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DEVELOPMENT OF SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract. *The research objective is to examine the current state and development trends of special economic zones (SEZs) in the Republic of Kazakhstan, assess their overall contribution to national economic growth, foreign direct investment inflows, and regional industrialization, and elaborate scientifically grounded proposals for improving the functioning and management of SEZs. The methodological framework of the study relies on a combination of comparative, systematic, logical, quantitative, and statistical approaches that together ensure a comprehensive analysis of the topic. The research is based on a wide range of empirical and analytical sources, including official data from the Kazakhstan Industry and Export Center “Qaz Industry” JSC, the National Company “KAZAKH INVEST” JSC, and the legal information system “Adilet,” as well as foreign specialized literature, academic publications, scientific articles from reputable periodicals, and analytical reports of international organizations. The uniqueness and value of the study lie in its integrative assessment of the role of SEZs in strengthening Kazakhstan’s national and regional economy, identifying systemic institutional and infrastructural barriers that hinder their effectiveness, and offering scientifically substantiated recommendations aimed at optimizing the regulatory framework, enhancing investment attractiveness, and improving the overall management model of SEZs. The final results of the research are distinguished by practical relevance, as they contribute to improving economic policy instruments, stimulating industrial growth, and increasing the competitiveness and sustainability of regional development in Kazakhstan.*

Keywords: *special economic zones, regional development, industrialization, economic policy, foreign investments, innovative infrastructure, export potential.*

Main provisions. The main provisions of the research highlight the current condition and strategic significance of special economic zones (SEZs) in Kazakhstan, emphasizing their role in promoting economic diversification, attracting foreign investment, and accelerating regional industrial development. The study identifies key institutional, infrastructural, and regulatory challenges that limit SEZ efficiency and proposes mechanisms to improve governance, investment policies, and management practices. It also outlines the importance of aligning SEZ development with national industrial priorities, strengthening coordination among state institutions, and enhancing support measures for resident companies. The findings provide practical recommendations aimed at increasing SEZ competitiveness and ensuring their long-term economic impact.

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Introduction. The size of a nation's economic potential, its level of technical and economic development, and the availability of natural resources all influence the extent and type of that nation's integration into global economic ties, particularly international trade. It is thought that a nation's economic potential decreases with its amount of natural resource scarcity and increases with its level of economic and technical progress. The extent and character of Kazakhstan's involvement in international markets are determined by these factors.

The state of Kazakhstan's raw material specialization and its preservation in the near future are fundamental, therefore the task of state regulation is to increase the efficiency of raw material exports and ensure their sustainability. Countries such as Norway, Great Britain, Canada, and Australia specialize in the export of fuel and raw materials, but from this they do not move to the category of underdeveloped countries, but, on the contrary, increase their economic potential. Kazakhstan cannot steadily increase the volume of supplies of raw materials abroad and first-class products for a number of reasons: the factor of depletion of raw materials will play a major role over time; the spread of resource-saving technologies in the world will restrain the growth of demand for raw materials and energy resources; limited capacity of the domestic transport infrastructure.

Kazakhstan can withstand growing international economic competition and protect itself from threats to its economic security only by building a competitive national economy. No measures will protect it from this threat in the context of globalization. This requires conditions such as openness and freedom of the external and internal economy, reduced state regulation and control of the activities of Kazakhstani entrepreneurs. Without such an environment, domestic producers cannot act freely, choose the necessary strategy for the production and sale of products, use resources, and enjoy equal opportunities. For safe economic development, it is necessary to overcome a number of internal threats, including: the predominance of worn-out and morally obsolete production equipment in the economy; deformation of the economic structure, its raw material orientation; the weakened scientific and technical potential of the republic; high income differentiation of the population, a high proportion of the poor and unemployed, which undermines social stability in the country; a high level of the shadow economy.

One of the most promising ways to develop market infrastructure and attract investment to the economy is the development of special economic zones (SEZs). The creation and formation of SEZs in Kazakhstan will allow for economic reforms in the regions: the development of industrial production, attraction of investments, creation of additional jobs and employment of the population, expansion of the supply of competitive goods and services for production and non-production purposes to the domestic market.

Literary review. Economic zones, which eventually grew to include free trade zones or export processing zones, were the source of its earliest, most basic form. These kinds of zones have been employed by several nations, especially in Asia, since the 1960s to encourage export-oriented economic growth and shift away from import-substitution development policies. Nonetheless, the majority of these zones focus on one or more export-oriented economic activity, from financial services and transportation to bonded warehouses, export warehousing, processing, and cross-border trade.

Others are specifically designed to facilitate technology transfer and promote R&D, such as high-tech development zones and science parks. Most SEZs are associated with or located near ports [1, 2, 3].

Although many economists have defined SEZs, there has been no consensus on the definition of the concept [4]. There is often no clear distinction between free zones, export processing zones and SEZs in the scientific literature [5]. The diversity of names for SEZs is the



result of several variables, including the need to distinguish between types of zones that reflect very specific differences in terms and functions, differences in economic terminology between countries, the need to distinguish new zones from existing competitors, and the effects of climate change. different translations.

The basic concept of SEZs reflects several distinctive characteristics [6]:

- The territory of the SEZ is geographically separated;
- It has a single administration;
- It offers tax benefits within its territory;
- It offers an autonomous customs zone with simplified procedures and duty-free benefits;
- It offers more liberal economic and legal regulations than the rest of the country.

They are established to improve infrastructure and conduct research and development, and offer various tax incentives that are not available outside the zones. They are often established through direct intervention in industrial policy aimed at stimulating regional economic growth, where government policy offers incentives to attract major investors and other firms to a location [7, 8].

According to FIAS [9], the features included in the concept of a zone include a geographically limited area, usually physically protected, a single administration, entitlement to advantages based on physical location within the SEZ, a separate customs zone, and simplified procedures. In the reference work of Ahrens & Meyer-Baudeck [10], SEZs are geographically or functionally limited parts of an economy in which the rules and other institutions related to the production and distribution of goods and services are different from those operating in the rest of the economy. Farole (2011) also suggests that any definition of an SEZ should include structural and political characteristics.

SEZs have been the subject of intense scholarly debate on all aspects of their justification, motivation, and design. Neoclassical economists [11, 12] hold two different views. On the one hand, there are those who believe that the creation of special economic zones not only negatively affects competition, but also reduces the welfare of the population. In particular, they argue that special zones reduce the efficiency of resource allocation, contribute to the development of unfair competition between local firms and regional firms, deprive the state of important resources, and lead to high infrastructure costs, especially in developing countries [13]. In addition, the zones act as a barrier to competitive exports based on production factors and do not contribute to fundamental structural reforms at the regional/national level [14].

In accordance with the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Special Economic and Industrial Zones” No. 242-VI dated April 3, 2019 [15], a special economic zone is a part of the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan with precisely defined borders, within which a special legal regime of a special economic zone is applied for the implementation of activities in accordance with this Law. A SEZ is established for a period of up to twenty-five years, but the term of operation of the special economic zone specified in the first part of this paragraph may be extended by decision of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Materials and methods. The research is based on a combination of empirical, analytical, and comparative materials that reflect the current development of special economic zones (SEZs) in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The main empirical base includes official statistical data provided by the Kazakhstan Center for Industry and Export “QazIndustry”, the National Company “KAZAKH INVEST” JSC, and the information and legal system “Adilet”, which contains regulatory documents governing the functioning of SEZs in Kazakhstan. Additional materials consist of foreign academic literature, educational publications, scientific articles from international periodicals, and analytical reports of global organizations such as the



World Bank and OECD, which allow for methodological comparison with global SEZ practices.

The methodological framework of the study integrates a comparative approach, systematic and logical analysis, quantitative and statistical methods. The comparative approach made it possible to examine different types of SEZs operating in Kazakhstan and compare them with international models. The systematic and logical methods were applied to identify institutional patterns, classify types of zones, and evaluate regulatory mechanisms. Quantitative and statistical methods were used to analyze production volumes, investment flows, employment creation, export indicators, and fiscal contributions of SEZs, based on publicly available economic data.

This combination of diverse sources and methods ensured a comprehensive assessment of SEZ performance, structural challenges, and their impact on national and regional economic development.

Results and discussion. The States all over the world are engaged in the process of establishing special economic zones (SEZs) in an effort to boost the economic competitiveness of underdeveloped or unindustrialized areas.

As a result, research has been actively carried out over the last thirty years, creating a variety of SEZ kinds that concentrate on various linkages between regional institutions, business capacities, and regional competencies. The features of SEZs operating in various nations are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Types of Special Economic Zones

| Type | Explanation |
|--|---|
| Free Trade Zones (FTZs) | Small areas, sometimes called "free trade zones", are fenced, duty-free, and equipped with warehousing, storage, and distribution infrastructure. Their main activities are trade, transshipment, and re-export. |
| Export Processing Zones (EPZs) | Industrial zones primarily focused on foreign markets. They offer investors free trade conditions and a light regulatory environment. There are two types of FTZs: one is a comprehensive type open to all industries, and the other is a specialized type for specific industries. |
| Mixed EPZs | Typically divided into two parts: a general zone open to all industries, and a special export-oriented zone for registered enterprises. |
| SEZs | Often a broad concept. Various activities such as tourism and retail are carried out here, residents are allowed to reside within the zone, and many incentives and benefits are provided. |
| Enterprise-specific – single-factory zones | Incentives and benefits are provided for specific enterprises; factories do not necessarily have to be located in a specific zone. |
| Complex zones | Also called "multi-functional" zones, because they are large-scale and combine many types of economic activity. |
| Industrial parks | Mainly production-oriented areas. Some are similar to "complex special economic zones", but are designed for small and medium-sized businesses. Usually offer a variety of benefits. |
| Bonded zones | Also called "bond warehouses". These are specially protected areas where goods can be stored, processed or re-exported. Unlike ECA, customs legislation applies here and certain duties may be paid. |
| High-tech zones | Aimed at the development of research and high-tech industries; includes petrochemical and heavy industry. |
| Ecological industrial zones or parks | Aimed at reducing the environmental impact of development and production. In order to use energy and resources efficiently, the principles of "industrial symbiosis" and green technologies are used. |

Note: compiled by the authors based on [6, 7]



The first special economic zones in Kazakhstan appeared in 1991: Zhairm-Atasu in Zhezkazgan region, Alakol and Zharkent in Taldykorgan region, a sub-region based on the Taldykorganvneshtrans enterprise in Taldykorgan city, Lisakov in Kostanay region and the Atakent special trade zone in Almaty city. A number of regions (Atyrau, East Kazakhstan, Karaganda and Mangistau) were declared special economic zones. However, the initial experience of creating SEZs did not achieve the intended goals due to the imperfection of the legal and organizational mechanism of their work, and there was insufficient autonomy in solving financial, tax and other issues.

Today, 15 SEZs operate in Kazakhstan, each of the created zones has its own industry focus, that is, they differ both in terms of types of activities and in the scope of territories (Table 2).

Table 2 - Comparative table of SEZs in Kazakhstan (as of 2025)

| SEZ name | Industry | Region | Discounts | Infrastructure |
|--|--|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Astana - Technopolis | IT, pharmaceuticals | Astana | CST, VAT, land, property - 0% | Technopark, incubator |
| Astana - New City | construction | Astana | VAT, land - 0% | unique facilities for administrative and socio-cultural purposes, construction of comfortable housing |
| Pavlodar | Metallurgy, chemistry | Pavlodar region | All taxes - 0% | CHP, highways, railway |
| Aktau Sea Port | Logistics, export | Mangystau | Full package | Port, transport |
| Jibek Joly | Chemistry | Zhambyl region | CST, VAT, property - 0% | Gas, railway, water |
| Khorgos - Eastern Gate | Trade, logistics | Almaty region | All taxes - 0% | Dry port, border with China |
| Oñtüstik | Textiles | Shymkent | Land, CST, property - 0% | Industrial buildings |
| Saryarka | Mechanical engineering | Karaganda | Full tax package | Industrial sites |
| Oil and Chemical Technology Park (NINHT) | Gas and chemistry | Atyrau | All taxes - 0% | Industrial sites |
| Qyzyljar | Rapid development of the city of Petropavlovsk | Petropavl | All discounts | high-tech and competitive industries |
| Turan | Tourism, development | Turkestan | All taxes - 0% | Land for construction |
| Information Technology Park | Creative economy, IT | Almaty | Land, property, corporate income tax - 0% | Office and coworking spaces |
| Aktobe | Transport-logistics and industry | Aktobe | CIT, VAT, land, property, customs duty - 0% | Infrastructure in the commissioning stage |
| Alatau | Business and financial center, education and medical center, innovative-industrial and trade-logistics zones, culture, tourism and recreation center | Alatau city | CIT, VAT, land, property - 0% | Modern offices, laboratories and production facilities |
| Khorgos Industrial Complex | Development of border territories between Kazakhstan and China | Panfilov district, Almaty region | Full tax package | Construction facilities |

Note: compiled by the authors based on [16]



The main goals of creating a SEZ are the accelerated development of highly productive and competitive industries, the introduction of new technologies in the regional economy, employment generation, and attraction of foreign direct investment.

According to "QazIndustry", 317 projects worth 2.3 trillion tenge were implemented in the territory of 13 SEZs (excluding the "Alatau" SEZ), 24 thousand permanent jobs were created. 2.7 trillion tenge of investments were attracted to the SEZ, and 4.1 trillion tenge within the framework of construction. The production volume was more than 7 trillion tenge. 136 types of products are produced in the SEZ territories, including more than 30 new types of products that appeared thanks to the implementation of the industrialization program (helicopters, optical sights for rifles, night vision devices, armored personnel carriers, locomotives, electric locomotives, passenger cars, premium-class pipes, cotton pulp, polypropylene yarn, etc.), as well as more than 50 unique IT solutions and services. Products worth 480 billion tenge were exported. 353 billion tenge was received by the budgets from the implementation of projects in the SEZ.

In general, taking into account the budget expenditures for the construction of all SEZ infrastructure, 1 budget tenge invested in SEZ infrastructure attracted 3.1 tenge of investment in industry, including only 1 tenge of private investment and 0.37 tenge of foreign investment [16].

The list of priority types of activities in the division of special economic zones that correspond to the objectives of the creation of a special economic zone is approved by the Order of the Minister of Investments and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan (dated February 27, 2018 No. 142).

A legal entity carrying out priority types of activities in the territory of a special economic zone and included in the unified register of participants in special economic zones may become a participant in a special economic zone. Such applicants cannot be:

- 1) subsoil users;
- 2) organizations producing excisable goods, with the exception of organizations engaged in the production, assembly (assembly) of excisable goods, provided for in subparagraph 6) of Article 462 of the Tax Code;
- 3) organizations and individual entrepreneurs using special tax regimes;
- 4) organizations using investment tax preferences - under unfinished contracts concluded with the authorized state body for investments before January 1, 2009;
- 5) organizations implementing (implementing) a priority investment project and an investment strategic project;
- 6) organizations engaged in gambling business.

Foreign individuals and legal entities may only participate in SEZs whose boundaries fully or partially coincide with the sections of the customs border of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Since the adoption of the Presidential Decree of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the establishment of the Astana – New City Special Economic Zone, the zone has attracted investments totaling 2.8 trillion tenge. As of 2024, its investment portfolio includes 137 industrial projects with a total value of 329.7 billion tenge. Of these, 72 projects worth 221.7 billion tenge have already been commissioned, generating more than 6,000 jobs, while the remaining 65 projects, with a combined value of 108.0 billion tenge, are expected to create an additional 3,000 jobs.

Overall, the Astana – New City SEZ has demonstrated substantial economic results since its establishment. The total production volume has reached 7.9 trillion tenge, including



1,716.3 billion tenge in 2024 and 1,150.9 billion tenge in 2023. Export volume amounted to 147.5 billion tenge, of which 22.7 billion tenge was recorded in 2024 and 24.1 billion tenge in 2023. Tax transfers totaled 305.9 billion tenge, including 85.2 billion tenge in 2024 and 54.6 billion tenge in 2023 [17].

These indicators suggest that the Astana – New City SEZ occupies a leading position among Kazakhstan’s special economic zones in terms of investment attraction, industrial output, and fiscal contribution. Its performance confirms the important role of the zone as an instrument for stimulating industrial development, expanding employment, and strengthening the economic base of the capital region.

The Khorgos SEZ was established on October 6, 2017. Citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China and other countries can stay in the territory of the Khorgos SEZ of Kazakhstan and China without a visa for up to 30 days on the basis of valid documents agreed upon and recognized by the competent authorities of the state-parties.

The total cost of implementing the investment project, including the design and construction of facilities to support engineering infrastructure, is 382,882.83 million tenge. Given that the Khorgos SEZ is one of the largest investment projects implemented in our country, the construction of the infrastructure is financed by the state.

The Pavlodar Special Economic Zone is a full member of the World Organization of Free Zones, one of the largest international platforms uniting free and special economic zones worldwide. Enterprises operating within the Pavlodar SEZ produce more than 100 types of goods, while products manufactured in the zone are regularly exported to more than 15 countries. This indicates not only the diversification of industrial output, but also the growing integration of the zone into international production and trade networks. The performance indicators of the Pavlodar SEZ demonstrate its substantial contribution to regional industrial development and export expansion. The total production volume reached 380.32 billion tenge, the export volume amounted to 184.62 billion tenge, investment inflows totaled 151.59 billion tenge, and tax transfers reached 30,722.42 million tenge. In addition, the functioning of the zone has contributed to the creation of 1,588 jobs, confirming its important role in strengthening employment and stimulating economic activity in the region [18].

The Saryarka Special Economic Zone was established with the aim of developing metallurgy and metalworking, with a particular focus on the production of finished goods through the attraction of globally recognized manufacturers. Its territorial structure includes the Metallurgy and Metalworking Industrial Park covering 534.9 hectares, as well as Subzone No. 1, known as Silicon Valley, with an area of 60.11 hectares. The main economic indicators of the Saryarka SEZ also confirm its significant industrial and investment potential. The production volume of resident enterprises amounted to 242.5 billion tenge, while the volume of attracted investments reached 201.9 billion tenge. Tax transfers totaled 23.9 billion tenge, and 1,276 jobs were created within the zone. Taken together, these results suggest that the Saryarka SEZ serves as an important instrument of industrial modernization, investment attraction, and employment generation, contributing to the diversification of the regional economy.

The Jibek Joly special economic zone, previously known as the Taraz Chemical Park, was established on November 13, 2012 by Decree No. 426 of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan. On February 16, 2024, the zone was renamed Jibek Joly. The area is 505 hectares, located in the Shu district of Zhambyl region. The goal is to create new chemical production facilities based on highly efficient technologies.

Currently, the SEZ allows the production of chemical industry products; rubber and plastic products; other non-metallic mineral products; machinery and equipment for chemical production.



Today, the SEZ load is 86.7%. 16 participating companies are registered in the territory, four of which are operating, and three are at the construction and deployment stage. The remaining enterprises are undergoing state expertise or are carrying out design work. These include the construction of a plant by the Chinese TAS Market company for the production of cast iron, steel and ferroalloys for 12.9 billion tenge and the construction of an Uzbek enterprise Universal Trade LLP for the production of ferrous metal smelting and thin-sheet galvanized steel with a total investment of \$120 million.

The special economic zone “Qyzyljar” was established on October 11, 2019, and is located in the city of Petropavlovsk. Its total area amounts to 197.3 hectares. The establishment of the zone is aimed at accelerating the socio-economic development of Petropavlovsk and the surrounding region, as well as enhancing the integration of Kazakhstan’s economy into the system of global economic relations. In this context, the SEZ is intended to promote the creation of efficient, high-tech, and competitive industrial production, stimulate the development of new types of products, attract domestic and foreign investment, improve the institutional framework of market relations, and facilitate the introduction of modern management and administrative practices. An equally important objective of the zone is to support the rapid development of the region and contribute to the solution of pressing social issues through industrial expansion and employment growth.

At present, the Qyzyljar SEZ brings together a number of industrial and investment projects implemented by such enterprises as ATM Petropavlovsk Hospital, Alageum Electric, ST Assembly LLP, Zavod LSTK LLP, Gortek.Kz LLP, Reimann LLP, Atameken-Agro Oils LLP, Machine-Building Plant KAZTEKHMASH LLP, Kazcrane Engineering LLP, Nord Panels LLP, EcoPapFor LLP, and TFA Group LLP. The sectoral profile of these projects indicates the orientation of the zone toward manufacturing development, industrial diversification, and the formation of a modern production base in the northern region of Kazakhstan. Of particular significance is the joint Kazakh-Qatari investment project with a total value of 267.5 billion tenge, or approximately 505 million US dollars, which is planned to be implemented in several stages within the territory of the Qyzyljar SEZ. The investor is Ultradecor Trading Kazakhstan LLP, established in 2022. The implementation of this project is expected to generate more than 500 new jobs, which underscores the role of the SEZ not only as a mechanism for attracting large-scale investment, but also as an important instrument for strengthening regional employment and industrial growth [19].

The Khorgos - Eastern Gate SEZ is considered a strategic object for creating a logistics hub connecting China, Central Asia and the Middle East.

The total area of the SEZ is 4,591.5 hectares and includes three main zones - logistics and industrial, as well as the transport and logistics complex of the dry port.

The SEZ "National Industrial Petrochemical Technopark" is being created to attract investment and create highly efficient, including high-tech and competitive, production facilities, and develop new types of products. The SEZ will operate until December 31, 2032. However, it is planned to extend the validity of the SEZ until December 31, 2048, which will attract strategic investors such as Sinopec and SIBUR to implement large projects, including the construction of a polyethylene plant. Located in the Atyrau region of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The SEZ area is 3475.9 hectares. The volume of investments attracted as of May 1, 2021 is 850 billion tenge. The volume of manufactured products is 23.1 billion tenge.

In the Alatau settlement of the Medeu district of Almaty, based on the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 1166 dated August 18, 2003, the special economic zone "Information Technologies Park" was established.



The SEZ "Aktau Sea Port" is located on the territory of the sea trade port, as well as part of the territory within the administrative-territorial borders of the city of Aktau, Mangistau region. It will operate until 2052. The area of the SEZ territory is 2322.1719 hectares.

Since the start of operations, such projects as the Keppel Kazakhstan Marine Metal Structures Plant, the ArcelorMittal Turbolar Aktau Oil Grade Pipe Production Plant, the Aktau Fiberglass Pipe Plant, as well as the "Aktau International Sea Trade Port" have been built. These facilities have contributed 9 billion tenge to the economy of Kazakhstan, attracted foreign investments in the amount of more than tenge, and also created about one and a half thousand new jobs [20].

Table 3 - Plan of the Aktau Sea Port SEZ

| Indicator | Planned values for 2052 |
|---|-------------------------|
| Total investment volume | 590 billion tenge |
| Including foreign investment | 275 billion tenge |
| Volume of goods and services production | 640 billion tenge |
| Number of resident companies | 50 |
| Number of jobs | 2,600 |
| Share of Kazakhstani content | 50% |
| Note: compiled by the authors based on [20] | |

The Oñtüstik Special Economic Zone was established with the aim of developing the cotton-textile cluster and attracting investors to the textile industry, which is strategically important both for the region and for Kazakhstan as a whole. The functional specialization of the zone is closely linked to the formation of a full-cycle textile production system. Its core activities include the production of cotton-paper threads and various types of yarn, weaving, finishing and dyeing operations, the manufacture of finished textile products, and the production of knitted and hosiery goods. At the same time, the development prospects of the zone are associated with a gradual expansion of its sectoral profile to include pharmaceutical production and hydrocarbon processing, which indicates an intention to diversify its industrial base and strengthen its long-term economic resilience. The key performance indicators of the Oñtüstik SEZ confirm its significant contribution to regional industrial development. The total production volume reached 207,200 million tenge, the investment volume amounted to 180,200 million tenge, and tax transfers totaled 78,450 million tenge.

An important place in the current architecture of Kazakhstan's special economic zones is also occupied by the Turan SEZ in Turkestan. According to development plans, the zone is expected to implement 133 projects with a total investment value of 548.2 billion tenge. To date, 95 projects worth 369.3 billion tenge have already been launched, while 35 additional projects with a combined value of 197.7 billion tenge are scheduled for implementation this year. If all planned projects are completed, the zone is expected to create 7,221 new jobs. In addition, 11 potential investment projects are currently under development, with a projected investment volume of 177.65 billion tenge and the potential to generate 2,494 additional jobs. The long-term development parameters of the Turan SEZ up to 2043 reflect its substantial economic potential. These include a projected production volume of 207,200 million tenge, the creation of 5,935 jobs, investment inflows amounting to 570 billion tenge, trade turnover estimated at 32 billion US dollars, the implementation of 127 projects, and tax revenues totaling 78,450 million tenge. Taken together, these indicators suggest that the Turan SEZ is being positioned as one of the major investment and industrial growth poles in southern Kazakhstan.

At the same time, a comprehensive analysis of the functioning of special economic zones in the Republic of Kazakhstan reveals a number of systemic constraints that limit their



effectiveness. One of the key problems is the insufficient level of infrastructure development. According to the data of the Supreme Audit Chamber, only four economic zones in Kazakhstan – Astana –New City, PIT, Oñtüstik, and Aktau Sea Port – can be classified as relatively successful, as they account for the bulk of output produced within the country’s SEZ system. Most of the remaining special economic zones and industrial zones fail to achieve their target indicators due to the lack of basic infrastructure and a range of related institutional and organizational barriers. Although the average level of infrastructure completion in domestic SEZs exceeds 70%, this still indicates the existence of significant unfinished facilities and bottlenecks that directly affect the pace of project implementation and investor activity.

Another serious limitation is the relatively low occupancy rate of the zones. At present, the average occupancy rate of Kazakhstan’s SEZs is only around 40%, which is partly explained by restrictions on priority types of economic activity and insufficient flexibility in the functional specialization of certain zones. In practice, only Astana – New City and Pavlodar have achieved occupancy rates exceeding 90%, while the majority of other zones remain underutilized. This situation points to the need to revise approaches to sectoral planning, investor attraction, and the alignment of the SEZ regime with actual business demand.

A further structural issue is the high share of quasi-state companies in the implementation of industrial projects within SEZs. These entities account for 807.2 billion tenge, or 65.2% of the total investment volume in industrial projects carried out in special economic zones. Such a concentration of investment in the hands of quasi-state actors indicates that the SEZ mechanism has not yet fully realized its potential as a platform for broad-based private entrepreneurial activity. In the long run, this may weaken competition, reduce the demonstration effect for private investors, and limit the transformative impact of SEZs on the diversification and modernization of the national economy.

Thus, while Kazakhstan’s special economic zones demonstrate a certain degree of progress in industrial development, investment attraction, and employment generation, their overall performance remains uneven. The persistence of infrastructural deficiencies, low occupancy rates, and the dominance of quasi-state participation suggests that further institutional refinement is required in order to improve the efficiency, competitiveness, and developmental impact of the SEZ system.

Conclusion. To enhance the effectiveness of special economic zones in Kazakhstan, several interrelated policy directions should be considered. First, priority should be given to infrastructure modernization, as deficiencies in engineering, transport, and utility infrastructure remain among the main barriers to the successful implementation of SEZ projects. In this regard, it would be advisable to introduce a mechanism for reimbursing part of investors’ infrastructure maintenance costs after project commissioning, which could accelerate the resolution of infrastructure-related constraints and improve the investment attractiveness of SEZs. In addition, the successful experience of Almaty and a number of foreign countries shows that the development of industrial parks with ready-built premises, equipped with the necessary infrastructure and communications, can serve as an effective instrument for overcoming land and infrastructure bottlenecks.

Second, greater attention should be paid to attracting foreign direct investment. In response to the relatively low share of FDI in SEZ development, it is important to gradually restructure industrial policy in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. One possible approach is the introduction of requirements for the disclosure of non-financial reporting based on environmental, social, and governance principles. The incorporation of ESG standards into SEZ practice would improve transparency, strengthen investor confidence, and



increase the international competitiveness of resident enterprises.

Third, Kazakhstan's SEZs should be more closely aligned with the requirements of the evolving international trade environment. This is especially important in the context of Kazakhstan's participation in the World Trade Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, China's Belt and Road Initiative, and other regional and international agreements. Such adaptation would create more favorable conditions for the integration of Kazakhstan's SEZs into regional and global value chains, which today account for a substantial share of world trade. In this sense, SEZs should be viewed not only as isolated preferential territories, but also as instruments for embedding the national economy into broader international production and trade systems.

Fourth, the role of scientific organizations in the development of SEZs should be significantly strengthened. There is a clear need to increase the contribution of science and technology to Kazakhstan's economic development. At present, however, the country's expenditure on research and development remains extremely low. In 2022, R&D spending amounted to only 0.13% of GDP, which is substantially below the level of 1.0-1.5% generally considered desirable for countries at a similar stage of economic development. According to the IMD World Competitiveness Ranking and the Global Innovation Index, Kazakhstan continues to lag behind most comparator countries in this area. In the IMD 2023 ranking, national R&D expenditure amounted to 0.13% of GDP, or approximately 257 million US dollars, placing the country ahead of only a limited number of economies. In terms of business expenditure on R&D, Kazakhstan allocated just 0.05% of GDP, or around 90 million US dollars, which also indicates a weak innovation base. Under these conditions, it is recommended to involve scientific organizations more actively in the functioning of SEZs, particularly through their participation in the development and implementation of new products, technologies, and services. Strengthening the science–industry link within SEZs would enhance their innovative capacity and improve their contribution to long-term structural modernization.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАН РЕСПУБЛИКАСЫНДАҒЫ АРНАЙЫ ЭКОНОМИКАЛЫҚ АЙМАҚТАРДЫҢ ДАМУЫ

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Түйін. Зерттеудің мақсаты – Қазақстан Республикасындағы арнайы экономикалық аймақтардың (АЭА) қазіргі жағдайы мен даму үрдістерін талдау, олардың ұлттық экономикалық өсімге, тікелей шетелдік инвестициялар ағынына және өңірлік индустрияландыруға қосатын үлесін бағалау, сондай-ақ АЭА-ның қызмет етуі мен басқаруын жетілдіруге бағытталған ғылыми негізделген ұсынымдар әзірлеу. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық базасы салыстырмалы, жүйелік, логикалық, сандық және статистикалық талдау тәсілдерінің үйлесіміне негізделген, бұл тақырыпты жан-жақты зерттеуге мүмкіндік береді. Эмпирикалық және талдамалық дереккөздер ретінде «Qaz Industry» Өнеркәсіпті дамыту ұлттық орталығы» АҚ, «KAZAKH INVEST» Ұлттық компаниясы» АҚ, «Әділет» ақпараттық-құқықтық жүйесінің ресми материалдары, сондай-ақ шетелдік арнайы әдебиеттер, ғылыми басылымдар, халықаралық ұйымдардың аналитикалық есептері пайдаланылды. Зерттеудің бірегейлігі АЭА-ның Қазақстан экономикасын нығайтудағы рөлін кеиенді бағалауға, олардың тиімділігін тежейтін институционалды және инфрақұрылымдық кедергілерді анықтауға және реттеушілік базаны оңтайландыруға, инвестициялық тартымдылықты арттыруға, басқару моделін жетілдіруге бағытталған ғылыми дәлелді ұсыныстар ұсынуға негізделеді. Зерттеу нәтижелері экономикалық саясат құралдарын жетілдіруге, индустриялық өсуді жеделдетуге және өңірлік дамудың бәсекеге қабілеттілігі мен тұрақтылығын арттыруға практикалық үлес қосады.

Түйінді сөздер: арнайы экономикалық аймақтар, өңірлік даму, индустрияландыру, экономикалық саясат, шетелдік инвестициялар, инновациялық инфрақұрылым, экспорттық әлеует.

РАЗВИТИЕ ОСОБЫХ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИХ ЗОН В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ КАЗАХСТАН

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Резюме. Цель исследования – анализ современного состояния и тенденций развития особых экономических зон (ОЭЗ) в Республике Казахстан, оценка их вклада в национальный экономический рост, приток прямых иностранных инвестиций и региональную индустриализацию, а также разработка научно обоснованных предложений по совершенствованию функционирования и управления ОЭЗ. Методологическая основа исследования опирается на сочетание сравнительных, системных, логических, количественных и статистических подходов, что обеспечивает всестороннее рассмотрение темы. Эмпирическую базу составляют официальные данные АО «Qaz Industry», АО «Национальная компания “KAZAKH INVEST”», информационно-правовой системы «Әділет», а также зарубежная специализированная литература, научные публикации и аналитические отчеты международных организаций. Уникальность исследования заключается в комплексной оценке роли ОЭЗ в укреплении национальной и региональной экономики Казахстана, выявлении институциональных и инфраструктурных



барьеров, ограничивающих их эффективность, а также в разработке научно обоснованных рекомендаций, направленных на оптимизацию нормативной базы, повышение инвестиционной привлекательности и совершенствование модели управления ОЭЗ. Полученные результаты обладают практической значимостью и могут быть использованы для совершенствования инструментов экономической политики, стимулирования индустриального роста и повышения конкурентоспособности и устойчивости регионального развития.

Ключевые слова: особые экономические зоны, региональное развитие, индустриализация, экономическая политика, иностранные инвестиции, инновационная инфраструктура, экспортный потенциал.

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