

Kazakhstan is getting closer to OECD membership



Kazakhstan's financial hub Almaty will play host to OECD's Eurasia week, where the Central Asian country will hope to press its membership case. [Shutterstock]

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Next week Almaty, the financial hub of Kazakhstan, will welcome political leaders from Central Asia and OECD member states for the OECD Eurasia Week. Kazakhstan hopes that this event will further strengthen the relations between the Eurasian and the OECD countries, writes Timur Suleimenov.

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Global interconnection between people and nations has become a fact of life. Each country on our planet shares a collective destiny. Economic interdependence is ever more prevalent – prosperity in one part of the world makes a positive contribution to economic growth in another part of the world thanks to increased trade and enhanced investment cooperation.

This reality means that cooperation between nations, whether through bilateral or multilateral platforms, is ever more important. Kazakhstan, as an active member of the international community, has been actively striving to learn from developed nations by partnering with countries and international organisations. Our cooperation with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been especially noteworthy.

The OECD has played an indispensable role in helping nations, including Kazakhstan, to reap the benefits of globalisation by promoting economic growth, prosperity, and sustainable development. Underlining OECD's importance, today OECD member countries account for 63% of world GDP, three-quarters of world trade, 95% of world official development assistance and over half of the world's energy consumption.

Kazakhstan has made sustained efforts to work with the OECD since 2000 and has been particularly active since 2008.

In 2011 as part of the official visit to France, the then Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Karim Massimov, visited the OECD Headquarters for the first time, where it was officially announced that Kazakhstan intends to become a member of this organization, an aspiration that we continue to strive towards. A number of concrete steps have been taken in this direction.

In 2015, Karim Massimov and the OECD Secretary General José Ángel Gurría signed the Country Programme on Cooperation for 2015-2016, which aims to establish possible ways of cooperation, within which Kazakhstan can join a number of the OECD initiatives and participate in the activities of its agencies. Now the second round of the Country Programme on Cooperation with the OECD for 2017-2018 is being implemented.

In addition, the Coordination Council on Interaction of Kazakhstan with the OECD approved the 'Road Map on Implementation of the OECD Recommendations' received within the first stage of the Country Programme, in order to implement best practices and recommendations of the OECD. More than half of the 535 recommendations from the road map have already been implemented by Kazakhstan.

Already Kazakhstan participates in 34 working agencies of the OECD. These include various spheres, such as public governance, environment, health and education. We hope that our participation in these committees will contribute to the eventual membership of Kazakhstan in the OECD.

Domestically, as well, Kazakhstan has been implementing a number of reforms to help us reach OECD standards. From 2015 onward Kazakhstan has redoubled its reform agenda, beginning with a 100-step program focused on transparency and efficiency of government. By 2017, we adopted a package of fundamental constitutional reforms that, among others, devolve powers from the President's office to the parliament.

Economically we have been making progress too. In June this year, Kazakhstan became the 48th country to adhere to the OECD Declaration on International Investment and Multinational Enterprises, signalling our commitment to provide a fair and transparent environment for international investment.

The OECD Investment Policy Review of Kazakhstan has noted that we have managed to reduce bureaucratic barriers, streamlined licensing procedures, established agencies to facilitate new business formation and an investment ombudsman to

tackle concrete problems faced by investors. Tax reform is also under way, which will result in better tax efficiency and transparency.

Of course we understand that we still have a lot to do if we are to achieve our ambitious goal of joining the top 30 most developed countries. We need to build stronger institutions and ensure better policy coherence and transparency. We will need to prove to investors that these institutions are accountable. We must also continue to strengthen judicial independence and fight corruption, as we understand that these are among the main concerns for businesses operating in Kazakhstan.

Our cooperation with OECD has helped us substantially to make progress in these areas. Going forward we want to continue to develop this partnership further.

Next week, the financial hub of Kazakhstan, Almaty, will welcome political leaders from Central Asia and OECD member-states, as well as experts and representatives of international and regional organizations, civil society and business circles, for the OECD Eurasia Week. Our hope is that this event will further strengthen the relations between the Eurasian and the OECD countries.

Kazakhstan has seen its ups and downs since our independence 25 years ago. But we have managed to build a foundation to continue our development. With the help of the OECD, I have no doubt that Kazakhstan will achieve its objectives and, one day, join the ranks of OECD member-states.