The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Kazakhstan's President Calls for Early Election

January 31, 2011

ASTANA, Kazakhstan — Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev called an early presidential election on Monday after refusing to sanction a referendum that might have let him govern unopposed for a third decade.

"I cannot create a precedent that would set the wrong guidelines for further generations of politicians," Nazarbayev, 70, said in a live televised address.

"I have made the decision not to hold a referendum," he said. "I propose holding an early presidential election, despite the fact that this will reduce my current term in office by almost two years."

The next election, very likely to be won by Nazarbayev, was scheduled to be held by December 2012.

Earlier on Monday, the Constitutional Council ruled that a bill calling for a referendum that would have bypassed elections in 2012 and 2017 was not legal, giving Nazarbayev one month

to oppose the decision.

The council's decision overruled a unanimous vote by members of parliament in favor of the plebiscite on Jan. 14. Nazarbayev himself had publicly rejected the proposal a week earlier.

The United States and the European Union had also criticized the idea, with Washington calling it a setback for democracy.

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