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KAZAKHSTAN: AN OVERVIEW

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	Historical Background.....	1
1.1	Creation of Modern Kazakhstan.....	1
1.2	Kazakh nation	1
2	Contemporary Political Situation.....	3
2.1	Political System	3
2.2	Presidential Power and Constitutional Changes.....	3
2.3	Political Parties and Parliamentary Elections.....	6
3	Economy.....	7
3.1	Oil and Gas	7
3.2	Other Sectors.....	8
3.3	Economic Reform.....	9
3.4	Regional Economic Integration	10
4	Social Issues	10
4.1	Power and Patronage.....	10
4.2	Social and Economic Disparities.....	11
4.3	Kazakh Nationalism and Political Islam.....	12
4.4	Ethnic Minorities	13
4.5	Emigration and Falling Demographic Trends	14
5	Human Rights.....	15
5.1	General Situation	15
5.2	Censorship and Media Control	16
5.3	Freedom of Religion.....	16
6	Groups at Risk.....	17
7	Outlook.....	18
8	Bibliography	19

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1 Historical Background

1.1 Creation of Modern Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan (Kazakstan)¹ is located between the Russian Federation to the north, China to the east, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan to the south, and the Caspian Sea to the west. It covers a huge area (some 2.7 million square kilometres), but has a population of less than 15 million. Parts of the north-east of the country are quite densely populated, but elsewhere, especially in the central regions, the population is spread very thinly. The Kazakhs constitute just over half the population, while Russians account for just over a third (some 35%). The remaining 20% of the population comprise over a hundred other ethnic groups, among them Ukrainians, Germans, Koreans, Uighurs, Tatars, Chechens and Kurds.

Kazakhstan, in its modern form as a unified, political entity, came into being after the establishment of Soviet rule. In 1920 the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was created, within the jurisdiction of the Russian Federation. The Kazakhs were then known to the Russians as Kyrgyz, or Kyrgyz-Kazakhs, hence the name of this new formation. As a result of the 1924-1925 National Delimitation of Central Asia, some Kazakh-populated areas were transferred to the jurisdiction of the territory, which, in 1925, was formally renamed the Kazakh ASSR. In 1932 the Karakalpak region (now part of Uzbekistan) was detached from the Kazakh ASSR. In 1936 Kazakhstan was elevated to the status of a full Union Republic, becoming the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). Despite some redrawing of the borders (mostly along the line between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan), the main contours of Kazakhstan remain those that were mapped out in the early Soviet period. With the collapse of the USSR, on 16 December 1991 the territory declared its independence as the Republic of Kazakhstan. It joined 11 other former Union Republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), by the Almaty Declaration of 21 December. It was admitted to the UN as a member state in March 1992.²

1.2 Kazakh Nation

The Kazakhs are a Turkic people, descendants of nomadic tribes who, in the sixth century AD, migrated eastwards from their original homeland in Mongolia. Nomadic pastoralism was the dominant way of life. In the early thirteenth century Mongols conquered Kazakhstan. There followed a long period of internecine power struggles. In the early sixteenth century, one of the Kazakh princes, Kasym Khan, succeeded in uniting the main tribal groupings. From this time onwards it is possible to speak of a Kazakh nation, despite the fact that after Kasym's death the region was again riven by local wars.

By the early seventeenth century three major groupings had emerged among the Kazakhs, each under the leadership of its own *khan* (leader): the Great Horde (Ulu Zhuz), the territory of which lay to the south-east, between the Aral Sea and Lake Balkhash; the Middle Horde (Orta Zhuz), which controlled the central zone; and the Little Horde (Kishi Zhuz), with

¹ The spelling "Kazakhstan" was used until the mid-1990s; for a while thereafter "Kazakstan" was the preferred form, but recently there has been a return to "Kazakhstan"

² For a more detailed account of the creation of modern Kazakhstan, see Akiner, S., *Islamic Peoples of the Soviet Union: A Historical and Statistical Handbook*, 2 ed., London: Kegan Paul International, 1986, pp. 291-301; also Akiner, S., Kazakhstan: History, The Economy, in I. Bell (ed.), *Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia 2001*, London: Europa Publications, 2002, pp. 199-209

territory to the north of the Caspian Sea, between the Emba and the Ural rivers. These Hordes were further divided into tribes and clans. There was a highly developed awareness of genealogy, since it was lineage that determined both a man's place in society and his rights to pasture land. These features of Kazakh society have, in one form or another survived up to the present.

The Kazakh aristocracy adopted Islam soon after the Mongol conquest. The nomadic tribes in the north, however, had little direct contact with Islam. They were not fully converted until the nineteenth century, when, under the Russian tsarist administration, Tatar Muslim missionaries were sent to "civilize" the region. A number of mosques were built during this period, but, although the Kazakhs became, by their own standards, sincere believers, they were unorthodox in their beliefs and practices, retaining many elements of customary law and animism.

The Kazakhs came under Russian domination during the eighteenth century. This was a period when they were constantly under attack from their neighbours, particularly the Oirat Mongols. Thus, they had little option but to seek Russian protection: the Little Horde in 1731; the Middle Horde in 1740; and part of the Great Horde in 1742 (the rest of this Horde came under Manchu rule). Russian influence in the steppes grew ever stronger until, eventually, the entire region was under Russian control, with the exception of the area that fell within the Chinese Empire (and is still part of the People's Republic of China today). The powers of the Kazakh leaders were steadily eroded and by the mid-nineteenth century, the khans had been deposed. A Russian garrison named Vernoye (Faithful) was established in the far east of the territory in 1854. This town, renamed Alma-Ata, subsequently became the capital of the Kazakh SSR. After independence, renamed Almaty, it retained this status until 1997, when the capital was transferred to Astana.

Traditional Kazakh culture was rooted in the nomadic way of life, expressing itself in the crafts and skills of daily life, as well as in the oral epics that encapsulated the history, wisdom and philosophy of the people. The advent of the Russians opened the door to the ideas and opportunities of a (comparatively) developed Western society. A number of the Kazakh elite became Russified in their behaviour and outlook. Scholars such as Ibraj Altynsarin (1841-1889) and Abay Kunanbayev (1845-1904) played an active role in the development of the Kazakh literary language (previously Tatar had been used as a written language), as well as in the general process of educational reform. The nomadic way of life meanwhile began to come under threat. This was in large measure the result of a massive influx of Russian settlers in the second half of the nineteenth century. The immigrants moved into northern Kazakhstan, obstructing traditional migration routes and appropriating fertile pastures. This caused great resentment among the Kazakhs and was the trigger for a fierce uprising in 1916. The revolt was brutally suppressed, but a year later, tsarist power collapsed.

There followed a brief, confused period of civil war during which a semi-independent Kazakh state, known as Alash Orda, was formed on part of the territory of Kazakhstan. However, the region was soon brought under Bolshevik control (see section above on the creation of modern Kazakhstan). The collectivization campaign of the 1930s brought about the enforced sedentarization of the remaining nomads. It has been estimated that approximately 1 million Kazakhs died from starvation and other problems caused by collectivization (the Soviet census revealed that in 1959, the Kazakh population numbered

some 347,000 less than in 1926).³ Gradually, there was a demographic recovery. In the 1960s, a new generation of urbanized, educated Kazakhs began to emerge. At the same time, Kazakh representation in the republican Government and Party institutions began to increase. Yet the great majority of Kazakhs continued to live in rural areas, mostly in the less developed southern belt. They tended to be conservative and culturally far removed from the educated, Westernized, Russian-speaking Kazakhs of the urban centres.⁴

2 Contemporary Political Situation

2.1 Political System

The system of government in Kazakhstan is centralized and authoritarian. The state is officially described as a “parliamentary republic”, but since the country became independent in December 1991 power has increasingly been concentrated in the hands of the President. This tendency to consolidate the power of the executive branch has permeated local Government. There are 20 principal administrative-territorial units. The executive bodies at this level (known as *akimiyat*) report directly to the President, bypassing both the local councils and the ministries of the central government. There has been some attempt to build Western-style democratic institutions, but the process is at an early stage. Such new institutions as have been created are still very fragile.⁵

2.2 Presidential Power and Constitutional Changes

In December 1991 Nursultan Nazarbayev became the first elected President of Kazakhstan, elected for a five-year term of office, with extensive personal powers which included the authority to appoint and dismiss officials at all levels and to issue decrees counteracting parliamentary legislation. Nazarbayev had been appointed to the post of Chairman of the Council of Ministers (head of Government) of Kazakhstan in 1984, then to that of First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan in 1989. He introduced political and administrative reforms in September 1989, including the introduction of extra executive duties for the Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of Kazakhstan, the republican legislature. He was duly elected to this post in February 1990, thus becoming, *de facto*, the republican head of state. He was elected to the newly created post of President by the Supreme Soviet in April. On 1 December 1991 he was the sole candidate in a general election to the presidency, in which he gained the support of 98.8% of the votes cast.

In the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union foreign analysts were for the most part enthusiastic about the Kazakh leadership’s commitment to democratic reform. However, by the end of 1993 doubts were beginning to surface, nationally and internationally. In November of that year President Nazarbayev announced plans for a reform of the Supreme Kenges, the legislative body that had been inherited from the Soviet period. He proposed that the number of seats should be halved from the current total of 360, also that

³ Lorimer, F., *The Population of the Soviet Union: History and Prospects*. Geneva: The League of Nations, 1946, p. 121

⁴ Historical and cultural developments are discussed in depth in Olcott, M. B., *The Kazakhs*, Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987; Akiner, S., *The Formation of Kazakh Identity: From Tribe to Nation-State*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995

⁵ Akiner, S., *Emerging Political Order in the New Caspian States: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan*, in G. K. Bertsch *et al.* (eds.), *Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia*, New York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 90-128; Capisani, G. R., *The Handbook of Central Asia: A Comprehensive Survey of the New Republics*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2000, pp. 1-14

the new deputies should receive a salary and devote themselves full-time to parliamentary work. The Supreme Kenges thereupon agreed to dissolve itself in December, in preparation for elections to the new-style parliament. There were several deputies who opposed this move. Nevertheless, on 7 March 1994 elections to the new parliament were held.

Observers, foreign and local, declared that there had been numerous violations of the electoral law, including ballot stuffing and the blocking of media access to polling stations. Moreover, many votes were cast by proxy and should have been disallowed. Of the 177 seats in the new parliament, 42 had to be chosen from a specially selected list of presidential nominees. Deputies who were critical of government policies won only 23 seats. The ethnic mix of the new legislative body was tilted in favour of the Kazakh population, with some two thirds of the new deputies being drawn from the titular people, although within the population as a whole the Kazakhs represented less than half the total.

When the new parliament convened in April 1994 President Nazarbayev promised that more constitutional safeguards would be introduced. He indicated that there was to be a clearer definition of the conditions under which the President could be impeached, or parliament dissolved. At the same time, however, government control of the state television and radio was strengthened: a new decree was passed that gave the President the right to appoint the head of the organization for radio and television. In March 1995, following on-going accusations of shortcomings in the electoral procedures, the Constitutional Court invalidated the elections of the previous year as a whole and thereby cancelled the mandate of the parliament. Some 70 deputies refused to accept this ruling. They attempted to form a new organization called the "People's Parliament". However, there was little general support for this initiative and it was soon dropped.

Immediately after the parliamentary crisis had been resolved, President Nazarbayev's term of office, due to run out in 1996, was extended for another five years, until the year 2000, by a referendum held in April 1995. In August of that same year another referendum was held, this time on the draft of a new constitution. This, too, was approved by a resounding majority (90% of the electorate participated in this referendum; 89% of the votes were cast in favour of the proposed changes). Under the new constitution, the powers of the President were broadened. Rule by presidential decree was formally sanctioned; also, the President was given the right to call a state of emergency, and to dissolve parliament if it passed a motion of no confidence in the government, or twice rejected the presidential nominee for the post of Prime Minister. A reformed, bicameral parliament was also outlined in the constitution, to consist of an Upper House (*Senat*) with 40 members, and a Lower House (*Majlis*) with 67 members.

Elections to both houses were held in December 1995. Seats were contested by several candidates. Nevertheless, there was a widespread sense of apathy, especially in the northern provinces where the population was predominantly composed of ethnic Russians. Foreign observers noted a number of electoral violations, including multiple voting. The final results of the elections were not announced until 24 January 1996, more than six weeks after the event. The new deputies were overwhelmingly pro-government, and firmly supported the President's reform programme. The social profile of the deputies of the new parliament was mainly professional (teachers, local government employees etc), all with higher education. There were only ten women. Ethnically, the Kazakhs predominated (68 deputies), with a significant Russian group (31 deputies) and a handful of representatives of other minorities.

The constitutional arrangements established in 1995 were, in many ways, inadequate and in some instances unnecessarily cumbersome. Furthermore, the 1995 elections emphasized the difficulties of obtaining a clear result with the requirement of an absolute majority. Consequently, in September 1998 President Nazarbayev proposed further constitutional changes. He maintained that these reforms would strengthen the role of Parliament and make elections more democratic. On 7 October, at a plenary session of the Senate and the Majlis, the constitutional amendments were formally enacted. They included: the abolition of the maximum age limit for presidential candidates (formerly set at 65 years of age); extension of the term of office of the elected president from 5 to 7 years; removal of the need to have a minimum of 50% of the electorate participating in the poll. On 8 October a snap decree confirmed that presidential elections would be held three months later, on 10 January 1999 (instead of in 2000, as scheduled). No reason was given for bringing forward the date of the elections, though some commentators speculated that President Nazarbayev was seeking a way to reconfirm his mandate in an extended term of office.

A period of one month was allowed for the registration of presidential candidates. Requirements included the support (demonstrated by signed petitions) of at least 2% of the registered voters nation-wide, drawn from at least two thirds of all the provinces and major cities of Kazakhstan. Candidates were also required to pay a deposit of 2.44 million tenge (equivalent to 1,000 times the minimum salary), to submit proof of their mental health, to show competence in the Kazakh language and to be free of convictions of any infringement of the laws, no matter how minor, during the past year (this last clause had been introduced in May 1998).

President Nazarbayev was at first non-committal about whether he would stand. However, on 20 October, in response to demands from “about a million Kazakh citizens” from various political parties and movements, he did agree to stand. Other candidates who sought registration were Akezhan Kazhegeldin, Gani Kasymov, Engels Gabbasov, Asylbek Amantau-uli, Mels Eleusizov, Karishal Asanov and Zhakysbau Bazibayev. Of these, Kazhegeldin was regarded as the only credible rival to President Nazarbayev. Prime Minister of Kazakhstan from 1994 to 1997, he was generally regarded as an energetic economic reformer. However, his candidacy was rejected, ostensibly because he had attended a meeting of a group called “For Honest Elections” in early October 1998. The meeting was retrospectively declared illegal on the questionable grounds that it had not been sanctioned in advance. At the same time, he became the target of much hostile propaganda in the press. There was an alleged attempt on his life in mid-October.

The outcome of the presidential election was that Nursultan Nazarbayev was returned to office for a seven-year term, to expire in December 2006. He received almost 80% of the vote cast. His nearest rival was Serikbolsyn Abdildin, the Communist Party leader, who received 11.7%. The turnout nation-wide was 87%. It was particularly high in the south, reaching more than 95% in Kzyl Orda and Almaty provinces.⁶

Over 130 international observers monitored the election. It was generally agreed that the actual voting took place without any gross misconduct. However, there were many shortcomings in the pre-electoral procedures. For this reason, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) declined to take part in the official monitoring process.

⁶ See further European Institute for the Media, *Monitoring the Media Coverage of the Kazakhstan Presidential Elections: Preliminary Report*, Düsseldorf, January 1999

One of the main causes for concern was the disbaring of former Prime Minister Akezhan Kazhegeldin, the only serious rival to the incumbent President, on a minor legal technicality. Several areas of concern were noted by the OSCE. These included the amendments to the Decree on Elections, introduced in May 1998, whereby individuals who had committed minor administrative offences in the previous twelve months were barred from standing for elected office. Also, the number of signatures and the monetary deposit required from candidates was felt to be high. Another criticism was that the election campaign was too short to allow for adequate preparation on the part of all prospective candidates. A further concern was that the state authorities did not behave impartially, but provided support for the election campaigns of some candidates, in particular the incumbent. Moreover, the rights of freedom of association and assembly were felt to be unduly restricted through legal and administrative obstacles; this impeded the registration of a number of groups and led to harassment of those involved.⁷

In June 2000, a law giving President Nursultan Nazarbayev extraordinary powers and privileges after the expiry of his present term of office in 2006 was passed by both houses of the Kazakh Parliament. The Bill evoked criticism from the opposition, some of whom blamed the rampant corruption and economic mismanagement that is endemic in Kazakhstan today on a system of government that is focused on one person. Nazarbayev stressed that he did not intend to be “a Khan or a President for life”. Yet he did not exclude the possibility of standing for a further term of office, as his current term is, arguably, only the first under Kazakhstan’s new Constitution. Thus, he would be eligible to stand again in 2006.

2.3 Political Parties and Parliamentary Elections

Political life in Kazakhstan is marked by profound apathy on the part of the majority of the population. This is to some extent a reaction to the enforced politicization of the Soviet era. It is also a result of the disillusionment with the Communist party that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union; this has engendered a sense of cynicism and distrust towards all forms of political activity. In addition, preoccupation with the problems of everyday life - for many, the sheer struggle to make a living - allows little time or energy for other matters. Civil society is still at a very early stage of development.⁸

Nevertheless, an embryonic multi-party system has begun to emerge in Kazakhstan. There is a legal distinction between parties and movements. Regulations for the formation of the latter are less onerous; hence new groups often prefer to seek registration as a “movement” rather than a “party” In practical terms, however, there is little difference between them and as a matter of general usage all such organizations may be regarded as “parties” (and will be referred to as such here). Most parties are small, with a fluid membership, and a relatively short active life span. Their political platforms are vague and idealistic. Usually they are created by, and remain clustered around, a particular individual. All such groups must be formally registered.

By 1999 there were some 20 political groupings. The main parties were the Fatherland-Otan Party and the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. Presidential supporters with the intention of espousing a social democratic stance founded the Fatherland-Otan Party in Almaty in March

⁷ Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Election Assessment Mission, Republic of Kazakhstan, January 11, 1999*, Vienna; Prague, 1999

⁸ See further Ruffin, M. and Waugh, D. (eds.), *Civil Society in Central Asia*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999.

1999. It rapidly became the dominant party in the country, closely associated with all levels of the administration. The Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK), maintained in being by a faction of the old ruling party, was re-registered in March 1994. It won two seats in the parliamentary elections of late 1995–early 1996. By the late 1990s it was broadly social democratic in orientation and represented the main opposition to the government.

In 1999 parliamentary elections were held, as scheduled. However, the run-up period was marred by allegations of mismanagement and obstruction on the part of the authorities. In the elections to the Upper House on 17 September 1999, there were 29 candidates for the 16 available seats (representing the 14 provinces and the cities of Almaty and Astana). Elections to the Lower House were held on 10 October, on the basis of a reformed, mixed system of single-seat constituencies and proportional representation for parties. Ten parties took part. The results were confused and in several cases contradictory outcomes were announced. According to official reports, the pro-Presidential Fatherland-Otan Party won a majority, claiming just over 30% of the popular vote. The Communist Party of Kazakhstan came second, with 17.75%. The conduct of the elections was severely criticized, not only by international organizations, but even by the Kazakh Prosecutor General.⁹

3 Economy

3.1 Oil and Gas

The backbone of the Kazakh economy, accounting for some 50% of GDP, is the oil and gas sector. Proven petroleum and gas reserves are very considerable. In 1998, proven oil reserves were assessed at 10.0-17.6 billion barrels (BBL), with possible reserves of 85 BBL; proven gas reserves at 53-83 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), with possible additional reserves of 88 Tcf. Annual oil production in 2000 was 35.2 million tonnes. Annual production of natural gas is currently 150 billion cubic feet.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan became the first and largest recipient of foreign investment in the hydrocarbons sector in the CIS. The first major deal was struck with the US oil company Chevron in May 1992 to develop the giant Tengiz oilfield on the north-eastern littoral of the Caspian. In the gas sector, British Gas and Agip SA (Italy) began investing in the huge Karachaganak gas field in northwest Kazakhstan in 1992. In 1993, the Caspian Shelf Consortium (a seven-member group consisting of Agip, British Gas, BP, Mobil, Shell, Statoil and Total) was created to explore an offshore area of 100,000 sq. km in the north-eastern sector of the Caspian Sea. In 1997, the North Caspian Sea Production Sharing Agreement, covering an area of 5,600 km sq., was signed.

That same year, several new energy companies became involved in Kazakhstan. These included the Chinese National Petroleum Company; Repsol, the Spanish company, in partnership with British Enterprise Oil; and India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation. These and other deals, and in particular the confirmation of a massive find in the eastern Kashagan oilfield in mid-2001, gave grounds to believe that by 2010, Kazakhstan could become one of

⁹ Akiner, S., Political Parties in Kazakhstan, in A. Day (ed.), *Political Parties of the World*, 5 ed., London: John Harper Publishing, 2002, pp. 281-3; Dixon, A., Kazakhstan: Political Reform and Economic Development, in R. Allison (ed.), *Challenges for the Former Soviet South*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1996, pp. 93-103; Olcott, M. B., The Growth of Political Participation in Kazakhstan, in K. Dawisha and B. Parrott (eds), *Conflict Cleavage and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 201-41

the world's largest oil producers. It is anticipated that it will receive vast revenues from its oil wealth.

However, the export of hydrocarbons from Kazakhstan is hindered by the limited nature of routes to world markets. The Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), created in 1992 as a joint venture between the Governments of Kazakhstan and Oman, proposed the construction of a pipeline from the Tengiz oilfield on the northern littoral to the Russian Black Sea port of Novorossiisk. However, construction of the 1,580 km pipeline was subject to many delays (including major disagreements over the ownership structure). The pipeline was completed in late March 2001, but political differences between Russia and Kazakhstan caused further problems. It finally became operational in the autumn of that year. Meanwhile, the Soviet-era pipeline network, linking Kazakh oil fields to Russian refineries, continues to be used. Other facilities are also being used for export deliveries of crude petroleum, including tanker shipments from the Tengiz field (via Azerbaijan and Georgia) to Black Sea terminals; transportation by rail to the People's Republic of China; and swap deals with Iran. The development of the gas sector is also seriously hampered by the lack of an adequate pipeline infrastructure.

A significant proportion of Kazakhstan's hydrocarbon reserves lie offshore, in the Caspian Sea. However, exploitation of the oil and gas fields of the Caspian shelf poses a considerable legal problem. During the Soviet period, treaties between the USSR and Iran, which, effectively, treated it as a trans-boundary lake, covered the status of the Caspian. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and Iran wanted to keep this treaty in force, or to replace it with a similar one in which all resources of the Caspian would be held in common. The newly independent littoral states of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan and, to some extent Turkmenistan, wanted the Sea divided. In 1998 Russia partially accepted the principle of zoning, as far as undersea mineral resources are concerned. The presidents of Russia and Kazakhstan signed a bilateral treaty to this effect in July 1998. Yet there is still no comprehensive agreement between the littoral states on this issue, hence the question of legal jurisdiction is unclear.¹⁰

3.2 Other Sectors

Mining is another key sector of the Kazakh economy, accounting for some 25% of GDP. The country possesses rich reserves of coal, chrome (some 90% of total Soviet reserves were located in Kazakhstan), lead, copper, zinc, wolfram and gold. Karaganda province, which has 13 mines producing high quality coking coal, is the main centre of the coal industry; further north, Ekibastuz (the third largest coal basin in the former USSR), is also well developed. Ferrous and non-ferrous metallurgy are highly developed. Important copper, zinc and lead works are located in the north-east of the country, while the mining and processing of iron is based in the Aktobe region in the north-west. There are copper deposits in the centre of the country and lead and zinc in the south. Also, in the north-east of the country is one of the world's largest gold deposits. In 1999, metals constituted some 30% of total exports. However, foreign investment in this sector has to date been somewhat disappointing, largely owing to an unfavourable investment climate.

¹⁰ For an overview see Akiner, S., Politics of Energy in the Caspian Sea Region, in I. Bell (ed.), *Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia 2000*, London: Europa Publications, 2002, pp. 11-16. A good survey of current oil and gas projects (including pipelines) is given in European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, *Kazakhstan: Investment Profile 2001*, London: EBRD Business Forum, April 2001

Kazakhstan is also an important producer and exporter (mostly to other former Soviet territories) of agricultural products. Following independence, however, Kazakh agriculture, on the whole, performed poorly. This was partly owing to the political disruption and uncertainties which ensued, but, more significantly, because of the short-term consequences of economic reform. This could be attributed to shortages of inputs (for example, of fuel, feed and fertilizers), machinery and expertise, but also to adverse weather conditions. In 1990-1995 agricultural product declined by an annual average of 18%, but still provided 12% of GDP in the mid-1990s. By 1999, it had fallen to 8.4%. The country remained self-sufficient in both grain and animal products, but poor yields hindered the widening of agricultural export markets.

3.3 Economic Reform

Until December 1991 economic planning for Kazakhstan, as for the other Soviet republics, was carried out at Union level, in Moscow. Several key areas of the economy, such as the military-industrial complexes, transport, communications and major industrial plants, came directly under the jurisdiction of the central Government; the republican administration had little, if any, knowledge as to how they functioned. Since independence, Kazakhstan (as other former Soviet republics) has received considerable support through the training and technical assistance programmes that have been provided by international bodies, and by a number of national governments (e.g. India, Japan, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the USA). However, the technical capability in all essential areas of economic planning is arguably still very limited. Thus, mechanisms to implement economic reforms have often been lacking.

A privatization programme was launched in 1991, but the initial results were disappointing. The plan was overly ambitious, and progress was impeded by a lack of basic technical and professional skills and public suspicions. Corruption and organized crime complicated the development of private enterprise, and a high level of bankruptcies further discredited the process. Nevertheless, by 1998 significant progress had been made in the privatization of small enterprises; the privatization of large and medium-sized enterprises was also proceeding steadily.

Other economic reforms were also introduced, often in response to situations, rather than as a result of serious planning. These included price liberalization (1992) and the introduction of a national currency (1993). In the immediate aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there was serious economic dislocation. Essential industrial supplies were disrupted as republics, voluntarily or involuntarily, reneged on contracts with partners within the Union. This triggered a chain reaction of falling production, shortages, rising prices and unemployment. They had been major sources of employment. Sectors such as agriculture, construction, transport and communications, which had been vital contributors to GDP prior to Kazakhstan's independence, were worst affected. This decline continued into the mid-1990s. By this time, however, large numbers of people, especially in rural areas, had become trapped in a cycle of poverty. The situation has been exacerbated by cuts in social services and benefits.¹¹

¹¹ Good studies of the period of transition and stabilisation are given by Kalyuzhnova, Y., *The Kazakhstani Economy: Independence and Transition*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998; Pomfret, R., *The Economies of Central Asia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. Briefer accounts are given by Kaser, M., and Mehrotra, S., *The Central Asian Economies after Independence*. London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1992; and Dixon, pp. 104-11

3.4 Regional Economic Integration

President Nazarbayev is a strong supporter of an integrated economic policy for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). In March 1996, Kazakhstan signed an agreement with Belarus, Russia and Kyrgyzstan on the formation of a common market and customs union. Concurrently, he pursued the goal of closer economic integration within Central Asia. In January 1994, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, soon joined by Kyrgyzstan, reached agreement on the formation of a trilateral economic and defence union. In May 1998, with the addition of Tajikistan, this became the Central Asian Economic Union. The organization has since undergone several transformations and changes of name. It is currently known as the Central Asian Cooperation Organization.¹²

4 Social Issues

4.1 Power and Patronage

As discussed above, very considerable power is now concentrated in the hands of the President. There is very little sign of the “cult of personality” that characterizes the political systems in some of the other Central Asian states. Nevertheless, President Nazarbayev has succeeded in constructing an image of himself as the “founding father” of independent Kazakhstan, and moreover, as the unique guarantor of independence, stability and communal harmony. This has helped him to gain the support of the many ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan.¹³

However, the strong authoritarian rule that he exercises has not been conducive to the development of genuinely independent democratic institutions. The absence of effective checks and balances has led to a burgeoning of bribery and corruption in every sphere of public life. Moreover, it has in large measure contributed to the untrammelled growth of “patronage”, i.e. the use of personal influence to further private ambitions. Members of the presidential family and other close associates (friends, relations and clients) have been given key positions in the state apparatus, the economy and the media. The bureaucracy and the provincial governments are also stacked with presidential supporters. This creates an environment in which abuses of power readily become entrenched. In autumn 2001 several leading figures (including parliamentary deputies and senior officials) openly complained about corruption in high places, naming the President’s son-in-law, Rakhat Aliev, as one of the worst offenders. An opposition group, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan, was formed. However, by January 2002 it had already begun to fragment. Subsequently, two of its founder members were arrested on charges of corruption. By mid-2002 it was no longer regarded as a significant force for change.

Some commentators suggest that the patronage system is linked to Horde affiliation (see above). They claim that positions of power and influence are predominantly held by members of the Great Horde (President Nazarbayev himself is from the Horde). This allegation does

¹² Akiner, S., Regional Cooperation in Central Asia, in R. Weichhardt (ed.), *Economic Developments and Reforms in Cooperation Partner Countries: The Interrelationship between Regional Economic Cooperation, Security and Stability*, Brussels: NATO, 2001, pp. 187-208

¹³ For an account of Nazarbayev’s own view of his role, see Nazarbayev, N., *My Life, My Times and the Future*, trans. and ed. by P. Conradi, Yelverton Manor: Pilkington Press, 1998

not seem to be borne out by the biographies of senior political or economic figures. Yet there is undoubtedly a perception of discrimination, exclusion and a general lack of transparency.¹⁴

4.2 Social and Economic Disparities

During the Soviet period there were many differentials in society. However, the popular perception, reinforced by the official ideology, was that there was social equality and solidarity. Since independence rifts between different groups have begun to open up. Some of these have historical roots, real or imagined (e.g. Horde rivalry - see above). There are also other cleavages along regional, ethnic, religious and urban/rural lines. However, potentially the most dangerous divide is that which is emerging between the “haves” and the “have-nots”.¹⁵

A small but extremely affluent elite has emerged in Kazakhstan. Some individuals have no doubt accumulated their wealth by legitimate means, but many are suspected of having enriched themselves illicitly. They indulge in a life-style of ostentatious opulence. Typically, their clothes and cars will be expensive foreign imports, while their children will be sent to private fee-paying schools, or educated abroad in prestigious Western establishments. By contrast, large sectors of the population have seen a drastic decline in their standard of living. The situation is exacerbated by high birthrates, especially in rural areas, and large numbers of elderly dependants. Unemployment is widespread (local observers claim that it is far higher than official estimates). The social services which used to be provided free of charge during the Soviet period are now either no longer available or have become prohibitively expensive. The percentage of those falling below the poverty line is now estimated to be around 30%.¹⁶

Education is one of the areas that has been catastrophically affected by the economic crisis. In poor families where there are many children – which is the rule rather than the exception in much of the region – a choice has sometimes to be made as to whom should be educated; invariably it is the sons who are favoured. Thus, universal education for both sexes, one of the major achievements of the Soviet regime, is rapidly being eroded.¹⁷ Health care, too, has suffered: there are many that can no longer afford to pay for medical treatment and as a result, health standards are falling. Morbidity, especially tuberculosis and oncological, rose sharply in the 1990s. Post-independence, life expectancy rates decreased, especially in urban areas. There has also been a rapid increase in the spread of HIV infection. The chief cause of this epidemic is intravenous drug abuse. By 1998, according to official sources, there were 20,000 drug addicts, reflecting a five-fold rise within a decade. Unofficial estimates are far higher. The main centre of drug abuse is Temirtau, an industrial city in Karaganda province. As a result of these similar downward trends in social welfare, the Human Development Index declined significantly in the 1990s. By 1997 it was on a level with Botswana. However, there was considerable variation by region, with the southern provinces on average obtaining lower scores than the north.¹⁸

¹⁴ Cummings, S., Kazakhstan: an Uneasy Relationship - Power and Authority in the Nazarbayev Regime, in S. Cummings (ed.), *Power and Change in Central Asia*, London: Routledge, 2002, pp. 59-73

¹⁵ Olcott, M. B., *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002, pp. 197-203

¹⁶ United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report: Kazakhstan 1998*, Almaty, 1998, pp. 17-32, gives a stark picture of the decline in living standards in Kazakhstan in the 1990s.

¹⁷ See *Idem*, pp. 43-8

¹⁸ See *Idem*, pp. 34-43

4.3 Kazakh Nationalism and Political Islam

Kazakh nationalism began to emerge in the 1980s. One of the first signs of this was the Law on Language, adopted in September 1989, which declared Kazakh to be the official language of the republic; Russian was granted the status of “language of inter-ethnic communication” and all officials dealing with the public were expected to know both languages. At this period, knowledge of Kazakh was low, even among Kazakhs themselves, since in the Soviet period the emphasis had been on spreading the use of Russian. This was a cause of grievance for many Kazakhs, who felt that their culture had been ignored or treated with contempt. Greater public use of Kazakh, particularly in the media and in education, was seen as a necessary measure to redress the balance.

Post-independence, there were renewed calls for wider use of Kazakh. In 1992, the Cabinet of Ministers adopted a resolution whereby official communications were to switch to Kazakh by 1995. This dismayed the ethnic minorities; few among them had any knowledge of Kazakh and they feared that the language law would be used as a tool of discrimination against them. This did happen on occasion, but sporadically and not in an institutionalized fashion; ten years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian was still widely used.¹⁹

The extensive renaming of cities and streets was another sign of the rise in Kazakh consciousness. Official holidays and festivals likewise promoted the national culture in a way that seemed to exclude the non-Kazakh population. The very designation used for the population raised questions. The term “Kazakh” may be understood as referring to a specific ethnic group, while “Kazakhstani” is more inclusive. However, efforts to introduce the latter term have not been very successful and “Kazakh” is more commonly used. Political parties espousing overt Kazakh nationalism, such as Alash (named after a legendary Kazakh hero) and Azat (Freedom) have not attracted much support. Nevertheless, a distinct process of Kazakhification of the administration and other public offices has become apparent, with ethnic Kazakhs often receiving preferential promotion to senior posts.²⁰

The rise of Kazakh nationalism has to some extent influenced attitudes towards Islam. In the early 1990s, Kazakh nationalism was sometimes linked to extreme expressions of Islamic identity. However, this phase soon passed, and today radical political Islam has little appeal in Kazakhstan. As discussed above, the Kazakhs were converted to Islam gradually, a process that was not fully completed until the nineteenth century. Even then, the majority practised a syncretic form of Islam that included elements of animism and other local traditions. During the Soviet period, the institutional framework of Islam was all but destroyed. In Kazakhstan, as in other parts of the Soviet Union, Islam survived more as a cultural identity than a living faith.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated at the end of 1991, the governments of the newly independent Central Asian states energetically promoted Islam in a manner that suggested an attempt to establish an ideological replacement for the discredited doctrine of Marxism-Leninism. It was also a nation-building strategy, as it sought to recreate the nation by drawing on the heritage of the pre-Soviet past. This trend was less pronounced in Kazakhstan than in

¹⁹ Oka, N., Nationalities Policy in Kazakhstan: Interviewing Political and Cultural Elites, in N. Masanov *et al.*, *The Nationalities Question in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*, Chiba: Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), 2002, pp. 109-47. Landau, J. M., and Kellner-Heinkele, B., *Politics of Language in the Ex-Soviet Muslim States*, London: Hurst & Co., 2001, particularly pp. 83-92, and 116-19

²⁰ Akiner, S., *Emerging Political Order*, pp. 90-128; Karin, pp. 69-108

the neighbouring states, but nevertheless, here, too, President Nazarbayev eventually began to adopt an overtly pro-Islamic stance. One indication of this was the inscription on the imposing new mosque in Almaty (former capital of Kazakhstan) proclaiming that the construction was undertaken “on the initiative, and with the personal support of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan”. In interview in 1999 he explained, “We are Sunni Muslims and must follow this path”. As one Kazakh commentator pointed out, when the head of state makes such a pronouncement it takes on the force of a political directive - a violation of the principle of freedom of conscience that is guaranteed in the Constitution. During the 1990s there was a rapid increase in the number of mosques and educational establishments. Also, links with foreign Muslims were developed and many Kazakhs went to train in Islamic universities abroad. There was also a considerable influx of Muslim missionaries to Kazakhstan, especially from Turkey and Pakistan. These and similar developments have certainly contributed to a rise in the awareness of Islam, though to date, active adherence to the faith is still relatively low.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Western commentators were concerned that the newly independent states of Central Asia would fall prey to radical Islamist movements, and that this in turn would promote new centres of international terrorism. These fears were heightened by the civil war in Tajikistan (1992-1997). Islamism certainly played a role in this conflict, but a more potent factor was the power struggle between different regional groupings. By the mid-1990s, the main focus of radical Islamic activity was in Uzbekistan, in the Ferghana Valley. Its adherents were allegedly responsible for acts of terrorism; also, it was claimed, they were linked to repeated cross-border armed insurgencies. Very soon, the movement spread to neighbouring areas of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. There have also been reports of radical Islamic groups in southern Kazakhstan, near the Uzbek border. The indications are, however, that among the Kazakhs, such activity has little support.²¹

4.4 Ethnic Minorities

In the 1989 Soviet census of Kazakhstan, 100 ethnic groups were listed separately. Almost twenty of these were represented by fewer than 100 individuals. Fewer than thirty groups came within the 100 to 10,000 range. A further twenty-odd groups ranged in size from 10,000 to 100,000; amongst these were Bulgarians (10,426), Kurds (25,425), Dungans (Chinese Muslims - 30,165) and Greeks (46,746). The range 100,000 to 1 million included Koreans (103,315), Tatars (327,982), Ukrainians (896,240) and Germans (957,518). Russians (6.2 million) constituted the largest, and most established, group of immigrants.²²

There have been several waves of migration into Kazakhstan. There are two main categories: voluntary settlers and deportees. Amongst the former, Slavs were predominant. The first major influx of Russians and Ukrainians took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. By 1926, Slavs constituted about a third of the total population of Kazakhstan (Russians alone accounted for almost 20%). Slav immigration reached a peak during the Second World War, when many industries and academic institutions were relocated to Kazakhstan. The “Virgin Lands” scheme of the 1950s, which aimed to raise grain production by bringing large areas of the steppe under the plough, brought new waves of Slav settlers. In

²¹ Akiner, S., *Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Contested Territory*, in A. Strasser, *et al.* (eds.), *Zentralasien und Islam/Central Asia and Islam*, Hamburg: German Oriental Institute, 2002 (fc)

²² For a survey of the history of the ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan, see Akiner, S., *Minorities in a Time of Change: Prospects for Conflict, Stability and Development in Central Asia*, London: Minority Rights Group, 1997

1989, on the eve of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there were 6.2 million Russians and just under 900,000 Ukrainians in Kazakhstan, compared to 6.5 million Kazakhs. The majority of the Slavs were concentrated in the industrial centres of the north-east.

The major influx of deportees took place in the mid-1930s to mid-1940s. During this period entire peoples were alleged to be anti-Soviet and were deported to Kazakhstan from other parts of the Union. They included Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, Koreans, Greeks, Chechens and Ingush. Until Stalin's death in 1953, they were subjected to harsh discrimination and deprived of basic human rights. Thereafter, they were gradually "rehabilitated". By the 1980s, most had been well integrated into society and several rose to quite senior posts in the professions, also in local and national administration. They were eventually granted some cultural facilities of their own, including, for the larger groups, primary education and some publications in their own language.²³

In the immediate aftermath of independence, most of the ethnic minorities were optimistic about their future prospects in Kazakhstan. Soon, however, they became increasingly concerned about the deteriorating economic situation. Moreover, many were apprehensive that their civil rights would be eroded and that in the future they would be treated as second class citizens.

The Russians in particular felt that they were being pushed out of the public sphere. The 1994 March elections to the Supreme Kenges, in which 59% of successful candidates were ethnic Kazakhs and only 28% ethnic Russians (below their representation in the population as a whole), led to allegations of discrimination against the Slav population. In the same year Boris Suprunyuk, the Cossack leader of the Russian community in northern Kazakhstan, was arrested on charges of "inciting inter-ethnic strife", and was subsequently sentenced to two years' imprisonment. In March 1995, in an attempt to address the problem of inter-ethnic relations in the country, President Nazarbayev established the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan, a forum with the status of a "consultative presidential body". Anti-Government rallies continued, however, this time at the instigation of another Cossack leader, Nikolai Gunkin, who was arrested in October and given a three-month prison sentence.

The decision to move Kazakhstan's capital from Almaty to the industrial city of Aqmola (formerly Tselinograd and, from May 1998 Astana), in the north of Kazakhstan, was perceived by observers to be a strategic move to undermine Russian influence in the area, where Russians far outnumbered Kazakhs. President Nazarbayev's policy of maintaining close relations with the Russian Federation helped allay Slav anxieties to some extent. Nevertheless, tensions remained; many Russians chose to emigrate rather than to face an uncertain future in Kazakhstan. Some of the Stalin-era deportees also began to return to their pre-deportation homes or to seek repatriation to their original homelands abroad.²⁴

4.5 Emigration and Falling Demographic Trends

During the 1990s, particularly in the immediate aftermath of independence, there was a massive exodus from Kazakhstan. Most of those who left belonged to the ethnic minorities. The reasons for their departure were varied, but the primary causes were undoubtedly their

²³ The best study of the deportations is Nekrich, A. *The Punished Peoples: The Deportation and Tragic Fate of Soviet Minorities at the end of the Second World War*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1978. See also Conquest, R., *The Nation-Killers: The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities*, London: Macmillan, 1970

²⁴ Olcott, *Kazakhstan* pp. 63-86

hopes for a more secure economic future, as well as concerns over what was perceived to be the emergence of xenophobic tendencies in Kazakh society. Thus, in the period 1989-1999, the Russian population fell by almost 2 million (down to 4.4 million), the Ukrainian population by over 300,000 (to 550,000). Some two thirds of the German population emigrated to Germany, reducing the remaining number to just over 350,000. By contrast, most Koreans (in 1999 numbering just under 100,000) seemed determined to stay and were extremely active in business ventures involving partnerships with the Republic of Korea (South Korea). The other groups of deportees had relatively limited opportunities to leave, but nevertheless, there was a noticeable reduction in their numbers during the 1990s.

There was also some Kazakh emigration during this period. This process is not well documented. Moreover, it is masked by the fact that over 300,000 Kazakhs from Mongolia, Turkey and elsewhere returned to Kazakhstan after independence. Also, the birth rate among Kazakhs is much higher than among other groups, such as the Slavs. Overall, the Kazakhs increased by almost 1.5 million in 1989-1999 (to just below 8 million), and their percentage in the total population rose from under 40% to 53.4%. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that in the 1990s a not insignificant number of qualified young professional Kazakhs emigrated, legally or illegally, to Russia.²⁵

The statistical results of the emigration of the 1990s was a fall of some 1.5 million in the total population, bringing it down to under 15 million in 1999. The loss in human capital was far greater, since many of those who left were highly trained specialists. Their sudden departure was a serious blow to the social infrastructure of the newly independent state. Industry was also badly affected, since much of the outmigration was from the industrial centres of the north.²⁶

5 Human Rights

5.1 General Situation

Kazakhstan's record on human rights is generally considered to be better than that of other Central Asian states. Cases of arbitrary arrest and detention do occur, but not on a systematic basis (as is the case in some of the neighbouring states). A system of bail was created in 1997, but is not often used. Prison conditions are extremely poor, mostly owing to inadequate funding. There have been some reports of brutal police actions. Also, there is a widespread perception that all the law enforcement agencies are negligent and venal. The judiciary is considered to be extremely corrupt. Local human rights organizations have expressed concerns that the right of freedom of assembly has sometimes been circumscribed, notably in the run-up to the presidential election of January 1999.²⁷ Opposition activists not infrequently complain of physical and administrative harassment by the authorities. However, there have been no reports of extrajudicial killings of government critics.²⁸

²⁵ Open Society Institute, *Kazakhstan: Forced Migration and Nation Building: A Special Report by the Forced Migration Projects*, New York, 1998. For a different perspective on the changing demographic profile of Kazakhstan see Masanov, N., Perceptions of Ethnic and All-National Identity in Kazakhstan, in N. Masanov, *et al.*, pp. 4-68

²⁶ See United Nation Development Programme, pp. 34-5

²⁷ Zhovtis, E. A., Freedom of Association and its Realization in Kazakhstan, in M. H. Ruffin, and D. Waugh (eds.), *Civil Society in Central Asia*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999, pp. 57-70

²⁸ See, for example Amnesty International, *Annual Reports*, London, [annual], <http://www.amnesty.org> [accessed June 2002]; also Amnesty International, *Kazakhstan: Ill-treatment and the Death Penalty*, London,

5.2 Censorship and Media Control

One aspect of civil liberty that has been eroded in recent years is freedom of the media. The Law on the Press and Other Mass Media (1991) enshrined the right of free speech. This was reaffirmed in article 20 of the 1995 Constitution, which guarantees the “right of freedom of speech and creativity”, likewise the freedom of information. Censorship is expressly prohibited. Nevertheless, directly and indirectly, a considerable degree of censorship has been introduced.

Firstly, a large proportion of the media, electronic and print, is either state-owned or state-run. Close relatives of President Nazarbayev own most of these outlets. Consequently, as a matter of policy, they support the government and restrict themselves to reflecting official views. Secondly, although some genuinely independent media outlets do exist, they encounter a number of problems. One is the sheer operational cost of these ventures; commercial rates (leaving aside questions of availability) for such items as equipment, premises and paper are often exceedingly high. Another problem is harassment. This can take a number of forms, ranging from physical assault to indirect methods. These include the sudden imposition of fines, pressure on printing presses not to accept material, interference with distribution systems and the withholding of licenses. Such problems combine to create what is perhaps the most effective form of censorship: self-censorship.²⁹ Thus, virtually all independent media organizations prefer to follow the state sector in their coverage of news and information. It is noteworthy that there is no censorship of foreign radio and television channels, or the Internet.³⁰ Yet only the relatively wealthy have access to such facilities (and unconfirmed rumours suggest that the Government is now seeking to impose curbs on Internet use).

5.3 Freedom of Religion

Kazakhstan is a secular state. However, as indicated above, Islam, in its orthodox Sunni form, has been accorded special status akin to that of state religion. Other religions that have long been established on the territory of Kazakhstan are also treated with respect and do not suffer any discernible harassment. The main faiths that are accorded this treatment are the Russian Orthodox Church and Judaism. New faiths, by contrast, are subject to many forms of direct and indirect harassment. These include Baptists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, various evangelical sects, the Hare Krishna movement and Bahais. There is particular concern about the activities of some of the Protestant sects. Several of these missions (mostly from the US and South Korea) are extremely well funded and energetically seek converts. Many Kazakhs regard this as a dangerous phenomenon, on the grounds that it “steals” vulnerable young people away from the faith of their fathers. This is regarded as a threat to national unity. There are also concerns about the nature of the teachings of some of these faiths.

The Law on Religion that was adopted on 15 January 1992 was in broad outline in keeping with international practice. However, thereafter, several attempts were made to introduce more restrictive amendments. In March 2001 a new draft law was presented to parliament. It contained many clauses aimed at limiting religious freedom. These included proposals to

July 1996; United States, Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998: Kazakhstan*, Washington DC, 1999

²⁹ McCormack, G. (ed.) *Media in the CIS: A Study of the Political, Legislative and Socio-economic Framework*, 2 ed., Düsseldorf: European Institute for Media, 1999, pp. 123-44

³⁰ Akiner, S., *Emerging Political*, pp. 90-128

impose more onerous requirements for the registration of religious associations and religious education. Criminal punishment for unregistered missionary activities was also foreseen. Strong expressions of concern were voiced both within Kazakhstan and from foreign organizations (including the OSCE). The draft law was eventually rejected in April 2002, when the Constitutional Court deemed it unlawful. Fears, however, remained that new attempts might be made to resurrect it in one form or another.³¹

6 Groups at Risk

There is no evidence to suggest that in Kazakhstan any particular social, ethnic or religious group is at risk of serious human rights violations by State and/or non-State actors. As discussed in the previous section, the human rights record in Kazakhstan is relatively good (particularly in comparison with other Central Asian states). However, the collapse of the Soviet Union caused huge economic dislocation. This in turn resulted in a sharp fall in the standard of living of a large proportion of the population. Although the situation has to some extent stabilized, unemployment remains high and there is scant income security. At the same time, there has been a deterioration of law and order. Corruption is rife in every sphere of public life. The judiciary and the police force are underpaid and tend to resort to bribe taking as a means of supplementing their wages. Protection rackets are widespread. In these circumstances, individuals who do not have access to social networks that might offer support and assistance are vulnerable to abuse and harassment. Such problems are further exacerbated by poverty. Single women with no immediate family, particularly those from a non-Kazakh background, are most likely to experience difficulties of this nature.

There is no official policy of discrimination against non-Kazakhs, but as indicated above (see section 4.3), in the immediate aftermath of independence, the rise of Kazakh nationalism and the concomitant trend towards the Kazakhification of the public sphere alarmed members of the ethnic minorities. In the early 1990s there was a mass exodus of Slavs and other minority groups. By the end of the decade, however, the flow of emigrants had been greatly reduced. A *modus vivendi* was established that was not ideal, but did provide for a certain accommodation of the ethnic minorities. This helped to dispel immediate anxieties regarding their prospects in Kazakhstan. There is still a degree of covert, informal discrimination towards non-Kazakhs, but in general, ethnic relations are cordial. There is some persecution of followers of “non-traditional” faiths such as the Hare Krishna movement (see section 5.3), but this is very small scale. On balance, it seems unlikely that there will be any major movements of population in the foreseeable future.

Today’s emigrants are mainly economic. The primary destination is Russia, though some seek opportunities to go to the West (North America and Western Europe). Occasionally, a few of the latter request asylum in the country of their destination. In such cases, professional legal advisers sometimes suggest that their chances of being granted asylum will be enhanced if they stress that they are at risk of religious and/or ethnic persecution in Kazakhstan.³² The number of such individuals is, however, quite small.

³¹ *Keston News Service*, <http://www.keston.org> [accessed June 2002] is an invaluable source of regular information on religious affairs in Kazakhstan. See in particular report of 18 December 2001 on the presentation of the new draft law on religion.

³² In recent years the author has been asked to review a few such applications for asylum by emigrants from Kazakhstan. Lawyers working in this field tend to suggest to their clients possible lines of appeal. This can result in a certain degree of exaggeration in the way they describe conditions in Kazakhstan.

7 Outlook

In mid-2002 the outlook for Kazakhstan was good. There were huge proven hydrocarbon reserves. These were continuing to attract considerable international interest, resulting in significant flows of foreign direct investment. Although there were still a number of problems that complicated the exploitation of the oil and gas, nevertheless, it was confidently expected that in the near future Kazakhstan would be the recipient of massive revenues.³³ There were concerns, however, as to how this wealth would be used. The Kazakh Government in 2000 established a National Fund, following the Norwegian model. By October 2001, the Fund had already accumulated US\$1.2 billion. The rules governing contributions to and investments by the Fund were generally considered to be sound, but there were concerns as to how well they would be implemented. Given the high level of corruption, it seemed possible that much of the oil wealth would remain in the hands of a small elite, rather than benefiting the population at large.³⁴

There were also concerns about the political stability. President Nazarbayev was still relatively young (b. 1940) and certainly very much in control of the country. His term of office was due to run until 2006. He might then stand for re-election. In any case, he had already been voted special powers for life (see above). Yet rumours were gaining ground that he was not in the best of health. For a time, it had seemed to some commentators that the foundations for a “presidential dynasty” were being laid. However, the accusations that had publicly been levelled at Nazarbayev’s son-in-law in autumn 2001 had created such a scandal that this was no longer an option - if indeed, it ever had been. There were no other obvious candidates on the horizon (with the possible exception of Prime Minister Tasmagambetov). The lack of strong democratic institutions, and in particular, the highly flawed conduct of presidential and parliamentary elections since 1991, aroused fears that once President Nazarbayev left office there would be a ruthless power struggle. This in turn, it was suggested, could trigger social unrest.

A more encouraging development was the degree of regional stabilization. By mid-2002, the Western-led campaign in Afghanistan appeared to have largely succeeded in defeating the Taliban and al-Qaeda forces. This greatly improved the security situation in Central Asia as a whole. Kazakhstan co-operated with the international community in this undertaking, but was careful to maintain a balance in its relations with Russia, China and the West (particularly the US). This enhanced its standing in regional affairs. Later, when Pakistan and India were on the brink of conflict, Kazakhstan was able to offer a forum for mediation, within the framework of the Conference for Cooperation and Confidence Building in Asia. On the whole, it seemed likely that, barring unforeseen shocks, Kazakhstan would remain the most stable and prosperous of the Central Asian states. Wealth would continue to be unevenly distributed, but it did not seem likely that there would be any major social disturbances.

³³ European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

³⁴ Olcott, M. B., *Kazakhstan*, pp. 28-148

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