



# *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

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October 31, 2005

No. 20

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## **Washington Conference Further Strengthens Kazakhstan-U.S. Commercial and Political Ties**

The growing role of Kazakhstan as a leader in Central Asia and the increasing strength of ties between Kazakhstan and the U.S. were examined at a Washington conference hosted by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and supported by the Embassy of Kazakhstan on October 25. "The Challenges of Kazakhstan: Regional and Global Impact" brought together officials and business leaders from Kazakhstan and the United States.

The conference coincided with both the Republic Day of Kazakhstan, one of the nation's two most important holidays, and the kick off of the campaign for the December 4 presidential election viewed by many as a milestone in Kazakhstan's and regional development. The gathering included three panels focusing on Kazakhstan's role in the global war on terrorism, stabilizing energy markets, and the economic and democratic development of the country.

The message from speakers on both sides was clear: The United States and Kazakhstan already enjoy a very strong and wide ranging strategic partnership, the relationship has the potential to grow even stronger, and a lot depends on the upcoming presidential election in Kazakhstan.

Dr. Karim Massimov, Assistant to the President of Kazakhstan, led his country's delegation. His keynote address noted: "President Nazarbayev is fully aware of the expectations of the international community concerning the process of democratization in Kazakhstan and the region, whose focus is the upcoming presidential election. All efforts are being made to ensure the fair and open conduct of the elections, and that all participants are able to be involved on an equal footing and enjoy the same freedoms of speech, movement and assembly that are part of a modern democracy."

Dr. Massimov noted the election will be a key factor in ensuring success of the broad reform agenda proposed by President Nazarbayev earlier this year: "The free and fair conduct of the upcoming presidential elections is especially pertinent to the reform efforts of the President... The whole package of economic, political and social reforms, which has already become known as the 'Nazarbayev Model', has been subject to wide scrutiny, encouragement and support... The international community is optimistic and hopeful that these reforms will be successfully implemented and the 'Nazarbayev Model' would achieve its goals."

E. Anthony Wayne, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Economic and Business Affairs praised Kazakhstan's economic policies, stressing Washington's interests in Kazakhstan as a force for growth and development in Central Asia: "Kazakhstan has taken commendable steps in implementing market reforms, particularly in terms of privatization and liberalization of financial markets. Such efforts enable it to play a special role in demonstrating that economic, and for that matter democratic, reforms are a way of mitigating sources of conflict and instability by creating the foundations for prosperity."

The United States is the largest foreign investor in Kazakhstan with billions of dollars invested and several hundred American companies working in the republic.

According to Mr. Wayne, "The United States Government wants to continue to partner with Kazakhstan to strengthen its ability and commitment to be an example to the region. The United States supports Kazakhstan's efforts to thrive economically. As Kazakhstan's economy continues to develop it will be an engine for growth within Central Asia. Its neighbors, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan, would benefit immensely from Kazakhstani investment and energy exports to stimulate growth and create jobs."

Kairat Kelimbetov, Kazakhstan's Minister of Economy and Budget Planning told his American audience that Kazakhstan's economy was very stable and rapidly growing with the oil and gas sector continuing to lead. He spoke of challenges facing the growing Kazakh economy and its moves to diversify calling for greater U.S. and other foreign investment into the country. Anvar Saidenov, Governor of Kazakhstan's National Bank, confirmed the economy was stable. A vivid demonstration of the economy's health the are assets of Kazakhstan's National Fund, a "rainy day" fund for future generations, which now stand at US\$5.9 billion.

Ariel Cohen, a senior analyst with The Heritage Foundation in Washington, told the conference that at a recent meeting of the World Economic Forum in Moscow, Kazakhstan was pointed out as an example of diversification that Russia itself might follow, no small feat for a former dependency. He noted "Kazakhstan has very positive outlook in terms of investment climate."

Other speakers at the conference stressed the potential for stronger ties between Kazakhstan and the U.S. in areas such as the war on terrorism and countering the upsurge in Islamic extremism.

Richard Perle, former Assistant Secretary of Defense, said "the example of Kazakhstan led by a visionary and wise President could and should be followed as a model and stabilizing force in other countries." Kazakhstan, a Muslim majority country with more than 100 ethnic groups and 40 religions, has demonstrated the way to tolerance in a very diverse society. Perle went on to categorize Kazakhstan as "a serious heavyweight country where our relationship should be centered" and said he was "optimistic" about the future of bilateral ties as the two countries joint together to face modern challenges.

Judge William Webster, former director of CIA and FBI, recognized Kazakhstan's important role in the region and the continuing importance for the U.S. of closer ties with Kazakhstan in the fight for the hearts and minds of the Islamic world. He said "Kazakhstan is not just our friend, but also helps protect U.S. interests in a tough world." Judge Webster stressed the need for Washington to support the continued expansion of Kazakhstan's educational programs at Western universities, saying these would produce a new generation of leaders in both private and government sectors in tune with democratic values.

Col. Vladimir Reichel, head of international programs for the Kazakh Armed Forces, said Kazakhstan's role as an ally for the United States continues to strengthen. He noted 2,700 U.S. and coalition aircraft have used Kazakhstan's airspace on the way to Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom since 2001, and more than 40 U.S. planes used Almaty and Shymkent airports for landing and refueling. In Iraq, Kazakhstan's contingent has destroyed more than 3.5 million pieces of deadly ordnance. The country is committed to keeping its army engineers there. Moreover, they now play a wider role in training Iraqi soldiers in mine disposal, Col. Reichel added. Bilateral military-to-military ties are developing under a five year program which he called an "excellent instrument" of practical cooperation. It focuses on U.S. assistance to Kazakhstan in strengthening the capabilities of the KazBat peacekeeping battalion, Kazakhstan's airborne troops and its fledgling navy, as well as helping to upgrade the military infrastructure in the strategically important Caspian Sea region.

However, it was democracy and the upcoming presidential election in Kazakhstan which drew the most attention during the conference as a crucial point in Kazakhstan's growing relationship with the United States and the West in general.

Rakhat Aliyev, Kazakhstan's First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs told the conference his country is serious about its desire to be the chairman-in-office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in 2009. He stressed Kazakhstan's commitment to increasing democratic reforms and the need for the United States to support Kazakhstan's bid for the chairmanship.

Matthew Bryza, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia, said the relations between the two countries were strong and can be even stronger. Mr. Bryza, referring to statements made recently in Astana by both Assistant Secretary of State Dan Fried and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, said "if Kazakhstan holds free and fair election, we would be able to move our cooperation to a new strategic level."

Gen. Wesley Clark, former NATO Commander, called for Kazakhstan's continued "step by step march" on the road to democracy. He believes Kazakhstan can be "a unique beacon in the region" and, with a free and fair vote on December 4, has "a chance" to move further along that road and to pull the region ahead with it, strengthening relations with the United States in the process.

Dr. Massimov, the presidential assistant, said "The government of Kazakhstan is committed to free and fair elections... The government of Kazakhstan is fully aware of the heavy responsibility it faces, and is determined to tackle the challenges in a manner that conforms with the goals President Nazarbayev has set out for the country, to ensure a sustained build up of democratic values that can serve as an example to the region and emerging democracies throughout the world."

Kanat Saudabayev, Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the United States, said the conference was a very real example of the growing partnership and friendship between Kazakhstan and the U.S. "It showed the two countries look toward each other and very much need each other as we face together many challenges of the world, and it gave grounds for optimism that together we will succeed," he concluded.

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