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Greater Push on English Studies Planned

During the next three years the Kazakh Government will expand measures to improve English language studies in secondary schools as part of efforts to improve the country's international competitiveness.

Zhanseit Tuimebayev, Minister of Education and Science said last week the Government will run a pilot project starting in 2007 through 2009 to attract English teachers from abroad for secondary schools. The initial scope of the project will cover 24 regular schools and four special profile schools.

"Today, 1,800,000 children study English in our schools but we only have 14,500 teachers of English. That does not meet our needs," Tuimebayev said at a planning session in his ministry.

Efforts to promote English studies are not limited to the Government's programs. The Minister especially noted the assistance Kazakhstan was getting from U.S. Peace Corps volunteers, and lecturers from the Kazakh-Turkish lyceums. The contribution from these organizations is not trivial. To date, more than 700 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Kazakhstan helping thousands of youngsters to learn English and acquire other important skills.

Tuimebayev said new measures will be taken to promote English studies at younger ages and in rural areas: "Since 2005, we have been introducing English studies since early childhood. To promote this work further I believe it is necessary to dispatch seniors from colleges who are majoring in English to the countryside during summer breaks."

Ensuring competitiveness of higher education is receiving greater attention from the Government. Tuimebayev said five universities in Kazakhstan will seek international accreditation of some of their programs during the next two years, including the Al Farabi Kazakh National University, the Lev Gumilev Eurasian National University, the Kanysh Satpaev Kazakh National Technical University, the



Kazakh football players celebrate after their first competitive win in the European league.

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Abai Kazakh National Pedagogical University, and the Kazakh National Agrarian University. These universities will seek full international accreditation by 2010.

These efforts are key to the Government's stronger push on education. Last month, President Nursultan Nazarbayev also unveiled plans to build 100 new schools within the next three years and announced the goal of achieving proficiency in three languages in Kazakhstan: Kazakh as the state language, Russian as the language of interethnic communication, and English as the key to world commerce. In 2006, the Government also expanded the Bolashak (Future) international presidential scholarship program from 100 to 3,000 students every year.

Ambassador, Members of Congress See Bright Future in US-Kazakh Relations

Kanat Saudabayev, Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the United States held a far reaching discussion with key members of the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee on March 28 at the Capitol.

The Ambassador outlined the future of Kazakhstan's development in light of the recent state of the nation address by President Nursultan Nazarbayev, saying relations of strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and the U.S. "must be strengthened for the benefit of our two peoples."

Topics of discussion included the growing cooperation in national security and military areas, energy and economic diversification, as well as a dialog on democracy building in Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

Eni F. H. Faleomavega (D-AS), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific and the Global Environment, which oversees the relations with Kazakhstan, hosted the gathering. He praised President Nazarbayev's nuclear disarmament choice for his country, saying Kazakhstan's example is even more relevant in today's tense times. Chairman Faleomavega, who last visited Kazakhstan in 2004, also noted great strides Kazakhstan has made in reforming its society, offering his support for strengthening the relations between the two countries.

Representative Donald Manzullo (R-IL), ranking member of the subcommittee, said Kazakhstan has achieved "two astounding feats" since its independence in 1991. The first is nuclear disarmament, and the second is the reformation of the socialist economy into an open environment promoting free enterprise. Rep. Manzullo noted the large U.S. business presence in Kazakhstan, especially in the energy sector, and expressed interest in seeing this trend continue.

The U.S. is the largest foreign investor in the Kazakh economy with more than 15 billion dollars invested so far, and more than 400 companies with U.S. participation.

Rep. Jeff Flake (R-AZ) showed special interest in seeing more diverse investment from the United States in Kazakhstan. The Ambassador welcomed his interest since diversification of the economy is one of President Nazarbayev's top priorities and explained prospective sectors for such investment included services, food processing, biotechnologies and IT. The Kazakh Government supports diversification by offering tax breaks and other support to potential investors.

Rep. Alcee Hastings (D-FL), Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, focused on political developments in Kazakhstan. Rep. Hastings, who visited Kazakhstan in 2005 as President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), said Kazakhstan has been one of the most active members of the OSCE and is seeking the chairmanship of that organization in 2009. Rep. Hastings noted Kazakhstan still has a way to go in implementing additional democratic reforms but added he was encouraged the country's leaders recognize that and are committed to improvement. In light of this, he believes Kazakhstan's OSCE bid should be given serious consideration.

Representatives Joseph Crowley, Chief Deputy Whip of the Democratic Majority, and Jim McDermott (D-WA) also participated in the discussion, among others.

Europeans Focus on Central Asia in Key Astana Meeting

Marat Tazhin, Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister hosted top European foreign policy envoys and foreign ministers of the other four Central Asian countries as they gathered in Astana on March 28 to discuss future European strategy toward the energy rich Central Asian region.

"The talks showed that the time is right for a new, closer cooperation. The EU aims to diversify its energy policy. This is why it is necessary to increase our contacts with Central Asia," German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, representing the EU presidency, said at a press conference in Astana.

"It is in our interest that the Central Asian countries take a path to be peaceful, democratic and prospering states," Steinmeier added. He was joined in Astana by European Commission's External Relations and Neighborhood Policy Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, EU Special Representative for Central Asia Pierre Morel, as well as Ambassador Manuel Kurtu of Portugal, which will assume the EU Chairmanship in the second half of 2007.

In Astana, Ferrero-Waldner said the European Commission will support Kazakhstan's candidacy for OSCE presidency in 2009, provided more political reforms are carried out between now and the end of this year, when the 56-member OSCE will make its consensus based decision about the matter. She said, "We want Kazakhstan to get the OSCE 2009 presidency if several reforms are made. Recently, President Nazarbayev declared in his speech that a number of reforms will be made. We would like to see that. This will be a very good step if the first Central Asian country could get the OSCE presidency."

Speaking after the meeting with President Nazarbayev, Ferrero-Waldner explained Europe's new focus on Central Asia and Kazakhstan: "Kazakhstan has a special importance for us as the first pillar in this region, and we talked about our desire to have special relations, special partnership with Kazakhstan, at the same time as we maintain intensive cooperation with the entire region." She said Europe will make "a new step in a new dimension of cooperation... giving it a strategic vector and aiming for the future."

Germany and the European Commission in Brussels have been pushing for a coherent strategy for relations of the energy hungry Europe with Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries rich in oil, gas and uranium reserves. The strategy, to span seven years, is expected to be approved at the next EU summit in June.

Beyond energy, the Europeans are focusing on common threats and challenges to security such as terrorism, porous borders, and drug and human trafficking. Under the strategy, the EU would look to spend 750 million euros on programs in the five Central Asian countries in areas which will also include environment protection, education and personnel training.

At the meeting, Kazakhstan expressed interest in working with the European Union on developing transit and transport potential, including joint implementation of regional projects such as the TRACECA corridor which stands for Transportation in Europe, Caucasus and Asia.

Following a meeting with President Nazarbayev, Steinmeier said the situation in Afghanistan, where a number of European countries have their troops under NATO, is a matter of concern for both the EU and Central Asia. "We are interested in stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan and neutralizing negative consequences coming from that unstable situation. This has to do, first of all, with trafficking of drugs, weapons, and organized crime," the German Foreign Minister said.

Kazakhstan Develops New Navy Concept, Will Pool Resources to Fight Caviar Poachers

Kazakhstan is developing a new concept for its fledgling Navy in the Caspian Sea up to 2025. Daniyal Akhmetov, Kazakhstan's Defense Minister since last January led a discussion of the new concept at an internal meeting in Astana on March 26.

According to the Defense Ministry, "The main changes under the concept will concern the gradual equipping of Kazakhstan's Navy with military ships, and the construction of coastal infrastructure to ensure security in Kazakhstan's sector of the Caspian Sea and protect strategically important facilities." The concept

is to be implemented in three stages, from 2007 to 2010, from 2011 to 2015, and from 2016 to 2025.

The press service further explained the acquisition of new ships for the Navy will be based on matching the types of ships to potential security threats. Equipping ships with weapons will be done in the framework of the general plan of military procurement. "Orders to produce small tonnage military cutters will be placed with the Zenith joint stock company, a local producer," Akhmetov noted as he instructed the Defense Ministry to come up with full plans for reforms of the Navy within a week.

Elsewhere, Kazakhstan's Interior Ministry unveiled plans to combat poaching on the Caspian Sea, known for both its vast oil reserves and being home to the world's largest population of caviar producing sturgeon.

Mukharan Amirov, Atyrau regional police chief said additional police officers will be assigned from regions across Kazakhstan to area during the spawning of sturgeon in April and May. He lamented that until now local police were stretched thin as they tried to enforce anti-poaching laws in the northern sector of the Caspian, an area spanning 1,030 kilometers of the coastline as well as the 400 kilometers of the Ural River where sturgeon actually spawn. To help the Atyrau police during the season, each of the 14 regions of the country will second seven to ten police officers. At the same time, soldiers of the Interior Ministry's forces will be dispatched to patrol the area.

Kazakhstan has been one of the largest legal producers of caviar in the region, but in recent years poaching, by both locals and Russian nationals, has caused major reductions in sturgeon populations. The Kazakh Government has been clamping down on poaching, which led to lifting of the ban on beluga caviar exports by the United Nations' CITES in January 2007.

Kazakh Football Team Chalks Up First European Victory

Kazakhstan's national football team made history on March 24, beating the Serbs 2 to 1 in a EURO-2008 qualifying match in Almaty. This was the first competitive win for Kazakhstan's football team since it transferred from the Asian to the European federation three years ago. With this victory under their belts, the Kazakh players now have five points in their tally and a fighting chance to qualify for the 2008 European cup to be hosted jointly by Austria and Switzerland.

All goals in the game came in the second half. The score was opened in the 48th minute by Kazakh forward Kairat Ashirbekov. Then, in the 61st minute Nurbol Zhumaskaliyev made it 2:0. In the 67th minute Serbian forward Nikola Zhigich scored a goal to provide his team a chance for a draw. But, in the end the pressure from the Kazakhs prevented the Serbs from capitalizing on their chance and they ended finishing the game with ten players after their defender committed a major foul on an attacking Kazakh player.

"I would like to express gratitude to footballers because today's victory is their achievement more than anybody's," Kazakhstan's jubilant Dutch coach Arno Pijpers said after the game. "I would also like thank Kazakhstan's Football Federation and personally its President, Rakhat Aliyev. In the last year, players, coaches, and the administration have done a great job, and today we have the results."

Things to Watch:

- "Nomad", Kazakhstan's official entry for Best Foreign Film for the 79th Academy Awards, is up for a wider distribution in the U.S. this Friday March 30. Please check local listings for theaters near you.
- We still have a few copies available of *Kazakhstan: Reaching for the Future*, a 9-minute video documentary prepared by our Embassy. The video is available at Youtube [here](#). Those in the United States and Canada who would like to receive a copy on DVD, please contact Roman Vassilenko.

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News Bulletin of the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada
Contact person: Roman Vassilenko
1401 16th Street NW, Washington, DC 20036
Tel: 202 232 5488, ext. 104, Fax: 202 232 5845