

**Presentation of Chairman of the Board of Foreign Policy
Research Institute under the MFA of the Republic of
Kazakhstan
Bolat Nurgaliyev**

**Central Asia and European Union in Context of New
Geopolitical Realities,
Athens, February 16, 2024.**

Your Excellency Ambassador Baudarbek-Kozhatayev,
Dr. Charalampos Tsardanidis,
President Simos Anastosopoulos.
Dear Ladies and Gentlemen!

First of all I would like to express gratitude to the leadership of the International Economic Research Institute for its kind invitation to deliver my views on the topic. Today we signed the MoU between the Foreign Policy Research Institute of Kazakhstan and the IERI of Greece and my presentation can be considered the first event opening the gates for what I hope will be a fruitful, mutually beneficial partnership between our two analytical structures.

Conventional perception is that European states established relations with Kazakhstan after it gained independence in 1991. In fact, our relations can be traced to several centuries back, to Middle Ages, at least judging by documentary evidence. And what could be more objective and convincing than cartography? I have a friend in Astana, Professor Mukhit-Ardager Sydyknazar, for seventeen years on pure enthusiasm, on his own initiative and for most of the time on his own money, he conducted independent research in Greek, Polish, Belgian, Dutch, French, German, Austrian, Italian, Irish, Scottish universities, libraries and museums, where he studied 1200 maps of what is now called Eurasia made by European travelers, geographers and cartographers. These maps and accompanying written descriptions and drawings clearly show that at least since the 16th century the Kazakh sovereign nation has been meeting all four criteria prescribed in the 1933 Montevideo Convention on the Rights and Duties of States: a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; d) capacity to enter into relations with other states. Mukhit-Ardager produced a huge 525 pages album with unique maps and scientific description of written and graphic data. The title

of the album is “Uninterrupted History of Nationhood in Kazakhstan. The Kazakh State on European and American Maps of the 16th-19th Centuries”. So, whenever there is a claim from some foreign politicians or so called experts on Central Asia that Kazakhstan has no history as an independent state, we, the Kazakh experts and diplomats, suggest to sceptics to check their false assumptions against documentary evidence of the Middle Ages European scholars. In a way, the European sources are practically useful in the process of defending our sovereignty and territorial integrity, and we are grateful for this.

Kazakhstan as other four Central Asian Republics from the outset of their independence consistently maintained strong political and economic cooperation with the EU in all dimensions: international and regional security, social, economic and judicial reforms, cultural development, energy and investment, effective use of transit potential of the region, modernization of logistics infrastructure and many other fields. For example, ten years ago Kazakhstan became the first Central Asian Republic to conclude the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) with the EU. Since then other Central Asia (CA) countries signed similar EPCAs, but Kazakhstan is again the only one which has so far ratified the Agreement. The Kazakh-EU EPCA sets four distinct goals: 1) building a sufficient institutional framework for cooperation; 2) supporting Kazakhstan’s democratization and market-based economic development; 3) facilitating trade and investment; 4) building strong collaborations in energy and transport fields. Examining the experience of the Kazakh-EU partnership, one has to conclude that the EU played and will be playing a very significant role in both foreign and domestic policies of Kazakhstan.

Moreover, under the current geopolitical tension and alarming instability in international relations the EU plays instrumental role by advocating the need for a stronger regional dialogue within Central Asia, opening vast opportunities for leading economies of the region to serve as drivers for effective resolution of social and economic problems of lesser developed neighbors. Official statistics available to me indicate that out of 350 billion dollars which have come to Kazakhstan during three decades of its independence as direct foreign investment nearly half is of the European origin. 40 percent of the Kazakh foreign trade is with the EU, its monetary value is 40 billion dollars. More than three thousand European companies operate in our country, among them transnationals like Shell, Eni, Total, Air Liquide, Alstom, Siemens. Besides traditional venues of industrial cooperation we are opening new horizons in such

innovative fields as mining of rare earth metals and production of “green” hydrogen. Recently there was quite a breakthrough with a ground breaking of construction by a German-Swedish company Svevind of a wind and solar power stations manufacturing plant and production of three million tons of “green” hydrogen, which is covering 20 percent of the EU need in this product. Kazakhstan offers to the European market not only raw materials, but finished, value added products related to machine-building, steel and iron production, food processing and agricultural goods.

Time flies and geopolitical and geoeconomic realities change so fast that governments and other state institutions hardly catch up with adjusting their strategies, updating and upgrading assumptions and implementation of different road maps. Just 5 years ago the EU adopted its strategy in relations with Central Asia as a region and with the 5 Central Asian Republics individually. Nowadays there is concurrence among the EU institutions that this Strategy is outdated, that it is to be reassessed in light of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict, which within six days will be two full years long, developments in Afghanistan after the Taliban movement coming to power and intensification of China-West rivalry in all directions, including in the Central Asian region. A month ago an overwhelming majority of the European Parliament members voted in favor of a resolution to reconsider the EU strategy towards Central Asian states by expanding political and economic cooperation with them. European parliamentarian from Germany Karsten Lucke as author of a report on the EU strategy justified reconsideration as a pressing necessity of looking for new ways to establish new partnerships in a changed geopolitical environment.

I remember that immediately after the adoption of the EU Central Asia Strategy of 2019 some of Kazakh experts were expressing skepticism over the expected effectiveness of this strategy, pointing out to lack of specifics and somewhat distorted optics. My personal impression of the document was that it reflected the difficulty in finding a right balance between treating Central Asia as a wholesome entity and differentiating each five Republics specific characteristics and development needs. For example, being a Kazakh native I appreciate better peculiarities of our profile as a country. Unlike our neighbors, Kazakhstan in many respects (pointed Eurasianism, secularism accompanied by religious tolerance, government policy of promoting harmony in interethnic relations, tri-linguism-English spoken widely along with Kazakh and Russian-, civic conception of the nation, education system standards, consistency of offering itself as a bridge in civilizational dialogue, pronounced desire to draw from

European experience of economic development and modernization of political system) is more a European state, than what you might consider a typical Oriental state.

Kazakhstan along with other Central Asian Republics is a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). You might remember that at the time immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union there was a heated debate here in the West whether it would not be an overstretch of traditional perceptions of geographic boundaries to include newly independent Central Asian states into a European institution. Nevertheless, a notion prevailed that effective management of security issues in Europe and Eurasia demanded involvement of all former Soviet republics. Kazakhstan pursued active and extensive participation in the OSCE and deserved the Organization's rotating chairmanship in 2010, which culminated in convening a long due summit and adoption of the Astana Declaration "Towards a Community of Security", a comprehensive document still retaining relevancy, especially in turbulent environment of heated debates over the future of the OSCE, where the spirit of cooperation and mutual accommodation of conflicting interests of participating states has unfortunately been replaced by ideological rivalry, mutual distrust and division of member-countries into "friendlies" and "adversaries". As a matter of principle Kazakhstan consistently calls for return to normalcy in interstate relations as the only viable option of stepping back from a precipice of uncompromising confrontation. We are unwaveringly committed to the concept of comprehensive, cooperation-based, equal and indivisible security, which combines maintaining peace with respect of human rights and basic freedoms, as it follows from the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the Paris Charter, the Charter of European Security and all other documents agreed upon among the civilized members of the international community. Indivisible security means equal right of everyone to security and no yielding to temptation to strengthen your security at the expense of security of another country. No need to invent new rules, everything that is necessary to preserve peace and stability as a prerequisite for sustainable progress of the humankind as a whole and of individual states has already been negotiated, the only problem is honoring your own obligations under signed and ratified treaties, agreements, charters and conventions. *Pacta sunt servanda*. Core principle of international law. If every state in good faith and fully abides by its international obligations, there would be no complications in geopolitical environment the way we unfortunately witness currently.

Returning to the topic of the EU renewed strategy in our region. Among priority venues of cooperation should be development of transport and logistics infrastructure. Special, I would say strategic, significance acquires the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, also known as the Middle Corridor. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev speaking last June at the Central-Asia-European Union summit in a Kyrgyz resort town of Cholpon-Ata highlighted the TITR role in enhancing interaction between our two reainsgions. Yesterday I spoke at the International Conference in Pireaus “Trading Arteries and Global Supply Chains at Stake. New Order and Trends in Regional Connectivity”, organized by Balkans and Black Sea Forum, some of you in the audience were present at the event. Kazakhstan and China started in 2023 construction of a first class logistics terminal in X’ian designated to dispatch direct container trains from China across Central Asian territory to Europe. Every day the Kazakh railways processes more than a hundred cargo trains delivering containers with goods from China to Europe and vice versa. Further development of the Middle Corridor is interlinked with the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. I believe that there is every reason to connect the Middle Corridor and the BRI with the European “Global Gateway” initiative. Underlining that Central Asia had become a crucial partner for the EU, High Representative Josep Borrell said at the Brussels Forum two weeks ago, that while in the past Central Asia was a little bit in the middle of nowhere, now Central Asia is in the middle of everything. He went even further, stating that “everything that matters between Europe and Asia goes through you”. Mr Borrell, of course, wanted to flatter his Central Asian partners, but his remarks reflect significant transformation of ground reality in the region, along with perception by outside players of its strategic value. My only wish is that Central Asian strategic value is recognized for good reasons of using the region’s comparative advantages for common benefit, not out of necessity to look for additional ways to inflict more damage to your adversaries or pull Central Asian Republics into taking sides in geostrategic rivalry between conflicting camps. The EU has already pledged 10 billion euro investment into the TITR. Vice-Chair of the European Commission Valdis Dombrovskis announced that this sum would be spent to promote sustainable transport communication in Central Asia. We will watch how the European Commission (EC) mobilizes the announced amount through its own allocations, commitments of the European Investment Bank and some additional funding within the framework of the so called open architecture of the EC investment guarantees. The scope of the project goes beyond Central Asia-EU connectivity,

restoration of the ancient Silk Road implies linking Europe and China through Central Asia, South Caucasus, Turkey and South Asia at some stage.

Quite rightly we are engaged in discussion of the ways to diversify routes for delivery of energy resources. Currently 80 percent of the Kazakh crude oil is exported to Europe through the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, starting from our oilfields in the Caspian basin all way to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. It is commercially viable, as recognized by all international partners of Kazakhstan in the Consortium. While we count on long-term and stable usage of this strategic pipeline for the European needs, it would be prudent to develop oil export operations in other directions. From early 2023 1,5 million tons of the Kazakh crude is channeled through Aktau-Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline with planned doubling of the volume by 2025. We intend to expand oil delivery on the route Aktau-Batumi. The Kazakh oil started to flow to Germany via “Friendship” pipeline. Initial volume was rather modest, but potentially it can reach 1,2 million tons annually and increase further in future.

As locomotives of Central Asian integration Kazakhstan closely interacts with Uzbekistan. We attach great importance to issues of environmental degradation, climate change, water resources management and development of renewable energy sources. We believe that within the framework of Global Gateway strategy and Team Europe initiative the EU and Central Asian countries need to join efforts in introducing principles of closed cycle economy. Equally important venues of Central Asia-EU partnership are spheres of education and science, hi-tech and innovations.

Practical measures in all the abovementioned areas, including reforms, economy, trade, green energy, connectivity, humanitarian aspects are agreed upon in a Joint Roadmap for deepening ties between Central Asia and EU, endorsed in October 2023 when Foreign ministers of the 5 Central Asian Republics met Foreign Ministers of the 27 European Union member-states. It is very encouraging that such high level meetings are becoming a regular practice.

Final point. We acknowledge and appreciate the role the US and the EU played in undisputable achievements in Central Asian social and economic development, in strengthening nationhood and state sovereignty of all five republics, especially at the early stage of their independence. The range, scale and depth of commitments of the West to the wellbeing of our region is impressive. But expectations of immediate transformation and abrupt shifts in relations with outside powers have to be adjusted by recognition and respect of the factual truth that Central Asian states are now masters of

their own destiny, that they cherish their long awaited ability to determine the course of their domestic and foreign policy. Times for “Big Games” in Central Asia, when nations inhabiting the region were considered objects of policy of great powers, are gone. Future of our relations will be determined by one factor alone: they are to be beneficial to all parties. I do hope that this will be reflected in a renewed strategy of the EU for Central Asia.

Thank you for kind attention!