PM Asks Kazakhstan to Back Israeli Bid for Security Council Seat

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Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday said he had asked the president of Kazakhstan to support Israel’s application for a non-permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council in 2019-2020.

During his visit, the first-ever to the Central Asian country by a sitting Israeli prime minister, Netanyahu also hailed Kazakhstan for being “the first Muslim country to embrace Israel” and said he hoped that Israel’s Arab neighbors would follow suit.

“My hope is, and I say this to all our friends, that the great partnership that we are building here will also be reflected in international forums like the UN. That’s beginning to happen. The ship doesn’t move overnight; we understand that, it’s a big ship. But it’s going to change, it’s changing already,” Netanyahu told President Nursultan Nazarbayev in Astana’s Akorda presidential palace during a joint appearance before the press.

It was in that context that he asked Azarbayev to support Israel’s bid for a seat in the Security Council, Netanyahu said, adding that Jerusalem backed Kazakhstan’s successful application to the Security Council. The former Soviet republic will take up its non-permanent seat on January 1, 2017. Kazakhstan — territoriality, the ninth-largest state in the world — traditionally follows the lead of its top ally, Russia, in supporting pro-Palestinian resolutions, a stance Netanyahu is keen to alter.

“Now, if you want a real change in the world, imagine the State of Israel on the Security Council of the United Nations — that’s a change,” Netanyahu exclaimed. “I think it’s possible and with your help it will be realized.”

Elections for the 2019-2010 seats will be held in the summer of 2018.

Israel has been publicly eyeing a seat on the important world body since at least 2013. Jerusalem is planning to apply for one of two spots allocated to the Western European and Other Group (WEOG), to which it was admitted in 2000.

Earlier on Wednesday, during his meeting with Nazarbayev, Netanyahu also marked the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties.

“You had said that you were the first — and in many ways you were the first — Muslim country to embrace Israel, to have fully normal relations with Israel,” Netanyahu said. “This is something that is very valuable, not only for our mutual relations, but for the world. The fact that Muslims and Jews are working together for the betterment of both our societies and our peoples is something that is important to us, but I think today for the world it’s important, for our region.”

Israeli-Kazakh cooperation is a “great example” that many other countries are starting to emulate, including in the Arab world, Netanyahu said.

“Big changes are taking place and I want to merely express my appreciation for the fact that Kazakhstan was first. And now others are joining… It’s a great sign of hope for the future of the world.”

Arab-Israeli relations are “changing dramatically,” Netanyahu added, though not all of the progress is public. “I view the relations with Kazakhstan as being part of this great change that the world is waiting for. They want to see not the forces of intolerance, the forces of tyranny, the forces of terror — they want to see forces of progress and of amiability and of friendship. And this is what this meeting represents.”

Some 70 percent of the Kazakhstan’s 18 million inhabitants are Muslim.

“What you see today are the leaders of a Muslim state and the leader of a Jewish state shaking hands, working to cooperate to create a better future for the citizens of our countries,” Netanyahu said. “But I think that this example of Muslim-Jewish cooperation is something that reverberates around the world.”

After leaving the Akorda presidential palace, Netanyahu was joined in his hotel by Kazakhstan’s prime minister, Bakytzhan Sagintayev, for an a bilateral business forum.

More than 70 senior representatives from Israeli companies in the fields of homeland security, renewable energy, agriculture, water, health and medicine and finance, along with their Kazakh counterparts, participated in the meeting.

Kazakhstan is interested in Israeli counter-terrorism knowhow and in doing business with Israel’s high-tech sector to diversify its economy, which is currently dominated by exports of hydrocarbons.

Low oil prices and a declining demand for hydrocarbons are worrying Astana, which could use Israeli expertise and technologies to boost the country’s economic growth and to Nazarbayev’s effort to diversify the economy.

Furthermore, Kazakhstan has recently been the target of terror attacks, which triggered the government’s increased interest in Israel’s counter-terrorism expertise.

Later on Wednesday, Netanyahu is scheduled to meet the chairman of Kazakhstan’s Senate, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, and representatives of the country’s Jewish community in Astana’s Great Synagogue.

It is estimated that between 12,000 and 30,000 Jews live in Kazakhstan. Most of them reside in country’s former capital Almaty.