

**Statement by the Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of Slovenia Kairat Sarybay at the Bled Strategic Forum during the “How will New Technologies Affect Tourism – Science Fiction or Reality? Tourism as an Instrument for Cultural Co-operation” session**

(11 September 2018, Bled, Slovenia)

**Honorable Chairman,**

**Extinguished participants of the conference, ladies and gentlemen**

The issue of tourism is becoming one of the topics of utmost importance in the contemporary world.

Apart from being a simple travel for pleasure or business, tourism is also an instrument of international cooperation. In this regard, tourism is an indicator of country's political stability. Peace and political stability are indispensable factors for successful tourism.

Tourism sector is one of the world's fastest growing industries. One out of ten jobs worldwide is directly related to the tourism sector. Over the last few decades due to unrestricted mobility worldwide international arrivals have been growing exponentially. More and more countries are utilizing and developing their tourism potential. In this regard the Silk Road is drawing more and more interest from the outside world. The area of Central Asia which was previously nearly inaccessible to the foreigners is now frequented by more and more visitors wishing to experience the legendary hospitality of the region. To this end today we experience the renaissance of the Silk Road which is reviving not only its trade routes but also its colorful history, culture and traditions. All over the region the countries of Central Asia are developing the forgotten landmarks and are discovering scythian monuments of the tribes that resided throughout Eurasia in the ancient times.

Kazakhstan is no exception to these new trends. Big changes are expected in Kazakh tourism in the coming years. For the purpose of tourism development, a national company “Kazakh Tourism” has been created which promotes and advertises unique cultural and historical places of the country. A special concept for the development of the tourist industry includes measures to help make the country recognizable throughout the world. According to statistics, 90% of all tourists coming to Kazakhstan are citizens of states that are located in relative or close proximity to the country. Nonetheless Kazakhstan is aiming to diversify and expand the scope of its visitors’ origin, welcoming guests from even the farthest parts of the world.

Kazakhstan is a huge and unexplored territory in the eyes of foreign tourists. For greater attractiveness of the country, the Committee of Tourism Industry of the Ministry of Investments and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan has developed a Sacred Map of Kazakhstan which includes more than one hundred unique cultural and historical sites.

More than 3 million people visited the Baikonur Cosmodrome last year. The Burabai resort and the Alakol Lake can receive the same amount of tourists.

Kazakhstan is removing barriers for the development of tourism. Today, citizens of more than 60 states can enter Kazakhstan without an entry visa. Kazakhstan is also trying to attract the transit flow.

The city of Turkestan which has become the new capital of South Kazakhstan Region in June 2018 is an emerging heart of Kazakhstan’s tourism. In the past Turkestan has been a capital of Kazakh Khanate for over two centuries and thus played an important role in Kazakhstan history and is a sacred town for significant part of Kazakh people. The tourist products of this ancient city will include spiritual, historical and cultural tourism.

On September 28 International Investment and Tourism Forum themed "Ancient Turkestan: New Opportunities" will be held in Turkestan region.

Investors from Turkey, China, Japan, and South Korea will participate in the forum. It will be the first international forum to be held in the Turkestan region, and it will help unlock the investment potential of the region including by implementing investment projects in the promising sectors of the region's economy and will enable further intensification and expansion of investment cooperation.

On 3 September 2018 the Turkic Council held its 6<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Heads of member-states, where the sides have discussed further the implementation of the mutual tourism project – “Turkic Council: modern Silk Road”. According to this project new tourist routes shall be created across the territory of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan and Turkey, which are designated to develop ecological and ethno-cultural tourism. This is a fine example of how tourism can contribute greatly to the regional cooperation between countries.

The full quality implementation of the aforementioned changes in the Kazakhstan tourism industry will require a sufficient amount of private capital. We welcome our European partners to make their contribution in developing tourism across the Silk Road. Slovenia as a prime tourist destination possessing experience and know-how in this field can make a particularly immaculate contribution in this context.

Kazakhstan and Slovenian tourism has a binding similarity, both our countries are well-known for their eco-tourism which is growing to be more popular in this age, outshining more conventional beach resorts by some standards. Both countries have ski-resorts and are destinations for health tourism in their respected regions. We are interested in learning the best practices of Slovenia in these areas, so that Kazakhstan can reach the same level of quality of services which can be provided to the growing numbers of visitors.

Apart from being an economic cluster tourism is also a door opener that helps to promote the exchange between people and cultures. The respect for cultures and traditions of countries visited is particularly important in this context.

Take the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions which was initiated by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev for example. The experience of interfaith and interethnic peace and harmony contributed to the successful implementation of the initiative to convene the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Kazakhstan. From 2003 to the present, five Congresses were held in the capital of Kazakhstan bringing together religious leaders of various faiths from all over the world to sit together at one table in order to conduct a peaceful and friendly dialogue.

The technological advances we have experienced over the last few decades have completely transformed tourism worldwide. The popular use of smartphones and their applications has allowed tourists to be more flexible and independent when searching and selecting travel destinations, accommodations and transportation. Due to this tourism has become a less of a luxury and more of a more common leisure for an average world citizen. One can book a tour, hotel, flight and even affordable inland transportation on his mobile phone without leaving his home if he has access to internet service. Therefor in this new age of technology it is imperative for a country to develop a rich tourist data base online that is widely available to the general public.

Needless to say along with these rapid changes in the tourism industry will pose certain challenges over time. Artificial Intelligence, machine learning and robotics will certainly impact jobs in the sector in the near future. The virtual and augmented reality might potentially replace the need to travel for a certain part of the population. Online communications carry a danger of wiping out need for business travel. Other challenges might also rise as the world tourism industry will continue to expand.

All these challenges will emerge in the next decade or two and we all have to be ready to counter them. Developing research centers, think tanks and other

institutions specializing in tourism is a sound investment as the sector clearly has a growing need for governments' support.

**Thank you for your attention!**