



## RELATIONS BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND INDIA: DISCUSSION OF KEY FEATURES

Based on the Declaration of Strategic Partnership from 2009, Kazakhstan and India had built a comprehensive dialogue, which experienced considerable dynamism during the last decade. In 2015, the visit of Prime Minister of Narendra Modi to Kazakhstan gave a further impulse to enhancing the existing ties, whilst the planned visit of President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to India in 2021 is expected to open new horizons of the fully-fledged partnership. Relying on the current developments in India-Kazakhstan interaction, we can define economics, defense, cultural and educational cooperation as key areas of cooperation.

During the 1990s, Kazakhstan in India's foreign policy was largely neglected. Since the early 2000s, Delhi reconsidered its foreign strategy towards the Central Asian region and now prioritizes its cooperation with the Central Asian states and especially with Kazakhstan – the largest trading partner in the region. India's engagement with Kazakhstan is framed under India's "Connect Central Asia" (2012) policy that aims to reconnect to the region to strengthen political, security, economic, and cultural ties, and consider the region as its "extended neighborhood". Kazakhstan in its multivector foreign policy, aspiring to develop relations based on a pragmatic, and non-ideological foundation, seeks to build sustained and multifaceted relations with India. At the regional level, countries work together in the regional platforms as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and since 2019 meet at the sidelines of the India-Central Asia Dialogue.

Institutionally, in order to enhance bilateral ties, countries work through the India-Kazakhstan Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) that discusses institutional mechanisms in the areas of trade, economic, scientific, technological, industrial, and cultural cooperation and the separate Joint Working Groups that was established in the respective spheres. In addition, The Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and the Chamber of International Commerce of Kazakhstan set up a Joint Business Council (JBC) that promotes trade and investment among the business community.

Kazakhstan remains a major trading partner of India in Central Asia with an overall turnover of \$2,2 billion over the 9 months of 2020, which was more than doubled in com-

parison to 2015. Out of that, medical products, tea, telephone sets, and other electronic devices contain the majority of Indian export, whilst 80% of Kazakhstan's export consist of petroleum oils and minerals. Over 560 entities with Indian capital have been operating in Kazakhstan, and around 200 of them were registered in the past several years.

Defense ties conventionally have been among the priority areas of cooperation between the countries, which has been further widening especially after signing the Agreement on defence and military-technical cooperation in 2015. To specify, the annual military exercise "KAZIND" between India and Kazakhstan army held since 2016 is considered as an important tool for deepening existing military ties between the armies of the two countries. Joint military training and tactical drills are undertaken to counter-terrorist operations in both jungle and mountainous terrains. During the two-week training, by jointly training and exchanging drills and procedures, military personnel attempt to achieve interoperability and to strengthen the skills of both contingents. Besides, India and Kazakhstan army have been interacting in peacekeeping activities when Kazakhstan peacekeepers joined the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) mission as part of an Indian battalion in 2018. The training of the Kazakhstan peacekeeping contingent was conducted at the UN Peacekeeping Training Centre in New Delhi. In October 2020, the online two-day India-Kazakhstan Defense Cooperation Expo was held to deepen military ties between the countries, where the opportunities for co-development and co-production of military and aerospace equipment and the action plan for India-Kazakhstan Defence Industry Cooperation were discussed. Apart from that, Kazakhstan students have an opportunity to obtain a degree in the Indian military institutions or to study as an exchange student based on intergovernmental agreements. As part of the Agreement on defence and military-technical cooperation from 2015, Indian National Cadet Corps signed memoranda of understanding with several Kazakhstan universities in order to enhance academic and practical cooperation between military institutions. Hence, bilateral defense cooperation between the two sides has been strengthening during the past years, whereas 246 officers from the Kazakh armed forces have been trained in India under the defense program.

As for students, Kazakhstan's medical universities are popular among the Indian students, especially in regard to the most popular medical program in India - Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS). Over 5300 Indian students are studying in Kazakhstan's universities, almost all studying medicine. Kazakhstan's universities have a special department for Indian students, where all necessary facilities are provided for international students. Kazakhstani students also have an opportunity to study in India with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) program that provides full scholarships for obtaining a degree at the Indian universities in 15 different directions. Besides, with the assistance of India's Ministry of External Affairs, the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program allows taking short-term capacity building courses in India for professionals and early career specialists that so far was used by more than a thousand professionals of Kazakhstan.

The general public in Kazakhstan is closely acquainted with Indian culture thanks to Bollywood films, Indian songs and dances, and their lifestyle. Since 1994, the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre (SVCC), formerly known as Indian Cultural Centre, has promoted Indian traditions and culture among the citizens of Nur-Sultan. In Almaty, famous choreographer, and Bharatanatyam (A classical dance type common in India) performer Akmaral Kainazarova at her Centre of Indian classical dance and yoga teaches along with Indian classical dances, how to get into the Indian spiritual world and philosophy by conducting lectures, and seminars. Other than that, the information technology, banking, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and energy sectors, are promising areas for cooperation.

In conclusion we could see that in many cooperation areas positive developments occur, however due to lack of investment and low interest among the business community slows down the realization of the prospective areas development process. Therefore it could be said that India-Kazakhstan relations still do not reach its full potential, however the growing global significance of India and the geopolitical weight of Kazakhstan push the sides for searching new mechanisms for enhancing bilateral ties especially in regard to emerging spheres as cybersphere, IT, banking and other service sectors, at the same time remaining as a core of the partnership the traditional fields as defense, trade, and education.

## Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in his phone conversation with the President of Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, declared that Kazakhstan was ready to develop a comprehensive partnership with Turkmenistan. President Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, in turn, noted that Kazakhstan remained Turkmenistan's key partner in Central Asia. The Presidents discussed concrete steps to increase bilateral trade volumes and to implement joint projects in different sectors. Moreover, President Berdimukhammedov invited Kassym-Jomart Tokayev to visit Turkmenistan to discuss bilateral cooperation issues (Kazinform, 28.04.2021).
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev had a phone conversation with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu. Minister Cavusoglu expressed condolences to the people of Kyrgyzstan and supported the agreements reached to stabilize the situation between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Moreover, he expressed Turkey's readiness for all-around assistance in the socio-economic and infrastructural restoration of the region of Kyrgyzstan affected by the conflict. Cavusoglu added that Turkey would provide medical and humanitarian assistance to the victims (Kabar, 01.05.2021).
- The President of Moldova Maia Sandu signed a decree on the dissolution of the parliament and scheduled snap parliamentary elections for July 11, 2021. She explained her decision by saying that many members of parliament were involved in corruption. Therefore, a new parliament has to be elected in order to form a competent government and return the country to normalcy. The dissolution of parliament was made possible after the Moldovan Constitutional Court had lifted the state of emergency imposed by lawmakers under the pretext of the coronavirus pandemic (Moldpres.md, 29.04.2021).
- The President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev held a telephone conversation with the Chairman of the People's Republic of China Xi Jinping. Discussing topical issues of developing trade, economic, investment and financial partnerships, the leaders noted a high level of friendly relations and strategic cooperation between the countries. The sides reached an agreement on the development of close relations and studying the great accumulated experience of China in the field of poverty alleviation (Centralasia.news, 01.05.2021).
- The President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov received the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev in Ashgabat. The heads of states discussed the prospects for bilateral cooperation in trade, economy, science and culture. President Mirziyoyev announced Uzbekistan's readiness to continue promoting the Ashgabat agreement on the creation of an international transport and transit corridor and to expand the load on the multimodal route of PRC-Central Asia-South Caucasus-Turkey (Centralasia.news, 30.04.2021).
- The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan and the Eastern Partnership Bilateral Relations Division held the 9th meeting of the EU-Azerbaijan Subcommittee on Justice, Freedom, Security, Human Rights and Democracy in Baku. The sides discussed Azerbaijan's progress in protecting civil, economic, political and social rights as well as the implementation of the national framework for the protection of human rights. The parties also exchanged views on issues of mutual interest in the fields of justice, freedom, migration and regional security (Azernews.az, 28.04.2021).

## Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The government of Kazakhstan aims to increase employment through the tools of the "Yenbek" (labor) state program, which will be restructured into a national project from July 1, 2021. According to the Minister of Labor and Social Protection of the Population Serik Shapkenov, 1.2 million Kazakh citizens will be supported with employment measures in 2021. Digitalization on the labor market will allow increasing real income by 27%, raising wages to \$707, creating new jobs and reducing the unemployment rate to 4.7% by 2025 (Qazaq TV, 27.04.2021).
- Speaking at the meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council, the Chairman of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission Mikhail Myasnikov mentioned positive trends in the economies of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). In early 2021, growth in manufacturing output varied from 1% in Russia to 9% in Belarus, while Kazakhstan's indicator reached 7.5%. At the same time, mutual trade of the EAEU countries increased by 6.8%. The EAEU governments will work jointly with the business community to provide economic recovery and growth (BelTA, 30.04.2021).
- Azerbaijan's Energy Ministry signed a memorandum of understanding on energy cooperation with the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry of Indonesia. The countries plan to cooperate in the fields of oil, gas and renewable energy. Moreover, they will collaborate in the implementation of joint scientific projects and promote mutual investments. Azerbaijan has been an important supplier of crude oil to Indonesia since 2007. During these years, it supplied more than 25 million tons of crude oil to Indonesia (AzerNews, 02.05.2021).
- Bilateral cooperation between Uzbekistan and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) is deepening. Recently, the parties signed a memorandum of understanding on long-term cooperation to achieve carbon neutrality of Uzbekistan's energy sector by 2050. The EBRD will assist in the financing, development and implementation of the country's strategy. To date, the EBRD has invested more than €2 billion in 92 projects in Uzbekistan, including seven projects in the energy sector worth \$1 billion (UzReport, 28.04.2021).
- The Vice Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and Finance of Kyrgyzstan Ulukbek Karmyshakov made a working visit to Russia, where he had a meeting with the Deputy Minister of Finance of Russia Timur Maksimov. The officials discussed the current state and future perspective of economic cooperation between the countries. In particular, they focused on the resumption of full-scale lending and investment activities of the Russian-Kyrgyz Development Fund. The fund's modernization aims to increase the financial support of entrepreneurship and create new employment opportunities (Kabar, 28.04.2021).
- On the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of Turkmenistan's independence, "Turkmengaz" and "Turkmennebit" (Turkmen Petrol) state companies, with the cooperation of the "Turkmen Forum", an international investment forum titled "Turkmenistan's Oil and Gas-2021 (OGT 2021)", will be held on 12-13 May 2021 in Ashgabat. The China National Oil and Gas Corporation sponsored the event as it has many important gas projects in Turkmenistan. For instance, it will conduct full-scale research, development and production of natural gas in the Bagtyyarlyk contract territory for 35 years. In 2021, Turkmenistan plans to increase the gas supply to China to 65 billion cubic meters (Trend, 26.04.2021).

## Society and Culture

- The President of Russia Vladimir Putin, following a conversation with the President of India Narendra Modi, ordered to provide India with humanitarian aid in connection with the crisis due to the outbreak of coronavirus. In total, the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Russia delivered more than 22 tons of cargo, including 20 pieces of equipment for the production of oxygen, 75 artificial lung ventilation devices, 150 medical monitors and 200,000 packages of medicines. In addition, India received the first batch of Sputnik V vaccine from Russia (Vedomosti, 28.04.2021).
- A new Consulate General of Kazakhstan was opened in the Uzbek city of Samarkand. The opening ceremony was attended by the Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Uzbekistan Darkhan Satybaldy, the Governor of the Samarkand region Erkinjon Turdimov, as well as representatives of the public and business of Samarkand. Besides consular and legal aspects, the task set for the new Consulate General will include a wide range of trade and economic issues (Gov.kz, 29.04.2021).
- Tashkent hosted an online meeting of the Council for Youth Affairs of the member-states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The meeting was attended by the Council members and representatives of organizations in CIS member-states for work with youth and the development of youth entrepreneurship. The participants discussed the progress in the implementation of medium-term action plans for the implementation of the Strategy for International Youth Cooperation of the CIS member-states. The draft of the Regulation on the International Project "Youth Capital of the CIS" will be submitted to the supreme bodies of the CIS was approved at the meeting. (Cis.minsk.by, 30.04.2021).
- The World Health Organization (WHO) country office in Turkmenistan handed over about 10,000 laboratory PCR tests to the virology laboratory of the Center for Public Health and Nutrition in Turkmenistan. The handover ceremony was attended by the EU Ambassador to Turkmenistan Diego Ruiz Alonso, Acting WHO Country Representative Tasnim Atatra and Director of the Center Azat Ovezov. The assistance was provided within the framework of a joint WHO-EU project on responding to the COVID-19 crisis for the countries of Central Asia (Hronikatm.com, 28.04.2021).
- The film "Tomiris", produced by the "Kazakhfilm" studio, was released on the media library of the Amazon Prime international video platform for Canadian and US viewers. The film has been translated and dubbed into more than 10 languages and it will be released internationally in France, Italy, Japan, Romania, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Spain and Turkey. In November 2020, Tomiris won the Taurus Award from the World Stunt Academy (USA) (Kazinform, 26.04.2021).
- The International Turkic Academy held an international conference titled "Edkhem Tenishev - Father of Turkic Linguistics" dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the outstanding Turkologist and specialist in Turkic linguistics Edkhem Tenishev. The event was attended by the President of the International Turkic Academy Darkhan Kydyrali, University rectors, heads of Turkology departments and prominent Turkologists from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Turkey. During the conference, colleagues and students of Edkhem Tenishev spoke about his career and legacy (Twesco, 26.04.2021).