

# Republic of Kazakhstan

## Country Report



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## Executive summary:

*The ninth-largest country in the world, independent Kazakhstan has worked to overcome a Soviet legacy of underdevelopment. Kazakhstan today has one of the most robust economies in Central Asia, thanks to substantive market reforms, strong government stewardship, significant foreign investment, and abundant energy and mineral resources.*

*Kazakhstan's long-serving President Nursultan Nazarbayev – in power since 1989, and reelected in 2011 to a new five-year term – has used his country's strategic location and extensive energy reserves to balance skillfully among Russia, China, Europe, and the United States, and has positioned Kazakhstan as an aspiring regional leader. Achieving sustainable economic development outside the oil, gas, and mining sectors is another near-term challenge, as is reversing the Soviet legacy of extensive environmental pollution and the drying of the Aral Sea.*

*Thanks to its large size and surging economy, Kazakhstan enjoys growing leverage over other central Asian states. Relations with key neighbors Russia and China are good and feature growing economic and security cooperation. The United States has praised Kazakhstan for its cooperation on U.S.-led non-proliferation, security, and counter-terrorism efforts. The U.S. has also maintained a positive relationship with Nazarbayev despite allegations of human rights and electoral violations, harassment of opposition and independent media, and endemic corruption.*

*The Jewish community of Kazakhstan is composed both of long-settled Bukharan Jews and more recent Ashkenazic immigrants from the era of Russian rule. Jewish relations with the Kazakh government are good, and there have been no recent reports of anti-Semitic acts. Kazakhstan maintains cordial relations with Israel, and President Nazarbayev is an advocate of interfaith dialogue, moderate Islam, and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.*

## History:

Kazakhstan is the second-largest Soviet successor state after Russia, and the ninth-largest country in the world. As large as Western Europe, and nearly four times the size of Texas, Kazakhstan hosts dozens of ethnic groups and religious denominations. It borders Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and the Caspian and Aral Seas.

### Statistics:

**Population:** 18,023,126  
(December 2016 est.)  
**Size:** 2,717,300 sq. km.

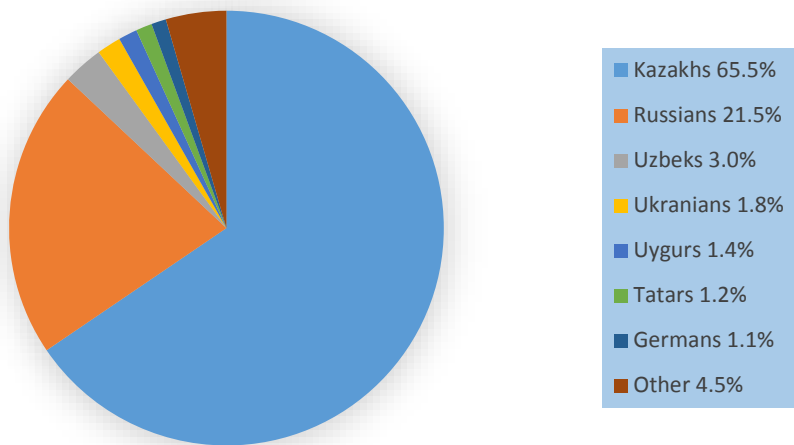
**Capital:** Astana  
**Major cities:** Almaty,  
Karaganda, Chimkent

**Jewish population:**  
approximately 50,000  
**2009 Aliyah** (emigration to  
Israel): 1,598

**Head of State:**  
President Nursultan  
Nazarbayev  
**Head of Government:**  
Prime Minister  
Bakhytzhon  
**Foreign Minister:**  
Erlan Idrissov

**Ambassador to United  
States:**  
Kairat Umarov  
**U.S. Ambassador to  
Kazakhstan:**  
George A. Krol  
**Freedom House Rating:**  
Not Free

## Ethnic Composition

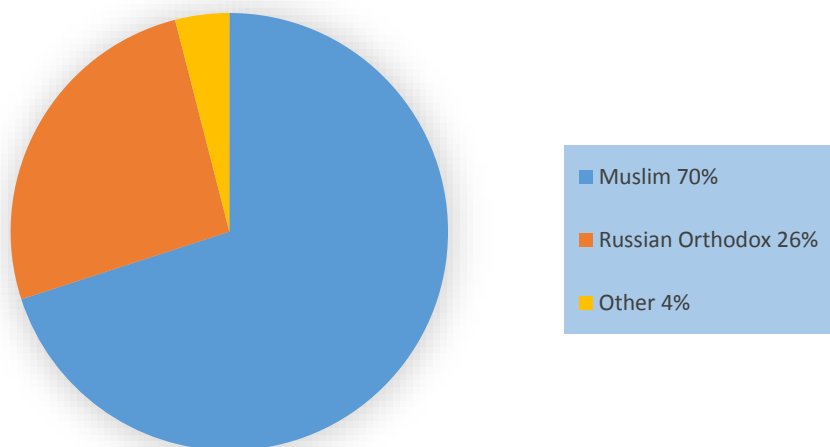


Long dominated by Central Asian nomads and their khanates (especially Mongols and Turks), Kazakhstan was annexed piecemeal by Russia in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, incorporated into the Soviet Union by 1920, and raised to Union Republic status in 1936. When it gained its independence in 1991 after the fall of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan held more ethnic Slavs than

ethnic Kazakhs, a legacy of Tsarist and Soviet policies of deportation and state-sponsored population resettlement. Kazakhstan's sparsely populated northern steppes in particular were intensively settled with Russian-speaking farmers by Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev in his "Virgin Lands" campaign during the 1950s and early 1960s.

In Soviet-era Kazakhstan, the large Russian-speaking population enjoyed preferential treatment over ethnic Kazakhs. After 1991, ethnic tensions and official policy (such as requiring Kazakh language proficiency for government jobs) led many Russian-speakers to leave Kazakhstan, ultimately shrinking its population by a million; likewise, Kazakhs returned home from other regions of the former Soviet Union, gaining automatic citizenship. Ethnic Kazakhs now enjoy majority status in their own country, although Russian speakers still form almost a third of the population.

## Religion



### Political Situation:

The Kazakh constitution, adopted by referendum in 1995 and superseding a version passed in 1993, established a bicameral parliament, a judiciary, and an executive branch headed by a popularly elected

President who serves a seven-year term. The upper house of parliament (the Senate) has 39 representatives serving six-year terms while the lower house (the Majilis) has 77 representatives serving for five years.

The constitution and subsequent presidential decrees have concentrated power in the executive branch, with little power granted to or practiced by the legislature, the judiciary, or local administrations, who are appointed and dismissed by the President, as are the prime minister and all other members of the cabinet. However, in May 2007, parliament approved, and President Nazarbayev signed into law, a series of constitutional amendments designed to reduce the powers of the presidency, boost parliamentary powers, and raise the number of parliamentarians to 154. The amendments, which took effect in 2012, also eliminated term limits for Nazarbayev himself, and reduced future presidential terms from seven to five years.

Kazakhstan's politics since independence has been dominated by Nursultan Nazarbayev, its powerful President and former Communist Party chief. Nazarbayev was originally appointed head of the Kazakhstan Communist Party in 1989 by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. Nazarbayev was elected Kazakhstan's first President for a five-year term in December 1991. Following flawed legislative elections in 1994 that were ultimately invalidated by the Constitutional Court, Nazarbayev dissolved parliament and initiated a national referendum in April 1995. Official results showed 95% of voters supported Nazarbayev's proposal to extend his term until December 2000; another referendum held in August 1995 and boycotted by some oppositionists approved a new constitution that greatly expanded executive powers. Parliamentary elections held in December 1995 for a new bicameral legislature resulted in a sweep for pro-presidential candidates.

In October 1998, parliament approved Nazarbayev's proposal to reschedule presidential elections from December 2000 to January 1999, and to extend the presidential term from five to seven years. Nazarbayev easily won reelection with a reported 80% of the vote, although his chief challenger, a former prime minister, was banned from running, and the OSCE declared the election non-democratic and below international standards.

Kazakhstan's held a Presidential election in December 2005. Official results showed that Nazarbayev won another seven-year term with 91% of the vote, though independent exit polls suggested this number was inflated. Several opposition candidates competed in the election, although OSCE monitors reported government harassment and interference in their campaigns.

During the run-up to the 2005 presidential election, the government assumed greater powers to combat vaguely defined "extremism," and imposed new restrictions on civil society in the name of enhancing national security. Observers suggested that these steps were taken partly in response to popular uprisings in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in 2003-2005, in which opposition groups, NGOs, and independent media played key roles in overthrowing unpopular authoritarian regimes. Threats and attacks against the opposition culminated in the killing of two leading opposition figures in late 2005 and early 2006, which further chilled Kazakhstan's political environment.

The OSCE criticized Nazarbayev's government for its conduct during the campaign and election, which it claimed limited meaningful political opposition and contributed to an atmosphere of intimidation. The OSCE determined that the 2005 presidential election did not meet democratic standards, despite some improvement over past elections. At the same time, many observers noted President Nazarbayev's genuine popularity at home, buoyed by growing prosperity and relative stability under his rule in a region roiled by open ethnic, political, and religious conflict.

In April 2011, Kazakhstan held early presidential elections, originally scheduled for 2012. They were called after the initiative for conducting a referendum to extend President Nazarbaev's rule until 2020.

Kazakhstan's most recent parliamentary elections were held on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2016. They resulted in a victory for the Nur Otan party. OSCE and PACE announced in their joint press release that the elections had been "efficiently organized with some progress noted, but they indicated that Kazakhstan still has a considerable way to go in meeting its OSCE commitments for democratic elections".

In April 2015, Kazakhstan held early presidential elections, originally scheduled for 2016. The result was a victory for long-term incumbent President Nazarbayev of Nur Otan, who received 97.7% of the vote, winning a fifth term in office.

President Nazarbayev's eldest daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, has emerged as a powerful political figure in her own right. The former head of the country's state-run news agency and a successful businesswoman, Nazarbayeva had led her own political party and was elected to parliament, where she was at times critical of her father's regime. However, Nazarbayeva merged her party with the President's Otan (Homeland) party in 2006 after Nazarbayev's reelection, and has redefined herself as a strong supporter of the current political system. Some have suggested that Nazarbayeva may be attempting to carve out a role as her father's designated successor during what may be his last term in office. Both Nazarbayeva and Nazarbayev have called publicly for an anti-corruption drive and a government shake-up, which some have interpreted as an opportunity to purge potential opponents of the Nazarbayevs from power.

In 1994, President Nazarbayev proposed moving the capital of Kazakhstan from Almaty, its largest city and Soviet-era capital close to the Kyrgyz and Chinese borders, to Astana in north-central Kazakhstan (formerly known as Akmola and then as Tselinograd, or "Virgin Lands City.") The move, completed by 1997-1998, may have been made in part to enhance national security by placing the capital away from the Chinese border and in the middle of the largely Russian-populated north, some of whose residents agitated for union with Russia following Kazakhstan's independence in 1991. After the move, Nazarbayev's government launched an ambitious, multi-billion dollar development project to turn Astana into an impressive capital, world-class city, and symbol of national pride and identity. Current plans envisage Astana ultimately doubling its population to one million and hosting a leading national university.

The Kazakh government has been accused of discouraging independent political activity, and freedom of association and assembly is limited by state regulations. Freedom of the press, although protected by the constitution, is not always respected in practice, and security services such as the KNB (Committee for National Security) have been accused of human rights abuses. The government generally allows opposition activity, including peaceful demonstrations. However, opposition groups also routinely report harassment, interference, and persecution by the authorities, including imprisonment and electoral disqualification, which is said to increase in the run-up to national elections.

President Nazarbayev is a strong advocate for non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Since taking office, he has dismantled Kazakhstan's nuclear arsenal, formerly the fourth largest in the world after the fall of the USSR, and has signed various arms-reduction treaties. The government has called on the international community to help fund the rehabilitation of Kazakhstan's extensive Soviet-era nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons-testing areas, whose residual toxins contribute to continued high rates of diseases and genetic disorders in nearby regions.

### **Economic Situation:**

The breakup of the Soviet Union led to a severe economic contraction in Kazakhstan in the early-to-mid 1990s. In response, the government accelerated privatization and economic reform with support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, halting further decline.

Kazakhstan's subsequent growth can be attributed to its profitable energy sector, economic reforms, good harvests, and increased foreign investment. The World Bank ranks Kazakhstan as an upper-middle-income state.

**Currency:** 336 Tenge =1\$  
**GDP:** \$184.4 billion (2015 est.)  
**GDP per capita** \$10,508 (2015 est.)  
**GDP Growth:** 1.2% (2015 est.)

In 2000, Kazakhstan became the first former Soviet republic to pay back its loans to the IMF, \$400 million in total, seven years ahead of schedule. In 2002, the U.S. government graduated Kazakhstan to market economy status under U.S. law, and Kazakhstan became the first post-Soviet state to receive an investment-grade credit rating from a major international credit rating agency, the same year. Due to the success of the Kazakh economy, monetary aid from international organizations has significantly decreased.

Significant increases in GDP and income growth have had a positive impact on country's poverty level and the unemployment rate. Poverty nationwide decreased from 47% in 2001 to 3.8% in 2012 and unemployment level dropped from 10% in 2001 to 5.1% in 2014.

Kazakhstan has major mineral reserves and massive fossil fuel reserves. It is a major exporter of raw materials and industrial goods. Much of Kazakhstan's industry depends on resource processing. In order

to avoid over-dependence on its energy and mining exports, Kazakhstan is promoting the growth of its other sectors, such as machine-building and light industry.

62% of the country is occupied by oil and gas areas, with 172 oil fields. Kazakhstan's oil exports in 2012 totaled \$55.2 billion, accounting for more than 60% of exports. Kazakhstan is the world's largest producer of uranium and has proven reserves of 65 trillion cubic feet of natural gas.

Economic relations between Russia and Kazakhstan are close. Kazakhstan depends on the use of Russian pipelines to export much of its oil, and Russia is Kazakhstan's largest export partner. In March 2001, Kazakhstan opened a pipeline from the Tenghiz oil field through Russian territory to the Black Sea port of Novorossisk. The Tenghiz oil field is the sixth-largest in the world. This is the first pipeline to connect Caspian oil reserves to international markets.

On May 29 2014, the Russian, Belarusian, and Kazakhstan Presidents met in Astana to discuss the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union, which will launch in January 2015. This new economic union will affect key sectors, such as energy, education, labor, technology, agriculture and transport.

In an effort to expand and diversify its oil export capacity, Kazakhstan is working with China to extend a major pipeline from the Tenghiz field into China. In return, China has sold a majority of its oil fields in Kazakhstan back to the state. The Kenkiyak-Kumkol oil pipeline began shipment of Kazakh oil to China in October 2009, starting with 10 million tons per year. In 2014 the oil export to China was 11.7 million tons of oil.

As one of the Caspian Sea's five littoral states (along with Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia, and Turkmenistan), Kazakhstan has been involved in longstanding disputes over control of potential Caspian Sea oil reserves. In May 2002, Russia and Kazakhstan signed an agreement dividing several northern Caspian oil fields on an equal basis. Delimitation of a seabed boundary with Turkmenistan in the Caspian Sea remains unresolved, and other issues remain outstanding with other littoral states, including Russia and Azerbaijan.

Despite economic progress, environmental pollution in Kazakhstan is widespread and represents a serious threat to public health and future development. The Kazakh government faces the prospect of a massive environmental cleanup to deal with Soviet-era pollution, including nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons test sites, failed agricultural projects, and weak industrial pollution controls.

Kazakhstan's most pressing ecological issue is the plight of the Aral Sea. Once a principal source of irrigation and drinking water for the region, this inland sea has shrunk dramatically since the 1960s, creating serious environmental, health, and economic hazards. Beginning in the 1930s, the Soviets diverted the tributary rivers of the Aral Sea in order to irrigate cotton; while cotton production in the region increased dramatically, so did poverty, disease, and lack of water, causing many rural Kazakhs to look for work in the country's cities. By 2000, the Aral Sea was a quarter of its original size, divided into separate North and South portions, and still shrinking.

In 2003, the World Bank and the Kazakh government began working together on the Kokaral Dam to reverse evaporation and improve water quality in the Sea's northern portion (the southern portion lies largely in Uzbekistan). Completed in 2005, the dam proved highly successful, raising water levels in the North Aral Sea, enabling the local fishing industry to resume, and helping to reverse the region's population loss. Reports in 2007 suggested that the Aral Sea, or at least its northern half, is beginning to recover, but noted that additional international funding is needed.

Kazakhstan has also been troubled by Tajikistan's plans to build a dam upstream, which would harm Kazakhstan's agricultural sector. However, in February 2015, Kazakhstan loosened its opposition and suggested it is ready to attempt to cooperate with Tajikistan and hear proposals for dam construction and the creation of a regional hydroelectric consortium.

The country experienced a slowdown in economic growth from 2014 sparked by falling oil prices and the effects of the Ukrainian crisis. The move to a floating exchange-rate regime in August 2015 led to a sharp depreciation of the tenge, which negatively affected private domestic demand and intensified inflationary pressures. The pass-through effect of the depreciation caused inflation to spike, reaching 13.6 percent, year-on-year, in December 2015.

### **Religious Policy:**

Human rights organizations have condemned intolerance towards religious minorities in state documents, in officials' public comments, and in state-inspired hostile media coverage. National security legislation passed in 2005 gave the government wider scope to designate religious groups as extremist and ban them, and also to ban all activities by unregistered religious groups, creating another lever of state control.

The New Law on Religious Freedom, passed October 2011, applies registration restriction on missionaries and religious groups, giving government a right to deny a legal status to religious associations, and to ban certain religious literature and religious ceremonies. The law required every religious group to re-register, to let the Government assess whether each religion association is based on religion rather than an ideology. As a result, some religious groups lost legal status due to their religious beliefs or lack of mandatory number of members. The total number of legal religious organizations groups decreased by 32%, from 4,551 to 3,088. This law has been criticized for discriminating against religious minorities.

In 2015, the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion recommended "far-reaching reforms" to the 2011 religion law, finding, for example, that "non-registered religious communities ... suffer from serious infringements of their freedom of religion."

### **Foreign Policy:**



Since independence, Kazakhstan has pursued, with a large measure of success, equally good relations with Russia, China, Europe, and the United States.

U.S.-Kazakhstani cooperation in security and non-proliferation has been a cornerstone of the relationship. The Kazakh government has been extremely supportive of the U.S.-led war against terrorism and Kazakhstan allowed the use of its airfields, air corridors, and shared intelligence information.

In 2009, a U.S. General Consulate was opened in Almaty, the former capital of Kazakhstan. In response, a Kazakhstan General Consulate opened in New York in 2010.

The energy sphere remains an important area of cooperation, represented by the Joint Kazakhstan-American Commission on Energy Partnership, which convenes on annual basis, focusing on nuclear security, hydrocarbons, renewables and energy efficiency.

Past disputes with Russia over the treatment of Kazakhstan's ethnic Russians, Russian leasing of the Baykonur Cosmodrome for rocket launches, and pipeline routes for Kazakh oil has rocked their relationship but are now resolved.

Recently, intensive political contacts have been in place between Kazakhstan and Russia. In 2013, there were nine high level official meetings – six meetings of presidents and three meetings of prime ministers. There was also several meetings between the foreign ministers of Russia and Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan remains an important trade partner of Russia, holding third place in terms of trade between the CIS countries.

Active economic and financial integration with several other CIS countries is being implemented within the Customs Union of the Eurasian Economic Community. It is expected that a supranational body to regulate the integrated financial market of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus within the Eurasian Customs Union will be created in 2025.

The Treaty on Creation of the EEU was signed in May 2014, legitimizing a possibility for the EEU to start functioning within the Customs Union from 1st January 2015. Basic principles of the Eurasian Economic Space were agreed by the Presidents of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia on 24th December 2013.

Creation of the EEU is the new integration stage for participating countries. Kazakhstan, Belarus and Russia will guarantee a free movement of goods, service, assets and work force, and also implement coordinated policies in such economic spheres as energy, industrial sector, agriculture and transport. The ultimate goal of such steps is to complete the formation of the biggest common market in the CIS area, with 170 million people, though lacking a common currency like the Euro.

Border disputes with neighboring Uzbekistan have been peacefully resolved, and a 2006 summit meeting between the presidents of both countries appeared to improve relations and reduce latent rivalry between Central Asia's two biggest states. Drought and the ongoing desertification of the Aral Sea have triggered disputes over water rights among all the Central Asian nations; Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have yet to determine their boundaries in the Caspian Sea.

Kazakhstan's relationship with China has been growing, boosted by Chinese interest in transporting and receiving Kazakh oil and investing in the Kazakh economy, and joint security cooperation. Kazakhstan is a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace and was acceded into the World Trade Organization on June 27, 2015.

Kazakhstan is a member of the regional Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and has staged joint security exercises with both China and Russia.

In June 2002, fifteen countries established the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) in Almaty. President Nazarbayev had lobbied strongly for the creation of CICA as a forum similar to the OSCE, to defuse tensions and resolve conflicts.

In February 2003, the Kazakh government hosted the International Conference on Peace and Harmony, which brought together Central Asian and Caspian leadership, and representatives of Jewish and Muslim groups from many nations, to promote interfaith tolerance while condemning terrorism and extremism. A follow-up conference in September 2003 brought together political and religious delegations from all regions of the world, including the United States. In September 2006, Kazakhstan hosted the Second Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, which attracted religious leaders from around the world, including the two Chief Rabbis of Israel. Nazarbayev has described hosting such multi-confessional meetings as his contribution to global security.

Kazakhstan held the rotating chairmanship of the OSCE in 2010, and its tenure culminated in a summit in Astana.

Kazakhstan provided Ukraine with humanitarian aid after the beginning of military conflict in southeast Ukraine in 2014. In October 2014, Kazakhstan donated \$30,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross's humanitarian effort in Ukraine. In January 2015 Kazakhstan sent \$400,000 worth of aid to Ukraine's southeastern regions to help ease the humanitarian crisis.

On June 26, 2015 Kazakhstan issued a resolution expanding the number of countries included in a trial visa-free regime and extended that regime until Dec. 31, 2017. The list now includes 19 countries, including Australia, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UAE, the U. K. and the U.S.

In May, 2016, Kazakh Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov spoke at two high level meetings at the U.N. headquarters in New York. The Foreign Minister said that Kazakhstan was calling for a nuclear free world by 2045, the 100th anniversary of the United Nations.

### **Relations with the U.S.:**

The United States was the first country to recognize Kazakhstan as an independent country when it declared its independence in December 1991, and opened its embassy in Almaty in January 1992.

Since 1993, USAID has administered funds designated to enhance communications and political reform, education, health care, micro-enterprise, and community development, and market reforms.

Early U.S.-Kazakh relations were marked by significant cooperation in security and non-proliferation. With U.S. assistance and encouragement, Kazakhstan renounced its Soviet-legacy nuclear weapons in 1993 and removed them in 1995, sending more than a half-ton of weapons-grade uranium to the United States. Kazakhstan has signed all major international arms control treaties. In addition, stockpiles have also been reduced through such programs as Cooperative Threat Reduction. U.S. funding also supports the strengthening of border security.

According to the Center for Defense Information, the Kazakh government has been extremely supportive of the U.S.-led war against terrorism. Over 800 U.S. flights over Kazakh territory were approved during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Kazakhstan has also allowed the use of its airfields, air corridors and has shared intelligence information with the United States. The two countries have engaged in joint military exercises and training.

As part of the 1974 U.S. Trade Act, the Jackson-Vanik amendment imposed trade restrictions on the Soviet Union in response to its inadequate human rights policy, particularly restricting emigration of religious minorities, and anti-Semitism. The amendment stated that non-market economies that continue to impose emigration restrictions on their citizens would not be granted permanent normal trade relations or most favored nation status with the United States. In March 2002, the U.S. granted Kazakhstan market-economy status, though as of publication, Kazakhstan has not graduated from Jackson-Vanik.

Concerns about government corruption have generated tension between the two countries. An ongoing U.S. federal grand jury probe alleges that American oil companies, competing for Kazakh oil and gas production rights, have paid hundreds of millions of dollars in bribes to senior Kazakh government officials, including President Nazarbayev.

In September 2006, President Nazarbayev paid a state visit to the United States and met with President Bush. Despite criticism over Kazakhstan's imperfect electoral record, state restrictions on news media, its decision to shut down two American democracy organizations, and alleged human rights violations, Bush praised Kazakhstan as a free nation. He touted Kazakhstan's role as an important U.S. ally that helps

to promote regional stability and security. During his visit, President Nazarbayev met with Jewish community leaders, including NCSEJ, and spoke of his desires to promote inter-ethnic peace.

The Obama administration has pledged to strengthen the strategic partnership with Kazakhstan, by continuing close cooperation in reducing nuclear threats in Kazakhstan and around the world. President Obama expressed appreciation for Kazakhstan's humanitarian and economic assistance to Afghanistan and Kazakhstan's agreement to permit U.S. cargo flights across Kazakhstan in support of the mission in Afghanistan.

Several years of Kazakh-American cooperation were marked by agreements reached by President Nazarbayev and President Obama in 2010, 2011, and 2012. They defined the following priority spheres of cooperation: regional security, Afghanistan stabilization, economic and trade cooperation, investment, energy and science.

In 2012, a bilateral Commission on Strategic Partnership was formed to consider issues including political and trade-economic partnership, cooperation on issues of global and regional security, energy, and science.

In 2012, a U.S. Congressional delegation visited Kazakhstan. In May 2013, a Kazakhstan Parliament delegation visited Washington, D.C. and New York City to hold negotiations with their U.S. counterparts on a broad range of economic and political issues.

In 2013, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, Assistant Secretary for Southern and Central Asia Robert Blake and Deputy Assistant Secretary Bill Burns visited Kazakhstan.

In November, 2015, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Astana. The sides discussed the conflict in eastern Ukraine, cooperation in countering the threats of ISIL, terrorism, and violent extremism. The next session of the Strategic Partnership Dialogue was held in Washington, D.C. on March 9, 2016, and covered a range of issues including international and regional affairs, security cooperation, economic cooperation, governance, rule of law, labor and human rights in Kazakhstan.

There is an active military-technological cooperation between Kazakhstan and the United States in developing peacekeeping potential, military education, and defense industry contacts.

Kazakh officials advocate for increased U.S. involvement in several sectors, including technology and international trade.

### **Relations with Israel:**

Kazakhstan has good relations with Israel. Diplomatic ties were established in 1992, and the countries have reciprocal embassies. Between 1989 and the present, an estimated twenty thousand Kazakh Jews have made aliyah.

Israel's Center for International Cooperation, MASHAV, has partnered with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to develop Kazakh agriculture and micro-enterprise. MASHAV partnered with USAID to assist in the building of a dam to help restore the Aral Sea. In addition, MASHAV supplements agribusiness training centers and administers health clinics throughout Kazakhstan.

In April 2000, President Nazarbayev led a Kazakh delegation on his second official visit to Israel. Focusing on bilateral economic ties, the two countries agreed to establish a joint committee to promote cooperation, including a customs agreement; 3,000 trees were planted in the Jerusalem vicinity in honor of President Nazarbayev's visit.

Numerous Israeli companies are involved with projects in Kazakhstan. Israel has participated in the CICA, including the 2002 Summit where it signed the Almaty Act. Kazakhstan was among those countries interceding on behalf of thirteen Jews who were put on trial in Iran in 2001.

Israeli President Shimon Peres visited Kazakhstan on an official visit in June 2009, where he met with President Nazarbayev, Prime Minister Karim Masimov, and Senate Speaker Kasym-Zhomart Tokayev. President Peres discussed various diplomatic and security issues as well as the potential for economic-technological cooperation between the two states. In addition, Peres was invited to be the keynote speaker at an inter-religious conference with hundreds of Muslim leaders and religious figures from the Middle East and around the world.

In January 2014, Kazakhstan's defense minister visited Israel, where he met with various officials including President Peres, and discussed intensification of bilateral military cooperation.

In February 2014, former Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak met with President Nazarbaev to discuss possibilities for further cooperation on unmanned systems, border security, command-and-control capabilities as well as satellite communications. In May 2014, the Ministers of Defense of Israel and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on military-technical cooperation.

In May 2015, Israel and Kazakhstan constructed the Israel-Kazakhstan Irrigation Demonstration Center in the Almaty region, which focuses on the sharing of environmentally adaptive irrigation technologies.

In July 2016, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced his plan to visit Kazakhstan by the end of the year.

### **Jewish Communal Life:**

Today, Kazakhstan is home to between 15,000 and 30,000 Jews, most of whom are descendants of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Ashkenazi immigrants from Europe and European Russia. Only an estimated two thousand are Bukharan and Tat Jews, who have resided in Kazakhstan for up to two thousand years.

Many Kazakh Jews are descendants of Russian army conscripts sent to Kazakhstan during the time of the Russian Empire.

The country's Jewish population increased during the Soviet period, in part due to the Soviet practice of exiling politically and economically "suspect" elements, especially during Stalin's rule. An estimated 8,500 Jews fled to Kazakhstan from Eastern Europe during World War II, escaping German occupation and the Holocaust. Almaty has the largest Jewish population, with 11,000 people. Smaller communities exist in other cities, including Karaganda, Chimkent, Astana, Semipalatinsk, and Kokchetav.

The Kazakh Jewish community enjoys a stable environment and well-organized religious and cultural life. Established in 1992, the Mitzvah Association coordinates the social services and cultural and religious work of fifteen Jewish cultural associations, thirteen welfare organizations, and twelve Jewish community centers. The welfare organizations, funded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC/ "Joint") help 10,000 Jews in more than 90 cities and towns through soup kitchens, home care for the elderly, medical services, and summer camps.

The Jewish Congress of Kazakhstan was created in December 1999 to help unify the Kazakh Jewish community, with businessman and philanthropist Alexander Mashkevich as its president. Mashkevich served as president of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress from 2005 till 2011. Mashkevich plays an influential role in the Kazakh Jewish community. He has contributed substantial funds to the Jewish community and has been the primary donor for the construction of new synagogues in Kazakhstan.

The Association of Jewish Communities of Kazakhstan, a Chabad Lubavitch organization, plays an active role in Kazakhstan's Jewish community. Chabad Lubavitch operates a Jewish center called Beis Menachem and conducts services at synagogues in Almaty, Astana, and Chimkent. Chabad offers Jewish day school, food distribution services, elderly care, and summer camp for Jewish children.

The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI) maintains an office in Almaty and actively participates in Jewish life throughout Kazakhstan, promoting Jewish identity while working with other Jewish organizations. JAFI sponsors Jewish youth centers throughout Kazakhstan, the largest of which is in Almaty. These centers serve as a hangout for Jewish teens as well as a forum for teaching Jewish culture.

Jewish education and cultural activities have expanded steadily since independence. Fourteen Jewish supplementary schools operate in Kazakhstan with more than seven hundred students in attendance. Chabad's Ohr Avner Gershuni Jewish Day School enrolls nearly 100 children. In 2000, the Jews of Uralsk established a Jewish Culture Society and have since received offers of material and financial aid from the local government.

Jewish leaders in Kazakhstan characterize their relationship with the government as positive. President Nazarbayev personally presented historical records on the late Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson's father – who was exiled to Kazakhstan during the Soviet period and is buried in Almaty – to Lubavitch leaders in a December 1999 visit to New York.

Many government officials, as well as the U.S. Ambassador, attended the founding session of the All-Kazakhstan Jewish Congress in December 1999. At a Washington, D.C. ceremony in October 2003, Kazakhstan's National Security Committee opened part of its archives to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The documents detail the prosecution of Nazi collaborators in Kazakhstan after World War II.

In September 2004, the largest synagogue in Central Asia was dedicated in Almaty. Funded by Mashkevich and named after his mother, Beit Rachel is large enough to accommodate all five hundred of Astana's Jews. In 2006, a new synagogue and community center opened in Ust-Kamenogorsk, a new Torah scroll was completed for the first time in the history of Kazakhstan's Jewish community, both chief rabbis of Israel visited Kazakhstan, and the country's first-ever Association for Hebrew Speakers was formed.

While the majority of Kazakhstan's population is Muslim, incidents of anti-Semitic violence are rare.