

# #Kazakhstan brings unique perspective and expertise

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***One of the most important regions in the 21st century has also been the least acknowledged. But leaders who have been converging the last few days for the United Nations General Assembly are finally waking up to the importance of Central Asia and, in particular, Kazakhstan. The 71st session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has kicked off at the UN headquarters in New York with a “new kid on the block”, writes Colin Stevens.***

Kazakhstan was recently elected to the United Nations Security Council as a non-permanent member.

It garnered 138 votes while Thailand gathered just 55 votes in the Asian-Pacific group.

Its election is a landmark: Kazakhstan is the first ever Central Asian country to be elected to the Security Council.

Reacting to the news, Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov said:

“Kazakhstan is incredibly proud to have been chosen to represent Asia as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

“As the first Central Asian country to be afforded the honour, we will bring our unique perspective and expertise to bear on the challenges that the council faces.”

The country, formerly part of the Soviet Union, has another good reason to celebrate: this year it marks the 25th anniversary of its independence.

According to prominent European politician Nikolay Barekov MEP, Kazakhstan has made “landmark progress” in its development over 25 years of independence and become a “leading country of the former Soviet Union.”

Barekov told this website: “Kazakhstan has managed to make a rapid breakthrough in its political and socio-economic development and has earned a great reputation in the international arena.”

“I think Kazakhstan as the next UN Security Council non-permanent member will be refreshing change,” added Barekov. “As a regional leader and global partner in matters of energy security, and a valuable contributor to international peacekeeping missions, Kazakhstan hopefully will bring its unique experience and expertise to bear on some of the pressing challenges currently facing the UNSC.”

Even so, this oil-wealthy country has no intentions of resting on its laurels and, recently addressing the second joint session of the Senate and the Mazhilis of the sixth convocation, the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev spoke of the necessity to continue the “tradition of constructive law making”.

Given its 25th anniversary of independence, the President said the session was a “central event” of 2016.

“It is important,” he declared, “to understand the country’s achievements. This event should be a final stage of a large outreach – it is necessary to convey all of our significant results to every Kazakh citizen. It is also important to define plans for the future.”

To this end, he said he supports “all initiatives aimed at restoring trust in international relations, and strengthening peace and security, based on international law”.

On the security front, he has proposed a universal declaration to achieve a world free of nuclear weapons. As the first country to close a nuclear weapon test site, Kazakhstan has helped create a nuclear weapon-free zone in Central Asia.

Such zones are now needed in other regions, particularly the Middle East, he argued.

His government, he pointed out, had also signed an agreement establishing the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) bank of low-enriched uranium in Kazakhstan, an important step that the world should acknowledge as safe use of the atom.

He went on to say that the erosion of international law and weakening of global institutions was “dangerous” and, with an eye on its upcoming participation in the Security Council, cautioned against the arbitrary imposition of sanctions, which “contravened” the United Nations Charter and international law.

“The right to impose international sanctions that can damage the well-being of millions of people should remain the exclusive prerogative of the Security Council,” he said.

In his speech, he advocated peaceful settlement of the Ukrainian crisis and full implementation of the Minsk agreements. More broadly, he proposed establishing, under United Nations auspices, a global network to counter terrorism and extremism.

The IAEA agreement is typical of Kazakh efforts to forge ever closer relations with the West, including the EU.

Since the conclusion of the 1994 Partnership and Co-operation Agreement, both Kazakhstan and the EU have experienced significant political, economic and social changes, paving the way for an upgrading of bilateral relations at the political level.

One example is the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA), signed on 21 December 2015.

This agreement has elevated relations between the EU and Kazakhstan to a new level. The EPCA, the first deal of its kind signed by the EU with one of its Central Asian partners, creates an enhanced legal basis for EU-Kazakhstan relations, providing a broad framework for reinforced political dialogue and co-operation in justice and home affairs.

EU-Kazakhstan relations date back to the early 1990s, shortly after the country declared its independence following the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Currently, the EU is the country's primary trade partner and its largest export market. In 2014, trade to the EU was worth €31 billion – 36% – ahead of China (22%), Russia (21%), the US, Uzbekistan and Turkey (2% each).

Aside from the politics, the landlocked country is increasingly seen as a model for others in its sometimes turbulent neighbourhood for the peaceful integration of people from many different ethnic backgrounds.

This was acknowledged with the country being chosen to host the recently concluded Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religion.

The Congress offered a platform for frank, inclusive and constructive dialogue on the most acute issues on the international agenda.

The forum had a wide geographic scope and a rich tapestry of participants, comprising representatives of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Shintoism, and other religions.

The country was chosen to host the event for a good reason: the population of Kazakhstan is unique for its ethnic composition.

Representatives of 130 nationalities live there. The local ethnos – Kazakhs make the largest part of the population – 58.9%, while Russian – 25.9%, Ukrainians – 2.9%, Uzbeks – 2.8%, Uighur, Tatar and German – 1.5% each, and other groups 4,3%.

Given the many advances it has made in a short space of time, many now have high hopes for Kazakhstan – the newest addition to the UN's Security Council.