DEALING WITH THE BEAR: HOW KAZAKHSTAN'S MULTI-VECTOR POLICY SHAPED ITS RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA

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Author's Declaration

I, the undersigned, Anuar Satmurzin, candidate for the MA/PhD degree in Political Science declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree. Vienna, 14.09.2023.

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Acknowledgments

As Alan Watts once put: “You are an aperture through which the universe is looking at and exploring itself.” In the grand tapestry of my life journey, I have been blessed to cross paths with remarkable individuals who played vital roles in shaping my academic and personal “Odyssey.” For this, I am grateful:

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Abstract

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 left Kazakhstan "sandwiched" between two powerful regional actors, leaving Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan's First President, with an opportunity to find a way to maintain friendly relations with everyone, not just Russia, without being reduced to a client state status. The long history of relations between Kazakhstan and Russia has largely defined the nature of their bilateral relations. Having unexpectedly obtained the status of an independent country Kazakhstan's leaders built foreign policy as Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy. Yet this policy remains understudied. This thesis, thus, seeks to answer the question: "how did Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shape its relations with Russia between 1991 and 2023?" To do so, this study uses qualitative description with process tracing elements and builds on the existing scholarly analysis, content analysis of government websites, and archival data from National Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan. I identify three periods in Kazakhstan's relations with Russia in accordance with Kazakhstan's prevalent foreign policy choices, modes of behavior, and the character of relevant issues: 1991-1999, 2000-2013, and 2014-2023.

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List of Abbreviations

ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations

ATOM – Abolish Testing. Our Mission

BRI – Belt and Road Initiative

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CNPC – China National Petroleum Corporation

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization

DNR – Donetsk People's Republic

EEU – Eurasian Economic Union

IPC – Privatization Investment Points

LNR – Luhansk People's Republic

MSU – Moscow State University

NPT – Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty

NWS – Nuclear-weapon State

SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization

STS – Semipalatinsk Testing Site

UNGA – United Nations General Assembly

Introduction

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the newly independent Republic of Kazakhstan found itself in a precarious regional interplay between Russia and China. Over the next 30 years, as an independent state, it has grown economically by exporting natural resources and acquired a solid diplomatic reputation across the international community. Kazakhstan is a secondary power -"a state with a relatively moderate regional influence and international recognition" (Vanderhill, Joireman, and Tulepbayeva 2020, 975), which Russia dwarfs in terms of economic development, yet it has managed to successfully sustain stable diplomatic and economic relations without being reduced to a client state, like Belarus (Pål and Blakkisrud 2021). Perhaps, it is due to Nazarbayev's multi-vector policy - "a form of relational power allowing a weaker state to mitigate the dilemmas of dependence while engaging in an asymmetrical relationship" (Contessi 2015, 301) - that guided Kazakhstan's foreign policy throughout its history as an independent state.

Scholarly analysis of Central Asian states' behavior when dealing with powerful regional actors is relatively scarce. The persistent tendency of the international community to treat Central Asian states as a post-Soviet bloc coupled with the low global strategic importance of the region per se can constitute a reason for the lack of focus. Studies that do focus on Central Asia and Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy usually focus on energy-related (İpek 2007; Henriksen 2013), military (Ameyaw-Brobbey and Amable 2023), or other highly-specific aspects. There is only a handful of studies that systematically and comprehensively analyze the role of multi-vector policy in Kazakhstan's relations with Russia, and other powerful actors in the region (Alexandrov 1999, Vanderhill, Joireman, and Tulepbayeva 2020).

The primary goal of my analysis, thus, is to analyze the dynamic of relations between Kazakhstan and Russia by answering the research question: "how did Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shape its relations with Russia between 1991-2023?" To do so, this research seeks to fulfill three essential sub-goals. First, I review existing theoretical and empirical knowledge on the subject of Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy and identify research gaps. Second, I suggest a realism-based theoretical framework model, which is a combination of Goh's (2007) "omni-enmeshment" model and Alexandrov's (1999) insights into the nature of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia. Third, I apply this theoretical framework model via the chosen methodological tool of qualitative description with process tracing elements to demonstrate how Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shaped its relations with Russia.

More specifically, I focus on the political domain of interaction between Kazakhstan and Russia to provide a comprehensive analysis of their relations. In particular, I examine the history of diplomatic exchanges, official visits, and high-level meetings between the two states as it will shed some light on the diplomatic climate over time. I conduct an analysis of both states' foreign policy decisions and strategies concerning each other, which includes their positions on several critical international issues, their alignment and divergence within regional and international organizations, with United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) voting patterns as an example, and the evolution of their key foreign policy objectives and priorities. I consider how broader regional factors, including conflicts, and regional organizations, influence their bilateral relationship to highlight the interplay between their interactions and regional power dynamics. Finally, I investigate how domestic policies have influenced their bilateral relationship. This includes policies related to ethno-linguistics and

citizenship, national development and identity-building, and to a lesser extent economy and security.

I identify three periods in Kazakhstan-Russia relations from 1991 to 2023 upon the character of respective relations: 1991 to 1999, 2000 to 2013, and 2014 to 2023. The first period reflects on the "ethnic" question as a driving mechanism behind chosen strategic mode of interaction with Russia. This period is characterized by Nazarbayev creating a discrepancy between the official and intended political discourses with the main aim at achieving desirable policy outcomes while avoiding antagonizing Russia. The second period focuses on the dualism behind Kazakhstan's political orientation manifested through its attempts at maintaining friendly relations with Russia while establishing relations with other powerful actors, such as China, the US, and the EU member states, at the expense of partial disengagement from Russia and its Soviet legacy. During the third period Kazakhstan became more reactive towards Russia in the post-Crimea period. The gist of this period is but a combination of Kazakhstan's re-vitalized security concerns over the status of its northern regions and somewhat successful diversification attempts aimed at reducing its energy and economic dependence on Russia.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. First, I review the existing scholarly research on Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy. Second, I suggest a realism-based theoretical framework model. Third, I explain my methodological choices and case selections. Next, I offer my analysis of variation of Kazakhstan-Russia relations. Finally, I conclude with the summary of my results, limitations of my study and suggestions for future research on relations between small states and powerful regional actors.

Chapter 1. Literature Review

Over the years, Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy has taken a multitude of meanings and definitions. It started with the adoption of the "Strategy on the Formation and Development of Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State" in May 1992 (Sembayeva 2020). Some scholars emphasize the pragmatism (İpek 2007; Hanks 2009; Diyarbakırlıoğlu and Yiğit 2014) and non-ideological foundation (Hanks 2009) of multi-vector policy, while others focus on the development of mutually beneficial relations with neighboring states as its primary objective (Nazarbayev 2017; Omelicheva and Du 2018). As Nazarbayev puts in his book "Era of Independence" (Era Nezavisimosti), Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy (mnogovektornost') is a "strive to develop mutually beneficial, equal, and constructive relationship with everyone who wishes to do the same"[1] (2017, 167). This definition stresses a rather vague and open-ended process, and thus far from reflecting on the "essence" of multi-vector policy. Contessi (2015), in this regard, is somewhat closer to reality. Hence, I adopt Contessi's (2015, 301) definition of multi-vector policy as a "form of relational power allowing a weaker state to mitigate the dilemmas of dependence while engaging in an asymmetrical relationship." In other words, Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states have utilized their relations with Russia, China, and other regional powers to serve their own strategic interests through several ways:

(A) creating a network of regional integration projects and cooperation initiatives by purposively "luring" regional dominant actors into a sphere of its regional strategic interests so they become so inter-tangled between each other that it would make it counter-productive to assert their dominance over Kazakhstan (Kassen 2018), and

[1] (...stremlenie k vzaimodeystviyu so vsemi, kto takzhe, kak i my, otkryt k ravnopravnomu konstruktivnomu, plodotvornomu i vzaimovygodnomu dialogu).

(B) preserving the delicate balance between maintaining friendly relations and avoiding overdependence by either "disguising" the actual purpose of the advocated policy or moving "back and forth" from supporting the actor to alienating from it (Alexandrov 1999; Hanks 2009). Thus, Kazakhstan has managed to achieve some degree of control over its complicated and challenging geopolitical context.

The majority of existing studies on Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy seek to analyze the extent to which it constitutes a "balancing act" capable of preserving and maintaining regional stability. From economic and energy-related standpoint, Farhan Khan and Sher (2011) and Bastas (2013) concluded that Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shapes its oil and trade policies so that prioritizing certain regional actor in one economic sector comes at the expense of compensating other actors in associated sectors. Yuneman (2020) applied the following logic to the regional level. He argued that Kazakhstan has inhibited the development of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), a regional integration initiative, past 2014 by resisting any attempts of Russia and Belarus to transform it into a political union. Ipek (2007) and Henriksen (2013) claimed that introducing as many regional actors in its foreign energy policy scope as possible could prevent Kazakhstan from plunging into economic and political overdependence on any of the powerful regional actors.

From the security-related perspectives, Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy tends to be analyzed through the lens of its relations with powerful regional and international actors. Those studies that focus on the tripartite relations between Kazakhstan, Russia, and China reflect on the regional security build-up (Wu and Chen 2004, Hanks 2009, Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron 2011; Laruelle and Peyrouse 2012; Laruelle 2015; Proń and Szwajnoch 2020; Sim and Aminjonov 2022; Kondapalli 2023). It is suggested that Kazakhstan's concerns about its own security are proportional to the number of actors integrated into

regional security framework, where more is better (Omelicheva and Du 2018; Vanderhill, Joireman, and Tulepbayeva 2020).

Studies that go beyond the regional framework with its focus on Kazakhstan's relations with Russia and China, analyze whether other powerful actors can constitute a counter-balance to Russia and China. Gnedina (2015), Kurmanguzhin (2016), Laruelle and Royce (2019), and Toktogulov (2019) emphasize economic and diplomatic aspects of Kazakhstan's relations with the US, and the EU with its member states. Rangsimaporn (2020, 2021) showed how Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) could create an integrational counter-balance to the EEU, while Gaur, Tripathi, and Ray (2021) suggested that growing bilateral trade and absence of major conflicts could become a commencing point in the deeper integration between Kazakhstan and India.

Finally, several scholars investigated the bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia. Roberts (2015) and Kříž (2023) argued that Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 led to the immediate re-assessment of Kazakhstan's security perspectives. Terzyan (2022) concluded that the invocation of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) during the January 2022 crisis in Kazakhstan shattered country's international image as a stronghold of stability and peace in Central Asia.

What is common for most studies that explore Kazakhstan-Russia relations is a lack of a comprehensive perspective on how Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shaped its relations with Russia from 1991 to 2023. Alexandrov's (1999) work is a fair attempt at it yet it is limited by a period of 1991-1997. The following study, thus, will seek to address this gap.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

As mentioned, this study seeks to analyze how Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shaped its relations with Russia in 1991-2023. For this purpose, the framework that can at least partly explain Kazakhstan's political decisions and strategic maneuvers vis-à-vis Russia is necessary. In theory, given the strategic focus of the multi-vector policy aimed at the interplay between the secondary states and regional Great Powers, realism seems to offer the most convincing theoretical explanatory value. However, realism, when it comes to relations between stronger and weaker states, tends to limit the choices of weaker states to either balancing or bandwagoning as state-to-state forms of behavior (Sheehan 1996). Kazakhstan's relations with Russia seem to go beyond the simplicity of a "realist" paradigm as Kazakhstan neither strives to bandwagon with Russia nor balance against it. Goh's (2007) "omni-enmeshment" model, in this regard, might constitute a better choice. However, Goh's (2007) model reflects more on the regional dynamics by explaining how relations between weaker and stronger regional actors are defined by *integration*, the process of integrating dominant regional actors into the institutional structure of the regional integration project to create another venue of interaction, and *diversification*, the process increasing the set of interactions with other actors to decrease the dependence on any single state. As a result, it tends to overlook the bilateral relations paradigm motivated by domestic policy considerations. Alexandrov (1999), in turn, focuses almost exclusively on the bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, and hence, fails to reflect on the regional integration dynamism. Thus, although both Goh's (2007) and Alexandrov's (1999) models alone seem to be insufficient to demonstrate how Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shapes its relations with Russia, their combination might be useful.

The following section provides a theoretical framework for this research by going from a generalized perspective on the relations between weaker and stronger states through the lens of realism and the balance of power notion towards a more specific account on respective relations as viewed by a combination of Goh's (2007) "omni-enmeshment" and Alexandrov's (1999) perspective on the nature of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia.

2.1 Realism and the Balance of Power

Analytical deliberations on the choice of strategies adopted by smaller (secondary) states vis-à-vis relations with their bigger counterparts tend to be almost intrinsically linked to the notion of "balance of power," and thus, to the realist school of thought. Hence, it seems obvious to look into what realism manifests and how it has transformed throughout the centuries as the foundational theory of international relations. In short, the functional paradigm of realism rests on the core assumption that the international system is of an anarchical nature – a system with no overarching authority that entails the states as pre-eminent actors to advance and defend the primary interests of the state (Nexon 2009). Just as states are different from one another, realists' assumptions on driving mechanisms behind the foreign and domestic policy decisions adopted by states are myriad.

Classical realists focused primarily on the assumptions of inequality of power between the states entailing differences in the available strategic maneuvers (Sørensen, Møller, and Jackson 2022), the juxtaposition of state survival (security) and the principles of morality and political ethics (Machiavelli 2009), the analysis of incompatibility between the personal security dilemma and international security dilemma (Missner 2016), and "bridging" the empirical and normative analysis of international relations (Morgenthau 1985).

Following the footprint of classical realists, perspectives on realism have grown voluminous, particularly over the last century. Schelling's strategic realism, for instance, was among the first steps towards establishing a demarcation line between the classic realists who viewed normativity as an essential part of realist thought, and another perspective on realism that claimed normative implications to be subjective and thus unscientific. Waltz's (2001; 2010) "neo-realist" perspective on international relations was from a different angle. He emphasized the structural orientation of the international system that he deemed capable of explaining relative peace and stability during the Cold War period. Although successful in his initial endeavor, Waltz and neo-realism, at its most robust, failed to explain the set of changes associated with the transition to a multipolar world order following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Walt's (1985; 1998) pursuit was to close the gap left by Waltz (2001; 2010) when he came up with a "defensive" realism that revolves around the idea of a *threatening* power as a balancing unit based on four factors: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive military capability, and aggressive intentions.

In his widely discussed essay, Mearsheimer (2000) believes that both strategic realism and neo-realism are, perhaps, too attached to the geopolitical rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union and therefore lack sufficient explanatory value regarding the post-Cold War status quo. According to Mearsheimer (1995; 1995; 2000), the multi-polarity, unlike bipolarity, is best explained via "offensive" means – each state strives to become a hegemony so as to dominate the entire system in a way to make sure that no other combination of states can become powerful enough to threaten or waging the war against the hegemonic state. Eventually, Mearsheimer's "offensive" realism started to be perceived as an equivalent to that of Walt's "defensive" realism, though a bit dated with respect to current foreign and domestic policy decisions (Donnelly 2000).

Ultimately, although Walt's and Mearsheimer's approaches are contrary to each other, both focus on the fundamental assumption of associative relations between the balance of power and alliance formation, particularly when it concerns smaller states and their more powerful counterparts. In this regard, *balancing*, a situation when states ally - such as Baltic states joining NATO - to counter-balance other power or alliance that otherwise might pose a threat, and *bandwagoning*, a scenario when smaller states ally with bigger power like Belarus did with Russia (Pål and Blakkisrud 2021), are viewed to be two general strategic choices when entering the alliance. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan's relations with powerful actors in the region, Russia as an example, seem to go beyond these choices. Kazakhstan neither strives to bandwagon with Russia nor balance against it, which makes realism alone to be insufficient to explain Kazakhstan's strategic choices. All combined, it calls for a more suitable analytical perspective and Goh's (2007) "omni-enmeshment" is one way to approach it.

2.2 Goh's "Omni-enmeshment"

In the aftermath of the Cold War, realist scholars have re-considered the balance of power concept to a certain extent by focusing more on the newer version of "soft" balancing (Pape 2005) and "institutional" balancing (He 2008). Among the relatively new additions to the balance of power theory is Goh's (2007) "omni-enmeshment" strategy.

The concept of "omni-enmeshment" is an alternative way to capture the way smaller states position themselves in the geopolitical interplay between dominant regional players.[2] Goh (2007, 113) focuses on instability in Southeast Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of China, and the associated phase of transition from a bipolar to a multipolar world. The deliberations on the versatility of the practices utilized by East Asian states in the

[2] Goh's "omni-enmeshment" is an elaborated and refined version of Takashi Inoguchi's (2013) "omni-directional" policy, i.e. the political and economic discourse adopted by Japan in the aftermath of the World War 2 aimed at developing economic relations with a number of countries.

aftermath of the Cold War have practically divided the scholarly community into two camps on whether realist "hard" balancing or "institutional" balancing can provide a better explanatory value for the Southeast Asian case. In other words, the distinction is made between the two sets of questions: (1) whether Southeast Asian states do, indeed, balance against China, or instead accommodate, align or balance with it, and (2) whether ASEAN-led regional institutions have paved the way towards greater regional stability and security (Jones and Smith 2007; Goh 2007; Acharya 2014).

Goh (2007) argued that East Asia enjoyed relative stability and peace in the post-Cold War era, partially because of its great power dynamics. The US has maintained its web of alliances across East Asian states, while China abstained from challenging the established status quo in an aggressive manner. Nevertheless, although the great power dynamics are part of the picture, they are certainly not sufficient to explain everything. Part of the answer to why East and Southeast Asia were relatively stable in the early 1990s is due to (A) regional build-up between Japan and other leading Southeast Asian states that served to "regulate exchanges, develop norms, and create regional identity (Goh 2007, 113), and (B) indirect political, economic, and social balancing against China (or any other aggressive regional actor) in favor of the US security commitment to the region (Goh 2007, 114).

More specifically, Goh proposed the concept of "omni-enmeshment" as the key to regional stability, defining it as:

> …[T]he process of engaging with a state so as to draw it into deep involvement into international or regional society, enveloping it in a web of sustained exchanges and relationships, with the long-term aim of integration (2007, 121).

In other words, the "enmeshment," in the context of Southeast Asian states, constitutes the process of developing closer political, social and economic relations, facilitating security dialogues, and enhancing bilateral exchanges with China as a dominant regional actor.

However, the same applies to the US, thereby making the case of Southeast Asian states go beyond the fundamental characterization of "enmeshment."

Thus, should Goh's (2007) "omni-enmeshment" model be used in the Central Asian context, it could explain why Kazakhstan seeks to include as many regional powers in its strategic interests framework as possible – to avoid the necessity of pledging its support to any of the major regional powers so it can counter-balance one with another. However, while Goh's (2007) model focuses on regional perspective manifested mainly through regional integration initiatives, it overlooks the impact of domestic policy considerations on foreign policy decisions. Alexandrov's (1999) work on the matter of Kazakhstan's relations with Russia addresses Goh's (2007) limitation by analyzing how Kazakhstan managed its bilateral relations with Russia during the first decade of Kazakhstan's independence.

2.3 Alexandrov and Kazakhstan-Russia bilateral relations

The long history of relations between Kazakhstan and Russia defined the nature of bilateral cooperation between the two. Alexandrov's (1999) work delves into the complex dynamics that shaped respective bilateral relations during the first years of Kazakhstan's independence from 1992 to 1997. Both Russia and Kazakhstan grappled with realities of independence, and their relations reflected these realities as a mix of cooperation and competition. Economic factors played one of the key roles in their relations. The question of resource allocation, particularly in the energy sector, was a source of tension and negotiation. Kazakhstan's vast oil and gas reserves were a point of interest for Russia, leading to discussions on how to manage and distribute these resources. Likewise, Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy aimed at balancing relations with Russia, China, and the West, added another layer of complexity to the relationship. The region's broader security environment, including the conflict in Chechnya, also impacted Russo-Kazakh relations. Kazakhstan's

bilateral relations with Russia focused mostly on resolving the "ethnic" question. Alexandrov (1999) explores how the Russian-speaking population in Kazakhstan and the Kazakh diaspora in Russia influenced the countries' policies towards each other, including issues related to citizenship and socio-cultural identity.

He defines Kazakhstan's relations with Russia by reflecting on Nazarbayev's political style:

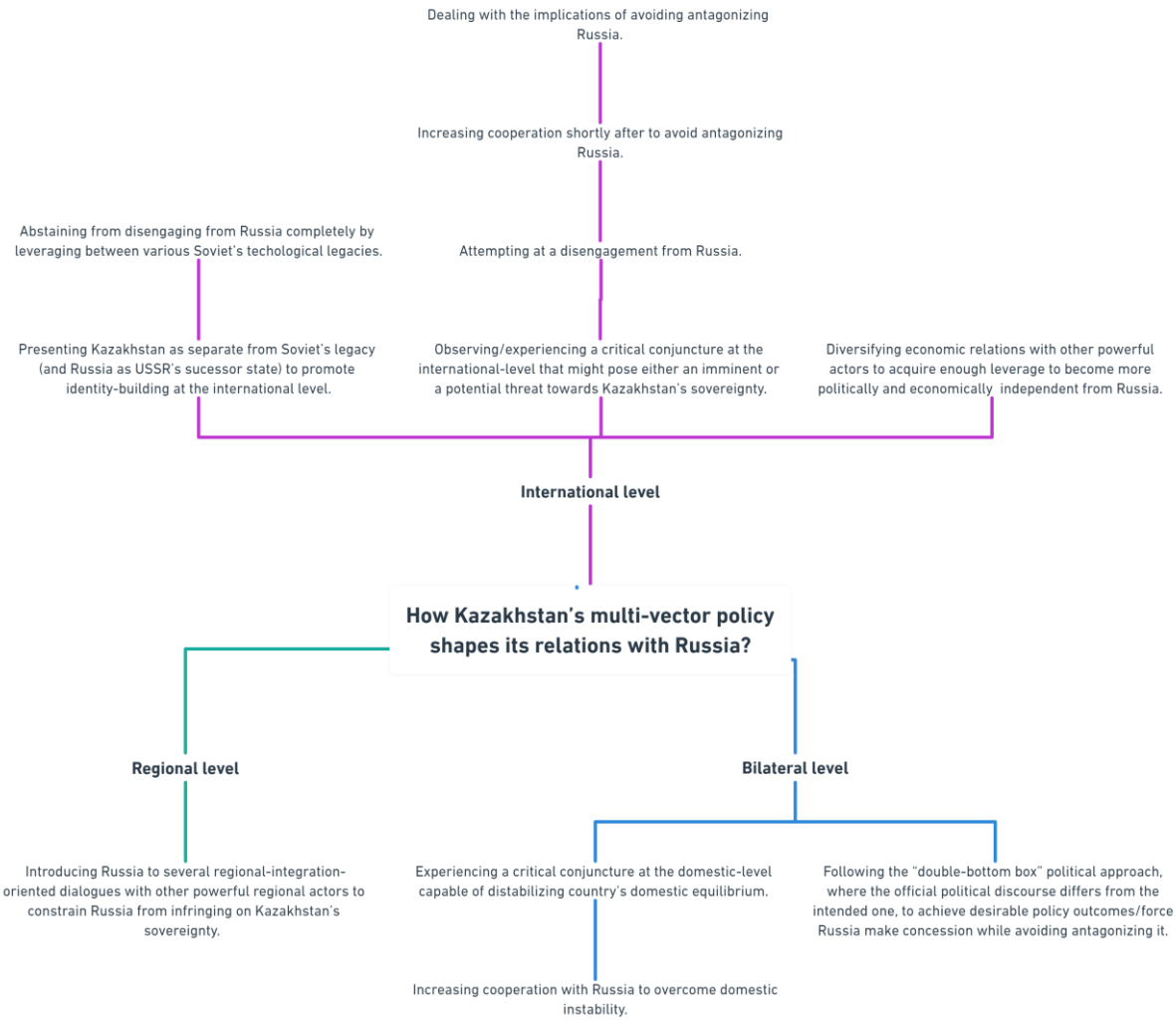
> It was typical of Nazarbayev's political style that he described the meeting as an "event to strengthen our Union, our Federation as a whole", whereas in reality both the meeting and the agreement served the opposite purpose of involving the other Central Asian leaders in a process of fragmenting the union, skillfully capitalizing on their natural anxiety about the Russian declaration of sovereignty's potential consequences for Central Asia (1999, 41).

In other words, Nazarbayev's, and hence Kazakhstan's political style vis-à-vis its relations with Russia, is a "double-bottom" box where the "official" meaning of the advanced political decision differs from the intended one in a way to force Russia to draw concessions in favor of Kazakhstan. By this, Kazakhstan manages to prevent overdependence on Russia by shifting the asymmetry in the bilateral relations, while avoiding antagonizing Russia.

What Alexandrov's (1999) account lacks is the analysis of regional and international dynamics, to which Kazakhstan adapted and which shaped bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia. However, combined with Goh's (2007) "omni-enmeshment" it constitutes a conceptually suitable way to describe how Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shapes its relations with Russia. On one side, Goh's (2007) "omni-enmeshment" helps to understand how *diversification* and *integration* allowed Kazakhstan to avoid overdependence on Russia from regional and global-oriented perspectives. On the other side, Alexandrov's (1999) insights will reflect on the domestic side of the respective relations.

The following figure is a visual depiction of the suggested theoretical framework model:

Figure 1. Suggested theoretical framework model



Source: Author's own visualization.

Chapter 3. Research Design

To explore how Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shaped its relations with Russia, this study applies qualitative description with process tracing elements to the analysis of existing materials on the subject, including scholarly literature, government websites, and National Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The following chapter explains the choice of a methodology in more detail. It starts with a brief section on case selection followed by sections on qualitative description, process tracing, and data collection.

3.1 Case Selection and Case Justification

Kazakhstan is a particularly prominent example of a secondary state "sandwiched" between two dominant regional actors.[3] Kazakhstan has a long history of relations with Russia, first as a vassal state of the Russian Empire in the 19th century, and then as a part of the Soviet Union. Kazakhstan became independent in 1991 and initiated cooperation with the Russian Federation shortly thereafter. Kazakhstani leader Nazarbayev remained in power for 30 years, which coupled with current President Tokayev adopting Nazarbaeyv's political discourse, allows me to control for other variables, such as the personality of the leader and type of political regime. Over the next three decades of independence, Kazakhstan managed to sustain its economic and diplomatic relations with Russia, eventually co-launching a Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2015 (Karasayev et al 2019).

Aspiring for deeper economic integration with Russia at the beginning, Kazakhstan, however, tailored its foreign and domestic politics to seek a delicate balance between maintaining friendly relations with Russia while avoiding antagonizing it and preventing overdependence. To do this, Kazakhstan resorted to diversifying its economic, diplomatic, military, and energy relations with other powerful regional actors, such as China, India, the

[3]Another example is Mongolia. Other examples might include Southeast Asian states in the aftermath of the Cold War locked between the US and rising China (Goh 2007).

EU, and the US. There are a variety of strategies that Kazakhstan's government resorted to when diversifying its political and economic relations with Russia, such as trying to include as many states as possible into its cooperation schemes to integrate the respective countries into regional security and economic frameworks (Wu and Chen 2004). For instance, in 2001, Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan announced the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), one of Kazakhstan's first integration-oriented diversification attempts to lessen its overdependence on the Russia-led CSTO (Dadabaev 2014).

Both Russia[4] and other powerful actors in the region[5] dwarf Kazakhstan in terms of economic development, military capabilities, and international recognition; hence Kazakhstan sought to mitigate their influence by avoiding overdependence, either by leveraging between the two or pursuing a delicate balance vis-à-vis bilateral relations. With Russia's annexation of Crimea taking place in 2014 and China launching its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, the importance of Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy as a balancing mechanism elevated to a significant extent.

3.2 Methodology

Methodologically, this research seeks to apply the logic of qualitative description with a relatively modest process tracing overtones to illuminate on how Kazakhstan uses its multi-vector policy to shape its relations with Russia.

[4] Russia's GDP in 2021 amounted to $1.7 trillion("GDP (Current US$)" n.d.) with a PPP of $4.8 trillion("GDP, PPP (Current International $)" n.d.).
[5]China's GDP in 2021 amounted to $17 trillion("GDP (Current US$)" n.d.) with a PPP of $27 trillion("GDP, PPP (Current International $)" n.d.), while Kazakhstan's GDP in 2021 constituted $197 billion("GDP (Current US$)" n.d.) with a PPP of $545 billion("GDP, PPP (Current International $)" n.d.).

3.2.1 Qualitative Description

Qualitative methods include a vast array of approaches to social science inquiry. Among them is qualitative description. To fulfill the established research goal, this study adopts a fundamental type of qualitative description. To differentiate it from any other types of qualitative description, which might include phenomenology, grounded theory, or ethnographic studies, this study adopts Margarete Sandelowski (2001; 2010) definition of the qualitative description: "a qualitative description is a comprehensive summary of a particular event or a chain of events that is intended to offer descriptive validity" (2001, 335).

3.2.2 Process Tracing

As researchers may apply different methods in combination with one another, this study stretches far from being an exception. The logic of process tracing, here, is intended to support that of qualitative description. Drawing from Beach and Pedersen (2013), the logic of process tracing aims to establish a causal link between the cause and outcome through a chain of causal steps upon the analysis of observable manifestations of certain empirical expectations. Since the following study does not pursue the goal of establishing the causal link between the cause and the outcome but rather to describe how multi-vector policy lens can help explain Kazakhstan's relations with Russia, it will limit the procedural part of the process tracing logic to a certain extent. In short, it will only seek to describe the process without resorting to establishing causal connections between any steps, let alone applying any strength tests. Accurate description, in this regard, is necessary for diagnostic evidence, which, in future research could be used in theory-building and/or theory testing.

More specifically, to demonstrate how Kazakhstan maintains its relations with Russia it might be helpful to theorize about the presence of action-reaction dynamic, i.e., the one where Kazakhstan undergoes a timely increase in cooperation with one actor – sometimes

contrary to another actor's strategic preferences – followed by an increase/decrease in cooperation with another actor in favor of the other actor in the respective areas. Alternatively, Kazakhstan may both directly and indirectly seek to connect to or disengage itself from Russia on both domestic and international levels to vividly demonstrate its stance as an independent self-sufficient unit.

As for the observable manifestations of the chosen empirical expectations, this particular research draws from Alexandrov (1998) on the role Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy plays in shaping its relations with Russia. Hence, if I was to find that Kazakhstan seeks to create a balance vis-à-vis relations with Russia, so that it can avoid overdependence while maintaining cooperation, I should first observe changes in Kazakhstan's behavior and attitudes towards Russia over time. In this case, an observable manifestation would be Kazakhstan's policies and political preferences shifting from cooperation with Russia following an international-level event or a certain critical conjuncture that might pose an imminent threat or a potential threat to Kazakhstan's sovereignty. In theory, a decline in the willingness to cooperate with Russia should be followed by a "mitigating" political initiative aimed at avoiding antagonizing Russia.

Second, this research can expect to observe the dual, and perhaps even "hidden," purpose behind the implementation of certain initiatives. In other words, if I were to find that Kazakhstan does indeed strive to make timely strategic decisions with the purpose of maintaining stable relations with Russia while striving to avoid overdependence, I should observe the duality of some of Kazakhstan's policies and initiative implementation purposes vis-à-vis the associated theoretical and practical paradigms. Hence, another observable manifestation would a difference between Kazakhstan's official and intended political discourses.

3.2.3 Data Collection

To trace the relations between Kazakhstan and Russia from 1991 to 2023, I examine the existing data on the subject: existing scholarly research, newspaper articles, official statements, online resources, which include the Official Website of the President of Kazakhstan, and Adilet.zan.kz and Online.zakon.kz – legal information systems of regulatory legal acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the National Archive of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The majority of the sources available are either in the Kazakh language or in Russian with no English translation. However, when necessary, a translation is provided.

Chapter 4. Analysis and Results: Russian minority, "Sovietness," and diversification

In this chapter, I present my analysis of Kazakhstan's relations with Russia in the period from 1991 to 2023. I identify three periods in history of Kazakhstan-Russia relations in 1991-2023, distinct in the character of such relations and the associated set of practices used.

The first period, spanning from 1991 to 1999, is largely defined by the policies aimed at addressing the "ethnic" question. During this period, Nazarbayev and his cabinet pursued the duality of Kazakhstan's political discourse manifested through the difference between official and intended political discourses. The ultimate goal was to achieve desirable outcomes and force Russia to make concessions vis-à-vis the "ethnic" question while avoiding antagonizing it. The second period covers the set of events from 2000 to 2013 and focuses mostly on Kazakhstan's simultaneous attempts at maintaining friendly relations with Russia and reaching other regional and international actors at the expense of partial disengagement from Russia achieved via leveraging between various aspects of the Soviet Legacy. The final period is characterized by an impact of Kazakhstan's successful diversification attempts combined with elevated security concerns caused by Russia's annexation of Crimea on Kazakhstan's approach towards handling its relations with Russia.

4.1 Kazakhstan, Russia, and the "ethnic" question in 1991-1999

The character of Kazakhstan's relations with Russia in 1991-1999 was mainly a by-product of Kazakhstan's struggle to resolve the "ethnic" question characterized by the discrepancy between Kazakhstan's official and intended political discourses. "The Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance between Kazakhstan and Russian Federation" signed in May 25, 1992, has generally defined the nature of future relations between Kazakhstan and Russia by providing a legal framework for addressing the "ethnic" question by both countries

(Adilet.kz (A)). What came as a build-up for the largest set of provisions addressed in the treaty was the set of socio-ethnic challenges faced by Kazakhstan in the immediate aftermath of its independence. Handling a diverse multi-ethnic population caused primarily by mass migration waves in the 1920s-1930s, World War II, and Khrushchev's 1950s "Virgin Lands Campaign" stood out as particularly challenging (Ayagan and Aunanasova 2012, Karasayev et al. 2019).

More specifically, the status of ethnic Russians living in Kazakhstan had largely made it choose between several potential *modus operandi* regarding its future political and socio-cultural orientation:

1. a "civic-nationhood" as a type of the state formation that would respect all of its citizens regardless of their ethnic origin;
2. a type of a "bi-national" state with two or more ethnicities constituting several "core" nations;
3. adopting a "revengeful" nationalist-oriented agenda that would favor the "titular" nation at the expense of others (Collins and Burkhanov 2019, 13);

Yeltsin saw the diversity of Kazakhstan's population as a way to boost his popularity. Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, an opposition seized the moment by heavily blaming Yeltsin not only for the collapse of the Soviet Union per se, but also for the humiliation and suffering of 25 million ethnic Russians who found themselves outside the border of their motherland, so the government had to tailor its moves accordingly. Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev is exemplary in this regard. In an interview, he claimed that Moscow would strive to protect the Russian and Russian-speaking populations in other CIS states. Thus, Yeltsin's willingness to regain popularity pressured Kazakhstan's government

into adopting a "civic-nationhood" logic of behavior. Nazarbayev had to abide, given that Russian and Russian-speaking population constituted more than half of Kazakhstan's northern region's population. Nevertheless, Nazarbayev's cabinet also tended to "overlook" revengeful pushes by Kazakh nationalists (Collins and Burkhanov 2019).

The logic here is rather vivid in light of the suggested theoretical framework model. In 1992, Nazarbayev clearly understood that the recency of independence allowed for an open confrontation with Russia neither at the bilateral nor at the international level. Should Nazarbayev go against Yeltsin, Kazakhstan, still part of the rouble zone at that moment, would have to endure severe economic consequences. Hence, Nazarbayev, although verbally only, went along with Yeltsin's desire to support ethnic Russian population in Kazakhstan. However, no one could stop Nazarbayev from supporting ethnic Kazakhs at the expense of Kazakhstan's Russian-speaking population as will be shown via the examples below. Thus, right from the beginning Kazakhstan's intended political discourse differed from the official one.

In essence, Russia made the first move towards resolving the "ethnic" question. On March 23, 1992, Kazakh government received Russian delegates in Uralsk where both discussed and agreed to develop a treaty capable of addressing the majority of "ethnic" related issues (Correspondence with Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on the inter-state and inter-parliamentary relations in 1992). In short, "The Treaty of Friendship and Mutual Assistance between Kazakhstan and Russian Federation" stipulated the following:

- Article 11 guaranteed equal rights of citizens and non-citizens irrespective of their ethnic origin, and most importantly, the right to choose citizenship in other countries.

- Article 12 ensured that the sides would provide support and protection for their citizens living in the territory of other parties in accordance with international law.
- Article 27 stipulated that the parties would promote the mutual development and exchange of language practices between Russian-speaking and non-Russian-speaking populations.
- Articles 10 and 15 prohibited the establishment of separatist organizations aimed at reinforcing inter-ethnic tensions and spreading violence against minorities by other groups.
- Article 14 enlisted the set of rights vis-à-vis the cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious individualistic features of minorities (Adilet.kz (A)).

Thus, several articles did not turn out to be "free of holes," which added to the gap between Kazakhstan's official and intended political discourses. The majority of ethnic Russians was not citizens of Kazakhstan at the time, or at least not yet, and were therefore not covered by the provisions of Article 12. In theory, Articles 11 and 12 would benefit Russians living in Kazakhstan who wanted to receive Russian citizenship. However, it would practically make them foreigners, therefore stripping them of any privileges granted by citizenship, such as access to Public Service. Article 14, in turn, did not add anything substantial to the socio-political domain while focusing almost entirely on freedom of cultural representation (Adilet.kz (A)). Hence, the resulting treaty benefited Kazakhstan, to a degree incomparable to that of Russia. Kazakhstan has received an unambiguous recognition of its territorial integrity, yet has not made any significant commitments to the ethnic Russians in its territory. What allowed Nazarbayev to make the Russian side make more concessions than they otherwise would have liked to was his arduous criticism of the negative experiences from other post-Soviet Republics. In Estonia and Latvia, for instance, the initial drafts on the

Citizenship Law triggered wide scale protests blaming the government for the lack of imposing language and residency requirements when opting for a citizenship (Brubaker 1992, Zakon.kz (A)).

Needless to say, Nazarbayev's initiatives were far from focusing on mitigating inter-ethnic division between the Kazakh and Russian and Russia-speaking population. The first draft of the new Constitution that passed on June 2, 1992, emphasized the "inviolability of Kazakh" statehood, raising concerns among Kazakhstan's Russian-speaking population (Adilet.kz (B)). The meeting of the constitutional commission chaired by Nazarbayev on October 28, 1992 did not provide any substantial benefits for advocates of the federative structure of the state and state bilingualism. Moreover, any proposals on the recognition of multinationalism and the status of the Russian language as a second state language brought by the Russian deputies at the Supreme Soviet were rejected by the Kazakh majority. Thus, although the Russian minority in the Supreme Soviet opposed the adoption of the new constitution, it was officially adopted on January 28, 1993 (Adilet.kz (B)).

On paper, the political discourse advocated by Kazakhstan and its President was aimed at mitigating the inter-ethnic divide, which was necessary to avoid antagonizing Russia. In reality, Nazarbayev sought to circumvent it by various means. On a more global level, Nazarbayev sought to promote the repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs back to their country of origin. In 1991, Kazakhs, as a titular nation, constituted only 40% of Kazakhstan's total population. Ethnic repatriation, therefore, was considered one of the ways to increase a country's sustainability and maintain government's legitimacy. It quickly became one of the government's top priorities. The repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs to Kazakhstan began in 1991 with the Cabinet of Ministers of the KazSSR passing a resolution "On the procedure and conditions for the resettlement to Kazakh SSR of indigenous people who have expressed a

desire to work in rural areas, from other republics and foreign countries" on November 18, 1991 (Vanderhill, Joireman, and Tulepbayeva 2020). On June 26, 1992, the Supreme Council of Kazakhstan adopted the Immigration Law that stipulated the process of migration, established the quota number for migrants and their families, and allocated the necessary amount of resources.[6] According to the Immigration Law, the "indigenous people" could return to the country of their origin, thereby referring mostly, if not exclusively, to Kazakhs rather than those of Russian descent like Russian Cossacks that fled to China after the Civil War, let alone any other ethnicities of the post-Soviet Kazakhstan including Uighurs, Dungan, and Kalmyk people (Zakon.kz (B)).

The principles of the Immigration Law were later incorporated into the new constitution of 1993. It ultimately contradicted Kazakhstan's official political discourse by increasing the scale of inter-ethnic division within the country, in line with the suggested theoretical framework model. It is no surprise that it was criticized both at the local and international levels. The UN High Commissioner for the Refugees stated that Article 4 of the new constitution violated the fundamental principles of the equality of the citizens by preferences on the "titular" nation, thereby practically dividing the population of Kazakhstan into two – Kazakh and non-Kazakhs (Alexandrov 1999). Article 4 of the new constitution prohibited any citizens of Kazakhstan from holding the citizenship of any other country apart from Kazakhstan while allowing Kazakh nationals living abroad to hold the citizenship of the Republic of Kazakhstan along with the citizenship of the country they lived in (Adilet.kz (B)).

[6] The number of migrants that moved to Kazakhstan has never exceeded the quota of 10 thousand families per year established in 1992. As such, in 1992, only 9441 families moved to Kazakhstan. The repatriation coincided with economic crises and other associated issues so the number of migrants has been reducing every year with only 500 families moved to Kazakhstan in 1999 and 2000. In this regard, President Nazarbayev sought to support Kazakh diaspora overseas by, first, facilitating the process of acquiring and terminating citizenship. To do so, Kazakhstan's government negotiated bilateral agreements with Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine in 1999. Despite that, the net migration remained negative, hence, the government has decided to expand the classification of those who can repatriate by including those individuals who ever lived on the territory of Kazakhstan - autochthonous population, which helped to increase the number of repatriates to a certain extent(Cummings 1998; Zeveleva 2014; Zardykhan 2016).

In short, the ultimate goal of repatriation was to shift the ethnic and demographic balance towards the Kazakh population.

The crux is that in 1992, almost every decision made by the government of Kazakhstan bore a clear anti-Russian overtone, which was in direct contrast with Nazarbayev's official political position. First, on July 6, 1994, the Parliament of Kazakhstan adopted a resolution to move the capital from Almaty to Astana, as proposed by Nazarbayev in July 1994 (Zakon.kz (C)). The justifications given were the government's concern about the overpopulation of Almaty, its geographical location in the center of the seismically active zone, and China and politically unstable Tajikistan located in close proximity to their borders. However, the Russian-speaking population of Kazakhstan and many Russian experts unequivocally concluded that the decision was due to the desire for tighter control over country's northern parts, partially by, stimulating an influx of the Kazakh population (Correspondence with Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on the inter-state and inter-parliamentary relations in 1994).

Second, following the transfer of the capital closer to Kazakhstan's northern borders, the Supreme Soviet Presidium renamed 29 Russian settlements' names to those reflecting Kazakh heritage. What gives a hint on the presence of anti-Russian sentiment in the respective decision is the renaming of Dzhambetinskiy district in West Kazakhstan province to Syrymsky district after SyrymDatov – a famous fighter for Kazakh independence against Soviet Rule. Alma-ata, meanwhile, still the capital at the time, was renamed Almaty so it can follow the "norms of the Kazakh language" (Adilet.kz (C)).

Similarly, the government did not overlook the language policy. Nazarbayev claimed that Moscow weaponized the language so it can exercise a tighter control over its periphery

via the means of "cultural integration" so the persistent conviction was to diminish the role of the Russian culture and heritage to build an independent Kazakhstan (Nazarbayev 1996). The first post-Soviet Constitution, then, declared the Kazakh language to be an official state language, while the Russian language took the status of "language of inter-ethnic communication" (Adilet.kz (B)).[7] The language policy quickly became the tool for sidelining Russians by, for instance, assigning language requirements for positions of power in government and public service, which denied the majority of Russians access to such positions. Although language requirements were introduced after commencing the repatriation program, Kazakhs constituted only half of the population. The Russian authorities were concerned with the way Kazakhstan's language policies were proclaimed. According to Alexandrov (1999, 61), Mikitayev, Head of the Directorate for Citizenship Questions in the presidential administration, mentioned that the willingness of Kazakh authorities to catalyze the development of the Kazakh language across the masses should not be against the use of other languages and that the continuation of discrimination against the Russian language could provide a negative impetus towards the development of bilateral relations between Russia and Kazakhstan. Although it was a clear indication of Russia's awareness about the differences between the official political discourse and the intended one, there was little Russia could do to prevent Nazarbayev from creating a clear distinction between the Kazakh language and any other language, Russian in particular.

One of the many ways of using language policies to sideline Russian-speaking population was a decrease in the number of Russian-taught schools from 3916 in 1989 to only 2484 in 1996 (Documents on the distribution of schools and students in accordance with the language of study in 1989-1994, Documents on the distribution of schools and students in

[7]In the pre-independent Kazakhstan, only 17.5% of Kazakhs did not possess enough Russian speaking, reading, and writing skills necessary for communication, while 74.5% had. Meanwhile, only 2.1% of Russians were able to speak, write, and read in Kazakh, which essentially made Russian the main language (Zardykhan 2016).

accordance with the language of study in 1995-1996). It is noteworthy that the fall in Russian-taught schools was not compensated by the increase in opening of mixed-taught school as the number of such schools opened by 1996 amounted to 1225 against 1438 of those closed (Documents on the distribution of schools and students in accordance with the language of study in 1995-1996).

The same, however, did not take place at the university level of education, perhaps because transferring tertiary education to the Kazakh language has proven to be rather difficult at the time (Documents on the acceptance rates of college students in 1993-1996). The proportion of students taking university classes in Kazakh language increased by only 9% from 1992 to 1996 (Documents on the acceptance rates of college students in 1993-1996). Ultimately, it did not cause the same level of concerns among the Russian-speaking population relative to that of the secondary education level mainly because there were enough university courses taught in Russian to fulfill the demands of the Russian-speaking population. Nevertheless, this resulted in a significant gap in the acceptance rates between Kazakh and Russian students. The proportion of admitted students inclined towards Kazakh students even in 1993, when Kazakhs constituted 79.5% of those admitted, while Russians did not exceed 15% in Kazakhstan's National University in Almaty (Documents on the acceptance rates of college students in 1993-1996). Abdigaliev explained this to be a result of a mere difference in the number of applicants, where 79.4% of the applicants were of Kazakh descent while only 13.4% were Russians. The probability that there were six times more Kazakh applicants is rather questionable given that Russians constituted 59% of Almaty residents, whereas Kazakhs were only 22% (Alexandrov 1999, 65). No differences were observed in other regions. Better access to higher education was a way to give Kazakhs an upper hand in applying for more skilled, prestigious, and higher-paid jobs, which eventually

was supposed to ensure that the next generation of elite was comprised of Kazakhs. Another goal of such preferential treatment was to force Russians to see higher education overseas and thus create more incentives to emigrate.

The next step was a set of policies related to privatization of the state property. Given the long heritage of Kazakhstan's relations with Russia, particularly as a part of the USSR, Kazakhstan's industries were full of ethnic Russians to the extent that they comprised around 80% of all industrial employers (Jermakowicz et al. 1996). It comes as no surprise as Russians were more skilled and highly qualified industrial workers even before independence, while the Kazakh population prioritized agriculture over the industrial sector. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russians outnumbered Kazakhs four to one as engineers, officers, and leading specialists, two to one as manual workers, and three to one as directors (Alexandrov 1999). On June 21, 1992, Nazarbayev issued a decree on the National Privatization Program followed by a Law on Destatization and Privatization in June 1993 that difened the legal framework for privatization (Adilet.kz (D)). In theory, the buy-out by the workers collectives was given a preference in the privatization schemes alongside auctions and tenders, which was supposed to benefit the Russian population who were the majority. In reality, the legal framework ensured that workers collective would not have a chance to acquire the share majority, particularly in medium-sized and large enterprises. Upon corporatization, the labor force would not only be entitled to 25% of all shares, whereas senior executives would be entitled to a certain number of shares (Jermakowicz et al. 1996). It soon became evident that Nazarbayev's tactics envisaged depriving Russians of their industrial economic power and re-distributing national wealth so it could favor the Kazakh elite. The majority of shares were allocated for different purchases on the set of different categories of stakeholders, including suppliers, clients of the firm, and foreign investors, and

to be distributed among citizens or retained by the state. It eventually prevented the labor force from acquiring the shares majority.

Nazarbayev, however, went further at shifting the balance of privatization towards ethnic Kazakhs over Russia. First, the Mass Privatization Campaign that followed the first privatization offers in 1991 and small-scale privatization in 1992 introduced a coupon system where coupons representing the Privatization Investment Points (IPCs) were distributed across the population (Documents on the results of the coupon auctions in 1992-1995). Only the Kazakh nationals were entitled to distribution of coupons, which, given the ambiguity regarding the citizenship question, significantly undermined the chances of ethnic Russians acquiring the coupons. Moreover, while people in rural areas received 120 coupons per person, those living in cities received only 100, which benefited ethnic Kazakhs that occupied rural areas at higher rates compared to ethnic Russians (Minutes of meetings of the Permanent Commission under the State Privatization fund on summing up the results of specialized coupon auctions). Second, after the government retained approximately 70% of the shares of medium-sized and large enterprises, it made them available for contract management by foreign companies with a future prospect of privatization. Nazarbayev allowed foreign contractors, most of which went bankrupt or ceased to exist, to purchase more than 98% of the country's industry for a sum that barely exceeded $3 billion (Minutes of meetings of the Permanent Commission under the State Privatization fund on summing up the results of specialized coupon auctions).

Thus, Nazarbayev achieved his primary goal at sidelining ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan's industrial sector. He deprived Russians of the chance to privatize Kazakhstan's industrial sector by handling it over to foreign contractors and sidelining Russian companies that had more experience and knowledge of Kazakhstan's business practices. The industrial

contractors depended on the Kazakh leadership concerning the process of management of the industrial enterprises, which ultimately allowed Kazakh bureaucrats, comprised mostly of ethnic Kazakhs, to have indirect control over the industrial sectors (Jermakowicz et al. 1996). As a result, Nazarbayev decreased Russians' influence over Kazakhstan's industrial sector, which would otherwise be elevated and be capable of causing serious issues with Nazarbayev's domestic political discourse.

Finally, unlike industrial privatization, the land privatization did not take place. The government understood that privatization of the land would mostly benefit Russian workers engaged in sedentary agriculture and most likely harm ethnic Kazakhs that focused on animal grazing (Documents on the work of territorial bodies on the implementation of the program of privatization and restructuring of state property). In industrial privatization, the government could not simply seize industrial enterprises because it would trigger a series of protests among ethnic Russian workers that could not be replaced with ethnic Kazakhs due to the lack of qualified personnel. In contrast, the situation with the lands allowed for such measures (Adilet.kz (E)). The first post-Soviet constitution defined land as a property of the state. In March 1993, a policy on the right of an inheritable 99-years lease was adopted (made transferrable in April 1994) (Adilet.kz (B)). Thus, it allowed the government to retain control over the land while allowing ethnic Russians to work on the lands via the right to use (though not the right to possess). It solved the potential issues with ethnic Kazakhs' resettlement in the country's northern region.

The economy, as suggested by the theoretical framework model, played its role in catalyzing disputes between Russia and Kazakhstan vis-à-vis the ethnic question. In November 1993, Russia left the ruble zone and refused to supply Kazakhstan with fresh rubble deliveries. It created a pre-condition for anti-Russian violence to take place, and

Shokhin, Russian Deputy Prime Minister, addressed this by emphasizing Russia's willingness to protect Russian-speakers in other post-Soviet Republics. It increased tensions between the two countries, with Nazarbayev drawing parallels between Shokhin's and Hitler's reasoning in invading Czechoslovakia (Alexandrov 1999). Such an accumulation of anti-Russian sentiments might have been detrimental to Russia at the time. The internal pressure would disallow Yeltsin from invading Kazakhstan to protect Russian-speaking populations in other post-Soviet states, while the international community's outrage would put Russia in economic and political isolation should Russia make a decision to invade Kazakhstan. The annexation of Kazakhstan's northern regions could make the rest of Kazakhstan more inclined towards adopting Islamic fundamentalism, thereby creating a direct security threat to Russia. Russia's administration did it best to prevent this scenario from taking place by referring to Shokhin's comments as "irresponsible" remarks.

Nazarbayev sought to utilize Russia's "vulnerable" position to pursue his own strategic interests. He presented the idea of a establishing a simplified procedure for acquisition of citizenship by Kazakhs and Russians and granting the right for citizens of both countries to serve in each other's armies under the contract (Adilet.kz (F)). Nazarbayev's idea wielded two primary purposes. First, Nazarbayev wanted to facilitate emigration of ethnic Russians from Kazakhstan, which had slowed down by 1994. Second, he wanted to diminish the concerns of the Russian-speaking population during the first parliamentary elections on March 7, 1994, in order to reinforce positive relations with Russia in the wake of an almost imminent ethnic crisis. At that time, the inter-ethnic divide between the Kazakh and non-Kazakh populations of Kazakhstan suddenly became too obvious. Along with the education, privatization, and language policies, the representativeness of Russian-speakers in government positions, representative bodies on every level and public service was lower than

ever, which made Russian Duma conclude on the "unreasonable" and "rather provocative" attempts at ousting Russian speakers from governmental positions (Correspondence with Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on the inter-state and inter-parliamentary relations in 1994). Hence, Nazarbayev attempted to create a vision of the establishment of the "Russian parliament," or at least a subdivision of it that would protect the interests of the Russian-speaking population in Kazakhstan. This did not occur. Gross violation of democratic norms prevented Russian-speakers from acquiring the majority of the seats with Kazakhs, comprising 103 out of 176 winning candidates (Alexandrov 1999).

Unlike Kazakhstan's Russian-speaking population, Russia was not surprised by election results. Zatulin, the head of the Russian parliamentary delegation, visited Almaty to observe the election process on 6-9 March 1994. He expressed dissatisfaction with the way elections were held, yet expressed no significant concern about Kazakhstan's capability to "develop a real confrontation with Russian interests" (Hanks and Reuel 1998). Zatulin's report expressed a centrist view of Russia's future strategy towards Kazakhstan. At the core of the strategy was the gradual incorporation of Kazakhstan's northern borders into the territory of Russia and further non-violent integration of the rest of its territories into a new form of federation-type unit (Alexandrov 1999). For Nazarbayev it meant the end of his allegedly "nationalistic" regime due to the pressure both within caused by unfair parliamentary elections, and without, exemplified by Russia supporting pro-Russian organizations and activists groups.

The accumulation of domestic and international pressures eventually had a toll on Nazarbayev's political image so he had to act accordingly. Just as the theoretical framework model suggests, Nazarbayev sought to re-approach Kazakhstan's relations with Russia by

engaging the latter in a regional integration dialogue. In March 1994, he went to Moscow to discuss a set of crucial matters involving security, energy, economic, and socio-political aspects. In pursuit to elevate his political image on both the domestic and regional level gave the lecture at the Moscow State University (MSU) where he outlined the vision of the future development of political and economic relations between Russia and Kazakhstan (Nazarbayev 2016; Mesheryakov 2012; "Nazarbayev suggested the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU))" 2014). During his speech, he emphasized the prospects for deeper economic and socio-political integration under the umbrella of the Eurasian Union. Such an integration should rest on principles different from those of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as it would entail the creation of a joint parliament, council of ministers, ministry of defense, common citizenship, and monetary union (Mostafa 2013). Although Nazarbayev's vision of the future relationship between Russia, Kazakhstan, and other post-Soviet republics has received a cold shoulder from the majority of post-Soviet countries, it has demonstrated Kazakhstan's willingness to engage with Russia and the region beyond mere economic cooperation(Raikhan 2013). Nazarbayev's suggestion to create the Eurasian Union allowed him to shift the focus of the meeting from socio-political issues and inter-ethnic divisions, and hence to avoid making any serious concession vis-à-vis the status of Russian-speaking individuals in Kazakhstan.

Realizing the persistency of the "ethnic" question, Russian delegation headed by Mikitayev visited Kazakhstan in May 1994, hoping to reach any decisive conclusions on the problems of Russian-speakers in Kazakhstan manifested through citizenship issues. Despite Mikitayev's hopes, Nazarbayev remained adamant in his refusal to allow dual citizenship (Correspondence with Inter-parliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on the inter-state and inter-parliamentary

relations in 1994). The primary issue that Nazarbayev and his cabinet had was an almost immediate and, perhaps, inevitable, succumbing to Russian authority over Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev saw through Yeltsin's official discourse on "dual citizenship" constituting a "bridge of friendship" that could strengthen bilateral relations between the states and facilitate the protection of human rights. In reality, "dual citizenship" bore a far-reaching political agenda. Should Kazakhstan accept dual citizenship, it will be indefinitely bounded by Russian domestic and foreign political agendas to the extent that Kazakhstan's sovereignty would become questionable. If accepted, half of Kazakhstan's population would become Russian citizens, which, in turn, would grant Russia access to justify putting political, economic, and even military pressure on Kazakhstan, disguised as striving to protect its citizens. Indirectly, it might have created a deterrence mechanism sufficient to prevent Kazakhstan from taking steps towards approaching the international community that does not go in line with Russia's direct interests. Though Kazakhstan did not have any respective examples at the time, Russia's actions in 2008 in Georgia and in 2014/2022 in Ukraine justified Nazarbayev's decision to prevent "dual citizenship" from happening.

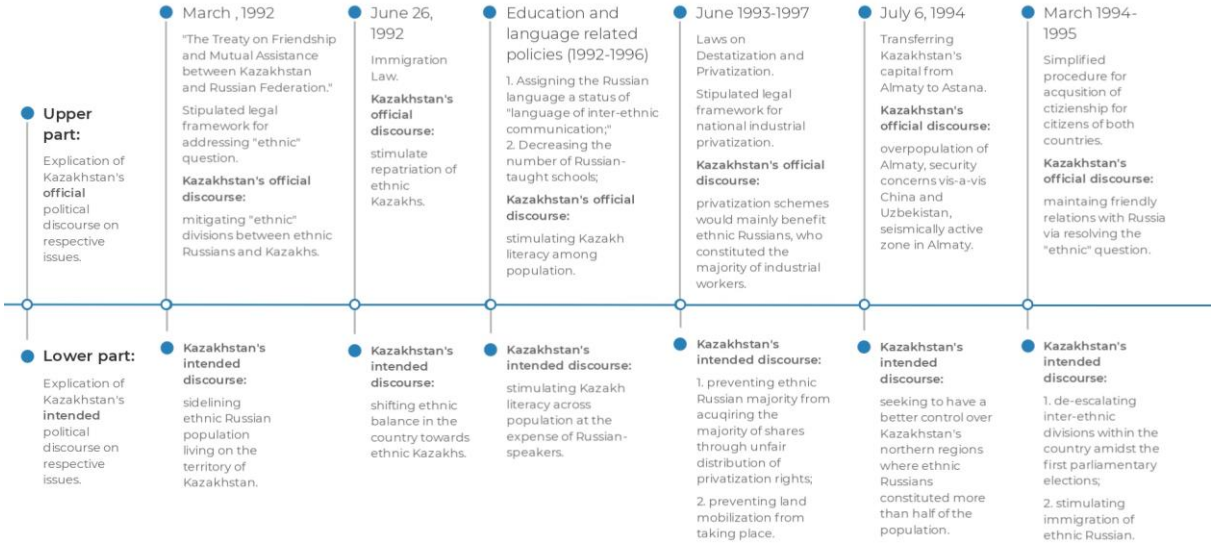
Nazarbayev's pursuit to solve "ethnic" question saw its end in 1995 when he called two subsequent referendums in April and August. First, he dissolved the parliament in favor of calling the referendum on extending his powers up until the 2000. The primary goal was to deplete pro-Russian forces in Kazakhstan of their last resort, one-third of the seats in parliament. In the referendum held on April 29, 1995, 95.4% of the voters from the turnout of 91.3% voted in favor of Nazarbayev's extended term (The decree of President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Republican referendum [of April 29, 1995]).

Second, the referendum on the new constitution took place in August 1995, resulting in 89% of voters approving of the new constitution (The decree of the President of the

Republic of Kazakhstan on "Running the Republican referendum on August 30, 1995). Like every other Nazarbayev's decision, the establishment of a new constitution had an ulterior motive. He sought to improve Kazakhstan's relations with Russia vis-à-vis the ethnic question while resolving the "dual citizenship" issue (Nohlen et al. 2001). Article 10 denied the possibility of any individual acquiring citizenship from any other country, except Kazakhstan (Adilet.kz (B)). In short, it deprived Kazakhs living overseas of an advantage compared to ethnic Russians, yet it prevented any future arrangements on dual citizenship from taking place. Article 6 elevated the status of Russian language to that of the "official language" yet not the state language – to the disappointment of pro-Russian activist groups whose agenda was almost entirely focused on resolving language disputes. In reality, the Russian language was far from equal to the Kazakh language as the administrative work was in the middle of transferring to the Kazakh language at the beginning of 1997 (Documents on the progress of transferring the government bodies to Aqmola city). Ultimately, it granted Kazakhstan a short period of political stability, and Nazarbayev continued the practice of ousting ethnic Russians from government positions. By January 1997, more than 75% of the leading positions in the government were occupied by Kazakhs (Nohlen et al. 2001). By 1997, with the notable exception of Russia's attempts to deploy Cossack troops to pressure Kazakhstan's northern borders (Karassayev et al. 2021), Nazarbayev had accumulated enough power to force Russia to make enough concession, and to sustain official political discourse.

The following figure, thus, demonstrates how Kazakhstan's official political discourse differed from the intended one vis-à-vis the key policies adopted in 1991-1999:

Figure 2. Dualism of Kazakhstan's "ethnic" policies adopted in 1991-1999



Source: Author's own analysis.

4.2 New "frontiers" and Kazakhstan's Soviet Legacy in 2000-2013

After resolving the "ethnic" question by the end of the 1990s, the dualism that characterized Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy transcended beyond the framework of its bilateral relations with Russia. The theoretical framework model suggests that Kazakhstan, while striving to maintain friendly relations with Russia, now under Putin's command, sought to establish relations with other members of the international community at the expense of partial disengagement from Russia. Nazarbayev and his cabinet could not fail to observe the existing asymmetry in Kazakhstan relations with Russia, particularly in the economic sector. The Asian financial crisis triggered the Russian financial crisis in mid-August of 1998, and put a serious stress test on Kazakhstan's economic model by reducing oil prices –

Kazakhstan's primary export item through pipelines via Russian territory (Hayman and Mayne 2010). All combined made Kazakhstan re-consider its political and economic dependence on Russia, and look for a potential alternative to counter-balance Russia's dominant presence in Kazakhstan's political and economic domains.

Hence, the first move was to diversify Kazakhstan's economy away from Russia towards other powerful regional actors. Kazakhstan signed its first petroleum agreement with China in June 1997, when China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) acquired 60.3% of the rights to explore several oilfields in Kazakhstan. It resulted in creation of Kazakhstan China Xinjiang pipeline in 2005, and the construction of West-East Gas pipeline, which started in 2012 (Alvarez 2015). Although Nazarbayev strived to decrease Kazakhstan's economic dependence on Russia, he has never sought to completely disengage from Russia but to create a counter balance. Nazarbayev met with Putin during his visit in Moscow in 2003 where he re-vitalized deliberations on the nature of political and economic integration, and later the same year he proposed a creation of a single currency – "altyn" (Vinokurov 2010). Just as in 1994, when Nazarbayev first mentioned the creation of the "Eurasian Union," Russian authorities, now led by Putin, have perceived Nazarbayev's ideas with skepticism. Nazarbayev continued to advocate for currency and financial integration, yet his viewpoint changed, reflecting predominantly on the economic side of the issue. Thus, despite achieving a major breakthrough in January 2010, when Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus established a Customs Union, Nazarbayev's enthusiasm for a politically oriented integration union weakened.

However, the EEU was not the only regional integration initiative that Kazakhstan invested in. In 2001, China, Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan signed the Declaration of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) that stipulated the main

principles of the organization (Dadabaev 2014). For Kazakhstan, SCO constitutes a balancing act. Its participation in the SCO allows it to have a better control over its foreign policy in the region. While maintaining close ties with Russia, it can also engage with other major powers like China and Central Asian neighbors within the SCO framework, thereby reducing the risk of overdependence on any one partner, Russia in particular. In addition, it provides a forum for dialogue and cooperation on regional conflicts and disputes. Kazakhstan can use this platform to advocate for peaceful resolutions to conflicts that may affect its security, economic, and political interests.

Russia's skepticism, however, towards "Eurasian Union" was barely a sole reason for Nazarbayev to re-consider his perspectives on Kazakhstan's relations with Russia. Given the ambiguity concerning Russia's stance on Kazakhstan's northern regions in the 1990s, the Georgian War of 2008 constituted one of the most significant critical conjunctures. It had a substantial effect on Kazakhstan's political perspective on Russia in line with suggested theoretical framework model. Although Nazarbayev was concerned about the events in Georgia because it could give Russia an incentive to follow the same tactics in Kazakhstan, "there was not much that Kazakhstan could do to protest Russia's military invasion and destabilization of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Sullivan 2019, 38). The combination of the Summer Olympics in Beijing in 2008, the global financial crisis, and the US presidential elections prevented Kazakhstan from making any decisive moves to support Georgia against Russia without facing severe economic and political consequences. Hence, Kazakhstan resorted to a muted protest. This is evident when looking closely at voting choices at UNGA resolutions. The percentage of identical voting by Kazakhstan and Russia in the UNGA resolution was quite high during the period from 2007 to 2013, yet has been steadily declining from 82% to 64% throughout the years following the Georgian War. The reason for the

decline in identical voting between Kazakhstan and Russia is Kazakhstan changing its voting tactics from "yes" to "abstain" as soon as the issue becomes important for Russia and other Great Power. Thus, when Russia and the US voted oppositely on the resolution on the Abkhazian and South Ossetian refugees, Kazakhstan abstained from voting to preserve stable and secure relations with both of the Great Powers (Yuneman and Nesmashnyi 2023, 143-146).

For a political "diversification" to take place, it was necessary for Kazakhstan, as a relatively young state, to be perceived both as separate from Russia by other members of the international community and as a reliable partner by Russia. Leveraging between various artifacts of Soviet heritage was perhaps one of the best ways to achieve both objectives that could help Kazakhstan to levitate toward and from Russia at the same time. The strategic choice of undergoing nuclear disarmament to be perceived as a vanguard of non-nuclear proliferation across the world is exemplary in this regard. In the late 1940, Joseph Stalin chose the Kazakh Steppe as a nuclear testing site following the launch of the Soviet nuclear program. In theory, the spacious Kazakh steppe, a flat piece of land cornered by a mountain, was at a perfect distance from any rural settlement, and hence an almost ideal place for nuclear testing (Kassenova 2016, 2022). In reality, the nuclear testing site was in a much closer geographical proximity than suggested, thereby entailing disastrous implications over the years for both local environment and population (Nesipbaeva and Chang 1997). The first nuclear bomb was dropped at the Semipalatinsk Testing Site (STS) on August 29, 1949, commencing a 50-years' worth history of Kazakhstan's community struggle to shut down the STS. The negative environmental and health effects of nuclear testing, pressure from local authorities, and the unwillingness of the Soviet government to acknowledge the issue led to the accumulation of protest sentiments across the Kazakhstani population (Kassenova 2022.

Protest sentiment peaked in 1989, manifesting through the massive Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement launched in solidarity with a similar movement in the West. A prominent Kazakh poet, Olzhas Suleimenov, led the movement by gathering more than one million people in the capital of Kazakhstan at the time of signing petitions to close the STS. The unprecedented scale of the movement pressured the Soviet government to launch a series of investigations and inspections of the nuclear testing sites, which eventually resulted in a decrease in the number of nuclear tests per year. In August 1991, the STS was closed upon Nazarbayev's decree.

The end of the STS allowed Nazarbayev to separate Kazakhstan from Russia, the nuclear-weapon state (NWS), on the broader level. In 1994, the state became a member of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), emphasizing Kazakhstan's identity as free from any nuclear weapons. With Kazakhstan nuclear arsenal gone, Nazarbayev took further steps to solidify country's position in the international nuclear arena. However, the first tangible success was only achieved during the second half of the 2000s. In 2006, Kazakhstan and its closest Central Asian neighbors established a nuclear weapons free zone, and in 2009, the UN proclaimed August 29, the International Day against Nuclear Tests (Kassenova 2022). On August 29, 2012, Nazarbayev launched the "Abolish Testing. Our Mission." (ATOM) project with the aim of spreading awareness of Kazakhstan's negative experience of nuclear testing across the world. Thus, while Russia was and remains a nuclear state, Kazakhstan strives to shape its own identity as separate from that of Russia and nuclear weapons. Kazakhstan's commitment to nuclear non-proliferation is evident in its voting preferences in the UN General Assembly resolutions. The general pattern is that Kazakhstan voting strategy reflects its multi-vector political orientation as it strives to vote "yes" when it comes to issues of importance for Russia and at least one other Great Power, thereby

maintaining positive relations with both, and abstaining from voting when it comes to the issues where Great Powers have polar views, however backing Russia most of the time. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan is less prone to voting identical to Russia when it comes to the issues of nuclear security, which is consistent with Kazakhstan's position as a vanguard of nuclear non-proliferation (Yuneman 2023).

Kazakhstan, as theoretical framework model suggests, has never pursued a complete disengagement from Russia and Kazakhstan's space program is exemplary in this regard. Bekus's (2022) account for the use of the Baikonur space station for image-building centers around the notion of technopolitics and the associated choice of strategic maneuvers.[8] The Cold War times might be considered an epitome of scientific and technological achievements and progress, which, in turn, were used by the Great Powers to manifest their geopolitical power. During the Cold War, the manifestation of geopolitical status through scientific and technological breakthroughs in nuclear power, computer science, and space was associated with the biggest geopolitical actors of the time, including the United States, European core, and the Soviet Union. However, the end of the Cold War, followed by the collapse of the Soviet Union allowed newly established post-Soviet states to use Soviet technological legacy for their own advantage. Space exploration has become of paramount importance as a way to elevate international status. Kazakhstan is not an exception to this trend.[9] Unlike the Soviet nuclear program, which faced fierce resistance from the local population and which the government of Kazakhstan practically gave up in 1993 as a symbol of de-Sovietization, the

[8]Technopolitics refers to the "the ability of competing actors to envision and enact political goals through the support of technical artefacts" (Bekus 2022, 350).

[9] During the early stages of country's independence, some portions of the Kazakh society strived to oppose the re-vitalization of Kazakhstan's space-faring program as an old Soviet artefact that might fulfil the long-cherished fetish of putting Kazakhstan on the global map. In theory, the re-vitalization of the space program was supposed to help Kazakhstan to integrate the status of a scientifically development nation in the identity-building narrative as well as establish the trajectory for future developments (Bekus 2022).

Soviet space program received different treatments from both the government and the population.

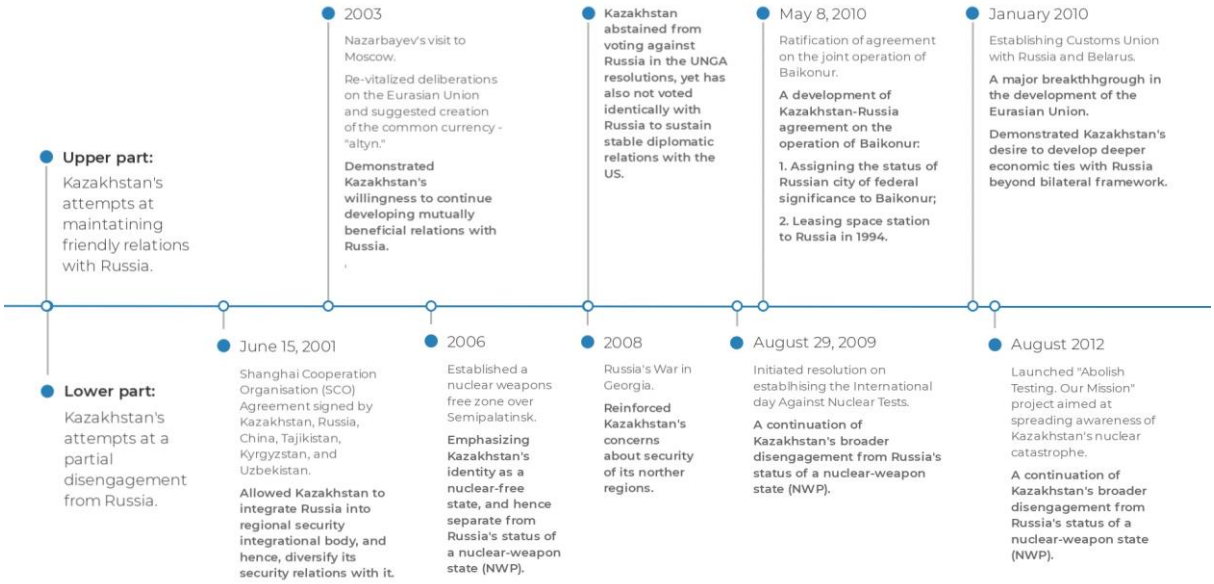
Despite Kazakhstan's attempts at separation, the Baikonur space station remained a crucial linking vessel between Kazakhstan and Russia (Bjornerud 2004, Oushakine 2016). In 1994, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Boris Yeltsin signed a 20-years lease agreement, transferring the responsibility for managing the space station and the enclosed city to Russia and its Roscosmos State Corporation (Correspondence with Ministries on the lease of Cosmodrome "Baikonur" in 1993-1994). The decision to lease Baikonur to Russia has proven to be highly problematic, particularly when managing a local population comprised mostly of Kazakh nationals. Some speculated that such a decision was made under political and economic pressure, and therefore symbolizes Kazakhstan's "sporadic" sovereignty (Kopack 2019). Nazarbayev described it as a necessary sacrifice towards the brighter technological future of Kazakhstan and an effort to strengthen its relation with the closest neighbor – Russia (Bekus 2022).

The reality behind Nazarbayev's strive to lease the Baikonur cosmodrome was justified by the lack of qualified personnel, own space program, and funding – all necessary to maintain the station. By leasing the Space Station in 1994, Nazarbayev sought to achieve several goals: (A) developing Kazakhstan's relations with Russia by inter-linking Kazakhstan's infrastructure with the Russian space program, (B) elevating Kazakhstan's status in the international arena as a state capable of space exploration, and (C) attracting Russian expertise in the space industry to exchange relevant experience with local personnel. The agreement on December 23, 1993, attained the status of a Russian city of federal significance to the cosmodrome Baikonur (Correspondence with Ministries on the lease of Cosmodrome "Baikonur" in 1993-1994). The next step was May 8, 2010, when Kazakhstan

ratified an agreement with Russia on the joint operation of Baikonur, allowing Kazakhstan to launch joint projects with Russia (Adilet.kz (G)). Hence, Kazakhstan and its government diligently maneuvered between the remaining artifacts of the Soviet legacy while carefully adjusting the official identity-oriented narrative so it could embrace Kazakhstan's independence from the Soviet era while maintaining friendly, fruitful, and trustworthy relations with Russia through a series of scrupulously tailored strategies and symbolic gestures.

The following figure, thus, demonstrates how Kazakhstan balanced between maintaining friendly relations with Russia while attempting at partial disengagement from it:

Figure 3: Kazakhstan's attempts at maintaining friendly relations with and achieving partial disengagement from Russia in 2000-2013



Source: Author's own analysis.

4.3 Economic diversification and post-Crimean dynamics in 2014-2023

The Annexation of Crimea in 2014 embarked on the commencement of a new period in the history of the relations between Russia and Kazakhstan. Russia economic estrangement caused by economic sanctions imposed by the US, the EU, and Japan had a significant negative impact on Kazakhstan's economy. Coupled with a relative success in economic and energy diversification attempts, the increase in security concerns allowed Kazakhstan to become more reactive towards developing deeper political relations with Russia (Kuchins 2014).

Following the Annexation of Crimea, Kazakhstan has shied away from opposing Russia directly, instead focusing on a more active disengagement from further political integration. In March 2014, Kazakhstan abstained from voting on the UNGA resolution on the "territorial integrity of Ukraine" (Sullivan 2019). Yet just a month after the Crimea took place and almost 20 years after his first speech, Nazarbayev gave another speech at the MSU where he emphasized friendly relations and mutually beneficial progress made by both countries in the course of the last two decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It became evident that Nazarbayev's vision of the Eurasian Economic Union project became less expansionist as he reneged on Russia's plan to establish a monetary union that would integrate Kazakhstan into the Russian economy even more deeply (Official Website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan). Vieira (2017) highlighted that the EEU founding treaty, signed in October 2014, turned out to be "less comprehensive," compared to the original proposals, thus practically transforming the EEU from a political unity to an exclusively economic one. The majority of provisions previously aimed at ensuring political integration were removed from the proposal on the creation of the EEU: common citizenship

and visa control, creation of inter-parliamentary assembly, and export control (Kheifets 2015, 7, Yuneman 2020, 44).

This notwithstanding, Kazakhstan's membership in the EEU brought some unwanted complications. Russia imposed counter-sanctions, manifested mainly through a total ban on food import from the EU, the US, Norway, Canada, and Australia, without prior consultation with other EEU members. It spiraled Kazakhstan's economy even further. In addition, on August 29, 2014, during the Russian youth camp, Putin admired Nazarbayev for creating "a state in a territory that had never had a state before" (Najibullah 2014). Infuriated, Nazarbayev threatened to leave the EEU in case Russia's actions would pose a threat to Kazakhstan's sovereignty. In December of the same year, Nazarbayev and Belarusian President Lukashenko flew to Kyiv to recognize and express political support to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. The day after Nazarbayev confirmed Kazakhstan's readiness to host the next round of peace talks in Astana (Abdulova 2015). Additionally, Kazakhstan has refused to support Russia's decision to impose negative economic measures against Ukraine, let alone join Russia's retaliatory economic sanctions on the EU while recognizing the government of Petro Poroshenko. Moscow, in turn, appeared unable to persuade Kazakhstan to support the seizure of Crimea under any circumstances (Tanchum 2015). Unlike in Georgia in 2008, Kazakhstan has made more assertive measures to persuade the international community that Kazakhstan's position is separate from that of Russia vis-à-vis the Crimea question while avoiding antagonizing Russia.

What allowed Kazakhstan to become more reactive towards Russia was its relative success in the diversification of its economy, particularly in terms of its energy resources. Essentially, the nature of bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and China fundamentally rests on Kazakhstan's participation in China-sponsored projects. A brief analysis of the list of

projects presented by Tija (2022) demonstrates that the majority of Chinese projects in Kazakhstan signed and commenced before 2013 were resource-oriented projects, such as oil and gas extraction stations, hydropower stations, mining plants, pipeline constructions, and connectivity infrastructure such as ports and railways. The energy relations between Kazakhstan and Russia mimic those of China with a focus on natural resource-extraction machinery, which makes it a leading cause of Kazakhstan's overdependence on exporting resources.

China's announcement of BRI in 2013 fulfilled Kazakhstan's diversification dreams as it turned to negotiations regarding the transfer of Chinese oil refinement technologies to Kazakhstan. In theory, the acquisition of Chinese oil processing technologies was supposed to help overcome Kazakhstan's oil dependence in the long run (Niva 2020). Indeed, the composition of Chinese projects in Kazakhstan took a different turn from 2013 onwards. Unlike before 2013 when the majority of the projects were resource-extraction and connectivity related, 113 out of 138 Chinese projects that were signed and commenced after 2013 were non-resource extraction oriented. Instead, there is considerable shift towards "agriculture and food processing, building materials, chemistry and petro-chemistry, energy and renewable energy, finance, industrial parks, manufacturing, mechanical engineering, and metallurgy" with an estimated cost of approximately $54 billion, which, in turn, constitutes 70% of the total spending on Chinese projects in Kazakhstan (Tjia 2022, 808). Thus, as suggested by the theoretical framework model, the re-composition of China-sponsored projects enabled Kazakhstan with an extended leverage towards its economic relations with Russia as the diversification of its economy decreased Kazakhstan's dependence on Russia.

The accumulated economic leverage, in turn, "spilled" into other domains allowing for a more "nationalistic" push in the domestic politics in the post-Crimea period. July 2014

began with the opening of the National Museum of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Museum halls and exhibitions represent the long history of the Kazakh civilization stretching from 15th to the 21st century, demonstrating the main developmental stage that Kazakh society had to undergo through the centuries as a Kazakh khanate and then a part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (Harvey et al. 2013). In 2015, just a few months after Vladimir Putin's remark that Kazakhs never had a state before 1991, Kazakhstan celebrated its 550-years history, as a nation, which had never taken place before 2015 (Orazgaliyeva 2015). On paper, the main goal behind commemorating the Kazakh nation is to elevate the sense of ethnical-affiliation and social cohesion among Kazakhstani population so as to steer the "united" Kazakh society towards a "brighter" future while remembering the lessons of the past. In reality, it aimed at further separation from Russia on the identity level as an individual and independent "Eurasian" nation, which has been increasing dramatically following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Shlapentokh 2016; Isaacs and Frigerio 2019, 2020)

Nazarbayev sought to mitigate his security concerns over country's norther regions by language policies. From 2014 onwards he has initiated the "Serpin" ("Impulse") program (Jaxylykov 2017). The core operating mechanism of the "Impulse" program was to move a portion of young students and blue-collar workers from the southern regions of the country (Turkestan, Kyzylorda, Jambyl, Almaty, and Jetysu regions) to its northern regions (North Kazakhstan, Aqmola, Abay, Pavlodar, East Kazakhstan, Karaganda, and Kostanay regions) (Jaxylykov 2017). According to the official governmental discourse, Kazakhstan's northern regions are more industrially developed, and have higher educational standards than the country's southern regions. Hence, it was presented as an opportunity for students and blue-collar workers to receive higher quality education in their professional spheres. Country's Northern regions do, indeed, have a better quality of education, particularly in the industrial

and infrastructural sectors ("National Program "Impulse - 2050 (Gosudarstvennaya Programma «Serpin – 2050»" n.d.)). However, what is hidden behind the curtains of the official governmental discourse is the socio-cultural identity-driven reasoning behind the implementation of the program. Even in 2020, the population of several northern regions comprised predominantly from Russia-speakers.[10] On the contrary, the closer geographical proximity to other Central Asian states resulted in a lower Russian-speaking population in Kazakhstan's southern regions.[11] Hence, in reality, the fundamental reasoning behind the implementation of the program could likely have been to elevate the literacy of the Kazakh language across the population as well as to prevent Northern regions from becoming more pro-Russian, particularly in the aftermath of Crimea.

Similarly, in 2017, Nazarbayev initiated a transition from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet. The official government's narrative describes the associated transition as an attempt to find a solution to the low popularity of the Kazakh language across the youth. The persistent believe was that such a transition is a convenient way to provide many opportunities for image development, including a facilitated way of integration into the world's economy, boosting national identity, and facilitating cooperation with the outside world and the process of learning English language for younger generations (Chavasse 2019). However, this attempt to transition from using the Cyrillic alphabet to a Latin alphabet is far from being the first. The Kazakh people used the Latin alphabet during Soviet times from 1929 to 1940. At the time, the alphabet was known as the Yanalif or the "New Turkic alphabet." Nevertheless, Moscow was concerned with a growing sense of pan-Turkic sentiment that was particularly prominent across Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and other Turkic-

[10]In 2019, the population of Kostanay region, one of the northern regions of the country, for instance, consisted of 40.97% Russians, 40.76% Kazakhs, and 8.22% Ukrainians, which makes it Kazakhstan's most "Russian-speaking" region (Sharipova 2020).

[11] In Zhambyl region, in 2019, Kazakhs constituted 72.73% of the population, while Russians were only 9.78% (Sharipova 2020).

affiliated nations, forcing the adoption of the Cyrillic alphabet to promote Russian culture and avoid the formation of a shared non-Soviet identity (Reagan 2019). Thus, the transition from a Cyrillic alphabet to a Latin signifies Kazakhstan's attempts at separating from Russia (Syzdykbayeva 2016). Yet Nazarbayev's successor, Tokayev, did little to speed up this transition, in a clear nod to displeased neighbor from the North.

The resignation of Nazarbayev on March 19, 2019, did not bring any changes to the nature of the relations between Kazakhstan and Russia. As Nazarbayev's successor, Tokayev adopted his vision of relations with Russia (Isaacs 2020). His first official visit two weeks after becoming President was to Moscow where he ensured the continuity of the policy of the First President. Shortly before Russia's War in Ukraine and amidst the January 2022 crisis in Kazakhstan, Tokayev requested Russia to intervene in Kazakhstan under the framework of the CSTO to mitigate anti-government protests, and thereby help Tokayev to remain in power. Russia deployed 2500-3000 paratroopers to arrive in Kazakhstan on the morning of January 6, once again, fuelling critical deliberations on Kazakhstan's northern parts becoming the next Crimea and Tokayev's credibility as a leader of the country (Putz 2022).

Nevertheless, despite its membership in a CSTO, recency of January events, and close economic and political ties with Russia, Kazakhstan and Tokayev did not support Russia's decision to recognize the independence of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR) and to invade Ukraine. He announced Kazakhstan's position in a meeting with Putin during the annual Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum in June 2022, and told Russia's journalists to be friends with Kazakhstan (Auyezova 2022; Velazquez 2022; Auyezova 2023). Kazakhstan has also abstained from sending troops while providing humanitarian aid for Ukraine. In short, Kazakhstan's government took neutral position seeking a delicate balance between Russia and the West. It feared

antagonizing Russia amidst the Ukraine War due to persistent security concerns over the security of its norther regions. Tokayev has refused to support international sanctions against Russia, yet has "vowed" not to violate them by allowing Russia to circumvent their negative economic effect (RFE/RL 2022).

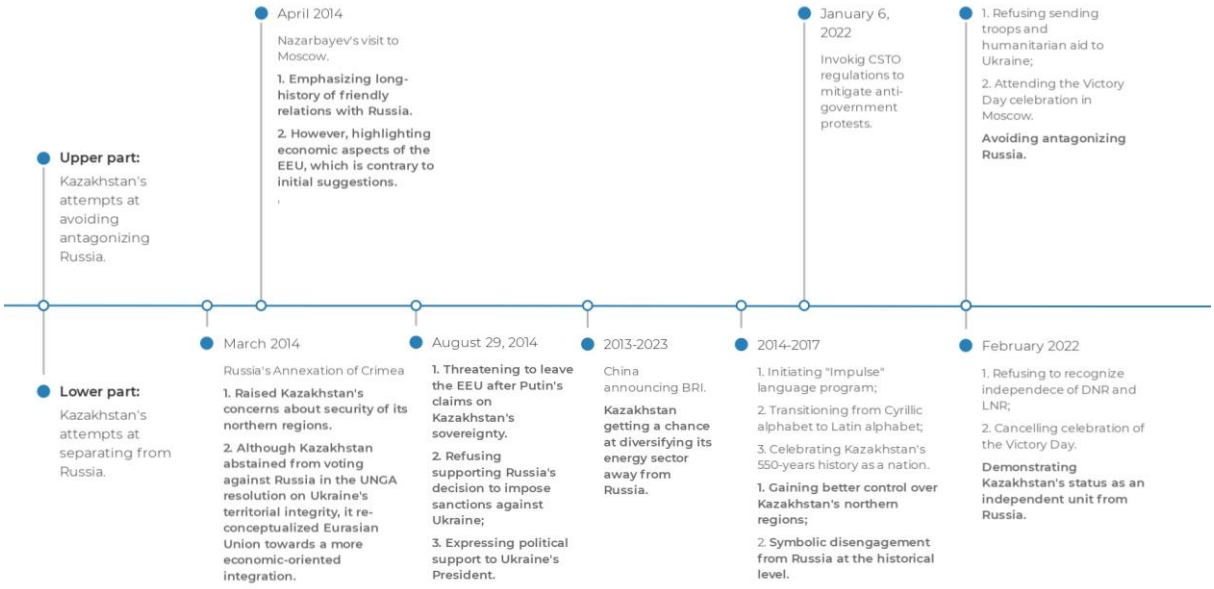
Kazakhstan has also sought to find the common ground between Russia and Ukraine as well as to find a way to "cease fire" (Auyezova 2022). On November 11, 2022, at the Turkic Nations Summit, Tokayev publicly criticized Russia's non-compliance with the UN charter, while at the November 2022 CSTO meeting in Yerevan, he called for peace talks. Kazakhstan also went beyond a simple condemnation of Russia's invasion in Ukraine, as it has enhanced negotiations on the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, a Trans-Caspian corridor network of roads, railways, and sea lanes designed under the BRI framework that circumvents Russia on China's roadmap to Europe going from Central Asia through the Caucasus, and then across the Black Sea to Southern Europe (Auyezova and Sanchez 2022).

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan sought to mitigate the lack of support for Russia's invasion in Ukraine with small gestures aimed at demonstrating Kazakhstan's status as an ally of Russia. In 2023, Kazakhstan cancelled the annual celebration of Victory Day in May. Although Kazakhstan has not celebrated Victory Day since 2019 due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Defense Minister did not provide any explanation for the cancellation of the celebration in 2023, which caused speculations on the cancellation constituting a symbolic gesture of condemnation against Russia's War in Ukraine (Malaisarova 2023). Nevertheless, Tokayev attended the Victory Day celebration held in Russia in May 1993, along with President Putin, Belorussian President Lukashenko, Armenian President Sarkissian, and Kyrgyzstan's President Japarov (Temirgaliyeva 2023), all members of the CSTO, and the EEU. Tokayev's decision was not without criticism; however, it once again

demonstrated Kazakhstan's pursuit of establishing the balance between seeking cooperation with Russia as a regionally important partner and the rest of the world.

The following figure, thus, demonstrates the dynamics of Kazakhstan-Russia relations in the 2014-2023 period:

Figure 4: The dynamics of post-Crimean relations between Kazakhstan's and Russia



Source: Author's own analysis.

Conclusion

Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy, as suggested by the theoretical framework model, is but a combination of strategic maneuvers aimed at pursuing the balance between maintaining friendly relations with Russia while preventing overdependence. The respective maneuvers include: creating discrepancy between the official political discourse and the intended one as a way to avoid antagonizing Russia while achieving desirable political outcomes; fostering identity-building as a separate from Russia and the associated Soviet legacy on both international and domestic levels; diversifying economic and political means via engaging with other regional and global powerful actors as well as engaging Russia in the regional integration dialogues. Kazakhstan, in the period from 1991 to 1999, focused almost entirely on resolving the ethnic question. Hence, its relations with Russia rarely went beyond the bilateral paradigm where Kazakhstan resorted mostly to utilizing political and economic circumstances to veil its intentions at sidelining ethnic Russian population with the official political discourse of helping Russia with mitigating the inter-ethnic divisions. The second period from 2000 to 2013 is characterized by Kazakhstan's attempts at maintaining friendly relations with Russia while seeking to establish political and economic connections with the rest of the international community. During the respective period, Kazakhstan focused on engaging Russia in the regional integration dialogues, and fostering identity building both inside and outside its borders. Kazakhstan's relatively successful economic and political diversification attempts coupled with the Annexation of Crimea raising serious security issue allowed Kazakhstan to be become a bit more reactive towards Russia during the period from 2014 to 2023. Here, Kazakhstan went further in integrating Russia in the regional integration dialogues, promoted its relations with other regional powerful actors such as China, and maintained its course at solidifying its identity as separate from Russia.

Limitations and further research suggestions

To begin with, it is essential to be aware of the source coverage problem and the source coverage bias. This study aims to develop a comprehensive and accurate description of how Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy shaped its relations with Russia. The collection and evaluation of the abovementioned sources, thus, is what brings the picture together. There are two fundamental problems that need to be addressed. First, every source is capable of covering only a certain fraction of the whole puzzle. Thus, relying only on one particular source might result in an incomplete depiction of the actual events or a phenomenon (Rohlfing 2012).

Second, it is necessary to consider that every piece of information encountered can contain some bias. Hence, relying on a limited number of source can transfer some bias into the analysis. Triangulation, deriving information form a diverse set of independent sources, might be used to overcome the uncertainty vis-à-vis the source coverage problem and source bias (Rohlfing 2012). This study seeks to overcome both problems via triangulation of various sources of information on the topic, including secondary sources (scholarly literature on the subject, website content), primary sources (National Archives of the Republic of Kazakhstan), and newspapers. Nevertheless, this study refers to the use of primary sources only with respect to the first period of Kazakhstan's relations with Russia (1991-1999), which is mainly due to lack of archival information on respective relations post 2000. The information from the archives could potentially be supplemented with interviews with political representatives of Kazakhstan and Russia. Such interviews could enrich analysis with valuable insights into motivations behind chosen maneuvers performed by both countries.

Further research can focus on analyzing other domains of relations between Kazakhstan and Russia beyond the political one. In addition, further research on the topic can

delve deeper, by analyzing the essence of certain events more closely, or wider, by including other powerful regional actors such as China into the scope of the analysis. Likewise, this study can serve as a foundational basis for a future research on Russia's relations with other Central Asian states, and other post-Soviet states in general. It offered diagnostic evidence for building a case study for further theorizing about the relationship between regional power and its smaller neighboring state.

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