

Foreign Policy of Kazakhstan - Risks and Perspectives

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Eurasian Transition Group, e.V.

Roettgener Str. 90

53127 Bonn

Germany

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Preface¹

by Amantay Dandygulov, Executive Director of Azia Prime Ltd.

During one of my visits in Western Europe, I was watching a TV-discussion, where the participants always put 1 € into a piggy bank when using a proverb during their discussion. I am also willing to put a coin into the piggy bank after I closed my remarks for this publication, which brings together different views on the issue of the publication's title.

Stability and security is based on common trust, which by all means can only be possible with the knowledge of understanding, realities, context and the „Way of Thinking“ by people. Mutual understanding in terms of bi- and multilateral relations is mainly based on information. Therefore, in the recent past experts always say that the reliability of information became an essential component of global security and stability; I do not have to underline that secret services around the world have a different opinion on that.

Informations should not only reflect reality, but also perceived by the recipient in view of the fact that the information for the recipient and the one for the author has unique characteristics. In other words: The reliability of information is dependent on the context, in which insiders, sources and partners exist outside.

I am participating only with one aspect in this publication on Kazakh foreign policy. I would like to underline the fact, how important it is to support politics, which directs to better regional and international security, through information.

In my opinion, there is an essential and unexplored space within the information relations between Central Asia and the Western world. It would be a desirable idea to build a bridge between both sides. Obviously this space arose in fact, because the regional and central authorities in Central Asia held informations concerning incidents secret or those informations did not exist. Concrete examples are not far away: audits of gas resources in Turkmenistan are covered in safes of the ruling President; in the same country numbers of infected HIV-victims would not become public. In Uzbekistan, the authorities use another strategy: the closure of all information channels. In Tajikistan, the government probably invented the Uzbek strategy by a now ten years lack of information sources. With every new year the interested addressee - I mean the West - could percept less and less informations from the region in a homogene context.

I would like to underline this aspect. The lost of context is responsible for using stereotypes and simple templates when trying to analyse information, which reaches the recipient from the region of Central Asia - if it reaches him at all. This, in fact, leads to different analysis, while the event is the same. Those stereotypes and templates are then the main reason for misinterpretations of the given information. Wrong assessments of the information damage more the mutual understanding than a non-existing one.

¹ Translated from Russian

Even in countries like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan there are enough insiders and information sources who can draw a complete and objective picture with the help of modern communication techniques. But in order to have the whole picture and not only simple brush strokes, it is necessary to have a „translator“. Using this term, I don't mean the so-called information bridge (source and channel), but - even more important - a bridge in the sense of an operator, who is able to understand the conflict of the events together with the knowledge and consideration of mentality characteristics and traditions of the people between the lines.

But this is not enough: The „translator“, who in fact contributes in the growth of mutual trust and in consequence in the growth of reliability of information, has to be part of the global context. He must have the ability to evaluate the importance and meaning of any event, not only from the regional point of view, but also by connecting with the tendencies outside the region; more than this, he has to understand the partner's logic of perception and the logic of decision-making.

At the end of the 90's and at the beginning of the first decade of the new century, Kyrgyzstan was entitled to absorb such hopes and to be the place where this information-bridge between the West and Central Asia could have its beginning. But economic immaturity and a lack of patience when building-up civil society postponed those hopes for a long time. Therefore, Kazakhstan became the successor of this plan, especially when looking at the following characteristics:

- ➔ The existence of an elite, that is interested in stability and stable relations with the West
- ➔ The existence of newest information technology
- ➔ A relatively wide stratum of people, who have independent and objective contacts with the authorities of all Central Asian countries and with the West
- ➔ Businessmen, who understand the meaning of information for their business and also the fact that informations not only cost money, but also are a main factor for earning it

I really do not know, how many coins I have to put into the piggy bank of the Western community now.

Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy - Eurasia In Real Politics

by Nurbakh Rustemov²



Probably one of the main factors in the field of foreign policy is the perception on how countries are recognized by other states. This, let me name it „interstate psychology“ is dependent on culture, tradition, history and bilateral relations. In addition, such thesis are not only responsible for the opinions, and also maybe prejudices between two countries, but also between continents and geographical spheres of values, religion, history and tradition.

Living at the beginning of the 21st century, all the „-stan“ countries still do not have a history of recognition in many parts of the world. To speak in a more modern term, the development of a diversified country-branding of states like Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan did not take place so far. This is of course not a mistake caused by ignorance, missing tolerance or individual contacts and dialogue. Until 1991 independent states east of the Caspian Sea simply did not exist, they were all part of the Soviet Union - even before 1917 - they were under the rule of the Russian Empire.

Since the independence movements of all Central Asian states at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century, the „-stans“ tried to build up an identity, not mainly for its own population - we all already had our ethnic, national and cultural identity - but for the rest of the world.

The birth of independent states Central Asia was more than difficult, even independent experts believed that the region was doomed to failure, especially in Kazakhstan. There were many reasons for such a pessimistic view after the independence in December 1991:

- ➔ The ethnic and demographic situation
- ➔ The economic and social situation
- ➔ The legacy of Soviet military industry, including the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal
- ➔ The ecological catastrophes at Semipalatinsk nuclear test area and secondly the Aral Sea
- ➔ The lack of experience as an independent state

Of course, those analysts were right by doubting the possibility of a future success story when looking at the above listed facts. But Kazakhstan's development from 1991 to the present demonstrated the contrary: a country of transition, of stability, of economic success, a country that became a reliable

² Nurbakh Rustemov was born 1965. He studied economics, was correspondent member of the International Academy of Psychology and Management in St. Petersburg, Honorary Professor of the International Kazakh-Turkish University in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Nurbakh Rustemov started his professional career in 1986 as a teacher in a middle school, afterwards worked as a public servant. In 1992 he began his work as an advisor in the Kazakh Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in 1996 he advised the Economic Council of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan as an expert and was Director of the Prime Minister's Office. He was Member of the 2. and 3. parliamentary term of the Majilis (Lower Chamber of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan). In September 2007, Member of the 4. parliamentary term of the Majilis, Mr. Rustemov was elected Chairman of the Committee for Foreign Relations, Security and Defense and since 2008 Head of the Kazakh Delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

partner for the nations of the world, a country that was granted with the Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, one of the most important international institutions. All these aspects could change the perception of Kazakhstan in the world and did it in fact.

As a citizen of Kazakhstan, I would like to talk about the Kazakhstan I wish to be recognized by the rest of the world, not the version of it represented, or rather misinterpreted in the movie „Borat“. I would like to talk about the realities and challenges of a modern Kazakhstan, about why Kazakhstan is important for the nations of the world, why the nations of the world are important for Kazakhstan.

For the first time in the many centuries and of a sometimes tragic history we are now feeling ourselves as free citizens of a free nation. The mentality of our people has changed irreversibly as they embrace ideals of democracy and the principles of a free market. Today, almost a third of our gross domestic product is produced by SME's, which employ more than one million people, almost 20 % of our workforce. These people are the foundation of a fledgling middle class in Kazakhstan and a guarantee that our democratic and market reforms will not be reversed.

All these achievements gave international experts reasons to talk about a so-called Kazakh way of development for nations in transit as it shows that it is possible to build market economy and democracy in a predominantly Muslim state, which only recently freed itself from the yoke of totalitarianism. I believe the story of creating Kazakhstan's statehood is very timely as a model for development of other countries in similar conditions, and perhaps, it should become a subject for more detailed studies in the future.

Kazakhstan became one the very few former Soviet republics which avoided ethnic and religious conflicts. Moreover, as a predominantly Muslim country, Kazakhstan has become an internationally recognized model of tolerance, which is especially timely in our world today.

Year after year the constant strengthening of the political and economic role of the Asian continent becomes more and more powerful. Kazakhstan is part of this continent, but at the same time part of Europe as well, not only because of its geographical location, but also because of its ethnic variety and social stability. That's why we call ourselves not Asians or Europeans, but Eurasians.

Being located in the centre of this Eurasian region next to powerful neighbours like Russia and China and being a landlocked country, Kazakhstan was also in a difficult geopolitical situation. The country has made the only correct choice opting for a principle of keeping equal distance from the centres of influence. We put this principle into the foundation of our multivectoral foreign policy and the course toward comprehensive integration into the civilized international community.

There is one special trait of Kazakhstan, which I would like to stress and that is its interesting and specific geographic and geomenal position. Located both in Asia and Europe, and being on the crossroads of civilizations, Kazakhstan became a truly Eurasian nation, which unites both Asian qualities such as strong feelings for the family and the respect and care for the elderly, and European, such as the spirit of freedom and enterprise. So, Kazakhstan can be called an Asia in Europe and a Europe in Asia, and we try to bring our best to the development of both characteristics.

Thanks to such choice and an open foreign policy, our young state was able to achieve a balance of interests between the major world powers. We have built equal and respectful relations with the leading countries. We resolved border issues with our neighbouring countries, including Russia and China. Finally, we have built relations of strategic partnership with the US and Western European states, which have become a major factor in the balance of stability in the region of Central Asia.

Being part of a society and region between two important blocs, I often ask myself, how Kazakhstan as the 9th largest country in the world with 16 million citizens, possessing rich natural resources and the world's key space harbour and - until recently - the fourth largest nuclear arsenal, wants to position itself in the world? My answer is more than simple: I see no alternative than becoming a trusted member of the international community, a stable and respected state that is involved in the global network, with an open economy and a developing democratic system.

Indeed, beside the stability of a multi-ethnic society and a growing economic success story, one of the most important decisions of Kazakhstan was the choice for a non-nuclear weapons future. Fifteen years ago, as Kazakhstan stood at the threshold of independence, it was the Kazakh Government who had to make the most difficult decision about the future of the nuclear arsenal in Kazakhstan, which included more than 1.000 nuclear warheads and 100 intercontinental ballistic missiles. I really do not want to speculate what could have happened after 9-11 and the allied war on terror, if Kazakhstan still would be a nuclear power state, especially with regard to possible threats of Islamistic terrorists in Kazakhstan.

Especially Kazakhstan's relations to the Western hemisphere, its nations and pan-national institutions and organizations became a true strategic partnership, based on common values of democracy, progress and prosperity. This partnership encompasses such key elements as nuclear nonproliferation, energy and ensuring sustainable development in Central Asia. In partnership with the West, Kazakhstan rid itself from the unwanted nuclear legacy, becoming a responsible model of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. With the trends in the world today, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of Kazakhstan's example. Our nation believes, that the strength of a country is not based on the fear of weapons, but on the strength of moral principles of peace.

Equally important is the example of Kazakhstan as a moderate and tolerant Muslim nation, which is respected both in the Muslim world and in the world at large. The international community should undoubtedly be interested in this and should actively rely on Kazakhstan's potential for reducing tensions in the international community and strengthening the dialogue between Islam and the West. Furthermore, Kazakhstan is a reliable ally in the war on terrorism and in restoring Afghanistan and Iraq. Kazakhstan is seriously interested in ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan and intends to participate in its economic revival in a meaningful way. Our republic is the only country in Central Asia and one the very few Muslim countries to send troops to Iraq. Our soldiers have already destroyed more than four million pieces of deadly ordnance there.

The new century has brought new threats and the enlargement of unstable regions in the world. Globalization is drastically changing the familiar face of the world and is speeding up the unfolding processes. New structures emerge as well as modernized architectonics of the Eurasian security. In this

respect, Kazakhstan as the upcoming Chairman of the OSCE in 2010 will fight for the Organization's effectiveness. The notion of a European security system in its pure essence as of 40 years ago does not exist anymore. We are observing a growing interaction and interdependence of Asian and European trends in the global politics, the enlargement of the European Union brought us closer, geographically and in terms of politics as well. Kazakhstan is ready to make the OSCE strong and effective vis-à-vis the growing number of threats and challenges in present and future. In addition, Kazakhstan will focus on the issues of stability and security maintenance, the strengthening of tolerance and non-discrimination, and the fight against international terrorism. Terrorism and religious extremism is probably one of the main plagues of our time. The proximity to Afghanistan has turned our region into the OSCE's outpost, which confronts the present security challenges and threats. Central Asia has long ceased to be the peripheral region of global politics. Any process in the region has a direct impact on the situation in the entire Eurasian area. Kazakhstan will keep its hand on the pulse of not just the Euro-Atlantic region, but also that of the Central Asian. Alternatively, the emerging vacuum, in the conditions of uneven stability in the region, will immediately be filled with other powerful trends that could destroy all efforts of the international community.

Beside the cooperation with the OSCE, Kazakhstan also would like to intensify its work with the Council of Europe. The values of the Council of Europe are also the values of Kazakhstan; therefore it would only be a logic step, that Kazakhstan will also be a member of this pan-European institution. Those efforts will be conducted by the two Parliamentary Chambers of Kazakhstan in close cooperation with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. In the past Kazakhstan made enormous reforms in the political structures. Further decentralization of the state management and the transfer of power to elected entities. The significant strengthening of the importance of political parties and the expansion of their influence and power in Parliament represent the important direction of a political reform. The Constitution and all relevant legal acts of Kazakhstan are in alignment with the principles of the Council of Europe.

All efforts made by Kazakhstan and in contrary by the international community can prove, that my country already fulfilled all demands a country has to make, in order of being a trustable and respected partner for the nations of the world. The economic, political, social and geostrategic future can be described as a globalized painting of the world. This masterwork has not only its focus on the Western hemisphere, but also in the East, and my country lies, because of its geographical location, in the middle of it. In the present and in the future, Kazakhstan is the bridge between those two regions in the world, it is the intermediate, it combines like no other location both characteristics and can therefore help to understand each other, to make the world a peaceful place with prosperity for all.

Is The OSCE Kazakhstan's „Bridge“ To Europe?

by Martha Brill Olcott³



President Nursultan Nazarbayev's quest to establish Kazakhstan as a bridge between Europe and Asia, has been a cornerstone of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, for more than a decade. Today it no longer seems like a far-fetched goal. Kazakh diplomats currently head the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and EurASEC. Next year they will join the "troika" that heads the OSCE, in preparation for Kazakhstan's assumption of the chairmanship in 2010.

The decision to award Kazakhstan the OSCE chairmanship is viewed in Astana as a major foreign policy achievement. Kazakhs made receiving the chairmanship a real priority, despite the fact that it started out as an attempt by Nazarbayev's son-in-law Rahat Aliyev, who had been sent as Kazakh Ambassador to the OSCE as a gentele form of banishment, to find a peace-offering to deliver to Nazarbayev.

Aliyev probably did not understand how difficult this would be to achieve, and it is said that Nazarbayev at first was relatively indifferent to whether or not the Kazakhs received the chairmanship. However, opposition by the U.S. and the U.K. as well reportedly by some other western European members, made the Kazakhs press even harder to receive the chairmanship, as a matter of national pride.

The Kazakhs simply would not take no for an answer. When they were turned down in winter 2006, they pressed the OSCE to delay making a decision for another year, supposedly the first time that this ever occurred in the organization. This in itself was something of a Kazakh victory. The public nature of Kazakhstan's lobbying was also something of a first, and they redoubled both public and private efforts to gain the chairmanship.

Pressed by the U.S. and E.U. members to make major political reforms, the Kazakhs made some political concessions, but refused to accept a script designed by the west. A broadly constituted commission offered a series of proposed constitutional reforms, but the version leaked to the press differed substantially from that which was finally adopted, as it provided for parliament with enhanced powers, but also included a constitutional amendment permitting President Nazarbayev to run for as many terms in office as he desired. While there were improvements made in the electoral code, heavy handed politicking by the president's Nur Otan party and an uneven playing field led to the newly

³ Martha Brill Olcott is a senior associate with the Russian & Eurasian Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C.

Olcott specializes in the problems of transitions in Central Asia and the Caucasus as well as the security challenges in the Caspian region more generally. She has followed interethnic relations in Russia and the states of the former Soviet Union for more than 25 years and has traveled extensively in these countries and in South Asia. Her book, *Central Asia's Second Chance*, examines the economic and political development of this ethnically diverse and strategically vital region in the context of the changing security threats post 9/11.

In addition to her work in Washington, Olcott codirects the Carnegie Moscow Center Project on Religion, Society, and Security in the former Soviet Union. She is professor emerita at Colgate University, having taught political science there from 1974 to 2002. Olcott served for five years as a director of the Central Asian American Enterprise Fund. Prior to her work at the Carnegie Endowment, Olcott served as a special consultant to former Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.

Soon after 9/11, she was selected by a *Washingtonian* magazine for its list of "71 People the President Should Listen To" about the war on terrorism.

elected parliament is made up entirely of people from the president's own party, despite the fact that the actual conduct of the voting was judged more transparent than that of earlier elections, though falling short of international norms.

So the decision to grant Kazakhstan the chairmanship without the country being forced to truly democratize gave Nazarbayev the recognition that he has long sought - recognition that Kazakhstan matters to Europe and the U.S., matters enough for these countries to largely accept Nazarbayev on his own terms. True, Kazakhstan had to commit to not making major changes in the OSCE mission or charter, which annoyed Russian leaders who had hoped that the Kazakh chairmanship would also serve some of their own ends. Kazakhstan's willingness to adhere to the U.S' conditions did not necessarily force Astana to go against its perceived interests, as certainly the Kazakhs had no intention of using their presidency to serve Russia's interests, but rather want to use it to launch themselves into Europe's neighborhood as a member in good standing.

The Kazakhs really do see themselves as fulfilling a role as intermediary in international affairs. In fact, over the last several years Kazakhstan has set itself up as a rather effective go-between, occasionally lobbying Moscow on issues of importance to Washington, as an occasional mediator between Beijing and Moscow, and even occasionally Beijing and NATO countries on questions of security.

Kazakhstan's security agenda still has much in common with Russia, and slightly less so with China, and this notwithstanding the increasingly close cooperation between Kazakhstan and NATO. Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian state to have any military presence in Iraq, and though this is only a small detachment of de-mining experts, Kazakhstan's very presence is deeply disturbing to a small portion of that country's polity, and also annoying to Russia.

Kazakhstan is also developing a strong regional presence. While the Uzbek-Kazakh rivalry has not disappeared, the Uzbeks tacitly accept that the Kazakhs have the strongest economy in the region and with it an enhanced capacity to influence developments in all the neighboring states, a role Tashkent had initially sought for itself. The Kazakhs and Uzbeks largely see eye to eye on questions relating to Kyrgyzstan, and both presidents met to discuss possible joint responses when Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiyev seemed vulnerable to being ousted in November 2006.

Nazarbayev has also taken advantage of the opening provided through the death of Turkmen President Saparmurad Niyazov, offering Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov counsel and the possibility of a joint front in negotiations with Russia over the transit of gas and gas pricing. While neither is willing to sacrifice his own national interests in pursuit of a common strategy, the three party negotiations have led to Russia offering a higher price for the purchase of both Kazakh and Turkmen gas, as well as higher transit fees for the Kazakhs. It may also have led to a delay in Kremlin decision-making regarding the expansion of the CPC (Caspian Pipeline Consortium) oil pipeline from Tengiz to Novorossisk, as a form of punishment to the Kazakhs for having tried to take too much of a leadership role in the gas sector.

Questions of oil and gas transport remain the tensest part of the Kazakh-Russian relationship, as the Kazakhs continue to leave open the possibility that they will support an undersea gas pipeline, as well as ship increased quantities of oil across the Caspian as well. At the same time the Kazakhs have

become more aggressive in asserting national interests in the oil and gas sector, forcing Kashagan's foreign consortium members to increase Kazmunaigaz (the state oil and gas company's) share of the project for bargain basement prices, as well as make Kazmunaigaz part of the project operation team. The Kazakhs also plan to increase their share of royalty and tax payments through new legislation.

The Kazakhs also are interested in further enhancing their role as friend and mediator in post-Soviet space. Nazarbayev enjoys a good relationship with Imomali Rahmon, Tajikistan's president, and this is one reason why the U.S. wants Kazakhstan to take more of a lead (including part of the financial burden) in the reconstruction and stabilization of the security environment in Afghanistan. This could well become one of the priorities of the Kazakh presidency of the OSCE.

There are other issues that the Kazakhs might take up as well, including offering a new voice in the stalled negotiations over the "frozen conflicts" in the Caucasus. While the traditional soft rivalry between the Kazakhs and the Azeris as to who is the most important energy producer in the Caspian might preclude the Kazakhs from being effective in jump-starting negotiations over the status of Karabakh and the occupied Azeri territories, they may be able to be effective in the disputes involving Georgia.

Kazakhstan has been the largest foreign investor in Georgia, on an annual basis, for the last two years. And of course they are on better terms with Moscow than any of the Europeans who have headed the OSCE in recent years, and are likely to be viewed by the Kremlin as credible negotiators. Moreover, it is likely that the Kazakh understanding of the two Georgian conflicts in particular is more nuanced than that of other negotiators.

The Kazakh chairmanship of the OSCE will also bring with it the prospect of better coordination of that organization's security mission with that of both the SCO and that of the CSTO, although there are likely to be serious limitations as to how much cooperation is possible, even in Afghanistan, where both the SCO and CSTO are pressing for more coordinated engagement with NATO.

The Kazakh presidency of the OSCE will also likely concern itself with the trafficking of persons, as well as narcotics, and has more likelihood of having some impact in the former area than in the latter. Finally, the Kazakhs may well try and better regulate competition over water resources in Central Asia, and between Central Asia and China, as well expand the discussion on the use of renewable energy resources to relieve some of the chronic energy shortages in the region. The Kazakh government is currently considering passing major legislation designed to encourage the development of renewable energy resources in the country, offering considerable financial incentives to this previously overtaxed sector. This legislation could be a model for the region more generally.

In fact, the Kazakhs are now working closely with a number of European countries to help prepare the Kazakh diplomats for the rather arduous institutional and bureaucratic obligations of the OSCE chairmanship, so that they can try and manage what ever challenges are presented to that organization in 2010, as well as to make a success of the OSCE summit that will be held in Astana that year.

It is difficult to predict how successful a Kazakh chairmanship will be. However its degree of success will certainly define what kind of "bridge" Kazakhstan is likely to provide for the E.U. and U.S. on the

one hand, and the SCO, CSTO and CIS on the other, in the decade to come. The next two years should be interesting ones for all of us who are interested in security developments in the Central Asian region more generally.

The Brand Kazakhstan - Foreign Policy As Marketing

by Michael Laubsch⁴



It is still not usual to speak of branding, when talking about foreign policy. Many diplomats, foreign policy experts and decision-makers believe that the term „branding“ is a subject of marketing, which is not suitable for political affairs.

A brand is nothing more than the good name of an item in public. Therefore, the same principles apply for geographical regions. Thinking about where to go for vacation, buying a product of a specific country, applying for a job somewhere in the world, moving to another city, donating to a destroyed region, we always rely on our awareness of places and countries, in order to lighten the decision we have to make. The confirmation of a value or quality that we can get from a „Made in ...“, is in reality only a symbol. Governments are not able to declare the same quality standards for the hole country, this is even impossible in very rich and in totalitarian states of the world.

But countries have more things in common with brands. The good name of a country is not only helping the consumer to make hundreds of purchasing decisions every day, more important aspects are related with this: Companies decide where to build their factories and where to realize their human outsourcing. Therefore it is no exaggeration to say that a branding image has a tremendous influence on the social, cultural, economical and political faith of a country.

Although many countries claim to accept the significance of a national brand, it is usually done only with the background of a very limited understanding of marketing. For those countries the term „marketing“ is just a modern expression for PR and advertisement - with other words: propaganda. Everything is reduced to communication: One should cover a golden PR-cape over the things, the government in its wisdom had decided to implement. Following this concept, many problems will arise. The most important one is that it makes a policy of truth impossible. When the task of marketing would be to make everything just shiny, then the messages of a country could be true, a lie or a mixture of both. One day this marketing strategy will reduce itself by telling something good to the world. But it is a fact that a product, the image and a country have one fact in common: You can only lie once. As soon as the recipient is realizing the lie, trust is destroyed, sometimed for a long period. Lies damage a brand irreparably.

Kazakhstan is in the current position of changing its brand. The country itself is not solely responsible for that shift, external developments are also have to be taken into account. The perception of Kazakhstan as a unique brand in the West has to be devided into two different sub-points: the perception by the Western public and the perception by the Western politics.

⁴ Michael Laubsch was born 1966 in Freiburg, Germany. After his university degree in Political Science, Eastern European History and Philosophy-, he worked in the German Parliament as Foreign Affairs advisor, focussing on Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia. As President and Executive Director of Eurasian Transition Group, he became a well-known expert on Central Asia in the West and cooperates with institutions like OSCE, Council of Europe, European Union and Parliament on this issue. and gives frequent comments of Central Asian themes in the international press.

After the Central Asian states became independent in 1991, Kazakhstan and its neighbouring countries were not able to build up a positive country branding, mostly because of the fact that they were simply located in an unknown region for the West. The so-called „-stans“ could not build on the history of a nation, because since the times of the Russian Empire, self-determination was impossible. With this lack of historical continuity, a recognition by the Western societies⁵ was impossible. The only exception was probably Germany, which tried to integrate the millions of „Volga Germans“, who were deported from Russia to Kazakhstan during Stalin’s reign and after Kazakhstan’s independence left the country for Germany. Here, Kazakhstan was known, but unfortunately not in a positive or even objective way.⁶ Nothing changed fundamentally until 9-11, when the Central Asian region became an essential part of geopolitics and the fight against the terror. Readers in the West could find articles about the region, were looking to maps of Central Asia.

But this recognition by the Western public was not a complex one. The brand Kazakhstan was still not visible, beside geopolitical aspects, which were not under the responsibility of Kazakhstan itself. The most understandable reason for this were probably the close economical and political ties between the Central Asian country and its former ruler Russia. Internal affairs of Kazakhstan were not often covered in the Western media, and if they were, the result was not too optimistic: corruption, manipulated elections, arrests of political opponents and critical voices. Probably the best example of public perception of the Kazakh brand in the West was in 2007 the film „Borat“. It is more than obvious why the film describes a trip of a fictional Kazakh journalist to the US, and not a Chinese, Russian or African reporter: Because for the Western audience, Borat’s character fulfilled all prejudices of Kazakhstan; it is understandable that protests took place in Kazakhstan regarding that film.⁷ But strange enough, even paradoxically, the film made Kazakhstan famous, the country was in the headline of every Western newspaper. Of course the Western audience in general did not believe Kazakh characteristics, which were described in the film.⁸ At the same time, they even started to be interested in the country. So a general negative brand shifted to an abjective one.

Of course, foreign policy is often not an item of huge public debate. The main dialogue always happens behind the curtains of governments, parliaments and institutions. Here, the whole issue of the Kazakh country brand becomes more difficult.

How was the perception of Kazakh politics in the West defined and which aspects actually played a leading role? There are several points in the responsibility of Kazakhstan, that defined its position as a country and nation. In addition, there are different periods to consider as marks for Kazakh policy and how it was and is perceived in the so-called Western hemisphere.

⁵ I do not mean Western politics, just the fact that a „normal“ citizen in Western Europe or Northern America was unable to find the location of Kazakhstan on a map, even if it is the ninth biggest country in the world.

⁶ Because of problems in the integration of those ethnic Germany in their homeland, the criminal rate increased; as a result, criminality of those ethnic Germans was not seen as German criminality, but Kazakh.

⁷ There were no significant protests in the West. This would have been different, if the „Borat“ character was not a Kazakh figure, but a journalist from Nigeria; probably the film would not have been allowed to be shown in the cinemas, mainly because of racist background.

⁸ In addition, no one of the Western audience could believe that the characteristics of US-citizens in the film reflects reality.

➡ Internal Policy

▶ The status of the Kazakh Constitution: The constitution is the basis for the executive, legislative, judicial branch, for the citizens of a country. With its latest amendments, the Kazakh Constitution came nearer to an international standard. One of the main critical aspects that were discussed in the West, is the constitutional position of the first President of the Republic and the status of his reelection. Many comments were made, that this clause would mean a life-long reign of Nazarbayev. But in fact this is not true: The first President could only be re-elected more than two times. In fact, this perception is caused by the quality of Kazakhstan's brand in the West. A factual objective view on this item is difficult. Otherwise no one would criticize it, unless she or he would also contest some Western constitutions, where the head of states could theoretically be reelected as long as he/she wishes.

▶ The results of Presidential and Parliamentary Elections: There is no doubt that previous elections in Kazakhstan did not meet international standard. After the recent Parliamentary Election 2007, ODIHR and OSCE said that improvements could be achieved. The election observers had no restrictions during their work, they were free in their movement and assessment, so in fact not comparable with the situation of the recent Duma Elections and the upcoming Presidential Election in Russia. At the same time it was criticized by Western governments and institutions, that only the Presidential Party is represented in the chambers. While the independent observers did not find any violations during the voting day, one might ask if the Kazakh authorities should have falsified the results, in order to have a multi-party parliament. The state media played an important role for having such a result. The election observers mentioned those short-findings.

▶ The role of opposition parties: In fact, an alternative for the President and his elite cannot be seen at the moment for the Kazakh citizens. There are many reasons responsible for that. Even if political parties and joined movements started to act before elections, they disappeared after voting day and stopped their political work in the country. It also has to be said, that most opposition politicians were part of the Nazarbayev-system before changing the sides. Many Kazakh voters don't recognize them as an alternative to the running team. Most of the leading opposition groups only have a high number of supporters in the financial centre of Almaty, while the rural regions of Kazakhstan have the feeling to be the forgotten ones. The development of a nation-wide civil society is not only the task of a government, but of all parties and social movements in a country. The denial of party registration and the law on political parties is still an aspect, that has to be criticized in Kazakhstan, because beside the above mentioned facts, it is still more than difficult for a new party or movement to be registered with all the rights a similar movement would have in the West.

➡ Foreign Policy

▶ The cooperation with Russia: Russia is still the prime partner for Kazakhstan, economically and politically. Taking into account the history of both regions, this aspect is more than normal. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan could prove in the past, that in contrary to its neighbours Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, it started to use a multivectoral foreign policy, where Russia is not always the prime partner. This aspect of heading to new partners, is concentrating on economic, financial and geostrategical aspects, while some others, are still communicated with a close Russian cooperation. On a long scale, Kazakhstan could become more or less the only rival in the region of the CIS, which could mean possible future conflicts between Kazakhstan and Russia.

▶ The cooperation with the United States and Europe: The US have two main interests when cooperating with Kazakhstan: Natural resources and geostrategical implications. Europe on the other hand has interest in natural resources and to lead Kazakhstan closer to the European institutions. The Kazakh Government is aware of those desires and started to shift its cooperation from Russia towards the West. Kazakhstan in addition could play an important role as a stabilizing factor in Central Asia.

▶ The cooperation in the Central Asian region: Kazakhstan is able and willing to become the regional leader in Central Asia. This aspect is important for Kazakhstan's position in a global context, because any great power in the world is interested in a Central Asian stability and therefore counts on Kazakhstan's influence in the region.

▶ The cooperation with the „tigers of the East“: China and India are in the transition to become the major global players in the future. Therefore both countries already started to strengthen their influence in the region. Kazakhstan, as supporter of the multivectoral foreign policy, fully accepts the rising interest of India and China in Central Asia.

▶ The cooperation with international institutions: Two institutions are of main importance for Kazakhstan: The OSCE and the Council of Europe. The country finally got the Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010, one year later than expected. Two reasons were mainly responsible for the immense efforts by Kazakhstan, in order to reach an agreement on this issue. First the personal wish of the Kazakh President, second the fact that with the Chairmanship of a first country of the CIS it could underline its efforts to be the regional leader in Central Asia. Kazakhstan can improve this by playing an important role in stabilizing the region and in having influence on states like Afghanistan and Iran. The efforts concerning the Council of Europe are not so clear. A membership, as an observer or as a full member, would bring no fast success back to the country. That is why many independent observers believe that Kazakhstan's efforts in this respect are a sign for the wish of transforming the country on the civil and democracy area.

All those aspects can prove, that finally the brand of Kazakhstan has changed, it became reliable in the terms of foreign policy. The next steps by Kazakhstan may prove if this is just a short-time aim or a long lasting strategy.

Kazakhstan on its path towards a national ideology⁹

by Vitaly Volkov¹⁰



Kazakhstan as a bridge connecting Russia and the West ...

Kazakhstan as a bridge connecting Asia and the West ...

Kazakhstan as a bridge connecting China and the West ...

The English wording of the „simplified multiplication“, a formula that should simplify geopolitical relations in world politics, does not suit to the current situation in Kazakhstan. More than that, it is not a very safe term, because one might risk to overlook the other, hidden tendencies. I am taking advantage of the opportunity to underline the fact that speaking of a bridge regarding Kazakhstan, it can only be a moving suspension bridge.

Yes, without any doubt Kazakhstan is capable of using its position „in between“ and is trying to get most out of its geographical and political location. However, this position as a bridge or conductor alone, which could conduct the Western caravan towards Asia and the Asian caravan towards the West, is not sufficient enough for Astana!

Various symptoms indicate that the Presidential Palace in the Kazakh capital looks at the first stage of stabilization by founding an independent state as concluded. The power of President Nazarbayev was accepted by the Kazakh citizens and the elites. The state power is based on the idea - which is backed by the society - that it succeeded in avoiding a Russian-like oligarchy and while keeping a national and religious consensus and achieved relatively increasing prosperity; I would like to underline that in this respect the objective view is not as important, but the „divided reality“, based on human psychology. Not only the results of the previous Presidential and Parliamentary Elections, but mainly the followed reaction of the Kazakh society could prove this fact.

Now there are new plans, which could confirm the leading role of the Republic - Astana is ready for a new phase. The leadership is not only focussing on a race with its Central Asian neighbours, especially with its long-lasting enemy Uzbekistan, but in a certain way in comparison with Russia. The business elite of Kazakhstan would like to spread its money, it's aware of the fact that the Kazakh market is somehow overheated with US-\$ and therefore the financial market needs to invest in foreign countries. This elite is expecting a support by expansion from the Government, not a liberation from the chains of the internal market, which in fact is controlled by close allies of the President. The Kazakh money is not moving in one direction towards Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, but also directly to Russia. In contrast to Russian businessmen, who only follow their own interest, the Kazakh business elite underlines its

⁹ Translated from Russian

¹⁰ Vitaly Volkov was born 1965 in Moscow; located in Germany, he is one of the leading experts on Central Asian issues. As an independent journalist, he frequently works for Deutsche Welle and international newspapers. He is also author of several novels.

mission to support the national interest as well. This thesis has already been proven by the replacing of ethnic Russians from the leading circles in Kazakhstan.

The new formed strategy of Kazakh national importance and power was recently taken up by several groups, that combined the idea of a „Kazakh“ with vectors of an ethnic pan-turkism or a hidden islamism.

Possibly those experiments already would have been successful within the elite, but President Nazarbayev, representing the old Soviet party-school, is still a correcting and calming factor, especially concerning possible islamistic tendencies. In this respect, the power of state is not passive. President Nazarbayev is recognizing, that sooner or later under certain circumstances an aggressive national ideology could be suggested from parts of the political elite. The surrounding of the Kazakh President is aware of that fact and by forming an ideology of a nation, a state with a national charisma, a state with the right of a long-lasting leadership, possible aggressive ideologies could be absorbed. Astana has already started to translate this theory into action: it defines itself and its claims not on a leading, but on a particular position in world politics.

This special and desired position has the following attributes:

- ➔ Independency from the global players Russia, China, USA: Such an independency has to be secured by a multivectoral foreign policy; this means in practical terms a non-connection to the one or the other bloc and a rotation of partners, depending on the interests
- ➔ No military plans and at the same time the power for stabilization not only in the region of Central Asia, but a guarantee the dialogue and stability between East and West. The pre-crisis in Iran can prove, that Kazakh foreign policy already declared its position on this issue, and together with the crisis in Afghanistan several initiatives can be expected, especially during Kazakhstan's Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010. Those initiatives will not only be based on the use of institutional channels, but also on informal ones
- ➔ A future ideological focus on a so-called „Eurasianism“ by denying any islamistic tendencies. This Eurasianism probably will include pan-turkish aspects. This aspect can only be assumed at the moment, because the political elite in Kazakhstan is the leading catalysator for this ideological orientation; the further formation of an ideology of a nation is just at the starting point, it is an independent process that cannot be conducted by the Kazakh Administration alone
- ➔ Strengthening of the role as a centre and reliable multiplier for different economical and financial currents, especially in the gas and oil sector
- ➔ The readiness to secure its own economical interests, even taking into account the possibility of tensions with powerful foreign companies or countries
- ➔ The Support of expanding Kazakh capital in Central Asia and Russia and the possibility of starting to exert those countries politically on a short- and long-term perspective (e.g. the

dominant influence on the Kyrgyz Government during the political crisis 2005/2007; also the Russian financial elite underlines an increase of Kazakh influence on its internal market)

- ➔ Retention of autocratic state structures and institutions, that remain unfamiliar for Western institutions. This particular political system can be described as a constitution lying in the centre of the dividing line between Asia and the West.