

Nazarbayev: Partnership in Eurasia can strengthen the world system

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Exclusive: Two days ahead of the [Asia-Europe meeting \(ASEM\)](#) which will bring together heads of state and government of 51 European and Asian countries, the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev offered his comments on a wide range of issues.

Nursultan Nazarbayev has served as President of Kazakhstan since the office was originally created on 24 April 1990.

He answered the questions of EURACTIV's Senior Editor Georgi Gotev.

Kazakhstan has been cooperating with European countries for more than a quarter of a century now. A new enhanced partnership and cooperation agreement was signed between Kazakhstan and the EU in 2015. In this regard, how do you describe the relations between Kazakhstan and the European Union since then?

The deepening expansion of cooperation with the European Union is a strategic priority of Kazakhstan. Such interrelation is based on our mutual interests and common values, and also takes into account the challenges which require our joint efforts.

It is notable that my current visit to Brussels (to participate in the [ASEM Summit](#)) is taking place in the year of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and the European Union. Over the past quarter century, we have managed to create a solid basis for the dynamic development of our valued partnership. Currently, the European Union is the biggest trade, economic and investment partner of Kazakhstan.

In the first 7 months of this year alone, trade turnover with the EU totaled more than €18 billion. This is almost the same amount achieved in the entire year before last – which came to €20 billion.

In 2015, we concluded a new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 29 priority areas, including international and regional security, trade, investment, the advancement of infrastructure, as well as innovation, culture, sports and tourism.

The European Union supports Kazakhstan's policy of global integration politically and economically, as well as wide-ranging reforms in the key areas of our country's public and social life.

In the context of our partnership with the European Union, I believe special attention could be drawn to my vision to bring together the Eurasian Economic Union, the Silk Road Economic Belt and the European Union into a single integration project that can be called "Greater Eurasia".

The economic advantages of such synergy are evident. By means of Kazakhstan's new overland transcontinental corridors, constructed under the Nuryly Zhol national programme [a \$9 billion domestic economic stimulus plan to develop and modernize roads, railways, ports, IT infrastructure, and education and civil services in the Republic of Kazakhstan], we have managed to significantly reduce the time, down to two weeks, of the transportation of goods from the Asia-Pacific region to Europe.

These new opportunities facilitate the development of the whole Eurasian continent, and we are now working to rally our European partners around the idea of "Greater Eurasia".

In the meantime, the process of establishing a dialogue between the EU and the EAEU should theoretically cover not only economic aspects, but also security matters. In that vein, it is also reasonable to create a single Eurasian security space under the aegis of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Joint activities of the EU and OSCE could be focused on establishing a common platform for economic collaboration and security.

Therefore, today it is particularly relevant to further promote our relations, given the increasing general unpredictability of the global economy. Most importantly, our cooperation can be an essential factor in mitigating political tensions and the driving force for economic progress of Eurasia.

This year, Kazakhstan is participating in the Asia-Europe Meeting for the third time. What will be your message to the ASEM summit?

Our country is located geographically in both Asia and Europe. Consequently, Kazakhstan is highly interested in implementing the ASEM's key concept of strengthening the connectivity of the Eurasian states.

In view of this, the Republic of Kazakhstan raises the question of interaction between multilateral institutions of Europe and Asia. I suggest that the time has come to hold a Forum of Asian and European Regional Organisations under the auspices of ASEM. I am confident that the partnership between them will be a useful aid to ensuring connectivity between ASEM member countries.

We also call for the OSCE and Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) to combine efforts. In this context, I would like to highlight the importance of trust in relations between European and Asian countries. The settlement of existing and the prevention of new conflicts and crises is one of the key tools to strengthen such trust.

Kazakhstan is also able to facilitate the implementation of ASEM principles such as "Europe for all" and "Asia for all". Specifically, our country, in addition to the role as a transit and transport bridge between Europe and Asia, can provide its territory as a hub for the promotion of European business, investment, technology, science and culture in Asia, and vice versa.

In fact, we have established an institutional platform for such a hub. [The Astana International Financial Centre](#), the International Centre for Green Technology and Investment Projects, the Astana Hub International Technology Park of IT-Startups, Nazarbayev University, as well as a number of significant cultural institutions including Astana Opera Theatre, Astana Ballet, among others, may serve as its components.

In turn, the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, a unique body in our country representing ethnic and cultural organisations of ethnic groups of European and Asian descent living in our state, can make a significant contribution to implement the ASEM People-to-People initiative.

We believe that partnership in Eurasia can strengthen the world system and we are ready to actively contribute to further maintaining international stability and security.

Kazakhstan was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2017-2018. What was the foreign policy agenda of Kazakhstan as part of its presidency in the UNSC [this January](#)?

What other activities is your country planning to hold before the end of its mission?

First and foremost, it should be noted that Kazakhstan's activities in the UN Security Council were carried out according to seven priorities identified in my policy address entitled "Kazakhstan's Concept Vision on Sustaining Global Partnership for Secure, Just and Prosperous World". These were:

1. Achieving a world free of nuclear weapons;

2. Preventing and eliminating the threat of a global war by reducing the degree of military confrontation at global and regional levels;
3. Building a model for a regional zone of peace, security, cooperation and development in Central Asia;
4. Fighting against international terrorism and violent extremism;
5. Making efforts for national reconciliation and the restoration of peace on the African continent;
6. Taking joint measures to prevent wars and conflicts, protect human rights, achieve Sustainable Development Goals, and combat climate change;
7. Adapting the Security Council and the entire UN system to the challenges and threats to humankind in the 21st century and increasing the role of this organisation in world affairs.

This address was accepted as an official document of the UN Security Council.

As part of its activities, in January 2018 for the first time in its history, Kazakhstan presided at this main global body. Our presidency took place against the backdrop of ongoing tensions in world political processes.

Despite the challenges, Kazakhstan has properly fulfilled this responsible mission and achieved the main objectives of the presidency. During my visit to the USA on January 18 this year, I took part in a thematic high-level briefing entitled “Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction: Confidence Building Measures”.

The main goal of this event was to seek solutions to the main challenges in non-proliferation through confidence building measures. In addition, the UN Security Council Presidential Statement on a Comprehensive Conflict Prevention Strategy was adopted in New York. This is the first politically binding international document of the Security Council, developed and adopted under the leadership of Kazakhstan.

For the first time our country managed to ensure that, along with early warning, preventive deployment, mediation, peacekeeping, post-conflict peace-building and the strengthening of accountability measures, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction was also included in the document.

At the same time, international terrorism is still one of the most important and acute challenges to global peace and security.

At the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, I expressed an idea of establishing a global counter-terrorism coalition (or network) of states under UN auspices. As a basis for building this coalition, Kazakhstan proposed to develop a Code of Conduct towards Achieving a World Free of Terrorism.

I would like to emphasise that on 28 September 2018 within the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly, more than 70 UN member states supported our initiative, joined and signed the Code.

Before the end of our membership of the UN Security Council, Kazakhstan intends to carry out active work and make a feasible contribution to its activities on all agenda items in order to maintain international peace and security.

Now our country continues to chair the Security Council committees on Afghanistan/Taliban, on ISIL/Daesh/Al-Qaeda, and on Somalia/Eritrea.

In general, I believe that Kazakhstan's presidency has demonstrated the openness and constructiveness of our foreign policy, and the ability to reach compromises without detriment to national interests.

We have ensured the well-coordinated and transparent work of the Security Council, confirming the unique capability of our diplomacy to reach agreements through negotiation and strengthening the reputation of Kazakhstan as a responsible partner and an unbiased mediator.

At present, we see steady tendencies towards the development of integration processes in Central Asia, and the region can become a zone of peace, cooperation and security. What has Kazakhstan achieved in this area, and what are the challenges faced by your country?

Kazakhstan pays special attention to the development of relations with the states of Central Asia. We actively support the rapprochement of the regional countries and strengthening of mutually beneficial cooperation.

As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Kazakhstan has purposefully upheld the common interests of the Central Asian states, which are of particular importance for the future successful and safe development of the region.

These include the fight against terrorism and extremism, drugs and organised crime, as well as strengthening border security and countering illegal migration.

I'd like to note that over the past two years, interstate and interregional ties have reached a completely new level; we've made a major breakthrough in relations. Thus, at the first Central Asian Consultative Meeting held last March in Astana, the heads of state identified the basic priorities of five-sided cooperation and outlined plans for the future.

I would also like to draw your attention to the absence of any "bloc mentality" in these efforts. Peace and prosperity in this region are beneficial not only for its countries, but also for major non-regional states. In this regard, we, together with our Central Asian partners, noted the need to further strengthen ties with Russia, China and the EU.

Kazakhstan stands for the strengthening of mutually beneficial cooperation of the countries of Central Asia in all areas. This applies to the development and expansion of cooperation in trade and the economy, transport and communications, water and energy, culture, humanitarian matters and other domains.

By relevant agreements and treaties, our countries have established a strategic level of partnership. At the same time, trade and economic cooperation is undoubtedly at the core of bilateral relations.

In general, Central Asia is a region of unique opportunities with a large, and, as yet, untapped potential. Ensuring its sustainable development, stability and prosperity is our common and quite achievable goal.

For many years, the eyes of the world community have been riveted on the conflict in Afghanistan. How can Kazakhstan contribute to the stabilisation of this country? What measures can be taken to counter terrorism and extremism in the region?

Of course, the instability in Afghanistan, the threat of terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking emanating from its territory also affect Kazakhstan, since we are near neighbours.

Over the years, our country has consistently made its own contribution to the efforts of the international community to help stabilise the situation in Afghanistan, providing financial, technical and humanitarian assistance annually.

In particular, attaching special importance to the development of human capital in Afghanistan, we are implementing an educational program for one thousand Afghan students in Kazakh universities at a cost of 50 million US dollars.

Moreover, as the Chair of the UN Security Council Committee on Afghanistan/Taliban, we are promoting issues of particular relevance to the peace, security, stability and development of Afghanistan.

Kazakhstan also supports effective formats for global and regional cooperation with the participation of Afghanistan, including such reputable venues as CICA, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Istanbul Process, Tashkent Conference, Moscow Format, [CAREC](#) and [RECCA](#) forums, among others.

More recently, on 5 September, we organised a regional conference in Astana titled “Empowering Women in Afghanistan”. We hope that this conference has contributed to the stable, economically sustainable and safe development of that nation. The conference announced a new joint programme of cooperation on the education of Afghan girls, which [will be implemented by the European Union](#), Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

In order to rebuild the long-suffering Afghanistan, the world community, under the auspices of the UN, should continue to provide a range of assistance to Kabul. We believe it important to note that the government of that country continues with reforms designed to transform it into a stable democratic state.

From the point of view of regional integration, the development of economic cooperation and transnational trade, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a promising partner with significant transit potential and a sufficiently large domestic market.

In this respect, Kazakhstan fully supports the involvement of Afghanistan in the expanding regional network of trade, energy and transport ties. Transport infrastructure development is crucial for unlocking the enormous potential of this country and the entire Central Asian region.

Today, Astana has become one of the dialogue platforms for discussing international and regional issues. What are Kazakhstan's achievements in this area?

I am convinced that dialogue is the only real alternative to conflict and power confrontation for all humanity today and in the future. Fear causes most wars. People tend to be afraid of the unknown and concepts which are alien and incomprehensible.

Meetings and talks help people to get to know each other better, to understand objectives and interests, as well as each other's fears and hopes.

Therefore, since the earliest years of independence, the development of international dialogue has become a key principle of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. The values of peace and cooperation, safe and sustainable growth are in the fundamental interests of our state.

Over these years, our new capital, Astana, has become a centre that has generated many global peacekeeping initiatives, which has met with the understanding and support of the global community.

Kazakhstan initiated the creation in 1992 of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia. It is a permanent dialogue platform, where representatives of Israel and Palestine, India and Pakistan sit at the same table.

The Eurasian Media Forum, first organised in 2001, has long gone beyond a purely journalistic format and has become a place where the most pressing issues of our time are discussed.

From time immemorial, all religious denominations have called for peace and harmony. However, today religion, unfortunately, often becomes a factor that divides people, contributing to distrust and confrontation.

In 2003, I initiated the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana. [The Six Congress has been held this October](#). For 15 years, this platform has served to build a culture of mutual respect at the global level, which is especially important in the context of growing interethnic and interreligious intolerance in different parts of the planet.

The world is now changing dramatically. In order to find solutions to the key economic and social problems of our time, in 2008 we launched the Astana Economic Forum. Every year it brings together politicians, scientists and representatives of businesses from around the world.

The Astana Club, a neutral discussion platform that lays the groundwork for an international expert dialogue, opened in our capital in 2015.

Kazakhstan is ready to assume the role of a responsible and impartial mediator in addressing current international problems.

Thus, two rounds of talks on the Iranian nuclear programme held in Almaty in 2013 led to positive developments in the negotiation process, which resulted in the adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) two years later.

Thanks to our assistance, the successful settlement of Russian-Turkish relations was achieved. Russia and Turkey are countries close to Kazakhstan in terms of history and culture. And the choice in favour of cooperation made by the leaders of these states is very important for us.

In December 2014, during the Ukrainian crisis, we made our modest contribution to the normalisation of relations between Russia and Europe. This convinced the Russian president and his French counterpart of the vital need for dialogue rather than confrontation and stalemate.

The Astana negotiation process to settle the Syrian situation has become an effective tool for helping to achieve peace in the country. In particular, an agreement was reached in our capital to create de-escalation zones that significantly reduced the extremely high levels of violence in Syria.

I would like to note that we are not trying to single-handedly solve complex, almost intractable problems for others. We only want to help opposing parties take the path of dialogue. If we manage to help them to make their choice in favour of peace talks, and not military actions, then this is no mean accomplishment.