

Ever closer relations

By LORD CORMACK FSA DL

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FSA, DL is President, International Affairs at FIRST. Previously a Member of Parliament since 1970, he was created a life peer in 2010 and sits on the Conservative benches.

It is a little over a year since Kazakhstan celebrated its Silver Jubilee as an independent nation, following the ending of the Cold War and the break up of the former Soviet Union. And now we mark a more personal milestone – twenty-five years of increasingly close diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Kazakhstan. I am confident that in another twenty-five years we will be marking half a century of even closer commercial and cultural ties between our countries because this is a developing relationship from which both partners have much to gain.

Last year Kazakhstan exported some £550m worth of goods to the United Kingdom and imported £248m. From Kazakhstan's point of view it is a very healthy trade balance but we in our country know the potential of an enormous land, sparse in population but rich in natural resources and I do not merely refer to oil. Iron, manganese, chrome, lead, zinc, copper, titanium, silver, gold and uranium are among Kazakhstan's vast mineral wealth. And it is a country of rich potential, not just because of this wealth but because of the resources and dynamism of its people. There is no country in the world that has a higher literacy rate – 99.8%. Only 2.9% of Kazakhstan's people live in extreme poverty and unemployment is low at 5.7%. When one adds to this the fact that the average age of the population is around thirty one appreciates just what a truly exciting country this is.

Even though the population is under 20 million, it is well able to exploit its mineral resources.

But what makes Kazakhstan even more exciting is the fact that it is a country rich in history. At a time when King John was obliged to seal Magna Carta in 1215 Kazakhstan was on the verge of being absorbed into the empire of the mighty Genghis Khan – something which occurred in 1218.

Over the last 800 years Kazakhstan has seen periods of turmoil and strife and upheaval and revolution. The first half of the twentieth century was a particularly fraught and difficult time. But with its declaration of independence in 1991 nations all over the world began to realise not only Kazakhstan's enormous strategic importance but its potential as a trading partner.

We in the United Kingdom are in the process of loosening our ties with the rest of the European Union. That is something many of us regret but on whatever side of the Brexit argument you are placed you cannot but acknowledge that new and vibrant associations with friendly nations around the world must be developed. We have much to offer but we also have much to gain. I very much hope that as we mark this quarter century of diplomatic relations – 25 years of true friendship building on a real strengthening of economic ties – we can look forward to an ever closer relationship with a country that has, by dint of its geography, a crucial part to play during the rest of the 21st century, and beyond!

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Previous Kazakh Ambassador to the Court of St James's Erzhan Kazykhanov and members of the APPG at the launch of *Leadership Perspectives* and *South to the Great Steppe* published by FIRST

