KAZAKHSTAN, NATION BRANDING AND NATIONAL IDENTITY: THE CASES OF NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION AND ASTANA EXPO-2017

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

Akorda	Office of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan
BIE	Bureau International des Expositions
CA	Central Asia
CANWFZ	Central Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free-Zone
CICA	Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
CTBTO	Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organisation
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
Kazakh SSR	Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic
KazISS	Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Kazakhstan
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan
NPT	Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty
NWFZ	Nuclear-Weapons-Free Zone
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Politburo	Supreme Policy-Making Body of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this research thesis, and it has not been submitted to another university for the award of any other degree.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives and their implications for the evolution of its national identity. The building of a new national identity and a favourable international image has been integral to Kazakhstan's pursuit of its security, political and economic interests since its independence in 1991. However, Kazakhstan has continued to face challenges to its identity from 'negative misrecognition' – the process where external actors reject the national identity a state seeks to build. Nation branding constitutes Kazakhstan's response to negative misrecognition by changing how it represents itself and is represented by others. Based on the literature on identity and branding, this thesis develops a conceptual framework to explain nation branding as an identity construction process divided into five steps: branding context, branding motivations, branding channels, branding narratives and branding effectiveness.

This thesis examines two cases: international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament and Expo-2017 in Astana[1]. The findings show that although Kazakhstan was able to increase its global visibility in both cases, the former was more effective than the latter in communicating Kazakhstan's branding narratives and persuading others into recognising its self-representation. The history of Soviet nuclear testing and Kazakhstan's achievements in denuclearisation gave credibility to the country's branding narratives about its transformation from a voiceless victim of the global nuclear arms race into an advocate of the global anti-nuclear movement, a model of denuclearisation and an upholder of a rule-based international order. In contrast, the Astana Expo's branding effectiveness was undermined not only by corruption scandals but also by the discrepancy between the narrative about Kazakhstan as a Eurasian nation on its path to becoming an advanced and green economy on the one hand, and the reality of the country's socioeconomic development on the other. Consequently, Kazakhstan's attempt to redefine its national identity and international image remained incomplete.

[1] Astana was renamed Nur-Sultan in 2019. To avoid confusion, I will continue using Astana throughout this thesis.

INTRODUCTION

'Kazakhstan is a Eurasian country in essence and by geography', that is how President Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev introduced the country at the 16th meeting of Valdai International Discussion Club in Russia (Valdai Discussion Club, 3 October 2019). Since independence, Kazakhstan has represented itself to both its population and the international community not as a Central Asian or Muslim country, but as a Eurasian country that has made admirable progress in domestic development and significant contributions to the international community. This has meant a sociopolitical and spiritual-cultural transition from the Soviet to a new Kazakhstani identity for the country with a multi-ethnic society and geo-strategically important location. As Tokayev's speech indicates, despite the power succession from Nursultan Nazarbayev to Kassym-Zhomart Tokayev, Kazakhstan has preserved its Eurasian national identity, which historically and culturally connects it with its geographical locality – Europe and Asia.

To lay down the ideational foundation for Kazakhstan's statehood, Nazarbayev used Eurasianism, which originated in the works of Lev Gumilyov and other Russian intellectuals, to place the founding of the Republic in the context of world history and offer a unique perspective on the Kazakhs' relations with their external environment. Kazakhstani Eurasianism is a set of beliefs and representations of Kazakhstan, built over the decades since independence by socialising itself to both Western and Asian civilisations, and at the same time incorporating some of their values and ideas. However, Kazakhstan has faced the challenges of persuading the outside world into accepting its self-representation. Indeed, the essence of the country's national identity has been questioned and criticised throughout these decades, not fully recognised by the international community, and sometimes challenged severely, which explains why Kazakhstan has needed to undertake nation branding as a form of identity creation.

By declaring itself Eurasian, Kazakhstan has tried to identify with the West in many aspects, yet at the same time has remained determined to integrate into the Western-led liberal international order on its own terms (see section 3.2.). The new national identity represents Kazakhstan's attempt to dissociate itself from its former self as ex-Soviet, Central Asian and underdeveloped. Compared to its former identity as the Soviet Republic, Eurasian Kazakhstan is a sovereign state that has embraced Western-

led liberal international order aspects. As chapters four and five demonstrate, Kazakhstan abides by various liberal international rules and norms set by international institutions. Meanwhile, it advocates global peace and environmental security through participation in or partnership with international institutions, including the European Union (EU), Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), United Nations (UN), Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

On the other hand, Kazakhstani Eurasianism reflects Kazakhstan's rejection of Western values of democracy and human rights. At the intersection of these worlds, Kazakhstan has become more Westernised but retained its core non-Western characteristics like Russia (Vernadsky, 1927: 6; Gumilyov, 2006; Dugin, 2002). Kazakhstan has pursued a form of modernisation without full Westernisation. Given its location and history, under the Nazarbayev administration, Kazakhstan has tried to retain its cultural and political attributes, which raised criticisms from Western countries. As chapter three will discuss in detail, negative misrecognition and misrepresentation of Kazakhstan by the West are external manifestations of continued domestic contestation over the meanings of Kazakhstani national identity.

Contemporary Relevance

The relevance of this research emerges from the challenges Kazakhstan has faced to its national identity, as well as its response to these challenges through nation branding. This thesis is relevant to understanding Kazakhstan's continued struggle to redefine its national identity as the Republic renegotiates its relations with Central Asia, Russia and the West. As I am going to show in chapter three, external contestation over the terms of Kazakhstan's socialisation into the Western-led international order is inseparable from internal contestation over the meanings of its civic, Eurasian identity. The Eurasian identity, which is derived from Kazakhstan's geographical location, geopolitical position and history, is central to the long-lasting political, social and academic debate on the country.

The relevance and essence of the Eurasian identity of Kazakhstan could be defined in relation to the significant influence of powerful states such as Russia, China, Turkey, the United States and the European Union on the geo-strategically and geo-economically important region of Central Asia, where the political and economic

interests of these powers overlap (Volovoi, 29 August 2009; Kishore, 2015). Kazakhstan's unique geopolitical location places it at the crossroad between Western, Orthodox, Islamic and Confucian civilisations, between developed and developing countries, between powerful and weak states, and between Europe and Asia. Besides, Kazakhstan's natural resources and vast territory increase its importance for neighbouring and distant powers, particularly if we also consider its adherence to a multilateral foreign policy that diversifies its external relations (Huntington, 1993; Laumulin, 2009: 19). Such a state of affairs has not only posed challenges to Kazakhstan's physical security but also complicated the question concerning its national identity. This regional dilemma underpins the imperative of physical and ontological security, which require Kazakhstan to manoeuvre skilfully in order to survive and advance its national interests (Khurramov, 21 December 2018; Volovoi, 29 August 2009).

Since independence, Kazakhstan has sought peace and stability in its transition from the Soviet to Eurasian identity. However, in its neighbourhoods, the post-Soviet transition sparked violent political and ethnic conflicts in some Central Asian, Caucasian and Eastern European states, such as the civil wars in Tajikistan and Georgia. Although Kazakhstan has seen no outbreak of ethnic conflicts, Kazakhs and non-Kazakh ethnic groups have continued to contest the meanings of national identity. The history of continuing ideological dispute on Kazakhstan's national identity shows the difficulty of integrating different ethnic groups into a single, unified nation. Building a Eurasian nation in Kazakhstan has, therefore, partly been about creating a unique society of people who feel 'a communal bond' of history, geography and language (Talentino, 2004: 559).

On the other hand, the image of Central Asia in Western academic literature, mass media and film industry has not always been pleasant. The cult of personality in Central Asia, for example, represented its regional states in a bad light (Cummings, 2002: 52-53; Koch, 2013a: 117). Thus, the combination of domestic and foreign challenges has continued to pose a threat to Kazakhstan's evolving national identity and image. As a result, Kazakhstan has engaged in nation branding to secure its ontological security, dispel widespread stereotypes, and soften international criticisms. Given the country's lack of a historically constructed, sustainable identity that comes with time and through interaction with others, nation branding is considered to compensate for these shortcomings.

Research Puzzle and Questions

Kazakhstan's activism in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, a niche where great powers exercise unparalleled influence, is already unusual. What is puzzling, however, is that unlike many countries, which 'brand' themselves mostly through tourism and culture, Kazakhstan chose to conduct nation branding through 'niche' activities in the realm of international high politics such as nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. On the other hand, history has shown – and policymakers are surely aware – that the branding effectiveness of mega-events like international expositions has been mixed at best. No less puzzling than Kazakhstan's motivations to launch these nation branding initiatives is the difference in their results. As chapters four and five will show, although the Astana Expo remains Kazakhstan's most expensive foreign policy initiative, the mega event was less effective than international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament in building the country's national identity and international image.

This thesis examines Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives in nuclear and environmental security spheres as part of its nation branding policy aimed at consolidating its Eurasian national identity. To understand how Kazakhstan changed its self-representation in order to address negative misrecognition by others, I examine the cases of international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament and the Astana Expo. Organised under the presidency of Nazarbayev, both nation branding initiatives were intended to communicate Kazakhstani political elites' beliefs and visions about their country.

Scholars mostly treat nation branding as a foreign policy strategy to improve a state's international image and reputation (Fan, 2006: 6; Anholt, 2010: 1-2; Ham, 2008: 129-132; Jordan, 2014: 283; Bolin and Stahlberg, 2010: 82; Jansen, 2008: 122; Marat, 2009: 1123-1124;). This thesis, however, explicitly tries to go beyond those claims by explaining how nation branding contributes to the (re)construction of national identity. It shows that nation branding has both an instrumental and a constitutive dimension. While nation branding has often been used by states to simply project an existing identity, it can, under certain circumstances, bring about identity change. Indeed, these two dimensions are often inseparable. As my study of Kazakhstan shows, nation branding, on the one hand, was integral to the efforts of the Nazarbayev government to enhance its domestic and international legitimacy. On the

other hand, the government's nation branding initiatives contributed to the building of Kazakhstan's identity as a modern, Eurasian country and as being willing to contribute to the global common good through domestic reforms and international behavioural change.

Accordingly, nation branding is considered a foreign policy tool of Kazakhstan directed to address negative narratives and misrepresentations in the formation of its national identity. This thesis will explore and explain how international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament and the Astana Expo constituted integral parts of Kazakhstan's attempt to respond to external challenges to its national identity. To achieve this aim, this thesis will address the following research sub-questions:

1. How have external perceptions threatened the way Kazakhstan perceives and represents its national identity?
2. How has Kazakhstan represented itself through the two nation branding channels?
3. How effective were the two branding channels in addressing external challenges to Kazakhstan's identity?
4. How did the nation branding channels contribute to the construction of the national identity of Kazakhstan?

Nation Branding Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature on branding in business administration and the literature on identity and nation branding in International Relations (IR), this thesis develops a conceptual framework to analyse Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives under the Nazarbayev administration. While states have often used nation branding to promote their existing images and identities, it can, under certain circumstances, play an important role in the (re)construction of a state's national identity. The potential role of nation branding in identity building is manifested clearly in the case of Kazakhstan. Since independence, the Central Asian state has faced negative misrepresentations in the international community, especially in the West, which culminated in the release of the British television satire 'Da Ali G Show' and mockumentary 'Borat' (see section 3.3.). The conceptual framework is designed to study and explain how Kazakhstan has addressed external challenges to its national identity and international image through constructing and communicating a new or counter-narrative. This thesis focuses on

two notable branding channels that are different from each other: international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament and Astana Expo-2017.

While some IR scholars relate nation branding to national identity building, my conceptual framework aims to go further by addressing important questions such as: under what circumstances and in what ways can nation branding facilitate identity (re)construction? While confirming the relationship between nation branding and national identity building, the existing literature falls short of explaining how the former influences the latter. This thesis seeks to contribute to the literature by explaining how a state persuades others into accepting its self-representation through nation branding. The conceptual framework takes into account different types of nation branding initiatives, as each country is unique and special in terms of its geography, history, culture, state of development, the external challenges it faces to its national identity and international image, and its motivations to engage in nation branding.

As will be discussed in detail in section 2.5., the conceptual framework conceives of nation branding as a process divided into five steps: branding context, branding motivations, branding channels, branding narratives and branding effectiveness. Since identity is a social and historical construct, the branding context determines the motivation and opportunities for nation branding. A state is motivated to engage in nation branding when it seeks to earn additional recognition or address negative misrecognition. To persuade others into recognising its self-representation, a country needs to communicate a new or counter-narrative to its target audience through different branding channels. Branding effectiveness, however, depends not just on a state's ability to temporarily change others' perception, but more importantly, on its ability to persuade others into recognising its self-representation persistently with genuine change and development. The conceptual framework will help us understand why and how Kazakhstan has conducted nation branding and compare international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament and the Astana Expo as the Central Asian state's nation branding initiatives.

The conceptual framework underscores the idea that nation branding is a long-term, comprehensive policy without shortcuts and time-saving features (Anholt, 2013: 7). As I will discuss in section 2.5.5, although nation branding campaigns can differ considerably in their motivations, narratives and channels, their effectiveness invariably hinges on the extent to which a state's branding narrative is considered

genuine by its target audience. The credibility of a branding narrative, especially one that seeks to address the misrecognition of a target audience, can only come from a state's commitment to genuine change (Anholt, 2007: 47). In this regard, the pressure of international socialisation and domestic legitimation is where nation branding could play an important role in providing the incentives for a state to implement a long-term domestic reform that can have a positive impact on not only a state's international image in the short term but also national identity in the long term. This, as chapters four and five will show, explains why Kazakhstan's conference diplomacy in nuclear nonproliferation has proven to be more successful than the billion-dollar Astana Expo as a nation branding initiative. The former not only drew upon the Central Asian state's genuine experience as a victim of the nuclear arms race under Soviet rule; it was accompanied by the Kazakhstani government's strong commitment to the goal of nuclear nonproliferation since the nineties. In contrast, the Central Asian state's continued reliance on its profitable fossil fuel industry and the relatively slow progress in socioeconomic development outside its futuristic capital have undermined the branding narrative about Kazakhstan as a modern, Eurasian and internationally responsible state that contributes to the global cause of green growth and sustainable development.

Contributions

Despite a growing literature with significant contributions, Kazakhstan has for a long time remained understudied. The introduction of the concept of branding to IR and Kazakhstan's efforts to improve its international image have rendered the country a prominent case of study. Scholars have argued that Kazakhstan's political and business elites have engaged in branding to enhance the country's international image and reputation, legitimise its authoritarian regime, foster economic development and promote tourism (Marat 2009; Fauve, 2015, Frigerio, 2017; Gaggiotti, Low Kim Cheng, and Yunak, 2008). Studies on Kazakhstan's nation branding, meanwhile, offer useful analyses of the dominant slogans and images such as 'Kazakhstan is the heart of Eurasia', 'Borat' and 'crossroads of civilisations' (Anholt, 2008, 2010; Jordan, 2014; Browning and de Oliveira, 2017; Ham, 2008; Saunders 2007; 2008).

For instance, Frigerio and Yessenova provide succinct overviews of the complicated representations of Kazakhstan in Western films (Frigerio, 2017;

Yessenova, 2011). Pak and Go, meanwhile, investigate the influence of global university rankings on Kazakhstan's brand reputation (Pak and Go, 2011). Yet, notwithstanding their contributions, the literature tends to apply the concept of nation branding generally without really examining how Kazakhstan has conducted nation branding. Furthermore, most of the studies do not analyse the relationship between Kazakhstan's nation branding policy and the contested nature of its national identity. Only by investigating how Kazakhstan has sought to brand itself, which is undertaken in this thesis by analysing two important cases, will we be able to understand how the country wanted to renegotiate its national identity and its relations with the external world. By developing a conceptual framework, this thesis explains why Kazakhstan chose these nation branding initiatives, how it communicated with target audiences, and how effective these initiatives were in addressing identity challenges and consolidating its national identity. Through building on existing scholarship, the research takes our understanding of Kazakhstan's nation branding one step further.

Given the gap in the literature, this thesis contributes to the study of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and nation branding literature in the following ways. First, it provides a new interpretation of Kazakhstan's nation branding as a continued bargaining process with the external world over the terms of its national identity. Chapter three shows how the national identity of Kazakhstan has been represented and misrepresented in and by the international society. By developing a conceptual framework of nation branding, this thesis shows that nation branding is integral to a continued bargaining process, wherein Kazakhstan seeks to redefine and reinforce its national identity against negative representations and images. In this regard, national identity and foreign policy actions of states are not just interrelated but mutually constituted.

While the existing scholarship has done much to consider the role of nation branding events and strategies in communicating a positive image of Kazakhstan, this thesis highlights the need to assess how the form of Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives – their aim, content and channels – bears on the development of its Eurasian national identity. Indeed, as chapters four and five will show, the effectiveness of Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives remained limited, as the country sought to project a counter-image of itself as a Eurasian, modern and internationally responsible state without addressing the negative perception of its political system.

Second, by examining Kazakhstan's nonproliferation diplomacy and its holding of the Astana Expo, this thesis contributes to a better understanding of two understudied, yet important, areas in the country's foreign policy. This thesis, with its new conceptual framework, provides an alternative perspective on and interpretation of the significant foreign policy initiatives of Kazakhstan. International conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament and the Astana Expo on alternative energy and green economy have not been analysed and explained through the conceptual lens of nation branding before. In particular, they have not been considered as branding channels that contribute to the construction of the Eurasian identity of Kazakhstan. The nation branding conceptual framework in chapter two enables us to explain how Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives have contributed to the consolidation of its national identity.

And again, nuclear nonproliferation diplomacy, international renewable energy projects, and Astana's rise and development represent Kazakhstan's struggle to reconstruct and project a new national identity beyond its Soviet past. My conceptual framework, in turn, will help emphasise and show the contestation in the construction of national identity and its impact on Kazakhstan's foreign policy. Examining Kazakhstan's nuclear and environmental diplomacy as the primary sources of nation branding policy will help understand and explain how the country sees and represents itself.

Last but not least, this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the domestic debate in Kazakhstan by drawing upon a large body of Kazakh and Russian-language sources. In the same way, as with the case studies, the research on the historical context brings into the literature of identity new insights into the domestic contestation over Kazakhstan's national identity and its indivisibility from the country's external identity challenges. More importantly, it contributes to the literature on Kazakhstan by explaining its foreign policy from the perspective of nation branding. The research provides a new interpretation of how Kazakhstan has used and developed Eurasianism and, in turn, how Eurasianist thoughts of the political elites have shaped the country's foreign policy. Chapter three will study and explain the origins and development of Kazakhstan's Eurasian identity, which will demonstrate the tension and power struggle between the political elites and society, as well as between Kazakhstan and the world, over how to shape the country's image and identity.

Empirical Cases

Nuclear and environmental security have been the prominent directions of Kazakhstan's foreign policy (Ädilet, 21 January 2014). Their prominence is attributed first and foremost to their connection with Kazakhstan's Soviet identity and historical experience. The history of both the Kazakh SSR and the Republic of Kazakhstan are tightly connected to nuclear and environmental security. The Soviet Union's storage, development and testing of nuclear weapons have constituted a central part of Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakhstan's history and identity. Since 29 August 1949, the day the Soviet Union first tested its nuclear bomb 'First Lightning' in Semipalatinsk, the Kazakh SSR had become both the possessor and victim of nuclear power (Kassenova, 28 September 2009). Kazakhstan had several testing grounds in its territory that had remained active for more than 40 years. The Soviet nuclear programme not only shaped Kazakhstan's history but also influenced its identity. If Soviet nuclear tests and the anti-nuclear protests in the 1980s were integral to Kazakhstan's former Soviet identity, its current claim to be a Eurasian, modern and internationally responsible nation is inseparable from its image as a model country for successful denuclearisation and an advocate of the global anti-nuclear movement. Since independence, Kazakhstan has chosen to define its new identity in direct relation to what it no longer wants to be. This appears to have affected its choice of nation branding channels.

The severe impact of Kazakhstan's nuclear history on domestic society led the country to relinquish the world's fourth-largest nuclear arsenal and to close the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site, the world's second-largest nuclear testing space after it gained independence in 1991. As I will discuss in chapter four, since then, Kazakhstan has invested enormous financial and diplomatic resources in the promotion of global and regional nuclear security. It promoted the creation of the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ), signed all international treaties on nuclear disarmament, nonproliferation and nuclear security, and worked closely with global institutions such as the UN, CTBTO and IAEA. Since 2009, Kazakhstan has held annual intergovernmental conferences on nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. These platforms served as branding channels for Kazakhstan to project a new identity and image of not only an independent state pursuing an independent foreign policy but also a moral leader in upholding modern international institutions, norms and rules. This is due to the fact that Kazakhstan's anti-nuclear

campaigns or narratives are a clear reflection of the consensus within the domestic society based on its historical experience.

Meanwhile, as a Soviet industrial Republic endowed with natural resources, Kazakhstan was a site of mass extraction of coal and oil. Due to the overdependence of its economy on fossil fuels and its experience of environmental problems, Kazakhstan has prioritised renewable energy and sustainable development in its foreign and domestic policy. Since 2009, Kazakhstan has promoted green growth by ratifying the Kyoto Protocol, launching the 'Green Bridge' global environmental initiative, starting Asia's first nationwide trading system for greenhouse gas emissions, adopting the 'Concept on Transition of the Republic of Kazakhstan to a Green Economy', and ratifying the Paris Climate Agreement. To accomplish the long-term goal of becoming one of the world's 30 most developed countries, Kazakhstan needs to increase the share of renewable energy in its total energy consumption to 50% by 2050 (Kazinform, 14 December 2012). As the biggest ever nation branding event not only in Kazakhstan but in the whole Central Asia, Astana-Expo 2017 represented Kazakhstan's attempt to transform its image from a backward into a modern, Eurasian and responsible nation. As will be discussed in chapter five and the conclusion, however, the credibility of Kazakhstan's branding narrative was undermined by doubts and criticisms over the country's continued reliance on oil and gas exports, its political system, and domestic trends of retraditionalisation.

This thesis identifies Kazakhstan's initiatives in these two prominent areas as parts of its attempt to redefine and reinforce its Eurasian national identity. Eurasianism is a political identity of Kazakhstan rather than being a social identification of common people (Interviewee 5, 26 November 2018). It is a tailor-made identity of Kazakhstani political elites to justify Kazakhstan's pursuit of economic integration with Russia and other former Soviet republics on the one hand, and the country's deepening ties with Western and Asian civilisations on the other. Eurasianism is also essential to understanding the significance of Kazakhstan's choice of the areas and initiatives of nation branding. As chapters four and five will show, international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament and Astana Expo-2017 embody Kazakhstan's transcendence of its Soviet past and aspirations for sovereignty, independence and equality. Meanwhile, both initiatives project Kazakhstan as a modern and internationally responsible nation contributing to global nuclear and environmental governance.

The selected cases on nuclear and environmental diplomacy have been significant but under-researched areas in the nation branding literature. Foreign and domestic scholars focused mostly on different types of cases such as sports events, mass media advertisements, movies, global university rankings, cities, events and activities organised by Kazakhstani embassies abroad (Marat 2009; Fauve, 2015, Frigerio, 2017; Gaggiotti, Low Kim Cheng, and Yunak, 2008; Pak and Go; Yessenova, 2011). For instance, Fauve studied Kazakhstan's 2010 OSCE chairmanship, the Astana Pro cycling team and Nazarbayev University as the components of the country's nation branding strategy (2015). Marat emphasised the role of political and business elites tasked with organising and participating in events, giving speeches and distributing books and magazines about Kazakhstan (2009). Frigerio explored the representation of Kazakhstan in the American and European film industries, briefly overviewing the distorted and negative image of the country created within Western popular culture (2017). In-depth analysis of the annual international conferences on nuclear issues and Astana Expo-2017 contributes to nation branding literature by adding nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament and environmental security as areas where Kazakhstan has endeavoured to project its image and identity to the international community. As chapters three to five will show, Kazakhstan's history and national experience have shaped its choice of the areas and initiatives of nation branding. These nation branding initiatives, in turn, serve to reinforce and project the country's identity as a Eurasian, modern and internationally responsible nation.

Certainly, scholars have long examined Kazakhstan's nuclear policy, including Nevada-Semipalatinsk anti-nuclear movement, denuclearisation process, transfer of nuclear weapons and materials to Russia and the USA, and the establishment of the CANWFZ (Laumulin, 1995, 2010: 109-123; Sergounin, 1999; Parrish, 2001; Faizova, 2011; Ayazbekov, 2014; Kassenova, 2016; Miller, 2008). These existing studies on Kazakhstan's nuclear foreign policy tend to be empirical studies of the country's decisions and behaviour since the 1980s. Yet, despite the notable contributions of Ayazbekov (2014) and Maitre (2018) to the study of Kazakhstan's nonproliferation diplomacy, there is little attempt to relate it to the country's identity building project since independence. As chapters four and five argue, Kazakhstan's nuclear and environmental policies shape and are, in turn, shaped by the country's national identity.

On the other hand, the Astana Expo is a relatively recent event. As Kazakhstan's hitherto most ambitious nation branding initiative, it received considerable domestic and international attention at the time. In addition to media coverage, universities and think tanks held conferences and forums on the impact of the Astana Expo on Kazakhstan's image, economic and industrial development, and environmental and energy security (Tazhin, 2018; Rakhimbekova, 2018). Cull (2017) and Schulz (2018), for instance, provided detailed overviews of the Expo such as various cultural and traditional events, competitions for the best pavilion, and the content of national pavilions. Since then, however, there have not been studies on the Astana Expo through the conceptual lens of nation branding and national identity. Chapter five aims to make up for the lack of information and conceptually informed analysis in the literature about the Astana Expo.

Research Methods and Sources

This research uses a qualitative design to study Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives in nuclear and environmental security during the Nazarbayev administration, with a particular focus on the period between 2000 to 2018. The rationale behind choosing this type of design is to conduct a case study within a conceptual framework (Hennink, 2012: 273). As Gerring (2007: 19) defines, a case is 'a spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time or over some period of time'. This temporal and spatial approach to a state's domestic and foreign policy enables researchers to define, assess and compare actions and events over a specific period of time.

The combination of case study with 'interpretive process tracing' is particularly suitable for the study of nation branding from two aspects (Norman, 2015; Beach, January 2017). First, national branding is a complex process, the organisation of which includes multiple stages and dimensions (see section 2.5.). Moreover, given that national identity and international image are social and historical constructs, nation branding cannot be understood in separation from its context. Interpretive process tracing enables researchers to simultaneously analyse the constitutive relationship between meanings and identity and the causal relationship between different stages of nation branding (Norman, 2015: 4-7).

Second, the combination of case study, interpretive process tracing and elite interviews allows for a 'thick' analysis of the social construction of Kazakhstan's national identity and international image (Geertz, 1973; Tansey, 2007). Overall, the research design aims to provide a detailed, rich, holistic and general picture of the role of nation branding in strengthening and maintaining the national identity of Kazakhstan in the domestic and international realms (Gerring, 2007: 49; Yin, 2014: 129). The two branding cases, international conferences in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament of WMD and Astana Expo-2017, are targeted at different audiences. While the former is directed at governments, the latter is aimed at the global public. These case studies demonstrate how Kazakhstan has tried to raise awareness and (re)shape the existing negative views of the particular group of people about Kazakhstan's identity. Besides, the research analyses two different types of events, conferences and expositions, which allows for some comparison of the effectiveness and success of these different nation branding events.

In order to understand and explain how Kazakhstan has addressed external challenges to its national identity through nation branding, I employ a combination of document analysis and elite interviewing in the study of the two cases. Document analysis in this research involves close examination of a large body of authoritative and non-authoritative primary sources in Kazakh, Russian and English languages. The former includes official documents and publications such as laws, national strategies and programs, foreign policy concepts, presidents' addresses to the nation, as well as speeches, interviews and works of government officials. For instance, throughout this thesis, reference is made to the works and speeches of the former and current president, Nursultan Nazarbayev and Kasym-Zhomart Tokayev; the ministers of foreign affairs and energy, Kairat Abdrakhmanov and Kanat Bozumbayev; and the ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Erlan Idrissov. Besides, the case studies refer to official materials of foreign governments and international institutions like Bureau International des Expositions (BIE), CTBTO and IAEA, which were obtained from their websites. These materials include, for example, the speeches and statements by UN Secretaries-Generals such as Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Kofi Annan, Ban Ki-moon and António Guterres.

Non-authoritative documents include local and foreign newspapers (e.g. *The Astana Times, Egemen Kazakhstan, Komsomolskaya Pravda, Vechernij Almaty, Express-K, Kazakhstanskaya Pravda; The Guardian; The Evening Standard*),

magazines (e.g. *Forbes, The Diplomat*), independent information websites (e.g. Azattyk Radio), local information agencies (e.g. Zakon, InformBuro, Tengrinews, Khabar, NUR, Kazakh TV, Kazinform) and international nation branding rankings (The Good Country Index, FDI Intelligence's Nation Brands, Brand Finance, FutureBrand Country Index, The World Bank's Doing Business). Given that the Kazakhstani government continues to dictate the boundary of public discourse, local media have the tendency to avoid sensitive topics and support the government's policy. Nonetheless, notwithstanding the limitations, they provide valuable information about international conferences and Astana Expo-2017 and are particularly useful in understanding Kazakhstan's self-representation. Comparison of these sources with Western media sources such as Azattyk Radio, *The Guardian* or *The New York Times* reflects the difference between how Kazakhstan represents itself and is represented by others.

Besides, I examine a significant number of articles and books by academics, think tank researchers and former government officials in both Kazakh and Russian languages. These materials are useful in understanding and interpreting the views of Kazakhstani political elites, bringing out the domestic discourses about the country's national identity and its choice of branding channels. Despite the state programme of 2017 on digitalisation and automation of Kazakhstan, there are still difficulties with access to electronic academic and research materials. Notwithstanding its limitations, document analysis enables us to gain insight into the changing domestic debate on national identity in Kazakhstan.

In addition to document analysis, I carried out semi-structured elite interviews with high-level current and former government officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Energy and National Company 'Astana Expo-2017'. Moreover, I interviewed the representatives of top governmental think tanks and institutions in Kazakhstan and abroad such as the Institute of Diplomacy at the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, School of Public Policy at Nazarbayev University, Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Centre for International Security and Policy, Department of International Relations at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Interviews were mostly face-to-face, except for a couple of remote interviews (video call and official correspondence) with experts based in Almaty and Washington.

Elite interviews complement document analysis in qualitative research. They enable researchers to discover or learn information not available in the literature (Goldstein, 2002: 669). In this sense, interviews are good at identifying the gap in open sources. Moreover, elite interviews provide insight into the thinking of Kazakhstan's foreign policy community on relevant issues. As the boundary of public debate on foreign policy continues to be strictly defined by the authorities, most publications tend to shun sensitive topics or reiterate the government's position. By conducting conversations in a private setting, the researcher can encourage relatively open discussion and free expression of personal opinions. Indeed, while the interviewees did not always like and sometimes even avoided my questions, they were in general willing to engage in discussion and express their views. To protect the identity of the interviewees, they will remain anonymous throughout this thesis. It should be noted, however, that notwithstanding their positive response, the validity of their claims should always be 'triangulated' against other primary and secondary sources (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 453-4).

Regarding this research, elite interviews serve two aims. First, they explore how the Kazakhstani political and intellectual elites understand Kazakhstan's national identity. Second, they explore why Kazakhstan has hosted large-scale, expensive events as part of its foreign policy; and establish whether they were part of the government's nation branding policies directed at strengthening the identity and position of the country in the international society. During elite interviews, especially with current and former government officials, I tried to find out the following questions as they constitute the basis of my thesis: how they see Kazakhstan's role in global nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament? what caused the active participation of Kazakhstan in these global affairs, and what is the benefit to the country from organising and participating in these international conferences?

Regarding my second case on the Astana Expo, my main interest was to ask questions like: how do you evaluate the results of Astana Expo-2017? Was the project successful? Why was the Astana Expo held under the title 'Future Energy'? How do you assess the impact of the Astana Expo on the international image of Kazakhstan? Apart from these questions, the interviews sought to identify how the political and intellectual elites see and imagine Kazakhstan's national identity.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of two parts: concepts and cases. Chapters one and two provide the conceptual foundation for the study of Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives. The remaining chapters examine Kazakhstan's nation branding context and initiatives. Chapter one provides a critical review of the literature on identity and foreign policy in IR. Dissecting the relationship between national identity and foreign policy behaviour of states, it explains how national identity influences state behaviour on the one hand, and how it is (re)constructed through action on the other. If national identity is produced through behaviour, nation branding has not only a functional but also a constitutive dimension as an integral part of identity building.

As a response to external challenges to national identity, nation branding represents a state's attempt to renegotiate how it is perceived by others. Negative images and associations – which are often the results of nonconformity to in-group values, norms and rules – can threaten a state's identity and security. Given their proximity to powerful civilisations, history of foreign rule and struggle to build a nationhood, Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states such as Estonia and Ukraine are particularly vulnerable to external challenges to their national identity. On the other hand, while the rewards and recognition of being an in-group member provide incentives for Kazakhstan and many non-Western countries to socialise into the Western-led international order, the imperative of sovereignty, security and identity means that they only want to accept these liberal international values, norms and rules selectively. As a strategy to influence others' perception of the self, nation branding represents Kazakhstan's attempt to ensure its positive and strong selfhood, socialise into the Western international society while maintaining its own values and beliefs.

Building upon my analysis of the existing scholarship on identity and foreign policy in IR, chapter two addresses the concept of nation branding. Drawing upon the literature on branding in business as well as the literature on identity and foreign policy in IR, I develop a conceptual framework of nation branding to analyse Kazakhstan's international conferences in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament and Astana Expo-2017. The framework divides nation branding into five steps: branding context, branding motivations, branding channels, branding narratives and branding effectiveness. As a state's attempt to persuade others into accepting its self-representation, nation branding is motivated by the need to earn additional recognition

or address negative misrecognition. To influence others' perception of the self, nation branding involves the communication of a new or counter-narrative through a branding channel. Although it remains highly challenging to measure branding effectiveness, the key to an effective nation branding initiative is the credibility of the branding narrative, which, in turn, hinges on genuine change. By providing the incentives to introduce domestic reforms or make active contributions to the global common good, nation branding can be the driver of behavioural and, in the long term, identity change.

The conceptual framework guides my study of Kazakhstan in chapters three to five. Chapter three establishes the context of Kazakhstan's nation branding campaign by examining the ongoing and highly contested process of identity building in Kazakhstan since independence. It focuses on exploring the domestic and international perception of Kazakhstan. The conceptual framework argues that studying the development of national identity helps understand the main challenges and difficulties Kazakhstan has faced in building its identity. It determines the branding motivations of the country, which, in turn, is argued to define the possibilities and parameters of nation branding.

It shows that Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives cannot be understood in separation from the domestic politics of identity building. To promote Kazakhstan's national unity, socioeconomic development and integration into the international society, Nazarbayev and the country's cosmopolitan elites adopted Eurasianism as the ideational foundation to build a new national identity. Originating in the works of Lev Gumilyov, Kazakhstani Eurasianism provided the ideational foundation for the Republic to transcend its Soviet past and redefine itself as a Eurasian and modern nation. Kazakhstan's quest for a new identity was embodied in both its domestic and foreign policy. Modernisation, however, did not mean full Westernisation. Although Kazakhstan was prepared to integrate into the Western-led liberal international order, it was equally determined to preserve its unique culture and traditions. Indeed, the meanings of Kazakhstani national identity remain highly contested, as manifested in the continuing division between Eurasian-optimists and Eurasian-sceptics over issues such as language policy. Domestic contestation, moreover, is accompanied by external identity challenge. Western discursive hegemony means that Kazakhstan has for a long time been represented as an Asiatic, authoritarian and backward nation. The problem of negative misrecognition culminated in the controversy over the release of

British television satire ‘Da Ali G Show’ and mockumentary ‘Borat’. Nevertheless, the controversy also provided the incentives and opportunity for Kazakhstan to represent itself through nation branding.

The last two chapters are devoted to two important yet understudied cases. Chapter four examines the international conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. Inheriting stockpiles of Soviet nuclear weapons after independence, Kazakhstan was once seen as a risk to international security. Nonetheless, after its much acclaimed voluntary relinquishment of Soviet nuclear weapons in 1994, Kazakhstan has striven to project itself as an upholder of the rule-based international order, a leading contributor to nonproliferation and disarmament, and a model of denuclearisation. As branding channels, international conferences served to promote to the global civil society Kazakhstan’s contributions, ongoing initiatives and vision in what is otherwise a ‘niche’ area of high politics. Indeed, many of the conferences were co-organised with international or non-governmental organisations including CTBTO, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs (the Pugwash Conference). Moreover, they were attended not only by government officials but also by major stakeholders in the global civil society. Through keynote addresses, panel discussion and tours to the former Soviet test sites, international conferences projected a branding narrative about Kazakhstan’s transformation from a voiceless victim of the global nuclear arms race into a model of denuclearisation, a strong supporter of the rule-based liberal international order and leader of a global anti-nuclear movement.

While international conferences on nuclear nonproliferation represented Kazakhstan as an active contributor to global nuclear governance, the Astana Expo was the most ambitious project to communicate the Republic’s new national identity as a modern and Eurasian nation well on its path to become one of the world’s 30 most developed countries by 2050 (see chapters 4 and 5). With a modern cityscape and Western-style institutions, Astana is the embodiment of political stability, economic achievements and sociocultural renewal of Kazakhstan since independence. The choice of renewable energy as the theme, the construction of a futuristic architectural complex, and the exhibition of green technologies conveyed an image of Kazakhstan as a modern nation determined to transform its commodity-based economy into an advanced green economy driven by knowledge and innovation. With the participation of countries, international organisations and visitors from across the world, the mega

event projected Kazakhstan as a Eurasian nation. Like the annual international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament, the Astana Expo demonstrated Kazakhstan's contribution to the solution of global challenges.

But while the Astana Expo was successfully implemented, public controversies over extravagance and corruption affected the mega event's effectiveness as a branding channel. The credibility of Kazakhstan's branding narrative, moreover, was undermined by the development gap between Astana and the rest of the country. Chapter five shows that the ideas of introducing green technologies and building a modern nation did not develop beyond Astana. The remoteness of the branding narrative from socioeconomic reality undermined the effectiveness of the nation branding initiative.

The conclusion reviews the findings of the thesis, discuss its implications and future directions of research. As my research will show, the effectiveness of a nation branding initiative is highly contextual. The credibility of a branding narrative and the impact of a branding channel are subject to both domestic and international factors. Second, while many scholars tend to focus on the international dimension of nation branding, this research shows that nation branding can also be a government's strategy to push forward domestic reforms. Third, nation branding is integral to Kazakhstan's struggle to integrate into the Western-led international order on its own terms. To expand and deepen the study on Kazakhstan, this thesis recommends three directions for future research. First, the study on Kazakhstan's nation branding can be further developed by focusing on other branding events such as Eurasian Media Forum, Astana Economic Forum and Astana Club. Second is the comparative study of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states' nation branding initiatives. Third, Kazakhstan's early management of the Covid-19 outbreak can be a promising direction for further research on nation branding.

CHAPTER 1. INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY ON FOREIGN POLICY BEHAVIOUR

1.1. Introduction

Identity has become what Berenskoetter calls a 'conceptual shooting star' in IR since the 1990s (2010: 1). As David Campbell points out, '[i]dentity is an inescapable dimension of being. Nobody could be without it' (Campbell, 1998: 8). By making the foreign policy behaviour of states 'predictable', identity brings a degree of order and certainty to the world. Its absence or ambiguity, on the contrary, would lead to uncertainty, unpredictability and 'chaos' (Hopf, 1998: 174-175). As chapter three shows, in the case of Kazakhstan, the contestant and ambiguous identity led to different misrecognition and disrespect in the international society. Having a strong and positive identity would become a priority for the countries that are actively engaged in world politics, in international institutions. The increasing prominence of the concept in IR scholarship reflects the view that the nature of world politics is not structurally predetermined but rather dependent on the meaning(s) actors give to the reality (Wendt, 1999: 20; Zehfuss, 2004: 2-23). To understand the relationship and importance of nation branding for the change and reinforcement of identity, it is necessary first to examine the highly contested concepts of identity and national identity.

This chapter provides the basis for the study of nation branding by re-examining the concept of identity in IR. Generally referred to as a socially constructed understanding of the self, identity informs an actor's interests and thus interaction with the external world (Wendt, 1999; Zehfuss, 2004; Finnermore, 1996; Katzenstein, 1997: 3; Wallace, 1991; Banchoff, 1999; Weldes, 1999; Ashizawa, 2008; Therien and Mace, 2013). National identity was not only central to the establishment of the modern international system but has since then been a major driving force of world politics (Hopf, 1998: 174-175). The expansion of the European international society represents a process through which the identities of non-Western states are challenged and redefined. The end of the Cold War and the expansion of the American-led liberal international order resumed the process of socialisation in the former Soviet sphere. Western-centrism means that scholars tend to examine the process of social

interactions, primarily from a Euro-American perspective. Non-Western, out-group states tend to be seen as passive actors to be socialised into adopting liberal international values, norms and rules. Equally important, however, is their struggle to reclaim their agency over the (re)construction of their national identities on their own terms. Indeed, to a newly independent, non-Western state like Kazakhstan, physical and ontological security are indivisible. Nation branding, in this regard, represents Kazakhstan's attempt to secure its statehood, develop a positive selfhood, continue with nation building and redefine its relations with the external environment on its own terms.

This chapter begins with an overview of the highly contested concept of identity. Then it moves on to explain the distinction and significance of the concepts of image, reputation and brand to the construction of national identity. The third part discusses the role of identity in IR and state behaviour, with an emphasis on foreign policy. It will investigate the influence of identity on states' foreign policy. This, as I am going to show in the final part, enables us to reveal aspects of the significance of nation branding.

1.2. Defining National Identity

The importance of identity across all aspects of social life has led scholars from different disciplines to come up with different definitions and typologies of the concept. Nonetheless, however it is defined, identity refers primarily to a 'sense of the self' (Berenskoetter, 2010: 8; Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel, 1998: xviii-x). As a form of social identity, national identity refers to a shared understanding of the self among members of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 2006: 6). Such shared understanding can originate from a variety of sources; indeed, the defining sources of national identity are unique to each country. Nonetheless, according to Smith, states can derive their sense of national identity and belonging from five essential sources: a territory, 'historical memories', a 'mass public culture', 'legal rights and duties for all members', and an economy (Smith, 1991: 14). As I will discuss further below, although 'mass national public' perception is important to the formation of national identity, the (re)construction of national identity is often dominated by state elites (Bloom, 1990: 79-80; Zevelev, 2002: 450). The way how state elites see their national identity is fundamentally based on Smith's five essential sources. Accordingly,

chapter three shows how state elites understand the national identity of Kazakhstan. This required me to conduct elite interviews in Kazakhstan.

National identity exercises 'multifaced power' in nation-state building (Smith, 1991: 15). To begin with, it underpins a state's sovereignty over a specified territory and its resources. Indeed, the shared understanding of a historical territory and common descent is the driving force of nationalism as both an ideology and a political movement directed towards statehood (Finlayson, 2014: 100; Smith, 1991: vii). The establishment of a nation-state as a political community distinct from others, in turn, legitimises domestic institutions and policies to both the population and the international society. National identity promotes and maintains a social bond in society by promoting cultural values, symbols and traditions (Smith, 1991: 16-17). By using slogans, symbols, historical myth, sacred monuments and ceremonies, it reminds people of the common descent, ethnic origin or race that strengthen their sense of belonging to the nation. As a historical, social and political construct, identity is not static but dynamic and 'processual' (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 7). An actor often possesses multiple and sometimes contradictory identities at one time. These identities are constantly (re)defined by competing discourses (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 7-8; Zevelev, 2002: 450).

However, a people's common origins do not always underlie national identity. According to Smith, for instance, former colonies such as post-Soviet states adopted either a 'dominant ethnic' or 'civic' approach to identity building (Smith, 1991: 110-112). In the former, the identity of a new multi-ethnic nation is built around that of the dominant ethnic group (Smith, 1991: 110). The latter involves the construction of a 'supra-ethnic "political culture"' that incorporates all ethnic groups (Smith, 1991: 112). In either case, state elites play a central role in identity building (Smith, 1991: 119-122). Kazakhstan, in this regard, was similar to the case of India, wherein identity building was marked by the combination of both approaches (Smith, 1991: 113-114). As I will discuss in chapter three, Kazakhstan's national identity is built based on the dominance of ethnic Kazakhs, as manifested in the government's promotion of the Kazakh language, history and culture (Kazakhstani Constitution, 30 August 1995). On the other hand, the political elites use Eurasianism as the ideational basis for a civic, Eurasian identity, which made the nature of identity ambiguous.

However, the collective selfhood of a nation cannot be established without the 'otherness' of other nations (Neumann, 1996; Triandafyllidou, 1998). Indeed, the

perceived threats from the sheer presence of others are integral to the development of a nation's identity (Triandafyllidou, 1998: 600). The mutually constitutive relationship between self and other underscores the indivisibility of the domestic and international dimension of national identity (Kowert, 1998; Katzenstein, 1998: 20; Banchoff, 1999: 268). Kowert argues that 'national identity may refer either to internal coherence or external distinctiveness' (Kowert, 1998: 5). While the former represents nation-states as a coherent entity, which could be considered as an agent, the latter demonstrates its difference from others (Kowert, 1998: 6-7). Internal identity means a set of norms, beliefs and understandings shared by people, especially dominant social groups in a society that 'sustain we-ness through time' (Banchoff, 1999: 268). On the other hand, the external dimension of national identity refers to the self-identification of a one-state in relation to other states in particular international contexts (Banchoff, 1999: 268-271). It is an awareness of the difference, feeling and recognition of 'we' and 'they' (Lee and Yi, 2000: 29).

The diverse classifications of identity are based on the variety of factors such as actions, roles states play in world politics (great power, middle power), the influence of external structures and self-identification of states emanating from their geography, culture and belief (Smith, 1991: 3; Ashizawa, 2008: 574). That is why the construction of national identity is the state action of drawing boundaries that distinguish the inside from the outside, the self from the other, the domestic from the foreign (Campbell, 1998:9). For instance, Kazakhstan's Eurasian identity refers to its shared history, close geography and similar political system with Russia, on the one hand (Shlapentokh, 2007; Yesmukhanov, 2014: 91). It, on the other hand, defines Kazakhstan as an independent political community different from Russia. Eurasian Kazakhstan is distinguished by its national identity, territory and culture (see chapter 3).

Nevertheless, state-centrism in the study of IR has led to the interchangeable yet confusing use of the concepts of national and state identity. Some scholars treat the external dimension of identity as state identity (Banchoff, 1999; Weldes, 1999; Ashizawa, 2008), while others use these two terms interchangeably or offer no conceptual distinction (Bloom, 1990; Smith, 1991; Prizel, 1998; Triandafyllidou, 1998; Burant, 1995; Zevelev, 2002; Mader and Potzschke, 2014; Therien and Mace, 2013). The difference between the two concepts is primarily one of focus. Confined in its scope to a state's external identity in distinction from others, the concept of state identity does not consider the uniqueness of its domestic society. In contrast, the

concept of national identity emphasises the interconnection and tension between the internal and external dimensions of a state's identity.

Those who use national identity focus on the self-identification and self-placement of a state in relation to others. As Smith contended above, here scholars highlight the influence of national criteria such as territory, history, culture, religion, economy and politics on the formation of the sense of national identity (Smith, 1991: 14; Prizel, 1998; Triandafyllidou, 1998). On the contrary, the studies distinguishing state identity look at the self-positioning of the state within a particular union and institution. Banchoff, for instance, examines the self-identification of Germany in relation to the European Union (Banchoff, 1999: 268). Given the fact that this thesis focuses on both internal and external dimensions, I use the concept of national identity. To understand how Kazakhstan represents itself through nation branding, it is essential to study how the country sees itself and is perceived by others.

1.3. National Identity, Image, Reputation and Brand

Before proceeding further, it is also necessary to clarify identity's relationship to the interrelated and indeed overlapping concepts of image, reputation and brand. Image refers to the visible representation of an actor (Shenkar and Yuchtman-Yaar, 1997: x). It is the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions people have of a country (Kotler et al., 1993: 141). While a country can be seen differently by different individuals at different times, its reputation is built upon shared and continued beliefs about its 'persistent characteristics' (Dafor et al., cited in Neumann and de Carvalho 2014: 4). In other words, reputation presupposes a consistent image over an extended period of time (Ibid). Nonetheless, both image and reputation can be changed, especially in a negative way, relatively quickly. Identity, on the contrary, is more persistent than image and reputation. As an understanding of the self that is shared by members of a social group – be they citizens of a state or member states of a regional economic or security community – identity cannot be constructed without its binary opposition to the other (Neumann, 1998: 399).

The relationship between these three concepts and brand is confusing. As I will discuss further in 2.3.1.1, scholars have for a long time used the all-encompassing concept of brand to refer to the aggregate of everything, from name, products to tourist destinations, that constitutes a state's image, reputation and identity. The problem of

definition is further complicated by the use of terms such as 'brand identity', 'nation brand reputation' and 'nation brand image' (Kemming and Sandikci 2007; Kemming and Humborg 2010). To offer a clear and consistent understanding of how nation branding can potentially influence the process of identity building, I will use the concepts of image, reputation and identity in the discussion that follows.

Here image and reputation are not treated as being equivalent to identity, but they are understood as integral to its construction. If identity exists only as an intersubjective construct in social interactions, it is formed as much, if not more, on subjective representation and interpretation as objective attributes. Image plays a critical role in the initial encounter between actors since how they represent themselves will influence the dynamics of subsequent interactions, which in turn form their reputation. Meanwhile, the projection of stereotypes and prejudice onto others enables the construction of the 'good' self in distinction from the 'bad' other (Elias and Scotson, 1994: xv-xiii). Therefore, image and reputation are essential to the social construction of an actor's identity as a member or non-member of a social group on the one hand and the selected representations of that identity on the other. As a state's coordinated attempt to promote a desired image and reputation, nation branding can thus potentially influence the social construction of its identity.

1.4. Identity and the Study of International Relations

Identity and the self/other dichotomy define the possibilities and parameter of individual and collective action (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 6-7). As Charles Taylor puts it,

> *[to] have an identity is to know 'where you're coming from' when it comes to questions of value, or issues of importance. Your identity defines the background against which you know where you stand on such matters (Taylor, 1991:305-306).*

Without any knowledge of who you are and who you are surrounded with, states cannot decide what they should do and how to act (Jepperson et al., 1996: 60). National identity speaks about who states are, what kind of interests they have, and how those interests can shape their foreign policy (Agius, 2019:7). The centrality of identity to IR theory reflects a recognition by scholars of the complexity of reality.

Nevertheless, different schools of international relations theory differ considerably in their approach towards the question of identity. For realists, national identity is

primarily a testament to the logic of anarchy in the state-centric international system. As the key to legitimacy, national unity and domestic mobilisation, national identity is a driving force behind states' struggle for survival and power (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999: 192). On the other end, some liberals such as Doyle believe that a state's national identity – and hence its interests and intentions – is first and foremost defined by its political institutions. Founded on the ideas of democracy, human rights and free trade, liberal states can achieve peace between themselves, though they can have aggressive intentions towards non-liberal states (Doyle, 1986: 1151-69; Doyle, 2005: 463-6). The intensification of international cooperation and the proliferation of international institutions led neoliberal institutionalists to examine how states can cooperate under anarchy (Keohane, 1984; Oye, 1986). While adhering to a rationalist approach, they recognise the importance of reputation in addressing the prisoners' dilemma. In the light of imperfect information, a positive reputation is more likely to induce reciprocity in cooperation (Keohane, 1984: 93-4, 105-6).

It is the constructivists who emphasise ideas as a key variable in deciding the meaning of anarchy and the dynamics of international relations. Whereas realists assume that national identity and national interests are structurally determined by anarchy and the distribution of capabilities, constructivists claim that they are constructed by 'shared ideas rather than given by nature' (Wendt, 1999: 1). As the following discussion will show, however, constructivists are not a uniform group. While agreeing on the importance of identity and ideas, they remain divided over other major assumptions in the study of international relations. In general, there are two constructivist approaches towards the study of international relations: conventional and critical. The main distinction between the two approaches revolves around the questions of methodology and analysis of identity (Agius, 2019: 19). Conventional constructivists, including Wendt, Katzenstein, and Bloom, see constructivism as a bridge between neo-realism and neo-liberalism, which rests on a positivist epistemology and assumptions of the state as a rational actor and the dominant actor in the international system.

On the contrary, critical constructivists consider this synergy and the reliance on positivism problematic. Inspired by Foucault and Derrida, critical constructivists study the power of discourse and language in constructing realities and interpreting the relationship between self and others. Identity is seen as more complex, 'less solid and given', which is dependent on power and representations of states (Agius, 2019: 20).

Most importantly, they challenge the assumption of the state as a unitary actor by interrogating how the state and its identity, interests and preferences are constantly (re)constructed.

The above discussion of conventional and critical constructivism has important implications for understanding the relationship between identity, foreign policy and nation branding in the case of Kazakhstan. As a key component of Kazakhstan's foreign policy, nation branding has been at many times an instrument to present what is considered the 'real' Kazakhstan. However, as I will explain in detail in chapter three, Kazakhstan's national identity since independence is not pre-existing and fixed, but historically and politically (re)constructed. It was a political choice by Nazarbayev and the cosmopolitan political elites to adopt and revise Eurasianism as the ideational foundation for the Republic's new national identity. Nonetheless, the (re)construction of national identity remains a continuing and highly contested political process. Domestically, the nationalists have rejected the Eurasianists' cosmopolitan imagination of Kazakhstani national identity. Externally, Kazakhstan has continued to be represented and misrepresented by the West on Western terms. If identity is produced, renegotiated and changed through behaviour, nation branding has not only a functional but, more importantly, a constitutive dimension as an integral part of identity building. The need to persuade the world into accepting a state's branding narrative facilitates behavioural change. It provides the incentives for long-term domestic reforms or foreign policy commitments that can lead to identity change. In this regard, this thesis lies in the middle between conventional and critical constructivism, with a greater leaning towards the latter.

1.4.1. Identity in International Relations: System-Level Perspective

As a response to neorealism and neoliberalism, conventional constructivists examine the role of identity in IR from a systemic perspective. According to Wendt, in the absence of prior information, each actor would seek to define the situation by assuming a role and projecting a corresponding 'counter-role' to the other. The significance of power, in this regard, lies in the ability to shape the definition of the situation and the behavioural expectations of the actors (Wendt, 1999: 331). Any enduring pattern of social interactions is based on the formation of shared knowledge about the role identities of self and others (Wendt, 1999: 332-5). The self/other

relationship helps states distinguish the 'others' who are alike from the 'others' who are different (Berenskoetter, 2010: 6). In this regard, identity informs states' interests, preferences, and behaviour by helping them distinguish friends from enemies, insiders from outsiders of particular groups, clubs and institutions (Kowert, 1998: 1; Berenskoetter, 2010: 5-7). Identity does not obviate power as a variable in social interactions. Yet, an increase in the level of shared positive identity and the formation of a role structure of friendship will decrease the impact of power asymmetry on threat perception and might eventually redefine its meaning to actors (Wendt, 1999; Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero, 2007). This explains why Wendt concludes that 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt, 1999).

As a strategy of image management, nation branding represents a state's attempt to influence others' attitude and behaviour towards itself by (re)negotiating the terms of the self/other relationship. In the age of globalisation, nation branding has become more important than ever since modern society is defined by the 'increasing frequency, scale, and importance of indirect social relationships', which are (re)constructed on information from mass media and information technologies (Calhoun, 1992: 211). Indeed, the majority of non-state actors – from small and medium enterprises to tourists – more often than not act on a state's image they obtain from these channels. As I will discuss in chapter three, the British satires 'Da Ali G Show' and 'Borat' have continued to shape the popular image of Kazakhstan in the West.

In an increasingly interdependent and institutionalised international order, it is not surprising that socialisation has become the focus in the study of identity in IR. Like other social actors, states differ in their political interests, socioeconomic conditions, religious beliefs and cultural values. Actors are inclined to identify with those who share similar attributes as members of a distinct social group while disapproving differences that are perceived as faults or mistakes. The sameness of selfhood produces incentives for in-group members to treat each other preferentially while discriminating against out-group members. Strong belief in and attachment to in-group members on the one hand, and alienation from, dislike of and animosity towards out-group members, on the other hand, result in different forms of biased behaviour from 'in-group favouritism to harsh episodes of discrimination, aggression, and even conflicts between groups' (Halevy, Bornstein and Sagiv, 2008; Moscatelli and Rubini, 2017). Strong in-group bias and high collective-self-esteem not only sustain group unity but also provide incentives for out-group members to gain membership (Flockhart, 2004:

364; Lebow, 2008: 478-479). A negative social identity, on the contrary, can lead members to leave and join another group with higher standing (Flockhart, 2004: 364). Socialisation refers to a process through which a newcomer gains membership in a social group by learning to adopt the values, norms, and rules shared by members of the social group (Johnston, 2001: 494).

The expansion of the European international society has been a major driving force of socialisation in modern international relations. Western dominance over the non-Western world was manifested not only in colonial expansion but also in the development of a system of knowledge that classified peoples and differentiated between 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' (Said, 1979: 26-27). Admission into the international society required non-Western states to meet Western 'standards of civilisations' (Stivachtis, 2010: 5-32). It was in this context that Central Asia came into contact with the European international society following Russia's expansion into the region in the 19th century. Nevertheless, Central Asia's interactions with the European international society were 'mediated' (Buranelli, 2014: 819). Albeit already a great power, Russia continued to be seen by its Western counterparts as less European, more Asiatic and hence less civilised (Buranelli, 2014: 823-8). Identity and status anxiety compelled the Tsarist empire to reaffirm its Europeanness by assuming the role of a 'civilised state' while casting the role of 'savage' to Central Asia (Buranelli, 2014: 828-35). As chapter four will show, this also explains why Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states have continued to be represented as 'inferior' by the West after their independence from the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union's breakup and Western dominance after the end of the Cold War mean that the common values and attributes of Western democracies are considered the essential elements of the highest form of government but also the prerequisite conditions for 'rightful membership' in a 'restrictive international society' (Fukuyama, 1989: 4; Clark, 2005: 173-89). As Clark points out, the standards that distinguish the in-group from the out-group concern domestic political order (Clark, 2005: 180-3). Only when states adopt Western values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law will they be accepted for full membership. Those who deviate from these values, norms and rules will justifiably be subject to stigmatisation, tutelage or even regime change (Clark, 2005: 173-83). The dynamics of exclusion have led to the formation of a 'tiered or hierarchical international society, constituted by a core and a periphery, or more loosely by insiders and outsiders' (Clark, 2005: 177). For many

non-Western states, the challenge to their sovereignty, security and identity stems not only from the West's promotion of democracy and human rights (Lawson, 1998). Global market capitalism has also led to the homogenisation of identities that transcends national, religious or racial difference. (Deudney and Ikenberry, 1999: 193).

The nature of socialisation as an asymmetric process, together with Western centrism in IR, means that scholars have for a long time tended to look at the interactions between Western and non-Western states from the in-group perspective. Based on an implicit belief that peace, cooperation and development are to be achieved through the promotion of democracy, human rights, market economy and other Western values, the primary concern in relation to out-group members is how they learn to accept in-group values, norms and rules. Sometimes out-group members such as Kazakhstan can be persuaded into accepting in-group values as normatively appropriate (Johnston, 2001: 496-9). More often, however, they comply with in-group norms and rules as a result of social influence. For out-group members, compliance and cooperation not only yield material benefits; the public affirmation of behaviour that meets in-group expectations also satisfies their quest for status (Johnston, 2001: 501). Noncompliance and transgression, in contrast, would lead to their stigmatisation, punishment and exclusion (Adler-Nissen, 2014).

Nevertheless, as the following discussion will show, socialisation poses an existential dilemma to out-group members, let alone a non-powerful, newly independent and non-Western state like Kazakhstan. Successful socialisation into a high-standing social group, on the one hand, can be beneficial to their material interests and social status. On the other hand, it can undermine the security of their nationhood and statehood. As a result, out-group members, while still rejecting in-group values, might engage in 'rhetorical action', 'mimicking' or 'strategic social construction' in order to gain reward or avoid punishment (Flockhart, 2004: 366; Johnston, 2008: 45-52). In rare cases, those that are stigmatised might reject the in-group 'system of honour' and turn their stigma into 'emblem[s] of pride' (Adler-Nissen, 2014: 153).

Nevertheless, while the constructivist scholarship has contributed to our understanding, it focuses primarily on social interactions within institutions, especially those established by the West (Schimmelfennig, 2000; Checkel, 2005; Johnston, 2008). Moreover, as I mentioned above, it tends to see out-group members as passive

actors responding to the behaviour of in-group members. As the following section will show, the security of nationhood and statehood often compel out-group members to defend their right to (re)construct their identities on their own terms.

As I am going to show in the following chapters, nation branding is both a manifestation of and Kazakhstan's response to the dilemma of socialisation. On the one hand, an out-group member gains acceptance into the in-group only when in-group members believe that it identifies with their attributes. Therefore, how it manages in-group members' perception of itself is crucial to the success of its socialisation. On the other hand, image manipulation enables an out-group member to (re)negotiate the terms of its relations with and integration into the Western-dominated international order.

The indivisibility of the domestic and international realm means that a systemic approach overlooks the influence of domestic variables on international relations. As sections 1.5. and 1.6. will show, only by opening the 'black box' of the state will we be able to fully understand the role of personal, political, social and cultural variables in identity building, interest formation and the making of foreign policy (Kubalkova, 2015: 15; Hudson, 2014).

1.4.2. Identity in International Relations: Unit-level Perspective

While the section above focuses on the international dimension, the state-centric bias overlooks the domestic dimension of identity and interest formation that affect states' international behaviour. According to Bloom (1993: 89), for instance, the interaction between foreign policy decision-makers and 'national identity dynamic' could have several forms:

> *1) National identity as a foreign policy resource for the pursuit of strategic foreign policy goals such as war and peace-making. 2) Foreign policy as a tool for nation-building. The government uses foreign policy to evoke the national identity dynamic for the purposes of nation-building with the result that either (a) the national identity dynamic remains under government control or (b) the national identity dynamic, once mobilised, influences government. 3) National identity dynamic triggered by non-government actors influence foreign policy. Other actors evoke the national identity dynamic and the mobilised national identity dynamic then influences the government's foreign policy decisions (Bloom, 1993:89).*

Nevertheless, the relationship between national identity and foreign policy is not only instrumental but mutually constitutive. This requires us to understand, first, how national identity influences the formation of national interests. It is because national identity is identified to define the parameters of what states consider their national interests are at home and abroad (Prizel, 1998: 14; Bloom, 1993). Foreign policy, in turn, is the expression of national identity, as it is the means by which a state upholds its sovereignty, protects the political, social and economic life that distinguishes it from others, and promotes the values and ideas it stands for (Wallace, 1991: 65).

While many different actors participate directly or indirectly in the formation of national interests and foreign policy, elites often play a decisive role in defining and constructing the meaning of national interests, which mainly consists of understanding and interpreting their surrounding world, their existence and position in it (Weldes, 1999: 3). That process of interpretation is influenced by the established understandings, imaginations and representations of the policymakers of their own country and others, of the international system and the country's place in it. For example, it may be a nationalist myth about the country's past glory, achievements, and failures (Ikenberry, 9 September 2014; Mylonas and Kuo, 2018). National interests are shaped by the shared understandings, imaginations and representations of the state elites about their own countries, constructed in interaction with the world through which they make sense of both domestic and international contexts. In short, the process of interpretation is about how the political elites make decisions by considering and choosing the most optimal means to secure political and economic goals.

So, this chapter argues that national identity influences on how the political elites (re)define the state's national interests and foreign policy. On the other hand, it is in the interest of the political elites to maintain and strengthen their national identity. In the identity building process, sometimes, the state’s self-perception and its perception by others may differ. How the nation sees and defines itself may contradict the ways in which others see and define them in international society. The way in which some states represent themselves and exercise power over their territory, people and resources could be interpreted by others differently, sometimes negatively.

As a result, it might heighten tension and misunderstanding in the international society, affecting states and people’s relationship with each other (Zevelev, 2002: 450). Given the growing role of media and the internet, any information about the

country would be widely shared, omnipresent. Journals, newspapers and the film industry could make the circumstances unavoidable. Widespread misinterpretation, criticisms and negative narratives towards any country and its people might threaten their sense of identity and the government's legitimacy as it could trigger social unrest, at worst, crisis and division in domestic society.

There are many constructivist scholars, such as Thomas Banchoff, Kuniko Ashizawa and William Bloom, who have studied and explained the constitutive relationship between identity and foreign policy in different cases. They show that nationalism, national myths, narratives and ideas about the state and its national identity shape foreign policy. For example, Banchoff's research shows how a change in Germany's identity influenced its postwar foreign policy behaviour in a way that contradicts realist assumptions. He explored why Germany will not pursue its own 'independent and assertive foreign policy' and will instead continue to pursue deeper economic and political integration into the European Union (Banchoff, 1999: 260). The research shows how the European identity dominates over Germany's own national identity, which is accompanied by dominant-negative narratives about the country's historical past. Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel contend that states adopting a common identity, such as members of the European Union, are more likely to conform to some norms over others (1998: xvii). According to them, identities can explain states' inclination to follow certain rules given their historical development and cultural background. Germany strictly observes the norm of military non-intervention, and that state behaviour might be unclear without recourse to the state's war history (Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel, 1998: xvii).

Foreign policy reflects a state's vision of its position in the hierarchy of states. The quest for a place in the social hierarchy of states is essential to the construction of a narrative about a state's legitimate place in the world to both domestic and international audiences. According to Igor Zevelev (2002), for instance, Russia has continued to have a similar superpower identity vision and nationalism after the collapse of the USSR. The hostility between Russia and America, Zevelev argues, goes back to that viewpoint, the reluctance of Russia to acknowledge supporting allies in the world. According to its national interests, Russia's constant wish to engage in world affairs in forming the global order met the objection of stronger states after the Soviet Union collapsed. In the view of the United States, reborn Russia was a country 'in transition' from communism to democracy with periodic instabilities (Zevelev,

2002: 459). He contended that examining the vision of the state leaders of Russia and the United States about themselves and the world can offer a more convincing theoretical explanation than looking at the differences in the political regime, military and economic capabilities, culture and civilisational development.

Kuniko Ashizawa takes a different approach to explaining the relationship between Japanese identity and its foreign policy actions. To facilitate the empirical and theoretical explanation of the Japanese foreign policy, Ashizawa proposes a value-action framework built on Walter Carlsnaes' model designed to examine states' international actions (Ashizawa, 2008: 578; Carlsnaes, 1987). The theoretical framework incorporates three main concepts, which provide a causal explanation to the relationship between state identity and foreign policy: values- preferences- state actions. Here, the role of identity is seen in terms of the value function. More precisely, values considered to be the reasons for actions that determine state preferences. Ashizawa argues that '[a] conception of state identity provides policymakers with a particular value, which sometimes the dominant value, and hence defines the preferences of state foreign policy' (2008: 581). She argues that the depiction of the primary reasons is the essence of explaining state actions. The pro-attitude and the beliefs of states are considered primary reasons and causes of actions (Ashizawa, 2008: 578).

While conventional constructivists tend to assume the existence of some form of identity as the starting point of their analysis, critical constructivists tend to denaturalise identity and understanding of the world by concentrating more on the context of interaction and intersubjective meanings. For instance, poststructuralist David Campbell contended that states have 'no ontological status' except for the repeated acts that constitute their reality (1992: 9). There are no original and pre-existing structures that influence the way how political elites see their country's national identity. In turn, foreign policy is regarded not as 'the external orientation of pre-established states with a secure identity' but as 'one of the boundary-producing practices central to the production and reproduction of the identity in whose name it operates' (1992: 75). As chapters three to five will show, Campbell's argument pinpoints the crucial linkage between nation branding and identity building. While nation branding can be a mere tool to enhance its visibility and project a positive image, effective nation branding often hinges on genuine domestic change. In this

regard, only by acting in accordance with its branding narrative will a state be able to persuade others into believing in its self-representation.

Questions of identity tend to be more sensitive in the case of recently independent and multinational countries like Kazakhstan. Former Soviet countries with reviving national identity and economy could be more sensitive to negative treatments and stereotypes in the nascent stage of their development, which can provoke states' counteractions. In Bloom's words,

> *The mass national public will mobilise when it perceives either that national identity is threatened, or that there is the opportunity of enhancing national identity (Bloom, 1990: 79).*

Based on the above discussion, in the following section, I argue that the external challenges to national identity as a threat to internal coherence and external distinctiveness will trigger states' foreign policy. It could be one of the characteristics of globalisation where high competition, the convergence of different economies and cultures put more pressure on the relationship between states. Nevertheless, as I will discuss in the following paragraphs, the challenged identity shapes countries' national interests; reinforcing or changing the sense of national identity becomes the state's foreign policy interest. If reinforcing the national identity prioritises the revival of the nation's cultural, historical and religious elements, then changing means the significance of transforming the old model of identity and thinking (Golob, Makarovic and Suklan, 2016).

1.5. Challenged Identity and Post-Soviet World

As a response to neorealism and neoliberalism, conventional constructivists examine the role of identity in IR from a systemic perspective. According to Wendt, in the absence of prior information, each actor would seek to define the situation by assuming a role and projecting a corresponding 'counter-role' to the other. The significance of power, in this regard, lies in the ability to shape the definition of the situation and the behavioural expectations of the actors (Wendt, 1999: 331). Any enduring pattern of social interactions is based on the formation of shared knowledge about the role identities of self and others (Wendt, 1999: 332-5). The self/other relationship helps states distinguish the 'others' who are alike from the 'others' who are different (Berenskoetter, 2010: 6). In this regard, identity informs states' interests,

preferences, and behaviour by helping them distinguish friends from enemies, insiders from outsiders of particular groups, clubs and institutions (Kowert, 1998: 1; Berenskoetter, 2010: 5-7). Identity does not obviate power as a variable in social interactions. Yet, an increase in the level of shared positive identity and the formation of a role structure of friendship will decrease the impact of power asymmetry on threat perception and might eventually redefine its meaning to actors (Wendt, 1999; Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero, 2007). This explains why Wendt concludes that 'anarchy is what states make of it' (Wendt, 1999).

As a strategy of image management, nation branding represents a state's attempt to influence others' attitude and behaviour towards itself by (re)negotiating the terms of the self/other relationship. In the age of globalisation, nation branding has become more important than ever since modern society is defined by the 'increasing frequency, scale, and importance of indirect social relationships', which are (re)constructed on information from mass media and information technologies (Calhoun, 1992: 211). Indeed, the majority of non-state actors – from small and medium enterprises to tourists – more often than not act on a state's image they obtain from these channels. As I am going to discuss in chapter three, the British satires 'Da Ali G Show' and 'Borat' have continued to shape the popular image of Kazakhstan in the West.

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show, the security of nationhood and statehood often compel out-group members to defend their right to (re)construct their identities on their own terms.

As I am going to show in the following chapters, nation branding is both a manifestation of and Kazakhstan's response to the dilemma of socialisation. On the one hand, an out-group member gains acceptance into the in-group only when in-group members believe that it identifies with their attributes. Therefore, how it manages in-group members' perception of itself is crucial to the success of its socialisation. On the other hand, image manipulation enables an out-group member to (re)negotiate the terms of its relations with and integration into the Western-dominated international order.

The indivisibility of the domestic and international realm means that a systemic approach overlooks the influence of domestic variables on international relations. As sections 1.5. and 1.6. will show, only by opening the 'black box' of the state will we be able to fully understand the role of personal, political, social and cultural variables in identity building, interest formation and the making of foreign policy (Kubalkova, 2015: 15; Hudson, 2014).

1.5.1. How to Understand Challenged Identity?

As summarised in figure one, this chapter argues that a challenge to identity arises when a state is subject to misrecognition and disrespect that jeopardise the government's international and national legitimacy. The identity of the self cannot be established without the other. Self-representation of itself, therefore, cannot (re)affirm self-identity, especially since it might not be valid. What Hegel called the 'struggle for recognition' requires the self to communicate its self-representation onto others and make them believe in its validity (Hegel, 1977: 111–19; Ringmar, 2002: 120). Recognition, in this regard, is essential to the stability of self-identity and the self/other relationship (Ringmar, 2002: 120-1). In IR, recognition can range from 'thin' to 'thick' (Gustafsson, 2016: 617). Whereas most states today enjoy 'thin' recognition as sovereign states of the international system, they attain 'thick' recognition only when others accept what they construct as their 'particular' identities (Gustafsson, 2016: 617).

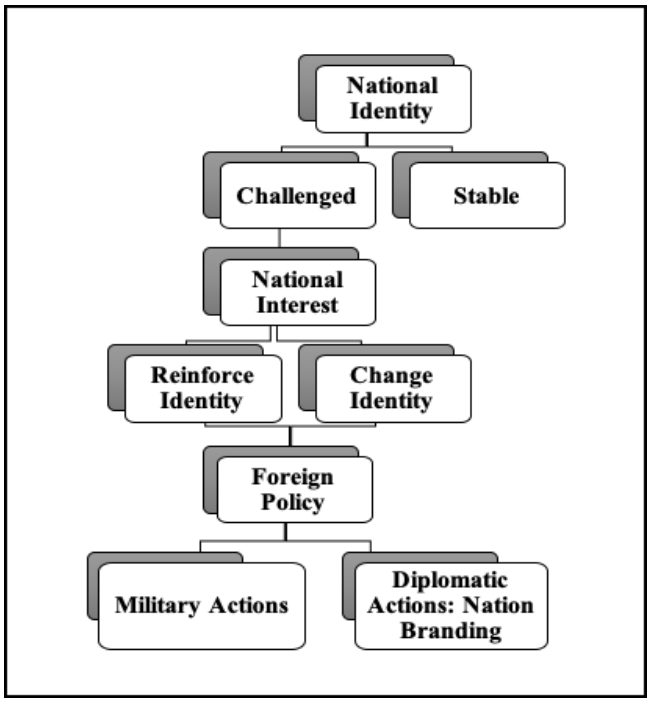
Misrecognition arises when others do not accept the identity which a state seeks to build and project. Since identity is a political and historical construct, what is once

considered recognition can become misrecognition (Gustafsson, 2016: 617-8). The significance of Western dominance since the end of the Cold War, in this regard, lies in the West's power not only to impose its narrative on others but also to grant or refuse recognition to others' narratives on its preferred terms. For Kazakhstan, nation branding is a communication strategy to persuade the West and the international society into recognising its self-representation on its own terms.

Misrecognition, however, does not necessarily provoke a negative reaction (Wolf, 2011: 108). A more fundamental need than recognition, according to Wolf, is respect, an 'attitude we expect others to show' by showing 'adequate consideration' of our 'physical presence'; 'social importance'; 'ideas and values'; 'physical needs and interests'; 'achievements, efforts, qualities and virtues'; and 'rights' (Wolf, 2011: 112). Whereas recognition assumes specific acts to give 'love' or other 'wholly subjective forms of positive evaluation', respect involves only minimum consideration one 'must' extend to others (Wolf, 2011: 107, footnote 1 in 106-107). Thereby, the concept of respect stresses the importance of status and identity. Whereas misrecognition that does not denigrate one's status and identity, such as when others overstate it, will not provoke a response, disrespect invariably involves '(mis)recognition of an actor's status' (Wolf, 2011: 108). Thus while 'negative evaluation' can be perceived as a sign of disrespect, it is less disrespectful as ignorance and, to a lesser degree, denial of a 'sense of importance', both of which undermine one's relative position vis-à-vis others in society (Wolf, 2011: 111-112).

To paraphrase Bloom, the challenged identity leads to national mobilisation since it could be perceived as a sign of disrespect for what the state believes and values (Bloom, 1990: 83). Moreover, a negative and challenged identity is undesirable in a highly competitive international community, as it might have a detrimental effect on the socialisation of the state with others and subsequently on its prosperity. As shown in figure one, I argue that the challenged identity triggers the state's foreign policy to fulfil the imperative of self-identity, even if it is costly and detrimental to the physical security (Ejdus, 2018: 1-3; Steele, 2008: 2).

Figure 1. Constitutive Effects of National Identity



States may give priority either to military or diplomatic actions such as nation branding (see figure 1). For instance, the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 undermined not only the United States' physical security but also its status as a liberal democratic hegemon with the moral obligation to promote its security interests through legitimate, multilateral channels (Steele, 2008: 1). The identity crisis facing the United States following the attacks, in this regard, was a significant factor in its decision to go to war (Steele, 2008: 1).

On the other hand, as Wendt argued, 'mutual respect and cooperation' promote the formation of a positive identity, which in turn strengthen the state's self-confidence and self-security (1999: 237). National identity is called social as it develops and changes through social interaction (Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel, 1998: x). Mutual respect and cooperation between states indicate thick recognition and rewarding social interactions, such as political legitimacy and economic prosperity. According to Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel 'psychologically rewarding' relationships over time influence the strength and durability of the state's values and beliefs, its shared national identity (Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel, 1998: x). For instance, positive group identification has led the United States and Western Europe to share the collective identity 'the West' (Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel, 1998: ix-x).

In the foreign policy of recently independent countries like Kazakhstan, national identity and nationalism play a crucial role as they are in their early stage of nation building. They could be the primary forces holding the society together and shaping a state's external behaviour (Prizel, 1998: 2). Nevertheless, the external challenge to national identity does not always lead to the unification of the mass public; on the contrary, it can cause national disintegration, exacerbating the division between different ethnic groups, as was manifested in the dissolution of Czechoslovakia (Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel, 1998: ix-x). Foreign policy in this regard is a reflection of the state's ongoing search for national identity (Wallace, 1991; Messari, 2001: 227).

As a state's attempt to promote a positive image and identity, nation branding promotes a consistent self-concept, redefines the shared understanding of the self-other relationship and facilitates adjustment to the uncertain, changing environment (Browning, 2015:197). The branding events become all about the very national identity of states because foreign policy is part of constituting and strengthening that national identity (Messari, 2001: 227). A positive sense of the self is a basic human need and the basis of choice and action (Wendt, 1999: 236; Mitzen, 2006: 344). According to Steele, without the ability to consolidate its 'self-identity through time', the state cannot meet its 'physical and social needs' (Steele, 2008:2).

For a less developed country, such as Kazakhstan, being able to create a positive and strong national identity on a par with the developed countries of the world is a serious challenge. Studies show that the superficial decoration and advertising of national identities do not reflect whether countries are more or less developed. Instead, real national developments in social welfare, governance, healthcare and education are key indicators of this strong national identity (Golob, Makarovic and Suklan, 2016: 12). This could actually determine whether the given state is able to join a high-standing social group or remain a member of the out-group. In this regard, building a national identity is a discursive power relationship between states or, in other words, between state elites and the foreign community. It is a competition about which actor gets to project a powerful and dominant narrative.

Nation branding provides a lens for understanding and explaining how states respond to their identity challenges. As I will discuss in the next chapter, it helps study states' foreign policy to make sense of why and how they do branding. In this thesis, national branding is not only a political tool to present Kazakhstan to key audiences, but more importantly, it plays a constitutive role in constructing a new national

identity. By communicating key narratives about the country, about its achievements and developments, nation branding contributes to the consolidation and building of national identity. Branding activities and events in this regard increase the country's awareness in international society and enhance the economic competitiveness and political legitimacy of the government. As Anholt argues, real developments promote positive associations about the country because superficial advertisements and propaganda only increase the criticisms (2010: 1-2).

1.5.2. Challenged Identities of Post-Soviet States

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the 'eastward' expansion of the American-led liberal international order entailed the need for Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet republics to redefine their national identities. In many of these cases, elites played a significant role in the discursive (re)construction of nationhood and statehood in relation to the changing external environment. However, this view has been subject to debate. Scholars agree that state elites can promote identity and nationhood, but they should be accepted and supported by the people (Isaacs and Polese, 2015: 372; Moreno-Almendral, 2018: 655). Nevertheless, differences in geography, history, ethnicity, religion and other factors resulted in different experience in nation branding.

In Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the state elites redefined the three states' identities as Central European to dissociate them from Russia and Eastern Europe. Their efforts were embodied in the creation of the Visegrad Group (Fawn, 2001). Similar initiatives can be seen further in the East. After gaining independence, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania immediately rejected their 'Baltic' identity, which was associated with the history of Russian and Soviet rule. Meanwhile, the desire to 'return to Europe' led to the fact that the three states have reconstructed their national and geopolitical identity. Miniotaite's study shows that as Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania realigned themselves with Europe and the West, their geopolitical identity shifted from 'bridge-states' between the East and the West to Europe's 'outposts' (Miniotaite, 2003: 213-6). Nevertheless, although integration into Europe and the West was necessary for the national security and prosperity of the Baltic countries, it can also undermine their national identities. The tensions resulting from accession negotiations between the European Union and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania on issues such as human rights, freedom of speech, nuclear energy and agriculture have significantly

weakened domestic support in the three states for EU membership (Miniotaite, 2003: 216-9).

On the contrary, Russia's entrenched influence and geopolitical vision have posed a significant challenge to the identity building of Ukraine. According to Burant, Ukraine sought to pave the way for integration into Europe by trying to redefine its national identity as Central European. However, the historical influence of Russia, especially in the eastern part of the country, impeded the development of the Ukrainian national identity. Russia's perception of Ukraine as its core interest, together with the latter's sociopolitical divide and sluggish economic reform, hindered Ukraine's efforts to join the Visegrad Group in the 1990s (Burant, 1995: 1126-32). The ongoing political instability and civil conflict in the country since the end of 2013 indicate the inseparability of identity and security.

Indeed, history is an essential factor in determining the direction of post-Soviet republics' identity building efforts and foreign policy. Tsygankov's comparative study of Latvia and Belarus shows that national identity plays an essential role in shaping newly independent states' geo-economic posture. Latvia's history of statehood before Soviet rule contributed to the formation of a strong national identity and connections with the world after independence (Tsygankov, 2000: 110-111). This, combined with strong domestic institutions, resulted in a high level of deviation in Riga's trade policy from the past (Tsygankov, 2000: 112-124). On the other hand, due to the lack of a history of statehood and weak domestic institutions, Belarussian politics in the post-Soviet era was dominated by 'empire savers' (Tsygankov, 2000: 113-114). As a result, Minsk has demonstrated little intention to develop a national identity in distinction from Russia after independence. It is surprising, therefore, to find a high degree of continuity in Minsk's trade policy from the Soviet to the post-Soviet era (Tsygankov, 2000: 113-124).

Whereas geographic proximity and a history of sociocultural exchange contributed to the success of Central European states – and to a lesser extent the Baltic states – in redefining their national identities and subsequently joining Europe and the West, countries lying at or beyond the geopolitical frontier of Europe faced a much bigger challenge in associating themselves with the high-standing social group. For instance, Georgia not only has historically been seen as more Asiatic than European, but its history is defined by the long period of Russian rule. However, as O Beachain and Coene's study shows, Georgian elites have also long endeavoured to draw upon the

country's racial, political and cultural linkages – be they real or not – with Europe to affirm the 'Europeanness' of Georgian national identity' (O Beachain and Coene, 2014: 924-29). Under the presidency of Saakashvili, Georgia's quest for a new identity became intertwined with its pursuit of security. The construction of a domestic discourse on Georgia's 'Europeanness' not only served to legitimise the Rose Revolution but also secure Western support for its territorial integrity and national security (O Beachain and Coene, 2014: 929-35). As is the case with Ukraine, Georgia's quest for a new identity was seen as a threat to Russia's ontological security.

Geography determines that Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states could not join the European international society in the same way as the other former Soviet republics in Central Europe. Moreover, the lack of a history of modern statehood and Soviet nostalgia enabled Russia to maintain considerable influence over Kazakhstan and its neighbours such as Kyrgyzstan (Huskey, 2005: 110, 116-9; Cummings, 2005: 142-9). Indeed, as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan strove to maintain their independence and promote nation-building, they struggled to establish a new identity. Ironically, their efforts to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy and deepen their linkages with the external world beyond Central Asia also exacerbated the contradictions in their national identities. For instance, notwithstanding Kyrgyzstan's attempts to associate itself with Europe, Kyrgyz national identity is inseparable from its neighbours in Central Asia, which remain opposed to many of the values, norms and rules of the American-led liberal international order (Huskey, 2005: 120-4). As I will discuss in detail in chapter three, the same contradiction has continued to haunt Kazakhstan's search for its national identity.

The above discussion demonstrates the limitation of focusing just on the process of socialisation within an institutional environment. Socialisation into a high standing social group often comes into conflict with a state's interests of its sovereignty, security and identity. The need to legitimise the newly independent polity means that they cannot accept the definition of the situation, their identities and their relations with the West on the latter's terms. Moreover, they not only need to address their relationships with the West but also their relations with their immediate neighbours. Thus, how to gain acceptance into the Western-led international order without Russia or other neighbouring states is central to their survival and security. Without the material capabilities of more powerful states, image management becomes central to Kazakhstan and other former Soviet republics' efforts to redefine their external

relations and secure their national interests. Nevertheless, as the next chapter will show, nation branding is more than rhetorical action or strategic social construction. Rather it represents an attempt by the state to (re)define its identity on its own terms. Indeed, the measures a branding campaign introduces to increase a state's attractiveness could lead to genuine domestic change.

1.6. Conclusion

This chapter forms part of the basis of the next chapter, the conceptual framework of this thesis. It explored and explained how and why national identity comes to inform the foreign policy behaviours of states, given that national identity is considered to be a source of understanding and explaining state actions. The study demonstrated that national identity shapes state actions as the national interests of countries defined in terms of the self-identification of states. National interests of states emerge from the shared understandings, imaginations and representations of the state elites about their country and the world through which they shape their domestic and foreign policies. This chapter argued that the international challenges to the national identities of countries, as well as the imaginations and representations of the state elite about their country, affect the foreign policy actions of states. Given the constitutive effects of national identity, nation branding is a state's response to external identity challenges directed to redefining its international image on its terms.

As a coordinated attempt to build, manipulate and project an image of the self, nation branding is essential to a state's pursuit of its economic, political and security interests. If how states behave towards each other, whether with 'in-group love' or 'out-group hate', depends on how they represent themselves and are represented, then it is important to project a positive image, especially in the highly globalised, interdependent and institutionalised international community (Halevy, Bornstein, and Sagiv, 2008). Even though image and reputation are not equivalent to identity, they are integral to the social construction of identity.

The next chapter will be devoted to building a nation branding conceptual framework that will help to examine Kazakhstan's branding campaigns. It will engage the discussion in the literature of business and IR about what nation branding is, why and how states have used it as part of their political measures to solve image and identity issues in the global market. As this chapter argued, the importance of both the

state’s self-perception and others’ perception of itself render nation branding an essential foreign policy tool. In other words, the way how countries see themselves and the world, as well as how states want to be seen or perceived by others, influence their national interests that will determine nation branding as a priority in the foreign policy of states.

CHAPTER 2. NATION BRANDING CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter develops a conceptual framework to explain Kazakhstan's nation branding policy. The previous one discussed the influence of national identity on states' foreign policy. It argued that international challenges to states' identity provide incentives to engage nation branding. As the intersubjective understanding of the self, identity is continuously (re)constructed through interstate interactions. The influence of national identity on interest formation, foreign policy behaviour and hence the dynamics of international relations underpins the importance of nation branding as a strategy to renegotiate or reinforce states' own identity. As I am going to show in the following chapters, nation branding has been crucial to Kazakhstan's response to external identity and image challenges.

Whereas Kazakhstan's nation branding initiative in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament was mostly successful, the Astana Expo produced, at best, mixed results. As chapter four will discuss, the former had a direct link to the history of Soviet nuclear testing and Kazakhstan's national experience of denuclearisation that enabled it to communicate a genuine narrative about its transformation from a voiceless victim of the global nuclear arms race into a strong supporter of the global nonproliferation regime, a model of denuclearisation and an advocate in the global anti-nuclear movement. In contrast, the latter represented Kazakhstan's attempt to communicate a narrative about itself as a Eurasian nation set to become an advanced and green economy through the Astana Expo, which unfortunately failed to gain external recognition. As I am going to show in chapter three, the meanings of Kazakhstani national identity have remained highly contested inside and outside the country. Authoritarian rule, clan politics, retraditionalisation and the resurgence of Islam have contradicted the image of modernity Kazakhstan has sought to project to the world. The credibility of Kazakhstan's narrative was further undermined by the corruption scandals over the Astana Expo. As a result, Kazakhstan's nation branding efforts to improve its international image and establish its national identity remain incomplete.

The conceptual framework is based on the branding literature and the literature on identity and foreign policy analysis in IR (Anholt, 2003, 2005, 2010, 2013; Dinnie,

2016; Kaneva, 2007, 2012, 2014; Smith, 1991; Bloom, 1990; Prizel, 1998; Browning, 2011, 2015, 2017; Ham, 2008; Marat, 2009). Given the multidimensional nature of nation branding, this chapter begins with a critical review of the highly contested concept. As a strategy to create and promote a positive international image, nation branding is not only crucial in attracting trade and foreign investment; it plays an equally vital role in its pursuit of both physical and ontological security. This is followed by a discussion of how different states – especially former Soviet republics and non-Western countries in Asia – have engaged in nation branding in response to external challenges to their national identity. Exploring the underlying reasons behind states' nation branding and their ways of branding themselves will help build my own conceptual framework.

The last section lays out the conceptual framework used to explain Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives in the empirical chapters. The framework dissects nation branding into five steps: branding context, branding motivations, branding channels, branding narratives and branding effectiveness. Contextual factors from geography, history to political developments define the possibilities of a nation branding campaign. Meanwhile, a state's decision to engage in nation branding can be attributed to one of these two motivations: additional recognition and negative misrecognition of identity. These, in turn, determine the branding campaign narrative(s) and communication channel(s).

2.2. Conceptualising Nation Branding

Given that the concept of branding was originally introduced to IR from the disciplines of business, marketing and communication, it is hardly surprising that the definition and usage of the term nation branding remain highly ambiguous. The increasing use of the term by scholars, experts and practitioners in different disciplines, moreover, has further multiplied its meanings (Kaneva, 2011: 119). As a result, scholars who are interested in various dimensions of nation branding tend to define the concept differently. Some, on the one hand, focus primarily on the economic role of national branding in trade, investment and tourism (Fan, 2006; Aronczyk, 2007; Ham, 2001; Rose, 2010). States, like companies, need to build up their reputation as 'an umbrella brand' and a 'country of origin' to enhance the competitiveness of their products and services (Aronczyk, 2007; Jansen, 2008; Gudjonsson, 2005). From this perspective,

nation branding is a practice to strengthen a nation's 'marketability' and fulfil its 'commercial ambition' by commodifying its identity (Gudjonsson, 2005: 286; Aronczyk, 2007: 105-107; Jansen, 2008: 122; Browning, 2016: 50; 2017: 486). Others, on the other hand, contend that the branding of a nation fulfils not only economic but also political and moral functions (Browning, 2015, 2017; Peterson, 2006). As Kaneva argues,

> *nation branding as a compendium of discourses and practices aimed at reconstituting nationhood through marketing and branding paradigms (2011: 118).*

In other words, nation branding is integral to the (re)construction of national identity (Jansen, 2008: 122; Gudjonsson, 2005: 285; Szondi, 2008b: 5; Kaneva, 2011: 118; Browning, 2015: 202; Aronczyk, 2007: 120). It is the latter's view that informs my research on Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives in this thesis.

Nation branding is often seen as 'a tool of high politics' to promote trade, investment and tourism (Clerc and Glover, 2015: 17; Dinnie, 2016:6). However, in addition to the commercial interests, the use of the term has extended towards the spheres of culture, education and politics. The elements of nation branding could be product brands, culture, cuisine, sport, political and economic achievements, global and regional events (Anholt, 2003 and 2005: 133). Nation branding creates a generalised picture of states, their identity, status in the global and regional affairs. For example, branding culture is the process of enlightening foreigners about nations' identit(ies) through diplomacy, exchange programmes and events (Clerc and Glover, 2015:17). Branding plays a vital role in advancing a state's economic and political interests by attracting foreign investments, highly educated talents and tourists, as well as communicating political ideas and narratives to the external audience (Szondi, 2007: 9; Hall, 2002; Berry, 2008; Stock, 2009a: 118; Ahmad, 2003: 171; Anholt, 2003 and 2005: 214; Ham, 2008:129). Nation branding, in general, is a state strategy that contributes to the construction of national identity.

Active manipulation and presentation of a state's international image as a foreign policy strategy, however, has a long history. Clerc and Glover state that 'propaganda, information, soft power, new public diplomacy and nation branding have at different historical points been (re)conceived and (re)formulated as the solution to rectify biased perceptions about the national identity' (2015: 17-19). The new term 'nation brand' was first introduced by Simon Anholt in 1996 (Anholt, 2013: 6). Anholt compares the

reputation of countries, cities and regions with the brand images of companies and goods that are critical to their prosperity and good management (2013: 6). Nevertheless, the concept of nation brand has gradually lost its original purpose, as consulting agencies have misused it to generate money from 'naive governments' (Anholt, 2013: 6). Indeed, countries he argued,

> *are judged by what they do, not by what they say, as they have always been; yet the notion that a country can simply advertise its way into a better reputation has proved to be a pernicious and surprisingly resilient one (Anholt, 2013: 1).*

To improve the image and reputation, nation branding should reflect the state's true character, achievements, and developments; otherwise, it can end up being a superficial commercial that is sometimes heavily criticised, judged, and condemned by others (Anholt, 2010: 1-2).

2.3. Why do States Conduct Nation Branding?

Notwithstanding a large body of literature on branding in business, marketing and communication, nation branding remains relatively understudied in IR (Browning, 2015: 195). While scholars have examined different dimensions and forms of nation branding, they, in general, adopt two approaches to the study of nation branding based on motivations. On the one hand, some see nation branding as an instrument to advance a state's economic interests by attracting businesses, capital and foreign talents. Others, on the other hand, consider nation branding integral to the (re)construction of identity and hence a state's pursuit of legitimacy, recognition and ontological security. Nevertheless, as the subsequent discussion will show, the two approaches are indivisible (Browning, 2015).

2.3.1. Economic Incentives

As already mentioned, the concept of nation branding became prominent at the time when economic globalisation and the end of the Cold War led to the expansion of the liberal economic order, wherein growth and development are driven by intensifying international competition. It is not surprising, therefore, that a significant portion of the literature focuses on nation branding as a strategy to advance national economic interests by attracting businesses, investment and human capital (Aronczyk, 2013:16; Jansen, 2008: 121). A state's reputation is crucial to the success of cooperation, as it

indicates the association of a country with positive attributes in the views of others and is, therefore, more likely to induce reciprocity in cooperation (Keohane, 1984: 94, 105-6; Johnston, 2001: 499-506).

Indeed, the transition from a 'Hobbesian world' of survival struggle to a 'Lockean world' of economic interdependence has rendered a positive reputation and image more important than ever in promoting trade, investment, tourism and immigration (Browning, 2017: 484). As the behaviour of states is guided by economic logic, they increasingly resemble 'business actors' (Browning, 2017: 485). Nation branding, in this regard, is both 'a powerful catalyst' for and the manifestation of market fundamentalism (Jansen, 2008: 131). The importance of image and reputation to cooperation explains why nation branding has become a key strategy in international competition for trade and investment.

As a 'simplification of a large number of associations and pieces of information' about itself, a state's image provides a quick reference point for others to assess its intentions (Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 251). People acquire from their impressions and perceptions' informative signals about the true qualities of a country' (Kalamova and Konrad, 2010: 405). These signals, be they beliefs, prejudices or stereotypes, enable actors to simplify decision-making (Kalamova and Konrad, 2010: 2-5; White, 2012: 110-111). Positive stereotypes such as punctual, reliable, developed, democratic and fair government make a state an appealing destination for investment, tourism, business, education and immigration. In contrast, as is the case of Central Asian countries, associations with negative attributes, including authoritarianism, poor human rights records or corruption may tarnish a state's image abroad (Anholt, 2005:104-106).

These collective judgments and impressions together provide the sources of a state's reputation and image (White, 2012: 110). Nation branding serves to promote a positive reputation and image by shaping the feelings, impressions and beliefs people have from their experience with the country (Reynolds and Gutman, 2001; Stern et al., 2001; Heslop et al., 2013). By improving its visibility, image and reputation, a state can enhance the world's confidence in itself and thus its credibility and international position (Dinnie, 2008: 17; Anholt, 2010; Jansen, 124-125). As Heslop et al. argue, mega-events as a form of nation branding have 'image spillovers' and 'reputational effects', which is widely exercised by states today (2013: 30).

2.3.1.1. Umbrella Brand

A strong brand such as Coca Cola and Apple, in turn, will give a state's economy, its industries and products a comparative advantage in the global market. State names have long been considered as brands (O'Shaughnessy and O'Shaughnessy, 2000: 56; Ham, 2001; Loo and Davies, 2003: 198); as they are believed to play the role of nations' and companies' brands, which are integral to their survival and prosperity (Anholt, 2003 and 2005: 105). It is referred to as 'nation brand' or 'brand identity'. State names or nation brand have always been associated with the famous product brands and tourist destinations they own, as well as with their people, geography, tradition and culture (Ham, 2001:2).

The nation brand is the aggregate of everything the country possesses and produces that serve as a tin of beans or an 'umbrella brand' for reassurance and status (Anholt, 2010: 4; Fan, 2006; Kalamova and Konrad, 2010: 3). It is therefore not surprising that the country names have been used as trademarks for products and services, such as Cafe de Columbia (Columbian coffee) and American Airlines (Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 250). Here, the image and reputation of the state help positively influence clients; for example, their decision to buy, invest, travel and change place of residence (Anholt, 2003 and 2005: 217). Thus, states as brands become 'trading identities' (Olins, 1999), 'intellectual propert[ies]' that can be patented and privatised like services, resources and knowledge (Jansen, 2008:121). They are the products of intellectual activities that certify the exclusive right, authorship and priority of the invention. As noted in section 1.3., the concept of brand has been used loosely to refer to a country's image, reputation and identity. The creation of terms such as 'brand identity', 'nation brand' and 'nation brand image' further exacerbates the problem of definition. To avoid this confusion, I am going to use the concepts of image, reputation and identity in the following discussion.

2.3.1.2. Country-of-Origin Effect

State names have a powerful 'country-of-origin' effect on the customers' choice of products and services (Dichter, 1962; Bannister and Saunders, 1978; Han and Terpstra, 1988; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 1993; Loo and Davies, 2003: 2000; Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 251-253; Anholt, 2003 and 2005: 217-219). As Kotler and Gertner argue, products bearing 'made in France', 'made in Italy', 'made in Japan' and 'made

in Germany' labels are considered high-quality goods given the reputation these countries have as the world's top leading manufacturers and exporters (2002: 250). Since the national reputation of these states has withstood collective judgements due to the quality of their products, services and domestic governance, it is relatively easier for them to develop a new brand (White, 2012: 110). Companies from Italy and America can successfully promote certain products by using their strong reputation as 'country of origin'. The companies carrying the powerful brands such as Apple, Chanel, Burberry, Toyota, Amazon, Coca-Cola, Samsung and Hollywood are mostly from the top 10 developed, industrialised countries (Hilton, 2003: 49; Anholt, 2003: 217).

Countries that are not among the most developed and with a challenged identity like Kazakhstan need 'flair, confidence and chutzpah' to start a new international brand (Anholt, 1999: 16). To do that, states with negative images, first of all, should evaluate the perception of the surrounding environment, how others see them and deal with it by accepting first that reality (Anholt, 1999). The popular product and service brands, in turn, will contribute to the promotion of a state's positive international image. For instance, South Korea has earned the reputation of the country as a 'high technology' and 'advanced economy', which strengthened the country's identity in the domestic and international society (White, 2012: 111).

It is not surprising, therefore, that six dimensions of national competence used to measure a state's global perceptions in the Anholt GfK-Roper Nation Brand Index – governance, people, exports, tourism, culture and heritage, and investment and immigration – have significant overlap with the indicators included in, for instance, the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index or Portland's global ranking of soft power. Indeed, as Kalamova and Konrad's research shows, a strong nation brand exercises independent, positive effects in attracting foreign direct investment even if there is a disparity between representation and reality in a country's economic fundamentals (2010: 412). In short, projection of a 'brand image to businesses, leaders, and the public' is crucial to the progress, prosperity and good governance of states (Rose, 2010: 254).

Nation branding in a global neoliberal economic order, however, generates two contradictory dynamics. On the one hand, globalisation has led to growing cultural homogeneity (Boaventura de Sousa Santos, 2006). By increasing the demand for regional and global identity, the intensification of global mobility threatens to

‘decentralise’ and undermine national identity (Zhou Guanghui and Liu Xiangdong, 2014: 184-186). Nation branding, in this regard, is not only a strategy for states to gain comparative advantage in the global economy but also to retain their distinct national identities. On the other hand, the commercialisation and commodification of nation brands have ironically contributed to the homogenisation rather than differentiation of national identities.

The last three decades saw the rise of a significant number of state branding agencies such as FutureBrands, Landor, Interbrand, Saffron, Acanchi, Wolff Olins, Bloom Consulting, Saatchi & Saatchi, Corporate Edge and Kohl&Partner. They specialise in creating and maintaining states’ ‘visual identity’ and image abroad (Allen and Simmons, 2003: 120-125; Nation-Branding.Info, March 17, 2008). The ‘professionalisation’ of nation branding means that the responsibilities for and authority in branding countries have gradually shifted from the hands of government officials into those of branding professionals (Aronczyk, 2007: 105–128; 2013: 64-65). Besides, brand development is today guided more by economic than historical or geopolitical factors (Aronczyk, 2007: 105–128; 2013: 64-65). As states adopt each other’s ideas or simply duplicate the successful experience of powerful states, they end up producing similar images and identities. (Allen and Simmons, 2003: 120; Browning, 2015: 205). Nation branding, in this sense, promotes as much homogenisation as differentiation (Browning and Oliveira, 2017: 487; Allen and Simmons, 2003: 120-125).

2.3.2. Political and Security Incentives

Anholt argued that nation branding is neither destination branding nor political propaganda nor public relations campaign. Yet, nation branding remains an intentional manipulation of states to shape people’s view of their culture, people, economy, foreign policy, politics and country as a whole. Despite the purposes behind nation branding, it is argued that it contributes not just to marketing states’ economic, cultural and historical values but also to the construction of national identity (Aronczyk, 2008: 48; Aronczyk, 2007: 120-121; Kaneva, 2011: 191; Browning, 2011: 8). Given the growing dominance of globalisation, branding scholars tend to claim that the way how identities and nations are understood and communicated today has changed in time and space (Aronczyk, 2013: 15-33; Jansen, 2008).

While a positive international image is conducive to cooperation, a negative one not only could affect a state's economic competitiveness but could potentially undermine its political and security interests. The commercial approach to nation branding discussed above seems to suggest that economic interdependence has replaced geopolitics as the driving force of international relations in the post-Cold War world. However, a number of scholars argue that the idea that 'image and influence' are substitutes for geopolitics in a globalised world is exaggerated (Ham 2001: 4; Browning, 2015). In the construction and communication of national identities, the fundamental constituents such as historical, geopolitical, and cultural factors, including states' economic and political capabilities, remain imperative (Browning, 2017: 496-497; Olins, 2002). In their view, nation branding is more than about advancing a state's economic interests; it is essential to the pursuit of political and security objectives (Browning, 2015: 196-200).

2.3.2.1. Ontological Security and Insecurity

While physical security remains fundamental to survival in an anarchic international system, states seek not only the security of their territory, population or government but also that of their identity. Ontological security, which refers to the 'security of being', is the precondition for a state's continual existence, functioning and development in a globalising world (Browning, 2011: 3; Browning, 2015: 198-200). Indeed, physical and ontological security are indivisible. As Ham argues, nothing disrupts the image and reputation of states more than the physical insecurity connected with the threat of terrorism and war, high rates of crime and natural hazards (2008).

The 9/11 terrorist attack in New York, for instance, undermined the United States' superpower identity and its international image as a safe place. Health security threats from Ebola, malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, meanwhile, can generate negative associations of states with risks in the minds of global consumers. Likewise, environmental hazards arising from pollution or nuclear testing could project an international image of a country like Kazakhstan as a risky and unsafe place to reside and do business. As I am going to discuss in chapters four and five, closing nuclear test sites, removing highly enriched uranium from nuclear facilities and developing a green economy demonstrate Kazakhstan's efforts to address both its environmental and image problems. As states compete to attract tourists, businesses, capital and

talents in the global economy, the advantages of having a positive international image of a safe, secure and reliable place have given rise to security branding.

As identity is socially constructed, states often face external challenges to their identities from misinterpretation, misrepresentation, a lack of recognition or stigmatisation (Browning, 2015: 195-196; Adler-Nissen, 2014). The ontological security of a state improves when it receives public recognition for its identity, statehood and activities in the international society; its stigmatisation, in contrast, can result in status anxiety, insecurity and loss (Johnston, 2001: 499-506; Adler-Nissen, 2014: 146-7). Nation branding, in this regard, is a state strategy to constitute, reinforce and preserve the sense of subjectivity and national identity of states that strive for recognition, status and respect in the international community. As Browning stated, a sense of self-esteem and dignity is as important as the matter of survival and material wealth in understanding the essence of states' subjectivity and action (2015). They are considered a source of national identity, nationalism and ontological security that are inherently interconnected. It leads to a secure and stable 'sense of subjectivity and identity' by enhancing the 'self-esteem', 'security of being' or the self-certainty of states to move forward in the quickly changing world (Browning, 2015: 198-199).

Jordan argues that the growing interest of non-Western states in nation branding reflects their ongoing struggle for ontological security (2014: 25). Indeed, while Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries have gradually come to identify with some of the values, norms and rules of the liberal international order, they have continued to reject others such as democracy and human rights (Boonstra, 2007: 1; Omelicheva, 2015: 1-9). Nation branding, in this regard, represents an attempt of the countries like Kazakhstan to renegotiate the terms of their socialisation into the Western international community. By applying marketing techniques in the construction and communication of powerful myths and narratives, states maintain, reinforce or redefine the meanings and essence of their identities (Olins, 1999; Gilmore, 2002; Aronczyk, 2013:15; Jordan, 2014: 284; Ham, 2008). Storytelling justifies states' action and policy.

2.3.2.2. International Recognition and Legitimation

To become a recognised global player in a particular niche area, developing countries like Kazakhstan, Qatar and Central and Eastern European countries have demonstrated

their diplomatic skills and services (Peterson, 2006; Govert and Go, 2011; Fauve, 2015). So, apart from gaining international and local recognition, nation branding helps states legitimise their activities and enhance soft power in the international arena. For instance, Kazakhstan's bid for non-permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and its initiatives that have been put forward through this platform can be regarded as its efforts to show off its diplomatic abilities. Whereas great powers are mostly occupied with legitimising their actions, small states have struggled to legitimise their existence and subjectivity in the first place. In this regard, nation branding is considered to contribute to the recognition of states (Lehti, 2011; Li and Fred, 2018: 17).

The above discussion has focused on the external dimension of nation branding as an outward-directed state action to improve the image and reputation of states that could be considered the continuation of the establishment of the national identity of countries. Equally important, however, is the domestic dimension of nation branding as a policy to strengthen social cohesion, national unity and identity. Given the importance of both dimensions, chapter three focuses not only on the self-perception and self-identification of Kazakhstan but also on the perception of others. According to Aronczyk, nation branding is a logical extension of the domestic discourse and practice of national identity (2007: 107). It is regarded as a type of mass communication disseminating the ideas and practices to maintain and preserve the nation and its identity in the unstable and uncertain world. By gaining universal recognition and respect, states make their citizens feel better and more confident about what they are and where they belong (Ham, 2008: 131).

Aronczyk contends that positive international opinion produces 'boomerang' effects within the country by promoting not only domestic consensus on and approbation of the state's action but also pride and patriotism (2013:16). The great sense of national pride and contentment that come with international recognition and respect, in turn, strengthen public support for the government's domestic policy (Kaneva, 2011: 191-207). Nation branding, as part of the identity building process, 'perform a disciplining function domestically by providing a powerful political and ontological incentive to live up to the expectations' (Browning and Ferraz, 2017: 493). This, in turn, gains social respect for public policy and strengthens the citizens' patriotism, sense of belonging to the country as a cohesive whole with its culture and tradition. This is the awakening or creation of the self-awareness of the population.

The function and process of nation-building consist mainly of these features, promoting integration among different ethnic groups and raising the sense of unity in society (Sutherland, 2009: 320).

Nation branding is a strategy of self-legitimation in the domestic and international community (Aronczyk, 2008: 42; Fauve, 2015). Legitimisation is defined as the acceptance and recognition by the public of the authority of the ruling government or political regime voluntarily, without coercion, only with consent (Hawkesworth and Kogan, 2004: 110-111; Sengupta, 2017: 47). Nation branding is a state tool to legitimise the government or political regime (Fauve, 2015). Not only the domestic but also the international society should acknowledge the political regime of states so that they can grow and prosper without restrictions and sanctions in the international system. The ultimate goal is to make the nation matter through representation. Some scholars such as Barker and Fauve argue that legitimisation is a 'self-presentation' of state leaders through large and popular events, ceremonies and global projects to gain the right and justification to exercise political power (Barker, 2001: 41; Fauve, 2015: 111).

2.3.2.3. Niche Diplomacy

Image and identity have become an important source of political influence in the post-Cold War world (Anholt, 23 November 2003). Nation branding is an indirect form of power (soft power) that even great powers exercise besides their economic and military capabilities. As Gienow-Hecht defines, power means 'influence' on and 'recognition' by others, not only as a sovereign political entity but also as a key international player (2016: 233). Regardless of one's military capability, 'there is also power in being respected and listened to by virtue of one's political and cultural influence' (Gienow-Hecht, 2016: 233). Nation branding helps to represent one's soft power by making it 'visible, accessible, perceptible, tangible, and, ultimately, convincing in order to exist and continuously assert itself' (Gienow-Hecht, 2016: 233).

To overcome identity and image challenges, most countries rely on nation branding as a peaceful and workable foreign policy solution. Using hard power may end up further deteriorating the image and influence of states in the world where the role and popularity of soft power have grown. In the age of globalisation, nation branding proves to be a more appropriate foreign policy to follow, especially for small states

like Estonia, Latvia and Kazakhstan (Szondi, 2008: 22). For Kazakhstan, which has faced severe public criticism and humiliation, nation branding as foreign policy counter action serves its national interests by contributing towards the construction, maintenance and reinforcement of national identity. However, as Nye emphasised, the use of soft power may seem like a safer option than military approaches. Still, it is often difficult to use, easy to lose, and expensive to restore (2015: 6). In this sense, nation branding, as the state's soft power strategy, could be a bid for securing a niche, which may succeed or fail after all. It is the survival strategy of small states that go beyond the cultural representations of states (Peterson, 2006).

The importance of status explains why nation branding as a strategy is more important to small states than great powers. Without preponderant capabilities, small states can only achieve 'self-esteem' (Browning, 2015) and ontological security (Carvalho and Neumann, 2014) by advancing their position in the international social hierarchy. The nation branding concept can be applied to explain the foreign policy activities of small states in the global arena. It could be considered a demonstration of the diplomatic capabilities of countries to occupy a particular niche area - to secure position, status and role. Nation branding or representation of states in the international community is one way for small states to overcome their limitations on economic, diplomatic and human resources. It makes small states visible and noticeable in the international crowd by allowing them to enter the circle of particular countries dealing with similar matters.

Whether they be small or great, countries involved in nuclear nonproliferation, for instance, may have common goals, slogans and actions, but different reasons for doing branding. As I will discuss in chapter four, Kazakhstan's inheritance of Soviet nuclear weapons and facilities has created not only a security problem but also an image problem. The history of Soviet nuclear testing and Kazakhstan's experience in denuclearisation, on the other hand, have given the country considerable moral authority on issues of nonproliferation and disarmament. Without the capabilities and influence of major nuclear powers, Kazakhstan is aware of the limited leverage it has on global nuclear governance (see chapter 4). Nonetheless, nonproliferation and disarmament provide a niche wherein Kazakhstan, by exercising leadership and promoting the common good, can rebuild its international image. In short, the pursuit of niche diplomacy in selected global governance domains such as nuclear nonproliferation and climate change is often central to increasing a small state's

visibility, promoting a positive image and advancing its status as a 'good power' (Carvalho and Neumann, 2014).

Nation branding may well function as niche diplomacy for doing 'public good' (Leonard, 2002: 9; Aronczyk, 2008: 55; Aronczyk, 2013: 79), which will 'promote benign cosmopolitan and inclusive identities, in contrast to chauvinist nationalism' (Browning and Oliveira, 2017: 494). As Aronczyk stated, 'branding appears as a benign form of national consciousness because the elements that are not benign are not permissible within a nation branding framework' (Aronczyk, 2013: 78-79). Countries' participation in the promotion of peace and security is assumed to make the 'nation's beneficence' a part of its competitive identity-building policy (Aronczyk, 2008: 42; Leonard, 2002: 9; Browning and Oliveira, 2015: 494). That is to say, nation branding has become a growing trend in solving global problems, turning into a peace-making tool for states that strive for peaceful coexistence with others. In practice, countries that present themselves in the opposite direction get a negative image.

Qatar's nation branding can be considered a survival strategy that goes beyond the cultural representations of the country (Peterson, 2006). Peterson discusses the high-profile political and economic engagements of Qatar with the international organisations and the beneficial implications of those relations for micro-states. As a small state with limitations and shortcomings in material and human resources, Qatar's achievements, according to Peterson, are to be proud of. Qatar is the founder of the Gulf Cooperation Council, a contributor to economic and security issues. Furthermore, it became a venue for sport and cultural events (Peterson, 2006: 746-748). Demonstrating diplomatic skills and offering services and commodities will bring small states international recognition and legitimacy. It will show these countries' usefulness to great powers as independent rather than dependent countries (Peterson, 2006: 741).

2.4. How have States Conducted Nation Branding?

Nowadays, almost every state engages in nation branding. As I mentioned in section 2.3.1, globalisation and market rationality have generated the contradictory dynamics of homogenisation and heterogenisation of identities. Although states adopt increasingly similar formulas in their nation branding campaigns, differences in national attributes and identity mean that they differ significantly in how they brand

themselves. National branding campaigns can be designed for the short- or long-term. Short-term initiatives include the design of symbols, logos and slogans, mega-events (World Cup, international expositions, sports games, singing and beauty contests), film production, the export of brand-name products or advertising campaigns (TV, radio, newspaper and magazine ads). These initiatives, however, tend to be criticised as nothing more than political propaganda and commercial (Kaneva, 2011: 130). Yet, according to Anholt, product and nation branding should not be treated equally since states are not 'for sale' (2010: 5).

On the other hand, there are longer-term branding programmes designed to promote a state's social, economic and political developments. Indeed, many argue that real nation branding is not propaganda, but substantial, well-coordinated national policy based on national substance and symbolic actions. In this regard, nation branding should involve genuine economic and political reforms, innovations, technologies, green development, art and science (Dinnie, 2008: 22-23; Anholt, 2010: 13; Kaneva, 2011: 130). This chapter will further investigate the nation branding strategies of former socialist countries, which have struggled with image and identity problems like Kazakhstan. It will help classify different types of branding channels for nation branding in my conceptual framework.

2.4.1. Former Socialist Countries

2.4.1.1. Central and Eastern European countries

While many countries, both developed and developing or Western and non-Western, are engaged in nation branding, the following discussion will concentrate on states that emerged after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The need to improve their international image and rebuild their national identity in the post-Cold War world led newly independent states to launch a nation branding campaign. Given the growing popularity and prospects of branding, states rushed into nation branding with high expectations, considering it a solution for their weak identity and image (Szondi, 2008: 23). Despite their differences, the nation branding campaigns of these countries followed similar formulas due to their geographical proximity and cultural affinity.

Central and Eastern European countries, which joined the EU after the Cold War, have tried to redefine their national and geopolitical identities by using a combination of short and long-term branding channels (Jansen, 2008: 126-130). Clerc and Glover studied the evolution of the national images of Baltic states by focusing on the constant necessity of these states for the global marketing campaign. According to them, policymakers engaged in nation branding to shape the social reality, clarify misunderstandings and represent the nation in a legitimate way (Clerc and Glover, 2015: 17-19). States like Estonia and Latvia, which became independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union, have sought to change their identity from 'post-Soviet' into 'European' (Jansen, 2008: 126-130; Szondi, 2007; Hall, 2004). They have encountered historical challenges in economic and political transformations.

Notwithstanding their differences, nascent countries' nation branding initiatives embraced the five key goals, which were similar and integral to their new image and identity. First, they branded themselves as democratic and politically stable emerging countries with a promising market economy. The second was to justify that Central and Eastern European countries are worthy of the attention and support of the Western European countries or 'Centre Nations' (Szondi, 2007: 10). The third was to change the negative associations of Hungary, Poland, Estonia, Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia into a positive image. Central and Eastern European countries have branded themselves as an 'inexpensive, affordable, modern, sunny and welcoming' tourist destination (Szondi, 2007: 11).

The fourth was to facilitate the construction of a strong national identity of the emerging European countries with the transition economy (Szondi, 2007: 10-11). For instance, Hungary, Poland and Estonia engaged nation branding to promote their economic and political transition in the post-Cold War period. Despite similar image problems, these three countries undertook different branding approaches. Poland and Estonia turned to international branding agencies such as Interbrand and Saffron, while Hungary managed on its own. Hungary established the '1999 Hungaricum club' and the '2005 Hungary roundtable' to coordinate its image construction. Branding strategies, meanwhile, were organised, included mega-events such as Miss World 2006 and Eurovision 2002. Nevertheless, these nation branding initiatives, according to Szondi, suffered from a lack of strategic approach and coordination between institutions and actors involved in the nation branding of these countries (Szondi, 2007: 17-19).

Similar to the practice of Central and Eastern European countries, nation branding has been considered as a strategy that will help gain access to political and economic unions like the EU (Aronczyk, 2008: 44; Kaneva, 2007: 1-16). On the other hand, it is a 'bandwagoning' strategy of the developing but still weak countries with powerful neighbours (Aronczyk, 2008: 42). The nation branding efforts of the emerging countries to join the multilateral organisations could be conceived as a political move for survival. For example, the branding campaign in Bulgaria, Romania (Kaneva, 2007: 1–16; Kaneva, 2011: 191–207), Poland, Estonia, and Hungary (Szondi, 2006: 8–11; Szondi, 2008) is to some extent designed to facilitate their political and social integration into the EU.

Aronczyk and Szondi assert that nation branding as destination branding often involves the process of creating state logos, slogans and symbols (Aronczyk, 2007: 105–128; Szondi, 2007: 8-20). In 2002, the red and white toy kite (see figure 2), which was designed by the advertising agency 'DDB Corporate Profiles', became the Republic of Poland's new national logo (Florek and Jankowska, January 2012). The flying kite signifies Poland's break from its communist past by representing it as a modern, free and joyful state (Aronczyk, 2007: 105-106; Szondi, 2007: 14). Likewise, the Latvian logo called 'The Land that Sings' depicts dancing people under the sun and undulating sea horizon (see figure 2). It symbolises Latvia's folk culture and its resistance to the Soviet rule (Crossman, 19 September 2018). In the late 1980s, Latvian song festivals were the sites of public mobilisation and resistance to the Soviet government (Dzenovska, 2007: 114-115). Some Central and Eastern European Countries have also changed their slogans. Croatia, for instance, changed its slogan from 'A Small Country for a Great Vocation' to 'the Mediterranean as it once was', Hungary from 'the Heart of Europe' into 'Talent for Entertaining' (Szondi, 2007: 11; Jordan, 2014: 289-290).

Kaneva (2011) and Dzenovska (2007) have also studied the role of symbolism in the nation branding of post-Soviet countries. Kaneva, for instance, analyses Romania and Bulgaria's efforts to redefine their national image and reunite their people under a new narrative that represents their parting with the history of communism and embracing the new European future. Kaneva learned the symbolism, theme and underlying meanings of the TV commercials of Romanian and Bulgarian nation branding campaigns (2011: 191-193). Through television commercials, the Romanian and Bulgarian political elites tried to improve the familiarity of the European people

and the world with their country while, at the same time, making the local population accept the new geopolitical reality, their countries' membership in the EU.

Figure 2. Nation Branding Logos ((Dzenovska, 2007: 115; Aronczyk, 2007: 106; Kaneva, 2012: 109)

In the face of an image crisis, Romania carried out several nation branding campaigns. The main issue was to address the negative image that affected the lives of Romanian migrants in Europe and isolated Romania from the rest of the continent (Kaneva, 2012: 17). In 2001, for instance, the 'Made in Romania' project was launched to revive the country's manufacturing sector. Two years later, the TV commercial 'Romania: Simply Surprising' was introduced worldwide to promote the country's historical and cultural heritage, including ancient Orthodox monasteries, Prince Dracula's castle, historical Transylvania as well as the capital city of Bucharest. As Kaneva points out, the combination of the features of the past and present in the state promotion represented Romania as a fairy-tale country tainted with mysticism (2011: 200-201).

For example, the branding campaign 'Romanians in Europe' was designed to tackle Europe's 'Roma Problem' (Kaneva and Popescu, 2014: 506-519). According to Kaneva, the Romanian nation branding strategy highlighted more the country's historical connection to Europe (2011: 198-199). In 2007, the Romanian government launched a poster campaign to clarify the confusion in people's mind about Roma and Romanian (Kaneva and Popescu, 2014: 511). In the following year, Romania

promoted itself as a place for tourism, 'The Land of Choice' (Kaneva and Popescu, 2014: 511-512).

Bulgaria has also carried out particular branding strategies such as 'Promotion Bulgaria', 'Branding Bulgaria' and 'Europalia Bulgaria' (Kaneva, 2011: 196-200; Kaneva, 2012: 99-123) that are considered to be less mystical than Romanian (Kaneva, 2011: 200-201). The 2001 governmental programme, for instance, 'Europalia Bulgaria' was an early ill-conceived attempt at nation branding. Nonetheless, it facilitated the country's participation in the biannual Europalia festival in Brussels in 2002, which celebrated different countries cultural heritage and funded the production of promotional materials (Kaneva, 2012: 102-103). 'Promotion Bulgaria' was another state-sponsored project that oversaw the creation of a national logo (see figure 2). The logo, which was developed by a Bulgarian artist Emil Vulev, became the symbol for nation branding materials and brochures immediately. In contrast, 'Branding Bulgaria' that lasted from 2001 to 2004 was the initiative of the British Council. Both state and non-state branding projects sought to position Bulgaria as a warm and hospitable country, which is noticeable in its national slogans 'Bulgaria. Easy to Find' and 'Open Doors to Open Hearts' (Kaneva, 2011: 198-199; Kaneva, 2012: 104-110).

2.4.1.2. Central Asian Countries

The Central Asian countries have also gradually adopted national branding vocabulary and techniques in their foreign policy, which differed in nature (Marat, 2009). As chapters four and five will show, Kazakhstan has projected itself as the 'Heart of Eurasia' with geostrategic importance, political weight and rich natural resources. Nevertheless, as Marat argues, Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives, while enhancing the country's 'prestige' mainly in the eyes of foreign business and political elites, have neglected the ordinary people (Marat, 2009: 1123). The gap between the government and the society's understanding of Kazakhstan was particularly manifest in the case of Astana Expo-2017 (see chapter 5). The mega event, which was designed to communicate a narrative about Kazakhstan as a modern and greening economy, was subject to doubts and criticisms both inside and outside the country.

Uzbekistan, on the other hand, places a great emphasis on its historical and cultural heritage. The country represents the descendants of the Turkish-Mongol Persian conqueror Amir Timur, who founded the Timurid Empire in the territory of modern

Iran and Central Asia (Subtelny, 2007: 40–41). Not surprisingly, both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan project themselves as ‘crossroads of civilisations and cultures’ (Marat, 2009). Kyrgyzstan has communicated the national slogan ‘Kyrgyzstan - a land of wonders’ and ‘Kyrgyzstan - a land of Santa Claus’. If Kazakhstan delivers similar messages both to domestic and international audiences, Uzbekistan relies on the opposite approach of filtering the information presented inside and outside the country. Kyrgyzstan’s nation branding, in contrast, appears less centralised and loosely coordinated by the government (Marat, 2009: 1123-1124). Marat considers Kazakhstan’s nation branding campaign as the embodiment of the power of persuasion directed to legitimate the domestic political regime. She briefly touches upon the branding investments of Kazakhstan via international mass media, commemorative books, conferences, and public events at embassies abroad (2009: 1129).

Similarly, Fauve contends that nation branding has served as an instrument to legitimise Kazakhstan’s authoritarian regime (2015). In his study of Kazakhstan’s chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010, the Astana Pro cycling team, the intellectual hub of local and international scholars, and the founding of Nazarbayev University, Fauve argues that elite and populace nationalism provided channels to portray Kazakhstan as an open and prosperous country while distracting the global audience from the country’s authoritarianism. These branding phenomena were seen to represent Kazakhstan as an emerging nation that is well integrated into the regional and global world (Fauve, 2015: 118).

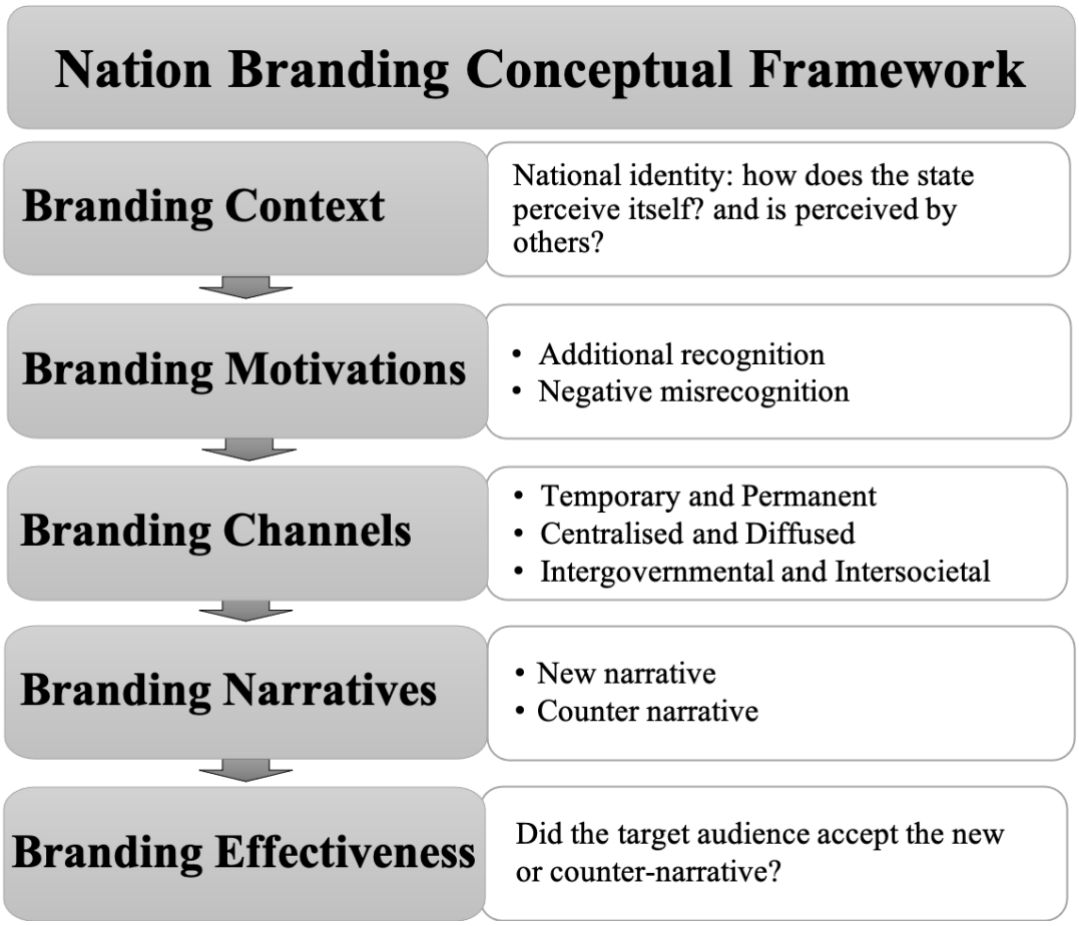
Cities and universities have also become the focus of nation branding as indicators of economic strength, reputation and image. Pak and Go studied how university rankings shape the nation's perception and contribute to nation branding (2011: 147-154). They investigated the influence of global university rankings on Kazakhstan’s brand reputation (Pak and Go, 2011: 149-151). Gaggiotti, Yunak and Cheng offered a city brand management model, a framework of actions and directions helpful in creating a ‘strong city brand’, which is applicable to Kazakhstan’s cities (2008: 115–123). The framework argues that to build competitive cities in the globalised world, Kazakhstan needs to update its approach to developing the economies of its cities (Gaggiotti, Yunak and Cheng, 2008: 122).

2.5. Nation Branding Conceptual Framework

Having reviewed the scholarship on nation branding, the rest of this chapter will proceed to develop a conceptual framework for exploring and explaining Kazakhstan's nation branding. Before I move on to my conceptual framework, I acknowledge that many business scholars and branding practitioners have developed different branding models. Olins, for instance, argues that a typical nation branding campaign consists of seven key steps, including the establishment of a working group, public perception research, consultation, formulation of branding strategy, development of visual design, adjustment of messages, and the formation of 'a public-private liaison group' to implement and oversee the programme (1999: 23-24). Roll, meanwhile, divides brand management into six steps, including brand audit, brand identity, brand strategy, brand implementation, brand equity and brand valuation (2006: 97-127).

Notwithstanding their contribution to the branding scholarship, however, these models tend to conceive of nation branding primarily in operational terms. Since a nation is seen as not much different from a corporation or company in the global market economy (see subsection 2.3.1.), nation branding is understood in the same way as a corporate operation, which refers to daily activities connected with the management, production and selling of products (Maverick, 3 August 2018). Nevertheless, as I have shown in chapter one and again in the above discussion (see subsection 2.3.2.), nation branding is more than an image management operation of a company; it is an integral part of the political (re)construction of national identity. To explain the relationship between Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives and the country's struggle for identity since its independence, the remainder of this chapter lays out the content of my conceptual framework. As figure three shows, this framework divides nation branding into five steps: branding context, branding motivations, branding channels, branding narratives and branding effectiveness.

Figure 3. Nation Branding Conceptual Framework



So, the first analytical step of my conceptual framework is to establish the branding context; to provide background information about the country involved in nation branding (see figure 3). It studies the development of national identity. The second step identifies branding motivations, which is interested in explaining why the state pursues nation branding. The following step discusses the branding channels of the country, used to address image issues by communicating positive narratives about the country. Then, the fourth step explores the state's counter or new narratives developed to surmount the identity crisis. In the last step, the research will examine the effectiveness of branding channels, the success and failure of the counter or new branding narratives. Below, I will describe every step of the conceptual framework in a more detailed form.

2.5.1. Branding Context

The purpose of this step is to examine the context behind the state's nation branding. Since my conceptual framework looks at nation branding as a foreign policy strategy applied to address international challenges to national identity, it starts with engaging the international and domestic discourse of national identity, to understand and explain the identity challenges behind the country's branding campaigns. As highlighted in chapter one, the focus of this step will be on exploring the domestic and international perception of Kazakhstan. It is how Kazakhstan sees itself and how others see it in a global society. So, the branding context determines what kind of identity and image issues triggered nation branding. To reiterate, analysing the development of national identity helps learn motivations of nation branding; and, more importantly, how the country sees and represents itself among the other members of the international society.

The fundamental constituents of national identity are territory, historical memories, myth, legends, culture, politics and economy of the state (Smith, 1991: 14). And they are the determinants of the branding elements and communicators of countries (Dinnie, 2008: 50). It is because the state elites often dominate the (re)construction of national identity. And the way how the elites perceive their national identity is based on the aforementioned fundamental constituents of national identity. Therefore, chapter three will study how Kazakhstan's state elites perceive their national identity, as well as how others perceive them. It helps to make sense of the motivations and actions of Kazakhstan in the branding industry.

As discussed, national identity is not a pure invention; instead, it is rooted as Smith argues in the state's 'geography, history, culture, art and music, famous citizens and other features' (Smith, 1991: 14; Kotler and Gertner, 2002: 251). Many of these features, such as geography, history and political system, impose constraints on the possibilities of nation branding, as it is not easy and fast to change the identity of states that have evolved over the centuries (Anholt, 2003: 116; Anholt, 2006: 272). National identity simply 'refers to what something truly is, its essence' (Dinnie, 2008: 42). For example, case chapters four and five show that Kazakhstan's efforts to build a modern Eurasian identity through the communication of new narratives have run into problems. The constraining factors have been the political regime, geopolitical location and history of Kazakhstan. That is why it is not easy to communicate a new

narrative unless it expresses the true experience and nature of the nation. As I will discuss broader in the last step of this conceptual framework, nation branding will not have much influence on national identity without a real change.

So, this thesis looks at nation branding as a foreign policy tool to represent a country's true nature to key audiences. It serves as a state policy that helps skillfully manipulate and bring out what genuinely exists and what truly changed about the country, which has been overlooked for some reason in the global and local society. It could be, for instance, a state's culture, new developments and achievements in its economy and social life. However, it focuses more on the constitutive role of branding in constructing a new national identity. By communicating positive narratives about the country's identity, nation branding contributes to the establishment of national identity. The political elites are not only the promoters of the true nature and developments of states but also the creators of a new identity. They do so by using marketing skills and tools that will help states look more appealing but not intrusive and annoying but more genuine, relevant and self-confident in the ever-changing world (Aronczyk, 2008). In other words, nation branding is about communicating to the world what the state really is rather than replacing one stereotype with another (Anholt, 2013: 11). Thus, a country with a record of human rights violations will not be successful when it brands itself as a champion of human rights.

On the other hand, the introduction of new policies or the construction of architectural landmarks does lead to changes in a state's economic, social and political life. As I will discuss in chapter five, the new narrative, Kazakhstan is a modern and green economy, the Astana Expo communicated, through building a new entire exposition complex in its new capital Astana, had a limited influence on others perception. The narrative was away from reality and the true characteristics of Kazakhstan's national identity. Kazakhstan's Eurasian identity has been considered an archaic national ideology supporting authoritarianism and conservatism (Yesmukhanov, 2014: 91; Shlapentokh, 2007).

2.5.2. Branding Motivations

In section 2.3., I discussed different incentives for nation branding generally grouped into two: economic, and political and security incentives. Nonetheless, underlying all of them is the need to improve a state's relations with other actors – from countries,

enterprises to individuals – by influencing how the former is perceived by the latter. As I discussed in chapter one, mutual respect and cooperation lead to the formation of a positive identity that strengthens the state's international recognition and legitimacy (Wendt, 1999: 237). But since identity is socially constructed, a state is in a continuous quest for external recognition. On top of that, growing globalisation increased further the competition among states. As an image management strategy, nation branding is needed when a state is dissatisfied with how others perceive it. Building on the nation branding literature in IR, this conceptual framework offers a different lens into understanding why states engage in nation branding. According to my conceptual framework, nation branding is motivated by two problems: additional recognition and negative misrecognition.

First is the problem of additional recognition. As discussed in subsection 2.3.1., a state's international image and reputation are both sources and indicators of its economic competitiveness in the global market. Thus, many states, including advanced economies with strong national identity, continue to enhance their competitiveness by (re)building a 'competitive identity' (Anholt, 2007). The second problem is negative misrecognition. As I mentioned in chapter one, misrecognition occurs when others reject or depreciate what a state projects as its national identity. Since a state is unlikely to be dissatisfied and engaged in nation branding when others misrecognise it by overstating its positive attributes, I focus on negative misrecognition.

The two problems of recognition are closely related since the quest for additional recognition, even for a state with an already competitive identity, can involve attempts to address misrecognition. Meanwhile, unlike Wolf, whose work is discussed in section 1.6., I do not distinguish disrespect from negative misrecognition but rather classify the former as a severe form of the latter (Wolf, 2011). Depreciation or rejection of one's self-representation often amounts to the denigration of its status. As chapter one has shown, the stability and continuity of a state's national identity depend on others' acceptance of its self-representation. Misrecognition, in this regard, not only affects a state's competitiveness in the global market economy but also jeopardises its status, legitimacy and ontological security (see subsection 2.3.2.). What is equally important, however, is a state's readiness to change. Instead of entirely rejecting misrecognition, 'counter-stigmatising' (Adler-Nissen, 2014: 160-9) or imposing one's

self-representation on others, nation branding presupposes a state's readiness to acknowledge and consider, whether fully or partly, others' misrecognition.

Since the lack of recognition and global attention can subject a state – especially a developing state – to significant disadvantages in the global economy – nation branding can increase a state's visibility, relevance and comparative advantage to attract more tourists, international students or investors. Branding studies show that countries have strived to become a popular country-of-origin of goods and services (see subsection 2.3.1.). For instance, national labels such as 'Made in Italy', 'Made in Japan' or 'Made in China' give a clear understanding of what the countries are famous for. Moreover, they market themselves as a top destination for tourism, investment and business. Creating a positive and sustainable image that will increase the level of awareness and popularity of states has been a branding priority. In general, nation branding is claimed to contribute to the economic well-being of countries.

As in the case of Kazakhstan, states' engagement in nation branding could be to combat negative misrepresentation and (re)build a positive international image. As discussed in section 1.3., the differences in national attributes or failure to conform to the values, norms and rules of the dominant Western international society can lead group members to stigmatise deviant or non-group members (Adler-Nissen, 2014). Group members attach a label(s) to deviant members or non-members by highlighting specific differences. Labelling can lead to stereotyping and othering by creating binary opposition between 'normal' and 'deviant'. This will provide the basis for differential treatment (Adler-Nissen, 2014: 146-7, 149-50). Nation branding is a strategy for states to address external challenges to their ontological security by addressing negative misrepresentations while promoting a positive image on their own terms. As I argued in chapter one, nation branding is both a manifestation of and Kazakhstan's response to the dilemma of socialisation.

The absence of nation branding and existing negative images of countries can be dangerous, especially in the globalising world (Browning, 2017: 485), because the state image, like in the case of Kazakhstan, can be hijacked by outsiders (van Ham 2008: 142–143). As Stock argues, any negative image emerges from information available out there (2009b: 120); failure to address misrepresentations could lead to adverse consequences. The lack of a nation brand plus bad image could be a reason for 'underdevelopment and inequality' (Browning, 2016: 50) that deter people from

investing into the economy; and that could stimulate the brain drain, human capital flight, which will further damage the well-being of states.

The strong presence of negative interpretations may disrupt the state routines and call into question the consistency of the state's actions with its self-identification. It is when the states' image and reputation will not correspond to their national identity and policy. In a nutshell, it unsettles states' 'sense of continuity and order in events' (Giddens, 1991: 243). Likewise, the crisis comes when the negative narrative becomes widely shared in the international community. As Steele argues, an international identity crisis creates a deep sense of "shame" and "anxiety" about what the state is, which can lead to insecurity of being, attracting the attention of the whole world (2008: 49-75).

According to Steele, it is the feeling of insecurity during the culmination of the identity crisis that engenders social action and national branding strategies (2008: 3). Rose notes that states can vary significantly in the form and content of branding, but one thing they do share is the decision to do marketing (2010: 254). The act of national branding proceeds because international challenges to states' identity reach a certain threshold: first, negative images portray international actors in a bad light, compromising their identity in front of others; secondly, it can cause feelings of humiliation; third, social humiliation generates shame and anxiety that undermine the state elite's self-vision and belief of themselves. As chapter three will explain, this reflects well the case of Kazakhstan with the film 'Borat'. The negative narratives cause 'a temporary but radical severance of a state's sense of Self' (Steele, 2008: 3); loss of self-confidence and identification will weaken state agency. This leads to a state's pursuit of ontological security through either military or diplomatic means, or sometimes both (see section 1.6.).

2.5.3. Branding Channels

As a strategy to influence other's perception of the self, nation branding is primarily concerned with communication. As discussed in section 2.4., states brand themselves through different branding channels: mass media, international organisations, political, cultural, sports activities and events. For instance, in 2002, the American vision and values were communicated to the Muslim world via the mass media instruments like pamphlets, radio and television advertisements (Anholt, 2010: 70-

73). The 2015 Turkey's nation branding campaign under the slogan 'Turkey: Discover the Potential' uses a distinctive logo and advertisements to increase the country's attractiveness (Rumelili and Suleymanoglu-Kurum, 2017: 557). The South Korean branding project 'Korean Wave' was implemented via the films, music and television industry that has made the country a media star in East and Southeast Asia (Anholt, 2010: 82).

Notwithstanding their differences, all branding channels amount to what Anholt calls 'symbolic actions', which possess intrinsic communicative power because of their particular 'substance' such as innovations, structures, legislation, reforms, investments, institutions, or policies that are especially suggestive, remarkable, memorable, picturesque, newsworthy, topical, poetic, touching, surprising, or dramatic' (Anholt, 2010: 13-14). However, subsection 2.4.1. shows that sometimes states adopt similar strategies of nation branding. Poland, Estonia and Latvia branded themselves through similar branding methods such as creating logos and slogans with the help of international consulting agencies. In this sense, Kazakhstan's approach is similar to that of Hungary, which is primarily run by the government itself. (see subsection 2.4.1.). Whichever branding channel is chosen, it must be appropriate and reflect the true nature and character of the country.

Many scholars have developed different typologies of branding channels. Keller, for instance, identified four types of branding communication channels applied into commercial practice: advertising and promotion; interactive marketing; events and experiences; and mobile marketing (2013: 221). Roll, on the other hand, divided brand communication channels into two categories: internal and external. Whereas the former included organising training and workshops for introducing the brand, the latter focused on the creation of a corporate logo and design (2006: 98). In my conceptual framework, I classify branding channels into three dimensions: temporary and permanent; centralised and diffused; intergovernmental and intersocietal (see figure 3). Since a nation-state is the subject of my study, the classification of branding channels is different from that of Keller and Roll's models. While I focus on nation branding, they study the product and destination branding of companies and corporations.

The first dimension of branding channels refers to the time frame in which the branding event occurs. Temporary branding channels include short-term mega-events, mass media publications and national and cultural symbols and slogans. Despite the

short period, these large-scale events, whether they are political, sporting and cultural, have ‘dramatic character, mass public appeal, and international significance’ (Heslop et al., 2013). Permanent branding channels, on the other hand, should last for a considerable period of time with consistency in branding action. They might not be as large-scale as the temporary channels, but they usually embody the essential elements of national identity. For example, Gilmore and Hansen emphasise the consistent branding activities of Spain, which have incorporated and conveyed the true nature of the nation (Gilmore, 2002: 282; Hansen, 2010: 269). Branding can represent political ideas, new architecture, social, economic, technological developments and innovations associated with states' identity.

The second dimension classifies branding channels from centralised activities such as a government’s diplomatic initiatives to diffused practices such as a country’s cuisine and music (see figure 3). Either way, it requires time, money and especially good commercial, technical and political skills to succeed in branding (Jansen, 2008: 130). States invest significantly in the branding industry with incentives to improve their visibility, reaffirm or support the construction of their national identity. Centralised branding channels include various types of foreign policy events and actions such as mega-events, political and economic initiatives, film industry, tourism and public relations campaigns. There are branding and PR companies that help states create and promote national logos, symbols and slogans such as ‘Spain - Everything under the Sun’, ‘Scotland – Silicon Glen’ and ‘Bulgaria. Easy to Find’ (Kotler and Gertner, 2002). They consult and coordinate states’ nation branding. On the other hand, countries such as Qatar, South Korea and Japan already pursue a high-profile foreign policy. Their active engagement and contribution to global issues can serve as a platform for nation branding.

By diffused branding channels, I refer to those branding activities implemented by non-governmental institutions. Most cultural events take place in a society without the government’s intervention. Developing and promoting national education, music, art, and even cuisine can become a powerful form of nation branding. For instance, famous singers, top universities and fine cuisine are the shortest and quickest way to win the hearts and minds of the global public with a long-lasting and strong grip. As Anholt argues, communication of people, exchange of views and mutual cultural experience are a steady way of building a strong brand of countries. He said, ‘country branding occurs when the public speaks to the public’ (Anholt, 2003: 119). The best and most

effective nation branding ambassadors a government can wish for are the ordinary people with strong attachment and patriotism to its motherland (Anholt, 2005: 300-304).

National culture is of particular importance as a diffused form of branding channel (Anholt, 2005: 136-138). Branding culture is more of a status promotion. It is representing the country from a national perspective, such as a civilised, cultured, philanthropic, intellectual and cosmopolitan nation (Anholt, 2005: 138). The cultural aspects of nations such as Japanese art and cuisine, Russian poetry and science, and German classical music and literature would build an irreplaceable and uncopiable national image (Anholt, 2005: 136-138). With a long history, these unique cultures not only can change misrepresentations but also add credibility and values to a country's image and reputation (Anholt, 2005: 139). The same can be said about national art, music and food, which carry those special and unique features of nations that can serve as powerful brands.

The third dimension of branding channels concerns the target audience. On the one end are channels directed at foreign governments and political elites. Such intergovernmental branding channels include summits, forums and conferences devoted to pressing global issues. On the other end are channels that are aimed to promote people-to-people relations. Examples of intersocietal channels include International Expos, Olympic Games, World Cups, Universiade, tourism, film industry, etc. By communicating a state's narrative to its target audience, these branding channels not only serve to increase its visibility but also to build a unique and favourable image and identity.

2.5.4. Branding Narratives

As chapter one argued, external threats to the stability and continuity of a national identity trigger foreign policy counteraction (see figure 1) (Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008; Schelenz, 2017; Ejdus, 2018). International challenges such as negative misrepresentations and disrespect hamper the development of national identity. On the contrary, mutual respect and cooperation contribute to the consolidation and longevity of a state’s values and beliefs that strengthen its national identity (Wendt, 1999: 237; Chafetz, Spirtas and Frankel, 1998: x). According to my conceptual framework, nation

branding represents a state's attempt to respond to its identity challenges by constructing and communicating a counter or new narrative.

Build a compelling narrative is quite a challenge, as it should address the wishes and needs of people to succeed (Hansen, 2010: 270). Some scholars such as Gilmore and Hansen refer to Spain as a successful example of nation branding practice since its branding channels and narratives communicated the country's true history and national experience (2010: 269). During the last 50 years, Spain has turned from a poor and isolated state into a modern European country with a democratic society and developed economy (Gilmore, 2002: 281-282; Hansen, 2010). An effective narrative is a true story that is credible and offers different perspectives on a country.

So, what is a narrative? As I have discussed in chapter one, national identity arises from shared knowledge, beliefs, and feelings about an 'imagined community' that has evolved over time (Berenskotter, 2014: 268). To communicate a nation's identity to the world, therefore, entails the construction of narratives. Structured as a story with a sequence of events (Berger, 1997: 4), the narrative is not just an arranged 'set of facts' (Lawler, 2002: 242). According to Lawler, narratives are

> *social products produced by people within the context of specific social, historical and cultural locations. They are related to the experience that people have of their lives, but they are not transparent carriers of that experience. Rather, they are interpretive devices, through which people represent themselves, both to themselves and to others (2002: 242).*

Lawler's definition stresses that as an 'interpretive device', the narrative does not include every experience; instead, it includes what is considered essential and excludes what is not (Lawler, 2002: 242; Berenskoetter, 2014: 269). Nonetheless, according to Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin (2014), it consists of four components: character(s), setting, action and resolution. Character(s) refer to the actor(s) such as the nation itself that exercise agency in the sequence of events. Setting refers to the context such as geographical, temporal and historical wherein events take place. Actions are performed by the actor(s) to resolve problems or achieve certain ends (Roselle, Miskimmon and O'Loughlin, 2014: 75-6). These components and selected experiences are structured to communicate 'a process of coming into being' – in other words, what the nation has experienced in the past and what it will become in the future (Berenskoetter, 2014: 268, 270-80).

To reiterate, this framework identifies two types of narratives: counter and new. A counter-narrative is an argument developed and disseminated to refute prejudices or stereotypes about people and nations (Given, 2008: 132). Telling a counter-narrative is to offer an opposite reality that has hitherto remained hidden and unclear to the people living in different countries (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004: 2). Another way to deal with social stigma is to retell a new narrative of what a nation is by offering a more compelling story than the existing negative one that is closer to reality.

A narrative is a narrated story or account about a person, organisation or state. Telling stories is to give meanings to the main character's actions, decisions, and goals (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010: 135). It involves interpreting situations and a series of events that reflect and promote a particular point of view or set of values. The narrative is a subjective narration of the sequence of events that suggest how to comprehend the situation (Sheigal, 2007). The story is what defines the developmental experience of a particular society and nation. The new narrative would allow its audience to gain new knowledge about the life of the unfamiliar or less familiar community and country. It is a particular lens through which a particular subject or object is explained (Sheigal, 2007: 87).

Through the construction of narratives, states convey to the domestic and international audience information about '[what] they are now, how they came to be, and where they think their lives may be going in the future' (McAdams and McLean, 2013: 233). It is telling what a state is and what it does. As Whitebrook points out, constructing a narrative 'is a matter of showing and placing ourselves and others in the public realm' (2001: 23). The process of narration is a process of communication during which sides share information and messages. Constructing narratives is managing the relationship between credibility and novelty successfully. 'Credibility requires convincing the audience that the story is plausible, whereas novelty requires getting them to view things in new, different ways' (Wang, 2013: 144). Nation branding in this regard is about telling a credible story from a different perspective that helps interpret the actions of states. It shapes the social reality, clarifies misrepresentations and represents the nation in a legitimate way.

2.5.5. Branding Effectiveness

How to assess the effectiveness of a nation branding initiative is subject to debate. On the one hand, the major international rankings of nation brand, such as the Good Country Index, Brand Finance, FutureBrand Country Index and FDI Intelligence's 2018 Nation Brands, equate the overall value of a nation's brand mostly with its economic competitiveness. On the other hand, conceptual ambiguity renders it difficult to assess the extent to which a state's image and identity have genuinely changed as a direct result of its nation branding campaign. As I argued in subsection 2.5.2., a state's choice to engage in nation branding is motivated by two problems of recognition: additional recognition and negative misrecognition. In this regard, this conceptual framework considers a nation branding campaign effective when the target audience recognises the narrative a state seeks to convey through a branding channel. Perceptual change occurs when a new or counter-narrative reported by the state replaces the existing narrative(s) as the primary basis on which it is perceived and presented by others. A state earns additional recognition when an increasing number of actors become increasingly aware of the new image and identity the country seeks to project through nation branding.

This, however, leads back to the fundamental questions about the nature of identity change and the difference between nation branding and other strategies of image management, in particular propaganda. According to Anholt, a state can only change its image either by changing itself or by 'do[ing] something' that changes others' impression of itself (2007: 47). Not surprisingly, the former often takes a long time; it is a gradual process (Anholt, 2007: 40-47). Nation branding is not a substitute for the tasks of change but a strategy to facilitate their implementation and enhance their impact (Anholt, 2007: 47). On the contrary, the latter can lead to a change in a state's international image – be it positive or negative – in a short period of time (Anholt, 2007: 48-54).

The importance of genuine change points to the difference between nation branding and other image management strategies, particularly propaganda. As Anholt argues, what distinguishes nation branding from propaganda is the purpose (2007: 37-41). Whereas nation branding is the means to facilitate genuine change and development, propaganda is the means to achieve a political objective without regard to whether or not there will be genuine change. For example, an authoritarian regime that seeks to

project itself as a democracy without implementing genuine reforms is only engaged in propaganda rather than nation branding.

The indivisibility of the international and domestic dimensions of national identity means that the success of a state's nation branding initiative hinges on its domestic impact. If national identity arises from citizens' shared knowledge, beliefs and feelings about their 'imagined community', a state's new narrative gains credibility only when citizens believe in it (Anderson, 2006: 6; Anholt, 2007: 56-58). Moreover, if citizens are the essential bearers and promoters of their national identity, strong identification with the new narrative will contribute to the success of a state's nation branding initiative. As the following chapter will show, the Kazakhstani society has remained divided over what constitutes the new Kazakhstani national identity since the country's independence in 1991. As I will show in chapter five, the lack of domestic consensus would further undermine the credibility of the narrative the Kazakh government sought to communicate to the world through the Astana Expo.

When a state is engaged in nation branding for economic purpose, it does not seek to change its identity. Others, such as Kazakhstan and other former Soviet republics, do seek to promote identity change. The latter is the deep form of nation branding aimed at contributing to the construction and communication of a new national identity. In other words, nation branding represents a state's attempt to renegotiate the intersubjective understandings of its national identity. It is a state strategy to communicate the political elites' views and beliefs about a given country - where the state belongs, how it wants to be seen and what role it wants to play in world affairs.

To reiterate, changing a state's image and identity is not as quick as one might think (Anholt, 2007: 40, 47). Communicating new or counter-narratives to the global public is a time and money consuming process, the outcome of which eventually is dependent on the proper selection of branding channels to the right audience at the right time. Nation branding failure, as Rose stated, might be the outcome of communicating 'the wrong audience with the wrong vehicle' (2010: 267). Or, on the contrary, not communicating a clear or well-structured narrative that delivers the genuine beliefs and characteristics of a state. For the purpose here, I will evaluate the effectiveness of Kazakhstan's nation branding, whether the communicated narratives of Kazakhstan were accepted or not by both the domestic and international community, by examining the general public's opinion. The primary sources of studying the effectiveness of

nation branding would be analysing the mass media, global branding rankings, research and statistics.

It is necessary to take into consideration the global surveys and ratings of countries done by the nation branding firms such as Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, FutureBrand Country Index and East-West Global Index 200. The different forms and dimensions of nation branding highlight the difficulty of measuring its effectiveness. Anholt, for example, developed the Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index, the first global ranking of nation brands (2003: 214-216; 2005: 296-304). It measures the global perceptions of countries across six dimensions of national competence: governance (it evaluates citizens' confidence in the competence of their government and fairness of their domestic policies); people (employability and hospitality); exports (it shows customers' satisfaction with products and services countries produce); tourism (tourists' first choice of destination); culture and heritage (assessing the attractiveness of the cultural heritage of nations); investment; and immigration (it shows the preference of people about where they would want to live, work and set up a business.) (Anholt, 2005: 296-298). The difficulty, though, lies in the fact that high scores on these parameters do not mean that a country has a positive image or reputation. For instance, while China has emerged as the world's largest exporter, the quality of Chinese-made products has long been the subject of criticisms.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has re-examined the concept of nation branding and developed a conceptual framework for explaining Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives. Introduced to IR from business administration and communications, the concept of nation branding reflects the increasing importance states attach to managing how they represent themselves and how others in the post-Cold War world represent them. Indeed, if governments, businesses and individuals act towards a state based on their ideas, opinions and feelings about it, nation branding as a strategy of image management is central to a state's pursuit of economic, political and security interests. Although some scholars have linked the study of nation branding to that of identity, which is one of the fundamental concepts in the study of IR, more efforts are required to examine how nation branding contributes to the (re)construction of national identity. It is for this purpose that this chapter developed a conceptual framework to

explain nation branding as an identity construction process divided into five steps including branding context, branding motivations, branding channels, branding narratives and branding effectiveness.

The conceptual framework conceives of nation branding as a state's response to the problem of recognition. The need to earn additional recognition or address negative misrecognition requires a state to influence how others represent it by changing how it represents itself. This entails a state to communicate a new or counter-narrative to its target audience through a branding channel. The durability of a state's national identity and international image, however, means that success depends not just on how a country conducts nation branding, but more importantly, on the purpose for which it performs nation branding. Only when a state is committed to genuine change, will its narrative gain credibility in the views of others.

The conceptual framework provides the basis for understanding Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives. The possibilities of any nation branding initiative are constrained by its context. As the following chapter will show, how Kazakhstan responded to external challenges to its identity from misrecognition by others cannot be understood without considering the nation has perceived itself since its independence in 1991. While the political elites under the leadership of Nazarbayev redeveloped Eurasianism as the ideational foundation for the building of a new national identity, the society remained deeply divided over what constitutes Kazakhstani national identity. The lack of domestic consensus, which is manifested most sharply in the contradictions between Kazak-centrism and a transethnic civic identity, as well as between modernisation and retraditionalisation, not only exacerbated the problem of negative misrecognition by the outside world but would also prove to undermine Kazakhstan's branding narrative about itself as a modern Eurasian nation.

CHAPTER 3. BRANDING CONTEXT: EURASIAN IDENTITY OF KAZAKHSTAN

3.1. Introduction

The two previous chapters laid out the conceptual framework for explaining Kazakhstan's nation branding during Nazarbayev's presidency and its impact on the development of the country's identity. As a foreign policy strategy aimed at eliminating external challenges to the image and identity of countries, nation branding in my conceptual framework is considered to (re)construct national identity. In the post-Cold War era, the role of identity and image in the economic and political life of states has increased, becoming one route towards success. National identity reflects not only the states' national characteristics and distinctive properties but also its role and position in world politics. Most importantly, national identity influences a state's socialisation into the international community, determine whether the given country will be a member of 'in-group loved' or 'out-group hated' (Halevy, Bornstein and Sagiv, 2008). In the case of authoritarian countries, identity plays a significant role in the international and domestic legitimisation of a ruling party.

To reiterate, the conceptual framework of this thesis consists of five steps such as branding context, branding motivations, branding channels, branding narratives and branding effectiveness. As the first and second analytical steps of my conceptual framework, the function of this chapter is to establish the context of Kazakhstan's nation branding and identify the country's branding motivations. Since national identity and image are social and historical constructs, we cannot understand the motivations and possibilities of nation branding in separation from its context. For this purpose, this chapter examines discourse(s) on the national identity of Kazakhstan both inside and outside of the country. The focus will be on exploring two central questions of self-consciousness: how does Kazakhstan see itself? How do other countries see Kazakhstan?

As the branding context, this chapter identifies Kazakhstan's motivations to and the need for (re)branding. Analysis of both the internal and external contestation over the meaning(s) of Kazakhstani national identity will help explain the identity challenges behind the country's branding campaigns. To counter negative misrepresentations and project a new international image, nation branding involves the construction of

narratives and the selection of corresponding branding channels to project them internationally. The problem of negative misrecognition by the West, as the following discussion will show, constituted the motivation behind Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives. To counter negative misrepresentations and project a favourable international image, Kazakhstan has attempted to change how the world perceives it by changing its self-representation.

This chapter puts Kazakhstan's nation branding in context by examining the evolution of and contestation over the Republic's new national identity since its independence in 1991. The end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union forced the newly independent republics to search for new identities. In Kazakhstan, this was embodied in the use and redevelopment of Eurasianism as the ideational foundation for the construction of a new civic identity. However, the Kazakhstani Eurasian national identity has remained highly contested in light of domestic and international challenges. Domestically, the Republic struggled to balance the need to consolidate the legitimacy of the new political order dominated by the ethnic Kazakhs on the one hand and the need to preserve its sovereignty and stability by maintaining interethnic and interreligious harmony. Internationally, Kazakhstan needed to stabilise its relations with Russia while gaining recognition and support from the West to secure its survival, integrate itself into the liberal international order and develop into a modern nation. The evolution of, and contestation over, Kazakhstani Eurasianism embodied the country's struggle to address these challenges since independence.

As section 3.3. will show, however, Western cultural hegemony and perceptual differences between Kazakhstan and the world have led to its negative representation in the West. In the views of Western observers, not only has Kazakhstan yet to reach Western standards of modernity and democracy; the Republic and Central Asia, in general, could pose a threat to international security. The biggest challenge to Kazakhstan's international image and identity, however, came from popular culture, as epitomised by the television programme 'Da Ali G Show' and the comedy film 'Borat'. Ironically, these external challenges provided the context in which Kazakhstan embarked on its nation branding campaign. While these satires helped Kazakhstan gain unprecedented visibility and built an 'accidental international brand' for the country, they posed a problem of negative misrecognition in its most serious

form that jeopardised Kazakhstan's image, identity and legitimacy (Marat, 2009: 1128).

3.2. Nation Branding of Authoritarian Regimes: Identity and Legitimacy

The victory of liberal democracy over its ideological rival communism led to the spread of Western values and ideas in the developing world. They are considered essential elements of the highest form of government and a prerequisite for socialisation in the liberal international community (see section 1.4.). As Kubicek (1998: 29) and Huntington (1991: 58-59) state, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, democratisation transitions have taken place in most of the post-Soviet republics, especially in the Eastern European countries trying to join the European Union. Given the expansion of the American-led liberal international order, preservation and legitimisation of the authoritarian form of government have become a major challenge for non-Western developing countries. They became 'out-group members' of the international society, which became increasingly subject to stigmatisation and exclusion (see section 1.4.).

As I am going to show in the following sections, the negative perceptions of Kazakhstan's authoritarian rule, clan politics, as well as the processes of Kazakhisation and retraditionalisation have contributed to the representations of the country in the West as a 'former Soviet outpost', 'backwater' and a 'black hole' (Frank, 1992: 50; Cummings, 2012: 1-10; Marat, 2009: 1131-1135; Saunders, 2012: 58-64). As scholars highlight, every public scandal and mass media story about nepotism and corruption in Kazakhstan contributed more and more to the consolidation of the negative image (Accultyules, 26 February 2010; Cummings, 2012: 1-10; Olcott, 2005: 30-36). All these criticisms, in general, have represented Kazakhstan as both a security risk and as an underdeveloped country struggling between modernisation and retraditionalisation. By subjecting the narratives of Eurasian identity into question, foreign representations of Kazakhstan pose a threat to both the domestic and international legitimacy of the Nazarbayev government.

Meanwhile, the challenge of maintaining power and building a strong, positive identity made Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan more creative and adept. According to Matveeva (2009) and Omelicheva (2016: 481), the persistence of authoritarian regimes in Central Asia is due to 'effective authoritarian

legitimisation' and political manipulation. As a practice directed to reconstituting and enhancing a state's image and identity, nation branding has become an effective political tool for authoritarian rulers to hold on to power and resist the impact of democratisation waves (see section 2.2.). As I will show in chapters three to five, Kazakhstan's nonproliferation diplomacy and the development of the country's capital city of Astana have become almost synonymous with Nazarbayev himself. Astana's hosting of annual conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament and Expo-2017 projected an image of Kazakhstan's remarkable achievements in domestic development and international diplomacy the leadership of Nazarbayev and the Nur Otan Party.

As I argue in chapter two, nation branding is integral to states' identity building and image promotion, especially it gained a prominent role in authoritarian countries' foreign policy agenda. By remaking their images, authoritarian countries try to distract public attention away from the domestic problems that are unattractive to Western and democratic states (Patrascu, 2014: 43). At the same time, nation branding helps legitimise an authoritarian state by focusing others' attention on its culture, traditions, socioeconomic achievements and effective governance (Cho, 2017: 594). Cho, for example, studied North Korea's Arirang public festival and military performances, such as nuclear tests, as platforms to promote the country's culture and military capabilities in order to gain domestic and international recognition (Cho, 2017). These two annual events are designed to bolster the ruling government's position by exhibiting North Korea's history and culture and showcasing its nuclear development as a guarantor of the country's sovereignty and prosperity.

The popularity of the ruling party in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan means that Central Asian governments rule not only by 'coercion,' but also by building and maintaining a positive image and identity so as to justify themselves as the 'right and proper' government that represent the beliefs, values and expectations of the people (Koch, 2013: 42; Omelicheva, 2016: 481). Referred by scholars as soft authoritarianism, this type of government uses a mixture of hard and soft power, and refrains from using overt coercion whenever possible (Schatz and Maltseva, 2012: 46). Like other soft authoritarian states, Kazakhstan has continued to rely on nation branding and other effective legitimisation strategies to consolidate its rule and build a positive identity.

As discussed in section 2.2., the concept of nation branding gained prominence in the study of international relations only relatively recently. Therefore, it is not

surprising that there is a limited number of studies examining governments' legitimisation activities through the conceptual lens of nation branding (2013: 6). Cornelissen, for instance, studies South Africa's nation branding as an integral part of the political elites' attempt to legitimise the post-apartheid state and society (2017). She examines how the South African government has used foreign policy and international events to communicate official messages to the domestic and international society (Marat, 2009; Fauve, 2015; Cornelissen, 2017). Marat and Fauve, meanwhile, look at how the Nazarbayev government enhanced its legitimacy through sports and cultural diplomacy, including the Astana cycling team, conferences and cultural expositions.

Based on the works of Cornelissen, Fauve and Marat, my thesis investigates the nature of Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives in relation to the contested process of national identity building since the country's independence in 1991. As Kazakhstan's notable foreign policy events, the annual international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament and the Astana Expo bore influence on the country's image and identity. Yet, they have not been analysed through the prism of nation branding. While the aforementioned works see nation branding as primarily a tool to improve Kazakhstan's image and reputation, my research studies and explains how nation branding is related to the (re)constitution of the country's national identity.

3.3. Kazakhstan's Self-Perception: Kazakhstani Eurasianism

Like other former Soviet republics, Kazakhstan needed to search for and rebuild the ideational foundation for its statehood after 150 years of Russian rule. If the former Soviet identity of Kazakhstan was built on Soviet ideology, Russian culture and language, then its identity after independence developed on the basis of Kazakh culture and traditions. At the same time, however, the newly independent Republic also strove to be the legitimate successor state to the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (Kazakh SSR). It is not surprising, therefore, that Kazakhstan preserves many social and political elements that constituted the Kazakh SSR such as multi-ethnicity, syncretism, the dominance of the Russian language and the political system (Laruelle, 2000: 8; Kubicek, 1998: 29-31). Under Nazarbayev's presidency, Kazakhstan found the ideational source of its new national identity in the Russian political theory of Eurasianism. Notwithstanding its Russian origins, the Kazakhstani variant of

Eurasianism represents the country's attempt to construct a narrative about itself in distinction from Russia.

Most of the time, the literature on Eurasianism uses Kazakh and Kazakhstani Eurasianism interchangeably, sometimes one of the two in explaining the identity-construction process in Kazakhstan. Embodying Turkic people's aspirations for freedom, Kazakhstani Eurasian identity underlines Kazakhstan's quest for independence, unity and stability in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society. Kazakhstan's Eurasian features are, as such, underpinned by a multi-national, multi-religious society and trilingual system. However, the study shows that the Eurasian identity of Kazakhstan has developed around the culture and history of the Kazakhs, which again makes us to question the essence of the civic identity of the country. To emphasise that point, some scholars used the term of Kazakh Eurasianism (Shlapentokh, 27 May 2016; Sengupta, 2017: 53-60; Chaudet, Parmentier and Pélopidas, 2009: 154). To prevent any confusion and vagueness in the subsequent discussion, I apply the term Kazakhstani Eurasianism (or Kazakhstani Eurasian identity), which is intended to be distinct from the Russian schools of thought, Classic Eurasianism and Neo-Eurasianism. The main reason for choosing Kazakhstani rather than Kazakh is to emphasise the form of national identity that Kazakhstan has adhered to up until now, namely civic.

Meanwhile, to protect its national selfhood, Kazakhstan pursues modernisation without full Westernisation, in a way that ties in more closely with elite views of Kazakhstani culture and values. Kazakhstan's aspirations to be recognised as a 'modern' nation by the developed West were manifested in the dissociation of Kazakhstani Eurasianism from the Soviet, 'Muslim' and 'Turkic' identities of other Central Asian states on the one hand, and its commonality with Russia and Europe on the other (Laruelle, 2000: 8-9). Kazakhstan avoids being seen as a Muslim country (Cummings, 2003:33). In this regard, Kazakhstan distinguished itself from other Central Asian states such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Yet, notwithstanding the political elites' efforts to promote Kazakhstan as modern and Eurasian, the question of what constitutes Kazakhstan's national identity remains highly contested. As the following discussion will show, Laruelle suggests that Kazakhstan's identity-building project brought about a dual process of 'retraditionalisation and modernisation' (Laruelle, 2017: 5). However, it is slightly different and more complex than this claim suggests. Domestic contestation over the

meanings of national identity, meanwhile, has been manifested externally in negative misrecognition and misrepresentation by the West. In chapters two and three, I argue that nation branding becomes a political tool by which Kazakhstan (re)defines its national identity according to its own particular path of modernisation and its integration into the liberal international order on its own terms.

3.2.1. Origins of Kazakhstani Eurasianism

This section explains why Eurasianism in the first place appeared in the formation of Kazakhstan's identity, an aspect that has been little studied in the literature. Although some scholars such as Bassin and Laruelle examine the role of Eurasianism in Kazakhstan's national identity building, many tend to focus on the school of thought's influence on Kazakhstan's aspirations for regional leadership, its security policy towards Russia, and the Kremlin's geopolitical vision (Cummings, 2003: 139-155; Shlapentokh, 2007: 143-156; Abzhaparova, 2011b: 1-14; Bassin, 2016: 275-286; Anceschi, 2017: 283-297; Sengupta, 2017: 47-67). While Bassin talks about the influence of Gumilyov's ideas on the identity discourses of Kazakhstan and other constituent republics of post-Soviet Russia, Laruelle goes further by analysing the views of local writers such as Olzhas Suleimenov and Murat Auezov on Eurasianism (Bassin, 2016: 275-286; Laruelle, 2008: 171-176). By building on the existing literature, this chapter examines the localisation of Eurasianism in Kazakhstan, its implementation in national identity building, and the continued domestic contestation on the meanings of Kazakhstani national identity since independence. In this and the following subsections, I explain why Eurasianism became the basis of the new Kazakhstani national identity and how the country's political elites have understood and represented the idea of being a Eurasian nation. This section explores domestic policies and programmes, the tension between Eurasian optimists and Eurasian sceptics, and the controversies over language and religion, all of which have shaped the development of Kazakhstan's national identity.

One cannot understand the significance of Eurasianism in Kazakhstan's identity building without understanding its origins. To begin with, here I draw on the history of the Eurasian school of thought to show how important Kazakhstan's history is to its modern sense of self. Eurasianism offers a historical and theoretical lens to study and explain the development of Kazakhs, their relationship with others. It connects

Kazakhstan to the transnational history of the world. That is why we cannot understand the Kazakhstani Eurasian identity in the post-Soviet era without understanding its historical origin. Like other former Soviet republics, which were searching for new identities after independence, Kazakhstan sought to draw upon elements in the nation's history to legitimise its statehood and nationhood.

The modern territory of Kazakhstan was historically settled by Turkic nomads, whose ancestors united Turkic-speaking tribes and established the Turkic Khaganate from 6th to 8th century (Akhmatnurov, 2015: 3-17). In the 13th century, Genghis Khan's army occupied half of Eurasia, uniting Turkic nomads, Russians and Mongols into the Golden Horde empire (Abdakimov, 1994: 44-50). In the 15th century, the steppe tribes under the leadership of the sultans Zhanibek and Kerey seceded from the Golden Horde empire and founded the Kazakh Khanate – the first independent Kazakh polity – in 1466 (Artykbayev, 2008: 295-305; Qazaqstan Tarihy, 30 December 2016). Later, in the 18th century, Tsarist Russia's Eastward expansion led to the loss of statehood for Kazakhstan and its subjection under Imperial Russian, and subsequently Soviet Russian rule for the next one and a half centuries (Qazaqstan Tarihy, 30 December 2016; Laumulin, 2016). The rise and fall of the Turkic, Mongolian and Russian empires on the territory of Eurasia closely intertwined the histories, cultures and identities of its indigenous populations (Trubetskoy, 1995: 425; Dugin, 2002: 200-207; Zhuravleva and Ivanov, 2016: 15-19).

The origins of Eurasianism and the history of Eurasian nations could be traced back to the works of Russian intellectual elites such as philologist and historian Prince Nikolai Trubetskoy, historian Georgy Vernadsky, geographer Petr Savitsky, philosopher L.P. Karsavin, art critic Petr Suvchinsky, publicist G.V. Florovsky, Soviet historian and ethnologist Lev Gumilyov. Notable figures of contemporary (Neo-)Eurasianism include Alexander Dugin, Alexander Panarin and Alexander Prokhanov (Lavrov, 2008: 5; Arbatova, 2019). The historical and geographical school of classic Eurasianism studied and explained the history of Russians and Turkic nomads from ancient times. By tracing the influence of history and geography, classic Eurasianists offered a unique lens of interpretation of the history of Russia, the Soviet Union, and the nations and peoples of the Great Steppe, such as Kazakhstan. In the subsequent paragraphs, I mainly refer to Gumilyov's Eurasianism, the last Eurasianist of the classic school.

‘Eurasia’, according to Savitsky, refers to the ‘Great Steppe’, the geographic, cultural and historical sphere of the so-called Eurasians, including the Russian empire and the USSR, as well as what are now Mongolia and northern Xinjiang (Zhuravleva and Ivanov, 2016). According to the classic school of Eurasianism, Eurasia is neither Europe nor Asia but the ‘middle continent’, which gave birth to an ‘independent civilisation’ combining its own distinctive features with elements of both Europe and Asia (Vernadsky, 1927: 7; Dugin, 2002: 41). As an Orthodox empire comprised of Slavic, Mongol and Turkic peoples and a civilisation influenced by the cultures of the Great Steppe, Russia is the centre of Eurasia (Vernadsky, 1927; Ermolayev, 1994; Dugin, 2002). Under Russian leadership, Eurasia is seen as a ‘big family’ and Turkic Central Asia as its inseparable part, connected by history, geography and common way of life (Trubetskoy, 1995: 425; Dugin, 2002: 200-207). Western civilisation is considered a great threat to Eurasian culture, which differs radically on a spiritual, sociopolitical and cultural basis. In this way, Eurasianism explains the nature of negative bias, dislike and alienation of both the West and Eurasia towards each other. This is important as, by identifying a shared Eurasian history and heritage with Russia, Kazakhstan sought to stabilise its relations with Russia.

Throughout the 20th century, Eurasianism developed into a unique intellectual movement. Although the school of thought was highly criticised during the Soviet era, it regained prominence after the fall of the Soviet Union. Gumilyov’s works epitomised the peak of Eurasianism’s intellectual influence. They discuss the dominant role and influence of the Mongol Empire and its descendants Turkic people in the history of Eurasia during the Middle Ages. Gumilyov’s historical narratives about the fall and rise of Turkic Khaganate, Mongol Empire and formation of the Kazakh state in the Great Steppe before the Russians emergence in the territory of current Central Asia legitimise the national borders and identity of Kazakhstan, leaving Russia no legal claim to the Northern territory of Kazakhstan.

Gumilyov’s advocacy for respect towards Turkic populations and preservation of their culture represents his opposition during the USSR against forced Russification and the imposition of a single Soviet identity across all nationalities (Gumilyov, 2010). Indeed, Soviet citizens had to be fluent in Russian and be familiar with the Soviet and Russian culture, which performed communicative functions that strengthen power (Varnavsky, 2013). Among Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan suffered the most

destructive consequences of the communist nationalising policy (Nazarbayev, 2006: 98).

Centrally imposed policies, together with forced Russification, resulted in socioeconomic disasters. These include: the Rapid Industrialisation of the Soviet Economy from 1928 to 1932; the Forced Collectivisation of Agriculture, referred to as the 'Kazakhstan tragedy', during the late 20s–30s (Abylkhozhin, Kozybaev and Tatimov, 1989: 53–71); the Soviet Famine of 1932–33; the Great Purge of 1936-1938; Anti-Religious Campaigns (Library of Congress, 31 August 2016; McCauley, 2013); and the Virgin Lands Campaign in 1954 (Koppen, 2013: 592). One consequence of these policies was the dwindling of the Kazakh population and the rise of non-Kazakhs, mostly Russians (Dave, 1996: 52; Olcott, 1995: 129-224; Koppen, 2013: 592-593). The demographic change was accompanied by the declining role of Islam and the Kazakh language, as well as the transformation of sociocultural norms and beliefs. The Soviet nation building policy of the 1920s-1930s was deeply indoctrinated in the Union Republics (Kaziev, 2015: 29; Burkhanov, 2017:13). The ethnic composition of the Kazakhstani population and their identity were reformulated.

As I am going to discuss more in detail in the coming subsections, Sovietisation or Russification took deep roots in Kazakhstan. Given the massive changes in culture and society, the Soviet legacy left a huge scar in the international and local image and identity of contemporary sovereign Kazakhstan (Smagulova, 2006: 305-308). Some scholars emphasise that under Soviet communism the Kazakhs, and other nationalities, stood close to 'the abyss of depersonalisation' (Karamanova, 1 October 2013). Seventy years of communist rule has deeply established Russian as the language of administration, employment and social communication within Kazakhstan. Not surprisingly, this has posed a distinct challenge to the country's nation building project after independence.

The post-Cold War era saw a gradual de-Sovietisation and revival of ethnic self-consciousness in the former Soviet republics. Despite belonging to the same Turkic-speaking ethnic groups, the resurgence of national identity in the countries of Central Asia assumed different forms and degree, as the Soviet identity was more entrenched in some states more than in others (Kubicek, 1997: 643-644). As far as possible, all post-Soviet countries tried to restore some of what they had lost and what had been forgotten during the communist period. William Fierman, Professor in Central Eurasian Studies, offers this explanation:

> *As republics moved towards sovereignty and later achieved independence, conflicting sides pressed for measures representing very different approaches. I will oversimplify the situation by identifying two polar groups, 'nation-statists' and 'civic-statists' (Fierman, 1998: 172).*

The 'nation-statists', members of a titular nation, pressed for the culture and tradition of the titular ethnic group to acquire a privileged status in its home territory. The 'civic-statists', on the other hand, mostly the members of non-titular nations, demanded that their country of residence treated them or at the least other major ethnic groups as equals (Fierman, 1998: 172). As noted, the countries of Central Asia adopted either national or civic identity. Whereas in Uzbekistan nation-statists established Uzbek identity and culture, Kazakhstan saw the dominance of civic-statists (Omarov, 2012: 78; Fierman, 1998: 172).

Notwithstanding its prominence, Kazakhstani Eurasian identity remains a contested subject amongst the country's political and intellectual elites. Despite the opposition, the Eurasian identity has been installed by the political elites to ensure harmony, not only inside but also outside of the country, by offering a secure strategic transition from the Soviet into Kazakhstani identity. As the following discussion will show, the use and redevelopment of classic Eurasianism represent Kazakhstan's struggle to find a middle ground. This was a fine balancing act. On the one hand, by promoting a Eurasian and civic rather than an ethnic-Kazakh national identity, the government sought to: promote national unity between Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs in the society, legitimise the newly independent Republic's status as a successor state to the Kazakh SSR and gain positive affirmation from the international community. On the other hand, by promoting the Kazakh language and culture, the national identity that underpins the Republic is firmly based on the centrality of Kazakh nationalism. Like 'Soviet internationalism', Kazakhstan offered equal treatment to all ethnic groups while at the same time making Kazakhs 'first among equals' (Beissinger, 1991: 41; Fierman, 1998: 172).

Eurasianism provides an ideological justification for the establishment of a civic identity in Kazakhstan. Based on Gumilyov's interpretations of history, Kazakhstani Eurasianism represents 'Kazakhstani people' as descendants of 'great civilisations' bound by shared history and culture (Nazarbayev, 16 October 1997). Classic Eurasianism affirms the common historical destiny of the 'Kazakhstani people' united on the native Kazakh land (Kazakhstani Constitution, 1995). Kazakhstani

Eurasianism, in this regard, promotes a smooth departure from Soviet identity and the formation of Kazakhstan's national statehood by linking the nation's present and future to its past. As a sign of official institutionalisation of Gumilyov's ideas - Kazakhstani Eurasianism, in 1996, Nazarbayev named the newly established National University after Lev Gumilyov, where local scholars study and develop his philosophy and theory to this day (Laruelle, 2008: 178). If the relocation of the capital was designed to sever Kazakhstan from its Soviet past, the establishment of Eurasian National University represented the government's attempt to use and develop Eurasianism as the ideational foundation of the country's new national identity.

The prominence of Gumilyov's ideas in Kazakhstan's identity is not only connected with his historical and theoretical works communicating the role and influence of Turkic people in the past but also with his great respect for and positive judgments of the Turkic nomads, particularly the Kazakhs and their culture during the Soviet Union (Gumilyov, 2006; Bassin, 2016: 278-279). Gumilyov's Eurasianism criticises not only the Sovietisation and russification of the CPSU but also Eurocentrism for understating and marginalising the cultures of other nations. For instance, denigrating Tatars, Turkic nomads and Russians (Gumilyov, 2006: 13-15). The idea of 'backwardness' and 'savagery', Gumilyov argues, concerns every nation in the world. The problem arises when we look at the evolution of different nations from a 'synchronic time scale', that is, comparing countries of different ages as if they were contemporaries. (2006: 15). That is why he considered it senseless to compare states in Europe and Eurasia from different historical periods. Accordingly, Kazakhstani Eurasianism represents the attempt of Kazakhstan's elites to counter the Eurocentric criticism of the Eurasians (see chapter 4 and 5).

For Nazarbayev, Eurasianism is not equated with estrangement from the West, but interaction with it at a new interstate and interregional level (Yesmukhanov, 2014: 91; Lobjakas, 18 July 2006). While Russian Neo-Eurasianism sees Atlanticism as its rival for global dominance (Dugin, 2002: 23-26), Kazakhstani Eurasianism avoids any anti-Western sentiments and interpretations (Yesmukhanov, 2014: 91; Vinokurov, 2013). Located in a region surrounded by great powers and other powerful political forces, like Islam, Kazakhstan considers its partnership with the United States and the European Union essential to the success of its multi-vector foreign policy. Neo-Eurasianism presents a vision of Russia as a resurrected empire that would align itself with China, India and Iran and eventually secure access to warm seas (Dugin, 2002:

13). On the other hand, Kazakhstani Eurasianism projects Kazakhstan as a regional leader and a bridge between the Western and Asian worlds in the sphere of culture, politics and finance (Bakirlanova, 2017: 101). Underlying this vision is Kazakhstan's anti-imperialism and its emphasis on sovereign equality in regional affairs and integration (Nazarbayev, 1994: 5; Anceschi, 2017: 286-288).

Nonetheless, even though Kazakhstani Eurasianism is believed to seek a close relationship with the West and create a civic and modern nation, Kazakhstan does not intend to fully Westernise (Yesmukhanov, 2014: 91; Lobjakas, 18 July 2006). Apart from pursuing economic integration, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) stands as an alliance of preserving and protecting the national identities and values of the member states (Zeleneva and Ageeva, 2018: 739; Gulevich, 17 December 2013). Some critics of Eurasianism consider it an archaic national ideology and movement in support of authoritarianism and conservatism (Yesmukhanov, 2014: 91; Shlapentokh, 2007). Even though most of the former Soviet states declared themselves democratic and modern, it is hard to say that the political systems of the countries of the EAEU fully correspond with Western standards of democracy. For instance, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), of which Kazakhstan is a founding member, has been referred to by the West as a 'dictators' club' (Tisdall, 6 June 2006).

The main features that distinguish Eurasianism from Western liberalism are its positive attitude towards authoritarianism and the elevation of the role of national leaders (Zeleneva and Ageeva, 2018: 739). According to Gulevich, Zeleneva and Ageeva, specific to Eurasian countries are a government monopoly, weak civil society and strong national leaders (17 December 2013). It is considered an advantage rather than a disadvantage. From their viewpoint, an authoritarian government can more effectively promote national unity, social stability and rapid economic development (Zeleneva and Ageeva, 2018: 739). Given the existing sociopolitical and spiritual-moral dichotomy between the western and Eurasian way of thinking, it is obvious to see the Eurasian states falling into the 'out-group hate' category in the Western-led international society (Brewer, 1999). As I argued in section 1.4., the sameness of selfhood produces incentives for 'in-group members' to treat each other preferentially while discriminating 'out-group members'.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Gumilyov stated that Russia could be saved only as a Eurasian power, through promoting Eurasianism and the integration of the post-Soviet countries (Lavrov, 2008: 11). As the following discussion will show, the

Russian centrism of some of Gumilyov's ideas ultimately, and inevitably, led to strong opposition from Kazakh nationalists against Nazarbayev's attempt to construct a new narrative about Kazakhstan's national identity based on classic Eurasianism.

3.2.2. Identity and Ideological Vacuum (1991 - 2001)

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, identity and an ideological vacuum formed on the territory of the newly independent states. To refill that void, the Nazarbayev administration engaged in the building of a new national identity. Kazakhstan's new national identity, which is officially designated as 'civic', is both similar to and distinct from its former Soviet identity (Kazakhstani constitution, 30 August 1995). In the first decade of its independence, the identity building project reflected Kazakhstan's preoccupation with its survival. At the domestic level, the government's priority was to maintain national unity and enhance the political legitimacy of the new state. At the international level, Kazakhstan needed to stabilise its relations with Russia and other neighbouring countries, enlisting at the same time the support of the United States and the West.

Comprised of 140 ethnic groups and 17 religious confederations, Kazakhstan was founded as a multiethnic and multireligious nation. (Kazinform, 14 December 2012). The first 1999 state census identified two major ethnic groups: the Kazakhs and the Russians. The Kazakhs formed 57% of the population, Russians 28%, and other ethnic groups 15% (Smailov, 2000: 6). Undertaking these demographic surveys was necessary but alarming, given that they had a significant impact on the authority and legitimacy of the government, which had been dominated at that time by the ethnic Kazakh elites. Given the Russian roots of the declared Eurasian identity, the Kazakh majority of the society has hesitated to accept the new national identity. Domestic identity struggle to maintain the interethnic harmony in Kazakhstan encountered alternative influences ready to fill the identity and ideological vacuum.

Nazarbayev's use and reinterpretation of Gumilyov's Eurasianism represented Kazakhstan's initiative to reconcile with its Soviet past and redefine its relations with Russia on its own terms. On the one hand, the representation of Kazakhstan as a multiethnic, multicultural and Eurasian nation legitimised the newly independent Republic as a successor state to the Kazakh SSR. Indeed, some Russian nationalists from Alexander Solzhenitsyn to Vladimir Zhirinovsky have continued to claim that

Kazakhstan's northern territory, where its sizeable Russian population lives, belongs to Russia (Solzhenitsyn, 18 September 1990: 2; Laumulin, 1997: 33; Zhardykhan, 2004: 69-70; Osborn, 10 February 2005). By proclaiming the country a multiethnic nation, Kazakhstan defended its sovereignty and legitimised its claim to the territory of the Kazakh SSR. On the other hand, by emphasising a shared history and heritage with its northern neighbour, Kazakhstan reassured Russia of its intention to remain as a close ally.

The development of Kazakhstani Eurasian identity was also driven by economic rationale. Chapters one and two have demonstrated the importance of a positive image to a country's competitiveness in the global economy. As Nazarbayev proposed in his speech at Lomonosov State University in 1994, Eurasianism envisaged not only the establishment of a new national identity of Kazakhstan but also the formation of an economic union among the members of the CIS (Laruelle, 2000: 8; Dadyrova, 2012: 181-183; Odnostalko, 2015: 133). Despite domestic criticism, during the first decade of independence, Kazakhstan played a leading role in Eurasian economic integration, which led to the establishment of the EAEU in 2015. Accordingly, it reflected Kazakhstan's domestic policies in establishing a Eurasian identity.

In Kazakhstan, Eurasianism turned from a pure philosophical theory into the actual political practice, which conceptually substantiated the unity of geographical and cultural-historical ties of the peoples of the huge part of Northern and Central Eurasia. Eurasianism, as a national ideology, was a very familiar term to the Kazakhstani people. During the Soviet period, the Eurasian school of thought was famous, especially its member Lev Gumilyov. In the 1990s, his books, such as 'Ot Rusi do Rossii' (From Rus to Russia) and 'Drevnyaya Rus' i Velikaya Step' (Ancient Rus and the Great Steppe) were recognised as the best books of the year (Ria Novosti, 1 October 2012). As I will discuss in the following subsections, despite domestic tensions, Kazakhstani Eurasianism was a governmental effort to reach a compromise on political and identity issues in the domestic society. That is why the Nazarbayev administration used this school of thought to unite the multiethnic community and strengthen the independence of Kazakhstan.

According to Nazarbayev, the most valuable thing is that Gumilyov's works give Kazakhstani people the opportunity to take pride in their unique historical and cultural code, and also in the fact that they are 'all Eurasians' (Nazarbayev, 28 April 2014). According to some scholars, Eurasianism is the idea that unites all Kazakhstanis

(generally referred to as the inhabitants of Kazakhstan) (Baymanov, 11 March 2015; Egorin, 3 November 2015). As a chief storyteller of independent Kazakhstan's identity, Nazarbayev justified Kazakhstani Eurasianism as follows,

> *You are familiar with the history of Kazakhstan, and you know about the major migration waves in the Republic associated with Peter's and Stolypin's reforms, Stalin's deportations of whole nations, the development of virgin lands, industrial construction sites - this ancient land hosted and fed everyone. For centuries, as if in a huge crucible, an alloy was boiled here from hundreds of precious components, that now we call the Kazakh society. As the former metallurgist and today's President, I will say that this alloy is reliable, strong, it has withstood and will withstand any tests (Nazarbayev, 2011: 329).*

Despite promoting a civic identity, equality and harmony between Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs, the government's ethnonational policy during 1991-1995, on the other hand, has been aimed at reviving the spirit and values of Kazakhs considering them first among other ethnic groups. A concatenation of circumstances could not prevent the Kazakhs from officially legitimising their ethnic majority and language in their heavily Russified territory. According to the Declaration on State Sovereignty of the Kazakh SSR of 25 October 1990, the Kazakhs became the titular, state-forming nation and constituted the ethnocultural core of Kazakhstan's statehood. The declaration says,

> *The revival and development of aboriginal culture, traditions, language and the strengthening of the national dignity of the Kazakh nation and other nationalities living in Kazakhstan are one of the essential tasks of the statehood of the Kazakh SSR (Ädilet, 25 October 1990; Sheretov, 2003).*

Except that, the 1991 Kazakhstan's Independence Law stressed the Kazakhs' right to self-determination - revival and development of the Kazakh culture, traditions and language (Ädilet, 16 December 1991). However, the growing ethnonational policy, especially the 1993 Kazakhstani Constitution about the nature of the statehood, generated a public controversy that led to the revision (Makashev, 2002: 25-30; Sultanov, 2011: 10-16). It stated, 'The Republic of Kazakhstan, as a form of statehood of a self-determined Kazakh nation, provides equal rights to all its citizens' (Kazakhstani Constitution, 1993).

The initial ethnonational policy of the government faced strong social opposition from the ethnic Kazakhs in the first decade of independence. Australia is a famous

example of ethnonational conflicts with some similarity to the Kazakhstani case. In both countries, as Jayasuriya explains, the struggle is between the settled migrants and indigenous peoples; however, the constituting details of the dispute are different (Jayasuriya, 2010). As mentioned, establishing a civic identity in Kazakhstan was a strategic necessity even if it has had a complicated path in its formation (Bhavna, 1996: 51; Surucu, 2012: 391; Sadykov, 10 September 2013). The government remained committed to interethnic unity and equality by developing the culture of both the Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. This marked the beginning of future criticism against the civic identity policy of Kazakhstan.

The text of the new Constitution was adopted at a republican referendum on 30 August 1995. As a Constitutional Council member – Malinovsky stated, the 1993 Constitution did not correspond to the views and preferences of the political elites and the public (13 July 2018). After it entered into force, the Constitution proved to contain gaps and inconsistencies that prevented it from serving as the legal basis for state building (Malinovsky, 13 July 2018). Despite the widespread use of Russian in Kazakhstan, the 1993 Constitution made Kazakh the sole official language, with the condition that during the transition period, the administrative work would be conducted in both languages (see article 8). Russian, though widely used in the country, would not be an official language (Kazakhstani Constitution, 28 January 1993: article 8). Except for the statehood, culture and language issues, the 1993 Constitution reflected the complexities and inconsistencies related to the form of government, property rights and the administrative structure of Kazakhstan (Malinovsky, 13 July 2018; Sultanov, 2011). Consequently, people's deputies made a public appeal for change to the Constitutional Court (Malinovsky, 13 July 2018).

In response, the Constitutional Court held public meetings and discussions on issues concerning the 1993 Constitution. In total, more than 3 million citizens participated in about 33 thousand collective discussions (Sultanov, 2011: 12). During the meetings, almost 30 thousand proposals and remarks were made. As a result, more than 1100 amendments and additions were made to 55 articles (Sultanov, 2011: 12). Eventually, the Kazakh language retained its official status, while the Russian language was declared to be officially used in central and local governments (Kazakhstani Constitution, 30 August 1995). The government also had the responsibility for promoting the development of other languages (Kazakhstani

Constitution, 30 August 1995). Nonetheless, despite all the amendments, Russian has remained the dominant administrative language until today.

The constitutional dispute resulted in the annulment of the state ethnonational policy. The new edition of the Constitution did not contain any division, like the titular and non-titular ethnic group. The emphasis shifted from an ethnic to a more civic model of nationhood, which gave Kazakhstanis the right to choose whether to indicate or not to indicate their ethnicity, party and religious affiliation (Kazakhstani Constitution, 30 August 1995: Article 19). Since that time, the population of the Republic has been referred to as the 'Kazakhstani people', not the 'Kazakh nation'.

Central to the reconstruction and reinforcement of Kazakhstan's national identity was the relocation of the capital from Almaty to what was then called Akmola. In light of the latent threat of Russian irredentism, the founding of Astana in 1997, symbolically unified Kazakhstan by moving Kazakhs and other populations to the Russian-populated northern region (Wolfer, 2002: 486). Moreover, the new capital embodies Kazakhstan's transcendence of its Soviet past and its new identity as an independent, modern and Eurasian nation (Koppen, 2013: 592). Almaty, the former capital of the Kazakh SSR and the economic centre of Soviet Central Asia, had long symbolised the Soviet communist regime and its culture (Koppen, 2013: 594-596; Ria Novosti, 25 June 2008). As the former Mayor of the capital, Imangali Tasmagambetov, stated 'Kazakhs themselves never had the opportunity to make decisions about the location of their capital; the Soviet Union leadership did it for [us]. Therefore, where our country's capital city would be, became, of course, a historical stage in the final formation of Kazakhstan's statehood' (Ria Novosti, 25 June 2008).

Astana provided a strong foundation for Kazakhstan to develop its Eurasian identity on its own terms (Nazarbayev, 2010: 26; Schatz, 2000: 82-83). Located at the centre of the Eurasian continent, the capital underpins Kazakhstan's aspiration to become a bridge between Europe and Asia (Nazarbayev, 25 October 2011). The founding of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University one year before the inauguration of Astana symbolised the inseparability of the capital city from the ideas and practice of Kazakhstani Eurasianism (Sydykov, 3 October 2012). Indeed, Nazarbayev sees Kazakhstan as the 'epicentre of the world' and Astana as the 'heart of Eurasia' (Nazarbayev, 1994; 2001; 2010: 9; Sengupta, 2017: 47-65). The government has continued to develop Astana into a diplomatic, economic and cultural hub of the Eurasian continent (Nazarbayev, 2011; Tokayev, 2015). It is not surprising, therefore,

that Astana, in the view of the political elites, has become the 'symbol of a successful nation' (Akorda, 2 July 2015). Kazakhstani Eurasianism, in this regard, could be considered as an expression of Kazakhstan's future aspirations and nationalism in the new geopolitical environment (Zeleneva and Ageeva, 2018: 743).

The national idea that Kazakhstan is a Eurasian country immediately assumed its practical form and was disseminated through public institutions such as L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University and Assembly of the People. On 1 March 1995, Nazarbayev formed the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan (the Assembly), which contributed to,

> *Ensuring interethnic harmony in the Republic of Kazakhstan in the process of forming a Kazakhstani civic identity and a competitive nation united by the national patriotic idea of '*Mäñgilik El*', based on Kazakhstani patriotism, civil, spiritual and cultural community of Kazakhstan with the consolidating role of the Kazakh people (Ädilet, 20 October 2008; Amirova, 6 February 2015).*

Despite the social opposition – 'Kazakhisation', the Assembly promoted tolerance, friendliness, openness in the multi-ethnic society, which the government most needs (Sadykov, 10 September 2013).

Some foreign diplomats such as the EU Ambassador to Kazakhstan - Hristea Traian and the seventh Secretary-General of the UN - Kofi Annan highlighted the effectiveness of the Assembly that represents the interests of 140 ethnic groups in Kazakhstani Parliament (Annan, 14 July 2009; Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, 2016; Nechayeva, 2016: 80). The Assembly's success could be related to its close relationship with the society through public bodies, governmental programmes and events led by President Nazarbayev himself. Under the chairmanship of the President, the Assembly holds annual meetings with the representatives of ethnic groups in order to introduce and discuss adopted domestic laws and programmes on national identity and unity. The first founding session of the Assembly was held in March 1995, which brought together the multinational society of Kazakhstan under the slogan 'for peace and harmony in our common home'.

The Assembly as a presidential consultative body keeps close communication with the society through local public bodies and councils such as the Republican state institution 'Qog'amdiq kelisim' (Public Consent) under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ethnocultural associations, Regional Assemblies of the People, Fund of the Assembly, Journalists' Club, Friendship Homes, Councils of Public Consent

and many more. According to the 1995 Constitution, the creation of political parties on an ethnic and confessional basis is prohibited. In the structure of the Assembly, however, registered public associations of different ethnic groups such as Republican Slavic Movement 'Lad', 'Urban Society of the Kazakh Language', German Cultural Center 'Wiedergeburt', Jewish Cultural Center 'Sion', Association of the Chechen and Ingush peoples 'Vainakh' and many more. Since its foundation in 1992, Lad has advocated the preservation of the official role of the Russian language in Kazakhstan (Klimoshenko, 11 August 2006; Smagulova, 2006: 306). Around 50,000 members of the Slavic Association, subscribed to 24 branches throughout the country, contribute to the preservation of Slavic culture, identity, and traditions (Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, 2011: 3-24).

The primary purpose of these state and regional bodies is to 'popularise the Kazakhstani model of social harmony and national unity of Nazarbayev and promote its basic concepts in public consciousness' (Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, 17 June 2014). On the other hand, the Assembly was considered necessary for the 'legitimisation' and expansion of Nazarbayev's power. Indeed, some critics question the effectiveness of the Assembly, especially the dedication of the government to the civic model of identity-building. Edward Schatz, for instance, argued that 'national-cultural centres' had less freedom and was under the direct control of the president (2000: 489-490). Public figure Mukhtar Taizhan and economist Meruert Makhmutova say that the Assembly was built to serve the interests of the former president, and it divides rather than integrates different ethnic groups in the country (Radio Azattyk, 17 February 2020).

Kazakhstan's efforts in maintaining interethnic and interfaith harmony are intended to project an international image of its commitment to the Western political values of pluralism, multiculturalism and minority rights. It is considered to contribute to the country's success in assuming the chairmanship of OSCE and OIC in 2010 and 2011, respectively (Qazaqstan Tarihy, 22 August 2013). For accommodating various nationalities and religions, Astana was recognised as the 'City of Peace', as a peace-loving international environment (Mayor, 16 July 1999). For example, Kofi Annan and Pope John Paul II, in their official visit to Kazakhstan in 2002, called it an example of interethnic harmony, stability and sustainable development for other states (Annan, 14 July 2009; Pope John Paul II, 26 September 2001). Kazakhstan's experience differed from that of other former Soviet republics such as Estonia and Latvia, which

even refused to legally recognise the Russian minority as their citizens (Burkhanov, 2017: 6-7).

Yet, critics argue that Nazarbayev's Eurasianism denigrates Kazakh culture. For instance, according to Valikhan Tuleshov and Aidos Sarym, to avoid interethnic conflicts, the government adopted the motto - everything continues as it was during the USSR (Tuleshov, 2017: 36-39; Sarym, 9 June 2015). To many, Kazakhstan's nation and identity building policy have overlooked the development of Kazakh culture and traditions. For instance, in the 1990s and early 2000s, the mass media, pre-school, school and after-school institutions mainly functioned in Russian. The rise of the Kazakh language began in the mid-2000s, but it was not widely used as Russian (Vdovina, 18 December 2008). Kazakhstani Eurasianism, in this regard, is seen as nothing but another version of Soviet identity.

However, as in the case of Russians during the Soviet Union, since gaining independence, Kazakhs certainly enjoy greater privileges than any other ethnic groups. At the same time, the non-Kazakh population has not been marginalised either. They have also had the freedom to speak and develop their own languages and traditions. As I will discuss in the following subsection, despite the government's efforts, nation building in Kazakhstan ended up dividing the population into two social groups with conflicting identities. The first is a group of ethno-nationalists who consider themselves a titular nation. They think that there is only one ethnic nation in Kazakhstan, which is made up of Kazakhs. The second is a group of civic-nationalists who think that all Kazakhstanis constitute a single nation. According to the political elites, the contradiction between these diverging views is being solved by forming a single nation as a civic society around the Kazakh ethnos (Eshpanova, 2010: 59).

Except for promoting the EAEU, during Nazarbayev's presidency, Kazakhstan was an initiator and founding member of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the SCO. Eurasian initiatives of the Nazarbayev administration envisaged the incorporation of the members of these regional organisations into a 'Greater Eurasia', which was aimed at making the country a main transport-logistic hub of not only Central Asia but also the Eurasian continent (Nazarbayev, 26 May 2006; Nigmatulin, 7 July 2019; Bakirlanova, 2017: 102). Given the Ukrainian crisis, Russia's growing interest in the EAEU during Putin's presidency clashed with the aim and principles of the Nazarbayev administration, which slowed down the process of regional integration (Bespalov, 17 July 2019;

Anceschi, 2017: 295-297). Russia's growing dominance in promoting regional integration and Putin's broader initiative to create an extensive Eurasian partnership uniting the EAEU with China, India, Pakistan and Iran have increased the sense of nationalism and protection in Kazakhstan.

3.2.3. Cultural and Spiritual Revival (2001-2010)

The second decade of independence could be characterised by the bold steps taken to move Kazakhstan towards a more stable and united future; the retreat from the identity vacuum and Soviet stagnation; the revival of the cultural values and spirit of the Kazakhs; and the resurgence of traditional social and religious forces. The government continued to concentrate its efforts on developing the Eurasian yet Kazakh-centric national identity. The Kazakh language problem has improved but remains a serious problem. These sociopolitical changes eventually contributed to the emigration of Russians, Germans, Ukrainians and even the Russified Kazakhs that have incrementally transformed the society (Smagulova, 2006: 306). As Smagulova argued, this demographic outflow can also be the result of the economic transformation, difficulties and its consequences (2006: 306-308).

The 2000s saw the division of the elites into two groups over the direction of Kazakhstan's identity building project: Eurasian-optimists and Eurasian-sceptics. As I argued in chapter one, history and geography do shape people's identity, the best example of which is Eurasian optimists. The influence of Russia in Kazakhstan is associated not only with the residence of a significant Slavic population in the country but also with the fact that the Kazakhs themselves changed after a long stay under the influence of Russia. The decades and centuries of migration created the group of Kazakhs whose mother-tongue became Russian (Dave, 1996: 51-52). Eurasian optimists are those Russified Kazakhs who consider themselves much closer to Russians than to monolingual Kazakhs (Gabitov, Muldybek and Mukanova, 2015: 5-6). This type of people who absorbed the Russian culture during the Soviet Union became the advocates of Kazakhstani Eurasianism (Gumilyov, 2003; Trubetskoy, 2015). In their view, 'civilisation is the highest good', for which it is worth sacrificing the national characteristics of small ethnic groups (Trubetskoy, 2015: 8).

As Dave well pointed out, the national revival of Kazakhstan has increasingly been associated with the revival of the Kazakh language (Dave, 1996: 51-52). In Kazakhstan, the urban population speak mostly Russian, without including the remaining Russian-speaking ethnic groups. Kazakh nationalists call public figures such as Olzhas Suleimenov, the Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to UNESCO since 2001, and Nurbolat Massanov, a professor of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Eurasian-optimists who are supporters of cosmopolitanism (Surucu, 2002: 390). Suleimenov considers bilingualism as an advantage of the Kazakhstani nation, which, as such, should be encouraged and developed, given the location of Kazakhstan at the crossroads of Eurasia where people of different civilisations live and meet (Shapka, 2010). In the views of Eurasian-optimists, however, losing the Russian language is equal to losing the nation's past and future, which will hinder the development of education, science and technology in Kazakhstan for decades (Shapka, 2010). Indeed, compared to Kazakh, Russian is one of the global languages used in international institutions, mass media and scientific research. To Russian-speaking, cosmopolitan urban elites, rejection of Russian means Kazakhstan's isolation from what they consider the 'developed' world.

On the contrary, Eurasian-sceptics dismiss the Kazakhstani Eurasian identity, which they believe insufficiently reflect elements of Kazakh culture and traditions. To them, Kazakhstani Eurasianism is equated to cosmopolitanism. Eurasian-optimists are considered cosmopolitans and 'Mankurt' – people who have forgotten who they are (Surucu, 2002: 397; Dave, 1996: 52-53). The leading figures of Eurasian-sceptics are mostly current or former government officials who reject Russian influence on the development of post-independence Kazakhstan. The severe critics of Eurasianists include the chairman of the Republican Social Movement, former deputy of the Mazhilis of the Parliament and prominent writer Mukhtar Shakhanov (Likhachev, 2017: 59). During the constitutional crisis in 1993-1995, he fought against the pro-Eurasian elites who voted to make Russian one of the two-state languages along with Kazakh. As Shakhanov publicly declared, '[w]e will raise the entire nation, this will be the second Zheltoksan' – by which he referred to the anti-Soviet/Russian riot in 1986 that gave birth to the national consciousness of Kazakhstan (Kalishevsky, 16 December 2011; Subakozhoeva, 20 June 2013). This contributed to the designation of Kazakh as the sole state language. Today, the Kazakh National Patriotic Front is

represented by intellectuals and activists such as Rasul Zhumaly, Mukhtar Taizhan, Aydos Sarym, Zhanbolat Mamai, Inga Imanbai and others (Likhachev, 2017: 60-65).

Given the controversy in identity building, it is not surprising that the Kazakhstani Eurasian identity has been criticised for its ambiguity. Cummings, for instance, argued that 'Kazakhstan's nation-and state-building policies do not fit neatly into any one paradigm of nation-building' (2007: 178). Schatz thinks of Eurasianism as '[a] normatively appealing discourse to all Kazakhstanis, but one that reserved a diffused set of privileges for the titular Kazakhs' (Schatz, 2004: 130). Eurasian Kazakhstan is claimed to be a civic country; however, the identity building project is clearly dedicated to the revival of Kazakh nationalism, the national sentiments of Kazakhs. Indeed, government documents, while referring to Kazakhstani identity as a civic identity, emphasised the significance of reviving the Kazakh culture and history (Ädilet, 16 December 1991; Ädilet, 20 October 2008). Here we cannot overlook the mandatory language requirement for civil servants. Whereas Soviet officials had to be proficient in Russian, now candidates for the civil service should master the Kazakh language. This requirement has helped to promote the Kazakhs to the ruling positions.

In 2004, under the leadership of Shakhanov started to act the 'State Language' social movement against the 2 million cosmopolitans that do not speak and write Kazakh (Hamza, 26 February 2005). The political elites look at the existence of Eurasian-optimists and Eurasian-sceptics neutrally, positively. According to them, the heated social discussion around Kazakhstani Eurasianism will help to refine and improve it further (Nazarbayev, 25 October 2011). And again, despite the government's neutral position, the situation is watched to prevent any ideological confrontations, to stop the conflict of values from growing into the conflict of interests on time (Nysanbayev and Kadyrzhanov, 24 December 2006). Except for the language, the Kazakhisation social movement manifests their dissatisfaction against any kind of political integration with Russia. The former president personally reassured that

> *There is no restoration or reincarnation of the USSR. These are just phantoms of the past, conjectures, and speculation. And in this, our views on the leadership of Russia, Belarus, and other countries coincide completely (Nazarbayev, 25 October 2011).*

As in any state, people's opinions and beliefs are divided, especially when it comes to the national identity of a particular country. And Kazakhstan is no exception. The Kazakhstani Eurasian identity, which considers only economic integration with its

neighbour states and embraces multiculturalism and multilingualism, faces the influence of different civilisations, which find support by groups of people in the society. The political elites and ordinary people represent Kazakhstan's identity differently, even today. In the 1990s, the question 'who we are, Kazakhstanis?' was difficult to answer. The former president puts it well,

> *Today we need to make a strategic choice - which way to go next? There is no consensus in the society about that. Some say, Kazakhstan though small, but still a part of Europe, and historically we gravitate towards the Western civilisation. Others say, we are mainly an Asian country, so we must adhere to the experience of 'Asian Tigers': Japan, South Korea. The third says, we have deeply imbibed the Russian mentality and the principles of collectivism, and our choice should largely coincide with the choice of Russia. The fourth one argues that we have a predominantly Muslim population, so the new-Turk model should be taken as a basis (Nazarbayev, 16 October 1997).*

The process of establishing the Kazakhstani Eurasian identity gave impetus to the development of alternative views on how Kazakhstan's national identity should be defined.

The Kazakhs are part of the Muslim religious community. The revival of national sentiments, as what scholars refer to as retraditionalisation, in the first place, has led to the strengthening of Islam. This may be an ordinary process taking place after the communist rule. The Soviet era was described as the period of the 'atheist state control' that denounced and denied any religious worldviews (Kushkumbayev, 2017: 8-9). Soviet communism and religion were seen as mutually exclusive phenomena (Firsov, 30 October 2002). Post-Soviet Kazakhstan has embarked on a spiritual and moral quest to fill that religious void left by 74 years of atheism (Rorlich, 2003: 173). Even so, Islamic revival in Kazakhstan remains more of a cultural than religious identity (Cummings, 2003: 26).

In Kazakhstan, not only Islam is practised, but a sizeable population professes Christianity. The government officially recognises the dominant role of Islam of the Hanafi trend and Orthodox Christianity in the development of culture and spiritual life of the people and respects the importance of interfaith harmony, religious tolerance and citizens' religious beliefs (Ädilet, 11 October 2011). Today, Kazakhstan is a home for 140 ethnic groups and 17 confessions, but the number of believers in Islam exceed the others (Isabayeva, 20 April 2018; Bekturganova and Nurgalieva, 2016: 75).

According to the Association of Sociologists and Political Scientists of Kazakhstan (ASPS), the results of the 2016 sociological research on 'Ethnoreligious Identification of Kazakhstani Youth' identified that 71% of the rural and regional youth in Kazakhstan consider themselves believers of Islam (Bekturganova and Nurgalieva, 2016: 26).

Given Kazakhstan's aspirations to be recognised as a 'forward-looking and modern' nation in the international and domestic audiences, the findings of the 2016 sociological research sparked controversy among the country's intellectual elites (Laruelle, 2000: 8-9; Cummings, 2003: 33; Koch, 2010: 770). While the development of the Kazakhstani version of Eurasianism is aimed at modernising the nation and rooting out traditions, the promotion of a Kazakh-centric Eurasian identity has inadvertently created favourable conditions for retraditionalisation. Although 'Kazakhisation' was mainly focused on elevating the status of the Kazakh language, it provided incentives for the resurgence of Islam and clan identity. Given their associations with problems such as corruption, nepotism and inequality, Islamism and clan politics have undermined Kazakhstan's international image.

Indeed, Islam has regained its prominence in Kazakhstan 'not so much as a spiritual worldview, but as an active ethnic consolidating and mobilising ideology of national revival' (Bekturganova, 2016: 3). Some intellectuals, albeit in the minority, went so far as to call for the introduction of a system of law based on Sharia (Bekturganova and Nurgalieva, 2016: 117; Nurgaliyeva, 2018; Laruelle, 2017: 6; Baitenova, Rysbekova and Duisenbayeva, 2015: 21-28). Not surprisingly, some local media and observers warned against the threats of foreign Islamic teachings to the values, traditions and ways of life of Kazakhstani society (Najibullah, 30 March 2011). On the other hand, the threat of Islam has, to some extent, been exaggerated. According to the 2016 state survey, 71% of believers do not practise Islam in daily life. They associate themselves with Islam primarily because they were born to Kazakh families (Bekturganova and Nurgalieva, 2016: 28). As Deputy Chair of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims Alau Adilbayev argues, while it is a fact that Islamisation has taken root in Kazakhstani society, it should be connected to local culture (Abugaliyeva, 19 April 2018).

Nonetheless, Kazakhstan's sizable Muslim population means that the country has continued to be seen by the West as a potential hotbed for radical Islam, even though it is founded as a secular state that prohibits the politicisation of religion (Kazakhstani

Constitution, 30 August 1995: Article 1; Ädilet, 11 October 2011). Negative foreign media reports – regardless of their credibility – can potentially undermine Kazakhstan's efforts to project itself as a modern nation (Heathershaw and Montgomery, 29 December 2014). As chapters four and five will show, domestic and international contestation over Kazakhstan's national identity explain both the motivations and limitations of Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives.

Central Asia is settled by the Turkic speaking Muslims, who supported the revival of Turkic unity in the 1990s and 2000s. During the Cold War, Pan-Turkism, which emphasised the inter-cultural affinities of Turkey into Central Asian countries, was considered both an anti-Soviet and anti-Eurasian identity (Kubicek, 1997: 641). Turkey's aspiration to promote Turkish Eurasianism and eventually establish a commonwealth of Turkic states in Central Asia seemed an enticing alternative, even though it lacked support from Central Asian states (Mostafa, 2013: 163). Russia's demographic, historical and geographical influence has always guaranteed its presence in Central Asia (Kubicek, 1997: 648). Kazakhstani political elites support the ideas of the Eurasian civilisation, in which Kazakhstan is tightly bound with Russia. The shared history played a significant role. Kazakhstan's foreign and domestic policy has a more Russian face than a Turkish one (Zharmukhamed, 2004: 61). But for Turkey, this geopolitical strategy for integration was significant to determine its foreign policy priorities since its 1989 application for affiliation to the European Economic Community was rejected (Shlykov, 2017: 59).

The resurgence of traditional social forces has continued to pose a challenge to the entrenchment of the Kazakhstani Eurasian identity. The growing opposition of Kazakhs further challenged the consolidation of a Eurasian society. The efforts to create a Eurasian civic community around the ethnic Kazakhs have encountered unexpected implications. According to Danilovich, the regeneration of Kazakh culture led to the resurgence of tribalism and archaic foundations, which are incompatible with the values of liberal democracy (2010: 51). Schatz argued that Kazakhisation inadvertently stumbled upon the country's clan policy (Schatz, 2000: 489-490). Today, it remains a custom for the older generation to ask, even at random table talk, a person's ancestry, the genealogical belongings.

Danilovich wrote, '[i]t is quite common for Kazakhs to cite the tribal past or customs of bygone days not only in casual conversations but also in political discourse' (2016: 51). History tells that the Kazakhs, who occupied the territory of

current Kazakhstan, relate themselves to the three hordes: the Junior, the Middle and the Senior. This, as Esenova highlights, explains, '[t]he real identities of Central Asian populations' that 'have survived from the pre-Soviet past or may have been unintentional fallouts of the Soviet national policies' (2002: 11-13). All this cast doubt on the values and image of Kazakhstan's Eurasian identity as modern and civic. As I will address in 3.3., clan politics, tribalism and radicalisation in Central Asia contributed to the negative image of Kazakhstan in the international society, representing it as politically and socially backwards.

3.2.4. Consolidation of Kazakhstani Eurasianism through Modernisation (2010-2020)

The third decade of Kazakhstan's nation building centred on its efforts to promote the modernisation of public consciousness in identity building, which was considered the heart of the political and economic modernisations (Nazarbayev, 12 April 2017). Whereas the first decade focused on political and legal institution-building, the second was dedicated to economic and cultural development, which coincided with an economic boom from 2000 to 2007 (World Bank, 2019). Kazakhstan's efforts to integrate into the regional and global economy led to its accession into the EAEU and the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2015. Despite its identity challenges in the domestic and international audience, it is interesting to follow Kazakhstan's efforts to become one of the world's top 30 developed nations and the de facto representative of Central Asia in the world and an active participant in shaping the global nuclear and environmental agenda that are the characteristics of the developed countries.

As discussed, the identity building process has not only been undermined by the diverging views of Eurasian-optimists and Eurasian- sceptics, by the consequences of 'retraditionalisation' and 'Kazakhisation', but also by the loss of the homeland feeling, civic patriotism in non-Kazakhs. Despite its multi-ethnic and multi-religion composition, Kazakhstan has sought to build a Eurasian nation connected by the historical consciousness of unity and a sense of statehood. Nevertheless, the findings testify to the failure of Kazakhstan's national identity building project in unifying Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs under a new civic identity (Radio Azattyk, 17 February 2020). As the 2016 state survey showed, the sense of patriotism and motherland is high in Kazakh-speaking Kazakhs (88%). However, the same feeling, the civilian

identification with Kazakhstan, is weak or lost among Russian-speaking Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs (Bekturganova and Nurgalieva, 2016: 20).

The modernisation of the consciousness of Kazakhstani society does not mean diverting from the chosen course of the identity building procedure. The essence of the modernisation of public consciousness is to ultimately link the past, present and future history of Kazakhstan by eliminating the archaic structures that were revived during Kazakhisation while preserving the inner core of the Kazakhstani Eurasian identity (Nazarbayev, 12 April 2017). As Eshpanova explained, it is 'the formation of a single nation as a civic society around the Kazakh ethnos' (Eshpanova, 2010: 59). Yerlan Sydykov, Rector of L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, said, 'Eurasian essence is inherent in every Kazakh: nationalism, religious intolerance and spiritual aggression are unacceptable for us.' (Kazinform, 20 October 2016). In Kazakhstan's case, reaffirming an ethno-nationalist dimension of the Kazakhstani Eurasian identity and countering the resurgence of traditional social forces that are incompatible with Western standards of modernisation go side by side.

Thus, Kazakhstani Eurasianism pursues modernisation along with 'internationalism with a Kazakh face' (Schatz, 2000: 83-88; Dave, 2004: 447). Schatz argues that similar to its predecessor, the Soviet Union, which distinguished the roles of Russians as missionaries, emissaries, and technical specialists of Soviet rule, Kazakhstani Eurasianism has an ethnic face supporting to restore and advance the linguistic, demographic, and political situation of Kazakhs (Schatz, 2000: 83). This is the latest manifestation of Kazakhstan's struggle to address the dilemma of preserving a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural nation while promoting the development of the Kazakh-centric national identity. For instance, Nazarbayev said,

> *Our national traditions and customs, language, music and literature, in a word, our national spirit should remain with us forever. Abai's wisdom, Auezov's pen, Dzhambul's heartfelt lines, Kurmangazy's magical sounds, ancestors' eternal call are only a part of our spiritual culture (Nazarbayev, 12 April 2017: part 3).*

Indeed, without the fundamental Kazakh culture and traditions, the renewal of self-identification of Kazakhstan will turn into an empty sound.

As a constant process, national identity is (re)formulated according to the views of succeeding generations (Ädilet, 18 December 2015). During the last decade, Kazakhstan's identity-building has continued against the contestation between Eurasian-optimists and Eurasian-sceptics over the meanings of Kazakhstani national

identity. For the political elites, the possible compromise has been to reinforce the civic identity of Kazakhstan based on the principle of 'one Country, one Nation' (Kazinform, 14 December 2012). This principle, as Nazarbayev mentioned, focuses on enhancing the historical consciousness of the Kazakhstani people, which very much emphasises the common history, shared culture and traditions of Kazakhstanis. The following state strategy and programmes brought that civic identity issue to the foreground: 'Strategy Kazakhstan-2050' (2012); nation's plan '100 Concrete Steps: a Modern State for All' (2015); the state programme 'Nurly Zhol' (Bright Path) for 2015 – 2019 and 2020-2025; 'Concept of Strengthening and Developing Kazakhstan's Identity and Unity' (2015); Nazarbayev's article 'Course towards the Future: Modernisation of Kazakhstan's Identity' (2017). These policy documents identify the main features of Kazakhstani Eurasian identity and ways to strengthen it further. They represent how the political elites see Kazakhstan's national identity.

Measures to strengthen the national unity and identity of Kazakhstan are one of the five reforms outlined in the national plan '100 concrete steps' and 'Strategy Kazakhstan-2050'. Institutional reforms promoting identity and unity involved the implementation of the following strategic projects: a patriotic act 'Mäñgilik El' (Eternal Country); national projects 'Big Country and Big Family', 'Meniñ Elim' (My Country) and 'Nurly Bolashak' (Bright Future). The government also launched the state programme 'Ruhani Jañğyru' (Spiritual renewal) as an ideological platform for social modernisation and development (Baygarin, 26 October 2018). They became part of the school curriculums promoting the values and ideas of civic identity.

If the nation's plan '100 Concrete Steps' is considered to introduce the basic ideas of national identity into the public consciousness, 'Nurly Zhol' was a transportation infrastructure development programme aimed at integrating Kazakhstan and Central Asia into the rest of the world (Vassilenko, 5 November 2015; Nazarbayev, 10 July 2012). Given its geographical location between the great manufacturers of the East and the large markets of the West, Kazakhstan plans to become one of the strongest links in the global logistics network (Chartered Institute, 25 July 2017). It participates in the international transport corridors such as TRACECA, North-South, Central Asian Corridor, Trans-Asian Railway (Kazlogistics, 7 December 2015). Transportation infrastructure development is central to reinforcing Kazakhstan as a trade, financial and transportation hub in 'the heartland of Eurasia' (Vassilenko, 26

February 2018). The country's perspective plans have been to revive the ancient Silk Road, of which Kazakhstan was a part.

As one of the central pillars of modernisation stands the 2016 Patriotic Act 'Mäñgilik El', which is directed to instil patriotic feelings in Kazakhstanis. It promotes nationwide ideas such as national unity, peace and compliance; a secular state and civic identity; a stable economic growth based on innovations; a commonality of history, culture and language (Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, 26 April 2016). They are the core values and ideas consolidating the statehood and the Eurasian identity, which underlie the independence and sovereignty of Kazakhstan. The Patriotic Act was a call on people, whether Kazakhs or not Kazakhs, to accept reality and coexist in harmony.

Nazarbayev envisions modern Kazakhstan as a meritocratic society defined by trilingualism, 'competitiveness', 'pragmatism', '[preservation of] national identity', 'cult of knowledge', 'evolutionary development' and 'open attitude' (Nazarbayev, 12 April 2017). In this regard, modernisation represents an attempt to root out nepotism and corruption, problems that have long damaged Kazakhstan's international image. Through the promotion of meritocracy, 'Ruhani Jañğyru' serves to reduce ethnic and social divisions, with the ultimate goal of nurturing the younger generation into well-educated, competitive and patriotic citizens with a single 'communal identity' (Talentino, 2004: 559). By enhancing domestic social cohesion while earning international recognition, spiritual renewal is integral to the consolidation of Kazakhstan's national identity as a Eurasian and civic nation (Laszczkowski, 2016: 5). Nevertheless, the combination of domestic and foreign challenges has continued to pose a threat to Kazakhstan's evolving national identity.

The implementation of 'Ruhani Jañğyru' means the renewal of public consciousness through the development and popularisation of independent Kazakhstan and its culture, history and art. For instance, the state programme, 'Tugan Zher' (Home country), is aimed at instilling patriotism in Kazakhstanis by promoting the study and teaching of the country's history and culture, as well as by supporting the building and renovation of public facilities such as kindergartens, health centres and sports facilities (Zhakon.kz, 16 February 2018; Zakon.kz, 16 July 2019). Another programme, 'Spiritual holy sites of Kazakhstan', is intended to identify and conserve historical sites such as the holy city of Turkestan, the Akyrtas palace complex and the mausoleum of Ybyrai Altynsarin (Velichko, 13 April 2018; Akimat of Fedorovsky

District, 5 June 2018). The third programme, 'Modern Kazakh culture in the global world', is designed to foster the development of contemporary Kazakh culture by collecting the works of famous Kazakh artists (Iksanova, 2017). Last but not least is the programme '100 new faces of Kazakhstan', which promotes stories of the most successful and talented Kazakhstanis in sports, art, science, business, and other sectors (Zhakon.kz, 16 February 2018).

Within the framework of the 'Ruhani Jañğyru' programme, the latinisation of the Kazakh language is considered the most significant. The political elites believe that it helps integrate Kazakhstan more quickly and effectively into the Western world of research and development (Nazarbayev, 12 April 2017). Besides, the transition of the Kazakh language from Cyrillic to Latin is seen as one of the main features of decolonisation, the liberation from the alphabet imposed by the Soviet Union in 1940 (Enelane, 13 April 2017). However, pro-Eurasianists argue that latinisation will not improve the situation of the Kazakh language, instead will lead to the degradation of society (Serikov, 2 August 2017).

According to Nazarbayev, today, the world is witnessing the birth of 'a new Eurasian nation', which has a shared past and an 'indivisible common history of the future' (25 October 2011). The future generation of the Eurasian nation is seen as trilingual and tolerant to other nations and religions (Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, 15 December 2014). Nazarbayev said,

> *'I have repeatedly said and will not be afraid to repeat myself. I would like to see a new generation of Kazakhs as trilingual, fluent in Kazakh, Russian, and English. It is one of the principles of the competitive state, economy and nation.' (Nazarbayev, 28 February 2007).*

The introduction of the 'trilingual policy', however, has divided experts and populace opinion reflecting the unresolved the Kazakh-Russian language dispute. The policy is considered a threat to cultural integrity, but the primary debate is more about the practical implementation and its consequences to both the younger and older generation (Eldes, 5 May 2017; Nurseitova, 28 November 2017). Given the fact that society is mainly non-English speaking, the trilingual policy is seen as an unattainable goal. For example, the 2019 trilingual school curriculum forced not only children but also their parents and teachers to learn English (Eldes, 5 May 2017). Despite some social dissatisfaction, 65% of respondents to the national survey supported the trilingual education policy that allowed the government to launch it (Zhikeeva, 2017).

3.3. Others' Perceptions: External Challenges to Kazakhstani Eurasianism

Identity is inter-subjectively constructed (see section 1.2.). The discrepancy between a state's self-representation and others' perception of it can pose a threat not only to the identity construction of the country but also to the legitimacy of its ruling party. Since its independence, Kazakhstan has struggled to cope with the constant challenge arising from the perceptual difference between itself and the world. As discussed above, since 1991, Kazakhstan's attempts to construct a Eurasian identity has been complicated by the development of different identity challenges. In addition to domestic identity contests, however, Kazakhstan has repeatedly faced criticisms within the global community which have influenced its international image, reputation and perceptions of its national identity. The following discussion will focus on identity challenges of Kazakhstan that arose in the global community.

3.3.1. Kazakhstan is a Global Threat

Cummings argues that the misinterpretation of Central Asia is connected with its history full of political and geographical changes that made outsiders refer to it as a 'black hole between disciplinary cracks' (Cummings, 2012; Frank, 1992: 51-52). Brzezinski considered Central Asia as part of the 'Eurasian Balkans' that would always tempt powerful states to intervene and challenge the dominance of one another (Brzezinski, 1997: 123). He linked it with their rich mineral resources, also with the diverse ethnic composition of the region, especially Kazakhstan, which made it vulnerable to internal and external conflicts and/or pressures (Brzezinski, 1997: 130). Schoeberlein claimed that 'we do not need to be among those who hope for things to get worse so that others will recognise the importance of the region' (Schoeberlein, 2002: 4). Indeed, as a former Kazakhstani government official recalled, the West was pessimistic about Kazakhstan's prospect of survival and considered the newly independent country a source of instability and insecurity (cite).

The history of Kazakhstan is marked by the short duration of statehood. As Kazakhstan gained independence after 150 years of Russian rule, the lack of knowledge about the landlocked country and Central Asia led scholars to see the region as a 'black hole' (Frank, 1992: 50). The problem was further exacerbated by misinterpretation, which was perhaps inevitable given Central Asia's tumultuous history and authoritarian regime. The history of Central Asian countries has been

obscure and intermittent and, for periods of time, the only way to get to know about them has been through the literature of neighbouring countries, such as Russia and China (Bolshina, 3 February 2017). The lack of information about the newly independent states in Central Asia contributed, in much of the western literature, different types of interpretation and narrative. Moreover, the reluctance of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to open up and integrate themselves into the liberal global world (Blackmon, 2011: 1-3), added up to the existing negative discourse about the region as a whole. Although Kazakhstan's domestic and foreign policy was considerably different from its neighbours, its international image continued to be affected by negative representation in the West.

This has, unsurprisingly, generated identity and image problems. In other words, negative and pessimistic assessments about the future of Kazakhstan, and other Central Asian states, led outside observers to see the region as either the prize of a new 'great game' or a breeding ground for international security threats. The main concern was that Kazakhstan might become a site for the spread of weapons of mass destruction, especially since it inherited what amounted to the world's fourth-largest stockpile of nuclear weapons from the Soviet Union (Laumulin, 2010: 92; Olcott, 1992). Besides, the growing threat of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia exacerbated these concerns. Even though Kazakhstan declared itself a secular country (Kazakhstani Constitution, 30 August 1995), it was still a country the majority population of which professed Islam (Tengrinews, 26 February 2012). Unfavourable public opinion about Islam in the West, which has worsened since 9/11, strengthened Kazakhstan's association with long-standing stereotypes about Muslim countries (Telhami, 9 December 2015; Najibullah, 30 March 2011; Malik, 2019). Meanwhile, others predicted that ethnic tension and the surge of Islamic fundamentalism would render Central Asia prone to political instability, terrorism and conflicts (Olcott, 1992: 130; Kavalski, 2010; Ferdinand, 1994; Trenin, 2007: 75-136). It is therefore not surprising that the international community approached Kazakhstan, which had an authoritarian political system, a sizeable Muslim population, a different value system and nuclear weapons, with caution and suspicion (Interviewee 5, 26 November 2018; Laumulin, 2010: 92; Starr, 2006: 14).

The 2003 US invasion of Iraq served as an example of how global images of a country being a security threat can lead to the loss of sovereignty (Hinnebusch, 2007; Jervis, 2003). Some have argued that Iraq's negative image as a Muslim country with

nuclear, chemical and biological weapons was the fundamental cause of the war (Hinnebusch, 2007: 209). The US and UK leaders, George Bush and Tony Blair, perceived Iraq as a threat to the international community (White House, 31 January 2003). This war was perceived within Kazakhstan as a threat to its physical and ontological security if we take into account the similarity of the above social and political narratives.

The Ukrainian crisis was also perceived as a threat, to some extent, to the national and ontological security of Kazakhstan, as well as all other small states that have a large Russian population in their territory (Abdurasulov, 9 November 2014). Vladislav Kosarev, a member of the Parliament in Kazakhstan, considers the conscious anxiety of the Kazakhstani society as a good lesson to learn from the bitter experience of Ukraine (Asautay, 28 November 2018). To bring clarity and positivity into the gloomy and dark picture of the state, Kazakhstan has sought to become a more open and active participant of international events and organisations that have tried to contribute to harmony between peoples of the world (see chapter 4 and 5).

Thirdly, Central Asia causes distrust among foreign citizens since its members have developed political regimes, traditions, social and economic norms and values opposed to the Western countries. Although some considered Nazarbayev wiser than the leaders of other former Soviet republics, he continued to receive negative coverage in the West as an authoritarian leader (Anholt, 2005; Standish, 7 June 2019). Anholt considers the cult of personality in the CIS as a big mistake, which has kept showing them in a bad light (Anholt, 2005). Moreover, in the light of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism across Eurasia, Kazakhstan's proximity to Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as its Persian affix 'stan', have contributed to the reinforcement of negative international image (Ford, 7 February 2014; Saunders, 2012: 55-58).

Lastly, Nazarbayev's Eurasianism was criticised for its pro-Russian orientation, even though under his leadership, Kazakhstan has adhered to a multi-vector foreign policy, which has aspired to balance its relations with the great players such as the USA, European Union, Russia and China (Cummings, 2005: 67; Cohen, 2008: 83-112; Weitz, 2008). As an act to simultaneously appease Muslims and Christians, Nazarbayev visited both Mecca and the Vatican during a foreign trip in 1994 (Cummings, 2005: 81). Cohen stated that 'Kazakhstan's multilateral foreign policy has thus far prevented a single global political player from achieving complete hegemony over Central Asia' (Cohen, 2008: 84). Malashenko stressed Kazakhstan's neutral

attitude to the Ukrainian crisis and its role as a 'mediator' between Russia and Ukraine (Malashenko, 21 January 2015).

3.3.2. Kazakhstan as a Petro State with Brown Economy

It is hard to see Kazakhstan as a developed country because of its fossil fuel resource-based economy and the environmental issues that accompany it. The nuclear and economic policy of the Soviet Union have had negative implications for Kazakhstan's identity but without much external recognition of the significant detrimental effects both for nature and for the population (Kassenova, 9 February 2017). The CPSU policies, such as the wide-scale dryland wheat farming during 1950-1960, nuclear testings between 1949 and 1991, and mass extraction and transportation of natural resources to the industrial centres of the USSR, generated environmental, humanitarian and economic issues. However, Kazakhstan's current aspiration to contribute to the global and regional energy and environmental security can be seen as a manifestation of the seriousness of the non-traditional security challenges experienced both inside and outside the country. This includes the vulnerability of Kazakhstan's economy to sharp fluctuations in fossil fuel prices, the ecological and humanitarian consequences of nuclear testings, and the environmental catastrophe of the Aral Sea (Kapparov, 2011).

Kazakhstan is a net commodity-based economy, and this is, as for many countries, both a blessing and a curse. The country is the world's biggest producer of uranium (World Nuclear Association, 2016). It also ranked 10th in mining (International Energy Agency, 2016), 15th in oil production (Central Intelligence Agency, 2015) and 31st in gas production (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). These drivers have boosted the country's economy. Still, on the other hand, they have also caused Kazakhstan a range of problems: greenhouse emissions, land degradation and desertification, industrial pollution and the problem of waste management (UNECE, 2008: 5). The centralised administrative planning system of the USSR transformed Kazakhstan, like many dependency states, into the manufacturer of raw materials (Jarbussynova, 2001). This is in contrast to modern ideas about what a developed nation looks like today. For example, according to the IMF world survey, the 39 most advanced economies have industrialised and highly technological infrastructures and enjoy high per capita income, high standards of living and long-life expectancy (IMF,

16 April 2016: 146-148; Encyclopedia.com, 23 January 2019). Kazakhstan's export of natural resources also strengthens the country's international image as a 'prize' in the competition of great powers. Indeed, one observer has noted that 'Kazakhstan is like a big fat pie: it has gas, oil, and other natural resources . . . and its political elite is weak, with no supporters of a strong state' (Gali, 2002; 2003).

Kazakhstan is one of the 30 top emitters of carbon dioxide in the world (Friedrich, Ge and Damassa, 2015; Boden and Andres, 2014). The main sectors contributing to the high CO2 emissions are the energy sector, agriculture, industrial processing and waste (UNFCCC, 2013: 13-14; United Nations, 8 September 2016: 6-7). Moreover, heat and electricity generation in the country is heavily dependent upon coal, which comprises 52.8 % of national greenhouse gas emissions (UNFCCC, 2013: 13). Although Kazakhstan is one of the largest grain producers globally, the share of agriculture in GDP has decreased, between 1991 to 2014, from 26 to 5% (World Bank, 2014). According to the Deputy of Parliament - Zheksebay Duysebaeva, 26.6 million ha (30%) of the total 188 million ha of pastures have become useless because of environmental problems (Duisebayev, 2015). Some ideas for improving this situation are legal reforms and funding for agriculture (Duisebayev, 2015; Mamytbekov, 29 April 2016).

Partly as a result of these agricultural and environmental problems, Kazakhstan now has ambitious goals, as part of Strategies 'Kazakhstan-2030: prosperity, security and ever-growing welfare of all the Kazakhstanis' (Strategy Kazakhstan-2030) and 'Kazakhstan-2050: new political course of the established state' (Strategy Kazakhstan-2050), to become one of the 30 most developed countries in the world with the green economy by 2050. Chapter five will demonstrate Kazakhstan's efforts to establish a green economy wherein the application of green technologies is expected to reduce CO2 emissions in the spheres of energy production, heat and electricity generation.

3.3.3. Clan Identity

While the long association of Kazakhstan with natural resources is not conducive to the formation of a favourable international image, it is the combination of the images of natural resource abundance and bad governance that threatens to undermine the country's international image. Western discourse on Kazakhstan often attributes the

problems of authoritarianism, nepotism and corruption to the deep-rooted clan and tribal identity (Masanov, 1996; Rumer, 2002: 6-16; Gretsky, 2003: 84-95; Schatz, 2004; Kramer, 23 December 2005; Starr, 2006). The association of Nazarbayev's rule with clan politics is epitomised by repeated references to the 'Nazarbayev's clan' (Solovyov, 17 March 2011; Lillis, 10 June 2013; Hagelund, 3 May 2016). Foreign observers often analyse reshuffles of key positions in government and national companies from the perspective of clan politics (Hagelund, 3 May 2016).

Historically, the Kazakhs' identity has been based on kinship bonds, family linage, and, most importantly, clan affiliation and membership (Saunders, 2008: 89). Since the mid-17th century (Akimbekov, 6 June 2017), the Kazakhs have organised themselves into three clans: great horde (uly zhuz), middle horde (orta zhuz), and small horde (kishi zhuz) (Radio Free Europe, 30 August 2011). In the absence of a central government or modern state bureaucracy, it was clan rather than a nation that defined the Kazakhs' collective identity (Collins, 2014: 238). Indeed, the social division of Kazakhs along clan lines has endured through political change and modernisation (Schatz, 2004: xv-xxvi). The demise of Soviet identity allowed space for the emergence of modern clan politics in Kazakhstan (Masanov, 1996: 5-8; Collins, 2014: 224), even though clan identity no longer bears any 'visible markers' among the general population and features largely appear in private acquaintance and conversation (Masanov, 1996; Schatz, 2004: xxii).

As a sign of nepotism and favouritism, the resurgence of clan identity has damaged Kazakhstan's international image (Masanov, 1996; Rumer, 2002: 6-16; Gretsky, 2003: 84-95; Schatz, 2004; Kramer, 23 December 2005; Starr, 2006). As 'informal social organisations', clans encroach a country's 'social fabric' and hinder its economic and political development (Collins, 2004: 225). Once the clan leader is in power, key positions in governance and business are distributed to clan members. Clan politics, in this regard, is considered anti-democratic and pre-modern, as it is based on family and friendship ties rather than merits (Collins, 2004: 225-226; Kramer, 23 December 2005). Some western and domestic political analysts like Lillis, Schatz, Masanov and Satpayev emphasise that a society based on kinship and friendship networks is prone to corruption and hence loses its economic competitiveness (Radio Free Europe, 30 August 2011; Satpayev, November 2019). Moreover, as Kramer argues, the mixture of business with politics fosters social and economic inequality, which in turn increases the risk of social unrest (23 December 2005). International rankings such as

Bertelsmann Stiftung's BTI Transformation Index, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index and Worldwide Governance Indicators all give low grades to Kazakhstan in governance effectiveness, the rule of law, corruption and political participation (BTI Transformation Index, 2020: 9-15; Transparency International, 2019; Kaufmann and Kraay, 2018). The western world sees the politics of Kazakhstan as, in the words of Satpayev, 'the classic autocratic model' (Trotsenko, 7 June 2019).

The detrimental impact of the clan and tribal identities on Kazakhstan's international image has led Nazarbayev himself to declare them a national security threat and called for their eradication (Nazarbayev, 13 December 2015). These remnants of the past have had implications for the construction of the national identity of Kazakhstan by generating a negative narrative about the country in the international community. The tendency of retraditionalisation demonstrates the lack of competition and the rise of corruption that eventually contradicts the values of the international liberal order and hinders the full-fledged integration of Kazakhstan into the modern world (Cohen, 2008: 59; Olcott, 2003: 5). The representatives of Kazakhstan's General Prosecutor's Office states that the country's anti-corruption system cannot be considered effective, and statistics of corruption offences remain negative (Umarova, 29 December 2017). To address the problem, the government seeks to raise competition, invest in modernisation and reform the political institutions and society (Nazarbayev, 12 April 2017). Not surprisingly, Majilis deputy Kuanysh Sultanov stated that even though he cherishes the tradition, he will not idealise the past and project it into the future (Sultanov, 21 May 2012).

3.3.4. Kazakhstan is a 'Terra Incognita', Uncivilised and Underdeveloped Nation.

Nevertheless, the biggest challenge to Kazakhstan's international image in the 2000s came from Western popular culture, which could be seen as a consequence of the country's aforementioned representation in the international community. The challenge began with the appearance of Sacha Baron Cohen's 'Da Ali G Show', on Britain's Channel 4 (Stock, 2009a: 181). In the satirical show, Cohen played a fictitious character, a journalist from Kazakhstan who tried to learn British and American culture and traditions but continued to embarrass himself because of his 'primitive mindset' (Harris, 26 April 2000). The 'Da Ali G Show' broadcast from

2000 to 2004 led to the production of the comedy film 'Borat! Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan'. 'Borat' became one of the top 15 highest-grossing movies of 2006 and was nominated for an Oscar (The Numbers, 2006; BBC News, 19 December 2006). While the film quickly became famous around the world, it was banned in Kazakhstan, Russia and some Arab countries, since it was considered a potential source of a threat that would bring disarray in the country by offending the religious and ethnic feelings of people (The Guardian, 1 December 2006; Myers, 9 November 2006).

The Kazakhstani government reacted to the release of 'Da Ali G Show' very strongly. Talgat Kaliyev, First Secretary of the Kazakhstani Embassy in Britain, stated to the press that:

> *We can take a joke like anyone else. But this has gone too far - it's a form of racism. His moustache is nothing like the typical Kazakh moustache. He looks Turk or Arab. His character is nothing like our people, and there is no torture of animals in our country. The horse is like a saint. We want Borat banned (The Sun,* 2000*; Harris, 26 April 2000).*

Nevertheless, Kazakhstani officials' strong reaction to the comedy made Cohen and his film even more popular (Bahrampour, 3 November 2006; Cohen, 13 February 2016). One British magazine, GQ, said, 'Not since John Lennon has an English entertainer had such an effect on the world' (Evening Standard, 29 January 2007). According to the GQ magazine's top 100 influential people of 2006, Cohen was ranked the 19th most powerful man in the United Kingdom. That made Cohen only one rank behind Prince William and two behind politician David Cameron (Evening Standard, 29 January 2007).

The Borat persona had a vast influence on the popular representation of Kazakhstan in the West. As Kaliyev explained, while the publicity would not have been so bad if it was in the newspaper because people might forget about it the next day, this was a film broadcast to a huge audience. The downside of TV programmes and films, media in general, is that they shape public opinion, influence people's view of places, products and countries, especially if it is viewed negatively (Kotler and Gertner, 2002; Nye, 2008: 97). The following seasons of the 'Da Ali G Show' in 2003 and 2004 that perpetuated misconceived generalisations about Kazakhstan were broadcast across the USA through HBO cable and satellite television network (Saunders, 2008: 100).

The Kazakhstani Embassy in Washington, D.C., embarked on a 'Borat war' as they believed the honour of the country was at stake. As the embassy's press secretary, Roman Vassilenko, pointed out, Cohen represents Kazakhstan as a backward country (Radosh, 20 September 2004). According to Yerzhan Ashykbayev, spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the government didn't rule out the possibility that Cohen was following someone's political order designed to present Kazakhstan and its people in a derogatory way. Ashykbayev stressed that Kazakhstan reserved the right to take any legal action to prevent similar situations in the future (Wolf, 15 November 2005; Myers, 29 September 2006). The warning to sue for parody and mockery had reverse effects, and Cohen continued to build a popular career while the rating of his TV show kept rising. Kazakhstan's defensive reaction was perceived as repression of freedom of speech (Saunders, 2008: 99).

The film 'Borat' depicts the image of an uncivilised, backward and undeveloped Kazakhstan, where illiterate and ill-behaved people live, similar in appearance to gipsies. The story is based on a mix of stereotypes, fabricated cultural attitudes and characteristics. It narrates the story of a Kazakh journalist - Borat Sagdiyev, who travels to America to make a documentary about American society and culture for the Kazakh national TV. During his visit, the so-called Kazakh journalist demonstrates his unfamiliarity with the basic conveniences of modern life, his ignorance of the rules of social conduct and communication with people. For instance, the film shows how Borat starts shedding a tear of happiness fascinated by the opulence of his budget hotel-room, where he can wash his face in the toilet water. He mistakes a budget hotel room for a luxury suite. The fictional character creates and reinforces a negative image of Kazakhstan as a nation that has not reached Western standards of civilisation and democracy where journalists can get killed for making an unsuccessful documentary. As Hannah Pangrcic highlights, during his performances, Cohen crosses all moral and ethical lines of documentary filmmaking, which could be offensive to women and minorities (2014). All jokes made at the expense of the entire nation are based on western prejudices of Central Asia, which culminated into a mockumentary that entertained mostly small-town middle Americans.

The persistence of stereotypes and Kazakhstan's inability to effectively respond to the public identity crisis at that time were the manifestations of the unequal discursive power relationship between Kazakhstan and the West. As Saunders argues, Borat was made at the expense of an entire nation – 'glorious Kazakhstan' (16 November 2006).

For instance, during Nazarbayev's visit to the UK, London 'welcomed' Kazakhstan's president with billboards of Borat, whose image has haunted the Kazakhs abroad (NEWSru.com, 21 November 2006). Having learned from the failures of Kazakhstani officials in the handling of the incident, Nazarbayev, in his speech, called to treat the film with humour and judge the real image of Kazakhstan by the specific achievements of the country and invited, in the end, Cohen to Kazakhstan (Nazarbayev, 10 September 2009). Yerlan Idrissov, the ambassador of Kazakhstan to the UK, said that 'Having managed to survive Stalin, we will certainly survive Borat too'. Shame and anxiety caused by the fictitious narratives of Baron Cohen about 'Borat Land', however, continued to motivate Kazakhstan's foreign policy activities and events directed towards (re-)constructing its international image and the national identity of the country (Idrissov, 4 November 2006).

The mocumentary certainly undermines Kazakhstan's national identity, mocking its culture, national symbols, emblem and anthem. As some critics explain, Borat as a coin with double sides indicates, on the one hand, on the ignorance of American society about Central Asian countries and, on the other hand, the negligence of Kazakhstani diplomats, of the fact that Kazakhstan was a 'terra incognita' for others (Aasen, 26 October 2006; Myers, 28 September 2006). Indeed, Cohen himself explained that 'The reason we chose Kazakhstan was because it was a country that no one had ever heard anything about, so we could essentially play on stereotypes they might have about this ex-Soviet backwater' (Cohen, 4 December 2006; Lillis, 2019: 1-2). The lack of knowledge about Kazakhstan, in turn, perpetuate Western images and stereotypes of the country as a 'black hole'. In some respects, therefore, Borat merely highlighted existing identity and image gaps and substantiated the importance of nation branding. Given Kazakhstan's failure to project a positive image of its own, international society kept defining and redefining the country's identity for her. Even if, as Cohen claims, Kazakhstan was chosen randomly, we still cannot refute the idea that it was picked out because the country was seen as a Soviet state with negative images, as discussed in subsections 3.3.1., 3.3.2. and 3.3.3.

As an 'accidental international brand' for Kazakhstan, Borat indicated the existing branding gap that the political elites should fill in (Marat, 2009: 1128). Ashykbayev said that the government's concern was that Kazakhstan had been a 'terra incognita' for the Western part of the world (Myers, 28 September 2006). Kazakhstan, a country the size of Western Europe, was a blank patch in the world, from where Soviet

scientists catapulted rockets into orbit, detonated nuclear bombs and hatched agricultural plans (Harris, 26 April 2000). To divert the negative picture, Kazakhstan needs to engage more nation branding, proper representation of the country to the world. As argued in chapter two, the absence of global brands, sustainable country image and strong national identity became the highest threat in the global economy where states compete for investment, tourism and human talents. Negative images do not only threaten the domestic regime, but they also undermine states' economy by influencing their business and tourism. 'Borat' is an excellent example of how the country's international image can easily be hijacked by strangers (Ham 2008: 142-143). On the other hand, it was also a right call for 'the terra incognita' like Kazakhstan to catch international attention. As Hugo said, after Cohen's famous 'Da Ali G Show' and 'Borat', 'The audience is ripe and ready for any piece of branding information that would come out of official and unofficial Kazakhstan'. (Gaggiotti, 2007:115).

Nevertheless, Cohen's film emerged as somewhat of a double-edged sword. It increased the country's international exposure and visibility by putting Kazakhstan on the global map (Saunders, 2012:60). Some people who had never heard about Kazakhstan, mainly where it was located, became interested in the idea of where such a country could exist. The global public was ready to digest any available information about Kazakhstan. Former minister of foreign affairs of Kazakhstan, Yerzhan Kazykhanov, said that he would take a philosophical approach to the film 'Borat'. The minister expressed his gratitude to Cohen for helping to attract tourists, which rose from 90 to 450 thousand a year between 2006 and 2011 (Kilner, 23 April 2012; Kalikulov, 23 April 2012). Ultimately, the public diplomatic disaster with 'Da Ali G Show' and 'Borat' also led Kazakhstan to embark on a multi-million-dollar nation branding campaign to improve its international image.

Except that, Borat's shadow has continued to haunt Kazakhstan, until today. The effect of the film turned out to be very broad, affecting the entire global community, from ordinary people to officials. Once a state's international image has been influenced in such a way, it needs a more exciting and captive replacement narrative or event to make people want to change their opinions about it (Anholt, 2005: 106). Otherwise, it merely needs time to be forgotten. To divert the public attention from the existing misinterpretations about the country and promote a positive international image, Kazakhstan has spent significant financial resources that could have been instead invested in solving internal problems that actually damage the country's

reputation abroad (Marat, 2009: 1130; Satpayev, 22 November 2012; Tynan, 23 January 2012). Political analyst - Dosym Satpayev stated that the government spent over $10 million on international image promotion campaigns, even though the actual amount could be 100 times higher, if to consider Kazakhstan's active foreign policy in nuclear and environmental security, I am going to discuss in the following case chapters (22 November 2012). Satpayev referred to Kazakhstan's initiatives about forming an 'International Advisory Board' to the government of Kazakhstan, hiring international PR companies, making films and documentaries, organising international events and running newspaper and television advertisements.

One month after Borat was released, Kazakhstan purchased four-page advertisements in the New York Times and International Herald-Tribune to tell the Western world about how prosperous and modern Kazakhstan was and not to confuse it with the fictitious country depicted in the comedy film (Gordon, 28 September 2006). Newspaper advertisements about Kazakhstan included headlines like: 'Bolstering ties with the United States', 'Growing economy attracts international hotel groups', 'Religious tolerance', and 'Kazakhstan is home to over 40 religions' (E&P Staff, 27 September 2006).

To promote an international image of 'a modern, open and investment-friendly nation', Kazakhstan has employed global PR companies such as Tony Blairs Associates (Lewis, 29 October 2011), BGR Gabara (Michel, 6 January 2015; US Department of Justice, 31 December 2012), BGR Group, Portland Communications (Gingerich, 14 June 2018) and Berlin-based Media Consulta that did not leave the foreign press without attention (Tynan, 18 January 2012). Kazakhstan has started to invest more in lobbying and pushing public relations abroad since 2010, precisely speaking, outreaching the government officials, news outlets and other individuals in the USA (Fisher, 23 July 2012; Tynan, 18 January 2012). For instance, Kazakhstan turned to the BGR Group for public relations consultation in 1999, which lasted until 2013. Total lobbying costs grew from 380,000 to 600,000 US dollars per year (Center for Responsive Politics, 23 January 2020). Kazakhstan's interest doubled in PR campaigns in 2010 that shows the increased interest and need of Kazakhstan to work on its international image (Center for Responsive Politics, 23 January 2020).

In 2005 was released a state-sponsored film to familiarise the world with ancient Kazakhstan. The epic movie 'Nomads' tells the story of nomadic Kazakhs in the 15th and 19th centuries laid out in the famous novel of Ilyas Yessenberlin. The $53 million

historical film conveys the power of tradition, culture and the character of the Kazakhs and the Great Steppe (E&P Staff, 27 September 2006). It bridges Kazakhstan's past with the present that portrays it as 'advanced and forward-looking' (Sengupta, 2017: 48). Unfortunately, the film 'Nomads', starred by mainly American and local actors, did not succeed as the highest-grossing mockumentary of 2006 'Borat' (Yessenova, 2011). Despite the international cast, 'Nomads' could not overshadow the negative representations of Kazakhstan in 'Borat' (Yessenova, 2011: 181).

The government continued to finance the Kazakh film industry to produce films about Kazakhstan's history and culture, such as 'Mustafa Shokay' (2008), 'The Sky of My Childhood' (2011) and 'In the Stirrups of Time' (2011). As its name suggests, 'Mustafa Shokay' portrays the life of the famous Kazakh politician, a member of the 'Alash Party' and a leading proponent of Pan-Turkism who fought for a free and independent United Turkestan (current Central Asia) (Mirzakhmedova, 4 January 2018). The 'Sky of my Childhood' is about the childhood and youth of Nursultan Nazarbayev (Sengupta, 2017: 48-51). 'In the Stirrups of Time' is a one-hour documentary film produced by the Kazakh satellite channel 'Caspionet' that narrates Kazakhstan's history and achievements through interviews with famous political and business leaders such as Nursultan Nazarbayev, Tony Blair, the World Bank Director for Central Asia Dennis de Tray and others (Massimov, 10 January 2012). However, Western media such as BBC, CNN and The Guardian criticised these films as pro-Nazarbayev propaganda (Toye, 30 May 2015; BBC News, 24 April 2012). Fareed Zakaria, for instance, wrote that the issues of corruption, press freedom and democracy contradict the content of these films (30 April 2012).

On the other hand, Satpayev thinks that 'hiring political heavyweights like British Prime Minister Tony Blair to help advance the economic and political reforms in Kazakhstan is also a type of nation branding', as they 'do not forget to talk about the success of Kazakhstan in international circles' (Watt, 30 June 2013; Michel, 1 March 2016). Blair, a 'master of spin' and the architect of the United Kingdom's international brand 'Cool Britannia' (Lillis, 24 October 2011), was the official advisor to Nazarbayev from 2011 to 2016 (Lewis, 29 October 2011), whose ultimate obligation was to advise on how to 'present a better face to the West' (Lillis, 24 October 2011). It cost Kazakhstan, Satpayev highlights, £ 8 to 16 million pounds a year (Michel, 1 March 2016). Besides, recruited famous and influential business and political

executives provide Kazakhstan strategic advice on how to develop Kazakhstan into one of the world's top 30 developed countries by 2050 (Kulseitov, 26 May 2015).

3.4. Conclusion

During the three consecutive decades, the Kazakhstani civic identity has gone through major political reformulations, but its hardcore remained unchanged. As Olcott stated, gradually year after year, 'Kazakhstan has become a more conspicuously Kazakh state, both in its composition and ideology' (2010: 53). Kazakhstani Eurasianism has kept its Kazakh face, culture and traditions, without which Nazarbayev said modernisation would be just empty rhetoric. On the other hand, he also emphasised that 'This does not mean preserving everything in the national culture. We need to separate those aspects which give us confidence in the future and those that hold us back.' (Nazarbayev, 12 April 2017). The evolution and contestation over Kazakhstani Eurasianism reflect the country's struggle to address domestic and international challenges to its embryonic national identity until today. Domestically, Kazakhstan faces the challenge of strengthening national unity while preserving interethnic and interconfessional harmony. Externally, Kazakhstan seeks to stabilise its relations with post-Soviet, nationalist Russia while integrating itself into the American-led liberal international order. If identity is continuously constructed and reconstructed through social interactions, the use and redevelopment of Kazakhstani Eurasianism, in short, embodies the Republic's continued struggle to redefine itself and its relations with the external environment on its own terms.

In the next chapter, I will analyse Kazakhstan's diplomacy in global nuclear security. To counter its negative representation in the West as a threat to international security, Kazakhstan sought to position itself as a leading advocate for nonproliferation and disarmament not only by presenting its national experience as a model but also by actively joining and hosting international events. As chapter two discusses, the characteristics of a good country and the ways of earning a positive image have changed since the 1990s from commercial advertisement and power to the contribution to humanity and global issues. Through its active support and involvement, Kazakhstan has tried to create the image of a country where peace, democracy and mutual respect flourish. It contradicts the way how Western scholars see and interpret Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan has been imaged in a good and bad light at the same time. To endear others, the country has conducted and participated in various global events (Saunders, 2007, 2008, 2009). Kazakhstan's efforts to project a positive international image and promote its new national identity culminated in Astana Expo-2017, which aimed at increasing the efforts and investments in developing further 'a green economy' and 'green technologies'. The Astana Expo manifests Kazakhstan's attempt to project the country as a modern, Eurasian state willing to assume leadership in promoting regional and global environmental security. Indeed, the Expo was a platform for bringing together and distributing local and international knowledge and experience on alternative energies. Kazakhstan wishes to enhance its position and status among other post-Soviet countries by turning to a source of information and expertise on leading innovation and technologies in future sustainable energy.

CHAPTER 4. ASTANA CONFERENCES AS NATION BRANDING

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter analysed the branding context to identify Kazakhstan's branding motivations. As my conceptual framework looks at nation branding as a foreign policy strategy applied to address international challenges to national identity, the branding context examined the Republic's struggle to construct and reconstruct Kazakhstan's national identity since it became independent in 1991. The evolution and contestation over Kazakhstani Eurasianism reflect Kazakhstan's efforts to address domestic and international challenges to its national identity during the Nazarbayev administration. Domestically, the government has striven to consolidate the political legitimacy of the Republic as the successor state to the multi-ethnic Kazakh SSR by promoting a Eurasian national identity. Internationally, it has sought to maintain relations with Russia and other neighbouring countries while simultaneously developing ties with the United States and the West.

The analysis of the branding context shows that Kazakhstan has struggled to overcome its lack of visibility and negative misrecognition of its post-Soviet identity that culminated in the 2000s with the release of Sasha Baron Cohen's TV show and mocumentary. If Kazakhstan's survival, development and foreign policy relations hinge on its identity, nation branding represents its attempt to represent itself and, importantly, influence how it is to be represented internationally on its own terms. This latter aspect of why Kazakhstan has sought to re-brand itself is crucial in the light of ongoing negative representations of Kazakhstan in the West - as a Muslim and authoritarian state with rich uranium resources and developed nuclear industry that would threaten the American-led liberal international order.

As the subsequent analytical steps of my conceptual framework, set out in chapter two, this and the next chapters will focus on international conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament and Astana Expo-2017 as Kazakhstan's nation branding channels to communicate a counter and new narratives about itself (see section 2.5.). These two chapters help explain how Kazakhstan responded to external challenges to its post-Soviet identity by attempting to (re)build its international image on its own terms. In other words, Kazakhstan has sought to develop its international

image and identity in accordance with how its political elites and population understand it. Section 3.3 showed how the international society sees Kazakhstan and tried to understand and define its image for it. Given the dominance of the Western mass media and the significance of the Western world to the economic and political development of the country, the case chapters demonstrate how Kazakhstan approached the issues of nation branding.

This and the next chapters will demonstrate how Kazakhstan has tried to project a positive and modern identity that showed its willingness to transform its Soviet identity into a Eurasian identity. In other words, while the third chapter focused on the internal dimension of identity formation, which analysed the self-image and self-perception of the political elites about Kazakhstan and its position in the international community, this and the following chapters will explore and explain how Kazakhstan has tried to shape the representations and images of others about itself. The conceptual framework will help to explain the link between *who I am and how I want to be seen externally*. This and the next chapters will explore and explain how Kazakhstan as a Eurasian nation wants to be viewed in the international community by focusing on international conferences and expositions as its main nation branding channels.

The second focus of this chapter is to explore those branding activities of Kazakhstan that contributed not only to its physical but also ontological security. This chapter discusses that Kazakhstan not only took the decision to dispose of its Soviet nuclear weapons voluntarily but has since then been actively promoting nonproliferation and disarmament externally. By renouncing its (Soviet) nuclear power status, building the Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ), establishing the Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) Bank of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Kazakhstan, and actively participating in the global anti-nuclear movement, Kazakhstan has arguably secured both national security and national identity.

The history of Soviet nuclear testing has been central to the formation of Kazakhstan's nationhood. Soviet nuclear tests left a disastrous environmental and health legacy that gave birth to an anti-nuclear movement and national consciousness. The Republic's commitment to nonproliferation and disarmament since independence, however, has been driven as much by the imperative of survival as by any 'moral duty' (Interviewee 1, 15 November 2018). The unanticipated possession of Soviet nuclear weapons and facilities and the possession of vast uranium reserves did not guarantee

Kazakhstan's security, status and development. Instead, the Republic has continued to be represented in the West as a threat to international security. As I argued in chapter one, if a state's foreign relations very much depend on its external image, reputation, and identity, Kazakhstan's nonproliferation diplomacy is as much a quest for ontological as physical security (see section 1.4.; Kowert, 1998: 1; Berenskoetter, 2010: 6). While lacking the material capabilities that many nuclear powers have, Kazakhstan skilfully used international conferences as branding channels not only to influence the global governance agenda but also to project a positive international image.

This chapter shows that international conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament have been central to Kazakhstan's nation branding efforts. While undertaking a variety of initiatives under existing international institutions, Kazakhstan hosted a series of international conferences co-organised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). As branding channels, these conferences allowed Kazakhstan to communicate to a wide international audience a narrative about itself as a victim of the nuclear arms race, an upholder of the rules-based international order, and an advocate of the global movement for non-proliferation and disarmament. Indeed, the influence of these conferences on international outcomes remained limited. Meanwhile, uncertainty about Kazakhstan's relations with Russia, its capabilities to secure nuclear facilities, and its uranium exports have continued to pose a challenge to the country's identity (see section 4.5.). This chapter concludes that Kazakhstan's nonproliferation diplomacy has successfully increased its visibility, countering negative representation and promoting a positive international image.

4.2. International Conferences as Branding Channels

International conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament are Kazakhstan's 'symbolic actions' in its 'foreign policy niche' (Ädilet, 21 January 2014; Maitre, 1 July 2018). It is important to emphasise that nonproliferation and disarmament are more than just a main pillar of Kazakhstan's foreign policy. Given the country's national experience, Kazakhstan considers the issue not only its 'moral duty' but also a defining element of its post-Soviet identity (Interviewee 1, 15 November 2018; Nazarbayev, 1996: 163-164). In the views of branding experts such as Anholt, actively contributing to the solution of global challenges, as Kazakhstan

has been doing since it gained independence in the field of nuclear security, is an effective nation branding for states (Anholt, 2010: 13-14). According to my nation branding conceptual framework, these conferences can be grouped into the centralised, permanent and intergovernmental nation branding channels. As discussed in subsection 2.5.4., international conferences in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament have been organised by the Kazakhstani government since 2010 to address the political and intellectual elites directly.

In this chapter, I argue that international conferences have not only contributed to global nuclear governance but also improved Kazakhstan's post-Soviet identity and image that helped the country to socialise into the expanding Western international society. Nonproliferation diplomacy is central to Kazakhstan's efforts to transcend its Soviet past and redefine its relations with Russia. Continued partnership with the United States and the West in the disposal of nuclear weapons and highly enriched uranium, meanwhile, demonstrates Kazakhstan's determination to secure its independence, pursue a 'multi-vector foreign policy' and integrate itself into a rule-based international order (Ädilet, 21 January 2014). By hosting international conferences that brought Western and non-Western states together to address global nuclear issues, Kazakhstan improved its international image. Indeed, Kazakhstan's niche diplomacy on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament is the constituting value and characteristics of the newly developed Kazakhstani Eurasian identity. As mentioned, Eurasian Kazakhstan is a model of denuclearisation, an advocate of the world free of nuclear weapons and an upholder of the Western international order in the sphere of nuclear security and safety.

As a permanent and intergovernmental branding channel, international conferences can bring together various stakeholders, stimulate discussion and develop cooperation on issues of common and specific interest. In a highly institutionalised and interdependent international order, the role of conferences has continued to grow by providing platforms for different stakeholders – Western and non-Western, governmental and non-governmental, powerful and less powerful – to come together and discuss global challenges, to express their position concerning the exacerbating global problems and conflicts (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018; Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019). As Kaufmann argues, 'conference diplomacy' has altered traditional diplomatic strategies based on power (Kaufmann, 1996: 7). On the other hand, conferences that do not reach any 'international agreements' are (often) considered a

waste of time, money and energy (Kaufmann, 1996: 7; Death, 2011: 1). As the following discussion will show, however, while the effects of conferences on international outcomes should not be exaggerated, an exclusive focus on actual (measurable) impact overlooks the value of these events to less powerful states (Death, 2011: 3-7, 10-13).

This chapter shows that international conferences provide useful platforms for less powerful states like Kazakhstan to secure their interests and influence the global agenda by persuading and building coalitions (Williams, 1992: 57-60). At the same time, they offer opportunities for nation branding. By attracting the media and global public attention, conferences enable a state to represent itself on its own terms rather than relying on external actors to shape its identity. Indeed, the value of international conferences as platforms to shape public opinions renders them important branding channels.

In the view of officials at Kazakhstan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), conferences have a 'positive and effective influence' on global governance in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018; Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019). In their view, stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in decision-making by 'voicing their opinions', 'introducing proposals, voting, and putting social pressure on nuclear states to refrain from using nuclear weapons' (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018). According to a former senior official at the MFA, international conferences have been used by states as dialogue platforms to express their anxiety about possible nuclear conflicts, as well as to signal their intentions and solidarity (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018). Similarly, Abdrakhmanov highlighted that conferences enable states to build mutual trust that can lead to collective efforts to prevent nuclear war (Orazgaliyeva, 30 August 2018).

To be more precise, as stated in the 2009 resolution of the UNGA on the 'International Day against Nuclear Tests', international conferences hosted by Kazakhstan annually are aimed at educating the general public about the inhuman nature of nuclear weapon testings for military purposes. Another MFA official has noted that

> *Through education and use of the tools of 'public diplomacy' like conferences, it is possible to influence the governments of those countries that have not yet acceded to or ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). To achieve this noble goal, of course, it needs time and the considerable collective efforts of many*

citizens and organisations as well as the political will of governments (Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019).

This commentary emphasises the importance of engaging non-governmental organisations, epistemic communities and the global community to promote peace and security.

As discussed in chapter two, effective nation branding involves communicating credible narratives about the true nature of a nation and the aspirations of its people. There are no more effective communicators of a branding narrative than ordinary citizens that support and represent their states' foreign policy. As the following discussion will show, while utilising existing international institutions such as the UN and the OSCE, Kazakhstan hosted international conferences together with various international NGOs to communicate the history of Soviet nuclear tests and the anti-nuclear movement in Kazakhstan, the country's initiatives in nonproliferation and disarmament since independence, and its vision for global nuclear governance in the future. Bringing together political leaders, international civil servants, academics, radiation victims, youth and other stakeholders, these conferences strengthened the credibility of Kazakhstan's narrative about its evolution from a voiceless victim of the nuclear arms race to a strong supporter of a rule-based international order and an advocate in nonproliferation and disarmament.

Eurasian Kazakhstan has built strong credentials for its leadership in global nuclear governance by relinquishing its Soviet nuclear weapons, advocating for 'a world free of nuclear weapons', keeping an active profile in the anti-nuclear movement, and supporting the peaceful use of atomic energy in the world (Maitre, 1 July 2018; Standish, 1 April 2016). For instance, apart from the international conferences I am going to discuss below, Kazakhstan has partnered with the United States, the European Union and Russia in removing highly enriched uranium from its nuclear facilities, as well as establishing the LEU Bank of the IAEA in its territory, which supplies nuclear power plants of non-nuclear countries with low enriched uranium (The Astana Times, 10 May 2016). Except for France, Germany, the Netherlands, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, other countries cannot independently produce nuclear fuel or enrich uranium that could potentially be used for military purpose (The Astana Times, 10 May 2016).

Kazakhstan has always sought international recognition for its contributions to global and regional security, its role in the anti-nuclear campaign, both of which are

dictated by its new Eurasian identity. While the Kazakh SSR refers to nuclear power and testing, Eurasian Kazakhstan explicitly refers to a zone free of nuclear weapons and tests, a country that is 'a firm and consistent anti-nuclear defender' (Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019). As a country with sufficient size and economic capacity to play a prominent role in regional affairs, but without superior military power to dictate or impose rules, Kazakhstan has always wanted to identify a global niche area to project its influence. In this regard, international endorsement of annual conferences organised and held by Kazakhstan under the auspice of the UN means that the international society recognises Kazakhstan's moral rights and unique role to promote nuclear security. Kazakhstan has quite skilfully used international conferences to project itself as a moral leader in the global movement to build 'a world without nuclear weapons' (Ädilet, 21 January 2014).

Astana conferences support international institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation (CTBTO) and IAEA, in updating their efforts to address nuclear issues and drawing more extensive public attention to them (Groom, 2013: 1). International conferences can help generate new knowledge around long-lasting issues, 'give another impetus' and offer a different perspective to their solution (Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019). If in the past conferences had mostly been about the pursuit of national interests of great powers (Groom, 2013: 8), then their function has later broadened to include issues of interests to both powerful and less powerful states. As the following discussion will show, conferences as official platforms for dialogue serve to broaden and deepen the global debate on issues of the nuclear arms race, proliferation and testing.

Moreover, the global conferences hosted by countries like Kazakhstan and Japan, both of which have lived through nuclear holocaust, have an educational purpose (see section 4.4.). Kazakhstan and Japan serve as living examples to the world of the catastrophic consequences of nuclear weapons. Indeed, as I will discuss below, a partnership with a country like Japan, which has acquired considerable reputation in the issue-area, proved to boost Kazakhstan's visibility, image and reputation (MFA, 19 September 2019; Abdrakhmanov, 25 December 2017). Since 2008, Kazakhstan and Japan have developed a high-level partnership relationship in the sphere of nuclear energy cooperation (Muzalevsky, 2 August 2010). Similarly, Kazakhstan's partnership with Russia, India, the USA, Canada and South Korea in the peaceful use of nuclear energy has turned the country from a supplier of raw materials into a seller

of fabricated uranium fuel assemblies (World Nuclear Association, 2020). This has not only improved Kazakhstan's industrial and technological capabilities but also enhanced its status in both the global uranium market and global nuclear governance. As a Kazakhstani senior researcher on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament at an international think tank emphasised, because of the 'developed nuclear industry' Kazakhstan is not 'the last person' and it has 'leverage' in nuclear issues (Interviewee 9, 6 May 2019).

It is partly the need to engage a broad global audience that has led Kazakhstan to co-organise international conferences with different countries and international organisations every year since 2010. International conferences are understood to contribute to the formulation of principles, norms and rules of conduct in particular areas, as well as give a chance to observe that process in the future (Groom, 2013: 4). The general agreements reached during these conferences can sometimes lead to the conclusion of new treaties in international organisations such as the UN and CTBTO. As a supporter of a world free of nuclear weapons, Kazakhstan, like Japan and other international institutions, has sought to contribute to the implementation of international treaties aimed at preventing the detrimental effects of nuclear weapons on humanity and the environment. It has done so by co-hosting and co-chairing global conferences, congresses and summits on nuclear disarmament with the CTBTO, International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW), Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs (the Pugwash Conference), Mayors for Peace, Global Zero campaign and Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation, and Disarmament (PNND).

As a nation branding channel, the success and effectiveness of international conferences in improving the image and global issues depend on their organisation level, scope and content. A broad audience and attendance of high-ranking officials tend to lead to better results in solving common problems. By hosting these events, a state maximises its opportunity to shape the agenda and hence communicate its narrative to target audiences on its own terms. By bringing together political leaders, international civil servants and representatives of epistemic communities, non-governmental organisations and the global public, international conferences are designed to bolster the host country's image and enhance the credibility of its narrative.

Kaufmann identifies four types of international conferences (Kaufmann, 1996: 11-16; Groom, 2013: 11-13). First are the formal and informal meetings devoted to bringing up a general discussion about global issues, share information and exchange views. Second, conferences for broaching and addressing specific global problems aimed at adopting non-binding recommendations and declarations aimed at promoting collective action by formulating and adopting non-binding agreements. Thirdly, there are conferences organised under international institutions, such as the UN, designed to make joint decisions, leading to the approval of an official document governed by binding rules and norms. The fourth type is conferences that lead to the conclusion of formal international treaties and agreements with specific obligations to be followed and upheld (Groom, 2013: 11-13). International conferences Kazakhstan has held since 2010 belongs to the second type. Still, it does not mean that they are ineffective as nation branding channels to address the country's image and identity crises.

According to the conceptual framework of this thesis, the effectiveness of international conferences as branding channels depends on whether the narratives communicated through those conferences were accepted by the targeted audience (see subsection 2.5.5). This chapter will examine whether the international community changed its negative misrecognition of Kazakhstan as a threat to others. As this thesis argues, earning external recognition for the image and identity the state elites have of their country is a primary motivation behind nation branding. Influencing and changing others' view is possible only by communicating a genuine narrative that reflects the nation's true characteristics and beliefs of local people. As Anholt stated, changing a state's existing image, as in the case of Kazakhstan, is possible only by making genuine changes and developments that will bring improvements into people's lives (2007: 47). Besides, nation branding is likely to be successful only when the state contributes to the solution of global issues. This chapter shows that the history of Soviet nuclear testing and Kazakhstan's achievements in denuclearisation gave credibility to the country's branding narrative about its transformation from a voiceless victim of the global nuclear arms race into a supporter of the global nonproliferation regime and a model of denuclearisation.

As discussed in chapter two, the possibilities for and effectiveness of a nation branding campaign are considerably shaped by its context, which includes a country's geography, history, as well as economic, social and political developments. In the case of Kazakhstan, the history of Soviet nuclear tests, voluntary denuclearisation and anti-

nuclear movement of the country, especially international conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, bolstered the credibility of the country's branding narrative about its transformation from a voiceless victim of the global nuclear arms race into a model of denuclearisation. On the other hand, the country, which inherited Soviet nuclear facilities and possessed vast uranium reserves, has been susceptible to negative representations. Western media reports about Kazakhstan's uranium exports and nuclear theft incidents have threatened to undermine the country's international image and branding effectiveness. In this regard, Kazakhstan's active foreign policy in global nuclear security and safety helped to maintain and strengthen its image and identity during the Nazarbayev administration.

4.3. Background: The First Decade of Kazakhstan's Independence.

4.3.1. Kazakhstan and Soviet Nuclear Programme

Kazakhstan's active and constructive participation in the global anti-nuclear movement is inseparable from the country's history (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018; Interviewee 3, 16 November 2018; Interviewee 1, 16 November 2018). Since the first nuclear test code-named 'First Lightning' on 29 August 1949, Kazakhstan had been the Soviet Union's nuclear test site where the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) kept improving its military nuclear programme (Kassenova, 28 September 2009). Some of the thermonuclear explosions conducted at the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site, known as 'the Polygon', were 20 times bigger than the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Aitken, 2009: 129). In Soviet times, testing activities were considered of greatest significance to national security, known only to the highest military leadership of the CPSU (Aitken, 2009: 130-131). Besides, nuclear power was the defining element in the identity of the Soviet Union as a global superpower (Aldred and Smith, 1999).

Until 1986, the military secret of the Soviet nuclear programme was not even revealed to the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR (Aitken, 2009: 131). The city of Kurchatov, which is now located on the territory of Kazakhstan, was in those years the heart of the Soviet nuclear programme and was not indicated on the map at the time (Radio Azattyk, 29 August 2019). Consequently, except for 138 people, the population inhabiting near the testing were not evacuated (Adilov, 2007; Gelaev, 2015). Likewise, there were no recovery

and vegetation plans for the affected urban areas (Jarbussynova, 2001). As a result, as many as one and a half million people who lived close to the landfills of Semipalatinsk, Karaganda and Pavlodar suffered from severe radiation that affected their future generations (Demytrie, 2009).

The national pride of the Soviet Union turned into a national tragedy for independent Kazakhstan (Radio Azattyk, 29 August 2019). Nuclear testing had a disastrous health impact on the domestic population. The 1980s census registered 158 cases of cancer in every 100 thousand people; the number of patients tripled after 1990 (Adilov, 2007; Gelaev, 2015; The Atom Project, 2020). The family tragedy of Nazarbayev's colleague Tuleutai Suleimenov, whose father and sisters either died or suffered from serious health effects, had a deep influence on the former president (Aitken, 2009: 130). Today, the government provides support for the victims of nuclear radiation.

Indeed, the disastrous legacy of radioactive contamination, which was 'unfair [to Kazakhstan] from the historical, moral, ecological and other points of views', has continued to affect the country and its population since independence (Nazarbayev, 1996: 164). For instance, the radiation level in the former nuclear test grounds could still range from 10 to 50 μSv/h. The International Commission on Radiological Protection found the terrestrial radiation in some parts of Kazakhstan two to three times higher than the global average of 1.5 to 6.0 mSv/a (Bunnenberg, 2000: 77). Besides nuclear detonations, the production of nuclear fuel and uranium mining since 1950 (at about 100 sites in 8 regions of Kazakhstan) had a detrimental impact on the living condition in Kazakhstan (Bunnenberg, 2000: 82-85).

All these eventually ended up giving birth to the 'Nevada-Semipalatinsk' anti-nuclear movement and the national consciousness of Kazakhstan (Nazarbayev, 1996: 161; Abishev, 2014: 380). On 28 February 1989, two million people led by Olzhas Suleimenov, then a candidate for deputy of the USSR Supreme Council, participated in demonstrations demanding the closure of nuclear polygons in the Kazakh SSR (Brusilovskaya, 2011). Nazarbayev, then First Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, said that the movement had the clandestine support of Kazakh political leaders, without which the demonstrations would have been suppressed quickly by the Soviet army (Aitken, 2009: 133-134). On 6 August 1989, in one of the rallies close to the Polygon, protesters appealed to the Politburo of the CPSU and the United States:

Our steppe is shaken by nuclear explosions, and we can no longer be silent. Those 40 years of nuclear testings have contained thousands and thousands of Hiroshima. Our consciousness is poisoned by the fear for the future. We are afraid to drink water, eat food, and give birth to children. We organised the Nevada-Semipalatinsk Movement to fight for the cessation of nuclear tests in Kazakhstan, to defend our right for peace and security in our own home (Qazaqstan Tarihy, 27 July 2013; Aitken, 2009: 129-131).

19 October 1989 saw the last nuclear test in the Kazakh SSR. In the end, the anti-nuclear campaign prevented 11 out of 18 planned explosions for that year (Qazaqstan Tarihy, 27 July 2013). On 29 August 1991, with majority support, Nazarbayev signed the decree to close the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site, which by the time was the world's second-largest nuclear test site (Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019). The history of Soviet nuclear testing and anti-nuclear movement has continued to define Kazakhstan's national identity and provide the context for its branding narrative.

4.3.2. Voluntary Denuclearisation and the Problem of Negative Misrecognition

Although the historical memories of Soviet nuclear tests and anti-nuclear movement were integral to the birth of Kazakhstani national identity, Kazakhstan's commitment to nonproliferation and disarmament was not without challenge when it gained independence in a formidable international environment after the end of the Cold War. The breakup of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia was attended by political upheavals and civil conflicts in Russia and other former Soviet republics (Drobizheva et al., 1996; Tishkov, 1997). The disintegration of the old order, together with deepening globalisation and interdependence, gave rise to non-traditional security threats. Of particular concern at the time was nuclear proliferation (Interviewee 5, 26 November 2018). Mismanagement and dereliction of nuclear and chemical facilities across the former Soviet Union resulted in the theft, illegal trafficking and proliferation of these materials (Lowe, Tsvetkova and Deutsch, 14 March 2018). In 1995, for instance, Russian authorities arrested nine members of a criminal organisation in Novosibirsk for possessing Uranium-235 material, which they reportedly acquired from Kazakhstan and planned to smuggle to South Korea (CIA, 27 March 1996).

Meanwhile, the breakup of the Soviet Union turned Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus into nuclear weapon states overnight, as they were in control of Soviet nuclear

weapons in their territories (Abzhaparova, 2011a: 1537). Kazakhstan, in particular, inherited extensive nuclear and military facilities such as Emba State Research Test Site, Baikonur State Testing Ground, Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site, Ashuluk Polygon, Sary-Shagan State Research and Testing Ground, and Baikonur Cosmodrome. Besides, two hundred thousand Soviet troops and vast stocks of strategic weapons were also left in Kazakhstani territory (Laumulin, 2000; Nazarbayev, 2001: 43-84; Zhandybayev, 5 May 2018). The emergence of a new nuclear weapon state, on the one hand, was perceived as a source of instability and threat (Interviewee 5, 26 November 2018). State fragility and the rise of Islamic terrorism, on the other hand, could potentially give rise to the threats of nuclear theft, proliferation and terrorism.

The emergence of Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus as nuclear-weapon states drew the attention of the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which 'anxiously watched' their behaviour (Kassenova, 28 April 2008). In the West's view, international society would be safer if Russia remained the only inheritor of Soviet nuclear weapons (Mearsheimer, Summer 1993). This led the international society to promote nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament by promoting the adoption and strengthening of the CTBT and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Some feared that Kazakhstan would offer nuclear protection to interested 'Muslim countries' in return for financial aid (Interviewee 5, 26 November 2018; Onzhanov, 2015: 9). Indeed, foreign media reports about Kazakhstan's sale of its nuclear weapons to Muslim countries deepened suspicion and undermined the country's international image. The British Daily Mail and the Israeli Jerusalem Post, for instance, reported that Iran had obtained 2 to 4 nuclear weapons from Kazakhstan (NTI, 9 April 1998; Ludington, 12 October 1992; Los Angeles Times, 1 May 1992). Steve Rodan of the Jerusalem Post reported that Iran paid Kazakhstan 25 million dollars for two to four nuclear weapons, even though there was no substantial evidence in support of the allegation (Rodan, 10 April 1998; NTI, 9 April 1998). On the other hand, letting post-Soviet states keep the weapons could have provoked a chain reaction among other countries wishing to possess nuclear weapons; it could have undermined all the international efforts made to bring into force the CTBT and the NPT (Voronovich, 2001: 93).

However, notwithstanding historical memories of Soviet nuclear tests and domestic support for the anti-nuclear movement, the Kazakhstani political elites were initially

divided over the question of denuclearisation. As a former senior official at the MFA said,

> *after its independence, the first issue on Kazakhstan's agenda was what to do with the nuclear weapons that remained on its territory after the collapse of the USSR. The problem was not easy, and for the first time, Kazakhstan was faced with such a problem. Opinions were divided. One part of the society wanted to keep the weapons, and the other part wanted to part with it. We studied similar situations. This situation was strongly influenced by nuclear states, in particular, the United States and Russia. Nuclear countries argued that we should give up nuclear weapons, transfer them to Russia and thus become a nuclear-weapons-free state. From the very beginning, we told the Americans, and during the visit of our president to Washington, that we intend to give up nuclear weapons voluntarily. Still, we need to consider a number of security measures that would protect us from outside attack (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018).*

As the then foreign minister Tokayev put it, opponents felt that denuclearisation undermined the country's security (2003: 144). Located in a region that has long been seen as a theatre of 'great game', Kazakhstan is similar to 'a big fat pie'; its big land, small population and abundant reserves of oil, gas and uranium would always tempt external powers to intervene and struggle for spheres of influence (Cooley, 2012: 3-15; Brzezinski, 1997: 123; Gali, 2002; 2003). Both inside and outside Kazakhstan, there were fears that Russia would regain control of the country (Olcott, 1992: 130; Kavalski, 2010; Ferdinand, 1994; Trenin, 2007). Meanwhile, other external political powers were also eager to fill the political void that emerged after the breakup of the Soviet Union to advance their political and economic interests (Voronovich, 2001: 93).

Like Mearsheimer's argument regarding Ukraine[2], opponents of denuclearisation in Kazakhstan believed that the country should remain a nuclear power due to potential threats to national security (Interviewee, 26 November 2018; Aitken, 2009: 138). Indeed, the country possessed both the necessary infrastructure and expertise inherited from the Soviet Union to continue its military nuclear programme (Akorda, 3 July 2015). However, the argument that Kazakhstan was fully capable of becoming a

[2] Mearsheimer argued that 'pressing Ukraine to become a non-nuclear state is a mistake'. According to him Ukrainian nuclear weapon is the only reliable deterrent to Russian aggression. As Russia and Ukraine share a history of mutual enmity.

nuclear-armed state but instead abandoned self-interest in the interests of all has become central to the country's branding narrative.

In fact, even though denuclearisation might undermine Kazakhstan's military capabilities, an international image as a security threat could pose an equally, if not more, serious danger to its survival. Kazakhstan could maintain its security and acquire international recognition as an independent state only if it was able to reassure Russia and China of its benign intentions on the one hand and convince the West of its commitment to nonproliferation norms and rules on the other. This explains why, as Kassenova argues, Kazakhstan could have kept its nuclear warheads-but decided to relinquish them in exchange for 'international recognition, respect, investment and security' (Standish, 1 April 2016). Voluntary denuclearisation, in this regard, helped Kazakhstan gain accession to international institutions and earn the guarantee from the five permanent members of the UNSC not to use nuclear weapons against itself (Kassenova, 2016: 56-70; Saudabayev, 2007; Nazarbayev, 2001: 60-61).

At the same time, the Kazakhstani government's decision to forsake its nuclear weapons was motivated by the need to pull the country out of economic, social and political chaos that reigned across the former Soviet Union in the 1990s (Faizova, 2011: 31-32). The biggest priorities for Kazakhstan were domestic institution-building and economic development (Kassenova, 9 February 2017). Relations with the West were particularly important at the time, not least because Russia's and other former Soviet republics' struggles to reform and develop their economies underscored the importance of access to markets, capital and technology in the United States and Europe. Indeed, Nazarbayev later attributed growing foreign investments in Kazakhstan and the country's economic modernisation to its decision to relinquish nuclear weapons (Kazinform, 9 October 2015). Since then, Kazakhstan's partnership with the West has become an essential part of its multilateral foreign policy and its new Eurasian national identity. However, as the following discussion will show, uncertainty in Kazakhstan's relations with Russia has continued to cast doubt on its commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament.

To demonstrate its willingness to denuclearise in the shortest possible time, Kazakhstan signed the Lisbon Protocol to the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in May 1992 (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018; United States Department of State, 23 May 1992: Article V). In December 1993, Kazakhstan ratified the NPT, which officially classified it as a non-nuclear-weapon state (United Nations, 1 July 1968).

Since then, Kazakhstan has continued to cooperate with the United States in disposing of highly enriched uranium in its nuclear facilities (Synovitz, 2 December 2010).

Nevertheless, although Kazakhstan's anti-nuclear movement and voluntary denuclearisation were well-received by the international society, foreign media reports about alleged incidents of nuclear theft have threatened to undermine the country's efforts in projecting itself as a modern and responsible nation committed to modern international rules and norms. In 1998, for instance, a BGI-60U device with an ionising radiation source was stolen from a zinc facility in Leninogorsk, which is now called the city of Ridder, in Eastern Kazakhstan (NTI, 9 April 2002). One year after, the controversial American analyst Yossef Bodansky claimed that Osama Bin Laden, in his efforts to acquire 'several to twenty' tactical nuclear warheads, attempted to purchase 'nuclear suitcases' in Kazakhstan. Bodansky's claim was refuted by the Kazakhstani government, even though the Director of Kazakhstan's Atomic Energy Agency Timur Zhantikin admitted that there had been cases of attempted uranium trafficking (NTI, 5 October 1999). In 2002, Kazakhstani authorities arrested a resident in Pavlodar for selling 5 grams of Cesium-137 (NTI, 4 July 2002). As the following discussion will show, Kazakhstan's vast uranium reserves, its lack of sufficient capabilities to secure its nuclear facilities and the rise of Islamic terrorism in Central Asia have continued to cause the country to be associated with nuclear security risks.

The combination of opportunities and challenges explains Kazakhstan's choice of nonproliferation and disarmament as the issue area for its nation branding initiative, as well as its decision of international conferences as branding channels. These international conferences not only provided Kazakhstani political leaders to engage target audiences; by offering conference participants first-hand experience with Kazakhstan's sufferings and achievements, these events communicated and reinforced the country's branding narrative. Co-organised with prominent NGOs in nonproliferation and disarmament, these international conferences enabled Kazakhstan to reach out to the global civil society. The participation of statesmen, international civil servants, activists and students in these events, in turn, enhanced Kazakhstan's visibility and the credibility of its branding narrative.

4.4. Astana Annual Conferences as Nation Branding Channels

As discussed in section 4.2., organising international conferences has been central to both Kazakhstan's nonproliferation diplomacy and nation branding campaign (Interviewee 1, 15 November 2018; Interviewee 7, 28 November 2018). Conferences, as branding channels, have served to maintain and reinforce Kazakhstan's national identity as a peaceful and responsible country with the ultimate goal of becoming one of the 30 most developed countries by 2050 (Kazinform, 14 December 2012). Given that it was once seen as a threat to international security, Kazakhstan's nuclear diplomacy represents the country's efforts to counter negative misrecognition and project itself as an upholder of the global nonproliferation regime and a model of denuclearisation. Nonproliferation diplomacy, meanwhile, symbolises Kazakhstan's reconciliation with and transcendence of its Soviet past. This underpinned the political elites' efforts to construct a new national identity. Under the influence of Kazakhstani Eurasianism, Kazakhstan pursued an independent and multilateral foreign policy rather than remaining under Russian tutelage. The clear choice to reject nuclear weapons embodied Kazakhstan's transcendence of its Soviet identity.

By bringing in Western and non-Western states as well as international organisations like the IAEA and CTBTO, international conferences manifested Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy. As a Eurasian country, Kazakhstan stresses the importance of principles such as independence, pragmatism, multilateralism and ideological neutrality in its foreign policy (Ädilet, 21 January 2014; Reuel, 2009: 259). The broad participation of major stakeholders from both the West and the non-West in the Astana conferences corresponded with Kazakhstan's self-identification as a Eurasia nation. At the same time, the fact that many of these conferences were organised and attended by representatives of international and local non-governmental organisations demonstrated that Kazakhstan's target audiences included not only foreign governments but also the global public. Engagement with NGOs and interest groups is based on the notion that they often exercise more considerable influence on popular perceptions of Kazakhstan in the West (Simons, 2018: 149; Death, 2011: 1-3).

During Nazarbayev's presidency, Kazakhstan turned from a post-Soviet 'Islamic nuclear state' into a strong supporter of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament regime, a Eurasian 'model country of successful denuclearisation' and 'global anti-

nuclear leader' (Krasienko, 7 April 2010; Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018; Interviewee 6, 28 November 2018; United Nations, 28 September 2018; Bayzakova, 5 July 2016). Given its history, nonproliferation and disarmament are one of the niche areas where Kazakhstan can manoeuvre and represent itself as a responsible nation that upholds modern international rules and norms (Maitre, 1 July 2018). Moreover, located in a region surrounded by great powers and other powerful political forces like Islam, Kazakhstan considers its partnership with the United States and the European Union essential to its survival and the success of its 'multi-vector' foreign policy (Bakirlanova, 2017: 101).

The realisation of Nazarbayev's vision, however, hinged on how the country was perceived by the great powers – its former suzerain Russia, neighbouring China, as well as the United States and the European Union. A negative image would endanger Kazakhstan's independence, security and development, let alone its efforts to build a new national identity. Countering negative representation required Kazakhstan to reassure the world of its intentions and project itself as a supporter of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. Meanwhile, given Kazakhstan's history as the site for Soviet nuclear tests, nonproliferation and disarmament diplomacy has not only underpinned the Republic's independence but has also been central to the nation's reconciliation with and dissociation from its Soviet past.

4.4.1. Second Decade: XXI Century: Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons

On 29 and 30 August 2001, Kazakhstan held its first international conference on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, which was called 'XXI Century - Towards a World Free of Nuclear Weapons'. Government departments, particularly the MFA, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, the Committee on Nuclear Energy and the National Nuclear Centre combined efforts to gather together over 300 prominent political and public figures, as well as scientists and experts who have made significant contributions to the global nuclear governance. The main speakers and participants of the conferences were current and former world dignitaries such the former President of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev; former President of Turkey, Suleyman Demirel; former Prime Minister of India, Inder Gujral; former Foreign Minister of Germany, Hans Genscher; UN Deputy Secretary-General, Vladimir Petrovsky; UNESCO Director-General, Koichiro Matsuura; and former Minister of Russian Atomic Energy,

Viktor Mikhailov (Orlov, 2001: 72-73). Apart from that, leading international experts and scholars such as Jozef Goldblat (UNIDIR), Piet de Klerk (IAEA) and Alexander Pikaev (Carnegie Moscow Center) made presentations. They contributed to the exchange of views (Orlov, 2001: 73). Moreover, the event included visiting tours to the Polygon, National Nuclear Center and Nuclear Test Museum to convey the atmosphere in which the nuclear tests were carried out (Sevchik, November 2001: 8-9).

The conference indicated Kazakhstan's early awareness of the potential of international conferences as branding channels. As the following section will show, many of the features of the 2001 conference could be found in subsequent conferences. Since 29 August was declared the International Day against Nuclear Tests, Kazakhstan annually hosts and co-organises international conferences. Except for the 2013 conference held in Saint-Petersburg in partnership with the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, the rest were held in Astana. Given that most conferences were held in the capital of Kazakhstan, I will refer to them as Astana conferences for clarity and emphasise their importance to Kazakhstan's nation branding efforts.

To begin with, Kazakhstani political leaders and representatives used international conferences to communicate the country's branding narrative to target audiences. Almost invariably, they recounted in their speeches the history of Soviet nuclear tests, Kazakhstan's voluntary denuclearisation and the country's contributions to nonproliferation, disarmament and world peace since then. To enhance branding effectiveness, these conferences often included visits to the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Sites and meetings with victims of radioactive contamination. At the same time, these international conferences served as platforms for Kazakhstan to make proposals and launch initiatives. To enhance the country's image and the credibility of these conferences, the Kazakhstani government often invited representatives of relevant stakeholders, including political leaders, international civil servants, academics, activists and students. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan was yet to take full advantage of the usefulness of international conferences in the 2000s. While continuing to engage in multiple initiatives, including the IAEA's Global Threat Reduction Initiative, the Russo-American-led Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism (GICNT) and the establishment of the CANWFZ, it was only after six years that the country hosted another international conference to commemorate the sixteenth anniversary of the closure of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site (Sputnik, 16 August 2007).

Foreign media reports on scandals of nuclear theft damaged Kazakhstan's international image and underscored the need for nation brand management. In 2004, for instance, President Bush accused Sri Lankan businessman Bukhary Syed Abu Tahir of dealing with nuclear technology and materials in the black market (Bukharbayeva, 20 February 2004). Suspicion of Kazakhstan's connection to Pakistani scientist Abdul Kadeer Khan's nuclear black market led Kazakhstani authorities to investigate the office of Tahir's Dubai-based company in Almaty (Bukharbayeva, 20 February 2004). In 2009, Muktar Zhakishev, then head of Kazakhstan's national nuclear company 'Kazatomprom', was arrested for illegally transferring the mining rights to 60% of the country's uranium deposits to his offshore companies (Agence France Presse, 1 June 2009; Pan, 25 February 2010). The challenge of nation brand management was further complicated by foreign media reports on Kazakhstan's alleged deal to supply uranium to Iran at the end of the same year. However, the Kazakhstani government strongly denied these reports and 'consider[ed] them groundless insinuations damaging the country's reputation' (Agence France Presse, 30 December 2009).

The need to preserve Kazakhstan's international recognition, together with the strategic imperative of multi-vectorism and the country's aspiration for global leadership, resulted in the Kazakhstani government's activism in nonproliferation and disarmament (MFA, 20 February 2018). Of the highest importance to Kazakhstan's nonproliferation and disarmament diplomacy in the 2000s was its leadership in creating the CANWFZ with other Central Asian states (United Nations, 3 June 2002; Socor, 7 April 2016). The formal proposition to create the CANWFZ was initially made by Uzbekistan and then Kyrgyzstan at the beginning of the 1990s. However, according to a senior official at the MFA, Kazakhstan's active involvement contributed to the signing of the Almaty Declaration agreeing on the establishment of the CANWFZ on 27 February 1997 (Interviewee 5, 26 November 2018). As a former nuclear power, and more significantly as the world's largest producer and exporter of uranium, Kazakhstan's participation and leadership were significant (Interviewee 5, 26 November 2018). According to former senior officials of the MFA, Kazakhstan's initiative and diplomatic efforts to prepare and sign the necessary documents concerning the CANWFZ were crucial to the conclusion of the Semipalatinsk Treaty that established the CANWFZ on 8 September 2006 (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018; Interviewee 7, 28 November 2018). Nevertheless, except China, the other

permanent members of the UNSC were reluctant to sign the Treaty, which entered into force on 21 March 2009 (Kassenova, 22 December 2008; Parrish and Potter, 5 September 2006).

The establishment of the CANWFZ, however, was not free of controversy. Russia was initially against Kazakhstan's participation, as this would constrain the flexibility of the deployment of its nuclear weapons. However, growing concerns with NATO's eastward expansion, together with its shifting views on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, led Russia to change its position. At the same time, the CANWFZ also faced opposition from the three Western permanent members of the UNSC, which considered Article 12 of the Semipalatinsk Treaty as legitimising Russia's right to deploy nuclear weapons in the region through the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Nevertheless, Central Asian countries' commitment to nonproliferation and disarmament, as well as Kazakhstan's initiatives and activities in global nuclear security and safety, such as conference diplomacy, led to victory despite political power struggle (Barbarossa, 23 December 2019). As the permanent members of the UNSC that support the significance of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, later in 2014 and 2015, these countries had to sign the additional protocol to the CANWFZ Treaty and ratify it in 2014 and 2015 (Barbarossa, 23 December 2019; Nuclear Threat Initiative, 19 March 2019).

The success in the establishment of the CANWFZ became central to Kazakhstan's branding narrative about its transformation from a voiceless victim of the global nuclear arms race into a leading contributor to nonproliferation and disarmament. Since the Treaty entered into force, Nazarbayev and other Kazakhstani officials have repeatedly highlighted the CANWFZ as a model and nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) as a solution to the global nuclear arms race (Abishev, 2014: 386-387). At the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, DC, Nazarbayev put forward a proposal to continue building a nuclear-weapon-free-zone in the Middle East, North-East Asia, Europe and the Arctic, with the ultimate goal of achieving a 'world free of nuclear weapons' by 2045, the centennial anniversary of the UN (Nazarbayev, 13 April 2010). On 7 December 2015, on Kazakhstan's initiative, the universal declaration on the achievement of 'a nuclear-weapon-free world' was approved in the UNGA with the support of 133 countries out of 193 (United Nations, 7 December 2015). 'After five years of hard work, from 2010 to 2015, on the text of the declaration', Kazakhstan's nuclear-weapon-free world initiative, co-authored by 35

states from different continents, was approved (Kalmykov, 9 December 2015; Orazgaliyeva, 8 December 2015).

4.4.2. Third Decade: Building upon XXI Century

Since the end of the 2000s, Kazakhstan has stepped up its diplomatic initiatives in nonproliferation and disarmament. Not only has the country shifted its attention from the regional to the global level; the Kazakhstani government has begun to take full advantage of international conferences as branding channels. In 2009, upon Nazarbayev's initiative, the UN declared 29 August – the day when the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site was closed – as the 'International Day against Nuclear Tests' (IDANT). The 2009 resolution called on all member states, civil society, academia, the media and individuals to celebrate the IDANT to increase the awareness of the broader audience about the consequences of nuclear tests (Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019). The designation of IDANT not only represented Kazakhstan's success in earning international recognition; it has also provided a basis for the country to increase its visibility and communicate its branding narrative to the broader global audience. The Kazakhstani government has taken full advantage of the IDANT by holding annual international conferences both inside and outside the country to commemorate the closure of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site and the global moratorium in nuclear testing (Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019; Kartoyev, 2014). While educating the global public and appealing to the support of other states for building 'a world free of nuclear weapons', these branding channels projected Kazakhstan as a model of denuclearisation and a strong advocate of the global anti-nuclear movement (International Day against Nuclear Tests 29 August, n.d.; Saudabayev, 2010: 11).

In September 2010, for instance, while hosting a joint exercise with Australia and the United States and an Implementation and Assessment Group (IAG) meeting with Spain, Kazakhstan co-organised an international conference with the American NGO Nuclear Threat Initiative (Nuclear Threat Initiative, 28 May 2020). The conference provided a platform for 'law enforcement, financial and nonproliferation experts to investigate and develop holistic approaches to countering the financing of nuclear terrorism, as well as run simulations to test existing international standards and programs (Nuclear Threat Initiative, 30 September 2018).

Indeed, 2010 marked the beginning of Kazakhstan's growing activism in using both

international conferences and existing multilateral platforms as branding channels. As an attempt to earn recognition from the United States and the West, Nazarbayev attended the Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, DC. Kazakhstan's branding narrative was best encapsulated in the President's article published during the Summit. In addition to strengthening the NPT, Kazakhstan proposed a 'new, universal treaty for comprehensive horizontal and vertical nonproliferation of nuclear weapons' (Nazarbayev, 2010: 16-7). Moreover, it called for the early adoption of the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) (Nazarbayev, 2010: 17). Kazakhstan would continue to lead by example, such as by conducting on-site inspection experiment in the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site in 2008 (Nazarbayev, 2010: 17-8). To promote the peaceful use of atomic energy, Kazakhstan offered to host the LEU bank of the IAEA (Nazarbayev, 2010: 19). Given its national experience, Kazakhstan would also be an 'ideal candidate' to host an international nuclear security training centre (Nazarbayev, 2010: 17). To mobilise global commitment to nonproliferation and disarmament, Nazarbayev proposed the adoption of a 'Universal Declaration of a Nuclear Weapons Free World' (Nazarbayev, 2010: 20). These views were reiterated by Kazakhstani Ambassador Byrganym Aitimova at the NPT Review Conference in New York one month later (Sieff, 2011: 67-70).

From a nation branding perspective, Kazakhstan's offer to host the LEU bank significantly increased the country's visibility. The facility was endorsed not only by US President Obama; Kazakhstan also succeeded in winning the endorsement from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who stood by President Nazarbayev when the latter first announced the offer at a press conference in Astana on 6 April 2009 (Hanley, 19 May 2009). Apart from political leaders, American investor Warren Buffett contributed $50 million for the construction of the LEU bank (Hanley, 19 May 2009). Since then, the foreign ministers of G8 and subsequently, G7 had expressed their welcome and support of Kazakhstan's initiative (G8, 2012; G8, 2013; G7 Information Centre, 5 June 2014).

Meanwhile, as the OSCE chair in 2010, Kazakhstan held the organisation's first heads of state and government summit since 1999 in Astana. Although Nazarbayev's proposal for a universal declaration to build a world free of nuclear weapons was not adopted immediately, the prominence of nonproliferation and disarmament in the summit's agenda contributed to Belarus's announcement to complete disposal of its nuclear weapons stockpile by 2012, and discussion of the Iranian nuclear issue

(Nazarbayev, 1 December 2010; Synovitz, 2 December 2010; Clinton, 1 December 2010). Kazakhstan later offered to host an OSCE conference in Astana in 2020 to discuss updating the 1975 Helsinki Final Act (Gotev, 14 November 2018).

In 2012, Kazakhstan commemorated the IDANT by hosting a high-level international conference 'From the Prohibition of Nuclear Testing to a World Free of Nuclear Weapons'. The conference brought together representatives of 75 states, as well as 20 international and public organisations (Akorda, 29 August 2012). Nazarbayev's remarks at the conference represented a much stronger reinforcement of Kazakhstan's branding narrative. The country's decision to close the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site, according to him, was not only a 'decisive step towards its real sovereignty and independence', but a 'historical action' with 'great significance to civilisation' (Nazarbayev, 29 August 2012). In rebuttal to foreign opinions, Nazarbayev stressed that had it not been for the nation's 'political will', Kazakhstan would have become a nuclear power with considerable economic capabilities (Nazarbayev, 29 August 2012). Since then, Kazakhstan has continued to play a leading role in many of the international nonproliferation and disarmament initiatives. As he outlined his vision of a 'G-Global' new world order, Nazarbayev called for the CTBT's early entry into force, 'strong international security guarantees' to member states of regional NWFZs, and mutual trust in the promotion of nonproliferation and disarmament. He also announced the launch of the ATOM project – 'Abolish Testing. Our Mission' – an online petition campaign for the CTBT's entry into effect (Nazarbayev, 29 August 2012).

The ATOM project has since become central to Kazakhstan's efforts to communicate its branding narrative to the global civil society. For instance, on 17 February 2015, when the Conference on Disarmament discussed the participation of the NGOs in the Conference on Disarmament/Civil Society Forum next month, Kazakhstan's representative, Arsen Omarov, specifically requested the Secretariat to consider inviting the ATOM project representatives as well (United Nations, 17 February 2015: 9-10). Likewise, in the Conference on Disarmament on 4 March 2015, Idrissov emphasised again the significance of the ATOM project, and its growing subscribers from around the world to bring into force the NPT treaty (United Nations, 4 March 2015: 4). Since then, the number of signatures has increased to over three hundred thousand.

As an act to balance its foreign relations and reinforce its Eurasian identity, Kazakhstan organised a conference under the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of States - Parties to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 2013 (Abishev, 2014: 387). The CIS parliamentary dialogue in Saint Petersburg attracted a broad audience of high-level officials. In the conference, the heads of the parliamentary delegations of the CIS countries made speeches and attended discussions. According to the final document, the conference stressed the importance of the participation of all states in the NPT; and called on nuclear states to limit their nuclear weapons, prevent their illegal production, transfer, and trafficking, and strive for a world free of nuclear weapons (Interparliamentary Assembly of Member Nations of the Commonwealth of Independent States, 29 November 2013).

The 21st IPPNW World Congress was held in Astana from 25 to 30 August 2014. It assembled national medical organisations from 64 countries to campaign against the threat of nuclear proliferation, nuclear abolition and the prevention of armed violence. The Congress provided a global platform for 500 delegates from different countries that include doctors, medical students, health workers and supporters to advance and assess the progress of the global anti-nuclear movement. They shared the common goal of creating a peaceful and secure world freed from the threat of nuclear annihilation. Special attention was given to urge countries to support the NPT and establishment of 'the Middle East Zone Free of Nuclear Weapons' (Medact, 4 September 2014).

The key initiatives of the Kazakhstani nuclear security campaign that have been promoted through these annual conferences include, first of all, reducing nuclear weapons step by step; second, granting international security guarantee to members of a regional nuclear-free zone, as well as to individual states that contribute to nuclear security; third, developing 'the principle of trust' among countries through regional organisations such as OSCE, Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Nazarbayev, 2001: 100); fourth, transparency as the basis of a nuclear-weapons-free world in the future. The main nuclear security concerns Kazakhstan raises in these conferences are as follows: universalisation of the nonproliferation regime has not been attained; the lack of other nuclear powers to follow the leads of the US and Russia that signed the 2010 Prague treaty about the nuclear arms reduction; the CTBT has not yet entered into force; the absence of the surveillance system for nuclear weapons

programme; the 2011 Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant disaster demonstrates the safety gap in nuclear technology (Nazarbayev, 29 August 2012).

The 2015 IDANT commemoration conference saw Kazakhstan's signing of the agreement to build the world's first Low Enriched Uranium Bank, which began operation on 29 August 2017. By hosting the LEU bank, Kazakhstan would play an essential role in the promotion of fissile material control and peaceful use of atomic energy. As the government argued, the bank would improve the international system of nuclear fuel supply that would strengthen the global nonproliferation regime (Ferrari, 1 June 2016; InformBuro, 11 June 2019). As noted earlier, the improved and uninterruptible supply of nuclear fuels to countries in need would help prevent any attempt to use atomic energy for military purpose.

On 29 September 2015, Kazakhstan and Japan co-chaired the conference on 'Facilitating the Entry into Force of the CTBT', which was also known as the 'Article XIV Conference' (United Nations, 20 September 2017). Through the conference, the two countries mobilised global efforts to bring the CTBT's entry into force in two years. The Article XIV Conferences was held at the UN headquarters upon the request of interested states that had already ratified the CTBT. Its primary purpose was to urge the remaining 44 countries to sign and ratify the CTBT (CTBTO, 29 September 2015). Idrissov, who was the co-chair of the conference, warned that he would be 'straightforward, even undiplomatic' in pushing states to sign the CTBT. According to Idrissov, Japan and Kazakhstan have the moral right to be aggressive about abolishing nuclear weapons (CTBT, 29 September 2015). He called on conference participants to support Kazakhstan's vision of building a world free of nuclear weapons by 2045, which will be the 100th anniversary of the UN. From a nation branding perspective, Kazakhstan's partnership with Japan, a country with high visibility, a favourable image and respectable status, facilitated its efforts to earn international recognition. For instance, in their 2016 statement, the foreign ministers of G7 praised Kazakhstan for its work as co-chair of the Article XIV Conference (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 11 April 2016).

The 2016 annual conference epitomised Kazakhstan's efforts to communicate its branding narrative to all major stakeholders in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament - Western and non-Western, governmental and public. The attendants of the Astana conferences included parliamentarians, mayors, religious leaders, civil servants, disarmament experts, political analysts, civil society activists and

representatives of international and regional organisations such as the UN, OSCE and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). In total, 50 states took part in the conference (Isenov, 29 August 2016). It became one of the key events of the 2016 global initiative 'Chain Reaction: A Global Action for Nuclear Disarmament' that continued from 8 July till 2 October (Unfold Zero, 8 July - 2 October 2016).

On 28-29 August 2016, Kazakhstan partnered with the PNND to host an international conference on 'Building a Nuclear Weapons Free World'. The conference sought to give a new political impetus to the nuclear disarmament process by urging countries, especially the nuclear powers: to sign and ratify the CTBT; to help establish a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East; to support the creation of additional NWFZs, such as in North-East Asia, Europe and the Arctic; to reduce the risks of nuclear conflicts by taking all nuclear forces off high-operational readiness; to adopt the no-first-use policy; and to refrain from any threats to use nuclear weapons (International Conference, 29 August 2016). Like the previous conferences, the international conference on 'Building a Nuclear Weapons Free World' included the Astana city tour and the trip to the Semipalatinsk Test Site.

In the 2016 Astana conference, Nazarbayev represented Kazakhstan as an 'effective model' of denuclearisation for others (International Conference, 29 August 2016). Kazakhstan sought to project itself as a leader in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament by offering a Kazakhstani model of building a world free of nuclear weapons. Consistent with the country's long position on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, the model called for the closing of nuclear test sites worldwide. All states, meanwhile, should uphold the global nonproliferation regime by signing and ratifying the CTBT, the NPT, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (the TPNW) and other agreements. To qualify for a non-nuclear state status, countries should undertake the required actions to relinquish nuclear weapons according to international treaties. As was the case with Kazakhstan, the success of denuclearisation hinged on cooperation with the UNSC's permanent members and other international organisations. Denuclearisation, however, would not deprive countries of opportunities to develop atomic energy for a peaceful purpose, such as the production of nuclear electricity and nuclear fuel. Kazakhstan, for instance, established the National Nuclear Center and the National Atomic Company 'Kazatomprom'. The latter has become the world's largest producer of natural

uranium. The Astana Declaration also called for states to support the global anti-nuclear movement (Akorda, 29 August 2016).

In 2017, Kazakhstan hosted an international conference in partnership with Pugwash, another major international nongovernmental organisation in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. The Conference was a strong call to stop testing, abolish nuclear weapons and build a peaceful world based on the principles of trust and cooperation. To strengthen its ties with the organisation and the international nongovernmental sector, Kazakhstan established the Pugwash Committee branch in its territory under the National Academy of Natural Sciences. Like the previous conferences, the 62nd Pugwash Conference addressed the issues of nuclear disarmament, the prohibition of nuclear weapons and their testing, civilian nuclear energy, energy security, new nuclear technologies and regional security in Europe, the Middle East, South Asia and Northeast Asia (Ria Novosti, 25 August 2017). The Astana Declaration of the Pugwash Council called for nuclear powers to reduce and remove the existing 15 thousand warheads that pose a threat to humanity (Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, 25-29 August 2017).

In his bilingual speech, then Chair of the Senate Tokayev hailed the conference as giving a new impetus to the international anti-nuclear movement (Kazakhstan Today, 29 August 2017). As was the case with previous conferences, Tokayev used his speech as an opportunity to communicate Kazakhstan's branding narrative to the international audience. He recounted the closure of the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test site and Kazakhstan's contributions to global nonproliferation and disarmament since then. As new security challenges threatened international stability, Tokayev reiterated Kazakhstan's call for the strengthening of the global nonproliferation regime and a greater commitment of the permanent members of the UNSC to nonproliferation and disarmament.

Kazakhstan's activism in nonproliferation and disarmament strengthened its successful bid to be a non-permanent member of the UNSC for 2017-18 (Fairfax and Napper, 25 June 2016). Kazakhstan took advantage of this position to undertake further initiatives to project itself as a global leader in nonproliferation and disarmament. During Kazakhstan's one-month presidency of the council, Nazarbayev chaired a meeting on confidence-building measures in nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (Altynsarina, 5 March 2019). At the meeting, he called for rethinking the existing nonproliferation regime and suggested that new decision-making

structures might be needed in response to growing nuclear security challenges. He proposed reform of the NPT's withdrawal procedures so as to raise the threshold and requirements of withdrawal. This should be followed by the further development of mechanisms to sanction nuclear proliferation. He also suggested the establishment of a nuclear-weapons-free zone in the Middle East based on the experience of CANWFZ. Last but not least, he called for mutual trust and a common commitment to stopping the nuclear arms race. (Altynsarina, 19 January 2018).

Another significant conference that urged all countries to sign the CTBT was the Astana international conference on disarmament under the theme of 'Remembering the past, looking to the future', which was held between 29 August and 2 September 2018. Apart from commemorating the IDANT, the conference was organised to appeal to the eight countries that have not yet signed the CTBT, including the United States, North Korea, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, Israel and Egypt (Abdrakhmanov and Zerbo, 29 August 2018). The conference recalled #2310 resolution of the UNSC (of 2016) that urged these eight states to sign and ratify the CTBT without further delay (CTBTO, 29 August 2018). Co-hosted by the MFA and CTBTO, the 2018 conference was bigger in scale than the previous ones. The five-day conference with the involvement of the CTBTO Youth Group (CYG) and the Group of Eminent Persons (GEM) was considered to be a more influential anti-nuclear event in the world (Abdrakhmanov and Zerbo, 29 August 2018). While continuing to invite political leaders and other dignitaries to enhance the visibility and credibility of the event, Kazakhstan focused its attention on the global youth, who are now among the most influential opinion-makers on cyberspace (IDN_INPS News and Views, 14 September 2018). Through visits to the Polygon and meetings with victims of radioactive contamination, youth participants would contribute to the promotion of a positive international image of Kazakhstan.

In the 2018 CTBTO international conference, foreign minister Kairat Abdrakhmanov announced Kazakhstan's signing of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (Abdrakhmanov, 29 August 2018). Meanwhile, with its 'unique experience' in voluntary denuclearisation, Kazakhstan was willing to assist with the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula (Abdrakhmanov, 29 August 2018). To facilitate the CTBT's early entry into force, Abdrakhmanov called on the conference participants to turn to the experience of Kazakhstan in order to encourage the respective governments and parliaments, which have not yet done so (Abdrakhmanov,

29 August 2018). To demonstrate Kazakhstan's engagement with the global civil society, Abdrakhmanov once again appealed to conference participants to support the ATOM project's online petition (Abdrakhmanov, 29 August 2018). His joint statement with the CTBTO Executive Secretary Lassina Zerbo endorsed Kazakhstan's vision and proposals (Abdrakhmanov and Zerbo, 29 August 2018).

Meanwhile, at the 62nd Session of the IAEA General Conference one month after, Energy Minister Kanat Bozumbaev again promoted Kazakhstan as a model of denuclearisation and leader in global nuclear governance. 'Our history', Bozumbaev said, 'showed the effectiveness of the chosen development model without weapons of mass destruction, with the policy of peace and good neighbourhood' (2018). Bozumbaev appealed to other countries to follow Kazakhstan's footsteps in implementing the International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism. Meanwhile, the projects run by the state, such as the VVR-K research reactor at the Institute of Nuclear Physics in Almaty and the IAEA's LEU bank, were successfully carried out (Bozumbaev, 2018).

4.5. Branding Effectiveness

The above discussion has shown how Kazakhstan has used international conferences as branding channels to communicate a narrative about itself as a victim of the nuclear arms race, an upholder of a rule-based international order and an advocate in the global movement of nonproliferation and disarmament. Astana conferences brought together a broad global audience. At the interstate level, Kazakhstan took advantage of its membership in and support from international institutions such as the UN, CTBTO, IAEA and OSCE by communicating its national experience and genuine commitment to denuclearisation. The country launched global initiatives and hosted formal meetings that served the purpose of bringing together nuclear and non-nuclear, Western and non-Western states.

Kazakhstan's nuclear diplomacy, particularly the international conferences, contributed to the country's visibility as a peaceful country by countering negative misrepresentations and projecting a positive image in the sphere of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. Kazakhstan has faced negative misrepresentation in the sphere of nuclear security (see subsection 4.3.2.). In the 1990s, it was perceived by international society as a possible threat to the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Kazakhstan still occasionally faces doubts and suspicions. The study shows that holding international conferences was aimed not only at raising awareness of the international community about the serious consequences of the arms race but also at proving Kazakhstan's commitment to the ideas of liberal international values and norms of non-proliferation and disarmament, the peaceful use of atomic energy and the principles of neutrality and independence in nuclear security matters. As discussed, security relations with Russia through the CSTO, its rich uranium resources, developed nuclear industry and capabilities to secure nuclear facilities posed a challenge to the country's identity. Still, on the other hand, the above-listed factors gave Kazakhstan leverage on nuclear issues and deals. By bringing together Western and non-Western states, these international conferences underpinned Nazarbayev's vision for Astana to become 'a diplomatic hub in this unstable region right at the crossroads of the West and East' (Radio Azattyk, 9 October 2015; Kazinform, 13 June 2011).

4.5.1. Organisational Success of Branding Channel

As discussed in section 4.4., there was an emphasis on organising international conferences, particularly in the 2010s, in partnership with international NGOs, including the NTI, PNND and IPPNW. By cooperating with these NGOs in organising and hosting these international events, Kazakhstan sought to communicate its national experience and vision directly to epistemic communities and the global public. On the other hand, Kazakhstan shows its deepening partnership in the global anti-nuclear movement, particularly in co-organising conferences, with Japan, CTBTO and IAEA. In terms of organisational level, scope and content, these conferences proved to be a success. As permanent and intergovernmental branding channels that lasted from 2001 to 2018, Kazakhstan gathered together in Astana former and current statesmen, representatives of international institutions, well-known experts and academicians in the sphere of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, environmental and health security in the international and domestic community. All these indicate Kazakhstan's improving international status and image among developed countries and international institutions in global nuclear governance.

The international conferences of Kazakhstan grew in organisation, participation and scope over the years. At the beginning of the 2000s, the international conferences

held and co-organised by Kazakhstan gathered mostly former heads of states and government officials who did not have a direct influence on global nuclear politics. Albeit, they still were authoritative and influential figures. However, the fourth international conference, held in Astana in August 2012, hosted representatives of governments and parliaments of 75 states, as well as representatives of more than 20 international and public organisations. Of all the members of the nuclear club, Russia had the highest representation - at the level of the Chairman of the Federation Council and a member of the Security Council, Valentina Matvienko (Golubitskaya, 3 September 2012). The following gatherings in 2016, 2017 and 2018 took place at a yet higher level with the participation of the most senior officials and involvement of leading international organisations. This shows how difficult it is to unite competing states and nuclear powers that believe in hard power and don't trust each other.

As discussed above, international conferences organised by Kazakhstan are distinct from other types of formal meetings in the sphere of nuclear security. Conferences provide platforms for Kazakhstan to introduce to its target audiences its history and experience in multiple ways. For instance, except discussion and presentation, conferences' programme includes visiting tours to the city of Kurchatov, where museums and the Polygon are located; interviews with the victims of radioactive contamination (see subsection 4.4.2.). Zerbo said, 'The significance of being in Kazakhstan on 29 August where nuclear testing has left a poisonous legacy is immense'. (United Nations, 29 August 2018). As he said, visiting and talking with people in countries such as Kazakhstan, Japan and the Korean Peninsula strengthen people's 'conviction' that global anti-nuclear movements should be taken seriously by heads of states (United Nations, 29 August 2018). Besides, these conferences and forums offer a suitable platform that facilitates integration and negotiations between heads of states, diplomats, scientists and journalists (Death, 2011: 2). This would not only increase Kazakhstan's visibility but also strengthen the credibility of its narratives about itself as a victim of the global nuclear arms race and, therefore, it has the moral authority to speak in this arena.

The political elites highlight that Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship in 2010, permanent membership in the UNSC, and the hosting of international conferences 'generated new knowledge' about long-lasting nuclear issues and 'gave an impetus' to the global anti-nuclear movement (Kazakhstan Today, 29 August 2017; interviewee 4, 26 November 2018; Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019). Besides, with the support and

dedication of the participants, international conferences enhanced the credibility of Kazakhstan's statement by securing the support of major international stakeholders for adopted non-binding recommendations and declarations calling all states to sign international agreements such as the CTBT and NPT; stop testing and limit the production of nuclear weapons; to prevent the illegal production, transfer and trafficking of nuclear weapons; and eventually support the idea of building a world free of nuclear weapons through establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones such as CANWFZ (see the previous section).

On the other hand, Kazakhstan's dedication to hosting international conferences also demonstrated the limitations of its influence on international nuclear politics. Although the current formal nuclear powers, which are the permanent members of the UNSC, have always expressed their support for nonproliferation and disarmament, none of them volunteered to abandon their nuclear weapons unilaterally. For instance, in the 2012 Astana conference, Matvienko stated unequivocally that 'nuclear weapons remain the absolute guarantee of Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and play a key role in maintaining the global and regional equilibrium and stability' (Golubitskaya, 3 September 2012). Such statements from nuclear powers undermine the global anti-nuclear movement as a whole, including Kazakhstan's international conferences. Nonetheless, as one interviewee pointed out, holding conferences in a victim-country of nuclear explosions are believed to have longer-term impacts on participants and to be more conducive to bringing into force international treaties on disarmament and nonproliferation of WMD (Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019).

4.5.1. Effectiveness of Branding Narratives

Kazakhstan believes that nuclear weapons do not eventually guarantee the national security of countries in the multipolar world (Chumalov, 20 August 2017). The country's voluntary denuclearisation was an unprecedented case in the history of global nonproliferation (King, 19 January 2018). It contributed to the strengthening of international institutions and treaties promoting nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament (King, 19 January 2018). As Nikki Haley, the US ambassador to the UN, stated in 2018, Kazakhstan's voluntary denuclearisation was a vote of confidence in the NPT, which since then has remained the cornerstone of the global nonproliferation regime (King, 19 January 2018). In Nazarbayev's view, Kazakhstan's decision

‘changed the global attitude towards the anti-nuclear movement’ and ‘gave it a new impetus’ (1996: 161).

In the views of the country’s political and intellectual elites, Kazakhstan earned the moral authority to be a leading voice on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018; Interviewee 3, 16 November 2018; Interviewee 1, 15 November 2018; Interviewee 2, 15 November 2018). Since then, nuclear diplomacy has become Kazakhstan’s ‘business card’ in its pursuit to project a favourable international image as a responsible upholder of peace, security and the norms of nonproliferation (Kadyrzhanov, 2009: 10; Khabar 24, 9 January 2018). As I argued in chapter one, if Kazakhstan seeks to socialise itself into the Western-led international order on its own terms, nonproliferation and disarmament are the issue-area where the country represents itself as a modern nation embracing modern international rules and norms.

A senior Kazakhstani diplomat said that the heads of international institutions in the sphere of nuclear nonproliferation have particularly high regard for Kazakhstan’s anti-nuclear initiatives (Interviewee 17, 10 December 2019). For example, Ban Ki-moon, former General-Secretary of the UN, after he visited the Semipalatinsk testing ground, proposed Kazakhstan to lead the global anti-nuclear movement, considering it the most suitable for that role. According to him, Kazakhstan has demonstrated ‘an extraordinary leadership’ in nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation by banning nuclear weapons and closing the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site (Ban, 2014: 23). Kazakhstan, on top of that, has tried to correspond to its status in the anti-nuclear movement campaign, to persuade the nuclear states such as North Korea and Iran to follow its lead (United Nations, 28 September 2018; King, 19 January 2018). During the Astana conferences, Kazakhstan has communicated its path of denuclearisation, which, according to the political elites, led to economic prosperity and national security. As a manifestation of Kazakhstan’s success in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, others refer to it as a denuclearisation model for Iran and North Korea (Kim, 23 April 2019; Karasik, 18 August 2017; Cohen, 10 January 2018). Ban Ki-moon, for instance, on his visit to the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site, ‘called on all nuclear-weapon states to follow the suit of Kazakhstan’ (Ban, 2014: 24).

Notwithstanding Western criticisms of President Nazarbayev on issues of democracy, corruption and human rights violation, his international standing on nonproliferation and disarmament embodied international recognition of

Kazakhstan's contribution to global nuclear governance. The President has been seen as one of the 'model leaders' in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, as recognised by the heads of states such as Barack Obama and Dmitry Medvedev (White House, 27 March 2012; Aitken, 2012: 74-76). President Obama highlighted that the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit could not have happened without the presence of Kazakhstan's President (Bennett, 2014: 125; Clinton, 2014: 8). They expressed their gratitude by highlighting the outstanding will of Nursultan Nazarbayev (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018). Special emphasis is given to Nazarbayev's personal contribution and support during the 'Nevada-Semipalatinsk' anti-nuclear movement and his initiatives to strengthen the nonproliferation regime and build a world free of nuclear weapons (Maitre, 1 July 2018). According to a former foreign minister, 'Nazarbayev twice in Washington, once in the Netherlands and once in South Korea, was noted as the most active supporter of the anti-nuclear movement by Barack Obama' (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018).

Growing recognition of Kazakhstan's commitment to nuclear nonproliferation in the West is also reflected in international assessment. For instance, according to Nuclear Threat Initiative's nuclear security index, Kazakhstan's scores in nuclear theft prevention and nuclear sabotage prevention both increased by five points, from 66 to 71 in the former and from 67 to 72 in the latter (NTI Nuclear Security Index, 2018). In 2018, among all countries with weapons-usable nuclear materials, Kazakhstan tied with China for 14th place in nuclear theft prevention, only one place below the United Kingdom and the United States. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan tied with Argentina and Indonesia for 27th place among all countries in nuclear sabotage prevention (NTI Nuclear Security Index, 2018). In most subcategories under security arrangements, norms compliance and domestic commitment, Kazakhstan achieved above-average performance. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan's performance in the subcategories of effective governance, corruption and cybersecurity remained less satisfactory (NTI Nuclear Security Index, 2018). The index, on the one hand, is a testament to the success of Kazakhstan's efforts to demonstrate its commitment to the international rules and norms of nuclear nonproliferation. On the other hand, it reflects the negative Western perception of the country's political system and governance.

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan continued to face image problems. As mentioned, except for the rich uranium resource and developed nuclear industry, Kazakhstan's military alliance with Russia under the Collective Security Treaty continued to cast doubt on

its commitment and international identity as a nuclear-weapon-free state (Kakatkar and Pomper, January 2009). For instance, in 2018 and 2019, permission for Russia to test its anti-ballistic missiles in Kazakh territory raised the question of whether or not this would encourage, however indirectly, the nuclear arms race between the great powers (The Moscow Times, 4 June 2019; Kuhn, 12 July 2019). This actually goes back to the reason the permanent members of the UNSC, such as France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, raised and did not want to sign the Additional Protocol in the first place that would guarantee the Central Asian states negative security assurance.

Central Asia has been a significant geopolitical region wherein the great powers 'tussled for influence' (Kakatkar and Pomper, January 2009). Establishing a zone free of nuclear weapons in Central Asia and giving the countries negative security assurance would prevent any great powers from transiting and stationing nuclear weapons within the zone. For instance, after the 11 September attacks, the American military base was present in Uzbekistan until the US was asked to leave the Uzbek territory in 2005 (Paton, 1 August 2005). According to the former and current senior officials of the MFA, the Central Asian countries' commitment to the idea of building a nuclear-weapons-free zone, particularly Kazakhstan's moral authority and leadership role in establishing the zone, played a significant role (Interviewee 7, 28 November 2018; Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019). Moreover, this initiative developed with close assistance and under the auspices of the UN (Interviewee 13, 15 May 2019). As the former MFA official stated,

> *Kazakhstan often met with every nuclear power and travelled a lot to the capitals of all five nuclear power counties; consulted, agreed on the text of the CANWFZ treaty so that they would sign it. Kazakhstan acted as a mediator between them. Then, in May 2014, the P5 simultaneously signed the Additional Protocol on negative security assurance at the UN, in New York. And subsequently, 4 out of 5 ratified it very quickly. We have only the United States left. This is a fact. This is our merit. Everyone recognises this; our neighbours acknowledge it (Interviewee 7, 28 November 2018).*

Likewise, international incidents, such as the radioactive poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, led once again to associations of Kazakhstan with such problems as nuclear theft (Lowe, Tsvetkova and Deutsch, 14 March 2018). Furthermore, the need to reduce Kazakhstan's overdependence on oil and gas exports

has provided incentives for the country to boost its uranium exports. As with all major uranium exporters, exporting uranium to nuclear powers such as China and India have raised concerns with the nuclear arms race and moral objections from the global civil society. On the other hand, as I mentioned earlier, this identity and image issues also explain Kazakhstan's continued activism in the sphere of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, particularly its hosting and co-organisation of international conferences with the developed countries and international institutions such as the CTBTO and the UN. Apart from that, Kazakhstan's nuclear diplomacy and its global status as a country free of nuclear weapons underpin the Republic's post-Soviet identity that represents the people's wish to be free from nuclear weapons and testing.

The growing involvement and interaction with the states and international institutions in the sphere of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament served not only as a branding channel but also enhanced Kazakhstan's national security and promoted its initiatives in this area. For instance, the establishment of the CANWFZ, getting the permanent members of the UNSC to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the CANWFZ treaty, promoting the Nuclear-Weapons-Free World Declaration and making 29 August the International Day of against Nuclear Tests. As nation branding, international conferences were an effective branding channel for Kazakhstan as they represented the strong belief of Kazakhstani people in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament. The country's history during the Soviet Union and its nuclear diplomacy after independence show Kazakhstan's true identification with narratives such as the victim of the global nuclear arms race, upholder of a rules-based international liberal order, model of denuclearisation and advocate of international nonproliferation and disarmament.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter examined Kazakhstan's nuclear diplomacy as an integral component of its nation branding and the role of international conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament within it. Given its history of being a centre of Soviet nuclear programme and coming out of the Soviet Union as a nuclear power, post-Soviet Kazakhstan has faced challenges to not only its physical but also ontological security. In this regard, Astana conferences served as an effective branding channel to communicate a positive, genuine narrative about independent Kazakhstan,

the identity of which became a non-nuclear weapon state. As a country that voluntarily renounced its nuclear power, Kazakhstan tried to represent itself as an advocate of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament and a model of successful denuclearisation that positively influenced the country's economic and political development.

This chapter analysed the history of Kazakhstan during the Soviet Union and after its independence. The analysis shows that the country once was perceived by others as a source of threat - for the possible nuclear weapons proliferation and theft - grew into a strong advocate of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, as well as peaceful use of atomic energy. As I discussed, even if Astana conferences had a limited influence on international outcomes of global nuclear disarmament, as a nation branding, it was an effective platform to promote the national interests of Kazakhstan in the sphere of nuclear security. Kazakhstan's active nuclear diplomacy promoting the idea of building a world free of nuclear weapons remained the country's positive image. It demonstrated its commitment to nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament, which contributed to Kazakhstan's national security as well. Despite its complicated geopolitical location, Kazakhstan's active nuclear diplomacy contributed to the establishment of the CANWFZ, getting the UNSC permanent members to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the CANWFZ treaty, the worldwide acceptance of the Nuclear-Weapons-Free World Declaration, and the designation of 29 August the International Day of against Nuclear Tests. As nation branding, international conferences were an effective branding channel for Kazakhstan as they represented the strong belief of the people in nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament.

CHAPTER 5. ASTANA EXPO-2017 AS NATION BRANDING

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter examined Kazakhstan's nonproliferation diplomacy as a major pillar of its nation branding strategy. The quest for a new national identity entailed reconciliation with and transcendence of the legacy of Soviet nuclear test. The imperative of identity, meanwhile, was inseparable from that of survival in the post-Cold War world. Although the decision to relinquish its Soviet nuclear weapons earned positive affirmation from the international community, Kazakhstan has continued to be associated with the threats of proliferation in the West due to its possessions of large uranium reserves, uncertainty about the security of its nuclear facilities, and long-standing perception of Central Asia as simultaneously a theatre of 'great game' and a hotbed of non-traditional security threats. While lacking the material capabilities of great powers, Kazakhstan skilfully used international conferences as branding channels to communicate a narrative about its transformation from a voiceless victim of the nuclear arms race into a supporter of a rule-based international order, a model of successful denuclearisation and an advocate of nonproliferation and disarmament. Co-hosted with international institutions and non-governmental organisations, these international conferences provided platforms for Kazakhstan to engage a broad global audience, increase its visibility, convey the nation's history and, importantly, seek to change the narrative about itself in a positive way. Although issues, such as Kazakhstan's relations with Russia and the security of its nuclear facilities or its uranium exports to China, lead some to remain sceptical about the country's commitment to nonproliferation, overall, the previous chapter argued that Kazakhstan has been fairly successful in addressing negative representation and projecting a positive international image through international conferences.

Nevertheless, in terms of scale and investment, international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament paled in comparison to the Astana Expo, Kazakhstan's hitherto most ambitious nation branding initiative. Since the first World's Fair in 1851, international expositions have provided a platform for countries to represent themselves to each other and a global audience. This chapter examines

Astana Expo-2017 as Kazakhstan's branding channel to communicate a new national narrative about its commitment to sustainable development and becoming one of the 30 most developed countries to address the problem of negative misrecognition in the West. Having long been represented as nothing more than a post-Soviet petro-state, Kazakhstan used the Astana Expo to demonstrate its potential as a green economy and contributions to solving global environmental challenges (see section 3.3.). More importantly, by hosting an event on this scale in its young capital, Kazakhstan sought to debunk negative misrepresentations of itself as a 'Borat land', 'backwater' and 'black hole' by communicating an up-to-date counter-narrative about itself as 'the Heart of Eurasia', a modern and greening economy striving to become one of the world's top 30 economies by 2050. The Astana Expo, in turn, was also the reflection of the modernisation of the public consciousness in Kazakhstan's identity building (see subsection 3.2.4.).

Notwithstanding some successes, however, the Astana Expo's effectiveness in promoting a positive international image of Kazakhstan remained limited. The broad attention that mega-events like international expositions bring to states illuminates not only the positive developments of Kazakhstan but also its problems such as corruption, nepotism, and the gap in the living standards between the rural and urban areas. The appeal of the new narrative was undermined not only by the negative perception of Nazarbayev's authoritarian rule but also by the scandals and problems concerning the mega event. Besides, the target audience questioned the credibility of Kazakhstan's branding channel and narrative, which did not accurately reflect the country's achievements and dedication to environmental, economic and political developments. As a result, the impact of the Astana Expo as a strategy of nation branding was limited to domestic audiences.

5.2. International Expositions as Branding Channels

This thesis places greater emphasis on exploring how a state, in this case, Kazakhstan, communicates messages about identity and nation branding. According to my nation branding conceptual framework, set out in chapter two, international expositions can be categorised into the temporary, centralised and intersocietal branding channels that contribute to the construction of national identity (see subsection 2.5.4.). As short-term mega-events like the Olympics, international expositions are large-scale

platforms to engage a global audience (Wang, 2019: 46). As the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) suggests: ‘Expos have a transformative power in shaping perceptions of nations and cultures, increasing awareness of the host country and international participants by helping to shape and enhance a nation’s image and reputation’ (BIE, 2020a).

International expositions, for centuries, have been the venues where countries display their economic, cultural and technological achievements and where people from different parts of the world – from political leaders, scholars to ordinary people - deepen their understanding of each other (Auerbach, 1999: 4-5; Wang, 2013). Given its ability to attract millions of visitors and the attention of world media, international expositions can be considered effective channels for raising the international community's awareness about the host country. Moreover, on the domestic front, successful international expositions can increase national patriotism and civic pride that strengthen national identity by enhancing patriotism and civic pride. As branding channels to shape global public opinion, states have competed to outshine each other in the design and construction of the exposition complex and national pavilion (Cull, 2019: 14-26). In this regard, the degree of financial and intellectual investment is of absolute importance as they determine the scope, content, and success of the mega event as a whole.

One of the acclaimed international expositions that had a defining influence on national identity was the world’s first exposition - the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in 1851. According to Auerbach, the Great Exhibition displayed the characteristics, beliefs and values of the British national identity (1999: 4-5). His analysis of the 1851 exposition showed that ‘Britain was seen as industrial and commercial, its people energetic and enterprising, its social and political system based on freedom, liberty, and justice.’ (Auerbach, 1999: 167). The Great Exhibition marked the beginning of the history of international expositions when major European powers like Great Britain and France wished to show the world their achievements in manufacturing and commerce as a result of industrialisation and trade liberalisation (BIE, 2020e). The mega-event attracted 6 million visitors and generated a great sum of revenue directed to improve Britain’s industry, culture and education further (Victoria and Albert Museum, 2019; BIE, 2020e). As mentioned above, international expositions can serve as a temporary but large-scale branding platform to engage

foreign and domestic audiences to represent the main elements of national identity, which are the constituting factors of the nation.

The baton for holding the expositions was passed to rival great powers such as France, Italy, Germany and Spain. To ensure the standards of those mega-events, on 22 November 1928, the Bureau of International des Expositions (BIE) – was established in Paris. Today, the BIE has 170 member states, which compete every 2 or 5 years to host one of the four types of international expositions (BIE, 2020e). According to the duration, theme and condition, expositions are divided into World Expos, Specialised Expos, Horticultural Expos, and the Triennale di Milano (BIE, 2020a). The one that Kazakhstan organised was an international specialised exposition.

As I discussed in subsection 2.5.4., international expositions are most often state-led, centralised communication channels. By hosting or participating in an exposition, a state seeks to shape the global public opinion about itself and its people to construct and maintain 'a coherent identity' (Auerbach, 1999: 165; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). The purpose of international expositions has extended since 1851 to address fundamental challenges in global governance. Expositions not only serve to showcase a country's economic prowess, scientific and technological achievements and cultural heritage, but also its contributions to global governance and human development (Bozumbaev, 29 June- 5 September 2017). So, as I argue, effective nation branding publicises how a state behaves in the international society and what it strives to become (subsection 2.5.4.).

By demonstrating their contributions to global governance and human development, states seek to enhance their image and reputation. Since the BIE General Assembly passed a resolution to place particular emphasis on the importance of sustainable development in 1994, countries have held world and specialised expositions on issues such as poverty alleviation, climate change, water and food shortage, environmental conservation and development of alternative energy (Loscertales, 2017: 5). Therefore, it is not surprising that the Astana Expo has become one of those international expositions devoted to environmental issues and the promotion of green energy. Since hosting a mega event, such as the Astana Expo, requires enormous infrastructure investment, the successful hosting of an exposition enables a state to represent itself as a capable state and responsible member of a rule-

based international order as well as a leader in global sustainable development. In this regard, international expositions can have a positive impact on a country's image.

As I discuss in subsection 2.5.4, expositions as branding channels also help raise international awareness about sustainable development issues and associate the host country with global efforts to address them. For instance, the 2008 Zaragoza Expo in Spain on 'Water and Sustainable Development' sought to highlight the problems of conservation and rational use of natural resources and contribute to their solution. The 2015 Milan Expo in Italy on 'Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life' addressed the critical questions of food shortage, population growth and rational use of mineral resources (BIE, 2020b). The Astana Expo, in turn, tried to attract the attention of the world community to the importance of green energy investment and how a green and sustainable economy would contribute to solving the environmental problems of the planet (QazExpo Congress, 28 November 2019; Sieff, 2017) For instance, Saltanat Rakhimbekova, former managing director of the national company 'Astana Expo-2017', said that the green technologies exhibited at the Astana Expo provide innovative solutions to reducing carbon emissions, improving the energy efficiency of buildings and roads, and increasing renewable energy investment/consumption (Zhanuzakov, 2 October 2017).

As shown in the case of the London Great Exhibition, international expositions can also help states build up their images as competitive, sustainable economies by promoting their scientific, technological and clean industrial development. As Vicente Loscertales, Secretary-General of the BIE, put it, 'from the planning phase through to the event itself and afterwards, Expos thrive on the power of creation and innovation' (Loscertales, 2017: 5). Expositions have always been platforms for exploring all sorts of inventions and novelties. Over the centuries, visitors of expositions have witnessed countless inventions starting from the steam engine, the telephone and the X-ray machine to the touch screen device and alternative energy sources (Qazaqstan Tarihy, 27 April 2017). In short, to the extent that innovation and knowledge are essential, expositions are where states project their soft power to attract others. Holding an international exposition depends not only on the commitment of a candidate state but also on the support of the international community. Taking into consideration competing sites and proposals, the BIE member states choose the host country after a bidding and voting process.

But while states compete to host world and specialised expositions, the effectiveness of these branding channels is subject to debate. The history of international expositions shows that host countries sometimes could end up with unpaid debts and a damaged reputation. Some of them even fail to properly organise the events, leading to negative rather than positive nation branding effects. For instance, the 1984 New Orleans World Expo in the United States, the 1992 Seville World Expo in Spain and the 2000 Hannover Expo in Germany were marked by inadequate promotion, unaffordable ticket prices and consequently low visitor numbers (King, 12 November 1984; Hodgson, 24 November 2013). After all, the public relations impact of expositions does not always meet expectations (Westlund and Mcalvanah, 2017; Hubbert, 2015). As I argued in subsection 2.5.5., branding effectiveness depends on whether the branding narrative communicated through the exposition was accepted or recognised by the target audience. And most importantly, whether the narrative reflected the true beliefs and characteristics of the nation. A branding narrative is more likely to be accepted by the target audience when it truly reflects a state's attributes. Nevertheless, as the Kazakhstani practice showed, one of the criticisms that cast doubt on the success of the Astana Expo was the lack of visitors (see section 5.5.). In this respect, the success of an international exposition also relies on factors such as the number of visitors, participant countries, and whether the construction of the exposition complex is completed on time.

So, if we go back to the main argument, which I put forward in subsection 2.5.5., international expositions may not always offer genuine narratives reflecting the reality of a country's development and transformation. For instance, Hubbert argued that Expos provide imagined, 'idealised forms of national identity', which are collections of representations about the nation that may not correspond to the reality (2015: 1-2). The 2010 Shanghai Expo, which was the most attended and expensive exposition in the history of the BIE, fell short of changing the international perception of China. The narrative of the Shanghai Expo as a modern and peacefully rising power remained in doubt. Besides, the Chinese government was criticised for forcibly closing down factories and destroying the facilities in and around the Expo site that led to unemployment and population resettlement (Zhang, 2017: 97-119; Westlund and Mcalvanah, 2017: 474). So, the successful organisation of an exposition does not mean that it was effective in transforming the existing international narratives.

Notwithstanding the claimed success and investment of enormous resources into the project, the positive impact of the Astana Expo on Kazakhstan's international image and identity was limited. Akhmetzhan Yessimov, chairman of the national company 'Astana Expo-2017', said that Kazakhstan had three main tasks: 'to ensure participation of over 100 countries and seven international organisations; to attract more than two million visitors; and to host the event at the highest organisational level' (Kostikova, 21 November 2017). The success and effectiveness of the Astana Expo depend on the criteria of evaluation. Increased attention to the organisational and technical part of the exposition made the event less effective as a branding channel. According to Eduard Poletaev, a political scientist and president of the think tank 'World of Eurasia', the Astana Expo became 'a product for the domestic consumption' not for an international image building (Yuritsyn, 20 September 2017).

5.3. Background: Kazakhstan and International Expositions

Kazakhstan has had a tenacious, developing attitude towards international expositions under the Nazarbayev administration. As branding channels, expositions have been of particular importance to Kazakhstan, given its negative representations in the West that culminated in the 2000s with the release of 'Da Ali G Show' and then the mockumentary 'Borat' in 2006 (see subsection 3.3.4.). The 2005 Aichi specialised Expo in Japan, on 'Nature's Wisdom', was the first exposition in which Kazakhstan participated, even though it became a member of the BIE on 4 of June 1997 (see table 1) (BIE, 2020c).

Table one below is an attempt to summarise themes and narratives of Kazakhstan's nation branding channels since the Aichi exposition in 2005. It shows that Kazakhstan's national pavilions projected a consistent narrative about the country's heritage, its Eurasian identity, the potential for sustainable development and contributions to the solution of global challenges. Participating and hosting international expositions offered Kazakhstan opportunities to engage its targeted audience directly and change its stereotypical images as 'terra incognita', 'black hole', 'backwater' and 'post-Soviet outpost' (see section 3.3.). As table one shows, Kazakhstan's nation branding could be divided into two directions. The first stage, which extended from 2005 to 2010, focused on introducing Kazakhstan to the international society: its history and culture, big landscape and rich resources, and

Eurasian national identity. In the second stage, which extended from 2012 to 2017, Kazakhstan aimed to publicise its interest in and contribution to the sustainable development of food, water and green resources. The Astana Expo represented Kazakhstan's efforts to develop a green and sustainable economy, with the ultimate goal of becoming one of the world's 30 most developed countries by 2050 (Kazinform, 14 December 2012; Sieff, 2017). This shows that expositions have been integral to Kazakhstan's identity building project.

Table 1. Kazakhstan's Participation in and Hosting of International Expositions

Exposition	Theme of the Pavilion	Kazakhstan's message to others
2005 Aichi Specialised Expo on 'Nature's Wisdom' in Japan	'Exchanges of Time'	Kazakhstan introduced to the global public its history, culture, rich land and natural resources.
2008 Zaragoza Specialised Expo on 'Water and Sustainable Development' in Spain	'The contrast of Steppes and Forests'	Kazakhstan exhibited the beauty, wealth and diversity of its water resources and landscapes, as well as highlighted the role of water in ensuring the sustainable development of the country.
2010 Shanghai World Expo on 'Better City, Better Life' in China	'Astana -the Heart of the Eurasia'	The purpose was to position Astana as the youngest and dynamically developing capital of the world and the heart of Eurasia.
2012 Yeosu Specialised Expo on 'The Living Ocean and Coast' in South Korea	'New Resources Technology'	The pavilion exhibited both its traditions and innovations in promoting the sustainable development of water resources.

2015 Milan World Expo 'Feed the Planet; Energy for Life' in Italy	'Kazakhstan - a country of opportunities'	The pavilion demonstrated Kazakhstan as one of the future global players in the world's food supply. The exposition also emphasised Kazakhstan's intensive integration into the international community and its potential as a major food supplier like Canada and Australia in term of arable land per person.
2017 Astana Specialised Expo on 'Future Energy' in Kazakhstan	'Museum of Future Energy'	It projected Kazakhstan as a modern nation with an emerging green and sustainable economy that is set to become one of the world's top 30 developed nations by 2050.

Kazakhstan's pavilion in the 2005 Aichi Expo, called 'Exchanges of Time', introduced the history of the Kazakh steppe, its culture and the way of living to the world. Emphasis was given to narrating the life of Kazakh families, the history of the country's land and its natural resources through unique paintings, short videos and maquettes (Japan Association for the 2005 World Exposition, 25 May 2005). Kazakhstan also presented its landmark places like the world's first and biggest spaceport 'Baikonur', which symbolised the evolution of the country and its people. The image of Kazakhstan as a Eurasian nation that combines the best of traditions and modernity remained a recurring theme in the subsequent expositions. In the 2008 Zaragoza Expo, Kazakhstan's pavilion on 'the Contrast of Steppes and Forests', first of all, aimed at conveying to visitors the country's natural treasure, especially the wealth and diversity of its water resources and landscapes. The exposition displayed the unique water bodies, climatic regions and ecosystems of Kazakhstan (Akorda, 2 August 2008). Moreover, Kazakhstan highlighted the role of water resources in maintaining and developing not only living beings but also ensuring sustainable economic development. The Kazakhstani pavilion won the Bronze award for best design, the third place among the 106 participant-states of the exposition (Akorda, 2 August 2008).

Whereas the first two expositions emphasised natural and historical heritage, the 2010 Shanghai Expos on 'Better City, Better Life' began to communicate a narrative about Kazakhstan's identity and vision as a Eurasian nation. According to the general commissioner of the Kazakhstani pavilion, Aidar Kazybayev, the motto 'Astana - the Heart of Eurasia' tried to position Astana as the youngest and most rapidly developing capital of the world (Suleimenov, 5 May 2010). By designing and building its pavilion for the first time, Kazakhstan conveyed the spirit, nature, culture and architecture of the Eurasian city through modern interactive technologies such as multi-touch tables, monitors, cinema and as well as the layout of the Astana Square with the replicas of landmark monuments and buildings (Tulesheva, 1 August 2014). The history of the development and achievements of Kazakhstan and Astana was shown in video episodes called 'Astana is the heart of Eurasia', 'Through the Ages' and 'Nature of Kazakhstan' (Suleimenov, 5 May 2010).

In the 2012 Yeosu Expo on 'the Living Ocean and Coast', Kazakhstan's national pavilion presented information about Kazakhstan's water resources and the ways of maintaining and improving them. Despite the fact that Kazakhstan is landlocked, it has 7000 lakes and reservoirs at its disposal (Expo 2012 Yeosu Korea, 28 July 2012). Like other participant states, Kazakhstan demonstrated its innovation capacity and contributions to the solution of global environmental governance by presenting alternative solutions that would meet the needs of current and future generations (BIE, 2020d). The Yeosu Expo highlighted the importance of oceans and coasts in improving and maintaining the ecosystem of the planet and the well-being of human beings. Kazakhstan's national pavilion was designed to show solidarity with other countries in solving the effects of 'continuous coastal developments, overexploitation of marine resources', coastal tourism and water pollution. Kazakhstan's pavilion entitled 'New Resources Technology' drew people's attention to the importance of both traditions and innovations in culture and science, business and tourism, in promoting the sustainable development of the sea (Kazinform, 11 May 2012). As was the case with previous expositions, the pavilion introduced the country's history, traditions, contemporary developments and visions for the future. Special attention, however, was given to Kazakhstan's candidacy for the Expo in 2017. Kazakhstan expressed its wish to host Expo-2017 in Astana on 'Future Energy' and called upon other nations to support its candidacy.

In the following the 2015 Milan Expo on 'Feed the Planet; Energy for Life', Kazakhstan introduced Astana as the host of the upcoming specialised Expo-2017 (Orazgaliyeva, 6 May 2015). Kazakhstan's pavilion showcased its ability to become a significant stakeholder and potential leader in global food security governance. Similar to Canada and Australia, Kazakhstan possesses one of the biggest arable land areas in the world. It is also one of the ten largest grain exporters in the world and the top five in terms of flour export. Annually, up to 6 and 2 million tons of wheat are delivered to, respectively, Asian and European Union countries (Akorda, 27 June 2015). The Kazakhstani pavilion was one of the five most visited pavilions and was awarded the Expo-2015 Bronze medal for best theme and content (Shimanskaya, 26 June 2015). The futuristic, 3250-square-meter pavilion 'Kazakhstan - a country of opportunities', represented the diversity of its agriculture, livestock, aquaculture, ecology and arable farming (Dubovitsky, 28 May 2015). The visitors were able to see and learn about how Kazakhstan had developed agricultural technologies to address challenges in food security.

5.4. Astana Expo-2017 as Nation Branding Channel

5.4.1. Whose Idea was It to Host Expo-2017 in Astana? And Why?

The idea of holding Expo-2017 in Astana came from Nazarbayev. During his visit to the Zaragoza Expo in 2008, the then president publicly expressed for the first time his wish for the same event in Kazakhstan (Amanova, 29 November 2014; Shaukenova, 2017; Interviewee 17, 10 December 2019). According to Nazarbayev, the Astana Expo was first and foremost 'an important image building project' for Kazakhstan, which, as I mentioned earlier, aimed at eliminating international negative misrepresentations about the country (Kazinform, 16 June 2017). Besides, it was a significant step in Kazakhstan's pathways towards a green and sustainable economy, with the ultimate goal of becoming one of the 30 most developed countries in the world by 2050 (see section 5.3.).

On 10 June 2011, Kazakhstan made an official bid to host Expo-2017 (The Library of the First President, 14 August 2017). Rapil Zhoshybayev, who would subsequently be appointed the Commissioner of Expo-2017, met with Lossertales to submit Kazakhstan's official application. In his address to the BIE's 151st General Assembly in Paris, Nazarbayev expressed his commitment to the successful implementation of

the mega event. Devoted to alternative energy and green technology, the Astana Expo would continue the focus of previous expositions of the BIE on environmental issues (Amanova, 29 November 2014; Seidumanov, 2017: 18). On 22 November 2012, one hundred and three member countries of the BIE voted in support of Astana over Liege to host the specialised exposition in 2017 (Karatayev and Barankulov, 25 November 2016).

The Astana Expo was arguably the crowning public diplomatic achievement of the Nazarbayev presidency. The mega event positioned Astana on the world map as 'the heart of Eurasia'. Setting aside the political unrest before the presidential election in 2019, Astana has been a symbol of political stability, social harmony and economic prosperity under Nazarbayev's presidency (Toktonaliev, 21 March 2019). As discussed in chapter three, Kazakhstan underwent a fundamental transformation in the first decade of its independence, from the founding of a new capital, the establishment of new political institutions to the introduction of new legislations concerning all spheres of social life. In only 20 years, Astana turned from a stagnant provincial town into a booming political, economic and cultural centre of Central Asia in light of the global financial crisis and sanctions, political conflicts and proxy wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan (The Astana Times, 3 July 2015).

As Nazarbayev said, '[b]uilding Astana was a battle at a difficult time, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. That was the victory of Kazakhstani people because they did it successfully' (Russia-24, 7 December 2018). According to Nazarbayev and other senior government officials such as former deputy prime minister Kairat Kelimbetov, while international conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament could turn Astana into the 'diplomatic hub' in Eurasia, Expo-2017 demonstrated the young capital's potential as a centre for alternative energy solutions in Central Asia (Nazarbayev, 2017: 481; Radio Azattyk, 9 October 2015; Kazinform, 13 June 2011). Notwithstanding strategic and political calculations, the project of a new capital did represent Nazarbayev's vision of his rule and the development of the newly independent state. In this regard, the mega event can be seen as one of the president's political legacies.

Nazarbayev's decision to hold the Astana Expo remained a subject of debate and speculation (Radio Azattyk, 13 June 2017). Despite disagreement within the society, the government was committed to hosting the mega event. As Kazakhstan's branding expert Ruslan Zhemkov said, 'every great project has a concrete goal to achieve' like

the Astana Expo project (Amantai, 3 July 2018). Indeed, a close examination of the mega event shows that it cannot be understood in separation from Kazakhstan's identity-building project and Nazarbayev's decision to move the capital from Almaty to what was then called Akmola more than two decades ago (Zinchenko, 2017: 10). Highly controversial and widely opposed at the time, the move symbolised the newly independent state's struggle to redefine its post-Soviet identity (Koppen, 2013: 594-596; Tasmagambetov, 25 June 2008).

Regardless of the true motive behind the former president's decision, whether it was to move the capital from an earthquake-prone region, stabilise Kazakhstan's northern border or free the government from the influence of established pro-Soviet/Russia political interests, Nazarbayev's decision reinforced Kazakhstan's new national identity by settling the terms of the Republic's relations with its Soviet past (Nazarbayev, 2010: 33-34; Wolfer, 2002: 486; Koppen, 2013: 592; Ria Novosti, 25 June 2008). Imangali Tasmagambetov, then Mayor of Astana, referred to the capital city as the epitome of Kazakhstan's Eurasian identity that dissociated the country from its Soviet identity (Tasmagambetov, 25 June 2008; Mkrtchyan, 2017). As the new capital of independent Kazakhstan, Astana was chosen by Kazakh rather than Soviet/Russian elites (Tasmagambetov, 25 June 2008; Mkrtchyan 2017). By bringing together different ethnic groups to the centre of Kazakhstan and Eurasia, Astana has contributed to the formation of a new national identity among citizens. In this regard, the president's political legitimacy and legacy hinge on the success of the new capital's development. As the following discussion will show, this explains, on the one hand, the unprecedented investment of resources in preparation for the Astana Expo and, on the other hand, the criticisms of extravagance and prodigality.

5.4.2. Nation Branding Symbols

Preparation for the branding event started within a week after Astana was declared the venue for the 2017 international specialised exposition. On 26 November 2012, Nazarbayev signed Decree #436 'On the establishment of the State Commission for the preparation and holding of the international specialised exposition "Astana Expo-2017"'. A state commission, whose members included the prime minister, two deputy prime ministers, the mayor of Astana and officials from the relevant ministries, was established to take charge of the organisation of the event. The prime minister chaired

the commission, who regularly reported to the president about the preparation progress (National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2017: 30). By the government's decree, the national company 'Astana Expo-2017' was established on 15 January 2013 to assume operational responsibilities for the preparation and hosting of the Astana Expo. On 1 June 2013, the official website of the Expo was launched (National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2017: 28).

Figure 4. Kazakhstan's Nation Branding Logos

The Astana Expo's logo and mascot were selected and approved in July 2013 and September 2014, respectively, by the state commission (Tengrinews, 26 July 2013). The nation branding symbols represent Astana as the cultural capital of Kazakhstan and as a centre of new technologies (Tengrinews, 26 July 2013). The exposition symbols, the logo 'Wind Energy' and mascots 'Saule, Moldir and Kuat', were inspired by the features of Kazakh culture, facial appearance of Kazakhs and the country's capacity to generate alternative energy (see figure 4) (National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2017:37). Regarding the mascots, Saule symbolises the Sun, Moldir the pure air and water, and Kuat the power of the Earth (Sputnik, 27 March 2017). As figure four shows, the shapes of the symbols of alternative energy sources represent sea waves, the Earth's magnetic field and the energy of the wind and the Sun. Closely linked to the Astana Expo theme, the philosophy behind the branding symbols emphasise the significance of alternative energy, green ideas, technological developments and culture in the sustainable development of Kazakhstan and other

countries. As the symbols of the Astana Expo, the chosen logo and mascots are designed to communicate to both the domestic and international audience Kazakhstan's achievements since independence, the success of Astana, as well as the nation's commitment to researching, developing and applying green energy and technologies.

5.4.3. Branding Narratives: Kazakhstan is a Eurasian and Modern Nation

The Astana Expo may not be a record-breaking exposition like Shanghai Expo-2010 or Osaka Expo-1970 for international participation and financial investment. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that Kazakhstan was the first Central Asian country and the former Soviet Republic to hold an international exposition since the first world's fair in 1851 (Kazinform, 5 December 2017). Not surprisingly, the Astana Expo has hitherto been considered Kazakhstan's most ambitious nation-branding initiative (Nazarbayev, 16 June 2017; Mutanov, 2017: 11; Rakhimbekova, 2018: 49). As suggested above, by holding the exposition in its new, post-independence capital, Kazakhstan intended to show the world its achievements in economic, social and political development (Selezneva, 10 September 2017; Ädilet, 2013). For Kazakhstan, hosting Expo-2017 was a matter of 'national prestige' as it seeks to promote a new narrative of itself as a 'heartland of modernisation', leader and 'centre of green technologies' and development in Central Asia (Capitabio, 25 June 2017; Nazarbayev, 9 June 2017; Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018). The Astana Expo represented Kazakhstan's aspirations to become one of the world's top 30 economies by 2050 (Kazinform, 14 December 2012).

By communicating a new narrative to a broad global audience, the branding channel was designed to: contribute towards Kazakhstan's long-lasting identity and image crisis, bolster its green growth initiative and consolidate Nazarbayev's political legitimacy. During the three months from 10 June to 10 September 2017, the Astana Expo gathered together the representatives of 115 countries and 25 international organisations and attracted 4 million visitors (QazExpo Congress, 28 November 2019). The distinguished guests of the Astana Expo included 25 presidents, 36 prime ministers and 70 ministers of foreign countries. On 9 June 2017, the leaders of 17 states and international organisations such as Russia, China, Spain, Uzbekistan, Serbia, Czech Republic, Singapore, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan, India, the BIE

and the UN attended the opening ceremony (Mukanov, 9 June 2017). One thousand two hundred journalists from 30 countries around the world participated and reported the event (Urankaeva, 9 June 2017). For foreign media, every region of Kazakhstan organised press tours to promote the country's heritage and development.

The preparation for the exposition required enormous infrastructure investments. Indeed, architecture has been central to Astana's development and Kazakhstan's identity building project. The futuristic buildings, symbols and monuments in the young capital are not only designed to highlight Kazakhstan's economic, social and political developments; they also represent its new identity as a Eurasian nation that combines traditions and modernity (Koppen, 2013: 597-601; Fauve, 2015: 112). In this regard, the Astana Expo provided a platform for the government to mobilise domestic resources to develop the capital city into the hub of Eurasia through infrastructure investment.

During the five years of construction and preparation, Kazakhstan built 36 new hotels, 50 hostels, 47 restaurants of different cuisines and 11 new city roads. Moreover, to increase the flow of passengers between the cities of Kazakhstan and with other countries before the event, Kazakhstan built a new railway station and expanded its international airport. For the convenience of the Astana Expo visitors and city dwellers, the new railway station 'Astana Nurly Zhol' was opened on 1 June 2017, with the passenger flow of up to 35,000 people per day (Ospanov, 2017: 105-106; Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 19 July 2017). Besides, on 31 May 2017, a new international passenger terminal at the Nursultan Nazarbayev International Airport, with a capacity of 5.2 million passengers per year, came into service (Ospanov, 2017: 105-106; Kazinform, 6 June 2018). Meanwhile, the international airport extended its route capacity and launched a new airline, 'Qazaq Air' (National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2017: 13-14). In March 2017, the new shopping and entertainment centre 'Mega Silk Way' was opened in front of the Expo City (Tengrinews, 4 March 2017). As figure five shows, the construction of new facilities and buildings for hosting the exposition transformed the view of Astana and gave it unique architectural objects and spaces (Seidumanov, 2017: 19-25).

5.4.3.1. Expo City

The Expo provided an opportunity for, as well as necessitated, a considerable building programme within Astana. In the Astana Expo site, which covered a total area of 174 hectares, Kazakhstan built a mini-city, 'Astana Expo City-2017' (the Expo City). It is equipped fully with new infrastructure such as residential buildings, a congress complex including a five-star hotel, congress office and congress centre, shopping and entertainment centres, green parks and a botanical garden, an amphitheatre and an exposition complex (see figure 5). The construction of the Expo City lasted two and half years from 24 April 2014 until 31 December 2016 (Tengrinews, 14 May 2014), and it cost the country 565.1 billion tenges or $2.1 billion US dollars (Nasha Gazeta, 29 June 2017). However, not everyone reacted positively to these investments and the public was divided regarding the holding of Expo-2017 (see section 5.5.).

Figure 5. Astana Expo City-2017 (Ismailova, 4 December 2018)

In order to select the most suitable architectural design for the 'Future Energy' theme, Kazakhstan held an international competition. Fifty architects and companies from 20 countries such as Manfredi Nicoletti (Italy), Zaha Hadid Architects (United Kingdom), UNStudio (Netherlands), and Coop Himmelb(l)au (Austria) presented their work (Amanova, 29 November 2014). On 22 October 2013, the American company 'Adrian Smith+Gordon Gill Architecture' won the national architectural competition. According to Jeremy Rifkin, the head of the selection committee, the winning architectural design was chosen based on the architectural style and appearance, sustainable development, as well as the convertibility of the constructions into usable spaces like museums and office buildings after the mega event (Madsen, 14 June 2016). As aforementioned, the Expo City as a 'green powerhouse' harnesses energy from the Sun, wind and waste recycling, also fully supports itself with electricity (Amanova, 29 November 2014).

The Expo City is located on the left bank of the river of Ishim, among modern and shiny apartment buildings, next to Nazarbayev University and the Mega Silk Way Shopping Mall. The underlying concept and architecture of the Expo City correspond with Nazarbayev's vision of Astana. According to Zarema Shaukenova, Director of Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of Kazakhstan (KazISS), the government's vision is to develop the capital into a high-urban city 'Smart Astana' (Shaukenova, 2017: 8). The Expo City projects the vision of 'Future Astana in 2050' with futuristic buildings, housings, shopping mall, green parks and transportation system equipped with green and sustainable technologies (Davydova, 24 May 2017). As a 'high green technology centre', it sets up a potential pathway for the further development of Astana, as well as the modernisation and industrialisation of Kazakhstan and Central Asia as a whole in an environmentally friendly way (Mutanov, 2017: 12; Seidumanov, 2017: 16-25). For instance, the Expo City houses a collection of leading projects exhibited by the Astana Expo participant countries (Seidumanov, 2017: 19).

The Expo City was constructed with 'smart city' technologies that correspond to the Expo's 'Future Energy' theme. It is the first district of Astana with the latest smart and renewable energy technologies. According to Vladimir Sobolev, Director of the Department of New Technologies and IT of the national company 'Astana Expo-2017', the most advanced technologies were used in the construction of the city (MK-Turkey, 12 July 2018). The design of the Expo buildings, their energy-saving materials

and panels, mean that their energy consumption is 48 percent less than that of ordinary buildings (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 1 March 2014; National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2016: 60-65). Energy-efficient and sustainable buildings reduce energy costs and carbon dioxide emissions. The energy supply to the facilities in the Astana Expo complex is managed by 'Smart Grids' designed by Siemens (Flowcon International, October 2017). The latest technologies ensure uninterrupted power supply to the exposition pavilions, as well as reduce energy costs by reducing losses (Siemens, 2020).

According to Sobolev, the 'Smart Grid' system, which consists of a unified control centre and a network of 42 substations, will shorten accident response time, reduce electricity loss and automatically redistribute transmission load (Vechernij Almaty, 26 May 2017; Zhumabayeva, 1 June 2017). Moreover, the exposition complex was installed with a 'Smart Street Lighting' system, which covers 1,200 lighting poles with LED lights that control energy supply (Vechernij Almaty, 26 May 2017). Zaure Aitaeva, Director of the Architecture Department of national company Astana 'Expo-2017', informed that the 'Smart Building' technologies were introduced in the pavilions and offices of the Expo City to automatically control ventilation, lighting and heating (Dobrin, 10 June 2017; Vechernij Almaty, 26 May 2017). Kazakhstan's pavilion 'Nur Alem' is the best illustration of an energy-efficient building. Two noiseless wind generators at the very top of the Sphere, its facade that incorporates photovoltaic elements, transform the wind and solar energy into electricity (ArchDaily, 12 October 2017). The smart city master plan also includes a 'Smart Parking' system, the automation and safety equipment for buildings, waste management system, and inter-seasonal underground and thermal energy storage areas (Siemens, 2020; National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2016: 60-65).

All these infrastructure and facilities were built to make Astana a new global venue of international affairs, finance and green technologies with diverse cultures (Interviewee 16, 6 June 2019; Nazarbayev, 2011; Tokayev, 2015). The Expo City was specifically designed to contribute to the development of a modern, green urban landscape in Kazakhstan with its low-carbon buildings, parks, and public transport developments. It supports the philosophy of the creation and development of Astana and its Eurasian identity (Nazarbayev, 2010). As the following discussion will show, the Astana Expo exemplified Kazakhstan's efforts to address long-standing, negative misrepresentations of itself in the West. While Western popular representations such

as ‘Borat’ and ‘Da Ali G Show’ had satirised and disparaged the country’s traditions and people, Kazakhstan presented the success story of Astana as part of a counter-narrative about itself as a nation that combines the best of modernity and cultures, and a nation dedicated to contributing to global sustainable development. Meanwhile, by attracting millions of visitors and global media attention to the country’s young capital with a futuristic cityscape, the Astana Expo provided a channel for Kazakhstan to communicate a narrative about its transformation from the backward Soviet Republic into a fast-developing, emerging economy, underpinned by its vision to be one of the world’s 30 most developed countries by 2050.

As discussed in chapters one and two, the value of a country’s brand is often measured in terms of economic development, and the Expo provided a starting point for further reforms designed to modernise and diversify the commodity-based economy of Kazakhstan. It is therefore not surprising that physical infrastructure investment was followed by legislation to strengthen Kazakhstan’s competitiveness as a destination for trade, investment and human capital. On 3 December 2013, Kazakhstan introduced legislative reforms to facilitate the organisation and hold of the Astana Expo. The reforms affected eight legislative acts, such as the tax and budget codes; also, the laws on trade, standards of goods and services, ‘special economic zones’, migration, ‘employment’ and ‘architectural, urban planning and construction activities’ (Zakon.kz., 9 December 2013).

New legislative changes simplified the process of hiring foreign workers, financing the national company ‘Astana Expo-2017’ and exempting it from local government taxes, such as the land and property. These legal improvements also concerned legislation in the field of tourism, trade and investment (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior of Kazakhstan, 2019). For instance, beginning on 1 January 2017, Kazakhstan introduced a visa-free regime up to 30 days for nationals of 45 countries, including all members of the European Union and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, as well as the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Monaco, Singapore, Turkey and the United States (Zakon.kz., 27 December 2016; Anastasia, 3 January 2017).

These reforms contributed to the further development and opening of the economy and society of Kazakhstan to the international community (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Interior of Kazakhstan, 2019). The following years saw the introduction of a 72-hour-free transit visa for citizens of China and India. Meanwhile,

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan plan to introduce a joint 'Silk Road Visa' for foreigners to travel to both countries by the end of 2020 (Sputnik, 13 February 2020). On 5 July 2018, the Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC) was launched to develop Kazakhstan into the financial hub in Eurasia. Such political and economic developments are integral to Kazakhstan's efforts to raise its international profile, create a favourable business environment and become one of the 30 most developed economies by 2050.

5.4.3.2. National Pavilion - Nur Alem

The exposition complex stands in the heart of the Expo City, occupying 25 hectares of the total territory that accommodate the National Pavilion of Kazakhstan, commercial, thematic, international and corporate pavilions, arts centre and 'energy best practices area' (Karatayev and Barankulov, 25 November 2016; National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2017). The complex was based on the theory and practice of Jeremy Rifkin - the 'Third Industrial Revolution' and demonstrated how the world had been moving to it (Rakhimbekova, 28 September 2017, Seidumanov, 2017: 23-24). The whole transition process consists of 5 stages. The first stage represented the European Union's 2020 targets to generate 20% of its energy consumption from renewable sources, whilst other countries were also called upon to follow this path. The main task of the second stage was to figure out how to achieve the targets in practice through building design and renovation. One represented idea was to convert residential buildings, offices, and factories of the European Union, and other countries, into small power plants. These power plants would be equipped with roof solar panels, wind turbines in the building facades, and garbage recycling in the basements. The third was the need to save energy and increase energy efficiency. The fourth stage was to switch to 'Smart Grids' that is becoming increasingly possible with advancements in information and communication technologies and battery storage systems - a merger between internet and energy revolutions. The final stage is the transition to electric transport (Rakhimbekova, 28 September 2017).

The thematic concept of the Kazakhstani national pavilion 'Museum of Future Energy' tried to represent the country's green energy potential and its capacity to supply the country with it. The national pavilion with an area of 5 thousand square meters of floor space is located at the eight-storey sphere building 'Nur Alem', which

is referred to as the Sphere (National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2017). The Sphere was the design of the German architect Albert Speer Junior that 'epitomises the last drop of the oil' and marks the beginning of the future energy epoch (Kazinform, 4 June 2018). It is the largest sphere-shaped building in the world, which is 100 metres in height and 80 in diameter. History shows that international expositions create conditions for the emergence of symbolic architectural landmarks. For instance, the Eiffel Tower, which served as the entrance arch of the 1889 Paris Universal Exhibition, has become a world heritage, the symbol of Paris. The Atomium symbolises the 1958 Brussels World's Fair (CNN, 28 September 2012). Like the Eiffel Tower and Atomium, the Sphere became the symbol of the Astana Expo and the future energy (Shaukenova, 2017: 9; ArchDaily, 16 October 2017).

Now, the Sphere serves as a museum of future energy, which would be the historical milestone in the development of a green economy in Kazakhstan and Central Asia (Kazinform, 4 June 2018). The first floor of the Sphere, called the 'National Pavilion', consists of two zones: 'acquaintance with Kazakhstan' and 'creative energy' (Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 19 April 2017). The first zone introduces visitors to the domestic culture, history and mineral resources of Kazakhstan. Moreover, it displays various country landscapes such as steppes, lakes, intricate canyons, deserts, semi-deserts and mountains. The second zone exhibits the 28 best local research projects on renewable energy in Kazakhstan. All of these projects have been developed and used in Kazakhstan, for instance, the Kazakhstani model of the thermonuclear reactor for material testing 'Tokamak' (Satayeva, 16 May 2017). Except for the first storey, every other floor of the Sphere presented a particular type of renewable energy, which could be extracted from the Sun, the cosmos, biomass, wind, water and kinetic energy. The top floor communicates the vision of the political elites about Kazakhstan and offers the future image of Astana in the next 30 years 'Future Astana - the capital of Kazakhstan in 2050' (Mukanov, 9 June 2017; Kazakh TV, 21 June 2017).

5.4.3.3. Why is Kazakhstan interested in green energy?

As discussed in chapter three, Kazakhstan declared the third decade of its independence a 'period of modernisation' after political, social and economic developments in the first two decades (Akorda, 31 January 2017). The Astana Expo

can be considered an ‘anti-crisis project of Kazakhstan’ directed to address economic and image issues of the country (Velikaya and Marmontova, 8 June 2017; Abayev, 29 September 2017). As the world enters the post-oil era’, states seek to overcome their dependence on fossil fuels. Apart from the detrimental impact of fossil fuels on the environment, falling demand for petroleum products and technological revolution have led to a long-term fall in the oil price since 2014 (Rakhimbekova, 28 September 2017). Traditional industries of Kazakhstan, including oil and gas production, mining and metallurgy, can no longer be the drivers of sustainable economic growth (Ospanova, 2017: 102-103). Indeed, Kazakhstan cannot project itself as an emerging economy poised to become one of the most developed nations if the country continues to be associated only with oil, gas and other low-value-added, heavily polluted industries in popular representations.

Given that, as Nazarbayev highlighted, Kazakhstan had to reconsider its national priorities and develop a green economy to reach its long-term goal of joining the group of 30 most developed countries (Kazinform, 14 December 2012). As this thesis argues, a branding narrative is effective only if it is a credible story (see subsection 2.5.3). Without a genuine commitment to developing a green and sustainable economy, Kazakhstan’s self-representation as a ‘modern country’ and a ‘leader’ and ‘centre of green technologies’ will always be questioned (Seisembayeva, 19 November 2017; Sieff, 2017; KazInform, 22 April 2018).

Over the years, Kazakhstan has consistently pursued a course towards the development of a ‘green economy’ at both the national and international level. In Central Asia, Kazakhstan became the first country to establish a legal framework for the transition to a green economy. The followings are the major milestones in Kazakhstan’s greening policy. In 2007, the Kazakhstani government adopted the environmental code. In 2009, Kazakhstan ratified the Kyoto Protocol to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. In the same year, the government passed a law supporting the use of renewable energy sources. In 2011, Kazakhstan launched the ‘Green Bridge’ global environmental initiative, which was proposed at the 66th session of the UNGA. In 2013, it launched Asia’s first nationwide trading system for greenhouse gas emissions. In the same year, the ‘Concept on Transition to a Green Economy’ was adopted. In 2016, the country ratified the Paris Climate Agreement. In this regard, the Astana Expo, which took place after the Paris Climate Agreement and centred on the theme of environmental sustainability, could not be a more apt

communication channel to project a narrative about Kazakhstan's intentions to contribute to global environmental governance (Dodonov, 2017: 60-61). Nevertheless, as the following discussion will show, although the government has introduced different initiatives to facilitate structural economic reform and the development of renewable energy since the Astana Expo, international media have continued to cast doubt on the country's commitment to green growth.

To become one of the world's 30 most developed countries, the Astana Expo was seen as one of the significant steps Kazakhstan had to pass (Ospanov, 2017: 102-110). According to Zhoshybayev, the exposition would contribute to the speedy development of the country by opening up new opportunities for studying and developing alternative technologies (Zakon.kz., 18 August 2015). However, the transition from a commodity-based to a green, knowledge-based economy will not be easy for Kazakhstan, given the experience of other countries (Shaukenova, 2017: 7-8). The majority of Latin American countries, for example, fell into the 'middle-income trap' as a result of their failure to make structural reforms and transform human capital (Shaukenova, 2017: 7-8; Kharas and Kohli, 2011).

Apart from investing in technology and infrastructure, Kazakhstan should promote the culture of 'green technology and information society', which does not require as much investment as international expositions do but will better contribute to the development of green knowledge (Tatilya, 28 July 2017). To support the development of a green economy, human resources such as professional managers, technical specialists, and engineers able to handle the latest technology and innovation are of great significance (Kashkinbekov, 2017: 94-95). Except for the contribution to Kazakhstan's image and identity, the Expo demonstrated Kazakhstan's long-lasting efforts to overcome its over-reliance on commodity exports and address environmental issues, particularly inefficient use of natural resources, high energy consumption, unsustainable agricultural practices, water scarcity and low level of waste management. The Astana Expo facilitated the green growth initiative and Kazakhstan's transition to a greener economy since 2007 (Mutanov, 2017: 12; Samruk-Kazyna, August 2018). The theme of Expo-2017 'Future Energy' promoted the state initiative of 'reducing CO2 emissions, efficient energy use and energy for all' (Interviewee 12, 14 May 2019; National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2017: 31-36).

Holding the Astana Expo contributed to the development and introduction of renewable energy sources in Kazakhstan. It addressed the constraints preventing the green growth process, such as the lack of green knowledge, investment and technology, limited expertise in the field of renewable energy and low energy price (Samruk-Kazyna, August 2018). According to a senior official at the Ministry of Energy,

> *The effect of Expo 2017 was the exchange of knowledge at the exposition. About 115 countries exhibited their achievements on the declared topic 'Energy of the Future', i.e. renewable energy technologies. In addition, a number of agreements were concluded at the exposition, which led to the financing of renewable energy projects today (Interviewee 16, 6 June 2019).*

For instance, according to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Energy and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the EBRD plans to invest in Kazakhstan's renewable energy projects (Interviewee 16, 6 June 2019).

According to the representatives of the Ministry of Energy, the exposition helped primarily to develop new energy projects in Kazakhstan (Interviewee 16, 6 June 2019). It facilitated the development of scientific research in clean technologies and alternative energy sources (Interviewee 12, 14 May 2019). The exposition of 28 technological research outcomes of domestic scientists in the national pavilion of Kazakhstan showed the country's scientific achievements (Interviewee 16, 6 June 2019). Besides, the Astana Expo was a platform to call for global cooperation and facilitate discussion on energy conservation, renewable energy and sustainable development in developing countries. Serik Seidumanov, Deputy of the Mazhilis and Galimkair Mutanov, President of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, stated that the Expo served as a communication network linking the initiatives of Kazakhstan and the United Nations to address the energy challenges of the 21st century (Seidumanov, 2017: 19-20; Mutanov, 2017: 12; Rakhimbekova, 28 September 2017).

5.4.3.4. Green Technologies after the Astana Expo

Kazakhstani government intends to raise the share of alternative energy in power generation to 3% by 2020, 10% by 2030 and 50% by 2050. According to the statistics from the Ministry of Energy, after the Expo, 133 green technologies were chosen to

be introduced to Kazakhstan's economy: 27 concerning the oil and gas sector, 7 concerning the coal and nuclear industry, 63 concerning electricity generation, 36 concerning environmental conservation such as waste management, water treatment, and air quality control (Interviewee 16, 6 June 2019; Skakova, 2017: 58; Khabar 24, 22 September 2017). Of the 133 chosen technologies, 53 projects have been in the process of implementation. Magzum Mirzagaliyev, Deputy Energy Minister, highlighted that the Belarusian 'Turbosphere', the German 'Smart Grid' and the Polish 'Blue Coal' energy-saving technologies that allow an 80% reduction in emissions of harmful substances can be applied to the enterprises of the oil and gas sector in Kazakhstan (Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 22 September 2017). Moreover, Kazakhstani experts were interested in technologies introduced by General Electric and CNPC to increase oil recovery in hydrocarbon fields (Interviewee 16, 6 June 2019).

In April 2018, upon Nazarbayev's initiative, the government established the 'International Centre for Green Technologies and Investment Projects' (the Green Centre), which was the continuation of the 'Green Bridge Partnership Programme' (Central Communications Service under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 17 January 2019; QazExpoCongress, 2020; Rakhimbekova, 2018: 189). The Green Centre works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Energy, Association of Environmental Organizations, the municipal government of Astana and regional administration offices to introduce green technologies and promote the country's transition to a green economy (Central Communications Service under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 17 January 2019). According to the head of the Green Centre, Rapil Zhoshybayev, the centre was established to create favourable conditions for investors to work, to promote a green culture and to solve environmental problems through the development of green technologies in Kazakhstan and subsequently in Central Asia (Central Communications Service under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 17 January 2019).

Moreover, Kazakhstan established a public green organisation, 'the Coalition for Green Economy and Development of G-Global' (The Coalition) and a public foundation, 'Akbota' (Rakhimbekova, 2018: 16). The Coalition works in four directions: creates new centres of green technologies; supports local innovators and inventors of renewable energy; recruits women into the green economy projects; and provides legal, institutional and informational support for the development of a green economy (Rakhimbekova, 2018: 18-19). The Coalition has successfully launched the

following projects: green village ‘Arnasay’; centres of green technologies’ Arnasay’ and ‘Karaganda Agrotechnical College’; centres of green technologies in Almaty, Kostanay, Pavlodar, Zhambyl and North Kazakhstan regions. The Coalition received support from the International Secretariat of G-Global, UNDP, OSCE Programme Office in Astana and the Coca Cola Company (Interviewee 12, 14 May 2019; Rakhimbekova, 2018: 17-18). Scholars argue that the 2009 law on using renewables in Kazakhstan should be updated to encourage local and foreign organisations' involvement in Kazakhstan's green growth. To make an efficient and swift transition to a green economy, the government should introduce additional administrative measures and economic incentives (Baideldinov, 2017: 78-79).

Some scholars believe that Kazakhstan's green electricity goal to reach the target of 50% by 2050 is overly ambitious and thus unattainable because of the chronic distrust of population in elections, state programs and presidential addresses (Dodonov, 2017: 65-66). The political elites, on the other hand, have a positive view on the subject. Mukhtar Mankeev, chairman of the Kazakhstan 2050 National Movement Council, believes that Kazakhstan will have a diversified, socially responsible economy based on knowledge and innovation, even if it applies only half of the green technologies exhibited in the Expo (Zhanuzakov, 2 October 2017). Kazakhstan has already introduced 65 renewable energy facilities with a total capacity of 629.5 MW in power generation: 12 wind, 19 solar, 33 hydroelectric power plants and 1 biogas plant (Mukanova, 10 September 2018). The share of green electricity in overall electricity production has reached 2.2 % (Tukpiev, 29 October 2019; Baideldinov, 2017: 74). Accordingly, the number of renewable energy facilities is planned to be increased to 95 (1483 MW) by 2020 and to 119 (2096 MW) by 2021 (Interviewee 16, 6 June 2019). If these projects are completed as scheduled, they will inspire strong hope of success in the green growth initiatives of Kazakhstan.

5.5. Branding Effectiveness

5.5.1. Organisational Success of Branding Channel

According to the Kazakh political elites, the Expo was very useful in raising Kazakhstan’s profile in a number of respects. One interviewee observed that ‘through this event, many nationalities who had not visited Kazakhstan before learned about the country, its capital, people and culture’ (Interviewee 4, 26 November 2018). In a

similar vein, another interviewee suggested that, given the capacity of international expositions to attract foreign visitors and publicity, Kazakhstan's participation in international expositions, since 2005, and its hosting of Expo-2017 have promoted 'cultural exchange and public relations and increased the international awareness' (Interviewee 16, June 2019). As table one shows, international expositions provided Kazakhstan with branding channels to communicate to a broader global audience a narrative about the country's history, development, international contributions and vision as a Eurasian nation. In addition, as discussed in 5.3., Kazakhstan's national pavilions were among the most visited Expo sites and won the bronze medals for the distinguished and interesting representation of information several times (Akorda, 2 August 2008). Expo-2017 projected 'Astana as the heart of Eurasia' by: representing its modern architecture that combines both European and Asian styles; introducing its own form of Eurasianism, which is multinational, multi-confessional and three lingual; representing Astana as a new global venue for international affairs, business and finance (Interviewee 16, 6 June 2019).

As the aim of nation branding is to (re-)create a positive image for a state, its effectiveness depends first and foremost on the functional success of an international exposition. So, as pointed out in section 5.2., the success of international expositions should, first of all, be examined according to some basic factors such as the number of visitors, the number of participant countries and whether the country was able to finish the exposition complex on time. The 2010 Shanghai World Expo had attracted 246 participant countries and 73 million visitors, and the 2015 Milan World Expo drew 145 participant countries and 21.5 million visitors (see the BIE website). It is somewhat unfair to compare the international specialised exposition in Astana with two world expositions held in older and bigger cities, especially since Kazakhstan and Central Asia did not have much prior experience in holding Expos. Nonetheless, the Astana Expo was able to attract a sufficient number of visitors to be considered a success by the BIE. According to the BIE registration dossier of Kazakhstan, 2.5 million visitors were expected, but the exposition was able to attract almost 4 million people, 15% of which were foreign visitors from 187 countries (*Forbes*, 12 September 2018). In total, 137 participant countries and international organisations attended the Astana Expo.

In term of visibility, figure six shows that the release of Sacha Baron Cohen's TV show and mocumentary in 2000 and 2006 respectively increased the country's

international exposure by putting Kazakhstan on the global map. The controversy between Cohen and Kazakh political elites, Kazakhstan's active nation branding in nuclear nonproliferation and green growth have improved the country's international awareness and image, which addressed negative misrepresentations such as 'terra incognita' and 'black hole'. The Astana Expo drew the attention of foreign and domestic media to Kazakhstan, which, according to the World Bank statistics, increased the flow of foreign visitors to the country (see figure 6). In 2018, 8.5 million people visited Kazakhstan, which is 10.2% more than in 2017 and 32% more than in 2015 (Khabar 24, 13 March 2019).

Figure 6. The Number of Foreign Visitors (World Bank, 2020)

Despite the successful organisation and hosting of Astana Expo-2017, not everyone reacted positively to the financial investments in the mega event. Indeed, the public remained divided regarding the need for this kind of events in Kazakhstan. If the political elites kept highlighting the importance of the Astana Expo for the improvement of Kazakhstan's visibility, image and economy (Seidumanov, 2017: 21-22; Radio Azattyk, 14 September 2017), some local experts criticised the government's profligacy by comparing the expense in the Astana Expo with spending on other public services. Satpayev said that '[w]hile we hold expositions, other states are building factories' (Kim, 11 September 2017). For instance, the Expo expenses exceeded several times the investments made in other industries, infrastructure and urban planning of Astana (193 billion tenges), as well as the fund for the development

of Kazakhstan's Fuel and Energy Complex (537.3 billion tenges) (Nasha Gazeta, 29 June 2017).

Overall, the total cost of the Astana Expo exceeded $5 billion US dollars, which does not reflect the socioeconomic reality of Kazakhstan (Palmer, 15 June 2017; Kim, 11 September 2017). In response, Nazarbayev emphasised that all expenses had already been paid off and that the revenue from the Expo more than covered the cost (Aulbekova, 24 July 2017; Seidumanov, 2017: 21-22). Moreover, the Expo created new jobs, boosted tourism, and brought new infrastructures to the community (Radio Azattyk, 14 September 2017). For instance, the architectural complex of the Expo City is now used for large-scale international projects such as Astana International Financial Centre, Astana Hub, International Centre for Green Technologies and Investment Projects, and Astana IT University. On the other hand, as Satpayev highlighted, if Kazakhstan spent the Expo budget on the construction of factories, it would have made an even greater contribution to the domestic economy by creating more permanent jobs (Kim, 11 September 2017). In short, 'the Expo is not a trading company where profit can be easily calculated' (Dzhaldinov, 17 February 2017).

5.5.2. Effectiveness of Branding Narratives

Raising a country's profile has always been a nation branding goal. However, according to my conceptual framework, the real motivation for national branding is to change the negative misrecognition or gain additional recognition by effectively communicating the branding narratives. Indeed, the organisational successes of international expositions like in the case of Astana Expo do not necessarily guarantee its effectiveness in addressing negative misrepresentation and identity. Notwithstanding the investment of enormous resources in the branding channel, the positive impact of the Astana Expo on Kazakhstan's international image was arguably limited. On the one hand, it was able to debunk some negative misperceptions of Kazakhstan in popular representation. It projected Kazakhstan as a modern country that has accomplished significant progress in development and with enormous potential to be a green economy and a regional hub on green technologies. In this way, the Astana Expo communicated a counter-narrative against stereotypical representations of Kazakhstan as a 'Borat land', 'black hole' and 'backwater' country.

The Expo went some way in demonstrating the remoteness of the characters of Ali G and Borat Sagdiyev from lived reality.

Even after the Astana Expo, Kazakhstan remains subject to negative representation, even though some international ratings on business and economy emphasise the growing strength of the country's brand (Brand Finance, 2018; Doing Business 2020). First of all, while foreign media rarely referred to Kazakhstan as a 'Borat' country, their coverage continued to associate the country with authoritarianism, human rights violations and commodity exports (Gething, 11 April 2017; Osborne, 12 October 2017). As I will discuss in the conclusion, this not only underscores the shortcomings of Kazakhstan's nation branding management and overreliance on expositions and conferences but, more generally, the limitations of any state-led nation branding initiatives in the modern media age.

Second, Kazakhstan has yet to occupy a solid place in international nation branding rankings other than business. FDI Intelligence's 2018 Nation Brands ranking tables benchmark branding into: the top 50 most valuable, the top 10 best performing and the 10 worst performing brands (Shehadi, 8 October 2018). Kazakhstan does not appear in any of these rankings. However, Estonia, Portugal and Poland, the countries that have relied on the professional expertise of the international branding companies, occupy the top 50 valuable and the top 10 strong brand rankings in the world. These companies include Bloom Consulting, FutureBrand and the independent policy advisor to heads of state and CEOs - Simon Anholt (see the companies' website).

Kazakhstan has hired neither a professional company nor an independent advisor on nation branding. Dastan Kadyrzhanov, a political analyst on nation branding, criticises the political elites' superficial and casual attitude towards branding the country (5 September 2016). For instance, in the 2018 Good Country Index, Kazakhstan was ranked 106th (Anholt, 2018). While European countries have followed nation branding experts, Kazakhstan has taken a different direction, which is more peculiar to its nature. Estonia is a former Soviet country like Kazakhstan; however, before joining the EU, it had conducted nation branding such as 'Welcome to ESTonia, Go to EST!' that has more or less addressed some of its image issues and association with the Soviet Union. May other former USSR countries still live under the shadow of the Soviet Union, partly because of their unsystematic approach to marketing or branding the territory and the nation in general.

However, there is some disagreement over Kazakhstan in analyses performed by global branding companies; indeed, branding study results vary depending on the categories the companies choose as main indicators for categorisation. For instance, in 2018, Brand Finance ranked Kazakhstan 51st among 100 country brands (Brand Finance, 2018). Apart from that, Kazakhstan was ranked 36th in the World Bank's Doing Business 2018 and 59th in the 2019 FutureBrand Country Index (World Bank, 2018: 4; FutureBrand, 2019: 21). Depending on ranking methodology and categories, the content of reports varies. Brand Finance assesses a country's image and reputation according to GDP, goods and services, investment and society (Routley, 27 December 2019). Anholt, conversely, includes into his brand comparison a wider range of characteristics like science and technology, culture, international peace and security, world order, planet and climate, prosperity and equality, health and wellbeing (Anholt, 2005: 296-298). During Nazarbayev's presidency, Kazakhstan performed better in international rankings focusing on the country's economic performance. But in branding rankings such as the Good Country Index, which focused on domestic and foreign policy, Kazakhstan did not perform well. During Nazarbayev's presidency, Kazakhstan moved gradually towards democracy by prioritising the economy over politics (Euronews, 15 January 2010).

As mentioned in 5.2., the Astana Expo, as the biggest branding channel of Kazakhstan, fell short of transforming the country's international image and identity. The branding narrative about Kazakhstan as a modern nation and a hub of green technologies and energies in the region remained in doubt. As The Guardian pointed out after the Astana Expo, Kazakhstan's 'green technology revolution hasn't spread far beyond the capital' (14 November 2018). As the domestic mass media and scholars at Kazakhstan's leading universities and think tanks said, while Astana opened the Expo with big fireworks and slogans about green technologies, people who live in outskirts of the capital and other small villages in Kazakhstan did not have even access to basic infrastructure in electricity and transportation (Kim, 11 September 2017; Interviewee 10, 8 May 2019; Interviewee 14, 22 May 2019; KTKnews., 7 February 2020; Muslim, 15 October 2009; Ahmet, 2 August 2019). In the light of these facts, Kazakhstan's ambitious branding channel and narratives about green energy look hardly trustworthy and far-fetched.

As we see, Kazakhstan's efforts to address negative misrecognition by offering new narratives exposed even more deep-rooted social and political problems that, in turn,

limited the effectiveness of the country's nation-branding channels. As a political scientist at a leading Kazakhstani university pointed out,

> *many countries have the issue of unrecognisability, not only Kazakhstan. Therefore, an attempt to put yourself on the international arena, to secure a niche, is what all countries do, of course, with different degree of success, but they do it. In principle, there is nothing bad about it; this is good, and it should be welcomed. Another important point is that it is great and good to represent ourselves, Kazakhstan, on the international stage as a developed, technologically advanced country, but we tend to forget about the substance of that argument. Substance is very important because we should not only resemble but truly become such a country (Interviewee 10, 8 May 2019).*

What the political scientist means is that Kazakhstan represents itself as a developed and modern country, but when foreign people visit Kazakhstan, they notice the problems confronting the capital city, such as the lack of security and infrastructure underdevelopment (Interviewee 10, 8 May 2019).

Overall, as Kazakhstan's branding channel, the Astana Expo did not offer a genuine narrative reflecting the social and political reality of the country. Like some other international expositions like Shanghai Expo-2010, the Astana Expo provided global society with imagined, idealised forms of national image and identity, which became subject to criticisms (Hubert, 2015: 1-2). So, as I highlighted earlier, the successful organisation of the mega event, which Kazakhstan emphasised a lot, does not mean that the nation branding was effective in changing the opinion of the international society.

International expositions cannot cover up or completely distract attention away from the real state of a state's economic, social and political development. Nor can they hide the differences between the Western and Asian ways of thinking and approaches to political governance. Nation branding channels, such as international expositions, can promote positive feelings among domestic and international society towards a country by publicising how it is developing and taking on obligations to solve global problems. This, in turn, can divert attention from less positive issues such as 'unemployment, the cost of living, official corruption and incompetence, access to good healthcare and escalating house prices' (Branigan, 21 April 2010). The Astana Expo, however, also revealed the struggle of Kazakhstan to eliminate remnants of its past that revived during Kazakhisation or retraditionalisation, such as nepotism and

clan politics, while trying to consolidate its Eurasian civic identity (see chapter 3). It also revealed tensions beneath the image of Kazakhstan as transitioning towards a 'smart', clean developing country.

This is partly due to the fact that increasing a country's visibility, as the Expo clearly did, can also lead to increased international and domestic scrutiny. To begin with, foreign media outlets had cast doubt on Kazakhstan's commitment to green growth. For instance, citing Nazarbayev's remarks to Putin that he 'personally [does] not believe in alternative energy sources, such as wind and solar', and that 'the shale euphoria does not make any sense', some foreign media outlets cast doubts on Kazakhstan's commitment to green growth (Sorbello, 17 October 2014). Negative media coverage, such as this, limited the effectiveness of the Astana Expo as a nation branding initiative.

Moreover, the social and political scandals that accompanied the Astana Expo since the beginning of the preparation process couldn't help but damage Kazakhstan's reputation. It diminished the overall effectiveness of the Expo as a nation branding channel. In 2015 the chairman of the board of the national company 'Astana Expo-2017', Talgat Yermegiyayev, was arrested and jailed for 14 years for stealing around 4.2 billion tenges, $22.4 million (Sorbello, 22 July 2015). Later Sulambek Barkinkhoyev, managing director, and Kazhymurat Usenov, head of construction for Astana Expo-2017, were also convicted of corruption (Sorbello, 30 June 2015; Zakon.kz., 2018). Commenting on the corruption scandals, the former president declared that 'the anti-corruption combat will be merciless' and warned all friends and even relatives that 'there will not be immunity' for the people involved in corruption (Tengrinews, 1 July 2015).

Media coverage of the scandals raised strong public discontent. After the outbreak of embezzlement scandals, Akhmetzhan Yessimov, Chairman of the Board of Astana Expo-2017, said, 'I have been in government service and leadership positions. I can say, even before independence, and there were different situations in which I saw a lot of criticism. But I have not seen so much criticism in my life as in these one and a half years' (Tengrinews, 29 May 2017). The government was able to rectify the situation by putting more efforts into finishing construction work and holding a grand opening ceremony to distract audiences. Nonetheless, the scandals drew international and domestic attention to the same negative sides of Kazakhstan that have been damaging its reputation for years.

Another scandal during the Astana Expo arose from the mishandling of the foreign media. The public relations catastrophe started with a critical article in the magazine Foreign Policy by its editor James Palmer (Palmer, 15 June 2017). Mockingly entitled 'Kazakhstan Spent $5 Billion on a Death Star and It Doesn't Even Shoot Lasers', the article highlighted the Astana Expo's low visitor numbers, empty pavilions and excessive spending. Kazakhstan, he argued, built a futuristic city to host the World's Fair and polish its own brand, but the country 'forgot to invite guests' (Palmer, 15 June 2017). Such criticism, of course, is questionable considering official statistics on visitor numbers (QazExpo Congress, 28 November 2019). The controversy gained further publicity when the government was reported to have blocked the magazine's website, although it strongly denied the allegation. Minister of Information and Communication Dauren Abayev stated that '[w]e did not exclude the possibility that someone did this perhaps deliberately to exacerbate the scandal. On our side, there were no actions' (Radio Azattyk, 20 June 2017). Regardless of the truth, the incident could not help but hurt Kazakhstan's international image. The media also raised issues such as price hike in public transport, housing and food in Astana throughout the Expo (Rysaliev, 19 June 2017). Meanwhile, foreign visitors and locals criticised the management of the Expo and the city's deficient infrastructure.

5.5.5. Domestic implications of the Astana Expo

Seidumanov provides some more excellent examples of the domestic implications of the branding channel (2017: 19-25). First is the formation of an important scientific, academic and intellectual legacy. For instance, the new 'Museum of the Future Energy', in 'Nur Alem', presents projects based on the theory and practice of Jeremy Rifkin's 'Third Industrial Revolution'. The 'Manifesto of values and principles of Expo-2017', developed as a result of 12 international conferences on future energy, which were held in the framework of the Astana Expo, also formed part of this legacy (Mukanova, 6 September 2017). From 29 June to 5 September 2017, at the Expo Congress Centre, the world's leading 500 renewable energy experts made presentations of their research.

Moreover, the 'Energy Best Practices Area' exhibited 24 high technology practices of the world in conserving, producing and transporting sustainable energy. These were selected by the International Selection Committee of the 2013 Competition chaired by

the BIE Secretary-General, Vicente G. Loscertales, among 133 projects applications from 25 countries (National Company 'Astana Expo-2017', February 2017: 60-61). Second are the positive environmental policy effects. For example, as discussed in section 5.4.3., after the Expo, the introduction of green technologies became one of the government's domestic priorities.

However, the Astana Expo can also be viewed as a strategy for building the state's identity, aimed at the domestic audience. As Jennifer Hubbert contends, conceptualising the concept of exposition as a branding channel only for a foreign audience overlooks its domestic implications for national unity and social cohesion (2015: 3). This builds on my arguments in chapter three that international expositions can promote domestic unity and cohesion. First of all, the Expos attract more local than foreign visitors. Indeed, the majority of the Astana Expo's visitors were Kazakhstanis themselves (Forbes, 12 September 2018). Second of all, by narrating Kazakhstan's achievements and growing international appeal under Nazarbayev's rule, the Expo could be seen as the ultimate justification of not only the President's decision to move the capital city to Astana but also his domestic and foreign policy since then. The sparkling futuristic buildings of the Expo City, which are environmentally friendly and technologically advanced, impressed and inspired mostly Kazakhstanis.

International and national pavilions of the Expo represented show the world's latest technologies to the local population. It projected the image of a modern and economically prosperous country the Kazakhstani community should be proud of. Yulia Kuchinskaya, Director of the Centre for Political Analysis and Strategic Studies of the 'Nur Otan' Party, believes that Expo-2017 strengthened patriotism, solidarity, and the belief, especially of the younger generations, in the success and development of Kazakhstan (Nurkatova, 2017: 98-101). As such, by increasing Kazakhstan's visibility and deepening its relations with participant countries, the Astana Expo promoted the narrative of Kazakhstan as a modern, Eurasian nation to both its domestic and international audience. The global messages and national narratives the Expo presented to the outside world, such as Kazakhstan being a 'heartland of modernisation', 'centre of high green technology', 'green economy', shaped the domestic public opinion at the same time. As the head of the Department of Socio-Economic Research at the KazISS states, the Astana Expo promoted national unity at home (Nurkatova, 2017: 98-101).

5.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the Astana Expo as Kazakhstan's key nation branding communication channel aimed at raising international awareness and improving Kazakhstan's image and identity. It reflected Kazakhstan's strong aspirations to transcend the constraints of its (post-)Soviet and Central Asian identities and redefine itself as a Eurasian nation and an emerging economy with ambitions to become one of the world's top 30 most developed countries by 2050. On the other hand, it indicates the Republic's struggle to grapple with the dilemma of ontological insecurity. While Kazakhstan and Central Asia have long been 'invisible', the Republic's surging international publicity is often seen as a response to negative representations in the West. As Kazakhstan has sought to redefine itself and its relations with the world, the Expo became a branding channel for Kazakhstan to engage the world directly and represent itself on its own terms.

By demonstrating Kazakhstan's potential as a leader in renewable energy and contributions to global sustainable development, the Astana Expo did serve to improve the country's image, which has long been associated mainly with fossil fuels and heavily polluted, low-value-added industries. Meanwhile, by hosting the mega event in its young and futuristic capital, Kazakhstan sought to counter negative representations of itself in Western popular culture and maximised its image of modernity. As a communication channel, the Astana Expo, for which the government invested enormous resources in upgrading the capital's infrastructure, served to demonstrate Kazakhstan's achievements and ambitions in development. Although the branding event was successfully organised, its effect in improving Kazakhstan's international image was limited. The corruption scandals, the lack of belief in and identification with Kazakhstan's new branding narratives communicated through the Astana Expo reduced its effectiveness as a branding channel. Nonetheless, like international conferences on nonproliferation analysed in chapter four, the Astana Expo contributed to the consolidation of the Republic's Eurasian identity by facilitating the genuine change and development in Kazakhstan's green growth. As discussed, the new infrastructures, improvement of air and land transformation systems and application of the exhibited 133 green technologies in Kazakhstan's social and industrial developments all positively influenced its image even if it did not totally transform it.

CONCLUSION

'Our country', President Nazarbayev said at the closing ceremony of Astana Expo-2017, 'strengthened its image as [a] dynamically developing state in the Eurasian region' (Kazakh TV, 11 September 2017). The President and his administration's continuing belief in the value of international expositions was evident during his visit to the United Arab Emirates in the year after, when Kazakhstan signed the agreement to participate in the Dubai Expo in 2020 (Kazinform, 10 April 2018). Allocated one of the largest plots on the Expo site, Kazakhstan planned to invest over 23.5 million dollars in the construction of what will be one of the Expo's largest pavilions. According to the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Alikhan Smailov, the goal is to attract 10 billion dollars of foreign investment (Khassenkhanova, 5 January 2020).

Notwithstanding the Kazakhstani government's investment in nation branding, the country's image can be tarnished by unexpected events. In March 2020, Britain's National Crime Agency (NCA) froze three properties owned by Dariga Nazarbayeva, the former president's daughter and Speaker of the Senate, and her son Nurali Aliyev, on suspicion regarding the source of their funds. Although Nazarbayeva and Aliyev won the court case against the NCA, media coverage of the controversy reinforced the long negative representations of Kazakhstan in the West. Whether by coincidence or not, Nazarbayeva was later relieved of her position as Speaker of the Senate (Eurasianet, 2 May 2020).

Kazakhstan's significant investment in national branding testifies to the importance of a state's image and reputation not only to its economic development, but also to the building of its national identity and the legitimacy of its government (see chapter 3). Focusing on the cases of international conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament and Astana Expo-2017, this thesis has examined Kazakhstan's nation branding initiatives and their implications for identity building during the Nazarbayev presidency. This conclusion starts by revisiting the research questions, which will help us reflect on the major research findings and their implications. This will be followed by a discussion of this thesis's contributions and future research directions.

Revisiting Research Questions

How have external perceptions threatened the way Kazakhstan perceives and represents its national identity?

In chapters one and two, I showed that misrecognition and disrespect threaten the development of a state's national identity and jeopardise its security by calling into question the domestic and international legitimacy of its government. Therefore, Kazakhstan's strong motivations to improve its international image cannot be understood in separation from its struggle to build a new national identity since independence, which has been central to the Republic's national security, political legitimacy, and foreign policy interests. As chapter three showed, Kazakhstan has sought to dissociate from its Soviet past and integrate into the Western-led liberal international order as a modern and internationally responsible state. On the other hand, the Republic has sought to maintain its uniqueness and develop its relations with neighbouring states by repositioning itself as a Eurasian nation. National identity building has unfolded a process of contestation both domestically and internationally. As the Kazakhstani society has remained divided over the meanings of the new national identity, the country has suffered from a lack of international awareness and negative representations in the West.

Western discursive hegemony, Kazakhstan's obscurity and the country's geography, history and culture mean that the West has long represented it as an Asiatic, authoritarian and backward post-Soviet state with a wealth of natural resources to be exploited (see chapter 3). On the other hand, following the Soviet Union's disintegration and the sociopolitical upheavals across its former sphere of influence, the possession of Soviet nuclear weapons by a newly independent yet politically unpredictable Kazakhstan was seen as a threat to the Western-led liberal international order. Although Kazakhstan's relinquishment of nuclear weapons has been widely praised, lingering uncertainty about its domestic political stability, foreign relations and capacity to secure its nuclear facilities means that the West has continued to see the country as a security risk, if not a 'prize' in the new 'great game' in Central Asia.

Western dominance in the production of knowledge about Kazakhstan and Central Asia has created an image of the country in opposition to the West. Politically, Kazakhstan has been represented as a post-Soviet, Asiatic authoritarian regime marred

by nepotism, corruption and human rights violations (Bohr, Brauer, Gould-Davies et al., November 2019; European Parliament, 14 March 2019). The Central Asian state's domestic social conservatism, bad governance and membership in 'dictators' clubs' such as the SCO further reinforced its image and identity as an out-group member (Tisdall, 6 June 2006). Economically, Kazakhstan's overdependence on commodity exports means that it has continued to be seen primarily as an oil and gas economy. Nevertheless, nothing has reinforced the stereotypical representations of the country in the West more than popular culture. The satire British TV program 'Da Ali G Show' and film 'Borat' depicted Kazakhstan as an uncivilised, backward and undeveloped nation with a population of illiterate and ill-behaved people (see section 3.3.). Indeed, Kazakhstan's initial strong reaction to 'Borat' reflected the discrepancy between, on the one hand, how the country perceived itself and, on the other, how the West and the world perceived it. Negative misrecognition from the West threatened to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the identity building project led by the country's political elites.

How has Kazakhstan represented itself through the two nation branding channels?

Nation branding, I have argued in chapter two, involves the communication of branding narratives to a target audience through a branding channel. Notwithstanding their differences, the two cases reveal a consistent pattern in how Kazakhstan has represented itself. First, by holding international events in the country's capital, the Kazakhstani government maximised control over its branding channels and target audiences' engagement with the nation. Second, even though nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament are often considered within the confines of 'high politics', international events in both cases were designed to engage not only foreign governments, international organisations or epistemic communities, but also the global civil society. Participation of and endorsement from major international stakeholders, from intergovernmental organisations to prominent individuals, helped raise Kazakhstan's international awareness and enhance the credibility of its branding narratives. Finally, the carefully organised international events in Kazakhstan's most developed and futuristic-looking city presented to target audiences a key dimension of the country's new identity as a modern, Eurasian and internationally responsible

nation. But whereas the international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament drew upon a historical experience that has given birth to Kazakhstan's national consciousness, Astana Expo-2017 reflected the country's successes since independence and its visions for future development.

International Conferences on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament

As I have showed in chapter four, international conferences have been central to Kazakhstan's nonproliferation diplomacy and nation branding campaign since 2010. While undertaking a variety of initiatives under existing international institutions, Kazakhstan held an international conference in partnership with a non-governmental organisation every year. As branding channels, these conferences provided platforms for Kazakhstan to share its historical experience, demonstrate its commitment to the promotion of the global common good, present its visions for the future, and build international coalitions in support of its initiatives. Through keynote speeches, meetings with victims of radioactive contamination and tours to the Semipalatinsk Nuclear Test Site, Kazakhstan communicated to a broad global audience a narrative about its transformation from a voiceless victim of the global nuclear arms race into an upholder of a rule-based international order and an advocate of the global anti-nuclear movement. Once seen as a threat to international security, Kazakhstan has successfully consolidated its international image and status as a model of successful denuclearisation (see section 4.3).

Astana Expo-2017

The Astana Expo represented the country's most ambitious attempt to project itself as a modern, Eurasian and internationally responsible nation. With a modern cityscape and Western-style institutions, Astana symbolises Kazakhstan's political, economic and social achievements since independence and its visions for the future. By gathering together representatives and visitors from across the world, the mega event reinforced Kazakhstan's narrative about its capital as the 'heart of Eurasia' in trade, investment and innovation. With an innovative and futuristic architectural complex, the billion-dollar Astana Expo City became the latest embodiment of the country's vision to become one of the world's 30 most developed economies by 2050. The theme of renewable energy not only reflected Kazakhstan's aspiration to transform its oil and

gas economy into a green economy based on knowledge and innovation; it also demonstrated the country as an internationally responsible nation committed to the solution of the most pressing global problems. By projecting a new narrative, the mega event served to address the country's long-lasting identity crisis that was manifested most conspicuously in the controversies over the British satire TV programme 'Da Ali G Show' and film 'Borat'. The holding of a mega event in the country's young, futuristic capital promoted an image of Kazakhstan as a modern nation that has transcended its Soviet past and is set to become one of the world's most developed countries.

How effective were the two branding channels in addressing external challenges to Kazakhstan's identity?

If the problems of recognition motivate a state to engage in nation branding, branding effectiveness depends on its ability to persuade the target audience into accepting its branding narrative. As I have pointed out in subsection 2.5.5, it is inherently difficult to influence how one state is viewed by other states and their peoples (Anholt 2013: 3-4, 9). Nonetheless, branding effectiveness depends first and foremost on the credibility of the branding narrative, which in turn rests on a state's ability and commitment to effect genuine change. This explains why, even though international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament and Astana Expo-2017 were both effective in enhancing Kazakhstan's international awareness, the former proved to be more successful than the latter in addressing the problem of negative misrecognition. Kazakhstan's continued commitment and contributions to nonproliferation and disarmament since independence underpinned the credibility of its branding narrative, which was communicated through international conferences. On the other hand, the socioeconomic gap between Astana and the rest of Kazakhstan, combined with foreign media coverage on corruption and extravagance in the preparation of the mega event, undermined the effectiveness of Astana Expo-2017 as a branding channel.

International Conferences on Nuclear Nonproliferation and Disarmament

International conferences gathered together a broad audience of major international stakeholders – Western and non-Western, as well as governmental and non-governmental. By cooperating with various international non-governmental

organisations in organising and hosting these events, Kazakhstan not only provided platforms for nuclear and non-nuclear states to exchange their views, but more importantly used them as branding channels to communicate its national experience, contributions and visions directly to the target audience. These conferences increased Kazakhstan's visibility and strengthened the credibility of its narratives. As a manifestation of Kazakhstan's success in its nation branding, other states referred to the country as a denuclearisation model for Iran and North Korea (Kim, 23 April 2019; Karasik, 18 August 2017; Cohen, 10 January 2018). Kazakhstan's nation branding efforts in nuclear security show that the country has become one of the 'in-group loved' members in the sphere of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament (Halevy, Bornstein, and Sagiv, 2008). By bringing Western and non-Western states together, the international conferences underpinned Nazarbayev's vision for Astana to be 'a diplomatic hub in this unstable region, right at the crossroads of the West and East' (Radio Azattyk, 9 October 2015).

Although these annual international conferences were incomparable with the Astana Expo in terms of their scale, cost or number of attendees, they proved to be more effective than the billion-dollar mega event in communicating Kazakhstan's branding narrative to its target audience. As chapter four has showed, their effectiveness is attributed primarily to a credible branding narrative based on a genuine historical experience and the Kazakhstani government's strong commitment to denuclearisation and nonproliferation since independence. Kazakhstan's voluntary relinquishment of Soviet nuclear weapons, its partnership with the United States, the EU and Russia to dispose of highly enriched uranium, and its diplomatic initiatives such as the hosting of the world's first nuclear fuel bank, have underpinned the credibility of its branding narrative.

Astana Expo-2017

Whereas international conferences on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament were relatively small-scale branding channels in a narrowly defined 'niche' area, Astana Expo-2017 was Kazakhstan's hitherto most ambitious nation branding initiative. Even if the Astana Expo was not a record-breaking world exposition such as the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, but, as a specialised exposition like Expo Zaragoza-2008, it enhanced Kazakhstan's international awareness by attracting 4 million visitors, 15%

of which were foreign tourists from 187 countries (Forbes, 12 September 2018). The Astana Expo drew domestic and international attention to Kazakhstan's young, futuristic capital, which is considered the 'heart of Eurasia' and the symbol of the country's new identity as a Eurasian nation. By hosting the international exposition, Kazakhstan demonstrated its political, economic and social achievements since its independence.

On the other hand, in addressing the global environmental challenges, Kazakhstan's commitment and efforts to shift from a 'brown' to a 'green' economy met a positive international reaction. Under the theme of renewable energy, Astana Expo-2017 tried to project a new narrative about Kazakhstan as a modern nation transitioning from a commodity economy based only on resource extraction and low-tech, polluting industries into a green economy based on high-value-added sectors, knowledge and innovation. As was the case with Kazakhstan's voluntary denuclearisation, green economic development became a key element of Kazakhstan's national identity.

In terms of visibility, the Astana Expo was a successful case. It was able to raise awareness of the international community by becoming the topic of global and national media (see Chart 6). This, in turn, increased the flow of tourists to Kazakhstan from different countries. In 2018, 8.5 million people visited Kazakhstan, which is 10.2% more than in 2017 and 32% more than in 2015 (Khabar 24, March 13, 2019). However, the functional success of the international exposition did not necessarily guarantee its effectiveness as nation branding in persuading the target audience into accepting Kazakhstan's branding narrative.

Notwithstanding the claimed success and investment of enormous resources into the project, the positive impact of the Astana Expo on Kazakhstan's international image remained limited. Certainly, the mega event and the Expo City further reinforced imaginations about Astana as an affluent, futuristic-looking city and enhanced the image of Kazakhstan as an emerging state; however, both domestic and international opinions on the Astana Expo remained divided. As I have discussed in detail in chapter five, some in Kazakhstan remained sceptical about the mega event's economic benefits to the local population. Meanwhile, questioning Kazakhstan's commitment to the development of green technologies, some in the foreign media dismissed Astana Expo-2017 as a vanity project. Worse still, the mega event's image was further affected by the scandals of extravagance and corruption. These problems

undermined the effectiveness of the Astana Expo in communicating a branding narrative about Kazakhstan as a modern, Eurasian and internationally responsible state that is on the path to becoming one of the world's 30 most developed states by 2050.

Nonetheless, the Astana Expo was able to address some negative perceptions of Kazakhstan in the international community. Kazakhstan's successful hosting of the mega event and its activism in international affairs directly challenged negative stereotypes about the country such as 'Borat Land', a black hole and backwater. The Expo demonstrated the remoteness of the image of 'Borat' from reality, even though the term 'Borat' has continued to be used as Kazakhstan's nickname to remind the public in the West that the conversation is about the country (Beanland, 16 September 2019; Lee, 18 October 2019).

How did the nation branding channels contribute to the construction of the national identity of Kazakhstan?

As I have argued above and throughout this thesis, the two nation branding initiatives focus on two central dimensions of Kazakhstan's new national identity as a modern, Eurasian and internationally responsible nation. Nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament symbolise Kazakhstan's transcendence of its Soviet past and integration into the Western-led liberal international order. As I have discussed in chapter three, historical memories of Soviet nuclear tests and the anti-nuclear movement were central to Kazakhstan's national consciousness. Kazakhstan's relinquishment of Soviet nuclear weapons and its efforts to enhance domestic, regional and global nuclear security since independence represent the Republic's struggle to redefine itself as a modern and responsible nation that upholds modern international rules and norms. With the participation of major stakeholders from foreign governments, international organisations to youth from across the world, international conferences contributed to Kazakhstani political elites' efforts to redefine their country as a Eurasian nation that is situated between Europe and Asia and a nation that pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and economic development.

While international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament reflect Kazakhstani political elites' ambition to position Astana as the 'diplomatic hub' of Eurasia, Astana Expo-2017 embodied their vision of the capital city's development into the continent's economic, financial and innovation centre (Radio Azattyk, 9

October 2015; Kazinform, 13 June 2011). The relocation of Kazakhstan's capital from Almaty to Astana in 1997 corresponded with its transformation from a former Soviet Republic into a Eurasian nation. With a futuristic cityscape and Western-style institutions, Astana symbolises Kazakhstan's achievements and visions.

Having long been viewed in the West as an oil and gas-rich authoritarian regime, an international exposition on renewable energy consolidated Kazakhstan's self-identification as a modern nation transitioning from a commodity-based to a sustainable, innovation-driven economy. This corresponds with the country's vision of becoming one of the world's 30 most developed countries by 2050. Like other architectural monuments in Astana, the Expo City not only represents Kazakhstan's vision of itself as a modern, Eurasian nation. Similar to international conferences on nonproliferation and disarmament, Astana Expo-2017 projected Kazakhstan as a responsible nation committed to the solution of pressing challenges in the world.

Nonetheless, this thesis shows that Kazakhstan's national identity remains highly contested and incomplete. As my discussion of Eurasianism and the domestic politics of identity building in Kazakhstan in chapter three has showed, Kazakhstan has pursued modernisation without full Westernisation. Since the collapse of the USSR, Kazakhstan has undergone a 'paradigm shift' in all dimensions of socioeconomic development; however, the country's political development has not moved in the direction as the West would expect (Olcott, 2003: 8; 2005; Bohr, Brauer, Gould-Davies et al., November 2019: v). As Olcott emphasised, political backwardness has made many economic and social problems difficult to change (2003: 8). The absence of genuine multi-party democracy, the lack of democratic reforms, press censorship, weak civil society and lack of an independent judiciary have reinforced Kazakhstan's international image as an Asiatic, authoritarian and backward nation (Bohr, Brauer, Gould-Davies et al., November 2019; European Parliament, 14 March 2019).

As discussed in section 3.2., given the existing sociopolitical differences between Western and Eurasian states, it is not surprising that the Eurasian states tend to be perceived with 'out-group hate' in the West. Unless there is genuine change, it is difficult to change Kazakhstan's image and promote its new identity as a modern and Eurasian nation in the West. On the other hand, nation branding has been integral to Kazakhstan's struggle to redefine its national identity and renegotiate its integration into the Western-led liberal international order on its own terms. While rejecting Western political values of freedom, democracy and human rights, Kazakhstan

demonstrated its selective acceptance of liberal international rules and norms through its nation branding initiatives in nuclear and environmental security.

The findings have important implications for understanding the relationship between nation branding, foreign policy and identity building. While there are enduring elements in Kazakhstan's national identity development, this thesis has shown that identity is not fixed but a historical and political construct. Based on Kazakhstani Eurasianism, Nazarbayev and the country's cosmopolitan elites have promoted a discourse on Kazakhstan as a modern, Eurasian and internationally responsible nation in order to facilitate its development and integration into the international society. Nevertheless, this discourse has continued to be contested both domestically and internationally. As I have shown throughout this thesis, nation branding represents the Kazakhstani government's attempt to renegotiate its image and identity on its own terms. The need to persuade the international society into accepting Kazakhstan's self-representation provides the incentives for and pressure on the Kazakhstani government to commit itself to domestic reforms and foreign policy initiatives that could potentially bring about identity change in the long term.

Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

This thesis makes three contributions to the scholarship. First, it provides a new interpretation of Kazakhstan's nation branding as a continued bargaining process between the Central Asian state and the external world over the terms of its national identity. As Kazakhstan endeavoured to build a new national identity after independence, it had remained for a long time a passive object to be represented and misrepresented by the West. Based on the conceptual framework of nation branding in chapter two, this thesis interprets Kazakhstan's nation branding as a process of communicating to the target audience the Kazakhstani political elites' narrative of Kazakhstan as a modern, Eurasian and internationally responsible nation. The key to success is to persuade the target audience into changing their existing perception and accepting the state's self-representation. This requires true actions and real change that make the narrative credible.

As I have discussed in sections 4.5 and 5.5, it is the credibility of the branding narrative that differentiated between the two nation branding initiatives. Based on Kazakhstan's genuine experience as a victim of the global nuclear arms race and its

genuine commitment to nonproliferation and disarmament, the international conferences communicated a credible narrative about Kazakhstan's transformation from a voiceless victim into an upholder of peace and an advocate of the global anti-nuclear movement. The historical experience of Soviet nuclear tests and the anti-nuclear movement have become integral parts of Kazakhstan's national consciousness and identity. Kazakhstan's ability to take advantage of a critically important issue of global governance and communicate a credible narrative about itself contributed to the success of its nation branding initiative.

On the other hand, in the case of the Astana Expo, the rationale of the billion-dollar mega event remained a subject of debate. Even though the Expo was useful in raising Kazakhstan's international awareness, the messages the branding channel sent were subject to doubts and criticisms. Given the continued dependence of Kazakhstan's economy on the extraction of fossil fuels and mineral resources, it is not surprising to find a branding narrative about the country's transformation into a green economy and a leader in green technologies lacking in credibility. Furthermore, whereas the international conferences communicated a narrative that is based on the experience of ordinary citizens like the ATOM project ambassador Karipbek Kuyukov, the Astana Expo and its branding narrative were not based on the experience of the country's ordinary citizens.

Second, this thesis contributes to the study of Kazakhstan's foreign policy by examining two understudied yet important cases. Until now, Kazakhstan's nuclear foreign policy has never been studied through the lens of nation branding. Likewise, the Astana Expo has not been considered as a branding channel communicating a narrative about Kazakhstan's national identity. As I have discussed in subsection 2.4.1.2, the branding literature on Kazakhstan approached the issues of nuclear nonproliferation and environmental security mostly from the perspective of international and domestic security. However, examining them as parts of Kazakhstan's ongoing attempt to build its image and identity helps understand and explain how the country sees and represents itself.

Finally, this thesis contributes to a better understanding of the domestic debate in Kazakhstan. As the discussion in chapter three showed, the Kazakhstani society has remained divided over what constitutes the country's new national identity. Through elite interviews and the analysis of Kazakh and Russian-language sources, this research provides new insights into the domestic politics of identity building in

Kazakhstan. These insights, in turn, are crucial in understanding the indivisibility between the domestic and international realm of identity building, as well as the role of nation branding in both realms. By hosting international conferences and a billion-dollar Expo in the country's futuristic-looking capital, the Kazakhstani government not only sought to enhance its international legitimacy by projecting an image of Kazakhstan as a modern, Eurasian and internationally responsible state to the international society, but also sought to bolster its domestic political legitimacy by showcasing to its people the country's remarkable achievements.

Implications and Further Directions for Research

The findings have three implications. First is the complexity of nation branding. To begin with, nation branding – and indeed national identity and international image – is highly contextual. Western political, economic and cultural dominance in the post-Cold War international order means that Kazakhstan's influence on how it is represented remains limited. Contextual factors – from geographical location, history to language – have constrained the possibilities of how a state can represent itself. Indeed, if the success of nation branding depends on the communication of genuine experience, contextual factors are central to branding effectiveness.

This explains why, as Anholt argues, it is inherently difficult to change how a state is perceived by others (2013: 3-4). Moreover, how others perceive a state is not always subject to its control. Political and cultural differences between Western and non-Western countries or unexpected events could significantly affect a country's branding effectiveness. As chapter five has shown, even if Kazakhstan successfully organised the Expo, negative media coverage of the wastefulness and corruption surrounding the mega-event undermined the effectiveness of the branding channel, while simultaneously demonstrating the remoteness of the branding narrative from the sociopolitical reality in Kazakhstan. Indeed, a comparison of the two cases shows that material investment does not guarantee branding success. Rather, it is important to communicate a credible and compelling narrative that can convince the target audience (see subsection 2.5.4.).

Thus, of all the factors in branding effectiveness, the key remains the credibility of the branding narrative, which rests first and foremost on a state's ability and commitment to effect genuine change. While Kazakhstan was at a disadvantage in

terms of visibility, the history of Soviet nuclear testing and Kazakhstan's experience in denuclearisation instilled confidence and credibility in the country's counter-narratives. In contrast, notwithstanding more than two decades of efforts in building the city of Astana as the symbol of Kazakhstan's modernisation, the country's problems of authoritarianism, corruption and uneven socioeconomic development undermined the Nazarbayev administration's efforts to communicate counter-narratives about Kazakhstan through Astana Expo-2017.

Second, the findings show that nation branding could be a driver for domestic reform. In their studies of nation branding, many scholars have tended to assess the effectiveness of a nation branding initiative according to the extent to which it genuinely reflects the nation's development. This shows that nation branding can be simultaneously the result of and an impetus for reform. The need to persuade the outside world into believing and recognising Kazakhstan's counter-narrative about itself, in this regard, could put pressure on the government and bureaucracy to implement the necessary reforms. Thus, for example, while Kazakhstan's actual progress in renewable energy development did not match the country's image projected at the Astana Expo, the need to achieve global recognition meant that the Kazakhstani government needed to push forward renewable energy reforms. This underpins the indivisibility of the international and domestic dimension of politics.

Third, nation branding reflects Kazakhstan's struggle to renegotiate the terms of its integration into the Western-led international order. The post-Cold War world saw the expansion of the Western-led liberal international order. To be accepted into the high-standing in-group of developed nations, out-group, non-Western states are pressurised to adopt liberal international norms and rules. Nevertheless, the imperative of sovereignty and security means that non-Western states tend to reject Western-style political reform. In this regard, nation branding is integral to Kazakhstan's attempt to navigate through international politics and renegotiate its integration into the liberal international order on its own terms. Chapters four and five have shown how Kazakhstan deliberately chose the selective issue-areas wherein it sought to change others' perception through nation branding. The nation branding initiatives in global nuclear and environmental governance were designed to project Kazakhstan as a supporter of the Western-led international order and active contributor to global governance, even though it has continued to reject Western values of democracy and human rights.

Future Directions of Research

The findings of this thesis point to three directions for future research. To begin with, more efforts are required to study Kazakhstan's other nation branding initiatives. For instance, apart from the Astana Expo, Kazakhstan has continued to develop the capital city as the symbol of its Eurasian identity by holding, at the same time, the Eurasian Media Forum, Astana Economic Forum and Astana Club. As the equivalent of the St. Petersburg Economic Forum and the Valdai Club, both platforms serve to project the capital city as the 'epicentre of Eurasia'. By applying the nation branding conceptual framework, we can better understand, for instance, whether or not Kazakhstan has a coordinated nation branding strategy, as well as their branding effectiveness.

Second is the comparative study of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states' nation branding initiatives, which remain understudied (for exceptions, see Erica Marat, 2009 and Pesakovic, 2020: 90-105). Nation branding represents Kazakhstan and many other former Soviet states' attempt to renegotiate the terms of their relations with the West and their integration into the West-led international society (see subsection 2.4.1.1.). Similar to and perhaps even more than Kazakhstan, other Central Asian states have been represented as 'authoritarian', 'corrupt', 'backward' or even 'pariah' (Osborn, 13 May 2006). On the other hand, like Kazakhstan, Central Asian countries have launched new national development strategies since the global financial crisis. In particular, since the death of Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan, which has long been seen as Kazakhstan's rival for regional leadership, has sought to open up and change its international image (Matyakubova, 10 April 2019). As I have argued above, if nation branding is subject to its context, Central Asian states are supposed to face the same constraints as Kazakhstan when they sought to change others' perception of themselves. Nevertheless, they have responded differently and adopted different nation branding strategies. A comparative study between the nation branding initiatives of Kazakhstan and its neighbours can contribute to a greater understanding of, for instance, why a similar context has resulted in vastly different strategies of nation branding.

The British satires 'Da Ali G Show' and 'Borat', while posing a serious problem of negative misrecognition, created an 'accidental international brand' for Kazakhstan (Marat, 2009: 1128). As Anholt argues, most people are, by nature, indifferent to what happens beyond their immediate milieu (Anholt, 2013: 9). They pay attention to a

foreign country only occasionally, such as when it begins to intertwine with their lives (Anholt, 2013: 9). Nation branding, in this regard, is often situational. The success of nation branding hinges on a state's ability to take advantage of opportunities to raise its international profile and communicate with the biggest target audience. Like the cases of 'Da Ali G Show' and 'Borat', these opportunities can arise from positive events or crises. The third area for future research is crisis branding (Rasmussen and Merkelsen, 2014). While the Covid-19 pandemic has walloped the most developed countries in the West, Kazakhstan was one of the countries like South Korea that has successfully contained coronavirus spread. Whereas Kazakhstan hesitated as to how it should respond to 'Da Ali G Show' and 'Borat' over a decade ago, it will be interesting to see how the Kazakhstani government takes advantage of the global health crisis and turns it into an opportunity to redefine its image and identity on its own terms. Then the third direction for future research could be analysing Kazakhstan's early response to the global pandemic Covid-19 through the lens of the nation branding concept.

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APPENDIX: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

Interviewee	Description	Date	Form and Location
1	A senior academic in International Relations	15 November 2018	Face-to-Face (Astana)
2	A senior academic in International Relations	15 November 2018	Face-to-Face (Astana)
3	A senior scientist in Political Science	16 November 2018	Face-to-Face (Astana)
4	A professor at Eurasian National University and former senior official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	26 November 2018	Face-to-Face (Astana)
5	A senior academic in International Relations and senior adviser to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	26 November 2018	Face-to-Face (Astana)
6	A senior academic in International Relations	28 November 2018	Face-to-Face (Astana)
7	A think tank director on nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament	28 November 2018	Face-to-Face (Astana)
8	A journalist	05 May 2019	Face-to-Face (Astana)
9	A senior researcher in nuclear politics at an international think tank	06 May 2019	Skype (Washington DC)
10	A political scientist	08 May 2019	Face-to-Face (Astana)
11	An official of Astana Expo-2017	13 May 2019	Email (Astana)
12	A director of a think tank and former senior official of the national company ‘Astana Expo-2017’	14 May 2019	Face-to-Face (Astana)

13	A senior official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	15 May 2019	Correspondence (Astana)
14	A senior researcher at a government-affiliated think tank	22 May 2019	Skype (Almaty)
15	A senior diplomat and expert at a government-affiliated think tank	27 May 2019	Face-to-Face (Astana)
16	A senior official at the Ministry of Energy	06 June 2019	Correspondence (Astana)
17	A senior diplomat	10 December 2019	Face-to-Face (Overseas)