

# Mass Media Perception of the European Union in Kazakhstan

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**Abstract.** *This paper<sup>2</sup> explores the mass media perception of the European Union (EU) in Kazakhstan through the content analysis of major mass media outlets. This paper examines news reports and periodical articles from four major national Kazakh newspapers: “Yegemen Kazakhstan”, “Kazakhstanskaya Pravda”, “Zhas Alash” and “Vremya” at three measurement points. The first measurement point covers early 1990s when Kazakhstan became an independent state and started to build its foreign relations. The second measurement point covers years before and after introduction of the EU Strategy for Central Asia, namely years between 2006 and 2008. The third measurement point covers last three years (2011-2013) associated with implementation with the EU Strategy and assessing its results. The research suggests that the mass media generally positively perceives the EU, as most publications emphasize the positive role played by the EU in the region and Kazakhstan. Additionally, the initiation of the EU strategy for Central Asia led to wider coverage and therefore wider public recognition of the EU in Kazakhstan. However, discourse analysis of publications authored by the EU and Kazakhstani elites indicates substantial variation in depiction of the European Union and its engagement in Central Asia and Kazakhstan in particular.*

**Keywords:** *European Union, Kazakhstan, public opinion, mass media outlets, perception*

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## 1. Introduction

The topic of external perception of the EU has recently become a focus of scholarly enquiry. This includes questions such as how the EU partners assess its role and place in the global politics? To what extent does the external perception of the Union differ from self-representation of Brussels? Holland and Chaban (2005) conducted the pioneering research on the image of EU outside Europe, particularly focusing on Asia Pacific. This followed by various research projects focusing on EU perception in China (Jing, 2006; Peruzzi and

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Polletti et al., 2007; Kenneth, 2010; Zhimin, 2012), Russia (Kaveshnikov, 2007; Utkin and Baranovsky, 2012), India (Jain and Pandey, 2010; Jain, 2012), Turkey (Eralp and Torun, 2012), Brazil (Gomes Sariava, 2012), Japan (Oshiba, 2012) and South Korea (Park and Yoon, 2010).

Recently Holland and Chaban edited the collective works on EU perception in Asia Pacific (Holland and Chaban, 2008; Holland, 2009) and Lucarelli and Fioramonti edited a collaborative edition on external perception of the European Union by various international actors (Lucarelli and Fioramonti, 2010). Stumbaum recently presented a working paper on EU perception in Asia (Stumbaum, 2012), published based on a research project on Asian Perceptions of the EU, and Chaban and Elgström (2014) published an article on EU's perception in media of emerging powers. However, the issue of EU perception in Central Asia has attracted limited interest of researchers. Peyrouse recently edited EUCAM working paper on Central Asian views on the European Union (Peyrouse, 2014), in which he attempted to outline general EU perceptions of Central Asian elites.

The research on EU-Central Asia relations is focused on several main topics: first, a number of scholars have examined the rivalry of great powers in Central Asia and EU's role in that game (Williams, 2007; Meister, 2009; Cameron, 2009; Kavalski, 2010; Kavalski, 2012). Secondly, other scholars concentrate on the issues of implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia (Kassenova, 2008; Melvin, 2008; Shao, 2008; Emerson and Boonstra, 2010; Pirro, 2013). Other researchers focus on EU promotion of democracy, human rights and rule of law in the region (Crawford, 2008; Hoffmann, 2010; Axyonova, 2011; Dave, 2008). Moreover, some research is aimed at explaining EU's role in Central Asia and the challenges for European policy in the region (Melvin, 2007; De Pedro, 2009; Demirtag, 2009).

One general conclusion of most of this research is that EU lacks power in the Central Asian region and its policy remains inefficient. Most researchers claim that despite substantial financial support the EU failed to secure the energy transportation routes bypassing Russia (Melvin, 2007; De Pedro, 2009). Others say the EU also failed to promote its core values such as democracy, human rights protection and rule of law in Central Asia (Crawford, 2008; Hoffmann, 2010; Axyonova, 2011; Dave, 2008). Thus, the issue of EU perception keeps to be neglected. Thus far only Bossuyt touched upon this issue in her dissertation by arguing, "the EU is perceived as a more neutral and benevolent player" (Bossuyt, 2010, p. 205). This study of the EU image in Central Asia is a part of Bossuyt's attempt to challenge the existing academic consensus on EU shortcomings in the region and is heavily based on her interviews with government officials from Central Asia (Bossuyt, 2010, p. 20). Among local Kazakh scholars, Chernykh (2011) attempts to evaluate the public perception of the players active in Central Asia. This research is based on a public survey held in 2010. It illustrates Kazakh public opinion on Kazakhstan's foreign partners.

The literature review of the EU-Central Asia interactions and perception of EU in the region indicates that most research has concentrated on the European Union policy in the region and discussions of its effectiveness. The issue of public perception of the EU remains neglected in the academic community. Research on this issue is fragmented and represents the marginalised parts of other research topics. Moreover, existing works rely on either public surveys (Chernykh, 2011), interviews with political elites (Bossuyt, 2010) or interviews with experts (Peyrouse, 2014) at particular point of time.

This paper aims to complement existing knowledge on the EU image and perception in Central Asia via adding supplementary dimension. The paper attempts to explore mass media perception of the European Union in Kazakhstan, and seeks to explain perceptions of the Union as put forward by political elites of the EU and Kazakhstan through mass media. The paper utilizes the content analysis of the four national newspapers with different editorial policies at various measurement points in order to evaluate the peculiarities of published opinion on the EU in Kazakhstan and its variation over time. It then employs discourse analysis to the selected publications from the dataset to reveal variation in description of the EU by elites. Authors seek to define characteristics attached to the European Union in Kazakh mass media and attempt to explain the variation in media coverage and EU description.

## 2. Methodology

The paper applies multi-stage analysis of mass media publications in Kazakhstan. On the first stage this paper utilizes a content analysis method of four national newspapers of Kazakhstan, published in Kazakh and Russian languages. Secondly, the paper focuses on periodical articles and combined data on topics covered and the connotation of the publications to demonstrate the changes within particular themes related to the coverage of the European Union. This paper then proceeds to discourse analysis of the texts authored by Kazakhstani and EU elites in order to examine specific features attached to the EU and its cooperation with Kazakhstan.

Authors of the paper manually compiled dataset of the publications, which include periodical articles and short news derived from four national newspapers. Two of these newspapers – “Yegemen Kazakhstan” and “Kazakhstanskaya Pravda” – are daily official newspapers having circulation of 100,000 issues. The other two – “Zhas Alash” and “Vremya” – are considered as opposition newspapers. The first one is published twice a week and has a circulation of 140,000 issues a week, and the second one is published three times a week and has a weekly circulation of 130,000 copies. The “Yegemen Kazakhstan” and “Zhas Alash” are published in Kazakh, and “Kazakhstanskaya Pravda” and “Vremya” are published in Russian.

These particular newspapers were chosen for several reasons. First, they are well established and have a wide national circulation. Second, two of these newspapers represent the official pro-government position and the other two publish alternative views. Thus, analysis of the publications in these newspapers provides the opportunity to cover various opinions.

The authors recognize the limitations and shortcomings of focusing on these particular newspapers. Kazakhstan has been long criticized for undeveloped independent media, underlining the self-censorship of the press and limited ownership of media outlets (Allison, 2006; Freedom House, 2002; Freedom House, 2015). Still, “Zhas Alash” and “Vremya” might be considered as moderate opposition newspapers criticizing public policy of Kazakh authorities. For instance, “Zhas Alash” heavily criticizes Kazakhstan’s decision to join Eurasian Economic Union; this critique is absent in official pro-government newspapers. Similarly, Vremya regularly publishes articles questioning Kazakh authorities’ policy.

In order to assess the changes in EU image this paper analyses publications in newspapers mentioned above at three different measurement points – early 1990s (1992-1994), mid-2000s (2006-2008) and last three years (2011-2013). It should be noted that for “Vremya” the first measurement point is not available as it was established in 1999. However, analysing this particular paper in the other 2 measurement points contributes to better understanding of the larger picture of EU perception in Kazakhstan. The authors decided to concentrate on discrete time periods rather than on the whole spectrum to keep the research parsimonious and precise. Moreover, this piece was interested in political change and its reflection in mass media, not in the historical continuity; this affected the choice of measurement points. The first measurement point included early days of Kazakhstan’s independence, when it established foreign relations with other countries. The presence or absence of particular actors in the mass media content at that time might indicate the foreign policy preferences of newly independent state. Therefore, authors considered important to review the publications back in early 1990s. The second measurement period included years before and after the EU announced its Strategy for Central Asia. This particular step is considered as a milestone in EU-Central Asia relations (Cameron, 2009 p. 32). Authors suggested that the increased EU interest in the region should mirror in Central Asian republics’ policies, and expected to trace the changes in mass media publications at that period of time. The third measurement point covered publications in 2011-2013 as the recent ones. Authors were interested in exploring the persistence of the trends and relations uncovered in previous measurement points. Concentration on time periods allows authors to analyze trends and compare them, simultaneously isolating the upsurge of publications influenced by certain events like official visits or talks.

The paper traces the publications devoted to the EU and classifies them in different domains, depending on type, general message and topic of publication. The publications in all national newspapers are categorized in two main groups: news reports and periodical articles. These publications are divided into three categories of negative, neutral and positive, based on the nature of their message and their connotation. While there is no pure negative, neutral or positive categories, authors grouped the news reports/periodical articles into three mentioned categories based on the nature of general message. The publications emphasizing positive aspects of EU domestic affairs and its interaction with other players of international relations both on global arena and in the region were codified under positive category. Respectively, the publications, which tended to portray dark side of EU affairs in different domains, were grouped under negative category. Neutral category represents the ‘grey zone’, which covered publications with either neutral assessment of EU activities or news/articles covering both negative and positive aspects of the Union’s affairs. Therefore, the distinction among three categories is relative and serves the analytical purposes. Moreover, based on the nature of activities, the authors have also classified three separate topics of publications: EU economics, EU politics and EU-Kazakhstan/Central Asia cooperation.

The data for discourse analysis employs selected texts from the same dataset. These texts include publications by political elites of EU and Kazakhstan either in a form of periodical (extended) article or an interview. The authors do not distinguish among types of publications and treat all of them as texts, however they differentiate the texts based on authors. The publications of EU and Kazakhstan’s elites are analysed separately, by applying

the same criteria, and then results are compared to demonstrate similarities and differences in discourse. The guiding question for this part of the research was whether characteristics attached to EU vary in perception of EU elites and Kazakhstani elites, and if they do, what are these differences.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

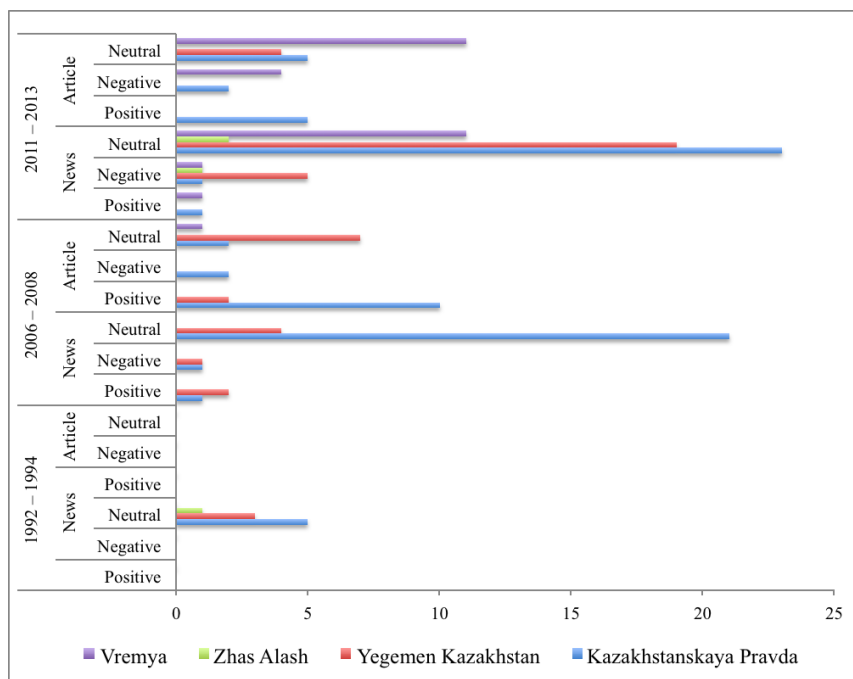
#### *3.1 Content Analysis of Four National Newspapers*

The content analysis of mass media sources of “Yegemen Kazakhstan”, “Kazakhstanskaya Pravda”, “Zhas Alash” and “Vremya” reveals the positive dynamics of EU coverage in Kazakh mass media. Initially, Kazakhstan’s newspapers were focused on Kazakhstan’s bilateral relations with the European countries, and cooperation with the EU was totally neglected. The examination of early 1990s publications demonstrates that generally media was more focused on domestic politics, and even publications on Kazakhstan’s foreign policy were rare. For instance, “Yegemen Kazakhstan” published only eleven periodical articles devoted to the bilateral relations of Kazakhstan with European countries in 1992-1994, and EU was only mentioned in short news reporting on establishment of diplomatic relations between the parties. Enlarging number of newspapers covered by content analysis of this research project documented similar results; in early 1990s EU was neglected from Kazakh public discourse. The authors could only find one periodical article devoted to the European Union (not to the European countries!), published in 1994 in a newspaper, which is not published since mid-1990s.

This disregard of the European Union might be explained by different orientation of mass media. Most of the publications somehow related to foreign affairs of Kazakhstan appeared on the pages of newspapers in the early 1990s are devoted to republic’s bilateral relations with foreign partners, interaction in the framework of CIS or ethnic Kazakhs living abroad. Moreover, the EU itself was under construction that time, and paid little interest to individual countries of the former SU, focusing on CIS and other regional projects. The analysis of publications in other two measurement points reveals that the most publications are essentially short news with neutral coverage of EU-Kazakhstan/Central Asia cooperation. Figure 1 demonstrates the breakdown of all publications according to the types and general message of the mass media sources in three measurement points.

A brief overview of the summarized results of content analysis reveals the domination of EU agenda in official newspapers. Most publications appeared in these newspapers are neutral news reporting meetings between EU and Kazakhstan officials at home or abroad. Such news covers both bilateral EU-Kazakhstan meetings as well as multilateral talks between the EU institutions and delegations of all Central Asian republics. It is remarkable to note the increased interest of opposition newspapers in EU at the third measurement point. However, while both pro-government newspapers published in Kazakh and Russian, have recorded similar interest in EU, the opposition newspapers vary in their coverage of EU-related topics. “Vremya”, published in Russian, regularly provides short news and periodical articles devoted to EU, while “Zhas Alash” published only 3 short news concerning European Union politics or bilateral Kazakhstan-EU relations in 2011-2013, two of which were devoted to the internal EU development.

**Figure 1. Publications devoted to EU in national newspapers, breakdown by type\***



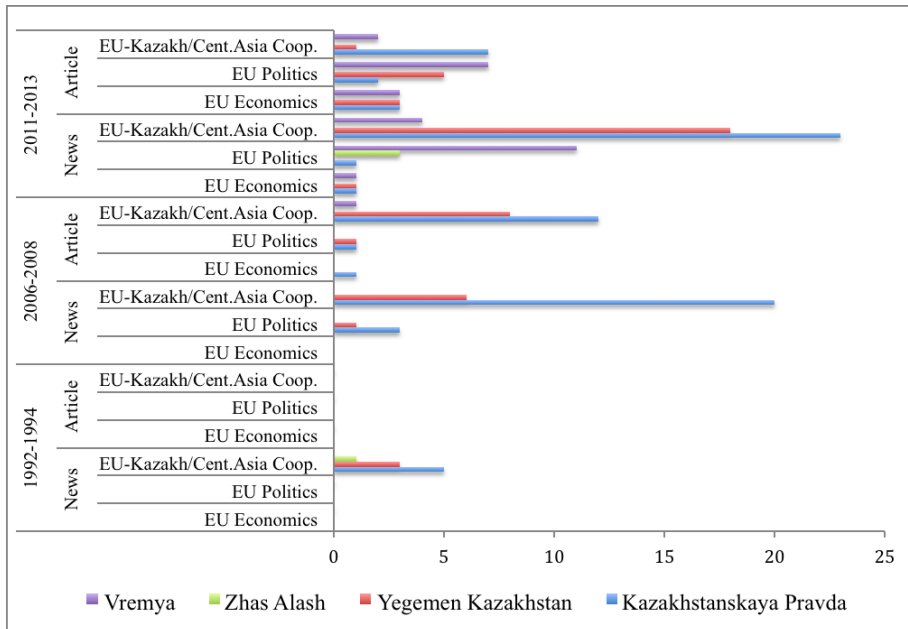
\* Figure is developed by B. Ospanova based on publications in four national newspapers

This lack of interest by opposition media might be explained by the editorial position of the alternative newspapers; these newspapers are generally concentrated on domestic politics. The content analysis of the publications devoted to foreign policy of Kazakhstan and international politics of these newspapers reveals their focus on Russia, China and the Customs Union/Eurasian Economic Union as main point of interest. This is especially true about “Zhas Alash” publications, which tend to criticize Kazakh authorities’ decision to develop integration project with Russia. They portray the Eurasian integration project as a path to losing sovereignty and independence of the republic. Similarly, China is portrayed as a possible threat to Kazakh state, while publications devoted to the USA or the EU are usually news reporting on international events or domestic politics of the players mentioned above.

Further analysis of such sources demonstrates the diversity of official and opposition newspapers’ interest in terms of topics covered. While official newspapers recorded prevailing interest in EU cooperation with Kazakhstan or with Central Asia in general, opposition newspapers tended to focus more on EU politics and economics. Figure 2 below illustrates the diversion in newspapers’ interests, when it comes to the topics of publications devoted to the European Union. The targeted readers of particular newspaper as well as editorial position might explain this outcome. Naturally, official newspapers reported regular

meetings between EU and Kazakhstan officials on bilateral or multilateral basis as reflected in the content analysis results. The pro-government media also reported the new enhanced cooperation agreement negotiations between Kazakhstan and EU as a main focus of last two years' high-level meetings. On the other hand, opposition newspapers focused more on domestic EU issues such as Eurozone crisis, elections in particular member states, or external action of EU.

**Figure 2. Publications devoted to EU, breakdown by topics\***



\* Figure is developed by B. Ospanova based on publications in four national newspapers

In order to explore the prevailing assessment of particular topics and peculiarities of their reporting by Kazakhstan’s mass media, the authors have combined data from two tables, and concentrated on general connotation of periodical articles. The decision to eliminate news from coverage of cross tabulation is driven by the fact that the news tends to be short and neutral, reporting on particular events, and does not include evaluative statements of authors. On the other hand, periodical articles cover a variety of facts and usually include authors’ interpretations of the reported information. Thus, periodical articles represent the better unit of analysis to explore mass media’s perception of the European Union.

Previously, the authors mentioned the lack of interest to the European Union in national mass media at first measurement point. This measurement point cover only five short news devoted to the cooperation between the Union and Kazakhstan or Central Asia in general.

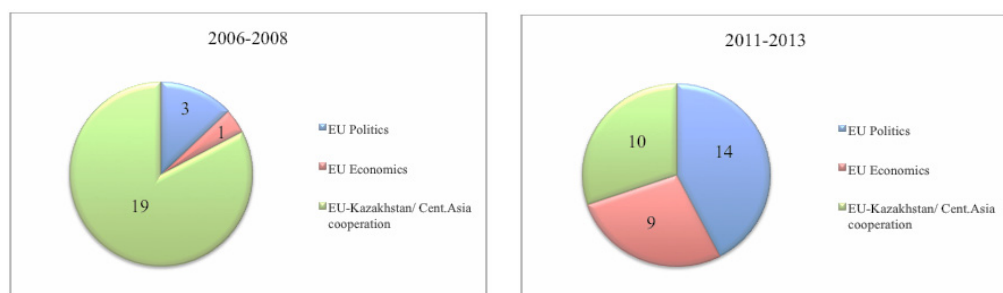
Focus on periodical articles confirms the pattern viable in general content analysis of mass media publications. Government newspapers consistently keep the coverage volume



of the EU affairs at second and third measurement points when only periodical articles are analyzed. Similarly, opposition newspapers published in Russian recorded increased interest in covering EU related issues, while Kazakh language based alternative mass media outlet neglects EU in its extended publications.

Further analysis reveals proliferation of topics' variety covered by all three newspapers, publishing articles on EU affairs. While majority of articles (82%) published in 2006-2008 focused on EU cooperation either with Kazakhstan or with Central Asian region, the share of the articles grouped under this category in 2011-2013 measurement point decreased to 30% in total number of publications. Figure 3 illustrates the substantial change in EU-related topics, covered by national newspapers at two various measurement points.

**Figure 3. Breakdown of publications by topics at 2 measurement points\***



\* Figure is developed by B. Ospanova based on publications in four national newspapers

Recently Kazakhstan's mass media has become more interested in global affairs, and thus the number of publications on EU politics (both domestic and external) as well as on EU economics increased, recording more or less similar interest of national outlets as bilateral EU-Kazakhstan interaction. This increased interest of the national mass media in global affairs, and in EU related issues in particular might be explained by intensification of Kazakhstan's interaction with the outer world. Kazakhstan hold a Chairmanship in OSCE in 2010 and in Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2011, hosted Winter Asian Games in 2011 and is expected to host EXPO 2017. These foreign policy tasks led to more diversified and intensive interaction of Astana with the global community. Obviously, national mass media reflected on this growth of country's involvement in global affairs. The second possible explanation of diversification of topics covered by the national mass media might be gradually changing role of the European Union as a source of news, especially taking into account economic recession and Eurozone crisis in Europe.

The second result derived from cross tabulation of periodical articles demonstrates the shift in general message of publication at second measurement point. Articles published in 2011-2013 recorded higher percentage of negative connotation (33%) than those published during 2006-2008. This shift is also recorded within each category of topics; while almost half (10) of all periodical articles published in 2006-2008 and covering issues of EU's cooperation with Kazakhstan or Central Asian region were positive ones, at third



measurement point only 3 articles were classified as positive. Moreover, this category also included 1 publication having negative message to the reader. It is interesting to note the growth of negative publications on EU affairs by official newspapers, though their negative messages concentrate on EU politics and economics. Generally, those publications report the problems within Eurozone and its consequences for social and economic situation in member states, with focus on Greece and Spain. Obviously, difficulties within the European Union related to Eurozone crisis contributed greatly to the proliferation of negatively connoted publications in two categories of EU politics and EU economics. However, this does not explain the decreased number of positive publications on EU bilateral interaction with the republic and region. It also should be noted, that authors of positive articles in this category are either Kazakhstan's politicians or EU diplomats. For instance, Head of the EU Delegation in Kazakhstan Ambassador, Aurélie Bouchez, is an author one of the articles devoted to the cooperation between the European Union and Kazakhstan, which is published in 2013 in "Kazakhstanskaya Pravda". The Deputy of Chairman of Mazhilis (Note 1) Sergey Dyachenko presented an article published in the same newspaper. Compared to 2006-2008, journalists tend to report on bilateral interaction neutrally in 2011-2013. This shift is puzzling; compared to second measurement period bilateral interaction of the European Union with Kazakhstan became more intense and diversified during 2011-2013. Kazakhstan has become the most important trade partner of EU in the region; it also increased its supply of energy resources to EU. On the other hand, EU has also become the first trade partner of Kazakhstan in terms of trade turnover, and EU member states' investments surpassed those of other partners of Astana. This situation is supposed to affect publications' messages the other way around. The improved and enhanced relations between EU and Kazakhstan, as well as more active engagement of the Union in the region since the introduction of its Strategy for Central Asia in 2007 supposedly led to more positive publications in this category.

### *3.2 Discourse analysis of publications*

The content analysis of national mass media publications reveals their focus on EU-Kazakhstan or EU-Central Asia cooperation. These publications tend to be neutral or positive in their connotation, and they supposedly affect the wider public perception of EU in Kazakhstan. However, results of content analysis do not reflect the image of EU being portrayed in mass media. In order to define characteristics attached to the European Union, the authors apply discourse analysis to the selected texts from the same dataset.

The first finding of analysis indicates the preference of elites to publish their texts in official pro-government newspapers issued in Russian. This holds true for both Kazakh and EU elites. While choice of official newspapers by EU elites might be explained by the diplomatic practice, the preference of Russian publishing newspaper might indicate assumed perception of Russian language as a main communication tool in the country. Although this might hold true, exclusion of Kazakh newspapers leads to reinforced pattern of EU's absence from discourse of Kazakh mass media. Table 1 summarizes the data on publications by Kazakhstanian and EU elites in the national mass media. The table cover only those newspapers, which published texts of political elites, and it contains data only for two last measurement points.

**Table 1. Publications of elites in national mass media\***

		2006-2008	2011-2013
Yegemen Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan's elites		1
	European Union elites		
Kazakhstanskaya Pravda	Kazakhstan's elites	2	3
	European Union elites	1	3
Total		3	7

\* Table is developed by B. Ospanova based on publications in four national newspapers

Further exploration of publications demonstrates the limited authorship of texts among Kazakhstan's elites. In fact, four publications out of six texts published by Kazakhstan's elites represent either interview with the Deputy of Chairman of Mazhilis and Co-Chairman of EU-Kazakhstan Parliamentary Cooperation Committee Sergey Dyachenko or his reflection on EU-Kazakhstan cooperation in a form of periodical article. The other two publications are interviews with the then Head of the Mission of Kazakhstan to the EU and NATO, Ambassador Yerik Utembayev, available in Kazakh and Russian newspaper with similar content. On the other hand, publications of EU elites are more diverse in terms of authorship. These publications include texts provided by Heads of European Union delegations to Kazakhstan Ambassador Norbert Jousten and Ambassador Aurelia Bouchez, Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and co-authored publications by Ambassador of France to Kazakhstan Jean-Charles Bertone, Ambassador of the United Kingdom to Kazakhstan David Moran and Ambassador of Spain to Kazakhstan Manuel Larrotcha Parada.

Although the number of analyzed texts is limited, exploration of their content and keywords allows the authors to demonstrate the similarities and differences in the discourse of European and Kazakhstani elites. In order to understand the discourse the authors distinguish keywords in each of the texts, and focus on texts' coverage of several issues. These issues included descriptions of bilateral EU-Kazakhstan relations, cooperation between the Union and Central Asia, and depiction of the European Union.

The discourse analysis of the given texts indicates that economic relations between the parties represented the common ground for evaluation of dynamics of bilateral cooperation between the European Union and Kazakhstan by EU and Kazakhstan's elites. Representatives of both groups emphasize close trade ties between EU and Kazakhstan, indicating the growing importance of EU as Kazakhstan's trade partner and the main provider of investments. This emphasis on EU's significance as economic partner dominates in the texts of both political elites at the second measurement point, although Kazakhstani elites mention importance of EU-Kazakhstan trade at the first measurement point too. However, further analysis of the texts demonstrates variation in assessment of priorities of bilateral interaction by EU and Kazakhstani elites. Kazakh elites focus on economic cooperation between the parties, emphasizing Kazakhstan's role as reliable energy supplier to EU, issues of negotiations on enhanced cooperation agreement and easing visa regime between Brussels and Astana. On the other hand, EU representatives concentrate on issues of human rights and rule of law, and emphasize the provision of EU aid for economic and political reforms in a country.

EU elites clearly indicate regional governance, reforms of public administration and justice, rule of law as priorities of bilateral cooperation, without disregarding Kazakhstan's role as energy supplier to the EU or issues of enhanced cooperation agreement. However, the issue of easing visa regime between EU and Kazakhstan is absent from EU's elites discourse. This might indicate that Kazakhstan's side tables visa regime issue in bilateral interaction, while EU does not consider it as a part of agenda.

The analysis of the text blocks devoted to the EU-Central Asia cooperation demonstrates very limited coverage of this issue. This cooperation is mentioned in passing and is mainly attached to the EU-Kazakhstan bilateral interaction. The probable explanation of such neglected approach lies in the targeted audience of the texts. Both Kazakhstani and EU elites target Kazakhstan's population and therefore focus on bilateral relations.

Despite limited coverage of EU-Central Asia interaction in analyzed texts, the variation in discourse is also evident. Kazakhstan's elites heavily emphasize the role of Astana in fostering and enhancing cooperation between EU and Central Asian region. Although they indicate Astana's interest in enlarged EU-Central Asia cooperation, Kazakh elites underline Kazakhstan's leading role in the region and its closer ties to the Union compared to its neighbours. On the other hand, EU elites portray cooperation with Kazakhstan in the framework of Union's Strategy and approach to the Central Asian region. The texts provided by Europeans emphasize the regional priorities and projects, and Kazakhstan is presented as a part of Central Asian policy. Development, democracy and security are mentioned as main EU concerns in the region, and specific cooperation initiatives with Kazakhstan thus linked to the EU's Strategy for Central Asia. Although Europeans recognize the closer relations with Kazakhstan compared to its neighbours, they do not treat Astana as a privileged partner in the region. It could be claimed that EU elites and Kazakhstan elites view EU-Central Asian cooperation through different lenses. Europeans link bilateral cooperation with Kazakhstan to the general approach to the region, while Kazakh elites tend to focus on relatively close relations with the EU and portray Astana as 'primus inter pares' in EU-Central Asia cooperation.

The third part of discourse analysis focused on description of the European Union by EU and Kazakhstan elites. This analysis reveals variation in depiction of the EU by two groups, and the lack of a formal description of the Union. Among all analyzed texts, only one description portrays the European Union as "complex and large single market" (Jousten, 2011), reflecting on the nature of the entity. Other depictions of the Union represent reflections on EU values and activities, and are linked to the general connotation of the text.

As previously mentioned, EU and Kazakhstan elites vary in their description of the Union. Europeans emphasize their values and experiences in portraying the EU, while Kazakh elites focus on bilateral interaction and derive their description from that context. Consequently, audience receives two different portraits of the Union. Table 2 illustrates the description of the EU provided by EU and Kazakhstani elites, and is self-explanatory in demonstrating the variation.

**Table 2. Description of EU by elites\***

Kazakhstan's elites	EU elites
EU is trade and investments partner	EU has experience in providing peace
EU is dependent on import of energy resources	EU policies are based on its values
EU has experience in developing social policy	EU is ready to share its experience in various areas
	EU is an expert, not a model

\* Table is developed by B. Ospanova based on publications in four national newspapers

Summarizing results of discourse analysis, the authors emphasize substantial variation in discourses of EU elites and Kazakhstani elites. These discourses vary in their focus on priorities of bilateral cooperation, their assessment of EU-Central Asian collaboration and Kazakhstan's role in EU's regional policy and in description of the EU itself. Growing trade and investments relations between the European Union and Kazakhstan represent the common ground of two discourses, however descriptions of reality based on that fact vary in the interpretation of two groups.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper partly addressed the gap in the literature on EU-Central Asia research. The review of research defined public perception of EU in Kazakhstan as an area which is underdeveloped in current academic literature.

This paper examined four national Kazakh newspapers, which have wide circulation. Authors have analysed the content of "Yegemen Kazakhstan", "Kazakhstanskaya Pravda", "Zhas Alash" and "Vremya" at three different measurement points and selected news reports and periodical articles dedicated to the European Union. All these sources were categorized in two main categories: news reports and periodical articles. These two categories were further divided into three types based on the nature of message and connotation: negative, neutral and positive. The third dimension of categorization used nature of activities as a base line, and it also has three categories: EU economics, EU politics and EU-Kazakhstan/Central Asia cooperation.

The analysis reveals that the official newspapers generally publish more on EU related issues compared to the opposition ones. These newspapers also tend to publish neutral or positive news reports/periodical articles about EU. Another observation is that EU has gradually become important focus of Kazakhstan's mass media, though they varied in terms of their interest and topics covered.

The growing relations between EU and Kazakhstan definitely contributed to this growing interest. Moreover, the increased role of EU played in the world also affected to the increased number of short news and periodical articles published in Kazakh mass media.

The content analysis indicates that the majority of publications in all three measurement points is neutral or positive; mass media contributes to developing of generally positive image of the European Union in Kazakhstan. EU's image is channelled through major mass media outlets forming positive perception of the Union in the republic.

However, the discourse analysis of the selected publications derived from dataset demonstrates variation in depiction of the European Union and its relations with the region. Kazakhstan and EU elites recognize the gradual increase of trade and investment ties between EU and Kazakhstan, and this recognition represents common ground of two discourses. However, the discourses of EU and Kazakh elites vary substantially in depicting the Union, assessing priorities of bilateral interaction and EU's engagement in the region.

The authors recognize that this work has limitations and the research needs further elaboration. Specifically, it would be useful to include other national newspapers and enlarge dataset, which might make the results more robust.

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## Notes

Note 1. Mazhilis – One of two Chambers of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan