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Kazakhstan: new survey shows strong support for Nazarbaev among general population but complex opinions on the role of the U.S., Russia and China

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Ahead of Kazakhstan’s 4 December presidential elections, global media research institute **InterMedia** today released findings from a mid-November national survey of 1,645 Kazakhstanis which found continued strong support for President Nursultan Nazarbaev. Seventy-one percent of respondents said they plan to vote for President Nazarbaev while no more than two percent of respondents said they plan to vote for any other single candidate.

“There is little question that Nazarbaev will win his third term in office to secure seven more years as President of Kazakhstan,” said InterMedia Project Manager Marjorie Winfrey. “The dynamics for future relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, the United States, China and other world powers, however, are less certain. Public opinion reflects the country’s difficult position balancing competing interests and Kazakhstan’s unique role as a bridge between Central Asia and much of the rest of the world.”

Respondents expressed confidence the elections will be “free and fair,” with only 15 percent disagreeing. Further evidence of Nazarbaev’s support among Kazakhstanis is the percentage of respondents agreeing that Nazarbaev’s government has implemented the appropriate level of reforms in recent years; 56 percent are satisfied with the rate of reforms. Less than four percent of respondents disagree with the statement “Kazakhstan is going in the right direction.” Eighty-three percent “view the next 12 months with hope,” and 82 percent believe “life in Kazakhstan is better than life in neighboring countries.” These are likely important factors in Nazarbaev’s impressive level of support among the population.

Perhaps the most striking finding is the high confidence citizens have in the central government: when asked to state their trust level of 12 various institutions, 81 percent of respondents said they trust the government of Kazakhstan, compared to only 37 percent who say they trust international NGOs.

As discussions between the United States and Kazakhstan on enhanced economic and military cooperation continue, it is noteworthy that people in Kazakhstan have very mixed feelings about the United States. Those who harbor negative feelings toward the United States tend to think of the country’s military power and political influence; those more positively inclined toward the United States think first of the country’s strong economy. Attitudes have remained steady over the

past year, but about one-third of the population think the United States has too much influence over Kazakhstan's affairs. The population is clearly divided on how close relations between the two countries should be: nearly one-third (29 percent) agree Kazakhstan should align itself more closely with the United States, but 39 percent disagree and 26 percent neither agree nor disagree.

Public opinion regarding Russia is more complicated, with 49 percent of people saying Russia has too much influence over Kazakhstan's affairs. As with people in the other Central Asian states, people in Kazakhstan simultaneously maintain very positive attitudes toward Russia while wishing their own country would exercise more control over the relationship. They were more likely to say Russia has too much control over Kazakhstan's affairs than they were to say the same about the United States or China. But Kazakhstanis also expressed much more support for expanding partnerships and cooperation with Russia than with either of the other two superpowers: 79 percent want to see Kazakhstan more closely aligned with Russia; 35 percent want to see Kazakhstan more closely aligned with China.

Elsewhere, people in Kazakhstan, enjoying better economic conditions than their counterparts in other countries in the region, are looking beyond Central Asia to Western Europe, with just over 41 percent of respondents saying they would eventually like to see Kazakhstan join the EU.

InterMedia is a leading international media research, public opinion, evaluation and consulting organization creatively equipping clients to understand their audiences, gauge their effectiveness and target their communications in transitional and developing societies worldwide. Based in Washington, D.C. and active year-round in more than 60 countries, InterMedia helps clients understand complex issues in challenging research environments. The company's strengths include its people—area experts skilled in scientifically-based research and focused on client solutions—its vast global network of local research partners and contacts and its rich data archive of close to 500 media and opinion surveys carried out over the past 15 years.

Survey note: The most recent InterMedia-sponsored survey was of 1,645 adults 15 and older and was conducted 7- 28 November 2005. At the time of this report, data had not been received for Aktobe, Atyrau, Kyzylorda and Mangystau regions; figures are based on data from all other regions of Kazakhstan. Range of error with a 95 percent confidence interval is +/- 2.42 percent. InterMedia's previous national survey of 2,000 adults was conducted 12 November - 10 December 2004.