

- Ensuring Kazakhstan remains its closest partner and ally in Central Asia and the post-Soviet space;
- Developing large-scale integration projects with Kazakhstan, in particular the Customs Union;
- Maximizing integration between the Russian and Kazakh economies;
- Creating an energy pool with Astana: joint production and transportation of hydrocarbons and development of nuclear energy;
- Creating a food cartel with Astana (primarily in grain production);
- Limiting Kazakhstan's capacity to pursue an independent, multi-vector policy in areas that are seen as of vital importance by Moscow (energy and transportation);
- Limiting cooperation between Kazakhstan and the West;
- Monitoring Kazakhstan's relations with China.

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#### ANALYSIS

## Russian–Kazakh Security Relations Revisited

By Aigerim Shilibekova, Astana

### Abstract

Since the early 1990s Russian–Kazakh relations have been strengthening. In the present day, the security relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan is accurately described as a strategic partnership, even though Moscow and Astana have different perceptions of the relationship. This article revisits security relations between Russia and Kazakhstan on the bilateral level, as well as within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

### Why Russia and Kazakhstan Matter to Each Other

A careful analysis of the basic security documents of the Russian Federation—Foreign Policy Concept (2008), National Security Concept (2009) and the Military Doctrine (2010)—clearly reveals an emphasis on relations with the so-called "Near Abroad". Russia's primary security concerns remain focused on the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the existing or potential conflicts near its borders and the rights of Russian minorities in the "Near Abroad".

Although the Russian–Kazakh relationship is mainly considered within the context of Russia's approach toward the Central Asian region in general, increasingly there is also a tendency to view Kazakhstan as a partner distinct from the rest of Central Asia. Russia is aware of Kazakhstan's significance as its neighbor and partner, and recognizes that without the cooperation of Kazakhstan, its wider Central Asian strategies will not succeed. In turn, Kazakhstan understands that cooperation with Russia is vital to its national security, as well as development.

The nature of Russia's relations with Kazakhstan is shaped by several basic factors. Firstly, Russia is an immediate neighbor of Kazakhstan, and the two countries share the longest land border in the world. Secondly, Kazakhstan is Russia's natural gateway to Central Asia. Thirdly, Kazakhstan, with its rich reserves of natural resources, is a major economic player in the region, whose participation is vital to the Customs Union (Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus), which came into force in July 2010. Fourthly, Russia is involved in many integration processes at a regional level, and acknowledges Kazakhstan's significance to the success of these projects. Fifthly, both countries are Eurasian, or in other words are both influenced by European as well as Asian cultures and values. Last but not least, the Russian community in Kazakhstan is the largest Russian diaspora living in Central Asia.

### When Demographics Matter

The Russian diaspora in Kazakhstan predominately live in large numbers in the northern parts of the country. After Kazakhstan became independent, many of the

Russians living on Kazakh territory tried to immigrate to the Russian Federation. Many of these Russians sought to immigrate because they felt that Russians were being treated as second class citizens in independent Kazakhstan, and due to pressure from the Kazakh state to learn and speak Kazakh. Initially, Moscow was very concerned about this wave of immigration, fearing it may create economic and social problems in some regions of Russia. However, taking into account Russia's deteriorating demographic situation and forecasts, at the current time it seems that the issue of the Russian population abroad presents a dilemma for Russian authorities: should Moscow invite more Russian specialists living in Kazakhstan and other countries of the former Soviet Union to return to Russia in order to improve the demographic situation, or should it encourage the Russian diasporas to remain, so that they may function as a means of soft-power and a reason for intervening in internal situations in the post-Soviet space.

In turn, Kazakhstan also perceives the issue of the Russian diaspora in Kazakhstan as a major security concern. Indeed, in comparison with Russia, Kazakhstan faces more complex problems in this regard, particularly in the social and cultural spheres. One of the most acute challenges is that the overwhelming majority of Russians in the northern oblasts of Kazakhstan are against the Kazakh authorities changing the names of the cities in which they live. While the original Kazakh names have been restored or new Kazakh names given to almost all major cities and towns in other parts of Kazakhstan, the oblasts and cities of Petropavlovsk and Pavlodar remain unchanged. Several attempts have been made to change these names, but each time the Kazakh authorities have been met with significant discontent from the Russian population in these cities, as well as open protest by several Russian-sponsored local NGOs, which see themselves as the guardians of Russians' rights in Kazakhstan.

Another important issue for Kazakh officials in relation to the Russian diaspora is the issue of language. While Kazakh nationalists exert pressure on the government to implement more decisive measures to ensure that Kazakh is widely spoken, the Russian-speaking population resists. This is a key problem, which has the potential to impact on the stability of inter-ethnic relations in the short term and national security in the long-term.

A third characteristic within the nexus of national security and demographics is related to the issue of nation-building in Kazakhstan. This debate revolves around the issue of whether the Kazakhstani nation should be one in which ethnicity does not matter or one in which the Kazakhs form the titular nation with other ethnic groups living alongside them in a common home country. The Kazakh authorities attempted to resolve

this dilemma by developing a national unity doctrine and issuing a new biometric version of the Kazakhstani passport, in which no ethnicity is documented. However, these new passports caused discontent among the Kazakh intelligentsia, with many sending an open letter to the President stating that this change was unacceptable and unpatriotic. As a result, the Kazakh authorities reversed their decision, and the new passports continue to contain a field outlining nationality, which is determined by ethnic origin. This incident signals the obstacles the government must negotiate in its search for ways to ensure the cohesion of the Kazakh population and nation, at least in the short-term.

A further concern has arisen following the Russian military intervention in Georgia in 2008. In spite of the prohibition of dual citizenship in Kazakhstan, there are an unknown number of citizens in Kazakhstan holding both a Kazakh and a Russian passport. Russia's stance with regard to Russian passport holders in Abkhazia and South Ossetia raises concerns among Kazakh officials about dealing with Moscow on the issue of the Russian diaspora in Kazakhstan.

At the same time, the presence of a significant Russian population in Kazakhstan is not only a negative factor of concern to the Kazakh authorities. In recent years, a positive trend can be discerned in which interactions between Kazakhs and Russian and other non-Kazakh populations are increasing. Examples include Kazakh-speaking non-Kazakh TV presenters and journalists, non-Kazakh children attending Kazakh kindergartens and schools, and more inter-ethnic marriages between Kazakhs and Russians. There are also cases of joint Kazakh–Russian business ventures, as well as purely Russian investment in major cities in Kazakhstan. These developments raise hope that societal stability between the different groups can be sustainable and long-lasting, and may also impact positively on other spheres of bilateral relations between Russia and Kazakhstan.

### **Bilateral Military And Security Relations**

During the immediate years following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Central Asian Republics, many analysts predicted that Kazakhstan faced the greatest challenges among the Central Asian Republics to developing a strong and stable nation-state. A number of factors were said to offer little prospect of a bright future and signal an enormously complicated state-building process in Kazakhstan: a huge territory but small population, the longest land border with Russia and a common border with China, Soviet nuclear heritage but without the technology and technical specialists to manage it, a diverse ethnic composi-

tion with a minority of ethnic Kazakhs in proportion to other nationalities, weak governmental institutions and a deteriorating socio-economic situation, a lack of effective security and military structures and forces. Indeed, perceptions about these challenges prevented Kazakhstan from declaring its independence until 16 December 1991 (the last of all the Central Asian Republics). Against this background, the Kazakhstan President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, sought to develop an independent state by taking into account the complicated breakup process not only of the economies, but also the armed forces of the Soviet Union, and particularly how closely interconnected these fields were with Russia. As a result, he supported the possible continuation of the Soviet military as a combined armed forces of the newly formed Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on 21 December 1991. However, despite his efforts and the interest of some of the other leaders, the CIS failed to create a combined or unified armed forces, with each Republic going on to deal with problems of state-building on their own. Nonetheless, a major part of military building in Kazakhstan has focused on maintaining and strengthening bilateral military ties with Russia.

The preservation and development of close ties have remained a significant aim for both Russia and Kazakhstan up to the present day, suggesting that they identify common threats to their national security. The Kazakh and Russian governments face complicated issues in relation to one another that require collaboration, such as monitoring cross-frontier trade or collecting customs duties across a vast border and its many possible crossing points. On the whole, the two states have managed this problematic situation well and on 17 January 2005, Nazarbayev and Putin signed a comprehensive border delimitation agreement. Additionally, Astana and Moscow express a common view regarding the formation of a united air-defense system among CIS states. Moreover, Russia depends on Kazakhstan supplying it with uranium and similar products for its nuclear power industry, as well as Kazakh goodwill in allowing Russia to access the Baikonur Spaceport. During a long negotiation process over the use of this facility both Russia and Kazakhstan attempted to obtain for themselves the most beneficial rental conditions. Finally, in 1994 an agreement was reached under which the two governments recognized Kazakhstan's ownership of the site, but Russia was permitted to continue to use the location under a 20-year lease. A January 2004 accord, which entered into force in 2005, extended the leasing arrangement through 2050. Settlement of these issues has contributed to an understanding of interdependence and mutual interest. This trend is also being strengthened within the framework of the CSTO.

### **CSTO: Quo Vadis?**

Reading the short history of the CSTO as an organization, it is obvious that it has failed to become an efficient regional structure in terms of policies, as well as military potential. Indeed, the attitude of many of the member states to military coordination suggests that the only thing keeping the CSTO together is its members common past. However, this is not the case for Russia and Kazakhstan, who are the only member states striving for real cooperation and which are willing to realize the Collective Operation Reaction Force.

According to many, the CSTO is perceived as a tool for the projection of Russian interests in the region, as well as a chance for Russia to position itself as a great power. At the same time, as demonstrated by numerous analytical articles and expert opinions on the prospects for regional cooperation published following the events in Kyrgyzstan in April and June 2010, Russia considers Kazakhstan as its highest priority partner in Central Asia, a region it deems as strategically vital.

For Kazakhstan, the CSTO is not only a defense umbrella, but also a valuable framework for bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other states within the former Soviet space. Therefore, at the informal summit of the leaders of the CSTO member-states, held in Kazakhstan in 2008, Nazarbayev stressed the need to reconsider the CSTO as a framework in the context of the Russian–Georgian war and that its members should discuss how to ensure its further development. Moreover, only Russia and Kazakhstan signed the CSTO Plan of Joint Actions for 2009–2010, a document covering economic and trade aspects of relations within the CSTO, alongside cooperation in the military sphere. Indeed, it is not surprising that recent developments in Kyrgyzstan have led to a reassessment of the CSTO and the difficult relationship between some members of the organization has caused Kazakhstan and Russia to seek closer relations with each other.

### **Conclusion**

Security relations between Russia and Kazakhstan may be defined as a strategic partnership due to the commonality of issues on the security agendas of both states. Russia's adoption of a more realistic assessment of its capabilities in recent years, as well as the current regional situation has further strengthened Moscow's perception that Kazakhstan is a key country in the region. At the present time, Russia considers the bilateral format of relations as the most successful and suitable for Russian policies towards Central Asia. Kazakhstan is also very determined and clear in its vision of regional developments. On the one hand, Astana seeks to play the role of the "locomotive" for regional integration and closer

cooperation between the Central Asian states; on the other hand, Astana is increasingly concerned about stability in the southern part of Central Asia, as well as the growing Chinese presence and pressure in the region. These concerns are pushing Astana to strengthen its ties

with Moscow. Thus, neither Russia nor Kazakhstan will change their course in bilateral relations in the foreseeable future, which involve prioritizing one another as strategic partners.

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## ANALYSIS

### Russia And the Customs Union With Kazakhstan And Belarus

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#### **Abstract**

The Customs Union of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus is a product of “diverse speed” integration in the post-Soviet space. It consists of both free trade arrangements among its members and a common commercial policy towards third countries. Russia has a keen interest in this project because, *inter alia*, it opens up new opportunities for both foreign and Russian investors, keeps the Eurasian Economic Community in operation and represents an important tool for Russia to increase its economic and political influence in the region. On the other hand, the Customs Union limits Russia’s sovereignty in foreign trade policy, and requires coordination with its partners on issues of common jurisprudence and interest.

#### **Chronological Overview of the Formation of the Customs Union**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia and other countries in the post-Soviet space have been involved in various integration processes in order to maintain and further develop historically established relations through new regional arrangements, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) comprising 12 countries, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, “GUAM” (which stands for Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and others. Among these integration schemes, the Customs Union of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus is an important project for strengthening economic cooperation in the CIS region.

The idea of creating a customs union in the post-Soviet period dates back to 24 September 1993, when the CIS countries signed the Economic Union Treaty that envisaged the launch of an economic union following the formation of a multilateral free trade association, a customs union, a common market, and a currency union. Such an economic union was perceived to comprise free movement of goods, services, capital and labor; coordinated policy in monetary, budgetary, fiscal, and external economic issues; harmonized

economic legislation as well as a single statistical database. As for the CIS customs union, it targeted the full removal of tariff and non-tariff barriers to the movement of goods and services, and the establishment of a common customs tariff and coordination of external trade policy towards non-signatory countries. The Economic Union Treaty was just a framework agreement to be put into practice by a number of more specific agreements, including the 1994 Agreement on the Formation of a Free Trade Area (CIS FTA)—an area with no internal trade barriers. However, multilateral trade integration within the CIS-12 framework has faced certain challenges. Firstly, as the signatories failed to work out a common list of goods exempt from the multilateral regime, they agreed to identify such exceptions in bilateral documents and then to gradually abolish them. Secondly, the provisions outlining the aim of a transition to a customs union were removed from the treaty as a result of amendments introduced by a protocol on 2 April 1999. Thirdly, neither the CIS FTA nor the protocol has ever been ratified by Russia. Finally, the integrity of a single multilateral free trade regime has been hampered by a web of bilateral FTAs between the CIS countries. While CIS countries managed to establish a free trade area on the basis of the CIS FTA and bilat-