

Statement of the Chair of the Board of the Foreign Policy Research Institute Bolat Nurgaliyev at online round table on occasion of the 30-th anniversary of Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan, December 2, 2021. Session “Kazakhstan’s Foreign Policy: Major Achievements and Aspirations”

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, Excellencies, Assalam-u-Aleikum! I am glad to greet you from snowy Nur-Sultan and extend my sincere wishes for a fruitful discussion within the framework of the 5 sessions of today’s round table. Occasions like this give the speakers opportunity to share their perspective of the topic and offer the audience their personal take of events that have taken place throughout the 30 years since Kazakhstan gained independence.

Early December 1991 15 newly independent republics emerged on the ruins of the USSR and stepped into the unknown. As you are aware, the Supreme Soviet declared Independence of Kazakhstan on the 16-th of December, thus opening doors for diplomatic recognition of our Republic. We are grateful to friendly countries which were among the first to welcome Kazakhstan and offer their unwavering support in the process of strengthening our territorial integrity, state sovereignty and political independence. In this regard Kazakhstan was more lucky than other post-Soviet countries because we were led by Nursultan Nazarbayev, who possesses wisdom of a true statesman, a man of clear strategic vision and lucid, sharp understanding of international realities. He enjoys great respect throughout the former Soviet Union as a man of reason in the times of turmoil and chaos. His proposals on the best ways to ensure swift and non-problematic transit were much appreciated and their implementation was instrumental in shaping the cause of history of statehood of newly independent republics and good-neighborly relations among them.

Understandably, and our Pakistani friends know it too well from their own historic experience, it is extra hard to move smoothly from one arrangement – being part of empire and

run by a distant center – to another, when decisions are to be taken independently. Add to this disruption of economic ties between republics, collapse of law and order structures, demoralization of armed forces. How to avoid bloodshed when all of a sudden nobody would call you to responsibility for hostility against your former neighbors who happen to be of a different ethnicity or religious faith or whose forefathers might have grabbed land which you believe is rightfully yours. In a way, it is a miracle that the former USSR space largely, with a few exceptions like Nagorny Karabakh, Transnistria and some other hot spots, escaped outbreak of armed hostilities among republics which for nearly 70 years of living together in one state officially enjoyed relations of brotherhood and friendship. And it was not just a boastful claim of Soviet propaganda: indeed, the Soviet people used to treat each other as sisters and brothers, as equals, irrespective of ethnicity. That was decidedly proven during the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945 when all able-bodied men and women of the USSR – Russians, Kazakhs, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Tatars and millions of others rose to defeat invading Nazi Germany and her European satellites.

Among first hard decisions in the realm of foreign policy were whether to form a commonwealth of Asian republics or join association announced by the leaders of three Slavic republics. Nursultan Nazarbayev decided that the best way to serve vital interests of common people, to keep economies of new countries running, including through ensuring free cross-border movement of goods, services, people and capital would be to promote integration in the entire post-Soviet space. Our President suggested to other presidents to gather in the then capital of Kazakhstan to legalize the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States in the now famous Alma-Ata Declaration. Thirty years on the strategic wisdom of that choice is proven beyond doubt. The CIS is still a win-win for all its members politically, economically and, most important, humanely, making life easier for ordinary people, who enjoy the freedom of travel and employment within the territories of the Commonwealth

participating states. We believe that the creation of the CIS ensured stability and predictiveness in the vast Eurasian space and became a major contribution to global security.

I joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan in May 1992, right after returning from India, where I went as the first secretary of the Embassy of the Soviet Union, which within 2 years turned into the Embassy of the Russian Federation. In his book “On the Threshold of the 21st Century”, published in 1996, Nursultan Nazarbayev described the situation of that period in these words “We had no tradition of foreign policy activities. Just imagine a country facing plenty of extremely difficult problems, but having not a single diplomatic mission abroad, no even elementary conceptual approaches to foreign policy issues, no qualified personnel. The absurdity of the situation was compounded by the fact that Kazakhstan, while possessing highly developed economic potential, vast resources of minerals, nuclear weapons on its territory, had no international agreement with anybody.” Thus, among the pressing matters were the following: how to correlate Kazakhstan’s potential with its actions abroad? What should be the main directions of our foreign policy? How to balance regional and global interests of the country? How to approach solution of international security problems, including the fate of nuclear weapons located on our territory? Have in mind that we had close to 1300 nuclear warheads on 104 ICBMs and cruise missiles. If we are to get rid of this nuclear weapons infrastructure, how to ensure diplomatically national security interests of Kazakhstan?

Looking back to those early years of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy implementation I am proud to have been part of the team which was engaged in the process of formulating the right answers to these pressing issues. The main achievement is that throughout 30 years Kazakhstan had no conflict in relations with major partners, positioned itself as a model of economic and social modernization, reliable and predictable member of international community of civilized nations. The fundamental

principles of our foreign policy are constant: from the outset to this day our policy is peaceloving, responsible and devoid of any hostility in regards of any country, nearby or far away. We do not have territorial claims to anyone, we strive to maintain good-neighborly relations in our immediate environment and call on all our partners to resolve outstanding issues without use of military force or threat of use of military force. Kazakhstan is a staunch practitioner of multivector foreign policy, putting priority in developing constructive relations in all directions – East-West, South-North, geographically close and geographically distant.

In March 2020 President Kassym Jomart Tokayev signed a Decree on the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the decade of 2020-2030. Those of you who would like to get a more detailed take of the conceptual approaches of Nur-Sultan can refer to this document, all answers to your potential questions are there.

Thank you for your kind attention. Bahut shuqria. Quda Hafiz!