

**Tolezhan Barlybayev,**  
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary  
of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Ukraine

## **KAZAKHSTAN-UKRAINE: strategic partnership rooted in trust and history**

*— Your Excellency, what does returning to Ukraine mean to you, now that you are an Ambassador?*

— Back in 1994, still at the dawn of both of our countries' independence, I served as a member of the first mission that opened the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Ukraine. Having worked there for three years, I returned to my homeland, Kazakhstan, where I actively participated in the process of moving the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the new capital, Astana. Then, in 1998, I came to Ukraine for my second time, and by that point, I was already well acquainted with your country and even had a decent grasp of the Ukrainian language.

While working in Kyiv, I went through nearly all the stages of my diplomatic career: from third secretary to counsellor. I was fortunate to participate in the organisation of the first official meetings and visits, negotiations between Kazakhstan's leadership and the MFA that involved outstanding Ukrainian diplomats: independent Ukraine's first foreign ministers, Anatolii Zlenko and Hennadii Udovenko. Minister Borys Tarasyuk was the most frequent guest at our Embassy. It was an interesting and eventful time.

My third arrival in Ukraine coincided with an extremely difficult and important historical period. Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to wish the Ukrainian people the chance to thrive as quickly as possible and enjoy continued growth under a peaceful sky. I view my return to Ukraine as an Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary as a great honour, responsibility, and high mission whose goal is the comprehensive development and enhancement of Kazakhstan-Ukraine relations to benefit both countries' peoples.



Вручення Вірчих грамот Президенту України Володимирі Зеленському  
Handover of Credentials to President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy

**— *How would you assess the bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Ukraine?***

— Kazakhstan and Ukraine share old historical ties. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the first Ukrainian settlements began emerging in Kazakh lands. At a difficult time of oppression and large-scale forced resettlement, many Ukrainians brought by fate to the Kazakh steppe received help and support from ordinary Kazakhs.

Our people are united by the great spiritual legacy of Taras Shevchenko, who spent almost ten years of his life in Kazakhstan. Three hundred fifty of his paintings, which he created during the exile, depicted the Kazakh culture and daily life from a new angle, and the willow tree the poet planted on the Mangyshlak Peninsula became one of the significant symbols of Kazakhstan's poets and writers.

Taras Shevchenko's creative work was highly appreciated by Jambyl Jabaev, a Kazakh poet and philosopher. He wrote a poem entitled 'The Song of Taras' to commemorate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great Kobzar's birth. We cherish the memory of Taras Shevchenko in Kazakhstan. Many cities have streets named after him, and Aktau has one of the world's biggest monuments to him.

Ukrainians and Kazakhs fought shoulder-to-shoulder to liberate Europe from fascism during World War II. One of our legendary guerrillas, Kazakh hero Qasim Qaysenov, heroically fought in the Ukrainian territory. I fondly remember how I got a chance to accompany him to the sites of battle glory in 1996.

In the post-WWII years, Ukrainian specialists made a great contribution to Kazakhstan's industrialisation and construction of metallurgical plants and energy and infrastructure facilities. At the same time, Kazakh specialists studied in Ukraine. Our first President Nursultan Nazarbayev studied in Dniprodzerzhynsk [modern name: Kamianske], while Ukraine's President Leonid Kuchma worked at the Baikonur Cosmodrome. There are many examples like these. Over the years of my work, I've met a great deal of Ukrainians living or working in Kazakhstan.

Today, there are approximately 400,000 ethnic Ukrainians in Kazakhstan. They play an important role in developing our society, economy, culture, science, and education. We are proud of our Ukrainians and do our best to help them preserve their cultural traditions and the Ukrainian language.

The development and enhancement of the traditionally friendly relations with Ukraine is very meaningful for Kazakhstan. Very recently, on 23 July 2025, we marked the 33<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of our diplomatic relations.

Now, under President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's leadership, Kazakhstan maintains a steady course towards political modernisation and profound economic and social reforms, implementing an active, balanced, and reasonable policy.

Considering our solid historical foundation and close spiritual ties, we intend to work together on the new opportunities to expand economic, trade, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation with Ukraine. I'm confident that the relations between Kazakhstan and Ukraine will continue to grow for the benefit of both countries.

— *What is the current state and prospects for the trade and economic cooperation between our countries?*

— For well-established reasons, trade and economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and Ukraine has shrunk in recent years. Last year, the total volume of mutual trade turnover was only \$411.8 million. The reduction in turnover resulted from the disruption of supply lines, the dwindling volume of exported and imported products, and a change in the mutual trade system.

Despite the current difficult situation and logistical issues, we maintain business contacts. Almost 900 enterprises in Kazakhstan operate with Ukrainian involvement. In May 2025, Ukrainian agrarians from the Cherkasy region made a successful visit to Kazakhstan, reaching important agreements to increase milk and meat production. I would like to highlight that Ukrainian specialists have proven themselves reputable in agro-industrial complex management, animal breeding, grain crop farming, etc.

We are looking forward to the beginning of the Interstate Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation's work. We also see potential for Kazakh companies' involvement in housing, school, and hospital construction projects.

— *Please tell us about Kazakhstan's humanitarian initiatives in Ukraine.*

— First of all, I would like to highlight our interstate projects to aid Ukrainian children. In June 2025, a group of 45 Ukrainian children went on a recovery holiday to the Baldauren Republican Summer Camp at the Kazakh resort Burabay. I thank the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Social Policy, our Ukrainian colleagues in Astana, and the deputy of the Verkhovna Rada Serhii Nahorniak for supporting the implementation of this important project.

Thanks to the initiative of the ANA UYI fund and the support of the Kazakh community, a Mother's House facility operates in Kyiv. It provides temporary housing and legal and psychological support to women with children in crisis.

Humanitarian projects implemented with the support of Kazakh businesses are especially important. Specifically, the BI Group company has rebuilt and outfitted the trauma department of an emergency hospital in Mykolaiv, providing personnel with medical tools and equipment. In March 2025, the BI Group transferred ambulance cars to the Ministry of Health.

The Kazakh yurts set up in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv, Dnipro, and other Ukrainian cities symbolise our friendship and mutual support. The Kazakh community, represented by people like Marat Darmanov, Saule Aliyeva, and many others, actively participates in humanitarian initiatives, offering aid to Ukrainians who require food, medicine, and first aid tools.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the readers on the upcoming Independence Day in Ukraine and sincerely wish them peace and welfare!

*Interview dated 28 July 2025*