

## FROM A COMPETITIVE EDUCATION TO THE PROSPERITY OF THE NATION

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Dear colleagues and guests, first of all, let me express my gratitude to the organizing committee for allowing me to present my ideas to you!

In his national address “Nurly Zhol”, President Nursultan Nazarbayev reiterated the need to achieve the quality of education that can affect the whole future destiny of the country. Undoubtedly, over the years of independence, higher school has adapted to the demands of the century. A striking example of this is Nazarbayev University, National Universities and competitive private universities that represent progressive tendencies. These achievements is a considerable merit of my colleagues, talented rector, worthy of respect of the whole society. The status of rector could actually be equaled to that of member of parliament and requires an adequate attitude. In the hands of the rector is the future of the country.

It is symbolic that Minister Aslan Sarinzhapov, now as the head of the new format, who obtained a brilliant education, has a good command of foreign languages, organically fit into the new system. So the further development is the task of education leaders and administrators. It is our personal and civil responsibility. Surely, we have many achievements. But there are still many problems. Having thirty years of experience of working as a rector, I consider to have a right to make some observations.

*First, training without the regard for the demands of the labor market leaves about 25% of each year graduates unemployed.* I propose to return to the already proven experience: establishment of large regional innovative state universities in each region by merging universities, which will eliminate duplication of majors.

*Second, the imbalance between budget-based and tuition-based places at leading universities dramatically reduces the quality.* No wonder employers are discouraged by the skill level of graduates. We cannot allow the rapid growth of fee-paid education to further increase the “educated” unemployment.

Another way to quality is the selectiveness of higher education. The analysis shows that only 30% of high school graduates are actually prepared for college and university programmes. The rest should be directed to vocational education colleges. In this regard, the responsibility of the secondary school is growing immeasurably. Today it needs a new rational model of timely and competent diagnostics of the student’s academic achievements.

In this context it would be logical to introduce annual testing of high school students in all school subjects. Upon graduation the final average grade, combined with the results of national testing will provide the maximum objective assessment of each student’s knowledge. There will be no “cramming” in a few selective subjects. Universities will receive a career-focused entrant. Following the national testing it may also be necessary to conduct profile interviews at the university by the leading faculty staff.

*Third, universities traditionally focus more on providing theoretical knowledge at the expense of the practical element of education.* A solution to this is reduction in the share of general education subjects. The students also do not obtain sufficient skills for the chosen profession. The university and the employers are still worlds apart. The share of the involvement of the employers does not exceed 1%, while in developed countries this number is about 30%. Hence, coordination is needed at national level.

*Fourth, the quality of state standards.* We should significantly reduce the share of general subjects, placing them in the programme of secondary schools and colleges. Then, more time will be left for special subjects, achieving professionalism in the walls of the university.

*Fifth, urgent, universities are not providing measures to encourage and motivate the teachers (high teaching load, low wages, excessive and time-consuming paperwork, no time for professional development).* I will say more: we do not support even the famous Kazakh scientists who have received, in due time, their education in prestigious universities in Moscow, Leningrad, and younger generation - in the best foreign universities. But we manage to forbid them to work at several universities at the same time. We do not invite them to guest-lecture for decent honorariums at leading universities. But internationally it is a sign of special respect for eminent specialists. I hope the problem will be solved at the level of the Ministry.

*Sixth, an innovative economy needs highly qualified personnel.* However, the number of state grants for the preparation of PhDs is too low and unevenly distributed (there are more grants for universities in the capital and large cities). I propose to annually allocate grants among competitive universities, including providing private universities that already have had successful defense of doctoral dissertations with admission quota for a fee-based Ph.D programmes. It can be established by the Ministry on the basis of petitions from regional Akimat in accordance with the requests of the enterprises in the region. Those enterprises take responsibility for paying tuition for the students.

Another important point, the twenty-first century with its advanced technologies, mainly in English, amplified the importance of multilingualism. The Kazakh-American Free University (KAFU), the university of international partnership with the US, was one of the first, along with KIMEP, to predict this need well ahead of time. We started with undergraduate programmes while KIMEP with masters programmes. In the twenty years of its history, KAFU has trained more than four thousand of competitive specialists with knowledge of the English language. Our graduates are in demand virtually around the entire civilized world. According to the Ministry in 2014 KAFU took the 4th place out of 130 universities in the country in the rate of employment of graduates. Having an experience in multilingual education, we propose to host a special round-table discussion at KAFU with participation of the Minister, the rectors of leading universities and foreign partners.

Dear colleagues!

Do not misunderstand me: all these considerations are dictated by my responsibility of the rector and a citizen of the society. A more detailed discussion of these issues is presented in my recent monograph "Rector - the Conscience of the University", published in 3 languages in Kazakhstan and America. The book presentation was held on the initiative of the National Library in cooperation with the Almaty Bureau of the Press Service of the President and the Academy of Journalism of Kazakhstan, and in March of this year it was also presented in Portland, Oregon, in the US.

Finally, I am sure that by not just following the foreign models but also by maintaining national priorities, we can create a Kazakhstan university model. A good example of such process is Singapore and Malaysia. You would agree with me that if we do not evaluate our problems from hard critical positions now, it might be too late tomorrow.