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The enhanced strategic partnership between Kazakhstan and United States

The official visit of the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev in Washington, where he met the US President Trump, highlights the special partnership and relations existing between these two countries since the independence of this post-soviet republic in 1991.

As a matter of fact, Kazakhstan has become the most relevant partner of the United States in Central Asia, given its political stability and its huge energy wealth: moreover, in the 90's President Nazarbayev undertook a process of economic liberalization in order to attract international investments and financial support from abroad.

Since 1991 some of the most powerful US energy companies are involved in the development of profitable energy fields in Kazakhstan: Chevron holds relevant stakes in Tengiz and Karachaganak oil and gas fields, while ExxonMobil joined the international consortium – North Caspian Operating Company – created to develop Kashagan's giant oil field (containing estimated 13 billion barrels of oil) which also included the Italian company Eni.

During the meeting Nazarbayev and Trump discussed initiatives to boost trade relations, expanding business and trade and attracting investments to enhance a technological partnership.

Furthermore, the worsening scenario in Afghanistan and the threat of a spreading instability in the region will impose to focus joint and coordinated efforts to provide security and to fight international terrorism and radicalism, also expanding cooperation to train Afghan civilian and security forces ["Nazarbayev, Trump elevate strategic partnership during Washington meeting", The Astana Times, January 17, 2018]. In the framework of Partnership for Peace program held by NATO in Central Asia, Kazakhstan has deepened its military cooperation with the United States, also sending troops in the international coalition engaged in the Iraq war: in 2009 Kazakh government envisaged to send Kazakh peacekeepers in Afghanistan to assist NATO forces but a strong domestic opposition frustrated this initiative.

It was particularly significant that Nazarbayev expressed gratitude and thanked Trump for supporting Kazakhstan's territorial integrity and independence.

Even if Kazakhstan is one of the founder members of the Eurasian Economic Union – a regional economic organization also including Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus and Armenia – Nazarbayev has frequently expressed his mistrust on Russian projects of integration aimed to transform the EEU on a supranational and political entity, which is perceived as a threat to the national sovereignty and political independence, while Kazakh President reiterates that the EEU will always have an exclusive economic dimension.

Moreover, after the Ukraine war and the annexation of Crimea, Russian foreign policy doctrine aimed to protect Russian ethnic minorities and interests in the post-soviet space represents a threat for Kazakhstan, which share a long border (7000 km) with Russia, also hosting a sizable ethnic Russian population (estimated at around 20 percent) concentrated in northern parts of Kazakhstan.

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