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DIPLOMATIC PANORAMA-KAZAKHSTAN

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FOREIGN MINISTER DENIES KAZAKHSTAN BECOMES TOTALITARIAN STATE

ALMATY, Sept 4 (Interfax) - "The concern on the part of certain circles that Kazakhstan is entering a period of totalitarianism is groundless," Kazakh Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev said in an exclusive interview with Interfax Friday.

"Kazakhstan steadily fosters democratic values in both the internal and the foreign policies," he said, commenting on a statement issued by the U.S. Embassy in Almaty on the results of the August 30 constitutional referendum in Kazakhstan.

In its statement, issued on August 31, the Embassy expressed the concern on the part of the United States about the fact that "the Kazakh Constitution does not correspond to some generally recognized democratic norms," stressing that the development of democracy in the country "will inevitably affect" bilateral relations.

According to the foreign minister, the practice of many countries, "both in Europe and in Asia, demonstrates that Kazakhstan needs strong presidential power."

"The adoption of the new Constitution cannot in any way affect the Kazakh foreign policy," said Tokayev. He said that the Foreign Ministry is subordinate directly to the president who is "the architect of the country's foreign policy." The Constitution only confirmed these principles, said Tokayev.

"Whether someone likes it or not, Kazakhstan will now live under the new Constitution adopted by the people. About 90% of the eight million voters who took part in the referendum voted in favor of it," said the Kazakh foreign minister.

Speaking about U.S.-Kazakh relations, Tokayev supposed that "they will not change significantly" and will develop further.

"We maintain most close contacts, both secret and open, with the U.S. administration," he said.

"We believe that the democratic partnership relations, as they are called in the charter signed by our countries in February of 1994, will be strengthened," said Tokayev.

"As a bearer of democratic values, Kazakhstan can play an important role in the Central Asia, which are unrepresented."