

# **Lecture “The major Geopolitical Challenges of Central Asia Today”**

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**Ambassador Mark Geleyn**, Director General of the Economic and Bilateral External Relations of FPS Foreign Affairs:

“Your Excellency,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to this seminar in which we have the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan talking about the geo-political aspects of his country. Imagine that you are in 1992, that you are reading a newspaper of today and you would read that the Baltic countries are now preparing for membership in the European Union. It seems so easy and so logical now. It was just an impossible thought twelve years ago. You would not have read in a newspaper of ’92 that the minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic Kazakhstan would now be in Brussels on a working visit or would be visiting the Commission.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs Tokaev will talk to you about geopolitics. You know, geopolitics was a dirty word, only a few years ago, because it did not fit with modernism, progress, planning and the modern economy. And now geopolitics is back in full force with a vengeance. We have to deal with it every day. Mister Minister, during the twelve years of the existence of the independent state of Kazakhstan, your country not only integrated very successfully in the international community in such a short time, but has also managed to play a very important and stabilising role in that volatile region. What I consider as one of the main achievements in ten years is the fact that you gained a status of non-nuclear power and adopted a policy of non-proliferation. We were all looking with suspicion and with a sort of fear and mixed feelings to the fact that after the implosion of the Soviet Union several of those countries had a nuclear status. You, from your own will decided to do otherwise and we respect you for doing that. It is an honour to have you here, mister Minister, and to share with us the insiders’ views of the major geopolitical challenges of Central Asia today. And as you are a professional diplomat yourself - you served in different other countries, Singapore, Moscow, Beijing, before your appointment as Foreign Minister - we took very much note of that, because it boosts our career planning in the Foreign Ministry here in Belgium. Sir, we are looking forward to your lecture. You have the floor.”

## **Minister of Foreign Affairs Tokaev:**

“I really appreciate the so kind and eloquent introduction of Ambassador Mark Geleyn. I am very much honoured to be in this magnificent building. It is my honour to address this very respective audience. Twelve or fifteen years ago, nobody could expect that Kazakhstan would be addressing the international community. During the last twelve years, despite all the doubts, all over the world, Kazakhstan succeeded to build up its own statehood. I would say that indeed there were many doubts whether Kazakhstan would be able to do so, taking into

account all the complexities with regard to the demographic situation as well as all the challenges from inside as well as from outside. But we did it. We are very much proud that Kazakhstan has become an indispensable part of the international community. At the same time we succeeded to assure liberal reforms and first of all in the economic area. Kazakhstan was one of the first CIS countries that was recognized by the European Union as well as by the US administration to be a country with a market economy.

Despite the very complicated political neighbourhood or environment, we started our reforms. We are still pursuing these reforms. We do not believe that reforms can be halted or completed, even if someone in Kazakhstan or elsewhere would like to stop or even push back liberal reforms. This would be a big failure because people of Kazakhstan demand reforms. People want to see Kazakhstan as an open society with an open and transparent economic and political system. As far as the government of Kazakhstan is concerned, we believe that these reforms must be pursued on a gradual basis, taking into account the necessity of protecting our safety and security, protecting our statehood and ensuring the future of our country.

Central Asia is quite a complicated region. Central Asia itself is not homogenous. There are five countries and all of us are different, despite the fact that our historical background, our traditions are very close to each other. And we used to have a very close and active interaction. First of all, we are different in terms of our economic potential. Secondly, we are different in terms of assessing the ways of how we could develop our economy. And thirdly, we are different in assessing the entire geopolitical situation. But despite all these differences, we are trying to be consolidated in order to pursue an economic, political as well as a regional cooperation.

Kazakhstan, being an open society with a liberal type of economy is very much interested in forging and enhancing the regional cooperation. Our commitment is very strong. At the same time it is very simple, because during the last twelve years we used to accumulate - in terms of Central Asia - a big amount of finances which need to be invested abroad. So our aim is to open up additional markets outside our country, to create mutually beneficial projects and to assist the process of developing market economies in our neighbourhood.

On the political or diplomatic level we are quite active within Central Asia. In this respect I would like to mention the organisation of Central Asian cooperation, which is quite successful, despite the fact that we are not happy about everything which is taking place within this organisation. But we are trying to enhance this community, to make it more pragmatic and more practical. What does it mean? It means, first of all, to overcome the existing challenges and difficulties. The lack of water resources is a very acute problem which is on the agenda of this organisation. During the last ten years, we failed to create feasible projects to set up joint water and energy resources. During the last summit in Kazakhstan, the leaders of four countries decided to apply to the international organisations and to the major financial institutions asking them to assist the Central Asian countries to prepare such kind of feasibility studies. And we believe that the World Bank, IMF, Islamic bank, Asian bank, as well as the European Bank would be very much helpful for us to prepare the feasibility studies of these projects, which will be very necessary to enhance the regional cooperation as well as to give impetus to the development of our economies.

Central Asia is a huge region in terms of population. Almost 60 million people live in our part of the world. It is rich in terms of mineral resources and to name Kazakhstan, we possess probably the richest deposits or the largest deposits of oil and gas as well as other kinds of mineral resources. Talking about oil and gas, the projected amount of hydrocarbons is more than 120 billion barrels. It is a huge amount of oil, of hydrocarbons which need to be explored. The government of Kazakhstan should create a special programme of exploration of

oil and gas on the offshore of the Caspian sea. We believe that all the major companies could come to Kazakhstan and take part in this process of exploration of hydrocarbons. But at the same time, oil and gas is considered to be a good asset for pursuing the innovation of our economy, in order to make it more diversified. We attach big importance to the setting up of such institutions like IT zones or in order to develop high technologies. We attach big importance to the educational sphere. Properly educated people are needed in order to be in full compliance with the European standards and in order to be able to contribute to the development of Kazakhstan.

There are a lot of challenges. I have just said that the Central Asian region is very much complicated and difficult. We must be frank to say that. There are a lot of difficulties for regional cooperation, for the development of our economies, given other challenges which go from inside as well as from outside: international terrorism, illegal migration, the shortage of water resources, drug trafficking and in this respect I have to mention the problem of Afghanistan despite the success of the anti-terror operation carried out by international coalition - Kazakhstan was one of the Central Asian countries to resolutely support this operation. We provided our airspace and our airport for emergency landings of the US as well as other military aircrafts. We must admit that the first stage was successful, but the international community must contribute in order to ensure the success of the second stage. Despite all the efforts of the international community under the auspices of the United Nations and the efforts of Central Asian countries which are very much active in supporting Afghanistan, like our neighbouring country Uzbekistan, Afghanistan is still unstable. The President Hamid Karzai deserves to be supported by the international community, but still he is not able to control the entire territory of this country. Unfortunately, we are witnessing the growing production of drugs in this country. This year will be in a very negative sense a record year for the drug harvest in accordance with the data provided by the United Nations on drug control. The drug products or poppies from Afghanistan have become more and more competitive on the international market, including the market of Latin America, including the market of Latin America. Central Asia is becoming a crossroad or transportation road for illegal drugs trafficking. This is a big challenge, not only to the economies, not only to the house care of the people, but it is also a big threat to the safety and the security of Central Asia. We believe that the entire international community has to unite its efforts in order to combat the illegal drugs trafficking from Central, from Afghanistan across the territory of Central Asia to the European markets.

Another issue which I would like to touch upon during my presentation is the activity of Shanghai organisation of cooperation, because I know that the international community is very much interested in seeing how this organisation will carry out its activities in Central Asia. It is a unique organisation, first of all because one of the major members or participants of this organisation is China which was never before joining any organisation, neither military nor political pacts, except for the United Nations. We believe that the Shanghai organisation of cooperation can contribute a lot in order to enhance trade and investment cooperation in Central Asia. It contributes a lot to ensure stability and safety in the region. Being very much interested in enhancing the potential of this organisation, we do believe that there should be no rivalry in the region, neither among the big powers who are involved in the region, nor between the different organisations in the region. In this respect of course I have to express our assessment of the military presence of the United States as well as other major western countries in the region. Our assessment is very simple. It is positive, because we do believe that the United States did a lot of things in order to ensure stability and safety, succeeding in its operation in Afghanistan. They are eliminating the alleged threat which used to exist in Afghanistan threatening the safety of other Central Asian countries.

International terrorism is targeting each of the countries in the region and that is the reason why we do believe that all the powers in the region, including those who are present militarily, should contribute in order to combat this common threat.

I'll say a few words about our assessment of the pipelines. Sometimes Kazakhstan is called a pipeline country because we have to talk a lot about the proposed oil and gas trafficking to the external markets. Geographically, Kazakhstan is a landlocked country, so we have to think how we could transport our hydrocarbons to the external markets. Our view is quite simple. The more pipelines we will have, the better this will be for Kazakhstan. In this respect, we have no political prejudices. We are negotiating with many countries involved and with major companies. You know that there is a project called CPC, which goes from the western part of Kazakhstan to the Black Sea. It has become functional and operational. We hope that this project will be able to transport more than 20 million tons of oil from Kazakhstan.

At the same time, we understand that China is becoming more and more a promising market. We have a common border of 1700 km, which by the way has been regulated and judicially solved and adopted, approved, so we are negotiating with China on how we could supply them with oil in the nearest ten years. There is a project which is being studied from the point of view of feasibility, its own feasibility. We believe that in the nearest ten years the pipeline will be constructed on the territory of Kazakhstan and will go to the Chinese market, which is quite promising. We are also very positive to other projects such as the construction of a pipeline going from the western part of Kazakhstan to Turkey. We do not exclude the possibility of constructing the pipeline which will go to Iran.

Nowadays, we produce 53 million tons of oil, and as a matter of fact we could double this amount of production. Kazakhstan will then solidify its economic basis to pursue further economic reforms and to make the economy of Kazakhstan more diversified and more contemporary.

I say a few words about our claim to become the president of OSCE in 2009. By the way during my meetings here in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs we talked about this issue. We know that Belgium is claiming its own presidency in the OSCE in 2007. As far as Belgium is concerned, we have no doubts that your country will become president of this organisation. As far as Kazakhstan is concerned, we know that there are some doubts abroad. There are many questions addressed to myself as well as to other representatives of my country. We want to apply for this chairmanship in the OSCE because first of all, we fully understand the importance and the difficulty of this issue. It is a challenge not only for OSCE itself, but for Kazakhstan. It is an impetus for us to follow up with the political reforms in order to make the country in full compliance with the international standards and those adopted by OSCE itself. So our commitment in this respect is quite clear. When addressing to OSCE, to our partners within this organisation, we want to see your support, to obtain your spiritual assistance and your understanding, because, not exaggerating, pursuing liberal, drastic reforms during the last several years, it is not so easy because of the complicated geopolitical situation around the Central Asia.

Thank you very much.”