

A portrait of a middle-aged man with grey hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a purple patterned tie. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a flag with blue and white stripes.

**EURACTIV**

# MULTI- VECTOR DIPLOMACY

SPECIAL REPORT | NOV - DEC 2019  
<https://eurac.tv/9R60>

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## MULTI- VECTOR DIPLOMACY

SPECIAL REPORT | NOV - DEC 2019  
<https://eurac.tv/9R60>

*Lodged between China and Russia, Kazakhstan, a country with huge territory and a modest population, pursues a 'multi-vector' foreign policy, positively engaging with its big neighbours, but also with the US and the EU and the global community.*

*Strengthening world peace through various initiatives, ranging from nuclear non-proliferation to mediation to help solve hotbeds of tension or inter-religious dialogue, have been constant policies of Kazakhstan since its independence from the USSR.*

*After the 2019 presidential election, the country's new leadership is continuing and developing further these initiatives.*

# Contents

.....

Strong state power –  
the case of Kazakhstan 4

EU-sponsored Nur-Sultan conference  
'happily coincides' with Central Asia summit 6

Expert: Nazarbayev pushed Russia  
and Ukraine to meet in Paris 8

Yerman Mukhtar:  
We don't build walls in the steppe 12

Kazakh strategist: The EU is a precious,  
but undervalued partner 15

# Strong state power – the case of Kazakhstan

By Georgi Gotev | EURACTIV.com



The conference “institution of Presidency: Kazakhstan’s model”, on 27 November 2019 in Nur-Sultan. [Georgi Gotev]

From the early stage of its post-Soviet transition, Kazakhstan has consolidated strong state power to avoid chaos. Today, as the country is considered successful at home and internationally, this centralisation is being reduced and tribute is being paid to the one person who steered the country during the last 30 years.

Former President Nursultan Nazarbayev was not present at a conference on Wednesday (27 November), titled “Institution of

Presidency – Kazakhstan’s model”, held in the Kazakh capital, recently named Nur-Sultan after him. But his name was pronounced many times, in a sign that he has been elevated to the status of international “senior statesman”.

Nazarbayev served as the president of Kazakhstan from 24 April 1990 until his resignation on 19 March 2019. Before that, he was the leader of the Kazakh soviet republic before the collapse of the USSR.

Actually, Nazarbayev “stepped

aside” rather than resigned. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Nazarbayev’s political “child”, was elected as the country’s new leader on 9 June with 70% of the votes. Nazarbayev, who usually won well over 90% in previous elections, is still very present in the political life, in his current capacity as “First President”.

“Voting for Tokayev, Kazakhs actually voted for Nazarbayev,” said Nurnam Nigmatulin, chairman of the

Continued on Page 5

Continued from Page 4

Madzihilis, the lower house of the Kazakh parliament.

He recalled the difficult beginning of independent Kazakhstan in the early 1990s, with two million unemployed out of a population of 15 million, and 200 big state enterprises going bankrupt in 1994.

“It became clear that we need a strong state”, Nigmatulin said, illustrating the concept of the 1993 constitution, which gave the president strong executive powers. This constitution marked the transition to a market economy, he said, adding that during 22 years in office, Nazarbayev did not make use of his constitutional right to legislate directly.

In the meantime, the country’s economy greatly improved, with living standards increasing nine-fold, the official said.

In 2017, it was Nazarbayev who initiated a constitutional reform aimed at a more balanced power-sharing, giving up several presidential prerogatives, including vetting government decisions, the parliamentarian said further.

Farid Mukhamedshin, chairman of the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan (actually the leader of Tatarstan, a federal subject of the Russian Federation), made an interesting comparison between the different entities resulting from the collapse of the USSR.

Although the starting conditions were equal for all, Kazakhstan “succeeded a lot”, Mukhamedshin said. He didn’t name entities that were less successful in their transition but said Kazakhstan’s example and the name of Nazarbayev were very highly regarded in Tatarstan.

## THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Recent developments in Ukraine, including high-level corruption, in which some of the actors are incidentally US politicians, highlight that transition paths have indeed been different for the former Soviet republics. No one mentioned Ukraine, but the relative success of Kazakhstan was measured against setbacks in other cases of recent nation-building.

The deputy speakers of the parliaments of Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkey, as well as parliamentarians from Serbia, Azerbaijan, and Mongolia, praised Kazakhstan for its international initiatives, aimed at easing global tensions.

Levent Gök, the deputy speaker of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, praised Kazakhstan as a “brotherly county”, a “very successful state in Central Asia”, also very active internationally.

In particular, he highlighted the role of Nazarbayev in the framework of the Turkic Council, a group of countries speaking the same family of languages. He said Nazarbayev was unanimously elected honorary chairperson of this group, which is on its way to becoming an international organisation.

Adil Aliyev, a member of Azerbaijan’s parliament, said that in the post-Soviet transition, in “other countries incompetent people created chaos”.

Fortunately, he said, this was not the case of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. He stressed the importance of transforming the Turkic Council into a fully-fledged organisation and highlighted Nazarbayev’s role in this endeavor.

Speakers at the conference, which did not include any EU officials, also highlighted another honorary title Nazarbayev has recently obtained. Soon after he resigned as president, he was named honorary chairman of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council.

Kazakhstan, a founding member of the Eurasian Economic Union, is spearheading a rapprochement between this organisation and the EU.

Serbian MP Dragomir Karić quoted his country’s Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić as telling Nazarbayev “I want to learn from you”. Karić praised Kazakhstan for having managed to raise living standards but also provided some advice to his hosts.

With an area of three million square kilometers, Kazakhstan is the eighth-largest country in the world but its population is only 20 million.

The Serbian MP said he had five children and urged all Kazakhs to aim for the same number.

“You should adopt a law for that”, he said, triggering applause from the audience.

# EU-sponsored Nur-Sultan conference 'happily coincides' with Central Asia summit

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By Georgi Gotev | EURACTIV.com



Participants to the Regional Conference on 'Enhanced Integration for Prosperity in Central Asia'. Their host Roman Vassilenko raises his hand. [Georgi Gotev]

**A** two-day conference on "Enhanced integration and Prosperity in Central Asia" opened in Kazakhstan's capital Nur-Sultan on Thursday (28 November), coinciding with a summit of the leaders of the five Central Asian countries on Friday in Tashkent, the capital of neighbouring Uzbekistan.

The conference in Nur-Sultan was organised by the EU delegation

in Kazakhstan and had in its title the keyword "integration" – not exactly to the taste of all countries of the region, which prefer the less binding term "cooperation".

The five countries of Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – are all former Soviet republics but each followed its own path after the collapse of the USSR. In 2018, a rather discrete but very important Central

Asia summit was held in Astana, as the Kazakh capital was called then.

The summit in Tashkent is labeled as a "Consultative meeting" of the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan, the country with the largest population of the five, became key for the start of regional

Continued on Page 7

Continued from Page 6

cooperation after the death of its first leader Islam Karimov in 2016.

His successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, has been pursuing a less autocratic path, seeking to reform and liberalise the country and mend ties in the region. It was him who initiated in 2017 the idea of holding regular meetings of the presidents of the Central Asian countries.

Turkmenistan, the most authoritarian country of the region, and the most suspicious of Western influence, has as policy not to join any organisations except the UN. Its president Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov did not attend the Astana summit but did confirm attendance in Tashkent.

The EU, but also other organisations such as the OECD, see a lot of value in Central Asian cooperation. The reason is simple: separately, the countries are less attractive for investors while together they could represent a sizeable market, as well as a zone of prosperity and geopolitical stability.

Central Asia has a total population of about 72 million, of which Kazakhstan has 18 million, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan six million apiece, Tajikistan nine million and Uzbekistan 33 million people.

Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan all border Afghanistan and the positive influence of such culturally close neighbours could be of utmost importance in overcoming decades of war and violence in Afghanistan.

## A SAFE DISTANCE

The EU has no geopolitical plans in the region and in no way wants to lead the integration of the Central Asian countries. EU relations in the region are at different degrees and, in fact, the EU is not represented at the Tashkent summit.

With Kazakhstan, the EU has signed an Enhanced Partnership Cooperation Agreement, the first of its kind, which has just been ratified by all EU members and will enter into force in 2020.

With Kyrgyzstan, the signing process was completed in July and ratification has now started. With Uzbekistan, negotiations on finalising the PCA are ongoing. Remarkably, 2019 saw the opening of a full-fledged EU Delegation in Turkmenistan, and this ensures the political presence of the EU at its highest level in all five countries.

Asked by EURACTIV if the EU-organised conference in Nur-Sultan was intended to coincide with the Central Asian summit in Tashkent, the EU ambassador to Kazakhstan, Sven-Olof Carlsson, said this was actually a “happy coincidence”.

Indeed, while the EU event had been planned for months, Uzbekistan announced the holding of the summit only days ago.

Roman Vassilenko, Kazakhstan's deputy foreign minister, added that what was agreed in Nur-Sultan today could be “a harbinger” for things to come in the bigger format.

He said that economic cooperation, security and assistance to Afghanistan would be without any doubt among the priorities to be discussed at head of state level in Tashkent.

The Regional Conference on ‘Enhanced Integration for Prosperity in Central Asia’ was organised to mark the official launch of three EU-funded multi-year programmes that aim to support trade, rule of law as well as investments and growth in Central Asia, to the tune of €28 million.

The EU is not spending big on Central Asia, but apparently its contributions are more than welcome, also because they bring a “label” in terms of EU-compatibility, which is precious for building international trust.

As an example, the Rule of Law programme signed in Nur-Sultan on Thursday has a goal to create “a common legal space” between Europe and Central Asia, enhance human rights protection, provide support for anti-corruption compliance practices, promote transparency and action against economic crime and train law enforcement officials.

“Rule of law is always on investors’ minds. I hope [such programs] will boost our credentials”, Vassilenko said.

Another programme, on trade facilitation, will help the Central Asian countries to have improved rankings in different OECD indicators.

William Thompson, head of the Eurasia division of the OECD [Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development], spoke of a “positive dynamic”, describing that it was becoming easier, year after year, to discuss regional cooperation in Central Asia.

He also highlighted a phenomenon: each individual country was increasingly curious what the OECD plans with respect of the others were.

Diplomatic sources told EURACTIV that the OECD was particularly influential in Kazakhstan, as the country aims to join this “club of the rich”. In 2017, Kazakhstan became the first country in the region to host the OECD Eurasia Week, a ministerial-level event.

## INTERVIEW

# Expert: **Nazarbayev pushed Russia and Ukraine to meet in Paris**

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By *Georgi Gotev* | EURACTIV.com



Ariel Cohen in Nur-Sultan on 28 November 2019.  
[Georgi Gotev]

**I**n a wide-ranging interview, Ariel Cohen, a US expert with ties to Kazakhstan, spoke about the various international initiatives of the Central Asian country, including improving US-Russia relations, finding a solution to the Ukraine crisis, nuclear arms control and more.

*Ariel Cohen is the director of the “Energy, Growth and Security” programme at the International Tax and Investment Centre in Washington, DC. He is also Senior Fellow with the Atlantic Council and runs his own firm ‘International market analysis’.*

*He spoke to EURACTIV’s Senior Editor Georgi Gotev.*

**We are speaking in Nur-Sultan, where as a panelist in a conference, you mentioned that you have a family link**

Continued on Page 9

Continued from Page 8

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**with Kazakhstan, can you elaborate?**

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Indeed. My grandfather, his last position was the editor of *Kazhkhstanskaya Pravda* at Almaty and in 1938 he was executed by Stalin. During the war both my parent's families, they were children, were in Kazakhstan. My mother was in Almaty with her parents and my father was in Karaganda with his mother. But the country provided a refuge for a lot of people during World War II.

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**And you keep coming to Kazakhstan?**

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Yes, since the 1990s.

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**Can you sum up your main messages from this forum, which was dedicated to Nazarbayev's legacy.**

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As Nazarbayev is taking a position of a senior statesman, people want to acknowledge his role in the development of the country and his new role. That's why I mentioned Lee Kuan Yew [he compared Nazarbayev with the first Prime Minister of Singapore, who has governed for three decades], I could mention Deng Xiaoping and other similar leaders that after a long period of being the chief executive change or shift their power position, remain powerful clearly, but they're more in a role of a guide than the role of a day-to-day executive.

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**Do you think that in general, Kazakhstan has had a successful post-Soviet transition, especially if you compare with other countries, such as Ukraine? The corruption there has created problems even for the US administration...**

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With the exception of the Baltic states, which are *sui generis*, in the Soviet area, I think Kazakhstan has probably had the most successful

transition.

Ukraine is an unfortunate case. I like Ukraine, I was born in what used to be Ukraine or was to be just to be Ukrainian Republic of the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan avoided all the pitfalls of Russian speaking population going against non-Russian speaking population. Russia is trying to grab territory, whereas in Kazakhstan nobody is thinking about Russia territory. Ukraine did have or does have a track record of pretty transparent democratic elections, and pretty comprehensive freedom of the press. But I'm sure a lot of Ukrainians would be willing to trade it for security and stability.

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**You called Nazarbayev a "convener". One of his initiatives was to mediate in the Russian-Ukraine conflict. Do you think this is a good idea? Let's not forget that we have the Normandy format summit upcoming; the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany are meeting on 9 December...**

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But I think Nazarbayev played a role already in pushing the sides to meet and go to this Normandy format meeting.

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**How?**

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I know that.

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**What do you expect from the 9 December Normandy summit in Paris?**

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Well, first of all, I want to acknowledge the role of President Nazarbayev in making it happen. It wasn't happening for a while. Secondly, the question for Russia – Russia keeps the majority of cards, if not all the cards and this, – the question for Russia is: are they rational enough to be driven by greed? Or are they irrational enough to be driven by glory? Because the glory would be pushing the Ukraine too far, and then continuing in this politico-military

offensive that they're squeezing Ukraine for the last five years. On the other hand, if they're driven by greed, and they want to begin the process of lifting sanctions, they need to achieve a real progress in the relationship with Ukraine. That would, from the European perspective, and also from the American perspective, include restoring the Ukrainian territorial integrity. That means that the Ukrainian troops have to control the 400 kilometers of Donetsk-Lugansk that they don't control now. So you restore the territorial integrity by restoring the border. The second question is: is Russia ready to follow, I would call it the Colin Powell dictum 'if you break it, you own it'. And Russia, I think is responsible for the situation and Donbas by supporting these separatist militias. So if you're going to get to a solution there...

Russia doesn't care about Ukraine. As far as Russia is concerned, Ukraine could disappear, cease to exist, join Mother Russia, do whatever. Tomorrow. And they'll be happy. They don't acknowledge Ukrainian right for independence, Ukrainian nation's independence, they don't acknowledge any of that. By the way they did the same with the Poles a hundred years ago. But what they want is status quo ante 2014 vis-à-vis Europe and possibly the United States. They want sanctions lifted. Sanctions, I hope will not be lifted before we sorted out Ukraine, territorial integrity, and Donetsk-Lugansk. And then probably agree to disagree about the Crimea. Nobody's going to acknowledge Russian sovereignty in the Crimea but we're not going to continue with massive sanctions that were not imposed over Crimea. They were imposed over two things. First, Donetsk-Lugansk and then the Boeing [MH17]. So the question is, what does Russia want? Is Russia, as I put in the New York Times 2011 article, does

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Continued on Page 10

Continued from Page 9

Russia want to be fortress Russia, or it wants to restart the integration as it existed before 2014?

**How about Nazarbayev's big idea of having a four-way forum with the four big players of the United States, Russia, China and the European Union?**

Look, I'm in this business for longer than I care to admit, for almost 40 years. And I do not remember when the relationship between Russia/ the Soviet Union and the United States was as bad as it is now. With the exception 1979-1984: so [the times of] late Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko. So it's really bad. And if Nazarbayev can convene, the question is – can he change the minds of the leaders and the elites? And I was in Moscow very recently and it's very hard for me to imagine how one changes the minds of the Russian elites that became extremely anti-American. And for that matter, the American elites that are extremely suspicious of Russia after the 2016 elections. On top of that, the roots of the strategic competition between the US and China and the trade war are very real and very deep.

So, in a way, the current situation is worse than the Cold War, and therefore it will be more difficult to overcome. Because the Cold War was a dichotomy. It was the US and the Soviet Union, one. Two, the Soviet economic system was not effective, period. The current Russian economic system and definitely the Chinese economic system are more competitive with the American capitalism than the Soviet system ever was. And there was no contest in terms of size of the economy, back in the day. And people in the orbit of the Soviet Union, a lot of people were not happy with having the Soviet Union as a patron. I don't know what the Bulgarians thing but I think even the Bulgarians, who the Russians always considered big

friends of Russia, were not that happy, and definitely were not Poles, Czechs, Romanians, Hungarians, and many East Germans. So where was the support? If you look at Russia today – it doesn't have a lot of allies. But those who are connected, they are connected by economic ties, like Lukashenko, and not only by military or ideological ties. Let alone China where people are connected by a lot of economic ties.

**Nazarbayev pushes a lot for nuclear disarmament, or nuclear arms control. We are both old enough to remember the Euromissiles crisis – the fear of the population that mid-range nuclear missiles can hit European countries. Today, I don't sense any worries in the public opinion that a nuclear holocaust could happen in Europe. Why is that? Is it because, as Macron says, NATO is "brain-dead," Article 5 does not apply, which means that nuclear weapons will not be used? Which on the other side makes local wars possible?**

Well, I was laughing when people were surprised by what Macron said, because this is a classic Gaullist rhetoric vis-à-vis NATO. And de Gaulle would be proud, he would see Macron as his grandson. The French policy is always a mélange of aspirations of grandeur, the proclaimed will to lead Europe, which means to spend German money, the deep dislike of America and fear of Russia. But at the same time, keeping in mind the disparity of economic power, the Germans will never acquiesce to the French leadership. And the further we get away from World War II, the less the Germans will acquiesce to the French leadership. What I'm afraid of in the long term is that if NATO does not survive, I don't think NATO is brain-dead at all, I think NATO is a very effective alliance that has a problem, illustrated by the Russian saying *Рыба гниет с головы*: the fish rots from its head. And the head, the United States, doesn't give NATO the love it deserves

because it wants the money. I think US deserves the money but you should get that money from the Europeans through love and not through abuse. And Europeans now feel abused...

Back to your point about Nazarbayev and nuclear arms control. I think that generations of people in the Soviet Union, the United States and elsewhere built this arms control edifice, and destroying it so quickly is not serving US interests and not serving Russia's interests, and anybody's interests. But at the same time I recognize with the emergence of China, Pakistan and other actors, India, North Korea, we are in a much more complicated, complex and unstable environment. When I was the head of Eurasia and Russia studies at the Heritage Foundation, we war gamed. There was a gentleman named Baker Spring, who was the architect of these war games, and war game after war game demonstrated that the system with multiple nuclear armed actors is much more unstable and therefore dangerous. So the challenge for Mr. Nazarbayev is to convene, if he manages to convene, not just US and Russia.

**The problem is that the Chinese reportedly don't want.**

The Chinese don't want. And the Chinese don't want either because they don't want or because they're smart negotiators – and they are. So the first position in the negotiation where you want to arrive to a point is to say "I'm not interest. What can I get?" So that's a negotiating tactic. Then, why would Pakistan, that is much smaller and much more afraid of India than vice versa, would give up its medium-range nukes? If I was a Pakistani leader would I give it up? Why would Israel that has an undeclared arsenal, give it up when the Iranians day in and day out, say "Israel, death to America.

Continued on Page 11

Continued from Page 10

Death to America, death to Israel,” depending on which day of the week it is. Now Turkey is talking about getting nuclear weapons, Erdoğan said something in that sense. Why would Israel give it up? It won't. So we have a problem.

And I think we will not have a zero nuclear option. The INF Treaty went out of business, the US toppled it. But it went out of business because it didn't apply to the current conditions anymore. And because the Russians violated it, or so the US says. So I think you can have a situation where you have limitations on intermediate-range arsenals, you may have limitations and certain types of intermediate-range systems. Air launch, space launch, submarine launch, this launch, that launch. So not everything, not every toy you can buy in the store you will have, but you'll have something. India will have something. India doesn't need ICBMs. Israel doesn't need ICBMs. Israel is not about to go to war against the United States, or Russia. Or, actually, Russia they can get if they had a real long-range. 5000 kilometers, most of Russia is in the range. So you don't need ICBMs when you talk about nuclear regional powers. When you have crazies like North Korea and Iran, who would starve their people but get a big ICBM because that's what real men have, big ICBMs, maybe they will go to that but before that we have a different problem. We have an intermediate-range problem. Nobody knows how to resolve it. If people knew, they would be talking about solutions. Nobody's talking about specific solutions.

**To return now to Kazakhstan, and their multi-vector policy. Do you think the new president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, will continue the policy of Nazarbayev?**

Yes, he will. Mr. Tokayev is one of the most accomplished diplomats I ever met. He has the Chinese language, and Chinese experience in Beijing, for several years. He has a foreign ministry experience, he has been twice foreign minister. Not once, but twice [1994-1999 and 2002-2007]. He was Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva. You can't wish for better than that for a mid-size capture like Kazakhstan.

Regarding the multi-vector policy, of course it was the right policy for Kazakhstan and for that matter for any Eurasian, Central Asian or Caucasus country. The problem now that I see – is as China is rising and Russia is becoming more anti-American – will they be wise enough not to put a gun to the head of a multi-vector country? Putting countries in choices they shouldn't be doing is wrong. Would Xi Jinping, or Putin, or Putin 2.0, or whoever that may be, or Trump for that matter, be wise enough not to force the choices that a country like Kazakhstan is better off having good relations with everybody. And we need to have maturity and wisdom to recognise that.

**That's an interesting point. How about the European Union?**

[Smiles] What's that?

## INTERVIEW

# Yerman Mukhtar: **We don't build walls in the steppe**

By Georgi Gotev | EURACTIV.com



Yerman Mukhtar [Parliament of Kazakhstan]

In a wide-ranging interview, Yerman Mukhtar, the chairman of the Kazakh parliament's committee on foreign affairs, defence and security, explains his country's foreign policy initiatives, known as 'the Three Dialogues'.

Yerman Mukhtar is the chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security of Mazhilis (the lower house) of the Parliament of

Kazakhstan.

He spoke to EURACTIV's Senior Editor Georgi Gotev.

**Can you explain Kazakhstan's 'Three Dialogues' initiative? In Brussels, we have only heard about one of its aspects, the invitation by the First President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to host a summit of the big geopolitical players: the United States,**

**Russia, China and the EU.**

The idea of such a global summit was first voiced by the First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev in 2015, at the 60th anniversary of the United Nations. In 2016 he repeated this idea at a meeting of the Eurasian economic union. Then again, he reiterated the proposal at

Continued on Page 13

Continued from Page 12

the Asia-Europe (ASEM) summit in Brussels in October 2018. In that sense, the announcement made in China last April in the framework of the One Belt- One Road forum, was not a spontaneous initiative, it was an initiative already tested at various forums during four years.

The philosophy of the idea is linked to the reputation of our country. I just learned that an India-Pakistan Davis Cup tie will take place in our capital Nur-Sultan because the two countries didn't agree that this tennis match be played in Pakistan. But they agreed to play the match in Kazakhstan and thanked us for that. So two southern countries with a warm climate will come to the winter capital of Kazakhstan [where at the time of this interview the temperature was -20 degrees Celsius] to play an official match under the Davis Cup.

This story reminded me of the 2002 summit in Almaty [the former capital of Kazakhstan] of CICA [Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia] when there were serious tensions between these two countries. And our president succeeded, first, to have the leaders of India and Pakistan, of two nuclear powers, sit on the same table, and also they subscribed to a common document, and we saw the tensions between the two decrease. I'm giving these examples to explain our philosophy of peace and cooperation.

In relation with the big players, the US, Russia, China and the EU, we know that the US and Russia have their own agenda, and the same goes with the US and China, the latter being largely economic. There is a common aspect – all players are members of the nuclear club, of course, in the case of the EU only France and the UK have nuclear weapons. But the US, Russia, China have their geopolitical plans and strategies how to increase their potential, to leverage their influence.

It's clear that these countries will not sit around the table tomorrow. But such a tendency should be encouraged.

There is a need to create a political background, a media background leading to the materialisation of this proposal. Of course, each of these countries are very different, but Kazakhstan has good relations with all of them. Last year First President Nazarbayev met with President Trump, this year President Tokayev was in the US for the UN General Assembly session. And we have good relations and a strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, a comprehensive partnership with China, and a couple of days ago I met with a delegation of the EU, they visited us in Kazakhstan, and we made the point that Italy was the last EU country to ratify the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the next step is just procedure ahead of the full entry into force of EPCA, from 1 January 2020.

In short, we have the possibility, with each of these global players, to exchange views. And what is important is that our initiative is already on the agenda.

**Regarding the “second D” - Eurasia, can you elaborate on how your country sees uniting the potentials of CICA [the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia] and the OSCE? Can you better explain about CICA - the EU audience is not very familiar with it?**

CICA's history started in 1992, when President Nazarbayev proposed the initiative at the UN General Assembly. Today 27 countries of Asia, all players on the continent, are members of this organisation. This includes India, China, the two Koreas, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Egypt, as well as eight observers, including the US and Japan. Observer organisations are both OSCE and the UN, among others.

What is the role of Kazakhstan in CICA? We are a Eurasian country, a large part of our territory is on the European continent. We are the only country which was able to convene the summit of OSCE here, in 2010. After their meeting in Astana, as the capital was called then, OSCE leaders were not able to gather in the same format again, attempts have failed.

Given our close relations with OSCE and our role in CICA, President Nazarbayev has formulated the idea of having an Asian version of OSCE, an Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Asia. This means changing the format of CICA, transforming it into OSCA. We live in very dynamic times. And two mega-continent, Europe and Asia, could cooperate very actively in the framework of these big organisations, OSCE and OSCA. We have voiced our ideas, and we believe it is making its way.

About your remark that the Brussels audience is not very familiar with CICA – this only motivates us to do more to promote it. I am the head, from the Kazakh side, of the Committee for cooperation between Kazakhstan and the EU, in the European Parliament we had meetings, and we have invited our counterparts, during the EP 'green week' in February 2020, and we will discuss the perspectives of our cooperation. We are happy also to discuss with the press, and we count on interviews such as this one to increase awareness in the West about initiatives in the Asian space.

**Regarding the “third D”, how do you see the establishment of a systematic dialogue between the Eurasian economic union (EAEU) and the EU?**

Kazakhstan is a key actor in EAEU. The EU is the largest trade and investment partner of our country. And we are happy about it. Of course,

Continued on Page 14

Continued from Page 13

if EAEU has grown into a community consisting of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, this increases the potential for economic cooperation. All transport communications are deploying along this big line from South East Asia to Europe and back. By creating a modern infrastructure, Kazakhstan has drastically reduced the time of goods crossing via its territory.

If we talk about ASEAN, one of its important members is Vietnam. On 15-16 November, I was on a visit to Vietnam and this country signed a free trade agreement with EAEU. This allows a very dynamic country, with a growth rate of 7%, to take advantage of all benefits on the EAEU market. Serbia has signed a similar deal, and Egypt is also interested. What lies in the bottom is economic pragmatism. When economic relations are strong, the political component will also be predictable.

***But aren't sanctions against Russia in the context of the Crimea annexation and the crisis in Eastern Ukraine preventing relations between the EU and the EAEU from developing?***

Unfortunately, sanctions are a matter of reality, and political motives always lie behind them. The sanctions are against the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan is not subject to sanctions, but given that we have very close economic relations, of course, sanctions impact on the economic situation. The way out could be to separate the political from the economic issues, and realising that sanction cannot last forever. All wars, and this includes trade wars, come to an end. I would say that the losses are for both sides. Sanctions are a counter-productive policy. We live in the times of information technologies, our youth goes to study far away, we receive investors from distant countries, we

work on common projects. The Iron Curtain from the Cold war is no longer possible. I believe that pragmatism is going to prevail, on the regional and global level.

Let me give as an example the cooperation in Central Asia. We see that in the last two-three years the economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan grow exponentially, also between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, we see the countries discussing together regional security. Indeed, security is needed for development, and development must be in the interest of the peoples. The world lives in times of mega-communication, and mega-communication should enhance our cooperation, this is my strong personal belief.

***You are the chairman of your Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security. How can a regional problem such as Afghanistan be solved?***

History has shown that a military solution of the Afghan problem cannot be found. The British failed, the Soviet Union failed, the US failed. The use of force cannot change the mentality. I will give an example, it may be small, but it's revealing. Our country allocates funds for young Afghans to study in Kazakhstan, to get training as doctors, engineers. And by spending five years in Kazakhstan, these people return to their country with other values. The EU supports such programs and also contributes funds.

***In my understanding, the EU supports such initiatives because young Afghans who receive training in Kazakhstan return to their country, while those studying in the EU want to stay, and don't contribute to their country's future.***

I can confirm this. And I personally saw the wave of immigration to Europe

in 2015, including at the station of Vienna, Budapest or Salzburg. I spoke to these people and they told me: we come here to stay.

***On 9 December in Paris, a summit will be held to help solve the Ukrainian crisis. What are the stakes for Kazakhstan?***

We don't have any problems with Russia, and we don't have any with Ukraine either. We would like progress at this summit, progress in relations between these two countries so close by history, culture and language. A breakthrough would positively influence the global climate. Russia is a big country and Ukraine is a big country. One less hotbed of tension in the Eurasian space – we can only support such an effort.

***How did Kazakhstan manage to preserve its good relations with Russia, while others couldn't?***

It's true that the experience of different countries varies. We had the right policy. Kazakhstan is a multi-national country, with Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Polish, Koreans, Uighurs, but unlike the EU countries or the US, neither in the constitution of Kazakhstan, or in its legislation, or in our vocabulary, we never say "minorities". We call them citizens of our country.

Also, we were pro-active, proposing formats for our relations with Moscow. The Commonwealth of Independent States was created in Almaty. The EAEU was also first formulated by President Nazarbayev in the Moscow University [in 1994].

But Kazakhs are bad at one thing. We cannot build walls. Because in the steppe, there are no walls.

## INTERVIEW

# Kazakh strategist: The EU is a precious, but undervalued partner

By Georgi Gotev | EURACTIV.com



Sanat Kushkumbayev at the conference "Institution of Presidency – Kazakhstan's model" in Nur-Sultan, on 27 November 2019. [Georgi Gotev]

On the sidelines of a conference dedicated to Kazakhstan's experience with the presidential model of governance, EURACTIV spoke to Sanat Kushkumbayev, a prominent foreign policy analyst, about Kazakhstan's diplomatic and geopolitical efforts, including its relations with China and the EU.

*Sanat Kushkumbayev is deputy director of KAZISS, the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.*

**Is it possible to compare the situation in Ukraine and in Kazakhstan, almost three decades after both countries' independence from the USSR?**

It is not by chance that at the conference we both attended it was said that in a transition period it is very important to have a long mandate to carry out reforms. Kazakhstan adopted the presidential model and long-termism. Short-termism and a big role for Parliament doesn't help,

Continued on Page 16

Continued from Page 15

maybe this was the issue in Ukraine, and the democratic process can also often bring about populism. This is especially true when unpopular decisions need to be taken. Maybe in Central Europe, the parliamentary model worked, but in the post-Soviet space, Ukraine, Moldova, it didn't.

**But can we speak about cult of personality in the case of Nazarbayev?**

I would call it otherwise: paying respect by society to the man, whose leadership and authority contributed hugely to Kazakhstan becoming an independent country, becoming what it is now. The First President Nazarbayev retired, he remains an important figure in Kazakhstan's politics, but he is no longer the head of state, he stepped down voluntarily.

**The respect to Nazarbayev you are talking about, isn't it also the result of a net improvement of living standards in the post-Soviet period?**

Of course, this is clear, and we see mentalities change, we see people becoming more ambitious about their future.

**Your speciality is international relations and in your speech, you mentioned the Astana Process which assists the peace negotiations for Syria, with the so-called three "guarantor states" in the lead, Russia, Turkey and Iran. You mentioned that a 14th such meeting will take place in Nur-Sultan in December. What are the expectations?**

The meeting is planned for the first half of December. It is expected to focus on technical issues, in the northern part of Syria, the area of Idlib and the banks of the Euphrates. It's about expanding previous agreements regarding the same zone, in the north-eastern direction. This is a sensitive

area where there are Turks, Kurds, and remains of the terrorists from Islamic State.

**It's a very tricky area...**

Indeed. We are not trying to force anything, this is not the task of the Kazakh diplomacy, our task is to provide help on technical issues. We don't aim at replacing the Geneva talks for the political solution. The Astana talks are about practical implementation on the ground.

**But you say that the Astana talks will meet for the 14th time. The Geneva talks, if I am not mistaken, haven't taken place since March 2017...**

You are probably right. But what is important is to keep the dialogue alive.

**Regarding another of your country's priorities, the dialogue and cooperation in Central Asia, what are the main areas of the dialogue, at the time when the leaders of the five countries are meeting for a second summit?**

The main issue is transport, economic cooperation. We focus on areas where there are no contradictions. I don't think we can solve all the questions regarding water management or energy cooperation. But transport is very important, and we will start from there. The most important is to create a win-win atmosphere for further cooperation.

**Where is the EU on Kazakhstan's radar? You have such powerful neighbours: Russia, China.**

I consider that the EU is to a great extent an undervalued partner. It's an economic giant without geopolitical ambitions. I would say, for us, the EU is the ideal partner for all types of relations: economy, legislation, culture, political cooperation. Kazakhstan was the venue of an OSCE

summit [in 2010], but our relations should be constant. This is an anchor for our multi-vector policy. But I think the EU is undervalued globally. It is not a political subject, although economically, it is number one for us, for Central Asia, and I think for many. We should definitely focus more on our relations with the EU.

**At this forum, it was said that Kazakhstan has no issues with its neighbours. But how do you see the situation of the Kazakh minority in Xinjiang?**

It's a very worrying issue for us. But we see that the issue is being raised at the global level, in the UN, by the world press. Media reports sound dramatic. The issue requires transparency. We expect that the people who sounded the alarm will be able to see for themselves the situation.

**Do you authorities raise this question with your Chinese neighbour?**

Yes, our foreign ministry has discussed the issue several times.

**But they are very discrete?**

There are legal issues. We cannot interfere in China's internal affairs, China is very sensitive. But there are cases of people with double nationality and in their case we can intervene.

**Are there ethnic Kazakhs who returned from Xinjiang and what do they say?**

I think we need to gather facts and analyse them. And we need to cross-check what they are saying. So there is a need for transparency. We hope that China will not be interested to keep this in the dark. Because it would seriously harm China's reputation. We hope that as a neighbour, as a partner China will help solve the issues we raise.



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