

# Looking East? An Analysis of Kazakhstan's Geopolitical Code after Participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative

Giulia Sciorati

Università di Trento, Italia

**Abstract** Kazakhstan's geopolitical landscape plays a decisive role in framing its multi-vector foreign policy. Not only is the country landlocked by five states, but it is also enclosed between two regional powers, China and Russia. When joining the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Kazakhstan made firm commitments to China, potentially putting its multi-vectorism at risk. The paper adopts geopolitical codes as a theoretical framework to account for changes in the country's geopolitical considerations. It presents a qualitative discourse analysis on the presidential 'State of the Nation Addresses'. The research contributes to the literature on Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism by conducting a data-driven analysis that maintains geography at the core.

**Keywords** Foreign Policy. Multi-vectorism. Geopolitical Codes. Discourse Analysis. Kazakhstan-China Relations.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 Competing Explanations for Kazakhstan's Multi-vectorism. – 3 Geopolitical Codes as a Framework for Kazakhstan's Multi-vectorism. – 4 Research Design, Methodology and Data Selection. – 5 Navigating Nazarbayev's Discursive Landscape. – 6 Interests and Threats in Kazakhstan's Geopolitical Codes. – 7 Responses and Justifications in Kazakhstan's Geopolitical Codes. – 7.1 Integration in the Global Economy. – 7.2 Advancing the Eastern Vector. – 8 Conclusions.



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari

**Eurasiatica 18**

e-ISSN 2610-9433 | ISSN 2610-8879

ISBN [ebook] 978-88-6969-550-6 | ISBN [print] 978-88-6969-551-3

**Peer review | Open access**

Submitted 2021-04-06 | Accepted 2021-06-30 | Published 2021-12-21

© 2021 Creative Commons 4.0 Attribution alone

**DOI 10.30687/978-88-6969-550-6/011**

## 1 Introduction

The geopolitical landscape plays a crucial role in framing Kazakhstan's foreign policy. On the one hand, the country is landlocked by five states; on the other, it is also surrounded by great powers like China and Russia. Maintaining cooperative relations with neighbouring countries, differentiating trade routes, and increasing connectivity are thus essential objectives for the Kazakhstani leadership. After the BRI's launch, Kazakhstan made a dual commitment to Beijing. On the one hand, the country created a special trade zone in Khorghos; on the other, it launched the Nurly Zhol, a national development plan that complements BRI's investments. Building on the work conducted by Thomas Ambrosio and William A. Lange on Kazakhstan's geopolitical code from 1991 to 2014 (2014), this research expands the timeframe, using previous findings as a basis to investigate the extent to which Kazakhstan's geopolitical orientation evolved after the country participated in China's BRI.<sup>1</sup> In the first section, the research is placed within the literature on Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism. The theoretical framework, the research design, the methodology and the data are discussed in the subsequent sections. Then, findings from the qualitative discourse analysis are presented in sections four to seven. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion on the main results.

## 2 Competing Explanations for Kazakhstan's Multi-vectorism

Since its independence, scholars have examined Kazakhstan's foreign policy under different lenses. While the exploitation of foreign policy for identity- and nation-building purposes constitutes the starting point of several investigations (e.g., Cummings 2003; Anceschi 2014), the vast majority of studies focuses on the country's multi-vectorism (among others, Hanks 2009; Ambrosio, Lange 2014; Omelicheva, Du 2018; Sullivan 2019). Simply put, multi-vectorism defines a 'pragmat-

---

The author is grateful to the two anonymous reviewers and the editors for the useful comments.

**1** In this work, China's BRI is understood as an expression of the country's grand strategy, consistently with the argument put forward by Zhou Weifeng and Mario Esteban (2018). As a consequence, Kazakhstan's participation in the BRI is considered as an advancement of China's penetration in Kazakhstan, with Beijing's foreign policy and the BRI here indicating the same engagement process. When addressing Kazakhstan's approach to Asia, moreover, the research assumes that China remains at the centre of Kazakhstan's geopolitical considerations, given the role of economic and political superpower acquired by the country over the continent (Das 2014). In this study, the BRI, China and Asia thus constitute a single foreign policy vector for Kazakhstan - that is, the East.

ic foreign policy' - i.e., one that disregards ideological calculations favouring the pursuit of states' interests. As Reul R. Hanks argues (2009), the emphasis placed on self-interest and self-preservation links multi-vectorism to the realist approach to International Relations. In practice, multi-vectorism has come to identify the pursue of a diversified foreign policy to establish "cordial relations" (Sullivan 2017, 274) with other systemic actors, especially neighbouring great powers. Although several post-Soviet countries have relied on a multi-vector foreign policy after independence, Kazakhstan is among the few Central Asian countries that consistently carried it out throughout its thirty years of independence (Hanks 2009; Sullivan 2019). Although Uzbekistan may also be singled out as a successful case for multi-vectorism in Central Asia, Kazakhstan deviated the least from the conceptualisation adopted right after independence than any other post-Soviet nation (Hanks 2009).

The literature on Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism may be divided into three main strands. The first looks at changes in multi-vectorism pursued by the country, asking questions on their rationale. This strand also investigates the conditions under which multi-vectorism has been effective and its impact on the international system. This is the case of the studies conducted, among others, by Robert M. Cutler (2002), Reul R. Hanks (2009) and Charles J. Sullivan (2019). Still, most of these investigations identify in great power competition the critical determinant of Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism. Indeed, the main argument of these studies is that multi-vectorism significantly exposes the country to the risk of being influenced by great powers and, in particular, *regional* great powers like Russia or China. In particular, shaking off dependency from Russia is identified as the primary reason behind Kazakhstan's adoption of multi-vectorism (Kakenova et al. 2016). This argument is central when looking at the relationship between Russia and Kazakhstan in the security domain, pointing to Kazakhstan's overreliance on Russian security. In the same vein, some recent studies have connected Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism to great power competition by presenting the strategy as a form of complex balancing, either making a case for the application of Evelyn Goh's theory of enmeshment to Kazakhstan (Vanderhill, Joireman, Tulepbayeva 2020) or defining multi-vectorism as a cooperative strategy aimed at reducing the revisionist potential of neighbouring great powers (notably, Russia) by sharing "norms, identities, membership, incentives, and costs" (Tskhay, Costa Buranelli 2020, 1047).

The second strand of the literature on Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism looks at the country's vast energy resources and its unique status as a landlocked state at the centre of Eurasia as the main elements that inform the country's foreign policy. This approach holds that multi-vectorism is either ensured by Kazakhstan's interests in exporting energy resources (e.g., İpek 2007; Koch 2013) or the country's landlocked

geography (e.g., Kassen 2018). Lastly, the third strand details specific vectors of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, such as relations with neighbouring great powers like Russia or China (e.g., Laruelle, Royce, Beysembayev 2019), security issues, or competition in the Caspian sea.

In his latest book, Luca Anceschi (2020) makes a case against the centrality of multi-vectorism in Kazakhstan's foreign policy-making, arguing that the country maintained the partnership with Russia at the centre of policy considerations. Therefore, in Anceschi's view, multi-vectorism should be understood as "a mere postscript" (167) in Kazakhstan's neo-Eurasianist agenda. Although Russia maintained a preferential position, Kazakhstan's efforts to emancipate from the identity of a post-Soviet republic and consolidate its role as a rising regional player support the notion that Astana adopted a strategy driven by other interests than a balanced relationship with Russia.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, investigations on the changes in Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism can benefit from in-depth analyses on the country's prioritisation of specific issues or partnerships, including Russia. In addition, these studies can shed some light on the powers that hold the most influence over Kazakhstan.

Following Ambrosio and Lange (2014), this paper moves in this direction. In their work, the authors propose an investigation of Kazakhstan's foreign policy that relies on geopolitical codes, presented in the following section. The authors operationalised geopolitical codes via a discourse analysis on the country's State of the Nation Addresses from 1991 to 2014. Ambrosio and Lange observe a slight variation in geopolitical codes within this timeframe, detecting few mentions of external threats and emphasising the need to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy and fully integrate Kazakhstan into the global economy. Moreover, in their analysis, the authors identify Russia and China as the primary vectors of the country's foreign policy, engaging the same number of mentions in the analysed documents.

This work thus proposes to advance Ambrosio and Lange's work in two ways. First, the paper will continue the analysis on Kazakhstan's geopolitical codes following what is here posited to be a shift in Kazakhstan's geopolitical world order (Taylor, Flint 2000) – i.e., the country's participation in China's BRI – which has the potential to cause a considerable change in Kazakhstan's geopolitical considerations. Second, this work will pay particular attention to the Eastern vector situated within the broader context of Kazakhstan's complex multi-vectorism. By doing so, the research offers an in-depth examination of one

---

<sup>2</sup> For instance, considering to drop the *stan* suffix from the country's name (Brauer 2014) or establishing the national agency for international development (Abilgazina 2020) are evidence of Kazakhstan's emancipation process and diversified foreign policy interests.

of the two vectors that Ambrosio and Lange identify as the most represented in Kazakhstan's foreign policy discourse between 1991 and 2014 without overlooking the country's geopolitical landscape.

### **3 Geopolitical Codes as a Framework for Kazakhstan's Multi-vectorism**

In an effort to understand the beliefs that determine Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy - i.e., the context in which policy-makers imagine to be making decisions and the lenses under which they view their country's conditions, threats and opportunities - this paper adopts the concept of geopolitical codes as a theoretical framework, building on the insights presented by Ambrosio and Lange in their work on Kazakhstan's geopolitical considerations from independence to 2014.

Geopolitical codes were first theorised by John Lewis Gaddis (1982), who employed them to understand the principles that moved foreign and security policy decision-making in the US after the Second World War. In his work, Gaddis argued that states' foreign policy is guided by "certain 'strategic' or 'geopolitical' codes, assumptions about [...] interests in the world, potential threats [...] and feasible responses" (Gaddis 1982, ix). Geopolitical codes, therefore, are crucial because they lay down the principles against which foreign policy is conceived. Further developing Gaddis' work, Gertjan Dijkink (1996) coined the term 'geopolitical visions'. From his viewpoint, these are ideas that states produce when considering their relations with other systemic actors. According to Dijkink, in particular, these ideas emerge from the way states perceive their position *vis-à-vis* others, security and insecurity, advantages and disadvantages, or their role as pursuers of a collective mission. Therefore, geopolitical codes are identified as a 'map', where countries are coloured differently per the degrees of hostility or friendship perceived by states (Dijkink 1998). Dijkink's representational approach of geopolitical codes was further developed by Peter J. Taylor and Colin Flint (2000). They argued that these are "highly biased pictures of the world" (91) because not only do they place the state at the centre, but they also convey a single state's worldview. The belief that underlies this particular notion of geopolitical codes is that international politics is constructed by systemic actors' interactions, limited by the structure of international politics itself (Flint 2021; Taylor 1993). Accordingly, geopolitical codes are strategic assumptions that inform states' foreign policy by evaluating other systemic actors following "a state's interests, an identification of external threats to those interests, a planned response to such threats, and a justification of that response" (Huliaras, Tsardanidis 2006, 465-6). Scholars still disagree on the prowess

of geopolitical codes to change. For instance, Gaddis (1982) argued for extremely modifiable geopolitical codes, sensitive to government changes. Conversely, Taylor and Flint (2000) contended that geopolitical codes are relatively stable, with changes occurring concurrently to shifts in the geopolitical world order. Nonetheless, as argued elsewhere, Kazakhstan's geopolitical assumptions are "potentially precarious" (Ambrosio, Lange 2014, 538), thus making the country prone to experience more frequent changes.

Therefore, when discussing states' foreign policy, geopolitical codes offer a comprehensive theoretical framework to connect states' national interests to geographically-driven considerations. Given the centrality of geography in Kazakhstan's foreign policy-making, employing geopolitical codes to investigate the country's foreign policy choices allows distinguishing between the interests, threats, responses and justifications that underscore the decisions of foreign policy-makers and, at the same time, account for the impact of geography. Moreover, geopolitical codes offer a framework that can navigate the complexity of the country's multi-vectorism. By translating geopolitical principles into their constitutive elements, foreign policy choices are operationalised, thus allowing to draw quantifiable conclusions on the broader geopolitical considerations that inform Kazakhstan's policy-makers.

#### **4 Research Design, Methodology and Data Selection**

The paper presents a longitudinal study of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy. The research seeks to investigate the country's geopolitical orientation following Kazakhstan's participation in China's BRI. In particular, the study examines the interests, threats, responses and justifications that compose the geopolitical codes of President Nursultan Nazarbayev and inquires whether Kazakhstan's perception of its geopolitical position has changed after joining the BRI. Also, the research asks which were Kazakhstan's considerations with regards to its regional and international role. Consistently with the research question and objectives and the findings on the 1991-2014 period presented by Ambrosio and Lange, the paper analyses the period spanning from 2014 to 2018. Although Kazakhstan played host to China's launch of the BRI in September 2013, the China-Kazakhstan BRI partnership only started to materialise in 2014. Conversely, the end date of 2018 is a critical moment for Kazakhstan's domestic politics, as it marks the last Address of Nazarbayev's thirty-year-long leadership before he formally retired in March 2019.<sup>3</sup>

---

**3** See Lemon 2019.

The research adopts a historical study design. Discourse analysis was chosen as a method of inquiry and was conducted by employing qualitative data analysis and a research software (ATLAS.ti).<sup>4</sup> Discourse analysis has a social-constructivist epistemology that contends that social reality is a living process created by interactions (Phillips, Lawrence, Hardy 2004). It treats discourses as “concrete” in the sense that “they produce a material reality in the practices that they invoke” (Hardy, Phillips, Harley 2004, 20). Accordingly, discourse analysis accounts for the role of speech acts in communicating a geopolitical culture through geopolitical narratives and producing instances of ‘practical geopolitics’ such as political speeches (O’Loughlin, Ó Tuathail, Kolosov 2005). The annual State of the Nation Addresses, which report on the work done by the government to achieve previously settled goals, was then selected as the primary corpus of data for several reasons. First, the Addresses establish a consistent dataset both in terms of time and type of content. They indeed outline and define Nazarbayev’s geopolitical thinking on an annual or bi-annual basis. Second, the Addresses target an internal audience, but they also engage international stakeholders by offering a yearly overview of Astana’s foreign policy objectives. Third, the Addresses provide a basis for the evolution of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy concept. Fourth, being Nazarbayev the ultimate decision-maker of the country’s foreign policy issues (Elgie 2007), changes in Kazakhstan’s foreign policy priorities are more dependent on the evolution of Nazarbayev’s thought than the context in which the foreign policy concept is expressed or the target audience.

The paper thus examines the entire universe of the 2014-18 Addresses, which includes five speeches. The Addresses were analysed in the English translation after ensuring their consistency with the Russian version. The speeches were collected from the official website of the President of Kazakhstan (Akorda.kz).

## 5 Navigating Nazarbayev’s Discursive Landscape

In the initial phase of the analysis, documents were coded according to international content. The core aim was to identify the amount of text devoted by Nazarbayev to Kazakhstan’s international dimension in the Addresses. Therefore, claims were coded in this category when mentioning the country’s role in the global system, Nazarbayev’s future expectations or plans to change it, and foreign actors, organisations, and regions. Results are presented below [fig. 1].

---

<sup>4</sup> ATLAS.ti was mainly employed to code and compare findings across the primary documents. For more details on the use of software in qualitative research, see Silver, Lewins 2014.

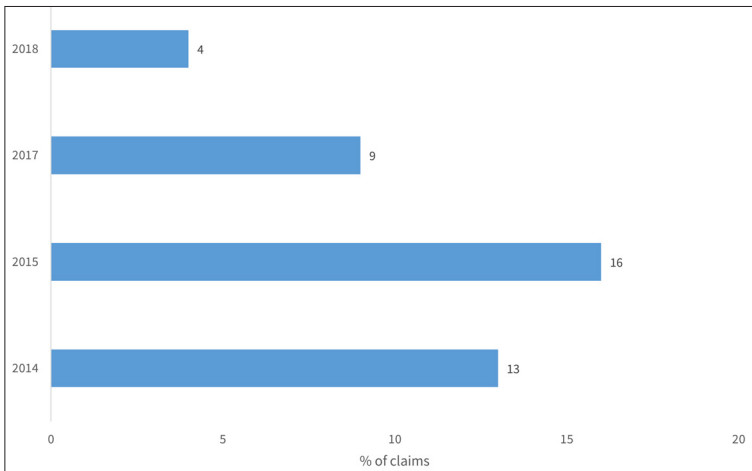


Figure 1 Annual Percentage of International Content

The Addresses Nazarbayev delivered in 2014 were incorporated in the “2014” category to compare the documents annually. Year-on-year inconsistencies are prominent, especially when comparing the first and second halves of the analysed timeframe. Indeed, while between 2014 and 2015 international content constituted over 13 percent of the texts – a value that is consistent with previous Addresses as illustrated by Ambrosio and Lange (2014), from 2017 onwards, instances focusing on Kazakhstan’s international domain remain below 10 percent, making up an average 6 percent of each text. The timing of these inconsistencies is somewhat puzzling. Nazarbayev could have been expected to continue expanding the focus on Kazakhstan’s international dimension, especially as the country in that period had been developing a more prominent global role that attempted to single Kazakhstan out from other Central Asian nations. In 2017, for instance, Kazakhstan was the first Central Asian country to hold the non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (Sanchez 2019). Yet, Nazarbayev’s emphasis on the country’s international role decreased. In total, an average of little over 10 percent of text in Nazarbayev’s 2014-18 Addresses includes international content – a value that is significantly lower than the one presented in the previous period, as the analysis on the Addresses delivered between 1991 and 2014 had shown an average 18 percent of texts devoted to Kazakhstan’s international dimension.<sup>5</sup> However, year-on-year incon-

<sup>5</sup> As Ambrosio and Lange contended (2014), Kazakhstan’s main objective was to develop the national economy. As a consequence, it was only natural that the leadership



sistencies had also been prominent in previous works, and international content had spanned from a minimum value of 6 percent to a maximum of 36 percent in the texts (Ambrosio, Lange 2014). One explanation for Nazarbayev's reduced emphasis on international content may be that Kazakhstan had also been hit by a severe economic and financial crisis that had partly hindered national development and required a thematic re-focus of governmental priorities. Indeed, as annual data of Kazakhstan's gross national income show, national wealth had plummeted after 2013 due to the concurrent effects of Russia's 2014-15 financial crisis and subsequent recession, China's economic slowdown, and the reform of the Kazakhstani *tenge* (i.e., the country's national currency). Indeed, the *tenge* had passed from a fixed exchange rate regime (where the government had been predominantly responsible for determining *tenge* rates) to a floating exchange rate regime, in which the foreign exchange market decides the *tenge* price. As highlighted by the 2016 third economic update for Kazakhstan of the World Bank (2016), this move had diminished the country's purchasing power – directly affecting Kazakhstani civil society and increased national inflation rates. In this light, Nazarbayev's focus on domestic issues might mainly be ascribed to the country's staggering economic prospects.

Despite the prioritisation of national economic development efforts in the texts, the international content of Nazarbayev's Addresses paints a broad picture of the country's multi-vectorism. By discriminating international content by regions, for instance, the Eastern vector in Kazakhstan's foreign policy emerges as the most prominent, making up 14 percent of all international-related claims [fig. 2]. In particular, when China's Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) – that is, the landroute of the BRI – was presented to the world in 2013, the attention paid by the political leadership to the East soared (Laruelle 2018). Data on China reinforce these results, as the country was mentioned the most by Nazarbayev, accounting for almost 50 percent of East-looking claims.

In contrast, Kazakhstan's traditional primary foreign policy vector – i.e., the country's 'traditional neighbourhood' – only makes up 11 percent of total inferences.<sup>6</sup> These findings show a change from the 1991-2014 period analysis' results, which showed that most international claims focused on Kazakhstan's traditional neighbourhood, with China only scoring third place and Russia second (Ambrosio, Lange 2014). Nonetheless, this inconsistency needs to be considered in light of the consolidation of the country's aim to establish a com-

---

devoted little space to the country's international role.

<sup>6</sup> In this work, the 'traditional neighbourhood' comprises claims mentioning 'Central Asia', 'Eurasia', the 'former Soviet Union' and the 'Caspian Sea'.

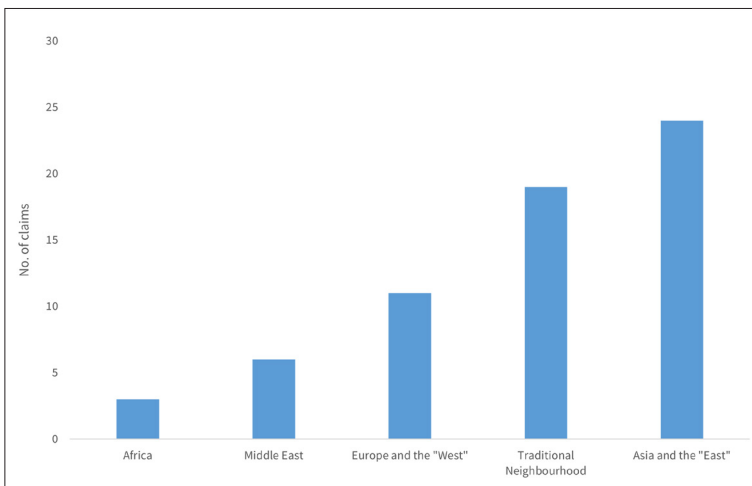


Figure 2 Number of Claims per Region (2014-2018)

prehensive Central Asian cooperative framework, under which regional economic and security issues would be tackled without any assistance from external third parties (Mostafa 2013).

Between 2014 and 2015, Kazakhstan had made its goal of becoming a leading force for Eurasianism evident. In particular, the country drafted an economic plan to support war-torn Afghanistan (Weitz 2013). Astana also opened two dry ports to the US Army to supply troops deployed in Afghanistan without consulting Russia (Eurasianet 2018).

Had no actual prioritisation of the Eastern vector over the Central Asian vector occurred, the "Europe and the 'West'" category would still be only composed of 11 claims, less than a half of the East-looking category. In the previous period, the two regions had swapped places - a change consistent with Kazakhstan's consolidation of its relations with China and the Eastern neighbourhood. Moreover, when examining the claims that constitute regional categories transpire that the majority of the countries mentioned by Nazarbayev are located either in East Asia, South Asia or Southeast Asia [fig. 3]. For instance, among the top five countries referenced in the Addresses are China, India and Singapore. At the same time, European countries are relatively few and are never mentioned more than once.<sup>7</sup> China and Russia are the powers referenced the most, with the former counting 11 mentions, while the latter only counting 6. Iran is the only Middle East-

<sup>7</sup> Only three European countries are mentioned in the Addresses - that is, France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

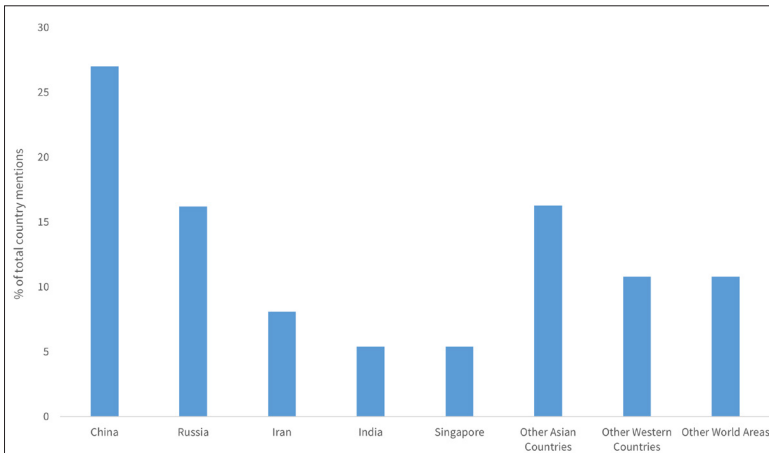


Figure 3 Percentage of Country Mentions (2014-2018)

ern country to be mentioned by Nazarbayev, but it also shows the most mentions after China and Russia. Iran's making the list of the top countries mentioned by Nazarbayev can be traced back to the identarian processes that had been shaking the Gulf region - that is, the discovery of a West Asian identity that invites regional powers to look towards the East.<sup>8</sup> In those claims, Nazarbayev mainly mentions Iran concerning building transport infrastructures and fostering Kazakhstan's national development by exploiting Tehran's resources.

The total number of mentions of China and Russia invites further discussions. In their study, Ambrosio and Lange (2014) had found that Russia had been the foreign power most mentioned by Nazarbayev. After independence, Kazakhstan maintained the same institutional architecture that the country had inherited from the Soviet Union. Moreover, Kazakhstan was asked to come to terms with the mass migration of the workforce from its northern regions to Russia (Cohen 2008). Consequently, Kazakhstan had treated the Russian vector of its foreign policy with particular care and maintained a close relationship with Moscow. After 2013, not only did the relation between Kazakhstan and China become more prominent, thanks to the country's joining the SREB and later developing a national economic development plan aimed at strengthening the national economy to

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive overview on West Asian identity formation in Iran, see Perteghella 2019.

boost Chinese investments,<sup>9</sup> but in 2014 Russia also invaded Crimea (Baizakova, McDermott 2015).

Nazarbayev repeatedly argued when presenting the country's multi-vectorism, this approach attempted to appease adjacent great powers, which could have endangered the government's sovereignty (Sullivan 2019). Moreover, due to Kazakhstan's geographic position between Russia and China, national development became an even more pressing objective. Therefore, the leadership saw it as a viable tool to ensure its independence (Hanks 2009). In particular, Russia's annexation of Crimea pushed Kazakhstan closer to those foreign powers deemed the most capable of contrasting Russia's expansionism (Baizakova, McDermott 2015). Thus, in this period, Russia's scoring among the top countries mentioned in Nazarbayev's Addresses answers a logic of threat, a vital component of the country's geopolitical code. Relations with China, in contrast, present the tools identified by Nazarbayev as the most effective to oppose Russia and assist Kazakhstan's national development.

Although mentions to Western countries take up limited space in Nazarbayev's Addresses, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is devoted to the majority of mentions, when international organisations are taken into consideration (about 25 percent). Indeed, multilateralism remains mainly connected to Western powers, and Western organisations topple other regional frameworks in terms of variety and the total number of mentions [fig. 4].

Russia-led organisations, for instance, namely the Commonwealth of Independent States or the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), only constitute 14 percent of all institution-related content. At the same time, China scores especially low in this domain, as the BRI and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) are mentioned only once in the Addresses. China's traditional diplomatic approach, though, favours the establishment of bilateral relations. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Kazakhstan would have adopted this bilaterally-oriented narrative.

In brief, these findings discuss Nazarbayev's discursive landscape between 2014-18, showing a renewed attention of Kazakhstan's President towards national development, which is considered a catalyst for the consolidation of the country's national sovereignty. Moreover, the increased emphasis on the country's relations with the East (notably, China) emerges with a sharp decrease in the mentions reserved to Europe and Western powers. However, multilateralism is still profoundly connected to Western mediation, as emphasised by the number of claims dedicated to Western organisations.

---

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on the complementarity of the BRI and the Nuryly Zhol, see Kasenova 2017.

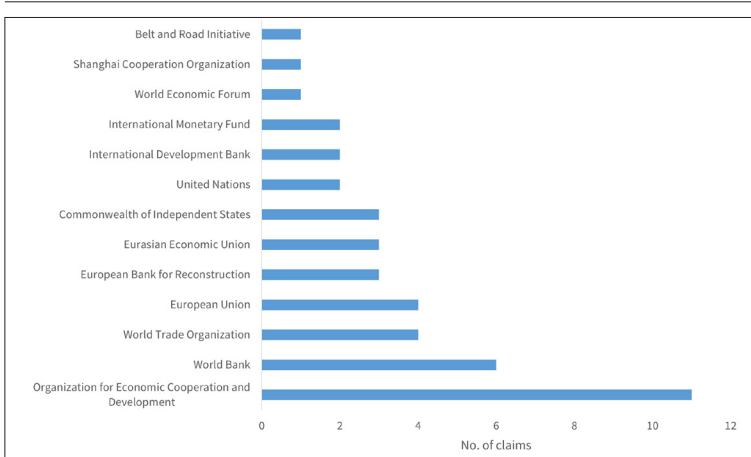


Figure 4 Number of Claims per International Organisation (2014-18)

## 6 Interests and Threats in Kazakhstan's Geopolitical Codes

This section focuses on two of the four elements that determine states' geopolitical codes - interests and threats - while the following sections complete the analysis by presenting the responses enacted by the Kazakhstan's leadership to address the identified threats and the justifications used to support these responses.

Previous studies have shown that, after Kazakhstan became independent, the country's geopolitical codes mainly developed along three lines: geographic position, absence of state-level threats, and good relations with Russia (Ambrosio, Lange 2014). Kazakhstan's leadership emphasised its interest to exploit the benefits offered by the country's location at the crossroads of Eurasia. These were primarily related to having access to various foreign markets in the East and the West, which was believed to be crucial to unlocking the country's full economic potential. Moreover, the presence of regional great powers was not identified as a threat but as an opportunity to formulate an actual multi-vector foreign policy. In contrast, the country's ethnic composition, including numerous communities of Russian origin, was presented as a threat to the adoption of a 'free' foreign policy, as much that building a constructive relationship with Russia was prioritised (Ambrosio, Lange 2014).

The analysis carried out in this work presents similar findings, placing the reliance of the country's leaders on Kazakhstan's geographic position at the core of its geopolitical situation. In the analysed Addresses, though, the advantages offered by the country's location at the centre of Eurasia are presented mainly to justify

national policy choices or share the unique traits of Kazakhstan's newfound regional role. For instance, in the January 2014 Address, Nazarbayev refers to the country's geographic location to support national plans to construct high-quality transport infrastructures (Akorda 2014a). In 2017, the President again relied on Kazakhstan's location to justify investments in the logistic sector (Akorda 2017).

Although the country's geographic position remained a central element in Kazakhstan's geopolitical codes, it is no longer an asset because it facilitates relations with neighbouring foreign partners. Indeed, Kazakhstan's location is mainly appreciated for its role in enhancing the country's main interests in this period – that is, fostering national economic development, diversifying and expanding exports through infrastructures, and contrasting its status as a landlocked nation. Kazakhstan's geographic position is thus primarily associated with the country's international role rather than constructing a network of foreign partnerships that the government had consolidated during Kazakhstan's thirty years as a sovereign state.

It is interesting to notice that, in this period, no state-level threats were specified in the documents. However, this period includes the unfolding of the Crimea crisis, a turning point for Russia's relations with all the countries of the post-Soviet space, including Kazakhstan.<sup>10</sup> Despite a lack of direct mentions, the Addresses stress Kazakhstan's interests in spurring national development and consolidating the country's role in the international system to secure independence and sovereignty. In January 2014, for instance, Nazarbayev clearly stated that sustaining independence is more complex than achieving it. Kazakhstan needed to learn how to defend its independence by studying other nations' past experiences and errors. In Nazarbayev's view, Kazakhstan's independence was “our *wealth and happiness*” (Akorda 2014a, emphasis added). A similar message was emphasised in 2015, the second Address Nazarbayev makes after the Crimea crisis. The former President repeatedly mentions the 25th anniversary of Kazakhstan's independence by referring to the country's status as a sovereign country no less than six times. He indeed contends that while all crises are temporary, “our fundamental values are eternal, our commitment to the independence of our country” (Akorda 2015). Claims stressing Kazakhstan's independence are particularly relevant, as they are the sole comments that can be traced back to the Crimea crisis in Nazarbayev's discourse. No direct mention is made of Russia as a state-level threat for Kazakhstan: a choice that may have responded to diplomatic considerations, thus aiming not to antagonise a neighbouring great power. Mentions to the rela-

---

<sup>10</sup> On the impact of the Crimea crisis on Russia's relationship with Central Asia, see Lanteigne 2018.

tionship with Russia, which had been a cornerstone of Kazakhstan's geopolitical codes in the past, are extremely limited in the Addresses, becoming less frequent as time passes. The 2015 Address is an exception, as Nazarbayev comments on the economic integration between Kazakhstan and Russia. Not only were these remarks spurred by President Vladimir Putin's state visit, but they were also prompted by Putin's openly downplaying Kazakhstan's nationalism and status as an independent country (Najibullah 2014). Russia thus remains in the background of Nazarbayev's geopolitical considerations. Despite being mentioned in numerous passages, the country is mainly included in prospective partners for Kazakhstan. Conversely, relations with the East are mentioned continuously and connected to Kazakhstan's economic goals, representing the country's main interest in this period. Moreover, Nazarbayev often refers to China separately from other countries, thus underlying its relevance.

International terrorism remains the most pressing global threat identified in the documents. Nonetheless, no direct mention to regional-level terrorist groups is made in the texts, not even regarding the issue of the Uyghur secessionist claims in China's north-western Xinjiang, a region that shares a border with Kazakhstan. Chinese authorities treat Uyghur secessionism as terrorism and adopted an extremely intrusive counterterrorism strategy that had even come to affect Kazakhstani nationals residing in Xinjiang.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Nazarbayev only indicates the West's sanction regimes against several countries (including against Russia after the annexation of Crimea) as a threat to the successful and comprehensive relaunch of the global economy after the economic and financial crises (Akorda 2015). The President signalled that economic development represents Kazakhstan's primary interest and economic stagnation as the country's main threat in this period.

In sum, the interests and threats that shape the country's geopolitical codes in this period remain connected to the country's geographic position at the centre of Eurasia. At the same time, despite Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, no state-level threats are mentioned, and international terrorism and economic stagnation are the only threats to be identified as such. Sanction regimes are presented as a challenge to global economic recovery in several documents and emphasise Kazakhstan's main interest - the relaunch and development of the national economy. Relations with Russia, moreover, lose focus. There are no mentions of ethnic Russians living in Kazakhstan, but stress is placed on national ethnic unity. Relations with the East, in contrast, gain importance. In particular, China's business-like ap-

<sup>11</sup> To expand on the connection between the Uyghur issue and Kazakhstan, see Putz 2018; Smith Finley 2019.

proach to international relations is welcomed by Kazakhstan, thus presenting a new focal point in the country's geopolitical landscape.

## 7 Responses and Justifications in Kazakhstan's Geopolitical Codes

Although the full scope of Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism is debated among scholars, the concept remains central in the country's foreign policy strategy. Nazarbayev's Addresses make no exception. Although there is no direct mention of multi-vectorism in the documents, the approach is developed by the long lists of partners that Kazakhstan identifies as the most prominent for the country's foreign relations. As discussed in the previous section, specific interests and threats move the country's geopolitical considerations: economic stagnation is understood as an insidious threat to the country's interests towards national economic development, diversification and expansion of exports, and the fight against Kazakhstan's status of a landlocked nation. The following section discusses the country's emphasis on Kazakhstan's integration in the global economy that is presented as a response to the country's perceived threat of economic stagnation.

### 7.1 Integration in the Global Economy

As a developing country, Kazakhstan had been especially prioritising achievements in the economic sector. After gaining independence, the country put in a great effort to transforming the outdated economic system it had inherited from the Soviet Union into a modern market economy (Pomfret 2005). As a result, thanks to its vast oil and gas reserves, the country managed to expand its GDP by nine times in little over 20 years: Kazakhstan's GDP indeed passed from 25 billion in 1991 to 236 billion in 2013 (current US dollars).<sup>12</sup> In 2013, though, Kazakhstan's GDP peaked, as the 2014 economic crisis significantly slowed the country's growth momentum.

Kazakhstan's inclination to be internationally recognised as a developed economy is made especially evident by transforming the country's relations with international organisations. After obtaining the non-permanent seat at the UNSC in 2017, Kazakhstan started to refuse to be associated with less developed countries and, in particular, poverty-stricken Central Asian states such as Tajikistan. A striking example of this tendency looks at cooperation with the European Commission. Kazakhstan demonstrated a marked preference to

---

<sup>12</sup> Data from the World Bank.



work with DG Trade rather than DG INTPA, which, until then, had been the primary contact point for EU-Central Asia relations, given its mandate, which provides that the DG fosters cooperation with developing countries.<sup>13</sup>

Kazakhstan's strive to be fully recognised as a developed country is predominant in Nazarbayev's Addresses: the President devoted a significant number of claims to stressing the country's need to be included in the 'top thirty most developed countries' in the world (Akorda 2014a; 2014b; 2015; 2017). A total of sixteen claims spread over four Addresses emphasise this goal. Looking at Kazakhstan's advancements in the UN Human Development Index global ranking, the funds and efforts devoted to raising the country's status are also made clear. As a result, Kazakhstan experienced a steady rise, passing from ranking 68th in 2010 to 51st in 2019, showing a practical commitment to national economic development. Despite this positive trend, Kazakhstan's 'top thirty goal' had remained elusive, and, at this juncture, Nazarbayev presents a specific long-term strategy to achieve it.

Despite being a traditional objective for Kazakhstan, it is interesting to notice that, in this period, the implications that had underlain the achievement of the top thirty goal became more pressing. While it had initially been considered a means through which the country could secure an international position, the 'top thirty' goal was now mainly connected to the notion that international recognition as a developed country is a tool that Kazakhstan can use to avoid economic stagnation. Stagnation is identified as one of the significant risks for the country, given that it could have eventually led to losing national sovereignty. The annexation of Crimea had made the risk even more tangible. Achieving Kazakhstan's integration in the global economy is the 'response' that Nazarbayev identifies to reduce this threat. To do so, the President singled out economic diversification and the attraction of foreign investments as the most effective tools. Yet, as noticed by previous studies on Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism (Ambrosio, Lange 2014), the scope of the country's engagement with foreign countries is limited by a prioritisation of neighbouring states over the full array of potential international partnerships, especially with regards to neighbouring great powers. Unsurprisingly, Kazakhstan spurred economic cooperation with China, a regional power that, through the BRI, was in the correct position to meet the country's needs.

In contrast, Russia, the other neighbouring great power Kazakhstan could have turned for help, was still coming to terms with a

---

**13** Interview with former DG INTPA official by the author conducted on 10 December 2018.

staggering national economy and a sanction regime. Moreover, Russia's imprint on the multilateral framework slowed Kazakhstan's efforts to increase regional economic integration in the EAEU (Wolczuk 2017). As a consequence, the Kazakhstan-China relationship, in this period, becomes prominent mainly because the country fits well into Kazakhstan's geopolitical considerations. One of the most salient examples is the development of the 2014 Nurly Zhol, an economic stimulus plan worth 20 billion dollars.<sup>14</sup> Nargis Kassenova (2017) noted that Kazakhstan's Nurly Zhol and China's 'New' Silk Road are complementary projects that rely on a cooperative framework for energy and infrastructure that predates the BRI. Even the name chosen by the authorities for Kazakhstan's plan echoes China's Silk Road.<sup>15</sup> The Nurly Zhol is a highly ambitious plan for Kazakhstan, whose infrastructural ambitions risk straining its finances (Financial Times 2015). Therefore, the project emphasises the country's deep commitment to a single foreign partner, thus risking weakening Kazakhstan's traditional multi-vectorism. In addition to the Nurly Zhol having been devised in coordination with China's Silk Road, the synergy between the two plans is considerably emphasised by both sides (Xinhua 2018), signalling a preponderance of the Eastern vector in Kazakhstan's foreign policy strategy.

In this period, Kazakhstan's geopolitical considerations were driven by the country's understanding that integration in the global economy would have been the most effective response to spur its national interests and counter threats. Indeed, the country defended this choice of response by stressing the link between Kazakhstan's position in the global economy and its consolidation as an independent nation.

## 7.2 Advancing the Eastern Vector

From 2014, Kazakhstan's political leadership emphasised the Eastern vector of the country's foreign policy to support the country's integration into the world economy, identified as a critical response to stimulate the country's interests and respond to threats. Indeed, as shown in section 5, the total mentions to the East in Nazarbayev's Addresses surpassed the total number of claims on the West, which had scored higher among Kazakhstan's foreign policy priorities in the study of Ambrosio and Lange (2014).

Despite the considerable emphasis placed on the East, the Eastern vector is not a recent addition to Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy but had captured the attention of decision-makers since the

---

<sup>14</sup> On the relationship between the Nurly Zhol and the BRI, see Kassenova 2017.

<sup>15</sup> The Nurly Zhol can be translated as the 'Bright Path', see Kassenova 2017.

country's state- and nation-building processes in the Nineties (Rangsimaporn 2020). Kazakhstan was attracted to Asia's rapid economic development and power of innovation, and decision-makers suggested that the region as a benchmark for Kazakhstan's development.

China has remained at the centre of Kazakhstan's Eastern vector because of its significant economic growth and success in poverty alleviation. Since 2014, the two countries have developed a comprehensive partnership that articulates across several sectors and comprises various bilateral engagement tools. China and Russia, after all, are the only two actors that are referenced constantly in Nazarbayev's Addresses, except for 2018.<sup>16</sup> In particular, the economic partnership between Kazakhstan and China takes up the majority of China's claims. In the Addresses, Nazarbayev first links China to the economic agreements, investments and funds that Kazakhstan had received under the BRI, presenting them as essential tools for national economic development and global economic integration. Indeed, the country had received 3 billion in investments from China between 2014 and 2018, most of which in 2014 alone. The country's oil sector was mainly targeted, which received 2 of China's 3 billion, consistently with China's national energy security plan.<sup>17</sup> For instance, Sinopec and Geo-Jade Petroleum, two of China's largest multinational oil companies operating in Central Asia, acquired significant shares in four Kazakhstani oil companies in 2014 and 2015.<sup>18</sup> The failed transaction between Sinopec and Kazakhstan Petrochemical Industries (KPI) in August 2014 is worth mentioning. China had presented a 1.85 billion investment to Kazakhstan, one of China's highest offers to the country for a single investment. Although Sinopec's bid failed, China National Chemical Engineering succeeded in concluding a construction contract with Kazakhstani Petrochemical the following year, raising Sinopec's bid up to 1.87 billion.<sup>19</sup> The case of KPI is evidence of China's commitment to strengthening its presence in the Kazakhstani economy and its ability to raise its political capital with the country.

In a single year, China indeed managed to conclude a more profitable agreement that had previously failed because of "a lack of mutual agreement on commercial and other conditions" (Conroy 2015). So far, Kazakhstan remains the Central Asian country with the most funds from China (about 17 billion dollars). Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan fall in second and third place, with 4 and 2 billion respectively (Scissors 2019). China's economic projection is not limited to invest-

---

**16** In the 2018 Address, Nazarbayev does not make direct mentions to any specific foreign country.

**17** On China's traditional objectives for Central Asia, see Sciorati 2019.

**18** See data gathered by Scissors 2019.

**19** See Scissors 2019.

ments but also offers Kazakhstan an example of successful national development; accordingly, Nazarbayev presents China's economy as an asset that should be exploited to boost Kazakhstan's economy. This argument is well-presented in the 2015 Address, where Nazarbayev states that the country "should efficiently use the economic potential of neighbouring countries. These are, first of all, China, Russia, Iran" (Akorda 2015). Moreover, in the 2014 Address, China's long-term national economic plans are mentioned as a justification to Strategy 2050, a 36-year plan devised to improve Kazakhstan's prosperity and security. Nazarbayev indeed stresses that "today, many successful countries - China, Malaysia and Turkey - follow their long-term strategies" (Akorda 2014a).

What is made clear by the Addresses is the complexity of the Eastern vector in Kazakhstan's foreign policy. Despite remaining linked to economic objectives, relations with the East present several justifications to Kazakhstan's foreign policy choices: from boosting the national economy to exploiting national development programmes and integrate the country into the global economy. Singapore, for instance, is taken into consideration by Nazarbayev because of the pace of its industrialisation (compared to South Korea's) or its role as a financial hub like several European countries (Akorda 2014a; 2015). Although Japan also is indicated as another potential economic partner for Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev's mention of Japan is mainly connected to a visit of the country's prime minister to Astana (2015).<sup>20</sup> China and Singapore, in contrast, are mentioned in the Addresses independently from external events, thus showing Nazarbayev's preference for referring to certain Asian countries instead of others. In addition to economic development and innovative power, the East is a competitive vector in Kazakhstan's foreign policy because of the authoritarian leaderships under which objectives were achieved, which present a source of legitimation to Kazakhstani policy-makers. The cases mentioned above of China and Singapore are prime examples, one an authoritarian regime and the other a hybrid regime.<sup>21</sup> Asian democracies like Japan, South Korea or India are mentioned sparingly by Nazarbayev.

From 2014 to 2018, the Eastern vector of Kazakhstan's foreign policy thus justifies the country's emphasis on integration in the global economy. Indeed, the example of Asian countries and the relationship with China, in particular, fit well with the geopolitical considerations that inform Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism. The country ensured that its interests to develop nationally and diversify exports would be achieved by 'looking East'. Moreover, potential threats like econom-

<sup>20</sup> On the details of the visit, see Pollmann 2015.

<sup>21</sup> See the V-Dem Dataset for additional contextualisation of China and Singapore's regime types.

ic stagnation and the subsequent risks to national sovereignty would be countered. As global economic integration was understood as the optimal response to these threats, Kazakhstan relied on the example offered by its Eastern partners to justify its plan and foster relations, especially with China.

## 8 Conclusions

This paper falls within the scope of foreign policy-making and multi-vectorism. The research has contributed to studies focusing on changes in states' multi-vector foreign policies and the theoretical framework of geopolitical codes by presenting a case study on Kazakhstan (2014-18). In addition, the paper has continued the work started by Ambrosio and Lange on Kazakhstan's geopolitical codes after a potential shift in the country's geopolitical world order occurred - an instance that, according to the literature on geopolitical codes, could generate new geopolitical understandings.

The paper has argued for Kazakhstan's engagement in China's BRI to be a turning point for the country's multi-vector foreign policy, showing that Kazakhstan has increasingly relied on the Eastern vector to sustain its national interests towards economic development and export diversification. The research has indicated that Kazakhstan's trademark multi-vector foreign policy had been weakened by the country's new geopolitical considerations. Indeed, the country has identified economic stagnation as a threat to its national interests (especially after Russia's actions in Crimea jeopardised national sovereignty) and the country's further integration in the global economy as a viable response to this threat. Under this geopolitical landscape, the paper has shown that the Eastern vector has become predominant. The added value of the research is that the study articulates in an investigation on Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism that also offers insights on the regional balance in Eurasia: indeed, it understands participation in China's BRI as significant evidence of geopolitical transformations.

The research also indicated that relations with Western countries mainly shifted at the multilateral level, while bilateral ties have become the almost exclusive domain of the country's regional partners. The main lesson drawn is that Kazakhstan's overreliance on one partner risks over-exposing the country to the influence of a single power and failing to continue maintaining 'cordial relations' with neighbouring powers, which has been at the core of Kazakhstan's multi-vectorism since independence.

The main limitation of this study concerns the corpus of analysed data. The research may have benefited from complementing the insights drawn from the State of the Nation Addresses with in-depth

interviews with foreign policy-makers. Given the difficulty to conduct interviews in Kazakhstan and, in particular, with this community of respondents, the paper has compensated with a systematic study of Kazakhstan's political discourse.

Future studies may advance this line of research by adopting the same approach when investigating changes in multi-vectorism in other Central Asian countries that had developed firm commitments to China.

## Bibliography

- Abilgazina, A. (2020). "KazAID Offers a Way for Kazakhstan to Promote Its Foreign Policy Objectives". *Caspian Policy Centre*, 10 September.
- Akorda.kz (2014a). "Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan". Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 17 January.
- Akorda.kz (2014b). "Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan". Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 11 November.
- Akorda.kz (2015). "Address of the Head of State Nursultan Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan". Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 30 November.
- Akorda.kz (2017). "Address of the Head of State Nursultan Nazarbayev to the People of Kazakhstan". Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 31 January. [http://www.akorda.kz/kz/addresses/addresses\\_of\\_president/memleket-basshysy-nnazarbaevtyyn-kazakistan-halkyna-zholdauly-2017-zhylygy-31-kantar](http://www.akorda.kz/kz/addresses/addresses_of_president/memleket-basshysy-nnazarbaevtyyn-kazakistan-halkyna-zholdauly-2017-zhylygy-31-kantar).
- Akorda.kz (2018). "President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev's Address to the People of Kazakhstan". Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 10 January. [http://www.akorda.kz/kz/addresses/addresses\\_of\\_president/kazakistan-respublikasynyn-prezidenti-n-nazarbaevtyyn-kazakistan-halkyna-zholdauly-2018-zhylygy-10-kantar](http://www.akorda.kz/kz/addresses/addresses_of_president/kazakistan-respublikasynyn-prezidenti-n-nazarbaevtyyn-kazakistan-halkyna-zholdauly-2018-zhylygy-10-kantar).
- Ambrosio, T.; Lange, W.A. (2014). "Mapping Kazakhstan's Geopolitical Code: An Analysis of Nazarbayev's Presidential Addresses, 1997-2014". *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 55(5), 537-59. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2015.1024272>.
- Aneschi, L. (2014). "Regime-Building, Identity-Making and Foreign Policy: Neo-Eurasianist Rhetoric in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan". *Nationalities Papers*, 42(5), 733-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.928276>.
- Aneschi, L. (2020). *Analysing Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy: Regime Neo-Eurasianism in the Nazarbaev Era*. London: Routledge.
- Baizakova, Z.; McDermott, R. (2015). "Threat Perception in Central Asia in Response to Russia-Ukraine: Kazakhstan Will Not Be Next". *NATO Defense College*, 119. [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/194293/rp\\_119.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/194293/rp_119.pdf).
- Brauer, B. (2014). "Rebranding Kazakhstan by Changing Its Name". *The Jamestown Foundation*, 15 February 2014. <https://jamestown.org/program/rebranding-kazakhstan-by-changing-its-name/>.

- Cohen, A. (2008). *Kazakhstan: The Road to Independence: Energy Policy and the Birth of a Nation*. Uppsala: Institute for Security and Development Policy. <https://www.silkroadstudies.org/publications/silkroad-papers-and-monographs/item/13147-kazakhstan-the-road-to-independence-energy-policy-and-the-birth-of-a-nation.html>.
- Coppedge, M. et al. (2021). "V-Dem Dataset v11.1". *Varieties of Democracy Project*. <https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds21>.
- Conroy, W. (2015). "Kazakhstan's KPI Names CNCEC as Contractor for Petchems Complex". *ICIS Explore*. 30 December 2015. <https://www.icis.com/explore/resources/news/2015/12/30/9956395/kazakhstan-s-kpi-names-cncec-as-contractor-for-petchems-complex/>.
- Cummings, S.N. (2003). "Eurasian Bridge or Murky Waters between East and West? Ideas, Identity and Output in Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy". *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 19(3), 139-55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523270300660021>.
- Cutler, R.M. (2002). "The Sources of Kazakhstani Conduct". Gervers, M.; Schlepp, W. (eds), *Continuity and Change in Central and Inner Asia*. Toronto: University of Toronto, 63-76.
- Das, D.K. (2014). "The Role of China in Asia's Evolution to Global Economic Prominence". *Asia & the Pacific Policy Studies*, 1(1), 216-29. <https://doi.org/10.1002/app5.10>.
- Dijkink, G. (1996). *National Identity and Geopolitical Visions: Maps of Pride and Pain*. London: Routledge.
- Dijkink, G. (1998). "Geopolitical Codes and Popular Representations". *GeoJournal*, 46(4), 293-9. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006999221884>.
- Elgie, R. (2007). "What Is Semi-Presidentialism and Where Is It Found?". Elgie, R.; Moestrup, S. (eds), *Semi-Presidentialism Outside Europe: A Comparative Study*. London: Routledge, 1-13.
- Eurasianet (2018). "Kazakhstan Grants U.S. Access to Ports for Afghan-Bound Goods". *Eurasianet*, 7 March 2018. <https://eurasianet.org/kazakhstan-grants-us-access-to-ports-for-afghan-bound-goods>.
- Financial Times. (2015). "Kazakhstan Runs Economic Risks with Its Hyperactivity". *Financial Times*, 5 November 2015. <https://www.ft.com/content/e0baada2-83b3-11e5-8e80-1574112844fd>.
- Flint, C. (2021). *Introduction to Geopolitics*. London: Routledge.
- Gaddis, J.L. (1982). *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hanks, R.R. (2009). "'Multi-Vector Politics' and Kazakhstan's Emerging Role as a Geo-Strategic Player in Central Asia". *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 11(3), 257-67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448950903152110>.
- Hardy, C.; Phillips, N.; Harley, B. (2004). "Discourse Analysis and Content Analysis: Two Solitudes?". *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research*, 2(1), 19-22. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.998649>.
- Huliaras, A.; Tsardanidis, C. (2006). "(Mis)Understanding the Balkans: Greek Geopolitical Codes of the Post-Communist Era". *Geopolitics*, 11(3), 465-83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040600767909>.
- İpek, P. (2007). "The Role of Oil and Gas in Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy: Looking East or West?". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59(7), 1179-99. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130701607144>.
- Kakenova, Z. et al. (2016). "Foreign Relations of Kazakhstan in the Regional and Global Context: Security and Economic Aspects". *Journal of Advanced*



- Research in Law and Economics*, 7(5), 1042-50. <https://journals.aser-publishing.eu/jarle/article/view/525>.
- Kassen, M. (2018). "Understanding Foreign Policy Strategies of Kazakhstan: A Case Study of the Landlocked and Transcontinental Country". *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 31(3-4), 314-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2018.1520809>.
- Kassenova, N. (2017). "China's Silk Road and Kazakhstan's Bright Path: Linking Dreams of Prosperity". *Asia Policy*, 24, 110-16. <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2017.0028>.
- Koch, N. (2013). "Kazakhstan's Changing Geopolitics: The Resource Economy and Popular Attitudes about China's Growing Regional Influence". *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 54(1), 110-33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2013.778542>.
- Lanteigne, M. (2018). "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the 'Crimea Effect'". Blakkisrud, H.; Wilson Rowe, E. (eds), *Russia's Turn to the East. Domestic Policymaking and Regional Cooperation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Laruelle, M. (2018). *China's Belt and Road Initiative and Its Impact in Central Asia*. Washington D.C.: George Washington University. <https://voicesoncentralasia.org/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-and-its-impact-in-central-asia/>.
- Laruelle, M.; Royce, D.; Beyssembayev, S. (2019). "Untangling the Puzzle of 'Russia's Influence' in Kazakhstan". *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 60(2), 211-43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2019.1645033>.
- Lemon, E. (2019). "Why Nazarbayev Resigned and What Happens Next". *Kennan Institute, Wilson Centre*. 20 March 2019. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/why-nazarbayev-resigned-and-what-happens-next>.
- Mostafa, G. (2013). "The Concept of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian Policy and Its Implications". *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 4(2), 160-70. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2013.03.006>.
- Najibullah, F. (2014). "Putin Downplays Kazakh Independence, Sparks Angry Reaction". *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 3 September 2014. <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-putin-history-reaction-nation/26565141.html>.
- O'Loughlin, J.; Ó Tuathail, G.; Kolossov, V. (2005). "Russian Geopolitical Culture and Public Opinion: The Masks of Proteus Revisited". *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 30(3), 322-35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2005.00174.x>.
- Omelicheva, M.Y.; Du, R. (2018). "Kazakhstan's Multi-Vectorism and Sino-Russian Relations". *Insight Turkey*, 20(4), 95-110. <https://doi.org/10.25253/99.2018204.11>.
- Perteghella, A. (2019). *Iran Looking East: An Alternative to the EU?*. Milan: Ledizioni.
- Phillips, N.; Lawrence, T.B.; Hardy, C. (2004). "Discourse and Institutions". *The Academy of Management Review*, 29(4), 635-52. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20159075>.
- Pollmann, M. "What Did Abe Accomplish in Central Asia?". *The Diplomat*, 28 October 2015. <https://thediplomat.com/2015/10/what-did-abe-accomplish-in-central-asia/>.



- Pomfret, R. (2005). "Kazakhstan's Economy since Independence: Does the Oil Boom Offer a Second Chance for Sustainable Development?". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57(6), 859-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130500199467>.
- Putz, C. (2018). "Carefully, Kazakhstan Confronts China About Kazakhs in Xinjiang Re-Education Camps". *The Diplomat*, 14 June 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/carefully-kazakhstan-confronts-china-about-kazakhs-in-xinjiang-re-education-camps/>.
- Rangsimaporn, P. (2020). "Kazakhstan and ASEAN: The Unexplored Vector in Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy". *Asian Affairs*, 51(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2019.1706342>.
- Sanchez, W.A. (2019). "Analyzing Kazakhstan's First Tenure at the UN Security Council". *The Diplomat*, 22 March 2019. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/analyzing-kazakhstan-s-first-tenure-at-the-un-security-council/>.
- Sciorati, G. (2019). "Central Asia: One of China's Favourite Peripheries". *Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI)*. 3 October 2019. <https://www.ispionline.it/it/publicazione/central-asia-one-chinas-favourite-peripheries-24067>.
- Scissors, D. (2019). *China Global Investment Tracker*. Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research and The Heritage Foundation. <http://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>.
- Silver, C.; Lewins, A. (2014). *Using Software in Qualitative Research: A Step-by-Step Guide*. London: SAGE.
- Smith Finley, J. (2019). "Securitization, Insecurity and Conflict in Contemporary Xinjiang: Has PRC Counter-Terrorism Evolved into State Terror?". *Central Asian Survey*, 38(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2019.1586348>.
- Sullivan, C.J. (2017). "State-Building in the Steppe: Challenges to Kazakhstan's Modernizing Aspirations". *Strategic Analysis*, 41(3), 273-84. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2017.1295606>.
- Sullivan, C.J. (2019). "End of an Era? Kazakhstan and the Fate of Multivectorism". Caron, J. (ed.), *Kazakhstan and the Soviet Legacy: Between Continuity and Rupture*. Singapore: Springer, 31-50.
- Taylor, P.J. (1993). "Geopolitical World Orders". Taylor, P.J. (ed.), *Political Geography of the Twentieth Century: A Global Analysis*. Belhaven Press.
- Taylor, P.J.; Flint, C. (2000). *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Tskhay, A.; Costa Buranelli, F. (2020). "Accommodating Revisionism through Balancing Regionalism: The Case of Central Asia". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 72(6), 1033-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2020.1779184>.
- Vanderhill, R.; Joireman, S.F.; Tulepbayeva, R. (2020). "Between the Bear and the Dragon: Multivectorism in Kazakhstan as a Model Strategy for Secondary Powers". *International Affairs*, 96(4), 975-93. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaaa061>.
- Weitz, R. (2013). "Kazakhstan Expands Security and Economic Cooperation with Afghanistan". *The Jamestown Foundation*, 19 March 2013. <https://jamestown.org/program/kazakhstan-expands-security-and-economic-cooperation-with-afghanistan/>.
- Wolczuk, K. (2017). "The Eurasian Economic Union: Deals, Rules and the Exercise of Power". *Chatham House*, 2 May 2017. <https://www.chatham-house.org/2017/05/eurasian-economic-union>.

World Bank. "World Bank Open Data". *The World Bank Group*. <https://data.worldbank.org/>.

Xinhua (2018). "哈萨克斯坦驻华大使: 中国已为其他国家做出了开放的榜样 (Kazakhstan's Ambassador to China: China Has Set an Example of Openness for Other Countries)". *Xinhua News Agency*, 12 March 2018. [http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2018-03/12/c\\_129826453.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/world/2018-03/12/c_129826453.htm).

Zhou, W.; Esteban, M. (2018). "Beyond Balancing: China's Approach Towards the Belt and Road Initiative". *Journal of Contemporary China*, 27(112), 487-501. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1433476>.