

'We Don't Call It Annexation,' Kazakh Leader Says of Crimea

December 04, 2019



Kazakhstan's president appeared to address concerns that Moscow could seize parts of its territory with a sizable ethnic Russian minority. **Pixabay**

Kazakhstan doesn't believe that Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014, its new leader said in an interview with Germany's Deutsche Welle news outlet [published](#) Wednesday.

Kazakh President Kassym Jomart-Tokayev appeared to tamp down [concerns](#) that, given northern Kazakhstan's sizable ethnic Russian minority similar to Crimea's, the Kremlin could seize parts of its territory. Moscow does not appear to be fanning separatist sentiment in Kazakhstan, though it has worked to keep the ex-Soviet republic in its sphere of influence.

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“First, we don't call what happened in Crimea annexation. What happened happened.

Annexation is too heavy a word to apply to Crimea,” Tokayev said.

“Second, there was no fear” that Russia could annex parts of northern Kazakhstan, Tokayev said in the interview.

The ex-Soviet republic has “absolutely trusting, good-neighborly relations with Russia,” said Tokayev, who [succeeded](#) veteran Kazakh leader Nursultan Nazarbayev earlier this year.

“From the start, we believed in the wisdom and decency of the Russian leadership,” he said.

Moscow maintains that Crimea reunited with Russia after a referendum on the Black Sea peninsula. Most of the international community does not recognize the 2014 referendum, and Western countries have imposed economic sanctions on Russia over its annexation.

Kazakhstan’s foreign ministry [said](#) in 2014 that it had “understanding” of Russia’s position and that Crimeans exercised a “free expression of the[ir] will” in the vote.

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