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## FOREIGN POLICY COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN AND THE STATE OF QATAR: KEY AREAS AND PROSPECTS

The issues of foreign policy cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Gulf States are of particular relevance in the context of modern international relations. The paper considers key aspects of foreign policy cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State of Qatar, and reveals prospects and main areas of their further development. The objective of the present study is a thorough analysis of the bilateral relations, encompassing political-diplomatic, economic, military-technical and cultural-humanitarian interaction. The author proffers an evaluation of the attained tier of bilateral partnership, whilst concomitantly delineating the latent possibilities and prevailing impediments to the augmentation of reciprocal collaboration. The methodological basis of the study was formed by a comparative analysis, content analysis of official documents and a historical-analytical approach, which allowed the evolution of Kazakh-Qatar relations over three decades to be traced. The study identifies key areas with the greatest potential for further development, including investment partnership, transport and logistics cooperation, and joint projects in agriculture and security. The analysis concluded that the relations between Kazakhstan and Qatar are on the threshold of strategic partnership, and their expansion will continue to strengthening the position of Kazakhstan in the Islamic world and strengthening the role of Qatar in Central Asia. The practical significance of the work is formulation of specific recommendations for the advancement and fortification of bilateral ties that can be applied by public authorities and foreign policy departments of both countries.

**Keywords:** Kazakhstan, Qatar, foreign policy, international cooperation, strategic partnership.

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### Қазақстан Республикасы мен Катар мемлекетінің сыртқы саяси ынтымақтастығы: перспективалары мен негізгі бағыттары

Қазақстанның Парсы шығанағы мемлекеттерімен сыртқы саяси ынтымақтастығы мәселелері қазіргі заманғы халықаралық қатынастар контекстінде ерекше өзектілікке ие болуда. Мақалада Қазақстан Республикасы мен Катар Мемлекеті арасындағы сыртқы саяси ынтымақтастықтың негізгі аспектілері қарастырылып, оларды одан әрі дамытудың перспективалары мен негізгі бағыттары анықталды. Зерттеудің мақсаты саяси-дипломатиялық, экономикалық, әскери-техникалық және мәдени-гуманитарлық өзара іс-қимылды қамтитын екіжақты қатынастарды кешенді талдау болып табылады. Екіжақты әріптестіктің қол жеткізілген деңгейін авторлық бағалау ұсынылады, сондай-ақ өзара тиімді ынтымақтастықты кеңейту үшін әлеует пен қолда бар кедергілер анықталды. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық негізін салыстырмалы талдау, ресми құжаттардың контент-талдауы және Қазақстан-Катар қатынастарының үш онжылдықтағы эволюциясын бақылауға мүмкіндік беретін тарихи-Талдамалық тәсіл құрады. Зерттеудің негізгі нәтижелері инвестициялық әріптестік, көліктік-логистикалық ынтымақтастық және ауыл шаруашылығы мен қауіпсіздік саласындағы бірлескен жобаларды қоса алғанда, одан әрі дамыту үшін барынша әлеуеті бар анықталған бағыттар болып табылады. Жүргізілген талдау авторларға Қазақстан мен Катардың қарым-қатынасы стратегиялық әріптестік табалдырығында тұр, ал олардың кеңеюі Қазақстанның ислам әлеміндегі ұстанымын нығайтуға және Катардың Орталық Азиядағы рөлін күшейтуге ықпал етеді деген қорытынды жасауға мүмкіндік береді. Мақаланың практикалық маңыздылығы – екі елдің мемлекеттік органдары мен сыртқы саяси ведомстволары қолдана алатын екіжақты байланыстарды одан әрі дамыту және нығайту бойынша нақты ұсыныстар беру.

**Түйін сөздер:** Қазақстан, Катар, сыртқы саясат, халықаралық ынтымақтастық, стратегиялық әріптестік.

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### **Внешнеполитическое сотрудничество между Республикой Казахстан и Государством Катар: ключевые направления и перспективы**

Вопросы внешнеполитического сотрудничества Казахстана с государствами Персидского залива приобретают особую актуальность в контексте современных международных отношений. В статье рассмотрены ключевые аспекты внешнеполитического сотрудничества между Республикой Казахстан и Государством Катар, выявлены перспективы и основные направления их дальнейшего развития. Цель исследования заключается в комплексном анализе двусторонних отношений, охватывающем политико-дипломатическое, экономическое, военно-техническое и культурно-гуманитарное взаимодействие. Предлагается авторская оценка достигнутого уровня двустороннего партнерства, а также выявлены потенциал и имеющиеся препятствия для расширения взаимовыгодного сотрудничества. Методологическую основу исследования составили сравнительный анализ, контент-анализ официальных документов и историко-аналитический подход, позволяющий проследить эволюцию казахстанско-катарских отношений за три десятилетия. Основными результатами исследования являются выявленные направления, обладающие наибольшим потенциалом для дальнейшего развития, среди которых инвестиционное партнерство, транспортно-логистическое сотрудничество и совместные проекты в области сельского хозяйства и безопасности. Проведенный анализ позволил авторам сделать вывод о том, что отношения Казахстана и Катара находятся на пороге стратегического партнерства, а их расширение будет способствовать укреплению позиций Казахстана в исламском мире и усилению роли Катара в Центральной Азии. Практическая значимость статьи заключается в предложении конкретных рекомендаций по дальнейшему развитию и укреплению двусторонних связей, которые могут быть использованы органами государственной власти и внешнеполитическими ведомствами обеих стран.

**Ключевые слова:** Казахстан, Катар, внешняя политика, международное сотрудничество, стратегическое партнерство.

## **Introduction**

The establishment of foreign policy dialogue between the Republic of Kazakhstan and Middle East States represents a pivotal element of the nation's multi-vector diplomatic strategy. Among the Gulf States, the State of Qatar, possessing high investment potential and extending its international presence, occupies a special place in political and economic interaction with Kazakhstan. In 2023, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State of Qatar commemorated the 30-th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Despite the remote location of the two countries, more than three decades of diplomatic relations have resulted in the establishment of strong and trusting cooperation, underpinned by mutual interests and a foundation of friendship.

The strategic rationale in Qatar's selection as a priority foreign policy partner can be attributed to several key factors. Firstly, position of Qatar as a key player in the global energy market has rendered it a significant source of investment and advanced technology for Kazakhstan. Secondly, strategic location of Qatar in the Middle East and its role as

a major player in the Islamic world has rendered it a pivotal nation for Kazakhstan's foreign policy objectives. Conversely, Qatar, seeking to diversify its foreign relations and expand its influence, regards Kazakhstan as a pivotal partner in Central Asia, given its geopolitical location and resource potential.

The objective of the research presented herein is twofold: firstly, to address the existing lacunae in the scientific corpus of knowledge on the subject; and secondly, to formulate specific recommendations that could contribute to the further extension and deepening of a mutually beneficial partnership between Kazakhstan and Qatar in the foreseeable future.

## **Literature review**

Although foreign policy cooperation between Kazakhstan and Qatar remains a relatively understudied area, available scholarly research enables identification of several key theoretical perspectives regarding Central Asia's engagement with the Persian Gulf region. Existing international academic discourse underscores the necessity for Central Asia

countries, particularly Kazakhstan, to diversify their diplomatic strategies.

Scholars highlight Kazakhstan's deliberate efforts to deepen its diplomatic and economic relations with the Middle East countries, stressing the strategic significance of broadening geopolitical partnerships beyond traditional alliances (Weitz, 2013; Sabayeva, 2015; Cooley & Heathershaw, 2017). In particular, researches (Yousef, 2023; Aushev, 2024) argue that Kazakhstan, in building cooperation with Qatar, is driven by pragmatic economic and political interests, while using its favorable geographical location to expand its influence in the Islamic world.

Conversely, alternative authors consider Kazakh-Qatari collaboration through the lens of strategic investments. For instance, (Panfilova, 2024; Usmanova, 2025) emphasize Qatar's growing interest in investing into the Central Asia economy as part of its asset diversification strategy, singling out Kazakhstan as the region's most attractive market (Turebekova, 2015; Roberts, 2017). European researchers concur with this assessment, noting that Qatar is leveraging its economic partnership with Kazakhstan to fortify its global role and employ soft power (Kamrava, 2013; Koch, 2017).

A number of authors explore cultural and humanitarian aspects of interaction between Kazakhstan and Qatar. For example, publications mention that Qatar's religious and cultural diplomacy in Central Asia initially formed the basis of bilateral relations (Baabood, 2024). Researchers also emphasize that cultural interaction is an important platform for long-term and sustainable relations between countries with different geopolitical positions, such as Kazakhstan and Qatar (Siddiqui, 2024).

Another set of researchers particularly highlight transport and logistics in the Kazakhstan-Qatar relationship, pointing out the crucial role of the infrastructure projects aimed at enhancing connectivity between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf region (Roberts, 2014; Cooley & Heathershaw, 2017; Chaziza, 2020). The conclusions of these scholars indicate that Kazakhstan plays a pivotal role in the potential establishment of a corridor that could facilitate connectivity between Central Asia and the Middle East, thereby ensuring the economic prosperity of the region (Roberts, 2014; Cooley & Heathershaw, 2017; Chaziza, 2020).

A review of the extant literature reveals that foreign policy cooperation between Kazakhstan and Qatar is regarded as a promising and strategically significant area, despite the need to overcome a number of existing barriers and limitations.

## Materials and methods

The paper applies several recognized methodologies frequently used in international relations research, including comparative and content analysis, as well as a historical-analytical approach. The methods applied allowed for effective distinguishing both converging and diverging aspects in Kazakhstan's and Qatar's strategic frameworks for implementation of foreign policy initiatives. The integrated methodological approach allowed for a detailed understanding of each state's diplomatic priorities, enhancing the depth of the analysis and highlighting distinct and overlapping elements in their international strategies. This, in turn, has contributed to the identification of priority areas of interaction.

Important political areas of cooperation between states are revealed in official documents, statements, and agreements. Using a historical-analytical method, the genesis of bilateral relations was analyzed and revealed, and the reasons and events that influenced their deepening were identified. In addition, the use of this approach made it possible to determine the factors for the further development of diplomatic cooperation and the strengthening of friendly relations.

## History and evolution of bilateral relations

The origins and development of diplomatic ties between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State of Qatar trace back to 1 July 1993, when formal relations were officially established. In the early phase following Kazakhstan's independence, cooperation between the two countries was largely centered around humanitarian and spiritual dimensions. As members of the broader Islamic community, Kazakhstan and Qatar found common ground in shared religious and cultural values. During the 1990-s and early 2000-s their engagement was primarily shaped by what scholars refer to as "mosque diplomacy" – a form of soft power expressed through religious and cultural patronage. A notable example of this was Qatar's financial contribution of \$15 million toward the construction of the Nur Astana Mosque in Astana, which became a prominent symbol of spiritual partnership. This period is widely regarded as a foundation for trust through shared cultural and religious values.

Since the second half of the 2000-s, there has been an increase in the frequency of bilateral contacts. For instance, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Doha in 1998 and 2007, and the

Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani visited Kazakhstan in 1999, 2008 and 2011. In 2007, Kazakhstan established an embassy in Doha, and in 2008 the Qatari embassy in Astana commenced operations (Kazakhstan – Qatar: Opportunities and Prospects, 2008). These developments signaled a mutual political will to develop relations between the two nations. By the early 2010-s, the scope of cooperation had expanded beyond the spiritual sphere to encompass broader projects. For instance, in 2011, during the inaugural visit of the newly-en-throned Emir Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, a series of accords were ratified with the objective of fostering enhanced collaboration in the economic sphere (Sabayeva, 2015).

Nevertheless, a novel phase in the bilateral relationship between Kazakhstan and Qatar has emerged in recent years, largely attributable to shifts in foreign policy. In June 2017, Qatar experienced a diplomatic rupture with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Bahrain, who collectively declared the severing of relations with Doha. The aforementioned countries accused Qatar of supporting terrorist organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and of aligning with Iran, Saudi Arabia's regional rival. In accordance with the imposed sanctions, these countries closed their land borders, restricted air travel, and banned Qatari citizens from entering their territories. The diplomatic crisis persisted until January 2021, when a formal normalization of relations was initiated at a Gulf Cooperation Council summit. This development prompted Doha to pursue a diversification of its foreign relations, with a consequent shift in focus towards Central Asia. Kazakhstan, a nation that adheres to a multi-vector policy, emerged as a primary candidate for deepening the partnership. The expansion of the Doha-Astana dialogue from religious and humanitarian issues to trade and economic, investment, agricultural, financial and educational areas was prompted by geopolitical changes. Consequently, by 2022-2023, bilateral contacts had already reached an unprecedented intensity, laying the foundation for strategic cooperation (Aushev, 2024).

### **Political and diplomatic cooperation**

The political dialogue between Astana and Doha is traditionally based on the warm relations of the leadership of the two countries and similarity of positions on many international issues. From the outset of its independence, Kazakhstan actively fostered robust partnerships with Gulf Arab states, identify-

ing Qatar as a key ally within wider Arab and Muslim community. Similarly, Qatari leadership has consistently voiced its commitment to cultivating comprehensive relations with Kazakhstan, viewing it as a stable and strategically significant partner in the Central Asian region.

High-level summits and diplomatic visits have played a central role in accelerating this bilateral political dialogue. A notable example was the October 2022 state visit to Kazakhstan by Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani of Qatar, which marked an important milestone in strengthening diplomatic engagement between the two nations. This visit culminated in the signing of approximately a dozen bilateral agreements and memoranda covering diverse areas, including economic partnership, mutual protection of investments, cooperation in education, and enhanced governmental collaboration.

President Tokayev awarded the emir with Kazakhstan's highest state award, the Order of the Golden Eagle. In response, the Emir acknowledged Kazakhstan's pivotal role in Central Asia and emphasized the significance of the dialogue between Astana and Doha in Qatar's foreign policy.

In June 2023, the Emir of Qatar returned to Astana to take part in the Astana International Forum, reaffirming the growing importance of Kazakhstan-Qatar relations on the global stage. During the event, both leaders expressed a shared commitment to deepen collaboration, with particular emphasis on enhancing trade and economic engagement. In parallel with high-level diplomatic dialogue, progress was also evident in inter-parliamentary relations. The visit of the Qatari Shura Council delegation, headed by the Emir himself, played a pivotal role in initiating institutional contact with Kazakhstan's Parliament. This engagement laid the groundwork for continued legislative cooperation and the regular exchange of parliamentary expertise between the two countries. Furthermore, in May 2023, the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, A. Smailov, visited Doha and engaged in discussions with Qatari officials and business leaders, thereby fostering enhanced bilateral relations between the two governments and their respective business communities.

Multilateral diplomacy is an important component of political cooperation. The two countries have been effective in engaging with international organizations. Notably, Kazakhstan, in its capacity as an active participant of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) during the period 2011-2012, assumed the role of chair, promoting the concepts of interfaith dialogue, a nation that resonates with



Qatar's own foreign policy agenda (Berdibay, 2012; Weitz, 2013). Qatar, for its part, has expressed interest in Kazakhstan's initiatives to strengthen security in Asia: Doha has achieved full membership of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), a proposal put forward by the first president of Kazakhstan, N. Nazarbayev, and actively participates in the work of this organization. A notable convergence of views has been observed between Kazakhstan and Qatar on a range of regional and international issues, particularly in their joint support for peaceful conflict resolution and their commitment to combating extremism and terrorism. Both nations consistently advocate for diplomatic dialogue and multilateral cooperation as essential tools for maintaining regional stability and addressing global security challenges, reflecting a mutual alignment in their foreign policy priorities (Turabekova, 2015). This level of mutual understanding in the international arena serves to strengthen bilateral relations and increase their importance.

The political and diplomatic rapprochement between the two states culminated in a proposal to elevate their relations to the level of strategic partnership. On 14 February 2024, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev made his inaugural state visit to Qatar. During the talks, he publicly proposed moving bilateral cooperation to the format of a full-fledged strategic partnership noting Qatar's reliability as an ally and Astana's readiness for closer relations. Emir Tamim expressed support for this initiative, expressing hope for a comprehensive deepening of the dialogue. The leaders emphasized that for three decades they have successfully cultivated close cooperation in various domains, which serves as a robust foundation for elevating relations to a new level. During the visit, the Emir bestowed upon Tokayev Qatar's highest symbol, the Sword of the Founder of Qatar, signifying a significant gesture of friendship. In the autumn of 2024, the Kazakh Senate formally endorsed an accord on long-term strategic collaboration with Qatar, with the aim of advancing key projects, thereby solidifying the political collaboration with Qatar, with the aim of advancing key projects, thereby solidifying the political framework for the new status of bilateral relations (Qatar-Kazakhstan joint investment projects exceed USD 20 billion, 2024).

A comparative analysis of the regional context demonstrates that Qatar has achieved the most advanced level of cooperation with Kazakhstan compared to other Central Asian countries. A distinctive

feature is the willingness of the parties to deepen not only economic but also political-military ties, as discussed below. The political and diplomatic discourse between Astana and Doha is currently characterized by a high degree of intensity, institutionalized mechanisms such as the intergovernmental commission, political consultations, forums and mutual support in the international arena. This creates favorable conditions for increasing cooperation in other areas.

### **Trade, economic and investment cooperation**

The economic dimension of such relations is of particular note, given its status as a primary and most rapidly evolving area of collaboration between the two nations. As noted by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, the trade and economic dimension serves as the key catalyst in advancing bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Qatar. While the overall trade volumes between the two countries have traditionally remained modest, recent years have witnessed a notable surge in both trade turnover and the inflow of Qatari investments. This upward trend reflects a growing mutual interest in expanding economic cooperation and underscores the strategic importance both nations place on diversifying their commercial partnerships.

However, as of 2022, mutual trade remained modest, partially reduced by the impact of the pandemic. However, as early as 2023, trade turnover had increased exponentially. For the initial quarter of 2023, trade figures increased by 17 times in comparison with the corresponding period in 2022. Overall, for 2023, bilateral trade was well above the previous year's level. Nevertheless, the structure of the trade balance remains asymmetrical, with Kazakhstan exporting to Qatar at a lower level than it imports. Notably, the primary volume of trade was approximately \$56.6 million. This is indicative of Qatari investments into the Kazakh economy. These funds were primarily allocated to the financial and research sectors, signifying the long-term character of the contribution, the establishment of joint banking projects, the financing of scientific initiatives and start-ups.

There is an ongoing commitment on the part of both states to pursue diversification and increase mutual trade. The Kazakh side has expressed interest in expanding exports of non-resource goods to Qatar, ranging from food to engineering products. During the sixth meeting of the Kazakhstan-Qatar Joint High-Level Commission, held in Doha in

October 2023, Kazakhstan advanced a proposal to expand its export portfolio to the Qatari market by offering a diverse range of goods including meat, fish, honey, caviar, and gas-related products. This initiative aimed at establishing a structured agro-industrial partnership that would serve the interests of both parties. For Qatar, which faces significant limitations in domestic agriculture due to its challenging climate and geography, establishing such partnerships would provide essential access to stable and reliable food imports. At the same time, Kazakhstan stands to gain substantial benefits by tapping into a dependable and financially viable market for its agricultural and processed food products.

The economic cooperation between the two countries gained further momentum in February 2024 during high-level talks in Doha, where President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev highlighted the importance of strengthening commercial ties. He outlined Kazakhstan's ambitious plans to boost its exports to Qatar to approximately \$250 million across 60 diverse, non-resource product categories, and to increase bilateral trade volume to \$500 million within the medium-term horizon. Head of State Kassym-Jomart Kemelevich has repeatedly emphasized the importance of attracting Qatari investment into the Kazakh economy, particularly in the development of logistics and transport. This is especially important in the context of positioning the republic as an important strategic bridge in the Eurasian dimension. At the same time, such an important initiative as the North-South international transport corridor allows Qatar to strengthen its foreign policy cooperation with the region. According to the agreements for 2022-2024, important investment projects have been created. During their implementation, Kazakh-Qatari meetings were held at the highest level. Undoubtedly, these events contributed to further deepening ties and the adoption of agreements that became the institutional basis for further effective cooperation. These include the 2022 agreement on mutual protection of investments and the memorandum on trade cooperation.

These critical documents established a solid basis for sustained commercial interactions and provided essential guarantees to investors from both countries. In 2024, this foundation was further reinforced through sector-specific accords, including a strategic agreement between Kazakhstan's Samruk-Kazyna Sovereign Wealth Fund and Qatar's Power International Holding on cooperation in the energy and gas sector, as well as a project agreement for

the construction of gas processing facilities at the Kashagan oil field.

Particular attention has been drawn to Qatar's growing investment into Kazakhstan's energy infrastructure. In March 2024, the Qatari government committed 17.6 billion tenge to support key development projects across Kazakhstan. The allocated funds are directed toward the construction of new gas processing plants, the expansion of major gas trunk lines such as the Beineu-Bozoi-Shymkent pipeline, the establishment of a combined-cycle power station, and the creation of agro-processing enterprises focused on value-added production in grain, legumes, and dairy sectors. These investments signal not only Qatar's confidence in Kazakhstan's economic trajectory but also its intention to participate in shaping the region's long-term energy and agricultural landscape.

Such a large-scale investment package demonstrates the high level of confidence of Qatar in the investment climate of Kazakhstan and the strategic nature of the partnership. According to Kazakhstan's ambassador to Doha A. Isagaliyev, joint projects worth more than USD 20 billion in petrochemicals, energy, transport, telecommunications, finance and agriculture are currently under consideration (Qatar-Kazakhstan joint investment projects exceed USD 20 billion, 2024). This means that economic cooperation is reaching an unprecedented level, covering several sectors at once.

Nevertheless, both sides are aware of unrealized potential. So far, the volume of trade is far from the potential of the two economies, and investments are concentrated in specific sectors. To further develop cooperation, efforts to diversify and intensify business are needed. In this regard, bilateral business forums and intergovernmental commissions play an important role. In 2024, Doha hosted business-to-business (B2B) meetings involving dozens of companies from both countries in agribusiness, industry, food, and IT. Regular meetings of the Business Council and investment roadshows are planned. Such events allow establishing direct contacts between Kazakh and Qatari companies, agreeing on specific projects and eliminating information barriers.

In addition, Kazakhstan involves Qatar in its state development programs. For example, Qatari investors have been invited to cooperate in the Born Bold initiative to globally promote Kazakhstan's investment image. Qatar's engagement with the Astana International Financial Center (AIFC) has emerged as a promising avenue for deepening bilat-

eral cooperation in the financial sector, particularly in the realm of Islamic finance. As one of the global leaders in Sharia-compliant banking and investment, Qatar brings substantial institutional experience and expertise to this field.

The present paper sets out the hypothesis that trade. Economic and investment cooperation are key aspects of the relationship between the two states. The economic dimension of such relations is of particular note, given its status as a primary and most rapidly evolving area of collaboration between the two nations. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has emphasized that trade and economic cooperation represents the core engine driving the advancement of Kazakhstan-Qatar relations. Although bilateral trade volumes remained relatively modest in the past, recent years have witnessed a marked upswing in both the scale of trade and the volume of Qatari investment.

However, as of 2022, mutual trade remained modest, partially reduced by the impact of the pandemic. However, as early as 2023, trade turnover had increased exponentially. For the initial quarter of 2023, trade figures increased by 17 times in comparison with the corresponding period in 2022. Overall, for 2023, bilateral trade was well above the previous year's level. Nevertheless, the structure of the trade balance remains asymmetrical, with Kazakhstan exporting to Qatar at a lower level than it imports. Notably, the primary volume of trade was approximately \$56.6 million. This is indicative of Qatari investments into the Kazakh economy. These funds were primarily allocated to the financial and research sectors, signifying the long-term character of the contribution, the establishment of joint banking projects, the financing of scientific initiatives and start-ups.

Both Kazakhstan and Qatar have consistently shown a strong interest in diversifying and boosting their bilateral trade relations. Specifically, Kazakhstan has actively sought opportunities to broaden its non-resource exports to Qatar, highlighting sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing as key growth areas. A notable development occurred during the sixth meeting of the Joint High-Level Commission in Doha in October 2023, when Kazakhstan introduced proposals to enhance on the Qatar market through increased exports of agricultural products, including meat, fish, honey and caviar, as well as gas and related processed products. This step was aimed at laying the groundwork for an organized, mutually beneficial agricultural partnership. Given Qatar's natural conditions, it is understandable that

it faces certain challenges in agriculture. Kazakhstan can confidently become a worthy partner in this area, supplying its own high-quality products. In turn, this will diversify Kazakhstan's export segment. At the same time, it will strengthen Kazakhstan's role in the Gulf region.

It is also important to note bilateral cooperation in the military sphere. This is based on the exchange of technologies that enhance defense capabilities. Currently, this is also a relevant area of cooperation. As early as 2022, the defense ministers of Kazakhstan and Qatar began active dialogue aimed at building bilateral contacts. Officials from both sides held regular meetings to explore potential areas of cooperation, including military education and the exchange of expertise in security-related fields. Concurrently, matters pertaining to defense collaboration were addressed in meetings of heads of state, underscoring the strategic significance of the subject for the leadership of the two nations.

A major step in bilateral defense relations was taken with the signing of the Agreement on Military Cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the State of Qatar in December 2023 (On Signing the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the State of Qatar on Military Cooperation, 2023). The agreement was officially finalized during the visit of Ruslan Zhaksylykov, Kazakhstan's Minister of Defense, to Doha, where he held high-level talks with Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defense Affairs, Khalid bin Muhammad Al-Attiyah. This document encompasses comprehensive cooperation, including initiatives in military education – ranging from training programs for military and officer, to collaboration in military medicine, joint exercises, operational training, experience sharing. A particularly innovative component is the decision to old joint military exercises, marking Qatar's first such initiative with a Central Asia nation. Successfully conducting these exercises will significantly enhance interoperability and mutual confidence between the military establishments of both countries.

This military-technical cooperation is especially noteworthy, establishing a unique and unprecedented example in the broader Central Asian region. Cooperation in the field of defense demonstrates the importance and high level of trust between states. The adoption, ratification, and implementation of defense agreements demonstrate the evolution of cooperation as constructive: from economics to politics. Astana and Doza recognize each other as key partners in their respective regions. All these

measures also make it possible to raise the level of defense achievements and contribute to the introduction of the latest military technologies. For Qatar, the partnership with Kazakhstan, a nation with considerable experience in peacekeeping and participation in international exercises, enables the expansion of the geography of its defense ties and the strengthening of its influence in Central Asia.

The viability of these prospects is contingent upon the effective implementation of the agreed framework. The initial steps in this direction have already been delineated, encompassing the exchange of delegations of military specialists, the participation of observers in each other's exercises, and the potential supply of training equipment. Over the longer horizon, Kazakhstan and Qatar could explore opportunities for collaborative projects within the defense industry, potentially establishing joint training facilities or initiating the production of military equipment components in Kazakh factories backed by Qatari investments. An additional promising avenue for bilateral cooperation is cybersecurity and counter-terrorism – fields of mutual strategic interest. Kazakhstan faces persistent regional threats, whereas Qatar remains highly attentive to maintaining broader security stability in the Middle East.

Currently, the military dimension of Kazakhstan-Qatar relations is at a preliminary yet highly promising phase. Further development in this area will serve as an important of mutual trust and strategic commitment. The successful realization of the bilateral defense agreement's goals, alongside practical engagements such as joint exercises and personnel exchanges, would transform the nature of their partnership, extending its scope from primarily economic ties to encompassing a deeper security-oriented strategic alliance.

### **Cultural and humanitarian cooperation**

Cooperation in the field of defense demonstrates the importance and high level of trust between states. The adoption, ratification, and implementation of defense agreements demonstrate the evolution of cooperation as constructive: from economics to politics. Astana and Doza recognize each other as key partners in their respective regions. All these measures also make it possible to raise the level of defense achievements and contribute to the introduction of the latest military technologies.

The agreements signed during bilateral visits in 2022 laid foundations for collaboration between universities, enabling student and faculty exchange-

es, joint educational programs and collaborative research. Universities in Kazakhstan have actively pursued partnerships with renowned Qatari educational entities, notably the Qatar Foundation, internationally acclaimed for hosting campuses of prominent global universities in Doha. Cooperation in Islamic education and theological research holds special promise, considering Kazakhstan's experience in training theologians and its established role as an international platform for interfaith dialogue, exemplified by the Congress of Leader of World and Traditional Religions in Astana. Qatar's prominent status as an Islamic educational hub enhance the potential benefits of such cooperation. Currently, several Kazakhstani students are enrolled at Qatar University and this number is anticipated to grow further as educational ties deepen. It is noteworthy that a number of students from Kazakhstan are currently pursuing their academic studies at Qatar University, with expectations of an expansion in such programs.

Furthermore, the agenda includes cultural and sporting activities. The leaders of both countries have acknowledged the significance of these interactions. In 2022, Qatar extended an invitation to Kazakhstan to participate in the FIFA 2022 as a guest nation, with President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev in attendance at the opening ceremony and acknowledging Qatar's role in the tournament's organization. In turn, the Republic of Kazakhstan invites the Qatari side to cultural forums and sporting events held in the country (Kazinform International News Agency, 2022, October 12). Representatives of Qatar have been known to participate regularly in the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana, as well as in other international conferences held under the auspices of Kazakhstan, including summits on mediation and the dialogue of civilizations. Both countries are recognized as pioneers in the organization of significant international events, and the exchange of experience in their organization is a matter of mutual interest.

The cultural and humanitarian dimension serves to complement formal political and economic ties, fostering lively human interaction. This provides a solid basis for mutual understanding, with shared values such as commitment to Islam, tolerance and cultural dialogue bringing the societies of Kazakhstan and Qatar closer together. The existing accords in the domains of education, culture, and sports establish the foundation for further exchange of experience and knowledge. A content



analysis of joint statements and agreements reveals that the humanitarian sphere is regarded by the involved parties as a pivotal component of bilateral relations, along with the economy (Pmirgazy, 2022). In the future, an increase in the number of joint cultural events (cultural days, exhibitions, film screenings) is to be expected, as well as an

expansion of student exchanges and scientific conferences, and an increase in tourist traffic. These developments are poised to reinforce public diplomacy and positively impact the image of each nation in the public opinion of the other, thereby engendering a conducive environment for the execution of significant state initiatives (table 1,2).

**Table 1** – Main areas of Kazakh-Qatari relations (2022–2024)

Direction of Cooperation	Main Activities/Agreements	Implementation Year
Political-Diplomatic	State visits and agreements	2022–2024
Trade and Economic	Investment protection agreement, cooperation in energy, construction of gas processing plants	2022–2024
Military-Technical	Agreement on military cooperation	2023
Cultural and Humanitarian	Educational exchanges, joint cultural projects	2022–2024
Transport and Logistics	Negotiations on Central Asia – Persian Gulf transport corridor	2023–2024

**Table 2** – Key bilateral projects between Astana and Doha (2024–2028)

Project	Sector	Planned Investment Volume
Construction of Gas Processing Plant (GPP) at Kashagan	Energy	USD 2.5 billion
Joint Agro-industrial Complex	Agriculture	USD 350 million
Development of «Central Asia – Persian Gulf» Logistics Route	Transport and Logistics	USD 1.2 billion
Joint Islamic Financial Center based on AIFC	Financial Sector	USD 500 million

*Source: Proposals and initiatives discussed during bilateral negotiations and agreements(2023–2024).*

### **Main directions and prospects for further co-operation**

Further directions and ways to develop cooperation. Based on the analysis, we can say that diplomatic relations between the countries are definitely growing and getting stronger: starting with cultural and religious ties and moving on to trust in military defense. Partnership at the highest level demonstrates interest at the political level. Cooperation covers all new areas and fields of development of bilateral constructive diplomatic relations. The viability of this partnership is contingent upon the success of the following key areas:

- *Trade and investment* – undoubtedly the main material basis of relations. The prospects in this domain are contingent on the execution of projects with an announced value exceeding \$20 billion, the attainment of trade turnover targets (\$0.5 billion), and the establishment of novel joint production facilities. The successful initiation of projects in the oil and gas sector (Kashagan GPP), infrastructure

(transport corridors) and agro-industry is expected to render the partnership irreversible. A pivotal factor in this regard will be the enhancement of the business climate and the assurance of investment protection. The adoption of a long-term agreement on strategic partnership in priority sectors has already established the legal framework for this purpose. In terms of foreign policy cooperation based on the development of relations, an increase in Qatar's investments in the Kazakh economy can be predicted. At the same time, it can be confidently stated that Kazakh businesses will gain a new market in Qatar, including through joint ventures. Qatar is a gas leader, while Kazakhstan occupies a leading position in the world in uranium and oil production. In this regard, energy cooperation will also increase, which is especially important in the areas of liquefied gas exchange, gas modernization, and the development of the processing industry. Plans for joint development of renewable energy technologies are reflected in the agreement between QSTec and Ka-

zatomprom. Astana and Doha are mutually committed to developing alternative energy sources. Qatar, like Kazakhstan, is active in the development of solar and hydrogen energy.

- *The field logistics and transport* has emerged as a promising domain, stemming from the mutual interest of Central Asian nations in establishing trade links with the Persian Gulf region. Kazakhstan is advocating for alternative trade routes that circumvent the necessity for extensive transits through third countries. Qatar, leveraging its strategic geographical position and substantial financial resources, is well-positioned to support infrastructure development along these routes. The range of prospective cooperation includes initiatives focused on port infrastructure along the Caspian Sea, as well as railway and highway routes crossing through Iran or other intermediary states, all aimed at establishing a direct logistical link between Kazakhstan and Arab seaports. Qatar's participation in regional transport development has already been observed, notably through its investments in Turkmenbashi Port in the Caspian Sea, as highlighted in analytical studies (Koch, 2017). For Kazakhstan, engaging Qatar in the development of the Central Asia – Middle East transport corridor would represent a major strategic plan, enabling the country to lower logistical expenditures while expanding access to new regional and international markets. The potential for trilateral projects involving Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, with Qatar as the investor and Kazakhstan as a pivotal transit nation, is a prospect that may become a reality in the future. The development of this area is in line with the initiatives discussed in the Joint Intergovernmental Commission, and logistics is included in the 2023 protocol.

- *Education and innovation* represent long-term strategic investments, through which nations establish the foundations for future collaboration. The joint undertaking of research, academic exchanges and the establishment of innovation platforms (techno-parks, startup hubs) with the participation of Qatari capital in Kazakhstan has been identified as a key factor in fostering technological development. For instance, Qatar could assume a partnership role in the establishment of a regional center for artificial intelligence or a fintech hub in Almaty, drawing upon the experience of the Qatar FinTech Hub. Conversely, Kazakhstan has the opportunity to participate in the Qatar Economic Forum, an annual event hosted by Qatar that brings together experts in technology, innovation and investment. In 2022, President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev delivered

a keynote address at the Qatar Economic Forum, delineating shared approaches to the advancement of the digital economy. Such discourse establishes the foundation for specific projects in the domain of high technologies.

The outlook for the enhancement of collaborative endeavors appears highly promising, particularly in light of the symbiotic character of the two nations' agendas. Kazakhstan, pursuing a policy of multi-vectorism and pragmatism in its foreign relations, seeks to attract investment and expertise from advanced economies to modernize its infrastructure and economy. Qatar, with its substantial financial resources and aspiration to expand its influence beyond the Middle East, has identified in Kazakhstan a compatible partner, characterized by a stable political system and abundant resource potential. The alignment of interests between the two states is such that Astana is the recipient of investment and support in various sectors, whilst Doha is a reliable ally in a key region of Eurasia.

Concomitantly, it is imperative to consider the potential challenges that may arise. Firstly, the implementation of ambitious projects requires the smooth operation of bureaucratic systems in both countries and the overcoming of administrative barriers. Kazakhstan is obliged to guarantee favorable conditions for Qatari investors, including transparency of procedures and legal guarantees. In turn, Qatar is required to adopt a long-term investment strategy, rather than merely sporadic injections of capital. Secondly, geopolitical dynamics and relations with other powers could have an impact. Kazakhstan defends its interests by cooperating with Russia, China and the USA, and the partnership with Qatar contributes to the economic stability of the region, which is positively perceived by all. Thirdly, external economic factors, oil and gas price volatility, and global financial risks may affect the parties' ability to finance projects. However, it should be noted that both countries have accumulated significant reserves and have experience in dealing with crises, which will allow them to jointly face the challenges.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Kazakhstan – Qatar relations have reached a stage where the transition to a full-fledged strategic partnership is not only possible but increasingly likely. The bilateral dialogue between Astana and Doha is evolving across multiple priority domains, with trade and economic

cooperation emerging as the principal driving force. While early interaction during the 1990-s and 2000-s focused predominantly on spiritual, humanitarian, and selective investment projects, the current phase is marked by a broader and more diversified agenda that spans economic development, infrastructure, energy, defense, and beyond. According to the Agreement on Military Cooperation adopted in 2023, Kazakhstan has taken a special place in matters of defense and security in terms of the depth and scope of foreign policy cooperation with Doha.

Humanitarian and cultural cooperation continues to occupy a leading position and continues to deepen. The fields of education, sports, culture, religion, agriculture, and renewable energy have become the leading areas of bilateral cooperation. In addition, they continue to develop and expand on a constructive basis and at the highest political level. Kazakhstan is positioned as a stable and reliable partner of Doha. Qatar, in turn, is undoubtedly an important partner for Kazakhstan in the Gulf region. The following measures can be identified to ensure the further development of the current level of foreign relations:

First, in order to institutionalize bilateral cooperation, it is necessary to complete the formalization of relations, which will ensure the transition to a strategic partnership. In this regard, it is necessary to create a roadmap for the implementation of the 2024 Agreement on Long-Term Strategic Partnership between the Government of Kazakhstan and the Government of the State of Qatar on the development of projects in priority sectors. This roadmap should set out clear goals, objectives, and deadlines for the implementation of the agreement. At the same time, the organization of regular summits and constant mutual visits will also contribute to the institutionalization of foreign policy cooperation between the countries.

Second, the implementation of agreements in the economic sphere should be accelerated. To this end, working groups could be set up at all levels to carry out ongoing monitoring and resolve issues. These groups should be given broad powers to take the necessary measures in the gas and logistics sectors. Undoubtedly, such a group will also ensure the effective and timely development of investments, which will guarantee the economic effectiveness of the projects. The monitoring of the implementation of agreements signed in 2022-2024, as well as the regular sharing of information on progress, will help maintain investor confidence and avoid bureaucratic delays.

Third, the diversification of trade relations is imperative. Diversification of trade relations. It is recommended that the nomenclature of mutual trade be expanded. It is recommended that Kazakhstan promote its agricultural and industrial products (meat, grain, oil, and organic products) and encourage industrial cooperation (rolled metal products, chemicals, and construction materials) in the Qatari market. Mechanisms such as trade missions and exhibitions should be utilized to this end. The rationale behind this is to facilitate the production of specific goods within Kazakhstan for subsequent distribution to the regional market. The establishment of a Kazakh-Qatari Chamber of Commerce and Industry, an initiative that has been mooted in the media, would serve as a valuable instrument to support entrepreneurs (Panfilova, 2024).

Fourth, the development of the Central Asia-Gulf transport corridor. In the context of collaborative endeavors, the proposal entails the execution of a joint feasibility study, encompassing the optimal transport routes between Kazakhstan and Qatar. The routes under consideration include traversing Iran and the Gulf, or navigating the Caspian Sea and subsequently proceeding by sea. The results of this study may then be used by the parties involved to attract further partners, including Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Oman, with the aim of creating a consortium to invest in infrastructure. The Qatari capital and Kazakhstan's initiative in this area could be supported by development institutions, Islamic banks, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and so on. The development of direct transport links would significantly enhance the development of direct transport links. The enhancement of the economic impact of cooperation is a key benefit of the development of direct transport links.

Fifth, the continuation of military-technical cooperation is also recommended. Continued efforts in the military-technical sphere remain essential and immediate steps to implement the existing defense cooperation agreement are highly advisable. Initiating joint military exercises – or at least organizing joint command and staff simulations on the territories of Kazakhstan and Qatar – would substantially bolster mutual confidence and facilitate direct exchange of practical military experience. Such activities would further solidify defense ties and enhance interoperability between the two nations armed forces, reinforcing their strategic partnership. Additionally, careful consideration should be given to opportunities for mutual officer training and education, ensuring specialists from Kazakhstan can

study at Qatar military academies, and vice versa, within the established quotas outlined by the signed agreements. Furthermore, the regular organization of consultations on regional security issues, including within multilateral formats such as C5+1 dialogue with US participation, where Qatar can act as a partner, will allow for the coordination of efforts to counter common threats.

Finally, the enhancement of inter-societal relations. It is recommended that cultural exchange be strengthened through the organization of events such as Years of Culture, and the declaration of 2026 as the Year of Culture of Kazakhstan in Qatar, followed by the Year of Qatar in Kazakhstan. The expansion of student exchange programs, an increase in the number of scholarships for students from both countries, and the organization of mutual tourist weeks and business forums in the field of tourism are also recommended. The establishment of direct flights between Kazakhstan and Qatar has already significantly improved connectivity and now it is crucial to actively leverage these connections to boost tourism and facilitate exchanges among offi-

cial delegations. Additionally, simplifying visa procedures for specific groups of citizens could further stimulate interaction and mobility, with the growing partnership between Astana and Doha serving as an illustrative example of successful cooperation. Extending this collaboration to include other cities in both countries would represent a logical and valuable next step. These practical initiatives are likely to enrich interpersonal contacts, contributing to the durability and stability of bilateral relations, independent of shifting political circumstances.

In summary, Kazakhstan and Qatar find themselves on the brink of a significant new phase in their bilateral partnership. The progress already achieved underscores the effective realization of Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy approach and Qatar's proactive strategic outreach in Central Asia. It is therefore advisable for both Astana and Doha to pursue targeted measures aimed at fully unlocking the potential of their cooperation, ultimately establishing a distinctive and successful framework for Central Asia-Gulf region collaboration in the 21st century.

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