

ISSN 1404-6091 (Print)  
ISSN 2002-3839 (Online)

**CENTRAL ASIA  
AND  
THE CAUCASUS**  
*English Edition*

Journal of Social and Political Studies

**Volume 21  
Issue 3  
2020**

***CA&C Press AB*  
SWEDEN**

## FOUNDED AND PUBLISHED BY

INSTITUTE  
FOR CENTRAL ASIAN AND  
CAUCASIAN STUDIES

Registration number: 620720-0459  
State Administration for Patents and Registration of Sweden

## CA&C PRESS AB

*Publishing House*

Registration number: 556699-5964  
Companies registration Office of Sweden

Journal registration number: 23 614  
State Administration for Patents and Registration of Sweden

## Editors

Murad ESENOV

**Editor-in-Chief**

Tel./fax: (46) 70 232 16 55; E-mail: m.esenov@gmail.com

Kalamkas  
YESSIMOVA

**represents the journal in Kazakhstan (Nur-Sultan)**

Tel./fax: (7 - 701) 7408600; E-mail: kesimova@gmail.com

Ainura  
ELEBAEVA

**represents the journal in Kyrgyzstan (Bishkek)**

Tel./fax: (996 - 312) 61 30 36; E-mail: ainur\_eb@mail.ru

Saodat OLIMOVA

**represents the journal in Tajikistan (Dushanbe)**

Tel.: (992 372) 21 89 95; E-mail: olimov@tajik.net

Farkhad  
TOLIPOV

**represents the journal in Uzbekistan (Tashkent)**

Tel.: (9987 - 1) 225 43 22; E-mail: farkhad\_tolipov@yahoo.com

Kenan  
ALLAHVERDIEV

**represents the journal in Azerbaijan (Baku)**

Tel.: (+994 - 50) 325 10 50; E-mail: kenan.allakhverdiev@gmail.com

David  
PETROSYAN

**represents the journal in Armenia (Erevan)**

Tel.: (374 - 10) 56 88 10; E-mail: dave@arminco.com

Vakhtang  
CHARAIA

**represents the journal in Georgia (Tbilisi)**

Tel.: +995 593 13 18 11; E-mail: vakhocharaia@gmail.com

Vladimir MESAMED

**represents the journal in the Middle East (Jerusalem)**

Tel.: (972 - 2) 5882332; E-mail: mssamed@olive.msc.huji.ac.il

Sun ZHUANGZHI

**represents the journal in China (Beijing)**

Tel.: (86) 10-64039088; E-mail: sunzhzh@isc.cass.net.cn

Irina EGOROVA

**represents the journal in the Russian Federation (Moscow)**

Tel.: (7 - 495) 3163146; E-mail: egorova@mosinfo.ru

Rustem  
ZHANGUZHIN

**represents the journal in Ukraine (Kiev)**

Tel.: (380 - 44) 524-79-13; E-mail: zhangozha@yahoo.co.uk

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Vakhit AKAEV	Chief Researcher, Ibragimov Integrated Research Institute, Russian Academy of Sciences, D.Sc. (Philosophy), Professor, Member of the Academy of Sciences of the Chechen Republic, Honored Scientist of the Chechen Republic, Expert of the Russian Academy of Sciences (Russia)
Mariam ARUNOVA	Ph.D. (History), leading research associate, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences (Russia)
Svante E. CORNELL	Professor, Research Director, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, Silk Road Studies Program, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS (U.S.A.)
Jannatkhon EYVAZOV	Ph.D. (Political Science), Associate Professor, Department of International Relations at Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University (Azerbaijan)
William FIERMAN	D.Sc. (Political Science), Professor of Indiana University (U.S.A.)
Sergey GRETSKY	Doctor, Chair of Central Asian Studies, Foreign Service Institute, U.S. Department of State (U.S.A.)
Xing GUANGCHENG	D.Sc. (Political Science), Professor, Deputy Director of the Institute for East European, Russian and Central Asian Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (China)
Alexander IGNATENKO	President, Institute of Religion and Politics, Doctor of Philosophy, specialist in Islamic studies, leading expert of the Institute of Social Systems, Moscow State University, member of the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the Russian Federation President (Russia)
Ashurboi IMOMOV	Ph.D. (Law), Assistant Professor, Head of the Department of Constitutional Law, Tajik National University (Tajikistan)
Stephen F. JONES	Professor, Russian and Eurasian Studies, Mount Holyoke College (U.S.A.)
Lena JONSON	Doctor, senior researcher, Swedish Institute of International Affairs (Sweden)
Klara KHAFIZOVA	D.Sc. (History), Director, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Professor at the International Relations and Foreign Policy Department, Kainar University (Kazakhstan)
Zaynidin KURMANOV	D.Sc. (History), Professor, Head of the Chair of International Relations, the Kyrgyz-Russian University (Kyrgyzstan)
Jacob M. LANDAU	Professor of Political Science, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Israel)
Alexei MALASHENKO	D.Sc. (History), Professor, Scholar-in-Residence, Ethnicity and Nation-Building Program Co-Chair, The Carnegie Moscow Center (Russia)
Abbas MALEKI	Doctor, Director General, International Institute for Caspian Studies (Iran)
Roger N. McDERMOTT	Research Associate, the Institute of Middle East, Central Asia and Caucasus Studies (MEACCS), University of St. Andrews, Scotland (Great Britain)
Vitaly NAUMKIN	D.Sc. (History), Professor, Director, Center for Strategic and International Studies of RF (Russia)
Yerengaip OMAROV	Professor, Rector of Kainar University, President of the Academy of Natural Sciences, Republic of Kazakhstan (Kazakhstan)
Vladimir PAPAUA	D.Sc. (Economy), Professor, Faculty of Economics and Business, Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Member of the Georgian National Academy of Sciences (Georgia)
Vladimir PARAMONOV	Ph.D., Founder & Director of the Central Eurasia Analytical Group and Internet Project (Uzbekistan)
Mirzokhid RAKHIMOV	D.Sc. (History), Professor, Head of the Contemporary History and International Relations Department, Institute of History, Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan (Uzbekistan)
S. Frederick STARR	Professor, Chairman, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University (U.S.A.)
James V. WERTSCH	Professor, Director of the International and Regional Studies Program, Washington University in St. Louis (U.S.A.)

The materials that appear in the journal do not necessarily reflect the Editorial Board and the Editors' opinion

EDITORIAL OFFICE: CA&C Press AB, Hubertusstigen 9. 97455 Luleå, SWEDEN

WEB ADDRESS: <http://www.ca-c.org>

© *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, English Edition, 2020  
© CA&C Press AB, 2020

## **CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS**

*English Edition*

**Journal of Social and Political Studies**

**Volume 21**

**Issue 3**

**2020**

### **IN THIS ISSUE:**

#### *REGIONAL POLICY*

- Dinara Bayshulakova, Georgy Dubovtsev.* SCO ACTIVITIES AT THE PRESENT STAGE AND THE INTERESTS OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES ..... 7
- Gulnara Birimkulova, Aigerim Ibrayeva, Yermek Duisenkozha, Erkin Baydarov.* KAZAKHSTAN IN THE SYSTEM OF GEOPOLITICAL AND REGIONAL RELATIONS OF THE EU AND THE PRC ..... 15
- Vladimir Karyakin.* PAN-TURKISM: CIVILIZATIONAL PROJECT OF MODERN TURKEY ..... 31
- Rustem Kadyrzhanov, Nazken Abdykaimova.* KAZAKHSTAN: NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF INTEGRATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH RUSSIA..... 37
- Shugyla Kilybayeva, Azamat Nurshanov.* THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON KAZAKHSTANI YOUTH'S POLITICAL BEHAVIOR ..... 46

#### *COVID-19 PANDEMIC*

- Sergey Ryazantsev, Zafar Vazirov, Marina Khramova, Alexey Smirnov.* THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE POSITION OF LABOR MIGRANTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA IN RUSSIA..... 58

<i>Lasha Tchantouridzé.</i>	COVID-19: THE CASE OF GEORGIA.....	70
-----------------------------	---------------------------------------	----

## **REGIONAL ECONOMY**

<i>Zhamiga Tanatarova, Baurzhan Mustafayev, Saniya Nurdavletova, Lazat Nursultanova.</i>	INVESTMENT COOPERATION BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS .....	79
--	--	----

## **RELIGION IN SOCIETY**

<i>Myrzakhmet Zhuzey, Nataliya Seitakhmetova, Madina Bektenova, Sholpan Zhandossova.</i>	THE MOSQUE IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA: SACRAL AND SPIRITUAL CONTEXTS .....	94
<i>Elena Burova, Akhan Bizhanov, Aidar Amrebayev.</i>	KAZAKHSTAN TODAY: POLITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN A SECULAR STATE.....	109
<i>Asiyat Buttaeva, Akhmed Kakhaev.</i>	INTER-CONFESSIONAL RELATIONS AS A SPECIAL TYPE OF SOCIAL RELATIONS: RUSSIA'S POLY-CULTURAL MILIEU .....	124
<i>Anjela Gabueva.</i>	NORTH OSSETIA-ALANIA: RELIGION IN THE AXIOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF ITS POPULATION .....	131

## **ETHNIC RELATIONS AND MIGRATION**

<i>Gulnar Nasimova, Cynthia S. Kaplan, Kadyrzhan Smagulov, Kirill Kartashov.</i>	REASONS FOR AND FACTORS IN EDUCATIONAL MIGRATION FROM KAZAKHSTAN .....	137
<i>Victoria Medved, Sergey Ryazantsev, Ivan Filatov, Timur Miryazov.</i>	CHINA ON THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION SERVICES MARKET: SPECIFICS OF RECRUITMENT OF RUSSIAN STUDENTS AND THEIR ADJUSTMENT IN THE PRC.....	147

**FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

***The Special Feature section  
in the next three issues will discuss:***

- ***Eurasia: Politics Today***
- ***Eurasia: Energy Policy and Energy Projects***
- ***China's Infrastructure Projects in the Black Sea-Caspian Region***

***Contributors please use  
the following guidelines:***

- all articles accepted are published in Russian and English, in the Russian-language and English-language versions of the journal, respectively. The articles must be submitted to the editorial staff in Russian or English. The editorial board has its team of translators whose services are paid by the authors; translations done by the authors independently or with the help of other translators will not be accepted;
- begin articles with a brief abstract of 300-500 words and keywords;
- articles should be no less than 3,000 and no more than 6,000 words, including footnotes;
- footnotes should be placed at the bottom of each page; if there are references to Internet resources, please give the author's name, the name of the document, the website address, and the date it was made available, for example, available 2007-04-19;
- quotations, names of authors and other information from English-language sources should be duplicated in brackets in the original language, that is, in English;
- the article should be divided into sections, including an introduction and conclusion;
- the author should include the following personal information: first name, last name, academic degree, place of work, position, city, country.

## REGIONAL POLICY

### SCO ACTIVITIES AT THE PRESENT STAGE AND THE INTERESTS OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.01>

Dinara BAYSHULAKOVA

*Doctoral Candidate,  
Institute of Diplomacy, Academy of Public Administration  
under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

Georgy DUBOVTSEV

*Ph.D. (Military Science), Assistant Professor,  
Corresponding Member of the Academy of  
Military Sciences of the Russian Federation  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

#### ABSTRACT

**T**he article analyzes in detail the emergence and evolution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as an effective structure of the regional security system in Central Asia, its development potential, and its capacity to address possible threats and challenges.

The authors examine the security-building process in the region, provide an expert forecast of the SCO's further development in the context of the accession of India and Pakistan, and propose measures to increase its effectiveness in ensuring regional security and stability.

**KEYWORDS:** *Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Central Asia, regional security, international cooperation, SCO expansion, Pakistan, India, Kazakhstan.*

## *Introduction*

Given the radical change in the geopolitical situation in Central Asia and the fast-growing “internal knot” of problems after the breakup of the Soviet Union, the newly independent states in the region had to select optimal strategies for further development and mutually beneficial multilateral cooperation and for ensuring national security and territorial integrity.

Hence the primary objectives of the Central Asian countries: to lay the groundwork for ensuring sustainable and secure development; to create a favorable economic and political climate; and to establish mutually beneficial international cooperation.

Various organizations that could actually support the efforts to ensure regional security and stability were created in a relatively short period.<sup>1</sup> This includes the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

## **The SCO as an International Cooperation Mechanism**

In the first few years of the SCO, a consolidating factor for its member states was an increased risk of destabilization in the Central Asian region. At that stage, the Organization anticipated a possible increase in the activity of extra-regional players and destabilizing events in the development of Central Asian countries. It is precisely for fear of encountering such a scenario that the SCO states included in the 2005 Astana Declaration a provision recommending that the United States set a deadline for the presence of its military contingents in the territory of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.<sup>2</sup>

The increasingly complex situation in the region provided additional incentives to develop the SCO and led to changes in its priorities. One of the most urgent tasks now was to develop an optimal and effective mechanism for eliminating threats to the security of the Organization’s member states. As was evident from events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, threats can be not only terrorist. In this context, the SCO was faced with the need to agree on practical ways to counter unconventional threats. This helped to significantly expand the SCO’s functions and areas of responsibility.

The SCO’s priorities in ensuring regional security and stability were listed as follows:

- (a) combating terrorism, separatism, extremism, illicit trafficking in drugs, arms, ammunition and explosives, nuclear and radioactive materials, as well as other components of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and transnational organized crime;
- (b) ensuring international information security;

---

<sup>1</sup> See: A. Iskandarov, “Security and Integration in Central Asia: The CSTO and SCO,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 14, Issue 2, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> See: *Declaration by the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Astana, 5 July, 2005*, Official Website of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, available at [<http://eng.sectsc.org/documents/>], 14 March, 2020.



- (c) strengthening border security; and
- (d) fighting illegal migration, human trafficking, money laundering, economic crimes, and corruption.

The member states decided to regularly exchange information on these issues and undertake a joint analysis of the situation in the region, as well as to organize, with the participation of competent authorities, training sessions and workshops on a bilateral and multilateral basis.<sup>3</sup>

Today, the SCO has a significant impact on the security architecture of the whole of Central Asia and is a powerful political tool. The Organization's high prestige is also due to the fact that among its founding members are Russia and China, which makes it possible to check many negative processes in the region.

Moreover, given the global transformation of the world system of international relations, the significant decline in the credibility and effectiveness of most of the existing international organizations, primarily the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as the crisis of the entire system of international law, the SCO is becoming increasingly influential not only at the regional, but also at the global level. There are several reasons for this.

- *First*, in contrast to international organizations functioning as military-political alliances (blocs), the SCO countries have created an international mechanism that provides for the non-use of force or threat of force. For the SCO, its non-interference in the internal political affairs of its member states is a matter of principle.

The SCO is an example of how non-bloc associations can build an international security system. It is not a military-political alliance and has no intention of becoming one, while cooperation in the military field is developing exclusively for anti-terrorism purposes.

- *Second*, the SCO seeks to build a democratic and fair architecture of international relations based on multilateral, cooperative approaches and equally taking into account the interests and opinions of all its members. The SCO's activities are not directed against third countries, and it rejects confrontational approaches to resolving current problems of international and regional development.

At the present stage, no other international structure, except the SCO, can provide an opportunity for its member countries to build a more adequate model of interaction with each other and with the main extra-regional centers of power in order to ensure security and development.

- And *third*, the SCO is seen by Central Asian and other countries as the preferred international cooperation mechanism, because it creates the conditions for ensuring military-political security in the controlled area, a favorable and constructive economic climate, and a stable political situation in the member states.

## **Development of SCO Activities at the Present Stage**

Since its establishment, the SCO has significantly evolved and expanded its sphere of influence.

As we know, the SCO was originally set up for the express purpose of maintaining regional security. The Organization successfully achieved its initial goals: settlement of territorial disputes,

---

<sup>3</sup> See: *Business Club of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, InfoSCO Information Portal, available in Russian at [<http://www.infosco.biz/en/>], 15 March, 2020.

mutual inspection of state borders, and creation of border infrastructure. Subsequently, the SCO set the following goals in the field of regional security:

- (a) to strengthen mutual trust and neighborliness between member states and to maintain and strengthen peace, security, and stability in the region;
- (b) to step up joint efforts to counter terrorism, separatism, and extremism; and
- (c) to fight illicit drug and arms trafficking, other kinds of transnational crime, and illegal migration.<sup>4</sup>

When India and Pakistan joined the SCO as full members, the Organization entered a qualitatively new stage of development.

Today, the SCO covers 60% of the territory of Eurasia and about 45% of the world's population (3.5 billion people) and accounts for more than 20% of global GDP. It includes four nuclear powers.

In the current conditions, the SCO's most important task is to maintain international peace and security at both the regional and global levels. In order to create an indivisible security space, arrange interaction between international and regional organizations and forums, and coordinate their efforts in addressing current challenges and threats, the member states have coordinated their positions, advocating the need to ensure common, comprehensive, and sustainable security based on equal cooperation.

A whole set of tools and mechanisms for controlling security processes in the region have been developed, with priority given to fighting the "three evils" (terrorism, extremism, and separatism).<sup>5</sup>

Special attention here is paid to improving the mechanism for a rapid response to emerging threats and challenges.

- *First*, in order to strengthen cooperation in the field of security, the SCO seeks to involve its observer states and dialog partners in joint work in this field, as well as to intensify contacts with other interested countries and international organizations.
- *Second*, the SCO has been developing special cooperation programs that include a set of measures designed to prevent, detect, and suppress terrorism, separatism, and extremism, conduct joint operational-search activities, and provide mutual technical and material assistance.

The member states intend to develop the activities of the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in the fight against terrorism, separatism, and extremism.

- *Third*, special attention is paid to cooperation in countering the activities of international terrorist organizations aimed to recruit citizens of member countries into terrorist, separatist, and extremist groups, in establishing contacts with appropriate international organizations and regional associations to detect and block the routes by which terrorist trainees enter other countries to take part in armed conflicts in their territory, and in identifying such persons upon their return to SCO countries.
- *Fourth*, work is underway to fine-tune the algorithms for combating the spread of extremist and separatist ideas, primarily among the young, and for preventing religious extremism, aggressive nationalism, ethnic and racial intolerance, xenophobia, and fascist and chauvinistic ideas.

---

<sup>4</sup> See: *Bishkek Declaration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Heads of State Council, 14 June, 2019*, available at [<http://eng.sectSCO.org/documents/>], 15 March, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> See: G.M. Kakenova, "Initsiativy Respubliki Kazakhstan po problemam borby protiv noveishikh ugroz mezhdunarodnoi bezopasnosti," *Vestnik EAGI*, No. 3, 2015, pp. 50-55.

At a summit in Astana in June 2017, the SCO heads of state signed the SCO Convention on Countering Extremism. Along with coordination between law enforcement agencies, it pays special attention to joint efforts in the sphere of mass media, educational and research institutions, religious associations, and non-governmental organizations.<sup>6</sup>

- *Fifth*, measures are taken to strengthen cooperation in drug control.

The SCO summit in Qingdao (China) in June 2018 approved the SCO Anti-Drug Strategy for 2018-2023 and the Program of Action for its implementation, whose purpose is to enhance the effectiveness of joint efforts in combating the threat of drugs in the SCO area.<sup>7</sup>

These documents focus on activities in conducting joint operations to suppress illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs and their precursors, retraining law enforcement officers, providing material, technical, and organizational assistance, deepening cooperation to reduce demand for drugs, holding training sessions and workshops on methods and technologies for monitoring and eradicating illicit drug crops, and conducting educational activities to combat drug addiction.

- *Sixth*, an important area of SCO activities is the fight against the laundering of criminal proceeds. The Organization seeks to intensify cooperation with international structures that combat money laundering and financing of terrorism.
- And *seventh*, the SCO member states pay increasing attention to creating an effective joint mechanism for ensuring information security in order to prevent and counter threats to the political, economic, and public security of the member states.

With this aim in view, work is underway to improve the cooperation mechanism in combating the use of information and communication technologies for terrorist purposes and countering cyber threats to the security of SCO member states. Steps are also taken to strengthen cooperation in the area of Internet control so as to counter the use of the Internet for activities that undermine security and stability in the region.

In the interests of a prompt and adequate response to emerging threats and challenges to regional and global security, the SCO member states are expanding cooperation with interested countries and international organizations.

Along with this, the SCO has expanded its cultural and civilizational platform. It simultaneously features Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism, which can provide a basis for equal exchange and cooperation for the sake of peaceful coexistence and all-round development of various ethnic groups, religions, civilizations, and cultures.

Virtually all SCO countries are multi-ethnic and multi-religious. This is why they are interested in ensuring internal ethnic and religious peace, the harmonious coexistence of different nationalities and religions, and the development of dialog between civilizations with the participation of observer states and dialog partners.

Cultural and humanitarian cooperation within the SCO framework is aimed at creating favorable conditions for developing relations in areas such as education, science, culture, healthcare, and tourism, including contacts between public associations and citizens.

The SCO's expanding economic potential and increasing political importance are evidence of its transformation from a regional to a *global platform*.

---

<sup>6</sup> See: *Konventsia Shanhaiskoi organizatsii sotrudnichestva po protivodeistviyu ekstremizmu (Astana, ot 9 iyunia 2017)*, Information Portal Zakon.kz, available at [<https://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/bishkekskaya-deklaraciya-soveta-glav-gosudarstv-chlenov-shanhaiskoi-organizatsii-sotrudnichestva>], 15 March, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See: Official Website of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, available at [<http://eng.sectsc.org/>], 15 March, 2020.

Thus, SCO activities are currently focused on three main areas: cooperation for global and regional stability; joint fight against unconventional threats and challenges (terrorism, extremism, separatism, and drug trafficking); and broad economic integration on a regional basis.

Kazakhstan has recently proposed a number of ambitious projects and ideas in different areas of SCO activity. Its initiatives are mainly concerned with *security* (formation of a global anti-terrorist coalition under the auspices of the United Nations; development of additional measures to ensure cybersecurity and creation of an SCO information security center; establishment of a permanent platform for environmental cooperation jointly with the International Green Technologies and Investment Projects Center in Nur-Sultan; and measures to ensure security in Central Asia, including cooperation in combating illicit drug trafficking in the Central Asian region, assistance to Afghanistan and Syria, and settlement of all disputes regarding the Iranian nuclear program and the DPRK); *economics* (creation of a Eurasian financial advisory mechanism in collaboration with the Astana International Financial Center); *digitalization and innovative communication technologies* (creation of a pool of modern technology parks, organization of a forum for young IT specialists); and *expansion of cooperation* (abandoning the “bloc” mentality, strengthening the foundations for openness and equal cooperation with the EAEU, ASEAN, BRICS, and EU).

However, there are several factors that hold back the practical implementation of Kazakhstan’s initiatives.

1. *Changes in the nature of the SCO’s activity were triggered by its expansion.* In the past, the SCO’s main functions, despite its geographical spread from Eastern Europe to Eastern Asia, were concentrated in Central Asia, whereas the membership of India and Pakistan, according to Russian analysts, will turn the SCO, in political terms, “into a rapidly emerging center of power in a multipolar world” and a key geopolitical instrument that challenges the Western-led world order. The SCO’s expansion has also triggered a reconfiguration of the nature of its activity, both internal and external: as its geography expands and its weight in the international arena increases, the internal mechanism for coordinating the positions of its member states and its overall agenda naturally become more complicated. The new participants have made their own amendments to the Organization’s strategic agenda. Eventually, this will probably make it necessary to revise the SCO’s comprehensive development plan. The accession of new members objectively strengthens the Asian component in the Organization’s activities in the area of security, which creates a potential for joint efforts by the SCO and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) to lay the groundwork for a modern security architecture in Asia.
2. *Priorities of SCO member countries differ.* The SCO summit in Bishkek in June 2019 showed that member states had different views on the development of the Organization. In particular, priority was once again given to interaction at the bilateral level: China and Kyrgyzstan announced agreements worth a total of about \$7 billion, but at the multilateral level there were no such agreements.
3. *China’s attention to the development of the SCO has decreased.* At the present stage, we see that China, the main initiator and driving force of the SCO, tends to pay less attention to the Organization. In recent years, its approaches to the further development of the SCO have changed significantly, primarily in connection with the task of implementing the strategic Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In particular, based on the results of the Second Belt and Road Forum in April 2019, Beijing has mainly focused on this area. The same applies to Chinese policy in Central Asia.

In previous years, the Chinese side took an active part in preparing all key documents for SCO summits. Year after year, Beijing tried to promote initiatives such as the SCO Development Bank,

SCO Special Account, SCO Free Trade Zone, etc. But in recent years, it has not presented any new groundbreaking proposals.

Thus, in the near future, the Organization can expect to see a number of changes that will also influence its structure.

- *First*, SCO activities in the short term will be focused on adapting to the new realities. After the end of the transition period designed to resolve technical issues related to enlargement, the accession of India and Pakistan will sooner or later raise the question of revising the SCO's internal rules. This applies not only to the principles of work (allocation of quotas to India and Pakistan in forming executive bodies, nomination of their candidates for the highest post in the SCO bureaucracy, etc.), but also to ensuring equality of rights and opportunities between the SCO's new members and its founding states. Ultimately, the Organization's agenda will be transformed in one way or another.
- *Second*, in the context of the SCO's near future, an important question is about reaching a consensus in the decision-making process as one of the basic principles of its activity. Clearly, consensus in the expanded SCO will be difficult to achieve, and this principle may to some extent disrupt the Organization's work or lead to delays in decision making on controversial issues for an indefinite time, until a consensus is finally reached.
- And *third*, China's focus on implementing BRI projects may lead to less emphasis on the SCO in Beijing's regional policy. Under this scenario, SCO activity will gradually decrease. At present, China is not prepared to give up the SCO altogether, because this would cause a loss of face. In the medium and long term, however, China's participation in the SCO may become less active.

These changes generate two contradictory trends in the Organization's development and activity. On the one hand, with its expansion the SCO aspires to become a unique system integrator in Eurasia within whose framework the key players will coordinate their efforts. On the other hand, the SCO's institutional weaknesses caused by erosion of the Organization's core carry the risk that it could turn into a very amorphous structure.

In this context, it is now more important than ever for the SCO to abide by the principles of its non-bloc status. It is necessary to take into account the competition and activity in Eurasia of many organizations and projects, such as NATO, EU, OSCE, Central Asia Plus Japan dialog, Korea-Central Asia Cooperation Forum, CIS, CSTO, EAEU, Greater Eurasian Partnership, CICA, and others. All of them have different geopolitical objectives and roles, which makes the SCO's external environment more complicated. In these conditions, it is important for the Central Asian countries to prevent the Organization from turning into an anti-Western instrument in the hands of regional powers.

Since the SCO is an optimal dialog platform for resolving regional issues and clarifying the positions of all parties<sup>8</sup>, it is in need of conceptual and organizational renewal. The current concept of its development does not fully reflect the new realities, as well as various aspects of the new risks and opportunities it faces after its expansion.

It would make sense for the member countries to renew the SCO economic platform taking into account the following points:

- the purpose of the renewed platform should be to strengthen coordination between regional associations and economic initiatives that already exist in the SCO area (EAEU, BRI,

---

<sup>8</sup> See: R.R. Chukalova, "Vliianie vneshnikh i vnutrennikh faktorov na obespecheniye regionalnoi bezopasnosti v Tsentralno-Aziatskom regione," *Global Science and Innovations 2018: Materials of the International Scientific Conference*, Eger, 2018, pp. 460-464.

BRICS). Such coordination will allow the SCO member states to use the synergies of different regional integration processes and to reap real dividends in trade and investment;

—at the new stage of the SCO's development, after the accession of India and Pakistan, it would be advisable to revisit the issue of creating financial institutions within the Organization: the SCO Development Bank and the SCO Development Fund. It is important to promote the idea of establishing such a bank so as to give a boost to the Organization.

The economic component of relations makes it possible to balance all structures of the SCO and enhances its consolidating power. The following factors could be important in ensuring fruitful multilateral cooperation at every stage of economic integration within the SCO:

- first, agreed measures to inventory and improve existing trade and economic cooperation mechanisms so as to increase their effectiveness and coordination;
- second, establishment of a multilateral advisory and consultative mechanism within the framework of the SCO Forum; and
- third, use of the joint intellectual potential of SCO member countries, with more intensive exchange of scientific, technological, economic, and analytical information.

In the expert community, there is much talk about the need to strengthen the research component of the SCO. In this context, it might be useful to consider the possibility of setting up a specialized research institution, a kind of think tank of the SCO.

This would make it possible to exchange opinions on a regular basis and formulate appropriate decisions for the development of the Organization, as well to better understand the positions of other members at the expert level.

## *Conclusion*

Overall, the need to find new vectors for strengthening the SCO make it necessary to step up its activity associated not only with the solution of security problems, but also with the intensive development of its trade and economic component, as well as with cultural and humanitarian cooperation.

Coordinated action by SCO countries could enrich the practice of interstate relations with a number of innovations determined by the cultural and civilizational diversity specific to the SCO as an organization that makes a concrete contribution to ensuring internal ethnic and religious peace, to the harmonious coexistence of different nationalities and religions, and to the development of dialog between civilizations on the Eurasian continent.

## KAZAKHSTAN IN THE SYSTEM OF GEOPOLITICAL AND REGIONAL RELATIONS OF THE EU AND THE PRC

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.02>

Gulnara BIRIMKULOVA

*Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Regional Studies,  
Faculty of International Relations, L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University  
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

Aigerim IBRAYEVA

*Ph.D., Associate Professor, Higher School of Social Studies and  
Humanities of the Astana International University  
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

Yermek DUISENKOZHA

*Senior Lecturer, M.A., Department of Oriental Studies,  
Faculty of International Relations, L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University  
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

Erkin BAYDAROV

*Ph.D. (Philos.), Associate Professor,  
Lead Researcher, R. Suleimenov Institute of Oriental Studies  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

### ABSTRACT

The European Union (EU) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) are powerful trade and economic partners in the global market. As of 2019, the EU was the PRC's largest trading partner (the second-largest was ASEAN, and the United States ranked only third), and for the EU, PRC is the number one partner. In China, there are special forms of partnership with other entities of international relations associated with the new foreign policy strategy. The common interests of the EU and China

in the use of the Caspian region's energy resources lead to mutually beneficial cooperation between the two actors. The Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) is the main link in cooperation between these actors in the Caspian region.

Currently, transcontinental communication projects are underway: The Western Europe-Western China highway that spans 8,700 km and traverses Kazakhstan, and railway and pipeline networks. The Kazakhstan initiative to create an integral Eurasian

*pipeline system in the Caspian region is promising.*

*The authors examine the role and place of the Caspian region in modern geopolitics, the regional strategic interests of the EU and the PRC, and emphasize the nature of the EU and PRC's energy policy in the Caspian region. The potential of their economic interaction is analyzed. The purpose of this scientific study is to compare the geopolitical interests of the EU and the PRC in the Caspian region. The novelty of the study*

*is determined by the fact that developmental trends of the geopolitical situation in the Caspian region have been analyzed within the framework of EU—PRC cooperation.*

*Today, the Caspian region is a key space in Eurasia, where the geopolitical interests of the most important actors in modern international relations collide. The establishment of geopolitical control and access to Caspian energy resources is an instrument for ensuring the national security of the EU and China.*

**KEYWORDS:** *European Union, China, Kazakhstan, cooperation, Caspian region, geopolitics.*

## *Introduction*

Since 1991, the geopolitical setting around the Caspian region has undergone dramatic changes. It was seriously influenced by repeated attempts to determine the international legal status of the Caspian Sea on a multilateral basis, a certain militarization of the Caspian states, as well as by environmental problems. In particular, the issue of biodiversity conservation in the unique reservoir was and remains one of the main issues on the agenda.

The key influence on the geopolitical situation is exerted by the region's hydrocarbon resource issues. In the 21st century, the latter have become priorities on the political debate agenda both in the region itself and in adjacent and even very remote regions, such as the European Union and the People's Republic of China. The Republic of Kazakhstan, which has a large share of proven oil reserves (3.6 billion tons),<sup>1</sup> has its own stance in regard to the regional energy resource issues. One of the priorities of Kazakhstan's foreign policy is to strengthen its positions in the Caspian region.

Particular attention is heeded to the review and analysis of the processes of attracting foreign investment that involve the Kazakhstani sector of the Caspian Sea and adjacent territories (hereinafter referred to as the Kazakhstani sector of the Caspian): the main trends in investment inflow and the investments' sectoral and geographical structure are discussed. The article clarifies the issues that allow to specify the scale of real foreign investment flows and their impact on Kazakhstani economy, the factors that influence this process, the relationship between the country's advancement in international ratings and the attraction of investments from the EU and China. In addition, trends and features of Kazakhstani investments abroad through state financial institutions are considered.

The competition between external players in the Caspian region manifests in various aspects. At the same time, external players are actively using intraregional contradictions to promote their geopolitical interests in the Caspian region, and Kazakhstan is, in fact, acting as a connecting link, as

<sup>1</sup> According to the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan: Direct Investments in The Direction of Deposits by Country, State of the Net Position as of 1 February, 2020, Statistics of Direct Investments in the Direction of Deposits, National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official Internet resource, available in Russian at [<https://nationalbank.kz/?docid=680&switch=russian>], 15 February, 2020.



it tries to promote the development of an appropriate legal and regulatory framework on interstate sites that regulates oil and gas production and allows for a more accurate determination of the legal status of the sea. All of the above does not prevent Kazakhstan from actively attracting foreign investments from the EU and China to the extraction of energy resources. The following companies have been present in Kazakhstani fields since 1997: that year, CNPC bought Aktobemunaygas (Zhanazhol, Kenkiyak). In 2001, CNPC acquired 50% of Buzachi Operating Ltd. In 2006, it bought 100% of PetroKazakhstan, and the Chinese CITIC Group bought 50% of the shares of Karazhanbasmunay. In 2009, CNPC bought 50% of Mangistaunaygas, in 2013 CNPC bought out the share owned by ConoccoPhillips (16.8%) in Kashagan from KazMunayGas. EU oil companies are widely represented in Kazakhstan—Eni (Karashyganak—25%, Kashagan—16.81%), ExxonMobil (Tengiz—25%, Kashagan—16.81%), Royal Dutch Shell (Kashagan—16.81%, Arman—50%), British Gas (Karashyganak—20%), Repsol YDF (Zhambay-Yuzhny—25%).<sup>2</sup> Each of the external players present in the region proceeds from their own geopolitical interests, even when regulating the legal status of the region. The same tendency manifests itself in determining regional energy resource reserves, where the EU and the PRC use their estimates (that sharply differ from each other) as an instrument of pressure on third-party competitors, such as the Russian Federation, Japan, and the United States.

Currently, the Caspian region is a powerful tool for Kazakhstan that helps attract foreign investment, and provides the country with the status of an “oil power” and a spot in the geopolitical power balance. This proves that “the geography of Kazakhstan’s foreign trade has developed under the influence of global trends in the growth of demand for energy resources, as well as the peculiarities of the country’s location in the center of the Eurasian continent. The latter has shaped the two key directions of Kazakhstan’s export-import policy, namely, Europe and Asia. By choosing the direction of foreign trade, Kazakhstan can influence the change in the geopolitical and geo-economic situation in the region.”<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, a number of extra-regional investor countries began to actively use the issue of the Caspian region’s legal status and manipulate the assessment of its hydrocarbon potential to secure their rights to the Caspian fields. The competition between countries for securing control over Caspian energy resources is exacerbated by OPEC’s restrictions on oil production.

Due to the above, the EU and the PRC began to establish competitive pipeline routes in the Caspian region within the Western Europe-Western China transport system. At the same time, Kazakhstan, located in the center of the Eurasian continent, benefits from the establishment and development of this transport infrastructure. Its main trade partners, the European Union and China, are also interested in the development of pipelines.

## Research Methods

The study uses the method of comparative and statistical analysis in order to comprehensively assess the role of the EU and the PRC in the shaping of interaction in the region under consideration. The article used a systemic analysis of various aspects of the regional geopolitics of the EU and China as external partners and the Republic of Kazakhstan as a key regional country. The systemic

---

<sup>2</sup> See: “V RK 22 neftnyye kompanii s kitayskim uchastiem,” available at [[https://forbes.kz/process/probing/v\\_rk\\_rabotayut\\_22\\_neftyanyie\\_kompanii\\_s\\_kitayskim\\_uchastiem](https://forbes.kz/process/probing/v_rk_rabotayut_22_neftyanyie_kompanii_s_kitayskim_uchastiem)], 15 February, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> See: K.B. Safinov, M.S. Kulmamirova, N.I. Illeritskiy, “Kazakhstan v energeticheskoy integratsii EAES: perspektivy, riski, vozmozhnosti,” available at [<https://www.webeconomy.ru/index.php?page=cat&newsid=3701&type=news>], 20 February 2020.

analysis method was utilized for the general analysis of the geopolitical situation in the Caspian region and the impact of key extra-regional actors, namely, the EU and the PRC, on its development. A comparative analysis was used to study the nature and compare the cooperation between the EU, China and the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Caspian region.

The spatial modeling method is used due to the fact that trade relations with partners are based on the supply of goods to various regions. The BRI project has become one of the means of cooperation. In this regard, the spatial distribution of interstate project participants revealed the possibility of risk stratification. The spatial method was used to visualize and map the illustrations.

## EU Strategy in the Caspian Region

The Caspian oil-producing region comprises the Caspian Sea and adjacent countries with oil and gas-producing areas. Economic stabilization and political stability allow the regional states to actively develop their deposits. The government of Kazakhstan has tasked itself with becoming one of the fifty most economically developed countries. To solve this task, Kazakhstan has begun to successfully develop the regional oil and gas fields.

Today, the Caspian region, which is rich in oil and gas reserves, is one of the key nodes of modern energy policy, and Kazakhstan is the leader in terms of production and proven oil reserves. This fact plays a dominant role in shaping the structure of Kazakhstan's economy and foreign trade. The share of imports from regional countries in Kazakhstan's trade turnover is significant.<sup>4</sup> Now the Caspian region is being developed by five countries: the Russian Federation, Kazakhstan, Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan (see Fig. 1), but Kazakhstan is the leader in terms of production and proven oil reserves. The Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2020-2030 was adopted on 9 March, 2020. It outlines the benchmarks of Kazakhstan's foreign policy and tasks related to the country's place on the global stage.

The Kazakh side is actively involved in the integration processes in the Caspian region. "Kazakhstan can influence the solution of urgent problems of regional economic integration, primarily because,

- first of all, it relies on the Eurasian integration strategy;
- secondly, it is a member of all regional alliances concerned with the stability of the Caspian economic system—the CIS, the Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, the EurAsEC, as well as the ECO and the SCO;
- thirdly, it can become an intermediary between the EU, the countries of Central Asia, China and other regional states."<sup>5</sup>

Kazakhstan is currently an active participant in the global energy market, which determines both the export and the overall economic policy of the state over the past decade. The energy intensity of the economy is a particular indicator of the natural resource intensity. This is a key indicator characterizing the sustainability of development of both the energy sector and the country as a whole (see Fig. 2 on p. 20).

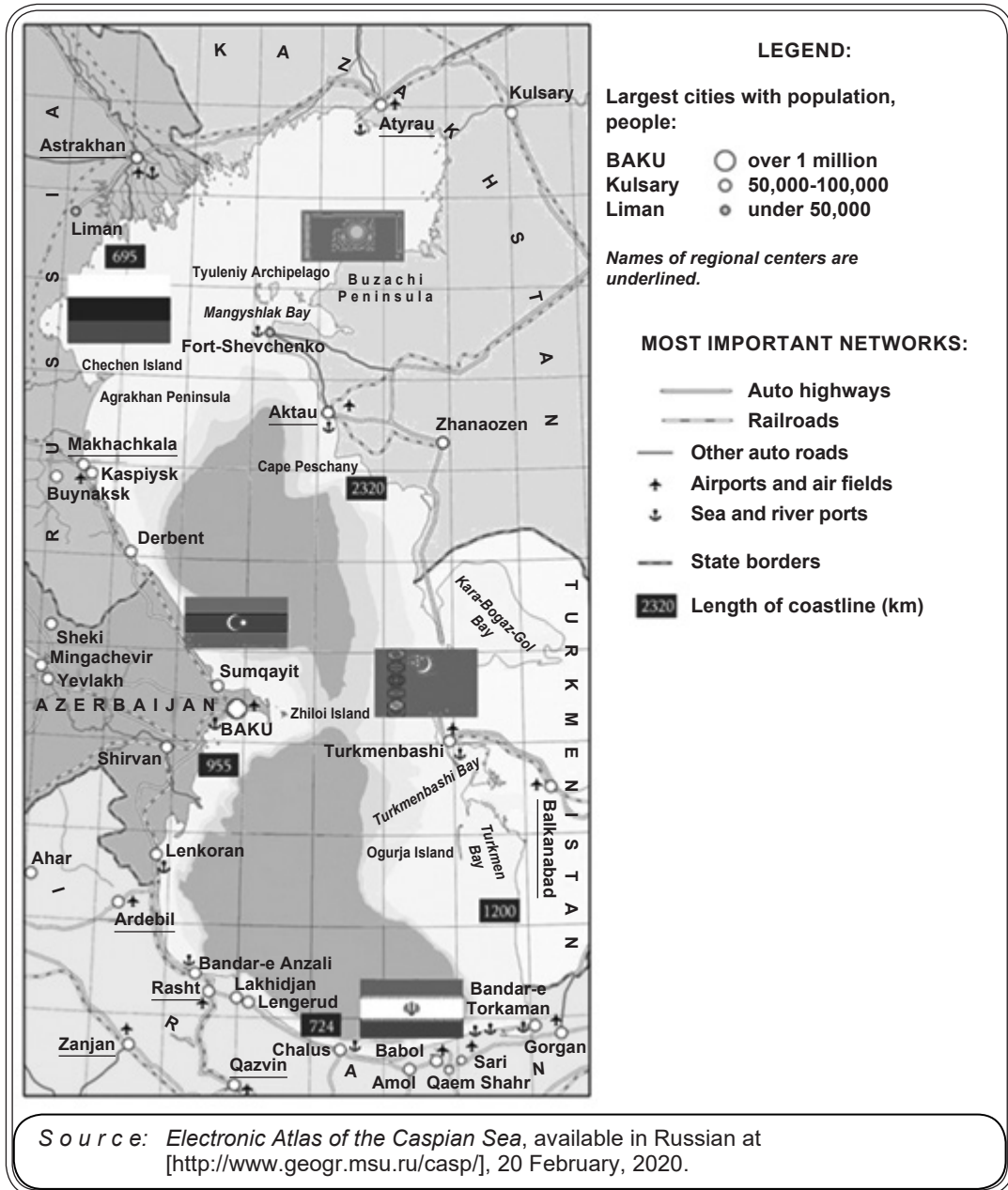
---

<sup>4</sup> See: B.K. Sultanov, *Tsentralnaia Azia i Kaspiiskiy region: riski, vyzovy, ugrozy*, Monograph, KISI under the President of RK, St. Petersburg, Almaty, 2012, 224 pp.

<sup>5</sup> See: "Interesy Kazakhstana v Kaspiiskom regione," available at [<https://www.webeconomy.ru/index.php?page=cat&cat=mc&mc=164&type=news&p=5&newsid=1603>], 20 February, 2020.

Figure 1

Political and Administrative Map of the Caspian Region

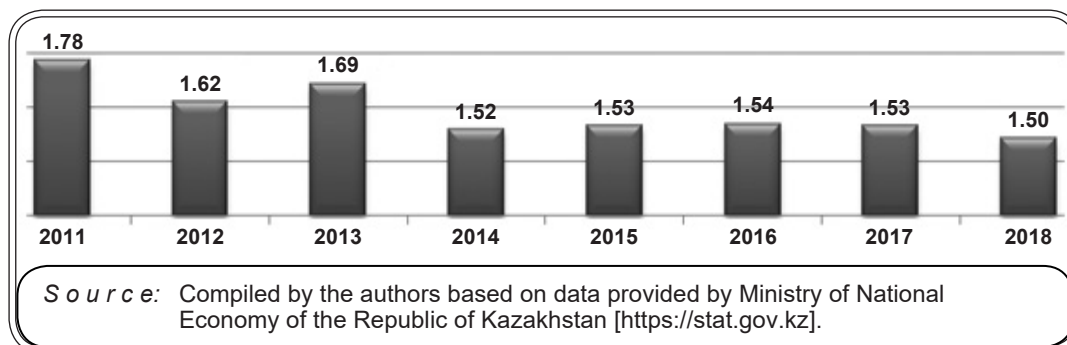


A joint meeting of the chambers of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan took place on 15 June, 2019, during which a report on the economic process in the Kazakhstani sector of the Caspian Sea was adopted. Total economic growth in this region of the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2019 equaled 4%. In addition to external factors, stable GDP growth was facilitated by the growth of industry (oil production) by 7.1%. In late 2019, agreements were reached on the implementation

of 42 new projects with major investors, including those from China and the EU countries. In total, 54 projects totaling \$3.9 billion will be completed in 2020. Work has begun on 63 joint projects with the EU and the PRC.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the transport industry and the oil and gas production infrastructure of the Kazakhstani sector of the Caspian contribute significantly to the development of the country.

Figure 2

**The Dynamics of the Energy Intensity of GDP in the Caspian Region in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2011-2018**



A very significant part of investments from the EU and China goes to Kazakhstan specifically for the Caspian projects. This factor determines the mining importance of the Caspian region for the further economic development of the Republic of Kazakhstan. At this time, oil reserves in the region amount to 5.1 billion tons, gas reserves—to 8 trillion cu m. From 1991 to 2018, the share of proven oil reserves in the region relative to global reserves increased from 2.6% to 3.3%, and proven gas reserves—to about 5%. Between 1991 and 2019, oil production increased from 26.6 to 90.3 million tons per year, and gas production is also growing—from 1991 to 2018 it increased from 23.7 to 77.1 billion cu m per year.<sup>7</sup>

At present, as the positions of the EU and China in the global economy strengthen, the geopolitical situation around the Caspian region and its resources has begun to undergo significant changes. The EU is implementing the Greater Europe strategy and, having determined the forms of regional cooperation with the countries it directly borders, it adopted a strategy for interaction with the countries of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, on 31 May, 2007. It was finally formulated at the end of 2007, when the European Energy Policy was adopted, but it still being refined and improved with regard to new geopolitical and economic realities.

The relations between Kazakhstan, the European Union and China can be fully characterized by J. Kennedy’s phrase: “Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners. And necessity has made us allies.”<sup>8</sup> If the economy has made these countries partners, then the need to strengthen security amid new threats has made them allies. The main spheres of interest of the European Union and China in Kazakhstan are trade and investment, energy, regional integration, transport and transit, water resource management.

<sup>6</sup> Calculated from the National Bank of Kazakhstan: International Investment Position of Kazakhstan: Standard Presentation, 1 October, 2018, International Investment Position, National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official Internet resource, available at [<https://nationalbank.kz/?docid=679&switch=russian>], 22 February, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See: Gross Domestic Product: Total and Per Capita, Current Prices, Annual; Merchandise: Total Trade and Share, Annual; Foreign Direct Investment: Inward and Outward Flows and Stock, Annual, UNCTADStat Data Center, available at [<http://unctadstat.unctad.org/wds/ReportFolders/reportFolders.aspx>].

<sup>8</sup> See: A. Collins, *John F. Kennedy*, Oxford University Press, 2012, 213 pp.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the EU has become Kazakhstan's main trade and important investment partner. Today, the trade turnover between the EU and RK amounts to \$30 billion. The deepening of the EU-RK energy cooperation is of great importance. The first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev said during his visit to Brussels: "Our country is the third largest non-OPEC supplier of energy resources to Europe. The share of Kazakhstani oil is very high in certain EU states. For example, in Rumania it equals 30%, in Austria—25%, in Switzerland RK is in the second place. Kazakhstan provides up to 20% of the total volume of energy imports to the countries of the United Europe."<sup>9</sup> Nowadays, Kazakhstan exports \$10 billion worth of oil to the EU.

Kazakhstan, just as its partners, still needs to partner with China in the development of hydrocarbon deposits. So, back in 2009, the domestic consumption of oil and natural gas in the European Union amounted to 670.8 million tons and 459.9 billion cu m, respectively, while production equaled to 98.7 million tons and 171.2 billion cu m<sup>10</sup> The influx of foreign investments to Kazakhstan is traditionally regarded as one of the most important factors in the development of the economy and is an example of policy efficiency in the international economic cooperation sphere. At half year-end 2018, the volume of accumulated foreign investments amounted to \$225 billion. In terms of the volume of attracted foreign investment, Kazakhstan is among the leaders not only in the post-Soviet space, but also in broader international comparisons. Thus, the amount of accumulated foreign direct investment (FDI) at the end of 2019 equaled 105% of GDP (GDP—\$162.9 billion, FDI stock—\$170.4 billion). This figure is significantly higher than the global average, the average for the OECD and the EU, and the indicators of neighboring countries such as the PRC and Russia (see Fig. 3<sup>11</sup>).

Attracting foreign investment has always been characteristic of the Kazakhstani economic model. The inflow of investments into Kazakhstan in the first years of the country's independence was rather large-scale. It became the main factor in the intensive development of large oil and gas fields, thereby laying the foundation for dynamic economic development. Kazakhstan has become one of the leaders in attracting foreign investment not only in the post-Soviet space, but also among all the developing economies of the world, which made it possible to raise the status of the national economy due to the extensive participation of large foreign companies in the country's economy, recognition of the market nature of its economy, obtaining high credit ratings, being promoted in a number of international indices and rankings.

The geography of foreign investments attracted to Kazakhstan is diverse: neighboring Russia is one of the investors along with the largest economies of the world, such as the EU and China; offshore territories and geographically remote states are among the leaders in terms of accumulated investments, which testifies to the extensive international interest in the country's economy (see Fig. 4<sup>12</sup>).

Meanwhile, foreign investments in Kazakhstan are distinguished by a very high level of concentration by donor country (see Table 1 and Fig. 5 on pp. 23 and 24, respectively): the top five investment partners account for 70% of the total investments. According to this indicator, the EU is the undisputed leader. Half of the total foreign investment in Kazakhstan falls on five EU countries: The

---

<sup>9</sup> See: "Kazakhstan-ES: novaia stranitsa otnosheniy. Prezident N. Nazarbayev posetil Bryussel s odnodnevnyim rabochim vizitom," 13 April, 2010, available at [<https://www.zakon.kz/169080-kazakhstan-es-novaja-stranica.html>], 25 February, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Calculated according to UNCTAD: *Foreign Direct Investment: Inward and Outward Flows and Stock*, Annual, UNCTAD Stat Data Center, available at [<http://unctadstat/>], 27 February, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Created according to the Data of: FDI Stocks, OECD website [<https://data.oecd.org/fdi/fdi-stocks.htm>], 2 March, 2020; Main Socio-Economic Indicators of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Agency on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at [<http://stat.gov.kz/faces/homePage/homeDinamika.pokazateli?afLoop=5405675809580933#>], 2 March, 2020; National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official Internet resource, available at [<http://nationalbank.kz/?docid=679&switch=russian>], 2 March, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> See: National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official Internet resource, available at [<https://www.nationalbank.kz/>], 1 March, 2020.

Figure 3

**Volume of Accumulated Foreign Direct Investments against GDP**

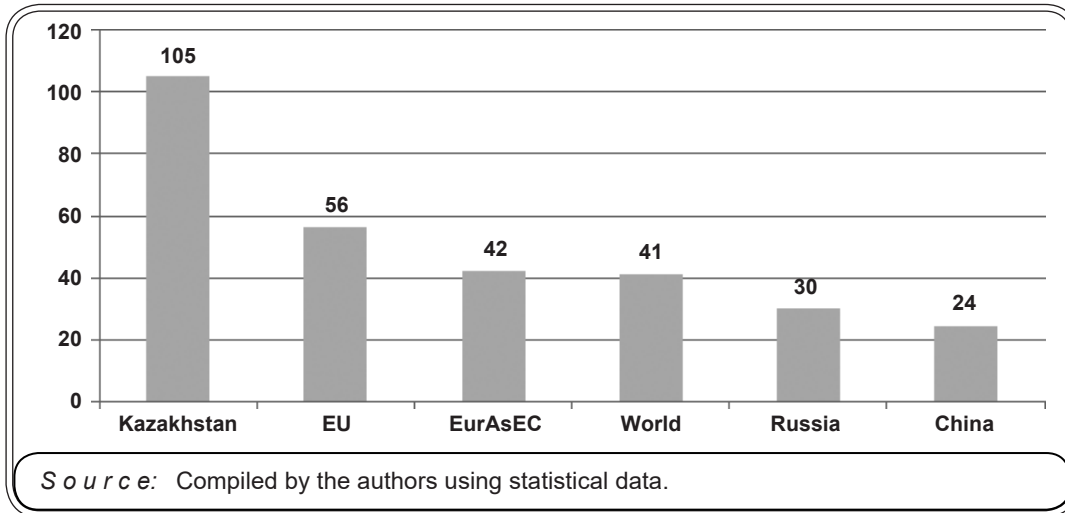
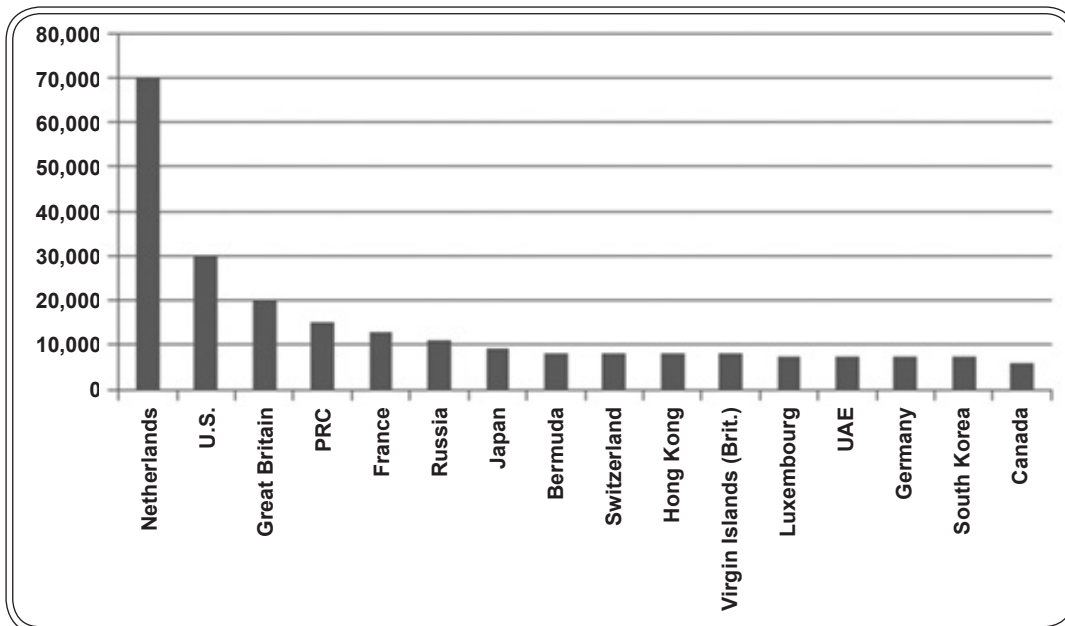


Figure 4

**Countries that Invest in Kazakhstan's Economy**



Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Luxembourg, and Germany. According to the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the total inflow of FDI from 28 EU countries in 2018 amounted to \$11.6 billion. By the end of 2013, the volume of investments in fixed assets amounted to \$30 billion, which corresponds to 47.9% of their total volume. The share of EU countries in the volume of accumulated foreign investments of all types at the end of 2018 amounted to 51.9%; for foreign direct investment

this figure equaled 55.7%. Also, the EU countries account for over 72% of the volume of direct foreign investments of Kazakhstan itself, which confirms the priority of the European vector in Kazakhstan's international investment activity.

European funds are invested in numerous projects, but most of them invest in large projects associated with the development of hydrocarbon deposits and in oil companies in Kazakhstan. For instance, most of the share capital of the second largest Kazakh company, Karachaganak Petroleum Operating (KPO), belongs to the Italian Eni and the Dutch-British Royal Dutch Shell (29.25% each, respectively).

*Table 1*

**Cumulative Inflow of Direct Investments  
from the EU to Kazakhstan's Oil Sector, 2005-2018, \$m**

	Belgium	Great Britain	Germany	Italy	Netherlands	France	EU Total
2005	-5.2	603.7	86.5	325.6	1,944.1	774.9	3,943.4
2006	2.8	894.4	164.8	381.6	2,990.7	802.3	5,490
2007	5.1	1,154.9	221.3	521.7	3,267.0	1,026.8	8,873.7
2008	62.8	1,912.3	353.0	699.4	4,411.5	1,206.5	9,212.4
2009	145.0	1,265.2	298.6	685.1	7,470.2	1,351.2	11,871.4
2010	422.1	1,098.0	201.9	648.0	7,310.3	1,561.4	11,790.7
2011	405.6	1,097.3	404.4	484.7	8,876.0	1,571.3	13,359.8
2012	856.6	1,395.7	681.6	866.0	8,692.2	1,168.7	14,434
2013	958.2	937.6	425.1	564.0	6,520.9	954.0	11,139.1
2014	859.8	747.2	479.9	470.3	6,795.8	837.5	10,610.6
2015	693.0	372.2	319.1	34.8	5,736.0	963.6	8,458.8
2016	710.6	684.8	249.8	65.4	7,655.5	1,137.3	11,460.7
2017	1,068.9	533.8	391.3	125.3	5,935.2	802.8	9,827.4
2018	1,049	593.1	400.5	216.2	7,349.8	916.1	11,646.6

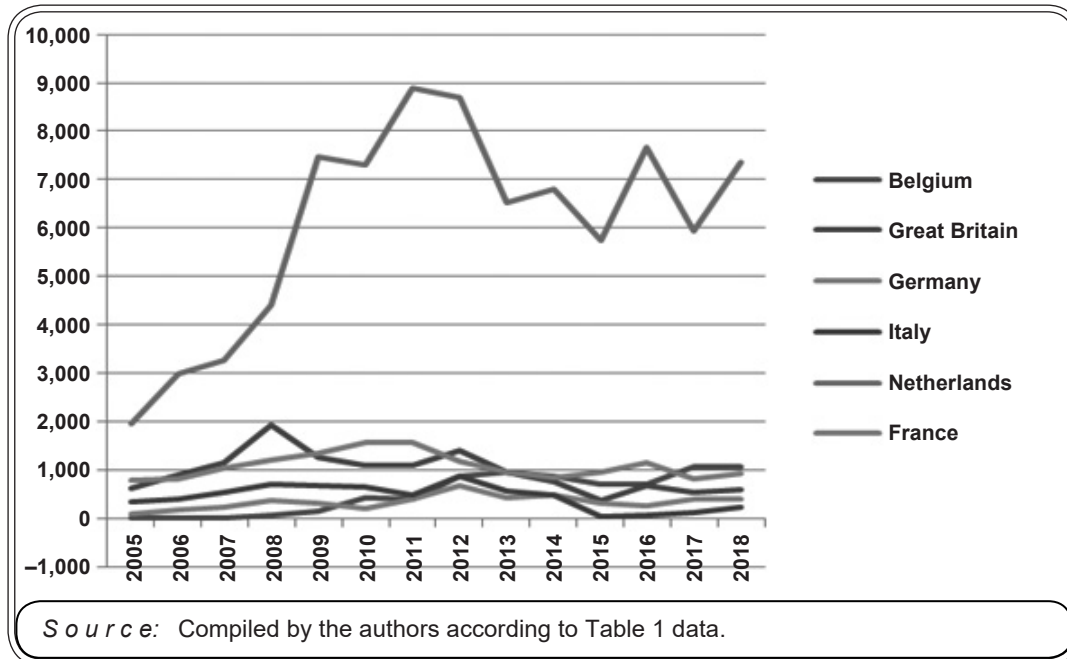
*Source: Total Inflow of Direct Foreign Investments in the Republic of Kazakhstan by Country, Statistics of Direct Investments by Sphere of Investment, National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available in Russian at [http://www.nationalbank.kz/?docid=680&switch=russian], 3 March, 2020.*

The Russian Lukoil also participates in this company's share capital with 13.5% of shares, which indicates the scale of KPO activities. Its total investments in the development of the Karachaganak field amounted to more than \$20 billion.<sup>13</sup> European business is also widely involved in the development of other oil fields in the Kazakh sector of Kashagan and the Northern Caspian. The capital of North Caspian Operating Company (NCOC) comprises such large oil companies as Eni,

<sup>13</sup> See: Kompanii-partnery. O kompanii Karachaganak Petroleum Operating B.V., available at [http://www.kpo.kz/ru/o-kompanii/partnery-po-proektu.html], 9 March, 2020.

Figure 5

Dynamics of Total Inflow of Direct Investments from the EU to Kazakhstan's Oil Sector, 2005-2018, \$m



Total, Shell, each of which owns 16.8% of shares. Thus, the European business accounts for the greater part of this megaproject (50.4%). The consortium also includes oil companies from the United States (ExxonMobil), China (CNPC), Japan (Inpex), as well as the Kazakh national oil company KazMunayGas.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, this latter participates in the consortium through its subsidiary company Kashagan B.V., registered in the Netherlands. Therefore, its investments are officially carried out as investments from the EU.

However, the actual participation of European business in large projects of the last decade was significant despite the fact that some of the investments from the EU, such as the aforementioned block of shares owned by Kashagan B.V., are only nominally European, but are, in fact, of Kazakhstani or other non-European origin. This participation is reflected not only in the macroeconomic indicators of the investment flow, but also in specific large-scale projects, including socially significant projects.

Major projects in Kazakhstan's raw materials sector, including two large projects with the participation of European and Russian businesses, are being implemented under production sharing agreements. These agreements often stipulate the social obligations of the consortia engaged in the development of deposits, which in most cases significantly contributes to the development of the regions where they operate. In general, such agreements will positively impact social progress in three main areas: labor market development through the creation of jobs and staff enhancement, including training in progressive foreign industry technologies; "social responsibility" programs, in which international companies assist in the development of various industries in the regions of their operation; provision of orders and contracts to Kazakhstani supplying companies as part of "pro-

<sup>14</sup> See: Kompanii-partnery. O kompanii Karachaganak Petroleum Operating B.V.



grams to increase local contribution,” that is, production localization. The activities of two large Kazakhstani energy consortia with predominantly European capital in these three areas contribute significantly to social progress, especially at the regional level. In particular, KPO (Karachaganak Petroleum Operating) was one of the first in Kazakhstan to start implementing a program to increase Kazakhstani contribution back in 2001. Since then, about 3,800 local suppliers have been registered in the database.

In recent years, the share of Kazakhstani business in the total volume of contracts and purchases by KPO has amounted to 47-50% (in 2015, it was equal to 48.8%, or \$581 million).<sup>15</sup> KPO, like other large subsoil users, continues to develop programs to increase Kazakhstani contribution within the framework of the Aktau Declaration. In 2012, this Declaration of Joint Action was signed by three large oil and gas operators in Kazakhstan with the aim of uniting separate programs of companies, investors and government agencies involved in integrating national industries into a single system. In 2015, the participants of this initiative—Tengizchevroil, North Caspian Operating Company, KPO and AO National Company KazMunayGas—continued to work together to settle on technical requirements for a unified supplier database. This database should become the main portal for local suppliers and should meet the needs of all participants.

Another important area of KPO activity that has a direct social effect is attraction of Kazakhstani personnel and increasing employment. The company has observed a positive trend in both the total number of employees and the number of Kazakhstani employees. In 2012-2015, the number of local company employees increased from 3,769 to 4,086 people (by 8.4%). In the West Kazakhstan region, the number of company employees in 2015 amounted to 1.3% of the total employed population, 14.2% of the number of employed in industry, 61% of the number of employees in the oil industry.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, the volume of funds invested by just two large Kazakhstani oil and gas projects in Kazakhstan with the domination of European capital in social and infrastructure projects amounted to \$900 million. Other programs that promoted social development in the areas of operation were also implemented. In these projects, the operating companies acted as the leading employers in the region, and created a significant demand for goods and services of Kazakhstani suppliers, contributing to the growth of the regional and national economy, expanding the tax base, and increasing employment rates and income of the population.<sup>17</sup>

Kazakhstan's cooperation with European countries was not devoid of certain shortcomings; along with the success in attracting large international companies, some companies that developed oil and gas fields have left, and there was capital outflow from the Kazakh market. As the economic system in the oil and gas sphere matures and strengthens, Kazakhstan will invest in national companies. Thus, KazMunayGas has been consistently included among the operators and beneficiaries of large fields, which were developed by European consortia early on. In this manner, the development of the Kashagan field was started by OKIOC (Offshore Kazakhstan International Operating Company), a consortium of Western oil companies established in 1998. The consortium includes mainly European companies, i.e., Agip (with a share of 14.29%), British Gas (14.29%), Exxon Mobil (14.29%), Shell (14.29%), TotalFinaElf (14.29%), BP Amoco (9.5%), Inpex (7.14%), Philips Petroleum (7.14%), Statoil (4.8%).<sup>18</sup>

According to Western experts, raw materials from the Caspian region may be of great importance for Europe as an alternative to Arab oil and a source of compensation for the decline in produc-

<sup>15</sup> See: Kazakhstanskoe soderzhanie. Karachaganak Petroleum Operating B.V., available at [<http://www.kpo.kz/ru/ustoihivoe-razvitiie/kazakhstanskoe-soderzhanie>], 10 March, 2020.

<sup>16</sup> See: B.K. Sultanov, op. cit.

<sup>17</sup> See: Severo-Kaspiiskiy proekt. TOO PSA website [<http://www.psa.kz/about/history/>], 10 March, 2020.

<sup>18</sup> See: Karachaganak. TOO «PSA» [[http://www.psa.kz/proekty/?ELEMENT\\_ID=55](http://www.psa.kz/proekty/?ELEMENT_ID=55)], 11 March, 2020.

tion in the North Sea fields.<sup>19</sup> According to some reports, only Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have oil reserves that exceed 100 billion barrels, which makes the Caspian region the third largest oil reservoir in the world after the Persian Gulf and Siberia.<sup>20</sup>

During the 6th KAZENERGY Eurasian Forum, EU Commissioner for Energy Günther Oettinger said on the official website of the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan: “For the European Union, the [Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline] will be a very important step in the development of the Southern Corridor. Not everyone knows that the European Union was the first to offer to conclude an international treaty in support of the infrastructure project. We will support Kazakhstan’s participation in the Southern Corridor.”<sup>21</sup> At the same time, it can be noted that the new gas pipeline will provide new opportunities for the development of export supplies from the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea.

## **Main Vectors of the PRC’s Geopolitics in the Kazakhstani Sector of the Caspian Sea**

The relationship between Kazakhstan and China is mainly based on economic interests. Chinese companies are involved in various sectors of Kazakhstan’s economy, especially in the oil and gas industry, since energy is of strategic importance to both countries. Currently, Kazakhstan is China’s second-largest trade partner among the CIS countries after Russia. Since last year, the PRC has become Kazakhstan’s number one trade partner. According to statistics provided by the Chinese side, trade between the two countries in 2010 amounted to \$20.31 billion (an increase of 45.3%) and exceeded the pre-crisis level. China also accounts for the largest share of Kazakhstan’s export-import oil trade. The volume of Chinese investments in the oil and gas industry in Kazakhstan amounted to \$15 billion.<sup>22</sup>

Cooperation between Kazakhstan and the PRC in the investment sphere is traditionally viewed in the context of attracting Chinese investments to Kazakhstan, but Kazakhstan also invests in the PRC. According to the National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as of January 1, 2019, all types of accumulated investments from Kazakhstan to the PRC totaled \$3,916 million. Chinese investments in Kazakhstan amounted to \$15,212 million. Thus, the net position of the PRC in mutual investment amounted to \$10,762 million.<sup>23</sup>

In addition, in the context of the implementation of an international oil project, special attention needs to be heeded to Chinese investments in Kazakhstan and the ways in which the implementation of this project influenced the volume of investment flows from the PRC. An analysis of these flows, both in absolute terms and in their share and dynamics of accumulated investment volume allows to

---

<sup>19</sup> See: S. Kushkumbayev, “Vliianie energoresursov na nekotorye aspekty vnutrenney i vneshney politiki Kazakhstana,” *Tsentralnaia Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 1, 1998, p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> See: *New York Times*, 17 February, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> See: Günther Oettinger’s Speech at the VI KAZENERGY Eurasian Forum, available at [<https://primeminister.kz/ru/search?q>], 11 March, 2020.

<sup>22</sup> See: K. Yu, “Energy Cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative: EU Experience of the Trans-European Networks for Energy,” *Asia Europe Journal*, No. 16 (12), 2018, pp. 251-265.

<sup>23</sup> See: *International Investment Position of Kazakhstan by Country (HIP)*. *International Investment Position*, National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official Internet resource, available at [<http://www.nationalbank.kz/?docid=679&switch=russian>], 15 March, 2020.

conclude that China's role in Kazakhstan's investment platform is decreasing. The total inflow of direct investments from China to Kazakhstan has been declining throughout most of the implementation period of the BRI project, which also led to a decrease in the share of Chinese investments in the total amount of accumulated FDI and other investments in Kazakhstan.

In the year when the Silk Road Economic Belt project was announced, the PRC's share in the total FDI inflow to Kazakhstan was 9.3%, and in 2018 it decreased to 6.1%. In recent years, the share of China in the total volume of accumulated foreign investment of all types has decreased from 9.6% in 2013 to 6.9% in 2018 (see Table 2 and Fig. 6).

*Table 2*

**Dynamics and Role of PRC's Investments in Kazakhstan**

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
<b>Total inflow of direct foreign investments from the PRC</b>	2,246.0	1,807,5	833.9	975.2	1,082.5	1,489.4	1,878.3
<b>Total inflow of direct foreign investments into the Republic of Kazakhstan</b>	24,098	23,809	15,368	21,367	20,960	24,276	26,466
<b>PRC's share, %</b>	9.3	7.6	5.4	4.6	5.2	6.1	7.0
<b>Accumulated foreign investments of all types from the PRC</b>	20,101	18,659	15,103	15,153	15,841	15,212	17,335
<b>Accumulated foreign investments of all types in Kazakhstan, TOTAL</b>	209,098	213,869	198,453	218,217	227,392	219,237	228,528
<b>PRC's share, %</b>	9.6	8.7	7.6	6.9	7.0	6.9	7.8

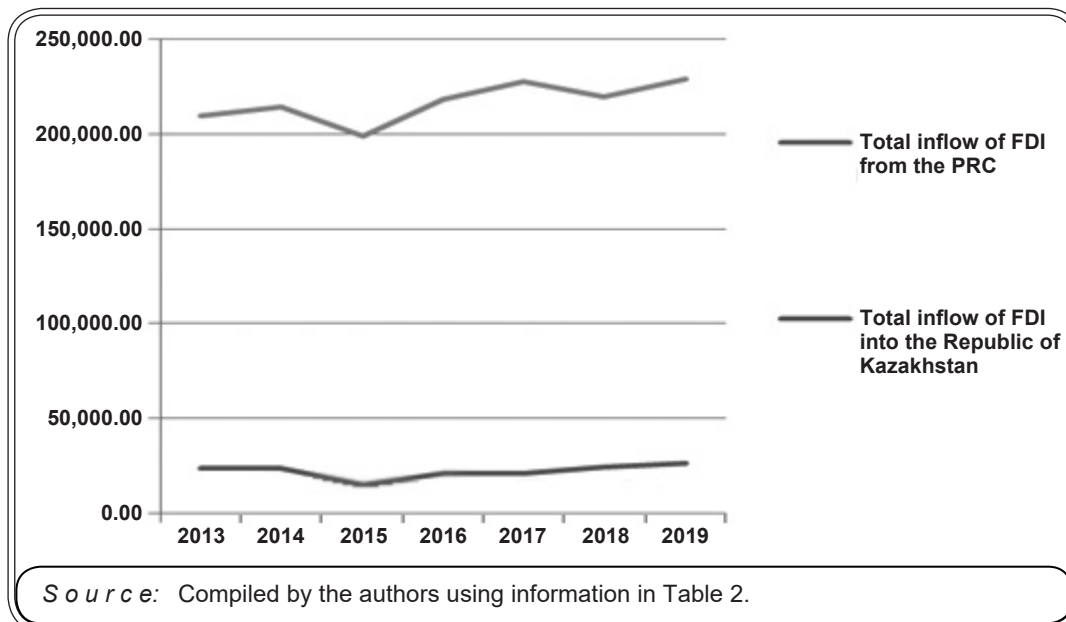
*Source:* Statistics of Direct Investments by Direction, Gross Outflow of Direct Investors in Kazakhstan by Country, National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official Internet resource, available at [<https://nationalbank.kz/?docid=680&switch=russian>], 13 марта 2020.

The oil industry is the main sector of Kazakhstan's economy. The oil-rich Kazakhstani sector of the Caspian is an important source of raw materials not only for Chinese oil companies, but also for companies from many other countries. The basis for bilateral relations in the field of oil production between Kazakhstan and China was laid by the intergovernmental agreement signed in September 1997 on cooperation in the field of oil and gas and the agreements between the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Chinese National Oil and Gas Corporation on the oil pipeline, river project and the Kazakh-Iranian oil pipeline. These documents were of strategic importance for both states and created a solid foundation for long-term mutually beneficial cooperation.

Subsequently, Chinese companies acquired shares in a number of oil-producing enterprises in Kazakhstan. Most of the oil fields in the country are developed mainly by two large Chinese companies: CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) and CITIC (China International Trade and Investment Company). After signing a bilateral agreement in 1997, CNPC initially acquired Aktobe-munaygas (Zhanazhol, Kenkiyak). In 1998, when the Chinese oil company took over the Aktobe Oil

Figure 6

Dynamics and Role of PRC's Investments in Kazakhstan



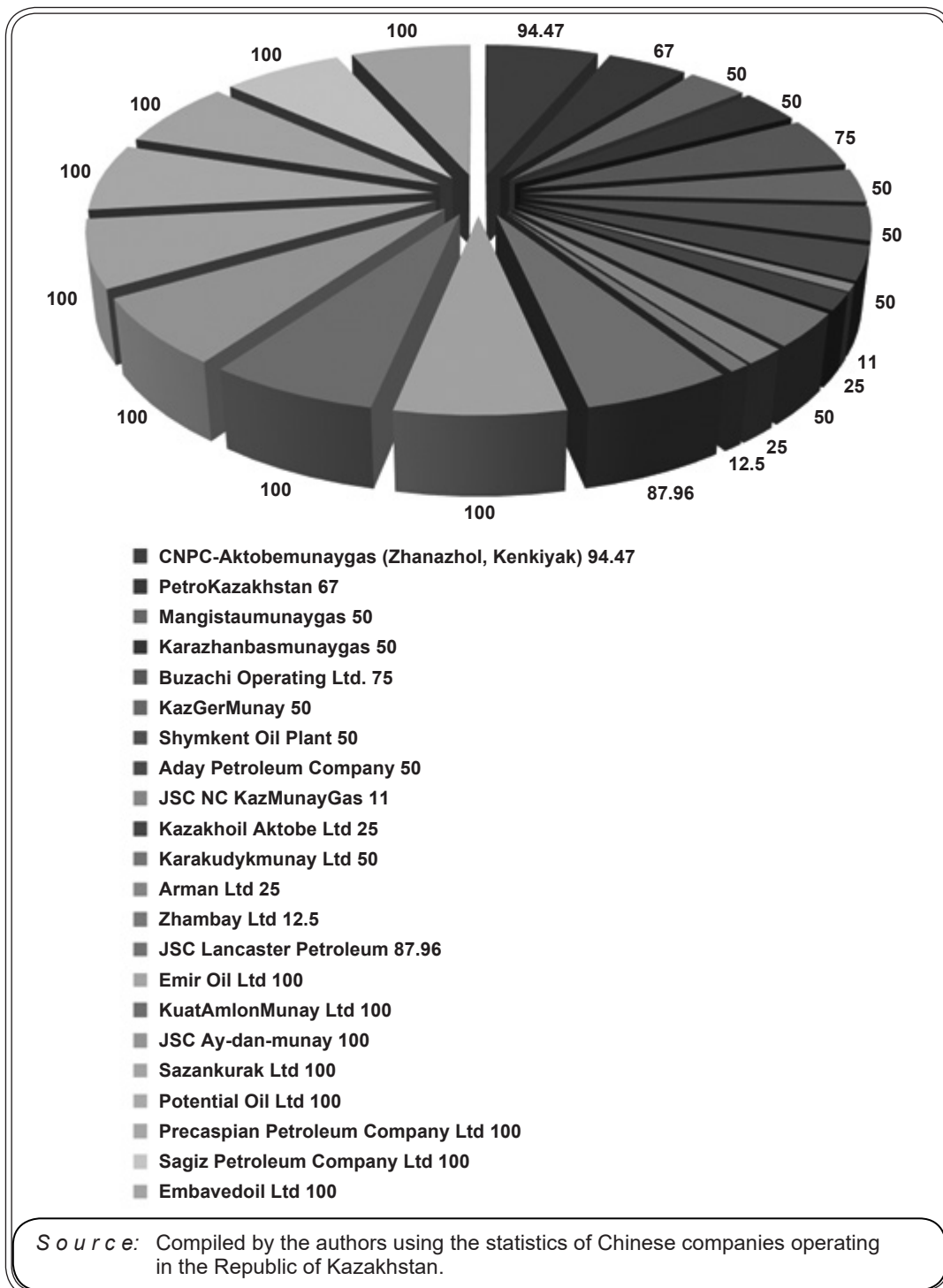
Company, the annual oil production was only 2 million tons. Ten years later, thanks to Chinese technology, investment and management system, the annual production increased 2.5 times. In 2001, CNPC acquired a 50% stake in the North Buzachi, a gas and oil field in the Mangistau region of Kazakhstan, on the Buzachi Peninsula. The field is being developed by Buzachi Operating Ltd, a joint venture owned in equal shares by Nelson Petroleum Buzachi BV and Chinese oil company CNPC). In 2006, CNPC acquired Petro-Kazakhstan, and CITIC bought a 50% stake in Karazhanbasmunay. In 2009, CNPC acquired a 50% stake in Mangistaunaygas. New technologies for exploration, drilling, storage and processing of oil and gas arrived in Kazakhstan along with Chinese oil companies. The introduction of CNPC technology allowed to develop the Kenkiyak oil field with reserves of 28 million tons in a short time, despite its notoriety for its difficult geological conditions. Currently, 2 million tons of oil are produced here annually. The Atasu-Alashankou, Kenkiyak-Kumkol, Kazakhstan-China and Beineu-Bozoi-Shymkent pipelines<sup>24</sup> were built to transport the extracted oil to China. The government of the People's Republic of China participated in financing the construction of oil pipelines that spanned thousands of kilometers traversing Central Kazakhstan towards the north-western Chinese border. These and other pipelines are interconnected, expanding access to oil sources at the bottom of the Caspian Sea. Kazakhstan seeks to control the development of its oil fields by investors from Russia, China and the West, but the global financial crisis has allowed China to increase its influence in Kazakhstan's oil industry and enter other sectors of the Kazakh economy.

Fig. 7 reflects China's growing role in Kazakhstan's energy sector and demonstrates that energy cooperation between the two countries is of strategic importance.

<sup>24</sup> See: *Direct Investment Statistics by Direct Investment Direction / Gross Outflow of Direct Kazakhstani Investors by Countries Abroad*, National Bank of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Official Internet resource, available at [<https://nationalbank.kz/?docid=680&switch=russian>], 13 March, 2020.

Figure 7

Share of Chinese Companies in the Capital of Kazakhstani Oil Companies (%)



## *Conclusion*

Currently, the priority areas for the EU and the PRC are the strengthening of energy diplomacy in the Caspian region, and more effective participation of the Republic of Kazakhstan in it. One of the key factors in energy diplomacy is the Caspian region, including the Kazakhstani sector of the Caspian. As noted by many, Kazakhstan is a symbol of stability for the EU countries and the PRC, as well as a bridge connecting the West and the East. The interaction between the EU, PRC and RK is growing year to year.

The strategic partnership between Kazakhstan, the EU and China opens up numerous prospects for realizing the interests of each of the parties. At the same time, deeper cooperation scenarios are limited by China's position on the country's unconditional sovereignty in decision-making processes based on its own principles. There is an obvious gap between China's approach, which allows for diversity of norms and common interests as the basis of cooperation, and the European approach, according to which differences of interests can be bridged by reaching an agreement on universal political rules. Hence the second contradiction: the EU is inclined to believe that the emergence of a multipolar world order will lead to effective multilateral cooperation, and that states like China will then abandon the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. At the same time, Beijing is using all the power of its position to uphold these principles in international institutions, such as the U.N. The legal framework for international cooperation is a key source of controversy and an obstacle to reaching an understanding on the basic principles of cooperation.

Despite the ambiguity of interpretations of the place and role of interstate strategic partnership, cooperation between the EU and China is characterized by the following parameters. The EU is China's largest trading partner, and China is the EU's second largest trading partner after the United States. In 2018, trade in goods between the EU and China amounted to 518 billion euros, and trade in services reached 78 billion euros. Trade and investment exchange between the EU and China became one of the main sources of wealth, job creation, development and innovation. The partners work together to achieve fast, sustainable and balanced growth, and have a common interest in creating a more stable and secure world to everyone's benefit.

The EU's share of total foreign direct investment in China is stable at about 20%. This makes the EU one of the top five FDI donors to China. However, this share could be significantly increased, as it only accounts for 6% of the total EU FDI inflows, and the EU's share in the total FDI outflows from China remains similarly small. Investment negotiations between the EU and China are aimed at improving access to the investment market and the overall investment climate in China for investors from the EU, and in the reverse direction. Thus, relations between the EU and China demonstrate a powerful development impetus against the background of growing economic interdependence, which is accompanied by a constant deepening of their political dialog with the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The oil sector is the principal component in the economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, along with the extraction of coal, uranium and other important raw materials.

Over the past two decades, stable and mutually beneficial relations in the energy sector have developed between Kazakhstan, the EU and the PRC. Major European and Chinese energy companies have invested heavily in Kazakhstan's oil and gas industry. Currently, about 70% of the total volume of exported Kazakhstani oil falls on the EU countries and China, which corresponds to about 6% of the total volume of oil imports by the EU and China. On the other hand, Kazakhstan's national oil and gas company KazMunayGas controls significant oil refining capacities in the EU and PRC.

In recent years, cooperation between the EU, China and the Republic of Kazakhstan has been successfully developing in trade, economic, energy, non-raw materials, infrastructure and other spheres. The prospects of further development of the mining industry and non-resource sectors of the

economy are quite significant. Therefore, Kazakhstan should not limit itself to raw materials, and heed attention to the further development of cooperation with the EU and China in other industries.

With regard to the above, both the foreign and domestic policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the energy sphere actually contributes to the rapprochement and interaction of the EU countries and the PRC, while the country itself is a “moderator” in the relations between these countries.

---

## PAN-TURKISM: CIVILIZATIONAL PROJECT OF MODERN TURKEY

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.03>

Vladimir KARYAKIN

*Ph.D. (Military Science), Lecturer,  
Department of Military Regional Studies, Military University,  
Defense Ministry of the Russian Federation  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

---

### ABSTRACT

**T**he paper examines the conditions and circumstances under which Pan-Turkism became the foreign policy cornerstone of the Turkic Republic, traces its transformations and use by the Turkish political elite to consolidate the Turkic-speaking peoples and unite them into a single state, the Great Turan. Pan-Turkism strongly af-

fects the policy of the Turkic Republic and the political processes unfolding across the post-Soviet space, as well as the situation in the Muslim regions of Russia. Certain measures that may help Russia stand opposed to the widening sphere of Pan-Turkism in the zone of Russia's traditional political presence are presented in the Conclusion.

**KEYWORDS:** *Pan-Turkism as a civilizational project,  
Pan-Turkism in the post-Soviet space,  
Turkey's policy in the Muslim regions of Russia.*

### *Introduction*

Leaders of a country who seek to conquer or preserve its leading positions in the world will inevitably devise a civilizational project as the ideology of the state's external and internal policies.

At the same time, the genesis of such projects and their realization should be discussed in the context of history of political thought, traditions, national mentality and political culture of the given country. This is typical, first and foremost, of the empires that lost their geopolitical consequence and left the historical stage. They are likely to suffer from phantom pains caused by lost territories and power.

Political science differently assesses the role of ideology in the political process ranging from a complete rejection of ideological impact (Russia is a pertinent example) to an assignment of a hyperbolized significance, in the case of Turkey. A constructive approach to ideological impact on political processes presupposes the assessment of the role played by the political elite in the implementation of ideological attitudes and formulation of new or revival of old traditional values in people's minds.

The above means that we should pay particular attention to Pan-Turkism and its role as a civilizational platform of Turkish policies.

A glance into the past will show that Pan-Turkism emerged in Turkey in the 1920s when ideological trends split up into Pan-Turkism and Turkism, radical and moderate Islamism, neo-Ottomanism and Pan-Turanism, all dominated by Kemalism, which was formulated by Kemal Atatürk as the basis of Turkish-style democracy.

## **Pan-Turkism as the Driver of Political Processes Unfolding in the Turkic World**

There are currently three factors that shape the political processes in the Turkish Republic:

- failed attempts of the Turkish leaders to achieve equal cooperation with the European Union and the United States, which forced Ankara to look towards the Middle East and Russia<sup>1</sup>;
- the concept of neo-Ottomanism that was revived when the previous factor remained unrealized, as the phantom pains caused by the lost power of the Ottoman Empire increased. The new concept was largely formulated by Ahmet Davutoğlu in his *Stratejik derinlik: Türkiye'nin uluslararası konumu* (The Strategic Depth)<sup>2</sup>;
- Pan-Turkism became Turkey's civilizational project used by its leaders in the post-Soviet military, political and economic vacuum as an instrument of realization of their imperial ambitions.

Disintegration of the Soviet Union merely kindled the ideas realized in a latent form during the Cold War to undermine the Soviet Union's positions in its Central Asian republics. Today, the full-scale implementation of the project in the post-Soviet space may deprive Ankara of apparent economic, military and political advantages created by its partnership with Russia and is, therefore, fraught with considerable losses.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See: P. Varbanets, "A Turkic Alliance: Possible Alternative to Turkey's Unrealized EU Membership?" *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (55), 2009.

<sup>2</sup> See: A. Simavorian, "Ideologicheskie techeniia v kontekste vneshney politiki Turtsii," available at [[http://www.noravank.am/rus/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT\\_ID=5011](http://www.noravank.am/rus/articles/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=5011)], 4 November, 2019l.

<sup>3</sup> See: A.B. Burashnikova, "Neopanturkizm i neosmanism vo vneshney politike Turtsii," *Izvestia Saratovskogo universiteta*, History. International Relations Series, No. 2, 2013, available at [<https://imo.sgu.ru/ru/node/1140>], 23 December, 2017; E.R. Nikulin, "Kontseptsia panturkizma v sovremennoy vneshnepoliticheskoy doktrine Turetskoy Respubliki," in: *Globálne problemy i protivorechia XXI veka*, 2018, available at [<https://nauka.me/s241328880000081-3-1>], 4 November, 2019.



The size of the Turkic family of peoples (about 200 million) endows the Pan-Turkism project with a fairly large potential.<sup>4</sup>

Today, Pan-Turkism has acquired even greater significance thanks to the following:

- the Turkic states are the field of competition between the Russian and Chinese integration projects that Turkey wants to join as a regional power;
- as consumer markets and as sources of natural resources and cheap labor in the Eurasian economic system, the Turkic countries are ready to meet Turkey half-way to diversify their partnership with all entities of international politics;
- Turkic countries are pursuing a multi-vector policy to develop relations with Russia and Turkey as a road towards closer contacts with Europe.

The Turkic states consider Turkey an investor that helps develop their economies.<sup>5</sup> Turkey, in turn, invests in the Turkic states of Central Asia and in the countries where the Turkic people are a minority (Georgia, Iran, Iraq, Bulgaria, Rumania and Greece); the total volume of Turkish investments has reached \$5.35 billion against a rather unfavorable background. The EU future of Turkey is dim<sup>6</sup>; Turkey's relations with Germany, the "locomotive of Europe" are deteriorating even though the Turkish diaspora in Germany spares no effort to pull Turkey towards the European Union.

The relations between Ankara and Washington are at their all-time low: America refuses to deport Fethullah Gülen who, according to the Turkish leaders, had stirred up a military coup in 2016. This suggests with a great degree of certainty that Turkey will not abandon the European track of its foreign policy in the near future.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, Turkey's political weight in the Middle East is not impressive enough to make the realization of the Pan-Turkic ideas easy. There is a sufficient number of global and regional players seeking domination in the Middle East and the post-Soviet space.

The Arab Spring of 2011 and the civil war in Syria seemed like a good chance for Turkey to gain regional leadership;<sup>8</sup> it was undermined by the incident with the downed Russian plane and support of the anti-Assad coalition in Syria. The Turkish potential was further undermined by the problem of the Kurds who had Americans on their side for a period of time. Americans pursued their own aims in the region together with a coalition of states that joined the anti-ISIS campaign to camouflage their opposition to Assad.<sup>9</sup>

The ideas of Pan-Turkism, however, are very much "alive and winning." This is confirmed by the work of the International Turkic Kurultai, regular summits of the Turkic states and economic integration spreading across the Turkic world. Cultural cooperation, empowered corporate spirit and civilizational unity are growing increasingly more obvious on the international arena.<sup>10</sup>

Ilkham Aliev, President of Azerbaijan confirmed this by saying that "any problem of any Turkic state should become a problem for all Turkic states." By this the President also confirmed that Azer-

<sup>4</sup> See: "Rasprostranenie idey panturkizma. Sovremenny analiz geopoliticheskikh ugroz," Vektor Evrazia. Federalnaia ekspertnaya set, 2018, available at [<https://vector-eurasia.org/internal/project-analyst/22/>], 4 November, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> See: "Priamyie inostrannye investitsii Turtsii," TRT Russkiy, 2017, available at [<https://www.trt.net.tr/russian/programmy/2017/05/25/>], 23 December, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> See: P. Varbanets, op. cit.

<sup>7</sup> See: "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: ES ne dolzhen stat khristianskim klubom i ne dolzhen prinimat uchastie v kampanii islamofobiii," available at [<http://najmnews.com/>], 11 January, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> See: T.A. Ganiev, V.V. Karyakin, "Bolshoy Blizhniy Vostok: geopoliticheskaya regionalistika konfliktogennogo tsentra mirovoy tsivilizatsii", *Arkhot*, No. 4 (7), 2018, pp. 15-28.

<sup>9</sup> See: T.A. Ganiev, V.V. Karyakin, "Kurdskiy faktor i ego rol v formirovanii geopoliticheskoy obstanovki na Blizhnem Vostoke", *Arkhot*, No. 2 (5), 2018, pp. 4-13.

<sup>10</sup> See: E.T. Mekhdiiev, "Neo-Osmanizm v regionalnoy politike Turtsii," *Vestnik MGIMO*, No. 2 (47), 2016, pp. 12-39, available at [<https://vestnik.mgimo.ru/jour/issue/view/17>], 11 January, 2018.

baijan was a pillar of Pan-Turkism in Transcaucasia. These feelings are not popularized at the official level, since the political elite of Azerbaijan does not want to worsen its relationship with Russia and cherishes its relations with Western partners.<sup>11</sup>

Back in 1989, Aliiev, the future president of Azerbaijan, expressed the common opinion held by the Azerbaijani political elite: “We want to proclaim the Turkic democratic republic of Azerbaijan, a dream of eight million of Azeri Turks to confirm our sovereignty and independence. Turkey is a window to the West for all Turkic peoples of Asia and the Caucasus... We want to create a Great Turkey that would unite all Turks under its egis.”<sup>12</sup>

Turkmenistan occupies a special place among its Central Asian neighbors. Turks and Turkmen have a common ethnic root—Seljuq Turks who in the 10th century build up a huge sultanate. In post-Soviet times, they added economic cooperation to their shared history and culture.

Their linguistic and cultural affinity is gradually bringing the two countries closer: the number of students from Turkmenistan at higher educational establishments of Turkey is great and growing; there are Turkish companies working in Turkmenistan, which has already brought it into the orbit of Ankara’s pan-Turkic policy.<sup>13</sup>

The political elites of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are gradually embracing the ideas of Pan-Turkism; meanwhile, Russia and China, countries that attach special importance to their role in the Eurasian integration projects, actively oppose this trend. The pro-Turkish elites, in turn, are working hard to turn their states’ foreign policies towards Turkey and to encourage separatist sentiment in the Muslim regions of Russia and China (Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region).

Turkey is implementing its Pan-Turkism project along two tracks:

- closer ties with the Turkic states;
- support of Turkic-speaking minorities in non-Turkic states (particularly, in the Balkans).

This is how Ankara acquires and supports its lobbies in the power structures of the above-mentioned states and can thus influence the results of national elections. Bulgaria, where the consistent successes of the pro-Turkish party Movement for Rights and Freedoms in the 2005 and 2009 elections (14% in 2009) are explained by Turkey’s support; between the elections the party boasted no more than 8%.<sup>14</sup>

Ankara behaves very aggressively within its Pan-Turkic project, causing concern in the countries in contact with the Turkic world: Bulgaria, China, and Greece, which have considerable Turkic diasporas and, of course, Russia. Pan-Turkism emerged as a counterbalance to Russia’s Eurasian integration project and is, therefore, clearly anti-Russian.<sup>15</sup>

Turkey will certainly spare no effort to implement its economic and cultural projects. The political elites of the Turkic world find the project highly attractive, which is confirmed by the idea of a Council of Cooperation of Turkic States voiced by Nursultan Nazarbayev several years ago (more on this below).<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> E.R. Nikulin, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from: V. Egiazarian, “Neopanturkizm: Azerbaidzhan i Tsentralnaia Azia,” 10 May, 2013, available at [<http://www.diplomat.am/load/public/neopantjurkizm/5-1-0-38>], 10 July, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> See: D. Valiuzhenich, “Turetskoe vmeshatelstvo v situatsiiu v Turkmenii,” 19 May, 2020, available at [<https://anna-news.info/turetskoe-vmeshatelstvo-vo-vnutrennie-dela-turkmenii/>]; I. Polonskiy, “Turtsia i panturkizm na postsovetском prostranstve,” 2 December, 2015, available at [<https://topwar.ru/87172-turciya-i-pantyurkizm-na-postsovetском-prostranstve.html>], 10 July, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> See: E.R. Nikulin, op. cit.

<sup>15</sup> See: A.B. Burashnikova, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> See: “Rasprostranenie idey panturkizma. Sovremenny analiz geopoliticheskikh ugroz.”

## Pan-Turkism in the Muslim Regions of Russia

Pan-Turkism, driven by the concept of unification of all Turkic peoples under the Turkish aegis into a sphere of influence that would include practically all Asia and a big chunk of Europe is spreading across the Russian borders. Plainly speaking, it threatens Russia's national interests.

The fact that during WWI adherents of Pan-Turkism called on Turkish leaders to side with Germany against Russia speaks volumes about the historical roots of its anti-Russian trend. They supported the Armenian genocide in 1915. Twenty years later, during WWII, Pan-Turkists stood for the German aggression against the Soviet Union in hopes of capturing Azerbaijan, Armenia and Crimea.

Turkey's NATO membership gave these ideas a new lease of life; active in Turkey's ideological confrontation with the Soviet Union, Ankara encouraged separatist sentiments in the Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan. This was very much in tune with the politics pursued by the United States, which aimed to weaken the Soviet (and, later, Russian) influence in these regions in the context of diversified hydrocarbon supplies to Europe. The Soviet Union's disintegration triggered the active propagation of Pan-Turkism across the post-Soviet space through educational establishments in both Russia and post-Soviet states.<sup>17</sup>

An Assembly of the Turkic Peoples was set up in 1991 to proliferate the ideas of Pan-Turkism. In 2009, President of Kazakhstan Nazarbayev suggested that Turkic countries should set up a Council of Cooperation of Turkic-Speaking States, a center for the studies of the Turkic world, a Turkish academy, a center of Turkic history and culture, a Turkic library and a Turkic museum. In 2010, the Turkish world responded with the Council of Cooperation of Turkic States, the Council of Heads of State; the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Council of the Elders, the Committee of Highest Officials and the Turkic Business Council.<sup>18</sup> Common Turkish textbooks on history, geography and literature that concentrated on history and achievements of the united Turkish ethnicity were recommended for secondary schools.

Turkish leaders relied on education, culture and religious organizations (jamaats) set up for in-depth studies of Islam to promote the ideas of Pan-Turkism far and wide beyond the Turkish borders. Jamaats consisted of parishioners of one mosque headed by an imam. In Chechnia, jamaats (at least, many of them) were part of the terrorist organization Imarat Kavkaz.<sup>19</sup>

Today, the majority of jamaats abandoned terrorism, but still insist on the ideas of separatism and extremism. The Nurcular jamaat, which opposes President of Turkey Erdoğan, is one of them.

It promotes the ideas of Pan-Turkism in the Islamic states and the Muslim regions of Russia. Founded by a radical preacher Said Nursi, the jamaat prefers the methods of psychological personality deformation to detach people from the real world, subjugate them, deprive them of their individuality and an ability to think independently, and even to prepare them for imprisonment or even martyrdom.<sup>20</sup>

The network of Nurcular Fethullahçılar jamaats, named after its founder, the Turkish preacher Fethullah Gülen, is one of the heavyweights. Their supporters are opposed to radicalism and extremism. Unlike all other jamaats, Fethullahçılar is a secular structure, it does not insist on beards for men and hijabs for women and stakes on lyciums, Turkish gender-specific boarding schools.

<sup>17</sup> See: A.B. Burashnikova, op. cit.

<sup>18</sup> See: A. Shustov, "Pantiurkizm protiv Evrazijskogo souza," *Stoletie*, 6 November, 2012, available at [[http://www.stoletie.ru/geopolitika/panturkizm\\_protiv\\_jevrazijskogo\\_sozuza\\_793.htm](http://www.stoletie.ru/geopolitika/panturkizm_protiv_jevrazijskogo_sozuza_793.htm)], 10 May, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> See: A.B. Burashnikova, op. cit.

<sup>20</sup> See: E.T. Mekhdiiev, op. cit.

In Russia, Gülen set up lyceums, cultural and scientific centers at higher educational establishments or libraries engaged in agitation and propaganda under the cover of legal organizations.<sup>21</sup>

The Süleymancılar jamaat founded by Süleyman Hilmi Tunahan, known as holy Ishan among his followers, is highly popular among the adherents of Pan-Turkism in Russia. It is one of the Sufi structures, yet, unlike traditional Sufism, members of Süleymancılar believe that there will be no more saints after the death of the holy Ishan Süleyman, but only his caliphs.<sup>22</sup>

The well-known mufti and fighter against radicalism Valiulla Yakupov insists that the approach preached by Süleymancılar is not appropriate for Islamic orthodoxy.<sup>23</sup> In Russia it avoids open propaganda with the exception of children's courses at mosques during school holidays. So far, its teaching programs have remained faithful to the traditional teaching of Islam.<sup>24</sup>

In summary, it can be stated that Muslim Turks in Russia were in the past, and remain today, loyal to authorities despite certain separatist sentiments betrayed by the desire of the elites of Tatarstan, Bashkiria and Chuvashia to gain independence in the 1990s. In the post-Yeltsin era the trend was cut short by Moscow; however, it had never threatened the unity of the state. The national elites of the Russian Muslim regions were and remain incorporated in Russia's political system; they invariably appealed to Moscow to manage social problems and contradictions and never thought about separatism. It should be said, however, that in the distant future the ideas of Pan-Turkism may develop into a real threat.

## *Conclusion*

Ankara relies on Pan-Turkism as an element of soft power with an anti-Russian hue; its activity in Central Asia and Trans-Caucasia is designed to elbow Russia out of the spheres of its traditional influence in the post-Soviet space.

In order to effectively oppose Turkish Pan-Turkism, while preserving the current degree of cooperation with Turkey, Russia should become more active

- in expanding Russia's influence across the post-Soviet space through education and culture, two instruments of soft power, by educating foreign students in Russia's educational establishments, setting up Russia's cultural centers abroad, organizing conferences, symposiums and youth summer camps, teaching the Russian language and history;
- in its efforts to disengage Azerbaijan from Turkey's geopolitical influence and involve it in the Chinese New Silk Road project and the North-South transport corridor;
- in cooperating with the Central Asian countries and China in opposition to the spread of radical Islamism;
- in developing education on the basis of traditional Islam by making the course on the fundamentals of world religions part of the secondary school curriculum.

---

<sup>21</sup> See: R.R. Suleymanov, "Religioznoe vliianie Turtsii na musulman Uralo-Povolzhia v postsovetkiy period," available at [<http://www.apn.ru/publications/article34669/>], 24 March, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> See: "Chto takoe sekta Nurcular?" available at [<http://voprosik.net/chtotakoe-sekta-nurdzhular/>], 24 March, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> See: V.M. Yakupov, *Neofitsialny islam v Tatarstane: dvizheniia, techeniia, sekty*, Izdatelstvo Iman, Kazan, 2006, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup> See: R.R. Suleymanov, op. cit.

# KAZAKHSTAN: NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE CONTEXT OF INTEGRATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH RUSSIA

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.04>

Rustem KADYRZHANOV

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor,  
Chief Researcher, Institute of Philosophy,  
Political and Religious Studies, Science Committee,  
Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Nazken ABDYKAIMOVA

*Doctoral Student, Al-Farabi National University of Kazakhstan  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

## ABSTRACT

The authors have traced down and analyzed the post-Soviet evolution of Kazakhstan's national identity in the context of its relations with Russia. The process began in the Soviet-style "friendship of peoples" rhetoric that dominated the 1990s-2000s. In the 2010s, unionist nationalism of the previous decades was replaced with the national identity of Kazakhstan that demonstrated much stronger elements of Kazakh identity and much stronger reliance on national interests when dealing with Russia.

**KEYWORDS:** *Kazakhstan, Russia, national identity, unionist nationalism.*

## *Introduction*

The post-Soviet states demonstrate different, or even opposite, attitudes to integration with Russia: while some of them willingly join integrational structures headed by Russia, others avoid them carefully. Kazakhstan, which has joined the ranks of the former, belongs to all regional structures in the post-Soviet space headed by Russia and has formulated numerous integration initiatives. Experts define this policy as unionist nationalism with a space for the country's national identity.

Due to the common Soviet past and the still thriving Soviet mentality, as well as domination of the Russian language and culture, regular people and the elites of Kazakhstan perceive Russia as the core of the Soviet Union and the center of the post-Soviet regional security complex. Integration rela-

tions between Kazakhstan and Russia are highly emotional in the Soviet “friendship of peoples” style. This explains why the relations with Russia strongly affect Kazakhstan’s national identity.

Everything written on the subject so far had merely skimmed the impact of Russia and foreign policies of the post-Soviet states on their national identities. The authors aim to fill the gap in regard to Russia’s impact on the national identities of its integration partners. We have agreed with the experts who insist that the national identities of the newly independent states are closely tied with their foreign policies. Ilya Prizel states: “...the interaction between national identity and foreign policy is a key element in both established and nascent polities, but this interaction is particularly important in the newly emerging or re-emerging states since nationalism and national identity are often the main, if not the sole force binding those societies together.”<sup>1</sup>

## On National Identity and the Unionist Nationalism of Kazakhstan

Today, the existence and opposition between the Kazakh and Kazakhstan identities is one of the widely discussed subjects in Kazakhstan. Part of its poly-ethnic society identifies itself as Kazakhstanis while another part, as Kazakhs. According to Marlène Laruelle, three types of identities coexist in contemporary Kazakhstan (Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism). The third type was formulated by the ruling elite to fit their country into the modernizing and globalizing world in order to tap the advantages offered by the policy of openness to the state and its citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Today, people are mostly aware of Kazakhness and Kazakhstanness; the rivalry between Kazakh and Kazakhstan identities can be interpreted as a disagreement over their roles in Kazakhstan: which should be treated as dominant and which should be pushed to the sidelines. “‘The nationalizing nationalism’ of newly independent states ... involves claims made in the name of a ‘core nation’ or ‘nationality’ defined in ethnocultural terms and sharply distinguished from the citizenry as a whole.”<sup>3</sup>

In the majority of post-Soviet states, “the nationalizing nationalism” of the core nation dominates, as it is practically uncontested by the rest of society. In these countries the language of the autochthonous population as its symbol becomes the principal language, while Russian is gradually pushed out of social life.<sup>4</sup> The same applies to all other ethnic symbols in art, history and other social spheres.

The situation in Kazakhstan is different: the culture of the autochthonous population cannot ensure the domination of Kazakh symbols in the linguistic and other spheres, mainly because a considerable part of the core nation considers themselves Kazakhs and Kazakhstanis and, therefore, appreciate Kazakh symbols and symbols of other peoples of Kazakhstan, Russians in the first place. The fact that urban Kazakhs do not use their native tongue, and that written and spoken Russian is the only language of communication speaks volumes. At a meeting with editors of Kazakh-language newspapers in April 2008, President Nursultan Nazarbayev said that out of nine million Kazakhs four million do not use their native language.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> I. Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See: M. Laruelle, “The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan: Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism,” in: *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2015, pp. 1-20.

<sup>3</sup> R. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> See: “Govoriashchikh po-russki stanovitsia vse menshe,” *Russkaia sluzhba BBC*, available at [BBCRussian.com](http://BBCRussian.com) [<http://www.bbc.co.uk>], 23 November, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> See: “Nursultan Nazarbayev: Velikiy put proydem v edinstve,” *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, No. 118-119, 3 June, 2008.

A considerable share of five million who used their native tongue in 2008 also knew and used Russian in their professional activities, when communicating with Russians and other nationalities living in Kazakhstan; they read Russian-language newspapers and books, watched Russian-language TV and listened to Russian-language radio programs. This means that the Kazakhs who insist on their Kazakh identity and reject the Kazakhstan identity are not in the majority in their ethnic group. They, however, constitute the most active part of the autochthonous population that demonstrate a lot of activism in consolidating the symbolic core of the Kazakh identity. Those who share not only the Kazakh, but also the Kazakhstan identity are doing the same.

What are the roots of bifurcation of the national identity of the Kazakhs into Kazakh and Kazakhstan identities that makes them aware of Kazakh symbols and the symbols of Russian culture? This phenomenon is best explained by the concept of unionist nationalism used by Henry Hale, an American political scientist in his article “Cause without a rebel: Kazakhstan’s Unionist Nationalism in the USSR and CIS.”

Having outlined unionist nationalism in general terms, he asked himself: Why would elites or masses in an ethnically distinct region ever opt for “alien rule” over national independence? Whatever has already been written in scholarly literature and the media deals mainly with separatist movements that try to detach themselves from an “alien” state to set up their own independent state. At the same time, the ethnicities that prefer to remain in a unionized multiethnic state dominated by other ethnic groups remain on the sidelines of political analysis.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, Hale deemed it necessary to point out that the number of unionist groups, orientated towards unions with other ethnicities within a multiethnic state, is much bigger than the number of separatist ethnicities. Indeed, the fact that there are one or several unionist regions around each of the separatist regions in a multiethnic state is practically ignored. In the 1960s, there was Yoruba in the civil war Biafra was waging for independence from Nigeria. The Northern Caucasus is a much closer example: separatist Chechnia’s neighbors: Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Dagestan and other national republics of the Russian Federation. Often enough, unionist ethnicities insist on political integration when they have every reason to demand independence. Political science and the theory of nationalism that consistently ignore unionist ethnicities cannot explain how different ethnicities coexist in a multiethnic state.<sup>7</sup>

Hale designated Kazakhstan a unionist nation; described the specifics of its unionist nationalism, explained its origins and gave a strictly logical answer to the question of why the Kazakhs, who had every reason to be separatist and nationalist, spared no effort to save the Soviet Union and remain a part of it until its final disintegration. Today, Kazakhstan is determined to consolidate the CIS.<sup>8</sup>

It should be said that Kazakhstan’s pro-Russian foreign policy is one of the forms of unionist nationalism in new, post-Soviet conditions. In fact, it has a different, internal dimension: for different reasons, many Kazakhs support the cultural status quo. They can be considered carriers of Kazakhstan identity, which is closely connected with the unionist nationalism of Kazakhs, as can be clearly seen in the attitude to the Russian language and culture and the approval of Kazakhstan’s special relations with Russia.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, the share of Kazakhs who object to the status quo in culture and seek to change it has considerably increased in the post-Soviet years. These people want to move the ethno-cultural symbols of the Kazakhs to the center of the sociocultural structure of Kazakhstan society.

---

<sup>6</sup> See: H. Hale, “Cause without a Rebel: Kazakhstan’s Unionist Nationalism in the USSR and CIS,” *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 37, No. 1, January 2009, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-12.

<sup>9</sup> See: “Russkiy iazyk—eto Kazakhstan,” *Central Asia Monitor*, 5 December, 2019.

These people are carriers of Kazakh national identity closely associated with the Kazakh ethnocultural titular nationalism, which is the opposite of unionist nationalism.

It is logical to proceed from the constructivist understanding of national identity but from its primordial interpretation; this means that national identity should be considered a product of activities of national elites, rather than heritage from the past. Its content may change due to the efforts of people in power, cultural figures and scientists.<sup>10</sup>

The question is, who designed the unionist national identity of Kazakhstan? Our answer is: the power elite and Nursultan Nazarbayev, the republic's Communist leader from 1989 and the First President of independent Kazakhstan. As distinct from the Baltic and Transcaucasian states, the population of Kazakhstan looked at the president and the Supreme Soviet actively involved in the social, political and national processes unfolding in the republic, rather than at the nationalist movement and organizations that had nothing to do with republican powers.<sup>11</sup>

During the last years of the Soviet Union, unionist nationalism of Kazakhstan comprised the Kazakh ethnic nationalism within the Kazakh S.S.R. and the desire to preserve the union state, albeit in a new form—with stronger economic ties with Russia and its greater economic support. Unionist nationalism of the Central Asian republics was comparatively the same. Their elites and regular people were convinced that Russia should preserve its dominant positions in the new states, and Russians should remain the leading nation.

Henry Hale notes that Nursultan Nazarbayev did not hail the Soviet Union's disintegration and the emergence of the CIS.<sup>12</sup> Having realized the unavoidable nature of this process, he became one of the most active and consistent supporters of the new structure. While many republics interpreted the CIS as an instrument of "civilized divorce," Nazarbayev tried to use it as an instrument of restoring and consolidating the ruptured economic ties between the former Soviet republics, first and foremost, between the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan. In other words, the unionist nationalism of Kazakhstan did not disappear along with the Soviet Union, but was adjusted to the new conditions by the president of this newly-independent state.

Nazarbayev's integrationist policy is well known. From the very beginning he was extremely active in drafting and promoting the CIS agreements. By May 1993, he signed 312 out of total of 318 CIS-related documents. Russia led with a total of 315 signed documents. Ukraine signed 229 documents, while Azerbaijan signed only 72. One hundred and twenty-one documents out of the 318 adopted by the CIS were related to the central structures of the new organization (Kazakhstan inked 118 documents). In the economic sphere Kazakhstan signed all 118 agreements; in the non-economic sphere—194 out of 199.<sup>13</sup>

Further developments confirmed that Kazakhstan stood apart from its Central Asian neighbors, where the level of unionist nationalism was concerned: post-Soviet Russia was too weak to extend subsidies, subventions and other types of economic aid. Its decision to limit the ruble to its own territory confirmed that Moscow was looking after its own interests and abandoned its Central Asian allies to their fates.

Predictably, they gradually moved away from their pro-Russian orientation to pursue differently orientated foreign policies. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan and, to a lesser extent, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, started discussing their own national interests. Their relations with Russia generally became more pragmatic, even if their unionist nationalism did not disappear altogether and the sepa-

<sup>10</sup> See: A. Smith, *National Identity*, Reno and Las Vegas, University of Nevada Press, 1991, pp. 110-116.

<sup>11</sup> See: A.B. Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 2010, pp. 26-27.

<sup>12</sup> See: H. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 21.



ratist nationalism in their internal and foreign policies became much clearer. The interests of each of the nations and states began to take priority, the interests of Central Asia and the CIS were pushed aside.<sup>14</sup>

## Eurasian Integration and National Identity of Kazakhstan

The failure of the ruble zone did not undermine the unionist nationalism of Kazakhstan, which initiated one integrational project after another, the most ambitious of them being the Eurasian Union, formulated by the president of Kazakhstan in his lecture delivered at Moscow University in March 1994. Four months prior to this, Russia had refused to establish a ruble zone and allow Kazakhstan to join it.

Neither in 1994, nor later this idea was supported by all post-Soviet countries, with the exception of Kyrgyzstan. According to the president of Kazakhstan, in 1990-2000 the idea of Eurasianism and Eurasian integration was realized through three structures—the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC); the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Conference on Confidence Measures in Asia (CCMA).<sup>15</sup> The level of integration achieved in the three organizations fell short of what Nazarbayev had suggested in 1994.

Vladimir Putin, the then Prime Minister of Russia, gave the idea a new lease of life in his article “A New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future in the Making” that appeared in *Izvestia* on 3 October, 2011. In the article he described the Eurasian Union as one of his priorities that should become one of the world’s mightiest integration structures, but would not, however, revive the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup>

The idea of the Eurasian Union formulated by Nazarbayev in 1994 was wholeheartedly supported in Kazakhstan—no political force in Kazakhstan (including the opposition) publicly rejected the idea in the media or at mass meetings. The society was living in hope that it would be translated into post-Soviet social and economic realities.

This enthusiasm is explained by the fact that the memory of the Soviet Union (which had disintegrated two years earlier) was still alive in the minds of regular people. In the 1990s, the former Soviet republics could barely cope with the huge economic problems caused by their switch to market economy and ruptured economic ties. The ideas of integration of newly independent states stirred up hopes in people coping with high and growing prices, unemployment, delays in wages, pensions and benefits and plummeting living standards. The high level of support of the initiative proposed by the president of Kazakhstan was, to a certain extent, an echo of the very high share of votes cast for continued existence of the U.S.S.R. at the 1991 referendum and evidence of the high level of unionist nationalism in Kazakhstan and among the Kazakhs. People were prepared to limit the sovereignty of their newly independent state to a certain extent in order to restore the Soviet living standards.

Today, the idea of a Eurasian Union or, rather, the idea of the Eurasian Union Putin had formulated in 2011, lost much of its attractiveness. Protests against the joint integrational projects with

<sup>14</sup> See: I. Bobokulov, “Central Asia: Is There an Alternative to Regional Integration?” *Central Asian Survey*, No. 25 (1-2), March-June 2006, pp. 76.

<sup>15</sup> “K ekonomike znaniy cherez innovatsii i obrazovanie.” Lecture of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan at the Eurasian National University, *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 27 May, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> See: Article by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin “A New Integration Project for Eurasia: The Future in the Making,” *Izvestia*, 3 October, 2011, available at [<https://russiaeu.ru/en/news/article-prime-minister-vladimir-putin-new-integration-project-eurasia-future-making-izvestia-3->].

Russia began in 2010. On 18 March, 2010, a large group of leaders and members of the national-patriotic organizations, political parties, NGOs, public figures and members of the intelligentsia in a letter to Nazarbayev and other leaders of Kazakhstan demanded that the Customs Union Treaty<sup>17</sup> should be denounced as highly unprofitable for Kazakhstan. The authors warned that as a member of the CU their country would lose its economic and, later, political independence and warned that they would respond the intention to join the CU with a public movement Defense of Independence.

The gap between the responses to the idea of the Eurasian Union in the 1990s and the 2010s was too extensive to be ignored. In the 1990s, the idea was unanimously supported by the elites and the masses, but in the 2010s, the idea was resolutely rejected by the elites, national-patriotic organizations, political parties and movements and some of the local intelligentsia.

This makes the attitudes to the issues of independence and Eurasian integration of Kazakh national patriots and the powers of Kazakhstan especially interesting. Both groups spoke of independence as an absolute value; those in power described it as the core point in their ideology. Officially, independence and the national statehood of Kazakhstan have become associated with Nazarbayev as head of state since Kazakhstan's independence, and even earlier (from June 1989), as the Leader of the Nation, and also founder of the sovereign state who consolidated its independence as president of Kazakhstan.<sup>18</sup>

National patriots of Kazakhstan treated its independence as the greatest value rooted in the titular ethnocultural nationalism as the ideological cornerstone of their activities. They see independent Kazakhstan as a Kazakh state that should support Kazakhs, their material well-being, culture and language. They were very critical of the authorities that they believed did not do enough to support and consolidate independence; retreated on the issues of the Russian language and culture and, on the whole, depended on Russia too much. Their country's membership in the Customs Union and its future membership in the EAEU was an unacceptable concession to Russia and its hegemonic plans in the post-Soviet space.

The attitude to Eurasian integration is the benchmark of the ideas of independence held by authorities and national patriots. People in power accept integration, in any form, as absolutely compatible with their country's independence. In fact, integration with Russia is economically profitable for Kazakhstan. To put it differently, independence of Kazakhstan corresponded to its unionist nationalism. National patriots insist that any form of integration with Russia will bury Kazakhstan as an independent country and that, therefore, independence and integration with Russia are two separate issues. In short, national patriots reject any form of unionist nationalism as unacceptable in independent Kazakhstan.

Since the fall of 2012, integration policy of Kazakhstan has been changing in regard to relations with Russia and interpretation of unionist nationalism. In the past, there were no (open) contradictions in the bilateral relations. In October 2012, Kazakhstan disagreed with Russia's suggestion to set up a Eurasian Parliament as a supra-national structure.

In the summer of 2012, Russia had formulated an idea of a Eurasian parliament as a supranational institute of the Eurasian Economic Union; several months later, in October, chairman of the Majilis committee for foreign relations Maulen Ashimbaev said in Moscow that his country had rejected the idea and any role in the parliament. *Nezavisimaia gazeta* wrote that in Kazakhstan the idea had been rejected as an encroachment on its sovereignty.<sup>19</sup> In December 2012, the head of state outlined the framework and the conditions on which Kazakhstan would be ready to join integration

<sup>17</sup> See: "Zaiavlenie po povodu vstuplenia Kazakhstana v Tamozhennyi siuz," *Internet-gazeta Kazakhsan*, available at [<http://www.zonakz.net>], 25 March, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> "Novy Kazakhstan v novom mire," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 20 November, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> See: V. Panfilova, "Nazarbaevy reshit problemu Baykonura. President Kazakhstana sgladit raznoglasiu po kosmodromu vo vremia vizita v Moskvu," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 8 February, 2013.

projects, stating that the country's political sovereignty was not discussed and, therefore, the country would respond to any step challenging Kazakhstan's independence with withdrawal from this structure.<sup>20</sup>

Russia was unpleasantly surprised: in the past Kazakhstan seemed to be the most consistent supporter of integration in the U.S.S.R. and, later, the CIS. Russian journalism Mikhail Rostovsky has written that Moscow was amazed by the unexpected change of Nazarbayev's attitude to the Soviet Union. This politician who had spared no effort to save the united country suddenly said that Kazakhstan "was a colony of the Soviet Union."<sup>21</sup> He referred to Nazarbayev's statement made at a business forum in Istanbul in October 2012: "We live in the homeland of the Turkic people. When in 1861 the last Kazakh khan had been murdered, we became a colony of the Russian monarchy and, later, of the Soviet Union. In the last 150 years, Kazakhs practically lost their national traditions, customs, language and religion. In 1991, with the help of the Almighty we declared independence. The Turkish state was the first to rejoice at our independence and recognized it. Our people will never forget this."<sup>22</sup>

We have already written that authorities and national patriots disagreed on the subject of unionist patriotism and integration with Russia: the former believe that they are compatible, the latter think differently and go even farther: unionist nationalism and national identity of Kazakhstan are unlikely bedfellows. This means that the idea of a Eurasian parliament outlined the limits of compatibility of unionist nationalism of Kazakhstan with integration with Russia. Integration is limited to the economy; any threat to state sovereignty makes it absolutely unacceptable for Kazakhstan.

This marked an important shift towards state sovereignty in the policy pursued by the president at a certain stage of integration with Russia. Russian analysts made a note of the above. One of them has referred to the speech delivered by Elbasy in Almaty on 9 January, 2013. Made at the ceremony of presidential stipend presentation to prominent figures in literature and art, the speech left no doubts that the country's leaders treated the sentiments prevalent among the nationally orientated circles as an instrument of strengthening their political and social base.<sup>23</sup> The president used elements of Kazakh identity to consolidate the national identity of Kazakhstan.

In her book *Russia's Relations with Kazakhstan* Yelena Zabortseva identifies five periods in the relations between the two countries: in the first period (1991-1994), immediately after the Soviet Union's disintegration, the relations were friendly yet fairly chilly, since both newly independent states (Russia and Kazakhstan) were building up their independence and consolidating their security. This is confirmed by the fact that Russia removed Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbors from the ruble zone. Kazakhstan reciprocated with a refusal to accept dual citizenship for its citizens.<sup>24</sup>

During the second period (1995-1999), the two states demonstrated significantly greater mutual interest: Kazakhstan was steadily widening its multi-vector foreign policy, while Russia demonstrated more openness in its relationship with Central Asia and Kazakhstan. It was at that time that Russia settled many of its military, nuclear and space problems by renting testing grounds in Kazakhstan, moving the Soviet nuclear arsenal out of Kazakhstan to Russia and leasing Baykonur. In the

<sup>20</sup> See: *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 10 January, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> M. Rostovsky, "Pochemu Nazarbayev razliubil Soiuz. Kak zamazat treshchiny v alianse Rossii i Kazakhstana," *Moskovskiy komsomolets*, No. 26152, 1 February, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> N. Nazarbayev, "Poka my byli koloniei Rossii—edva ne lishilis svoikh traditsii, obychev, iazyka (rech v Turtsii), available at [<https://regnum.ru/news/1581244.html>]. Permanent address [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1350219540>].

<sup>23</sup> See: M. Kalishevsky, "Kazakhstan oboznachil granitsy 'evraziyskoy integratsii'," *Fergana.RU*, available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1361249160>].

<sup>24</sup> See: Ye.N. Zabortseva, *Russia's Relations with Kazakhstan: Rethinking Ex-Soviet Transitions in the Emerging World System*, Routledge, London and New York, 2016, pp. 42-43.

context of Russia's claims on northern Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev moved its capital from Almaty in the south to Astana (now Nur-Sultan) in the north, a symbolic move.<sup>25</sup>

The third period (2000-2004) is associated with the election of Vladimir Putin president of Russia and transformations in Russia's foreign policy, the details of which became clear somewhat later. It was at that time that both countries exploited the high oil prices to revive their economies. The post-9/11 geopolitical context in Central Asia forced Kazakhstan to strengthen its security, primarily with the support of Russia while pursuing its multi-vector policy.<sup>26</sup>

During the fourth period (2005-2012) the two countries were developing their economic relations and regional cooperation. Kazakhstan relied on Russia to ensure its security.<sup>27</sup> Despite certain disagreements, Kazakhstan demonstrated that its relations with Russia were of priority importance as evidence of unionist nationalism and Kazakhstani identity. Russia, on the other hand, pursued the policy of economic regional integration across the post-Soviet space for its political aims.

The fifth period of bilateral relations (2013-2015) was unfolding under the impact of the Ukrainian conflict. Zabortseva notes that Kazakhstan initially supported Russia, which stirs up certain doubts. In view of Russia's weight and influence, Kazakhstan could not openly denounce the annexation of Crimea and a hybrid war in eastern Ukraine. It did all it could: it abstained from voting when the U.N. GA in March 2014 put the legality of annexation to a vote. Zabortseva has correctly remarked that Kazakhstan subsequently altered its Russian policy under the pressure of Russia's aggression in Ukraine and the negative impacts of Russia's neo-imperialist policy on the situation in Kazakhstan, in particular, threats to its territorial integrity and political stability.<sup>28</sup>

The leader of Kazakhstan responded to these threats with stronger support of Kazakhstan identity, intensified the civil national policy and the pressure on those who insisted on special rights of the Kazakh tongue at the expense of other tongues used in the republic. In August 2017, in his speech to the state media he said: "If we outlaw all other tongues except for the Kazakh language, we will become the next Ukraine." He warned that the exclusive language rights of the core nation may provoke the protests of the non-core groups, Russians in the first place followed by Russian interference. Nazarbayev deemed it necessary to say: "All Kazakhs have already probably realized that the policy of support of the Kazakh language as the only tongue used in the republic is dangerous. If we decide to beat all and everyone on the head to force them use Kazakh and shed blood, we will lose our independence."<sup>29</sup>

This meant that the events of 2014 and subsequent developments created a negative image of Russia as a threat to security and independence. This was an absolutely novel phenomenon among the elite and the masses. Other post-Soviet states, including the Central Asian countries, revealed, to certain extents, their perception of Russia as a threat to their security and independence. Since the first days of its independence, Kazakhstan, however, considered Russia a friendly country; as a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, it was and still is regarded as the key link of Kazakhstan's security and independence.

After 2014, the public has somewhat changed its idea about Russia. In the past, its image was absolutely positive; this was confirmed by the sociological polls of the 2000s and 2010s. In his interview to *Komsomolskaia pravda*, President of Kazakhstan Kasym-Zhomart Tokaev pointed out that for many years the level of confidence in Russia remained very strong (75%), a high and, what is even more important, sustainable value.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See: Ye.N. Zabortseva, op. cit.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> "Kazakhstan ozhidaet ukrainskiy stsensariy v sluchae zapreta vseh iazykov, krome kazakhskogo—Nazarbayev," *Central Asia Monitor*, 25 August, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> See: Interview of President of Kazakhstan K.-Zh. Tokaev, *Komsomolskaia pravda*, 3 June, 2020.

In 2014, Russia lost a lot of its positive image of a friendly country in Kazakhstan, and began to be regarded as a threat to security and territorial integrity; confronted with numerous threats and challenges, the Central Asian security complex became much more complicated.<sup>31</sup> Some of the threats are rooted in the authoritarian nature of power in the Central Asian countries; other similarly dangerous threats, are created by major geopolitical players (i.e., Russia) with interests in the region.

Perception of Russia as a threat to the security of Kazakhstan tipped the balance between the Kazakhstan and Kazakh identities and undermined Kazakhstan's unionist nationalism. In mass and elite consciousness, the ideas of integration with Russia and Russia as a threat have become inseparable. Predictably, Kazakh identity is gathering weight as opposed to Kazakhstan identity; this has been confirmed by the switch from the Cyrillic to Latin script, which was announced in 2017.

Moscow responded to the corresponding decree signed by Nazarbayev with a balanced statement of the Foreign Ministry of Russia that described this decision as "an internal affair of Kazakhstan."<sup>32</sup> Response of the Russian media and social networks was much more violent: "disloyalty and retreat to the West." Comments followed one another: "It is hard to understand how the RF and Kazakhstan will continue their economic and geopolitical integration when Kazakhstan switches to Latin script. It is worse than actions of Bandera supporters in Ukraine;" "The switch to Latin script is a clear message of what the current leaders of Kazakhstan think about the Eurasian Economic Union and about integration with Russia in general. They want the revenues created by cooperation, yet connect the future of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh people with the West."<sup>33</sup>

This is an obvious overstatement. An independent state, Kazakhstan can identify its foreign policy priorities according to its national interests. Russia as the main integration partner is one of its priorities in the spheres of security, economy and humanitarian contacts. In the above-mentioned interview to *Komsomolskaia pravda*, President Tokaev spoke of Russia "as the closest state."<sup>34</sup> He did not equivocate: his country had no intention to join Russia and Belarus as a member of the union state, it was prepared to develop its integration with both countries within regional institutions.<sup>35</sup> Kazakhstan should build up its integration with Russia and with all other states on the basis of rationally interpreted national interests stemming from its national identity.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the impact of post-Soviet relations between Russia and Kazakhstan on the latter's national identity has convincingly demonstrated that it was a highly dynamic phenomenon. Throughout the first two post-Soviet decades, unionist nationalism dominated in their relations, adding elements of Soviet ideology and rhetoric in the "friendship of peoples" style. The foreign policy imperative of the importance of stronger and broader relations with Russia as a strategic ally moved the Kazakhstani identity to the fore in the structure of the republic's identities. The national patriotic circles, however, were highly displeased with the pro-Russian course and accused the authorities of concessions to the Russian language and culture, which had a negative impact on the development of a national state and Kazakhstan's national interests.

<sup>31</sup> See: E. Klimenko, "Central Asia as a Regional Security Complex," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 12, Issue 4, 2011, pp. 7-20.

<sup>32</sup> "Eto vnutrennee delo Kazakhstana—MID Rossii o perekhode na latinitsu," available at [www.Zakon.kz], 1 November, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> "Kazakhstan poshel na zapad," Radio Liberty, 13 April, 2017.

<sup>34</sup> Interview of President of Kazakhstan K.-Zh. Tokaev, 3 June, 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

Russia's neo-imperialist policy changed the geopolitical situation in the post-Soviet space and strongly affected its relations with Kazakhstan and the Kazakhstani national identity, for that matter. The friend/foe perception of Russia became much more complicated and contradictory. This strongly affected Kazakhstani national identity, where elements of Kazakh identity were manifested clearer. From that time on, Kazakhstan has been relying on national interests that may contradict the interests of the Russian Federation. The 2017 decree of President Nazarbayev on the switch to the Latin script was an important symbol of the Kazakhstani national identity and Russia-Kazakhstan relations. In the new decade these relationships are likely to develop within the trends that emerged in the 2010s—less ideology of unionist nationalism and far more pragmatic and rational ties between the two countries based on their national interests.

---

## THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON KAZAKHSTANI YOUTH'S POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.05>

Shugyla KILYBAYEVA

*PhD, Postdoctoral researcher,  
Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science,  
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Azamat NURSHANOV

*PhD, Lecturer,  
Faculty of Philosophy and Political Science,  
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

### ABSTRACT

**O**ver the past decade, an extensive corpus of works has been published on the impact of social media on political behavior and youth participation. Many scholars argue that social networks stimulate the activity of youth in both online and offline political life. In Kazakhstan, the young

generation actively uses social media and is constantly exposed to the political content they contain. On the one hand, social media is an indispensable platform for collective discussion and youth involvement in socio-political processes. On the other hand, due to the large amount of information on social

networks, most people are not selective about the reliability of the information they receive. This study aims specifically to focus on the influence of social media Instagram, Facebook and YouTube on the political behavior of the Kazakhstani "Generation Z" (those born in the digital world).

The research objectives of this work are achieved through an extensive review of relevant literature, as well as through a thorough analysis of the results of online surveys ( $n = 272$ ) of young people aged 18-21 living in Almaty. In the context of this study, political behavior will relate to how young people use social networks to send and re-

ceive political information, and how social media shape their political views, beliefs, and political activism. The results of the study showed that political content on social networks enhances the level of political awareness and understanding of the Kazakhstani "Generation Z," fosters a sense of belonging to its society and a desire to contribute to the country's sustainable democratic development. At the same time, political information on social media does not sufficiently stimulate active offline participation of youth or increase their confidence in the ability to influence political leaders and the government.

**KEYWORDS:** social media, social networks, youth, Kazakhstan, political participation, political behavior, democratization.

## Introduction

Internet access in Kazakhstan has expanded significantly over the past decades. With the rapid surge in the number of smartphone users and the availability of mobile Internet in Kazakhstan, social media began to play a prominent role in the people's daily lives. They began to not only supplement the traditional media, but to gradually displace them,<sup>1</sup> since Internet users often use smartphones to keep abreast of socio-political events in the country and the world. Today, the following social networks are prevalent in Kazakhstan: Facebook, Instagram, VKontakte, along with WhatsApp, YouTube, Telegram and other media platforms, thanks to which Kazakhstan people actively read news, blogs, watch videos and participate in social and political discussions.<sup>2</sup> According to statistical data, approximately 14.6 million mobile subscribers in a country with a population of about 18 million people get access to the Internet via their mobile devices.<sup>3</sup> In January 2020, 9,246,000 Facebook users and 8,266,000 Instagram users were registered in Kazakhstan, which amounted to 49.1% and 43.9% of the country's total population. People between 25 and 34 are the largest group of Facebook users (3,700,000 people) and Instagram (3,400,000 people) in Kazakhstan.<sup>4</sup> According to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on youth policy,<sup>5</sup> the category of youth

<sup>1</sup> See: P. Vatikiotis, "New Media, Democracy, Participation and the Political Interactions," *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2014, pp. 293-307.

<sup>2</sup> See: Kilybayeva, G. Nassimova, A. Massalimova, "The Kazakhstani's Youth Engagement in Politics," *Studies of Transition States and Societies*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, 2017, pp. 53-71.

<sup>3</sup> See: "Freedom on the Net 2019. The Crisis of Social Media," Freedom House, available at [<https://www.freedomonthenet.org/country/kazakhstan/freedom-on-the-net/2019>], 19 December, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> See: "Social Media Users in Kazakhstan," available at [<https://napoleoncat.com/stats/facebook-users-in-kazakhstan/2020/01>], 11 January, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> See: *The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 7 July, 2004 On State Youth Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan*, available in Russian at [[https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc\\_id=1049268#pos=5;-155](https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=1049268#pos=5;-155)].

refers to people between 14 and 29, but in some documents in Western countries the upper age limit for “youth” is 34-35 years.<sup>6</sup> It turns out that youth is the largest group of social media users in Kazakhstan. Since young people primarily use social networks, they see numerous political messages throughout the day: information from the Instagram news feed, daily Facebook posts, political debates on YouTube, or WhatsApp messages from a friend or family member. According to researchers,<sup>7</sup> political content posted on social media affects people’s political knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and political participation. That is why the purpose of this study is to analyze the impact of political content obtained from social media on the political behavior of 18 to 21-year-old youth living in Almaty, Kazakhstan (between October and December 2019). This choice of the respondent group is not accidental. First, young people born in 1998-2001 belong to “Generation Z,”<sup>8</sup> which differs from the previous generation in that it grew up with gadgets in their hands and constant access to the Internet. Therefore, the study of the political behavior of this age group of young people seems to be the most interesting. Secondly, the study was conducted among young people living in the city of Almaty at the time of the survey. Among them there are university students from Almaty, and young people working (or looking for work). The survey involved both Almaty residents, and young people from other Kazakhstan regions who resided in Almaty on a permanent basis for study and/or work reasons. Almaty is one of the most attractive cities in Kazakhstan for students and working youth, as this city has more than 40 higher education institutions<sup>9</sup> and a wide range of jobs: state and private companies, international and non-governmental organizations, etc.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, compared with other cities of Kazakhstan, Almaty is distinguished not only by its developed infrastructure, but also by its rich social life and mild climate.

## Research Methodology

This article uses a quantitative research method, namely a survey. Survey questions are either open-ended or closed-ended, some questions use the Likert scale.<sup>11</sup> The survey questions were designed to find out, first of all, whether social networks increase the level of political awareness and knowledge in youth. Secondly, they aimed to discover how social networks influence youth political behavior, attitudes and participation. In the context of this study, political behavior refers to how young people use social networks to send and receive political information, and how information received from social networks affects their political views and beliefs.

A quantitative survey was conducted using the Survio platform. The online survey involved 272 respondents born in 1998-2001. The sample of participants is representative. The selection criteria were age, gender, ethnicity, residence in the city of Almaty.

---

<sup>6</sup> See: B. Perovic, “Defining Youth in Contemporary National Legal and Policy Frameworks across Europe, 2016,” Council of Europe European Union Online Resources, available at [<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/resources-2016>].

<sup>7</sup> See: H. Gil de Zuniga, L. Molyneux, P. Zheng, “Social Media, Political Expression, and Political Participation: Panel Analysis of Lagged and Concurrent Relationships,” *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 64, 2014, pp. 612-634.

<sup>8</sup> See: A. Turner, “Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest,” *The Journal of Individual Psychology*, Vol. 71 (2), 2015, pp. 103-113.

<sup>9</sup> See: Center for the Bologna Process and Academic Mobility of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. List of Higher Educational Institutions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available in Russian at [[https://enic-kazakhstan.kz/ru/reference\\_information/universities](https://enic-kazakhstan.kz/ru/reference_information/universities)], 27 November, 2019.

<sup>10</sup> See: M. Makhmutova, “Vnutrenniaia migratsiia molodezhi v Kazakhstane: primer Almaty,” Center for Analysis of Social Issues, 2013. P. 6.

<sup>11</sup> See: I. Allen, C. Seaman, “Likert Scales and Data Analyses,” *Quality Progress*, No. 40 (7), 2007, pp. 64-65.



The total number of young people in Almaty aged 14–29 years is 432,952.<sup>12</sup> The number of young people aged 18-21 in Almaty according to the census is 147,417.<sup>13</sup> Of these, 18-year-old citizens of Almaty make up 23% of the total number of young people aged 18-21; 19-year-olds—26.2%; 20-year-olds—26.2% and 21-year-olds—24.6%. Nevertheless, although the respondents lived in the city of Almaty during the survey, it does not mean that they were born in this city, as many of them moved to Almaty from different regions of Kazakhstan temporarily for study, work or permanent residence (see Table 1).

*Table 1*

**Youth Sample (18-21 y.o.), Almaty, Kazakhstan**

Respondents' Parameters	Percentage in Almaty	Number of Respondents
<b>18 years old</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>63</b>
Male	46.5	29
Female	53.5	34
Kazakh	53.03	33
Russian	33.16	21
Other ethnicities	13.8	9
<b>19 years old</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>71</b>
Male	46.8	33
Female	53.2	38
Kazakh	53.03	38
Russian	33.16	24
Other ethnicities	13.8	9
<b>20 years old</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>71</b>
Male	46.5	33
Female	53.5	38
Kazakh	53.03	38
Russian	33.16	23
Other ethnicities	13.8	10

<sup>12</sup> See: “On the Change in the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan from the Beginning of 2018 to 1 April, 2018, approved by 2 May, 2018, No. 36-7 / 282,” Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available in Russian at [www.stat.gov.kz].

<sup>13</sup> See: Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Statistics, Almaty. “Itogi natsionalnoy perepisi naseleniia Respubliki Kazakhstan 2009 goda,” Vol. 1, Statistics Collection, Ed. by A.A. Smailova, Astana, 2011, 52 c.

Table 1 (continued)

Respondents' Parameters	Percentage in Almaty	Number of Respondents
<b>21 years old</b>	<b>24.6</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Male</b>	<b>47.7</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Female</b>	<b>52.3</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Kazakh</b>	<b>53.03</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Russian</b>	<b>33.16</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Other ethnicities</b>	<b>13.8</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Total: 272 people</b>		

## Research Results

This section, in particular, will examine whether the 18 to 21-year-old youth of Almaty are interested in politics; Do they use social networks to read the news, posts by political scientists and public figures? What social networks do they use for their political education? How many political messages on social networks per day do they receive and share? Do they participate in discussions of news? Do they consider themselves politically informed and active? A number of other issues are also addressed. Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, the three most common social networks in Kazakhstan, were selected for the purposes of this study.

To the question “How much time do you spend on Instagram per day?”, 36.9% of Almaty youth answered that they spend 1-2 hours on Instagram per day; 38.5% of youth spend 3-4 hours and 18.5% of respondents spend more than 5 hours per day. In total, 93.9% of young people use Instagram every day, and 6.1% said they did not use this online application (see Diagram 1).

A similar question about Facebook produced interesting results. 75.1% of respondents said that they did not use this social network at all, with only about 25% of young people using it. Of these, 15.3% said that they spend 1-2 hours on Facebook, 8.1% of respondents spend 3-4 hours, and 1.5% said they spend more than 5 hours on Facebook per day (see Diagram 2).

However, there was not a single answer among the respondents that stated that they did not use YouTube. All the young people participating in the survey use YouTube, one of the most popular platforms for free video viewing on a daily basis.

To the question “How much time do you spend on YouTube per day?” 46.2% of respondents stated they spend 1-2 hours, 44.6% 3-4 hours, 9.2% more than 5 hours (see Diagram 3) daily on the platform.

Let us examine the results of the survey and Likert scale investigation in relation to the number of youth receiving and sharing political information.

About 80% of the respondents agreed with the statement “I get political information from Instagram,” 47.7% of them fully agree and 32.3% somewhat agree with it. 17% of youth disagree, 3% of the respondents selected a neutral answer.

Diagram 1

How Much Time Do You Spend On Instagram Per Day?

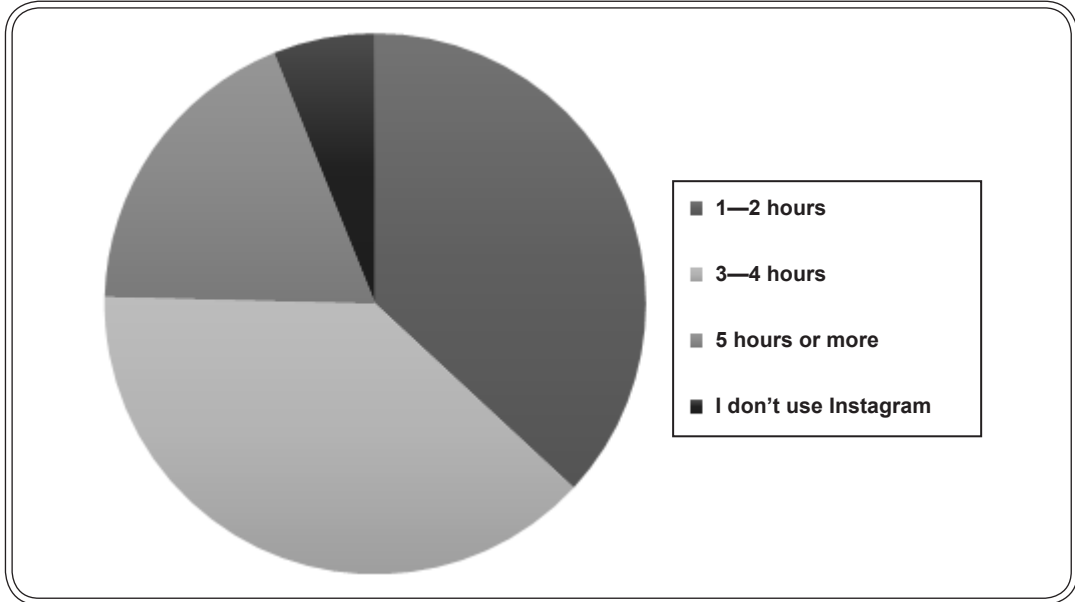
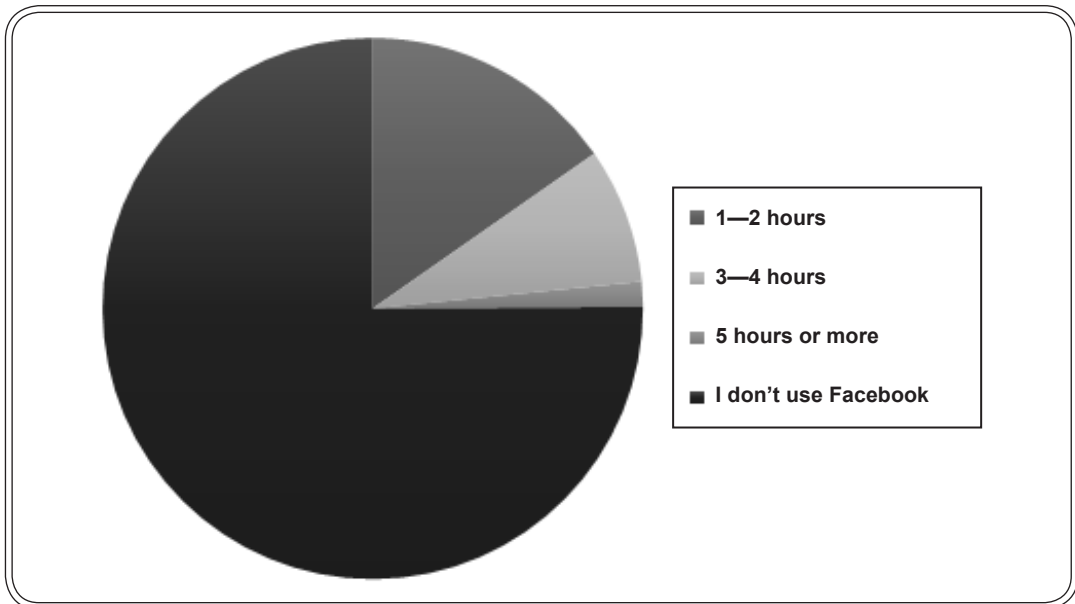


Diagram 2

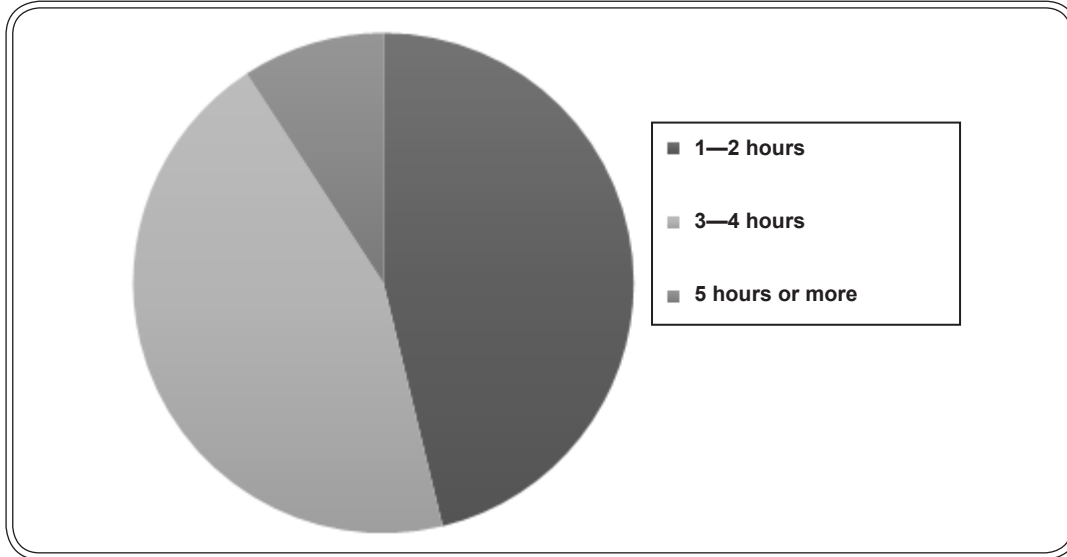
How Much Time Do You Spend On Facebook Per Day?



18.5% of the respondents agreed and about 77% did not agree with the statement “I get political information from Facebook.”

Diagram 3

How Much Time Do You Spend On YouTube Per Day?



53% of the respondents agreed with the statement “I obtain political information from YouTube,” of which 29% completely agree, and 24% somewhat agree. About 40% of young people did not concur that they received political information from YouTube. 7% preferred to remain neutral to this statement (see Table 2).

Table 2

Likert Scale Survey Results (%)

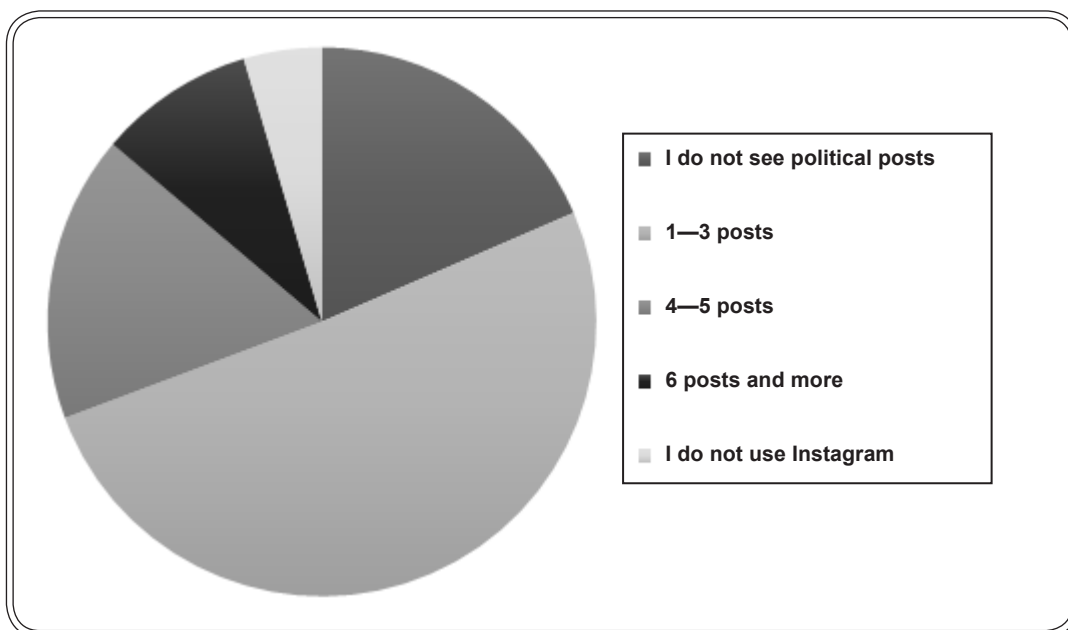
	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree, Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
I obtain political information from Instagram	47.7	32.3	3	4.7	12.3
	Agree: 80			Disagree: 17	
I obtain political information from Facebook	7.7	10.8	4.6	12.3	64.6
	Agree: 18.5			Disagree: 76.9	
I obtain political information from YouTube	29	24	7	17	23
	Agree: 53			Disagree: 40	
I share political posts/messages on Instagram	17	20	3	11	49
	Agree: 37			Disagree: 60	
I share political posts/messages on Facebook	3	6	4.6	0	86.4
	Agree: 9			Disagree: 86.4	

Next, let us consider the results of the survey regarding the number of political messages young people receive per day.

To the question of “Approximately how many political posts do you see on Instagram per day?” over half of the respondents (50.8%) answered that they saw 1-3 political posts per day. 16.9% of young people see more than 4-5 posts of a political nature per day and 9.2% see 6 posts and more. 18.5% of young people who use Instagram said they did not see political information. 4.6% of respondents do not use this application (see Diagram 4).

*Diagram 4*

**Approximately How Many Political Posts Do You See On Instagram Per Day?**



To the question “How much time do you devote to political content on YouTube per day?”, 49.2% of young people responded that they spend 1-2 hours per day watching political videos; 3.1% of respondents spend more than 3-4 hours, and 1.5% spend more than 5 hours per day. 46.2% of young respondents are not interested in political content on YouTube (see Diagram 5).

Only 9% of the youth answered affirmatively to “I share political posts/messages on Facebook.” 86.4% of respondents said they did not share political posts on Facebook. 17% fully agreed and 20% somewhat agreed with the statement “I share political posts/messages on Instagram.” In total, 37% of young people share political information compared to 60% of young people who do not share political posts on Instagram (see Table 2).

Young people have a sense of belonging to their country, because according to the results of the quantitative survey, the vast majority of respondents aged 18-21 demonstrate their interest in what is happening in the country (94%) and in politics (75.3%) (see Table 3).

Approximately 66% of young people aged 18-21 years agreed with the statement “I actively read news on social media and websites.” Just over half of the respondents (50.7%) actively read posts by political scientists, public figures and bloggers on social media (see Table 3).

Diagram 5

How Much Time Do You Devote to Political Content On YouTube Per Day?

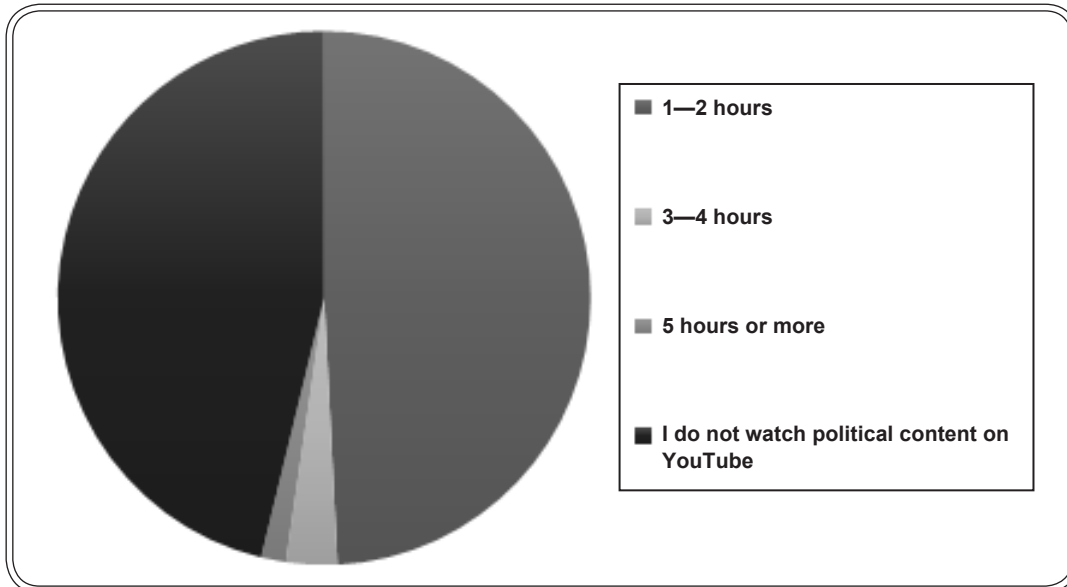


Table 3

Likert Scale Survey Results (%)

	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree, Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
I am interested in what is going on in Kazakhstan	55.4	38.5	1.5	3	1.6%
	Agree: 93.9			Disagree: 4.6	
I am interested in politics	33.8	41.5	10.8	7.7	6.2
	Agree: 75.3			Disagree: 13.9	
I actively read news on social media and websites	38.5	27.6	9.2	7.7	17
	Agree: 66.1			Disagree: 24.7	
I actively read posts by political scientists, public figures and bloggers on social media	29.2	21.5	12.3	4.6	32.4
	Agree: 50.7			Disagree: 37	
I consider myself politically well-informed	27.7	33.8	13.8	15.4	9.3
	Agree: 61.5			Disagree: 24.7	
I consider myself politically active	9.2	32.3	17	20	21.5
	Agree: 41.5			Disagree: 41.5	

In addition, the majority of young people feel politically informed with the help of social media—this is the answer of 61.5% of respondents, as opposed to 24.7% who consider themselves to be politically uninformed. In particular, 27.7% of the Almaty youth fully agree with the statement “I consider myself politically informed,” and 33.8% somewhat agree with it. 15.4% of young people tend to somewhat disagree with this statement. 9.2% of young people believe that they are not politically informed (see Table 3).

41.5% of young people agreed with the assertion “I consider myself politically active,” the same number of respondents identified themselves as politically passive, and 17% chose a neutral answer (see Table 3). Many studies have demonstrated that a high level of political efficacy is positively correlated with a high level of political participation, and that a low level of political efficacy explains the low level of political participation.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, it is advisable to examine the level of political efficacy among the youth in Almaty, in other words, the faith in their power to influence the actions of their country’s government and political leaders.

The level of political efficacy among the majority of 18-21-year-old Almaty youth remains very low. Thus, only 25.7% of young people agreed with the statement “My vote/opinion is important for the state.” An impressive number—62.6% of youth believe that their vote and opinion is not important for the state. About 12% of the respondents decided to abstain and demonstrated a neutral position.

There are many ways in which the political efficacy of citizens can be manifested: through social media, the media, protests and rallies, free elections, etc.<sup>15</sup> Approximately 60% of young people question the effectiveness of the methods described in the statement “If I publicly express my opinion (in a blog post, an interview on TV or social networks, with a banner in my hands), the government will take it into account.” Despite this, 23.1% of respondents believe that public statements somehow affect the authorities’ decisions. At the same time, half of young people agree that government officials have become more concerned with what the young people think, and it is the result of active online citizen participation. And if each of them had the opportunity to directly influence the decision of the authorities, then more than 90% of the youth responded that they would take advantage of this opportunity (see Table 4).

Table 4

Likert Scale Survey Results (%)

	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree, Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
<b>When I read political news, I understand almost everything I read</b>	40.2	34.3	7.4	12.1	6
	Agree: 74.5			Disagree: 18.1	
<b>I often discuss politics with my family, friends, fellow students and colleagues</b>	29.2	41.5	12.3	13.8	3.2
	Agree: 70.7			Disagree: 17	

<sup>14</sup> See: A. Campbell, G. Gurin, W. Miller, “The Voter Decides,” Row, Peterson and Company, Evanston. Illinois, 1954, p. 187; H. Catt, “Now or Never: The Impact of Political Education on Civic Participation,” *Australasian Political Studies Conference*, Dunedin, New Zealand, 2005, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> See: R. Niemi, S. Craig, F. Mattei, “Measuring Internal Political Efficacy in the 1988 National Election Study,” *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 85, No. 4, 1991, pp. 1407-1412.

Table 4 (continued)

	Completely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree, Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Completely Disagree
My vote/opinion is important for the state	13.8	11.9	11.9	32.8	29.8
	Agree: 25.7			Disagree: 62.6	
If I publicly express my opinion (in a blog post, TV or social media interview, with a banner in my hands), the government will take it into account	4.6	18.5	17	24.6	35.3
	Agree: 23.1			Disagree: 59.9	
Internet helps people like me participate more in politics online	39.3	36.4	12	6	6.3
	Agree: 75.7			Disagree: 12.3	
State authorities began to take opinions of people like me into account because of people's active online participation	13.8	37	18	16	15.2
	Agree: 50.8			Disagree: 31.2	
If I could directly affect decisions made by authorities, I would take advantage of this opportunity	69.2	21.5	4.6	3.2	1.5%
	Agree: 90.7			Disagree: 4.7	

### Conclusion

Several interesting results emerged as we summarize the analysis of the data collected from the Likert scale part of the study and the survey results.

- First of all, it concerns the support from social media: 66.1% of young people aged 18-21 are interested in news on social networks and websites; about half of young people (50.7%) read the posts by political scientists, public figures and bloggers; 70.7% of young people discuss political news they have read on social networks with their family, friends and acquaintances. Moreover, 74.5% of young people have no difficulty comprehending the text when reading political news.
- Secondly, 18 to 21-year-old youth primarily obtains political news through Instagram and YouTube, while Facebook is practically ignored. In particular, it turned out that about 94% of youth use Instagram daily, and 80% of youth receive political information. Despite the fact that 100% of the respondents stated that they use YouTube every day, only half (53%) of young people obtain political information on YouTube daily. It is worth noting that the purpose of this study was not to analyze all common social media in Kazakhstan, therefore, the three above-mentioned platforms were selected among all existing options.



- Thirdly, in our opinion, there is a relationship between the time spent on social networks and the level of political literacy and awareness. For example, the majority of young people (61.5%) are politically informed through social networks. Consequently, the more time young people spend on social media, the more political information they receive, thus becoming more politicized. It is also worth noting that young people are a source of information for their environment, as they share the information received on social networks through Instagram with friends and acquaintances and discuss it.

17% of the respondents remained neutral to the statement “I consider myself politically active,” while the remaining 83% of respondents split up into two equal groups: 41.5% consider themselves politically active, and 41.5%—politically passive. There is an ambiguous understanding of political activity by youth. However, most respondents feel involved in politics, at least online, with the help of social media. So, 75.7% of young people agreed and 12.3% did not agree with the statement “Internet helps people like me participate more in politics online.” At the same time, the level of political efficacy among the majority of 18 to 21-year-old youth in Almaty remains very low. An impressive number of young people believe that their vote and opinion are not important for the state.

In general, it can be concluded that social networking platforms contribute to increasing youth political awareness, as well as political collective discussion. Although the political activity of young people on social media may not translate into real political activity, the political content consumed by young people on social networks still has a positive impact on their interest in politics, the desire to participate in the country’s social and political life and online interaction with civic activists. With the help of social networks, young people feel engaged in politics, and, to some extent, politically active; involved in their society and feel like one with the country. The fact that 93.9% of respondents said they were interested in what was happening in the country and 75.3% were interested in politics testifies to that. Processes of mobilization of citizens and democratic consolidation can be accelerated in Kazakhstan with the help of social media.

---

# COVID-19 PANDEMIC

## THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE POSITION OF LABOR MIGRANTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA IN RUSSIA

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.06>

Sergey RYAZANTSEV

*D.Sc. (Econ.), Corresponding Member of  
the Russian Academy of Sciences, Professor,  
Director of the Institute of Demographic Studies,  
Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology,  
Russian Academy of Sciences (FCTAS RAS),  
Head of the Department of Demographic and Migration Policy,  
MGIMO University, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

Zafar VAZIROV

*Junior Researcher, Institute of Demographic Studies,  
Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology,  
Russian Academy of Sciences (FCTAS RAS)  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

---

*The article was written in the framework of a project supported by the Council on Grants under the President of the Russian Federation on the state support of the leading scientific schools of the Russian Federation (Grant #NSh-2631.2020.6).*

---

Marina KHRAMOVA

*Ph.D. (Physical and Mathematical Sciences),  
Deputy Director of the Institute of Demographic Studies,  
Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology,  
Russian Academy of Sciences (FCTAS RAS), Associate Professor,  
Department of Demographic and Migration Policy,  
MGIMO University, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

Alexey SMIRNOV

*Junior Researcher, Institute of Demographic Studies,  
Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology,  
Russian Academy of Sciences (FCTAS RAS)  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

## ABSTRACT

**T**he article examines the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the position of Central Asian labor migrants in Russia. The article notes the significant role of labor migration in the formation of Russia's gross domestic product and budget. The ethnic specialization of Central Asian labor migrants in the Russian economy is described: migrants from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan work in construction and agriculture, those from Kyrgyzstan—in trade, the service sphere and public catering. The economic downturn during the COVID-19 pandemic reduced the employment rate of labor migrants from Central Asian countries in the Russian economy significantly, albeit unevenly. Numerous workers from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan engaged in construction, maintenance and transport lost their jobs. A sociological

survey of labor migrants revealed that the key problems of Central Asian labor migrants during the pandemic were the loss of work and income, the inability to pay for housing and food, and increased pressure from the security forces. Considering the significant scale of the decline in production and the growth of unemployment among labor migrants in Russia, the volume of money transfers to Central Asian countries is expected to decrease in the coming months. The highest rates of decline are expected in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, to a lesser extent in Kyrgyzstan. The coordination of Russia's actions with the donor countries of Central Asia in the sphere of humanitarian aid, transportation of migrants to their homeland, and reduction of pressure on migration communities should be a key area at the international level.

**KEYWORDS:** *Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), pandemic, Russia, Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, labor migrants, money remittances, legal status, income, self-isolation.*

## Relevance of Research

According to WHO terminology, COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by the last of the recently discovered types of coronavirus.<sup>1</sup> The first outbreak of infection occurred in the capital of the Chinese Hubei province, the city of Wuhan, at the end of 2019. Due to the spread of COVID-19 and its danger to human health, WHO announced the start of a pandemic on 12 March, 2020.<sup>2</sup>

As of 2 May, 2020, 3,469,812 cases of COVID-19 coronavirus infection were detected in the world, including 243,780 dead and 1,117,010 recovered patients.

In Russia, the total number of cases equaled 124,054, with 1,222 deaths and 15,013 recoveries. In Russia, the epidemic began in Moscow, consequently spreading to the regions in a gradual mode. Both the local population and labor migrants from the Central Asian countries, whose number in Russia ranges from 2 to 3 million people, were at risk. Currently, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are the key labor force donors for the Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan.<sup>3</sup>

Through return migration and tourists, the virus also entered the Central Asian states, most likely through Russia. By the beginning of May 2020, 3,857 cases were detected in Kazakhstan, 26 people died and 985 recovered; there was a total of 769 cases in Kyrgyzstan, 8 people died and 527 recovered; 2,118 cases in Uzbekistan, with 9 deaths and 1,271 recoveries. The Tajik authorities have long denied the presence of coronavirus in their country, which was surprising in the face of active labor migration with Russia and Kazakhstan. However, by early May 2020, the authorities had officially announced 76 cases and 2 deaths. No coronavirus has been officially detected in Turkmenistan.<sup>4</sup> However, experts believe that the reason is the secrecy of information and the lack of testing in this country.

In order to contain and reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Government of the Russian Federation has restricted the entry of foreign citizens and stateless persons into the country from 18 March to 1 May, 2020.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, all recipient and donor countries of labor migrants, including the Central Asian republics, began to shut down their state borders. As a result of travel restrictions, international mobility dropped sharply, practically coming to a halt by early April. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan virtually shut down their borders. Kyrgyzstan only accepts evacuation flights with its citizens onboard. Kazakhstan also closed its borders and declared a state of emergency.

Many labor migrants from Central Asian countries were left without work in Russia or trapped at the borders, unable to return to their countries. As a result, the position of both categories of migrants from Central Asia remains difficult, as people are left without means of subsistence, sources of income, cannot pay for housing and food.

<sup>1</sup> See: The WHO official website [<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>].

<sup>2</sup> See: The WHO Regional Office for Europe [<http://www.euro.who.int/ru/health-topics/health-emergencies/coronavirus-covid-19/news/news/2020/3/who-announces-covid-19-outbreak-a-pandemic>].

<sup>3</sup> See: S. Ryazantsev, Z. Vazirov, E. Pismennaya, L. Delovarova, "China in Central Asia: Geopolitical, Economic, and Sociocultural Vectors of Influence," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 20, Issue 4, 2019, pp. 18-31.

<sup>4</sup> See: The RF Operational Headquarters [<https://стопкоронавирус.рф>], Kazakhstan—[<https://www.coronavirus2020.kz/>], Kyrgyzstan: Republican Headquarters of the Kyrgyz Republic to Combat COVID-19—[<https://t.me/RshKRCOV>], Uzbekistan: Official Telegram Channel of the Health Ministry of the Republic of Uzbekistan—[<https://t.me/ssvuz>], [<https://coronavirus-monitor.ru>], [<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>].

<sup>5</sup> See: *Order of the Government of the Russian Federation of 16 March, 2020 No. 635-r*, available in Russian at [<http://static.government.ru/media/files/wwGGarWzAuGcDRw4OFHbFkInXcpD0ZPu.pdf>].

## Employment of Labor Migrants from Central Asia in the Russian Economy Prior to the Pandemic

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic on 1 April, 2020, there was a total of 4.17 million labor migrants in Russia.<sup>6</sup> Considering the fact that migrants from the Central Asian countries account for about 76% of the total number of labor migrants in Russia, *about 3.2 million documented labor migrants from Central Asian countries could have been located in Russia* at the outset of the pandemic. In addition, about 2.5 million labor migrants were employed in the informal or shadow sector of the Russian economy without registration or a written contract, and were deprived of passports. Their freedom of movement was restricted, they were living on their worksites and were unable to leave the construction site or enterprise. Many migrants come from Central Asian countries—the number of undocumented migrants may have approximated 1.9 million (see Table 1).

Table 1

**Number of Labor Migrants from Central Asia in Russia  
in the First Two Quarters of 2019—2020**

Labor Migration Indicators		January-March 2020	January-March 2019
Number of migration registrations of foreign citizens and stateless persons		3,486,500	3,585,104
—including for work purposes		1,204,343	1,273,234
—including those from Central Asian countries		915,055	930,224
—including those from	Kazakhstan	29,162	28 001
	Kyrgyzstan	93,109	97 522
	Tajikistan	276,405	269 683
	Turkmenistan	1,467	1 197
	Uzbekistan	514,912	533 821
Work permits executed for foreign citizens and stateless persons, total		16,128	23,550
—including those for	Highly qualified employees	5,996	7 413
	Qualified employees	1,728	3 252
Patents executed for foreign citizens and stateless persons		426,726	377,525
<i>S o u r c e:</i> Statistical Data on Migration. Data Provided by the Main Directorate for Migration Affairs, available in Russian at [ <a href="https://мвд.рф/Deljatelnost/statistics/migracionnaya/2/">https://мвд.рф/Deljatelnost/statistics/migracionnaya/2/</a> ].			

<sup>6</sup> See: Yu.F. Florinskaya, “Trudovaia migratsiia v RF na etape zakrytiia granits,” *Monitoring ekonomicheskoy situatsii v Rossii. Tendentsii i vyzovy sotsialno-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia*, No. 7 (109), April 2020, p. 14, available at [[https://www.iep.ru/files/text/crisis\\_monitoring/2020\\_7-109\\_April-1.pdf](https://www.iep.ru/files/text/crisis_monitoring/2020_7-109_April-1.pdf)].

Citizens of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, which are members of the EAEU, do not need to obtain permits, only registration at the place of stay to be employed in Russia. Labor migrants from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan need to apply for a patent. Approximately 1.7 million labor patents are issued in Russia annually, which brings about 60 billion rubles to Russian regional budgets.<sup>7</sup> About 427,000 patents were issued for foreigners to work in Russia in Q1 2020, that is, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Every month, labor migrants from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are obliged to pay personal income tax in the amount that differs in various Russian regions (see Table 2). In 2019, the Moscow Multifunctional Migration Center issued 263,700 labor patents. According to the Department of Economic Policy and Development of Moscow, in 2019 the city budget received 18.3 billion rubles from the sale of patents. The majority of patents in Moscow were obtained by citizens of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (50% and 38%, respectively). Thus, citizens of the two Central Asian countries who obtained patents replenished the Moscow budget by 16.1 billion rubles. In 2015-2019, foreign citizens in Moscow obtained a total of over 2 million patents, adding 77 billion rubles to the city budget. Thus, according to our calculations, citizens of Central Asian countries contributed 67.8 billion rubles in direct revenues to the Moscow budget. The Mayor of Moscow Sergey Sobyenin noted that the city budget receives more money from the sale of labor patents to migrants than from oil companies' taxes.<sup>8</sup>

Table 2

**Cost of Labor Migrant Patents  
in Specific Russian Regions (rubles)**

Year	Moscow	Moscow Region	St. Petersburg
2018	4,500	4,300	3,500
2019	5,000	4,750	3,800
2020	5,341	5,092	4,000

*Sources:* Official website of the Multifunctional Migration Center in Moscow [<https://mc.mos.ru/worker/get-patent>]; Official website of the Federal Tax Agency [[https://www.nalog.ru/rn50/news/activities\\_fts/9525617/](https://www.nalog.ru/rn50/news/activities_fts/9525617/)]; Official website of the Administration of St. Petersburg [<https://www.gov.spb.ru/press/governor/176712/>].

In April, May, August and September 2019, the Federal State Statistics Service (Rosstat) conducted a sample survey of migrant labor. As part of the observation, over 130,000 households with members 15 years and older (0.24% of the total number of households) were interviewed in all Russian regions. Information on the employment of migrants in households is broken down by dominant type of work or service provided. Rosstat also conducts sample surveys of the labor force in Russia on a regular basis. As a result, there is information on the labor activity of migrants by type, determined by the predominant type of the entrepreneur's economic activity.

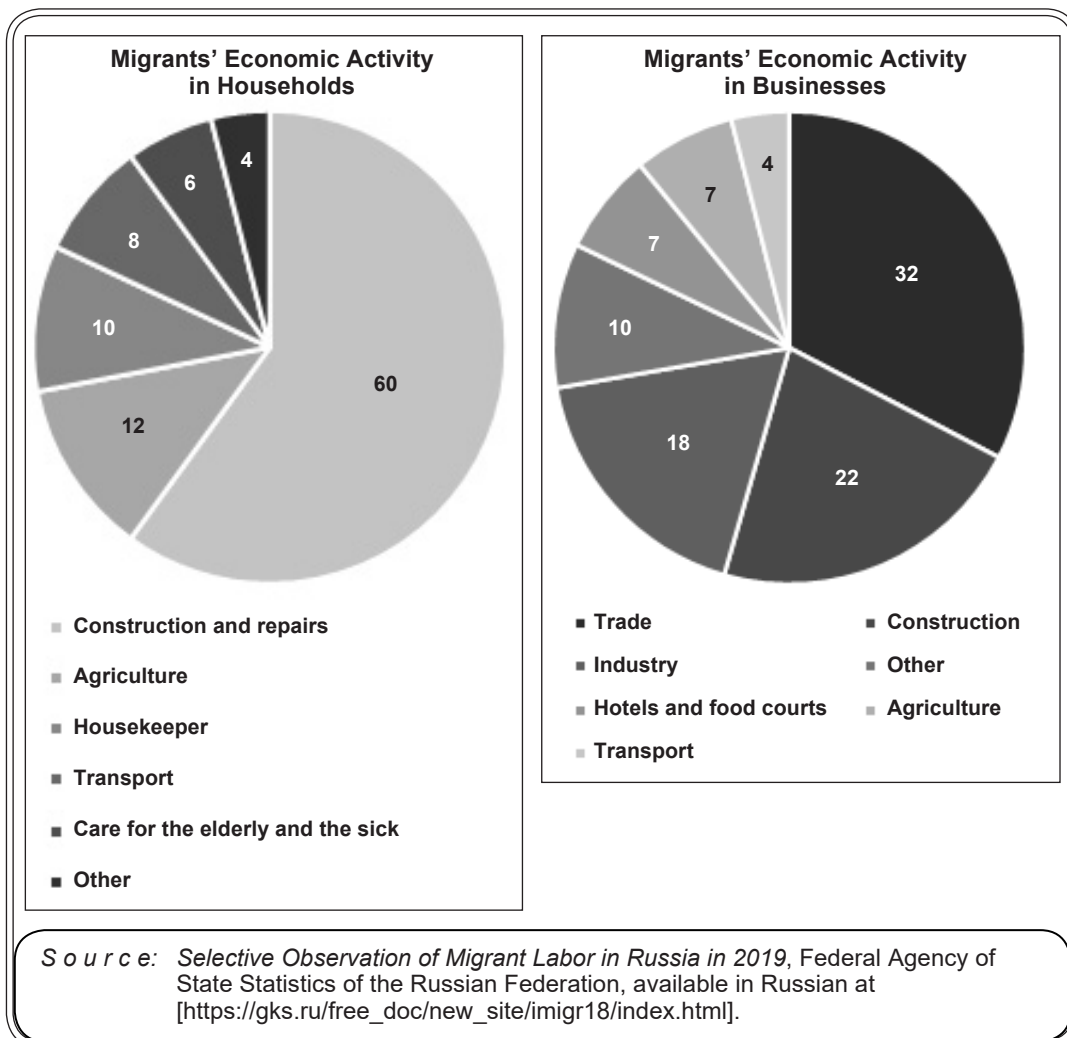
According to Rosstat, the majority of labor migrants are employed in the following spheres of the economy: construction and repair work (60% in households and 22% in businesses), trade (32% in

<sup>7</sup> See: "Moskva zarabotala milliardy na migrantakh," Lenta.ru, 10 February, 2020, available at [<https://lenta.ru/news/2020/02/10/migration/>].

<sup>8</sup> See: "Dokhody Moskvyy ot prodazhi patentov prevysili dokhody ot neftnykh kompaniy—RBK," 29 January, 2016, available at [<https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/56ab4f3a9a794770ae03f7d6>].

Figure 1

Labor Migrants' Employment Structure in Russia by Type of Economic Activity, %



businesses), industry (18% in businesses), agriculture (12% in households and 7% in businesses), transportation (8% in households and 4% in businesses), elderly care (6% in households), hotels and catering (7% in businesses) (see Fig. 1).

An ethno-geographic specialization of labor migrant employment in Russia has developed: citizens of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are chiefly employed in construction, agriculture, industry, and transport spheres; citizens of Kyrgyzstan—in trade, services, public catering, as domestic workers, caring for the sick, the elderly and children in Russian families; citizens of Turkmenistan are mainly employed in industry; citizens of Kazakhstan—in the non-production sphere.

Labor migration from Central Asian countries is of great economic importance for the Russian economy. Labor migrants produce about 8% of Russia's GDP, and migrants from Central Asian countries may be generating 2/3 of that amount. Also, labor migrants contribute to decreasing the

shortage of labor resources, stimulate the development of some sectors of the economy, and replenish the population of regions and settlements in Russia that are being depopulated.<sup>9</sup>

## The Response of the Authorities and the Change in the Status of Labor Migrants in Russia

During the pandemic, restrictive measures in Russia started with the actions taken by the Moscow authorities: on 5 March, 2020, a high alert regime was introduced in the city due to the threat of the spread of COVID-19. A 14-day home isolation regime was enforced upon arrival from 7 countries with the maximum spread of infection at that time (China, Republic of Korea, Italy, Iran, France, Germany, Spain). This measure barely affected labor migrants from Central Asia.<sup>10</sup> In order to contain and reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Government of the Russian Federation has restricted the entry of all foreign citizens and stateless persons into the country from 18 March to 1 May, 2020.<sup>11</sup>

As the COVID-19 situation deteriorated, the President of the Russian Federation established non-working days between 30 March and 3 April, 2020, with wages preserved for employees.<sup>12</sup> This regime was subsequently extended from 4 April to 30 April, 2020 inclusive. In fact, during this period, the activities of most trade enterprises (except for food and pharmacy), hotel and restaurant business (except for the export of food), construction and transport were suspended.<sup>13</sup> Gradually, the Russian authorities limited air traffic with foreign countries. And since 27 March, 2020, Russia's airspace has been practically closed—flights to and from other countries have been canceled, except for the return of Russian citizens and the outflow of foreign citizens. These measures directly affected labor migrants, most of whom were from Central Asia, had lost their jobs, and at the same time could not leave Russia.

Moscow authorities gradually tightened the regime by canceling mass events, expanding the list of arrival countries for returnees' self-isolation, enforcing isolation for people over 65, and restricting attendance at educational institutions. Gyms, fitness clubs and swimming pools have also been closed since 21 March, 2020.<sup>14</sup> From 28 March to 5 April, 2020 in Moscow, restaurants, cafes, canteens,

<sup>9</sup> See: S.V. Ryazantsev, "Trudovaia immigratsiia v Rossii: mify i kontrargumenty," *Vestnik Rossiyskogo universiteta družby narodov*, Series: *Ekonomika*, Vol. 26, No. 4, 2018, pp. 718-729, DOI: 10.22363/2313-2329-2018-26-4-718-729, available at [<http://journals.rudn.ru/economics/article/view/20764/16762>].

<sup>10</sup> *Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM On the Introduction of a High Alert Regime*, available at [<https://www.mos.ru/upload/documents/docs/12-YM.pdf>].

<sup>11</sup> *Order of the Government of the Russian Federation dated 16 March, 2020 No. 635-r*.

<sup>12</sup> *Decree of the President of the Russian Federation On the Announcement of Non-Working Days in Russia dated 25 March, 2020*, available at [<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/63065>].

<sup>13</sup> *Decree of the President of the Russian Federation On Measures to Ensure the Sanitary and Epidemiological Well-Being of the Population in the Territory of the Russian Federation in Connection with the Spread of a New Coronavirus Infection (COVID-19) dated 2 April, 2020 No. 239*, available at [<https://xn--80aesfpebagmfb1c0a.xn--p1ai/ai/doc/87/attach/0001202004020025.pdf>].

<sup>14</sup> *Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 10 March, 2020 No. 17-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 14 March, 2020 No. 20-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 16 March, 2020 No. 21-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 19 March, 2020 No. 25-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 23 March, 2020 No. 26-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 25 March, 2020 No. 28-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor*



bars, snack bars and other catering establishments (except for take-out work), retail trade (except for pharmacies, grocery stores and basic necessities), beauty salons, hairdressing salons, massage salons have stopped working. The restrictions were subsequently extended until 1 May, 2020.<sup>15</sup> Since 13 April, 2020, car rental services, taxi services (except for official carriers), construction and repair work have all been suspended.<sup>16</sup> Starting on 15 April, 2020, digital passes were introduced to travel around Moscow.<sup>17</sup>

This wave of restrictions significantly affected the predicament of labor migrants from Central Asian countries—many lost their jobs and were placed on unpaid leave. The owners of taxi companies claim that the demand for taxi services fell by 80-90% due to the introduction of the high alert regime, the self-isolation regime and the pass-only regime.<sup>18</sup> A significant number of migrants lost their jobs in construction, services, trade, restaurant and hotel business, and transport spheres.

The demand for home services, courier delivery, housing and communal services (wipers, disinfectants) and cleaning services has notably grown. For instance, Deputy Mayor of Moscow for Economic Policy and Property and Land Relations Vladimir Efimov estimates a 30.9% turnover increase in wholesale trade and online leisure services in one week (20-24 April, 2020). The average daily volume of wholesale trade during this week amounted to approximately 2.5 billion rubles. For the second week in a row, the online culture, leisure and sports industry has shown the largest growth for the second week in a row. Turnover growth against the previous week equaled 68%. The average daily turnover in this segment during that week equaled about 100 million rubles. For the first time since the introduction of restrictive measures, the average daily retail turnover in foodstuffs increased by 3.7% (2.6 billion rubles) and came out of the negative zone. The total average daily retail turnover of food and non-food goods amounted to 5.1 billion rubles.<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly, the growth in these sectors of the economy contributed to the employment of some labor migrants who had previously lost their jobs. But this sector could not absorb all the freed workers.

Then, the ban on the operation of restaurants, cafes, hairdressers and other service sector facilities was extended in Moscow until 31 May, 2020. Industrial and construction enterprises started working on 12 May, 2020. The mayor of Moscow stated: “Unlike trade and service workers, con-

---

*of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM*, available at [[https://mosgorzdrav.ru/ru-RU/document/default/search/2/10.html?phrase=&interval=&group\\_id=18](https://mosgorzdrav.ru/ru-RU/document/default/search/2/10.html?phrase=&interval=&group_id=18)].

<sup>15</sup> *Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 26 March, 2020 No. 31-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 2 April, 2020 No. 36-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 4 April, 2020 No. 39-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 9 April, 2020 No. 41-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM*, available at [[https://mosgorzdrav.ru/ru-RU/document/default/search/1/10.html?phrase=&interval=&group\\_id=18](https://mosgorzdrav.ru/ru-RU/document/default/search/1/10.html?phrase=&interval=&group_id=18)].

<sup>16</sup> *Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 10 April, 2020 No. 42-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM*, available at [[https://mosgorzdrav.ru/ru-RU/document/default/search/1/10.html?phrase=&interval=&group\\_id=18](https://mosgorzdrav.ru/ru-RU/document/default/search/1/10.html?phrase=&interval=&group_id=18)].

<sup>17</sup> *Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 11 April, 2020 No. 43-UM On Approval of the Procedure for Issuing and Using Digital Passes for Movement on the Territory of the City of Moscow during the Period of High Alert in the City of Moscow; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 18 April, 2020 No. 44-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 18 April, 2020 No. 45-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 11 April, 2020 No. 43-UM ; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 21 April, 2020 No. 47-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM and 11 April, 2020 No. 43-UM ; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 28 April, 2020 No. 51-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 29 April, 2020 No. 52-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 4 April, 2020 No. 40-UM and 11 April, 2020 No. 43-UM*, available at [[https://mosgorzdrav.ru/ru-RU/document/default/search/1/10.html?phrase=&interval=&group\\_id=18](https://mosgorzdrav.ru/ru-RU/document/default/search/1/10.html?phrase=&interval=&group_id=18)].

<sup>18</sup> See: [<https://iz.ru/999074/aleksandr-volobuev/ezda-bez-sprosa-stolichnye-taksisty-predupredili-o-riske-razoreniia>].

<sup>19</sup> See: “Ob’em optovoy trgovli v Moskve vyros na 30 protsentov,” Official website of the Mayor of Moscow, 24 April, 2020, available at [<https://www.mos.ru/news/item/73094073/>].

struction workers and employees of industrial enterprises barely ever come in contact with customers. It is much easier to ensure the proper sanitary and epidemiological regime in relatively confined workspaces, i.e., at construction sites and in production halls. Only those workers whose presence in workshops, offices and on construction sites is required for technological reasons will be able to return to their jobs. Construction of roads, schools, kindergartens and other facilities necessary for the city will be resumed.”<sup>20</sup> Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Marat Khusnullin recommended not to halt work at construction sites that employ migrants and rotational workers. On 24 April, 2020, he said: “We now believe that we do not need the foreign workers who work in our country to move elsewhere. Our share of foreign workers today is quite large ... and, of course, we need them in order to fulfill all the tasks that we are facing.”<sup>21</sup>

The authorities of the Astrakhan region, a border Russian region, announced a shortage of labor migrants in the agricultural-industrial complex, which is associated with the closure of the region’s eastern border with Kazakhstan.<sup>22</sup> Experts say that labor migrants from megacities who lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic began to move to the southern regions of the Russian Federation, including the Astrakhan region, seeking work that would allow them to survive the crisis.<sup>23</sup>

## Key Issues in the Position of Labor Migrants in Russia during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Sociological Survey Results

In April 2020, an online sociological survey was conducted via the official website of the ISPI FCTAS RAS and social networks (Facebook, VKontakte and instant messengers) with the support of Valentina Chupik, a lawyer who provides free services to migrants, NGO Tong Jahoni and the Trade Union of Migrants of Russia.<sup>24</sup> 717 respondents were interviewed to study the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the position of labor migrants in Russia. Following data cleansing, 671 questionnaires were selected for analysis. The sociological survey sample was random. The average age of the respondents was 36.4 years, the median age equaled 36 years, the minimum age was 19 years, the maximum—65 years, with the standard deviation of 9.27 years. The most numerous age groups of the respondents were 23-30 years old (201 respondents), 31-38 years old (158 respondents) and 39-45 years old (156 respondents). About 61% of respondents were male, 39% were female.

Most of the respondents (labor migrants) are citizens of Central Asian states: 413 people (62%) are citizens of Tajikistan, 92 people (14%) are citizens of Uzbekistan, 67 people (10%) are citizens of Kyrgyzstan, 6 people (1%) are citizens of Kazakhstan, 93 people (14%)—citizens of other countries. While this distribution looks significantly distorted in favor of the citizens of Tajikistan (obvi-

---

<sup>20</sup> Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 7 May, 2020 No. 55-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 5 March, 2020 No. 12-UM; Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 7 May, 2020 No. 56-UM On Amending the Decree of the Mayor of Moscow dated 4 April, 2020 No. 40-UM and 11 April, 2020 No. 43-UM, available at [<https://www.sobyani.ru/koronavirus-resheniya-07-05-2020>].

<sup>21</sup> See: “Rossiyskim stroykam nuzhny rabochie iz drugikh stran...” Sputnik Uzbekistan, 24 April, 2020, available at [<https://uz.sputniknews.ru/migration/20200424/13993565/Rossiyskim-stroykam-nuzhny-migranty--vitse-premer-RF.html>].

<sup>22</sup> Arbuz Today, available at [<https://arbuztoday.ru/v-astraxanskoj-oblasti-slozhilsya-deficit-rabochej-sily-iz-zakrytiya-granic-dlya-migrantov/>].

<sup>23</sup> Astrakhan News, available at [<https://ast-news.ru/node/v-astrakhanskuyu-oblast-mogut-rvanut-migranty-i-covid-19-iz-moskvy/>].

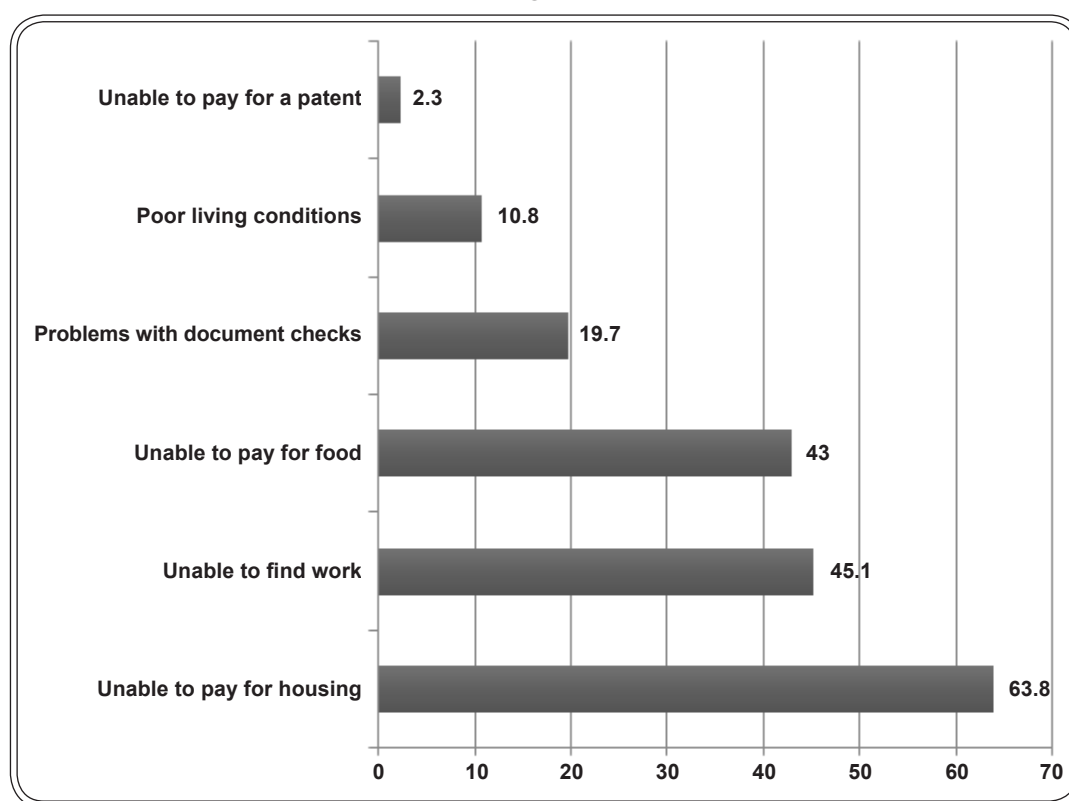
<sup>24</sup> A Survey of Foreign Citizens (Migrant Workers) in Russia on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, available at [<http://xn--h1aauh.xn--p1ai/11882-2/>].

ously due to the greater activity of Tajik citizens on social media, closer ties with these organizations, large-scale job loss in Russia during the pandemic), other socio-demographic parameters of the respondents suggest that the sample is close to the real socio-demographic structure of labor migrants in Russia.

The main issues for labor migrants during the pandemic was the inability to pay for housing (about 64%), the loss of work and inability to find work (45%) and the lack of money for food (43%). About 20% encountered problems with document checks and poor living conditions (11%) and 2% of respondents could not pay for a patent (see Fig. 2).

*Figure 2*

**Key Issues Encountered by Respondents (Labor Migrants) in Russia during the Pandemic, %**

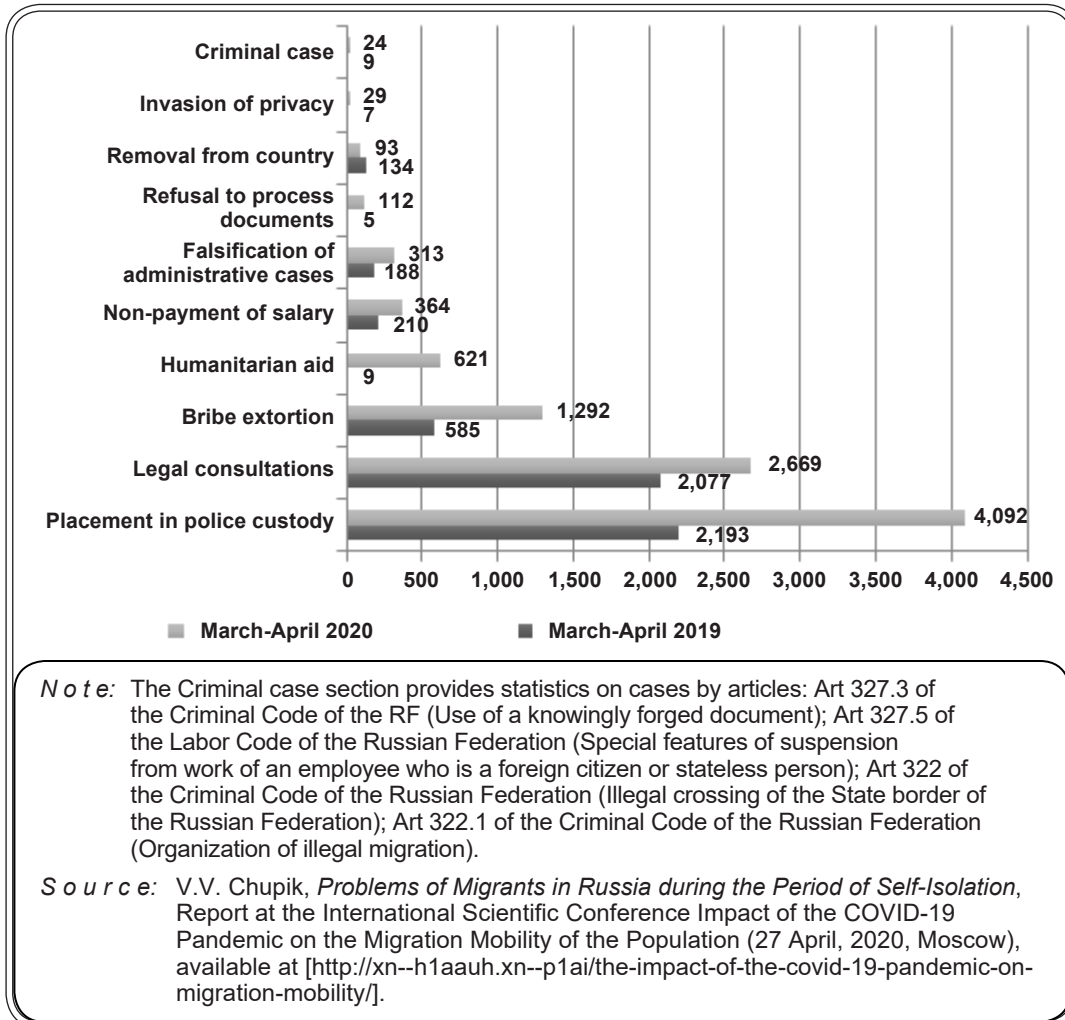


The main reason for the inability to pay for housing and buy food was the loss of income by a significant number of labor migrants: about 28% of the respondents were laid off and did not have a job at the time of the survey, and 37% were placed on unpaid leave. It turns out that 65% of the surveyed labor migrants had no sources of income during the pandemic. As the survey revealed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the overwhelming number of respondents, or 84%, have lost their income, income increased only for 1%, and did not change for 15% of respondents.

The largest reduction in the employment of labor migrants was noted in construction—37% of those who previously worked at construction sites have lost their jobs. The catering sector also shrank significantly: 21% of those who lost their jobs worked in restaurants and cafes. 18% of the laid-off labor migrant worked in trade, i.e., in supermarkets, shops, stalls and kiosks. About 6% of those who

Figure 3

**Migrants' Appeals to the Tong Jahoni NGO in March-April 2019 and 2020**



lost their jobs were fired from taxi services. Employment in home services (3.5%), industry (3.5%), education (about 2.9%), housing and communal services (2.6%), hairdressers and beauty salons (2.4%), cleaning (1.5%) and tourism (1.1%) also declined. Thus, at the end of April and the beginning of May 2020, the employment of labor migrants decreased by 60%.

Certain Russian experts have come up with a proposal to pay unemployment benefits to labor migrants and provide them with access to medical services. According to the survey results, in April 2020, only 5% received help from their fellow countrymen, 3%—from their employer, 1%—from their country’s embassy, 0.5%—from the Russian authorities. About 87% of respondents did not receive material assistance (money, food, medicine, antiseptics) in April 2020.

To move around the city of Moscow and the Moscow region in April and May 2020, Russian and foreign citizens need to obtain a digital pass with a QR code indicating the purpose of the trip, passport data, the starting and ending points of the trip. Only employers can issue a digital pass for a

migrant worker. A digital pass for personal purposes can only be obtained twice a week.<sup>25</sup> A person must carry identity documents confirming the place of actual residence at a specific address (document of ownership, registration, temporary registration, apartment rental agreement, notification of migration registration).<sup>26</sup> Since 1 June, 2020, the Moscow city authorities have limited daily personal walks.

Due to the above requirements, labor migrants have to face checks by various structures, primarily by the police. At the same time, as noted above, the majority of labor migrants live without registration at their places of residence. Landlords who rent out apartments do not always register their tenants. Labor migrants have to register for a fee at other addresses (in so-called “rubber apartments,” which the authorities are struggling to eliminate) to present the documents in the migration agency. In reality, the unreasonable registration system continues to exacerbate the labor migrants’ predicament and makes them extremely vulnerable to fines and violence from the security forces.

Although the Russian authorities have simplified migration procedures until 15 June, 2020 (registration, patents, work permits, temporary residence permit, visas), in reality, cases of police violence and violations of the rights of labor migrants in Russian cities have only become more numerous. According to Valentina Chupik, with the beginning of the self-isolation regime, the number of foreigners’ reports of illegal detention and extortion of bribes by the police, as well as requests for legal advice at the Tong Jahoni NGO in March-April 2020, increased sharply (by 2 times) compared to 2019 (see Fig. 3).<sup>27</sup>

## *Conclusion*

During the economic downturn in Russia during the COVID-19 pandemic, labor migrants from Central Asian countries were among the most vulnerable social groups, exposed to economic impact and the risk of stigmatization and exclusion. Considering the fact that their employment supported families and relatives at home, contributed to poverty reduction, provided their families with access to basic goods and services, and children—with access to education, the loss of jobs in Russia by migrants led to an increase in poverty in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

During the pandemic, the Governments of Russia and Central Asian states, civil society, international organizations, public organizations, non-profit and non-governmental organizations need to unite and coordinate efforts in the field of humanitarian aid and information support to labor migrants, synchronizing and coordinating action against COVID-19 internationally.

Although some diplomatic missions, non-governmental organizations and businessmen have organized charitable assistance for migrant workers (money, food, personal hygiene and medicine), assistance is not reaching all the migrants yet. Payment for food and housing remains a tremendously relevant problem for migrants who have lost income.

---

<sup>25</sup> *Decree of the Mayor of Moscow On Approval of the Procedure for Issuing and Using Digital Passes for Movement in the Territory of the City of Moscow during the Period of High Alert in the City of Moscow*, available at [<https://www.sobyanin.ru/tsifrovye-propuska-osnovnye-pravila>]; Official website of the Government of the Moscow Region, available at [<https://mosreg.ru/services/popular/kak-poluchit-elektronnyi-propusk-v-podmoskove>]

<sup>26</sup> “The Moscow City Duma Explained What Documents You Need to Take with You Now When Going to the Store,” available in Russian at [[https://yandex.ru/news/story/Nazvany\\_obyazatelnye\\_usloviya\\_dlya\\_predvizheniya\\_po\\_Moskve\\_peshkom--2c620e5439b953764399601a27affb4c?lr=213&stid=yZgRu8wp3I-FG\\_6a1Prc&persistent\\_id=94341741&lang=ru&rubic=index&from=story&nar=0](https://yandex.ru/news/story/Nazvany_obyazatelnye_usloviya_dlya_predvizheniya_po_Moskve_peshkom--2c620e5439b953764399601a27affb4c?lr=213&stid=yZgRu8wp3I-FG_6a1Prc&persistent_id=94341741&lang=ru&rubic=index&from=story&nar=0)].

<sup>27</sup> See: V.V. Chupik, *Problems of Migrants in Russia during the Period of Self-Isolation*, Report at the International Scientific Conference *Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Migration Mobility of the Population (27 April, 2020, Moscow)*, available at [<http://xn--h1aauh.xn--p1ai/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-migration-mobility/>].

It is necessary to organize the monitoring of the health status of migrant workers in cases of COVID-19 infection. Everyone should be provided with the necessary information on health guidelines and measures related to COVID-19. The dissemination of information must be carried out through social media, via SMS or other instant messengers.

The power structures of Russia need to end the pressure on migrant workers: unreasonable checks, violence, illegal detentions, illegal expulsions, direct extortion of bribes, illegal invasion of privacy, confiscation of passports, falsification of administrative cases, refusals to issue documents.

---

## COVID-19: THE CASE OF GEORGIA

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.07>

Lasha TCHANTOURIDZÉ

*PhD, Professor and Director,  
Graduate Programs in Diplomacy and International Relations,  
Norwich University—the Military College of Vermont  
(Northfield, VT, U.S.)*

---

### ABSTRACT

**I**n the global fight against COVID-19, some success stories are truly surprising, as are some failures. Some of the successful countries are in such volatile regions of the world as the Caucasus. Perhaps one of the most surprising success stories in the fight with the novel coronavirus has taken place in the Republic of Georgia. In executing its response, its national government has closely followed the advice and suggestions of a triumvirate of specialists composed of a doctor, a public health official, and a specialist in infectious diseases. Frequently harassed by its neighbor to the north, Russia, the former Soviet republic is not known for its effective political leadership. Quite the contrary, its leadership has often been fractious and disorganized. However, in dealing with the current pandemic,

they have shown good organization and leadership and have managed to rally the entire country for the cause. Two main factors have helped Georgia in this fight. In 2011, with the help of the United States, the country opened a new center for public health research named after former U.S. Senator Richard Lugar. The Lugar Center, as it is commonly known, is one of the best laboratories in the world for biomedical and biosafety research. This lab has played the leading role in Georgia's fight against COVID-19. The second factor is an odd organization of the executive branch of the Georgian government. Composed entirely by appointed officials, the Georgian executive government members owe their allegiance to an informal group of politicians known as "the ruling team," headed and sponsored by the

chairman of the ruling party. While in many other countries the public health officials had to tiptoe around political priorities of the governments, the Georgian team was not only tasked with fighting COVID-19 but was also put in the driver's seat by "the ruling team."

**KEYWORDS:** coronavirus, COVID-19, Georgia, the Lugar lab, microbiological research, Georgian government, Ivanishvili, pandemic.

## Introduction

As the novel coronavirus has spread around the world, it soon became clear that some states were better prepared for pandemics than others. Some success stories are truly surprising, e.g. Vietnam, Ghana, Taiwan,<sup>1</sup> and so are some failures, e.g. the United States, Italy, the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The most well-prepared countries have managed to deal effectively with COVID-19 due to such shared factors as a rationally organized national healthcare system, a national strategy to deal with epidemics, and effective leadership to implement the national strategy. Among those countries to have successfully resisted the spread of the virus has been the Republic of Georgia—not a giant in medical or logistical fields, but tremendously effective in dealing with this particular challenge. Georgia's small size and relative remoteness have contributed to the low levels of infection in the country; however, its success has been greatly aided by two structural factors: the legacy of its Soviet-era scientific institutions in the field of microbiology, and the odd set-up of its government, especially of its executive branch. These two structural factors coalesced in an unexpected way during the national crisis triggered by the pandemic, and their convergence has produced remarkable results in a country not known for stable national governments.

The novel coronavirus also known as COVID-19 and as SARS-CoV-2 was first identified in Wuhan, China, in December 2019. However, it is likely that this zoonotic virus was present in humans even earlier, some indicators suggesting its presence in humans in November 2019.<sup>3</sup> For first few weeks it only affected Wuhan and few other places in China, prompting Chinese authorities to lockdown Wuhan, and then to quarantine the entire area. This type of response to a highly contagious virus was hitherto unknown in practice or even in theoretical literature, but eventually many other countries followed the Chinese example to contain and eradicate the virus. However, many also failed to act early hoping that the new coronavirus would just dissipate or would not reach their countries. Among those who acted early in response to the coronavirus pandemic were Georgian authorities.

## Microbiological Research in Georgia

Georgia is one of the leading post-Soviet states in the study and treatment of infectious diseases. Soviet authorities invested in that field in Georgia, and among other facilities, since early So-

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance: Trang (Mae) Nguyen, E. Malesky, "Reopening Vietnam: How the Country's Improving Governance Helped It Weather the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Brookings*, 20 May, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance: Ph. Stephens, "How Politics Thwarted the UK's Covid-19 Response," *Financial Times*, 23 April, 2020, available at [<https://www.ft.com/content/af17147c-84a1-11ea-b555-37a289098206>].

<sup>3</sup> J. Ma, "Coronavirus: China's First Confirmed Case Traced Back to November 17," *South China Morning Post*, 13 March, 2020, available at [<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/3074991/coronavirus-chinas-first-confirmed-covid-19-case-traced-back>].

viet times it has operated a research institution for the study and application of phages—the so called “good viruses” used to treat dangerous bacterial infections.<sup>4</sup> Before the invention of antibiotics, phages were the only known effective method to treat the bacterial infections.<sup>5</sup> This research facility was preserved by Soviet Georgian authorities after antibiotics became common and effective means to combat bacterial infections even though similar institutions were being dissolved almost everywhere in the world. In the 1990s, as antibiotic-resistance bacteria emerged and spread, Georgia’s phage research institution once again came into prominence.<sup>6</sup> Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia was careful to preserve its knowledge, capabilities and infrastructure in the fight against bacterial and viral diseases. In 2011, using \$350 million in U.S. investment, the country opened a new laboratory for public health research named after former U.S. Senator Richard Lugar of Indiana.<sup>7</sup> The American investment was guided by the fact that Georgia already had effective knowledge and research infrastructure in place in the field of microbiology. The head of the Lugar Center, Professor Paata Imnadze, has been one of the key individuals guiding Georgia’s response to the novel coronavirus.<sup>8</sup>

Rather predictably, the Lugar lab soon became a target for disinformation—Russian intelligence accused the U.S. of using the lab to prepare weapons for biological warfare.<sup>9</sup> Moscow has persisted with this disinformation campaign without presenting any evidence the lab was involved in weapons research.<sup>10</sup> The Russian disinformation campaign was not stopped even during the pandemic even though it was clear that the lab was contributing to the fight against the coronavirus.<sup>11</sup> In fact, the Lugar Center is one of the best laboratories in the world for biomedical and biosafety research. It also educates and trains graduate students specializing in viral disease, epidemics and public health. Accredited by the World Health Organization, the laboratory was originally managed by American specialists, but it was handed over to the Georgian government in 2018.<sup>12</sup> From the very onset of the current pandemic, the Lugar Center has played a leading role in Georgia’s fight against COVID-19. The Lugar lab is also fulfilling its mission by providing home and base of operations for older scientists and training a new generation of researchers and technicians. Regardless, Moscow’s current disinformation campaign against the Lugar Lab has followed the pattern of Soviet-era false biological weapons allegations campaigns.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See: I. Snip, “Can Georgia Save the World from Antibiotics Overuse?” *Eurasianet*, 19 June, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Bacteriophages: Biology and Applications*, ed. by E. Kutter, A. Sulakvelidze, CRC Press, New York, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> See: “Neobychnaia terapiia: pochemu evropeitsy edut lechitsia v Gruziiu,” *Deutsche Welle*, 24 November, 2019, available at [<https://www.dw.com/ru/необычная-терапия-почему-европейцы-едут-лечиться-в-грузию/a-51355888>].

<sup>7</sup> See: I. Cockerell, “A U.S.-Funded Lab in Tbilisi, Georgia Fights COVID-19—and Russian Disinformation,” 18 March, 2020, available at [<https://www.codastory.com/waronscience/lab-georgia-coronavirus/>].

<sup>8</sup> See: “Professor Paata Imnadze MD, PhD,” WHO, available at [<https://www.who.int/ith/imnadze-paata-biography.pdf?ua=1>].

<sup>9</sup> See: V. Isachenkov, “Russia Claims U.S. Running Secret Bio Weapons Lab in Georgia,” *AP News*, 4 October, 2018, available at [<https://apnews.com/0cf158200e674f41bd3026133e5e043d/Russia-claims-US-running-biological-weapons-lab-in-Georgia>].

<sup>10</sup> See: M. Prothero, “For Years, Russia Targeted Conspiracy Theories at a U.S.-Funded Lab on the Frontline of Coronavirus Testing,” *Business Insider*, 19 March, 2020.

<sup>11</sup> See: Z. Anjaparidze, “Russia Dusts Off Conspiracy Theories about Georgia’s Lugar Center Laboratory in Midst of COVID-19 Crisis,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 17, Issue 62, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> See: P. Imnadze, “NCDC/Lugar Center Capacities and Current Activities,” National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, 2018, available at [[https://unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/2AA7486D41719A3AC125835C004921CC/\\$file/MSP\\_2018\\_side\\_event\\_NCDC.pdf](https://unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/2AA7486D41719A3AC125835C004921CC/$file/MSP_2018_side_event_NCDC.pdf)].

<sup>13</sup> See: M. Leitenberg, “Russian Disinformation Campaigns re: Biological Weapons in the Putin Era, School of Public Policy,” A 2019 Tucker CBW Symposium Presentation, University of Maryland, 11 December, 2019, available at [<https://cissm.umd.edu/sites/default/files/2019-12/Russian%20Disinformation%20on%20Biological%20Weapons%20in%20the%20Putin%20PPT%2011%20Dec%202019.pdf>].



A microbiological lab alone, no matter how advanced, would not have helped the country had Georgian experts not read correctly the developing situation in Wuhan. Public health officials in Georgia began preparing for the pandemic early. Georgian experts reacted to the emerging pandemic in China on 6 January, 2020.<sup>14</sup> This was significant as early in January Chinese authorities refused to acknowledge that the Wuhan virus was being transmitted from human to human. Only when representatives of the World Health Organization visited a Wuhan hospital on 21 January, and interviewed local nurses, that the crucial aspect of the novel coronavirus had to be officially acknowledged.<sup>15</sup> On 22 January, on the same day China confirmed COVID-19 was transferable between humans, Professor Amiran Gamkrelidze, the head of the National Center for Disease Control warned the virus could reach Georgia.<sup>16</sup> By 26 January, Georgian health authorities had convinced the government to screen all incoming visitors from China.<sup>17</sup> Since then, there has been a coordinated approach adopted by the Ministries of Health, Interior and Defense to enforce social distancing, administer testing in large quantities, monitor movements of the population, and lock down parts of the country as needed. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs also engaged early with national and regional authorities in China, South Korea, and Germany to secure shipments of personal protection equipment, test kits, and chemical reagents. In testing all suspected cases quickly and early, and allowing infectious disease experts to drive Georgia's response, the country's Georgia's anti-COVID-19 task force has essentially followed a blueprint pioneered by South Korea.

From the outset, authorities in Tbilisi tasked top specialists in infectious diseases with driving Georgia's response, and the government began monitoring arrivals at its airports and border crossings almost immediately. The first case in the country was confirmed one month after preparations began—a citizen returning from Iran via Azerbaijan tested positive (direct flights to and from Iran had been previously suspended).<sup>18</sup> After the first confirmed case, the numbers rose steadily with infected travelers returning from Italy, Spain, France, and China. Georgia avoided large scale clusters until late March, when clusters were developed in the Marneuli and Bolnisi regions of the country.<sup>19</sup>

While the novel coronavirus has done significant damage most everywhere around Georgia, the country has exhibited only 805 cases of infection and 13 deaths as of early June 2020, when the lockdown restrictions started to be eased.<sup>20</sup> This looks like a major success especially if it is compared with Iran, a close neighbor and economic partner of Georgia, which has been hit especially hard and was one of the first countries to develop major mega clusters. Iranian officials misunderstood the significance of the virus and just ten days after the first mega cluster was exhibited in Qom, 43 deaths were confirmed. By the time the Iranian government convened a high level task force to fight COVID-19 on

---

<sup>14</sup> See: "COVID-19-is tsinaagmdeg saqartvelos mtavrobis mier gatarebuli ghonisdziebis angarishi" (A Report on the Measures Conducted by the Government of Georgia against COVID-19), Government of Georgia, 6 June, 2020, available at [[http://gov.ge/files/76338\\_76338\\_444796\\_COVID-19angarishi...pdf](http://gov.ge/files/76338_76338_444796_COVID-19angarishi...pdf)] (in Georgian).

<sup>15</sup> See: "WHO Timeline—COVID-19," World Health Organization, 27 April, 2020, available at [<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>].

<sup>16</sup> See: "Health Official: China-Born Virus Has 'Low but Theoretical' Chance of Reaching Georgia," agenda.ge, 22 January, 2020, available at [<https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/206>].

<sup>17</sup> See: "Passengers Inbound from China Examined at Tbilisi Airport," agenda.ge, 26 January, 2020, available at [<https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/245>].

<sup>18</sup> See: "COVID-19 Georgia: Situation Report #2 as of 17 April 2020," United Nations Georgia, available at [<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/201604%20SitRep.pdf>].

<sup>19</sup> See: VOA, "mtavrobam marneuli da bolnisi chaketa, 160 000 adamiani karantinshia" (Government Shuts Down Marneuli and Bolnisi, 160,000 People Quarantined), *Amerikis khma* (*The Voice of America*), 23 March, 2020, available at [<https://www.amerikiskhma.com/a/georgia-covid-19-marneuli-and-bolnisi-closed/5340427.html>].

<sup>20</sup> See: "COVID-19 Dashboard," The Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE), Johns Hopkins University, available at [<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>], 5 June, 2020.

11 March, the outbreak was out of control.<sup>21</sup> During the first 6 months of the outbreak, there were more than 8,134 confirmed deaths in Iran and almost 167,156 confirmed cases.<sup>22</sup>

Like Georgia, Turkey began COVID-19 preparations in mid-January. But officials in Ankara were still caught off-guard when the first positive case was confirmed almost two months later, on 11 March. Within two weeks, Turkey coronavirus cases were recorded all over the country.<sup>23</sup> No one expected the infection to spread so rapidly. Turkey is, of course, much larger than Georgia—both in terms of geography and population. But it was arguably Turkey’s position as a global hub for the travelers in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the Black Sea region that made it particularly susceptible to rapid and uncontrollable spread. The country simply did not have a plan for an outbreak of that scale. This was exacerbated by a couple of critical errors made by Turkey’s COVID-19 taskforce. Most crucially, Ankara caused mass panic by announcing a surprise lock-down of all major Turkish cities on 10 April.<sup>24</sup> The unexpected declaration caused people to flock to grocery stores, banks, and other essential outlets, undoing the gains made with social-distancing practices. By early June 2020, Turkey’s confirmed infection numbers reached 168,340 with 4,648 fatalities.<sup>25</sup>

Azerbaijan, Georgia’s neighbor and close partner, started official preparations for the pandemic on 27 February—a month later than Georgia. The official kick-off was triggered by the first case reported in Georgia a day before: a Georgian citizen returning from Iran via Azerbaijan tested positive at the Azeri-Georgian border crossing.<sup>26</sup> On 28 February, Azerbaijan confirmed its first domestic case, and since then the infection rate has grown steadily and reached 6,860 confirmed cases by early June 2020 with 82 deaths.<sup>27</sup> Almost all initial COVID-19 cases entered Azerbaijan from Iran. Baku closed its border with Iran by early March, but the novel coronavirus was still introduced by Azeri citizens returning from Iran. Even though Azerbaijan has managed to avoid devastating mega-clusters of COVID-19 that have ravaged many parts of the globe, the country has sustained enormous economic damage: the price of crude oil, Baku’s main export, steadily declined and moved into the negative territory by end of April. The two major international events that were supposed to boost the Azeri economy in 2020, the 2020 European Cup in soccer and a stage in Formula-1 car racing have been cancelled or postponed.

In addressing the spread of the virus early and effectively, Georgia has received much praise and very good press coverage. It has received help and assistance as well: the Turkish government helped to evacuate Georgian citizens, the European Union provided financial assistance, a Chinese province delivered medical supplies, the United States has helped with funds and wheat supplies.<sup>28</sup> Among Georgia’s detractors, unsurprisingly, Russia has played the leading role. It was later joined by Armenian officials: in late May 2020, the Armenian Minister of Health suggested that the Georgian success was exaggerated and the overall infection numbers were underreported. He also claimed that Georgia was sending its infected citizens to Armenia, but failed to provide evidence for any of

---

<sup>21</sup> See: “Rouhani to Chair Iran’s Taskforce on Combatting Coronavirus,” IFP News, 11 March, 2020 [<https://ifpnews.com/rouhani-to-chair-irans-taskforce-on-combatting-coronavirus>].

<sup>22</sup> See: “COVID-19 Dashboard.”

<sup>23</sup> See: A. Wilks, “Why Turkey is Facing A Steep Curve of New Coronavirus Cases,” *Al Jazeera*, 2 April, 2020, available at [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/turkey-facing-steep-curve-coronavirus-cases-200402131247613.html>].

<sup>24</sup> See: S. Fraser, A. Wieting, “Turkish Minister Offers Resignation Over Weekend Lockdowns,” AP News, 12 April, 2020 available at [<https://apnews.com/646db674784e2978a6acfea2cc2ac87e>].

<sup>25</sup> See: “COVID-19 Dashboard.”

<sup>26</sup> See: “Azerbaijan Shuts Border with Iran Over Coronavirus Concern,” Reuters, 29 February, 2020 available at [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-health-iran-azerbaijan/azerbaijan-closes-border-with-iran-over-coronavirus-concerns-idUSKBN20N0MY>].

<sup>27</sup> See: “COVID-19 Dashboard.”

<sup>28</sup> See: C. Turp-Balazs, “Georgia’s Coronavirus Miracle: So Far, So Good,” *Emerging Europe*, 6 April, 2020, available at [<https://emerging-europe.com/news/georgias-coronavirus-miracle-so-far-so-good/>].

his claims.<sup>29</sup> Armenia was hit hard by the pandemic: a small country has experienced a significant rate of infection and a high number of deaths. By early June, Armenia started to experience a new surge in the coronavirus cases with Prime Minister of the country testing positive.<sup>30</sup> As the lockdown restrictions were easing in Georgia, by early June the confirmed coronavirus cases in Armenia reached 11,817 with 183 deaths.<sup>31</sup>

Georgia avoided a national lock-down until mid-April, preferring partial and regional measures. When it became clear that the Georgian Orthodox Church was not planning to cancel the annual celebration of Paschal (Easter) holidays, a national lock-down was announced and a curfew was introduced.<sup>32</sup> This was done out of fear that large gathering of people around the churches in Georgia would create overshoot of mega clusters of viral infections. The days preceding the Paschal celebrations witnessed the only instance of significant tensions in Georgian society regarding the lock-down. The disagreements were caused by the differences in opinion about Pascha and its significance between the church and its faithful, and their opponents. The church in Georgia has never ceased operations, but ecclesiastic authorities did introduce early social distancing requirements along with additional sanitary measures. The fear among secular authorities nearly reached levels of hysteria just before the Easter Sunday; however, their anxiety proved to be misplaced. The church celebrated Pascha, the overnight services were attended by a limited number of people, and the holidays were not followed by spikes in coronavirus infections. Doctor Tengiz Tsertsvadze, Director of the Tbilisi Hospital for Infectious Diseases and a key member of Georgia's anti-COVID-19 task force, acknowledged that the religious holidays in Georgia did not affect the spread of coronavirus.<sup>33</sup>

## Georgia's National Government

Among the wealthy nations to have successfully managed COVID-19, all have reasonably organized national healthcare systems, national plans for epidemics, and competent leadership. This enables swift decisions on the aspects of national healthcare and public health infrastructure that should be centralized and decentralized. Germany, for example, has a centralized national healthcare system, while laboratories for disease control are decentralized. This means each German lander, or federal unit, has a laboratory of its own. South Korea has also responded to COVID-19 effectively, with its unified healthcare system and a national strategy to deal with pandemics. Immediately after the first case in South Korea was confirmed, health authorities began widespread testing to identify those infected and to isolate and care for them, all while keeping vulnerable populations under observation. South Korea was the second country after China to see a sharp increase in cases, but remarkably has avoided large scale infections and deaths without shutting down the economy completely.

In comparison, Georgia is not a prosperous country and does not possess a chain of research labs, large pharmaceutical companies or a wealthy healthcare system. However, the Georgian specialists who were tasked to fight COVID-19, knew two crucial things that were essential in combating a pandemic: it was necessary to act early, and also to manage people's behavior effectively. The country's early re-

<sup>29</sup> See: "Ministr zdravookhranenia Armenii usomnilsia v gruzinskoy statistike po koronavirusu," *Ekho Kavkaza*, 22 May, 2020, available at [<https://www.ekhokavkaza.com/a/30627718.html>].

<sup>30</sup> See: M. Harutyunyan, "Armenian PM Tests Positive for Virus As Cases Surge," CTV News, 1 June, 2020, available at [<https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/armenian-pm-tests-positive-for-virus-as-cases-surge-1.4963763>].

<sup>31</sup> See: "COVID-19 Dashboard."

<sup>32</sup> See: "Georgia Introduces Curfew," OC Media, 30 March, 2020, available at [<https://oc-media.org/georgia-introduces-curfew/>].

<sup>33</sup> See: "Celebration of Pascha did not Affect Spread of Coronavirus in Georgia, says infectious disease specialist," *Orthodox Christianity*, 7 May, 2020, available at [<https://orthochristian.com/130918.html>].

response, in mid-January, made a key difference. The task force in Tbilisi closely monitored physical social networks: viral infections do not spread randomly, as it was once believed, but they spread through physical social networks. Since the virus originated outside the country, the priority was given to hardening the nodes through which social networks connected Georgia with the rest of the world, that is airports, and land border crossings. That meant testing everyone who arrived in Georgia with symptoms associated with the novel coronavirus. This was followed by the cancelation of air travel to the most infected countries, and eventually by shutting down the airports. The land border crossings with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey remained open for essential travel only, and everyone entering the country was obligated to get temperature checked and other symptoms examined.<sup>34</sup>

As it was expected by the specialists, despite their best efforts, the coronavirus penetrated the country after a month of implementing the restrictive travel measures. Once the virus carriers were identified, public health authorities started to track the social networks of the infected to prevent large infections clusters. However, in time clusters formed, and Georgian authorities were obliged to quarantine entire regions of the country by forbidding all travel in and out of the infected areas.<sup>35</sup> The purpose was to prevent the development of mega clusters that could have triggered overshoot—essentially, a defeat of the country’s public health infrastructure—similar to those developments that took place in Italy, Spain, France, Brazil, and New York. Georgian public health officials managed to prevent overshoot, and they never lost control of the situation during this first wave of the coronavirus pandemic.

In Georgia, the national government has closely followed the advice of a triumvirate of experts—a head doctor, a public health official, and a specialist in infectious diseases—professors Tsertsvadze, Gamkrelidze and Imnadze, with Doctor Marine Ezugbaia supervising the treatment of most coronavirus patients.<sup>36</sup>

However, there have been public health experts advising governments in nearly every country around the world, and if so, why has been the Georgian case different? The answer can be found in an unusual structure of the Georgian national government. It is most atypical of working democracies—to be sure, the Georgian democracy does not work all that well, but in the case of the current pandemic in has exceeded the expectations.

Ironically, the seeds of the current Georgian government structure could be found in its Soviet past as well. The chief executive in Georgia is country’s prime minister. The prime minister represents the party with the majority of votes in the nation’s parliament, which is a common practice in the parliamentary democracies. However, in Georgia prime ministers are not elected and they do not have a seat in the parliament. Instead, they are selected by the so-called “ruling team,” an extra-constitutional informal group of the top leaders of the ruling party, and then the candidates are approved—essentially rubber-stamped—by the parliament.<sup>37</sup> The key individual in this “ruling team” is currently the party chairman, who in the person of Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili exercises near unilateral decision-making privileges in this regard. At the same time, Mr. Ivanishvili, one of the wealthiest persons in the world, is the main sponsor of the ruling coalition, “Georgian Dream.”<sup>38</sup> Georgian

<sup>34</sup> See: “COVID-19 in Georgia Live Blog—March 2020 / Archived,” Civil.ge, March 2020, available at [<https://civil.ge/archives/349213>].

<sup>35</sup> See: “COVID-19 in Georgia Live Blog—April 2020 / Archived,” Civil.ge, April 2020, available at [<https://civil.ge/archives/351283>].

<sup>36</sup> See: “The Four Musketeers at Frontline of Georgia’s Fight against Pandemic,” Civil.ge, 15 April, 2020, available at [<https://civil.ge/archives/346979>].

<sup>37</sup> See: “mmartveli gundis gadawyvetileba” (The Ruling Team Decision), Itv.ge, 25 November, 2019, available at [<https://1tv.ge/video/mmartveli-gundis-gadawyvetileba/>] (in Georgian).

<sup>38</sup> See: M. Dzhindzhikhashvili, “Georgia’s Governing Party Wins Large Majority in Parliament,” AP News, 31 October, 2016, available at [<https://apnews.com/06360cd0253f435283f4021babe2b20f>].

government ministers and other top officials are similarly selected by Mr. Ivanishvili, in other words, Prime Minister of Georgia does not necessarily have his team around or even top officials that he can trust. In such circumstances, power and legitimacy of Georgia's prime minister is derived from the chairman of the ruling party, who directs both the parliamentary majority and the government ministers to support the prime minister or not.

This sort of executive government set-up strongly resembles the government structure characteristic of the late Soviet Union. The top decision-maker in the Soviet executive government was neither the Soviet premier nor the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Instead, the secretary general of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or the first secretary of the C.C. C.P.S.U. held the ultimate decision making powers.<sup>39</sup> Mr. Ivanishvili holds somewhat similar position to the secretary general of the C.C. C.P.S.U., albeit he is less active, shies away from the public eye, and prefers to direct things from behind the scenes. To be perfectly clear, Mr. Ivanishvili and his supporters have not invented this sort of government structure for Georgia. Instead, they have inherited it from the period of President Saakashvili who is now in self-exile and the remnants of his once powerful National Movement are bitterly opposed to Mr. Ivanishvili's "ruling team."<sup>40</sup> Amazingly, Georgia's odd government structure, which clearly weakens regular government operations and makes the entire system unstable, not to mention its anti-democratic nature, was reportedly endorsed Council of Europe's Venice Commission.<sup>41</sup>

It has not been directly stated, but it is highly likely that it was Mr. Ivanishvili who put the triumvirate of the Georgian epidemiologists in the driver's seat and let them to call shots. It is impossible to imagine that the three ended up in their key positions without Mr. Ivanishvili's blessing. This has made a difference in Georgia: unlike many other countries, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, the people who have led the fight against the novel coronavirus in Georgia did not have to dance around government's political priorities, but instead the government implemented nearly everything that they suggested and proposed.

Frequently harassed by its northern neighbor Russia, the former Soviet republic has not always been known for effective political leadership. Quite the contrary, Georgia's leadership has often been fractious and disorganized, with the current governing party ushering in five prime ministers in six years. Since 2012, all the individuals who have occupied the top executive post in Georgia, including Mr. Ivanishvili himself, entirely lacked political experience and had never held a government job, elected or appointed. Their only distinction was the fact that, at some point, they were all trusted individuals in Mr. Ivanishvili's close circle of associates, and were selected by him to head the national government. However, in dealing with this pandemic, Georgia was very lucky that knowledgeable experts were allowed to direct government action and guide the country through difficult times.

## *Conclusion*

The case presented here reflects about 6 months of activities in Georgia that like many other countries around the world worked hard to counter the deadly effects of the novel coronavirus. We do not yet know whether these 6 months represented the worst that COVID-19 had to offer, or it was

---

<sup>39</sup> See: *Authority, Power and Policy in the U.S.S.R.*, ed. by T.H. Rigby, A. Brown, P. Reddaway, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1983.

<sup>40</sup> D.M. West, *Billionaires: Reflections on the Upper Crust*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC, 2014.

<sup>41</sup> See: "Joint Opinion on the Draft Election Code of Georgia," Venice Commission and OSCE, Opinion No. 617/2011, Council of Europe, Strasbourg/Warsaw, 19 December, 2011, available at [[https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2011\)043-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2011)043-e)].

only the first wave in the deadly progression of this virus. At the end of the first 6 months of this pandemic, there are opinions that support both scenarios: according to some, COVID-19 is losing its potency, while other experts expect a long-term struggle involving vaccines, therapeutic drugs or and/or a cyclical recurrence of the novel coronavirus. No matter what the future has in store for this virus, and for us, the people whose job it is to protect population from pandemics can learn much from negative and positive experiences of COVID-19's first wave. Fortunately for its population, the first wave results for Georgia has been overwhelmingly positive.

With no end yet in sight, COVID-19 has tested national preparedness, public health competence and the leadership of many countries around the world. Georgia has fared much better than its larger and more powerful neighbors, including Turkey and Iran. Excluded from vital regional dialog by both Ankara and Tehran in recent years, Georgia could well use this experience to improve its standing in the region, providing it continues on the same trajectory. By effectively managing COVID-19, Georgia has a chance of repositioning itself as a more prominent and valuable player in global affairs, at least in the fields of public health, health policy and security.

---

## REGIONAL ECONOMY

### INVESTMENT COOPERATION BETWEEN KAZAKHSTAN AND MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.08>

Zhamiga TANATAROVA

*D.Sc. (Hist.), Professor,  
Department of History of Kazakhstan and World History,  
Khalel Dosmukhamedov Atyrau State University  
(Atyrau, Kazakhstan)*

Baurzhan MUSTAFAYEV

*Third-year Ph.D. student in Regional Studies,  
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University  
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

Saniya NURDAVLETOVA

*Ph.D. (Hist.), Assistant Professor,  
Department of International Relations,  
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University  
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

Lazat NURSULTANOVA

*D.Sc. (Hist.), Associate Professor,  
Department of Regional Studies,  
L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University  
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

## ABSTRACT

**I**n the early 1990s, Kazakhstan was faced with the dilemma of how to reform its economy. In this context, the republic began to build multilateral relations with many Middle Eastern countries, including the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, as well as with Turkey and Iran. The first investments went into the key sectors of the economy: energy, transport and communications, and the agro-industrial complex. According to experts, Kazakhstan's economy in the 1990s received more than 80% of all direct investments in Central Asia. The necessary prerequisites for Kazakhstan's integration into global and regional economic processes were put in place, and priority areas for the development of a market economy were selected. Memorandums and agreements with Middle Eastern states and financial institutions signed since then provide the basis for long-term cooperation.

Countries in the region are interested in Kazakhstan's sustainable and progressive development through the establishment of financial institutions, creation of conditions for market transformation, and a larger economic and political presence in Central Asia. Kazakhstan, in turn, seeks to use the potential of the Middle Eastern countries to ensure its economic and foreign policy security and help it integrate into the world economy, particularly by developing transport

and pipeline routes, attracting investment, and gaining access to the latest technologies.

Agreements between the Republic of Kazakhstan and Middle Eastern countries in various sectors and contracts in transport and communications have enabled our country to modernize the economy, both national and regional. Middle Eastern business is represented in almost all sectors of Kazakhstan's economy. Companies from the Middle East are building modern production facilities and creating new jobs in the market.

Leaders of Middle Eastern countries, statesmen, and entrepreneurs think highly of Kazakhstan's policy in attracting investment. A number of oil and gas companies are working successfully in the Kazakhstan sector of the Caspian Sea, and contacts in the humanitarian, financial, transport, and other spheres are developing rapidly.

For more than 25 years now, Kazakhstan and Middle Eastern countries have been cooperating in virtually all key sectors of the economy: oil and gas, nuclear power, transport, and communications. Middle Eastern companies supply industrial and medical equipment, all kinds of goods, building materials, etc. Kazakhstan has an opportunity to draw on reform experience that consists in various forms of government regulation.

**KEYWORDS:** *Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Middle Eastern countries, investment cooperation, trade and economic relations, direct investment.*



## *Introduction*

A study and analysis of the key areas of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Middle Eastern countries is relevant today in theoretical and practical terms, helping to understand the essence of multilateral relations in the trade, economic, and investment spheres within the system of international relations and to identify the differences in Kazakhstan's cooperation with individual countries in the region. This topic has become a subject of investigation for local and foreign researchers, who seek, first and foremost, to fill the existing gaps. This provides an opportunity to analyze the contacts between states emerging and developing as part of the complex process of global and regional interactions and to examine their differences and specific features.

Under its new industrial program, Kazakhstan has been working actively with Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and this has made it possible to set up new production facilities, create jobs, reduce unemployment, and address social problems.

Kazakhstan's long-standing relations with Muslim countries are a key element of its foreign policy. The republic has cooperated with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), and the Muslim World League (MWL). Constructive ties with Islamic countries help to develop multilateral contacts in various spheres of society's life and to strengthen political and economic dialog.

The foreign policy priorities of Kazakhstan are consistent with the OIC's goals and objectives. Let us note that Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state that actively supports the global process aimed at promoting cooperation and understanding between nations and cultures, which serves the interests of the OIC. Kazakhstan's real and active participation in the activities of the OIC, along with other major regional and global organizations, is highly relevant in today's geopolitical and geo-economic conditions.

The second decade of the 21st century demonstrates an unprecedented volume of foreign economic activity, in which transnational companies operate as traders, investors, and promoters of the latest technologies, fueling international labor migration. They are in large part responsible for the dynamics, structure, and competitiveness of the global goods and services market, international capital movements, and technology transfer. Among the independent states of the Persian Gulf, there is a group of oil-rich states that have achieved significant economic results. In the past few decades, increasing globalization, transformation of economic ties, and the emergence of new dimensions in international relations have allowed the Persian Gulf monarchies (which hold 43.9% of the world's proven oil reserves and 15.5% of its natural gas reserves) to move in their development from the periphery of the region to the center of the world economy and Middle Eastern politics.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union and the formation of new sovereign states in 1991, the Muslim republics in Central Asia saw a significant increase in the number of Islamic financial institutions. Moreover, Islamic banks and finance were regarded by Islamic researchers as an innovative way for the former Soviet republics in the region to form an economic bloc with other Islamic countries outside Central Asia, which would ultimately give them a big market advantage in the competitive global economy.

One of the mechanisms that provide access to global markets is national and regional socio-economic development based on liberal economic reforms. The dominant Soviet legacy in these Muslim republics, especially the influence of the centrally planned economy, significantly impeded this development. But with the arrival of Islamic banking services and finance, the Muslim republics of Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus have already gained significant momentum in their socio-economic development.

## Discussion

### Investment Projects of Kazakhstan and Middle Eastern Countries

Turkey was one of the first countries to organize joint ventures and joint stock companies in Kazakhstan. Kazfen JV, established by Turkey's Tekfen, Kazakhstanneftegazstroi, and Japan's Mitsubishi, began the construction of a 765 km Kenkiyak-Kumkol oil pipeline. Another question being considered was Kazfen JV's participation in the reconstruction of the Astrakhan-Mangystau water pipeline and the Zhetybai-Uzen oil pipeline, as well as in the construction of bund walls in oil fields on the Caspian coast.

Among the companies successfully operating in Kazakhstan were Vesnet, a telecommunications equipment company established by Turkey's Netaş (with a stake of 51%) and Kazakhtelecom (with 49%); Coca-Cola Almaty Bottlers with a 50% stake held by Efes Yatirim and Anadolu Endüstri Holding; the construction firm Bechtel-ENKA with a 50% stake held by Turkey's largest construction company ENKA, and others.

In June 1993, a turnkey contract for the construction of a 954 MW combined cycle power plant in Aktyubinsk was signed in Astana by the KazakhstanEnergo national power company and a German-American-Turkish consortium consisting of Siemens, Babcock, and BMB in the presence of the presidents of Kazakhstan and Turkey. It was planned to invest a total of about 800 million. But because of differences between three republican ministries (geology, energy, and oil and gas), there was no progress on the project for a number of years, and it was cancelled by the government at the end of July 1996.

One of Turkey's leading firms, Güriş İnşaat (Guris Construction), as part of another German-American-Turkish consortium, won a contract for the construction of a 2 x 140 MW power plant in Zhezkazgan and, jointly with Canada's SNC Lavalin, signed a contract for the construction of a metro system in Almaty.

These two projects, worth a total of \$1.2 billion, were to be funded by loans from international financial institutions. But in this case as well, the Kazakhstan side reviewed its obligations under the first project and suggested replacing it with a project for the construction of a 320 MW Balkhash Thermal Power Plant (TPP), valued at \$400 million. The construction of the Balkhash TPP was stalled because of lack of guarantees from the Kazakhstan Electricity Grid Operating Company (KEGOC) for the purchase of electricity to be generated by the plant. These and other examples of breach of our obligations could seriously damage the republic's image abroad.

Turkey's Okan Holding completed the construction of a five-star hotel in Astana with funding from the Exim banks of Turkey and the United States. Other Turkish companies, especially Entaş, Burch, Ahsel, Fintraco, ENKA, and Emsaş, were also active in Kazakhstan. Ties in agriculture and in the food and light industry developed rapidly. For example, 14 joint ventures for processing hides, skins, and leather waste for the subsequent manufacture of consumer goods were set up in the country.

The agriculture ministries of Kazakhstan and Turkey established close business contacts in the field of technical, scientific, and economic cooperation. The Turks were offered a list of top-priority investment projects in the agri-food sector and in the creation of joint ventures. Ties in the banking sector strengthened as well: Turkey's major banks, Ziraat Bankasi and Emlak Bankasi, set up joint venture banks in Almaty with Kazakhstan partners; the Kazakh-Turkish International Bank of Almaty (IBA) operated in the republic's financial market, etc. One of the main tasks was to fund Turkey's public and private sector investment projects in Kazakhstan in the absence of direct government guarantees.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Archive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (APRK), rec. gr. 5-N, inv. 6, f. 4540, sheet 68.

In the 1990s, an overwhelming majority of Turkish firms in Kazakhstan were small and medium-sized, while big capital took a wait-and-see attitude and was in no hurry to make large and long-term investments. This situation was due to lack of experience in coordinating and arranging systematic information work by ministries and departments to explain the specifics of Kazakhstan's investment climate and economic law. In this context, the coordinating role of the Kazakh-Turkish Inter-governmental Commission on Economic Cooperation came into sharp focus.

The new prospects of cooperation between Kazakhstan and Turkey in the 21st century are directly associated with the Turkish leadership's concept of creating an energy and transport corridor between the West and the Central Asian countries, which has the open and active support of the U.S. and other leading states of the world. This is particularly important as Kazakhstan is set to implement monumental projects in tapping its oil and gas wealth. In this context, it is time to elaborate our own concept and a long-term program for developing trade, economic, scientific, and technical cooperation with Turkey and focusing the government's efforts on its implementation.<sup>2</sup>

As of 2000, investments by Iranian companies in Kazakhstan were estimated at \$50 million and were connected with leather and footwear manufacturing in Taraz, kaolin production in Kokchetav [renamed Kokshetau in 1993] and the establishment of bread and pastry making centers in Almaty. Iranian companies also tried to enter the construction market in Kazakhstan.

Massive Iranian investments in our economy could hardly be expected, because Iran itself was badly in need of foreign capital inflows and was more of a competitor than a partner of our republic in this respect. In addition, legislative restrictions on funding projects outside the country constrained the foreign activities of Iranian companies. The fact that Kazakhstan had abandoned the practice of providing government guarantees was not conducive to Iranian investment either.

Nevertheless, there is significant untapped potential for trade and economic cooperation. According to the Tehran-based Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), trade between the two countries could reach \$1 billion.

Among the priority areas of trade and economic cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Islamic Republic of Iran one should include an exchange of crude oil and oil products. Despite serious financial and technical problems, there was a real prospect of resuming swap transactions. It was planned to begin implementing a new scheme for the delivery of Kazakhstan crude oil meant for exchange from the Kumkol oil field by pipeline to Chardzhou [renamed Turkmenabat in 1999] and then on by rail to the Tehran Oil Refinery. Negotiations on the project and on funding sources for the construction of a new oil pipeline (with a capacity of 320 thousand barrels per day) linking the Iranian port of Neka on the Caspian Sea with Tehran were virtually completed, and the only obstacle to the implementation of this very promising project was the problem of obtaining guaranteed minimum quantities of crude oil from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan exporters.

The Iranian side showed an interest in acquiring oil fields in Kazakhstan so that the oil produced from these fields would later be refined at Iranian refineries in the north of the country. This was a promising area of cooperation, and today it continues to deserve serious attention.

Kazakhstan has a solid position in the grain market. The task of increasing exports of wheat and barley to Iran so as to gain a foothold in its grain market and move on to long-term cooperation in this area is far from simple. For this purpose, Iran had to complete the construction of its grain-handling infrastructure, as well as grain storage facilities at its ports on the Caspian Sea. It was also necessary to step up negotiations on further improvements in tariff conditions, conclusion of futures contracts, and involvement of Iranian companies in long-term lease or privatization of grain farms, coupled with appropriate investment. Such an approach would help to make long-term forecasts of

---

<sup>2</sup> APRK, rec. gr. 5-N, inv. 6, f. 4540, sheets 70-71.

grain exports to Iran, stabilize the position of Kazakhstan's grain producers, and address social problems in rural areas.

The parties continued their efforts to develop transport infrastructure that links the two countries and to improve tariff conditions. From this perspective, they had to ensure full utilization of facilities at the renovated Aktau Port as goods from Kazakhstan were exported to Iran and through its territory, complete the construction of the Aktau grain terminal, and implement the agreement to establish a ferry service between the ports of the two countries. Work was also underway to improve tariff conditions for transit of goods by rail through the territories of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. As for Iran, a visit to Kazakhstan in March 2000 by Minister of Roads and Transport Mahmoud Hojjati showed that Iran was interested in taking part in the completion of the modernization of the Aktau Port and was willing to cooperate with Kazakhstan in negotiating tariffs with Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

The idea of establishing a freight forwarding office for shipping goods by rail has never been implemented, although Iran was obviously interested in this project. Kazakhstan and other potential participants in the project had to intensify their efforts in this direction.

The reconstruction of the Aktau Port with an increase in its cargo-handling capacity raised the question of establishing a shipping company to operate in the Caspian. Here, too, Iran could be an attractive partner with the necessary material and financial resources. The establishment of a joint shipping company within the ECO framework would enable Kazakhstan exporters of crude oil, oil products, metals, and metal products, as well as grain, to reduce transportation costs and maintain a regular shipping service between the Caspian ports of the two countries.

In the near future, joint projects for the construction of regional oil and gas pipelines could become one of the key areas of cooperation between the two countries. The Iranian direction is generally believed to be the shortest and most economical one. There is reason to expect that the developing trend towards a normalization of relations between the United States and Iran will eventually lead to the removal of political barriers to the construction of pipelines running in this direction. In view of this, the parties have continued joint work on feasibility studies for the construction of a pipeline from western Kazakhstan through Turkmenistan to northern Iran.

Iranian construction companies have wide experience and operate at world-class levels. Given the low cost and high quality of Iranian building materials and labor, they can effectively compete with other foreign companies in Kazakhstan, especially when it comes to tenders for the construction and renovation of roads. Their active participation in such tenders will allow Kazakhstan, among other things, to conclude contracts with other foreign companies on more favorable terms.

The solution of transport problems would provide new opportunities for trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. For example, there would be more opportunities for the Achisai Polymetallic Complex and Balkhashmys to establish mutually beneficial ties with Iranian companies, while Kazakhstan's chemical plants would be able to supply mineral fertilizers, borate ore, boron and its compounds, phosphorus products, chromium salts, calcium carbide, rubber tires, etc.

There are no political barriers to developing and expanding trade and economic cooperation between Kazakhstan and Iran. Moreover, the explicit political will of the leaders of both countries to promote the development of good neighborly and friendly relations and fill them with real content required active and purposeful work by appropriate agencies and departments to put this political will into practice.<sup>3</sup>

Let us note that Iranian companies have participated in tenders held by our republic. This includes:

---

<sup>3</sup> APRK, rec. gr. 75-N, inv. 1, f. 6385, sheets 66-67.

- the construction of a 166 km highway, Sormol company (prequalification stage);
- renovation of the Almaty-Astana road (215 km section), Iran Road Development Organization (prequalified tenderer);
- development of irrigation and drainage networks in the Akumski-Maktaaral districts, construction of two sections of the Almaty-Astana road, and reconstruction of irrigation systems;
- leasing of machinery under projects for the construction of a cigarette factory, Iran Sazman company;
- development of a project for drinking water supply in the Kyzylorda Region, Pars Kosulat company.

On 3 December, 2014, the presidents of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Iran attended the opening ceremony for the KTI railway, which has provided Kazakhstan with a direct overland route to the Persian Gulf countries.

Kazakhstan and Egypt have maintained wide-ranging relations in different areas for many years. Bahgat Group is Egypt's largest private manufacturer of electronics and household appliances under license from global leaders such as Grundig, Toshiba, Philips, and LG, manufacturing both under their brand names and under its own brand of Goldi. The company makes and assembles TV sets, video and audio equipment, refrigerators, gas stoves, air conditioners, and medical (diagnostic) equipment. It also makes furniture, manufactures plastics for TV sets and other products, and owns a marble factory and other production facilities.

The company was founded in 1985 by Ahmed Bahgat. Originally, it specialized in assembling TV sets and microwave ovens under a license from GoldStar (LG). As of July 2000, the company controlled 45-50% of Egypt's TV manufacturing market, producing about 500 thousand TV sets a year. Some of these produces were exported, particularly to the European market.<sup>4</sup>

In 1995, the company launched an urban development project called Dreamland with all necessary infrastructures, including apartment complexes, schools, hospitals, recreational facilities, a consumer services center, etc. It covers an area of more than 9 sq. km.

Arab countries have taken an active part in developing infrastructure in Kazakhstan, the country with the largest economic potential in the region. Saudi Arabia allocated more than \$15 million for the construction of the Senate building in the republic, \$12 million for the renovation of the Osakarovka-Vishnevka Highway, and \$2 million for the construction of a mosque in Petropavlovsk. Saudi investments in the economy of Kazakhstan have increased owing to Saudi Arabia's Central Asia Investment Company, which has operated successfully in our market since 1997. Prince Sultan bin Abdulaziz Al Saud funded the construction of a cardiac surgery center in Astana fitted out with state-of-the-art medical equipment. After its opening in 2006, it became the most modern and best-equipped medical facility in the whole of Central Asia.

Kazakhstan's trade and economic relations with the United Arab Emirates have developed dynamically, especially in the investment sphere. One of the first large-scale projects was the construction of the Abu Dhabi Plaza, a multifunctional complex in Astana, at a cost of \$1.1 billion. The Mubadala Investment Company from Abu Dhabi has made direct investments in the exploration of an offshore oil block in the Caspian Sea. Kazakhstan and the UAE have established a joint investment fund, the Falah Growth Fund, with committed capital of at least \$500 million. Al Hilal Bank (UAE) operates in Almaty, Astana [now Nur-Sultan], and Shymkent. An important event in Kazakhstan's banking sector was the purchase of a 28.5% stake in Kazkommertsbank (KKB), Kazakhstan's largest

<sup>4</sup> APRK, rec. gr. 75-N, inv. 1, f. 6348, sheets 35-36.

commercial bank, by Alnair Capital Holding, owned by Sheikh Tahnoon Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, brother of the UAE president.

Overall, there are about 50 companies with UAE capital registered in Kazakhstan and operating in the sphere of tourism, transport, forwarding, and consumer services. In 2012, trade between the Emirates and Kazakhstan was around \$187 million, with Kazakhstan importing cars, building materials, and clothes while exporting mainly food and agricultural products.

Kazakhstan can be involved in addressing problems related to the development of rail transport, including the following:

- participation of the National Company Kazakhstan Temir Zholy in the international tender for the construction of a 406 km single-track railway with a standard (1,435 mm) gauge that will link the developing cities and industrial zones of Abu Dhabi and Dubai with the Saudi Arabian border. Subsequently, the UAE railway network will be connected with the proposed Gulf Railway network covering all six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar);
- assistance to the Emirates in importing Kazakhstan grain and other food products into the UAE and other Middle Eastern countries, including under humanitarian programs;
- promotion of domestic products and assistance to Kazakhstan exporters in access to sales channels for high value added products;
- search for opportunities to adopt advanced technologies and acquire business competencies, particularly based on the models used to develop the Dubai International Financial Center, Islamic banking and financial institutions.

This can help to synchronize transport and logistics planning with assistance to Kazakhstan exporters in access to distribution channels in Middle Eastern target markets.<sup>5</sup>

Of particular interest from the perspective of establishing a Kazakhstan House in the Emirates in the medium and long term is probably Dubai, which should be seen as a special partner in external economic relations, considering its investment and financial potential in the UAE. Today, the Emirates has a well-functioning network of 7 industrial zones, 1 business park, 3 specialized free economic zones, and 2 world-class seaports. A number of companies included in the Global 2000 ranking have their headquarters and representative offices in the region. In addition, Dubai is preparing to host the world exhibition EXPO 2020 (postponed to 2021 because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic), creating attractive conditions for foreign direct investment.

Trade and economic relations between Kazakhstan and the Persian Gulf countries have developed successfully. For example, at a meeting in Kuwait City on 30 October, 1999, the Kazakhstan Ambassador to Kuwait and the Acting Director General of the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED) signed an agreement between the Republic of Kazakhstan and KFAED on a grant for the construction of a new government building in Kazakhstan.

In early November 1999, KFAED launched a tender to select a consulting company to design a new building for the Akimat (city administration) of Astana (now Nur-Sultan). The successful bidder—PACE/VL, a joint venture between Kazakhstan and Kuwait—planned to sign a contract to that effect with KFAED.

At a meeting in Riyadh on 8 November, 1999, Kazakhstan Ambassador Baghdad Amreyev and Saudi Arabia's Deputy Finance Minister Hamad Al Bazai signed a memorandum of understanding between the government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia on the construction of a new parliament building in Astana.

---

<sup>5</sup> See: K. Lama Sharif, "Kazakhstan i OAE: narashchivanie shirokoformatnogo partnerstva," available at [<http://mfa.gov.kz/ru/content-view/kajrat-lama-sarif-kazakhstan-i-oe-narashivanie-sirokoformatnogo-partnerstva>], 14 January, 2017.

By that time, the Saudi Engineering Consulting Company, selected by the Saudi Ministry of Finance to design the parliament building, was completing its work, whereupon the ministry and the company planned to invite bids from Kazakhstan and Saudi companies for the construction of the building.

At about the same time, a project for the construction of an Islamic Center in the capital of Kazakhstan with the participation of Qatar was in the phase of preliminary design and cost estimation (up to \$15-20 million). Since the site selected for this purpose by the Kazakhstan government was located in a new part of the city, the necessary infrastructure had to be built from scratch. The Qatari side requested its partners to inform it about their plans on this issue.

In October 1999, Ambassador Amreyev met with Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed, UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, and Sheikh Suroor bin Mohammed, Chamberlain of the Presidential Court, who pledged to allocate \$50-60 million for the construction of the Presidential Palace in Astana. The Emirati side determined the source of financing based on three options: the UAE government, the Abu Dhabi Fund, and the treasury of the UAE president.<sup>6</sup>

On 6 October, 2014, Chief Executive Officer of the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) Ahmad Mohammed Al Sayed took part in an international forum on the transformation of JSC National Welfare Fund (NWF) Samruk-Kazyna (Kazakhstan's sovereign wealth fund). Shortly afterwards, a Samruk-Kazyna delegation led by Board Chairman Umirzak Shukeyev participated in the International Forum of Sovereign Wealth Funds in Doha on 19-20 November, 2014.

On 25-26 January, 2015, a delegation from Kazakhstan led by Nurlan Kapparov, Chairman of the Board of Kazatomprom JSC, paid a visit to Doha. On 8-9 April, 2015, Astana was visited by a Qatari delegation led by Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Saud Al Thani, the new CEO of the Qatar Investment Authority. On 8 September, 2015, Deputy Chairman of the National Bank of Kazakhstan Nurlan Kusainov visited the State of Qatar.

Based on the results of these meetings, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, and the heads of the above funds and companies confirmed that Kazakhstan was an important country for Qatar and that Doha was interested in establishing large-scale cooperation with Astana, particularly through the implementation of major joint investment projects.

On 28-31 August, 2016, a delegation led by Sheikh Abdullah bin Mohammed bin Saud Al Thani, Governor of the Qatar Central Bank, visited Kazakhstan at the invitation of the management of the Astana International Financial Center (AIFC). A return visit to Doha by AIFC Governor Kairat Kelimbetov on 5 December, 2016, was a continuation of these contacts.

Kazakhstan's economic cooperation with Kuwait is also developing effectively. In May 2000, the parties ratified a loan agreement between Kazakhstan and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development for a project to supply water to the city of Aralsk (the Fund allocated about \$24 million for this project).

The leaders of the GCC countries have good personal relations with First President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, which is of considerable importance for top-level diplomacy. The UAE provided financial assistance in the amount of \$15 million for the construction of the Presidential Palace in the capital of Kazakhstan. In 1999, Qatar contributed \$6.84 million for the construction of a cultural Islamic Center in Astana, which was completed in March 2005.

In October 1999, a KFAED delegation took part in a roundtable discussion organized by Kazakhstan for representatives of Arab funds and the Islamic Development Bank.

Kuwait issued grants for the construction of a new building of the Astana Akimat (\$10 million) and preliminary feasibility studies for infrastructure development in left-bank Astana (\$1 million) and for a water supply project in the Aral Sea region (\$1.3 million). A Kuwaiti government loan was used

<sup>6</sup> APRK, rec. gr. 75-N, inv. 1, f. 5390, sheets 79-83.

to finance projects to improve water supply, sanitation and healthcare facilities in the Aral and Kazaly districts of the Kyzylorda Region (\$11.5 million).

A business conference on Kazakhstan's investment opportunities, organized jointly with the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI), was held on 23 April, 2006. At that conference, Kazakhstan was represented by I. Kopailov, Vice President of the Kazakhstan Investment Promotion Center Kazinvest, and B. Orazov, President of the Astana Development corporation, and Kuwait by KCCI Director General Ahmad Al Haroun, KCCI Board member Darar Al Ghanim, and members of the Kuwaiti business community.

The Fourth World Islamic Economic Forum (WIEF), held in Kuwait City from 29 April to 1 May, 2008, was attended by a delegation from Kazakhstan led by S. Mynbayev, Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The delegation included about 40 representatives of various government and private structures, such as the Akim of the Karaganda Region N. Nigmatulin, Vice Minister of Sports and Tourism K. Uskenbayev, Board Chairman of JSC Social-Entrepreneurial Corporation (SEC) Sary-Arka V. Zverkov, Board Chairman of JSC SEC Tobol M. Tolibayev, and others. The heads of Kazakhstan's business structures held a number of meetings with potential foreign investors, including the heads of the Malaysian company UEA, major Kuwaiti investment groups KEPCO and DAR, and the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development.<sup>7</sup>

Historically, the Kazakhstani are known to be part of the Muslim community, and Kazakhstan has its unique place in Western and Eastern civilization. As First President Nursultan Nazarbayev said at the Seventh World Islamic Economic Forum in Almaty in 2011, the modernization of Muslim societies does not mean a distortion of the fundamentals of Islam itself, of established customs and traditions. But existing economic and other relations in Muslim countries should be modernized, because otherwise the lag behind the developed countries will continue. The head of state proposed a number of initiatives, including the establishment of a group of ten major Muslim countries for better use of their economic potential and the creation of an innovation hub together with member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).<sup>8</sup>

On 5-7 January, 2009, a delegation consisting of representatives from Kazakhstan's Ministry of Finance, the National Welfare Fund Samruk-Kazyna, the Akimat of the Mangystau Region, and the Aktau Seaport Special Economic Zone paid a working visit to Kuwait. During the three-day visit, there were intensive negotiations with the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development, Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Kuwait Investment Authority, and representatives of the country's business community. Promising investment projects were presented to potential Kuwaiti investors by NWF Samruk-Kazyna and the Mangystau Region.

At the end of 2010, in accordance with agreements reached by the Intergovernmental Commission, efforts were made to attract Kuwaiti investments to Kazakhstan's banking sector and to build business contacts between the two countries.<sup>9</sup>

For example, a business forum in Kuwait City on 8-9 December, 2010, brought together entrepreneurs from the two countries working in the construction sector. Members of the Kazakhstan delegation, which included the heads and representatives of more than 10 major construction companies, met with the authors of the Mega Project for the development of Kuwait, heads of companies implementing this program, and members of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry to discuss the prospects for mutually beneficial investment cooperation. During bilateral negotiations

<sup>7</sup> See: "Sotrudnichestvo Respubliki Kazakhstan s Gosudarstvom Kuveit," available at [<http://mfa.gov.kz/ru/content-view/sotrudnichestvo-respubliki-kazakhstan-s-gosudarstvom-kuvejt>], 26 September, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> See: "V Kazakhstane proshol 7-i vseмирny islamski ekonomicheskij forum," available at [<https://kapital.kz/archive/7125/v-kazakhstane-proshel-7-j-vsemirnyj-islamskij-ekonomicheskij-forum.html>], 10 August, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> See: "Sotrudnichestvo Respubliki Kazakhstan s Gosudarstvom Kuveit," available at [<http://mfa.gov.kz>], 1 December, 2019.



held within the framework of the forum, the parties discussed issues of participation by Kazakhstan construction companies in implementing the Kuwait Mega Project, as well as supplies of our building materials to the Kuwait market.

The Sultanate of Oman was one of the first Gulf Cooperation Council countries to establish economic relations with Kazakhstan and provide financial assistance to the republic. Back in 1992, Kazakhstan and Oman created a Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), whose purpose was to ensure oil exports from the Tengiz Field, a huge oil field with recoverable reserves of about 1 billion tonnes. But in March 2008 Oman sold its stake in the CPC because of the project's ineffectiveness. Oman Oil, a national petroleum investment company, is involved in the development of the Zhemchuzhina (Pearl) offshore oil field in Kazakhstan's sector of the Caspian Sea and the Dunga Field in the Mangystau Region. In each of these projects, the Omani company holds a stake of 20%.

Cooperation between the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and the Central Asian states in the trade and economic sphere is so far insignificant. For example, Kazakhstan's GDP in 2013 was \$224 billion, while its trade with Saudi Arabia at that time was only \$14 million. Bilateral trade between Saudi Arabia and other post-Soviet states of Central Asia is also very low. In 2012, for example, Saudi trade with Uzbekistan was \$4.5 million, and this, according to Arab experts, falls far short of the real potential for cooperation.<sup>10</sup>

Investments in Kazakhstan's economy coming from OIC countries are shown in the Table.

*Table*

**Direct Investments in Kazakhstan from OIC Countries (\$m)**

	2000	2001	2006	2010	2012	2013	2017
<b>OIC</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>314.9</b>	<b>380.4</b>	<b>243.8</b>	<b>256.5</b>	<b>315.8</b>	<b>361.7</b>
<b>UAE</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>84.6</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>12.6</b>	<b>14.8</b>
<b>Turkey</b>	<b>29.8</b>	<b>116.4</b>	<b>98.5</b>	<b>337.5</b>	<b>83.6</b>	<b>80.3</b>	<b>80.1</b>
<b>Oman</b>	—	—	6.2	12.2	21.9	21.7	22.1
<b>Iran</b>	—	2.1	3.9	20.3	23.1	21.3	23.4
<b>Kuwait</b>	—	—	—	0.4	3.1	9.9	9.8
<b>Jordan</b>	—	1.6	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.2	0.3
<b>Bahrain</b>	3.5	—	0.2	0.4	8.8	-2.1	-2.0
<b>Tunisia</b>	—	—	0.1	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.0
<b>Lebanon</b>	—	0.2	38.9	0.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Malaysia</b>	—	—	—	0.2	0.0	0.0	1.5
<b>Indonesia</b>	68.1	47.1	216	—	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Nigeria</b>	—	—	—	0.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	0.8	2.0	0.0	0.8	-4.4	0.0	0.5

*Source:* [<http://www.oic-un.org>].

<sup>10</sup> See: E.M. Savicheva, M.O. Shaar, "Otnoshenia arabskikh stran Persidskogo zaliva s tsentralnoaziatskimi gosudarstvami SNG," *Vestnik RUDN*, No. 4, 2014, pp. 160-168.

As we see from the Table, Kazakhstan's major trading partners have increased their investments in our economy.

## The Dynamics of Relations, Problems and Prospects

At the same time, there are problems that hinder the progressive development of wide-ranging relations: long decision-making periods, bureaucracy, slow processing of various documents, etc.

Kazakhstan's bilateral relations with each of the states mentioned above have great potential, which should be used for fruitful cooperation. Joint investment projects further strengthen our partnership.

Cooperation between Kazakhstan and Middle Eastern countries varies widely: company representation, joint projects, exhibitions of modern equipment, business presentations, and economics days. It also includes intergovernmental agreements, constructive dialog, political consultations, and visits at the highest political level.

Kazakhstan's industrialization program allows foreign entrepreneurs to take part in modernizing virtually all sectors of the economy, to expand their investments, and provide banking and other services. The countries of the Middle East participated in EXPO 2017 in Astana, signing a number of bilateral documents.

In analyzing the overall state of bilateral trade and economic relations between Kazakhstan and Turkey in the 1990s, one can say that despite a solid contractual basis, steadily growing trade, and numerous negotiations and mutual visits, bilateral ties fell short of their potential and were affected by general negative factors. These included crisis phenomena in the economy as a whole, an inadequate regulatory framework, lack of proper government control, etc. The implementation of agreements and understandings often met with a lack of interagency coordination or even with inaction by some agencies and departments. In practice, there were cases when Turkish businessmen saw a lack of interest in constructive dialog from Kazakhstan partners, both private and government, some of whom turned out to be unreliable, acted without due consideration or failed to fulfill their contractual obligations. There were also cases of misconduct on the part of local authorities, whose actions sometimes ran counter to the decisions of the central authorities. All of this had a discouraging effect on the Turkish partners and made them less optimistic about cooperation with Kazakhstan.

The development of bilateral business ties was also hindered by poor liaison between related ministries and departments in the two countries, as well as between business associations, which play an important role in Turkey's economic life. They include the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD), and other private business organizations. An effort to establish and expand relations with these groups on the part of Kazakhstan's Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, and other appropriate organizations could raise trade and economic cooperation to a higher level in a short time. Meanwhile, the significant potential for cooperation could be realized by attracting both Turkish and other foreign capital through Turkish companies.

The United Arab Emirates is of key importance to Kazakhstan from the perspective of a faster increase in trade with the Gulf countries and an improvement in the competitiveness of the domestic economy. This is due to at least three determining factors:

- The UAE is becoming a major focus of interest for an increasing number of Asian and European shippers. Analysts predict that in the near future a large volume of freight traffic from

China, the Middle Eastern countries, and Central Asia will be redirected towards the Persian Gulf zone;

- The UAE has an extensive network of port and warehouse facilities at the world's largest transport hubs for international container traffic that ensure the shortest routes to Southeast Asia, the African continent, India, etc. These advantages enable the Emirates to handle more than 60% of sea freight destined for GCC countries;
- there is a real opportunity to expand Kazakhstan's export potential, given the steady demand from the Gulf countries for food products, including grain and meat (the region is 80-90% dependent on food imports).

Trade between Kazakhstan and the UAE in 2016 reached a peak of \$374.2 million, a 3.4-fold increase from 2015. Exports from Kazakhstan increased 7.2-fold to \$305.2 million, and imports from the Emirates by 2.8% to \$69 million, with a trade surplus for Kazakhstan in the amount of \$236.2 million.

The potentialities of Kazakhstan products have been estimated based on trade flow data from the Trade Map developed by the UNCTAD/WTO International Trade Center (ITC). This interactive database contains information on exports and imports for more than 200 countries. An analysis of statistics on the UAE's global imports compared to exports from Kazakhstan, including Kazakhstan exports to the UAE, demonstrates that this market has a potential for exports of manufactures from Kazakhstan, as indicated by the figures for 2016, which show that Kazakhstan's exports to the world include many items imported by the UAE. In 2016, Emirati imports of 52 potentially promising items totaled \$12 billion, while Kazakhstan's exports of these items to the world totaled \$2.3 billion, and its exports to the Emirates only \$1.4 million. The UAE is a net importer of all these potentially promising goods; moreover, imports of most of these goods have been growing for the past five years in terms of both value and volume.<sup>11</sup>

From 2005 to the first six months of 2015, FDI inflows from Oman to Kazakhstan totaled \$253.2 million. According to the Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in the first 11 months of 2015 trade between the two countries amounted to \$322.9 thousand, including exports of \$306.7 thousand and imports of \$16.3 thousand (in 2014, the figures were 707.8 thousand, 522.6 thousand, and \$185.2 thousand, respectively). The main items exported to Oman are grain, steel coil, pipes, etc.

Inadequate trade and economic relations between Kazakhstan and Jordan are determined by the following factors:

- long geographical distance between the two countries and high freight costs;
- low awareness among Jordanian entrepreneurs about the socio-economic development of the Central Asian republics since the disintegration of the U.S.S.R.;
- lack of knowledge about market conditions in the two countries that would help to find mutually beneficial forms of cooperation.

Among the issues on the agenda is the establishment of a joint chamber of commerce with the participation of the other Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan, with headquarters in Nur-Sultan and branches or representative offices in the capitals of other member countries.

The Persian Gulf is of key importance to Kazakhstan, because we need to develop foreign trade and expand the range of exports.

---

<sup>11</sup> See: "Kazakh Invest 2017, Stranovoi obzor. OAE," available at [export.gov.kz], 8 April, 2018.

It is also very important to use the port potential of the UAE, which acts as the “southern gate” in the North-South Transport Corridor. This is one of the priority Eurasian routes that include Kazakhstan’s transport network.

## *Conclusion*

Today, the Middle East plays a significant role in world politics, as indicated by the level of relations between countries in the region and the major countries of the international community, including those of Central Asia. Cooperation between the East and the Central Asian states is forming under the impact of the new geopolitical situation that arose following the disintegration of the bipolar system of international relations in the early 1990s. The development of relations between Kazakhstan and Middle Eastern states is primarily driven by mutual interest. The political and legal framework for these relations took shape by the early 2000s and is being implemented in practice.

Kazakhstan’s entry into the WTO in 2015 opened new opportunities for a stable presence of our goods in foreign markets and for participation in developing the WTO legal framework and technical standards.

The Islamic Development Bank, the Asia Muslims Committee, and various non-profit charitable organizations from the Arab East operate in our republic. This area of international cooperation is very promising from the perspective of Kazakhstan’s full-scale integration into the world community. An important fact is that back in the 1990s the Organization of the Islamic Conference supported Kazakhstan’s initiative to convene what is known today as the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

Creating optimal conditions for sustainable development of mutual trade and a significant increase in Middle Eastern investments in the economy of Kazakhstan is a major goal of our diplomacy. Further development and deepening of political dialog between Kazakhstan and the Middle Eastern countries, development of cooperation in culture, education, and science, and establishment of regular and extensive contacts in various spheres are key long-term objectives of our constructive cooperation.

Relations with the Middle Eastern countries are seen today as an unconditional, significant priority of our foreign policy. The main objective of Kazakhstan’s wide-ranging cooperation—to raise relations with the Middle Eastern countries to the level of a very mutually beneficial and fruitful partnership—has been achieved. As relations have expanded, the Middle East has come closer to the Central Asian countries in geographical terms.

In the future, the countries of the Middle East will be particularly important for Kazakhstan because of their geostrategic and geographical location and their large economic, resource, and human potential. One of the top priorities in Kazakhstan’s foreign economic activity is the openness of its economy. The republic’s cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries has entered a new and fruitful phase, and it is on the verge of a breakthrough in the economic arena of the Middle East.

In relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Middle Eastern countries, priority is given to trade and economic ties, with much attention being paid to cooperation under government programs, environmental and cultural aspects, and the fight against religious extremism. Cooperation in the energy sector is another current priority.

A number of major initiatives undertaken by Kazakhstan to improve the political climate and strengthen partner relations are based on the understanding that we need more effort to tap the economic, political, and cultural potential of Eastern countries. Kazakhstan believes it is possible to strengthen stability and security and to steer relations towards constructive, mutually beneficial co-

operation. At present, such efforts are of particular importance, considering the complicated and contradictory international situation.

Given the increasing relevance of problems related to the rapprochement of cultures and dialog between civilizations, we think it important to transform the OIC towards democracy and liberalization, both within the organization and in its relations with the outside world. Kazakhstan could play a positive role in this process owing to its geopolitical position as a country at the junction of Europe and Asia, the North and the South, the West and the East, as well as the Islamic, Christian, and Buddhist religions. Kazakhstan can play a key role in bringing together nations, countries, and ideologies and be a factor of peace and stability on the Asian continent and in the Muslim community. Kazakhstan's active involvement in discussing a number of problems at the regional and international level has confirmed its potential to become an important partner in addressing issues of significance not only to Central Asia and the Middle East, but also to the international community as a whole.

---

## RELIGION IN SOCIETY

### THE MOSQUE IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA: SACRAL AND SPIRITUAL CONTEXTS

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.09>

**Myrzakhmet ZHUZEY**

*Ph.D. student, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

**Nataliya SEITAKHMETOVA**

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor, Corresponding Member of  
the RK National Academy of Sciences, Lead Researcher, Institute of Philosophy,  
Political and Religious Studies, Committee for Science,  
Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

**Madina BEKTENOVA**

*Ph.D., Lead Researcher, Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Research  
under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)*

**Sholpan ZHANDOSSOVA**

*Ph.D., Associated Professor, Head of the Religious Studies Department,  
Institute of Philosophy, Political and Religious Studies, Committee for Science,  
Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

## A B S T R A C T

**T**he article examines the role of the mosque as a sacred and spiritual component of the formation and development of independent Central Asian states, an element of nation-building and an architectural image in a secular environment. The actualization of religious processes in society, the increasing number of religious buildings and places of worship, the number of believers and, in general, religious content in the public consciousness, led to a heightened interest in the study of socio-religious

practices and relations between the state and confessions. The subject of Islam, which is a traditional religion for many Kazakhstani, is discussed both from a theological and religious stance, as well as a factor of geopolitical influence and a component of today's political and socio-cultural discussions. The mosque has historically been an integral part of Islam. The authors consider issues related to the definition of the role and place of the mosque in the life of Kazakhstani society and in the process of spiritual revival.

**KEYWORDS:** mosque, post-Soviet space, secularity, mosque-related discourse and narratives, religious consciousness, national revival, religious identity.

*I n t r o d u c t i o n*

The relevance of the topic selected is justified by the fact that the mosque has not been exhaustively studied. An analysis of the scientific elaboration of the issue demonstrates a very small number of research works based on the study of the mosque phenomenon as a distinct issue. In general, scientific works devoted to the study of the mosque can be divided into three main types: first and foremost, studies of the architectural and cultural features of the mosque in the framework of urban anthropology, urban planning, architecture, monumental and decorative art, secondly, studies of sociological and empirical indicators of religiosity of the population, religious identification through the prism of attendance, implementation of religious practices, social activity, and thirdly, religious studies of the mosque as a sacred, spiritual and educational center, the focal point of the popularization of Islamic values.

The idea that, despite the apparent and actively promoted dominance of atheistic practices, in reality the union of Soviet and traditional institutions existed at the formal “upper” level became central in reconstructing the transition from Soviet to post-Soviet practices in everyday religious life. Real everyday relations and traditions that were important for people of Muslim culture were preserved in the depths of national cultural practices. This hidden, latent level of religious sentiment became the basis for the revival and actualization of Islamic practices and places of worship in the post-Soviet period, but it was not the sole reason behind what is now called the Islamic revival in the specialized literature.

The issues of restoring and rethinking the places of mass religious practice gained relevance along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the search for a spiritual beginning and religious identity. This was especially evident with regard to Islam and the Muslim peoples of Central Asia and the CIS countries. An active process of construction and restoration of various types of Muslim places of worship began—from mosques, madrasahs, Islamic cultural centers to sacred objects, i.e., mazars. Following the political transformations, the mass media assumed a different tone when describing

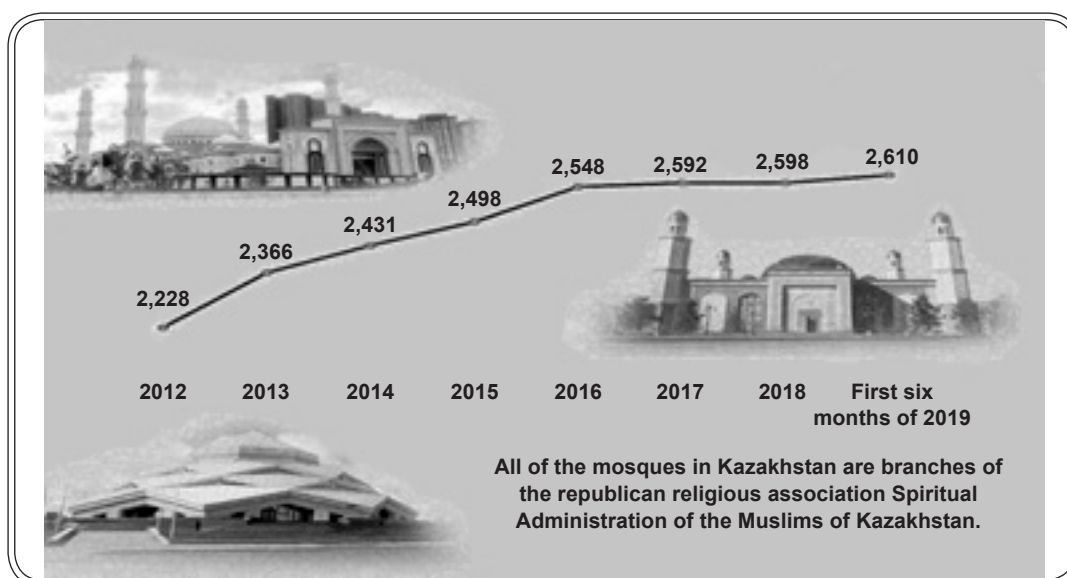
mosques; along with other objects of a religious nature, they were no longer perceived as traces of the past. The minarets began to be seen as the majestic dominants of the city, the presence of religious sites no longer embarrassed city planners, on the contrary, they began to pay attention to them as special tools for cities to endow their search for identity with special expressiveness.

The number of mosques built is measured not by dozens, but by hundreds and even thousands in the new conditions of post-Soviet urban development, despite the eclecticism and a mixture of architectural and stylistic solutions.

While there were only 25 mosques in Kazakhstan during the Soviet period, there were as many as 2,229 religious institutions of Islam in 2012 according to official data (after the re-registration of religious institutions), and in 2019 their number increased to 2,610<sup>1</sup> (see Fig. 1).<sup>2</sup>

Figure 1

Dynamics of Growth of the Number of Mosques in Kazakhstan (2012-2019)



Along with the political and social transformation processes, Islam has actually regained its political significance in many post-Soviet states. It is becoming increasingly more nationalized. In this regard, the study of Islam is important not only as a theological doctrine, but also through the prism of everyday practices in which it is actualized, as well as for understanding the key modern social trends.

Accordingly, the symbolic capital of the mosque as the main Islamic religious and cultural focal point in the post-Soviet space is loaded with new dominants that shape the meaning and correlate with the national discourse, the construction of identity and cultural heritage of peoples.

The search for and reconstruction of the national identity codes, which accompanied the democratization process in post-Soviet countries, often led to the renaissance of the symbolism and axiology of those religious traditions that were persistently pushed into the background during the Soviet

<sup>1</sup> See website of the Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, available at [<http://qogam.gov.kz/ru/kategorii/religioznaya-sfera>], 15 August, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> See: "Dinamika rosta kolichestva mechetey v Kazakhstane," available at [<https://kazislam.kz/қазақстандағы-мешіт-санының-өсу-дина/?lang=ru>], 4 October, 2019.



period. In addition, democratization of post-Soviet countries has sparked dynamic discussions about the observance of the right to freedom of religion, and as a result, about the recognition of religious diversity. Thus, the role of the mosque was amplified: it has transformed from a place of worship to a special religious and social institution, with an emphasis on rallying co-religionists, enlightenment, integration and orientation of the ummah (Muslim community).

## **Research Methodology**

The object of research is the changing role of the mosque in the socio-cultural space of the independent Central Asian states.

The multifunctionality and multifaceted nature of the mosque in national culture and religious practice, actualized in the architectural and construction projects of the post-Soviet period, provide an opportunity for a comprehensive analysis and interdisciplinary interpretation of the mosque phenomenon. Today, the scientific community needs to develop theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of the mosque's role in the social, cultural and political narratives of the post-Soviet period.

The methodology for studying the phenomenon of the mosque at the modern stages of development of scientific thought allows for a wide application of methods ranging from architectural and art history to theological interpretations of Islamic science. This study utilizes methods of historical and cultural reconstruction, the systemic holistic analysis method, the method of critical research and generalization of existing source material, methods of phenomenological interpretation, field research methods, including participatory observation and visual analysis.

The study of the mosque in the post-secular period takes on an interdisciplinary, cross-cultural character, which is justified by its symbolic capital.

## **Mosque-Related Discourse and Narratives**

The question of what a mosque is a question of a deep ontological understanding of the phenomenon, de-objectified as the House of God, where a person finds moral and spiritual meaning, peace and understanding of the purpose of his life.

The mosque was given special attention in the life and culture of Muslims. In the world of Islam, where religion embodied not only purely cult principles, but also the ethical and moral code of a society, where it pushed aside and took control of secular institutions, the mosque assumed the role of a key social and cultural center with many functions. The functions were communicative, whereby communication between a person and God is carried out; educational, which reveals the meaning of the Holy Scriptures, hadiths, rituals, Islamic holidays, the meaning of the Quranic truths for the daily life of a person, exalting it to high spiritual forms; and sacral, whereby a person is exalted by communion with God, whereby through prayer and communication with other people, with the imam, one comprehends the essence of the Islamic faith in an educational context. Since ancient times, the large mosque courtyard was a place for public meetings, it served as a place for debates, communication between rulers and people. In addition, mosques provided a place for social needs such as education, fellowship, and refuge for the traveler and the poor.

In our opinion, the symbolization of the mosque as a cult architectural entity that fills the environment with itself and with its meaning is one of the fundamental mosque-related discourses. The environment is often urban, since Islam had developed in cities. Cathedral mosques are large city

mosques, which are located in the city center and, according to the tradition of Islamic cities, subsequent design of neighborhood mosques proceeded from them to the city districts. An analysis of modern Islamic architecture is important for determining the content of the world outlook and worldview of that huge part of humanity that professes Islam. The mosque has many ciphers and codes that can be deciphered by analyzing the structure, typology, space and form, and understanding the coordinate system of the spiritual space created by Islam. Canonical requirements that forbid human images contributed to an unprecedented flourishing of ornamental art. National and regional differences allowed the peoples of the Middle East to make a unique, distinctive contributions to the development of world architecture. Words and texts are also the subject of a semiotic study of urban space. The word is everywhere in the mosque. Calligraphic wall inscriptions made by skillful ligature have become pervasive, an integral part of the mosque's architectural ensemble that set the rhythm of the entire building both from the outside and the inside. Whole fragments of the Quran were compiled to decorate the interior and the entrance to the mosque.

As part of the canonical stratum that actualizes the understanding or interpretation of the architectural fabric of the mosque and cult architecture as a whole, theoretical research on the specifics of Islamic art and architecture is needed.<sup>3</sup> In the studies of cult architecture, it is usually examined in direct relationship with religion, and an approach to all its constituent elements and traditions is carried out as if they were semantic symbols. Any religion, including Islam, has a structured spiritual universe, which can be designated as a coordinate system in the semantic and orientational space. This is a so-called system of spiritual coordinates, which sets a certain perception and understanding of the world and a person's place in it.

E. Akimova<sup>4</sup> believes that a person's macrosystem of Islamic spiritual coordinates is generated by a historical process and reflected in a religious architectural structure. A prayer hall in a religious building is considered the microsystem of Islam's spiritual coordinates for a person. In addition to the orientation system in spiritual space, a person needs visual spatial coordinates in real, physical space. A person can create such a system for himself either artificially or tie it to the existing landscape. A dominant landmark in space is set up, and, due to its height, it can be perceived from all points, it is the reference point in the coordinate system. In the Muslim religion, the system of spatial-visual coordinates is divided into two systems: religious, which draws architecture in the horizontal direction towards Mecca (mihrab, direction to Qibla), and vertical, which organizes landmarks in space and carries the function of an ontological axis (Minaret).

The system of Islam's orientational coordinates is also mentioned by Igor Ibragimov in his works, but he calls it the "visual dynamics" of mosques, the study of which is very important for a deeper understanding of the essence of religious architecture. By visual dynamics we mean the visual movement of an architectural form towards Mecca, conditioned by the religious direction once determined by the Prophet Mohammad. This knowledge expands the boundaries of temple studies, opens up new research prospects, and is also important for architects and designers who design mosques.<sup>5</sup>

The debate regarding the definition of the mosque as a temple, which occupies a significant place in the philosophical, aesthetic, cultural and art history literature of recent decades, has been

<sup>3</sup> See: T.Kh. Starodub, "Musulmanskie kultovye zdaniia v sisteme srednevekovogo arabskogo goroda," in: *Gorodskaiia khudozhestvennaia kultura Vostoka: Sb. statey Gos. muzeia iskusstva narodov Vostoka*, Moscow, 1990, pp. 190-200; S.A. Sukhorukov, *Arkhitektura stran islama: traditsii i novatsii*, Aleteyya, St. Petersburg, 2014, 168 pp.; G.A. Pugachenkova, L.I. Rempel, *Iskusstvo Sredney Azii*, Moscow, 1980, 288 pp.; N. Khalitov, *Mechet i ee arkhitektura*, Kazan, 1994, 64 pp.; S.M. Chervonnaia, *Sovremennaia mechet. Otechestvennyy i mirovoy opyt Noveyshego vremeni*, Tako, Torun, 2016, 478 pp.

<sup>4</sup> See: E. Akimova, "Otrazhenie sushchnosti islamskoy religii v gorizontальной arkhitekturnoy forme, sisteme koordinat i tipologii kompozitsionnogo postroeniia kultovoy arkhitektury," available at [[http://eakimova.com/?page=11&page\\_id=226](http://eakimova.com/?page=11&page_id=226)].

<sup>5</sup> See: I.A. Ibragimov, "Sistemy orientatsii v gorodskom prostranstve," *Akademicheskii Vestnik UralNIIProekt RAASN*, No. 2, 2009, pp. 48-51.

reflected in many publications. In particular, it appears in the works of the famous orientalist of the Russian school Sharif Shukurov,<sup>6</sup> who is a consistent supporter of the concept of the mosque as a shrine in the paradigm of temple architecture. The research of Stepan Vaneyan,<sup>7</sup> who distinguished the peculiarities of reading the iconography of Christian churches and Islamic mosques, as well as Evgeni Kononenko, were instrumental in the study and comprehension of the concept of architectural iconography.

The question of how the mosque fits into city iconography, as perceived by the townspeople, is very relevant in the era of urbanization. But there is another aspect of reading the text of the mosque through its own iconography, expressed in the philosophy and faith of Islam. In his studies of the philosophy of the temple, Sharif Shukurov proposes to heed attention to the fact that the plastic image of the universe, including the creation of Man, is transmitted in the Quran by referring to the architectural construction topic. The temple consciousness of Islam and the perfect concept of the Temple is shaped precisely in the Quran and in the Sunnah of the Prophet, that is, the Quran interprets the phenomenon and history of monotheism in the truth, consistency and universality of concepts. According to Shukurov, all the answers to the iconography of the mosque as a Temple are already laid down in the scriptures, and these basic requirements for believers during prayer determine the architectural features of the construction of the mosque. The mosque as an architectural structure has reached the heights of symbolic expression, serving as a testament to the unity of God.

Analyzing the research on the problem of iconography and symbolism of the mosque, Kononenko believes that the opinions of scientists and architects will be entirely subjective due to the fact that the architectural characteristics of the mosque are not enshrined in sacred or statutory texts. This certainly does not mean that mosque architecture cannot be endowed with certain symbols and perceived as an image of the Temple, but such interpretations are doomed to remain without proper Islamic argumentation, and can exist solely on the basis of the researchers' individual experience.<sup>8</sup>

When studying the conceptual relationship between mosque architecture and Islamic Sunnah, it is also necessary to highlight the works by Aydyn Zeynalov, Mohammed Arkoun, Akel Kahera, Latif Abdulmalik,<sup>9</sup> who, as philosophers, architects and art critics in one, study the modern transformations of the religion, culture and architecture of Islam.

Due to the fact that city iconography is subject to constant changes and modernization, the study of the architectural fabric of the mosque should have been conducted in line with the potential ways to relate the traditional forms of the mosque to the challenges of the time. The architectural fabric of the mosque, in the opinion of many modern Western scholars, should develop without fear of innovations and modern architectural solutions.

In this regard, it is crucial to note the position of Mohammed Arkoun, who, based on the example of Algeria, believes that the degree of industrialization of Muslim countries corresponds to the cusp of the 20th century in Europe. Moving on to the problem of the mosque, Arkoun writes that its mediation functions are feasible only when it is integrated into the "living system" of society. Arkoun notes the role of architecture in the formation of a new identity for Muslim society. He suggests "re-

<sup>6</sup> See: Sh.M. Shukurov, *Obraz khrama*, Progress-Traditsia, Moscow, 2002, 496 pp.

<sup>7</sup> See: S.S. Vaneyan, *Arkhitektura i ikonografia. "Telo simvola" v zerkale klassicheskoy metodologii*, Litres, 2013, p. 689.

<sup>8</sup> See: E.I. Kononenko, "Arkhitektura mecheti kak ob'ekt interpretatsii," *Vestnik SPbGU. Iskusstvovedeniye*, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 2018, pp. 113-130.

<sup>9</sup> See: A. Zeynalov, *Mechet Apsheronского poluostrova. Istoria i sovremennost*, Ph.D. Thesis in Art, Moscow, 2011, 182 pp.; M. Arkoun, "Islam, Urbanism, and Human Existence Today," in: *Architecture and Community*, ed. by H. Renata, D. Rastorfer, Aperture, New York, pp. 38-39; A. Kahera, L. Abdulmalik, C. Anz, *Design Criteria for Mosques and Islamic Centers. Art, Architecture and Worship*, Published by Elsevier Ltd., 2009. P. 95.

thinking the totality of Islamic legacy,” starting with architecture.<sup>10</sup> Arkoun comes to the following conclusions about the importance of architecture in the dynamics of social modernization:

1. Architecture is a totalizing activity,
2. [It is also an expression of] demands, expectations and answers in Muslim societies.<sup>11</sup>

This problem is now relevant all over the world, and in the post-Soviet space in particular, where Islamic religious architecture, due to historical reasons, is experiencing its next revival and is in a search of new solutions for mosque construction: from eclecticism, stylization and trivial repetition to the implementation of completely new forms and structures, in keeping with the spirit of our time.

Muslim views of architecture have changed dramatically since the establishment of Islam to the present day.

There are ongoing serious discussions about what a modern mosque should look like. Do mosques need a traditional look or will they be recognizable in futuristic, modernized designs? It is also worth noting that the traditional mosque-building style also differs depending on the regional traditions of religious architecture.

Today, there is an active mixing of styles, which erases geographical boundaries. Architectural details are adapted to the context and assimilated.

It is rather difficult to provide an axiological or theological assessment of this process, since temple architecture and iconography experts argue that the architecture of the mosque is not tied to a certain standard framework.

Architecture is viewed as an organic inclusion in the system of national traditions, cultures and religions. The architectural forms of Islam allow a person to exist in a variety of realities. The cult architecture of Islam has the ability to direct and organize the activities of people, influencing their spiritual world. Architecture can be viewed as purely a form of art, or it can be correlated with religious ideas, which reveals it from a completely different angle. Most of the new mosques and religious complexes in Tashkent that appeared in the post-Soviet period literally replicate the spiritual Islamic complexes that are classic for this region, such as the Hazrat Imam complex and the Kukeldash madrasah.

Examples of the symbolic and aesthetic content of new mosques (Kul Sharif in Kazan, Hazrat Sultan in Astana, Heart of Chechnya, etc.) in post-Soviet cities are the results of the architects' search for this very solution based on both traditions and modernity, aesthetics and, most importantly, the functionality of the mosque in an urban space.

According to the famous architect A. Sabitov, religious architecture in modern-day Kazakhstan can be divided into four principal groups:

1. Government contract, which goes through many approval stages. In this case, the creative will of the architect depends on the customer's requirements.
2. Original works of professional architects, which they endow with their own vision of modern Islamic architecture. Local governments and private patrons (as a rule, wealthy and educated people) usually commission these works. In this case the architect has greater creative freedom.
3. Works of craftsmen who engage amateur construction crews and work mainly in rural areas. This group's works are typically commissioned by rural communities and poorer individuals.

---

<sup>10</sup> M. Arkoun, "Thinking Architecture," in: *Building for Tomorrow*, The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, ed. by A. Nanji, Academy Editions, New York, 1994, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

4. Mosques built by foreigners. This is the smallest group, but we believe it deserves a mention, as it reflects the tendency to include Kazakhstan in the “family of Islamic peoples.”<sup>12</sup>

We would add one more category to the typology provided by A. Sabitov, namely, the construction of mosques by national diasporas in Kazakhstan. Such structures include the mosques of the Vainakh community in Almaty, whose parishioners mainly follow the Shafi'i madhhab common among the Caucasian peoples, and the Tatar community's Fatima mosque, which is located practically on the same spot where the Tatar mosque was built in the 19th century.

## Nation-Building Discourse in Studies of Post-Soviet Mosques

Post-Soviet studies of the mosque are characterized by a narrative that claims that in addition to becoming a symbol of Islamic revival in the countries of Central Asia and the CIS, the mosque is also a symbol of nation-building, presentation of statehood and belonging to the Muslim world.

Domestic, Russian and foreign literary sources related to the description of political, cultural and religious processes in the Soviet and post-Soviet space were analyzed in order to study the historical and cultural transformation of the role of the mosque and Muslim institutions in the above-designated space.<sup>13</sup>

The post-Soviet space, presented as multicultural and multi-confessional, contributes to the revival of the lost Islamic identity. This certainly does not imply that the Islamic identity was too fragmented or “Sovietized,” in fact, in some cases it was distinct and clear-cut, but due to atheist ideology it was mainly presented as a cult ethnic component. Social, political and general cultural changes that took place in the post-Soviet space destroyed the idea of religion as an archaic conservation of religious tradition, and the paradigm of ethical renewal of societies once again began to take shape. Religion, in this case, Islam, assumed the central role in this paradigm. At the same time, the new construction of Islamic identity began. It became especially important in Central Asia, where Islam is an integral part of spiritual culture and where liberation from the Soviet atheist discourse was taking place. The post-Soviet space was being shaped, wherein post-secularism contributed to the development of a different religious identity, free from atheistic dictate. Thus, in her field studies, H el en Thibault conducts an analysis of the issues of religious and national revival in post-Soviet Tajikistan. The research reflects a sharp increase of the public interest in religion, especially since Tajikistan has become the only post-Soviet country where an Islamic political party has emerged.

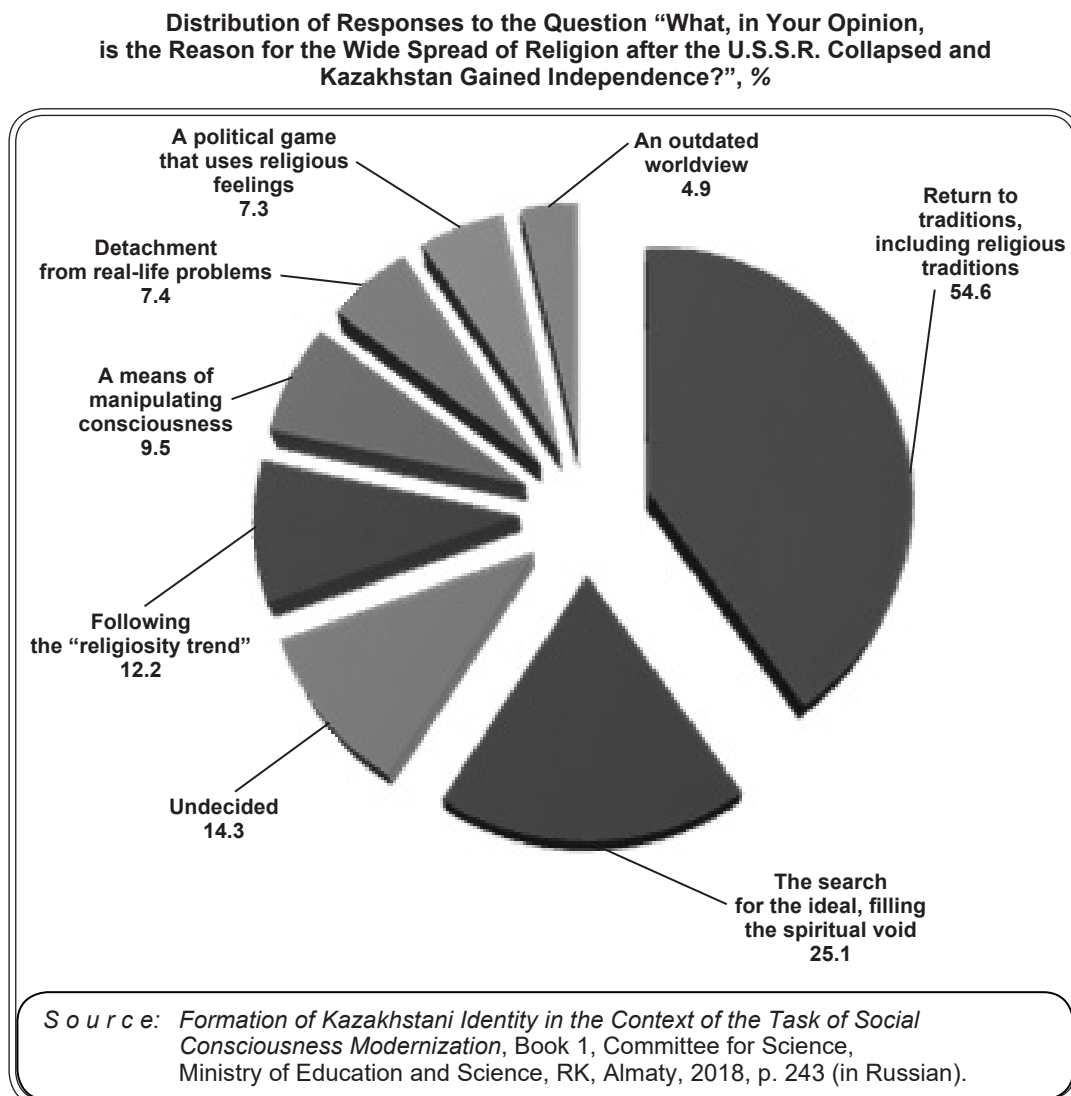
Researchers of Islam in the Central Asian region are concerned about the reasons for the revival of Islamic identity and Islamic discourse and the ways in which the post-Soviet states began to move from atheization, the strict secular regime inherent in the U.S.S.R., to a religious one.

<sup>12</sup> A. Sabitov, “Novoe kultovoe stroitelstvo v Kazakhstane,” *Nachnem s ponedelnika*, No. 4 (564), 4-10 February, 2005, pp. 8–9.

<sup>13</sup> See: Ch. Hann, M. Pelkmans, “Realigning Religion and Power in Central Asia: Islam, Nation-State and (Post) Socialism,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, No. 61 (9), 2009, pp. 1517-1541; S. Abashin, “The Logic of Islamic Practice: A Religious Conflict in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 25, 2006, pp. 267–286; A. Khalid, “A Secular Islam: Nation, State and Religion in Uzbekistan,” *Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 35, 2003, pp. 573-598; Idem, *Islam after Communism. Religion and Politics in Central Asia*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2014, 272 pp.; *Being Muslim in Central Asia Practices, Politics, and Identities*, ed. by M. Laruelle, Brill, Leiden & Boston, MA, 2018, 344 pp.; H. Thibault, *Transforming Tajikistan: State-building and Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia* (International Library of Central Asian Studies), I.B. Tauris, London, 2018, 288 pp.

In 2018, researchers of the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies in Kazakhstan conducted a sociological study within the framework of the scientific program Formation of Kazakhstani Identity in the Context of Modernization of Public Consciousness, which aimed to identify the features of religious identity formation in Kazakhstani society. Respondents were posed with the question “What, in your opinion, is the reason for the wide spread of religion after the U.S.S.R. collapsed and Kazakhstan gained independence?” The options selected by the respondents rank as follows (in a decreasing order): 1—return to traditions, including religious traditions (54.6%), 2—the search for the ideal, filling the spiritual void (25.1%), 3—following the “religiosity trend” (12.2%), 4—a means of manipulating consciousness (9.5%), 5—detachment from real-life problems (7.4%), 6—a political game that uses religious feelings (7.3%), 7—an outdated worldview (4.9%) (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2



As the study demonstrated, people mainly associate Islamic revival with a return to traditions, which is justified in view of the fact that Islam has been an important spiritual component of the people's consciousness for many centuries in both Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states.

It would certainly be erroneous to claim that the revival of Islam is characteristic only of the Central Asian republics. As you know, Islam is now widespread throughout the world, Muslim communities exist in Africa, the Middle East, Central, South and Southeast Asia. Europe and America are also seeing the growth of Muslim religious communities and the transformation of mosques into spaces of public social practices. In neighboring Russia, the Muslim ummah is also growing intensively, along with the revival of Orthodoxy. Today, according to Russian sources, Muslims make up 12% of Russia's population, or 15-20 million people. Accordingly, the number of mosques uniting Muslims is also growing. In 1991, there was a total of 870 mosques, but by 2015 their number increased to 8,000 (see Fig. 3).

The Moscow region is one of the most dynamic and large-scale Muslim migration centers in the entire post-Soviet space. The diversity of the Muslim space in the context of modern migration, translocal and transnational processes gives a new impetus to cultural anthropology research.

An international seminar (workshop) on the anthropology of Islam, held in Moscow in May 2019, actualized the issues related to the daily religious Muslim practices in Moscow and the Moscow region, revealing another side of the growth of regional Islamic presence. The main argument stated that we should not speak of mosque communities, rather, there is a sense of community formed around mosques, where Muslim immigrants from Central Asia and the Caucasus are inexorably drawn.<sup>14</sup>

For the countries of the former socialist bloc, the liberation from the rigid secularization of the Soviet type was marked by an active growth of religious content, which, according to P. Berger, could be characterized as the "desecularization" path. However, the post-Soviet states chose a secular, rather than a religious track, and are actively trying to balance religious and secular principles by structuring a dialog between states and confessions.

As it has been noted more than once, the religion of Islam has its own history in Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Islam and Islamic identity in Kazakh society developed in close relationship with the cultural, spiritual and national traditions of the people, striving to organically combine the Islamic principles of universalism and the mental characteristics of the Kazakh cultural tradition.

In post-Soviet studies dealing with the problems of religious identity, the main emphasis is placed on the growing role of religion in society. Indeed, the elimination of atheistic ideology and the opening of state borders did provide vast opportunities for the development of the economic and financial spheres of independent states, on the one hand, but on the other hand, it entailed an uncontrolled influx of all kinds of traditional and non-traditional religious and near-religious practices, cults and new religious movements. The issues of finding religious identity were now superimposed on the yet unhealed "colonial trauma," associated with the factor of the lost state, national and cultural identity.

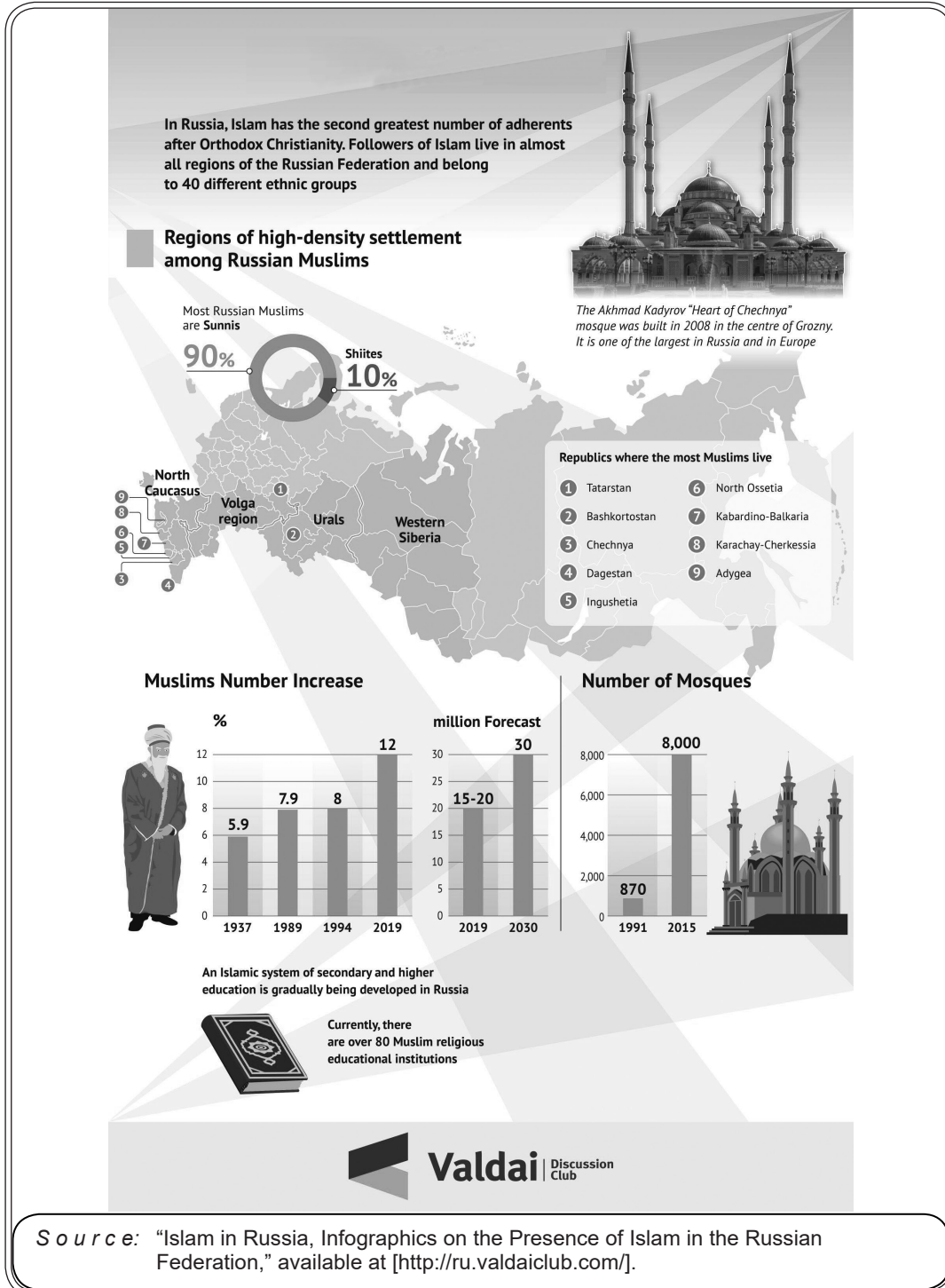
The Soviet period was ambiguous in terms of religious policy-building, since there was apparent persecution and oppression of religious organizations and clergy and confiscation of religious property. However, religion was also used as a consolidating factor of Muslim societies for certain political and strategic purposes. Nevertheless, the degree and level of religiosity was still quite low. Atheistic ideology, aimed exclusively at forming a civic identity, ousted religious practices and feelings of believers from everyday life, Islamic practices were used only in two cases: birth (Sunnat rite)

---

<sup>14</sup> See: "Voobrazhaemye soobshchestva mecheti v Rossii: migranty iz Tsentralnoy Azii v Moskve," *Antropologiya islama. Issledovaniya v Moskovskom regione*, International workshop program, available at [<https://isp.hse.ru/data/2019/05/12/1503982984/%D0%BF%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%B3%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BC%D0%BC%D0%B0.pdf>].

Figure 3

Islam in Russia





and death. This did not contribute to a profound understanding of Islam, especially since even Islamic education was not valued by society, and was used exclusively for the administration of religious rites. There was a division between “official Islam,” approved by the Soviet authorities within a certain framework, and “everyday Islam” as a syncretic combination of pre-Islamic (local cultural traditions and beliefs of Muslim peoples that were a part of the U.S.S.R.) and Islamic practices in the private space. However, it should be recognized that Islam, historically rooted in the minds of Muslims, albeit in a latent manner (within the framework of everyday life, religious holidays, traditions), continued to exist. This was the main factor behind the rapid revival of the religious consciousness of Muslims in the post-Soviet space after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Moreover, the Islamic revival was also characterized by a dichotomous meaning: on the one hand, the issue of self-identification of post-Soviet Muslim peoples with Islamic tradition arose, and on the other, the question of politicized Islam, the so-called “Islamic factor” and its threat to the security and stability of the region under consideration, was considered. Modern markers of Islamic identity, the search for the “correct” Islamic identity, correlation of Islamic identity with traditional elements and ethnic characteristics, prevention of radicalization of Islamic identity in the globalizing world—all of this is a problematic sphere both in geopolitical terms and in modern humanities research.<sup>15</sup>

Proceeding from the above, the conventional types of Islamic identity were conceptualized, including: “traditional Islamic identity,” “popular Islamic identity,” “ethno-Islamic identity,” “new Islamic identity” (“pure Islam”), etc.

It is reasonable to point out the flexibility and plasticity of Islam, within which another Islam can also become “traditional,” one that has absorbed the best spiritual traditions of the peoples where it spread, but does not run counter to the main dogma and moral principles of Islam.

Another post-Soviet Islamic discourse is state policy and the nationalization of Islam. It is the search for ways to solve state-confessional relations, to govern the people with the support of religion.

Alma Sultangalieva noted in her book that there is an ongoing nationalization of Islam, where the state, in turn, fights for Islam with its opponents and claims not merely control over Islam, but the place of religious authority.<sup>16</sup>

Exploring the daily practices of Islam in the Astana mosque, Alima Bissenova uses the rhetoric of “bourgeois Islam,” adapted to the emerging middle class and presented as “good” Islam, instilling values that both secular and religious authorities validate.<sup>17</sup>

Political will often creates an overstated framework, where the real capabilities of architecture and urban planning practice need to fit. This is an idealized model, and each new capital or city uses the language of national identity to achieve it through architecture and symbolism.

A clear example of political will is the Turkmenbashi Ruhy Mosque in Ashghabad, the main mosque of Turkmenistan, named after Saparmurat Turkmenbashi. Stylistically, the mosque corresponds to the specified Turkmen “white architecture” style. Its total area is 18,000 sq m, and the walls

<sup>15</sup> See: A.K. Sultangalieva, “‘Vozvrashchenie islama’ v Kazakhstan, Almaty, 2012, 170 pp.; Y. Ro’i, A. Wainer, “Muslim Identity and Islamic Practice in Post-Soviet Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2009, pp. 303-322; R. Shaykhutdinov, D. Achilov, “Islam, Islamism and Collective Action in Central Asia,” *TRAMES*, Vol. 68/63 (4), No. 18, 2014, pp. 383-405; M.E. Louw, *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*, Routledge, London, 2007, 220 pp.; F. Aliev, “Islamic Revival in Azerbaijan: The Process and Its Political Implications,” *The Caucasus & Globalization*, Vol. 1 (2), 2007, pp. 70-79; D. Lewis, *After Atheism: Religion and Ethnicity in Russia and Central Asia (Caucasus World)*, Routledge, 2000, 324 pp.; A. Sengupt, “The Making of a Religious Identity: Islam and the State in Uzbekistan,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 34, No. 52, 1999, pp. 3649-3652.

<sup>16</sup> See: A.K. Sultangalieva, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> See: A. Bissenova, “Building a Muslim Nation: The Role of the Central Mosque of Astana,” in: *Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols, and Social Changes*, Lexington Books, 2016, p. 211.

of the mosque are decorated not only with sayings from the Quran, but also with quotations from *Ruhnama*, a book by Saparmurat Niyazov.

In Kazakhstan, modern architectural styles, including elements of national culture, are used alongside the traditional Arab style. The influence of the historical school on modern mosque construction is also present in the project of the new Hazret Sultan cathedral mosque in Astana. The mosque is designed in the classical Islamic style using traditional Kazakh ornaments and decorative elements.

Yet another example is an unusual building, the main Pavlodar mosque named after Mashhur Zhusip. It is shaped as an eight-pointed star, the dome of the mosque is sky-colored, and shaped as a shanyrak or a yurt (although different interpretations are offered, including the shape of a Kazakh batyr's helmet).

In her studies of the modern architecture of Kazakhstan, Sara Sadykova concludes that the following key architectural and artistic directions are in place: on the one hand, the architecture of the new mosques has a pronounced tendency to reproduce ancient medieval images; on the other hand, there is an ongoing search for a new architecture of Kazakhstani mosques, based on the latest construction technologies, which will most likely reflect national, modern and Islamic features.<sup>18</sup>

Today, in research related to the construction of mosques and the representation of the power and wealth of the states initiating this construction, the issue of the size and uniqueness of mosque projects remains.

In the Central Asian region, this process is accompanied by the narrative of “the largest mosque in Central Asia.” All of the post-Soviet countries have attempted to beat the previous record. Up to this day, the Hazret Sultan mosque in the capital of Kazakhstan was considered the largest and most beautiful mosque, but now Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have claimed online that they are now claiming the title. This is, in fact, an ongoing process.

Natalie Koh also notes in her research the phenomenon of “gigantism,” monumentalism and politicization inherent in the new mosques in Central Asia, saying that religious architecture, including the mosque, has been used to demonstrate political will and statehood since the ancient times.<sup>19</sup>

Svetlana Chervonnaia, a Tatar researcher of the mosque, places the situation of building new mosques in Tatarstan, namely the Tauba mosque, in the context of redundancy, since she believes that the fascination with the symbolic capital of the new mosque in the eyes of regional clergy should have become an indicator of prestige and, most importantly, a symbol of Tatarstan's independence. From her point of view, this experience of overcoming the cautious Soviet attitude to the size and types of religious buildings is a characteristic feature of the post-Soviet Muslim communities.<sup>20</sup>

## The Mosque as a Sacred Geography Object in Kazakhstan

One of the breakthrough state projects in Kazakhstan, the Ruhani Zhangyru program, which aimed to modernize the public consciousness, was designed to revive and strengthen the spiritual and

---

<sup>18</sup> See: S.Sh. Sadykova, “Arkhitektura novoy sobornoy mecheti «Hazret Sultan» v g. Astana,” available at [<http://repository.enu.kz/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/2307/SadykovaSSH-Sobornayia-mechet-Khaziret-Sultan.pdf?sequence=1>].

<sup>19</sup> See: N. Koch *et al.*, “Mosques as Monuments: An Inter-Asian Perspective on Monumentality and Religious Landscapes,” *Cultural Geographies*, Vol. 25 (1), 2018, pp. 183-199.

<sup>20</sup> See: S.M. Chervonnaia, “Musulmanskie mecheti v sovremennoy Rossii,” available at [<http://mosgues-3.narod.ru/statja3.htm>].

national roots of the people, and, at the same time, to continue the country's course towards intensive development. The program covers a number of projects to strengthen national identity, among which the Sacred Geography project is notable. It is tasked with recreating an integrated field of the country's spiritual shrines and sacred places, revered by people since ancient times.

In general, the concepts of sacred places and sacred space have a fairly broad interpretation. The interest in the study of sacred spaces is believed to have sharply increased in connection with the search for spiritual guidelines and foundations of a particular people. However, the interest in the search for statehood through the prism of sacred topography is also present.

The use of sacred objects' potential to demonstrate the national spiritual revival of the people as a whole is inherent in Central Asian countries, since the appeal to cultural memory and spiritual archetypes gives an impetus to realize one's identity.

The sacred objects of Kazakhstan include objects beyond mosques. Cult architecture was originally represented in the Central Asian region by a variety of objects from mazars to majestic mausoleums and ensembles. The pre-Islamic period in the region's history was distinguished by its own cultural traditions and archetypes associated with the veneration of natural forces, ancestors and their spirits, personalities endowed with special, supernatural abilities, who were often canonized, etc.

The pivotal element of the Kazakh national culture was the Islamic tradition, which most fully accumulated spiritual and moral experience. We can say that the cultural traditions of the Kazakh people and the universal Islamic tradition fulfilled the common task of the spiritual and moral consolidation of the ethnos.<sup>21</sup>

The Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan project is aimed at identifying, reviving and popularizing the sacred objects within the country, which, in turn, will make it possible to systematize and analyze a huge layer of archeological, cultural, and ethnographic scientific material for the subsequent constructive development of this area.

Meanwhile, the classification of sacred objects in Kazakhstan covers the following:

- particularly revered monuments of natural heritage, archeological and architectural monuments;
- large medieval urban centers and capitals of the Kazakh Khanate;
- religious and cult objects that function as places of worship;
- sacred places associated with historical figures;
- sacred places associated with historical and political events.

The sacred map of Kazakhstan currently contains more than 600 objects of cultural, historical and natural heritage of the people of the republic, including such unique examples of religious architecture as the Zharkent Mosque, the Azret Sultan complex, the mausoleum of Khoja Akhmet Yasawi, the Beket ata and Shakpak ata underground mosques in West Kazakhstan, Ishan Mosque, etc.

The state program Ruhani Zhangyru launched in Kazakhstan is very active, and the systematic popularization of the program itself and its results in society is underway. The established design centers throughout the country provide the program with expert and methodological support. In 2018, the Institute of Eurasian Integration conducted sociological research aimed at identifying the degree of perception and support of the population for modernization. Thus, the results of the sociological survey confirm the positive perception of the Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan project in society. In fact, every second Kazakhstani (51.6%) considers this project important. The share of respondents

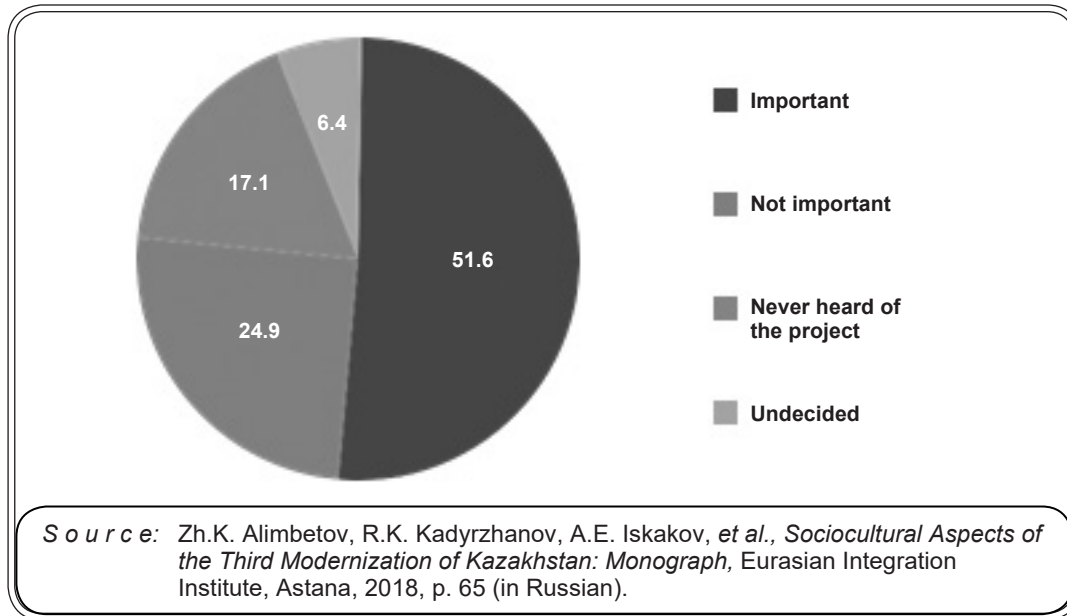
---

<sup>21</sup> See: Zh. Turganbayeva, N. Seitakhmetova, M. Bektenova, Sh. Zhandossova, "Islamic Identity in the Context of History and Its Prospects: Religious and Political Aspects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, 2019, p. 108.

who do not attach importance to this project is two times less (24.9%). 17.1% of the respondents answered that they have heard about this project for the first time (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4

Evaluation of Importance of the Sacred Geography of Kazakhstan Project, %



Thus, the sociological analysis demonstrates the constructive interest of Kazakhstanis in preserving the sacred roots for religious and cultural identification.

## Conclusion

The role of the mosque in the sacralization of the Islamic tradition is associated, first of all, with the sacralization of the Word of Allah, the Quran and the Quranic epigraphy. Sacralization in a mosque is often associated with strict adherence to rituals associated with religious practice, which includes sacralization of the Islamic space, the height at which the Quran is held and the positioning of worshipers, the sacralization of the Qibla, the correlation (spatial) with the main mosque (Masjid al-Haram).

One of the important roles of the mosque is educational. Historical discourse shows that the mosque has always been an educational center. At the mosques, madrasahs were opened, where the Arabic language was taught along with the study and interpretation of the Quran, a deep study of hadiths and the normative rules of the Islamic tradition.

The mosque is the theoretical and practical realization of Islamic life; it contains the source of the Islamic cultural heritage. The pinnacle of Islamic architecture—the mosque—plays the key role in the spiritual unification of Muslims and the preservation of Islamic cultural identity.

## KAZAKHSTAN TODAY: POLITICAL RECONSTRUCTION OF RELIGIOUS TRENDS IN A SECULAR STATE

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.10>

Elena BUROVA

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor,  
Leading Researcher, Institute of Philosophy,  
Political Science and Religious Studies,  
Committee for Science, Ministry of Education and  
Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Akhan BIZHANOV

*D.Sc. (Political Science),  
Professor, Director, Institute of Philosophy,  
Political Science and Religious Studies, Committee for Science,  
Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Aidar AMREBAYEV

*Ph.D. (Philos.), Coordinator of  
International Projects and Public Relations,  
Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and  
Religious Studies, Committee for Science,  
Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Kazakhstan  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

### ABSTRACT

Since the early 1990s, the political role and purpose of religion in Kazakhstani society has changed considerably. Freed from constitutional limitations that imposed a certain ideology, it plunged into an ocean of pluralism of worldviews. It turned out that in the context of limited influence of all socialization institutions (the family, education and the media), religion as a

means of socialization has moved to the fore even though the common trends of religiosity turned out to be highly contradictory and their political role highly ambiguous, to say the least.

The problems of the state and the functioning of religiosity and new religious trends remain in the center of public discussion. The authorities and society are equally con-

cerned with the proliferation of non-traditional religious institutions and practices that are not only alien to the mental culture of Kazakhstanis—they operate according to patterns of Islamization, evangelization and neo-Orientalism.

The number of people who think that Kazakhstan should develop as a religious state is steadily increasing. The state, for its part, is trying to avoid the politicization of the religious factor and seeking the optimal model of secularization and a consensus between the country's highly diverse religious institutions and their followers and those who remain outside any religion. The state is testing all sorts of ideological patterns and their impact on religious trends, eradicating the preceding ideas and stereotypes of interpretations of religion. This paper focuses on political reconstruction of the impacts of religiosity on decision-making in

Kazakhstan as a secular state, analyzes the channels through which religiosity extends its influence and the options that a secular state has for its neutralization and autonomization.

Scholars rely on various methods of qualitative and quantitative sociological and interdisciplinary theoretical reconstruction to outline the religious situation, discover the trends, create adequate models and supply the relevant structures with their forecasts. The latter are reified and substantiated by a range of methods ranging from prolongation to foresight.

Experts, researchers and the state need practical recommendations based on the results of comprehensive studies of religiosity. Some of our results were discussed in scholarly articles and monographs. This research study presents integral results and conclusions on the above-mentioned topics.

**KEYWORDS:** *political reconstruction, secular nature, conversion, religious trends, Islamization, evangelization, neo-Orientalism, religiosity.*

## *Introduction*

This article offers a concise survey of the phenomenon of religiosity and its role in political decision-making in Kazakhstan based on sociological measurements. The institution of religion is resurrected in post-totalitarian Kazakhstan, it acquires new chances, influences internal and external policy, socialization of the younger generation and is present throughout everyday life. Along with the positive chances of institutionalization, there appear risks of losing its identity due to quasi-religiosity fraught with radicalization and rejection of the state's secular nature.

In Kazakhstan, the institution of religion and outcrops of religiosity have moved to the frontline of studies that rely on interdisciplinary methods and strategies. Sociology of religiosity offers the chance to identify the condition and study the trends of new philosophy of life in Kazakhstani society in the state of transformation, to analyze them within political science, which is indispensable for the elaboration of the state policy of interaction with religious organizations.

In full accordance with the constitutional principle of freedom of conscience, there is no statistical information about the numbers of believers and non-believers. The scopes and trends of religiosity can be verified only through sociological measurements. Since the mid-2000s, the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies under the Committee for Science, Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, has been engaged in sociological assessment in the context of studies of common Kazakhstan identity, the phenomenon of "new religiosity" and

activism of new religious organizations; religious conversion;<sup>1</sup> and interaction between secularity and religiosity in everyday life. Due to this, we have studied

- (1) assessments of the institution of religion by various reference groups, its influence and importance in social and private life;
- (2) attitude to traditional and new religions;
- (3) perception and assessment of religious identities of the respondents' closest circle;
- (4) philosophical self-identification;
- (5) perception of the processes and results of religious conversion;
- (6) radicalization risks created by quasi-religions;
- (7) preferences for the secular or religious vectors of state development and other related issues.

Some of the results can be found in previous expert discussions and publications.<sup>2</sup>

## Methods and Materials

Our studies and our methodology can be described as comprehensive, both in regard to the subjects (philosophy, sociology, religious studies, political science) and the methods used. The methodological trends and the methods employed include all general and specific scientific methods, approaches and strategies used at different stages and levels.

The methods are suggested by the problems and subjects based on theoretical interpretations of information acquired at the empirical stage of sociological studies and rely on explications, comparisons, generalizations and conceptualization.

At the stage of empirical analysis followed by theoretical reconstruction we relied on a comparative approach, visualization, abstracting, phenomenological reconstruction, hermeneutical analysis, the method of narrative, conceptualization, modelling and forecasting. The methodology, techniques and research approaches allowed us to empirically register, verify and conceptualize the fairly complex processes of paradigmatic development and interpret their trends.

Changes in the paradigmatic foundations of socio-humanitarian cognition require a new class of social theories that stem from the specifics of social studies of contemporary societies and their fluctuations.

It should be specifically noted that the concepts formulated by Zygmunt Bauman about the non-linear nature of identity and the impossibility of guaranteeing a unilaterally fixed identity in contemporary conditions proved to be efficient.<sup>3</sup>

The materials used in the paper are based on the data provided by sociological studies carried out by the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies over the years.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See: *Religioznye konversii v postsekuliarnom obshchestve (opyt fenomenologicheskoy rekonstruktsii)*, Collective monograph, ed. By A.Kh. Bizhanov, Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies KN MON RK, Almaty, 2017, 431 pp.

<sup>2</sup> See: A. Bizhanov, A. Amrebayev, E. Burova, N. Seitakhmetova, "Kazakhstan: Secular and Religious Politics," *Central Asia and the Caucasus, English Edition*, Vol. 20, Issue 4, 2019, pp. 135-146.

<sup>3</sup> See: Z. Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, John Wiley & Sons, 2013, 272 pp.

<sup>4</sup> Data of the analysis of the large-scale sociological studies of public opinion carried out in 2011-2018 in 16 regions; in 2019, in 17 regions and in Astana (Nur-Sultan since 2019), Almaty and Shymkent. The studies in 2011-2019 relied on a representative national sampling; the sampled population consisted of adult citizens of Kazakhstan (18+). The respondents represented all most important demographic groups, including gender, age, educational level, social and professional status,

Social surveys created a foundation of representative data, while the use of the latest methods of information gathering and statistical processing has made it possible to identify correlational dependencies and their empirical and theoretical interpretations. Quantification measurements make it possible to identify the volume and scope and outline the typical features of philosophical identity, components of its religiosity, describe their qualities represented in the gender, age, ethnic, educational, social, professional, type of settlement, property and regional markers. The latter allows to compare them by the above-mentioned features.

## Hypotheses

1. In the absence of statistics on the number of believers and non-believers in Kazakhstan, a myth has emerged that religion is capable of creating an efficient contemporary axiological context of social life, fill the void left by foregoing values, development aims and ideals. Since the 1990s, publicists, journalists and researchers have been insisting that religious people comprise 80% or even 90% of the country's population. This myth requires verification.
2. The monitoring of religiosity has revealed its scope, dynamics, trends and regional specifics. The identified religiosity model allows us to examine how religiosity develops, offers objective ideas about the scope of influence and potential of religion as a social institution.
3. Self-identification of the country's population by religion and religious way of life reveals the model and structure of religiosity. Kazakhstani mentality as a hybrid of intertwined secular and religious values and norms. It can be surmised that the religious traditions, norms and ideals are not considered very important by many social groups, but are of the highest importance for the believers. It means that in order to be efficient, cultural policy should be adequately differentiated.
4. Studies of the capabilities and limitations of religion as an institution require the sociological information generated by studies of religious identity and its influence on the philosophy of life as compared with other institutions, such as the family, public education, state ideology, the impact of the media, the Internet and social networks.
5. The discovered functions and analyzed impacts of religion on the life-world of the local population point to highly varied (both positive and negative) trends of its development and potentials.
6. Differentiation of religions into *traditional* (Hanafi Islam and Orthodox Christianity) and *new* in the sociocultural environment in Kazakhstan allows us to identify the trends of religious conversion and study the attitude to state religious policies (premises).

---

ethnicity, level of incomes, types of settlement, etc. Data was taken from statistics and strictly adhered to during the selection process. Representation in the sampling structure was ensured by the multistage sampling stratified at the stage of selecting the points of the poll; interval at the stage of household selection and simple randomized selection of respondents in households.

The methodology of sociological studies was elaborated by the authors; the field stage and empirical processing were performed by professional sociological structures. In 2011-2017, this was done by a public organization The Scientific-Research Association "Institution of Democracy" (Astana); in 2018-2019, the Center for Business Information, Sociological and Marketing Studies "BISAM—Central Asia." We used the method of personal formalized interviews in the flats of the respondents, applying the CAPI/RAPI method. The answers were processed by IBM SPSS. In 2019, the sampling comprised 1,800 respondents who differed in the territorial and settlement structure types.



## Results

1. *Freedom of conscience*—one of the constitutional principles that stipulates the freedom of the citizens of Kazakhstan to choose a religious, secular or mixed system of values which conceptualizes the axiological and meaningful attitudes in the sphere of religion and the general relations between the state and confessions.
2. *Perception of religious identity*. The adult population demonstrates that it successfully identifies itself in the sphere of religiosity. In most cases, people identify themselves according to their ethnic and cultural roots, consolidating the traditional ethnic-cultural identities (Hanafi madhab, Russian Orthodoxy or other faiths directly determined by the culture of peoples who live in Kazakhstan).

Ethnicity is the main factor of religious self-identification (82.0% of the Kazakhs consider themselves Muslim, while 75.9% of Russians identify as Orthodox Christians). On the whole, 79% of the population insist that they belong to the religion of their ethnicity. In Kazakhstan religion is generally perceived as part of the culture of an ethnicity that determines the choice of confession.

Religious identity is one of the accessible socialization channels at both the individual and group levels. The number of those who identify with the believers is steadily increasing because of those who orientate themselves towards the external factors of religiosity.

The factor and situational analysis of the changing religiosity has revealed the fact that the phenomenon of the faith is inadequately perceived. Respondents refer to external features of religiosity and reject the importance of spiritual authority. A large number of the respondents identify themselves as believers without studying doctrines and practices or the religious way of life in general.

Religiosity of the Kazakhstani society is highly mosaic: there are “nominal believers” among the country’s population; “believers who do not read sacred texts,” “non-believers who follow religious rites,” “atheists who celebrate religious holydays,” “believers who do not believe in God,” “those who believe in God, yet do not profess any religion.” The absence of knowledge or a vague idea of religion as a system of convictions based on spiritual experience, cultural matrix, spiritual guidance, etc. are fraught with the danger of extensive propagation of quasi-religiosity.

3. *Model of religiosity*. People in Kazakhstan are convinced that religious faith per se is better than its absence; normally people positively assess the shift from lack of faith to its presence and, on the other hand, are very negative about the shift in the reverse direction.

There are several sub-groups among those who consider themselves religious people: true believers, passive believers and pseudo-believers. The traditional scale of religious self-identification is as follows: convinced believer-believer rather than non-believer-undecided-non-believer rather than believer-convinced non-believer. Projected onto the realities of Kazakhstan, this scale shows that there is a maximum of 15-17% of convinced believers in the country; mostly believers comprise approximately 35-40%; those who waver in their beliefs—about 18%; mostly non-believers, 12%, and convinced non-believers, 13%.

Religious identity is a product of both internal and external factors; it takes shape under the impact of the state’s secular policy and global cultural policies. Certain features of religious identification are comparable with international and regional trends; they are highly varied phenomena with complex structures and with numerous meanings that crop up as confessional and extra-confessional

religiosity. Religious identity is formed in the context of the secular nature of the state and society, hence the phenomenon of extra-confessional identity (see Table 1).<sup>5</sup>

Table 1

**Matrix of Religious Self-Identification**  
(2014, N = 2,500; 2019, N = 1,800, % of the polled)

	2014	2019
Believer, member of a religious community, follow all religious norms	10.3	14.5
Believer, not involved in religious life	56.2	65.5
Non-believer, follow religious rites	7.2	5.0
Non-believer, respect the believers	10.6	1.4
Indifferent to religion	7.6	4.7
Non-believer, negative attitude to religion	4.1	0.4
Believer, do not belong to any religious confession	—	5.4
Undecided	4.0	3.2

4. *More likely than not those who live in Kazakhstan have a combined value system—one that includes both religious and secular values, the borders between which are rather vague. This characteristic perfectly describes the real religiosity, which is diffused, fragmentary and contradictory. Believers, non-believers and atheists demonstrate mind-boggling combinations of axiological principles. Their value systems are hybrids, where the values of pragmatism and liberalism suppress the moral and spiritual values shared by mankind; society is moving away from the old axiological paradigm to a new system of values that is taking shape (see Table 2).*

Table 2

**Values and Norms that Different Groups are Ready to Accept**  
(2019, N = 1,800, % of the polled)

	For the Respondents	For the Family	For Colleagues	For Neighbors
Secular norms	39.5	31.7	27.4	22.4
Religious norms	9.8	14.7	9.3	9.2
Religious and secular norms	36.1	39.5	31.2	27.6
Undecided	14.6	14.1	32.1	40.8

<sup>5</sup> Here and elsewhere we quote the results of large-scale questionnaire polls of adult population (18+) according to the multistage representative sampling that reflects the territorial, gender-and-age and ethnic structure of population of Kazakhstan, which comprised 18,592,730 people as of 1 November 2019. The year and the volume of sampling are given in parenthesis.

5. *The functions of religion in Kazakhstani society* and their relative priority for the respondents are as follows:
- Existential: soothes, helps overcome difficulties and alleviates painful feelings and physical pain;
  - Philosophical and meaningful: enriches spiritually, helps acquire a meaning of life, purifies souls, calls to repent, shows the road towards salvation and everlasting life;
  - Regulatory: prescribes everyday norms of behavior;
  - Communicative: unites all co-religionists.

The amount of positive functions is much greater than the share of negative impacts, such as imparting passivity and humility, ascetic way of life, discouraging initiative, disuniting people who belong to different confessions, inviting destructive impacts on Kazakhstani society from abroad, limiting the impact of high communicative and information technologies, encouraging color revolutions. Religion and religiosity acquire new and, frequently, overly politicized connotations that can significantly affect the attainable statuses. This means that it is crucial to understand how the religious sphere develops in any society, register its scopes and intensity, prevent negative influences.

6. *Comparative analysis of positive effects of social institutions* has revealed that religion has not yet become the main institution that promotes unity and, in fact, occupies the last line in the Family-Education-State-Internet-Media-Religion hierarchy. The respondents spoke of the family as a more important institution that strongly affects the process of formation of the axiological consciousness. Religion occupies the last place (see Table 3).

Table 3

**The Hierarchy of Positive Impacts of Social Institutions on the Development of Society, Consolidated Agreement, Unity and Prosperity (2019, N = 1,800, % of the polled)**

Values/Institutions	Family	Education	State	Internet	Media	Religion (All Confessions)
<b>Yes, certainly</b>	<b>89.6</b>	<b>77.2</b>	<b>70.1</b>	<b>47.8</b>	<b>44.9</b>	<b>43.6</b>
<b>Yes, partially</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>17.8</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>34.4</b>	<b>35.0</b>	<b>35.5</b>
<b>No, never</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>11.8</b>
<b>Undecided</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>9.1</b>

7. *Assessment of popularity of religion and atheism in society.* Monitoring of religiosity revealed such trends as higher popularity of religion in the mass consciousness, admission that the variety of religious faiths and practices is increasing; more attention to atheism and atheists. The studies of people’s attitude to these trends had revealed that Kazakhstanis mostly positively (84%) assess the growing popularity of religion; they are fairly reserved in their attitude to religious pluralism (44.1% for and 36.6% against) and are mainly negative when it comes to the increase in the number of atheists among their compatriots (42%, negative and 25.9% positive) (see Table 4).

Table 4

**Assessment of Religion and Atheism in Kazakhstan Today  
(2019, N = 1,800, % of the polled)**

Statements	Values	%
Religion is gaining popularity among the Kazakhs	Positive	84.0
	Negative	7.0
	Undecided	9.0
The number of followers of different religions and religious trends is growing in Kazakhstan	Positive	44.1
	Negative	36.6
	Undecided	19.3
Atheism is gaining popularity in Kazakhstan	Positive	25.9
	Negative	42.8
	Undecided	31.4

8. *Assessment of the impact of religion on everyday life.* In t Soviet times (the 1920s-1990s) much was said about the desirability of atheism, while religion had mainly negative connotations in people’s minds. Starting in the 1990s, the de-ideologization of the Soviet image of religion created new attitudes. The period of religious variety began, during which religion was perceived by the masses mainly as a positive institution. The value of religion and its impact are differently assessed; positive assessments predominate (see Table 5).

Table 5

**Assessment of the Degree of Influence of Religions (of All Religious Trends)  
on Social Life in Kazakhstan (2019, N = 1,800, % of the polled)**

Connotations	%
Positive	53.3
Rather positive	24.2
Rather negative	2.6
Negative	1.0
No influence at all	11.6
Undecided	7.3

9. *The hierarchy of factors and subjects that influence the philosophy of life* during twenty years of independence has demonstrated that the most important factors are directly correlated with the functions of the most important social institutions. The family and the

closest circle are the main factors that determine the philosophy of life (78.1%). Family socialization is more important than the institution of education (37.2%). The sum-total of spiritual requirements, religious institutions and subjects occupies the third place (21.6%). One out of six respondents (15.0%) pointed to their life circumstances; 12.4%, to public sentiments. Special literature (9.3%) plays a more important role than an independent search for answers (8.1%) and Internet resources (7.9%).

10. *Trends in life philosophy formation.* Amid the changing institutions responsible for the values accepted by society, the family and the education system are losing their former monopoly. The media, the Internet and social networks, new religious organizations are spreading their influence as institutions of reified socialization of the younger generation. The methods of transfer and the methods of reproduction of values and norms are also changing. There are new risks caused by the disrupted transmission of traditions between generations; education has lost its function of upbringing; commercialized and increasingly technocratic educational practices are less accessible to the majority of the young generation.

New religious organizations, including the unregistered ones and those opposed to the traditional religions and the state offer young people all sorts of axiological and labor socialization. Socialization of the younger generation according to the patterns of pseudo-Islam that draw young Kazakhstanis and their families into banned terrorist organizations causes great concern.

SWOT-analysis of the trends in life philosophy formation generalizes the tendencies and identifies the spaces of risks and threats (see Table 6).

*Table 6*

**SWOT-Analysis of Trends in Life Philosophy Formation in Kazakhstan**

<p><i>Strengths</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— philosophical pluralism</li> <li>— continued domination of the institution of family in society</li> </ul>	<p><i>Weaknesses</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— lower role of education in upbringing</li> <li>— no adequate family socialization</li> <li>— greater role of religious institutions</li> <li>— absence of respected spiritual teachers outside the family</li> <li>— philosophy of life depends on ad hoc external factors</li> <li>— ambiguous role of information resources (media and Internet) and a greater role of negative content</li> </ul>
<p><i>Possibilities</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— reassessment of the role of religion and religious institutions</li> <li>— growing number of believers</li> <li>— deteriorating intellectual culture</li> <li>— loss of ideological impact on mentality</li> </ul>	<p><i>Threats</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— replacement of secular values and corresponding aims with religious ones</li> <li>— dissensus among philosophical orientations</li> <li>— loss of secularity as a statehood vector</li> <li>— use of means of information and communication to stir up protest feelings and manipulate them</li> </ul>

11. *Messages about the religious priorities of the state policy in Kazakhstan* became important instruments of forming paradigmatic concepts translated into legal acts, programs and conceptions (see Table 7).

Table 7

**Acceptance of the Ideology of State Confessional Policy**  
 (“Yes, I agree” in % of the polled, by each response; several choices possible)

Ideology of State-Confessional Policy	2011	2013	2014	2018
Due to the demographic prevalence of Muslims, Kazakhstan can be regarded as part of the Muslim World	39.1	60.5	68.3	50.4
Kazakhstan is a poly-confessional country that treats all confessions equally	64.3	72.0	77.5	76.6
Islam and Orthodoxy are religions of primary importance in Kazakhstan	53.6	68.3	63.4	67.1

12. *The idea of traditional and new religions* took root in mass consciousness: there is a clear perception, delimitation and assessment of the traditional and new religions, differentiated interpretation of their roles in and impacts on society.

On the whole, people positively assess the impacts of the traditional religious trends (72.1%). There is a clearly negative attitude to new religious organizations (41.6%); people do not trust and are even apprehensive of them. New religions are mostly orientated towards adaptation to the highly dynamic social, cultural and political contexts, hence their compensatory functions. New religions and cults rely on the latest forms and methods of proactive efforts to push the traditional religions aside; they exploit the need for the functions that are absent, for a variety of reasons, from the secular and traditional religious institutions (see Table 8).

Table 8

**Assessment of the Impacts of Traditional and New Religions, Trends and Denominations on the Whole and by Confessional/Extra-Confessional Affiliation**  
 (2019, N = 1,800, % of the polled)

Confessions, Trends, Denominations	Assessment of Impacts	Total among the Polled, %	Confessional Identification of the Respondents, %		
			Islam	Orthodoxy	No Confessional Self-Identity
Islam (traditional)	Positive	73.8	81.9	62.2	25.0
	Rather positive	12.0	8.9	18.5	26.8
	Rather negative	1.3	1.0	1.5	3.6
	Negative	0.9	0.7	1.5	1.8
	No impact	7.2	5.1	8.1	23.2
	Undecided	4.9	2.4	8.1	19.6
Orthodoxy	Positive	45.5	43.7	60.0	28.6
	Rather positive	19.2	17.9	21.5	26.8
	Rather negative	1.8	2.1	1.5	0.0
	Negative	3.8	4.7	1.5	1.8
	No impact	13.8	13.6	8.9	26.8
	Undecided	15.9	17.9	6.7	16.1

*Table 8 (continued)*

Confessions, Trends, Denominations	Assessment of Impacts	Total among the Polled, %	Confessional Identification of the Respondents, %		
			Islam	Orthodoxy	No Confessional Self-Identity
Catholicism	Positive	15.5	13.4	25.9	3.6
	Rather positive	13.8	13.2	14.8	21.4
	Rather negative	4.5	5.2	3.0	1.8
	Negative	7.0	7.7	5.9	3.6
	No impact	22.6	23.7	12.6	37.5
	Undecided	36.6	36.8	37.8	32.1
Judaism	Positive	5.9	5.4	8.9	1.8
	Rather positive	8.4	7.7	7.4	21.4
	Rather negative	5.9	6.6	4.4	3.6
	Negative	11.5	12.0	13.3	3.6
	No impact	26.3	26.7	21.5	35.7
	Undecided	41.9	41.6	44.4	33.9
Protestantism	Positive	4.2	3.7	7.4	1.8
	Rather positive	5.6	5.6	2.2	14.3
	Rather negative	6.9	8.2	4.4	1.8
	Negative	12.7	14.3	10.4	3.6
	No impact	24.2	24.2	20.0	33.9
	Undecided	46.4	44.1	55.6	44.6
Salafism	Positive	3.5	3.7	3.7	0.0
	Rather positive	3.3	3.8	0.0	5.4
	Rather negative	7.0	7.3	7.4	5.4
	Negative	29.0	32.6	21.5	17.9
	No impact	13.8	12.5	13.3	25.0
	Undecided	43.4	40.1	54.1	46.4
Krishnaites	Positive	2.2	2.4	1.5	1.8
	Rather positive	4.0	4.0	1.5	10.7
	Rather negative	6.8	6.4	8.9	5.4
	Negative	16.4	17.6	17.0	5.4
	No impact	21.7	21.4	20.7	28.6
	Undecided	49.0	48,1	50.4	48.2

Table 8 (continued)

Confessions, Trends, Denominations	Assessment of Impacts	Total among the Polled, %	Confessional Identification of the Respondents, %		
			Islam	Orthodoxy	No Confessional Self-Identity
Scientologists	Positive	2.2	2.6	1.5	0.0
	Rather positive	3.1	3.0	0.7	7.1
	Rather negative	6.3	6.1	8.9	3.6
	Negative	24.7	26.5	22.2	17.9
	No impact	16.2	15.7	14.8	23.2
	Undecided	47.6	46.2	51.9	48.2
Jehovah's Witnesses	Positive	1.9	2.3	1.5	0.0
	Rather positive	3.5	3.8	0.7	5.4
	Rather negative	7.9	8.0	9.6	5.4
	Negative	34.0	34.8	31.9	33.9
	No impact	16.0	15.0	17.0	21.4
	Undecided	36.7	36.1	39.3	33.9

13. *Religious conversion—main trends.* When reconstructed, religious conversion reveals the main motives that lead the citizens of Kazakhstan to religion. The most common is a search for a solution to an existential dead end, followed by less common motives: socialization and re-socialization, search for spiritual support, trend for religiosity, as well as the method of resolution of psychological collisions at the person-group level (marital conflicts or misunderstandings between generations).

The weakening of the socializing impact of the family, the absence of an access to education and jobs, as well as a lack of philosophical maturity, independence and critical perception made religious conversion an obvious rational choice within the identification matrix (see Table 9).

Table 9

**Changes of Religious Convictions of Members of Different Social Circles (2019, N = 1,800, % of the polled)**

Connotations/Subjects	Relatives and Close Friends	Colleagues, Classmates	Neighbors, Acquaintances
Attitude to faith and religion did not change, they are faithful	62.1	36.8	33.1
Changed their views in regard to religious issues, became believers	7.7	14.3	7.9
Switched religions and joined another religious community	2.2	6.8	8.1



*Table 9 (continued)*

Connotations/Subjects	Relatives and Close Friends	Colleagues, Classmates	Neighbors, Acquaintances
Lost their religious convictions, became atheists	2.9	3.5	5.0
Did not change their convictions, were and remain atheists	3.7	3.7	3.7
Are neither believers nor atheists	3.9	4.2	7.7
Undecided	17.5	30.7	34.4

Conversion to traditional Islam and Orthodoxy predominate, yet other types of conversions are sustained: not only do they promote a religious mentality, but are also responsible for its important transformation.

Religious identity strongly affects the choice of life style of a gradually growing number of Kazakhstanis. There are major and easily recognizable trends related to religious conversion: Islamization of the potentially Muslim and the traditionally non-Muslim population; Evangelization of the potentially Muslim population and attraction of different population groups (with the potentially prescribed ethnosocial and cultural, including traditional, confessional statuses) to neo-Orientalist cults and practices (spiritual healing, psychological training) (see Table 10).

*Table 10*

**Changes Caused by the Attitude to Religion or Religious Preferences in the Closest Circle (Relatives, Friends, Colleagues), as well as in Kazakhstani Society as a Whole (2019, N = 1,800, % of the polled)**

Vectors of Conversion/Subjects of Conversion	In the Family and among Relatives	Among Friends, Neighbors, Colleagues	In Kazakhstani Society
Conversion of non-believers into traditional Islam	25.4	19.7	23.7
Switch from traditional to non-traditional Islam	4.6	9.0	13.8
Conversion into Orthodoxy of those who professed another or did not profess any religion	4.8	10.3	4.4
Conversion into Protestantism of those who professed another or did not profess any religion	2.0	3.9	4.6
Conversion into neo-Orientalist cults	2.4	1.3	3.7
Involvement into pseudo-religious organizations	2.4	2.9	5.5
Involvement into all sorts of corporations with quasi-religious ideologies	2.4	0.9	3.7
Switch from religion to atheism	1.8	2.4	1.8
No changes	38.6	28.3	14.7
Undecided	15.6	21.3	24.1

## Discussion

In Kazakhstan, inter-confessional harmony and social unity are treated as absolute priorities. The religious factor that influences the emergence of an integrated identity (one of the aims of state religious policy) has produced fairly ambiguous results since socialization occurs through life philosophy. Religious ideas about the world produce different or even contradictory impacts that wipe out traditional cultural landscapes and challenge the stability and integrity of the state and society.

Religiosity of the country's population and religion (used as a political instrument) have become the frontline of attacks on the authentic model of ethnocultural, confessional, civil and political identity rooted in the country's past that relies on stability and agreement.

The new religious ideas (cults, movements, organizations, communities) frequently pose themselves as alternatives to the deeply rooted traditional mentality and, as such, create serious risks. They rely on political and institutional strategies that not only challenge the traditional religious institutions, but also consistently oppose the system of secular social relations and traditional ties, family connections in the first place. They use specific methods and technologies elaborated by psychology and psychiatry to manipulate consciousness and behavior; they do not hesitate to use drugs techniques of online influence and recruitment<sup>6</sup> to warp consciousness and sub-consciousness, while the achieved changes radicalize and politicize the minds as a step towards social confrontation.

Traditional religions are loyal to the state and are open to dialog; they do not use totalitarian methods to control minds and behavior; they rely on traditional values, which makes their influence purely positive in a political sense. Conversion from the absence of religiosity to traditional religiosity, from a non-traditional to a traditional religion positively affects individuals, family groups and society as a whole. These vectors of conversion do not contradict the value system deeply rooted in the minds of Kazakhstanis; they are in full harmony with the aims, interests and strategies shared by all Kazakhstanis. This creates a context in which the state wants to consolidate its secular status confirmed by the authority of traditional religions and is ready to cooperate. The political process unfolding in the country clearly demonstrates that the state is determined to interact and cooperate for the sake of public harmony. From this point of view, political reconstruction of interaction between the secular and religious factors is highly important.

## Conclusion

Society thinks of the institution of religion in ambivalent (positive as well as negative) terms. Religion is perceived in a wide range of statuses (moving from most to less important): as the traditional historical-cultural attribute; the space of ethno-cultural identification; the exclusive sphere of understanding the essence of human spirituality; means of personal salvation and a niche of communication with God; the truth and the meaning of life; the moral imperative and regulator of lifestyle; means of strengthening the spirit; obligatory rites; means of manipulating the mass consciousness; a delusion and self-delusion, and an outdated ideology.

When religion becomes a political institution and one of the means of socialization, it leads to an emphasis on the process of forming traditional ethnoconfessional identity; religious conversion expands its capabilities of becoming one of the obvious religious trends. In the minds of Kazakhstanis, the hierarchy of conversions is arranged along a vector from the most important to less important motives: social, cultural, religious, personal (mainly existential and psychological).

---

<sup>6</sup> [<https://www.zakon.kz/4995645-polomannye-sudby-v-chem-opasnost-poiska.html>].

Today, religious conversion is gradually developing into the main channel of engaging the youth, socially fragile population and people seeking socialization, new collectivity and a meaning of life in quasi-religious structures. Joining such organizations changes the way of life of the converts—they become the vehicles of a new world outlook that often does not correlate with the values of Kazakhstani society and the task of unifying the people of Kazakhstan. Conversion into non-traditional religions, cults and movements aims to detach people from the historical and cultural tradition, change their consciousness and redefine their idea of a meaning of life.

Religious ideas about the world affect the social context, the attitude to the family and the state, which deprive society of its traditional impact on cultural and, subsequently, political processes. This means that the contradictions between the traditional religions of Kazakhstan and new religions (trends, alliances and movements) will be mounting. There are no open confrontations or conflicts, yet more and more people demonstrate tolerance to the religious choice of their relatives and close friends and total indifference to the loss of traditional axiological regulators. Society is facing the latent danger of proliferation of religious fanaticism and extremism in everyday life.

The studies of the trends of religious conversion have revealed that the world-view component of social consciousness is in bad shape; it cannot be remedied by secular means, in particular, by the family and education systems and by ideology. It remains to be seen when society reaches the threshold criteria and demonstrates the signs of unfolding philosophical identification. The volumes and vectors of religious conversion indicate that the Kazakhstani society has already reached the line beyond which it might lose its philosophical and axiological identity at the micro-level and in society as a whole.

The fact that an increasing number of Kazakhstanis (including women and young people) embraces quasi-religious practices and the corresponding lifestyles does not correlate with the task of developing a competitive, intellectual and progressive-minded society.

It is highly important to be aware of the unfolding religious conversion processes in order to orientate them in the desired directions of everyone's harmonious socialization, to engage all groups of citizens, young people in the first place, in a socially significant system of values and social unity. It is highly important to study religiosity as a process unfolding in Kazakhstan to formulate new approaches to social management and harmonization of the secular and religious trends of social development.

## INTER-CONFESSIONAL RELATIONS AS A SPECIAL TYPE OF SOCIAL RELATIONS: RUSSIA'S POLY-CULTURAL MILIEU

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.11>

Asiyat BUTTAEVA

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor, Department of Theology and  
Socio-Humanitarian Disciplines, Humanitarian University of Daghestan;  
Professor, UNESCO Chair for the Northern Caucasus  
in Comparative Studies of Spiritual Traditions,  
their Specific Cultures and Interreligious Dialog  
(Makhachkala, Russian Federation)*

Akhmed KAKHAEV

*Post-graduate student, Department of State-Confessional Relations,  
Institute of Public Administration at the Russian Academy of  
National Economy and Public Administration  
under the President of the Russian Federation  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

### ABSTRACT

**I**n Russia, which is a poly-cultural state, the problem of inter-national and inter-confessional relations is invariably on top of the agenda. This is especially apparent in the south of Russia, where Orthodoxy and Islam have been coexisting for a long time and where the acculturation and assimilation processes are highly rigorous and contradictory. Disintegration of the atheist ideology imparted greater significance on the religious and cultural specifics and removed all ideological barriers. This had radically transformed the social context and the world-views of the local population and intensified the religious ideas and social engagement of confessions, primarily, Orthodoxy and Islam.

History has taught us that the coexistence of ethnoconfessional communities on

the Russian soil has been fairly complicated and highly ambiguous. On the one hand, there was latent or even open opposition; on the other, cooperation and interpenetration.

We are convinced that many aspects of this process were conditioned by the complex history and by the struggle between different political and religious forces and private interests that emerged as a spiritual component of life of different ethnicities. Today, the relations between members of different ethnic and confessional communities and their institutions are shaped by globalization and the ambiguous ethnoconfessional policy of the Russian state.

The inter-confessional relations in the poly-cultural contemporary Russia should be analyzed with particular care because the two great cultures—Orthodox and Isla-

*mic—are not merely different. Their world-views are burdened by ideological contradictions, the settlement of which may lead to conflicts and clashes. On the other hand, dissimilar world views of religious cultures are not necessarily a source of confrontations. The latter are ignited by certain accompanying socio-cultural conditions and other forms of inter-confessional contradictions. Today, the poly-cultural milieu is fraught with conflicts and contradictions of this type.*

*The paper examines the essence of Russia's contemporary context and its impact on inter-confessional relations. We are convinced that their nature and content determine, to a great extent, the consistent development of the poly-cultural milieu.*

*The historical phenomena of religious macro-communities continue to actively manifest themselves in confrontations that*

*are developing into "civilizational splits." The authors are convinced that a constructive cultural dialog as one of the important factors of stability is largely a constructive, albeit not always obvious, dialog of confessions.*

*The structure of Russian society is highly complex, which means that inter-confessional agreement based on tolerance and a dialog is a must.*

*We have pointed out that consent and poly-cultural tolerance between confessions are two indispensable conditions for the peaceful coexistence of two or more religions. Their absence leads to confrontations and the domination of one confession over the others, even without social upheavals in the best-case scenario. More likely than not, the prevailing confession is protected by the state, which means a retreat from the concept of a secular state.*

**KEYWORDS:** *inter-confessional relations, poly-cultural milieu, inter-confessional dialog, ethnoconfessional traditions, modernization processes, ethnocultural specifics.*

## *Introduction*

The timeline of the North Caucasian history can be presented as a chain of events that promoted the development of intercultural and inter-confessional relationships. They are important instruments of identifying the general patterns related to the above-mentioned issues. Historical time and space are not homogeneous: social processes accelerate at the turning points of history. At any given stretch of history, the problem of inter-confessional relations reveals one of its aspects to the society with a certain degree of tension. Researchers have stated more than once that during the times of acute tension confessional processes are more harmonized than during the periods of calm, when time slows down. This means that a coordinated picture of confessional cooperation may only be the result of concerted efforts of carriers of confessional specifics, spiritual and material culture realized through dialogs, disputes, congresses, etc.

Clearly, any effort to push aside the problems that exist in inter-confessional relations in the Russian Federation's poly-ethnic and poly-confessional environment had undermined in the past and will undermine in the future all attempts at economic and political reforms and democratization. To comprehend and systematize the course of events, their sources need to be traced and the past experience analyzed. In order to avoid the mistakes of the past, we should bear in mind the sad experience of the previous generations in the future.

## The Concept of a Poly-Cultural Milieu

A poly-cultural milieu is a social space where society and culture (religious, political, artistic, moral, etc.) function. This environment is created by interpenetration and mutual influence of highly diverse, historically determined national and regional cultures. They defy clear-cut criteria that would have guided an individual in a cultural and spiritual quest.<sup>1</sup>

The historically conditioned poly-cultural milieu presupposes qualitatively different ties between its elements in each of the historical epochs. Today, the content and structure of poly-cultural environment have become complicated to the extent that the spiritual development of personality cannot be adequately comprehended without analyzing and appreciating the role of poly-cultural environment and the mechanisms of its functioning. There is no cultural component identical to all cultures that can be set aside as the feature that sets any given nation apart from the rest. In some cases, this role belongs to language, in others—to religion, behavior, etc.

It should be noted that it is wrong to ignore culture as a medium of ethnic specifics. Ethnicity is a specific cultural component. Linguistic community disappears together with the tongue; religious community falls apart when some of its members change their religious convictions. If an ethnicity invariably disappeared when it lost its language or changed its religious convictions, and if language and ethnicity, linguistic and ethnic divisions invariably coincided, it would have become unnecessary to delimitate these concepts; the same is applicable to the ethnicity/religion pair. This means that the philosophical analysis of the structure of the sociocultural milieu, its content and the mechanisms of its functioning comes to the fore.

It is important to note that the condition of a poly-cultural milieu is considerably affected by the level of the country's economic development, the social policy of the state, the intellectual potential of society, historical traditions, religious situation, etc.

Today, the development of inter-confessional relations inside a poly-cultural milieu should not be regarded as a purely spontaneous process. It can be regulated and its regulation and governance require a profound examination and deeper comprehension.

This paper discusses the two aspects of the dynamics of inter-confessional relations in a poly-confessional environment:

- as mutually conditioned coexistence of several confessions in a poly-cultural environment that form a socially important “environment-religious confession” system;
- as mutually conditioned changes that led to the appearance of new qualities, features, structural elements, functions, etc. in poly-cultural milieus and confessions.

The milieu/confession interaction leads to qualitative changes in each of these subsystems and ensures, on the one hand, the uninterrupted development of human cultures and, on the other, evolutionary self-improvement of any given confession. The interaction between confessions and the milieu, the components of an integral functional system is realized through active and creative activities of a social actor.

As a sum-total of life conditions of an individual and the main determinant of his needs, a poly-cultural milieu is a form and product of activities of members of different cultures. The factors that inspire the actors' social activity spiritually enrich all sorts of micro-milieus (the closest circles) and the poly-cultural milieu per se.

In Russia, a poly-cultural, poly-ethnic and poly-confessional state, the dialog among confessions and between confessions and the state is a natural element of social development. The deepness, trends and nature of inter-confessional relations depend not only on collective goal-setting, but also on the spiritual values shared by all those involved.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: A.M. Buttaeva, Ph.D. thesis *Spetsifika dukhovnogo bytia cheloveka v usloviakh polikulturnoy sredy*, Makhachkala, 2003.

## A Few Words about the Past

The present is incomprehensible without the knowledge of the past, while a clear understanding of the place of certain past events in the present context allows us to comprehend the place of one's country, one's people and culture on Earth and the role of any individual and each people in the history of mankind. Much of what was discovered and invented by our ancestors is preserved in human culture in a "concealed" form. Any human being is a result of the planet's cultural development, a knot in the highly complicated network of poly-cultural relations, as an expression of historical destinies of peoples, classes and states. It is a unique cultural phenomenon that reflects the complexities of the world and individual fates, a singular combination of natural talents with education and life experience imposed on it. All people have certain ethnic features, they represent their ethnicities, they imagine their fates as connected with the fates of other ethnicities, yet highly distinctive; they consider their cultures to be unique components of common culture of the planet Earth and speak their own languages. Each of us brings certain features of our ethnicities common to all mankind or belonging to each of their cultures from the past into the future.

Religion is a part of history. All religions are fairly complicated structures with features shared (at least, partly) by other religions and each with the specific characteristics that distinguish them from other religions. Religion is a comparative category and should be examined as such. Comparisons are based on objective characteristics of various peoples as vehicles of world-view philosophies, such as the areas where they live, the poly-cultural nature of people's communities, specifics of their lifestyle, etc.

Russia is home to many religions, Orthodoxy and Islam having the biggest number of followers. The share of citizens of Russia in the confessions:

- Parishioners of the Russian Orthodox Church—41%
- Muslims—7%
- Orthodox Christians (non-ROC)—4%
- Pagans, Old Believers and followers of the traditional religions of Russia—1.5%
- Buddhists—0.5%
- Protestants—about 3%
- Catholics—0.2%
- Judaists—about 0.1%
- Non-affiliated believers—25%
- Followers of other religions—5-6%
- Atheists—14%.<sup>2</sup>

Today, the relations between Islam and Christianity are one of the most sensitive issues of inter-confessional relations in Russia and one of the most urgent problems in religious studies. This is caused by numerous prejudices, lack of knowledge of the fundamentals of one's own religion, let alone other religions.

As monotheist religions, Islam and Christianity address the souls of their followers and demand that they not only observe rituals and make certain sacrifices, but also become devoted to a definite system of ideas. In the first millennium A.D. any minor (from a contemporary point of view) devia-

<sup>2</sup> See: "Religii narodov Rossii v sovremennosti i v dokhristianskuiu epokhu," available at [<http://sam-sebe-psycholog.ru/articles/religii-narodov-rossii-v-sovremennosti-i-v-dokhristianskuyu-epokhu>], 11 Ma,y 2019.

tion from a dogma or rite was important to an extent unimaginable in the late first millennium B.C. and defies our imagination now.

Today, world congresses of representatives of Christian churches convene, Christian, Muslim, Judaic, Buddhist and other clergy assemble to discuss issues of faith. In the 200-800 A.D., (and often later) church congresses turned into ministers anathematizing each other.

Intolerance is not limited to religion: in Byzantium and Medieval Europe social disturbances stirred up by both class and national liberation struggles took the form of religious wars.

Today, there are dozens of different trends in Islam and Christianity, and practically none of them are limited to one people or one country. It seems that the religions inauspiciously defined as “national religions” are, in fact, not limited to one people. For example, Hinduism has not gone beyond the space of South Asia, yet it is adopted by dozens of ethnicities of India and Nepal. Confucianism, habitually perceived as a Chinese religious teaching, has followers among the Koreans and the Vietnamese. The list can be continued.

Paradoxically enough, national relations have deteriorated in the epoch of *glasnost*. Today, different peoples who paid little attention to religious affiliation, deliberately deepen and aggravate ethnic and confessional specifics; “we” is juxtaposed to “them”, that is, significantly more importance is artificially attached to ethnic self-awareness.

## **The Globalized Present: Specifics of Inter-Confessional Relations in Poly-Cultural Milieus**

Today, poly-cultural milieus exist and develop under the following conditions:

- (1) all peoples have the right to a lifestyle and culture of their own;
- (2) any national culture should develop;
- (3) each living tongue deserves careful and thoughtful attention.

These conditions should become the basis of harmonious coexistence of the confessions functioning within any given milieu. Indeed, “The *bridges* which tie together different *philosophical points of view* decrease the disproportions in the development of human society, which, to a certain extent, is a self-unfolding process calling for humanistic ideals. In Daghestan (and elsewhere), there are certain public and political forces and national movements trying to saddle religious revival and consolidate spiritual life (closely associated with popular national customs and rites) to pursue their own interests. This is true of Christianity and Islam, the republic’s two most popular religions.”<sup>3</sup>

We can identify three levels of destructive feelings in religious consciousness. First of all, narrowmindedness, limitations caused by the unwillingness to go beyond one’s own religious ideas about the world. This is the level where religious prejudices frequently appear. Religious egoism emerges at the second level, when people try to promote their own religion at the expense of others. Religious phobias, that is, undisguised hatred of other, “alien” religions, appear at the third level.

Outcrops of destructive feelings in any religion should be suppressed, and not only when their extreme manifestations occur. This is what happened in Kizlyar (Daghestan), where in February 2018, on Shrove Sunday, a 22-year-old local man shot at people who were leaving the local church

---

<sup>3</sup> A. Buttaeva, “Islam in Polyconfessional Daghestan,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 13, Issue 1, 2012, pp. 69-70.



after the service, killing five women and wounding several people. This tragedy is known as Bloody Shrove.<sup>4</sup>

“Everyday” forms of these feelings are even more dangerous: they spread far and wide beyond inter-confessional relations to damage other communication forms. Religious feelings are highly susceptible, which means that words should be weighed carefully, so as not to stir suspicions that one confession is favored or that somebody was fired from work because of religious preferences. The media should learn to be impartial when covering inter-confessional subjects. People are especially sensitive to encroachments on their national and religious feelings. Meanwhile, our media prefer sensations in pursuance of commercial success and wider audiences; they stir up the basest of feelings, including everyday phobias. The media, television in particular, are not fully utilizing their potentials in the harmonization of inter-confessional relations, and fine-tuning the inter-confessional and inter-national dialog and cooperation.

Harmonious inter-confessional relations may be affected by failed expectations in specific situations related to everyday life, career prospects, urbanization, etc. In order to accept and understand the religious convictions of members of different confessions, we should grasp and adopt a certain ideology. It is not simple, and requires an ability to understand and accept, as well as an openness to dialog.

Rules, values, principles and convictions should be mutually adaptable in different ways that vary by context. Mutual respect of “alien” values frequently stirs up reciprocal gratitude and helps achieve mutual understanding at the level defined as personal by psychologists and sociologists. It is highly important to accept the fact that the majority of the traits—patriotism, courage, firmness of purpose, determination to cognize supreme truth, etc.—are common to all mankind. This means that there is no monopoly of any ethnicity on these traits. We can discuss the differences between ethnicities when it comes to their manifestations.<sup>5</sup>

Every measure should be taken to maintain the precarious balance that prevents conflicts or unacceptable choices. This is the main condition of adequate existence of any poly-confessional society. It should be our goal since our knowledge is limited—we will never fully comprehend people, culture or religion. We should bear in mind, however, that this precarious balance may collapse and, therefore, requires comprehensive support.

Therefore, dialog as the meaning and way of life is impossible if not all actors are ready to join it, if there is no tolerant attitude to peoples and communities that profess different religious values. The main characteristic of any culture that makes it a culture is its openness to dialogue as an internal ability to look at itself as if from the outside and enter into a dialog with itself and, on the other hand, to exist on the borderline of other cultures.

Isaiah Berlin, a great 20th century thinker, wrote: “These visions differ with each successive social whole—each has its own gifts, values, modes of creation, incommensurable with one another: each must be understood in its own terms—understood, not necessarily evaluated... Values may easily clash within the breast of a single individual; and it does not follow that, if they do, some must be true and others false.”<sup>6</sup>

Regulation of inter-confessional relations requires special attention to the poly-cultural milieu. We all know that joint work and other activities and favorable communication establish friendly international and inter-confessional contacts. At the same time, social and cultural specifics come to the fore in the poly-ethnic and poly-confessional milieu. People tend to compare occupations and the

---

<sup>4</sup> See: “Krovavaia Maslennitsa. Chto izvestno o rasstrele prikhozhan tserkvi v Kizlyare, 19 February, 2018, available at [<https://narzur.ru/krovavaja-maslenica-chto-izvestno-o-rasstrele-prikhozhan-cerkvi-v-kizljare/>], 11 May, 2019.

<sup>5</sup> See: Yu.P. Platonov, *Narody mira v zerkale geopolitiki*, St. Petersburg, 2000, 224 pp.

<sup>6</sup> I. Berlin, *The Pursuit of the Ideal*, Princeton University Press, available at [<http://assets.press.princeton.edu/chapters/s9983.pdf>].

lifestyle and values of their culture to the culture of others. They may not share these values, but if their minds are open, they realize that others may hold values different from theirs, that they should communicate with others regardless of their values and that others' values are closely connected with their life goals, and that achieving them also brings joy.

On the other hand, before mastering the skill of appreciation of other cultures, people should be open to their own culture, be patriots of their country. They should be aware of their closeness to their native land, accept the cultural traditions and customs of their people and understand the language of their culture. Vissarion Belinsky, a prominent Russian philosopher and literary critic, wrote at one time: "Those who do not belong to their fatherland, do not belong to mankind."<sup>7</sup> The road towards a better understanding of other cultures goes from native to world culture; it is the only road that leads to a constructive and reasonable dialogue of cultures and religions.

### *Conclusion*

The social space, where a society develops and culture in all its hypostases (religious, political, artistic, moral, etc.) exists and advances, constitutes the main reason to constructively organize inter-confessional relations. The poly-cultural milieu is poly-ethnic and poly-confessional, which means that a common national culture may share its territory with religious and cultural variety dissolved in the ethno-cultural variety.

The irreversible processes launched by the globalization of all spheres of social life pre-determine the world community's path towards a variety of interconnections and interdependencies of different countries, peoples and cultures. There are practically no ethnic cultures in the world free from cultural impacts of other peoples. The same fully applies to the religious sphere. Today, nobody can dispute the fact that cultural exchanges and direct contacts between state institutions, social groups, religious communities and public movements of different countries are far more extensive than before in the social life of many peoples.

Thus, any society, especially in the poly-cultural Russian regions require the optimal mechanisms of regulation of inter-confessional and inter-ethnic interactions based on the principles of humanism and tolerance. Today, there is no well-substantiated national policy in Russia, which is a fact that should not be ignored. Inter-ethnic and interreligious tension is the result of unbalanced relations in all spheres of a poly-cultural society; it has moved to the fore as the main feature of the relations between peoples and is largely responsible for the unfavorable social and psychological contexts. This calls for new methods of consolidation of the spiritual and moral constants. In Russia, religion is best suited to address these tasks, yet unified norms of inter-confessional interaction are hardly possible in this poly-ethnic and poly-confessional socio-cultural space.

---

<sup>7</sup> V. Belinsky, "On Children's Books," in: B. V. Belinsky, *Collected Works*, in 9 vols., Vol. 3, 1840-1841, Khudozhestvennaia literatura Publishers, Moscow, 1976.

## NORTH OSSETIA-ALANIA: RELIGION IN THE AXIOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF ITS POPULATION

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.12>

Anjela GABUEVA

Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology,  
State University of North Ossetia-Alania  
(Vladikavkaz, Russian Federation)

### ABSTRACT

**I**n the last few decades, society in the Russian Federation has been exposed to globalization apparent in all spheres of social life ranging from the economy to worldviews. The globalization processes led to the revival of religion and the consolidation of its positions. The role of religion in the life of the peoples living in Russia varies. The Russian Federation is a state with a diverse ethnic composition, different geographical, climatic conditions and history, a state structured around various religious denominations.

In the 1990s, the religious policy in Russia was fairly ambiguous and vague, to say the least. This was the time when religious institutions acquired new social roles that moved religion to the fore. It regained its lost positions, the statuses of the previously discriminated religious organizations were restored, while previously unheard-of religious movements spread far and wide across the country.

The growing number of religious institutions, their greater role in everyday life of different peoples, the ever increasing authority of their leaders and the emergence of new, non-traditional organizations have created an absolutely new spiritual environment. These processes differ between regions, which means that the state should

establish a well-balanced religious policy by taking local specifics into account, among other things.

Religion and religious ideologies are realized on the basis of the altered functions and statuses of religions and the behavior of the followers of different religious organizations.

The steadily growing impact of religion in the Northern Caucasus demands closer attention to the transformations of religious beliefs in the context of the social and political statuses of the North Caucasian republics in the Russian Federation.

This article is based on the materials of the large-scale polls of the population of the republics of the North-Caucasian Federal District of the Russian Federation: North-Ossetia-Alania, Chechnia, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Ingushetia, Daghestan and Kabardino-Balkaria carried out in the summer of 2016 by the North-Ossetian Department of Social Studies of the Institute of Socio-Political Research, Russian Academy of Sciences, and the Department of Sociology of the Khetagurov North-Ossetian University which involved 1,200 respondents, including 50 experts (journalists, academics, bureaucrats, members of political parties, people working in the sphere of culture, followers of different religions and legal professionals).

**KEYWORDS:** *radicalization of Islam, religiosity, confession, religious attitudes, religious modernity, stability, sociocultural milieu, transformation, extremism, ethno-nationalism, ethnic religions, values, traditional religions.*

## *Introduction*

The institution of religion remains an inalienable part of human life despite the fact that over the course of centuries many social institutions such as marriages, birthdays and certain holydays lost their initial religious meanings.

The latest studies have demonstrated that a quarter of the total population of Russia should be regarded as genuinely religious. About 80% of Russians are Orthodox Christians, while church attendance is limited to about 20% of that number. Religiosity is much higher among the non-Orthodox peoples, where consolidation is one of its most important functions of religion.

Muslims of the Northern Caucasus speak of themselves as absolutely religious people: they identify religion with morals and other social regulators; religious dogmas are observed like laws; the steadily increasing impact of the religious factor on the ethno-political and social processes is capable of stirring up social conflicts.

They can be ignited by political and economic contradictions that create extremists. Those who refuse to accept the authorities' political decisions turn to radical Islam as an instrument of opposition. Adherents of terrorist organizations (i.e., Imarat Kavkaz, liquidated by the end of 2017) are pursuing their own aim: an independent Islamic state in the Northern Caucasus with international contacts in the globalized world. The steadily growing impact of religion on social life in the North Caucasian republics of the Russian Federation increases the opposition between the insurgents and the authorities.

The growth of religious self-awareness, religious identity and self-perception not as an ethnic group but as part of the great Muslim civilization is highly typical of the "Islamic" republics of Russia.<sup>1</sup> Mosques are built, Islamic customs and rites are restored, Muslim education is receiving increasingly more attention. We can even say that we are observing the politicization and radicalization of Islam.

The religious context of this sort inevitably attracts attention of the academic community of the Northern Caucasus. This explains why in 2016 the North Ossetian Center for Sociological Studies organized and carried out an ethnocultural study of the Religious Situation in the Republics of the Northern Caucasus, in which I took part. This paper presents the results obtained in the Republic North Ossetia-Alania.

## **The Degree of Religiosity**

The republic stands apart from its North Caucasian neighbors where its religious image is concerned. On the one hand, we should take its multiethnic nature into account, with members of different ethnicities belonging to different confessions. On the other hand, the titular ethnicity is not ethnically homogenous. Normally, Ossetians are defined as Christians, which is not entirely true. Christi-

---

<sup>1</sup> See: M.M. Mehedlova, Yu.A. Gavrilov, A.G. Shevchenko, E.N. Kafanova, "Rol religioznogo faktora v sotsialnoy adaptatsii v Rossii," *Rossia reformiruiushchiasia*, Annual issue, 2016, pp. 468-493.

anity came to the Northern Caucasus in the 6th century when the first Zikhia See was set up; several decades later the Alan See was set up on Kuban.<sup>2</sup> The absolute majority of Ossetians, who are descendants of the Alans, profess Christianity. A considerable part of them (about 15%) are Muslims; until the revolution of 1917 their share was much greater—up to 40%. Islam had reached this area in the Middle Ages, yet the culture and features of ancient faiths were and remain among the prominent factors of religiosity of the local population. Today, traditional religion plays an important role among the Ossetians: a third of the nation considers themselves followers of Styr XwytSau (The Great God) and prays to it in sacred groves.

The set of religious ideas is highly important as a component part of the structure of the ideas about the world. Materials of sociological studies have revealed which of the values (work, career, the family, friends and acquaintances, leisure, politics) are more important than religion for the citizens of the republic (see Table 1). Religion as a social phenomenon will be discussed here through the lens of empirical material.

Table 1

**Everyday Life Values of the Population of North Ossetia-Alania**

	Work, Career	Family	Friends and Acquaintances	Leisure	Politics	Religion
Not important at all	0.0	0.8	1.6	1.6	14.8	10.6
Not very important	5.5	0.8	8.7	25.4	48.4	26.8
Fairly important	36.2	3.9	55.1	53.2	30.5	43.3
Very important	58.3	94.5	34.6	19.8	6.3	19.5
Undecided	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

In a world that has economy at its core, career is believed to be one of the fundamental values. At the threshold of adult live all and everyone has to select his/her priorities: the choice is between family and self-realization/career. For the majority of the republic's population (58.3%) career is a very important life value; 36.2% agree that work is fairly important; and merely 5.5% dismiss it as unimportant.

The family, however, is more important than career for the absolute majority of the polled: 94.5% said that their families are the most important factor of their lives; 3.9% described them as fairly important; and a meager 0.8% believe that the family was not important or not very important.

Over half of the North Ossetia population spoke of friends and acquaintances as a fairly important component of their lives; 34.6% believed that friends were very important; for 8.7% they were not important, while 1.6% described friends as unimportant. The large share of those who cherish their friends and acquaintances means that the ties between people or even families are very important for those who live in North Ossetia-Alania.

Leisure is very important for 19.8% of the total population; the majority (53.2%) said that it was fairly important, while a quarter of the polled (25.4%) were indifferent; 1.6% said that leisure was not important at all.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See: Z.N. Vaneev, "Rodovoy stroy v Osetii," *IYuONII*, Tskhinvali, No. 5, 1946.

<sup>3</sup> See: Kh.V. Dzutsev, "Prichiny mezhnatsionalnoy napriazhennosti i ekstremizma v respublikakh Severo-Kavkazskogo federalnogo okruga Rossii," *Gumanitarniy Yuga Rossii*, No. 2, 2014, pp. 94-106.

A third of the republic's population said that politics was fairly important for them. Only 6.3% described it as a very important component of their lives. Half of the polled (48.4%) dismissed politics as not very important, while 14.8%, as not important at all.

In North Ossetia-Alania only 19.5% spoke of religion as very important; 43.3%, as fairly important; a quarter of the total (26.8%) as not very important. One out of ten of residents of North Ossetia (10.6%) feel comfortable without religion. According to the sociological study in the North Caucasian Federal District, religion is very important for the absolute majority in Chechnya (83.3%) and Ingushetia (82.3%). In other republics the shares of those who speak of religion as very important are slightly smaller—63.6% in Karachaevo-Cherkessia, 43.7% in Kabardino-Balkaria, 41.9% in Dagestan.

Sociologists are convinced that religion will serve as an instrument of a system of tolerant coexistence of different ethnicities.<sup>4</sup> This generally coincides with sociological results: 70.8% of the expert community believe that the family (clan) was and will remain the most important value for all Caucasian peoples. The family is less important for the young people (especially in cities). It is much more important in the countryside where the family is connected with land and house issues. In cities, sexual life does not require a person to be married. One of the experts refers to the family as a “shelter.”

Only a quarter of the experts believe that career is an absolute priority, by which they mean work as a source of means of subsistence, not as a calling. It is a second important value for 45.8% of respondents. Experts have pointed out that it is not that easy to find a job, jobs are few and far between. Work has become a priority, but not a method of self-realization. Young people who prefer the Western lifestyle move to big cities in Russia or emigrate.

Friends and acquaintances occupy the third place among the priorities in the North Caucasian republics; men and urban youth point to them as most important source of indispensable information and support.

A number of experts (20.8%) put religion in the third place; the same share of the polled put it on the fourth place; 16.7% of the expert community (mainly in Chechnya and Ingushetia) put it in the second place. Only 8.3% of the polled experts in Ingushetia and Dagestan moved it to the first place and specified that it was most important “for deeply religious people.” The majority of the expert community believes that the North Caucasian population is generally not very religious.

The experts pointed to the low level of political awareness in the Northern Caucasus: 29.1% of the polled put politics on the fourth place; a quarter of experts pushed it down to the fifth. According to the large-scale survey, population of Dagestan was more politicized than that of other republics. One out of four respondents stated that politics played an important role in his/her life. Most of the respondents in other republics answered this question negatively.

16.7% of experts are convinced that leisure comes in the fifth place in the life of local people; one out of five experts (20.8%), puts it on the sixth place. According to the majority, it does not play an important role in the life of the North Caucasian population. They are not accustomed to leisure and use their free time to earn money on the side, for home repairs and visits to relatives. None of the experts mentioned leisure as a time to improve qualification or engage in a hobby. One of them put it in a nutshell: “Success at work and a happy family adequately compensate for the lack of leisure time.”

The respondents and the absolute majority of experts agree that religion is very important, but not exceptionally important, in the axiological structure of the North-Ossetian society.<sup>5</sup> One-fifth of the experts spoke about the predominant interest in religion, while others believed that it came third

<sup>4</sup> See: Kh.V. Dzutsev, *Etnosotsiologicheskyy portret respublik Severo-Kavkazskogo federalnogo okruga Rossiyskoy Federatsii*, ROSSPEN, Moscow, 2012, p. 357.

<sup>5</sup> See: V.A. Tishkov, *Etnichnost i religia v sovremennykh konfliktakh*, The Miklukho-Maklai Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, RAS, Nauka Publishers, Moscow, 2012, 651 pp.

or even fourth on the scale of interests of the local people. It also followed from the answers of the inhabitants of North Ossetia that religion was even less important for them than for Russian and Russian-speaking respondents.

When asked about the place of religion on their value scales, neither the younger or the older generation in the other republics of the Northern Caucasus spoke of it as a priority. Our respondents were much more concerned about the problem of employment among the younger generation, crime, their own material welfare and interpersonal relations, that is, about social and economic problems. The positive answers to the questions about religion and the relationships with the closest circle confirmed that the communal form of life predominated in everyday life and in the minds of North Caucasian highlanders.

Positive answers to the question about religion and its importance were rare among the respondents of North Ossetia. In fact, it turned out that the level of religiosity among the polled in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria was much lower than among the population of Chechnia, Ingushetia and Karachaevo-Cherkessia.

Due to psychological, historical, geographic and ethnic factors religion has been occupying the same positions in people's minds for many years. In fact, religion appeared and survived due to the spiritual requirements of people who needed consolation, who wanted to feel protected in the face of cruel reality and sought harmonious development and peace of mind. Religion creates a certain comprehensive and objective understanding and description of the way of human existence in this world. It is closely connected with the absolute nature of the concepts of human existence. Religion existed in the past, exists today and will exist in the future as a special idea about life, an individual perception of the world and an answer to the question about the meaning of life.

Ethnicity is another factor behind the long history of religion. A people (ethnicity) is the bearer of traditions through history, while religion is, in fact, one of the traditions. It keeps smaller peoples together, which explains why the faith of the Muslim peoples is closely connected with folk traditions.<sup>6</sup> In Muslim families, religiosity is transferred from one generation to another along with customs, ideas about the world and rules of conduct. Religiosity consolidates its positions amid ethnic conflicts and social upheavals, which adds special importance to ethnic cohesion.<sup>7</sup>

## *Conclusion*

The family in the sense of a clan was and remains the main value for the Caucasian peoples. According to the data obtained so far it is an absolute priority.

Work, which is direly needed to support a family, comes second on the scale of values.

The third place on the same scale is shared by "friends and acquaintances" and "religion". Half of those polled in the Northern Caucasus spoke of friendship and good relations as extremely important. Men and young people said that friends and acquaintances meant a lot in their lives; in view of the highly special mentality of the Caucasian mountaineers, the opinions of blood relatives, relatives-in-law and neighbors become particularly significant.

According to 20.8% of the experts, religion occupies the third place, while the same share of the polled believe that it comes fourth; 16.7% of the expert community regarded it as the second priority.

---

<sup>6</sup> See: M.M. Mchedlova, "Religia, obshchestvo, gosudarstvo: vyzovy i ugrozy sovremennosti," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniia*, No. 10, 2016, pp. 110-118.

<sup>7</sup> See: Kh.V. Dzutsev, "Prichiny mezhnatsionalnoy napriazhennosti i ekstremizma v respublikakh Severo-Kavkazskogo federalnogo okruga Rossii."

The mechanism of religious attitudes is the part of human personality responsible for the ideas about the world. In fact, the ideas and doctrines that emerged as religious teachings gradually blend with culture to develop as products of group (people's) or individual culture and set axiological landmarks. An individual might be unaware that they are rooted in religion. This means that religious ideas about the world will survive as part of culture as long as mankind survives.

Despite the steadily growing number of atheists, it can be stated with a great degree of certainty that religion will not disappear for a great number of reasons. There are psychological reasons (consolation), social (religion keeps people together), historical, cultural and everyday factors. Whatever religion relies on — fear or love — its positions in human minds are firm.

---



# ETHNIC RELATIONS AND MIGRATION

## REASONS FOR AND FACTORS IN EDUCATIONAL MIGRATION FROM KAZAKHSTAN

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.13>

**Gulnar NASIMOVA**

*D.Sc. (Political Science), Professor,  
Department of Political Science and Political Technologies,  
Al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

**Cynthia S. KAPLAN**

*Ph.D., Professor, Department of Political Science,  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
(Santa Barbara, U.S.)*

**Kadyrzhan SMAGULOV**

*Ph.D., Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science and  
Political Technologies, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

---

*The article is prepared in the framework of the scientific project on subject "Educational Migration from Kazakhstan: Trends, Factors and Socio-Political Research" under the grant AP05134108 financed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan.*

Kirill KARTASHOV

Sociologist, Head of Projects,  
Center of Business Information,  
Sociological and Marketing Studies  
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)

## ABSTRACT

Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the article examines the causes of educational migration from Kazakhstan. It also determines the degree of influence of economic and socio-political factors affecting the choice of the country of study and educational institution.

**KEYWORDS:** educational migration, youth, socio-political factors, economic factors.

## Introduction

Trends in educational migration, the outflow of talented youth and uncompensated educational migration are pertinent issues for many countries.<sup>1</sup> For Kazakhstan, intellectual migration is an urgent problem in connection with the country's strategic task of creating a knowledge-based and innovative economy, strengthening the scientific and educational spheres, and improving the lives of its citizens. "Migration processes are of concern to both the expert community and the population. The outflow of the population carries negative consequences that affect the country's competitiveness and social stability, and the overall process of the country's development," researchers conclude.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, the problem of "brain drain" and its economic, social and political consequences came into focus of studies conducted by Kazakhstani scientists.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: A. Lulle, L. Buzinska, "Between a 'Student Abroad' and 'Being from Latvia': Inequalities of Access, Prestige, and Foreign-Earned Cultural Capital," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 8, 2017, pp. 1362-1378; S. Beech, "International Student Mobility: A Critical Overview," *Laboring and Learning*, 2017, pp. 285-303; F.L. Collins, "Researching Mobility and Emplacement: Examining Transience and Transnationality in International Student Lives," *Area*, No. 44 (3), 2012, pp. 296-304; J. Tan, "Introduction," in: *The International Mobility of Students in Asia and the Pacific*, UNESCO, Paris, 2013, pp. 1-5; C. Yue, "International Student Mobility: China," in: *The International Mobility of Students in Asia and the Pacific*, pp. 18-28; R. Choudaha, "Three Waves of International Student Mobility (1999-2020)," *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 42, No. 5, 2017, pp. 825-832.

<sup>2</sup> See: B. Bokayev, A. Zholdybalina, "Migratsionnye trendy v Kazakhstane v kontekste razvitiia intellektualnogo potentsiala," *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 2, 2019, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup> See: E. Sadovskaya, "Obrazovatelnaia migratsiia iz Kazakhstana v Kitay: operezhaiushchaia dinamika na fone drugikh vidov migratsiy," *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 1, 2014, p. 14; S. Koshanova, B. Rakisheva, A. Mazhitova, G. Ashkenova, "Nekotoryye aspekty uchebnoy migratsii iz Respubliki Kazakhstan v Kitayskuiu Narodnuiu Respubliku," *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 1 (75), 2016, pp. 63-82; B.I. Rakisheva, D.V. Poletaev, "Uchebnaia migratsiia iz Kazakhstana v Rossiiu kak odin iz aspektov strategicheskogo sotrudnichestva v ramkakh razvitiia Tamozhennogo soiuz," *Evrasiiskaia ekonomicheskaiia integratsiia*, No. 3 (12), August 2011, pp. 84-101.

The volumes of migration of Kazakhstani applicants are growing year to year. Thus, according to various estimates, the annual outflow is about 20-30,000 students. According to official data, as many as 31,287 people left the country in the first 8 months of 2019 alone.<sup>4</sup>

In order to examine the causes and factors of educational migration, the following questions require answers. What criteria do young people use when choosing a foreign education and country of study? Do the quality and accessibility of Kazakhstani education affect educational migration from the country? Do such factors as reputation, quality of the teaching staff, and employment options determine the choice of a university? Do political factors influence the educational migration from Kazakhstan?

## Research Methods

The study used the in-depth interview method and focus group discussions. A total of 70 in-depth interviews and 5 focus group discussions with undergraduate and graduate students studying abroad were conducted. 3 focus groups and 25 in-depth interviews were conducted in Russia, 2 focus groups and 15 in-depth interviews—in China. 10 interviews were conducted with students studying in the U.S., 13—with those studying in Europe, 7—in other countries.

The studies were conducted between September 2018 and December 2019. The guide's block of questions was aimed at identifying the main causes and factors that affect educational migration from Kazakhstan and the criteria that guide applicants in choosing a country of study. Each interview and focus group responses were encoded in a matrix based on the fuzzy sets (QCA) proposed by C. Ragin.<sup>5</sup> The method made it possible to establish patterns and compare the causes and factors that influenced the student's choice of the country of study.

## In Which Countries Does Kazakhstani Youth Study?

The following sources of data were used to determine the trajectory of educational migration from Kazakhstan and the number of Kazakhstani students studying in foreign countries: state statistics, the Institute of Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and information from foreign universities.

As of 2018, 120,000 people were studying abroad.<sup>6</sup> The geography of the principal flows of students is diverse and covers about 50 countries. According to the ministries of education of the Russian Federation and China for the 2016-2017 academic year, 70,000 people were studying in Russia (almost every fourth foreign student, both in-person and remote, is from Kazakhstan),<sup>7</sup> and approximately 14,000 study in China.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Official Internet resource of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan [mfa.kz], 20 March, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> See: *Ragin C.C. The Comparative Method. Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies.* University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, L., 1987.

<sup>6</sup> See: "Skolko kazakhstanskikh studentov uchitsia za granitsej," Today.kz—round-the-clock information portal, 2018, available at [<http://today.kz/news/kazakhstan>], 20 March, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> See: "Eksport rossiyskikh obrazovatelnykh uslug," Statistical collection, Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, Issue 6, Sotsiotsentr, Moscow, 2016, 408 pp.

<sup>8</sup> See: "Is China Both a Source and Hub for International Students?" Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016, available at [<https://chinapower.csis.org/china-international-students>], 20 March, 2020.

It's important to note that statistics do not always provide complete and accurate information; there are discrepancies in the figures provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and the ministries of education of the countries where Kazakhstani youth are studying. Nevertheless, based on the data provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan, it is possible to determine the geography of educational migration from Kazakhstan. According to the latest data, educational institutions in Russia, China, South Korea, the U.S., Canada, Germany, Czech Republic and Poland attract the most Kazakhstani students.<sup>9</sup>

## Reasons for Choosing to Study Abroad

The desire of young people to study abroad is linked to a range of domestic factors and reasons, which are intertwined with the reasons and factors in the country of study.<sup>10</sup> The analysis made it possible to identify common causes and distinctive features of motivation that guides the students in selecting a place to study.

### Quality of Education

The leading factor in choosing a foreign university for Kazakh students, particularly for aspiring master's degree students, is the quality of education. This may be due to the fact that the students entering master's degree programs are more conscious and selective in their choice because of their age and an already obtained higher education degree. Future graduate students, who have usually studied theory in a bachelor's degree program in Kazakhstan, seek an opportunity to gain more in-depth and applied knowledge. Despite the fact that similar educational programs are available in Kazakhstani universities, applicants consciously make a choice in favor of foreign programs, due to the subjectively perceived low quality of education in Kazakhstan. *"I knew that there are programs in my specialty in Kazakhstan. But still, I chose to study abroad, because our country does not provide a good education"* (graduate student from Nanyang Technological University, China).

In comparing Kazakh and foreign education, students conclude that the former is inferior to the latter in many respects. In their opinion, education in Kazakhstan is dissociated from reality and based on outdated teaching methods.

The choice of foreign universities is also determined by the desire to engage in scientific work, which is not at a satisfactory level in Kazakhstan, according to some respondents. Bureaucratized administration of science, a poor material and technical base, and the absence of modern laboratories have become the factors that stimulate educational migration. *"Friends said that it is impossible to conduct serious scientific work in Kazakhstan, and I decided to study in the U.S. The laboratories are new, all conditions for work are in place"* (graduate student from the University of Illinois, U.S.).

The reputation and image of the university also play an important role in choosing a future profession. The vast majority of students often rely on international ratings and heed attention to the quality of the teaching staff. *"This university is one of the top 100 in the world," "This university is*

---

<sup>9</sup> See: "V kakiye strany kazakhstantsy uyezzhaiut uchitsia," 26 October, 2019, *Wfin.kz*—a review and analytical online magazine about the impact of financial and economic factors and technologies on the development of the business environment and companies, 2019, available at [<https://wfin.kz/novosti/obschestvo-i-politika/item/29189-v-kakie-strany-kazakhstantsy-uezzhayut-uchitsya.html>], 20 March, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> See: *Vneshniaia molodezhnaia migratsiia v stranakh Tsentralnoy Azii: analiz riskov i minimizatsiia negativnykh posledstviy*, Astana, 2019, p. 70.

one of the leading British research universities,” students noted during the interview. Typically, students pay attention to the quality of the teaching staff, i.e.: “I chose this university because there are numerous famous professors with an international reputation,” “Before choosing a university and a program, I studied university websites and their instructors for a long time.”

### ***Economic Factors and Personal Financial Means***

Research demonstrated that the unstable economic situation, lack of competition in the business sphere, and low wages in Kazakhstan are the factors that stimulate educational migration. Kazakhstani researchers believe that factors of geographical proximity and close economic cooperation play an important role in choosing a foreign education.<sup>11</sup> Our interviews and focus group discussions demonstrated that the joint economic projects of Kazakhstan with China and Russia and border proximity affect the choice of the country of study. Interviews with students studying in Russia showed that common history and close economic ties between Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation play a role in the selection process. Young people hope that, for example, “there will be an opportunity in the future to find a high-paying job in the EAEU labor market.”

In the absence of financial means, applicants focus on scholarship and grant programs. This is especially true for students studying in China and Russia, who mentioned the problems related to their parents’ financial means more often than other students. They note that the main reason for choosing these countries was free tuition, or its low cost in comparison with Western European universities. In their opinion, universities in China and Russia are more likely to provide a study grant than those in Kazakhstan. These sentiments are expressed by the following comment: “I did not receive a grant for the master’s program. When Russian universities began to offer quotas for foreign students, I decided to take advantage of this opportunity.”

The study also revealed that the majority of respondents associated foreign education with a “good start” of their career, a step up in their social status, and an indicator of success. They are confident that in the future they will be more competitive in the international and domestic labor market than Kazakhstan graduates.

“A foreign diploma is valued. In Kazakhstan, everyone graduated with honors and then goes without work, or works for 100 thousand tenge. If you can graduate abroad, you can work anywhere, in any country, and when you return to Kazakhstan, then all the doors are open for you...” (student of University College London (UCL), specialty management).

They consider the knowledge of a foreign language, independence and ability to adapt in any conditions as their main advantages. “I think that I am much more competitive than my peers who graduated from Kazakhstani universities. They have not seen the world, they were always next to their parents and under their protection. A foreign diploma and knowledge of the English language are required by employers,” says a student from an American university. The desire to travel, to partake of a different culture, to be independent, unwillingness to live with parents are also named among the reasons for studying abroad.

Factors that affect the choice of countries of study were clustered into four groups to identify their degree of importance: the professional and educational factor, personal financial means, the economic factor, and the socio-political factor.

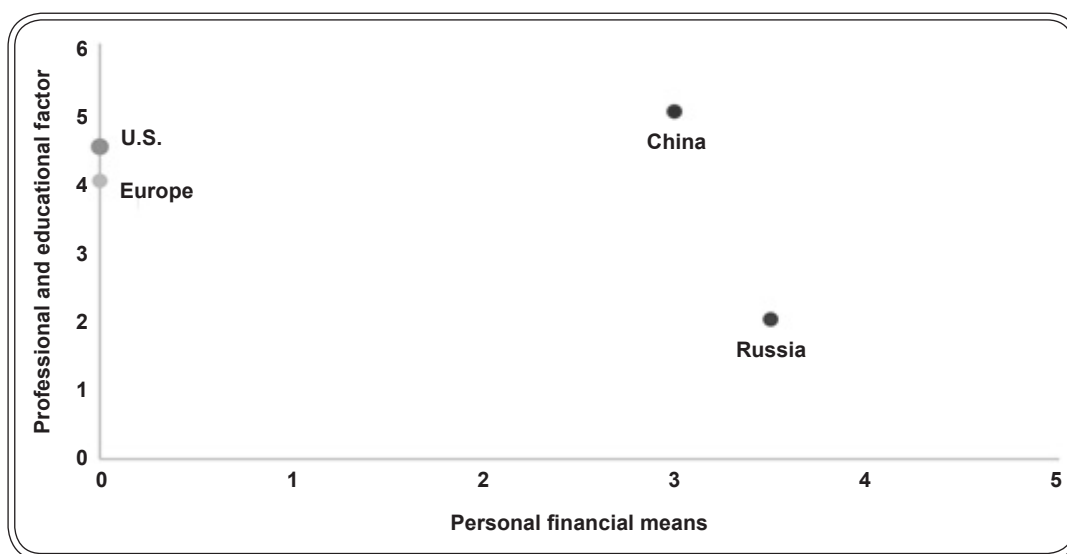
Figure 1 shows the coordinate system where the X axis is the personal financial means of the respondents and their parents, and the Y axis is the professional and educational factors. Obviously,

<sup>11</sup> See: M. Shibusov, “Politicheskiye faktory obrazovatelnoy migratsii iz Kazakhstana,” History. OSTKRAFT, No. 1 (13). M., 2020. C. 148.

the financial factor plays a more important role for those studying in China and Russia than those obtaining an education in the U.S. and Europe.

Figure 1

**Correlation between the Financial and the Professional and Educational Factors in the Choice of Country of Study (N = 70)**



### Socio-Political Factors

For the majority of respondents, the reluctance to study in Kazakhstan is dictated by political factors. For instance, they believe that corruption<sup>12</sup> is the main cause of educational migration.

*“The main problem is corruption. Unemployment, poverty and the lack of social lifts are all the result of corruption. Young people want to leave Kazakhstan in order to get an honest education,”* said a student at a Swiss university.

*“We all know that there is corruption in the education system. Is it a secret that students give a bribe for a good grade? There is a tradition of the writing theses by the research advisors themselves for a ‘fee.’ The Ministry [of Education] knows all about it, but does not want to fight it. Even a scientific grant can only be won through connections,”* said a student studying in the U.K.

They believe that corruption has become the norm in Kazakhstani reality. *“We only get dry figures about a decline in corruption. Even when corrupt officials are arrested, they are released a short time thereafter, or they simply hide abroad,”* students say. According to the students surveyed, anti-corruption measures are ineffective; rather, they are feigned or rooted in politics. Respondents believe that systemic methods of fighting corruption are required today. They should be linked with improving the socio-economic status of the people, the democratization of the political system, the efficiency of public administration, digitalization, and rational budget spending.

<sup>12</sup> According to the results of the annual survey of the global anti-corruption movement Transparency International for 2019 in the ranking of corruption perceptions Kazakhstan ranked 113 out of 180 countries (see: [[https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan\\_news/kazakhstan-zanyal-113-e-mesto-indekse-vospriyatiya-korruptsii-389446/](https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/kazakhstan-zanyal-113-e-mesto-indekse-vospriyatiya-korruptsii-389446/)], 20 March, 2020).

Another important political factor for the respondents is democratic values, which are implemented through the observance of human rights and freedom of speech. Such values are most characteristic of students who chose to study in the United States.

*“In the United States, there is no need to demonstrate your loyalty to the political system and state authorities. The main thing here is not to break the law. No one here is afraid to express their political views, there is no control over students. And in Kazakhstan, instructors control students even in the dorms. It is a violation of rights,”* say the students. In their opinion, political reforms, democratization of political institutions, and respect for human rights in Kazakhstan can stop the “brain drain” from the country.

Authoritarianism, according to most students who chose Western Europe and the United States, is also evident in the relations between teachers and students. Kazakhstani education lacks a democratic environment for scientific discussions.

*“In the U.S. there is no professional barrier between graduate students and professors. The professor and student are colleagues who are equally involved in a discussion. You feel confident in such an audience, you can express your opinion on any topic,”* said a graduate student from an American university.

The study showed the dependence of educational migration on the political situation in the country. This mainly concerns ethnic Russian students studying in Russia and determined to stay in the country after graduation. In their opinion, the conflicts that have arisen in recent years in Kazakhstan cause concern among parents, a sense of ambiguity about the future and force them to leave the country. *“My mother said that life in Kazakhstan used to be peaceful, but conflicts are now frequent. Now I am studying here, and my parents will move here in a year.”*

Note that the influence of parents is crucial in choosing to leave for Russia. *“Parents plan to move here permanently. My parents are doing well, they have jobs. But they are the ones who initiated the move, they worry about us,”* says a student at Lomonosov Moscow State University.

This category of respondents is also concerned about the possible decline in the status of the Russian language in Kazakhstan. This concerns the switch of the Kazakh language to the Latin script. An expert from the Institute of CIS Countries notes that “the switch of the Kazakh language from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet is perceived by many as another indirect step away from Russia. Following this announcement, the number of people wishing to move under the program has increased dramatically.”<sup>13</sup>

Other respondents noted that the lack of knowledge of the Kazakh language is an important factor pushing students towards obtaining an education in Russia. *“I lacked knowledge of the Kazakh language, so I did not get an augmented scholarship. And now Kazakhstan is switching to Latin alphabet,”* said a student at Tomsk State University.

An important factor that affects educational choices is Russia’s policy to attract educational migrants from Kazakhstan. For example, the implementation of the Russia’s federal project “Export of Education” is aimed at increasing the number of foreign students, primarily from post-Soviet states. This is evidenced by the speeches of the Russian leaders, which spell out the strategy of attracting foreign youth to study in Russia and creating attractive conditions and simplifying the procedure for acquiring Russian citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

A substantial argument in favor of Russian education is that Kazakhstani secondary school certificates are recognized without additional evaluation. Experts also note that the minimum exam

<sup>13</sup> See: “Obrazovanie priamo vliiaiet na migratsiiu—eksperty,” available at [<https://vlast.kz/obsshestvo/-kak-migraciya-menala-kazahstan>], 20 March, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> See: “Message from Russian President Vladimir Putin to the Federal Assembly in 2018,” Channel One is the largest television company in Russia, 2018, available in Russian at [<https://www.1tv.ru/shows/vystupleniya-prezidenta-rossii/poslanie-federalnomu-sobraniyu/poslanie-vladimira-putina-federalnomu-sobraniyu-2018-polnaya-versiya>], 20 March, 2020.

score required for admission is often reduced for applicants from Kazakhstan. The stress of the Integrated National Testing, the competitive application process to receive a grant in a number of specialties (even with high scores) are among the reasons for studying abroad. In addition, most students at Russian universities do not consider themselves study migrants. Students from Kazakhstan adapt very successfully to Russia regardless of their ethnicity.<sup>15</sup>

Educational centers play a very significant role. For instance, career counseling meetings held by representatives of foreign universities with high school students played a key part in choosing a place of study for many Kazakhstanis. Most of the respondents noted that they received information about the Russian university and the admission process when they were studying in high school.

This problem is already being raised at the state level. "One of the reasons for the outflow of our best students is the lack of proper effort on the part of Kazakhstani universities. They practically never conduct meetings at schools or meet with talented high school students, while representatives from foreign universities come to our country, conduct conversations and meetings with the top students and offer them preferential conditions for admission to universities in their countries. Of course, since there is no unambiguous statistics, it becomes impossible to bring back and hire specialists after their graduation from foreign universities. There have been negative trends in this sphere, as well. Unable to find a job in their homeland, they once again leave for the countries where they studied, and they are in demand there, since our compatriots are usually among the top students. And this, again, occurs against the background of the shortage of highly qualified specialists in our country," say the politicians.<sup>16</sup>

Numerous high school students, as well as those wishing to enroll in master's degree programs, resort to the services of educational centers that provide consulting services, assist in choosing a university and completing applications. There are approximately 1,000 private educational centers in large Kazakhstani cities.<sup>17</sup> More than a half of them are international educational organizations with extensive connections in the post-Soviet space, in European and Asian countries. They are essentially legal entities that operate within Kazakhstan's legal framework (training centers are not licensed under the law)<sup>18</sup> and provide a constant flow of students to partner universities in foreign countries.

It is difficult to assess the degree of influence of such centers on the processes of educational migration from Kazakhstan, since there are no available data on the number of students using the services provided by educational centers, or conclusive data on actual departures. Data on students who have left to study abroad is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan who work directly with their foreign colleagues and provide visa support for Kazakhstani citizens.<sup>19</sup> However, this information is not publicly available.

Figure 2 demonstrates that the socio-political factor is fundamental for the students studying in the U.S., while this factor is not a principal one for Kazakhstani students of European universities. For the latter, the economic factors in the country of study are paramount, i.e., the level of economic development, high living standards, decent wages, etc.

---

<sup>15</sup> See: A. Sadyrin, "Uchebnyy migrant iz Kazakhstana: pravda ili vymysel?" *Bulletin of the Tomsk State University. History*, No. 2 (40), 2016, p. 130.

<sup>16</sup> See: "Okolo 60 tys. vypusnikov kazakhstanskikh shkol ezhegodno uezhaiut uchitsia za rubezh," *ZONA.kz—Socio-political Internet Newspaper*, 2019, available at [<https://zonakz.net/2019/09/18/okolo-60-tys-vypusnikov-kazaxstanskix-shkol-ezhegodno-uezhayut-uchitsya-za-rubezh/>], 20 March, 2020.

<sup>17</sup> See: "Uchebnye (obrazovatelnye) tsentry Kazakhstana," *Edumart.kz—web market of educational services*, 2019, available at [<https://edumart.kz/ru/users/>], 20 March, 2020.

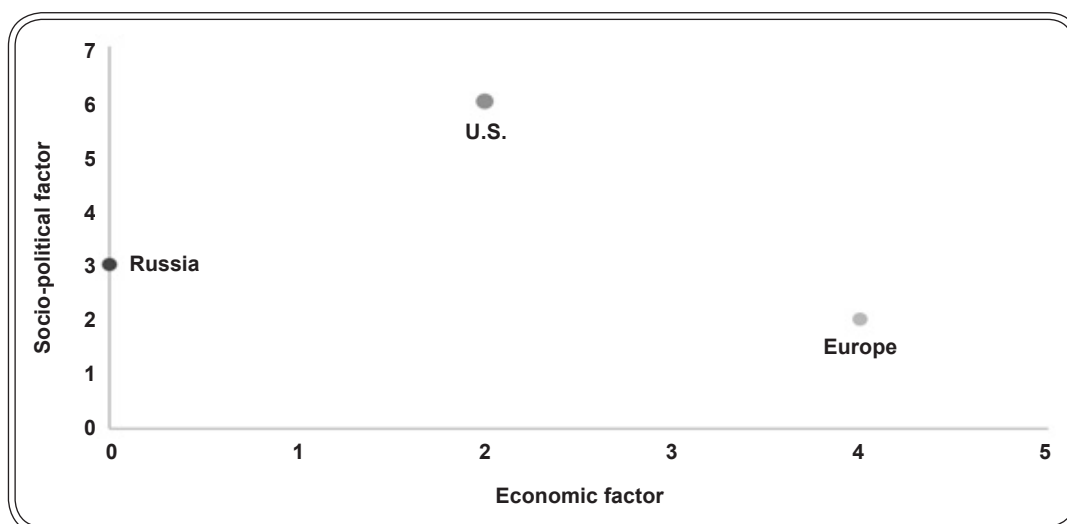
<sup>18</sup> See: Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 16 May, 2014 No. 202-V On Permits and Notifications (with amendments and additions as of 1 August, 2019), available in Russian at [[https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc\\_id=31548200](https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=31548200)], 20 March, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Official Internet resource of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan [[mfa.kz](http://mfa.kz)], 20 March, 2020.



Figure 2

Correlation between the Financial and the Professional and Educational Factors in the Choice of Country of Study (N = 70)



### Conclusion

The result of educational migration from Kazakhstan may be the outflow of talented youth. Once abroad, many will not return to Kazakhstan, deciding to stay in the country of study or to start looking for work in the international labor market. Based on the data obtained during in-depth interviews with a wide range of students from Kazakhstan studying in China, Russia, Europe and the U.S., the following emerged as the motivating factors in favor of studying abroad.

Figure 3 reveals both general reasons and the distinctive characteristics of the motivation of Kazakhstani youth in their choice of foreign universities.

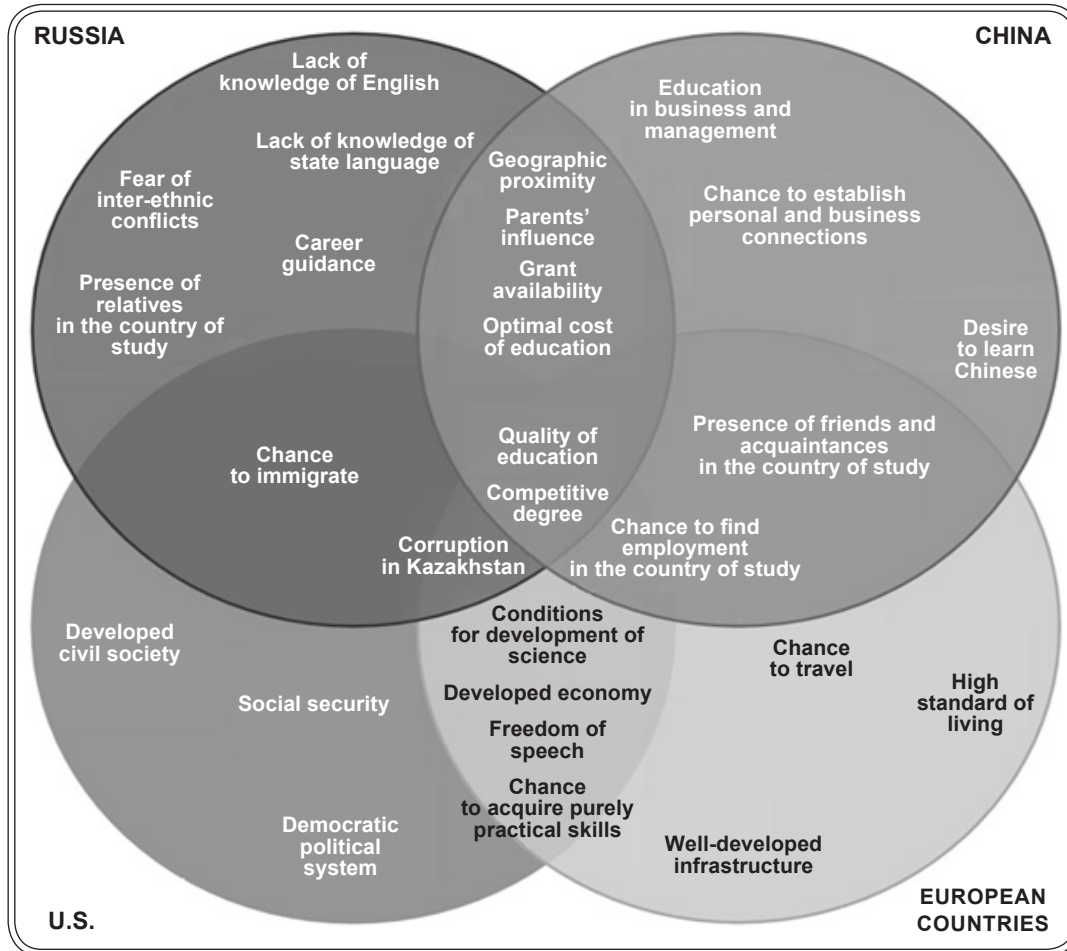
Foreign education is preferred to Kazakhstani education because of the quality of the former and its high places in international ratings. It is believed that qualifications acquired in foreign universities significantly increase the chances of successful employment, both in Kazakhstan and abroad. The desire to avoid bureaucratic procedures and corruption are stimulating factors for educational migration. Economic factors and the family's financial means also play a significant role. Kazakhstanis are also attracted by the tuition discounts offered by certain foreign educational institutions.

Respondents studying in the United States are most characterized by democratic values, i.e., human rights and freedom of speech, which served as the main trigger for their student migration. Students in the U.S. and Western Europe note a freer atmosphere in the classroom.

Of particular interest are the factors that motivate ethnic Russians to obtain a higher education in Russia. Among them are the influence of family members, geographic proximity, the absence of barriers to obtaining Russian citizenship and a concern about a lack of knowledge of the Kazakh language. Career guidance campaigns conducted by foreign educational institutions, especially Russian ones, relieve applicants of the difficulties associated with the entrance exam process, since early admission options are available.

Figure 3

Reasons for Choosing Education Abroad, By Country



Although educational migration can be considered a natural phenomenon, the factors pointed out by students from Kazakhstan indicate the importance of solving problems in the Kazakhstani education system and forecasting the possible negative consequences of educational policy.

**CHINA ON THE INTERNATIONAL  
EDUCATION SERVICES MARKET:  
SPECIFICS OF RECRUITMENT OF  
RUSSIAN STUDENTS AND THEIR ADJUSTMENT  
IN THE PRC**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.3.14>

**Victoria MEDVED**

*Junior Researcher,  
Institute of Demographic Studies,  
Federal Scientific Research Center of  
the Russian Academy of Sciences, Ph.D. Student,  
Department of Demographic and Migration Policy,  
MGIMO University under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

**Sergey RYAZANTSEV**

*D.Sc. (Econ.), Corresponding Member,  
Russian Academy of Sciences, Professor,  
Director of the Institute of Demographic Studies,  
Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology,  
Head of Department of Demographic and Migration Policy,  
MGIMO University under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

**Ivan FILATOV**

*Junior Researcher, Institute of Demographic Studies,  
Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

**Timur MIRYAZOV**

*Junior Researcher, Institute of Demographic Studies,  
Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology  
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

*The research study was funded by RFBR, project number 19-310-90054.*

**ABSTRACT**

**T**he article examines the main characteristics and features of modern educational migration to China. It determines the current trends in the main directions of higher education migration, in particular, the change of the classic East-to-West direction to East-to-East and West-to-East directions. It also investigates the characteristics of China's migration attractiveness in the global educational services market, and certain changes in PRC's migration policy in this context. The article presents the main quantitative indicators, directions and preferences of educational immigrants to China at the present stage. The geographic centers of attraction for foreign applicants are identified along with the

countries of origin of the majority of foreign students studying in China. It highlights the attracting factors, the goals pursued by Russian students in their migration to the People's Republic of China and their general attitudes along with certain adaptive capabilities of Russian students in the host country. The article also analyzes the degree and effectiveness of interaction and cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China in the field of education. It emphasizes the importance of elaborating a clearly conceived migration policy in both countries that would aim to further high-quality mutual progressive development both in the educational, and in the economic sphere.

**KEYWORDS:** *migration, education, educational migration, academic mobility, students, Russian Federation, People's Republic of China, Russian-Chinese cooperation.*

*Introduction*

The phenomenon of China's rapid political and economic development over the past several decades has been actively drawing the attention of people all over the world. The interest in the Chinese education system is also mounting. Today, PRC occupies the leading position in terms of economic growth, which is why students from many countries and regions strive to get a higher education in the Middle Kingdom. The trends in the higher education sphere are shifting. The countries of conventional immigration, as well as the countries that are the most popular among potential educational migrants, namely, the U.S., Canada, Great Britain, Australia, France and Germany, are increasingly less attractive to students from the CIS countries, Asia, Africa, Europe and even America. The vector is gradually shifting towards the East. In the case of China, this trend is explained by the high interest in the Chinese language among young people, a significant number of scholarships for foreign students, the widespread knowledge of the prospects of Chinese diplomas, which are highly valued in almost every country, and the relatively acceptable cost of educational services and accommodation in the PRC.

For many years Russia and China have been successfully and closely cooperating in the economic, international, military-technical, scientific, cultural and educational spheres. Cooperation in the educational sphere has been continuously developing over the past 20 years. The popularity of the PRC among Russian youth continues to gain momentum—even the country's geographical remoteness is not an obstacle. Previously, the majority of students who went to study in China hailed from Russia's eastern regions, while today the geographical origins of Russian students does not play a decisive role. In turn, China, relishes the opportunity to establish a mutually beneficial educational migration flow with Russia.

## PRC on the International Educational Services Market

China is currently the leader not only in the number of students studying abroad, but also one of the frontrunners in the field of international education. Since 1978, the number of foreign students in China has increased 400-fold. To stimulate the influx of foreign students to national higher education institutions, the Chinese government annually allocates thousands of scholarships for their free education. These tools are highly effective, and the People's Republic of China is currently among the most popular destinations for educational migration in the world, ahead of France, Germany and Australia, ranking third after the United States and Great Britain. In 2018, China accounted for about 10% of the total international student market.<sup>1</sup>

The rapid and systematic development of both the import and export of education helps China keep up with the successful international economic activity trend.

According to the statistics published by the Ministry of Education of the PRC, in 2016 the number of foreign students studying in Chinese universities reached 443,000 people, in 2017—489,200, in 2018—492,200 people,<sup>2</sup> 0.6% up from last year. Stable annual growth suggests that China is likely to achieve its goal of attracting half a million overseas educational migrants to the country by the end of 2020.

Foreigners currently studying in China hail from over 200 countries and regions of the world. The first place in China is held by foreign students from various Asian countries (see Table 1).

Table 1

Number of International Students in the PRC, 2018

Continent	Number of Students	Share, %
Asia	295,043	59.95
Africa	81,562	16.57
Europe	73,618	14.96
America	35,733	7.26
Oceania	6,229	1.27

Source: Ministry of Education of the PRC.

In 2018, the main student donor countries in China included South Korea (50,600), Thailand (28,600), Pakistan (28,000), India (23,200) and the United States (21,000). Russia ranks sixth with 19,200 students (see Fig. 1).

Large cities—Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Liaoning, Guangdong, Hubei, Yunnan, Shandong provinces are the traditional centers of attraction for educational migrants (see Fig. 2).

There are currently over 2,000 higher educational institutions and 11 million students in the PRC.<sup>3</sup> More than 500 universities, many of which are included in international rankings, are available

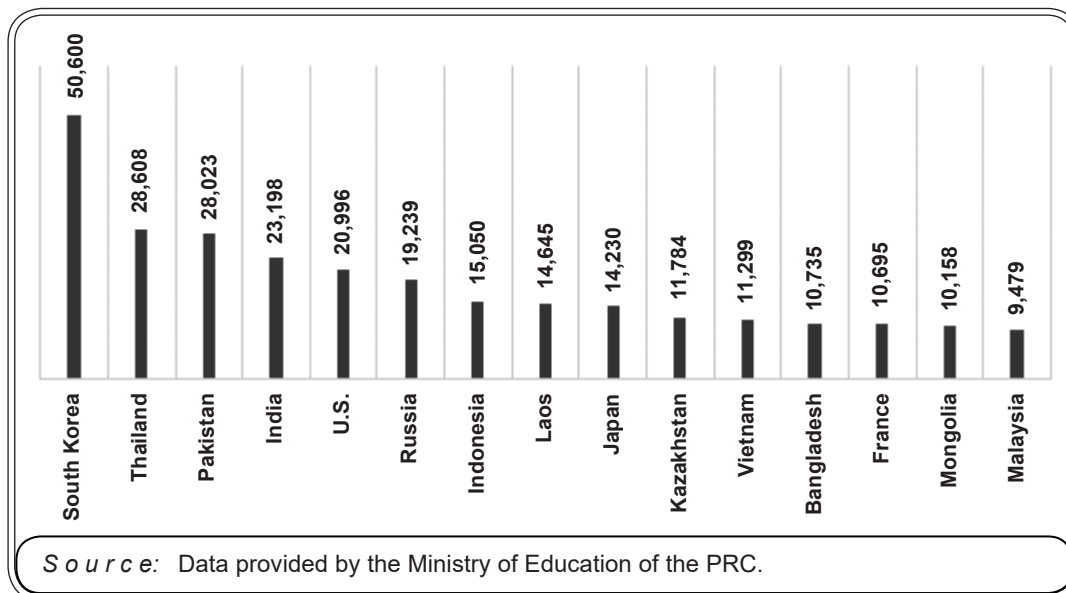
<sup>1</sup> See: S.V. Ryazantsev, S.M. Shakh-ray, A.A. Yanik, S.M. Popova, "Rossiisko-kitaiskaia akademicheskaja mobilnost kak konkurentnoe partnerstvo," *Bulletin of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 90, No. 1, 2020, pp. 3-14.

<sup>2</sup> Official website of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, available at [<http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/statistics/2018/national/>].

<sup>3</sup> See: A. Smirnova, "Milliony siadut za partu," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta / Spetsvypusk—dykhaniye Kitaia*, No. 6501, 8 October, 2014, available at [<https://rg.ru/2014/10/08/obrazovanie.html>].

Figure 1

Number of Foreign Students in the PRC by Country of Origin (people)



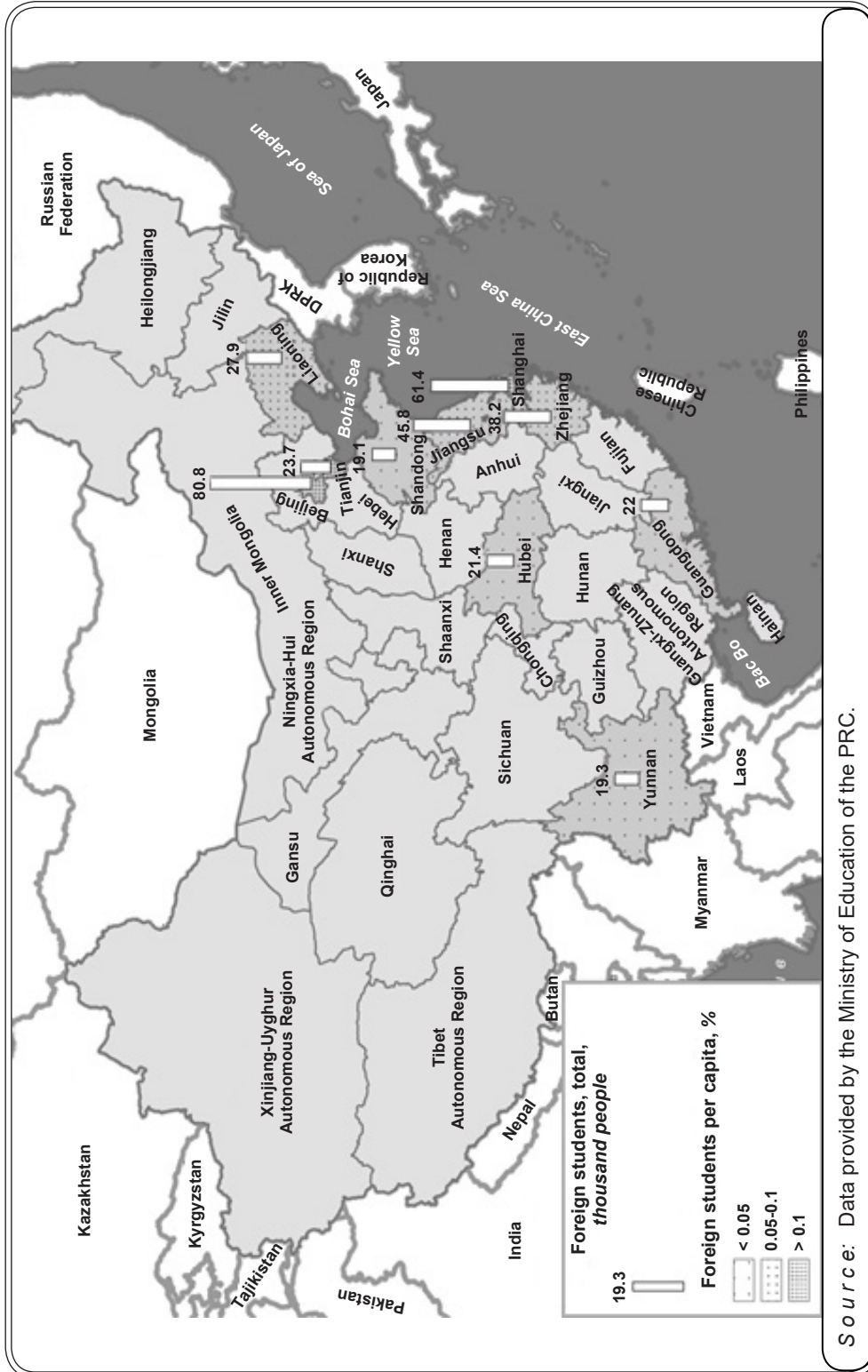
to foreign students. Also, China has its own methods and criteria for assessing the effectiveness of universities and the quality of higher education. Top universities in China include Beijing University (北京大学), Tsinghua University (清华大学), Wuhan University (武汉大学), Zhejiang University (浙江大学), Fudan University (复旦大学), Huazhong University of Science and Technology (华中科技大学), Shanghai Jiao Tong University (上海交通大学), Harbin Institute of Technology (哈尔滨工业大学), Central China Normal University (华中师范大学), Hunan University (湖南大学), Northwestern Polytechnic University (西北工业大学), Tianjin University (天津大学), Sun Yatsen University (中山大学), Beijing Institute of Technology (北京理工大学), South China University of Technology (华南理工大学), East China University of Science and Technology (华东理工大学).

The main specializations of the PRC higher educational institutions are engineering, agronomy, history, philosophy, pedagogy, linguistics, military affairs, medicine, natural sciences and mathematics, as well as economics, business, management, and law. China is one of the leaders in the following specializations, which are gaining popularity: computer technology, artificial intelligence, robotics, e-commerce, fintech, international economics, and logistics. However, the number of liberal arts students in China is still the greatest, accounting for about 49% of the total; the number of students studying engineering, management, business, art and agronomy has increased significantly, with annual growth in excess of 20%.

The education system in China is almost identical to the European system. Pre-university training is initially offered to foreign students, including Chinese language courses that last from three months to over a year, if necessary. Subsequently, the student transitions to a bachelor degree program (4 to 5 years), a master degree program (2 to 3 years), or doctoral studies. Internships and postgraduate practices are also available in some specialties. Experts predict a further increase in China's popularity in the global educational services market, explaining this by the attractiveness of a lower education cost in comparison with the U.S., EU countries and the Russian Federation, while the quality of educational services provided already meets the established international standards.

Figure 2

Provinces and Cities of the PRC with the Most Foreign Students



Source: Data provided by the Ministry of Education of the PRC.

## Russian Students in the PRC

Today, increasingly more students from the CIS countries, including Russia, are interested in obtaining higher education in the PRC. This trend is primarily associated with the phenomenal growth of the Chinese economy, as a result of which there is a growing interest among the younger generation in learning the Chinese language and culture. In addition, a Chinese diploma practically guarantees excellent career development opportunities, and knowledge of the Chinese language is likely to increase one's labor market competitiveness. Students are also attracted by the abundance of international companies in China; there is the prospect of subsequent employment and migration to Western countries. The following associated factors are also important: every year the Chinese government increases scholarship quotas for foreign students, there is a good chance of admission to state-funded programs, and the cost of tuition and living is much lower than in other countries. The expectations of Russian students to easily adapt to Chinese society, given the enthusiastic interest of the Chinese in people with European and Slavic appearance, are another noteworthy factor.

Between 2007 and 2009, the number of Russian students in Chinese universities increased sharply. The number of Russian students increased by 44% between 2006/2007 and 2007/2008 academic years. In 2008, the PRC Government allocated 614, or about 5% of their total state scholarships to Russia.<sup>4</sup> According to the Ministry of Education of the PRC in 2012, there were under 10,000 Russian students obtaining a higher education in China.<sup>5</sup> Director of the Center for Sociological Research A.L. Arefiev notes the following trends: "The number of Russian students in China is growing faster than the number of Chinese students in Russia. At the present time (2014) these numbers are approximately equal (16,000)."<sup>6</sup> The number of students from Russia in the PRC is increasing year to year. In 2016, over 17,000 Russians studied in China,<sup>7</sup> 2,000 of whom received a state scholarship from the Government of the PRC, which is 31% more than was allocated to Russians in 2008.<sup>8</sup> According to the statements of the representative of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation Igor Pozdnyakov, who is also the First Secretary of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in the PRC, approximately 18,000 students from Russia were studying in China in late 2017-early 2018,<sup>9</sup> which indicates a stable increase in the number of Russian students attracted to China.

The majority of educational migrants from Russia come to the PRC to study the Chinese language, culture and traditions. Some of them enter pedagogical universities, but the chances of finding a teaching job in a Chinese higher educational institution are poor. About 4-5% of Russian students in China study law, medicine, banking, the humanities, or receive a degree in civil engineering. Basically, "these are future specialists in the field of business management, business administration and Chinese culture, with knowledge of the Chinese language."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See: A.L. Arefiev, "Rossiiskie studenty v kitaiskikh vuzakh," *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 441-442, 14 November, 2010, available at [<http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2010/0441/analit03.php>].

<sup>5</sup> Official website of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with the magazine of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China *World Education* by the deputy director of the Center for Sociological Research A.L. Arefiev "On Russian-Chinese Cooperation in Education," Center for Social Forecasting and Marketing, 2014, available in Russian at [[http://socioprognoz-ru.lgb.ru/files/File/2014/interview\\_arefev\(1\).pdf](http://socioprognoz-ru.lgb.ru/files/File/2014/interview_arefev(1).pdf)].

<sup>7</sup> See: I. Pozdnyakov, "Prodvizhenie rossiiskogo obrazovaniya v Kitae: vyzovy i perspektivy," *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn*, No. 11, 2017, available at [<https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/1941>].

<sup>8</sup> See: A.L. Arefiev, K.A. Lubskaia, "Rossiiskie studenty v Kitae," *Demoskop Weekly*, No. 7015-716, 2017, available at [<http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2017/0715/tema01.php>].

<sup>9</sup> See: 截至2018年初俄罗斯在中国留学生达1.8万人.- «每日经济», 2018年2月22日, available at [<http://cn.dailyeconomic.com/2018/02/22/28472.html>].

<sup>10</sup> "Russkie studenty v Kitae. Tsena voprosa," Blog "Dao vyrazhennoye slovami," 21 February, 2012, available at [<http://www.daokedao.ru/2012/02/21/russkie-studenty-v-kitae-cena-voprosa/>].



Students come to study in China from all over Russia: from Moscow, St. Petersburg, Ryazan, Kaliningrad, Daghestan, Chechnia, Khabarovsk Territory, Amur Region, etc. However, there are more people from the Far East, the Urals and Siberia. Within China itself, educational migrants are attracted mainly by the universities located in large cities—Beijing, Shanghai, Harbin, Guangzhou, Nanjing and Chongqing, as well as in the northeastern provinces of Heilongjiang and Liaoning. An interesting fact is that, unlike Chinese students who migrate to Russia, the majority, or 62% of Russian students studying in China are women, and 38% are men, with the average age of 17-20 years.<sup>11</sup>

Like many Chinese students in Russia, Russian students in China pay for their studies from the family budget, participate in interuniversity exchange or study under intergovernmental agreements between the PRC and the Russian Federation. Also, Russian students attempt to earn money in China, despite the fact that foreign students are prohibited from working in the PRC, and a student visa does not provide for an official employment permit. The most common of these part-time jobs are translation, tutoring (mainly teaching English), working in commercials and modeling business, etc.

Unlike the Chinese students, Russians tend to integrate into the host society.<sup>12</sup> The level of Chinese language proficiency can serve as a determining indicator of the degree of Russian students' adjustment to the PRC. Knowledge of the language not only increases the chances of establishing contacts and connections in everyday life, but also directly affects the successful absorption of new material in their specialization and, in general, subsequent university studies.

According to a sociological survey conducted in 2016 among Russian educational migrants who were studying in Chinese higher educational institutions, over half of the respondents (55%) spoke Chinese well enough to fully acquire knowledge during their studies, 33% experienced minor difficulties, 8% had problems due to the low level of language proficiency, 4% did not provide a response.<sup>13</sup>

Despite the fact that at the very beginning, Russian students faced certain adaptation problems: the problem of language and cultural barriers, manifestations of nationalism, unusual schedule, unfamiliar customs, dress code in some of the higher educational institutions, issues with access to familiar Internet resources and social networks (Google, Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, Instagram and many other resources are blocked), most of them subsequently do their best to stay in China: to find a job, settle down, start a family, get married.<sup>14</sup> This is due precisely to the fact that the majority of Russians do not seek to return to their homeland. Experts believe that the essential reason for this is the lack of employment opportunities at home. There are many cases in which skilled professionals trained abroad have been refused employment.

In recent years, China's migration policy has tightened. The government revised its position and decided to regulate aspects of the migration policy, so that only "needed" and "useful" migrants remained in the country.<sup>15</sup> The question of the demand for Russian specialists who graduated from Chinese universities in the PRC's labor market remains open.

<sup>11</sup> See: A.L. Arefiev, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> See: Van Xiaoju, S.V. Ryazantsev, R.V. Manshin, "'Russkogovoriashchie' obshchiny i 'russkogovoriashchaia' ekonomika v Kitae: istoria i sovremennost,'" *Nauchnoe obozrenie*, Series 2, *Gumanitarnye nauki*, No. 6, 2016, pp. 61-68.

<sup>13</sup> See: A.L. Arefiev, K.A. Lubskaja, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> See: V.A. Medved, "Migratsionnye protsessy v kontekste rossiisko-kitaiskikh otnosheniy: sovremennye trendy," in: *Migratsionnye mosty v Evrazii: modeli effektivnogo upravleniya migratsiy v usloviakh razvitiya evraziiskogo integratsionnogo proekta: Materialy IX mezhdunarodnogo nauchno-prakticheskogo Foruma (Moskva, 28-29 noiabria 2017 g.)*. In two vols., Vol. 2, ed. by S.V. Ryazantsev, M.N. Khranova, Ekonomicheskoe obrazovanie, Moscow, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> See: S.V. Ryazantsev, Van Xiaoju, V.A. Medved, I.A. Filatov, "Russkogovoriashchie soobshchestva v Kitae: rasselenie, sotsialno-demograficheskaya struktura," *Nauchnoe obozrenie*, Series 2, *Gumanitarnye nauki*, No. 6, 2017, pp. 23-34.

## Russian-Chinese Cooperation in the Educational Sphere

The history of Russian-Chinese relations is rich and diverse in terms of spheres of cooperation. Humanitarian contacts in the educational sphere (primarily student exchange programs) play an important role among the political, diplomatic and economic ties. Cooperation between China and Russia (the R.S.F.S.R. was part of the U.S.S.R. at that time) in this sphere dates back to 1949, since the formation of the PRC. As early as in 1950, the U.S.S.R. and the PRC signed the Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance,<sup>16</sup> which launched an active mutual exchange of students and employees of higher educational institutions in the years that followed. The sharp increase in the interest of the Chinese in the Russian language during those years is remarkable. Russian language institutes, departments and courses were launched; Russian language was included in the curriculum in secondary schools in Northeast China.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the Soviet Union played a significant role in the development of the higher education system in China in the 1950s.

A new stage in the development of bilateral relations between China and Russia in the field of education has begun in the 1990s and continues today. An intergovernmental legal framework is being developed during this period, including the main provisions that contribute to reaching a qualitatively new level of cooperation. For example, the number of quotas allocated for student and teaching exchanges at the state level has significantly increased.

The signing of the historic Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the PRC in 2001 marked a new stage in the formation of an interstate system for regulating migration flows, which is characterized by the intensification of political, trade, economic, social and cultural ties between countries. Within the framework of the Treaty, the parties committed themselves to promoting “the development of exchanges and cooperation in the fields of culture, education, health care, information, tourism, sports and law” (Art 16).<sup>18</sup>

“The legal framework of modern Russian-Chinese cooperation in the field of education is based on the following intergovernmental agreements: On Cultural Cooperation (18 December, 1992), On Mutual Recognition and Equivalence of Educational Documents and Academic Degrees (26 June, 1995), On the Study of the Russian Language in China and Chinese in Russia (3 November, 2005), as well as On Cooperation in the field of Education (9 November, 2006), an agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia and the Ministry of Education of China.<sup>19</sup>

The agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Education of the PRC (On Cooperation in the Field of Education<sup>20</sup>) is the most important in the context of subsequent development of bilateral mutually beneficial cooperation in this area—the following are the first points to be emphasized: “exchanges of students, postgraduates and scientific teaching staff; promoting the development of direct cooperation between educational insti-

<sup>16</sup> See: “Sotrudnichestvo mezhdru SSSR i KNR v kontse 1940-kh-nachale 1950-kh gg.,” Asia Pacific International Relations Study Center, 3 November, 2012, available at [<http://ru.apircenter.org/archives/1561>].

<sup>17</sup> See: O.B. Borisov, B.T. Kolosov, *Sovetsko-kitaiskie otnosheniia 1945-1980-e gg.*, Mysl Publishers, Moscow, 1980.

<sup>18</sup> *Treaty on Good-Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China*, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 July, 2001, available in Russian at [[http://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/cn/-/asset\\_publisher/WhKWb5DVBqKA/content/id/576870](http://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/cn/-/asset_publisher/WhKWb5DVBqKA/content/id/576870)].

<sup>19</sup> See: “Sotrudnichestvo Rossii i Kitaia v oblasti obrazovania,” Press-sluzhba Minobrnauki Rossii, 3 June, 2015, available at [<http://минобрнауки.рф/новости/5691>].

<sup>20</sup> See: “Agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China on Cooperation in the Field of Education,” in: *International Agreements on Cooperation in the Field of Education*, Department of International Cooperation in Education and Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia, Moscow, 2009, pp. 328-332, available in Russian at [[http://минобрнауки.рф/министерство/68/файл/914/МС\\_Образование.pdf](http://минобрнауки.рф/министерство/68/файл/914/МС_Образование.pdf)].

tutions; deepening cooperation in organizing the study and teaching of the Russian and Chinese languages in both states...”<sup>21</sup>

The Russian-Chinese Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation was established in 2002, with a separate Sub-Commission on Education. Since its inception, the commission has held annual meetings aimed at promoting the settlement, improvement and development of Russian-Chinese cooperation in the humanitarian and educational fields, the protocols of which are also work documents on cooperation. “Within the framework of the Sub-Commission on Cooperation in Education, there is a Working Group on interaction in the study and teaching of Russian and Chinese languages, the development of bilateral academic exchanges and scientific cooperation of universities, the main content of which is monitoring bilateral cooperation in the field of education, practical development of recommendations for this Subcommittee and universities... In order to maintain a high level of interaction and wider involvement of young people in the study of the Russian and Chinese languages, Years of National Languages (2009-2010) were conducted... An agreement was reached with China to develop an interdepartmental memorandum on supporting the activities of Russian Language Centers in China and Confucius Institutes and Classes in Russia.”<sup>22</sup> To date, 22 Confucius Institutes and 22 centers have been opened in Russia.<sup>23</sup>

During a regular meeting of the Russian-Chinese Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation in September 2014, the Sub-Commission in Education developed a plan for implementing an initiative to increase the exchange of students and graduate students to 100,000 people by 2020.<sup>24</sup>

On 5 July, 2016, the Forum of Rectors of Russian and Chinese Universities was held in Moscow, during which the “Declaration on the establishment of the Association of Universities of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China was signed, along with agreements between specialized educational institutions of Russia and China, defining the strategy of long-term Russian-Chinese scientific and educational cooperation... A total of 15 agreements were signed between universities and scientific and educational organizations of the two countries.”<sup>25</sup>

An important event in the framework of Russian-Chinese cooperation in the field of education is the establishment of the first Russian-Chinese University, MSU-BIT, in Shenzhen in September 2017, cofounded by Lomonosov Moscow State University and the Beijing Institute of Technology.<sup>26</sup> The development of the joint university provides for continuous working interaction of Moscow State University with the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China and other departments, which is carried out with the support of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation and the Embassy of the Russian Federation in the People’s Republic of China.

Also, the grand opening of the Don Institute of DSTU-SHTU, established by joint efforts of the Don State Technical University and Shandong Transport University, took place on 18 June, 2019 in the city of Jinan, Shandong province.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> *Agreement between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China on Cooperation in the Field of Education dated 9 November, 2006*, FSBI “Main State Expert Center for Education Assessment,” available in Russian at [[http://nic.gov.ru/ru/docs/foreign/collaboration/agreem\\_coop\\_China\\_2006](http://nic.gov.ru/ru/docs/foreign/collaboration/agreem_coop_China_2006)].

<sup>22</sup> “Sotrudnichestvo Rossii i Kitaia v oblasti obrazovania,” Press-sluzhba Minobrnauki Rossii, 3 June, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>24</sup> See: “Namecheny prioritnyye napravleniia dvustoronnego vzaimodeystviia Rossii i Kitaia v oblasti obrazovaniia na 2014-2015 gody,” The Embassy of the Russian Federation in the People’s Republic of China, 8 October, 2014, available at [<https://www.russia.org.cn/ru/news/namecheny-prioritnyye-napravleniya-dvustoronnego-vzaimodejstviya-rossii-i-kitaya-v-oblasti-obrazovaniya-na-2014-2015-gody/>].

<sup>25</sup> “V Moskve podpisali Deklaratsiu o sozdanii Assotsiatsii universitetov Rossii i Kitaia,” Press-sluzhba Minobrnauki Rossii, 8 July, 2016 [<http://минобрнауки.рф/новости/8526>].

<sup>26</sup> Official site of the Joint Russian-Chinese University (MSU-PPI), available at [<http://msuinchina.org/>].

<sup>27</sup> See: “V Tszinane otkrylsia sovmestnyi rossiiko-kitajskiy institut DGTU-SHTU,” Official website of the Embassy of the Russian Federation in the People’s Republic of China, 20 June, 2019, available at [[http://www.russia.org.cn/ru/russia\\_china/v-tszinane-otkrylsya-sovmestnyj-rossijsko-kitajskij-institut-dgtu-shtu/](http://www.russia.org.cn/ru/russia_china/v-tszinane-otkrylsya-sovmestnyj-rossijsko-kitajskij-institut-dgtu-shtu/)].

There are other joint projects: the China-Russian Institute (CRI) of the NSU cofounded by Heilongjiang University and Novosibirsk State University,<sup>28</sup> the Moscow Institute of the Arts (MIA) cofounded by Weinan Normal University, established jointly with the Moscow State Pedagogical University.<sup>29</sup> Some higher educational institutions carry out joint activities based on bilateral agreements.<sup>30</sup> For instance, the M.K. Ammosov Northeastern Federal University and Heilongjiang Eastern University carry out joint work that engage several faculties and open language and cultural centers.<sup>31</sup>

All of the above contributed to an increase in the number of university students in both countries. According to the latest data, on 16 September, 2019, during the 20th meeting of the Russian-Chinese Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation, Tatiana Golikova, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation for Education, Health and Social Policy, said: "...the total number of students involved in bilateral educational exchanges, including those in short-term educational programs, exceeded 90,000 people,"<sup>32</sup> which indicates the practical implementation of the previously set goals and agreements.

## *Conclusion*

Educational migration is one of the most expedient forms of migration, since it can bring substantial mutual benefits to both the donor and recipient countries. At the present stage, China is positioning itself as a country with impressive economic growth, due to which educational immigration to the PRC appears to be quite promising for both Russian students and students from other, mostly Asian, states. Despite the difficulties of language studies and cultural differences, the number of educational immigrants from Russia is increasing in China every year. Educational migration between Russian and Chinese students enhances the rapidly developing relations between the Russian Federation and the PRC. China has shown a strong desire to develop and establish educational ties with Russia, hoping that as a result it will support the development of Russian-Chinese economic cooperation.<sup>33</sup>

It is therefore desirable and even essential for countries to develop and foster the most suitable and extensive policy in the field of educational migration. Indeed, this type of migration processes positively affects the growing numbers of highly qualified specialists and the working-age population, activates cultural exchange and the progress of the educational system.

---

<sup>28</sup> Official website of the China-Russian Institute, available at [<https://www.nsu.ru/n/sino-russian-institute/>].

<sup>29</sup> See: "Opening of the Moscow Institute of Arts on the basis of Weinan Pedagogical University," Official site of the Moscow State Pedagogical University, available in Russian at [<http://mpgu.su/novosti/otkrytie-moskovskogo-instituta-iskusstv-na-baze-veynanskogo-pedagogicheskogo-universiteta-kitay/>].

<sup>30</sup> See: A. Sukhoretskaya, "Gumanitarnoe sotrudnichestvo igraet vazhnuiu rol v rossiisko-kitaiskikh otnosheniakh," Internet portal "Rossiiskaia Gazeta" / Project "Russia-China: Events and Comments," 28 September, 2019, available at [<https://rg.ru/2019/09/28/gumanitarnoe-sotrudnichestvo-igraet-vazhnuiu-rol-v-rossijsko-kitajskih-otnosheniiah.html>].

<sup>31</sup> See: "SVFU i Kheyluntszyanskiy Vostochnyy universitet opredelili napravleniia partnerstva," Official site of the North-Eastern Federal University named after M.K. Ammosov, 11 December, 2018, available at [[https://www.svfu.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION\\_ID=4228&ELEMENT\\_ID=111626](https://www.svfu.ru/news/detail.php?SECTION_ID=4228&ELEMENT_ID=111626)].

<sup>32</sup> "20-e zasiedanie Rossiisko-Kitaiskoy komissii po gumanitarnomu sotrudnichestvu," Official website of the Government of the Russian Federation, 16 September, 2019, available at [<http://government.ru/news/37873/#>].

<sup>33</sup> See: S.V. Ryazantsev, U Qionglan, "Emigratsiia iz Rossii v Kitay: trendy, formy, formirovanie russkogovoriashchikh obshchin," *Nauchnoe obozrenie*, Series 1, *Ekonomika i pravo*, No. 6, 2016, pp. 15-23.