

#Kazakhstan: A model of inter-ethnic tolerance and social harmony



Originally published by EU Reporter, November 11th 2016

With the turmoil in the former Soviet Union and Middle East, the West is searching for countries of stability in embattled regions and allies to fight Islamist extremism. One leading candidate, Kazakhstan, will become a UN Security Council non-permanent member on January 1 2017. This is a good opportunity to strengthen the relations between the international community and Astana, writes Colin Stevens.

Kazakhstan is a country that only gained independence on 16 December 1991 but as a friend and strategic partner, it's come a long way fast. As with other countries of the former Soviet Union, Kazakhstan inherited a unique system for managing the needs of ethnic minorities.

The question, though, was how these countries utilized Soviet constructs to develop policies suitable for their distinct political contexts. In Kazakhstan's case its leaders chose to fashion a multi-ethnic civic nation and established the "Assembly of People of Kazakhstan" to oversee the work of creating a uniform national identity.

Kazakhstan is particularly multi-ethnic. According to official statistics, 59.2% of the population is Kazakh, 29.6 per cent is Russian, while 10.2% comprises Germans, Tatars, Ukrainians, Uzbek and Uyghurs. Representatives of more than 140 ethnic groups live in Kazakhstan and some 818 ethnic and cultural associations operate under the auspices of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. All ethnic groups have a single civil and social status.

Their representatives are not considered as national minorities but enjoy the full rights of the citizens of the single nation of Kazakhstan.

Few states are as deeply rooted and as vitally interested in peace as Kazakhstan, with the country becoming a member of the UN Security Council for 2017-2018, The chief criterion for Security Council membership is a state's contribution to the maintenance of peace and, here, Kazakhstan gets highest ranks.

As a new member of the Security Council, many, including Stephen Blank, of the American Foreign Policy Council, have **commended** Kazakhstan's inclusiveness and willingness to promote mediation as it offered to do in the 5+1 talks with Iran.

He believes its policies geared towards social harmony demonstrates Kazakhstan's conviction and willingness to act in world affairs in ways that champion both regional and international security and stability. "Kazakhstan deserves to be rewarded and encouraged

not least because it can serve as a model for other current and future members of the Security Council to emulate,” he said.

Kazakhstan is in the heart of Eurasia, at the crossroads of the Silk Road and at the intersection of Eastern and Western civilizations. In addition, the mentality of Kazakhs has been formed in the interaction of Western and Eastern civilizations.

Nursultan Nazarbayev, the president of Kazakhstan, was one of the first to draw attention to the need to build a model of inter-ethnic tolerance and social harmony. Since its first days of independence, Nazarbayev’s strategic vision and forward looking policy helped to shape Kazakhstan’s modern multi-ethnic society, making the diversity of the country one of its biggest strengths.

The promotion of multi-religious dialogue, such as the president’s initiative in hosting the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, is testament to Kazakhstan’s commitment to strengthen human rights and universal freedoms around the world. Every three years since 2003, Kazakhstan has hosted the Congress with the most recent one in June last year.

People of many ethnicities live in Kazakhstan and the creation, in 1995, of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan was important as it ensured respect for the rights and freedoms of Kazakh citizens, irrespective of their ethnicity.

Kazakhstan has made “notable” contributions to global peace and security in several key areas, including strengthening international dialogue, inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony.

As a multi-ethnic country, Kazakhstan promotes the belief in the importance of inter-ethnic, inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and non-discrimination.

International bodies, such as the OSCE, have also praised Kazakhstan as a model of tolerance and social harmony. A spokesman for the Vienna-based organization told this website that it is a “successful international example of building peaceful international relations”. As evidence of this, he cites, as an example, the fact that countries as diverse as China, Turkey, Germany, France, Poland and Moldova are each studying the Kazakhstan’s model.

Many international observers will be watching with interest to see how Kazakhstan will exert its influence for global peace and security on the world stage during 2017.