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Kazakhstan Celebrates 15th Anniversary of Independence

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Fifteen years in terms of history is but a blink of an eye, but for Kazakhstan that time, because of the depth and scope of changes, became equal to an entire era. During these years, all the institutions of a sovereign nation were created; radical social, economic and political reforms were implemented. A new capital of an independent Kazakhstan, the beautiful city of Astana, is now booming in the center of our country. Most importantly, our people's mentality has changed in a fundamental way, and we have embraced the ideals of democracy and the principles of free enterprise. For the first time during many centuries of sometimes tragic history we now feel ourselves free citizens of a free nation.

Today, the world is witnessing how during these past 15 years, Kazakhstan, under the prudent leadership of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, has turned from one of the worst off fragments of the former Soviet empire into an economically strong and dynamically developing democratic country, a recognized leader in Central Asia, and a reliable and respected partner of the international community.

The United States rightfully shares our successes. The U.S. was one of the first countries to recognize Kazakhstan's independence and to establish diplomatic relations with us.



Presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev (left) and George W. Bush meet at the Oval Office as Ambassador Kanat Saudabayev looks on.

During our years of independence, we have together covered a long and productive path of cooperation in areas such as security, the fight against terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, economy and energy, and building democracy and a civil society.

Kazakhstan voluntarily renounced the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal, and since that time, our two countries have worked successfully under the famous Nunn-Lugar program to eliminate the nuclear weapons infrastructure. During President Nazarbayev's September 2006 visit to Washington new agreements were reached in this area opening the way to blending down of highly enriched uranium and converting a nuclear reactor from highly enriched uranium to low enriched fuel. The many years of our cooperation and new projects speak of the highest levels of trust and great potential for future partnership between us. It was no coincidence that in a July 2006 unanimous resolution, the U.S. House of Representatives declared that "Kazakhstan's leadership and cooperation with the United States on nonproliferation matters is a model for other countries to follow."

Since the tragedy of 9/11, Kazakhstan has stood by its pledge of unconditional support for the United States in the war on terrorism. Kazakhstan has provided its airspace and the largest airport for use in operations in Afghanistan, and today we are taking part in rebuilding that country. Kazakhstan supports the efforts to bring peace and stability to Iraq and has sent its troops there starting in 2003. Kazakh army engineers have already destroyed more than four million pieces of deadly ordnance in Iraq and are continuing their mission there after a recent planned rotation.

Trade and economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and the U.S. is developing rapidly. Our bilateral trade in 2005 reached almost two billion dollars, and is bound to be higher this year. More than 400 U.S. firms work in Kazakhstan. They have already invested more than 15 billion dollars in our economy and are planning to expand investments in the future. As an example, GE is building a plant not far from Astana to produce locomotives of new generation. During the presidential visit to Washington in September, GE and Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, our national railway company, signed a 600 million dollar contract to supply engine kits for Evolution locomotives to be produced at this plant.

Our cooperation in these areas is supported by the continuous building of democracy and a civil society in Kazakhstan and a vigorous political dialogue with the United States.

Young people from Kazakhstan are an important and strengthening tie between our countries. Hundreds of youngsters from Kazakhstan study at the best universities in the U.S., including more than 600 students under the presidential "Bolashak" (Future) scholarship, and this number will grow in the future. Upon their return to Kazakhstan, these youngsters assume key positions in government and business, bringing both Western innovations and democratic values into the fabric of our country.

During these years, Americans were also able to learn more about Kazakhstan's rich and distinctive culture and ancient history. Concerts of Kazakh music took place at the famous Kennedy Center in Washington and Carnegie Hall in New York. Currently, an exhibit, "Of Gold and Grass: Nomads of Kazakhstan", is on display at Mingei International Museum in San Diego, representing the most valuable and rare items of the old Kazakh culture. The exhibit will move to the Houston Museum of Science for the summer of 2007, and will then move to other museums in the U.S. It draws major interest, and we are hopeful it will have success in other American cities.

The recognition of Kazakhstan's importance is growing in the United States, as seen in a major expansion of cooperation in all areas and the many visits to Kazakhstan by high level U.S. officials, including Vice President Richard Cheney, Secretary of Energy Sam Bodman, Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns, and many respected members of Congress just this year.

Kazakhstan stands on the threshold of a new important breakthrough in its social, economic and political development. We intend to join the world's most developed and competitive nations in the near future. It is hard to overestimate the importance of the support from the United States for Kazakhstan in its efforts to achieve these ambitious but realistic goals. We are confident that together we will succeed.

The most important result of the landmark visit of President Nazarbayev to the United States was the elevation of Kazakhstan-United States relations to a level of true strategic partnership.

What made the talks between Presidents Nursultan Nazarbayev and George W. Bush during the visit special was that this was a dialog of equal leaders who respect and understand each other, and that dialog was mostly directed at the future of our cooperation not just for the benefit of our countries, but for the interests of security and progress in the world. The two presidents announced just that in their joint statement after the meeting, saying: “We declare our intention to further strengthen our strategic partnership through enhanced strategic dialogues on energy, military cooperation, trade and investment, and democratization. We express firm confidence that an enhanced strategic partnership between our countries will promote security and prosperity and foster democracy in the 21st Century.”

As we in Kazakhstan celebrate the 15th anniversary of our independence, we thought our friends abroad may enjoy some pictures of Kazakhs enjoying their lives. Here they are.



Photo by Boris Buzin

A family and their friend enjoy a sunny day on the Independence Square in Almaty, Kazakhstan’s largest city and former capital. The Monument of Independence is seen in the background.



Photo by Boris Buzin

A young Kazakh lady sports traditional garb as she prepares to participate in festivities.



Kazakh children of different ethnicities put all their passion in what looks like a River Dance in Almaty.

Photo by Boris Buzin

A sergeant of the KazBat unit kisses his baby daughter on the tarmac of the Almaty airport as he prepares to leave for duty in Iraq, Kazakhstan's first ever peacekeeping mission abroad.



Photo courtesy of Kazakhstan's Ministry of Defense

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