

Nicholas Brousseau, Ambassador of Canada to Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, spoke in an interview with CABAR.asia about cooperation priorities with the countries in the region, features shared by Central Asian nations and Canada, and why inclusion and diversity are critical to addressing the challenges of the modern world.

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CABAR.asia: Dear Mr. Ambassador, you are the representative of Canada in three states of our region. Please share your impressions about Central Asia, about these countries. What are their similarities and differences from Canada?



Ambassador Nicholas Brousseau

It is my third year as Canadian Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic, yet I am still fascinated by the beauty of these three countries and their people. Each of these states has its unique political and economic systems, but what all of them have in common is the openness and generosity of their people, legendary hospitality, strong family ties, and vigorous entrepreneurial spirit.

Despite being located on a different part of the globe, Canada shares many similarities with the region. Canada and Kazakhstan, for example, have similar climates, large territories, and abundant natural resources. Kazakhstan has the Great Steppe, Canada the Great Plains. Kyrgyzstan and Canada, aside from picturesque landscapes and beautiful mountain vistas, share many values, such as freedom of expression and democracy. Like the province that I am from, Quebec, Tajikistan has abundant hydro resources for green power. Our countries also share a mutual love for excellent food. I believe that there is a Central Asian food revolution waiting to take place in Canada.

**What are the priority areas for Canada’s cooperation with Central Asian countries?
Is there a certain strategy, policy towards the countries of Central Asia?**

In Central Asian states, just as at home, we focus on six large thematic priorities:

- Peace, security, and human rights;
- Leadership and democratic participation;
- Economic participation and prosperity;
- Poverty eradication, health and well-being;
- Gender-based violence and access to justice;
- Education and skills development.

Under these high-level umbrellas, areas where we see great potential for cooperation in the region include addressing climate change and transboundary water management, strengthening democratic institutions, and advancing nuclear non-proliferation and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) security with Kazakhstan.

Canada implements a Feminist Foreign Policy to advance our overarching international objectives of strengthening a rules-based international order, supporting lasting peace and security, fostering prosperity and upholding progressive values.

This approach places gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as central objectives of Canadian foreign policy. It places a focus on dismantling persistent inequalities between women, men, girls, and boys, and accounts for how other forms of discrimination may also overlap or intersect. It recognizes these efforts will involve social norms, power relations, and discriminatory social, political, legal and economic systems and structures. It reflects a conviction that all people should enjoy the same human rights and the same opportunities to succeed.

How do you assess the prospects for further bilateral cooperation between Canada and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan? Please tell us about current projects in these countries.

Canada is a committed multilateralist. We strongly believe one country acting alone, no matter how big or how strong, cannot address the complex problems that the world faces. We cooperate across many areas with Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan. We are continuously working with multiple partners in all three countries to deepen and enrich our political and commercial relations.

What excites me when considering the prospects for further bilateral cooperation between Canada and Central Asian countries is that our engagement is increasing at the highest levels of government, for example, Prime Minister Trudeau met with President Tokayev at

the Munich Security Conference in February this year. In 2018, Canada's Head of State, Governor General Julie Payette, visited Kazakhstan and met with both First President Nursultan Nazarbayev and, President Tokayev, who was Senate Speaker at the time. Minister Champagne has been in contact with all his counterparts in the region and looks forward to meeting them once the pandemic is under control.

We share a wide range of multilateral priorities with Kazakhstan, including nuclear non-proliferation, a rules-based order, and chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) security. Canada and Kazakhstan have a history of cooperation on these priority issues, including cooperation on the provision of a radionuclide monitoring station in Semey, which will contribute significantly to the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization's global monitoring network.

As for the Kyrgyz Republic, we are strong supporters of reforms, including their advances on parliamentary democracy, which strengthens democracy in the whole region. Canada has contributed to multilateral and regional programs in the Kyrgyz Republic, such as our contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria there, and a major health and education program that was run by the Aga Khan Foundation and aimed at improving basic health outcomes in the country. Canada contributed to the UNESCO education monitoring program in the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as to the University of Central Asia, based in the republic and which has campuses there and in other Central Asian states.

With Tajikistan, we actively support local organizations that work to improve the lives of the most vulnerable communities through the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI). In fact, in all three states of accreditation, Canada provides small but catalytic support designed and implemented by local non-governmental organizations. These organizations understand local needs and priorities and usually best placed to respond to them. This increases the overall impact of projects and strengthens engagement in issues that are important to the prosperity and well-being of local communities.

Is Canadian business and investment present in the three countries of the region? If so, in which industries? What is the volume of trade between our countries?

The Canadian economy has similarities with the key economic drivers in Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan. We are endowed with great natural resources: hydropower, agricultural wealth, minerals, and oil and gas. Because of this complementarity, there are many areas where our businesses already work together and will continue to do so. In fact, we see new areas of opportunity within and beyond these traditional sectors like clean

technology and information and communication technologies for agriculture, for extractives and for cybersecurity.

We have a healthy commercial relationship with Kazakhstan. The pandemic will, of course, impact trade but in 2019, our bilateral merchandise trade with Kazakhstan was \$614 million, an strong increase of 17% over our 2018 results. Canadian foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan stood at \$2.7 billion in 2018, almost double the \$1.4 billion in 2017. Our commercial relationships with both the Kyrgyz Republic and with Tajikistan are much smaller, but here we see potential for development of green energy and water management cooperation.

What issues are most critical for further strengthening Canada’s business cooperation with Central Asian countries (or separately in each country)?

Canadian businesses thrive with transparency, predictability and fair competition. A stable business environment with clear and consistent legal standards, protection for property rights, including intellectual property, and a level competitive playing field is what Canadian businesses seek.

In Kazakhstan, I have the honour of participating in the monthly American Chamber of Commerce coordinated Prime Minister’s Council to Improve the Investment Climate where these issues are discussed on a regular basis. Important measures like the launch of the Astana International Finance Centre, clarity on labour mobility, measures to enhance cybersecurity, stability and predictability of the tax system, the independent judiciary, and respect for the rule of law, all help to attract Canadian commerce and investment.

We are focused on expanding and diversifying Canada’s trade and investment and building bridges to dynamic markets including here in Central Asia. More trade and investment means more economic growth and good-paying jobs.

Canada is known for its multiculturalism policy. Where did this journey begin? What can Central Asia learn from Canada?

Each country has its own story of diversity and walks a unique path towards greater inclusion. Out of a complex past, Canada continually strives to more fully include everyone in our democracy, so that each is able to actively contribute to a shared economic prosperity, social harmony and cultural vitality.

For 150 years, Canada has been an independent, stable, uninterrupted democracy. The

pluralistic Canada that the world knows today only emerged in the last 50 years, however. Many of the inclusive policies for which Canada is known, such as bilingualism and multiculturalism, were recently and deliberately adopted to make Canada a more inclusive society.

While Canada has a long history of diversity, it includes dark chapters of attempted assimilation and exclusion. The resilience of Indigenous peoples, Francophone Canadians and ethno-cultural minorities in the face of these challenges has shaped our more inclusive recent policies over the past fifty years.

We have come to learn that diversity is a source of creativity, resilience and strength. Canada's diversity makes us richer in every sense.

Inclusion is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do, but it is not always the easy thing to do. Only when governments and citizens choose inclusion can its economic, social, cultural and democratic benefits be fully realized.

Exclusion diminishes us all. Those who are excluded bear a heavy burden and cannot achieve their potential. But when they fully and meaningfully participate in economic, social, cultural, civil and political life, society as a whole enjoys the benefits. Their unique engagement drives innovation, helping to build prosperous, resilient, healthy, safe communities.

Building greater inclusion is challenging. It requires fresh solutions. No one has all the answers. There is no perfect model to copy. Canada is keen to learn from others and willing to collaborate with those in all regions who are working to promote inclusion and respect for diversity.

How is Canada handling the COVID-19 pandemic? How has the Canadian embassy's activity changed because of the pandemic? Were the difficulties and needs of Canadians in Central Asia?

The last several years have seen multiple crises engulf global affairs, and we are in the midst of the most daunting one yet: the COVID-19 pandemic. The embassy remains open but, of course, we have adapted to reflect the reality of COVID-19; we work remotely and have moved most of our activities online.

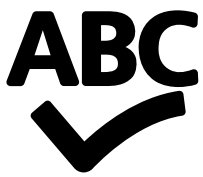
Canadians in Central Asia and around the world had immediate health and safety concerns. Canadian embassies worked, along with our colleagues in our host countries and the larger

diplomatic community, long hours to mitigate risk and help stranded Canadians return home were possible. These important efforts continue. I must sincerely thank the governments of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan for their help in repatriating Canadians.

At home, the Government of Canada is committing more than CAD \$25 billion to protecting the health and safety of Canadians and the global community. Internationally, we work closely with our partners, including the World Health Organization. As of July 17, we have set aside CAD \$443 million for support for international partners. This includes support for the World Health Organization to help vulnerable countries prepare and respond to coronavirus events. For example, we are proud that Canada has committed CAD \$250,000 to each, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan, to support their responses to COVID-19.

Canada has committed over CAD \$1 billion to COVID-19 medical research and vaccine development. We have joined other G7 countries in sharing information and providing scientific expertise and leadership to accelerate research efforts.

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