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Lagebericht

Auslandsbüro Kasachstan (Astana)



Kazakh-German Relations

The recent meetings between the Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev and the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, along with the broader CA5+1 meeting involving the five Central Asian leaders, highlight the increasing strategic importance of Central Asia for Germany's foreign policy. These engagements underscore Berlin's interest in diversifying its economic ties, reducing dependency on Russia, and engaging in regional stability through cooperation on energy, migration, and geopolitical balance.

Economic and Strategic Cooperation

Both the Tokayev-Scholz bilateral meeting and the CA5+1 summit underscored economic cooperation, especially in the fields of energy and green transition. Germany views Central Asia as a key partner for energy diversification, especially in green technologies, which aligns with Kazakhstan's goal of transitioning away from a reliance on fossil fuels. Scholz emphasized Germany's expertise in renewable energy, offering cooperation on large-scale green projects, like the establishment of a Kazakh-German school and scientific research partnerships. This focus on green transformation can aid Central Asia's modernization efforts while offering Germany access to new energy sources, which is crucial in the post-Russia era of energy sanctions.

Moreover, trade between Germany and Central Asia is growing, with Kazakhstan alone seeing a sharp rise in bilateral trade, reaching \$9.9 billion in 2023 and \$2.3 billion in the first seven months of 2024. Germany also seeks deeper partnerships with Uzbekistan, particularly in sectors like skilled labour and migration, which could help alleviate Germany's labour shortages in areas like healthcare and IT.

Diplomatic and Geopolitical Challenges

However, these meetings revealed the complex geopolitical balancing act Central Asian countries are engaged in. Tokayev's stance on Russia's war in Ukraine was notably cautious, as he called Russia "militarily invincible" and pushed for diplomatic solutions involving non-Western actors like China and Brazil. This reflects Kazakhstan's delicate positioning, as it seeks to avoid antagonizing Russia while still engaging with Europe. Germany, eager to counterbalance Moscow's influence in the region, faces limitations due to these countries' economic and political ties to Russia.

The CA5+1 format, while promising for expanding EU-Central Asia relations, also revealed tensions over Europe's attempts to increase influence. Central Asian leaders, particularly Tokayev, continue to prioritize their relationships with Moscow and Beijing, as demonstrated by the reluctance to fully support Ukraine or engage too deeply in NATO-related security cooperation.

Pros and Cons of the Meetings

Pros:

1. **Strengthened Economic Ties:** The agreements signed between Germany and the Central Asian countries, particularly around energy and migration, have the potential to boost regional economies, especially in green technologies and skilled labour migration.
2. **Diversification of Partnerships:** For Central Asian states, working more closely with Germany offers an opportunity to diversify their international partners, reducing over-reliance on Russia and China.

Cons:

1. **Geopolitical Constraints:** Tokayev's cautious stance on Ukraine and the broader region's reliance on Russia for economic and logistical reasons limit the depth of German engagement. Germany's hope of using Central Asia as a counterweight to Russian influence faces strong headwinds.
2. **Lack of Specificity:** Despite the positive rhetoric, several of the agreements, particularly around migration and labour, lacked clear targets or timelines, casting doubt on the immediacy of their impact.

The growing economic cooperation between Germany and Kazakhstan, particularly in energy and green technologies, underscores a mutually beneficial relationship. However, Kazakhstan's continued reliance on oil exports to Germany and its cautious geopolitical stance - especially regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine - limit the depth of political alignment. Tokayev's refusal to criticize Russia reflects Kazakhstan's need to maintain good relations with Moscow, which tempers Germany's ability to strengthen its influence in Central Asia.

While Germany seeks to reduce its dependence on Russian resources and expand partnerships in Central Asia, Kazakhstan's balancing act between Russia, China, and the West constrains the potential for a deeper, more transformative partnership. Economic ties are growing, but Kazakhstan's geopolitical positioning continues to complicate more robust political cooperation. This dynamic limits the strategic depth of the relationship despite economic gains.