

Youth Diplomacy in the Making: A Conversation with Zhanibek on Kazakhstan's New

10 SEPTEMBER 2026

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Active youth participation and public diplomacy are now essential tools for connecting the next generation with political institutions.

Interview between Zhanibek Sovetov and Marco Valerio Tauro (EPIS)

Marco: Zhanibek, thank you again for taking the time to speak with EPIS. To give the audience a little bit of context: could you outline your primary responsibilities in government relations and how your work intersects with institutions like the Majilis of Parliament?

Zhanibek: My name is Zhanibek. I'm sixteen years old and I live in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. I have an Instagram account with 4,000 followers, which is how the EPIS organization connected with me.

I work at the intersection between youth and political parties in Kazakhstan. The Majilis no longer exists as such — a referendum changed its structure, merging the Majilis and the Senate into what is now called the Kurultai. So today we'll talk about the Kurultai.

I work at the intersection of youth and the Kurultai. In practice, that means I've built connections with political parties such as OSDP, Respub-

lica and Adilet— the most popular parties in Kazakhstan. My main function is organizing events that bring together youth and Kazakhstani political deputies, or representatives of the Majilis and Senate.

My role isn't just corporate government relations — I'm more of a connector between youth and political parties. I'm sixteen, and I think that makes the story more interesting rather than less.

Marco: What are the key elements to successfully bridging the gap between external stakeholders and parliamentary policymakers in Kazakhstan?

Zhanibek: The key thing I've learned throughout my career is that all the important figures in Kazakhstan — the President, the ministries, the deputies, everyone working in the President's administration — have limited time.

The key priority is to engage with a deputy or a ministry from the very first contact. A deputy has limited hours and a lot of demands, so you can't just show up and say, "We'd like to attend our event" — that's a request, and you can't approach them that way. You need to come with concrete advice, with suggestions: "Here's an audience of young people in your area, this is your policy priority, here's what they want to discuss, here's the date, here's the location, and we'd like to invite you as a speaker for 40 minutes." That's a different conversation entirely.

You also need to be reliable. If the first event goes well, they'll come back — and you need to maintain that if you want the cooperation to keep growing.

Marco: Through your social media presence and online work, you've managed to build an engaged community. What is the main message you want to share with your audience, especially with young people?

Zhanibek: On my page, I always talk about youth — especially Kazakh youth. I connect them to the globe, to international projects, to international relations, to embassies.

My first advice is that people need to start from the very beginning — from zero — to become someone with authority. Young people in Kazakhstan often don't get information quickly enough. I see myself, and people like me, as connectors between serious events and the youth. If you want to start a path in diplomacy, you need to publish content — because if you're not publishing, organizations, including international ones, will never see you.

My second piece of advice is to create content related to something international — you can start with talking-head videos. That's how I started: volunteering, attending MUNs, working at events. I was really scared of networking with different people, but once I started, I realized it's actually easy to open a conversation and build connections from there. I had no connections through my father or mother — I built all of them myself.

My third advice is that you need to become a leader — to put yourself in circumstances that force you to lead and coordinate people. I joined an

ecological organization in my local area, and later founded my own. Once I did, I became a real leader, coordinating around 100, 200, up to 1,000 people across Kazakhstan.

Marco: What is your approach to content creation and project development? Do you follow a specific strategy, or is it driven by spontaneity and intuition?

Zhanibek: A lot of people make a mistake here — they start with strategy, with a content plan, with courses from coaches and gurus on Instagram. I think that's a real issue for people trying to start in content creation.

People just need to start publishing — even ten reels that don't go viral — to see what formats the algorithm favors. I started my own Instagram account about half a year ago, in February 2026, with around 200 followers. I published different reels documenting the events I attended as a volunteer, a delegate, a guest, a networking person.

It's crucial to start from zero, publish, and keep grinding. My first reel that went viral reached about 350,000 views. I was genuinely shocked — I knew that one day I'd reach numbers like that, but that moment gave me the adrenaline and motivation to keep publishing. My account grew from around 100 followers to the 4,000 I have today.

Marco: Public administration and diplomacy are rapidly evolving. What role do digital tools, public diplomacy, or strategic communications play in modernizing government relations today?

Zhanibek: Digital tools have changed things significantly for people who are just starting their careers — tools like Claude and ChatGPT can help with creating content or writing position papers for MUNs. I'm not talking about how AI helps people already working in diplomacy — I'm talking about people at the very beginning of their path.

Public diplomacy is no longer done only by diplomats. Sitting in front of an audience of a few thousand people is doing public diplomacy, whether anyone calls it that or not. From the start, I've always called my own actions public diplomacy. It's not only what diplomats, presidents or governments do — it's about how people connect, interact and network.

I run a media project, and I see institutions increasingly understanding that young people with reach are partners, not just an audience. I now run my own organization, with over a thousand people across Kazakhstan.

Marco: How do you ensure efficient communication and advocacy on complex policy issues?

Zhanibek: I can share a few practical things that actually work. It's hard for someone just starting out in advocacy, diplomacy or jurisprudence to reach a person working in government or as a diplomat directly. You first reach the office, the assistant, the people working at that institution — the clerks. That's not an obstacle; it's the correct road. Assistants are the ones who really decide whether something gets on the calendar of the person you're trying to reach.

When I first became interested in diplomacy, I sent an email to the Chinese Embassy in Kazakhstan. The attaché of the embassy responded first, asked me to share more about myself and my suggestions, and eventually connected me with the counselor of the ambassador. We talked for a long period before physically meeting the counselor.

Everyone needs to go through that process — from the assistant, to the attaché, to the counselor, to the ambassador — and eventually represent themselves in that country. You need to plan several weeks ahead. People assume silence means refusal, but it usually just means the request is in a queue.

Marco: As a last question — what advice would you give to young professionals and students who aspire to build a career in government relations or diplomatic affairs? What core competencies or mindset would you advise them to develop?

Zhanibek: I now run a project focused on producing exactly this kind of advice — in Kazakh, in Russian, and now in English.

First, young people often don't realize how many opportunities exist, locally and globally. Cities across Kazakhstan — Astana, Almaty and others — have their own embassy councils and organizations, each with their own initiatives for young people. Working with youth isn't necessarily the top priority for these institutions, but it's usually in their top five, because they need to communicate and connect with young people — it's part of their mandate. These opportunities exist on institutional websites that almost nobody ever opens. My first advice is to do serious research in your local area first — look at the institutions and the people working there — and only then move on to global programs. I personally went to Xi'an, China, last month: the trip was fully financed by the Chinese Embassy, as part of a program recognizing the impact I had made with their institution and with the government of Kazakhstan.

Second, young people often assume they don't qualify without even reading the requirements. They reject themselves immediately because they think they're not competent enough, and they don't know how to approach these programs.

Third, people need to start networking and building connections around the world. I've already mentioned this — you need to start publishing your own content and building a track record. That's part of why we're speaking today, across two different countries, over Google Meet — because we both started down that path of public diplomacy, of publishing and showing ourselves. Eventually, that networking and content creation lead to opportunities that are otherwise closed to people who don't do this work.

About the Interviewed: Zhanibek Sovetov is an ambitious leader dedicated to connecting Kazakh youth with global opportunities. Serving as the CEO of ABS24TV, he coordinates a powerful network of over a thousand young leaders, driving youth empowerment, media innovation, and inter-

national collaboration across borders. Passionate about unleashing local talent on a global stage, Zhanibek continuously builds strategic partnerships that inspire positive change and open doors for the next generation.