

Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov's speech at the Conference “25 years of Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan: Outcomes. Accomplishments. Vision for the Future”

Astana, 28th November 2016

Your Excellencies!

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you to Astana as our country prepares to mark its first 25 years as an independent nation. Certainly, it is a chance for us to celebrate what we have achieved, to reaffirm our commitment to continue our progress and to set out our goals for the future.

The Speaker of the Mazhilis, Mr. Nurlan Nigmatulin, has just presented a very comprehensive and thorough review of Kazakhstan’s path of independent development. As the Foreign Minister, I very much hope that with your expert help we can focus today primarily on Kazakhstan’s foreign policy achievements over this period, as well as on challenges and opportunities ahead.

I know many of you are familiar with our country so the weather may not come to you as too much of a surprise. For those who have not experienced an Astana winter before, I hope the warmth of the welcome you are receiving is providing compensation for the cold outside.

The strength of our winter, of course, stems from Kazakhstan’s location at the heart of the Eurasian landmass. This geography has been a major factor in the development of our foreign policy since independence, informing our choice of what came to be known as a multi-vector and balanced foreign policy.

Dear guests!

In 1991, our country was confronted with the daunting task of developing a foreign policy from scratch. Despite our size as one of the world’s largest countries, few could find us on a map. Those who did know where Kazakhstan was saw a country which was remote, landlocked, underdeveloped, multi-ethnic, burdened with environmental problems – and surrounded by powerful neighbours. Many feared that those formidable challenges we had to deal with threatened our very survival as a sovereign nation.

Yet we persevered, ensured the diligent use of our natural resources, implemented wide-ranging market economic and political reforms and became a recognized success story in our part of the world.

And, despite those formidable challenges I outlined, since the early 1990s, rather than limiting ourselves to domestic affairs at first, Kazakhstan has also embraced an active and engaged foreign policy whose ultimate goal is to ensure the best possible external environment for our development as a nation.

The clear vision of Kazakhstan's founding President Nursultan Nazarbayev of making our country an economically competitive and democratically mature nation urged the Kazakh foreign policy to develop according to two main pillars. First, adopting a balanced foreign policy model based on openness towards the outside world and promoting equal, respectful and mutually beneficial relations with all our partners, near and far. Secondly, assuming the role of a responsible and trusted citizen of the world committed to contributing to global security and progress.

These mutually reinforcing pillars have been serving our country's sovereignty, security and economic development, and have positioned Kazakhstan as a visible international player, whose voice now may well be heard worldwide. After 25 years of independence Kazakhstan has truly secured the role of a genuine geographic, economic and political bridge between East and West and we do our best today to function as such.

In the early 1990s, some of the biggest choices and challenges our President and country faced was the future of nuclear weapons left on our soil following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. And President Nazarbayev made the courageous, and, as time proves, the wise, choice. The decades of nuclear weapon tests at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site made our nation and its President steadfast proponents of a nuclear weapon free Kazakhstan, a nuclear weapon free Central Asia, and a nuclear weapon free world.

In fact, in August 1991, four months before independence, President Nazarbayev announced the closure of the Semipalatinsk site. Shortly after gaining the independence, another bold decision of President Nazarbayev was to give up the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal of more than 1,400 warheads, which we inherited from the Soviet Union. Availing of this opportunity let me reiterate our thanks to those countries, which supported in many ways our determination and our efforts to get rid of these weapons.

Since then, Kazakhstan has been an active leader in nuclear disarmament worldwide. Together with our neighbours, we have established the Central Asian Nuclear Weapons Free Zone, an initiative, which has won the backing of all the major nuclear powers. We further believe that regional nuclear weapon free zones, which are important building blocks for creating a nuclear weapon free world, must be established and expanded. The establishment of such zones, particularly in the Middle East, would be a major step towards reducing tensions and distrust globally.

In 2012, our President launched the ATOM (Abolish Testing. Our Mission) Project, an international education and civic activism campaign against nuclear weapon tests and nuclear weapons ultimately. Currently approximately 300,000 people from about 120 countries have

supported The ATOM Project's online petition calling on global leaders to ensure the early entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

We also tabled a resolution, adopted in 2009 at the 64th UN General Assembly, to proclaim August 29 as the International Day Against Nuclear Tests, and this day is commemorated annually now contributing to raising global awareness of the still present danger of nuclear annihilation facing humanity.

In 2013, Kazakhstan hosted two crucial meetings in Almaty between the P5+1 countries and Iran, concerning the latter's nuclear programme. The Almaty talks paved the way for the eventual resolution of the issue and the adoption of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action last year. Kazakhstan was honoured to participate in the implementation of JCPOA later.

In August 2015, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Kazakhstan signed the host country agreement on the establishment of the world's first Low-Enriched Uranium Bank, in an effort to provide countries with secure access to nuclear fuel, without the need for them to possess enrichment technology.

President Nazarbayev made yet another step towards a safer world when earlier this year he introduced the Manifesto "The World. The 21st Century." The Manifesto sets out both an ambition to rid the world of nuclear weapons by the 100th anniversary of the United Nations in 2045 and outlines our leader's vision of a world without wars in principle. Thanks to our initiative, last year the UN General Assembly adopted a Universal Declaration on the Achievement of a Nuclear-Weapons-Free World.

All of these achievements came true because of Kazakhstan's internationally recognised moral responsibility and right to champion the cause of peace and nuclear disarmament. And I am proud that our country stands for these goals around the world. Indeed, nowhere is our commitment to global security clearer than in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Dear friends!

Throughout all 25 years of independence, Kazakhstan has never subscribed to a zero-sum view of foreign policy, instead considering itself free to choose partners independent of their membership in any existing alliance. This open and at the same time bold foreign policy approach has earned Kazakhstan many friends and allies over the past two decades. This is the essence of what we call the multi-vector foreign policy of Kazakhstan, inspired and formulated by President Nazarbayev from the very beginning of our independence.

Thanks to this inspiration and consistency in foreign policy matters Kazakhstan has been successful in establishing mutually respectful and beneficial cooperation within Central Asia, with Russia and other members of the Eurasian Economic Union, all the while deepening ties with China, the United States, Europe, and other nations in the Asia and around the world.

It is worthwhile to note that Kazakhstan's commitment to global dialogue and co-operation could be easily seen even in the early 1990s. Such commitment could be traced back to the proposal, made by our President at the UN in 1992, to establish the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia. Today this ambition has transformed CICA into a major forum for promoting peace, security and stability in Asia. With 26 full members and some other countries and international organisations as observers, it has proved successful in bringing together states from across the continent in search for common grounds and solutions to security challenges in Asia, and we are very much eager to see the CICA playing greater role in ensuring peace in Asia as the full-fledged Organization of Security and Development in Asia.

Another great example of Kazakhstan's early strong will for a wider international cooperation is our strategic choice in favour of developing the Eurasian integration, which the President first proposed in 1994. Since then no obstacles or misunderstandings could divert us from reaching that long-term goal. It would not be an exaggeration to say that Kazakhstan's belief in the idea of Eurasian integration was of vital importance for it to have been institutionalised in 2014 in the shape of the Eurasian Economic Union.

All these massive and ambitious international initiatives of a newly established Kazakhstan, together with our denuclearization policy, certainly brought both credibility and wider international recognition for our country as a responsible and reliable partner, led by a very charismatic and bright leader.

At the same time the reality for us was that unless we had legitimate state borders, fixed internationally de-jure, Kazakhstan was unlikely to be treated as a fully sovereign and viable nation. Diplomatic efforts of legitimizing Kazakhstan's lengthy borderlines of 14,000 kilometres with all our neighbours are indeed a glorious part of our independent history, of which we can be proud. The way we solved any kind of issues through a negotiation process during the 1990s provided our diplomatic service with an immense expertise in this area. But in strategic terms the greatest outcome surely was that Kazakhstan could operate within its internationally recognized and respected national borders, whose demarcation is now still on the way in full accordance with the fixed schedule. This floor is a great opportunity for me to renew thanks to all our neighbouring states, which have always been supportive and sensitive in solving our common border issues in a best possible way and for the our nations' mutual benefit.

Distinguished guests!

The resolution of border issues with all neighbours, the establishment of trustful and mutually beneficial relations with partners within our region and beyond has enabled Kazakhstan, located as it is in the heart of Eurasia, to effectively play a role it is meant to play by geography and history – that of an effective connecting bridge between East and West. It is well shown through facts, which you are all aware of. Let me remind you of the most conspicuous of them.

Kazakhstan came to chair the OSCE in 2010 and hold in Astana the long-awaited Summit of the Organization providing a much needed boost to an organization that faced then and continues to face today the daunting tasks of promoting security and cooperation in the vast space from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

In 2011-2012, our country contributed to the development of better understanding between the Islamic world and the rest of the world while chairing the Organization of Islamic Cooperation Foreign Ministers Council. It was in Astana, where this community of Islamic nations and one of the biggest organizations of the world was officially renamed from the Organization of Islamic Conference to the Organization of Islamic Organization. It took since then just two years to institutionalize the idea of President Nazarbayev to establish the Islamic Organization for Food Security, whose headquarters is now based in Astana. And even today Kazakhstan, along with Turkey, continues to pour efforts into the promotion of Islamic rapprochement to build better understanding within the Islamic world itself.

Being landlocked at the heart of the Eurasian landmass, Kazakhstan has no option other than promoting interconnectedness between East and West through developing massive transcontinental transport corridors crossing our country. The ongoing construction and launching of the Western Europe – Western China transportation corridor, whose lengthy part is crossing Kazakhstan, is to make our country a globally visible part of transcontinental economic links. The same refers to Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan-Iran railroad corridor, which was officially launched a couple of years ago. We are determined to enhance even further Kazakhstan's transit potential as we work with China and other countries to recreate the Great Silk Road of yore. The implementation of China's Silk Road Economic Belt programme, along with our own Nurly Zhol infrastructure development programme, will provide the best mechanism for achieving the goal of reconnecting the East and the West via land.

Last but not least, our accession to the World Trade Organisation in 2015 as its 162nd member state became a culmination of Kazakhstan's full integration into the global economic system. This step once again reaffirmed our openness and commitment not only to be an economically competitive nation and to join the list of 30 most developed countries, but also to share the responsibility for the global economic environment.

Next year Astana will host EXPO 2017 international specialized exhibition, whose main topic, Future Energy, is indeed a clear manifestation of the recognition of such responsibility. With the participation of more than 100 countries and 17 international organizations, the Astana EXPO is expected to be a great event, which will provide the international community a vitally important understanding of what the energy of the future may be about in the years to come.

This year, of course, was marked by another foreign policy achievement of Kazakhstan let by President Nazarbayev. I mean, of course, our election this summer, by a large majority, to sit on the United Nations Security Council as its non-permanent member for the next two years. As the first country from Central Asia ever to be elected to the Security Council, we see it not

only as a great honour but also a major responsibility, which we will work tirelessly over the next two years to meet. At the same time we regard our UNSC membership as recognition of our deeply-held national commitment to the key principles of the UN Charter, which dates back to our joining the organisation as a member state in 1992.

As we prepare to take our seat on the UN Security Council in January, we do not intend to take our new responsibilities lightly, nor will we leave Central Asian region's urgent concerns unaddressed on the largest diplomatic stage of all. I see this seat also as a great opportunity to cement existing partnerships, and seek out new ones with like-minded governments around the world. We will focus, primarily, on strengthening the UN instruments in the fight against terrorism and extremism, stabilizing Afghanistan and generally contributing to the development of Central Asia, as well as on promoting the ideas of President Nazarbayev's Manifesto "The World. The 21st Century."

Dear guests!

Kazakhstan's foreign policy is developing now according to its concept for 2014–2020, which is the natural culmination and extension of our nation's foreign policy since Independence. The concept clearly and frankly sets out our foreign policy goals for the next few years. In general terms, Kazakhstan aims to continue its balanced foreign policy and reaffirm the principle of openness and mutual benefit in order to achieve our national goals and to promote global security still further. Kazakhstan's intention is to continue using its influence and experience to advance regional and global security and to continue to be a responsible and active citizen of the world.

Let me conclude my remarks with wishing the conference participants interesting and productive discussions, which I am certain will contribute to better understanding of what Kazakhstan's contemporary foreign policy and its future challenges are about.

Thank you very much!