

Strengthening UK-Kazakh relations

By RT HON LORD FRASER OF CARMYLLIE, QC

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is Chairman of the
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Following a successful
legal and political career
he was created a life
Peer in 1989.

In April this year, Dariga Nazarbayeva, who is President Nazarbayev's daughter and no intellectual slouch in her own right invited me to an important conference in Almaty entitled *The Eurasia Media Forum*. It was a very interesting and successful event. I never thought that I would be complimentary to journalists having sparred with them all my political life but on this occasion they provided blinding shafts of perception to the point that I was almost tempted to apologise for my past cynicism but even that quickly returned back in London!

Unsurprisingly, the OSCE and Kazakhstan's chairmanship was the focus of our deliberations. It was a robust, no-holds barred debate and I left Almaty reassured that Kazakhstan considered this signal honour of chairmanship as no worthless cipher.

It is for others to judge whether my participation had any value. Suffice it to say Dariga described me as a "true friend of Kazakhstan" and through my chairmanship of the British-Kazakh Society I have tried to be one.

Kazakhstan, with its chairmanship of the OSCE achieved a number of notable firsts: the first former member of the Soviet Union; the first Muslim nation and the first Central Asian nation to head the OSCE. For that alone a lap of honour in Astana is warranted.

In my contribution in Almaty I sought to emphasise that not only did the chairmanship of the OSCE confer exceptional accolades on Kazakhstan but with it went new responsibilities. I claim no special skills in security matters but guess Kazakhstan has real knowledge of what is going on not only internally but in the nations on its national borders. I sought to play down the prospect of any summit in Astana but I am delighted to have been wrong. What had troubled me was that from the time of the Congress of Vienna after the Napoleonic Wars international diplomats have moved forward at only glacial speed. But I was so impressed by the energy and impatience in Almaty that on my return to London I immediately wrote to that estimable Minister at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, David Lidington. He has a very satisfying understanding of Central Asia with Kazakhstan at its core but I nevertheless wrote out a very cheeky ten point agenda for the summit, most of which I hope will be followed in Astana even if some of my drafting is deliberately varied. He replied:

"The UK stands ready to support Kazakhstan to

deliver a successful Summit with tangible outcomes that will help to strengthen the OSCE commitments across all three dimensions. The Summit provides an important opportunity for Kazakhstan to deliver on the international stage.

May I take this opportunity to thank you and the British-Kazakh Society for its contribution in promoting UK-Kazakh relations. We greatly value the work of the Society in support of the UK's growing commercial, cultural and political relationship with Kazakhstan. We wish the Society every success for the future."

He further wrote on 7th October: "In my reply to your letter of 2nd August to the Foreign Secretary I referred to the role of the British-Kazakh Society in promoting and strengthening our bilateral relations with Kazakhstan. As I made clear to Foreign Minister Saudabayev when I visited Almaty in July, it is a relationship on which we place increasing importance. The UK and Kazakhstan enjoy a very strong commercial relationship, and energy security and supplies remains a particularly important issue. But as you are aware, there are many other areas in which we are working to enhance co-operation, from nuclear counter-proliferation to developing our education and cultural links.

We will continue to develop the UK's relationship with Kazakhstan, including through supporting its important role as this year's Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE."

I think that simplest would be to change the "E" in "OSCE" from "Europe" to "Eurasia" and I hope Kazakhstan will stamp its foot and demand any trace of the rhetoric of the Cold War be removed. There is a bigger and more relevant war against international terrorism to be fought and Kazakhstan has proved to be an unswerving ally.

Kazakhstan is also religiously a very tolerant country. For example, they are quite baffled that in the United Kingdom our monarch cannot marry a Catholic. They are also very forceful about the advancement of women. They have a lesson to teach not only the Islamic world but all of us.

Scots and dancing elegantly is a contradiction in terms but for Kazakhs music and dancing is not just an add-on but it is integral to their culture. Dariga in a discotheque in Almaty late at night cuts a mean figure. **F**