

RUSSIA'S CLAIMS AND KAZAKHSTAN'S SOVEREIGNTY

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 Analysis

Kazakhstan, which gained its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, faced many problems in the early 1990s. However, the country has solved those problems significantly with the rational and active policy it followed and it also has succeeded in increasing its weight in Central Asia. Being the ninth country with the largest lands in the world and very rich in underground resources, Kazakhstan has rapidly developed economically and significantly increased its visibility in international relations in recent years.

Kazakhstan stands out in Central Asia with the economic and political stability it provides, which explains why it reinforces its independence every year with the multifaceted foreign policy it tries to implement. Despite all this, the comments made from neighboring Russia about north Kazakhstan are met with a great reaction in the country. In 2020, Russian Duma Deputies

Vyacheslav Nikonov and Yevgeny Fyodorov described the existing lands of Kazakhstan as a gift of Russia, hence initiated a crisis between Moscow and Nur-Sultan.

Unfounded Claims and Rising Reactions

Vyacheslav Nikonov said in a program aired on Russian state television, "There were no settlements in Northern Kazakhstan. Much of what is now known as Kazakhstan was formerly uninhabited land. Today's Kazakhstan lands are a great gift of Russia and the Soviet Union." Yevgeny Fyodorov also similar statements in another television program.

After these unacceptable statements, a diplomatic note was given to the envoy of the Russian Federation, who was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.



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Precautions should be taken to prevent Russian statesmen from making such statements. In this process, Kazakh citizens reacted strongly to these incidents, both in actions and social media.

Kazakhstan President Kasım Comert Tokayev wrote in an article published on January 5, “No one from the outside gave this vast land to the Kazakhs. We have internationally recognized lands established by bilateral agreements, no one can doubt them. Freedom did not come easy to us. Independence is more valuable than anything else”. Tokayev clearly showed his reaction here.

The “Russian World” Discourse as a Tool of Repression

At this point, it should be noted that discourses and discussions surrounding this matter are not new. From time to time, Russian authorities do bring these baseless allegations to the agenda as a means of pressure on Nur-Sultan and to increase Russia’s influence in the country. As a matter of fact, in 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that Kazakhs could not establish any state prior to 1991.

As Russian propaganda, Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and north Kazakhstan were tried to be shown as the “Russian world”. This discourse is also based on the Russian population who settled there, especially during the Soviet Union era, and seen as Moscow’s direct sphere of influence. In fact, Moscow, which occupied Crimea and created instability in east Ukraine, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is in a new search in north Kazakhstan. However, it can be seen that Kazakhstan will not allow such an initiative.

It is an important development that Kazakhs constitute the majority in the country and the proportion of Russians in the population decreased by half compared to the 1990s. However, what is more important is that the Kazakh government has successfully maintained

its multinational state policy until today. Unlike its neighboring states, ethnic problems have not been experienced in Kazakhstan so far. This is the clearest indicator of the success of the Kazakh government policy.

Nation Consciousness is Strengthening

It has been observed that the Kazakh national consciousness has strengthened in recent years. In actuality, upon the latest developments, a group of civil activists in the city of Petropavl in the north of the country asked the Kazakh government to prepare a letter condemning the words of the Russian politicians. The activists also demanded the city’s name to be changed to the Kazakh language ‘Kızılyar’. Although changing the city’s name has been on the agenda, no step has been taken in this direction. However, many Russian city names have been changed to Kazakh/Turkish names in the last five years.

As a result, the fact that necessary international response was not shown to Russia - which intervened militarily in Georgia in 2008 and occupied Crimea in 2014 - raises the questions of whether new international rights violations can occur. Although the political, military and economic relations between Nur-Sultan and Moscow are highly developed, the latest statements of Russian politicians clearly show that Russia is setting its eyes on north Kazakhstan. In addition, despite its certain gains after Karabakh War II, Moscow - whose influence and prestige in the South Caucasus decreased in a broad perspective - is worried about similar processes in Central Asia. For this reason, it brings these discourses to the agenda as a means of pressure. However, both the Kazakh government and the Kazakh people seem determined enough to stand against such violations of rights with their historical consciousness.