

# KAZAKHSTAN



**The Republic of Kazakhstan**, straddling both Europe and Asia, is the world's largest landlocked country - 2.7 million sq.km., making it larger than Western Europe. Its main borders are with Russia and China, but also adjoins a large part of the Caspian Sea. It has a population of 16.6 million people approximately 63% of which are Kazakh, 25% Russian and the balance made up of various other ethnic minorities. Predominantly Islamic, it is a religiously tolerant country with 70% Muslim, 26% Christian and the remainder made up of Judaism and Buddhism. Kazakhstan is officially a bilingual country: Kazakh is the "state" language while Russian is declared the "official" language and is routinely used in business and government. A Kazakh language test has recently been applied to all of those seeking employment by the state.

**Education, as with most Asian countries, is highly regarded** and is universal and mandatory through to secondary level. The adult literacy rate is 99.5%. Education consists of three main phases: primary, basic general and senior

level. The Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan runs a highly successful scholarship, which is annually awarded to about 5,000 Kazakh applicants. The scholarship funds their education and all living expenses abroad as well as transportation costs once a year to and from their home. The choice of an institution of higher education and research, as well as any corporation that provides education to both undergraduates and postgraduates, has no restrictions, as long as an applicant complies with the eligibility requirements of that institution. The terms of the program include a mandatory return to Kazakhstan for at least five years of consecutive employment.

**In 1997 Kazakhstan transferred its capital** from Almaty to Astana and although Almaty remains the nation's business centre this is gradually shifting to Astana. The years following independence have been marked by significant reforms and progress towards developing a market economy.

Despite a small number of Kazakhs growing very rich through privatisation, inequality is now less pronounced than in other Central Asian



countries and unemployment is low by regional standards. Since the mid-nineties it is estimated that per-capita GDP has increased tenfold and as a result of major foreign investment into the Caspian oil industry, growth has averaged 6.5% per annum since 2000. Although 60% of Kazakhstan's income is derived from the sale of oil and oil-based products, Kazakhstan is also the world's largest producer of uranium, supplying over 39% of global demand.

**Kazakhstan pursues a multi-vector foreign policy**, seeking equally good relations with its two large neighbours, Russia and China, as well as the United States and the West in general. The policy has yielded results in the oil and gas sector, where companies from Russia, China, the US and Europe are present at all major fields, and in the multi-directional oil pipelines out of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan is also part of the Eurasian Union along with Russia Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan. It astutely manages its trade with East and West alike with the majority of its imports coming from Russia and 50% of its exports going to the EU, with China being its largest single export partner.



Today's Kazakhstan is a huge country with modern cities and enormous reserves of natural resources. Its economy is currently growing at around 4% and its National Debt to GDP stands at 17.5%, and with its unemployment rate at 4.9% it has many admirers from within the worlds more developed economies.

**Kazakhstan became independent in 1991** - the last Soviet republic to do so and now has a bicameral Parliament composed of the lower house (the Majilis) and upper house (the Senate), and is based upon the Russian system of government. Nursultan Nazarbayev became the country's first President, a position he has retained for more than two decades and is Head of State and also Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. He also holds a veto over any legislation passed by Parliament. The Prime Minister is appointed by the President and chairs the cabinet of ministers, and serves as Kazakhstan's head of government.



**Kazakhstan is divided into 14 provinces** and also then sub-divided into districts. Each province is headed by an Akim (provincial governor), appointed by the President. Municipal or district Akims are appointed by provincial Akims. Districts popularly elect 107 deputies to the Majilis, who serve a five-year term. The Senate has 47 senators. Two senators are selected by each of the elected assemblies of Kazakhstan's 16 principle administrative divisions (14 provinces plus the cities of Astana and Almaty), the President appoints the remaining 15 senators and they serve a six-year term. In 2010 President Nursultan Nazarbayev rejected a call to hold a referendum to keep him in office until 2020, instead insisting on presidential elections every five years.