

**LEADING EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN CENTRAL ASIA:
THE CASE OF KAZAKHSTAN**

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Dear colleague, Ladies and gentlemen. It has been a year since our first meeting in the format of Eurasian Higher Education Leaders Forum. It is good to see you again - top managers in education from many Eurasian countries - here at the Second Forum in our beautiful capital city Astana. I think you will agree that these meetings at Nazarbayev University have become a unique conversational platform, and it has great prospects.

After all, today the role of leadership attracts particular attention in global and local initiatives of human development. Let us recall that at the beginning of the 16th century, a Florentine thinker, Niccolo Machiavelli, assigned the phenomenon of leadership as one of the main functions in management of the society. The phenomenon of leadership has become a powerful driving force for statehood, social development, and systematic breakthroughs in policy, economy, science, thinking and the motivation of people.

Each of us can cite many examples of leaders who determined and influenced various spheres of human life. A very clear evidence of this was provided by the First International Nazarbayev Readings Conference held in Astana in November last year. They were devoted to a comprehensive study of the phenomenon of Nursultan Nazarbayev's leadership - the First President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and this event will take place on a regular basis.

The scope of higher education makes no exception in determining the importance of the role of leadership and this role has not been entirely explored yet. I think that our Forum will ensure significant advancement in this topical issue, for instance, in my opinion, in two key aspects. First, it is the leadership of universities themselves in the global context. We are witnessing times when leading universities are beginning to define the scope and directions of development not only in education, science and innovation, but they also exert a growing influence on the formation of the world's elite.

By means of this, down the chain of leadership, universities are having an impact on economic, scientific, technological and social development. There is a large field for today's debates, for example, on the question - is the Eurasian region ready for global and strong competition for leadership in the world of higher education? What are the predictable consequences of such competition, and how could it change the appearance and the role of higher education in the future?

Second, it is the topic of the leadership of top managers in higher education. As analysis of recent times shows, their role in making progress can be comparable to, and sometimes even higher than, corporate governance mechanisms. To what extent is higher education of the Eurasian region capable of producing the world's best exemplars of leadership in managing universities? Are university leaders ready to address issues of public concern? And these are, primarily, quality, relevance, massification of higher education, interaction between universities, the labor market, industry and society.

I hope that these issues will be reflected in discussions at the Forum. It is particularly relevant today, when Kazakhstani higher education faces new ambitious goals defined by President Nursultan Nazarbayev in the Strategy "*Kazakhstan - 2050*" as our nation enters

the next stage of growth, oriented to membership in the group of thirty most developed countries of the world.

The concept of transition to a "green" economy is adopted. Funds in the amount of two percent of national GDP will be invested in "green modernization". Implementation of this concept should be accelerated by the World Exposition EXPO-2017, which will take place in Astana under the theme "Future Energy".

In full swing, too, is the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union, which will bring together regional markets of goods, services and the labor force of Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus. This is not even a full list of significant challenges that confront us for the successful completion of the swift development of higher education and research.

I would like to summarise in a few words what has been done so far. First of all, we are integrating the academic community of the Eurasian continent with the world globally. In the near future, transfer of a part of our public universities into the trust management of consortiums of foreign and domestic investors will be initiated by the President of our country. This will represent another form of cooperation. This is what we are now doing.

We plan to create scientific and educational world-class clusters in the fields of agriculture, energy and chemistry. Nazarbayev University will serve as a model, with its pattern of international engagement in science, education and innovations. Other means of international integration will be the development of new study programmes for higher education institutions (HEIs)

First and foremost amongst these will be 70 programmes in all educational specialties for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degree programmes. Experts in the Graduate School of Education of Nazarbayev University and the universities of Great Britain, Australia, Germany, Finland, Belgium, Japan, South Korea, China, Singapore, etc. are involved in the elaboration hereof. Starting from the next academic year, we will start testing the programmes. Systemic importance for international integration is acquired by the introduction of multilingualism at all levels of education from kindergarten to higher school and post-graduate education, as initiated by the Head of our state.

In the same vein is the formation of a system of independent accreditation of HEIs involving Kazakhstani as well as foreign agencies, and its introduction into the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education. This will represent a gradual departure from total government supervision in the field. Already by 2015, state certification of universities will be cancelled.

Dear colleagues, this year marks 20 years of the unique strategic initiative of Nursultan Nazarbayev, that is, the "Botashak" International Scholarship Programme. During this time, thousands of programme scholarship holders have completed their education and are working in various sectors of the nation's economy. The success of the "Botashak" Programme has served as a good example of the systematic development of the academic mobility of our students.

In addition, we have an on-going relationship with internationally-recognised scholars. In 2011-2012, we invited more than 3,000 professors - from Europe, the U.S., the Russian Federation, Southeast Asia and other parts of the world.

Kazakhstan is among the countries that have adopted a National Framework of Qualifications. Our National Framework is compatible with the European Framework of Qualifications and is a basis for development of National System of Qualifications. In these terms Sectoral Frameworks of Qualifications were developed in a number of key areas of human activity. Systemic development of professional standards was initiated with view to emulating global experience. These standards will form the main basis for the elaboration of new academic programmes and the certification of specialists graduating from our universities. The certification will be carried out by independent centers established on the basis of sectoral employers' associations. This is a completely new mechanism of interaction of Kazakhstan's higher education with the national economy.

Dear colleagues, during the year since the First Eurasian Higher Education Leaders Forum, our higher education system has moved forward considerably. Our HEIs have entered the top 400+ universities according to OS World University Rankings 2012-2013. State policy is firmly focused on strengthening the research output of the university sector. Just in 2012, the number of papers published by our researchers in international peer-reviewed journals has more than doubled.

In our universities, a new model for integrating science and innovation, the commercialization of research, and attracting talented young people has been developed. We pay special attention to training scientists. As you know, we have completely switched to the accepted international practice by adopting a three-tiered degree system.

Young people are embarking on their careers of scientists and the number of our researchers has started growing.

Today, we are improving mechanisms of training scientists in accordance with the policy of industrialization of the country. By 2020, we envision to increase our intake for PhD programmes by a fourfold increase. Thus, our higher education sector is on the move, and we are drawing consistently on the most advanced world experiences for its development.

Dear friends, the Eurasian region - and the world as a whole - have entered a period of considerable change. In these circumstances, it is highly important to maintain the pace of progressive development and to stick to ambitious goals. The Eurasian Higher Education Leaders' Forum plays an important role in determining guidelines for higher education development in our countries.

I wish you very fruitful work and innovative achievement in the development of education and science.