



Cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan in Ensuring Integrated Security in the Caspian Macro Region

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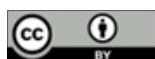
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Abstract

The article identifies the main areas of cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan in the Caspian Sea region. As the most promising, we see cooperation in fuel and energy industry, military cooperation and humanitarian cooperation in science and higher education. Yet, Russia now has to compete with Turkey and China for the influence in the region, as Kazakhstan tends to promote multi-vector foreign policy. Moreover, the US and the EU share a strong determination to keep Kazakhstan's fuel and energy industry under their total control, and this is the reason why they maintain sanctions policy in this territory. We conclude that Russia-Kazakhstan relations have a potential for constructive cooperation.

Keywords

Cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan in the Caspian Region; Atomic Engineering; Fuel and Energy Industry; Humanitarian Cooperation; Integrated Security



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Сотрудничество России и Казахстана в системе комплексной безопасности Каспийского макрорегиона

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Аннотация

В статье определены основные направления сотрудничества России и Казахстана в Каспийском регионе. В качестве наиболее перспективных рассматриваются кооперация в топливно-энергетической отрасли, военное взаимодействие и гуманитарное сотрудничество в области науки и высшего образования. Однако сейчас России приходится конкурировать с Турцией и Китаем за влияние в регионе, поскольку Казахстан склонен к многовекторной внешней политике. Более того, США и ЕС разделяют твердую решимость держать топливно-энергетическую промышленность Казахстана под своим полным контролем, и именно по этой причине они поддерживают санкционную политику на этой территории. Мы делаем вывод, что российско-казахстанские отношения имеют потенциал для конструктивного сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова

сотрудничество России и Казахстана в Каспийском регионе; атомная энергетика; топливно-энергетическая промышленность; гуманитарное сотрудничество; комплексная безопасность



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Introduction

Leading world countries pay particular attention to the Caspian region, since it is not only an important economic region, but also a source of strategic resources, including oil, sulfates, natural gas, sand, lime, etc. Main traffic arteries cross the region connecting Europe and South Caucasus with Central Asia. Moreover, the Caspian Sea is a unique biosystem and a source of valuable commercial fish. Therefore, cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan in the Caspian Sea is an important part of the foreign policy in both countries.

Over the past thirty years, Russia and Kazakhstan have maintained constructive and mutually beneficial relations. The support of Russia's close allies Kazakhstan and Belarus is particularly important in view of the growing aggravation in the current geopolitical situation, when sanctions, information wars and increasing pressure of Western countries act against Russia. Kazakhstan would also strongly appreciate friendly relations with Russia which still remains the guarantor of its security, taking into account China's increasing political and economic expansion.

Both Russian and Kazakh scientific discourse highlights various aspects of cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan. Scientists in both countries emphasize that collaborative Russian-Kazakh relations facilitate stability in the Caspian region (Dzhantaleyeva, 2013, Mirzazadeh, 2018, Tsvetkov & Dudin, 2019).

T.K. Trokal (Trokal, 2019), V.A. Tsvetkov and M.N. Dudin (Tsvetkov & Dudin, 2019) study the history of cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan in the foreign policy. A.I. Litvinov (Litvinov, 2019), A.M. Myrzakhmetova, D.U. Alshimbaeva, K.A. Turkeeva, A.T. Erimpashaeva (Myrzakhmetova et al., 2020) analyze various aspects of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. E.A. Degtereva, A.M. Chernyshova (Degtereva & Chernysheva, 2019), M.S. Karpenko (Karpenko, 2019) investigate into challenges and threats of cooperation in security matters.

N.A. Efremova-Shershukova, A.K. Kollegov, V.E. Mineev-Li (Efremova-Shershukova et al., 2020), P. Iun (Yun Peizhi, 2020) bring up the issues of humanitarian cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan. L.F. Mirzazadeh (Mirzazadeh, 2018) and M. Malmir (Malmir Mohammadreza, 2019) highlight the prospects for cooperation between the two countries. We should note that the scientific data on the current state of Russia-Kazakhstan cooperation in the Caspian Sea are rather scarce; therefore, when working at this article we mainly used Internet sources and statistical data.

Methodology

The study aims to analyze the current state of cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan in the Caspian region and identify strategic areas for further cooperation. In our research we used such general scientific methods as analysis, synthesis

and comparison. Works of modern Russian and Kazakhstani scientists, who study issues related to the bilateral cooperation, served as the basis for our theoretical part. The empirical part provides analysis of statistical data and evaluation of social and political writing on current affairs.

The main areas of cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan

Cooperation between the two countries dates back to the period following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. When deciding on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the two countries shared similar positions. In April 1996, during Boris Yeltsin's visit to Kazakhstan, Russia and Kazakhstan signed a Joint Statement on Cooperation in the Caspian Sea. The Russian government became the founder of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium. Since the mid-90s, Russian companies have been actively investing in the economy of Kazakhstan. They acted under the Agreements on deepening economic cooperation and integration, including those in the Caspian region. By 1998, Kazakhstan had received about 200 million US dollars of Russian capital in the form of investments (Trokal, 2019), which were then used to develop the oil refining sector and machine manufacturing. The governments regularly discussed the areas of cooperation in the Caspian Sea at the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) summits.

However, in recent years, Kazakhstan has been gradually shifting away from close cooperation with the EAEU and Russia, which is associated with anti-Russian sanctions after the incorporation of the Crimea. Moreover, Kazakhstan has changed its strategy as a member of the EAEU. In the early years of the EAEU, the political leaders of Kazakhstan tended to take the Union as the first step in further integration of the CIS countries, while these days they see the EAEU only as a mechanism of economic cooperation. The concept of foreign and domestic policy coordination has never been put into life because the countries were not ready to compromise even on part of their sovereignty. Another significant factor was active counteraction of Western countries, trading partners, primarily the EU and the United States. China also offers Kazakhstan its own economic integration projects and they look rather attractive from an economic perspective due to huge investments that China is ready to offer. Kazakhstan recognizes such risk factors for the Eurasian integration as insufficient financing and poor coordination of macroeconomic policy. Kazakhstan needs new technologies and production modernization and thus it seeks to establish close cooperation with China.

The Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan offered Foreign Policy Concept 2014-2020 which borrowed much from the development strategy "Kazakhstan – 2050". The strategy aimed to rank Kazakhstan among the top 30 most developed countries of the world. The Concept confirmed the multi-vector nature of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and promoted the idea of cooperation with various countries. The Concept highlighted the geopolitical potential of Central Asia and



the Caspian region. It declared that Kazakhstan stands for economic stability and it is ready to use instruments for maintaining collective security and make efforts to deepen integration processes within the EAEU (Turgambayev, 2019).

Kazakhstan applied the principle of multi-vector foreign policy to their economy. For example, Kazakhstan participated in two projects simultaneously: it constructed the Caspian oil pipeline going across Russia to the West and the Kazakh-Chinese pipeline going to the East. Kazakhstan also participated in the construction of the Southern oil pipeline on the Turkish Mediterranean coast under the US guidance. In 2022, Kazakhstan plans to increase its export of energy resources through the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan via the pipeline going to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. This is a strategic artery of the Caspian and Central Asian oil, supplying oil to the EU and competing with the Russian South Stream Pipeline.

On March 6, 2020, the new President of Kazakhstan K.-Zh. Tokayev introduced the Roadmap for Kazakhstan's foreign policy development for 2020-2030. It declares continuity of the state policy regarding principles of multi-vector and balanced foreign policy, which suggests positive dynamics in relations between Kazakhstan and the leading foreign partners including Russia. It was the first time that the country's leader declared the ambition to assert Kazakhstan's leadership across the region as one of the foreign policy goals, which stands in stark contrast to the previous concept of intraregional integration in Central Asia. The country intends to maintain maximum neutrality and stay-away from conflicts of the world powers. The Foreign Policy Roadmap introduced a new principle of multilateralism meaning formation of a collective vision and development of effective tools to assist the international community in tackling a wide range of global and regional issues. The Roadmap also confirmed ambitions for close cooperation within the EAEU and plans for expanding cooperation in the Caspian Sea. Particularly, K.-Zh. Tokayev emphasized that "he sees special prospects for cooperation in the joint development of the cross-border oil fields" in the Caspian Sea (Forum of Interregional Cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan, 2019).

The nearest economic goal of Kazakhstan is to further develop transit and logistics. This involves introduction of the "open sky" regime, further expansion of national exports and promotion of international projects, such as Astana international financial center, Khargos International Center for Cross-border cooperation and the Central Asia Center for Trade and Economic Cooperation. Currently, there are about 400 different agreements between Kazakhstan and Russia (Trade between Russia and Kazakhstan in 2019, 2020). Kazakhstan and Russia have steady partnership relations in energy engineering, space research and commerce. The countries shared participation in such joint research projects as KazSat satellites development and integrated use of GLONASS.

Kazakhstan sees cooperation with Russia in the Caspian region as extremely beneficial, since a significant part of the oil from Tengiz and Kashagan deposits

comes into foreign markets across Russia. Russian companies also take an interest in Kazakhstan oil and actively participate in fuel and energy joint projects. In particular, Kazakhstan develops Tsentralnoye field in cooperation with the Russian oil company LUKOIL. Lukoil also signed a joint contract with JSC NC “KazMunayGas” and Kazakhstan Ministry of Energy for exploration and production of hydrocarbons in Zhenis, near Aktau (Myrzakhmetova et al., 2020). Russia’s competitors in this area are Azerbaijan and Iran; the latter has escaped economic isolation and is rapidly increasing its economic potential. In addition, Iran can provide a short and cost-effective route for Kazakhstan goods through the Persian Gulf to the World Ocean. This transit corridor will give Kazakhstan access to the markets of the Arab states, Iraq, India and Pakistan. The two countries have already envisaged a number of joint logistics projects in the ports of the Caspian Sea. Therefore, Russia has to think of financing major projects, including those in logistics.

Another strategic area in Russia-Kazakhstan cooperation is atomic engineering. The Caspian regions of Kazakhstan, particularly, Aktau, are seen as a construction site for a nuclear power plant. Until 1999, this region hosted a Russian reactor used for water desalination.

As the army of Kazakhstan is the most powerful in the Central Asian region, the country is an important strategic military partner. Russian weapons and air defense systems are the best in the world, and both countries will definitely benefit from military trade. Maintaining security of Kazakhstan borders is currently important in the situation when Taliban took over Afghanistan.

In mid-August 2020, Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu visited Kazakhstan and the two states signed an agreement on cooperation. During the visit the parties discussed a number of issues, particularly, activation of test sites of the Russian Ministry of Defense, transit of Russian military cargo across Kazakhstan to Syria, export of military products and international peacekeeping efforts. In the 2020-2021 academic year, Russia allocated the maximum number of quotas for training Kazakhstani military personnel (Efremova-Shershukova et al., 2020). The Defense Ministers also discussed operational and combat training and the development of a unified regional air defense system. Russia provided 2 ships to guard Kazakhstan border waters on the Caspian Sea, the crews were trained in Russian naval schools.

Kazakhstan implements policies for encouraging closer relations with Turkey and Azerbaijan and prioritizing national interests over interests of the EAEU.

Turkey and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on military cooperation in 2018. The agreement coordinates joint training programs for military cadres, joint military field maneuvers and transit of military machinery. In August 2020, Turkish Minister of Defense Hulusi Akar arrived in Kazakhstan immediately after his Russian colleague had left. Turkey and Kazakhstan discussed prospects for cooperation agreements within Turkish project “Turan army” (a new military and political bloc of Turkestanian states under the leadership of Turkey). However, we must note that



Kazakhstan experts and politicians are very skeptical about ambitions of Turkey for building a unified army of the Turkic states (Trokal, 2019).

Kazakhstan also maintains close cooperation with Azerbaijan, another Turkic Caspian country. Nur-Sultan helped to train Turkish military for the war in Nagorny Karabakh. For this purpose Kazakhstan offered its training facilities and allocated quotas at the National University of Defense (“Russian Spring”: Kazakhstan Was Training Turkish Officers for the War in Nagorno-Karabakh, 2020).

Russia and Kazakhstan appreciate cooperation within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which ensures territorial integrity and sovereignty of its members. Using this significant integration mechanism the countries take cooperative efforts to stand against international terrorism, illegal drug trade, illegal migration and hack attacks. We again emphasize a particular role of the Caspian macro region for maintaining security in both countries, especially in view of the American army withdrawal from Afghanistan bordering on Iran and Turkmenistan that have an access to the Caspian Sea.

Another promising area for cooperation is humanitarian sphere. According to N. Nazarbayev, in the XXI century Kazakhstan–Russia dialogue must presumably focus on integration within the “triangle of knowledge”, i.e. education, research and innovations (Nurtazin, 2018). For this purpose Russia and Kazakhstan developed a cooperation program in science and new technologies (Nurtazin, 2018). Over 73 thousand students from Kazakhstan are currently studying at Russian universities (Borodavkin, 2019), including universities in the Caspian region, particularly, Astrakhan region. By setting up branch campuses in Kazakhstan, Russian top universities grant Kazakhstani students a chance to obtain their degrees in Russian universities (Moscow State University, Moscow Aviation Institute, Plekhanov Russian University of Economics). Since 2018, Kazakhstan has implemented about 240 scientific projects. Scientists from 50 Russian universities and research institutes actively participated in the joint researches (Borodavkin, 2019).

Prospects for further cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan

Assessing the prospects for further cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan, we should note that Kazakhstan still finds it important to maintain close cooperation with Russia within the existing integration projects. It expects to receive Russian investments and gain access for its producers to the Russian market (Zhiltsov, 2016, p. 12). Since 1993, Russia has invested no less than \$40 billion into various projects in Kazakhstan (Trade between Russia and Kazakhstan in 2019, 2020). Among the largest market players in Kazakhstan are the Russian companies: AvtoVAZ, Gazprom, Lukoil, Beeline, Sber[bank]. Russia is still the largest business partner of Kazakhstan. 76 out of 85 subjects of the Russian Federation have trade relations with Kazakhstan (Trade between Russia and Kazakhstan in 2019, 2020).

Currently, the Russian Federation is the main consumer of goods from Kazakhstan (Fig. 1).

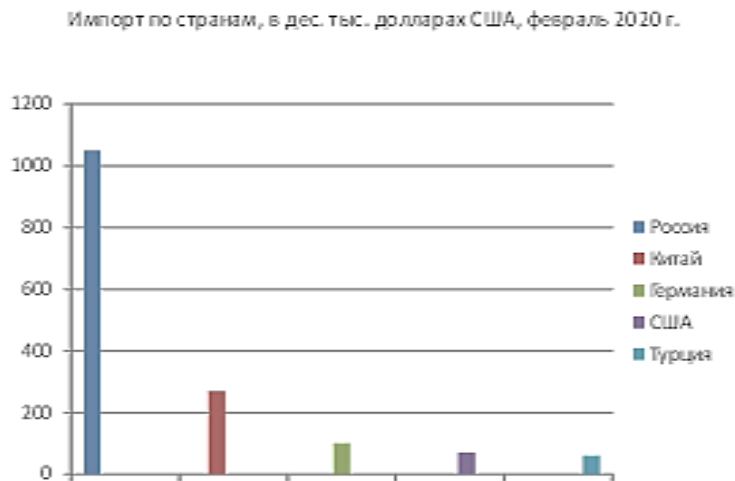


Figure 1. Kazakhstan's imports (Serikpayev, 2019)

However, we have to note that transition of Kazakh language from the Cyrillic to Latin alphabet sets additional barriers for mutually beneficial relations between the countries. According to some linguists, the Latin alphabet is not historically relevant for the Turkic people, which makes its adaptation to Kazakh language rather difficult. In addition, the new alphabet does not find support with the Kazakhstani, who have already adapted to the Cyrillic alphabet (Trukhachev, 2011). Such reforms reveal the fact that the Westernised elites are determined to stop using “the alphabet enforced by the Russians” and then to move out of Russia’s geopolitical influence with maximum benefits gained from the West. However, we have to admit that the Russian Federation, as compared to China, cannot currently ensure partnership in major joint infrastructure projects, which reduces prospects for cooperation in the short term.

Ankara, London and Washington encourage Kazakhstan’s intention to drift away from the EAEU and the CSTO and endorse its apparent interest in the “alternative” strategy of Turkey and its Western allies. A negative effect on Russia-Kazakhstan cooperation can have a steady trend for developing Turkic cooperation, which often ends up with growing Russophobia, manifesting itself through rewriting history, driving Russian cadres out of the country and renaming cities and streets constructed by Russian architects and engineers (Trukhachev, 2011).

Another threat to further mutually beneficial cooperation between Russia and Kazakhstan is the Chinese “One Belt, One Road Initiative” that went public in 2013. In fact, the Initiative means further Chinese economic expansion, and it considers the Caspian territories of Russia and Kazakhstan as strategic regions. The Initiative



sets an objective to build a transport corridor from St. Petersburg to Aktau and then across Iran to the Persian Gulf, with total length of 6191 km. As part of the Initiative, investors have already committed \$ 20 billion to Kazakhstan; the funding enables the government of Kazakhstan to transfer production sites and build new industrial facilities (Serikpayev, 2019). The goal of the Initiative is to provide markets for Chinese products and expand supply to other countries.

Evidently, the Initiative interferes with the interests of the Eurasian Economic Union. Kazakhstan is now actively involved in the project drifting away from the EAEU, anticipating a number of profits, i.e. loans, investments and major infrastructure projects. However, Kazakhstan should remember that, as a rule, the dynamics of bilateral trade with China develops according to the single scenario when a business partner supplies raw materials and energy resources to China, buys Chinese end products, primarily machinery and technologies, and, as a result, encounters stagnation and production decline. In fact, this is neocolonialism as the Chinese see it. This can cost you too much; you can even lose your economic independence and take the role of “an obedient younger brother of China” on the foreign policy arena.

Conclusion

Summing up, Kazakhstan and Russia have encountered a lot of challenges in their bilateral relations. On the one hand, the countries willingly searched for constructive solutions to such issues as delimitation of borders, joint exploitation of the space center Baikonur, cooperation on the Caspian Sea. On the other hand, some issues caused controversy, i.e. social feeling of the Russian community, migration and re-emigration, cooperation with Western countries as viewed from two different perspectives. By 2021, Russia and Kazakhstan have built up warm and cooperative relationship; they actively cooperate in economic, military, cultural and educational areas and have no claims against each other. Their cooperation in the Caspian macro region will be mutually beneficial for the countries' economies and for integrated security.

Authors' contributions

Yekaterina V. Kargapolova, supervised the research work, collected and analyzed the data, interpreted the findings, contributed to the final version of the manuscript.

Yulia A. Davydova, performed critical analysis of the theory, wrote the primary version of the manuscript, analyzed the collected data.

Marina A. Simonenko, performed critical analysis of the findings, contributed to the final version of the manuscript, analyzed the theory, checked the validity of the findings.

Andrey A. Lezhebokov, contributed to the primary version of the manuscript, developed formalized approach to the data analysis, contributed to the analysis of the theory.

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