

Speech: The Queen's birthday celebration 2019 in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan: Ambassador's speech

Vice-Minister Vassilenko, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to our celebration of the birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Thank you very much to our sponsors: Shell Kazakhstan, Diageo, the Aniri Group, JCB, and the London Stock Exchange Group.

Her Majesty the Queen and the other members of the Royal Family continue to be a focus for national identity, affection and unity in British public life.

Since the Coronation 67 year ago, British society has changed immensely, but for more than two generations, Her Majesty has been a symbol of stability and unity, and perhaps above all, has provided continuity in times of change.

And as those of you who follow British politics will know, the theme of continuity and change is very relevant to the United Kingdom at the moment. Tomorrow, Prime Minister Theresa May will resign as leader of the Conservative Party and a leadership election will take place.

Until Mrs May's successor is chosen, the business of government will continue as before. In July, we will have a new Prime Minister, who will take on the task of delivering Brexit, which has been described as the biggest peacetime challenge the United Kingdom has ever faced. So we have big political changes happening in the UK at the moment.

But the thought I want to stress tonight is the importance of continuity. Whatever happens, the United Kingdom will continue to be an outward-looking, confident and internationally engaged country, deeply committed to our values. Values such as respect for the rule of law, human rights, democracy, free trade, and the importance of the rules based international system.

We are committed to developing our partnerships with our friends and allies around the world, including of course with Kazakhstan.

Here, as you know, we are also witnessing an important moment of change ahead of the presidential election on Sunday – the first such election in the country's history without First President Nursultan Nazarbayev as a candidate.

In Kazakhstan too, we can see the value of continuity. The United Kingdom supports the peaceful leadership transition that is under way, and the message of continuity and stability which that sends, for this country and the wider Central Asia region.

There is much evidence of our strong strategic partnership with Kazakhstan:

the hundreds of British companies who invest and do business here; our project work in various fields; our growing defence cooperation. Our educational and cultural links are flourishing – thanks to the British Council who this year celebrate 25 years of working in Kazakhstan. Many thousands of Kazakhs choose to study in the UK. In 2018 the UK issued 1,156 student visas for Kazakhstani citizens – over 100 a month, and more than we did for Brazil or Australia.

It has been a busy and successful year. We were pleased to have three productive ministerial visits to Kazakhstan, as well as the first visit from our Prime Minister's trade envoy. We also had the pleasure of hosting you, Mr Vice-Minister Vassilenko, for our annual strategic dialogue meeting in London.

It was not all success, however. I am sorry to say that, on 21 March, Scotland were comprehensively beaten 3-0 by Kazakhstan in the opening qualifier of the UEFA Euros championship here in Nur-Sultan. The return match will be on 19 November in Glasgow. Good luck to both teams.

Tonight we have a fantastic selection of British food and drink for you, from all parts of the United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

If you are British, please do help us explain to our Kazakh and international guests what haggis is, and why chicken tikka masala is really an English dish.

Thank you very much. I hope you enjoy the evening.