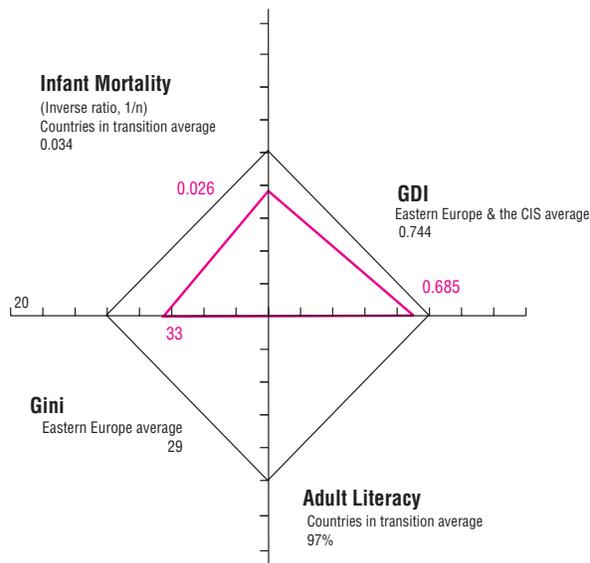


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DEMOCRACY IS RETREATING



The Equity Diamond: National values in terracotta compared to regional ones in blue.
Source: **Infant mortality:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **Adult literacy:** UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children, 1998*; **GDI** (Gender Development index); UNDP, *Human Development Report 1998*; **GINI:** World Bank, *World Development indicators 1998*. (The regional average for this indicator was calculated by Social Watch).

Kazakstan's position in the Human Development Index (HDI) declined from 61st in 1994 to 64th in 1995, 72nd in 1996 and 93rd in 1997, and moved from 8th to 6th, 5th and 7th places among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Baltic countries. 84% of the total decline in HDI is attributed to economic recession, 13% to shortened life expectancy, and 3% to lower educational levels (UNDP, pp. 7–8).

Since independence in 1991, Kazakstan has joined three conventions on human rights: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (in 1993), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW in 1998), and the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment (in 1998).

Observance of the first is not successful. The situation of children is worse than in 1991. Many families are not receiving their family allowances. 70% of pre-school facilities have been shut down since 1991. The percentage of children who attend kindergarten is down from 50.8% to 10.6%. In rural areas only 2.6% of children attend kindergarten. Out-of-school educational possibilities are considerably reduced (UNDP, p.35). The current situation is comparable to the 1961 level.

Democracy is steadily retreating. Its main limitations are: there is only one effective power—the executive; political opposition is weak and oppressed; there are no significant political parties; some senators are appointed by the president; and there is a complete ban on meetings, demonstrations, pickets and processions. The minister of internal affairs has dispatched a letter to all structural divisions requesting the mandatory presence of security representatives at meetings of all citizens' organisations.

Freedom of the press is rigidly limited. In 1998, all mass media organisations were investigated for violations of the Law on Press and other Mass Media. Four major topics are considered off-limits to the Kazak press: the personality of President Nazarbayev; the move of the capital from Almaty to Astana; the so-called Plan 2030—an economic and political plan charting Kazakstan's course to the year 2030; and government suppression of opposition movements (*All Over the Globe*,¹ p. 6).

The government not only exercises control over the press by refusing to issue licenses to some media organisations and requiring high fees. It also harasses organisations with unfair tax and business laws and leaves loopholes through which it can claim a media organisation is violating the law. If the government so decides, it can always find a reason to shut down a media organi-

¹ *All Over the Globe* is a bilingual weekly (English and Russian), published in Almaty.

sation. (*All Over the Globe*, p.6) Press freedom is being especially threatened during the campaign for presidential elections on January 10th 1999, which President Nazarbayev is expected to «win».

Most independent media practice self-censorship to avoid clashes with the government, which owns the printing presses. Some media organisations have moved their printing facilities to neighbouring Kyrgyzstan.

Freedom of political groups is restricted in practice and through contradictory laws. For example, the Law on Public Associations prohibits the activity of non-registered organisations, but simultaneously requires that organisations hold a general meeting before they can register. Political groups deemed by the government to be a threat to national security (eg, the Union of Cossacks of the Steppe Region) are out-lawed.

Crying violations of human rights are taking place at the local level. One example is the arrest and temporary detention of persons arriving from other former Soviet countries when they attempt to register with Kazakstan authorities as required by Kazak law. The reason given for their arrest is that they are not registered.

Regulations and decrees against corruption are regularly issued. Tax and customs employees are regularly transferred from one division to another. In mid-1998, a law was passed on Struggle Against Corruption in response to some cases of government corruption: the minister of Transport and Communications granted free use of the National Air Company at a cost of 2 million tenge (approx. USD 24 thousand); and an official in Akmolah district used state funds to renovate his private flat.

In an unprecedented event, six supreme court judges and five regional court judges were recently punished by the government for corruption. However, this will hardly reduce the scale and depth of corruption in the country. According to an evaluation of Kazakstan by western business, corruption is all-embracing at all levels.

Power is being centralised. Top administrative positions are appointed by the president, the number of administrative districts has been reduced, and all important decisions are taken by the government only.

The only initiative against centralisation—removal of the capital to Astana—has changed the geographical location of power only, isolating the government from populous regions and from opposition, which is in Almaty.

POVERTY

The government has issued the Presidential Strategy-2030, with a priority task of reducing and eliminating poverty by 2030. The government's measures against poverty are not effective in practice.

The minimum wage is less than the cost of living and it is also less than unemployment benefits. According to official data, 43% of the population (39.8% urban and 46% rural) consume less than the minimum consumption basket. (UNDP, p.18)

Pensioners funds in the National Bank were depreciated 3 thousand times as the result of inflation and transition to a national currency. Pension reform raised the pension age, in spite of the

shortage of working places (**the World Bank recommended raising the pension age in order to lower social expenditures as a condition for addition investment in Kazakstan**). The government has fixed the size of pensions at below the minimum consumption basket and it no longer guarantees pension funds.

Payment of salaries and other budgetary items are several months in arrears. There is no control over payment of salaries. Recorded salary arrears in the business sector alone amount to USD 4.4 billion. Compared with 1996, real salaries corrected to include arrears declined almost 20% in 1997.

Apart from branch and regional differences, there are huge salary differences within enterprises. Management is paid 20 times or more what labour is paid (UNDP, p.15). The result is social stratification and disruption of the economy. The gap between rich and poor is growing. Although there is a new and growing middle class, it is still too numerically insignificant to give the «have-nots» a real sense of hope.

Government regulations have sharply reduced access by the majority of Kazakstan people to the main social services. Perhaps the only real anti-poverty measure that government is taking is the payment of family allowances to families with monthly incomes of less than USD 20 per family member.

Still, the conditions for families in Kazakstan have critically worsened. Delays in payment of allowances for children have reached two years. In some towns, women have picketed at railways, demanding payment of the delayed allowances. Two of these women were taken to criminal court. Allowances for single mothers were cancelled in 1997.

Production and sale of electric power, fuel and main municipal services were denationalised and transferred to foreign firms. As a result, utility bills grew to 100% of the average pension. The programme for allocation of state and municipal housing accommodation has been sharply reduced and access limited to state employees and parliamentarians.

The average life expectancy has dropped to 64.9 years. From 1990-1995, it dropped by 3.4 years to 59.7 years for men, and by 2.6 years to 70.4 years for women. (Report on the Status of Women, p. 88)

The government does not cooperate with NGOs in their activities against poverty. There is a paragraph in the Constitution of 1995 forbidding financial aid to NGOs. Tax privileges are available to five organisations only, including an organisation of disabled people, the Red Cross Society and the union of veterans of war in Afghanistan. Tax exemptions for charitable organisations are limited to 2%. NGOs have not participated in the elaboration of policy on poverty alleviation.

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER COMMITMENTS?

Full employment is not a government priority. Government policy on job creation and unemployment reduction can hardly be called logical. In his annual message to the nation on September 30th 1998, president Nazarbayev again promised measures to reduce unemployment. In particular, he offered a wide-scale pro-

gramme of public works.

There is legislation protecting maternity leave that was elaborated in Soviet times. After Kazakhstan became independent, several paragraphs were cancelled. In practice, this legislation is used, with many restrictions, for budgetary purposes only.

- There is no special legislation concerning migrants and refugees except for Kazak repatriates. The balance of migration is negative.
- Special measures on access to education are restricted for the benefit of Kazaks, who make up 50.6% of total population. The state language is Kazak, the second official language is Russian, and other languages are not used at the official level.
- Effective during socialism, quotas for women have since been cancelled. The principle of positive discrimination to increase women's role in political parties and primarily in state structures is promoted only by NGOs, in particular, by the Feminist League. The government has no plans to introduce new quotas. The government is not concerned with discrimination against women in the job market or in payment of wages. Nor has it developed effective social programmes for the women living in poverty. However, the president recently articulated the idea of establishing a bank for women. UNDP is implementing a project on micro-credit for women in two ecologically poor regions of the country. There are no special services for women who are victims of violence in Kazakhstan. Due to influence of women's NGOs, the issue of criminal liability for domestic violence has been raised.
- External aid of United Nations' specialised divisions to Kazakhstan was USD 1.1 million in 1995, USD 1.2 million in 1996, USD 2.1 million in 1997 and USD 5 million in 1998. These funds were primarily directed to the social sector, and to envi-

ronment, agriculture, energy and infrastructure development.

Foreign aid was characterised by a total absence of coordination and excessive enthusiasm for the services of foreign consultants who sometimes made recommendations that did not correspond to the country's reality. For example, recommendations of the World Bank and European Bank of Reconstruction and Development to cut budget costs for education led to the closing of more than 300 schools. As a result, 26,900 children are not getting an education now. The system of higher education was destroyed, teachers' loads have increased and their wages have been reduced. (UNDP, p.81)

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- Feminist League of Almaty was established in 1994 as the first feminist group in countries of Central Asia. Main objectives of this NGO are: feminist education and elimination of sexism in mass media; support of creative women.