Diplomatic activity is high in the capital of Kazakhstan, where Pope Francis arrived on Tuesday (13 September) with messages about the need to ease Cold War-style confrontations and rhetoric. During his three-day trip, he will attend a peace meeting of world religious leaders, taking place simultaneously with an official visit of the President of China, Xi Jinping, his first trip abroad since the pandemic.
Kazakhstan doesn’t forget the EU in its busy international agenda

Busy day in the Kazakh capital as Pope Francis and Xi Jinping visit

Pope Francis in Kazakhstan: ‘We need a new spirit of Helsinki’

Kazakhstan behind the scenes – what pundits say

Analyst: Kazakhstan comfortable as ‘bridge between West and East’
Kazakhstan doesn’t forget the EU in its busy international agenda

By Alberto Turkstra

Pragmatism and multi-vector foreign policy have become Kazakhstan’s trademark, even more, valuable in a world characterised by geopolitical tensions, writes Alberto Turkstra. He announces, upon his return from Nur-Sultan, upcoming Kazakhstan-EU high-level contacts.

Alberto Turkstra is a Brussels-based Central Asia analyst.

Trust, dialogue, unity, cooperation and peace. These are not the first terms that come to one’s mind when looking at the current state of affairs in the world, characterised by geopolitical tensions, mistrust, new and recurring conflicts, narrow nationalism and the weakening of multilateralism.

But Kazakhstan stands out as a country with the capacity, will and political capital to advocate for dialogue and trust-building – even if the window of opportunity is narrowing.
This has been one of the hallmarks of Kazakh diplomacy since its independence, through initiatives of its own and active participation in other multilateral formats. It is, therefore, no surprise that the Kazakh capital is considered a “peace hub” (UNESCO awarded the “City of Peace” title to Astana in 1999) and is often the scene of peace negotiations (the Syria talks come to mind).

Last week, Kazakhstan’s capital Nur-Sultan (now to be renamed Astana), held the VII Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions.

The Congress, initiated by Kazakhstan in 2003 and held triennially, has as its main objectives and priorities the “functioning of a permanent international interfaith institution for the dialogue of religions and the adoption of agreed decisions”, “the establishment of peace, harmony and tolerance as the unshakable principles of human existence” and “preventing the use of religious feelings of people for the escalation of conflicts and hostilities.”

This year’s iteration of the Congress generated considerable interest, so much so that the traditional venue where the Congress was held on the previous six occasions – the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation – had to give way to the Palace of Independence, able to accommodate larger crowds. Representatives from all major religions, including the Catholic Church; Anglican Church; Russian Orthodox Church; Bahá’í; Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Jainism, and Shintoism, were all in attendance.

Most notable was the presence, for the first time, of the Head of the Catholic Church – His Holiness Pope Francis.

The central theme of this year’s gathering was the role of spiritual leaders in the post-pandemic era and times of geopolitical tensions. Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev made a solid call for religions to use their peace-making potential and united the efforts of spiritual leaders to pursue long-term stability.

For its part, Pope Francis praised Kazakhstan’s historical role as a “land of encounter” where “histories, ideas, faiths and hopes” have intersected for centuries.

Today, Kazakhstan is home to more than 130 nationalities and ethnic groups living peacefully together and enriching one another. Therefore, the Pope hoped that “Kazakhstan could open a new route, centred on human relationships: on respect, sincere dialogue, respect for the inviolable dignity of each human being and mutual cooperation”.

The final document adopted at the Congress calls upon “world leaders to abandon aggressive, destructive rhetoric which leads to destabilisation and bloodshed” and upon religious leaders and prominent political figures to “develop dialogue in the name of friendship, solidarity and peaceful coexistence”.

But will these messages come across, and will they have universal appeal? Religious leaders enjoy moral authority in many parts of the world, but in others, religiosity is rapidly declining.

There are doubts about the future of Congress in its current format, which does not convince everyone, such as more conservative elements of the Catholic Church. For example, Auxiliary Bishop of Astana Athanasius Schneider referred to the Congress as a “supermarket of religions” that “risks relegating the importance of the Catholic Church as the one true religion”. He suggests congresses be organised differently, at a more local level, in the future.

With hardly any time to digest the outcomes of the Congress, Tokayev flew to Samarkand to attend the annual Summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), an organisation in constant expansion which has often impaired its efficiency and effectiveness, apparently powerless to deal with the ongoing border skirmishes between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (ironically, the organisation’s initial goal was solving outstanding disputed borders in the region following the independence of the Central Asian countries).

At the risk of being hijacked by the geopolitical (and explicitly anti-Western) goals and rhetoric of its two largest member states, this year’s host (Uzbekistan) and Kazakhstan, among others, have gone at great lengths to reassure their partners and the international community that the SCO will not become a proxy for Russia or China’s geopolitical interests.

Judging from Tokayev’s speech, Kazakhstan wishes to reorient the organisation towards a pragmatic, economic agenda. In his speech, he called for the SCO, which counts among its member states the largest producers and exporters of agricultural produce in the world, to do more to ensure the stability
of the global food market.

President Tokayev also called for the adoption of a program of cooperation in the field of renewable energy and to increase work in modernising multimodal transportation corridors. Indeed, boosting the capacity of the Middle Corridor is essential for ensuring smooth and unimpeded trade flows between Europe and Asia.

Next month, Astana will host the Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), which is expected to be attended by President Vladimir Putin. Similar to the Congress of Leaders of World Religions, CICA is a format initiated by Kazakhstan. In 1992, during the 47th session of the UN General Assembly, the First President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, announced the creation of a mechanism for interaction and cooperation to promote peace, security, stability and prosperity in Asia in light of the emergence of newly independent states following the fall of the Soviet Union.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, it is a format that has gone largely unnoticed in the West and is struggling to transition from a dialogue platform to a fully-fledged international organisation.

Having met the leaders of Russia and China in a brief period and aware of the constant delicate balancing act that its multi-vector foreign policy entails, especially in geopolitically turbulent times, President Tokayev is expected to meet with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. European Council President Charles Michel will also reportedly pay a visit to Kazakhstan towards the end of October.
Busy day in the Kazakh capital as Pope Francis and Xi Jinping visit

By Georgi Gotev | euractiv.com

Languages: Italian

The President of China, Xi Jinping, arrived for a state visit to the capital of Kazakhstan on Wednesday (14 September), coinciding with an official visit of Pope Francis and a Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. EURACTIV reports from Nur-Sultan.

Traffic in the Kazakh capital, still named Nur-Sultan, but expected to return to its previous name of Astana, was intense on Wednesday. The view of alternating flags of China and the Vatican decorating the main boulevards looked out of place, given that relations between China and the Vatican are very difficult.

The President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, spent the morning with Pope Francis at the Independence Palace, with delegates from more than 100 countries representing Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and other faiths. In the afternoon, he met at the airport Xi Jinping, for whom this was his first visit abroad since the pandemic, and the two held talks at the presidential palace.

Jinping and Tokayev praised the bilateral relations, and Tokayev, who
speaks Chinese, said that the visit sends the message of a “high level of mutual trust and cooperation.”

“I sincerely thank you for your support for Kazakhstan’s economic development and our international initiatives,” Tokayev told Xi.

China is one of Kazakhstan’s biggest trade partners, accounting for 22.6% of the country’s foreign trade, according to data from the Kazakh State Revenue Committee.

The trade turnover reached $13.5 billion in seven months of 2022, 38.3% more than in the same period of 2021. This was driven mainly by a 52% increase in Kazakh exports to China, primarily exports of mineral products, fuel, and energy products.

“No matter how the international situation changes, we will continue to strongly support Kazakhstan in defending its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, firmly support the reforms you are carrying out to ensure stability and development and oppose the interference of any forces in the internal affairs of your country,” Jinping told Tokayev, as quoted by the Astana Times.

Kazakhs with whom EURACTIV spoke said they were proud that their country got so much international attention, which they thought was deserved due to a traditional peace-loving and multi-vector policy.

Diplomats added that the visit of Xi Jinping was obviously on short notice. They sought clues in an article by the Chinese president, published in the “Kazakhstan Pravda”, in which Beijing was generous with poetic hyperboles and compliments for Kazakhstan.

‘Eternal all-round strategic partnership’

“From good-neighbourliness and friendship to a strategic partnership, up to the eternal all-round strategic partnership, our bilateral relations are making a historic breakthrough and acquiring qualitatively new, unique connotations – these are interstate relations of a new type”, Xi wrote.

The Chinese president mentioned the “One Belt – One Road Initiative”, which was announced for the first time by himself during an official visit to Kazakhstan in 2013.

Due to its geographic position, Kazakhstan has been described as the “buckle” of the “Belt-and-road”.

According to diplomats, another of Xi’s objectives is to secure the imports of uranium from Kazakhstan, needed for China’s push to build many new nuclear power centrals.

Central Corridor

Diplomats told EURACTIV that this initiative needed re-calibration in the context of the war in Ukraine, with the so-called “Central Corridor” becoming the only viable route for Chinese exports by rail to the rest of Eurasia.

This means that the routes through Russia are no longer viable, nor are those across Iran subject to international sanctions. Consequently, the only corridor allowing for multi-billion savings in time and money for the transit of goods goes from Kazakhstan’s port of Aktau, across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan and then Georgia.

From Georgia, the goods can continue their way across the Black Sea to Bulgaria or Romania, Kazakhstan’s, and across land via Turkey.

One reason for the huge international concern about the current flare-up of tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia is precisely in the context of the plans to make the Central corridor come true, diplomats explained.

Jinping’s visit to Kazakhstan occurs as Russia suffers setbacks on the Ukraine battlefield. The Chinese leader and Tokayev will meet Russia’s President Vladimir Putin in the Uzbek city of Samarkand on Thursday at the leaders’ summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

China is under pressure from the US, who is reportedly considering options for a sanctions package to deter it from invading Taiwan. In this context, diplomats said China might need to re-assess its partnerships, scaling down Russia’s and possibly boosting those with Kazakhstan.

No meeting between Xi and Francis

Despite being in the same city, Xi and Pope Francis did not meet.

Francis appeared to criticise Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, who backs the invasion of Ukraine and has snubbed the conference of the religious leaders.

Speaking at a huge round table in the Independence Palace, a modern structure in the futuristic capital of Kazakhstan, “God is peace. He guides us always in the way of peace, never that of war,” Francis said.
The Russian Orthodox Church sent a delegation headed by its number two, Metropolitan Anthony, who later briefly met the pope.

Some of the messages from religious leaders sounded very hostile to liberal politics prevailing in the West, particularly against same-sex marriage.

**Surreal mass**

Francis celebrated a mass on Wednesday afternoon for the country's Catholics, which constitute roughly one per cent of the population, with many pilgrims travelling from abroad, mostly from other Central Asian countries.

The mass, attended by almost 10,000 people, appeared surreal, as although celebrated under the auspices of the Vatican, most of it was in Russian. At one point, even Pope Francis spoke Russian, saying “Исповедую” (“I confess”).

At the end of the ceremony, Francis made a political statement about the war in Ukraine and expressed concern over the clash between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

“The only solution is peace. And the only road to it is dialogue”, said Francis.
On a visit to the capital of Kazakhstan on Tuesday (13 September) which he called a “pilgrimage of dialogue and peace”, Pope Francis spoke of the need to ease Cold War-style confrontations and rhetoric. EURACTIV reports from Nur-Sultan.

Francis arrived in Kazakhstan at the start of a three-day trip to attend a peace meeting of world religious leaders. The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which has occurred every three years in the capital of Kazakhstan since 2003, gathers global religious and political leaders.

The pope’s visit coincides with the visit to Kazakhstan of China’s President Xi Jinping on Wednesday, his first official trip to a foreign nation since China all but shut its borders due to COVID-19.

In an address to the Kazakh government and the diplomatic corps on Tuesday night, Francis spoke of “the senseless and tragic war that broke out with the invasion of Ukraine”.

Pope Francis had made public his...
intention to talk to Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill, who supports the war in Ukraine. However, Kirill did not attend the congress of religious leaders, and the hosts said no explanations were provided.

Speaking alongside the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Francis said, "now is the time to stop intensifying rivalries and reinforcing opposing blocs" and spoke of the need for "a new spirit of Helsinki", in an apparent reference to the Helsinki process which helped end the Cold War.

The Helsinki process culminated with the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which saw the birth of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, with 57 member states from Europe, Central Asia and North America. In December 2010, Kazakhstan successfully hosted a OSCE summit held. Kazakhstan has also suggested "updating" the 1975 Helsinki Final.

Diplomats, including from the EU, recognise the importance Central Asia and Kazakhstan are gaining in the context of world tensions. As a former Soviet Republic, Kazakhstan has strong relations with Russia, but it is also seeking to balance those with relations with the other world major players, including with China, its other powerful neighbour.

As Deputy Foreign Minister Roman Vassilenko reminded journalists during a briefing on on Tuesday, Kazakhstan is ready to act as a mediator in the Ukraine conflict.

Kazakhstan has maintained neutrality in the case of the war in Ukraine, stressing the need to cease hostilities, preserve the territorial integrity of Ukraine and reach a solution based on the UN charter.

Asked in what way the Congress of religious leaders could help promote dialogue and peace, Vassilenko said Kazakhstan was trying to create an atmosphere and a momentum for peace initiatives.

He said that before Kazakhstan started its initiative in 2003, there had been hesitations among the world's religious leaders to gather and sit next to each other. He described the process as a “success story”, with an ever growing interest from more countries and delegations to join the gatherings.

Since 2003 when 17 delegations participated, this seventh edition of the Congress gathered more than 100 delegates from more than 50 countries, he said.

In his words, many of the world’s religious leaders shook hands for the first time ever in the capital of Kazakhstan.

Speculation is ripe whether Francis will meet Xi while both are in Nur-Sultan.

Speaking to reporters accompanying him on his flight, Francis was asked whether he might meet Xi in as both will be in the Kazakhstan capital on Wednesday.

“I don’t have any news about that,” the pope replied, without elaborating.

Asked if he was ready to go to China, a country with which the Vatican has difficult relations, Francis responded: “I am always ready to go to China”.

In his words, already China is the second largest trade partner of Kazakhstan, after Russia. He mentioned the figure of 52 projects worth $21 billion with Chinese participation being implemented in Kazakhstan, extending from areas such as energy, construction, and industry.

China is currently under US pressure, with Washington considering options for a sanctions package against China to deter it from invading Taiwan.

According to diplomats, one of Xi’s objectives is to secure the imports of uranium from Kazakhstan, needed for China’s push to build many new nuclear power centrals.

Orthodoxy and Russia

Some top Vatican officials were relieved that the encounter between Francis and Kirill would not take place because of the bad optics of the pope meeting with a key backer of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, according to a senior Vatican source quoted by Reuters.

Asked about Kirill’s absence, Vassilenko reminded that the Russian Orthodox Church had sent a big delegation led by Mitropolit Antoniy.

The Orthodox Church is the second largest in majority Muslim Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan will host Russian President Vladimir Putin in mid-October, Vassilenko told EURACTIV.

The occasion is the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in the Kazakh capital Nur-Sultan in mid-October. CICA is an initiative of Kazakhstan dating from 2002.
Kazakhstan welcomed an official visit of Pope Francis, a Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions and a state visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping on Wednesday and Thursday (14 and 15 September). EURACTIV met with politicians, diplomats and pundits, and offers a behind-the-scenes reading of these and other developments.

It is interesting to note that the off-the-record comments of foreign diplomats and of Kazakh pundits largely coincide. Kazakhstan is a country in the heart of Central Asia with powerful neighbours – Russia and China.

Aigul Kuspan, the former Kazakh ambassador to Brussels, who is now chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Security of the Parliament, told EURACTIV that the formulation of an ‘Eternal all-round strategic partnership’ used by Xi Jinping to describe the relations of his country with Kazakhstan was “absolutely unprecedented”.

She said that for the Chinese, every word counted and such a formulation shouldn’t be seen as merely a compliment, especially given the fact that Xi chose Kazakhstan for his first visit since the pandemic.

As Adil Kaukenov, chief expert on China at the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies explained, good relations between Moscow and Beijing were good for Kazakhstan, because “if these relations would turn into competition, this would be damaging for a small country.” Kazakhstan has a huge territory, but a population of only 19 million.

Kazakhstan is in an almost unique situation of having a trade surplus with China, as an exporter of energy – mostly oil, gas and uranium – and wheat.

While EURACTIV spoke with Kaukenov on Thursday, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev
was on his way to Samarkand, where a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is taking place, gathering Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping, as well as the leaders of India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and host country Uzbekistan.

**Number one news**

Asked about the news to be expected from Samarkand, Kaukenov mentioned that the “number one news” was that Iran was joining the SCO, while Saudi Arabia and Qatar were due to become observers.

Questioned on whether the idea at the SCO to initiate an alternative to SWIFT, the Belgium-based organisation in charge of international money transfers, was a good thing, he said that a parallel system was needed, because “global systems can change very suddenly”. For Kazakhstan, this would be a form of insurance, he said.

According to Kaukenov, China’s interest in Kazakhstan has grown since the January unrest in the country, which has had a positive fallout by boosting reforms, modernisation and “changing our political system”.

Diplomats agree that under Tokayev, the country is changing its political system, with the upcoming introduction of a 7-year term for the President, which cannot be renewed.

According to diplomats and Kazakh pundits, the parliamentary elections are more interesting than the presidential polls because new political parties are likely to emerge. It is generally accepted that Tokayev initiated the constitutional changes on short notice, to prevent the still powerful – and very rich – allies of former President Nursultan Nazarbayev to get organised for the elections.

A clear signal of the end of Nazarbayev’s power is the upcoming renaming of the capital as Astana, as it was known before Tokayev himself proposed to rename it Nur-Sultan.

Kazakhstan is worried about the economic fallout of the expected crisis in Russia, as the result of the Western sanctions and the invasion of Ukraine, which the Kazakh leadership doesn’t approve of, although it cannot express it. Kazakhstan doesn’t want to offend Russia, be it only because Moscow has the capacity to stop completely Kazakhstan’s oil exports to the Western markets.

Former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev wrote a long post on the Russian version of Facebook in which he called Kazakhstan “an artificial state”. Given the fact that Russia officially considers Ukraine an artificial state, such a statement could loom large. The post was deleted, and Russia explained that Medvedev’s account had been hacked. But diplomats said this was a clear message to Kazakhstan to watch its moves.

Relations with Russia were pushed into the spotlight over a decision by Kazakhstan to completely halt the exports of arms. Diplomats and pundits believe that this came as a consequence of a meeting between Putin and Tokayev, in which the Russian leader might have asked his Kazakh colleague to make sure that such weapons don’t end up in Ukraine. But Kazakhstan also exports military equipment to Russia, and some believe that Russia has more to lose from such a move.

Kazakhstan will host Putin in mid-October, on the occasion of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). CICA is an initiative of Kazakhstan dating from 2002.

**Belt and Road**

“I know that in the EU, they have their own strategy for connectivity and they don’t like very much the Belt-and-Road initiative, but for us, it is very important”, Kuspan said.

But with the war in Ukraine, the tables have turned. EURACTIV heard opinions from diplomats and pundits suggesting that the EU, Kazakhstan and China were getting close to prioritising the so-called Central Corridor.

Reportedly, Western institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development are working on identifying the bottlenecks of this corridor crossing the Caspian Sea, ahead of an EU-favoured meeting on connectivity in November in Uzbekistan.

It has also been reported that European Council President Charles Michel will visit Kazakhstan by the end of October, possibly to catch up with the diplomatic activity of other global players.

Asked about the role of the EU in Central Asia, the most candid answer came from Kaukenov. In his words, the EU is an “amorph entity” representing the “golden billion”, and a “good customer”. He said that it was difficult to figure out who the EU players were, except for Germany, but only in the economic field.

“They don’t know about our potential. The EU media don’t see us”, the analysts said, adding that journalists from the EU “don’t listen” and “think they know everything”.

This correspondent begged to differ, but thanked his interlocutor for being straightforward.
In an interview with independent Kazakh analyst Anastassiya Reshetnyak, EURACTIV took stock of a busy diplomatic week in Central Asia during which several regional conflicts unfolded, including between Azerbaijan and Armenia, as well as between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Anastassiya Reshetnyak is a political scientist working for PaperLab, an independent think tank. She spoke to EURACTIV’s Senior Editor Georgi Gotev.

Asked to explain the world’s sudden focus on Kazakhstan, which in the past week hosted Pope Francis and Chinese President Xi Jinping, she answered humorously that her country "has the ambition to be the centre of the world", as it feels comfortable as “a bridge between the West and the East”.

In Reshetnyak’s words, the visit of Pope Francis to Kazakhstan was a “diplomatic success” for the country. The visit lasted three days, during which the head of the Catholic Church made three political speeches and delivered a mass.

"It is very important for Kazakhstan to be pro-active in this world of instability, to continue its course of muti-vector politics, and play the role of peace-keeper in conflicts," she said.

Many diplomats had secretly wondered if the Pope, whose health is not very good, might shorten
his presence at the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, but this did not happen.

Since 2003, every three years Kazakhstan has gathered global religious and political leaders in an effort to promote dialogue.

Regarding the visit of Xi Jinping, on his first visit abroad since the pandemic, Reshetnyak said that it reflected the importance of bilateral relations at a time when movements of goods need to change course as a result of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

She mentioned China's plans to build a railroad via Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan as a “more interesting” route at a time of conflict in Ukraine. From Tashkent, the railroad links to Kazakhstan’s railroad system.

The governments of China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan signed the agreement for the construction of the so-called CKU link on 14 September, on the sidelines of the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

**All about business**

“If we look at the list of the documents signed at this SCO summit, we will see that this was about international energy security, international food security, international supply chains, about how this part of the world should react to world turbulences,” Reshetnyak said. “It was not about politics, not about adopting a joint position on Ukraine or another hotbed of tension.”

“Yes, it is about protecting ourselves, but in no case was this about creating some sort of alternative to NATO, interpretations we have seen in the Western press. It’s all about the economy,” the analyst said.

Recalling the sugar crisis in Kazakhstan last summer, when sugar disappeared from shops, she emphasised the need to improve the supply chains and food security. Kazakhstan produces 43% of its demand and imports 48% from Russia, which suddenly stopped exports to its neighbour, she explained.

Asked about China’s interest in Kazakh uranium, she said that this was only natural since her country produces 40% of the global output of this chemical element.

“If we turn to the speech of the President of Kazakhstan in Samarkand, he says that we [the SCO member countries] produce 25% of the world’s GDP and this is why we should cooperate economically, that we should improve our logistics and connectivity, and that we should improve food security by boosting our agriculture”, Reshetnyak said.

Asked about the simultaneous conflicts between Armenia-Azerbaijan and Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan conflicts, alongside that of Ukraine, the Kazakh analyst said her country stood for territorial integrity and finding a peaceful resolution.

“Kazakhstan is really interested in peace and security in our wider region because any conflicts hamper our potential to make business and be prosperous”, she said.

“Don’t be surprised if Kazakhstan will try to serve as mediator,” she continued, adding that the country did not take sides for a variety of reasons. With Azerbaijan, a Turkic state, Kazakhstan was close culturally, while it was also allied with Armenia as members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and of the Eurasian economic union.

Kazakhstan was one of 101 countries that voted on Friday (16 September) against Russia’s attempted blocking of a video address by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to the UN General Assembly in New York. Zelensky will now be allowed to deliver a pre-recorded statement.

“For me, the neutral position of Kazakhstan means that all leaders should have the right to speak,” Reshetnyak concluded.