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## **A New Stage of Relations between the European Union and Kazakhstan: Europeanization Process**

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**Abstract.** *This paper argues that Kazakhstan and the European Union have entered a new stage marked by two major changes. First, the parties finally signed the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA). The second change is described through the concept of Europeanization. In 2015 Kazakhstan reordered its policy agenda towards building a more transparent and accountable state. In order to assess this change empirically, we conducted an original content analysis of President Nazarbayev's speeches. A total of 69 speeches from 2010 to 2015 were evaluated. The analysis findings suggest that in 2015 the leadership of the country started paying greater attention to issues such as accountability, rule of law, and transparency, which are considered as core EU values. Kazakhstan's weak institutional development is regarded as a major barrier in EU-Kazakhstan relations; Europeanization of Kazakhstan's policies should be viewed as a significant event that will boost bilateral investments, trade, and other aspects of cooperation.*

**Keywords:** Kazakhstan, Europeanization, European Union, Accountability, Rule of Law, Democracy, Content Analysis.

### **Introduction**

In December of 2015, Kazakhstan and the EU signed the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA). This agreement is the first of its kind to be signed by the EU with any of the Central Asian countries. The agreement replaced the previous Cooperation and Partnership Agreement, which had governed bilateral relations since 1999. For decades Kazakhstan and the EU have built close and mutually beneficial relations. The EU is Kazakhstan's biggest trading partner and investor.<sup>1</sup> The Union also plays a major role in improving Kazakhstan's international visibility and recognition. Similarly, Kazakhstan is regarded as the EU's main partner in Central Asia, as most of EU's trade with the region is concentrated in Kazakhstan. Experts note that Europe is mainly interested in the country's hydrocarbon resources. However, it also seeks to extend its normative power over Kazakhstan. Particularly, development of Europe's values such as good governance, democracy, human rights, and rule of law in Kazakhstan are actively promoted as important conditions for bilateral relations. As Jos Boonstra (2015)<sup>2</sup> puts it, "democratic principles should be the centerpiece of engagement, since these countries will only become more reliable partners when they would develop and respect the rule of law and apply democratic governance."

This emphasis on European values such as democracy, rule of law, and good governance in the EU's foreign policy is theorized in the concept of

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<sup>1</sup> European External Action Service, "EU-Kazakhstan Relations Factsheet," 2015.

<sup>2</sup> J. Boonstra, *Reviewing the EU's approach to Central Asia*, Astana, Open Society Foundations, 2015.

Normative Power Europe (NPE). Ian Manners (2002),<sup>3</sup> who coined the term, describes it as the power over opinion, or shaping of what constitutes normal. According to Manners, the spread of EU norms such as democracy, rule of law, respect for human life, and fundamental freedoms describes an essential element in European foreign policy.

However, this paper is centered on the counterpart of the NPE – the Europeanization concept. KyriakosMoumoutzis (2011)<sup>4</sup> defines this as adoption of European norms and practices by nation states. Thus, if the NPE describes actions of the EU, this Europeanization explains the behavior of individual countries that interact with the EU. The term has been particularly used to describe the spread of democracy, rule of law, improved governance and other European norms in countries that joined the EU comparatively recently or that have ambitions to join it. The term is also used to describe reforms that have happened in older EU members and even in non-EU states.

Gawrich, Melnykovska, and Schweickert (2010) identify three streams in Europeanization studies: Membership Europeanization, Accession Europeanization, and Neighborhood Europeanization. The Membership Europeanization stream examines Europeanization patterns in member states. Anders Esmark's (2008)<sup>5</sup> study is a perfect example of this stream of Europeanization studies. In the paper he argues that Europeanization created new institutions and procedures in Denmark's central public administration. Similar studies were conducted in Britain, Germany, and other long-standing members of the European Union. However, most of the studies have been conducted on Accession Europeanization. They describe how Eastern European countries brought their regulations and policies closer to European standards in order to become a part of the EU. For example, Jan-Hinrik Meyer-Sahling, and Christian Van Stolkthere (2014)<sup>6</sup> conducted research on the Europeanization of central governments in Central and Eastern European countries such as Poland, Slovakia, Latvia, and others. Neighborhood Europeanization centers on EU neighbors with noimmediate EU accession plans. Gawrich et al. (2010)<sup>7</sup> focused on the effectiveness of Europeanization policies in Ukraine. Similarly, Defne Günay (2014)<sup>8</sup> examined the Europeanization of Turkey's foreign policy.

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<sup>3</sup> I. Manners, 2002. "Normative Power Europe: AContradiction in Terms?," in *Journal of Common Market Studies* , XL (2002), p. 235-258.

<sup>4</sup> K. Moumoutzis, "Still Fashionable yet Useless? Addressing Problems with Research onthe Europeanization of Foreign Policy," in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, IL (2011), no. 3, p. 607-629.

<sup>5</sup> A. Esmark, "Tracing the National Mandate: Administrative Europeanization Made in Denmark," in *Public Administration*, LXXXVI (2008), no. 1, p. 243-257.

<sup>6</sup> J. H. Meyer-Sahling, C. V.Stolk, "A Case of Partial Convergence. The Europenization of Central government in Central and Eastern Europe," in *Public Administration*, XIIIIC (2014), no. 1, p. 230-247.

<sup>7</sup> A. Gawrich, I. Melnykovska, R. Schweickert, "Neighbourhood Europeanizationthrough ENP: The Case of Ukraine," in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, IIL (2010), no. 5, p. 1209-1235.

<sup>8</sup> D. Günay, "Europeanization of State Capacity and Foreign Policy: Turkey in the Middle East," in *Mediterranean Politics*, XIX (2014), no. 2, p. 220-237.

The EU has been nudging Kazakhstan to align with European norms from the early period of their bilateral relations. In fact, values such as the rule of law, human rights, and free and democratic elections were included in all of the key bilateral agreements, memorandums, and other documents. They can be found in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and in the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement as well as in the EU and Central Asia strategy for a new partnership.

In practice, the leadership of Kazakhstan has avoided these issues. According to Anceschi (2014),<sup>9</sup> EU-Kazakhstan relations have been very pragmatic, paying little attention to human rights and civic dimensions. They have concentrated on material issues such as trade and investments, while more civic issues have stayed in the background. As Aitolkyn Kourmanova (2014)<sup>10</sup> argues, Kazakhstan has managed to use the divergent positions of EU member states to ignore or conveniently overlook these inconvenient matters.

However, in March of 2015, Kazakhstan's president initiated the Five Institutional Reforms. These reforms aim to build a functioning rule of law, an improved accountability system, and a modern bureaucracy among other things. Thus, they aim to strengthen the very values that Kazakhstan used to avoid.

A few months later the president announced how these five institutional reforms would be implemented in the 100 Concrete Steps program. The program specifies in what ways public administration and regulations will be brought closer to the EU norms. Some of the reform steps specifically refer to European norms. For example, Step 49 stipulates that the country's standard construction codes should be replaced with the Eurocodes.

Both the Five Institutional Reforms and the 100 Concrete Steps programs were identified as the country's national plan for the next 10 to 15 years. Thus, these documents will shape Kazakhstan in the foreseeable future. By the end of 2015, the parliament had already passed 59 new laws that modernized the country's regulations<sup>11</sup>. One of them is the new Law on access to information, which makes it easier for the general public to obtain government-held information and improve the public sector's transparency and accountability. Hence, the country has embarked on a long journey of aligning itself with European norms.

In this paper we argue that the bilateral relations have entered a new stage of development. This new stage is marked by two major events: the signing of the EPCA and the Europeanization of Kazakhstan's policy agenda. The importance of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in this regard is hard to

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<sup>9</sup> L. Anceschi, "The Tyranny of Pragmatism: EU-Kazakhstani Relations," in *Europe-Asia Studies*, LXVI (2014), no. 1, p. 1-24.

<sup>10</sup> A. Kourmanova, "How Does Central Asia View the EU?," *EUCAM working paper #18*, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> N. Nazarbayev, 2006. "President's Speech to the Nation: The Strategy of Kazakhstan in Entering into the 50 Most Competitive Nations of the World," available at: [http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses\\_of\\_president/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-leader-of-the-nation-nnazarbayev-strategy-kazakhstan-2050-new-political-course-of-the-established-state](http://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-leader-of-the-nation-nnazarbayev-strategy-kazakhstan-2050-new-political-course-of-the-established-state), accessed 12. 06. 2017.

overestimate. It is a major comprehensive agreement that describes the terms of cooperation for decades to come. Therefore, we will not spend much effort proving its merits. Instead, we will focus on the second event, which is less obvious and also grossly overlooked. Specifically, we will empirically assess the extent of the Europeanization of Kazakhstan's policy agenda.

The paper will proceed as follows: the first part will describe the evolution of relations between Kazakhstan and the EU. The second part will examine the policy context that brought Kazakhstan to its existing policy choices. The third part will explain the methodology of our empirical study and will be followed with our findings and discussion of bilateral relations in light of these findings.

### **Evolution of relations**

The two parties established diplomatic relations right after Kazakhstan declared independence. Scholars identify several developmental stages of bilateral relations. Particularly, Isaev (2007)<sup>12</sup> differentiates three periods of development. In this case, the first stage played out during the years 1992-1995. During this period, political and diplomatic relations were officially established. The EU opened its technical assistance and financing programs such as the

Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) and the Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies (TEMPUS) to Kazakhstan.

These rather shallow bilateral relations between the two sides strengthened after the signing of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) at the end of 1995. This agreement marked the second stage of cooperation. It was the first comprehensive agreement that established strategies between the two parties. The PCA listed core principles of bilateral relations. According to the agreement the relationship between Kazakhstan and the EU would be guided by principles such as respect for democracy, international law, and human rights. The document also included goals such as a transition to a market economy, encouragement of trade and investment, and political dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

During this period bilateral trade and investments were at the center of relations. Bilateral cooperation expanded in a wide array of industries including oil and gas, telecommunications, logistics, and transportation. Political cooperation also deepened through creation of a special committee, the Kazakhstan-European Union, which later became an important platform for political dialogue.

The third stage of cooperation started in 2001. In this period bilateral relations enjoyed the full impact of the PCA, which came into force in 1999. During this stage, bilateral relations matured. The parties signed agreements that allowed businesses to avoid double taxation and to import workers. All of this

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<sup>12</sup> K. Isaev, *Respublika Kazakhstan I Evropeikiy Soyuz: Osnovnie Etapy Sotrudnichestva za 15 let nezavisimosti Kazakhstana*, Almaty, KISI institute, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> EUR-Lex. 1999. "Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs): Russia, Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia." <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=URISERV:r17002>, accessed 12. 06. 2017.

boosted bilateral trade and investment to maximum levels. In particular, bilateral trade increased from \$3.5 billion in 2000 to \$15.3 billion in 2005. Technical assistance also increased. The EU extended its assistance into areas such as ecology, customs, and border control among others.

Aneschi (2014) builds on Isaev's periodization and identifies a fourth period, which started in 2007. In this year the EU adopted the Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia. Unlike the PCA, the Strategy for a New Partnership is a multilateral arrangement that involves all five Central Asian states. It was an important milestone in EU-Kazakhstan relations because it paid greater attention to non-economic issues such as support of democracy, rule of law, and human rights in all of the Central Asian republics. This was the first European strategy that specifically aimed to spread European norms and values in Kazakhstan and differed from the previous approach, which focused primarily on economic issues. This new strategy was also complemented by the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), a grant program that allocates €1,000,000 per year to Kazakhstan to support the goals listed in the strategy. In response, Kazakhstan adopted the Road to Europe (Put' v Evropu) state program. The program was adopted in 2008 and consisted of three components. The first component focused on the deepening of traditional economic ties in trade, logistics, and similar matters. The second component stressed the importance of institutional-judicial development based on European best practices. The third component was devoted to the creation of conditions for Kazakhstan's presidency of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in 2010.<sup>14</sup> Hence, through the Road to Europe program, Kazakhstan expressed its appreciation of the EU's new strategy towards Central Asia and its willingness to develop its institutions based on European best practices. Moreover, according to Baizakova (2013)<sup>15</sup>, the state program also raised the level of cultural cooperation.

However, during this period the EU became increasingly disillusioned with Kazakhstan's progress towards genuine democratization and the establishment of the rule of law. From 2007 the EU had expended a great deal of energy to develop democracy, accountability, rule of law, and other institutions. The European community even actively supported Kazakhstan's bid to chair the OSCE with the hope that it would deepen the role of democratic institutions in Kazakhstan. However, the long-awaited democratization did not happen. Instead, the country's leadership increased its grip on civil society. Since 2003 the country has enacted regulations which centralized state funding to NGOs and drastically

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<sup>14</sup> Republic of Kazakhstan. President. 2008. "Gosudarstvennayaprogramma Put' v Evropu." [http://ru.government.kz/docs/u080000653\\_20080829.htm](http://ru.government.kz/docs/u080000653_20080829.htm)

<sup>15</sup> K. I. Baizakova, "Regional Security Cooperation Between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the European Union," in *Russian Politics & Law*, LI (2013), no. 1, p. 88-95.

decreased the number of non-governmental organizations that advocate for human rights and freedom of expression.<sup>16</sup>

The country avoided democratization issues even during its presidency of the OSCE in 2010. The OSCE's mandate covers a broad range of issues such as security, the fight on terrorism, democracy, and human rights among others. During the country's presidency, Kazakhstan leadership focused on the first two issues. It openly neglected matters such as democratization, rule of law, and the establishment of a free society. In fact, following the OSCE chairmanship, the country's record on democratization, human rights, and rule of law moved backwards.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, this stage is characterized by both positive and negative factors. On the one hand, the EU's Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia and Kazakhstan's Road to Europe programs brought two sides closer than ever. On the other hand, Kazakhstan's poor record in advancing the goals of the EU strategy towards Central Asia had a negative impact on bilateral relations.

In this paper, we claim that in 2015 Kazakhstan and the EU entered a new stage of bilateral relations. In December of 2015, Kazakhstan and the EU signed the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, for which negotiations began in 2011. The new agreement consists of 29 areas of cooperation, including better conditions for bilateral trade and investment. Kazakhstan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, E. Idrissov, also underlines that development of human capital was included into the priorities of the new agreement. Consequently, implementation of the EPCA should result in more joint educational and research programs. Moreover, as EU High Representative Federica Mogherini stated, the new agreement puts a strong emphasis on development of democracy, human rights, and sustainable development. Idrissov also reiterated this by saying that the Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia was the basis of this new agreement.<sup>18</sup> Thus, Kazakhstan's commitment to adhering to European values was also indicated in the newly signed EPCA.

### **Context of Kazakhstan's europeanization**

Both Kazakhstan and the EU entered into this new chapter of bilateral relations in a world which differs from that of 2007 in significant ways. First, the EU no longer has illusions regarding Kazakhstan's rapid democratization. Before the EU embarked on its ambitious strategy towards Central Asia, most former Soviet Union countries experienced some form of political liberalization. In Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan, which embraced political liberalization the most, the rapid democratization processes even resulted in revolutions. In the search for

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<sup>16</sup> V. Axyonova, "Supporting Civil Society in Central Asia: What Approach for the EU?," in *EUCAM Commentary*, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> T. Tsertsvadze, J. Boonstra, "Kazakhstan: Finding Obstacles in the Path to a New EU Agreement," 2013 available on EurasiaNet.<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67613>, accessed 12. 06. 2017.

<sup>18</sup> A. Turebekova, "Kazakhstan, EU Sign Landmark Agreement," *Astana Times*, 2015: <http://astanatimes.com/2015/12/kazakhstan-eu-sign-landmark-agreement/>, accessed 12. 06. 2017.

international legitimacy, Kazakhstan's leadership also promised speedy democratization. These promises became especially pronounced during Kazakhstan's bid for OSCE chairmanship. However, Kazakhstan's track record on democratization, and building the rule of law and an accountability system has now belied these promises. Furthermore, the economic difficulties in Ukraine and Georgia give the leadership of Kazakhstan a valid reason to postpone further democratization. Therefore, this time, the EU's approach to Kazakhstan is more down to earth, and there are no inflated expectations regarding speedy democratization of the country. There is a rather long-term approach.

Second, Kazakhstan's need for foreign investments and export markets is greater than ever. The drop in oil prices had a significant impact on Kazakhstan's fiscal situation and current account balance. People's purchasing power has also suffered as the country's national currency lost almost 100% of its pre-crisis value. In previous years high prices for oil provided the country with most of its hard currency. This flow of wealth attracted foreign investors into the lucrative oil sector regardless of the country's institutional development. That is because higher than average returns in the oil sector fully compensated for any risks that arise in countries with weak institutional development. Kazakhstan could afford to ignore the rule of law, good governance, and other things that were usually expected by European investors. Not anymore. Now the country's revenues from oil are just a fraction of what they used to be. The oil industry is not so attractive for investment, either. So, if Kazakhstan wants to continue receiving high levels of investment, it has to offer efficient bureaucracy, better regulations, rule of law, and other related Western institutions. Thus, it has to comply with the norms and values of its biggest export market and investor.

Moreover, previously large revenues from oil made Kazakhstan's national currency too strong for development of other sectors. That is, the country suffered from the classic Dutch Disease. Now the country has a historical chance to diversify its economy if it manages to improve its rule of law, accountability, and governance.

Last but not least, the continuing standoff between the EU and Russia creates unnecessary barriers to cooperation between Kazakhstan and the EU. The relations between Kazakhstan's two key partners worsened due to the crisis in Ukraine and following economic sanctions. This deterioration of relations also impacted Kazakhstan. Specifically, when the Kremlin banned imports of agricultural products from the EU, food deliveries to Kazakhstan that were passing through Russia also suffered. Russian authorities substantially strengthened the restrictions on transit and the risk of re-exportation of goods transiting through to Russia.

Moreover, both the EU and Russia expect Kazakhstan to take their side. However, the Central Asian country is too dependent on both of them to choose. The EU is Kazakhstan's largest trading partner and investor. It absorbs about half of Kazakhstan's total exports and provides more than a half of its foreign direct

investments.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Kazakhstan also cannot distance itself from Russia either. Kazakhstan and Russia now share a common economic space and the world's longest land border. Kazakhstan also has a large Russian minority, which could cause an internal conflict if Kazakhstan decides to distance itself from its northern neighbor. Even more important, almost all of Kazakhstan's exports to Europe are transported via Russian roads and pipelines. Therefore, the country has to find a balance between the two conflicting sides, by positioning itself as a bridge between the EU and Russia. Instead of choosing sides, the country views this situation as an opportunity to become a hub that would connect European business with the EEU market.

In this regard, the country's decision-makers understand that the mere signing of the EPCA is not sufficient for this goal. The country needs to transform itself and offer European investors improved governance and regulations. This is the reason why the leadership of the country launched the five institutional reforms at the beginning of 2015. These reforms aim to drastically improve accountability of government structures and the rule of law and create a much more efficient government. Thus, the Five Institutional Reforms aim to achieve higher levels of Europeanization of Kazakhstan's regulations and policies. In order to test Kazakhstan's commitment to Europeanization, we conducted a content analysis of President Nazarbayev's speeches. The content analysis should also reveal evolution of the government's agenda and priorities over time.

### **Methodology**

Flockard (2010) identifies thick and thin forms of Europeanization. The thick form refers to full internalization of European values and practices. In contrast, the thin form is associated with no more than a change of rhetoric and agenda. Considering the institutional underdevelopment and inherently authoritarian structure of governance in Kazakhstan, we believe it is premature to discuss the thick form of Europeanization in this Central Asian country. Hence, this study focuses on thin Europeanization. Specifically, it examines the level of Europeanization of the country's agenda in detail. This study used an original content analysis of President Nazarbayev's speeches from 2010 to 2015<sup>20</sup>. The president's speeches were used because he is the main agenda setter for the country.

We took a sample of 69 speeches from 2010 to 2015 from the president's official [www.akorda.kz](http://www.akorda.kz) website. During this time period, the president made many more speeches, but not all of them are reflected in the official website's contents. We focused on speeches from the official website as we assume that the most important and agenda-setting ones are placed there. However, the population of the content analysis consists of all of the internal policy speeches, including those

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<sup>19</sup> European Commission, *European Union, Trade in goods with Kazakhstan*, 2015.

<sup>20</sup> The content analysis does not cover speeches that were made in December 2015, as they were not available on the official website when the content analysis was done.

that are not present on the website. Thus, our text analysis excludes external policy speeches.

The goal of the research was to identify the role of European values in the speeches. Other issues such as economic development and social security have been removed. Moreover, although the president's speeches contain texts in both the Kazakh and Russian languages, only Russian-language texts were included in the analysis. The Kazakh portion of texts was not covered for the following reasons. First, the substantive part of the president's speeches is delivered in Russian; the Kazakh portions of the speeches contain mostly extended greetings and some emotional remarks. Second, the Kazakh part of these speeches is usually directed to ethnic Kazakhs and has little to do with the broad state agenda. More importantly, in some of the speeches, the Kazakh text replicates the content of the text in Russian. Hence, including the Kazakh portion alongside the Russian version can result in double counting of coded words in some of the speeches.

During our content analysis, we developed codes that closely relate to European values such as democracy, rule of law, and good governance. In order to achieve higher objectivity in selecting our codes, we relied on the World Governance Indicators (WGI) as a theoretical basis. The WGI, which was developed by <sup>21</sup> consist of the following six dimensions of good governance: (1) voice and accountability, (2) political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, (3) government effectiveness, (4) regulatory quality, (5) rule of law, and (6) control of corruption. These governance indicators were used as broad categories or guidelines in developing specific codes.

Our codes consist of words that fit one of the six categories listed above. A total of 23 codes were identified during the initial review of the speeches. Since the codes were picked during subjective analysis by the authors, other researchers may come up with a different set of codes. A full list of codes in each category is listed in appendix A.

The coded words were used to run queries and generate frequencies of coded words. In order to achieve higher objectivity, the roots of the coded words were used. For example, the root word corrupt was used in order to find all of the target words such as corruption and corrupted. Moreover, in order to control for the number of words in each speech, we measured the proportional percentage of coded words as opposed to their absolute number.

As the frequencies of coded words were measured, they were categorized according to years. Then frequencies of coded words in 2015 were compared with the average of frequencies during the period 2010-2014.

## Findings

Our content analysis results show that there is a significant increase of attention in half of the governance indicators. Particularly, the empirical data shows

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<sup>21</sup> D. Kaufmann, A. Kraay, M. Mastruzzi, "The Worldwide Governance Indicators: Methodology and Analytical Issues," in *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law*, III (2011), no. 2, p. 220-246.

that the president paid greater attention to the following categories: Voice and Accountability, Rule of Law, and Control of Corruption. The full table of results can be found in appendix B.

The highest increase in the president's attention was observed in the Voice and Accountability category. This includes the following five code words: *accountability*, *democracy*, *party*, *powers*, and *transparency*. Most of the codes that were included in this category exhibited higher frequency in 2015 than the average of 2010-2014 showed. Moreover, the accountability code showed the most impressive increase among all of the 23 codes. In 2015 it was mentioned 49 times more than in the previous four years. The president also mentioned the word *transparency* five times more than he used it in previous years. Furthermore, the president referred to *democracy* twice as often as he had used it in previous years. Hence, in 2015 we can observe that the leadership of the country paid special attention to building a more accountable, transparent, and democratic society.

The second most frequently mentioned category in comparison with previous years was Rule of Law. This category consists of three codes: *Law*, *Rule of Law*, and *Judiciary*. The frequency of the Rule of Law codes grew by an astonishing 17 times in comparison with previous years. In contrast, the incidence of *judiciary* and *law* fell slightly. Thus, the president maintained some interest to the latter two issues whereas *rule of law* gained disproportionately more attention in the president's 2015 speeches. In fact, this code takes up almost 0.10% of speeches in 2015, although until 2013 the president did not mention the *rule of law* in any of the sampled speeches.

The third category that recorded growth in comparison with previous years consists of only one code. The frequency of the Corruption code (Control of Corruption category) grew by two times in 2015. Nevertheless, in 2015 the frequency of this word was a mere 0.05%, half of that of the other coded words. Thus, despite this significant growth of attention to combatting corruption, the subject still plays a relatively smaller role than other components of good governance such as development of accountability or the rule of law.

Unlike the above listed three, the categories Government Effectiveness and Political Stability did not receive any increase in attention. Frequencies of the relevant codes in both of these categories remained more or less the same as in previous periods. This is mainly because these issues have always been a priority in the government's agenda. Particularly, the leadership of the country has always stressed the importance of stability and harmony for the multicultural society of Kazakhstan. In fact, in terms of attention in 2015, the code words *stability* and *tolerance* tallied the highest frequencies. Specifically, these codes take up an overpowering 0.27% and 0.15% of speeches respectively. This is, of course, considerably higher than the 0.10% of coverage that the accountability code received in 2015. This increase in attention to stability can be explained by conflicts in Ukraine and other parts of the world. Furthermore, economic difficulties for Kazakhstan that were caused by the drop in oil prices could also threaten instability. Therefore, the president was forced to buttress his security and stability agenda.

Similar to the presence of the topic of political stability, the category of government effectiveness also exhibited relative stability in the president's speeches. Technically, in 2015 the coded words in this category received more attention than in previous years. However, these increases are so modest, that they cannot be regarded as a change of attention to this issue. For example, the frequency of the code word *modernization* only grew from 0.13% to 0.14% of speech coverage. Similarly, the president used the word result in 2015 in 0.08% of his texts as opposed to 0.07% in previous years. Hence, throughout 2015 the president's interest in the government effectiveness remained unchanged. The only code word in this category that stands out is *productivity*, which grew in frequency from 0.07% to 0.13%. The higher attention to this issue can easily be explained by the country's economic slowdown. Considering the fall of revenues from exports of oil and other raw materials, the country urgently needs to boost its labor productivity.

The only category that received considerably less attention than in previous years was that of regulatory quality. This category consists of four code words: *mechanism*, *competitiveness*, *regulation*, and *services*. All of them received less attention in comparison with previous years. We found this result surprising, as we anticipated higher frequencies for *regulation* and *services*. Considering that the country embarked on widespread structural reforms, it is logical to emphasize issues of improved regulation and state services. The increase was also anticipated because the president had paid relatively little attention to these issues in previous years. They took only 0.03%-0.06% of the president's texts before 2015. However, in 2015 the head of the country decreased his already low interest in these issues. *Competitiveness* is the only code word in this category that used to be a priority before 2015. That is because the country was pursuing a strategy of becoming one of the 50 most competitive nations for many years (Nazarbayev, 2006). However, in 2015 its frequency in the president's speeches dropped by half.

Overall, the data support our initial claim that in 2015 Kazakhstan's policy agenda moved significantly closer to European values. Categories such as voice and accountability, rule of law, and control of corruption greatly advanced in the country's agenda. Meanwhile, traditional issues such as political stability and absence of violence, as well as government effectiveness maintained their high profile. The only category that lost ground in country's agenda was regulatory quality.

It is also worth noting that the president's speeches are context-specific. The president pays more attention to certain issues depending on the geopolitical, economic, and social situation in the country and in the areas around it. For example, before the elections of 2011, his speeches were largely focused on economic achievements and directed at laypeople. In contrast, the speeches of 2015 were rather addressed to investors, both domestic and international.

## Discussion

Findings of the content analysis suggest that three out of six governance categories increased their presence in the leadership's agenda. These are the categories that are closest to the European values. Furthermore, in 2015 the leadership started paying attention to issues that had previously been ignored. These include the rule of law, accountability, and transparency, which are also closely associated with European values. Thus, our initial hypothesis that the country's agenda has Europeanized is confirmed.

Meanwhile, the president's traditional priorities such as political stability, security, and government effectiveness maintained their high profile. This is understandable considering the deteriorated economic situation in Kazakhstan. With inflation at 13% (Tengrinews 2015)<sup>22</sup> and the purchasing power of people dropping, there is a higher risk of social unrest. The risk is further reinforced by the continuing conflict in Ukraine. There is a fear that separatist ideas can spread and destabilize Russian-dominated northern parts of Kazakhstan, just as happened in Eastern Ukraine.

The Europeanization of the country's agenda is a significant event that should bring the EU and Kazakhstan closer together than ever. In fact, the Five Institutional Reforms, which are the basis of the country's Europeanization, should be considered as an enhanced version of the Road to Europe initiative. The Road to Europe was a short-term program, which lasted for only two years. Moreover, although it raised issues of institutional development, it devoted far more attention to traditional economic issues such as trade, energy, and logistics. In contrast, the Five Institutional Reforms effort covers a much larger projected time-span of 10-15 years. Furthermore, three out of five institutional reforms are devoted to institutional development. Only one of them is devoted to economic modernization and another one to identity building. Thus, in terms of institutional-judicial development the stated aims of the Five Institutional Reforms are far more comprehensive.

However, there are limits to Kazakhstan's Europeanization as well. After all, Kazakhstan is an authoritarian state. As Acemoglu and Robinson (2012)<sup>23</sup> noted, deeper democratization processes and more inclusive institutions usually threaten existing elites. This can be the reason why country's new agenda does not include issues such as human rights and freedom of expression.

Furthermore, we can also observe resistance to the president's plans for institutional development. Despite higher attention to issues of accountability and transparency, laws that undermine the influence of the people's voice and democracy have been passed. Particularly, the new labor code that was adopted at the end of 2015 makes it easier to lay off employees.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the new labor code

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<sup>22</sup> Tengrinews, "Inflation in Kazakhstan Nears 13%, Central Bank Admits," 2015, available at: <http://en.tengrinews.kz/finance/Inflation-in-Kazakhstan-nears-13-central-bank-admits-263121/>, accessed 12. 06. 2017.

<sup>23</sup> D. Acemoglu, J. A. Robinson, *Why nations fail: the origins of power, prosperity and poverty*, London, Profile Books, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> J. Lillis, P. Leonard, "Kazakhstan Passes New Labor Law Without Consulting Workers," 2015. <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/76291>, accessed 12. 06. 2017.

significantly diminished the bargaining power and voice of ordinary workers. Similarly, a new law on non-governmental organizations centralized financing of NGOs. That is, any funding that does not go through a special state operator becomes illegal.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, we can observe that Europeanization of the country's agenda has already showed its first results. At the end of 2015, President Nazarbayev visited Great Britain and France. During these visits the president informed the European community of Kazakhstan's new reform agenda. He particularly stressed that the country had started paying special attention to issues of the rule of law, accountability, and good governance. As a result of this visit, investment agreements worth \$10 billion were signed.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, in one of his speeches the president noted that these five institutional reforms would be followed by further democratization. He emphasized that, before embarking on deeper democratization, it would be essential to build up a strong middle class.<sup>27</sup> Kazakhstan's current agenda and institutional development may not create a democracy which entirely conforms to EU norms; however, a huge step towards greater Europeanization has been made. It is still too early to evaluate the full impact of Kazakhstan's Europeanization. This is a subject for further research in the years to come. However, it is clear that country's institutional underdevelopment is the main obstacle to a further deepening of bilateral relations. In this regard, Kazakhstan's current efforts towards greater accountability, rule of law, and good governance should strengthen EU-Kazakhstan relations more than any official agreement.

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<sup>25</sup> S. Glushkova, "Na zakonoproektob NPO aktivistiprosiatnolozhit' veto," 2015; Radio Azattyq, <http://rus.azattyq.org/content/kazakhstan-ngo-veto-obraschenye/27288103.html>, accessed 12. 06. 2017.

<sup>26</sup> V. Panfilova, "London i Paris Staviatna Kazakhstan", in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 2015, available at: [http://www.ng.ru/cis/2015-11-09/7\\_kazakhstan.html](http://www.ng.ru/cis/2015-11-09/7_kazakhstan.html), accessed 12. 06. 2017.

<sup>27</sup> *Kazakhstan Today*, 2015 "V Predvibornuyu Kompaniu Nazarbayeva Vklucheni Piat Institucionalnikh Reform."

Appendix A.

Full List Of Codes By Categories

Categories	Voic e and Accountability	Politi cal stability and absence of Violence	Regula tory Quality	Gov ernment Effectiveness	ule of law	ontrol of Corruption
Codes	Acco untability	Securi ty	Mecha nism	Effec tiveness	aw	C orruption
	Dem ocracy	Stabili ty	Compe titiveness	Mod ernization	ule of law	
	Party	Terro r	Regula tion	Prod uctivity	udicial	
	Pow ers	Toler ance	Service	Resul t		
	Tran sparency	Unity		Succ ess		

Aitmukhanbet YESDAULETOV Askhat ORALOV, Aigerim TURKHANOVA,  
IlyasYESDAULETOV, Lyazzat TULESHOVA, Ardak YESDAULETOVA

Categories	Codes	010 (N*=7)	011 (N*=16)	012 (N*=14)	013 (N*=10)	014 (N*=11)	015 (N*=11)	VE RA GE 201 0- 201 4	201 5/(AVG201 0-2014)
Voice and Accountability	Accountability	.00%	.00%	.00%	.00%	.01%	.10%	.00%	49.15
	Democracy	.11%	.07%	.05%	.10%	.00%	.14%	.07%	1.97
	Party	.05%	.13%	.12%	.17%	.02%	.03%	.10%	0.25
	Providers	.00%	.02%	.00%	.05%	.11%	.02%	.04%	0.47
	Transparency	.03%	.00%	.03%	.03%	.00%	.08%	.02%	5.05
Political stability and absence of Violence	Security	.30%	.11%	.26%	.07%	.12%	.12%	.17%	0.69
	Stability	.17%	.14%	.19%	.13%	.17%	.27%	.16%	1.65
	Terror	.05%	.01%	.02%	.00%	.00%	.01%	.02%	0.81
	Tolerance	.20%	.08%	.15%	.11%	.04%	.15%	.11%	1.30
	Unity	.19%	.37%	.12%	.11%	.05%	.15%	.17%	0.89
Regulatory Quality	Mechanism	.02%	.03%	.05%	.06%	.06%	.02%	.04%	0.54
	Competitiveness	.27%	.11%	.09%	.22%	.25%	.11%	.19%	0.59
	Regulation	.04%	.02%	.01%	.04%	.03%	.00%	.03%	-

