments in accordance with international best practices.

There is also a need to significantly expand their ownership base. With substantial resources, they will be able to exert real influence and responsibility. Otherwise, it is just an imitation, not self-government.

All the necessary preparatory work on this issue must be completed by the middle of this year.

Another important step will be to ease the procurement procedures for local governments, eliminating bureaucracy and formalism.

I instruct the Government together with the Administration of the President to work in detail on mechanisms for implementing the above-mentioned instructions and to take them into account when drafting the law “On Local Self-Government”.

In addition, we must consider the issue of ratification of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which is the basic international instrument in this area.

All these measures will promote the emergence of truly credible and responsible local leaders capable of mobilising their communities to effectively address the problems that concern people.

The real strengthening of the system of local self-government will open new opportunities for the development of regions, the reduction of dependency, and the deep rooting of democratic transformations in the country.

TENTH. On priority anti-crisis measures

Kazakhstan has faced unprecedented financial and economic difficulties in our modern history associated with a sharp aggravation of the geopolitical situation.

Tough sanctions confrontation is already leading to serious costs not only for individual countries, but also for the entire global economy.

The situation is changing rapidly, literally every hour. Uncertainty and turbulence in world markets are growing, production and trade chains are collapsing.

But there is still no reason to panic. Our country has all the necessary reserves and tools to overcome a large-scale crisis.

The government is obliged to urgently implement a comprehensive package of priority anti-crisis measures.

First of all, it is necessary to ensure the stability of the national currency. This is a key factor in our economic security.

Recent events in the world have put powerful pressure on the tenge. This is well known to you. Instability in the foreign exchange market is associated with panic, the withdrawal of capital, “gray” cross-border cash flows.

Therefore, in the financial sector, it is necessary to reduce the increased speculative demand that has arisen, among other things, due to the activity of outside buyers.

The day before yesterday, I signed a special Decree that imposes restrictions on the export of foreign currency.

Large institutional players should purchase foreign currency only as part of the fulfilment of their contractual obligations, ensuring its supply.

The issue of increasing sales of export foreign exchange earnings by companies with state participation should be worked out. I expect private subsoil users will also ensure the sale of their foreign exchange earnings.

As part of the fulfilment of their contractual obligations, second-tier banks must control and monitor the purchase of foreign currency by their clients.

It is necessary to establish a strict control over the observance of this requirement by banks.

Speculation in the markets should in no case cause an unjustified “burning” of our reserves.

The Government, the National Bank, the Agency for the Development and Regulation of the Financial Market need to take decisive measures in this direction. In general, extraordinary solutions are needed.

In the current extremely unstable international situation, ensuring the food security of the country is of great importance.

Events in Ukraine have led to a sharp jump in food prices. It is likely that they will soon break all absolute records.

Against this background, the quality of the sowing campaign comes to the fore. However, many farmers, as far as I know, are not yet ready to plant.

The government and akimats need to take this work under special control. It is necessary to provide farmers with the necessary volume of fuel and lubricants at affordable prices.

You should double-check the readiness of agricultural machinery, stocks of seeds and fertilisers.

We must not forget that low rainfall in several regions can negatively affect crop yields and lead to a shortage of fodder.

In general, it is necessary, together with the farming community, to reconsider approaches to state support for the agro-industrial complex.

In order to prevent shortages and an uncontrolled rise in food prices, it is necessary to work out the issue of purchasing agricultural products for state stabilisation funds at forward prices.

In a rapidly changing environment, the state apparatus must quickly respond to the situation, act extremely harmoniously.

Slow decision-making style, bureaucratic formalism is unacceptable here.

Now we need to fully mobilise. Decisions must be made quickly, based on the real needs of business and citizens, within a maximum of three days, and preferably within a day.

The Operational Headquarters created under the Government should simultaneously work as a Situation Centre, which analyses information in real time, as well as develops specific emergency measures.

At the system level, it is necessary to eradicate excessive bureaucratisation, which seriously hinders the development of the country. Its scale is so great that many state structures see it as the essence of their existence.

In the near future, I will sign a decree on the de-bureaucratisation of the activities of the state apparatus. It will become the starting point for a radical review of internal procedures in state bodies, optimisation of rule-making and budgetary processes.

In addition, it is necessary to urgently start developing a new package of structural reforms in the economy and public administration, taking into account the strategy of political modernization.

The foundation of the New Kazakhstan should be based on a harmonious combination of political and economic reforms.

This will ensure the continuous progress of our country and the improvement of the living standards of citizens.

Dear compatriots!

The initiatives I have presented today are ambitious. They will significantly change the political system and the administrative-territorial structure of the country.

To implement them, it will be necessary to amend more than 30 articles of the Constitution. In addition, more than 20 laws will need to be adopted by the end of the year.

Legislative work is a complex and lengthy process, which must be approached very responsibly.

We must take into account all internal and external challenges.

During the years of independence, we have worthily passed through all the difficulties and achieved great success.

The beginning of the cardinal transformation of the country coincided with the crisis that broke out in the world.

It is obvious that the current international situation has an impact on Kazakhstan.

However, no matter how difficult the times, we will firmly stick to our course.

Having learned the lessons of the past, we are moving towards the future with confidence.

On this path, we, first of all, need unity, common sense and patience, wisdom and endurance.

We must carefully weigh every decision, take every case seriously.

A nation with a high patriotic spirit will achieve all its goals.

Our mission is to build a New Kazakhstan.

What does it mean?

A New Kazakhstan is an image of the future of our sovereign country.

People that do not believe in the future will not be able to build a strong state. There are many examples of this from history.

We are firm in our intentions and confident in the bright future of Kazakhstan.

We will ensure that the constitutional rights of every citizen are respected.

We will form a new political culture based on mutual respect and trust between the state and society.

Important decisions will be made openly, with the participation of citizens, because the state will listen to the voice of everyone.

We will always highly appreciate conscientious work, progressive knowledge and advanced experience.

I want to see a New Kazakhstan as such a country.

To achieve our goals, the renewal of the state apparatus or personnel changes are not enough. Everyone must start the change with themselves. We need to reset the system of individual and social values.

This is a difficult process that takes years. Awareness of high responsibility, trust and attention to each other, love for our country will help us in this matter.

We need to understand that no one from outside will do anything for us. Everything is in our hands.

Let's build the New Kazakhstan together.

I am sure, relying on the support of the people, in unity and harmony we will achieve our goals.

* * *

Today, a devastating geopolitical storm has broke out on the planet.

Therefore, we need to firmly adhere to the strategic course aimed at protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state, ensuring the fundamental interests of our people. This is the most important task.

We must preserve our main asset – Independence, strengthen the foundations of national identity, focus on the transformation of the country. This is our sacred duty to future generations.

Now it is not the time to erect political barricades, organise rallies on every occasion, insist on dubious decisions, put forward peremptory demands, lash out at police officers doing their duty. All this discredits our people in the eyes of the world community. The events of “Tragic January” have already caused serious damage to the reputation of our country – this must be admitted.

Chaotic political reforms can lead to a weakening of the state, with grave consequences for its sovereignty and integrity.

There are many examples of this in ancient and recent world history, when individual countries lost a huge part of their territory, fell into the abyss of chaos and anarchy.

The course towards building a New Kazakhstan is aimed at changing the paradigm of the country’s development. We think over every step and firmly follow the intended path.

In New Kazakhstan, we must invariably follow the principle of “different views, but one nation.”

A high culture of dialogue and compromise will become one of the main factors in strengthening civil solidarity in our country.

We will resolutely oppose ignorance and archaism, radicalism and dependency, the cult of consumption and corruption.

We need to overcome mutual alienation and restore faith in society in the reality of change.

We will bet on the energy, talent and diligence of people.

We will create the most favourable conditions for the self-realisation of each citizen.

Only in this way can we multiply the creative potential of our people.

Only in this way will we create our own era of reformation, creating a new reality in all spheres of life.

I am sure that together we will overcome any challenges and make our Kazakhstan even stronger.

* * *

I want our citizens to have a happy life not tomorrow, but today.

For us – our independence is above all.

In this very unstable world, no one needs our Kazakhstan but us.

There is nothing more important for me than the well-being of the country. First and foremost, I am concerned about what the future of our people will be like.

Regardless of how different people evaluate my work, my most important duty is to protect our statehood.

And I am ready to take on this full responsibility.

My sacred duty is to be faithful to the precepts of my ancestors.

New Kazakhstan is a testament of the present generation to the future.

Let's build the New Kazakhstan together!

May our sacred Motherland prosper!