

Speech: Sir Alan Duncan speech on Kazakhstan success with UNSC

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, and thank you Ambassador for giving me this opportunity.

This fine building has a habit of witnessing historic occasions.

Both Houses of Parliament moved into Church House at some stage during the Second World War, and [as the Ambassador rightly said] the very first United Nations Security Council meeting took place here in 1946.

So this is absolutely the right place in which to be celebrating Kazakhstan's successful first spell on the Council.

Given Central Asia's pivotal place at the centre of the world, it was about time that we saw it represented at the heart of the international system.

I hope that Kazakhstan's obvious success in the UN over the last two years will encourage other states in the region to follow in your footsteps and become key players on the international stage in the way you have been. Your significant contribution to the workings of the UN is a good illustration of the way in which Kazakhstan, and the region, are attracting more and more attention and interest.

Kazakhstan's more active role on the international stage is undoubtedly one of the reasons for that – their successful Caspian Summit was a good example, and that forged an agreement to settle the previously unresolved status of the Caspian after 20 years of negotiation. This represents a key step in unlocking future international investment in the Caspian Basin.

Two particular highlights I would like to commend are its work on promoting regional partnership between Afghanistan and Central Asia, and its success in organising the first visit since 2010 of a Security Council Delegation to Kabul.

Beyond its membership of the UN Security Council, Kazakhstan has also demonstrated its commitment to international peace and security by deploying peacekeeping troops in Lebanon. This is a significant contribution to the pursuit of peace in the Middle East.

In connection with that deployment, I am proud that the UK's close partnership with Kazakhstan played a role in readying their troops for peacekeeping, by providing them with English Language Training and supporting what was called Exercise Steppe Eagle, which is an annual peacekeeping training exercise.

But our collaboration goes much further than the mere military. 2018 was a spectacular year for bilateral trade and investment. We saw the launch of the Astana International Financial Centre, with its associated

Court, based on English Law. We also saw the successful dual listing of the Kazakh uranium company, KazAtomProm, for its IPO, in both London and Astana.

I really welcome these closer trade and investment links and look forward to collaborating on trade policy as Kazakhstan prepares to host the World Trade Organisation 12th Ministerial Conference in Astana in June 2020. Of course, every successful partnership ultimately depends on the bonds between its people, and especially its young people. And here, too there is a good story to tell. Many Kazakhs have deep connections with Britain, in part thanks to the 'Bolashak' higher education programme, which has brought thousands of students to the UK over the last 25 years. And overall, we issue 3,000 visas to Kazakh students every year; and I have to say, it's nice to know that at least some visas can be issued without difficulty.

We plan to strengthen these personal links even further in 2019, which President Nazarbayev has helpfully declared the year of youth. And I have decreed that includes me. We will build on the successful model pioneered by the British Council's 'Creative Central Asia' programme, to link up young leaders across a range of fields, from politics and business to culture and social engagement.

Our vision for Central Asia is of a peaceful, prosperous and well-governed region, whose countries are free to exercise their independence and sovereignty, and which are able to continue cooperating peacefully with each other and with the wider neighbourhood.

This is a vision shared by our partners in the region, including Kazakhstan, and by the EU. We want the EU to continue to take an ambitious role in the region and that is why we have remained an active participant in discussions on the new EU-Central Asia Strategy.

It is also why, regardless of the nature of our future relationship with the EU after we leave, we remain committed to cooperating with them and other partners in Central Asia, and to further developing our strong relationship with Kazakhstan and its neighbours.

I very much look forward to working with Kazakhstan's new Foreign Minister to further develop our bilateral relationship, including by continuing to collaborate in the UN and other multilateral fora.

Your excellencies, Erlan, I offer my congratulations once more to Kazakhstan on your successful two year stint in New York, and I commend you all on your wider efforts to embrace international cooperation and the support you've given to the rules-based international system. In doing so, Kazakhstan has not only shown a determination to step up and play its part on the world stage; it has also set an example for the region to follow.

I believe that we share with the government of Kazakhstan a vision of a region working together for the common good, one that plays a positive role on the international stage, and most importantly one that realises its considerable potential, to the benefit of all its citizens and the wider world.

So we remain committed to supporting Kazakhstan to realise that vision, in 2019 and beyond. And once again I congratulate you for your service to the world over the last two years.