



# Kazakhstan-EU Relations in the Realities of the Geopolitical Turbulence: A Textual Analysis of Before and After Design

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**ABSTRACT.** *Global security concerns have impacted both domestic and foreign policies of international actors. A regional geopolitical crisis after 2022 has certainly impacted the relations between Kazakhstan and its external partners. This research aims to explore how the regional geopolitical turbulence shaped the dynamics of Kazakhstan's relations with the EU, one of the major actors in Kazakh multi-vector foreign policy. This research is concentrated on Kazakhstan-EU relations after 2022 and includes two studies: an analysis of press materials and a qualitative content analysis with some quantitative approach. An analysis of 191 press materials from the European External Action Service of 2018-2021 and 2022-2024 as well as content analysis of 2018-2021, 2022, and 2023-2024 press materials revealed the intensification of Kazakhstan-EU relations*

**KEYWORDS:** *Kazakhstan, the European Union, cooperation, geopolitics, energy, democratization, economy.*

## INTRODUCTION

The ongoing geopolitical crisis has significantly influenced the geopolitical landscape in the region and the world in general. The European energy sector was impacted considerably when Russia, as the major energy supplier, cut off the export of natural gas to the European market in response to the economic sanctions imposed by Western countries (Milov, 2024). Nevertheless, it is possible to supply Europe with energy by using alternative energy sources, reducing dependence on crude oil, considering that the EU has been aiming to ensure carbon neutrality for a long time now. To achieve this goal, the Union decided to pave the way to Kazakhstan, with its rare earth elements and uranium.

There are a few studies that examine the EU's relations with Kazakhstan following since 2022. Thus, forecasting the effect of the military conflict on economic cooperation, Muratova et al. (2023) assume the geopolitical situation provides the Central Asian states with a chance to advance their economies beyond those reliant on natural resources since the EU expresses interest in the region through numerous economic activities. Some studies suggest that the EU paid greater attention to human rights issues in its new Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) compared to its predecessor Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), while other studies argue that for the EU, economic and political competition with Russia and China, as well as defense, security, and economic ties with the region, are more important than promoting democracy. As for energy cooperation, the EU faces challenges in diversifying its energy supplies away from Russian dependence, whereas cooperation with Kazakhstan is maintained through such initiatives as the Global Gateway and Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR). However, the country encounters a decline in interest from the European side due to insufficient volumes of resources from Kazakhstan that would justify the investment, as well as the EU's reduced demand for coal and gas because of the transition to green energy (Martínez-García et al., 2023; Moisé & Sorbello, 2022; Muratova et al., 2023).

Taking into account the new geopolitical circumstances, this study seeks to explore the dynamics of Kazakhstan-EU relations. Therefore, the research question is established as: How has the ongoing geopolitical crisis impacted the dynamics of Kazakhstan's relations with the EU?

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine the Kazakhstan-EU relationship within the context of the present geopolitical situation. To this end, a textual analysis of bilateral relations based on economic prospects, energy, democratization, and development, as well as a content analysis of the published press materials in 2018-2024 will be conducted.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Economic Prospects

This year, Kazakhstan and the European Union celebrate 33 years of partnership that have been established since the country's independence in 1991. The EU is the most crucial trading partner for Kazakhstan, as it accounts for 40% of the latter's external trade (EEAS, 2023).

Konopelko (2017) argues that Kazakhstan and the EU are cooperating mainly in the fields of investment and trade diversification. Drieniková and Zubalova (2021) and Kembayev (2016; 2021) identify some barriers to economic cooperation within the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA). The violation of human rights, the absence of common borders, taking part in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and a lack of compelling strategy for long-term investments are only a few of them. To overcome these obstacles and ensure a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA), energy supply, and stability, the EU and EAEU should forge a strategic partnership, such as in the context of the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), which became unfeasible in the circumstances of the current Russo-Ukrainian stand-off. The importance of strategic partnership and the role of Kazakhstan as an energy provider and a transit route for Chinese products to the EU are arguments generally supported in existing studies (Kašťáková & Barinková, 2019). Muratova et al. (2023) suggest that the present geopolitical situation is an opportunity for Central Asian countries to move beyond resource-dependent economies due to the EU's immediate interest in the region, whereas the EU's development programs aim to strengthen cooperation and craft a shared agenda for regional development.

As observed from the literature, Kazakhstan is important to the EU's trade, and despite having some barriers, the future of relations seems to be prospective.

### Further Measures to Implement Strategic Development between Kazakhstan and the EU

Despite the promising trade cooperation, some issues remain a stumbling block to realizing the full potential of bilateral relations. Strengthening accountability, and democratic processes, and promoting transparency in Kazakhstan could lead to better long-term relations with the EU.

In this vein, Konopelko (2017) emphasizes the need for considerable effort to enhance liberal values by supporting civil society, attributing the stagnant due to a consolidated "authoritarian regime". Likewise, Kembayev (2016) highlights human rights violations as obstacles to realizing the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA). He proposes the "Wider Europe" approach to involve all the post-Soviet countries in building shared values and enhancing democratic institutions. A content analysis

conducted by Mukasheva and Akhmedyanova (2023) reveals that the EU places greater emphasis on human rights in the EPCA compared to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), indicating a shift in the EU's priorities towards Kazakhstan. Yesdauletov et al. (2017) conclude that Kazakhstan's leadership is moving towards Europeanization, based on the Five Institutional Reforms initiative, but note that the authoritarian nature of the government impedes this process. Their analysis of President Nazarbayev's speeches from 2010-2015 shows an increasing focus on transparency, rule of law, and accountability, which could be seen as the Kazakhstan government trying to address the EU's critique. Bhavna (2007) emphasizes the importance of liberal institutions like the EU and OSCE for extensive democratic changes in Kazakhstan, as continued authoritarianism may cause economic harm (Bhavna, 2007).

Fawn (2022) challenges the EU's positioning as a non-geopolitical actor in the Central Asian region, claiming that it is engaged in geopolitical competition covertly to offset the influence of China and Russia. Through "ideational geopolitics," or the defense of its "universal" values that challenge the prevailing norms in Central Asia, the Union asserts its influence. This is done by leveraging its competitive advantages, such as regional programs, democracy advancement, and normative principles. In this vein, Fawn et al. (2022) highlight that Kazakhstan serves as a crucial testing ground for EU policies based on beneficial cooperation between the two actors. However, limited research on the interactions of Central Asia with international organizations complicates the process of trial and integration of EU policies in the region.

However, Winn and Gänzle (2023) question the significance of democratization as the EU's top priority in Central Asia, noting a shift since 2019 towards "principled pragmatism" and resilience, considering geopolitical dynamics and powerful neighbors like Russia and China.

## **Energy Sector**

According to the European Council, with the acceptance of the Versailles Declaration in March 2022, EU countries agreed to promptly reduce dependence on Russian energy resources. This transition is challenging due to rising oil and gas prices, leading to higher inflation and transportation issues (Martínez-García et al., 2023). The Council has taken measures to guarantee this phase-out, including adopting a regulation to cut gas demand by 15% and ensuring adequate gas supply for colder seasons (European Council). Collins and Bekenova (2016) note that Kazakhstan adopted the same strategy of decreasing energy dependence after the Crimean crisis, reducing reliance on Russian policy, and expanding energy channels.

There is a general agreement in the existing literature on the idea that Central Asia-EU relations are largely driven by common interests in energy sector policy. Thus, Adnan and Fatima (2016) argue that the EU's approach to Kazakhstan is primarily driven by its energy prospects, as the EU aimed to import gas and oil from Central Asia bypassing

Russian territory. Similarly, Anceschi (2014) highlights the close energy ties between Kazakhstan and the EU during the Nazarbayev rule, though domestic governance saw no improvement. Mantel (2015) concurs that Kazakhstan's role as a transit country for energy exports is an attractive alternative that would potentially reduce dependence on Russian exports, violation of human rights and lack of democracy though remain persistent.

Despite the current geopolitical crisis, the Kazakhstan-EU partnership continues to be focused on energy projects through the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) and the EU's "Global Gateway" initiatives (Muratova et al., 2023). However, Moisé and Sorbello (2022) argue that the EU's interest in Central Asian energy has decreased as the region cannot supply enough resources to justify investment. Additionally, there is ineffective collaboration between EU institutions and transnational corporations, with limited competition among TNCs in the region, which is in contradiction with the fair and open market principles of the EU.

In countries with transitioning economies like Kazakhstan, the energy sector continues to be a crucial factor for cooperation with the EU. Strengthening democratic processes, respecting human rights, and promoting transparency at all levels of government can help reduce obstacles in bilateral relations.

### **Focus of the Current Study**

The reviewed literature discusses the obstacles and prospects of cooperation. What remains to be studied is how the current geopolitical turbulence echoed the EU and Kazakhstan relations. Based on the reviewed literature, we hypothesize that it may increase cooperation between Kazakhstan and the EU, as the strategy based on a pragmatic approach to the region by the EU may allow immediate reforms in Kazakhstan.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative research is grounded in an interpretive philosophy, aiming to understand the meanings embedded in the policy documents of the EU towards Kazakhstan. The research design is a case study that enables an in-depth investigation and analysis of complex interactions in the context of the current geopolitical situation. It describes how the EU and Kazakhstan partnership developed within the context of the current regional dynamics. The research consists of two parts.

For the first part, a databank containing all press materials of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in Kazakhstan was analyzed. Additionally, there are some media articles regarding EU-Kazakhstan relations. Data is collected from two periods of 2018-2021 and 2022-2024 and divided into three sections: Economic Prospects, Energy Sector, Democratization and Development. These sections were pre-coded based on the reviewed literature. The selection of the first period is justified by the

COVID-19 outbreak, which was at its peak in 2019-2020; due to which there was not much cooperation between Kazakhstan and the European Union. The period of 2018-2021 was included in the analysis as a baseline comparison because it was a relatively quiet time, free of global crises.

The second section is a qualitative content analysis with elements of a quantitative approach. It was tasked with uncovering the meaning of press materials about the development of EU-Kazakhstan relations. The quantitative part of the content analysis includes counting the number of times specific terms and categories of words appear in the texts (Halperin & Heath, 2020).

It is worth mentioning that only press materials covering activities between the EU and Kazakhstan and the EU and Central Asia with mentions of Kazakhstan were chosen for analysis. The total number of analyzed press materials is 191: 58 in 2018-2021, 86 in 2022 and 47 in 2023-2024.

The terms are divided into 7 categories: Democratization and Development, Economy, Energy, Security, Initiatives, Parties and Verbs. These categories were identified by classifying the most frequent words into the themes. They allow researchers to observe the changes in cooperation between two actors throughout the period and reveal the priorities of the EU towards Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

Some of these categories need further elucidation. The “Democratization and Development” category is defined as actions taken on the promotion of human rights, transparent government, tackling climate change, social policies including children’s well-being and infrastructural improvements such as water and housing management that directly influence the prosperity of a nation. The “Economy” implies the economic activity between parties. The “Energy” sector covers the initiatives regarding both renewable and non-renewable energy source management. Whereas issues such as border security along with international threats, for example, terrorism lie in the “Security”. The “Initiatives” category denotes all the official actions, such as agreements, programs and events initiated by and held between two parties. The “Parties” implies the actors mentioned in the press materials. The “Verbs” section demonstrates the purpose of initiatives.

The “\*” sign is used to identify words with the same root but with different endings. For instance, by using “democra\*”, the Yoshikoder software identified all the words possessing the same root, such as ‘democracy’, ‘democratic’, ‘democratically’ and ‘democratization’.

The first category encompasses 36 specific words, as follows: anti-corruption, child\*, climate, constitut\*, corrupt\*, covid\*, democra\*, development, dignity, disaster, discriminat\*, educat\*, elect\*, environment\*, equal\*, erasmus, free\*, gender\*, girls, housing, human\*, ill-treatment, journalis\*, justice, law, media, press, rights, stud\*,

sustain\*, training, transparen\*, university, violence, water, and women. The “Economy” comprises 6 particular terms such as econom\*, invest\*, market\*, sanction\*, trade and transport\*. The “Energy” category has 14 terms: alternative, atom\*, batter\*, critical, energ\*, gas, green, hydro\*, nuclear, oil, plant, power, raw, and renewable. The category of “Security” contains 13 words: Afghan, arm\*, extremis\*, geopolit\*, military, peace\*, security, stabil\*, terror\*, terror\*, traffic\*, war and weapon\*. The “Initiatives” comprises 16 terms as follows Action\*, Agreement\*, Conference\*, Cooperat\*, Dialogue\*, Event, Forum\*, Initiative\*, Meeting\*, Partner\*, Platform, Polic\*, Program\*, Project\*, Reform\* and Strateg\*. This category enabled us to see how often initiatives were conducted in the different timeframes before and after the the military conflict. The next category is “Parties” with 5 particular words: Central Asia\*, EU+Europe\*, Kazakh\*, Russia\* and Ukrain\*. The last category “Verbs” consists of develop, enhance, foster, implement, improve, intensify, promote, and support with 8 words in total. This category allows us to understand the EU's intentions towards Kazakhstan during that time.

The software used to facilitate the process are Yoshikoder and Excel. Yoshikoder counts the frequency words in a text and allows researchers to categorize them. Excel is used to visualize data in graphs and tables. The data is pre-coded based on the literature review, as a result of which the terms were classified into the first 3 categories: economy, democratization and development, and energy. However, the rigorous analysis of press materials revealed 4 new categories, namely, security, initiatives, parties, and verbs. To make the comparison clear, each category's top five frequent terms were chosen.

The results are explained through the prism of structural realism theory. Concerning ethical considerations, the research obtains information through legitimate channels, such as the EU's official websites and recognized news outlets. Potential limitations of the study pertain to the chosen timeframe (2018-2024), which includes the pre-pandemic times, the COVID-19 pandemic period, and the beginning of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Economic Prospects

**2018-2021.** The EU plays a significant role in establishing a sustainable environment for foreign investments and business development in Kazakhstan. The Union contributed to the financial development of the Central Asian region through the EU's multiannual indicative program for 2014-2020 (Council of the European Union, 2019). Moreover, the European Commission has allocated €1 billion to enhance the business environment (EEAS, 2020).

The economic aspect of the Kazakhstan-EU partnership during these years was characterized mainly by supporting the post-pandemic recovery. The EU-Central Asia Dialogue on Partnership for Prosperity was held online in 2020 (EEAS, 2020). The EU also expressed its intention to assist the small business environment through the Ready4Trade program (EEAS, 2020).

Economic cooperation was still relevant for both parties in 2021, and the evidence could be the launch of the European Union-Central Asia Economic Forum (EEAS, 2021). The EU demonstrated its anticipation for enhancing trade relations between the EU and Central Asia by embracing the new EU Ready4Trade programme (EEAS, 2021). The results of the forum were discussed at the 17th EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting, stressing the need for transparent investments and corruption combat (EEAS, 2021). In order to overcome the trade obstacles between Central Asian states and the EU, another meeting was held in June 2021. The main impediments that hinder trade, such as lengthy lines on physical borders and difficulties with obtaining certificates, were mentioned (EEAS, 2021).

**2022-2024.** The transition to a green economy has become one of the main priorities for the EU since the onset of the the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Strategic Partnerships on Sustainable Raw Materials, Batteries, and Renewable Hydrogen Value Chains was signed in November 2022. (EEAS, 2023).

Other actions taken since the outbreak of the military conflict in Ukraine include the EU-Central Asian Connectivity Conference. At this conference, representatives of Central Asian countries discussed the possible ways to continue work on trade infrastructure in the context of the Russian reality (EEAS, 2022). As a result, the Investors Forum for EU-Central Asia Transport Connectivity took place in January 2024. During the forum, €10 billion was committed by European institutions to accelerate the process of building efficient Central Asian trade routes in the realm of the geopolitical situation (European Commission, 2024). The emergency and strong demand for reliable infrastructure were highlighted, referring to the refusal of transit through Russia (European Commission, 2024).

## Energy Sector

**2018-2021.** Global interest in moving towards a renewable, sustainable energy model bound Kazakhstan and the EU. In 2019, the EU's policy on Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership was introduced to assist Kazakhstan in moving towards sustainable management of natural resources and a low-carbon economy (EEAS, 2019). Furthermore, the Low Enriched Uranium Bank, funded by the EU, started operating in Kazakhstan in the same year (EEAS, 2019).

During the 17th EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting and the EU-Central Asia Economic Forum in 2021, the Union showed support for Central Asia's efforts to transform into a greener economy and stressed the relevance of green investments (EEAS, 2021).

**2022-2024.** In May 2022, a workshop, within the EU – Central Asia Water, Environment and Climate Change Cooperation (WECOOP) program, was organized to exchange European experiences in the field of solar and wind power generation. In the next month, the EU introduced Sustainable Energy Connectivity in Central Asia (SECCA) to boost investment, efficiency, and knowledge in alternative energy, as well as reinforce policies aimed at



transitioning to a renewable energy system (EEAS, 2022). November 2022 marks a crucial step in relations, namely signing the Strategic Partnerships on Sustainable Raw Materials, Batteries, and Renewable Hydrogen Value Chains during the COP27 in Egypt. In light of the present geopolitical events, this initiative aims to improve Europe's supply of vital raw materials used in the manufacturing of batteries and earth magnets used in wind turbines (EEAS, 2022). Following this partnership, in June 2023, Tau-Ken Samruk (TKS) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) signed a Memorandum of Understanding at the Astana Mining and Metallurgy Congress (EEAS, 2023).

The European Union has frequently stated its willingness to improve ties in the energy sector in the years since the start of the military conflict in Ukraine during different events such as the 20th meeting of the Kazakhstan-EU Cooperation Council, the second EU-Central Asia Economic Forum or the EU-Central Asia: 10th High-Level Political and Security Dialogue (EEAS, 2022, 2023).

At the beginning of 2024, President Tokayev visited Italy, where he called for investments in critical raw materials, renewable energy, and the oil and gas industries. In the same year, KazMunayGas and Italian company Eni signed an agreement on constructing the first hybrid power station consisting of solar and wind plants in Zhanaozen city needed for KMG's local facilities (Satubaldina, 2024).

## DEMOCRATIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

**2018-2021.** The pre-conflict period of relations between the EU and Kazakhstan can be described by Joint Communication with the European Parliament and the Council: The EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Stronger Partnership. The strategy suggests the main priority: to develop Central Asian resilience towards internal and external challenges (EEAS & European Commission, 2019).

The issue of human rights violations was one of the EU's concerns before the military conflict. For instance, the Subcommittee on Justice and Home Affairs and the Human Rights Dialogue took place in 2019 (EEAS, 2019). Moreover, the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission mentioned serious violations during the 2019 presidential elections in Kazakhstan (EEAS, 2019).

Initiatives to overcome post-pandemic crises in 2020 included the Central Asia COVID-19 Crisis Response Solidarity Programme (EEAS, 2020), whereas the Asia-Europe Meeting emphasized the significance of international traffic and critical transportation infrastructure (EEAS, 2020).

The year 2021 was marked by many initiatives on democratization in Central Asia. For instance, a reoccurring Human Rights Dialogue and Subcommittee on Justice and Home Affairs were held (EEAS, 2021). Furthermore, Kazakhstan has taken its first steps to abolish the death penalty by ratifying the Second Optional Protocol to the International

Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (EEAS, 2021). The EU also supported education initiatives by funding various projects, including the 24-month initiative “School of Public Action - Western Kazakhstan” (EEAS, 2021).

**2022-2024.** The EU has been actively involved with its strategic partners, including Kazakhstan, since the start of the military conflict. For instance, sanction evasion by Russia was discussed during a visit by a delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the EU (EEAS, 2023). In the same year, the annual High-Level Political and Security Dialogue between the EU and the Central Asian states was held in Astana to strengthen cooperation with the region (EEAS, 2023).

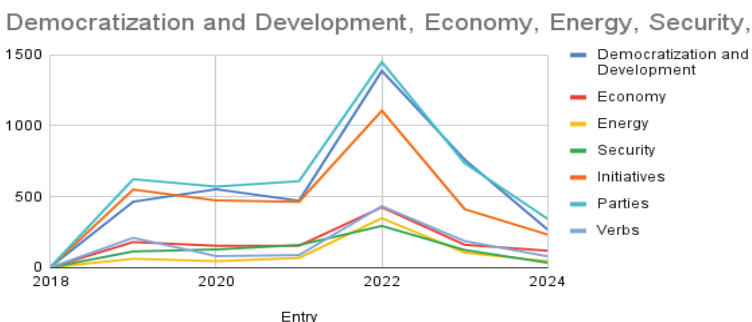
Another important aspect is human rights improvement ambition. In 2022, the EU and Kazakhstan had the 14th Human Rights Dialogue, where the need for a complete, transparent investigation of the “Bloody January” was stressed (EEAS, 2022). The 20th Subcommittee on Justice and Home Affairs meeting presented the results of their initiatives towards combating money laundering, corruption and human trafficking (EEAS, 2022).

Overall, the EU aims to tackle various issues concurrently and an example is a comprehensive partnership program with 72 concrete actions, with water management, climate and energy matters leading the list (Satubaldina, 2024). In May 2022, the JAILYM Project was introduced to change non-climate-friendly practices on pastures (EEAS, 2022). During the 18th EU-Central Asia Ministerial Meeting, the performance of the Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) and the counter-terrorism project Law Enforcement in Central Asia (LEICA) was evaluated and discussed (EEAS, 2022).

## CONTENT ANALYSIS

There are 7 categories identified in the content analysis: Democratization and Development, Economy, Energy, Security, Initiatives, Parties, and Verbs. The total count of terms in each category from 2018 to 2024 is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *Number of terms in categories used from 2018 to 2024 (Authors' calculation)*



The lowest numbers were in 2018 since press materials became available starting at the end of that year. In 2019, the Democratization and Development, Parties, and Initiatives categories experienced a sharp increase since the first contains a large number of terms in general (36) and the second and third categories contain general terms that were used in each press material. From 2019 to 2021, the Energy and Economy categories plateaued, while others experienced slight fluctuations, illustrating the general stability of relations between Kazakhstan and the European Union. It is observed that the busiest year is 2022, as it has the highest frequency of specific terms appearing in each category. There has been a military conflict in Ukraine that year, which may explain the increased activity between the two parties. In 2023, there is a sharp fall in the frequency of words, but the activity is still higher than before 2022. The fact that 2024 is only halfway through the year explains why there has been a decline in activity in each category as of today.

The following 7 tables illustrate the top 5 most frequent words in each category through the three timeframes - 2018-2021, 2022 and 2023-2024. The year 2022 is considered separately since it marks the highest number of words in each category, which represents the high engagement of the EU with Kazakhstan.

Table 1 *Top 5 Most Frequent Terms in Democratization and Development*

Categories	2018-2021 Count	Categories	2022 Count	Categories	2023-2024 Count
<b>Democratization and Development</b>	<b>1490</b>	<b>Democratization and Development</b>	<b>1388</b>	<b>Democratization and Development</b>	<b>1031</b>
human*	168	development	150	rights	87
rights	167	sustain*	126	human*	85
development	158	disaster	103	child*	84
sustain*	129	constitut*	91	educat*	84
environment*	83	human*	78	sustain*	66

It can be observed that terms containing “human\*” are the most frequently appearing in 2018–2021, indicating that humanitarian aid and human rights were often discussed in EU–Kazakhstan relations. However, its importance decreased in 2022, implying that the EU’s focus shifted to broader development-related projects. “Rights” and “human\*” resurfaced in 2023-2024, suggesting that these topics regained their relevance, but on the other hand, they have decreased by half as compared to the pre-conflict period.

Table 2 *Top 5 Most Frequent Terms in Economy*

Categories	2018-2021 Count	Categories	2022 Count	Categories	2023-2024 Count
<b>Economy</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>Economy</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>Economy</b>	<b>278</b>
econom*	206	econom*	116	econom*	71
trade	117	trade	121	invest*	65
invest*	97	invest*	113	trade	60
transport*	33	transport*	38	transport*	46
market*	24	market*	22	sanction*	22

The top 5 terms in these years are the same: econom\*, trade, invest\*, transport\*, and market\*. Notably, words comprising “econom\*” are the most frequently referenced throughout the years, including 2023–2024. Nonetheless, it experienced a significant drop in 2022, which accounts for almost half of the loss. The last period has similar patterns to previous years except for the last term, “sanction\*,” surfacing and signifying that attention is paid to sanction-related themes in these years.

Table 3 *Top 5 Most Frequent Terms in Energy*

Categories	2018-2021 Count	Categories	2022 Count	Categories	2023-2024 Count
<b>Energy</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>Energy</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>Energy</b>	<b>149</b>
energ*	62	energ*	147	energ*	65
green	62	green	86	green	23
renewable	11	renewable	40	raw	14
nuclear	9	raw	17	critical	12
critical	8	hydro*	16	renewable	12

In the Table 3, the terms “energ\*” and “green” are consistently leading throughout the period, starting from 2018-2021; nevertheless, the usage of both terms was on the rise in 2022. The word “renewable” experienced the same changes, going up sharply from 11 to 40 in 2022 and then showing up on the list as being the least frequently used in the 2023-2024 period as compared to 2022. The word “raw” shows an increase in usage throughout the overall period. It became one of the least frequently used in 2022 and increased slightly in subsequent periods. The term “hydro\*” entered the list as the last in 2022 and then experienced a decrease in the 2023-2024 period. The term “critical” is used less often in the 2018-2021 years, and the value of the mentioned cases increases only in the 2023-2024 period.

Table 4 *Top 5 Most Frequent Terms in Security*

Categories	2018-2021 Count	Categories	2022 Count	Categories	2023-2024 Count
<b>Security</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>Security</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>Security</b>	<b>166</b>
security	113	Afghan	88	Afghan	55
Afghan	98	security	67	security	50
peace*	64	peace*	28	peace*	33
traffic*	30	war	19	war	13
stabil*	28	traffic*	18	stabil*	12

The most frequently referenced words over the full selected period remain the same. The words “security” and “Afghan” are used most often throughout the whole period. The word “traffic\*,” which refers to drug and human trafficking, was less frequently appearing in 2018-2021. It decreased in frequency almost twice in 2022 and disappeared from the list in 2023-2024, demonstrating that it became less important on the EU’s agenda. While the word “war” enters the list of most frequently used words in 2022 and remains stable in further periods. The word “stabil\*,” which refers to stability, stable and stabilization, was the least frequently used in the list before 2022, but with the start of the military conflict in Ukraine, it left the list of words mentioned most often but returned in 2023-24, marking the least frequently mentioned word.

Table 5 *Top 5 Most Frequent Terms in Initiatives*

Categories	2018-2021 Count	Categories	2022 Count	Categories	2023-2024 Count
<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>1488</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>1107</b>	<b>Initiatives</b>	<b>664</b>
Cooperat*	377	Cooperat*	211	Cooperat*	130
Partner*	214	Project*	167	Partner*	88
Strateg*	107	Partner*	128	Meeting*	55
Action*	88	Program*	117	Dialogue*	45
Dialogue*	87	Strateg*	86	Forum*	45

Table 5 demonstrates different initiatives launched throughout the period. The term “cooperat\*” remains constantly the most used word throughout the period. The word “partner\*” was used 214 times during the first period; the usage is in decline in 2022. However, the indicator increased in the 2023-2024 period. The same trend is experienced by the word “dialogue\*.” The value starts with 87 in 2018-2021 decreases and leaves the list in 2022, and goes up in the last period, reaching the value of 45. Despite the word “action\*” being used 88 times in the first period, its frequency decreased in 2022 and further, no longer being included in the top.

Table 6 *Top 5 Most Frequent Terms in Parties*

Categories	2018-2021 Count	Categories	2022 Count	Categories	2023-2024 Count
<b>Parties</b>	<b>1805</b>	<b>Parties</b>	<b>1450</b>	<b>Parties</b>	<b>1079</b>
EU+Europe*	910	EU+Europe*	598	EU+Europe*	461
Central Asia*	603	Central Asia*	431	Kazakh*	310
Kazakh*	269	Kazakh*	359	Central Asia*	255
Russia*	18	Russia*	33	Ukrain*	27
Ukrain*	5	Ukrain*	29	Russia*	26

Table 5 demonstrates that the most popular reference is the EU itself as an actor conducting all of the activities. During 2018-2022, the reference to Central Asia was the most frequent among all other parties besides the EU, while in 2023-2024 Kazakhstan became the most frequently referenced party on the EU's agenda. It can also be noted that before the military conflict, references to Kazakhstan were almost 100 times lower than in 2022.

Russia and Ukraine were also mentioned, but less frequently throughout the whole period. However, if Ukraine was mentioned only 5 times before the military conflict, in 2022 it was mentioned almost six times more. In 2023-2024, this number decreased slightly. Whereas Russia was mentioned 18 times before the military conflict, in the year of the invasion, this number almost doubled.

Table 7 *Top 5 Most Frequent Terms in Verbs*

Categories	2018-2021 Count	Categories	2022 Count	Categories	2023-2024 Count
<b>Verbs</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>432</b>	<b>Verbs</b>	<b>264</b>
support	123	support	136	support	95
promote	108	develop	96	develop	37
develop	42	implement	61	enhance	37
enhance	33	enhance	50	promote	37
improve	30	improve	44	improve	21

The main trend observed from the table is that “support” is the main word that characterizes EU-Kazakhstan relations in the whole period. Before 2022, the verb “promote” was after support, but when the military conflict began, it was replaced by the word “develop”. Overall, the frequency of all of the verbs used was higher in 2022, marking the events that were conducted more actively between Kazakhstan and the EU this year as compared to the period between 2023 and 2024. The word “implement” entered the list only in 2022, symbolizing the active period.

## CONTENT ANALYSIS FINDINGS

In contrast to the other studied periods, 2022 is considered the most active year. This suggests that the cooperation between Kazakhstan and the EU was more intense when the military conflict between Russia and Ukraine began.

From the Democratization and Development category, it can be seen that the persistent human rights agenda before the military conflict was replaced by the development narrative in 2022. This is explained by the fact that the development of joint initiatives that will address urgent and unexpected challenges has become the top priority for both parties to maintain regional stability and security. However, human rights issues returned to the agenda in 2023-2024, re-occupying the top spot, implying that the parties have adapted to the realities of the military conflict by developing resilience measures and can continue working on previous endeavors.

In the Economy category, there were no significant changes in the narrative throughout the period. However, in 2023-2024, mentions of sanctions became some of the most common words. This indicates that the conflict between Russia and Ukraine impacted the economic agenda of Kazakhstan, the EU and the entire world.

Regarding energy, references to the green economy and green energy were some of the most frequently mentioned terms from the very beginning until today. This can be explained by the fact that the EU set and is still working toward carbon neutrality, even prior to the start of the military conflict. It is noteworthy that the EU began to pay stronger attention to hydropower and renewable energy in general, which, with the outbreak of the military conflict, suggests that it shifted its focus to cooperation in the field of sustainable energy as it can reduce dependency on fossil fuels exported from Russia.

In the Security category, discussions about the military conflict have been ongoing since 2022, showing a strong focus on geopolitical changes by both the EU and Kazakhstan.

The Initiatives category has shown increased activity in 2022, indicating a growing interest from the EU in Kazakhstan, particularly with the start of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict.

As for the Parties category, in 2022, mentions of Kazakhstan increased compared to before the military conflict, when the EU talked more about Central Asia than Kazakhstan. Now, Kazakhstan is viewed as an independent player rather than just a part of the Central Asian region.

From the Verbs category, it can be noticed that the relationships mainly involved providing support over the years. Furthermore, before the military conflict, the EU sought to promote its values, but after the conflict started, it focused more on development efforts.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of the present study was to investigate and comprehend the impact of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine on the cooperation between the EU and Kazakhstan. By analyzing and interpreting the data, several conclusions can be drawn, which illuminate the influence of the conflict on the relations between the mentioned parties.

The Kazakhstan-EU partnership has shown resilience and adaptability across democratization and development, economy and energy fields in light of the realities of the challenges posed by the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Both parties strive for economic prosperity by adhering to sustainable management of raw materials. The EU has shown interest in transforming an important sector of the economy, specifically energy. The cooperation between the two demonstrates mutual benefit, with Kazakhstan supplying raw materials to Europe and Europe providing support and investment in Kazakhstan's energy industry. In general, the energy partnership between the EU and Kazakhstan shows a shared commitment to sustainable development, energy security, and tackling global challenges in the shift to a low-carbon future. It was intensified with sanctions against Russia, which led to Europe's acceleration towards renewable energy sources. Moreover, establishing efficient trade routes in the face of geopolitical tensions is crucial for both parties. In the sphere of democratization and development, educational programs, diplomatic exchanges, human rights initiatives and other important projects contributing to the region's sustainability signify consolidated ties that extend beyond economic transactions. Relations between Kazakhstan and Europe significantly intensified after 2022, as illustrated by findings from the three main areas of cooperation.

In the analysis of content, there were noticeable changes in the discourse between Kazakhstan and the EU, especially in 2022. Human rights were a major focus for the EU before 2022, but after the start of the military conflict, development became the Union's top priority. Sanctions were frequently mentioned in 2023-2024 when discussing the economy, highlighting the EU's concern about geopolitics. Moreover, there has been an increased focus on green energy, particularly in 2022, due to energy disruptions. In 2022, the agenda started to frequently mention the word "war," and activity between the two parties was notably higher compared to other years. Kazakhstan was referenced more often in 2022, whereas previously, Central Asia as a whole was mentioned most frequently. Overall, relationships were mainly built on supportive actions throughout the entire period.

These results from the two parts of the study can be explained through the prism of Kenneth Waltz's structural realism since the EU as well as Kazakhstan pursue the goal of resisting geopolitical challenges. According to him, state behavior is driven by the anarchic nature of the international system and the pursuit of security (1979). Kazakhstan follows a multi-vector policy to balance relations with major powers, maintaining a neutral status to ensure geopolitical stability and economic resilience (Gnedina, 2015). By employing soft-balancing methods, Kazakhstan engages multiple



actors to diversify opportunities, whereas the EU, dependent on fossil fuels and seeking sustainable energy, imports both raw materials for renewable and nonrenewable energy sources from Kazakhstan.

Connecting the findings from both parts of the study, it is evident that the Russo-Ukrainian conflict has intensified Kazakhstan-EU cooperation. The intense interaction in various sectors demonstrates the adaptability of relations to address the current geopolitical situation. The emphasis on sustainable energy, development initiatives, and security concerns highlights a strategic move aimed at enhancing regional stability. In the face of the circumstances, the EU began to increase cooperation with Kazakhstan in the energy sector while easing its control over democratization.

This research has contributed to the existing literature on Kazakhstani-European relations, offering insights into the strategic importance of Kazakhstan for the EU as an institution. Moreover, it enriches existing knowledge of broader topics such as geopolitics and crisis management. Further research could be done on specific aspects of Kazakhstan-EU cooperation highlighted in this study. For example, the effects of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine on trade, energy and the implementation of joint projects promoting sustainability and human rights. As for the recommendations, additional investments in the renewable energy sector and enhancing diplomatic connections to foster stability and prosperity in the region are potential steps for mutual benefit.

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