

# SPECIFIC FEATURES OF KAZAKHSTAN-BELARUS RELATIONS IN POLITICS, ECONOMICS AND CULTURE

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The attainment of independence by Kazakhstan and Belarus, their political makeup, reference points and priorities attract ever greater interest, because the political course of these countries, considering their strategic position (Kazakhstan lies at the center of Asia, and Belarus at the center of Europe), is crucial to the future of the modern world, to its order and equilibrium.

Belarus and Kazakhstan almost simultaneously renounced the formidable nuclear heritage of the former U.S.S.R. and are working consistently for a secure peace in adjacent regions: Kazakhstan, by calling a Conference on Cooperation and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CCCBMA), and Belarus, by proposing the creation of a nuclear-free zone in Eastern and Central Europe. This proposal of the Minsk authorities is one of the alternatives to NATO's military and nuclear expansion to the east and could become an instrument for preventing the deployment of nuclear weapons in the wide corridor between the nuclear arsenals of Russia and the North Atlantic alliance. Such policies are a natural choice for countries that have suffered from nuclear tests.

The two republics have a common economic past: in the days of the U.S.S.R., Kazakhstan for decades remained a raw materials appendage of the Center, while Belarus was the "assembly shop" of Soviet engineering. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, when production relations were disrupted and the new sovereign post-Soviet countries were plunged into an economic crisis, each of them began looking for a way out of that crisis all on its own. But in the early 1990s the two republics were already faced with the challenge of resuming economic relations, which could only be done on the basis of integration, but this time on principles that were fundamentally different from the basic principles of the U.S.S.R. Such were the key strategic tasks on which the authorities of Kazakhstan and Belarus focused their efforts. The

two countries were pioneers of post-Soviet integration, because their strategic interests are complementary and interdependent. In fact, the founding documents of the CIS were signed in their capitals.

The political aspect of Kazakhstan-Belarus cooperation is one of its most significant aspects. Diplomatic relations between the two states were established during an official visit to Almaty (at that time the capital of Kazakhstan) on 14-16 September, 1992, by a Belarus government delegation led by V. Kebich, the then prime minister of the country. The embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) in Minsk was opened in December 1994, and the embassy of the Republic of Belarus (RB) in Almaty, during President Alexander Lukashenko's visit to Kazakhstan in 1997.

Bilateral summit meetings are held on a regular basis. The most significant of these are as follows: first official visit by RK President Nursultan Nazarbaev to Belarus on 16 January, 1996; first official visit by RB President Alexander Lukashenko to Kazakhstan on 22 September, 1997; official visit by RB President Lukashenko to Kazakhstan on 3-4 November, 1999; official visit by RK President Nazarbaev to Belarus on 22-23 May, 2000; official visit by RK Prime Minister N. Balgimbaev to Belarus on 3 June, 1999; official visit by RB Prime Minister V. Yermoshin to Kazakhstan on 4-5 October, 2000.

The basis for political cooperation between the two countries was mainly laid in January 1996, during N. Nazarbaev's official visit to Minsk, when the areas and prospects of interstate cooperation were markedly expanded. The basic document in this sphere was the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed by the two heads of state.<sup>1</sup> Both sides pledged to develop relations based on the principles of international law, state sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, and agreed to cooperate in order to strengthen peace and stability in situations affecting their interests. Another issue high on the agenda was the establishment of a Customs Union between Kazakhstan, Belarus and Russia and the transition from the first stage of its creation to the second stage. The two sides also reached an understanding on the establishment of a joint commission on trade and economic cooperation, which was to prepare a package of proposals on increasing mutual supplies of goods and to exercise control over the implementation of the adopted documents. It was deemed advisable to strengthen and develop direct links between economic agents in Kazakhstan and Belarus.

In a joint communiqué on the results of the visit, the two presidents noted the existence of significant untapped reserves in the field of economic cooperation and declared the readiness of the two sides to upgrade and look for new forms of relations involving the use of financial resources and of the industrial, scientific and technological potentials of both states.

Consequently, the aforesaid comprehensive treaty not only gave a new impetus to wider political cooperation, but was also a major part of the contractual framework for bilateral relations. A regular exchange of opinion, both on a wide range of international policy issues and on the development of bilateral contacts, has become an established practice. The contractual framework for cooperation now consists of about 50 intergovernmental and interstate treaties and agreements. The most important of these are: Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation; Treaty on the Legal Status of Kazakhstan Citizens Permanently Resident in RB Territory and Belarus Citizens Permanently Resident in RK Territory; Agreement on Simplified Rules for Acquisition of Citizenship by Belarus Citizens Arriving for Permanent Residence in the RK and by Kazakhstan Citizens Arriving for Permanent Residence in the RB; Agreement on Measures to Ensure the Convertibility and Stabilize the Exchange Rates of the Kazakhstan Tenge and the Belarus Ruble; Agreement on Cooperation in Culture, Science and Education; Consular Convention,<sup>2</sup> and Treaty of Long-Term Economic Cooperation for 1999-2008. Most of these documents were signed during N. Nazarbaev's visit to Minsk in 1996, except the Treaty of Long-Term Economic Cooperation, which was signed during A. Lukashenko's visit to Astana in 1999. All these documents have been ratified by the parliaments of both countries, providing a solid legal basis for active and intensive development of the bilateral negotiation process in the political, economic and cultural fields.

Presidents Alexander Lukashenko and Nursultan Nazarbaev stand out among the initiators of integration within the CIS framework. Their political will has made it possible not only to get these processes underway, but also to make significant progress. The political aspect of relations between Belarus and

<sup>1</sup> See: V. Alesin, "K voprosu kazakhstansko-belorusskikh otnoshenii," *Diplomaticheskii kurier*, No. 1, 1999, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> See: K.K. Tokaev, *Pod stiygom nezavisimosti. Ocherki o vneshnei politike Kazakhstana*, Almaty, 1997, p. 167.

Kazakhstan is measured by the results of integration within the CIS with the participation of Russia and Kyrgyzstan. There is no alternative to this integration (whatever its shortcomings), because this process is irreversible. All the political and economic achievements in this field—from the creation of the Customs Union to the signing of the Treaty on the Establishment of the EurAsEC and the idea of a Union of Four—are the result of political decisions at the highest level. Here again N. Nazarbaev and A. Lukashenko have played a major role.

As regards military-political and military-technical relations, work in this area (modernization of Kazakhstan's arms and military equipment at enterprises of the Belarus military-industrial complex, mutual supplies of military and logistic equipment, development of new models of arms and military equipment) has started under the Program of Long-Term Economic Cooperation for 1999-2008. In 2002, progress was made in the training of Kazakhstan personnel, primarily air defense specialists, at higher military educational institutions in Belarus. That same year the military attaché of the RK Defense Ministry at the diplomatic mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Russian Federation was also accredited at the RB Defense Ministry. However, relations in the military-political sphere have not yet reached a proper level: actual cooperation began only in the late 1990s in view of a number of problems in bilateral economic integration, of which military-political contacts are a component part.

Interparliamentary cooperation between the two states in matters of internal political construction has been stepped up in recent years. For example, representative delegations of Kazakhstan's Central Election Commission and two chambers of parliament (Senate and Majilis) took part as observers in the parliamentary and presidential elections in Belarus (in 2000 and 2001, respectively). In addition, a member of the Senate, P. Atrushkevich, led the team of CIS observers at the 2001 presidential election in Belarus. In the first half of 2001, members of the Belarus National Assembly paid a visit to Astana. In June 2002, Zh. Tuyakbai, chairman of the Majilis, paid an official visit to Belarus, during which the parties reached a number of agreements on coordinating the activities of the two states on a wide range of issues relating to state organization, intensification of interparliamentary contacts, and measures to enhance the efficiency of bilateral trade and economic relations.

As part of the efforts to establish direct contacts between the presidential administrations of the two countries, a highly productive working visit was paid to Minsk by a Kazakhstan delegation led by Ye. Utembaev, deputy head of the RK presidential administration. The range of issues discussed included matters of economic and social policy, selection and training of personnel, and interaction between different branches of power and trade union organizations.

In summing up the political aspect of cooperation, let us note its dynamic development, spurred by regular meetings between the leaders of the two countries within the framework of mutual visits and CIS summits. There is an active dialog at interparliamentary level, and direct contacts between the two presidential administrations have been developing.

The most complicated aspect of bilateral ties is trade and economic cooperation. Belarus and Kazakhstan are strategic partners. Their mutual economic interests derive, in the first place, from the high level of historically evolved economic, production and technological contacts in many sectors of the economy, from the objective need to maintain and develop them on an equal basis. Relations in this area are determined by the basic principles and conditions of the Treaty Between Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on Deepening Integration in the Economic and Humanitarian Fields (signed on 29 March, 1996). In addition, Kazakhstan and Belarus have established a free trade regime without exception or limitation.

Belarus is interested in the products of Kazakhstan's ferrous and nonferrous metallurgy, in the supply of lead automobile batteries, hides, oil, grain, flour and cereals. And Kazakhstan has been buying Belarus wheel tractors, forage harvesters, trucks, household appliances, consumer goods and food products. In 1996-1997, mutual trade exceeded \$200 million. At that time, Belarus was Kazakhstan's third largest trading partner (after Russia and Ukraine). These two years were marked by a surge in bilateral economic relations, including trade.<sup>3</sup> But in 1998 Belarus already ranked sixth among Kazakhstan's trading part-

<sup>3</sup> See: "Kazakhstan-Belarus: grani sotrudnichestva." Interview with L.V. Pakush, RB Ambassador to Kazakhstan, *Mysl'*, No. 12, 1998, p. 11.

ners within the CIS, and its share in Kazakhstan's total trade was only 0.9% (in trade with CIS countries, 1.9%). Compared with 1996, trade between the two countries had fallen sharply (to \$83.1 million). Moreover, in its trade with Belarus Kazakhstan had a deficit of \$38.9 million. Whereas in 1996 RK imports from Belarus increased 1.5 times, in 1998 they fell by almost 50%.<sup>4</sup> In 1999, trade was down to \$37 million. At the same time, starting from 2000 Kazakhstan imports from Belarus have steadily increased (from \$20 million to \$40 million), while Belarus imports have decreased (from \$45 million to \$8-15 million). On the whole, compared with the 1991 figure of \$250 million, mutual trade in recent years has decreased 4-5 times.<sup>5</sup>

So, an analysis of the two countries' trade and economic partnership over the past few years shows a lack of stability and of positive trends in mutual trade.

Even though the two states are interested in the establishment of joint ventures and financial-industrial groups, these problems have not been properly resolved in view of the geographical distance between the two countries and the resultant transportation costs. The difference in the economic models of the two countries has a noticeable effect as well. The centralized system of economic administration in Belarus differs radically from current practices in Kazakhstan.

The main reasons for the decline in trade include a lack of systemic efforts on both sides in implementing the agreements achieved and a lack of initiative among the business circles of the two countries (the main reason); inadequate use of traditional specialization patterns; significant differences in the legislative framework; and mutual nonpayments by economic agents. Other factors include low efficiency of joint ventures; high cost of transit of Kazakhstan and Belarus goods through the territory of Russia; insufficiently effective payment mechanism, under which payments can only be made in freely convertible currency; lack of a single quotation for the two national currencies; and the problem of collection of VAT and indirect taxes.

Measures designed to remedy these shortcomings are envisaged in the above-mentioned Program of Long-Term Economic Cooperation for 1999-2008. In the process of its fulfillment, it is necessary to address the following tasks:

- to bring closer together the legal frameworks of the two countries in the area of regulation of foreign economic activity and the tax system, and to carry out measures for the mutual protection of national commodity producers and for the development of interregional cooperation;
- to elaborate specific interstate projects and programs of economic cooperation and to set up joint ventures of different type and form of activity;
- to develop and make more effective use of transportation links;
- to work together to develop stock markets.

These transformations, which have to be carried out as part of a concerted structural policy, are connected with a profound structural adjustment of the production potential and affect the interests of both states. In this context, the parties are to consider proposals on the joint establishment and development of structure-forming lines of production, on the ways and forms of share participation in providing them with the necessary resources, and also on maintaining the production specialization of enterprises that are of key importance to the economic security of Kazakhstan and Belarus. This applies, in the first place, to the defense industry, instrument making, agricultural engineering, and light and food industry.

Let us note once again that special attention today is paid to the further implementation of Kazakhstan-Belarus agreements reached by the two presidents under the Program of Long-Term Economic Cooperation for 1999-2008. In 2001, deputy heads of government of the two states signed a specified Program of Long-Term Cooperation Measures for 2001-2008, which accentuates systemic efforts to unify

<sup>4</sup> See: L.V. Pakush, "Razvitie dvustoronnikh ekonomicheskikh otnoshenii—odno iz napravlenii integratsii Respubliki Kazakhstan v mirovuiu ekonomiku," in: *Integratsia Kazakhstana v mirovuiu ekonomiku: problemy i perspektivy*, ed. by M.B. Kenzhguzin, Almaty, 1999, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> See: N. Sergeev, "V tsentre vnimania ekonomicheskogo sotrudnichestva." Interview with G. Aldamzharov, RK Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Belarus, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 17 July, 2003.

the legal framework in such areas as taxation and foreign economic relations, mutual protection of national commodity producers, establishment of interstate business entities and joint ventures, creation of a securities market, and harmonization of approaches to WTO accession.

In the implementation of these agreements, the most significant progress has been made in matters relating to an exchange of investment projects and information on goods produced in both countries, steps to harmonize the regulatory framework in the field of tariff and nontariff regulation of foreign economic activity, establishment of branches of trading companies, and arrangement of annual participation by enterprises and trade organizations of the two countries in national exhibitions and fairs.

An analysis of these activities shows that there are no particular problems in the matter of creating a contractual basis for bilateral cooperation. The process of development of a regulatory framework is also running quite smoothly. However, the concluded agreements are mostly of a general character: they reflect the general principles of cooperation but, as a rule, do not specify the mechanisms for their implementation. Some sections of the Program, including those dealing with the development of commodity markets (organization of supplies of machinery, grain, oil and metals, leasing operations, establishment of trading companies and joint ventures, etc.), are being implemented on an irregular basis. Moreover, the 2002 and 2003 sessions of the intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation did not result in any serious progress in the matter of carrying out the ideas proclaimed in the Program.

At the same time, a considerable amount of work has been done to implement the provisions of the aforesaid Program relating to the agroindustrial complex. In particular, much attention is paid to long-term supplies of Kazakhstan grain to Belarus, notably in exchange for agricultural machinery. Over the past few years, the parties have arranged diplomatic monitoring of contracts, with the result that Kazakhstan has been receiving (on average) over 300 tractors per year.

Among the most promising projects one could mention the agreements on the establishment of shopping centers of the Minsk Tractor Plant (sale of tractors and spare parts, aftersales and leasing services) in different parts of Kazakhstan based on the former Kazselkhoztekhnika system. The Belarus side is prepared to take part in putting this idea into effect, provided it gets an official proposal from Kazakhstan on its share in the business and on the terms of use of buildings and engineering networks. Such an approach will simplify the system for purchasing tractors and spare parts, ensure price flexibility, and provide opportunities for leasing agricultural machinery.

In the short term, the understandings between Kazakhstan's agricultural producers and representatives of Lidselmash (producers of machinery for the full potato growing cycle) and Gomselmash (combine harvesters and forage production plant) are to be translated into concrete contracts.

Positive results in this area were achieved during a working visit to the Gomel Region in 2002 by V. Alesin, the then RK ambassador to Belarus. The parties agreed in principle on the establishment in Central Kazakhstan of technical maintenance centers for servicing agricultural machines fitted out with Belarus equipment (with the participation of Gomselmash and Bobruiskagromash); on the supply of equipment for transportation engineering on leasing terms (with the participation of Beltransmash); on the establishment of a joint venture for the manufacture of pneumatic seeding and mowing machines (on the basis of AstanaTechnopark with the participation of Lidselmash); on the possible implementation of a contract for the supply of Kazakhstan grain in exchange for forage harvesters; and on the supply of Kazakhstan rolled metal and small-displacement engines produced by the Petropavlovsk Plant for the needs of machine builders.

However, there are problems in this area as well. In Belarus, the annual shortage of grain for domestic needs is about 1-1.5 million tons, while the supply of Kazakhstan grain is irregular and fairly modest (up to 200 thousand tons per year). The reason is that Minsk is not prepared to pay for these supplies in hard currency, while Astana does not always agree to exchange grain for machinery. Hence the need to conclude a long-term intergovernmental agreement that would provide for annual deliveries of grain from state procurements in exchange for agricultural machinery. Similar arrangements are also possible for the supply of Kazakhstan tobacco, raw cotton and wool. So far such an agreement has not been signed, and this creates various problems.

Minsk and Astana depend on each other in freight transportation as well. Russia and Kazakhstan are transit countries for Western goods exported to China, India and other countries of Southeast Asia, with

which Belarus has well-established trade links (up to 4-5% of the republic's trade turnover). At the same time, trade routes to Europe, primarily transit routes for such goods of key importance to Russia and Kazakhstan as oil, run across Belarus. Of course, Minsk and Astana devote much attention to the development of their transportation systems in order to increase transit traffic through the territories of their countries. In view of this, it would make sense to develop mutually beneficial cooperation between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan in freight and passenger transportation by rail, road and air, and also in building pipelines.

Over the past two years, efforts have been made to develop Kazakhstan's transit potential, mainly in connection with the work being done by Belarus to put into operation the Northern Corridor of the Trans-Asian Railway, which runs through the territories of China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Poland and Germany. In this context, one should note the fruitful efforts of the Kazakhstan embassy in arranging talks with the governor of the Brest Region, the RB minister of transport and communications, and representatives of the country's business community. The accent here was on an acquaintance with the region's transit potential and with the state and capacity of the rail and road freight terminals of the Baranovichi and Brest junctions. Thus, talks have been held to coordinate customs and transportation activities and to carry out a joint project for a demonstration run by a container train along the Suzhoubel-Astana-Brest-Berlin route. A significant contribution to cooperation in this area has been made by the representative office of the Kazakhstan Temir Zholy organization in Minsk. In June 2001, the state-owned Kazakhstan Airlines with the support of the Kazakhstan embassy opened a direct air link between Astana and Minsk.

But in the transportation field there are problems as well. Although the two states are EurAsEC members, many questions arise in connection with transit through Belarus territory of Kazakhstan citizens and cargoes. In many cases, currency held by Kazakhstan citizens is seized and cargoes confiscated. The RK embassy naturally tries to resolve such problems, but it is time to open a representative office of Kazakhstan's customs agency in Belarus.<sup>6</sup>

Minsk is interested in diversifying oil flows in terms of companies and supplier regions, which will help to stabilize oil imports and make more efficient use of the competitive advantages of the trading partners. An increase in oil supplies from Kazakhstan will undoubtedly promote bilateral cooperation in this area. As regards Kazakhstan, Belarus is of great importance to it as a transit partner in oil exports to Europe. Belarus tariffs for oil piped across its territory are lower than in other transit countries. And considering that Kazakhstan's oil refining industry is currently in a state of crisis, Astana could benefit from wider use of tolling arrangements to refine its oil at Belarus enterprises, with the possibility of subsequent sale of the resulting products in CIS and European markets.

In 2000, transit of Kazakhstan oil via Belarus totaled 2 million tonnes. In 2001, about 1 million tonnes of oil was refined under tolling arrangements.<sup>7</sup>

Bilateral cooperation in the oil business is based on mutually beneficial use of Kazakhstan crude oil and Belarus pipelines and refineries. By now virtually all questions have been resolved: patterns of sale and joint refining of oil (with subsequent sale of products) have been agreed. In the event, contract prices for crude oil are set at world level and in hard currency. Belarus is prepared to reduce tariffs for the transit of Kazakhstan oil to Poland and Germany. The thing to do now is to sign the intergovernmental agreement on cooperation in developing the two countries' fuel and energy complexes whose draft was initialed back in 2001. The optimal solution here is to set up a joint venture that would enjoy the same fiscal benefits as similar foreign companies. In addition, privatization in the Belarus petrochemical complex is getting underway, and this creates fairly good opportunities for Kazakhstan businesses. Over the past three years, RK diplomats have been working on the question of arranging Kazakhstan-Belarus cooperation in the oil sector. This initiative has been supported by the leaders of both countries, and their heads of government have repeatedly emphasized the need for mutually beneficial use of Kazakhstan crude oil in combination with Belarus oil pipelines and refineries.

<sup>6</sup> See: N. Sergeev, "V tsentre vnimania ekonomicheskogo sotrudnichestva." Interview with G. Aldamzharov, RK Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to Belarus, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 17 July, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> See: L. Pakush, "Nekotorye aspekty stimulirovaniia ekonomicheskikh vzaimootnoshenii Belarusi i Kazakhstana," *Al'Pari*, No. 1, 2002, p. 33.

With this aim in view, working meetings were held in Minsk in July 2002 between top executives of the KazMunaiGas company, high-ranking Belarus officials and the president of the Belneftekhim concern (with subsequent visits to refineries in Mozyr and Polotsk). These meetings have resulted in practical understandings in this area. Today Astana is making an allround cost-benefit assessment of possible cooperation.

In order to create an attractive image of long-term economic cooperation under the above-mentioned Program for 1999-2008 among the business community in both republics, it would make sense (in developing regional trade policy) to accentuate the fact that the final stage in the production (i.e., assembly) of Belarus products of interest to Kazakhstan will be transferred to the region of its consumption (sale). For this purpose, it is necessary to set up joint ventures and subsidiaries in Kazakhstan that would operate on production sharing principles.

Another promising area of cooperation in this context is share participation by Belarus economic agents in the development of modern high-technology lines of production in Kazakhstan (for example, transfer of technology, trademarks, know-how, etc.). In particular, Belarus has unique experience and research and production facilities in developing hard alloys (Belarus Powder Metallurgy Concern).

As we saw above, there are various reasons holding back the development of bilateral trade and economic relations. Here are some examples of measures taken to overcome these obstacles. In February 1999, the two countries signed an intergovernmental agreement on the principles of collecting indirect taxes on exports and imports, whose main purpose is payment of VAT at the place of consumption of goods. Mutual trade is to be based on international rules for levying indirect taxes in accordance with the most widely recognized "country of destination" principle. Its main advantage is that the state is fully in control of its revenue regardless of the impact of taxation rules applied in other countries. All taxes payable on imports remain in the importing state. In the event, the prices of export goods tend to go down, the competitiveness of goods increases, and productivity in both countries is enhanced.<sup>8</sup>

In order to normalize mutual financial settlements and to provide funding for Kazakhstan production projects in Belarus, the first bank with 100% Kazakhstan capital, AstanaEximbank, was opened in Minsk in September 2002. It was founded by the RK Grain Union and the firm Alibi with the organizational support of the Kazakhstan embassy. Much could also be done in this respect by Priorbank, whose financial resources have largely been formed with the participation of Austrian capital.

Yet another major area is more active cooperation in the cultural and humanitarian fields. During President Nazarbaev's visit to Minsk in January 1996, the two sides signed an agreement on cooperation in the field of culture, science and education. The main attention in this document is focused on culture and art, health care and medical science, and on the functioning of the Kazakhstan President's personal representative office at the Presidium of the Belarus Academy of Sciences. The work of this office helps to intensify contacts in the field of science. This includes mutual proposals by researchers for implementing their achievements in the national economic complexes of both countries, for joint research in basic science and joint development projects.

As part of this process, the rectors of two academies—under the presidents of Kazakhstan and Belarus—signed a Protocol on Cooperation in June 2002, which provides, among other things, for assistance in advanced training of research and education personnel, in organizing mutual practical training, and in joint research into the problems of government service and state administration.

Over 110 thousand ethnic Belarusians now live in Kazakhstan, mostly in the Akmolinsk, Western Kazakhstan, Karaganda, Kostanay and Pavlodar regions. The Belarus embassy in Kazakhstan pays special attention to this diaspora. Eight regional ethnic cultural centers have been set up in the country. So-called Renaissance schools established under the Minor Assemblies of the Peoples of Kazakhstan have opened classes for the study of the Belarusian language, the republic's history and cultural traditions. Since 1992, the cultural center Belarus has been working in Almaty. In the Western Kazakhstan Region there is a class where Belarusian is studied as a native language and a Belarusian Sunday school. Belarusian lessons have also been arranged on the Kokshetau radio. All these measures are designed to reduce Belarusian emigration from Kazakhstan. It was significant in the early 1990s, but has now decreased to four

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<sup>8</sup> See: *Panorama*, 5 February, 1999.

or five thousand people per year.<sup>9</sup> One should note the considerable contribution of this diaspora to Kazakhstan's economy, politics and culture. For example, P. Atrushkevich, a Belarusian, for a long time headed the elite Architectural-Building Academy in Almaty, and was then elected senator and head of the Kazakhstan People's Assembly.

As regards Belarus, there are about 300 Kazakhs living in that country.<sup>10</sup> The Kazakhstan-Belarus Friendship Society set up in Minsk is working actively. To mark the centenary of the birth of the great Kazakh writer M. Auezov in 1997, one of the streets in the Belarus capital was named after him by decision of the Minsk city authorities.

In order to enhance the positive public image of Kazakhstan as the most politically stable and dynamically developing country in Central Asia, RK embassy officials in Belarus hold regular meetings with journalists, members of the public and the Kazakh diaspora in Belarus, and issue press releases on the democratic reforms in this country and its domestic and foreign policy strategy.

Efforts to propagate Kazakhstan's cultural heritage include such actions as the issue of an almanac (Great Steppe) in the Belarus journal *Vsemirnaia literatura*, which includes works by Kazakhstan poets and writers and articles on culture, a retrospective of Kazakhstan films, and many publications in the Belarus press on the centenary of S. Mukanov, writer and member of the Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences, on the 1500th anniversary of Turkestan, etc. As part of the activities to mark the 10th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence organized jointly with the Belarus Society of Friendship with Foreign Countries (2002), a number of newspapers held a quiz in order to propagate Kazakhstan's history, natural diversity, culture and current economic development, and also Belarus-Kazakhstan relations. A major segment of joint activities was the production by the Khabar Agency (Kazakhstan) of a documentary film, "Ten Years Older," with the participation of Belarus politicians. Materials showing Kazakhstan's approaches to CIS strategy and priority tasks, to the problems of bilateral cooperation and the mechanisms for resolving them were widely circulated in the host country.

In 2002, a notable event of public life in Belarus was the presentation of President Nazarbaev's book, *In the Stream of History*, published in Belarusian. A literary soiree held at the Belarus Society of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries was attended by public figures, scholars and artists. They spoke about the wide public response that the book was bound to have and about its importance in the bilateral exchange of cultural and sociopolitical experience.

So, Kazakhstan-Belarus relations can be tentatively divided into three stages. Stage one (1992-1995) is associated with the establishment of bilateral diplomatic relations. Stage two (1996-1999) was much more dynamic. In particular, the contractual framework elaborated as the result of a series of mutual visits by the two heads of state provided a legal basis for the further development of mutually beneficial contacts. Relations in the field of culture began to gather momentum. At the same time, that stage is associated with the emergence of serious factors (subjective and objective) holding back the development of cooperation, primarily in the economy. During stage three (1999-2004), steps have been taken to remedy these shortcomings. Special note here should be taken of the signing of the Agreement of Long-Term Economic Cooperation for 1999-2008. At this stage, the two countries have also established military-political contacts.

On the whole, Kazakhstan-Belarus cooperation is characterized by an active political and economic dialog (in the latter case with some reservations), by equality and partnership within the framework of bilateral and multilateral relations. In this article we have focused on economic issues, and this is only natural. First, the economy is an area where Kazakhstan-Belarus relations have reached their fullest scope. Second, the complex and contradictory nature of mutual relations in this area points to its indisputable priority in bilateral ties. At the same time, successes in economic cooperation are impossible without intensive political contracts. Interaction between the two states, whatever its complexities, goes beyond the framework of interstate contacts and, in my opinion, is one of the cementing foundations of the EurAsEC and the CIS as a whole.

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<sup>9</sup> See: Yu. Kirimitsianov, "Kazakhstan i Belarus—razgovor bez lakirovki," Business Review *Respublika*, 15 February, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> See: N. Aidarov, *Stepnaia diplomatiia odevaetsia vo frak*, Minsk, 1998, p. 137.