

The recent visit of the Kazakh president marks Belgrade's ambitions for closer economic ties with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has been in power for a long 27 years, but he had never been in Serbia until late August. And while the visit evidently focused largely on bilateral cooperation, the symbolic weight was perhaps more significant: a clear sign that this Balkan nation is serious about its intentions to make inroads into Eurasia.

Among other things, Nazarbaev encouraged Serbia's intention to create a free trade zone with the Eurasian Economic Union, whose current members include Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan.

While Serbia has bilateral trade agreements with Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, it has long been interested in tariff-free access to the rest of the EEU, more precisely to the markets of Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, the Balkanist wrote. And in a recent analysis for the European Council on Foreign Relations, political scientist Jovan Teokarevic wrote that Serbian political and business figures "now perceive the EEU as an opportunity to increase Serbian exports." But, he noted, few would press for the country to become an EEU member.

"While it would favor increasing exports to one more regional grouping, most of the Serbian business community is not at all enthusiastic about Serbia taking formal membership in the EEU, since this would derail Serbia from its EU integration path and put an end to the economic benefits offered by Europe. "

Nazarbaev's visit seems to have brought Serbia's business ambitions closer to fruition. The Balkan country's struggling Fiat plant is getting ready to export a fleet of cars to the EEU, after Kazakhstan's Minister of National Economy Kuandyk Bishimbayev pledged to support Belgrade at an upcoming EEU Council meeting, reports the Tanjug news agency.

"We waited for all barriers to fall, and Minister Bishimbayev pledged Kazakhstan's support for this at the EEU Council meeting. Once the Council makes the decision, only technical reasons and requirements will remain," Serbian Minister of Economy Goran Knezevic said. Nazarbaev's visit did have another benefit, at least for those who have followed the oddball statues or other monuments that have occasionally appeared across the region. The president attended the unveiling of a bust in Belgrade to honour Kazakhstani poet and traditional folk singer Jambyl Jabayev, according to the Balkanist.

Jabayev, whose statue now stands in a park in the New Belgrade municipality of the Serbian capital, is known for having composed several songs and poems praising Stalin. One of them, called "Obliterate," calls for the "liquidation" of "fascist bastards, assassins,

delinquents.”
source: tol.org