

**Speech by H.E. Erlan Idrissov,  
Minister of Foreign of the Republic of Kazakhstan,  
on the occasion of the launch of the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs  
Wednesday November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2014  
Steigenberger Grandhotel, Brussels**

My Lords, ladies, gentlemen and distinguished guests,

I take great pleasure in welcoming you to the Steinberger Grandhotel tonight for the launch of the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs. This is an exciting, new, and independent think-tank, dedicated to the discussion and debate of Central Asian issues, placing our region at the very heart of the European Union.

It is a privilege to celebrate this occasion in Brussels, merely 15 minutes from the site of the battle of Waterloo, as our eminent friends from Britain, including Peter Lilley and Lord Lamont may care to note. And, as our eminent German friend Dr. Josef Joffe, might point out in return, had it not been for the timely appearance of General Blucher, this dinner might be taking place in Paris!

However, Waterloo was followed by the Congress of Vienna in 1815 which, as our French friends would rightly remind us, redressed the balance, with Talleyrand, that Prince among diplomats, acting as the driving influence behind the new European order, a union of countries that today exists as the European Union. As Talleyrand himself put it, “The art of French statesmanship is to foresee the inevitable and to expedite its occurrence.”<sup>1</sup>

This evening, we are celebrating a truly international occasion. It is a great pleasure to see so many distinguished representatives from so many nations. From our host country of Belgium... From Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia, all of which are represented by their former Presidents, Mr. Georgi Parvanov, Dr. Vaclav Klaus, Dr. Aleksander Kwasniewski and Dr. Danilo Turk... From Norway, represented by H.E. Kjell Magne Bondevik, the former Prime Minister... From Germany, Italy and Serbia, which are represented by

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, 1754-1838, French diplomat and plenipotentiary to the Congress of Vienna, 1815.

distinguished former foreign ministers and members of academia... I am delighted to see all of you.

I am personally honoured that Dr. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the former EU Commissioner for External Affairs and former foreign minister of Austria, and above all, a friend, has introduced me in such glowing and, I am sure, thoroughly undeserved terms.

Then there are the Ambassadors of my fellow Central Asian states: Asein Isaev, Ambassador of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan, Rustamjon Soliev, Ambassador of the Republic of Tajikistan and Vladimir Norov, Ambassador of the Republic of Uzbekistan and our own Ambassador Almaz Khamzayev – not forgetting, of course, Kakadjan Mommadov, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkmenistan, who is with us tonight in spirit.

Welcome to you all! I would especially like to thank every member of the ECFA Advisory Council for their time, effort and confidence in this worthwhile project, for rarely has a new organisation attracted such a glittering array of distinguished statesmen around the same table.

And let us pause for a moment and wish a speedy and successful recovery to our good friend Dr. Guido Westerwelle, former Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister of Germany, who, unfortunately, is unable to be with us this evening.

The Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs represents a considerable achievement. It has been modelled on the United States' Council on Foreign Relations, Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs at Chatham House, and the EU's own European Council on Foreign Relations.

As Central Asia's engine for economic growth, Kazakhstan has taken the lead in developing relations with the EU. Accordingly, the Foreign Ministry of Kazakhstan is delighted to have provided modest funding for the ECFA's first year of activity. It is envisaged, however, that as with similar institutions in other countries, governments in the Central Asian region, as well as corporate sponsors and private individuals, will also in time come to support the ECFA.

I would like to congratulate Rauan Kenzhekhanuly, a bright representative of the new, modern generation of Kazakhs, on his first year as Director, and for already establishing relations with many of the leading international institutions based in Brussels, some of which are represented here today.

For myself, I can merely say that I have the unique privilege of being the first Honorary President of the ECFA, but in time, I hope and trust that this position will be shared with the Foreign Ministers of other Central Asian countries, with whom, along with other distinguished partners and stakeholders, the ECFA looks forward to developing study programmes and other joint activities.

I strongly believe that the ECFA is an innovation that is not only historic but also timely – because it is not always easy to bridge the cultural and psychological gulf between Europe and Asia. Some of you may remember the famous story of Enver Hoxha, the former leader of Albania, who decided that his country should follow the ideas of Maoist communism. “Do not forget”, Hoxha admonished the White House press corps, “that together with China, Albania makes up a quarter of the world’s population!”

Of course, everybody laughed, because it seemed absurd to imagine a common enterprise between his little Balkan state and the Chinese colossus. However, it is still true that if you look at the Eurasian landmass, the overwhelming bulk of the population - four and a half billion people - is to be found in Asia, as against 742 million in the whole of Europe as far as the Urals. And yet, our great twin-headed super-continent has changed out of all recognition since the alliance of Hoxha and Mao. Communism is dead in Albania, just as it is dead in my own country, Kazakhstan, and just as old-fashioned communism is dead in China.

Across this great landmass we face many of the same challenges: ageing populations, damage to the environment, the dark shadow of intolerance, terrorism and those grim nurses, poverty and sickness, which – as the famous British author Charles Dickens once said – preside over our bedsides from cradle to grave.

It is more vital than ever that Eurasian countries should work together to address these ills, and Central Asia, including my country, is eager and ready to take up that responsibility, working closely with our European partners.

It is for this reason that Kazakhstan has put itself forward for election as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council for 2017-2018. It is my hope that the ECFA will act not only as a forum for debate, but also as a window on Central Asia that will inform European audiences of how hard my country, amongst other countries in the region, is working to be a good neighbour and a true global citizen.

For Kazakhstan, it has been a memorable year. 2014 has seen the conclusion of important negotiations with the European Union on a new enhanced partnership and cooperation agreement, and on our imminent accession to the World Trade Organisation.

These agreements, which will be formally ratified next year, were announced following a meeting between Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, and the President of the EU Commission José Manuel Barroso, here in Brussels last month, and will enhance cooperation in 29 fields, including the economy, trade and investment, rule of law, democracy and nation building.

Kazakhstan is the first Central Asian state to enter into such an agreement with the EU – an important acknowledgement of the progress we have made in our foreign relations and an affirmation of Kazakhstan's diplomacy.

In September, I was honoured to visit New York to speak at the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly, where I reaffirmed Kazakhstan's commitment to food security, water security, energy security and nuclear security – the four pillars of my country's bid to secure a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council for 2017-2018. I also participated in a series of bilateral meetings, including with US Secretary of State John Kerry, during which he thanked the Kazakh government on its continued efforts to ensure sustainable development for Afghanistan, and underlined the importance of the strategic partnership between our two countries.

In May, along with Belarus and Russia, Kazakhstan signed a treaty establishing the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which will become a significant force for growth in Eurasia, developing economic cooperation with China in the East and

Europe in the West, and which will act, not in competition with Europe but in a manner that we believe will be wholly in the interests of both.

Let me sum up the recognition of our growing footprint on the world's map in the words of Hillary Clinton who said that Kazakhstan should be regarded not merely as an innovator in Central Asia, but as "a global leader."<sup>2</sup>

Yet, for too many, Central Asia is still a mystery. I believe it is essential for all of us that the global community, led by our close neighbours in the European Union, understands the contribution that Central Asia has been making, and will continue to make to regional security and prosperity. Over the last two decades, my country can justifiably claim to be among the nations that have made the greatest progress on every level.

Since gaining independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991, our economy has been the fastest growing in Central Asia – with gross domestic product per capita projected to reach \$25,000 by 2020 from around \$700 at the start of our independence 22 years ago.

Among CIS states, Kazakhstan was the first to pay off its debts to the IMF following the reforms in its economy, the first to obtain a favourable credit rating, the first to build creditable financial institutions modelled on Western standards, and the first to introduce a fully-funded pensions scheme for all its citizens.

Kazakhstan is, naturally, looking very carefully at the global economic situation and taking thoughtful measures to make sure that we maintain sustainable and stable growth. Yesterday, President Nazarbayev delivered his State of the Nation address unveiling a new economic strategy that is comparable, in some respects, to Roosevelt's New Deal. Its purpose is to maintain a clear sense of direction in our economic policy and ensure that Kazakhstan achieves its goal of becoming one of the world's top 30 most developed nations by 2050.

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<sup>2</sup>Hillary Clinton, US Secretary of State 2009 - 2013. Speech on October 8<sup>th</sup> 2012: "We view Kazakhstan as not only a regional player, but as a global leader."

Under the President's new policy, Kazakhstan will invest heavily in the next years in developing infrastructure, from transport to industry to housing. The new policy also emphasises the importance of cooperation with foreign partners, and we see exciting opportunities to achieve concrete outcomes working with all our friends around the world, including, of course, in Europe.

Let me elaborate on the four fundamental pillars of our bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, which are based on our own experience and capabilities, and our cultural and geographical position that enables us to act as a mediator and link between peoples of all nationalities and ethnic groups.

The great British Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, once spoke of the universal right to pure water, pure air and light. Today, the United Nations defines water security as "the capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water." We recognize the basic human right to safe drinking water and support the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Human Rights Council's proposals for ensuring water security at both individual and community levels.

Being home to the dying Aral Sea and having challenging trans-boundary water relations with our Central Asian neighbours, Russia and China, we do appreciate the value of water.

The second fundamental of our bid is Food Security. Food shortages and food security have been identified by the UN as one of the world's greatest challenges. 842 million people do not have enough to eat which is unacceptable.

My country possesses one of the most bio-diverse environments on the planet. Kazakhstan is one of the top global exporters of grain and wheat flour. Our agricultural industry produces cotton, rice and sugar beets, as well as meat, dairy and wool from the pastureland that makes up to 70 percent of the country.

Thus Kazakhstan has a huge contribution to make to global food security.

Food security involves more than production, however. Emergency food supplies and humanitarian aid infrastructure are vital. Asia has the largest number of hungry people in the world and my government recognizes its responsibility as a regional leader to support its neighbours. We are at the final stages of creating the Islamic Organisation for Food Security, the headquarters of which will be in Astana.

Let me speak of our third pillar, Energy Security. More than 1.3 billion people today live without electricity. We are committed to the UN's goals to make energy more accessible to the world's poorest countries. As one of the world's greatest suppliers of energy – and one of the top ten suppliers of oil and gas – we are also strongly placed to influence global strategy and decision-making. This is also a fundamental cornerstone of our relationship with the European Union. Moreover, the Kazakhstan 2050 Strategy has very significantly reinforced our commitment to invest in green energy.

Our dedication to a green agenda extends to Nuclear Security, which is the fourth pillar of our UN bid. Our record in this respect is underpinned by our historic decision to relinquish the nuclear arsenal that was bequeathed to Kazakhstan by the former Soviet Union.

Consequently, in the world today, we are one of the strongest voices for international nuclear security and non-proliferation to confront the serious threat of nuclear terrorism.

But the wealth of Central Asia is not merely to be found in its economy and natural resources. In my country it is to be found in its people, our national spirit and our determination to promote the principles of tolerance and multiculturalism – not as a path to separateness and divisions, but as a vital ingredient to promote unity and mutual respect within a country of more than 100 nationalities and ethnic groups.

Rare among Eastern countries, Kazakhstan is a secular state that is making progress towards creating our own distinct and culturally attuned democracy. As with all young countries, we may sometimes falter but I have no doubt that we are on the right road. Indeed, our commitment to democratic principles has

received independent international acknowledgement, by those who have taken the trouble to discover the truth.

An inquiry into the preparations for presidential elections in Kazakhstan, led by Lord Parkinson, former British Secretary of State under Margaret Thatcher, and which, amongst others, also included Peter Lilley who is with us tonight, concluded that: “Uniquely for a Central Asian state, Kazakhstan has made substantial progress towards building democracy while maintaining stability and promoting ethnic and religious tolerance.”<sup>3</sup>

Historically, Kazakhstan has been a place of great diversity. While Kazakhstan is a predominantly Muslim country, we have 17 different faith groups living in peaceful co-existence and freedom, as guaranteed by the Constitution.

We are proud to be a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural country and our forward-looking tolerance and hospitality has been recognised by Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, who commended Kazakhstan for its “efforts in promoting religious freedoms.”<sup>4</sup>

Kazakhstan is today reinventing itself as a prosperous and modern Central Asian nation. With its pivotal location at the heart of Eurasia, it is uniquely positioned to serve as a bridge connecting Central Asia with Europe and all our partners in NATO, including the United States.

Our logistical support has been critical to international security operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and our commitment to global security is recognized increasingly by the UN and NATO. Millions of tons of NATO military equipment, including from the US, Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy is being repatriated along the vast landmass of Kazakhstan as I speak.

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<sup>3</sup>An independent inquiry in 2005 into the presidential elections in Kazakhstan, led by Lord Parkinson, former UK Cabinet Minister under Margaret Thatcher.

<sup>4</sup>Pope Benedict XVI, during President NursultanNazarbayev’s official visit to the Vatican in November 2009.



It is also Kazakhstan's history that makes it so uniquely placed to act as intermediary, a peacemaker and – as Bismarck put it at the Congress of Berlin in 1878 – “an honest broker” in an unsettled and challenging world.<sup>5</sup>

Visitors to my country have gazed with awe at the great Silk Road, down which travelled, so many hundreds of years ago, caravans full of spices and silk, ivory and gold, along with a wealth of new philosophies and expanding knowledge.

Did you know that apples are from Kazakhstan? Empress Maria Theresa of Austria attributed to apples great powers of fertility. She should know, as she had 16 children, including a queen of France, a queen of Naples and two Holy Roman Emperors. So we can say, with a degree of modesty, that Kazakhstan has had a remarkable impact on European dynastic history.<sup>6</sup>

Kazakhstan is playing a major role in the development of New Silk Road initiatives that we hope will become, once again, secure paths to prosperity, peace, multiculturalism and enlightenment. Indeed, it might be said that the history of my country has been a preparation for that hour.

When I think of the potential of Eurasia, of all our countries working together in partnership, I am reminded of the story about Otto Von Habsburg, the late, distinguished member of the European Parliament. When he was told about an Austria-Hungary football match on the television he said, “Oh really? Who are we playing?”

Europe and Asia, working together, would be an unbeatable combination. And so it seems to me that the question before us is not what Europe and its partners can do for Central Asia and my country of Kazakhstan, but what together we can do for peace and prosperity in the world today.

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<sup>5</sup>Otto Von Bismarck, Chancellor of Germany 1871-1890. The Congress of Berlin, 1878, aimed to resolve the tensions between Germany's two allies, Russia and Austria-Hungary over the Balkans. As Germany was friendly with both, Bismarck could claim, if slightly disingenuously, to be interested in an honest, amicable settlement.

<sup>6</sup>Maria Theresa, Empress of Austria 1717-1780

Let me conclude by quoting Rudyard Kipling, who once stated, “East is East and West is West, and ne'er the twain shall meet.”<sup>7</sup>

My Lords, ladies and gentlemen, distinguished friends,

I believe we will prove him wrong, that the geographic, cultural and psychological gap between Europe and Asia will be increasingly bridged and blurred, and the twain shall meet here, in Brussels, in Europe and in the Eurasian Council on Foreign Affairs.

Thank you!

**Ends**

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<sup>7</sup>Rudyard Kipling, British poet and author. “The Ballad of East and West”, 1895.