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# CHANGES IN THE SPHERES OF INFLUENCE IN KAZAKHSTAN AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF THE UKRAINE WAR IN 2022

ELDANIZ GUSSEINOV



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OF INFLUENCE IN KAZAKHSTAN  
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After The Outbreak Of The Ukraine War in 2022**

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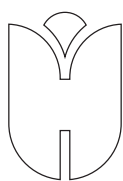
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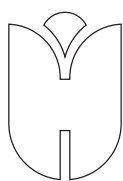
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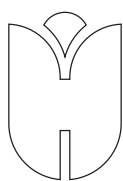
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# SUMMARY

This report provides the reasons for the change in Kazakhstan's spheres of influence following the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022. It focuses on the economic aspects of the spheres of influence and the influence of Russia, China, Türkiye, and the E.U. The central thesis is that Russia has expanded its influence in Kazakhstan as dual-use goods are transported through the country. The analysis is based on the theory of a "negotiated hegemon," which depicts Russia as a hegemon in Kazakhstan whose influence is limited by negotiations with Kazakhstan. The results show Russia has political and military influence, while the E.U. dominates economically. China's influence is less than expected, and Türkiye has the least influence before and after the war in Ukraine. Kazakhstan is trying to balance Russia's growing influence through global relations and cooperation with other actors while building trade relations with Russia within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union.





# INTRODUCTION

## Background of the Problem

***Since its declaration of independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has officially announced that it is pursuing a multi-vectoral foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>***

This means that the state tries to create a balance between the different countries and prevent one country or bloc from gaining too much influence. In the 30 years of its independence, however, Kazakhstan has developed centralized players in certain areas. For example, from 1991 to 2020, Russia accounted for 85% of total arms exports to Kazakhstan.<sup>2</sup> Looking at the economic sector, Russia and China accounted for around 60% of all imports to Kazakhstan in 2021, with Russia accounting for 42% and China for 20%.<sup>3</sup> The spheres of influence in this paper refer to the areas of political, economic, and military influence that states or blocs exert or could exert on Kazakhstan.

***The changes in these spheres of influence in Kazakhstan after the start of the Ukraine war in 2022 are analyzed in this paper.***

The intensification of the Ukraine crisis was a turning point in Kazakhstan's foreign policy. The sanctions imposed on Russia have had a negative impact on the country's economy.<sup>4</sup> There is also a risk that Western countries could impose sanctions on Kazakhstan because of its close cooperation with Russia.<sup>5</sup> The Kazakh government is trying to use this opportunity to expand its cooperation with the European Union, Türkiye, China, and other countries. Against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis and the West's attempts to isolate Russia through sanctions, the Central Asian states are playing an increasingly important role. This is due to the fact that most trade routes from China to Europe now pass through Central Asia as a result of the sanctions against Russia. In addition, Kazakhstan has announced that it is ready to export oil to the E.U. via the Caspian Sea (previously, the oil was delivered via Russia),<sup>6</sup> with Russia being the leading supplier. In general, the Central Asian states have actively cooperated with many countries and regional groupings since the beginning

of the conflict, including the U.S., Japan, South Korea, China, India, and the E.U. The European Union has already announced several global gateway projects to reduce the influence of Russia and China in supporting infrastructure projects in Kazakhstan and Central Asia.<sup>7</sup> In his article “Central Asia’s growing importance globally and for the E.U.,” Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, emphasized the role of Central Asia for the E.U.:

***The intensification of the Ukraine crisis was a turning point in Kazakhstan’s foreign policy.***

“It is clear that Russia and China have played a major role in the region and continue to do so. Equally, It is obvious that the region is looking to diversify its relationships and that the E.U. is seen as a partner of choice ... As E.U., we have a clear interest in seizing these changes. We must deepen our ties with the region and tap into the vast potential it has to offer in terms of energy supplies, critical raw materials, and new transport corridors that do not depend on Russia (to so-called Middle Corridor or Trans Caspian Corridor)”<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned in the quote, the potential of the transport corridors from China through Central Asia is significant for the E.U. For this reason, Türkiye is playing an increasingly important role as the transport hubs of the Trans-Caspian Corridor pass through its territory. The main problem of the transport corridor is that there are many customs barriers to transporting goods, as the routes pass through many countries, not just Russia. Türkiye’s interest in the region is to solve this problem. As one of the most important members of the Organization of Turkic States, the country has actively promoted signing agreements within the organization to reduce customs barriers and obstacles to delivering goods.<sup>9</sup> An international agreement on combined transport and a transport network interconnection program was signed in 2022.<sup>10</sup> In 2022, the number of transports on the trans-Caspian route increased by 2.5 times,<sup>11</sup> which strengthens Türkiye’s role and

influence for the Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan. Russia, for its part, is very interested in these measures by Türkiye and the European Union, as the Russian leadership itself is interested in developing alternative routes, especially in Kazakhstan. Vladimir Putin emphasized this in his speech to the Federal Assembly of Russia on 21 February 2023:

“What areas should we focus the partnership of the state, the regions, and domestic business on? First, we will expand promising foreign economic ties and build new logistics corridors. A decision has already been made to extend the Moscow-Kazan expressway to Yekaterinburg, Chelyabinsk, and Tyumen, and eventually to Irkutsk and Vladivostok with branches to Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and China.”<sup>12</sup>

After the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, Kazakhstan became particularly important for Russia as alternative transport routes were available for double imports. Exports from Kazakhstan to Russia of televisions, monitors, and projectors in 2022 increased 312-fold, computers 215-fold, and telephones 88-fold.<sup>13</sup> In 2022, the total number of online and face-to-face meetings between the Russian president and the Central Asian leaders exceeded 50. In addition to Putin, virtually all of Russia’s leading politicians have visited the region since the beginning of the war, from Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin and Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev to Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller and many governors.<sup>14</sup>

***After the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, Kazakhstan became particularly important for Russia as alternative transport routes were available for double imports.***

## Posing a Question

***Why have the spheres of influence in Kazakhstan changed since the beginning of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022?***

The main research question arises from all this is: Why have the spheres of influence in Kazakhstan changed since the beginning of the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2022? To answer this question, however, it is first necessary to clarify how the influence of external actors in Kazakhstan has changed since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, as there are no publications on this topic. When examining the change in spheres of influence, the work will focus on the year 2022 since it was this year that the war in Ukraine began, and before that, a peace-keeping contingent of CSTO troops was sent to Kazakhstan at the invitation of the Kazakh authorities, where most of the soldiers were Russian soldiers. The decision to send a contingent of CSTO troops provoked an adverse reaction in the E.U. and the U.S., which could damage Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy and portray the country as more pro-Russian. From this point of view, it was important for the government to show its commitment to cooperation with other influential players in the region besides Russia in 2022, i.e., after the start of the war in Ukraine.

## Hypothesis

This paper's hypothesis is that despite the increase in bilateral contacts between Western countries and Türkiye and Kazakhstan, Russia's economic influence in Kazakhstan is increasing. Following the imposition of sanctions, double-imported goods, i.e., goods that Russia cannot obtain directly from Western countries, are being imported from Kazakhstan to Russia. As the necessary sanctioned goods for Russia now come from Kazakhstan, Russia has also increased its influence in Kazakhstan's economic sphere.

***despite the increase in bilateral contacts between Western countries and Türkiye and Kazakhstan, Russia's economic influence in Kazakhstan is increasing.***

## Relevance of the Work

Apart from the facts already mentioned, the relevance of the work must be considered in the context of the concept of strategic deterrence. Michael Mandelbaum, Professor Emeritus of American Foreign Policy at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, has applied this concept to today's realities. According to Professor Mandelbaum, the U.S. is not dealing with one actor in global deterrence as it did during the Cold War, but with three - Russia, Iran, and China. According to Professor Mandelbaum, as the USA has not just one but three adversaries, it is dependent on the support of allies at the regional level.<sup>15</sup> This idea is reflected in the national security strategies of the Donald Trump<sup>16</sup> and Joe Biden administrations.<sup>17</sup> Kazakhstan is strategically important for Russia, China, and Iran, as important transport routes run through the country, connecting China with Europe and Iran with Russia. Of the U.S. partners, the European Union is the one that can contain the influence of these countries in Kazakhstan. Borrell confirmed this in the quote above, but even after the war broke out, European Union Council President Charles Michel,<sup>18</sup> Josep Borrell,<sup>19</sup> visited Kazakhstan and Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock in 2022.<sup>20</sup> For his part, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken did not visit Kazakhstan until 28 February 2023.<sup>21</sup> It is important to add that the E.U.'s 2016 Global Security Strategy identifies relations with Russia as a "key strategic challenge." In March 2016, the Council formulated five principles for EU-Russia relations, the second of which is to strengthen relations with the E.U.'s eastern partners and other neighbors, including Central Asia.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan, is a higher priority for the European Union than for the U.S. Moreover, in the entire history of independent Kazakhstan, not a single U.S.

president has paid a state visit to Kazakhstan, and even during Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's official trip to the U.S. from 19 to 21 March 2022, he did not meet with U.S. President Joe Biden but was able to meet with the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen.<sup>23</sup> For these reasons, the influence of the USA is not dealt with separately in this paper. Against this backdrop, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping, were also in Kazakhstan in 2022 and declared their willingness to support the territorial integrity of Kazakhstan.<sup>24</sup> Kazakhstan has also actively participated in developing military cooperation with Türkiye since the beginning of the conflict and has purchased weapons from Türkiye to reduce the proportion of Russian weapons in its own military arsenal.

***Kazakhstan is strategically important for Russia, China, and Iran, as important transport routes run through the country, connecting China with Europe and Iran with Russia.***

## Literature Review

In general, when describing the change in the sphere of influence in Kazakhstan, experts in the English-speaking community tend to believe that Russia is losing its influence, which China is taking advantage of to expand its influence.<sup>25</sup> In particular, they often point to the decline of Russian influence in the economic, energy, and security sectors. However, some authors tend to argue that the two sides cooperate rather than contest spheres of influence.<sup>26</sup> Independently of this, several authors attempt to show in their analyses that Kazakhstan is increasingly trying to distance itself from Russia.<sup>27</sup> Some European authors point to the need for Western states to strengthen their influence in Central Asia and Kazakhstan because of the weakening of Russian

influence and the war in Ukraine.<sup>28</sup> Some authors point to the growing influence of Russia, particularly in areas such as double importation, which has led to a record increase in interaction between Russian politicians and the Kazakh authorities.<sup>29</sup> The Valdai Club's report on "Central Asia and the Ukrainian crisis" is worth mentioning separately. The report notes the intensification of relations between Western countries and Central Asia and increased economic ties.<sup>30</sup>

The analysis of open sources in German, English, and Russian shows that the topic is relatively new and has yet to be fully explored. Some authors focus specifically on events in 2022 without considering the dynamics of Kazakhstan's economic and political relations with Russia, China, Türkiye, and the EU. Experts also widely agree that Russia is losing its influence, albeit based on some signals from the Kazakh government.<sup>31</sup> This paper aims to test this thesis.

# THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This section examines the theoretical framework of Negotiated Hegemony and Balancing Regionalism to analyze the changing spheres of influence. The theoretical framework chosen for this paper also provides a methodology for tracking trends in the sphere of influence of external actors in Kazakhstan. In addition, this section defines the most influential actors based on the Foreign Bilateral Capacity Index of a country's influence in another country.

## Theoretical Framework

### Theory of Negotiated Hegemony as a Sphere of Influence

The theoretical framework for the work is the Theory of negotiated hegemony, developed by Costa Buranelli and used to analyze relations between Russia and the Central Asian states. For Buranelli, "negotiated hegemon" meant that the territorial hegemony of one state over others had to be limited by the Degree of legitimacy that weaker states concede to the hegemon.<sup>31</sup> This means that the ability of a state to influence other states depends not only on the Degree of bilateral cooperation and the ability of the hegemon but also on the extent to which weaker states are willing to allow the hegemon to influence them. If weaker states are prepared to resist the

influence of the hegemon, they can take a range of measures in the following areas: security, norms and rules, and culture.<sup>32</sup> Buranelli has described a country's actions in these three areas to accept or resist hegemony, shown in Table 1.

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According to Buranelli, the Concept of spheres of influence is controversial, there is no clear definition and no scientific consensus.<sup>33</sup> While some define it as a geographical region in which a single external power exerts predominant influence, others see it as a social structure in which both the



influencer and the influenced are involved in shaping the character of the sphere.<sup>34</sup> The fundamental controversial nature of the Concept arises from the fact that there needs to be more scientific knowledge about its meaning, not to mention the practices of influence in relations between major powers and smaller states in a particular territorial area. Buranelli is guided by the Theory of the English School (E.S.), which emphasizes that states try to maintain a certain degree of coexistence by relying on commonly agreed norms such as respect for mutual sovereignty, the rules of international law, and diplomatic protocol.

***the transformation of spheres of influence in Kazakhstan should be analyzed from the perspective of negotiated hegemony, where smaller states are not passively subordinated but actively involved in shaping the character of the sphere.***

English School sees world politics as the product of three different ontologies in play simultaneously: an international system in which security and military logics predominate; an international society in which norms, rules, and institutions are in play; and a world society in which contacts between people, civilizations and cultures are central.<sup>35</sup> The tripartite division is vital because “influence” can refer to all three areas. Therefore, the transformation of spheres of influence in Kazakhstan should be analyzed from the perspective of negotiated hegemony, where smaller states are not passively subordinated but actively involved in shaping the character of the sphere. Although the English School of International Relations does not focus directly on economic issues, its core concepts can still be used to analyze the role of one country’s financial influence on another. The state can take similar measures towards security, culture, norms, and values in economic terms to accept hegemony or resist hegemony. This primarily refers to supporting the sanctions regime against

Russia, deepening or resisting further integration under existing agreements, attempting to sign additional agreements to diversify trade routes, and signing agreements to facilitate trade relations with other actors. Based on this, changes in economic influence in Kazakhstan are also analyzed. Buranelli’s text also discusses the concept of spheres of influence in international relations and its importance in today’s world. While the idea of spheres of influence has been neglected in international society, scholars have explored the notion of hierarchy and hegemony implied in spheres of influence. Hegemony is associated with the management of great powers, which serves to simplify the processes of international politics due to inherent power differentials.<sup>36</sup>

***The institutionalization of spheres of influence in Eurasia in the course of the 19th century shows that international society at that time was overtly hierarchical and reflected the hierarchical status of the various powers in the system.***

In the contemporary international context, however, the norm of sovereign equality is deeply rooted, so the open creation of a sphere of influence would violate the “constitutional act” of state society. Therefore, contemporary spheres of influence are conceptualized as social structures that involve relations of a ‘negotiated hegemon.’<sup>37</sup> The element of negotiation is crucial to the treatment of spheres of influence in this paper. This means that a sphere of influence as it was conceptualized in the 19th century would be legally and morally unacceptable in today’s international society. To justify a sphere of influence, it must be negotiated, and the states in the sphere must legitimize and recognize it somehow.

***The idea of negotiated hegemony helps understand the change in spheres of influence in Kazakhstan after the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2022, as the country's political relations with neighboring states are likely to shift, and new spheres of influence will emerge through negotiation and diplomacy.***

### **Concept of Accommodating Regionalism as an Addendum to Negotiated Hegemony**

***the concept of revisionism in international politics, which refers to questioning established norms, practices, principles, and doctrines in a social sphere to create an alternative order.***

In the article "Accommodating Revisionism through Balancing Regionalism: The Case of Central Asia," Buranelli, together with Aliya Tskhay, wanted to analyze the actions of Central Asian countries towards Russia further. The article discusses the concept of revisionism in international politics, which refers to questioning established norms, practices, principles, and doctrines in a social sphere to create an alternative order. The article argues that revisionism is related to the redistribution of power or the normative structure of international society.<sup>38</sup> The authors use Stacie Goddard's theory of embedded revisionism<sup>39</sup>, which posits that revisionist powers must measure their chances of successfully revising international politics against the current institutional order to illustrate how Central Asian states accommodate Russia's revisionism through

balancing Regionalism. The authors also utilize the analytical treatment of revisionism by Alexander Cooley et al. to highlight the complexities of revisionism itself.<sup>40</sup> The article shows that combining these two frameworks allows for a closer look at revisionism as a complex social phenomenon. The authors argue that Russia pursues two types of contradicting revisionist policies. At the international level, Russia advocates the return (or protection) of a Westphalian international order, while at the regional level, it wants to target the liberal order.<sup>41</sup> The article also highlights some of the limitations of Goddard's approach, such as neglecting sub-global networks and overlooking norms, principles, and rules as possible elements of revisionism. The article offers insights into how Central Asian states accommodate Russian revisionism by balancing regionalism. It highlights the multi-layered nature of revisionism, which can help analyze the changing spheres of influence in Kazakhstan.

***the Concept of "balancing regionalism" as a foreign policy tool used by the Central Asian states to achieve three different goals.***

The article further analyses the Concept of "balancing regionalism" as a foreign policy tool used by the Central Asian states to achieve three different goals. The first goal is to protect themselves from excessive domination by major powers and revisionism. Secondly, they want to benefit economically and politically by participating in multilateral formats. Third, they want to adapt to the norms of Regionalism and multilateralism and thus improve their international standing and legitimacy.<sup>42</sup> The article also shows how the Central Asian states are torn between two potentially conflicting foreign policy vectors: cordial and respectful relations to avoid antagonizing Russia on the one hand and diversification of foreign policy relations to avoid, and even contain, excessive dependence on Russia on the other.<sup>43</sup> Balancing Regionalism, which involves blending interests, spreading commitments, and raising the costs



of revisionist strategies, helps Central Asian states to behave simultaneously and strategically in multiple formal regional organizations and looser, more informal regional platforms and groupings without jeopardizing their sovereignty and not bundling them together. Understanding formal and informal regional groupings is crucial in establishing dialogue on a regional basis; however, informal is how states understand themselves as belonging to a particular region where certain norms, rules of conduct, codes of behavior, identities, and interests are upheld.<sup>44</sup> The authors describe three mechanisms: Bridging, dovetailing, and branding.<sup>45</sup> Bridging is a mechanism for linking the various associations in Central Asia, e.g., the calls for cooperation between the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or the strengthening of cooperation between the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).<sup>46</sup> The Central Asian states use their membership in various organizations, such as the SCO and the CSTO, to promote their interests and improve regional security cooperation. Examples include joint planning for implementing the U.N. Counter-Terrorism Strategy and cooperation with NATO member states. Discussing common problems and concerns in different forums and with other actors creates a “dovetailing” mechanism.<sup>47</sup> Branding is presented using the efforts of Central Asian states to create a new identity as an alternative to Russia’s Eurasianism. The branding of these new identities is reflected in various initiatives and proposals.<sup>48</sup> For example, in talks with the European Union, the Central Asian states emphasized strengthening “European values” through cooperation on democratic reforms. Thus, such interactions also symbolize support for state-building processes.

***the Central Asian states are torn between two potentially conflicting foreign policy vectors: cordial and respectful relations to avoid antagonizing Russia on the one hand and diversification***

***of foreign policy relations to avoid, and even contain, excessive dependence on Russia on the other.***

To conclude this section, this article draws on the theoretical foundations of negotiated hegemony and balancing Regionalism, both concepts originating from the English school of international relations. Particular security, cultural, normative, and value-related dimensions are used to determine the decrease or increase of Russian influence in Kazakhstan. The author adds the economic sphere to this. Furthermore, mechanisms such as bridging, interlocking, and branding are considered, which Central Asian states use to diversify their relations and adapt to Russian revisionism. Before analyzing Kazakhstan’s actions, it is necessary to assess the influence of external actors on Kazakhstan before the outbreak of the Ukrainian war.

***this section, this article draws on the theoretical foundations of negotiated hegemony and balancing Regionalism, both concepts originating from the English school of international relations. Particular security, cultural, normative, and value-related dimensions are used to determine the decrease or increase of Russian influence in Kazakhstan.***

## Degree of Influence Before 2022

### Focus on 2016-2020

After developing the theoretical framework for this paper, the Degree of influence of external actors such as Russia, China, Türkiye, and the E.U. must be determined so that change can be measured in 2022. The extent of the impact is calculated for the period between 2016 and 2020 because comprehensive statistical data for 2021 has not yet been made available. There are several reasons why this time was chosen. Firstly, Kazakhstan was elected as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council in 2017, a significant achievement for the country's foreign policy. This membership provided Kazakhstan with an excellent opportunity to implement the initiatives of the country's leadership in various areas and national interests, including nuclear non-proliferation, combating terrorism and extremism, and promoting a culture of peace and dialogue in the modern world.<sup>49</sup> An examination of the country's relations with external actors during this period could shed light on how this membership affected Kazakhstan's external relations. Secondly, Kazakhstan hosted the EXPO-2017 international exhibition in its capital, a major global event attended by over 100 countries and numerous heads of state, prime ministers, and government officials. The exhibition provided Kazakhstan with a platform to showcase its technological innovations and new industries utilizing these technologies, which could have an impact on its economic relations with other countries.<sup>50</sup> Thirdly, Kazakhstan played an active role in the peace talks in Astana on Syria, which led to the establishment of four de-escalation zones in the country and helped stabilize the situation in the country.

*Given Kazakhstan's role in the peace talks and its relations with Russia, China, the E.U., and Türkiye, an examination of its relations with these actors during this period could shed light on how these relations affected Kazakhstan's involvement in the Astana peace talks.*

Josep Borrell then spoke of an "Astanization" of international conflict resolution and stated that the E.U. should increase its influence in the world as a mediator.<sup>51</sup>

### Measuring the External Influence of Russia, China, the E.U., and Türkiye on Kazakhstan

To measure the degree of influence, in addition to analyzing primary and secondary sources, a method for calculating the external influence of one actor on another is used to determine the extent to which Russia, China, the E.U., and Türkiye influenced Kazakhstan from 2017 until the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2021 and 2022 respectively. For this purpose, a method for calculating the Foreign Bilateral Influence Capacity Index (FBIC) of the Atlantic Council will be used, according to which, in order to measure the influence of one state on another, it is not sufficient to consider only statistical data on indicators such as trade relations or the number of weapons sold, but rather to calculate their share in indicators such as GDP (share of trade with the state in the state's GDP), total arms imports (share of arms imports from a particular state), etc.<sup>52</sup> Each sub-component of the FBIC index has a weight. The distribution of weights is shown in Figure 1. The weights were derived from the conceptual understanding of the influence and power of the index authors discussed in the literature review and calibrated using a survey of international relations experts. The Atlantic Council's Foreign Bilateral Influence Capacity Index (FBIC) calculation is also used to compare the results of cooperation between Kazakhstan and external actors in 2022.

***To measure the degree of influence, in addition to analyzing primary and secondary sources, a method for calculating the external influence of one actor on another is used to determine the extent to which Russia, China, the E.U., and Türkiye influenced Kazakhstan from 2017 until the outbreak of war in Ukraine in 2021 and 2022 respectively.***

As shown in Figure 1, the indicator for bilateral influence itself also consists of other interdependent sub-indicators. The main input variables of the FBIC Index, selected both for their ability to capture the main elements of economic, political, and policy interactions between countries in the international system and for their wide availability of data, are as follows: 1) trade in goods; 2) foreign aid; 3) arms trade; 4) diplomatic exchanges (i.e., the presence of embassies); 5) joint membership in intergovernmental organizations; 6) trade agreements; and 7) military alliances.<sup>53</sup> The FBIC index also uses country-level data on 8) GDP and 9) military expenditure as denominators for dependency indicators.<sup>54</sup> Data from other prominent think tanks is used to calculate the impact. SIPRI data is used to calculate military influence,<sup>55</sup> while OECD<sup>56</sup> and AidData<sup>57</sup> are used to calculate the effect of development aid, with the latter providing the missing data for China. The index for alliances is calculated based on data from Rice University on treaty commitments and provisions of alliances.<sup>58</sup> Diplomatic representation is reflected by the index introduced by Moyer, Turner, and Meisel.<sup>59</sup> This index describes the official accreditation level of top diplomats exchanged by each country and whether these diplomats are assigned to more than one country. The FBIC data determines the influence of Russia, China, the E.U., and Türkiye.<sup>60</sup> For the E.U., the author calculated the Degree of influence depending on the accession or withdrawal of the individual states.

## **Degree of General and Economic Influence on Kazakhstan Before the War in Ukraine**

***The chart shows Russia's influence in Kazakhstan increased from 1994 to 2020.***

In 1994, it was only 0.07; in 2020, it is already 0.73. This means Russia had the most significant influence on Kazakhstan of all analyzed countries. At the same time, Russia's influence gradually declined until 2010, when it began to grow and overtook the European Union. The European Union has long had the most significant influence in Kazakhstan since 2010, but its influence has gradually declined since 2015. The second most crucial actor is the European Union. Its influence in Kazakhstan was 0.12 in 1994 and 0.64 in 2020. The influence of the United States was also significant but less significant than that of Russia and the European Union. It was 0.03 in 1994 and 0.08 in 2020. The influence of Türkiye and China on Kazakhstan was the lowest, although China has gained influence in recent years. Its influence was 0.03 in 1994 and 0.19 in 2020. Türkiye's influence remained below 0.06 throughout the period under review. The data for China is surprising as its trend runs counter to the narrative presented in the literature review that China is becoming a major player in Central Asia.

***The European Union has long had the most significant influence in Kazakhstan since 2010, but its influence has gradually declined since 2015. The second most crucial actor is the European Union.***

Regardless of this, it should be noted that the EU's influence has been declining since 2016 and Russia's influence has been increasing. At this point, China has also started to increase its influence, by

71% from 2016 to 2020, which is unique for all other actors considered. In the case of Türkiye, it is difficult to identify a unique development. Türkiye remains at the same level, while the influence of the U.S. gradually decreased by 19.6% between 2016 and 2020.

It can be concluded that Kazakhstan was most influenced by Russia and the European Union from 2016 to 2020, while China's influence increased. Regardless of this, it is essential to look at the economic impact of these players from 2016 to 2020, as it is pretty clear that Russia has absolute superiority in the military and political sphere due to the presence of organizations such as the CSTO and the EAEU. As can be seen in Figure 1, the economic influence factor is calculated based on trade data and trade agreements. The lack of FDI inflow seems logical in this situation, as in the case of Kazakhstan, the majority of FDI comes from the oil and gas sector, and most foreign companies, including Chinese ones, prefer to invest in this sector through the Dutch offshore base, as the country offers several advantages.<sup>61</sup>

As Figure 3 shows, the European Union is still Kazakhstan's most influential economic player from 2016 to 2020. The economic influence of the E.U. countries is around 73 %, while the figures for Russia, China, and Türkiye are all below 15 %. This suggests that Russia's political and military influence in Kazakhstan is strong due to the presence of alliances such as the CSTO and the EAEU.

***reduce or increase Russia's influence on Kazakhstan, it can be analyzed whether Russia's influence on the countries with which it has had a direct conflict has changed and whether the country can replace one hegemon with another.***

To further investigate the factors that reduce or increase Russia's influence on Kazakhstan, it can be analyzed whether Russia's influence on the countries with which it has had a direct conflict has changed and whether the country can replace one hegemon with another. An impressive example of this is Ukraine and the data on the influence of external actors from 1994 to 2020. To simplify the analysis, the E.U. countries were singled out separately and the five most influential members of the organization were selected. Overall, Russia's influence on Ukraine has been gradually declining since 2013, while the influence of Western countries, especially the USA and Poland, has been increasing progressively. In 2019 and 2020, Poland overtook Russia in terms of influence on Ukraine. Examining the evolution of influence over Ukraine shows how one country can lose influence over another over time. In the meantime, Ukraine itself has been trying to reduce Russia's influence as it focuses on moving closer to Europe after the change of power in 2014. However, the influence of one state on another can only change to such an extent, in terms of geographical proximity and shared historical development, with the political leadership of the country concerned wanting it to. This indicates that the Ukrainian leadership has made efforts to reduce Russia's influence, e.g., by concluding some new agreements with Western countries, and the country's leadership has increased military cooperation. This example illustrates how a country's leadership can reduce the influence of another state through closer cooperation with other countries or blocs.

***Russia's influence is based precisely on the existence of treaties on the reduction of trade barriers and tariffs on goods, as well as on the presence of organizations such as the EAEU and the CSTO.***

For example, the FBIC Index determined the extent of influence of Russia, the E.U., China, Türkiye, and the U.S. in Kazakhstan from 1994 to 2020, focusing on the period 2016-2020. Although Russia is the main player, the European Union leads with a 73% share in the economic sphere when considering the influence of the E.U. together with Russia, Türkiye, and China. It can be concluded from this that Russia's influence is based precisely on the existence of treaties on the reduction of trade barriers and tariffs on goods, as well as on the presence of organizations such as the EAEU and the CSTO.



# CASES OF ACCEPTANCE OF OR RESISTANCE TO RUSSIAN HEGEMONY BY KAZAKHSTAN

In line with the theoretical framework of the study described above, this section analyses the actions of the Kazakh government that can be described as an attempt to reduce or, conversely, increase Russian influence in Kazakhstan. First, the author aims to determine with whom the Ministry of Foreign Affairs interacted the most in 2022 compared to 2021 by conducting a quantitative content analysis of the Ministry's messages. Next, the country's government actions in 2022 will be analyzed and mapped to activities to reduce or increase Russian influence, as shown in Table 1, focusing on economic alignment. Statistical data and data on trade goods will be used, especially in the case of Kazakhstan's energy resources. At the end of the analysis, the author will try to give his assessment of why and how the spheres of influence in Kazakhstan have changed.

## **With Whom did Kazakhstan Have the Most Contacts?**

***To see with whom Kazakhstan interacted more in 2022, it was decided to count the mentions of actors such as the E.U., Russia, China, and Türkiye in the messages of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan.***

The messages of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were retrieved via the organization's official Telegram messenger channel.<sup>61</sup> The counting of mentions was done using the programming language for statistical calculations and graphics. The packages

used were”rves, “<sup>63</sup> “string, “<sup>64</sup> “dply, “<sup>65</sup>, and “udpip.”<sup>66</sup> The first three packages were used for loading files, working with regular expressions and their filtering and grouping. The last package was the most important, as the messages were in Kazakh and Russian. The author decided to use Russian to count mentions, as the last package, “udpip,” was unavailable in the Kazakh language. The Russian language is very rich in various endings for both adjectives and nouns. For this purpose, the author of the work decided to use the command to lemmatize adjective names of countries and organizations. In addition, a problem arose with the lemmatization of all 27 E.U. member states, as their names are identical in Kazakh and Russian. Both are written in the Cyrillic alphabet, and each message was accompanied in Kazakh and Russian. To this end, the author of the paper used the command “gregexp” to write a code that ignores the mention of a country name if there is a Kazakh letter in the following 40 characters. Since the work is based on the theoretical framework of the English school of international relations, organizations such as the CSTO and the EAEU are counted together with the mention of Russia and the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and Türkiye.

### ***the European Union (E.U.) is the most frequently mentioned actor in the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs news***

From these mentions, it can be concluded that the European Union (E.U.) is the most frequently mentioned actor in the Kazakh Ministry of Foreign Affairs news in both years. The number of mentions of the E.U. increased from 405 in 2021 to 556 in 2022, an increase of 37%. This could indicate Kazakhstan’s increasing activity and interest in cooperating with the E.U., possibly due to economic, political, or cultural initiatives.

### ***Russia ranks second in terms of mentions among the actors considered.***

2022 360 mentions of Russia were recorded, 52% more than in 2021 (237 mentions). The increase in mentions of Russia is due to the deepening of bilateral cooperation and the activation of regional projects such as integration into the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) or the CSTO. Russia is also often mentioned because reference is made to the Collective Security Treaty Organization, whose collective contingent was stationed in Kazakhstan during the protests in January 2022.

### ***Mention of China in Kazakhstan’s foreign ministry news is also increasing, from 35 in 2021 to 66 in 2022, an increase of 89%.***

This increase may reflect the active cooperation between Kazakhstan and China under the “Belt and Road” initiative and other joint projects and the potential strengthening of political and cultural ties between the two countries. Türkiye saw the most significant increase in mentions of all actors, from 16 in 2021 to 65 in 2022, an increase of 306%. Although the total number of mentions of Türkiye is lower than that of the other actors, such a significant increase may indicate an intensification of bilateral cooperation between Kazakhstan and Türkiye.

### ***Türkiye saw the most significant increase in mentions of all actors***

Overall, there has been an increase in the number of mentions in the Kazakh Foreign Ministry’s news for 2021-2022 for all four actors.

### ***This could indicate the intensification of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy activities and increased cooperation with key partners. The EU and Russia remain the most frequently mentioned***

*actors, reflecting their importance for Kazakhstan regarding economic, political, and cultural cooperation. A significant increase in the mention of China and Türkiye indicates a broadening of Kazakhstan's foreign policy horizons and a desire to diversify its partnerships, possibly focusing on developing economic relations, investment, and trade.*

It is already clear that Kazakhstan has significantly increased its interaction with the European Union and with Türkiye through the Organization of Turkic States, whose cooperation format was changed in November 2021.

## **Steps to Increase or Decrease the Influence of External Actors: Analyzing Government Actions**

### **An Overview of Kazakhstan's Economic Relations with Russia, China, the European Union and Türkiye**

The legal and contractual framework, trade relations, and investment projects are considered to examine Kazakhstan's economic relations with the relevant players.

## **Contractual Framework**

*In 2022, cooperation with Russia within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union and with Türkiye within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) was strengthened to create a legal and contractual framework for economic cooperation.*

It is important to mention that for the first time since 2009, OTS members have managed to sign agreements in economic terms with legal obligations: the agreement on the establishment of simplified customs corridors, the agreement on international combined transport of goods, the agreement on the establishment of a Turkic Investment Fund with a budget of USD 500 million.<sup>67</sup> The signing of these agreements simplifies the transportation of goods from China to Europe through the territories of the Turkic states, effectively bypassing routes that pass through Russia and Belarus. The main objective of the first two documents is to reduce the time spent on customs controls and to ensure the development of information exchange on goods and vehicles. The Turkic Investment Fund is intended to facilitate the development of joint business between the members. With the signing of these documents, Russia has lost its dominance over the transit of goods and minerals from Central Asia to Europe. Freight traffic on the trans-Caspian route (bypassing Russia) increased by 2.5 times in 2022.<sup>68</sup> Independently of this, the EU has expressed interest in developing transport infrastructure in Central Asia through the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. While the EBRD's priority for the 2017-2021 period was "balanced public and private sector participation," the priority of the EBRD strategy for Kazakhstan 2022-2027 is "promoting private sector competitiveness and transport connectivity,"



which includes financing transport and logistics infrastructure, including roads, warehouses, and dry ports.<sup>69</sup> Overall, when analyzing the EBRD data, it can be seen that in the last five years, most of the projects from the “Transport” sector in Kazakhstan were implemented exactly in 2022 (4 projects), compared to only one project in 2021, the same number in 2019, 2020 and 2018 (3 projects were initiated). All projects in 2022 relate specifically to the Middle Corridor. Another critical topic is Kazakhstan’s sanctions policy. Kazakhstan has stated that it will abide by the sanction regime against Russia, but it isn’t easy to understand how this works in practice. It is known that Kazakhstan has tightened administrative procedures for the import of road freight from Russia so that Russian lorries can no longer enter Kazakhstan from the E.U. and that the country’s leading banks no longer accept the Russian payment card “Mir.”<sup>70</sup>

## Trade Relations

***the European Union has the largest share of total trade with Kazakhstan with 31%, followed by Russia with 19%, China with 18% and Türkiye with 4.7%.***

As shown in Table 2, the European Union has the largest share of total trade with Kazakhstan with 31%, followed by Russia with 19%, China with 18% and Türkiye with 4.7%. These players account for around 74% of Kazakhstan’s total trade. However, the data on imports and exports varies greatly. Türkiye is in last place, regarding its share of total exports (5.6%) and imports (3.2%). At the same time, Russia is the most important exporter to Kazakhstan. China occupies a relatively modest position. A comparison of the data with that of 2021 shows that both imports and exports have increased for all players except Russia. Russia’s share of trade relations has fallen by almost 3%, which is due to a decline in Russia’s share of imports, while Russian imports have fallen only marginally in monetary terms. This reflects the role of

parallel imports to Russia via Kazakhstan. The increase in European Union exports to Kazakhstan in the first eight months of 2022 was already driven by increases in pharmaceuticals (25.6 %), tractors by 90.5 %, passenger cars by almost 100 %, and computer hardware by almost 50 %.<sup>71</sup> In the same period, petroleum products and oil accounted for almost 90 % of Kazakhstan’s exports to the E.U.<sup>72</sup> However, it is worth noting that the value of Kazakhstan’s exports to the E.U. remained at the same level as in 2021. This suggests that Kazakhstan’s exports to the E.U. were lower than in 2021 and that the decline in the Russian share of trade turnover is precisely due to rising energy prices. In 2022, Kazakhstan exported 65.2 million tonnes of oil and gas condensate worth USD 46.9 billion, which is 0.7 percentage points less in volume and 51% more in value than in 2021.<sup>73</sup> Kazakhstan has increased its energy supplies to China and Türkiye.

## Investment Projects

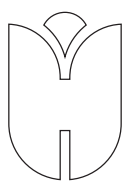
As mentioned above, it is difficult to determine the share of individual players in foreign investment in Kazakhstan, as a significant proportion of investment in the country’s mining sector is channeled through the Netherlands. However, it is possible to estimate investment growth based on the number of projects each state implements in Kazakhstan, not only in the mining sector. According to the foreign investment company Kazakh Invest, Russia launched 16 projects in Kazakhstan in 2022, creating 6,860 jobs. By comparison, only two projects were launched in 2021. In 2022, the European Union launched nine projects with an estimated 1,493 new jobs and a similar number of projects in 2021, but only 243 jobs were created.<sup>74</sup> China, on the other hand, launched 12 projects with 4,347 jobs in 2022, while there were only five projects with 371 jobs in 2021.<sup>75</sup> Türkiye recorded an increase in the number of projects: 13 projects were launched in 2022, and 2,157 new jobs were created. In 2021, there were still six projects with 952 jobs.<sup>76</sup> In addition, more than 13 thousand companies with Russian participation relocated to Kazakhstan in the first half of 2022 alone. According to statistics, around 11,500 companies with the Russian involvement were registered in

Kazakhstan on 1 January 2022, while on 1 January 2023, there were already 18,906 such companies.<sup>77</sup> Also, at the end of 2022, 19 foreign companies relocated from Russia to Kazakhstan, including Honeywell, inDriver, Fortescue, and Marubeni.<sup>78</sup>

## Are There Changes in the Behavior of Kazakhstan and Their Possible Causes?

It is clear from the above that the relevant actors have increased their activities in Kazakhstan, especially in Russia. The review of economic relations in 2022, based on the analysis of the legal framework, trade relations, and investment projects, suggests that Kazakhstan has sought to diversify its economic ties with each partner to avoid the emergence of a single influential player. However, it should be noted that Russia has increased its presence in Kazakhstan by creating new jobs, relocating production, and opening new investment projects. Government measures aimed at reducing Russia's influence include signing new agreements to facilitate the movement of goods to Europe and enforcing the sanctions regime, or at least a declaration to that effect. Nevertheless, it isn't easy to imagine Kazakhstan's attractiveness as a destination for foreign investment without having a common economic space with Russia within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. This fact is often used to promote Kazakhstan to foreign investors. The theoretical framework of this study allows us to characterize Kazakhstan's actions as interlocking, i.e., the country's attempt to reduce the influence of one actor by interacting with others within different alliances. Although Kazakhstan has taken steps to mitigate Russian hegemony, this has not led to a reduction in Russian influence. However, if Kazakhstan had not taken these steps, Russian influence would likely have continued to grow.

*The review of economic relations in 2022, based on the analysis of the legal framework, trade relations, and investment projects, suggests that Kazakhstan has sought to diversify its economic ties with each partner to avoid the emergence of a single influential player.*



## CONCLUSION

***This thesis of this paper aims to answer the research question, “Why did the spheres of influence in Kazakhstan change after the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022.”***

The author limits the work to the economic aspect of the sphere of influence but to consider the Degree of influence of Russia, China, Türkiye, and the E.U. before the start of the war in Ukraine.

***The main hypothesis is that Russia has increased its influence in Kazakhstan, as goods with double imports for Russia are channeled through Kazakhstan.***

In the course of this work, the author arrived at the following conclusions:

***According to the theory of “Negotiated Hegemon,” Russia is the hegemon in Kazakhstan.***

1. According to the theory of “Negotiated Hegemon,” Russia is the hegemon in Kazakhstan. Still, the extent of Russian influence in the country depends on what measures the country’s government takes to reduce or increase Russian influence. The deployment of CSTO troops after the protests in January 2022 shows that Russia has not lost its hegemonic status. However, an analysis of the influence of the individual actors using the FBIC index indicates that Russia is particularly influential politically and militarily; in the economic sphere, the influence of the European Union is enormous. Despite all the assumptions that China’s influence in Kazakhstan is growing, it was clearly inferior to that of the E.U. and Russia. Türkiye ranked last in terms of influence in Kazakhstan before the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine. Moreover, applying the Theory of negotiated hegemony enabled the development of models of state action to reduce or increase the influence of a foreign state in the economic sphere.

***Using the theoretical concept of Balancing Regionalism and its three main mechanisms: Bridging, Interlocking, and Branding allowed us to identify some of the mechanisms by which Central Asian states attempt to avoid the transition from Russian hegemony to a dominant state.***

2. Using the theoretical concept of Balancing Regionalism and its three main mechanisms: Bridging, Interlocking, and Branding allowed us to identify some of the mechanisms by which Central Asian states attempt to avoid the transition from Russian hegemony to a dominant state. Conducting an analysis using R on the most frequently mentioned actors in the news of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan provided the opportunity to find out that Kazakhstan is actively engaging with all actors, especially the engagement with Türkiye has increased. This is important as bilateral contacts between Kazakhstan and Russia have increased.

***The analysis of economic indicators, such as the legal and contractual framework for economic cooperation, trade relations, and investment projects, did not show a direct increase in Russia's influence compared with other actors.***

3. The analysis of economic indicators, such as the legal and contractual framework for economic cooperation, trade relations, and investment projects, did not show a direct increase in Russia's influence compared with other actors. However, Kazakhstan is trying to curb the rise of Russia's economic impact by interlocking, i.e., creating global connections, e.g. by expanding the trans-Caspian route for the transport of goods bypassing Russia or complying with the sanction regime. The increase in the share of Kazakh exports to these countries is due to rising oil prices; after some time, after the war in Ukraine, oil prices began to fall, which may lead to a decrease in the share of these players. At the same time, trade relations within the framework of a single economic union with Russia could continue to grow, especially given Russian society's need for dual-use goods. The main reason for the lack of direct growth of Russia's economic influence is precisely the constant balancing among the various players in the country's leadership and the attempt to engage in global processes through other players, such as Türkiye.

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# APPENDIX: ILLUSTRATIONS

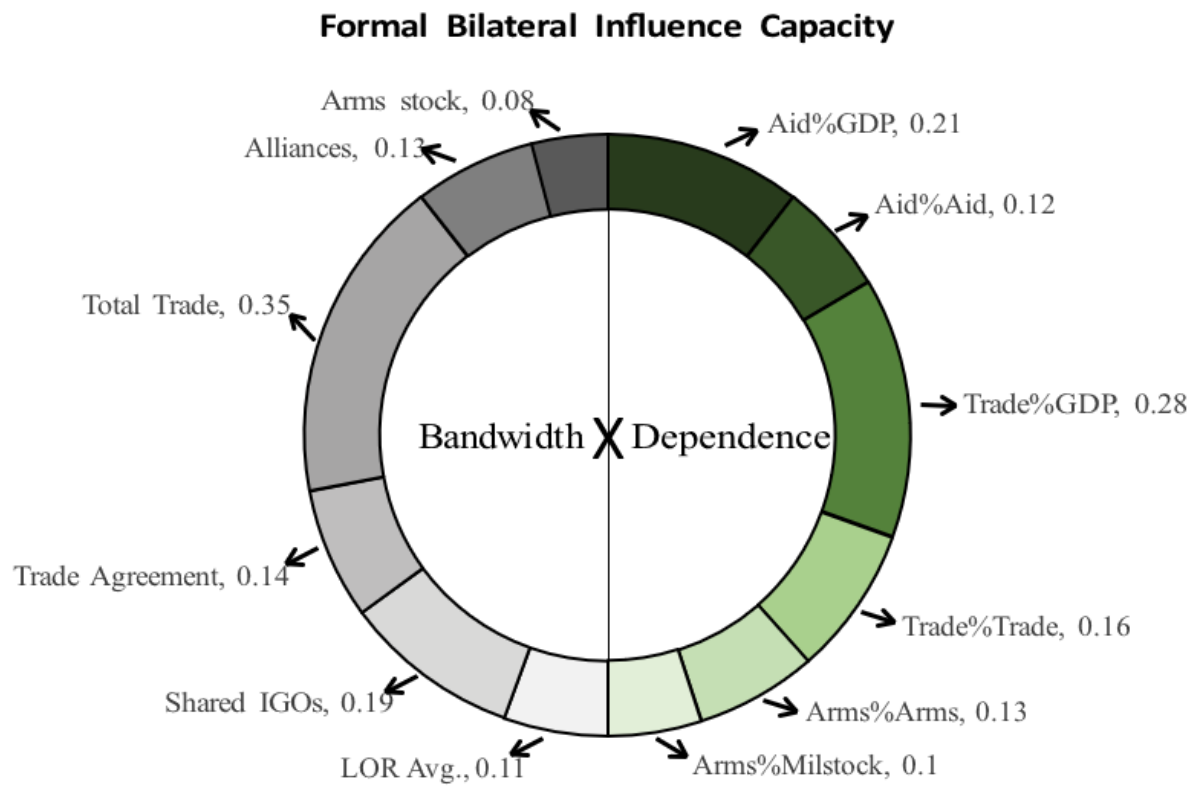


Fig 1: Sub-indicators with which FBIC is calculated

Source: (Moyer et al. 2021, p. 27)

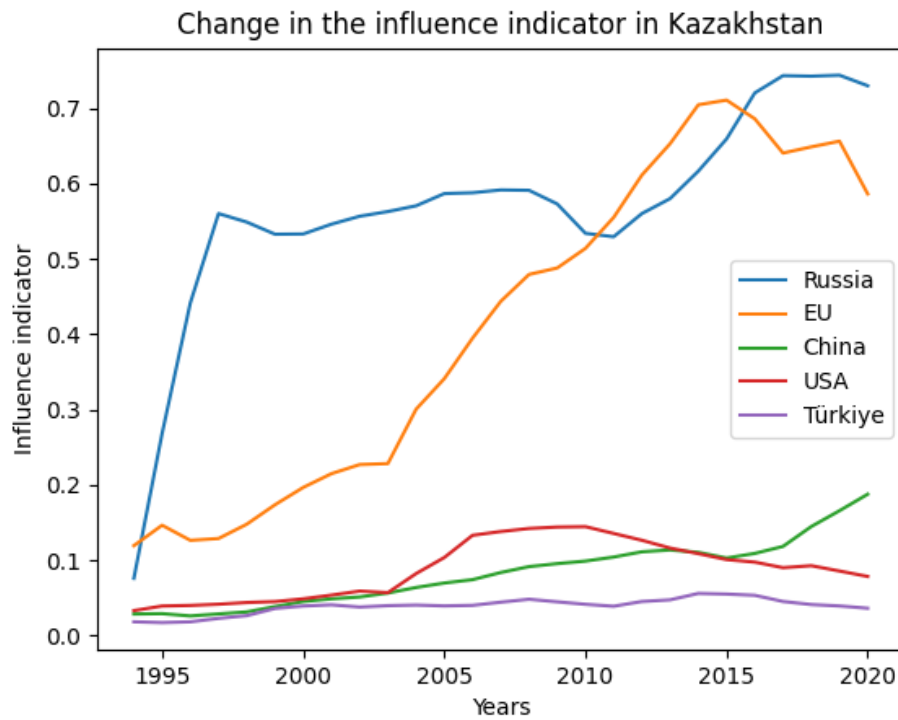


Fig 2: Change in the influence indicator in Kazakhstan from 1994 to 2020 (illustration by the author)

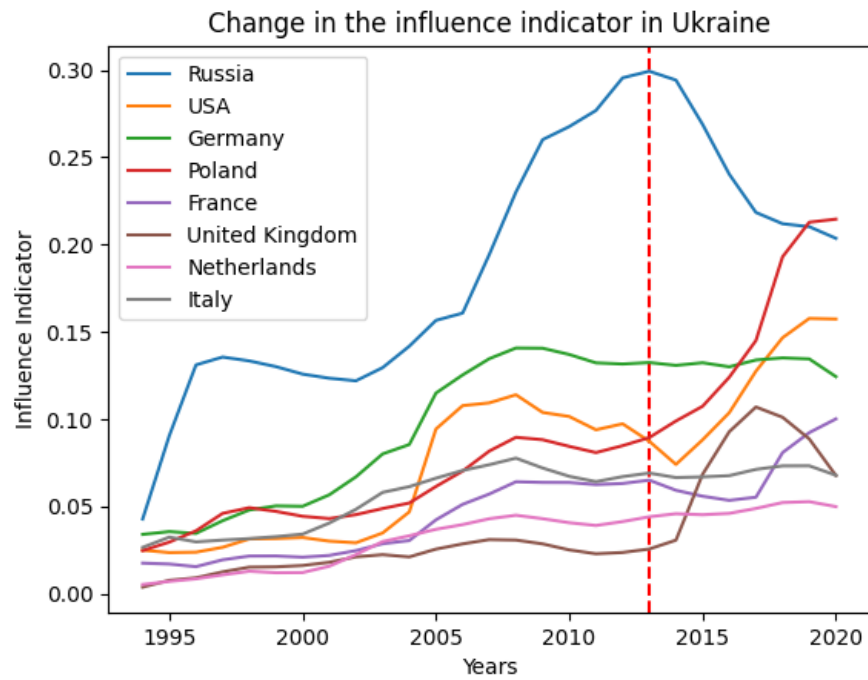


Fig 3: Change in the influence indicator in Ukraine from 1994 to 2020 (illustration by the author)

Share of external actors in economic dependence of Kazakhstan in %

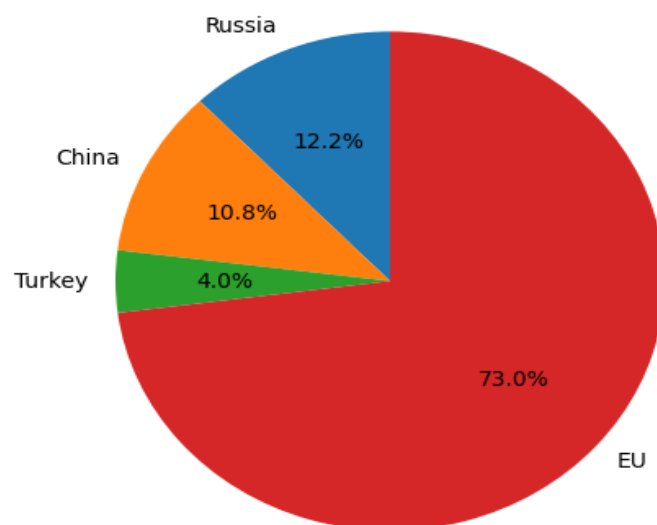


Fig 4: Share of external actors in Kazakhstan's economic dependence in % (Illustration by the author)

Mentions of EU, Russia, China, and Turkey in Kazakhstan MFA News (2021-2022)

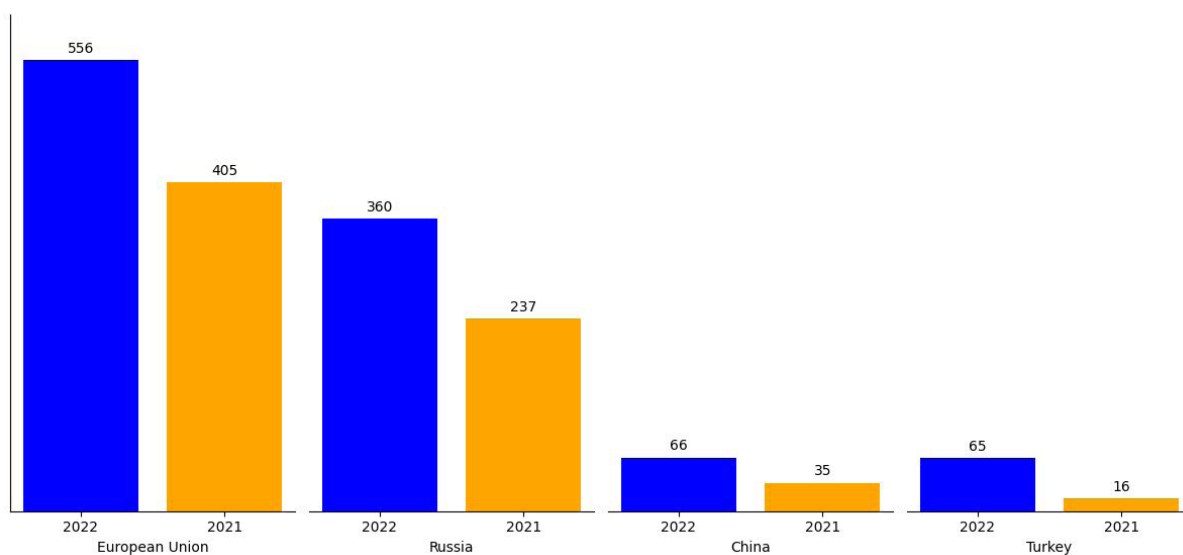
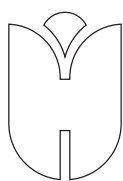


Fig. 5: Mentions of the E.U., Russia, China and Türkiye in the news of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2021 and 2022 (illustration by the author)









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HACE REPORT 04

**CHANGES IN THE SPHERES  
OF INFLUENCE IN KAZAKHSTAN  
AFTER THE OUTBREAK  
OF THE UKRAINE WAR IN 2022**  
E L D A N I Z   G U S S E I N O V

NOT SOLD FOR MONEY

