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KAZAKHSTAN-EU RELATIONS IN THE ERA OF EEU INTEGRATION

Luca Anceschi
University of Glasgow, Central & East European Studies

Policy Memo Presented at the Moscow BEAR Policy Conference

“Evaluating the Potential for Cooperation: the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union”

Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO)

September 16-17, 2019

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This policy memo investigates whether the formal acquisition of EEU membership has affected Kazakhstan's relations with the European Union. The memo will review political relations and economic ties as developed in the post-2014 years, querying whether the formal intensification of the EEU-strand of Kazakhstani foreign policy had an impact on Astana's ties with EU institutions. This study assesses in this sense the prospects for Kazakhstan's foreign policy overstretch, assessing the diplomatic capacity of dealing with two important strands of Astana's Eurasian strategy during the late Nazarbaev years.

Main findings

Three fundamental questions have led the research work underpinning the policy memo.

1) Does it make sense to view EEU and EU as mutually exclusionary strands in Kazakhstani foreign policy?

- Competitive integration in wider Eurasia is interfacing with the reality of Great power relations in Central Asia: The perils of looking at Eurasia from Cold War analytical standpoints

2) How did Kazakhstan navigate the rise of competitive Eurasianism?

- Sovereignty as driver of regime neo-Eurasianism: The peculiarity of Nazarbaev's *Bolshaya Evraziya* policy

3) Has EEU interaction affected the intensity of EU-Kazakhstani relations?

a. Profiling indicators suggesting that no change intervened between two key vectors of Kazakhstani multilateralism

- Ratification of Enhanced Partnership & Cooperation Agreement
- Persistence of EU-28 as main commercial partner and principal investor in the Kazakhstani economy

b. Profiling drivers behind occurrence of no change between two key vectors of Kazakhstani multilateralism

- The emergence of Kazakhstan's feckless multivectorism

- The peculiar nature of post-Crimea EEU integration

Policy Recommendations

The answers to these questions identify the key policy issue at stake here: rather than problematising the European or post-Soviet vectors of Kazakhstani multilateralism as disconnected or interacting policy strands, it is appropriate to rethink EU-EEU relations in a changing Eurasia. To this end, this policy briefs advances three fundamental policy recommendations:

To the government of Kazakhstan

EU membership is not an issue at stake in the relationships between Kazakhstan and EU institutions. Loose association may therefore represent the foundation to have the government in Nur-Sultan acting as the bridge between the two common markets, hosting talks for setting up the technical cooperation envisaged below.

To the European Union

Setting aside political differences, the European Union ought to treat the EEU for what is: an emerging, functioning if at times flawed, platform for economic cooperation regulated by supranational institutions. The European Union should establish mechanisms of technical exchange to support EEU institutions in deepening their economic collaboration.

To the EEU Commission

In whatever way allowed by the EEU Supreme Council, the Eurasian Commission should recognise that EU practices represent the state-of-the-art in common market operationalisation. Through the support of the Kazakhstani government, the EEU Commission ought to agree to the establishment of technical exchange mechanisms to strengthen the rising EEU common market.