



Kazakhstan's Echo

A publication of the Embassy of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada
with views and comments on developments in and around Kazakhstan

www.kazakhembus.com

December 4, 2006

No. 31

Kazakhstan Has “Made a Lot of Right Choices” in 15 Years of Independence, U.S. Ambassador Says

Here is the December 1 interview with U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan John M. Ordway by Tolkyn Maiussova of the KazInform News Agency in Kazakhstan.



Ambassador John Ordway

The United States was the first country to recognize Kazakhstan when it declared its independence in December 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union. This year Kazakhstan is celebrating the 15th anniversary of its sovereignty. The United States Ambassador John Ordway has shared his views on what has been done for the past 15 years and how the Kazakhstan–American relations are developing today.

KAZINFORM: Mr. Ambassador, you have lived in Kazakhstan for more than two years. What is your impression of the country?

ORDWAY: I have a very good impression of the country and I hope that it's much more accurate impression than when I first came here 2 years ago. Its certainly is a very big country. It's a country with a lot of diversity both among its people as well as its landscape and what it offers in terms of attractions. And it's a country that has made a lot of right choices over the past 15 years of independence. I think that the success of the economy, decline in the poverty rate, the obvious prestige that Kazakhstan has in the region and in the world, all testimony to hard work by its citizens and good choices and good leadership, so all in all, I would have to say, I am impressed by the country.

KAZINFORM: Well, how do you feel about Astana?

ORDWAY: I like Astana. First of all I like Astana because it's where my work is. And I spent two years living in Almaty and working in Astana. I flew to Astana over 50 times in two years. So it's a great relief actually to live and work in the same city since the Government is here, the Parliament is here and these are the principal people that I have to do business with. I spent eight winters in Moscow, so cold is nothing new to me. I am looking forward to an invigorating winter in Astana and getting a chance to see the beginning of what looks like is going to be a very dynamic and successful capital.

KAZINFORM: The United States has declared commitment to a shared vision of stability, prosperity, and democratic reform in Central Asia through an increasingly dynamic and varied partnership. How do you see the US and Kazakhstan relations today?

ORDWAY: I think that our relationship is really quite good. We've got 15 years of excellent experience behind us. We were the very first country that recognized Kazakhstan's independence and established diplomatic relations. We've had a number of major areas and a common interest that we worked on together starting with economic reform, democratic reform, fighting terrorism, working to improve health, healthcare, fighting majors, new emergent diseases. And the list goes on and on the areas in which we have a common interest and we work together very cooperatively to try to pursue this common interest.

KAZINFORM: The United States supports Kazakhstan's membership in the World Trade Organization and both sides pledge to facilitate Kazakhstan's graduation under the Jackson-Vanik Amendment. What is your opinion on economic reforms Kazakhstan has made since gaining its independence?

ORDWAY: I think that Kazakhstan has really been a leader in terms of macroeconomic reforms and having a very good financial sector. It has done a lot of really good things, but there are still a lot of challenges that remain. The economy is so large and it's mostly based on extractive industries, particularly oil and gas, so there needs to be much more efforts made to diversify the economy to create a more stable long lasting basic foundation. A lot of the population of Kazakhstan still lives in rural areas, more needs to be done to improve the economy.

There are some other things equally important to developing of the economy and attracting an investment in small and medium size industries in areas other than oil and gas, gold and copper are so attractive. That includes having a stable tax and good independent courts that provide impartial justice. Stability is important to any investor, and we certainly look upon Kazakhstan as being a stable country, but in a long term, stability depends upon providing not only in economic life but political life and lives of all the citizens.

So I think there is a connection between political reforms that are being talked about now in a state commission which President Nazarbayev has talked about quite a bit in ensuring a long-term stability and attractiveness of Kazakhstan as an investment partner.

KAZINFORM: Kazakhstan and the United States are signatories to international human rights covenants and our common membership in organizations whose goal is to support democracy and human rights, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. What do you think about Kazakhstan's efforts to chair the OSCE in 2009?

ORDWAY: We have said we welcome Kazakhstan's aspirations to be the chair of the OSCE and we want to help Kazakhstan to move more quickly, more rapidly on the path of democratic reform that has laid out for itself. Our view is that any leader of the OSCE has to be a country the exemplifies the standards of the Organization and this can be an excellent way for Kazakhstan to move more rapidly ahead in areas such as democratic reform, economic reform or some of the other areas OSCE works in.

I think that the issue of exactly how this will work out still remains to be seen. There will be a very important ministerial of the OSCE in a few days. We are having some very intense conversations with our OSCE partners on this, and what would like to see is a decision by the OSCE that reflects the standards of the Organization and at the same time provides a very positive outcome for everybody's concern including Kazakhstan.

KAZINFORM: Mister Ordway, what do you do on your free time?

ORDWAY: Well, I have lived in Astana for a couple of months now, but I have come to Astana quite quickly in the past. So I do our best ones that one can go to in the evening to concerts, a theater, I've done all those things, but I have to say I haven't done these things often as I would like to because of being pretty busy most of the time.

I go on cross-country skiing here in Astana. When I was in Almaty I did down-hill skiing. I've also done twice multi-day backpacking trips over the mountains from Kazakhstan to Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan. So, I have enjoyed what opportunities I have had to get around and to see the country.

KAZINFORM: Is there anything you would like to say to the Kazakh people on the eve of the 15th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence?

ORDWAY: It is a significant time to look back and see what has been achieved and what is not in a small period of time but also realize that it is a limited period of time and there is still a lot to be done and to concentrate on those things that are really necessary in order to have Kazakhstan live up to a great promise it has established for itself over the first 15 years of its independence.

KAZINFORM: Thank you very much.

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