

Remarks
by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan Erlan Idrissov at a briefing for
the diplomatic corps dedicated to the celebration of the 550th anniversary of
the foundation of the Kazakh Khanate

Your excellencies,
Dear friends!

This is a highly symbolic year for all citizens of our country.

It was exactly 550 years ago, here in the center of the Eurasian continent, that our ancestors founded the Kazakh Khanate, a great creation of the nomadic civilization.

It was the starting point in the centuries-long nationhood of our people, which has found its fullest expression in the modern country named Kazakhstan.

As our head of the state, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has written: “Assessing Kazakh history, we must abandon the many stereotypes and instead understand properly what aspects of traditional Kazakh society have ‘imprinted’ themselves into our modern nation.”.

It is this centuries-long period of the history of our country that laid the foundation not only of our modern state but also of our multi-vector foreign policy.

The Kazakh Khanate was not, of course, the first chapter in the history of the Kazakh people.

It was heir to the Great Steppe empires – the Turkic Kaganate (of the 6th to 8th centuries) and Eke Mongol Ulus (the Great Empire of Genghis Khan).

However, their origins and development can be traced much further back in time.

The ancient history of the Great Eurasian steppe zone is primarily a history of militant nomadic tribes.

The current territory of Kazakhstan were lands inhabited by Iranian-speaking and Turkic-speaking tribes: the Saka, Kangly, Usuns and Huns.

These ethnic groups had to permanently overcome the twists and turns of war, established diplomatic relations, concluded trade agreements, struck political

and military alliances, to extend permanently the territorial framework for the future Kazakh state of today.

Even in the second half of the 5th century BC the man known as the Father of History, the Greek author Herodotus described the vast eastern country of *Scythia*, which would be also known as “the country of *Saka* people”.

Ancient Persian sources placed Saka, the population of Great Steppe, to the north of the Amudarya and Syrdarya rivers.

The Saka civilization to the west was in contact with the Ancient Greeks and to the east with the Chinese.

To the south, the Saka’s nomadic country of Turan bordered Iran, the land of Indo-Aryan people.

It was this era when the Silk Road, the trade artery linking the early civilizations of East and West first began to emerge.

We also saw the rise of the first political entities within the present territory of Kazakhstan.

Some historians cite Zoroastrianism’s sacred book of *Avesta* to point to a state named *Kangkha* in the midstream of the Syrdarya River around the 7th and 6th centuries BC.

According to ancient Chinese document, the Book of Han, roughly the same areas were occupied in the 2nd century BC by the *State of Kangyui*.

A successor to the political traditions of the Saka tribes, covering roughly the lands of modern-day southeastern Kazakhstan and northern Kyrgyzstan, was the *State of Usun*.

The arrival of the *Great Empire of Huns* signaled a milestone in the ethnic, cultural and political development of the people of this land.

In the middle of the 6th century, a decisive role in the development of language, culture and the worldview of the tribes inhabiting Kazakhstan was played by the Turk Empire or *Turkic Kaganate* (referred to in written sources as “Turkic El”), a major power of the Early Middle Age.

The first kagans’ policies were so in tune with the interests of all Turkic tribes that the limits of their authority quickly expanded as far as the Black Sea in the west and the Great Wall of China in the east.

Based on authoritative historical sources, President Nazarbayev has written that “The first Turkic Empire (552-603) was part of the system of political and economic relations between Byzantium, Iran and China.

In its heyday, the Turkic Empire stretched from Manchuria to the Gulf of Kerch and from the Yenisei River to the Amu Darya. Therefore Turkic Kagans became the creators of the first Eurasian empire”.

According to both medieval and modern historians, the Turkic states were the direct successors of the Hun Empire.

The Turks, drawing on the achievements of western and eastern nations, created a distinctive culture with its own writing system, the so-called Orkhon-Yenisei runic script.

Being at the crossroads of different religions, such as Tengrism, Christianity, and Buddhism, the Turkic Kaganate also played a huge role in their subsequent development.

Following the collapse of the Turkic Kaganate, a series of new ethno-political unions of Turkic tribes emerged one after another.

In the area of the Irtysh River, the *State of Kimaks* appeared in the late 8th century.

Its fall was caused by a powerful wave of migration from the east and in the middle of the 9th century began the rise of Kypchaks.

Eventually they occupied much of Eurasia’s Great Steppe, with its borders stretching from the Irtysh to the west as far as the Danube’s mouth, with the entire area labeled in Arabic and Persian sources of the period as *Desht-i Kypchak* (or the Kypchak Steppe).

In Russian sources the Kypchaks were called *Polovtsy* and European ones named them *Kumans* or *Kuns*.

During the 12th and 13th centuries in *Desht-i Kypchak* there was a migration of large masses of the population.

The Kypchak confederation was a set of clans and tribes, brought together by both military and economic factors and from which the cultural and linguistic unity of the people gradually emerged.

The fundamental transformation of political and cultural values, economic and ethnic components of Eurasian political entities came in the 13th century after

the unification of the entire nomadic Central Asian peoples under the Mongol Empire or Horde led by Genghis Khan.

This emerged following the Supreme congress of nomadic tribes or *Kurultai*- in 1206.

Renowned early 20th century Russian historian of Central Asia Vasily Bartold highlighted the deep connections between the Turkic Kaganate and Genghis Khan's Empire.

According to him, the numerically dominant Turkic-speaking tribes gradually assimilated the core group of Mongolian-speaking warriors in central parts of the Eurasian plains to shape new state entities in the Great Steppe.

Another milestone event for the future of the Kazakh Khanate was the partition of the empire of Genghis Khan into several smaller informal states.

Among them, perhaps the largest was the *Golden Horde* (Altyn Orda) managed by the descendants of his eldest son Juchi.

The Golden Horde was the first centralized state in post-Mongol period that included most of the modern Kazakhstan's territories.

Initially part of the Mongol Empire, it was under the control of Genghis Khan's grandson, Batu (1242-1256), who behaved essentially as an independent ruler.

The key principles of nomadic statehood, which were laid in the foundation of the Golden Horde, were relevant for several other political entities which developed from Genghis Khan's descendants in the Great Steppe including the *White Horde*, the *Abulhair Khanate*, *Moghulistan*, and eventually, the *Kazakh Khanate*.

Unlike in the previous era, each of these had a number of important features as they emerged largely or exclusively on the territory of modern Kazakhstan.

They had similar political structures and far-reaching similarities in their economic and cultural development.

In addition, they had common dynastic origin, sharing the tradition derived from Genghis Khan and his descendants of the exclusive right of authority.

In the broader historical context, the remarkable civilization of the Great Eurasian Steppe in the medieval period left its imprint on the development of many

of its neighbours too including Iran, China, India, Byzantium, Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe.

It was on the basis of the nomadic civilization that the Kazakh people's first formalized state emerged and on which the best traditions and accomplishments of political, economic, social and cultural development of the peoples inhabiting the lands of modern-day Kazakhstan are now based.

The new state's very name - *the Kazakh Khanate* – confirmed the emergence of a new and hitherto unknown political entity in the 15th century's historical arena.

The 16th century Central Asian historian *Mirza Mohammed Haydar Dulati* reported that the Kazakh Khanate was formed in autumn 1465 in the valleys of rivers Chu and Talas in the modern Zhambyl Oblast in South and South-Eastern Kazakhstan.

This followed the migration of numerous tribes led by the princes (sultans) Kerei and Zhanibek that rebelled against the despotic rule of *Abulkhair Khan* from the rival dynastic branch of *Shaibanids*.

With the consolidation of the new state, a centralized system of political authority was established in the Great Steppe.

Legislative and executive powers were concentrated in the hands of a supreme ruler – Khan, who also performed the duties of a military commander.

The executive and legislative powers of Khan were regulated by such legislative acts of the Kazakhs as the *Qasym Khannyn Qasqa Zholy* (Kassym Khan's Trodden Path), *Esim Khannyn Eski Zholy* (Esim Khan's Old Path), and *Zheti Zhargy* (Seven Laws).

These were official documents that regulated public policy and society's functioning in general.

In turn, these laws were based on the centuries-old customs and traditions of the people.

These codes shaped the public administration of the Kazakh State and defined the concept of "Steppe Democracy."

The Kazakh society had the right to openly regulate the complicated issues of domestic and foreign policy by electing judges - *biys*, who represented the people's interests.

A special role in strengthening the Kazakh Khanate, promoting the idea of unity and spreading its message to the people as a whole was played by spiritual leaders – storytellers – *zhynraus* and akyns, as well as musicians – *kuishi*.

Through their works, they raised issues such as the power and responsibility of the *khans*, *biys*, *batyrs* (warriors) in securing the independence of the people.

They also drew attention to the importance of foreign policy and international relations, as well as educating the younger generation.

Founded in 1465, the Kazakh Khanate over two and a half centuries evolved. Its economic, political and cultural policies developed and strengthened.

Timely changes helped strengthen the national spirit of the Kazakh people.

In the 16th century, the Kazakh Khanate was already known throughout much of Eurasia.

According to the renowned Russian scholars *Vladimir Dahl* and *Nikolay Baskakov*, the ethnic name of “Kazakh” has Turkic origins.

In old Turkic sources the concept of “*kazaklyk*” was used as a symbol of freedom and the free way of life.

As Baskakov noted, all interpretations of the word “Kazakh” are related to each other and have common roots which mean an “independent person”.

He wrote, “the same meaning is associated with the name of Turkic nationality – Kazakhs – and it means a free and independent nomad”.

The early 16th century source known as *Zayn ad-Din Vasifi's “Badai Al-wakai”* labelled the lands ruled by Kazakh khans as “*Kazakhstan*”.

The map drawn in 1562 based on information collected by the English traveller and diplomat Anthony Jenkinson – the envoy in Moscow for the English Queens Mary and later Elizabeth the First named the vast land between “Tashkent” in the south and “Siberia” in the north as “Cassackia”.

The greatest political prominence and territorial expansion of the Kazakh Khanate was under the reigns of Khan Kasym who ruled between 1511 and 1523 and later Khan Khaknazar who ruled between 1538 and 1580.

During these periods, the Kazakh khans pursued active, independent domestic and foreign policies.

They ruled the lands between the Caspian Sea to the Altay Mountains, an area quite similar in its shape to the outline of modern Kazakhstan.

Already during this period, foreign policy was determined by a number of important directions, or vectors, that would find their continuation later.

It was during this time, for instance, that early diplomatic relations were established with Russia.

By the 17th century, the process of forming a single nation was generally complete.

As a result, all Turkic and non-Turkic tribes of Central Asia, ruled by the Kazakh Khanate, consolidated into an entity known as Kazakhs.

Ethnic traditions, customs, a common religion, language and culture were established.

The Kazakh Khanate's rulers and their people fought hard to preserve the integrity of their national territory.

It was only through the unity of the Kazakh people that external aggression, civil strife and separatist tendencies of individual rulers could be overcome.

We must not also forget the Steppe diplomacy that successfully operated across the vast lands of Eurasia.

The Kazakh Khanate gradually but confidently emerged as an independent force in international relations.

The Kazakh State rulers carried out their foreign policy by diplomatic activity based on rules drawn up from their practical experiences of negotiations with representative of other states.

Only a nation with genes of peacefulness, good-neighbourliness and tolerance in its blood could have safeguarded such a vast territory through the art of diplomacy.

These have become the principles of a multi-vector policy, balance and pragmatism of contemporary Kazakh diplomacy.

The Kazakh Khanate's history was, however, cut short by a number of negative factors.

In particular, military forces were depleted as a result of the bloody defensive wars of 17th and 18th centuries against a powerful nomadic Empire of the Dzungars and the parallel expansion of a new dominant power in Eurasia - the Russian Empire.

It was the Russian Empire which eventually incorporated lands of the Kazakh khanate - partly voluntarily, partly conquered by force of European weaponry, in the 130 years between 1731 and 1865.

Then followed a controversial, although not a totally negative, period of development under the rule of Russian Tsars.

In the early 20th century, when Russia faced a wave of revolutionary democratic activism, a fresh impetus for Kazakh statehood came from the activities of a new generation of Kazakh intellectuals.

This resulted in formation of the short-lived government of *Alash Orda*, with Alash being a synonym of the name Kazakh.

The All-Kazakh Congress, held in Orenburg in 1917, created a territorial and national autonomy “*Alash*” embracing a number of regions with Kazakh population.

All executive powers were passed to the Temporary National Council of Alash Orda, which consisted of 25 members and was led by the eminent statesman, liberal politician, and true patriot Alikhan Bukeyhanov.

Assessing the significance of those events, President Nazarbayev in his book “In the Stream of History” wrote that through the Government of Alash Orda: “The Kazakh nation obtained a real chance to reach its primary objective of recreating a national statehood.

However, the peaceful development of events was interrupted by a new crisis in the Russian society, which led to the establishment of a dictatorship of the Bolshevik party”.

Nevertheless, this new socio-political realities led to Kazakhstan having a chance to recapture some form of nationhood.

Milestone events in this process were the creation of the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Republic in 1920 and of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936.

But the truth is that autonomous Kazakh statehood existed only formally.

In reality there was limited sovereignty and a significant dependence of its authorities first on the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and later on the Soviet Union's leadership.

This all changed with the independence that Kazakhstan gained in 1991 which saw a new stage of Kazakh statehood.

This heralded dynamic political, economic, social and cultural development.

People throughout the world are now aware of our nation's achievements during this period.

They include the move of our nation's capital, hosting the OSCE Summit in Astana and the Congresses of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the triumph of our Olympic team in London 2012, and winning the right to host the EXPO 2017 in Astana.

In his 2012 State-of-the Nation Address, President Nazarbayev set out our country's development strategy until 2050 to build on all we have achieved. .

I invited you today, your excellencies, distinguished representatives of your governments and peoples to gather here at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to explain why the 550th anniversary of the first national state of the Kazakhs is so important to our country and people.

In a few days in Astana, with the participation of our President and many foreign visitors, there will be a celebration of this significant historical milestone. .

It will coincide with a major international conference, which will bring together scholars from around the world who study issues related to the history of the Kazakh khanate.

I hope to see you as honored guests in the evening of September 11 at a colorful performance in the newly commissioned Barys Ice Palace in Astana.

The celebration will continue the next day on streets and squares across our city.

In a month's time, the ancient city of Taraz in the south of our country will host further celebrations.

Taraz is the capital of the region where the actual events of the formation of the Kazakh khanate took place.

There, on October 8, we will hold a big celebration under the open sky to recreate the atmosphere of those historic events that happened on this land 550 years ago.

Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for listening to my attempt to explain the importance of the celebration of the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh khanate for our nation which I hope you will convey to your capitals.

I believe this will help improve understanding of the history and identity of the people of Kazakhstan.

This can only help improve relations and cooperation between our countries.

Let me end what has been a lengthier statement than usual.

Thank you for your attention. I would be delighted to answer any questions and to hear your opinions and comments on what I have said.