

Chapter 11

The Eurasian Idea of Nursultan Nazarbayev

Yerzhan Saltybayev

Institute of World Economics and Politics Under the Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan

Lidiya Parkhomchik

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3666-9294>

Institute of World Economics and Politics Under the Foundation of the First President of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan

ABSTRACT

The First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev had always emphasized the mutual influences of the culture and religions of people living in the country. Having absorbed both the European and Asian traditions Kazakhstan illustrates the principles of a diverse country that could build bridges among West and East. It became obvious that the newly independent nation led by Nursultan Nazarbayev was confronted with the need to find new forms of cooperation with the world community after the major geopolitical change. As a result, the Leader of the Nation proposed the long-term initiative, namely, the Eurasian idea that was designed to create an atmosphere of mutual confidence and cooperation. In this regard, this chapter will briefly identify the preconditions for the introduction of the Eurasian initiative with special emphasis placed on the transformation of Kazakhstan's vision of the issue. As a result, the conclusions of this chapter focus on the further prospects for integration between the Eurasian states within the frameworks of Nazarbayev's Eurasian concept.

INTRODUCTION

After independence in 1991, Kazakhstan entered the period of state construction and development, which was accompanied by a soviet-to-nation-state transformation. Kazakhstan focused on the search for identity-building policies that would be most suited for multi-ethnic society. Being a community of different nationalities, Kazakhstan has long accorded particular attention to the measures that improve inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony. As of July 1, 2019, the population of the country amounted to

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18.5 million people (Statistics Committee of Kazakhstan, 2019a). Nowadays over 32.02% of Kazakhstan's population presented by ethnic minorities, such as ethnic Russians (19.32%), Uzbeks (3.21%), Ukrainians (1.47%), Uygurs (1.47%), Tatars (1.1%) and others (Statistics Committee of Kazakhstan, 2019b). Therefore, it is not surprising that the First President Nursultan Nazarbayev had always emphasized the mutual influences of the culture and religions of people living in the country.

The vast steppe landscape of Kazakhstan also called the Great Steppe or the Eurasian Steppe gives rise to the very feeling of the Eurasianism. The Kazakh steppe's environmental conditions have a particular role in the establishing the nomadic style of life, which has left a lasting mark on the idea, traditions, customs and behavior (Laumulin & Laumulin, 2009). As a result, the socio-political structures of nomads generated desire to travel across boundaries blurring the lines between nations. Even in the 21st century Kazakhstan feels a connection with its cultural heritage associated with steppes and nomadic way of life. Located in the heart of the Eurasian Steppe, where East meets West, contemporary Kazakhstan is marked by ethno-cultural richness, which explained natural tolerance and openness of the Kazakh population to others. Under these circumstances, Kazakhstan claims that its unique combination of different cultures and traditions allows identifying itself as a Eurasian state. Therefore, there is a strong need to analyze Kazakhstan's approach to the integration among the Eurasian states.

The purpose of the chapter is to briefly define Kazakhstan's vision of Eurasianism and study its further development. Since the concept of Eurasianism has changed and evolved over time, the chapter raises key points in its evolution summarizing the benefits and advantages of Nursultan Nazarbayev's Eurasian idea for peacebuilding and economic development of the region in general and Kazakhstan in particular.

The analysis is based mainly on analytical materials of scholars specialized in the Eurasian studies with special attention given to books and articles authored by Nursultan Nazarbayev as a thought-leader of the Eurasian integration.

This chapter consists of three parts. The first part is devoted to analyzing the specific features of Nazarbayev's Eurasianism. The second part focuses on the evolution of Nursultan Nazarbayev's approaches to the Eurasian Union. In the third part, the author evaluates fundamental grounds of the Eurasian idea for the foreign and domestic policies of Kazakhstan.

BACKGROUND

The concept of Eurasianism came to Kazakhstan with Russian influence in the region and serves as a policy doctrine in implementing geopolitical ambitions, goals, and objectives. The Eurasian paradigm justifies Kazakhstan's ties with China, the West, Asia and the Middle East, counterbalancing Russia (Genté, 2010). This strategy involves a real opening up to the world. By a multi-dimensional foreign policy based on the Eurasianism Kazakhstan identifies itself as bridge lying between Europe and Asia.

For the purpose of review and analysis, the vast body of literature authored by the classical and modern writers of geopolitics and the concepts of Eurasia was studied. The literature on the issue can be conditionally divided into the supporters of the concept of Eurasianism and authors who criticize the concepts of Eurasia. The first group comprises both authors of Russian-origin and non-Russian researchers advocating for strengthening geopolitical ties within the Eurasian space. It is understandable that the founders of Eurasianism the so-called classical Eurasianists, like, Nikolai Trubetzkoy, Piotr Savvyzky, Nikolay Alekseyev, Georgii Florovsky, Andrey Liven, and Georgii Vernadsky, based their ideology on the Russian social-Orthodox school. Born in Europe among the Russian immigrants the Eurasianism

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