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Bokayev B.

PhD, Syracuse University
Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs,
USA
PhD researcher
b.bokayev@syr.edu
ORCID: 0000-0002-1037-7085

Konysbek A.*

PhD candidate
Academy of Public Administration
under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan
a.konysbek@apa.kz
ORCID: 0000-0002-6950-7374

Nefas S.

PhD, professor of Mykolas Romeris University,
Vilnius, Lithuania
saunef@mruni.eu
ORCID: 0000-0003-3740-1169

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION MECHANISMS IN SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONES OF KAZAKHSTAN

Abstract. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are pivotal in stimulating economic growth, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), and fostering industrial diversification. In Kazakhstan, SEZs have been established to support the country's transition toward a diversified and sustainable economy. This article examines the development of public administration mechanisms governing SEZs in Kazakhstan, focusing on regulatory frameworks, institutional arrangements, and policy measures aimed at enhancing their efficiency and competitiveness. Kazakhstan now has 14 SEZs, which have attracted a significant amount of investment and created job places for regions. Kazakhstan provides considerable tax breaks, such as no corporation tax and lower property taxes, which make its SEZs appealing to investors. The study suggests that the success of public administration processes in SEZs is dependent on governance structures and alignment with national economic goals, emphasizing the importance of flexible governance models in order to optimize SEZ economic advantages. The study analyzes the overall development of public administration mechanisms in special economic zones of Kazakhstan, and identifies current issues and makes recommendations for future development.

Keywords: public administration mechanisms, special economic zones, preferences, development, investments, technological transfer.

INTRODUCTION

The need for economic growth was highly dependent on industrial development and technological modernisation. The transfer of technology and foreign industry could be realised only mostly by foreign direct investment. Consequently, the creation of a special territory with preferences and necessary utilities for the investors was the main target of state leaders. Accordingly, special economic or free zones started their formation and development from 1959 (Julien, 2021).

Kazakhstan has established itself as the most important center of trade and investment in Central Asia due to its strategic location and wealth of natural resources. Since gaining independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has prioritized economic diversification to reduce dependence on oil and gas, with a particular focus on industrial development and international trading (OECD, 2018).

Despite the proposed tax incentives and simplified administrative procedures, the effectiveness of the SEZs has not demonstrated significant transfer of foreign advanced technologies to Kazakhstan (World Bank, 2022). This article analyzes the general development of public administration mechanisms in the special economic zones of Kazakhstan and examines how public administration can be strengthened to improve the operation of the SEZs in the context of high-tech industrialization of the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theory of SEZs has its origins in economic theories that promote geographically distributed territories with special regulatory regimes to encourage investment (Farole, 2011). In order to show positive outcomes, the SEZs should provide tax incentives, simplified administrative procedures and reliable infrastructure for attracting foreign direct investments (Zeng, 2021).

According to Konysbek (2022), SEZs in Kazakhstan serve as innovative tools for Public Administration of regional development, providing incentives and benefits that contribute to accelerated growth. However, the effectiveness of these regions is not the same, and some of them do not achieve optimal results, which indicates differences in regional public administration and management capabilities.

The review of the central administration of Kazakhstan, prepared by the OECD in 2018, emphasizes the need to improve coordination between government agencies to improve the effectiveness of SEZs. The report emphasizes that clear separation of tasks and regulated processes are necessary for effective SEZs management.

In addition, the World Bank Public Finance Review (Akinci, 2011) noted that although several SEZs have been created in Kazakhstan with different incentives, the overall impact on economic diversification remains ambiguous. The report notes that inconsistencies in policy implementation and infrastructure development impede the full disclosure of the SEZs potential.

Furthermore, Saulius (2024) defined the fundamental aspect of SEZs functioning as the construction of SEZs that run efficiently. The major and first aspects for properly running SEZs are the country's overall stability and general status, political conditions in terms of corruption, and state incentives for foreign and potential investors.

Kazakhstan's Special Economic Zones (SEZs) aim to attract foreign direct investment, boost industrial production, and promote regional development. Exemptions from corporation taxes, customs fees, and expedited licensing procedures are among the most important incentives. According to research, Kazakhstan's SEZs perform poorly due to fragmented governance and policy incoherence (OECD, 2017). Critical challenges include poor coordination between central and regional governments, as well as a lack of investor support channels (Akinci, 2011). Furthermore, limited infrastructure in SEZs hampers their ability to attract investment (Asian Development Bank, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research methods were applied in this analysis in order to study the public administration mechanisms and management of special economic zones of the Republic of Kazakhstan. These methods were applied by analyzing administrative institutions, incentive programs and regulatory framework on special economic zones of Kazakhstan. The effectiveness of special economic zones and its relation to good governance, and public administration mechanisms could be counted as main indicators in which incentive programs, regulatory framework and administrative institutions also play the main role in these relations (Osborne, 2006).

Consequently, there were applied secondary data analysis on examining the development of public administration mechanisms in SEZs of Kazakhstan by focusing on legislative documents, reports from government, academic research papers and literature, policy reviews and reports, and case studies. By studying these issues, there was also applied research on analysing challenges, best practices and future further research areas (Wang, 2013). In addition to that, international case studies and best practices were studied by analyzing international reports and reviews in order to comparatively understand the issue globally

RESULTS

According to the Law on SEZs of Kazakhstan, the Special Economic Zone is highlighted as a tool for attracting investments. According to the legislation, this is a part of the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan with precisely defined borders, where a special legal regime operates (Adilet, 2025). The main objectives of the creation of the SEZs are the accelerated development of

high-performance and competitive industries, the introduction of new technologies in the sectors of regional economies, and employment provision for the population.

The results showed main three factors:

1. Regulatory framework was regulated by the Law on special economic zones (Zakon.kz, 2025) and Tax Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Tax Code, 2025), where all the regulatory aspects, tax, preferences and administrative procedures are mentioned and regulated;

2. The institutional regulation or administration consists of the arrangements of governance structures, where central ministries and companies, local authorities (akimats) and local managing companies play the main role in public administration of all SEZs in Kazakhstan;

3. The development of infrastructure and readiness of SEZs play a vital role in attracting foreign direct investments. All the utilities, road, railroad, and the closer location of train stations and airports are one of key factors (World Investments Report, 2019).

According to the current law on Special Economic and Industrial Zones No. 242-VI of April 03, 2019, participants of special economic zones apply for tax benefits by the tax legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which exempts participants from paying three types of taxes: corporate income, land, property tax (Adilet, 2025). Also, the customs procedure of the free customs zone is in effect on the territory of the special economic zone or its part.

Participants implementing projects on the territory of the administrative and business center and the historical center, before the commissioning of the facility for the implementation of the project, are exempt from these taxes and provided a land plot free of charge (According to subparagraph 1) of paragraph 3 of Article 17 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Special Economic and Industrial Zones” dated April 3, 2019).

An organization or an individual entrepreneur that carries out activity in the territory of the SEZ may reduce by 100 percent the amounts of the following calculated taxes and (or) payments:

- 1) corporate income tax (to be applied to incomes received from the sale of goods, works, services resulting from the implementation of priority activities);

- 2) land tax;

- 3) property tax;

- 4) payment for the use of land plots;

- 5) social tax to be applied by business entities – members of the SEZ “Park of Innovative Technologies” only (the employer’s expenses on employee income must be at least 70% of the total amount of expenses) (Qazindustry, 2024).

Participants were also privileged to have import customs duties 0% – customs privileges (According to paragraph 1 of Article 281 of Chapter 29 “On Customs regulation in the Republic of Kazakhstan” of the Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated December 26, 2017).

The outcomes of the research also demonstrates that from January 1, 2024, tax preferences are determined depending on the cost of the project in the following categories:

- 1) category A – the cost of the project is up to 3,000,000 times the Monthly calculation index (MCI) (3,692 tenge in 2024)

- 2) category B – the cost of the project is from 3,000,000 times to 14,500,000 times the size of the MCI

- 3) category C – the cost of the project is from 14 500 000 times the size of the MCI (Qazindustry, 2024).

According to the Qazindustry (2024) SEZ participants operating in the industries of food production, textiles, clothing, leather and related products, the production of computers, electronic and optical equipment, and the production of electrical equipment are assigned category B at a project cost from 1,000,000 times to 14,500,000 times the MCI.

The period of application of the above preferences is carried out depending on the categories, but not more than the term of the agreement on the implementation of activities and the period of operation of the SEZ:

category A – for 7 years;
 category B – for 15 years;
 category C – for 25 years.

The above incentives can be applied by business entities and individual entrepreneurs that carry out activity in the territory of a SEZ given that SEZ contract is signed after 1 January 2024 pursuant to the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan on special economic and industrial zones.

RESTRICTIONS ON BECOMING A SEZ PARTICIPANT

The gained outcomes show that a legal entity can become a SEZ member given that it carries out priority activities on the territory of the SEZ and listed in the unified members register. SEZ membership cannot be given to business entities that:

- 1) Carry out mining;
- 2) Carry out production of 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 (Zakon.kz, 2025);
- 3) Business entities and individual entrepreneurs that apply special tax regimes;
- 4) Business entities that apply investment tax incentives under valid contracts concluded with the authorized state investment authority before January 1, 2009;
- 5) Business entities that implement (have implemented) investment priority projects and investment strategic projects;
- 6) Carry out gambling (Qazindustry, 2024).

Foreign individuals and legal entities cannot be members in the SEZ, whose borders in full or partially coincide with the customs borders of the Eurasian Economic Union.

EFFICIENCY OF SEZ

The efficiency of SEZs can be seen from the obtained results, such as 317 projects worth 2.3 trillion tenge have been implemented in SEZs, and about 24,000 permanent jobs have been created (Qazindustry, 2024). The volume of production amounted to more than seven trillion tenge. Products worth 480 billion tenge were exported. Entrepreneurs receive ready-made engineering and communication infrastructure, as well as a simplified procedure for hiring foreign labor. The average completion rate of the infrastructure of domestic SEZ is 71.5 percent (Qazindustry, 2024).

All SEZs are unique and promising in their own way. For example, the SEZ “Astana – New City” was created almost twenty years ago and includes not only an industrial park on the outskirts of the city. This is almost 80 percent of the total area of Astana, mainly the entire left bank of the capital. Astana – New City was created using the Chinese method and allowed attracting foreign investors to the development of the capital. The volume of investments in the SEZ is 215.3 billion tenge. And Astana – New City investors have invested more than 4.1 trillion tenge for the construction of the administrative and business center of the capital. 9.4 tenge of investments were attracted to the SEZ per one budget tenge (Qazindustry, 2024).

The SEZ “Ontustik”, a unique zone of the textile industry. The volume of investments is 60 billion tenge (Table 1), production is 156.4 billion. 7.4 tenge of investments have been invested per one budget tenge (Qazindustry, 2024).

Also, the “Aktau Seaport” has various types of activities, from tourism to the production of chemical products. The figures for this SEZ are very positive: the volume of investments is 286.8 billion (Table 1), production is 416.8 billion tenge. 36.8 tenge of investments were attracted for one budget tenge (Qazindustry, 2024).

Table 1 – Example of SEZs in Kazakhstan with economic indicators.

Special economic zone	Invested amount in tenge	Attracted for each spent tenge	amount Production in tenge	amount
Ontustik	60 billion tenge	7.4 tenge	156.4 billion	
Aktau Sea Port	286.8 billion tenge	36.8 tenge	416.8 billion tenge	

Note: was created by the authors based on information from Qazindustry (2024)

DISCUSSION

The incentives and privileges (tax and customs) in Kazakhstan can be estimated as a good public administration tool according to the outcomes of the research. The governance over the SEZs in Kazakhstan showed that there are many authorities that regulate and take part in management of SEZs. The best international experiences in public administration mechanisms, especially in increasing the efficiency of special economic zones could be very beneficial for good governance and positive outcomes (Saulius, N., & Konysbek, A., 2024). The World investments report (2019) mentions that the economic and innovative development of a country that is based on special economic zones should have a decentralised model of governance, that allows local authorities to respond in a quick manner for the need of regional development by rapid decision-making processes and adaptivity of the administrative framework.

The outcome of the research also highlights that in Kazakhstan SEZs economic zones and foreign direct investment are regulated mostly centrally. The regulation from state and management companies have their influences on each SEZ and potential investors. The decision making process takes their start from ministries, overall SEZs regulation company, local state authorities and SEZ management companies. All these authorities might be beneficial in terms of identifying the future perspectives of foreign direct investments and total outcomes to the region and the country as a whole.

Even though taking into account that there is a need and high competition for prosperous investors with significant technological opportunities and investments, there should be fast decision-making processes to attract and settle them in Kazakhstan (Bokayev, 2024). If the settlement time for investors lasts for a long period of time, then the investor might be interested in settling in other countries with less time-consuming processes and with already built and ready infrastructural utilities.

The transparency in business processes and quick response to the market economy through fast decision-making processes will be able to foster economic growth. In this regard, the regulation and public administration of SEZ by local authorities could give potential investors more opportunities and quickness in solving their necessities for technological transfer to Kazakhstan. Accordingly, attention to the readiness of SEZ infrastructure should also be considered as a necessary part, as the overall SEZ in Kazakhstan is supplied with infrastructure only about seventy percent.

CONCLUSION

Economic diversification and regional development are possible and Kazakhstan has an opportunity in reaching its goals by using special economic zones and their possibilities. So special economic zones should be used as tools in reaching those goals by using necessary and important public administration mechanisms in regulating and managing the special economic zones in Kazakhstan. Chance for Kazakhstan to be a competitive player in the world economy can be reachable by studying, analyzing and implementing best world practices in special economic zones regulation and management.

In this research, the case study on the effectiveness of special economic zones and functionality were analyzed in order to understand the influence of SEZ regulations and management. Consequently, the aim of the paper was to study the public administration mechanisms in special economic zones of Kazakhstan that fundamentally sharpens the future directions and positions of SEZs in Kazakhstan. For instance, incentive programs, administrative institutions and regulatory frameworks could be counted as mechanisms of public administration that direct the effectiveness of special economic zones and attraction of foreign direct investments to the country.

The outcomes of the research help in better understanding the vital issues related to special economic zones, such as challenges, mechanisms, best practices and possibilities in management of SEZ. This would be beneficial for practitioners, academics and researchers to evaluate the circumstances and opportunities of special economic zones, and viewing it further and in more detail.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ АРНАЙЫ ЭКОНОМИКАЛЫҚ АЙМАҚТАРДЫҢ МЕМЛЕКЕТТІК БАСҚАРУ МЕХАНИЗМДЕРІНІҢ ДАМУЫ

Бокаев Б.

PhD, зерттеуші
Сиракуз университеті
Максвелл азаматтық және мемлекеттік басқару
мектебі, АҚШ
b.bokayev@syr.edu
ORCID: 0000-0002-1037-7085

Қонысбек А.*

PhD докторанты
Қазақстан Республикасы Президенті
жанындағы
Мемлекеттік басқару академиясы
a.konysbek@apa.kz
ORCID: 0000-0002-6950-7374

Нефас С.

PhD, профессоры
Миколас Ромерис университеті Вильнюс,
Литва
saunef@mruni.eu
ORCID: 0000-0003-3740-1169

Аңдатпа. Арнайы экономикалық аймақтар (АЭА) экономикалық өсуді ынталандыруда, тікелей шетелдік инвестицияны (ТШИ) тартуда және өнеркәсіптік әртараптандыруды дамытуда маңызды рөл атқарады. Қазақстанда АЭА елдің әртараптандырылған және тұрақты экономикаға көшуін қолдау мақсатында құрылды. Бұл мақалада Қазақстандағы арнайы экономикалық аймақтарды реттейтін қоғамдық басқару механизмдерінің дамуы қарастырылады. Зерттеу АЭА басқару тиімділігі мен бәсекеге қабілеттілігін арттыруға бағытталған реттеуші құқықтық негіздерге, институционалдық құрылымдарға және саяси шараларға талдау жасайды. Қазіргі таңда

Қазақстанда 14 АЭА жұмыс істейді, олар өңірлерге елеулі инвестиция тартып, жаңа жұмыс орындарын құруда. Қазақстан инвестиция тарту мақсатында корпоративтік салықтан босату және мүлік салығын төмендету сияқты айтарлықтай салықтық жеңілдіктер ұсынады. Зерттеу АЭА-дағы қоғамдық басқару үдерістерінің табысты болуы басқару құрылымдары мен ұлттық экономикалық мақсаттарға сәйкестігіне тәуелді екенін көрсетеді. Сонымен қатар, АЭА экономикалық әлеуетін барынша арттыру үшін басқарудың икемді модельдерінің маңыздылығы атап өтіледі. Мақала Қазақстандағы арнайы экономикалық аймақтардағы мемлекеттік басқару механизмдерінің жалпы даму үрдісін талдап, қазіргі мәселелерді анықтап, олардың болашақтағы дамуына қатысты ұсыныстар береді.

Түйін сөздер: қоғамдық басқару механизмдері, арнайы экономикалық аймақтар, преференциялар, даму, инвестиция, өнеркәсіптік даму.

РАЗВИТИЕ МЕХАНИЗМОВ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО УПРАВЛЕНИЯ В СПЕЦИАЛЬНЫХ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИХ ЗОНАХ КАЗАХСТАНА

Бокаев Б.

PhD, исследователь
Сиракузский Университет
Школа гражданства и связей с
общественностью Максвелла, США
e-mail: b.bokayev@syr.edu
ORCID: 0000-0002-1037-7085

Қонысбек А.*

докторант PhD
Академия государственного управления
при Президенте Республики Казахстан
e-mail: a.konysbek@apa.kz
ORCID: 0000-0002-6950-7374

Нефас С.

PhD, профессор
Университет Миколаса Ромериса
Вильнюс, Литва
e-mail: saunef@mruni.eu
ORCID: 0000-0003-3740-1169

Аннотация. Специальные экономические зоны (СЭЗ) играют ключевую роль в стимулировании экономического роста, привлечении прямых иностранных инвестиций (ПИИ) и развитии индустриальной диверсификации. В Казахстане СЭЗ создаются для поддержки перехода страны к диверсифицированной и устойчивой экономике. Данная статья анализирует развитие механизмов государственного управления, регулирующих СЭЗ в Казахстане, уделяя особое внимание нормативно-правовой базе, институциональным структурам и политическим мерам, направленным на повышение их эффективности и конкурентоспособности. В настоящее время в Казахстане функционируют 14 СЭЗ, которые привлекли значительный объем инвестиций и способствовали созданию рабочих мест в регионах. Государство предоставляет существенные налоговые льготы, включая освобождение от корпоративного налога и снижение имущественных налогов, что делает казахстанские СЭЗ привлекательными для инвесторов. Исследование показывает, что успешность механизмов государственного управления в СЭЗ зависит от структуры управления и соответствия национальным экономическим целям, подчеркивая значимость гибких моделей управления для максимизации экономических преимуществ СЭЗ. В работе рассматривается общее развитие механизмов государственного управления в СЭЗ Казахстана, выявляются существующие проблемы и предлагаются рекомендации для дальнейшего совершенствования.

Ключевые слова: механизмы государственного управления, специальные экономические зоны, преференции, развитие, инвестиции, индустриальное развитие.