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ANALYSIS OF BILATERAL COOPERATION BETWEEN ITALY AND KAZAKHSTAN: AN ENERGY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. This scientific article provides critical assessment of bilateral relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Italian Republic. The time frame of the study covers the period from the establishment of official diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1992 and the development of relations to the present day. The main objective of this study is to identify the energy aspect of cooperation through the study of key documents concluded between Italy and Kazakhstan, as well as joint meetings, events and forums, also using the findings of various authors, including, C. Dario, and P. Sorbello. In addition, the study uses data from open government resources of Italy and Kazakhstan, reports and data from international organizations.

A special attention is given to the strategic interests of Italy in this cooperation and the development of its presence through Italian energy company ENI in the energy sector of Kazakhstan. In addition, the study examines Italy's goals to diversify its energy supply sources, as well as Kazakhstan's desire to attract foreign investment. In addition, key areas of energy cooperation, such as the supply of sources and the exchange of technological experience, are analyzed. The author concludes the article by highlighting the strategic complementarity of cooperation between Italy and Kazakhstan and the importance of bilateral partnership for ensuring energy security of both countries.

This article may be useful to specialists in the field of international relations research, especially those interested in energy security issues.

Key words: Italy, Kazakhstan, energy cooperation, energy security, oil and gas, renewable energy, ENI, multilateral diplomacy

Introduction

Contemporary system of international relations is characterized by cooperation as a key aspect in maintaining stability and security. It is a process of interaction between actors of international relations – states, international organizations, and transnational corporations – where one of the main goals is to achieve mutual benefits. This includes the exchange of information, resources, technology, and joint efforts to solve countries' urgent issues.

One of these tasks is to ensure energy security – the need to meet humanity’s growing needs for energy resources taking into account the requirements for sustainable development, that is to say, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs [1, p. 1]. At the same time, even minor interruptions of energy supply can lead to serious financial, economic and social losses [2, p. 113]. Considering the interdependence nature of the energy system [3], each country faces the need to develop its foreign policy for the successful cooperation in the energy sector taking into account current trends and challenges.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Republic of Kazakhstan has developed a certain course of political cooperation which is called a multi-vector foreign policy “based on developing friendly and predictable relations with all the geopolitical actors” [4, p. 83]. Being used in foreign policy and geopolitical relations, over time it began to cover various areas, notably the energy sector. As a result, this policy has become “of great importance for the country’s energy diversification” [5, p. 2]. Indeed, at present, it is a characteristic feature of Kazakhstan’s foreign energy policy, where the main task is balancing the interests of leading powers to obtain the greatest advantages.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan is a country rich in natural resources, mainly, oil, coal and gas. Notwithstanding this potential, the state has been actively advocating for economic diversification by developing the production of renewable energy resources, particularly, solar and wind, and, over the last years, aiming at constructing first nuclear power plant. Kazakhstan aims to ensure diversified supplies of essential raw materials to world markets to achieve global net-zero emissions goals [6]. Such energy profile reflects the country’s role as a key player in global energy market and a strategic partner for many countries.

As a result, leading actors show interest in the energy policy and strategy of Kazakhstan, including the European Union (EU), where, revealing multi-vector nature of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy, Italy seems one of the most promising countries for an open energy dialogue. Here, cooperation in the energy sector represents an important aspect of relations between these two countries, since Italy and Kazakhstan have significant potential in this sector. This interaction reflects the desire of both states to develop sustainable and innovative approaches to the energy sector, which contributes to countries’ diversification and strengthening energy security.

Materials and Methods

Methodologically, this study is based on the critical assessment of the available data and literature on Italian-Kazakh cooperation, giving a special attention to the key aspects of the cooperation in energy security. In the historical analysis of the development of relationships between these two countries, the author uses official documents and agreements, as well as research of significant publications of Kazakh and foreign experts on Italian-Kazakh relations. In

addition, the study uses data from government resources of Italy and Kazakhstan, reports and data from international and Kazakh open sources. The purpose of this scientific article is to assess the historical development of relations between Italy and Kazakhstan on bilateral level with a special attention on the energy aspect.

The main research question of this study is: Were the relations between Italy and Kazakhstan initially of the nature of cooperation in energy security or they were transformed taking into account modern trends in the transformation of diplomatic relations to strategically economic ones? Therefore, the research particularly focuses on tracing the energy issue in the sources used in this article.

Results

Official diplomatic relations between Italy and Kazakhstan were established on August 21, 1992 with the signing of the “Agreement on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Republic of Italy and the Republic of Kazakhstan”. Since then, the two countries have begun to take important steps in developing mutual cooperation. For the period of more than thirty years there were official visits, bilateral negotiations, and the organization of events and business forums.

An important year for the cooperation between these two countries was 1994 – the first official visit of Kazakhstan’s former President Nursultan Nazarbayev to Italy. At that time, a series of documents were signed, such as the “Joint Declaration on the Principles of Relations” and the “Joint Declaration on Economic Cooperation”. The main goals of these documents were to promote the development and facilitation of economic relations between Italy and Kazakhstan. Already at that time, Nazarbayev emphasized that these documents are of historical significance for the beginning of relations between the two countries and provide businessmen with a broader opportunity to work [7, p. 233]. In addition, two countries expressed a common interest in creating many platforms for the development of mutually beneficial cooperation.

Three years later, official visits to Almaty by the then President of the Italian Republic Oscar Luigi Scalfaro (May), and a few months later (September) by the then Chairman of the Council of Italy, Romani Prodi took place. This allowed the ratification of the “Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation” (1997). Kazakhstan and Italy agreed to assist each other in solving the technical aspects of industrial activities, giving attention to the energy sector, modernization of infrastructures and related communications. In addition to that, two states recognized the importance of the security and stability of the supply of electricity, oil, and natural gas for the development of economic cooperation and attracting potential investors, taking into account the norms and principles of the European Energy Charter Treaty, noting the research, use and transportation of hydrocarbons, gas and electricity [8].

Since then, followed a number of official meetings between the two parties. But it is with the signature of the “Treaty on Strategic Partnership” (2009) that Italy and Kazakhstan put the grounds for an extensive cooperation in the area of international security and economic partnership. A passage of such law states: “realizing that interaction of the two countries in the energy field is of strategic value for maintenance of energy security” [9]. In a few years, Italy became the main destination of crude petroleum export from Kazakhstan and, according to data of 2020, Italy imported Kazakh oil for an amount equal to 26% of the total exported rate [10].

A turning point was the year 2014, when the then Italian Prime Minister Renzi signed two agreements of cooperation with the then President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev. The first agreement sanctioned a cooperation between ENI and KazMunaiGas (KMG) in activities of offshore exploration of new oilfield in the Caspian Sea; the second agreement introduced mechanisms of cooperation in the industrial vehicle sector between Italian company Iveco and the Kazakh Ministry of Industry. In successive meetings, the two countries negotiated further bilateral agreements in the areas of infrastructural development, agricultural production and, once more, energy cooperation.

It is also noteworthy to mention the Expo context in this cooperation: from Expo Milan 2015 to Expo Astana 2017. In the context of Expo 2015, the two countries signed 25 trade agreements worth a total of 500 million dollars. The regime of cooperation seems promising because the Italian entrepreneurial system can offer an important contribution in terms of experience and technologies, while Kazakhstan has a richness in renewable energetic resources (included a growing export market for hydrogen) and rare-earth elements. As claimed by former Italian Ambassador Marco Alberti, “there are all the necessary conditions to scale up the Italy-Kazakh privileged relations on the traditional energy to a strategic partnership on the green energy domain” [11].

The institutional cooperation between the two countries was further strengthened with the bilateral organization of a business forum in Astana in 2019, another one online (due to Covid-19 pandemic) in 2021, Italian-Kazakhstan business forum in 2023, and Kazakh-Italian business and investment forum in 2024 in Milan. The last event was attended by more than 50 Kazakhstani enterprises from various sectors, with also from oilfield sector. Moreover, Kazakh Minister of Trade Arman Shakkaliyev emphasized the importance of Italy as one of Kazakhstan’s key trading partners in the European Union and in order to strengthen cooperation, Kazakhstan proposes to introduce the “Made with Italy” concept, which promotes products manufactured in joint ventures with the participation of Italian companies [12].

In January 2024, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev made an official trip to Rome. At the investment round table titled “Kazakhstan-Italy”, Tokayev explained to the Italian entrepreneurs the practical and legislative

measures that Kazakhstan plans to take to expand the influx of foreign direct investments into the country's economy. What is particularly important is that Tokayev also noted the energy sector as the main area of economic cooperation between these two countries [13]. During the visit, agreements were reached on investments in renewable energy, infrastructure and technology. This visit "marked a fundamental shift in relations between Kazakhstan and Italy, moving beyond traditional economic cooperation to a more diverse and strategically complex cooperation, in line with Kazakhstan's economic diversification plan and Italy's growing interest in Central Asia as a significant trade and investment centre" [14, p. 15]. Kazakhstan is interested in attracting investment and technology to increase production while reducing its impact on the environment, while one of Italy's strategic goals is to diversify its energy supplies. Thus, these mutually beneficial interests form a sustainable win-win platform based on energy, trade, and investment.

Discussion

An interesting question of discussion is why, considering the whole post-Soviet arena, Italy is developing strict relations specifically with Kazakhstan. According to Dario Cristiani, three factors must be taken into consideration:

1. Italy is counting on Kazakhstan as a long-term reliable partner in the energetic sphere;
2. Italy has a dynamic foreign policy strategy in the Central Asian region and it has also built a noteworthy net of business relations with Russia;
3. There is the perception in Italy that Kazakhstan is a land of opportunities and it might provide a high profitable market for Italian exports [15].

In support of the last point, already during former Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev's visit to Rome in 1994, then Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi noted that these countries were created to complement each other: on the one hand, Kazakhstan is a country rich in natural resources, on the other hand, Italy is poor in natural resources, but rich in human resources [7, p. 233]. In other words, Kazakhstan and Italy have complementary advantages, which makes their cooperation particularly promising and fruitful.

As follows from this, Italy, with its high technology and experience in the energy sector, is actively involved in the development of energy projects in Kazakhstan. In 1992 ENI, Italian extracting company, entered into the Kazakh market to conduct activities of oil and gas fields exploration. According to Paolo Sorbello, "some of the oil and gas fields in the region were either underdeveloped or developed under low-tech industrial regimes, so the arrival of Italian companies, as well as other trans-national companies (TNCs), helped develop these fields" [16, p. 208]. Since then, Eni has been active in Kazakhstan, participating in the development of natural resource fields such as Karachaganak and in various renewable energy projects. Moreover, the company cooperates

with Kazakh partners such as KazMunayGas and Samruk-Kazyna in the field of energy transition and carbon reduction [17]. As a result, Italy, through its energy company Eni, since 90-s, is developing its presence in the Kazakhstan energy sector.

Conclusion

The relationships between Italy and Kazakhstan demonstrates stable dynamics in fruitful cooperation in energy security. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, Italy has gradually expanded its presence in Kazakhstan's energy sector. This is evidenced by the signing of interstate treaties and agreements such as the "Joint Declaration on the Principles of Relations", the "Joint Declaration on Economic Cooperation", "Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation" and "Treaty on Strategic Partnership", and the holding of various events, like from Expo Milan 2015 to Expo Astana 2017, and business forums, in Astana and Italy, where one way or another, the issue of energy cooperation always takes place.

In addition, Italy is considered as Kazakhstan's main European trading partner in 2024, after Russia and China [18] and Italian company like ENI already operates in the Kazakh energy market since several years. As a result, a mutually beneficial pattern is observed – on one side, Italian expertise in technology, innovation and infrastructure that could be constructively used to develop the use of renewable and enhance energy efficiency in Kazakhstan; on the other side, Kazakhstan has a significant reserve of that raw materials that can contribute to Italy's energy diversification. In another words, Italy remains a reliable European partner and investor, and Kazakhstan is a stable supplier of traditional energy resources.

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АНАЛИЗ ДВУСТОРОННЕГО СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА МЕЖДУ ИТАЛИЕЙ И КАЗАХСТАНОМ: ЭНЕРГЕТИЧЕСКАЯ ПЕРСПЕКТИВА

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Аннотация. В данной научной статье автор дает критическую оценку двусторонних отношений между Республикой Казахстан и Итальянской Республикой. Временные рамки исследования охватывают период с момента установления дипломатических отношений между этими двумя странами в 1992 году, их дальнейшее развитие и современное состояние этих отношений. Основной целью данного исследования, является определение энергетического аспекта сотрудничества посредством изучения ключевых документов, заключенных между Италией и Казахстаном, а также совместных встреч, мероприятий и форумов, в том числе с использованием работ авторов, занимающихся исследованием данной темы, среди которых, следует отметить С. Dario, and P. Sorbello. Кроме того, в этом исследовании используются данные из открытых государственных ресурсов Италии и Казахстана, отчеты и данные международных организаций.

Особое внимание уделяется стратегическим интересам Итальянской Республики в этом сотрудничестве и развитию ее присутствия через итальянскую энергетическую компанию «ENI» в энергетическом секторе Казахстана. Кроме того, в исследовании рассматриваются цели Италии по диверсификации источников поставок энергоносителей, а также стремление Казахстана привлекать иностранные инвестиции. В дополнении к этому, автором анализируются ключевые направления энергетического сотрудничества, такие как поставка источников энергии и обмен технологическим опытом. В конце проведенного исследования, автор подчеркивает стратегическую взаимодополняемость сотрудничества Италии и Казахстана и важность двустороннего партнерства для обеспечения энергетической безопасности обеих стран.

Данная статья может быть полезна специалистам в области исследования международных отношений, особенно тем, кто интересуется вопросами энергетической безопасности.

Ключевые слова: Италия, Республика Казахстан, энергетическое сотрудничество, энергетическая безопасность, нефть и газ, возобновляемые источники энергии, Государственное управление по углеводородам, многосторонняя дипломатия

ИТАЛИЯ МЕН ҚАЗАҚСТАН АРАСЫНДАҒЫ ЕКІЖАҚТЫ ЫНТЫМАҚТАСТЫҚТЫ ТАЛДАУ: ЭНЕРГЕТИКАЛЫҚ ПЕРСПЕКТИВА

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Аңдатпа. Осы ғылыми мақалада автор Қазақстан Республикасы мен Италия Республикасы арасындағы екіжақты қатынастарға сыни баға береді. Зерттеудің уақыт шеңбері 1992 жылы осы екі ел арасында дипломатиялық қатынастар орнатылған сәттен бастап кезеңді, олардың одан әрі дамуы мен осы қатынастардың қазіргі жай-күйін қамтиды. Аталған зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты Италия мен Қазақстан арасында жасалған негізгі құжаттарды, сондай-ақ бірлескен кездесулерді, іс-шаралар мен форумдарды, оның ішінде осы тақырыпты зерттеумен айналысатын авторлардың жұмыстарын пайдалана отырып, ынтымақтастықтың энергетикалық аспектісін анықтау болып табылады, олардың арасында С. Dario мен P. sorbello атап өткен жөн. Бұдан басқа, бұл зерттеуде Италия мен Қазақстанның ашық мемлекеттік ресурстарының деректері, халықаралық ұйымдардың есептері мен деректері пайдаланылады.

Осы ынтымақтастықта Италия Республикасының стратегиялық мүдделеріне және оның Қазақстанның энергетикалық секторында «ENI» итальяндық энергетикалық компаниясы арқылы қатысуын дамытуға ерекше назар аударылады. Бұдан басқа, зерттеуде Италияның энергия көздерін әртараптандыру жөніндегі мақсаттары, сондай-ақ Қазақстанның шетелдік инвестицияларды тартуға ұмтылуы қаралады. Бұған қосымша, автор энергия көздерін жеткізу және технологиялық тәжірибе алмасу сияқты энергетикалық ынтымақтастықтың негізгі бағыттарын талдайды. Жүргізілген зерттеу соңында автор Италия мен Қазақстан ынтымақтастығының стратегиялық өзара толықтырушылығын және екі елдің энергетикалық қауіпсіздігін қамтамасыз ету үшін екіжақты серіктестіктің маңыздылығын атап өтті.

Бұл аңдатпа халықаралық қатынастарды зерттеу саласындағы мамандарға, әсіресе энергетикалық қауіпсіздік мәселелеріне қызығушылық танытқандарға пайдалы болуы мүмкін.

Тірек сөздер: Италия, Қазақстан, энергетикалық ынтымақтастық, энергетикалық қауіпсіздік, мұнай және газ, жаңартылатын энергия, Көмірсутектер жөніндегі мемлекеттік әкімшілік, көпжақты дипломатия

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