**Kazakhstan**

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| **Republic of Kazakhstan** **Қазақстан Республикасы*Qazaqstan Respwblïkası*Республика Казахстан*Respublika Kazakhstan*** |
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| **Anthem:**Менің Қазақстаным (Kazakh)*Meniñ Qazaqstanım* "My Kazakhstan" |
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| **Capital** | Astana51°10′N 71°30′E﻿ / ﻿51.167°N 71.5°E﻿ / 51.167; 71.5 |
| **Largest city** | Almaty |
| **Official language(s)** | Kazakh (state and major for Kazakh officials, spoken by almost all Kazakhs)Russian (2nd official (spoken by 85% of residents, including non-Russians)) |
| **Ethnic groups**  | (2009 census)63.1% Kazakh23.7% Russian2.8% Uzbek2.1% Ukrainian1.4% Uyghur1.3% Tatar1.1% German4.5% Other |
| **Demonym** | KazakhKazakhstani |
| **Government** | Presidential republic |
|  -  | President | Nursultan Nazarbayev |
|  -  | Prime Minister | Karim Massimov |
| **Independence** | from the Soviet Union  |
|  -  | Kazakh Khanate | 1465  |
|  -  | Alash Autonomy | December 13, 1917  |
|  -  | Kazakh SSR | December 5, 1936  |
|  -  | Declared | December 16, 1991  |
|  -  | Finalized | December 25, 1991  |
| **Area** |
|  -  | Total | 2,724,900 km2 (9th)1,052,085 sq mi  |
|  -  | Water (%) | 1.7 |
| **Population** |
|  -  | 2010 estimate | 16,196,800 (62nd) |
|  -  | 2009 census | 16,004,800  |
|  -  | Density | 5.94/km2 (224th)15.39/sq mi |
| **GDP** (PPP) | 2008 estimate |
|  -  | Total | $177.835 billion (55th) |
|  -  | Per capita | $11,434 (70th) |
| **GDP** (nominal) | 2008 estimate |
|  -  | Total | $135.601 billion (53rd) |
|  -  | Per capita | $8,719 (68th) |
| **Gini** (2008) | 28.8 (low)  |
| **HDI** (2007) | ▲ 0.804 (high) (82nd) |
| **Currency** | Tenge () (KZT) |
| **Time zone** | West/East (UTC+5/+6) |
| **Drives on the** | right |
| **Internet TLD** | .kz |
| **Calling code** | +7-6xx, +7-7xx |

**Kazakhstan** (also spelled Kazakstan, Kazakh: Қазақстан *Qazaqstan*, pronounced [qɑzɑqstɑ́n]; Russian: Казахстан [kəzɐxˈstan]), officially the **Republic of Kazakhstan**, is a country in Eurasia ranked as the ninth largest country in the world. It is also the world's largest landlocked country. Its territory of 2,727,300 km² is greater than Western Europe. It is neighbored clockwise from the north by Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and also borders on a significant part of the Caspian Sea. The capital was moved in 1997 from Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city, to Astana.

Vast in size, the terrain of Kazakhstan ranges from flatlands, steppes, taigas, rock-canyons, hills, deltas, and snow-capped mountains to deserts. With 16.2 million people (2009 census), Kazakhstan has the 62nd largest population in the world, though its population density is less than 6 people per square kilometer (15 per sq. mi.).

For most of its history, the territory of modern-day Kazakhstan has been inhabited by nomadic tribes. By the 16th century the Kazakhs emerged as a distinct group, divided into three hordes. The Russians began advancing into the Kazakh steppe in the 18th century, and by the mid-19th century all of Kazakhstan was part of the Russian Empire. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, and subsequent civil war, the territory of Kazakhstan was reorganized several times before becoming the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936, a part of the USSR. During the 20th century, Kazakhstan was the site of major Soviet projects, including Khrushchev's Virgin Lands campaign, the Baikonur Cosmodrome, and the Semipalatinsk "Polygon", the USSR's primary nuclear weapon testing site.

Kazakhstan declared itself an independent country on December 16, 1991, the last Soviet republic to do so. Its communist-era leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev, became the country's new president. Since independence, Kazakhstan has pursued a balanced foreign policy and worked to develop its economy, especially its hydrocarbon industry. While the country's economic outlook is improving, President Nazarbayev maintains strict control over the country's politics. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan's international prestige is building. It is now considered to be the dominant state in Central Asia. The country is a member of many international organizations, including the United Nations, NATO's Partnership for Peace, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In 2010, Kazakhstan is chairing the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Kazakhstan is ethnically and culturally diverse, in part due to mass deportations of many ethnic groups to the country during Stalin's rule. Kazakhs are the largest group. Kazakhstan has 131 nationalities including Kazakh, Russian, Ukrainian, Uzbek and Tatar. It has a population of 16.0 million, of whom around 63% percent are Kazakhs.

Kazakhstan allows freedom of religion, and many different beliefs are represented in the country. Islam is the primary religion. The Kazakh language is the state language, while Russian is also officially used as an "equal" language (to Kazakh) in Kazakhstan's institutions.

**History**

Main article: History of Kazakhstan

**Kazakh Khanate**

Artistic depiction of Ancient Taraz

Kazakhstan has been inhabited since the Stone Age: the region's climate and terrain are best suited for nomads practicing pastoralism. Historians believe that humans first domesticated the horse in the region's vast steppes. While ancient cities Taraz (Aulie-Ata) and Hazrat-e Turkestan had long served as important way-stations along the Silk Road connecting East and West, real political consolidation only began with the Mongol invasion of the early 13th century. Under the Mongol Empire, administrative districts were established, and these eventually came under the emergent Kazakh Khanate.

Throughout this period traditionally nomadic life and a livestock-based economy continued to dominate the steppe. In the 15th century, a distinct Kazakh identity began to emerge among the Turkic tribes, a process which was consolidated by the mid-16th century with the appearance of a distinctive Kazakh language, culture, and economy.

Nevertheless, the region was the focus of ever-increasing disputes between the native Kazakh emirs and the neighboring Persian-speaking peoples to the south. By the early 17th century, the Kazakh Khanate was struggling with the impact of tribal rivalries, which has effectively divided the population into the Great, Middle and Little (or Small) Hordes (*jüz*). Political disunion, tribal rivalries, and the diminishing importance of overland trade routes between East and West weakened the Kazakh Khanate.

During the 17th century Kazakhs fought Oirats, a federation of western Mongol tribes, among which the Dzungars were particularly aggressive. The beginning of the 18th century marked the zenith of the Kazakh Khanate. During this period the Little Horde participated in the 1723–1730 war against the Dzungars, following their "Great Disaster" invasion of Kazakh territories. Under leadership Abul Khair Khan the Kazakhs won major victories over the Dzungar at the Bulanty River, in 1726, and at the Battle of Anrakay in 1729. Ablai Khan participated in the most significant battles against the Dzungars from the 1720s to the 1750s, for which he was declared a "batyr" ("hero") by the people. Kazakhs were also a victims of constant raids carried out by the Volga Kalmyks.

**Russian Empire**

Abay Qunanbayuli, Kazakh poet, composer and philosopher

In the 19th century, the Russian Empire began to expand, and spread into Central Asia. The "Great Game" period is generally regarded as running from approximately 1813 to the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. The tsars effectively ruled over most of the territory belonging to what is now the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The Russian Empire introduced a system of administration and built military garrisons and barracks in its effort to establish a presence in Central Asia in the so-called "Great Game" between it and the British Empire. The first Russian outpost, Orsk, was built in 1735. Russia enforced the Russian language in all schools and governmental organizations. Russian efforts to impose its system aroused the extreme resentment by the Kazakh people, and by the 1860s, most Kazakhs resisted Russia's annexation largely because of the disruption it wrought upon the traditional nomadic lifestyle and livestock-based economy, and the associated hunger which was rapidly wiping out some Kazakh tribes. The Kazakh national movement, which began in the late 1800s, sought to preserve the native language and identity by resisting the attempts of the Russian Empire to assimilate and stifle them.

From the 1890s onwards ever-larger numbers of settlers from Russian Empire began colonizing the territory of present-day Kazakhstan, in particular the province of Semirechye. The number of settlers rose still further once the Trans-Aral Railway from Orenburg to Tashkent was completed in 1906, and the movement was overseen and encouraged by a specially created Migration Department (Переселенческое Управление) in St. Petersburg. During the 19th century about 400,000 Russians immigrated to Kazakhstan, and about one million Slavs, Germans, Jews, and others immigrated to the region during the first third of the 20th century.

The competition for land and water which ensued between the Kazakhs and the newcomers caused great resentment against colonial rule during the final years of Tsarist Russia, with the most serious uprising, the Central Asian Revolt, occurring in 1916. The Kazakhs attacked Russian and Cossack settlers and military garrisons. The revolt resulted in a series of clashes and in brutal massacres committed by both sides. The Russians' revenge was merciless. A military force drove 300,000 Kazakhs to flee into the mountains or to China. When approximately 80,000 of them returned the next year, many of them were slaughtered by Tsarist forces. During the 1921–22 famine, another million Kazakhs died from starvation.

**Kazakh SSR**

Almaty, the Soviet-era capital of Kazakhstan.

Main article: Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic

Although there was a brief period of autonomy (Alash Autonomy) during the tumultuous period following the collapse of the Russian Empire, many uprisings were brutally suppressed, and the Kazakhs eventually succumbed to Soviet rule. In 1920, the area of present-day Kazakhstan became an autonomous republic within the Soviet Union.

Soviet repression of the traditional elite, along with forced collectivization in late 1920s–1930s, brought mass hunger and led to unrest (See also: Soviet famine of 1932–1933). Between 1926 and 1939, the Kazakh population declined by 22%, due to starvation, violence and mass emigration. Today, the estimates suggest that the population of Kazakhstan would be closer to 20 million if there had been no starvation or massacre of Kazakhs. During the 1930s, many renowned Kazakh writers, thinkers, poets, politicians and historians were slaughtered on Stalin's orders, both as part of the repression and as a methodical pattern of suppressing Kazakh identity and culture. Soviet rule took hold, and a Communist apparatus steadily worked to fully integrate Kazakhstan into the Soviet system. In 1936 Kazakhstan became a Soviet republic. Kazakhstan experienced population inflows of millions exiled from other parts of the Soviet Union during the 1930s and 1940s; many of the deportation victims were deported to Siberia or Kazakhstan merely due to their ethnic heritage or beliefs, and were in many cases interned in some of the biggest Soviet labor camps, including ALZHIR camp outside Astana, which was reserved for the wives of men considered "enemies of the people". (See also: Population transfer in the Soviet Union, Involuntary settlements in the Soviet Union.)

The Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic contributed five national divisions to the Soviet Union's World War II effort. In 1947, two years after the end of the war, the Semipalatinsk Test Site, the USSR's main nuclear weapon test site was founded near the city of Semey.

The period of World War II marked an increase in industrialization and increased mineral extraction in support of the war effort. At the time of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's death, however, Kazakhstan still had an overwhelmingly agricultural-based economy. In 1953, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev initiated the ambitious "Virgin Lands" program to turn the traditional pasture lands of Kazakhstan into a major grain-producing region for the Soviet Union. The Virgin Lands policy brought mixed results. However, along with later modernizations under Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, it accelerated the development of the agricultural sector which remains the source of livelihood for a large percentage of Kazakhstan's population. By 1959, Kazakhs made up 30% of the population. Ethnic Russians accounted for 43%.

Growing tensions within Soviet society led to a demand for political and economic reforms, which came to a head in the 1980s. A factor that has contributed to this immensely was Lavrentii Beria's decision to test a nuclear bomb on the territory of Kazakh SSR in Semey in 1949. This had a catastrophic ecological and biological effect which was felt generations later, and Kazakh anger toward the Soviet system has escalated.

In December 1986, mass demonstrations by young ethnic Kazakhs, later called Jeltoqsan riot, took place in Almaty to protest the replacement of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR Dinmukhamed Konayev with Gennady Kolbin from the Russian SFSR. Governmental troops suppressed the unrest, several people were killed and many demonstrators were jailed. In the waning days of Soviet rule, discontent continued to grow and find expression under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*.

The Bayterek tower in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan

**Independence**

Caught up in the groundswell of Soviet republics seeking greater autonomy, Kazakhstan declared its sovereignty as a republic within the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in October 1990. Following the August 1991 aborted coup attempt in Moscow and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan declared independence on December 16, 1991. It was the last of the Soviet republics to declare independence.

The years following independence have been marked by significant reforms to the Soviet-style economy and political monopoly on power. Under Nursultan Nazarbayev, who initially came to power in 1989 as the head of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and was eventually elected President in 1991, Kazakhstan has made significant progress toward developing a market economy. The country has enjoyed significant economic growth since 2000, partly due to its large oil, gas, and mineral reserves.

Democracy, however, has not gained much ground since 1991. In 2007, Kazakhstan's parliament passed a law granting President Nursultan Nazarbayev lifetime powers and privileges, immunity from criminal prosecution, and influence over domestic and foreign policy. Critics say he has become a de facto "president for life."

Over the course of his ten years in power, Nazarbayev has repeatedly censored the press through arbitrary use of "privacy" laws, and refused demands that the governors of Kazakhstan's 14 provinces be elected, rather than appointed by the president.

**Government and politics**

Main articles: Government of Kazakhstan and Politics of Kazakhstan

President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev

**Political system**

Kazakhstan is a presidential republic. The president is Nursultan Nazarbayev. The president also is the commander in chief of the armed forces and may veto legislation that has been passed by the Parliament. The prime minister chairs the Cabinet of Ministers and serves as Kazakhstan's head of government. There are three deputy prime ministers and 16 ministers in the Cabinet. Karim Massimov has served as the Prime Minister since January 10, 2007.

Kazakhstan has a bicameral Parliament, made up of the lower house (the Majilis) and upper house (the Senate). Single mandate districts popularly elect 67 seats in the Majilis; there also are ten members elected by party-list vote rather than by single mandate districts. The Senate has 39 members. Two senators are selected by each of the elected assemblies (Maslikhats) of Kazakhstan's 16 principal administrative divisions (14 provinces, plus the cities of Astana and Almaty). The president appoints the remaining seven senators. Majilis deputies and the government both have the right of legislative initiative, though the government proposes most legislation considered by the Parliament.

**Elections**

Main article: Elections in Kazakhstan

Elections to the Majilis in September 2004 yielded a lower house dominated by the pro-government Otan Party, headed by President Nazarbayev. Two other parties considered sympathetic to the president, including the agrarian-industrial bloc AIST and the Asar Party, founded by President Nazarbayev's daughter, won most of the remaining seats. Opposition parties, which were officially registered and competed in the elections, won a single seat during elections that the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said fell short of international standards.

In 1999, Kazakhstan applied for observer status at the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. The official response of the Assembly was that Kazakhstan could apply for full membership, because it is partially located in Europe, but that they would not be granted any status whatsoever at the Council until their democracy and human rights records improved.

On December 4, 2005, Nursultan Nazarbayev was reelected in a landslide victory. The electoral commission announced that he had won over 90% of the vote. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) concluded the election did not meet international standards despite some improvements in the administration of the election. Xinhua News Agency reported that observers from the People's Republic of China, responsible in overseeing 25 polling stations in Astana, found that voting in those polls was conducted in a "transparent and fair" manner.

A sign for the Otan (Fatherland) Party, the former ruling party of Kazakhstan

On August 17, 2007, elections to the lower house of parliament were held with the ruling Otan Party coalition winning every seat with 88% of the vote. None of the opposition parties have reached the benchmark 7% level of the seats. This has led some in the local media to question the competence and charisma of the opposition party leaders. Opposition parties made accusations of serious irregularities in the election.

**Intelligence Services**

Kazakhstan's National Security Committee (KNB) was established on June 13, 1992. It includes the Service of Internal Security, Military Counterintelligence, Border Guard, several Commando units, and Foreign Intelligence (Barlau). The latter is considered by many as the most important part of KNB. Its director is Major General Omirtai Bitimov.

**Geography**

Map of Kazakhstan

Main articles: Geography of Kazakhstan and List of cities in Kazakhstan

With an area of 2.7 million square kilometers (1.05 million sq. mi), Kazakhstan is the ninth-largest country and the largest landlocked country in the world. It is equivalent to the size of Western Europe. It shares borders of 6,846 kilometers (4,254 mi) with Russia, 2,203 kilometers (1,369 mi) with Uzbekistan, 1,533 kilometers (953 mi) with China, 1,051 kilometers (653 mi) with Kyrgyzstan, and 379 kilometers (235 mi) with Turkmenistan. Major cities include Astana, Almaty, Karagandy, Shymkent, Atyrau and Oskemen. While located primarily in Asia, a small portion of Kazakhstan is also located west of the Urals in Eastern Europe.

The terrain extends west to east from the Caspian Sea to the Altay Mountains and north to south from the plains of Western Siberia to the oases and deserts of Central Asia. The Kazakh Steppe (plain), with an area of around 804,500 square kilometers (310,600 sq. mi), occupies one-third of the country and is the world's largest dry steppe region. The steppe is characterized by large areas of grasslands and sandy regions. Important rivers and lakes include: the Aral Sea, Ili River, Irtysh River, Ishim River, Ural River, Syr Darya, Charyn River and gorge, Lake Balkhash and Lake Zaysan.

Charyn Canyon in northern Tian Shan

The climate is continental, with warm summers and colder winters. Precipitation varies between arid and semi-arid conditions.

The Charyn Canyon is 150–300 meters deep and 80 kilometers long, cutting through the red sandstone plateau and stretching along the Charyn River gorge in northern Tian Shan ("Heavenly Mountains", 200 km east of Almaty) at 43°21′1.16″N 79°4′49.28″E﻿ / ﻿43.3503222°N 79.0803556°E﻿ / 43.3503222; 79.0803556. The steep canyon slopes, columns and arches rise to heights of 150–300 m. The inaccessibility of the canyon provided a safe haven for a rare ash tree that survived the Ice Age and is now also grown in some other areas. Bigach crater is a Pliocene or Miocene asteroid impact crater, 8 kilometers (5 mi) in diameter and estimated at 5 ±3 million years old at 48°30′N 82°00′E﻿ / ﻿48.5°N 82°E﻿ / 48.5; 82.

**Provinces**

Main articles: Provinces of Kazakhstan and Districts of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is divided into 14 provinces (Kazakh: облыстар, *oblıstar*). The provinces are subdivided into districts (Kazakh: аудандар, *awdandar*).

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| **Province** | **Capital** | **Area (km.²)** | **Population** |
| Akmola | Kokshetau | 121,400 | 0,829,000 |
| Aktobe | Aktobe | 300,600 | 0,661,000 |
| *Almaty*(1) | Almaty | 000,324.8 | 1,226,300 |
| Almaty Province | Taldykorgan | 224,000 | 0,860,000 |
| *Astana*(1) | Astana | 000,710.2 | 0,600,200 |
| Atyrau | Atyrau | 118,600 | 0,380,000 |
| *Baikonur*(2) | Baikonur | 000,057 | 0,070,000 |
| East Kazakhstan | Oskemen | 283,300 | 0,897,000 |
| Jambyl | Taraz | 144,000 | 0,962,000 |
| Karagandy | Karagandy | 428,000 | 1,287,000 |
| Kostanay | Kostanay | 196,000 | 0,975,000 |
| Kyzylorda | Kyzylorda | 226,000 | 0,590,000 |
| Mangystau | Aktau | 165,600 | 0,316,847 |
| North Kazakhstan | Petropavl | 123,200 | 0,586,000 |
| Pavlodar | Pavlodar | 124,800 | 0,851,000 |
| South Kazakhstan | Shymkent | 118,600 | 1,644,000 |
| West Kazakhstan | Oral | 151,300 | 0,599,000 |

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Notes:

* (1) Almaty and Astana cities have the status of State importance and do not relate to any province.
* (2) Baikonur city has a special status because it is currently being leased to Russia with Baikonur cosmodrome until 2050.

Each province is headed by an Akim (provincial governor) appointed by the president. Municipal Akims are appointed by province Akims. The Government of Kazakhstan transferred its capital from Almaty to Astana on December 10, 1997.

**Economy**

Main article: Economy of Kazakhstan

Baikonur Cosmodrome is the world's oldest and largest operational space launch facility

The capital Astana

Almaty, Kazakhstan's largest city

Buoyed by high world crude oil prices, GDP growth figures were in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005: 9.8%, 13.2%, 9.5%, 9.2%, 9.4%, and 9.2%, respectively. Other major exports of Kazakhstan include wheat, textiles, and livestock. Kazakhstan forecasts that it will become the world's leading exporter of uranium by the year 2010.

Its principal challenge since 2002 has been to manage strong foreign currency inflows without sparking inflation. Since that time, inflation has not been under strict control, registering 6.6% in 2002, 6.8% in 2003, and 6.4% in 2004.

In 2000 Kazakhstan became the first former Soviet republic to repay all of its debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), 7 years ahead of schedule. In March 2002, the U.S. Department of Commerce granted Kazakhstan market economy status under U.S. trade law. This change in status recognized substantive market economy reforms in the areas of currency convertibility, wage rate determination, openness to foreign investment, and government control over the means of production and allocation of resources.

In September 2002 Kazakhstan became the first country in the CIS to receive an investment-grade credit rating from a major international credit rating agency. As of late December 2003, Kazakhstan's gross foreign debt was about $22.9 billion. Total governmental debt was $4.2 billion. This amounts to 14% of GDP. There has been a noticeable reduction in the ratio of debt to GDP observed in past years; the ratio of total governmental debt to GDP in 2000 was 21.7%, in 2001 it was 17.5%, and in 2002 it was 15.4%.

The upturn in economic growth, combined with the results of earlier tax and financial sector reforms, has dramatically improved government finances from the 1999 budget deficit level of 3.5% of GDP to a deficit of 1.2% of GDP in 2003. Government revenues grew from 19.8% of GDP in 1999 to 22.6% of GDP in 2001, but decreased to 16.2% of GDP in 2003. In 2000, Kazakhstan adopted a new tax code in an effort to consolidate these gains.

On November 29, 2003 the Law on Changes to Tax Code was adopted, which reduced tax rates. The value added tax fell from 16% to 15%, the social tax from 21% to 20%, and the personal income tax from 30% to 20%. (On July 7, 2006 the personal income tax was reduced even further to a flat rate of 5% for personal income in the form of dividends and 10% for other personal income.) Kazakhstan furthered its reforms by adopting a new land code on June 20, 2003, and a new customs code on April 5, 2003.

Energy is the leading economic sector. Production of crude oil and natural gas condensate in Kazakhstan amounted to 51.2 million tons in 2003, which was 8.6% more than in 2002. Kazakhstan raised oil and gas condensate exports to 44.3 million tons in 2003, 13% higher than in 2002. Gas production in Kazakhstan in 2003 amounted to 13.9 billion cubic meters (491 billion cu. ft), up 22.7% compared to 2002, including natural gas production of 7.3 billion cubic meters (258 billion cu. ft);

Kazakhstan holds about 4 billion tons of proven recoverable oil reserves and 2,000 cubic kilometers (480 cu mi) of gas. Industry analysts believe that planned expansion of oil production, coupled with the development of new fields, will enable the country to produce as much as 3 million barrels (477,000 m³) per day by 2015, lifting Kazakhstan into the ranks of the world's top 10 oil-producing nations. Kazakhstan's 2003 oil exports were valued at more than $7 billion, representing 65% of overall exports and 24% of the GDP. Major oil and gas fields and their recoverable oil reserves are Tengiz with 7 billion barrels (1.1 km³); Karachaganak with 8 billion barrels (1.3 km³) and 1,350 km³ of natural gas); and Kashagan with 7 to 9 billion barrels (1.1 to 1.4 km³).

Kazakhstan instituted an ambitious pension reform program in 1998. As of January 1, 2005, the pension assets were about $4.1 billion. There are 16 saving pension funds in the republic. The State Accumulating Pension Fund, the only state-owned fund, could be privatized as early as 2006. The country's unified financial regulatory agency oversees and regulates the pension funds. The pension funds' growing demand for quality investment outlets triggered rapid development of the debt securities market. Pension fund capital is being invested almost exclusively in corporate and government bonds, including Government of Kazakhstan Eurobonds.

The Kazakhstani banking system is developing rapidly. The banking system's capitalization now exceeds $1 billion. The National Bank has introduced deposit insurance in its campaign to strengthen the banking sector. Several major foreign banks have branches in Kazakhstan, including RBS, Citibank, and HSBC. Raiffeisen Zentralbank and UniCredit have both recently entered the Kazakhstan's financial services market through acquisitions and stake-building.

Despite the strength of Kazakhstan's economy for most of the first decade of the 21st century, the global financial crisis of 2008-2009 has exposed some central weaknesses in the country's economy. The year on year growth of Kazakhstan's GDP dropped 19.81% in 2008. Four of the major banks were rescued by the government at the end of 2008 and real estate prices have sharply dropped.

**Agriculture**

Main article: Agriculture in Kazakhstan

Agriculture accounted for 10.3% of Kazakhstan's GDP in 2005. Grain (Kazakhstan is the seventh-largest producer in the world) and livestock are the most important agricultural commodities. Agricultural land occupies more than 846,000 square kilometers (327,000 sq. mi). The available agricultural land consists of 205,000 square kilometers (79,000 sq. mi) of arable land and 611,000 square kilometers (236,000 sq. mi) of pasture and hay land.

Chief livestock products are dairy products, leather, meat, and wool. The country's major crops include wheat, barley, cotton, and rice. Wheat exports, a major source of hard currency, rank among the leading commodities in Kazakhstan's export trade. In 2003 Kazakhstan harvested 17.6 million tons of grain in gross, 2.8% higher compared to 2002. Kazakh agriculture still has many environmental problems from mismanagement during its years in the Soviet Union. Some Kazakh wine is produced in the mountains to the east of Almaty.

Kazakhstan is thought to be one of the original homes of the apple, particularly the wild ancestor of *Malus domestica*, *Malus sieversii*. It has no common name in English, but is known in Kazakhstan, where it is native, as 'alma'. In fact, the region where it is thought to originate is called Almaty, or 'rich with apple'. This tree is still found wild in the mountains of Central Asia in southern Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Xinjiang, China.

**Natural resources**

Headquarters of KazMunayGaz, the national oil and gas company

See also: Energy policy of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has an abundant supply of accessible mineral and fossil fuel resources. Development of petroleum, natural gas, and mineral extraction has attracted most of the over $40 billion in foreign investment in Kazakhstan since 1993 and accounts for some 57% of the nation's industrial output (or approximately 13% of gross domestic product). According to some estimates, Kazakhstan has the second largest uranium, chromium, lead, and zinc reserves, the third largest manganese reserves, the fifth largest copper reserves, and ranks in the top ten for coal, iron, and gold. It is also an exporter of diamonds. Perhaps most significant for economic development, Kazakhstan also currently has the 11th largest proven reserves of both oil and natural gas.

In total, there are 160 deposits with over 2.7 billion tons of petroleum. Oil explorations have shown that the deposits on the Caspian shore are only a small part of a much larger deposit. It is said that 3.5 billion tons of oil and 2.5 trillion cubic meters of gas could be found in that area. Overall the estimate of Kazakhstan's oil deposits is 6.1 billion tons. However, there are only 3 refineries within the country, situated in Atyrau, Pavlodar, and Shymkent. These are not capable of processing the total crude output so much of it is exported to Russia. In 2006, Kazakhstan was producing approximately 1,426 million barrels (226,700,000 m3) of oil and 23.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually.

**Foreign relations and armed forces**

Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev with then U.S. President George W. Bush, 2006

**Foreign relations**

Main article: Foreign relations of Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan has stable relationships with all of its neighbors. Kazakhstan is also a member of the United Nations, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). It is an active participant in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Partnership for Peace program.

Kazakhstan is also a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Economic Cooperation Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The nations of Kazakhstan, Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan established the Eurasian Economic Community in 2000 to re-energize earlier efforts at harmonizing trade tariffs and the creation of a free trade zone under a customs union. On December 1, 2007, it was revealed that Kazakhstan has been chosen to chair OSCE for the year 2010.

Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has pursued what is known as the multidimensional foreign policy (многовекторная внешняя политика), seeking equally good relations with two large neighbors, Russia and China, and the United States and the West generally. The policy has yielded results in the oil and gas sector, where companies from the U.S., Russia, China, and Europe are present at all major fields, and in the multidimensional directions of oil export pipelines out of Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan also enjoys strong, and rapidly developing, political and economic ties with Turkey. In 2011, and possibly as early as 2010, Kazakhstan plans to form a customs union with Russia and Belarus.

Russia currently leases approximately 6,000 km² (2,300 mi²) of territory enclosing the Baikonur Cosmodrome space launch site in south central Kazakhstan, where the first man was launched into space as well as Soviet space shuttle Buran and the well-known space station Mir.

**Armed forces**

Kazakhstani Republican Guard

Main article: Military of Kazakhstan

Most of Kazakhstan's military was inherited from the Soviet Armed Forces' Turkestan Military District. These units became the core of Kazakhstan's new military which acquired all the units of the 40th Army (the former 32nd Army) and part of the 17th Army Corps, including 6 land force divisions, storage bases, the 14th and 35th air-landing brigades, 2 rocket brigades, 2 artillery regiments and a large amount of equipment which had been withdrawn from over the Urals after the signing of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. The largest expansion of the Kazakhstan Army has been focused on armored units in recent years. Since 1990, armored units have expanded from 500 to 1,613 in 2005.

The Kazakh air force is composed mostly of Soviet-era planes, including 41 MiG-29s, 44 MiG-31s, 37 Su-24s and 60 Su-27s. A small naval force is also maintained on the Caspian Sea.

Kazakhstan sent 49 military engineers to Iraq to assist the US post-invasion mission in Iraq.

**Demographics**

Main article: Demographics of Kazakhstan

Population pyramid, 2005

The US Census Bureau International Database list the current population of Kazakhstan as 16,763,795, while United Nations sources such as the World Bank give a 2002 estimate of 14,794,830. The last 10-year census, held 28 February to 6 March 2009, gave as result a total of 16,004,800 people registered in Kazakhstan.

The ethnic Kazakhs represent 65% of the population and ethnic Russians 24%, with a rich array of other groups represented, including Tatars, Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Belarusians, Uyghurs, Azerbaijanis, Poles, and Lithuanians. Some minorities such as Germans who had previously settled in Russia (especially Volga Germans), Ukrainians, Koreans, Kurds, Chechens, Meskhetian Turks, and Russian political opponents of the regime had been deported to Kazakhstan in the 1930s and 1940s by Stalin; some of the bigger Soviet labor camps (Gulag) existed in the country.

Significant Russian immigration also connected with Virgin Lands Campaign and Soviet space program during Khrushchev era. There is also a small but active Jewish community. Before 1991 there were one million Germans in Kazakhstan; most of them emigrated to Germany following the breakup of the Soviet Union. Most members of the smaller Pontian Greek minority have emigrated to Greece. In the late 1930s thousands of Koreans in the Soviet Union were deported to Central Asia. These people are now known as Koryo-saram.

Kazakhstan is a bilingual country: the Kazakh language, spoken by 64.4% of the population, has the status of the "state" language, while Russian, which is spoken by almost all Kazakhstanis, is declared the "official" language, and is used routinely in business. English gained its popularity among the youth since the collapse of USSR and 30% of megapolis dwellers, especially younger generations are fluent in English, another spoken foreign tongues which are more or less popular among Kazakhstanis is Turkish due to its proximity to the state language of Kazakhstan which is Kazakh.

The ethnolinguistic patchwork of Central Asia

The 1990s were marked by the emigration of many of the country's Russians and Volga Germans, a process that began in the 1970s; this was a major factor in giving the autochthonous Kazakhs a majority along with higher Kazakh birthrates and ethnic Kazakh immigration from the People's Republic of China, Mongolia, and Russia.

In the early twenty-first century, Kazakhstan has become one of the leading nations in international adoptions. This has recently sparked some criticism in the Parliament of Kazakhstan, due to the concerns about safety and treatment of the children abroad and the questions regarding the low level of population in Kazakhstan.

**Terminology**

The term Kazakhstani (Kazakh: қазақстандықтар, *Qazaqstandıqtar*; Russian: казахстанцы, *kazakhstantsy*) was coined to describe all citizens of Kazakhstan, including non-Kazakhs. The word "Kazakh" is generally used to refer to people of ethnic Kazakh descent (including those living in China, Afghanistan, Turkey, Uzbekistan and other countries).

The ethnonym Kazakh is derived from an ancient Turkic word "independent, a free spirit". It is the result of Kazakhs' nomadic horseback culture. The Avestan/Old Persian (See Indo-European languages) word "-stan" means "land" or "place of", so "Kazakhstan" is "land of the Kazakhs".

**Religion**

The front of the Nur-Astana Mosque in Astana during the morning hours. Islam is the major religion of Kazakhstan, and the Nur-Astana is largest of its kind in the country.

Main articles: Religion in Kazakhstan, Islam in Kazakhstan, Christianity in Kazakhstan, Judaism in Kazakhstan, and Hinduism in Kazakhstan

Islam is the major and largest religion in Kazakhstan. After decades of religious suppression by the Soviet Union, the coming of independence witnessed a surge in expression of ethnic identity, partly through religion. The free practice of religious beliefs and the establishment of full freedom of religion led to an increase of religious activity. Hundreds of mosques, churches, synagogues, and other religious structures were built in the span of a few years, with the number of religious associations rising from 670 in 1990 to 4,170 today.

Approximately 72% of the population are Muslim according to the 2009 census mainly followed by the ethnic Kazakhs, who constitute about 65% the population, as well as by ethnic Uzbeks, Uighurs, and Tatars. The majority are Sunni Muslims of the Hanafi school. Less than 1% are part of the Sunni Shafi`i school (primarily Chechens). The southern region of the country has the highest concentration of self-identified practicing Muslims. There are a total of 2,300 mosques, all of them are affiliated with the "Spiritual Association of Muslims of Kazakhstan", headed by a supreme mufti. The Eid al-Adha is recognized as a national holiday.

One third of the population is Russian Orthodox, including ethnic Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. Other Christian groups include Roman Catholics and Protestants. There are a total of 258 Orthodox churches, 93 Catholic churches, and over 500 Protestant churches and prayer houses. The Russian Orthodox Christmas is recognized as a national holiday in Kazakhstan. Other religious groups include Judaism, the Bahá'í Faith, Hare Krishnas, Buddhists, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

**Education**

Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research in Almaty

Education is universal and mandatory through to the secondary level and the adult literacy rate is 99.5%. Education consists of three main educational phases: primary education (forms 1–4), basic general education (forms 5–9) and senior level education (forms 10–11 or 12) divided into continued general education and professional education. (Primary education is preceded by one year of pre-school education.) These three levels of education can be followed in one institution or in different ones (e.g. primary school, then secondary school). Recently, several secondary schools, specialized schools, magnet schools, gymnasiums, lyceums, linguistic and technical gymnasiums, have been founded. Secondary professional education is offered in special professional or technical schools, lyceums or colleges and vocational schools.

At present, there are universities, academies, and institutes, conservatories, higher schools and higher colleges. There are three main levels: basic higher education that provides the fundamentals of the chosen field of study and leads to the award of the Bachelor's degree; specialized higher education after which students are awarded the Specialist's Diploma; and scientific-pedagogical higher education which leads to the Master's Degree. Postgraduate education leads to the Kandidat nauk (Candidate of Sciences) and the Doctor of Sciences. With the adoption of the Laws on Education and on Higher Education, a private sector has been established and several private institutions have been licensed.

The Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan runs a highly successful *Bolashak* scholarship, which is annually awarded to approximately three thousand applicants. The scholarship funds their education in institutions abroad, including the prestigious University College London, Oxford and Ivy League universities. The terms of the program include mandatory return to Kazakhstan for at least five years of employment.

**Sports**

Assan Bazayev, Astana rider

Alexander Koreshkov, HC Barys vs HC Dinamo Moscow match

Main article: Sport in Kazakhstan

* Football is the most popular sport in Kazakhstan. The Football Federation of Kazakhstan (Kazakh: Қазақстанның Футбол Федерациясы, *Qazaqstannıñ fwtbol federacïyası*) is the sport's national governing body. The FFK organizes the men's, women's and futsal national teams.
* Ice hockey - The Kazakhstani national ice hockey team has competed in ice hockey in the 1998 and 2006 Winter Olympics as well as in the 2006 Men's World Ice Hockey Championships. Kazakhstan has 7 teams. The teams are Kaztsink-Torpedo Ust-Kamenogorsk, Kazakhmys Satpayev, Gornyak Rudnyi, Barys Astana, Irtysh Pavlodar, Yenbek Almaty, Sary-Arka Qaragandy.

Top Kazakhstani ice hockey players include Nikolai Antropov and Evgeni Nabokov. Barys Astana - a major professional Ice Hockey team play in the Kontinental Hockey League.

* Cycling - Kazakhstan's most famous cyclist is Alexander Vinokourov, although cycling is a popular activity throughout the country. Vinokourov had an impressive cycling record while riding for the Telekom/T-Mobile teams early in his career. He won the silver medal in road cycling in the 2000 Sydney Olympics and finished third overall in the 2003 Tour de France. After moving to the Liberty Seguros team, Vinokourov finished 5th in the 2005 Tour de France, while two other young Kazakhstanis, Andrej Kashechkin and Maksim Iglinskiy, finished 19th and 37th, respectively. In 2006 Vinokourov's team became known as Astana after a drug doping scandal forced his team Liberty Seguros from the 2006 Tour de France. Vinokourov then helped form a new team, Astana, named for the capital of Kazakhstan and funded by a conglomeration of Kazakhstan businesses, which adopted the color of the Kazakh flag for its uniforms. That same year, Vinokourov and Kashechkin took first and third places in general classification in the 2006 Vuelta a España in Spain.
* In July 2007, Vinokourov tested positive for blood doping during the 2007 Tour de France and was disqualified from the race, although he was in the lead at the time. He was only banned for a year by the Kazakhstan cycling federation, but his suspension was increased to the internationally mandated two years by the UCI (International Cycling Federation). In addition, Kashechkin was also found guilty of blood doping and was also suspended for two years, and Astana was subsequently banned from the 2008 Tour de France. At that time, Vinokourov announced his retirement.
* The Astana cycling team continued under new management and continued to include Kazakhstan riders in the Grand Tours of cycling, although race leadership of the team passed to the Spaniard Alberto Contador and the Americans Lance Armstrong and Levi Leipheimer. However, in September 2008, Vinokourov announced his intention to unretire and to return to cycling in 2009, and he returned in August 2009, although he has still not been permitted to rejoin Astana.
* Boxing - Since its independence in 1991, Kazakhstan's boxers have won many medals. Due to that Kazakhstan quickly went up in all-time medal table of Olympic Games in boxing, where the country jumped from the lowest starting rank to current 11th rank among all other countries. As of now, 2 Kazakh boxers (Bakhtiyar Artayev, Vassiliy Jirov) have earned Val Barker Trophy, making Kazakhstan second from the top falling only 3 medals behind from USA.
* Equestrian sports are also popular in Kazakhstan. Since 1993 Equestrian Federation of the Republic of Kazakhstan has been organizing National and International events in Show Jumping, Dressage, Eventing and Endurance.
* Bandy - The national team is among the best and has twice won the bronze medal at the Bandy World Championships. During the Soviet time, Dynamo Alma-Ata won the national championships in 1977 and 1990.
* The 2011 Asian Winter Games will be held in the country.

**Culture**

Main articles: Culture of Kazakhstan, Kazakh cuisine, Music of Kazakhstan, Sport in Kazakhstan, and Kazakh wedding ceremony

Riders in traditional dress demonstrate Kazakhstan's equestrian culture by playing a kissing game, *Kyz kuu* ("Chase the Girl"), one of a number of traditional games played on horseback.

A Kazakh wedding party in Almaty

Before the Russian colonization, the Kazakhs had a highly developed culture based on their nomadic pastoral economy. Although Islam was introduced to most of the Kazakhs in the fifteenth century, the religion was not fully assimilated until much later. As a result, it coexisted with earlier elements of Tengriism.

Traditional Kazakh belief held that separate spirits inhabited and animated the earth, sky, water and fire, as well as domestic animals. To this day, particularly honored guests in rural settings are treated to a feast of freshly killed lamb. Such guests are sometimes asked to bless the lamb and to ask its spirit for permission to partake of its flesh. Besides lamb, many other traditional foods retain symbolic value in Kazakh culture.

In the national cuisine, livestock meat can be cooked in a variety of ways and is usually served with a wide assortment of traditional bread products. Refreshments often include black tea and traditional milk-derived drinks such as ayran, shubat and kymyz. A traditional Kazakh dinner involves a multitude of appetizers on the table, followed by a soup and one or two main courses such as pilaf and beshbarmak. They also drink their national beverage, which consists of fermented mare's milk.

Because livestock was central to the Kazakhs' traditional lifestyle, most of their nomadic practices and customs relate in some way to livestock. Kazakhs have historically been very passionate about horse-riding. Traditional curses and blessings invoked disease or fecundity among animals, and good manners required that a person ask first about the health of a man's livestock when greeting him and only afterward inquire about the human aspects of his life. Even today, many Kazakhs express interest in equestrianism and horse-racing.

Kazakhstan is home to a large number of prominent contributors to literature, science and philosophy: Abay Qunanbayuli, Al-Farabi, Mukhtar Auezov, Gabit Musirepov, Kanysh Satpayev, Mukhtar Shakhanov, Saken Seyfullin, Jambyl Jabayev, among many others.

Kazakhstan has developed itself as a formidable sports-force on the world arena in the following fields: boxing, chess, kickboxing, skiing, gymnastics, water-polo, cycling, martial arts, heavy-athletics, horse-riding, tri-athlon, track-hurdles, sambo, greco-roman wrestling and billiards. The following are all well-known Kazakhstani athletes and world-championship medalists: Bekzat Sattarkhanov, Vassiliy Jirov, Alexander Vinokourov, Bulat Jumadilov, Mukhtarkhan Dildabekov, Olga Shishigina, Andrey Kashechkin, Aliya Yussupova, Dmitriy Karpov, Darmen Sadvakasov, Yeldos Ikhsangaliyev, Aidar Kabimollayev, Yermakhan Ibraimov, Vladimir Smirnov, among others.

Kazakhstan features a lively music culture, evident in massive popularity of *SuperStar KZ*, a local offspring of Simon Fuller's *Pop Idol*. Almaty is considered to be the musical capital of the Central Asia, recently enjoying concerts by well-known artists such as Deep Purple, Tokio Hotel, Atomic Kitten, Dima Bilan, Loon, Craig David, The Black Eyed Peas, Eros Ramazzotti, José Carreras, Ace of Base, among others.

During the recent years, Kazakhstan has experienced somewhat of a revival of the Kazakh language, which is returning into mainstream usage both in media, law and business, as well as the general society. This is widely approved by Kazakh people and the international organizations as a way of preserving the national identity and culture, but has in some cases caused anxiety among Russian-Kazakhstanis, Russia-sponsored special-interest groups in Kazakhstan and some high-ranking politicians in Russia.

The Parliament is considering the introduction of Latin-based Kazakh alphabet to replace Cyrillic-based. The reasons that are popularly cited are cultural considerationsand the Turkic nature of the Kazakh language. Turkic languages such as Turkish and Uzbek use the Latin alphabet. However, the imposition of the Latin alphabet in Kazakhstan would involve massive costs of transcription and replacement of the vast Kazakh literature.

**Public holidays**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **English name** | **Local name** | **Notes** |
| January 1 | New Year's Day | Жаңа жыл / Новый Год |  |
| January 7 | Eastern Orthodox Christmas | Рождество Христово | from 2007 official holiday |
| Last day of Hajj | Qurban Ayt\* | Құрбан айт |
| March 8 | International Women's Day | Халықаралық әйелдер күні / Международный женский день |  |
| March 22 | Nauryz Meyramy | Наурыз мейрамы | Traditionally a springtime holiday marking the beginning of a new year, sometimes as late as April 21. |
| May 1 | Kazakhstan People's Unity Day | Қазақстан халқының бірлігі мерекесі / Праздник единства народа Казахстана |  |
| May 9 | Great Patriotic War Against Fascism Victory Day | Жеңіс күні / День Победы | A holiday in the former Soviet Union carried over to present-day Kazakhstan and other former republics (Except Baltic Countries). |
| July 6 | Capital City Day | Астана күні / День столицы | Birthday of the First President |
| August 30 | Constitution Day | Қазақстан Республикасының Конституциясы күні / День Конституции Республики Казахстан |  |
| December 16 | Independence Day | Тәуелсіздік күні / День независимости |  |

\* Eid al-Adha, the Islamic Feast of the Sacrifice.

**International rankings**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Organization** | **Survey** | **Ranking** |
| Institute for Economics and Peace | Global Peace Index | 84 out of 144 |
| United Nations Development Program | Human Development Index | 82 out of 182 |
| Transparency International | Corruption Perceptions Index | 120 out of 180 |
| World Economic Forum | Global Competitiveness Report | 67 out of 133 |

**See also**

Main article: [Outline of Kazakhstan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_Kazakhstan)

* [.kz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/.kz)
* [Internet in Kazakhstan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_in_Kazakhstan)
* [Kazpost](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazpost) (Postal & Forwarding services)
* [Media of Kazakhstan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Media_of_Kazakhstan)
* [Railway stations in Kazakhstan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Railway_stations_in_Kazakhstan)
* [Telecommunications in Kazakhstan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telecommunications_in_Kazakhstan)
* [Transport in Kazakhstan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transport_in_Kazakhstan)
* [Kazakh national-patriots](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakh_national-patriots)

Retrieved from: "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kazakhstan>"

[Categories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special%3ACategories): [Caspian Sea countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3ACaspian_Sea_countries) | [Kazakhstan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3AKazakhstan) | [Central Asian countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3ACentral_Asian_countries) | [Modern Turkic states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3AModern_Turkic_states) | [Eurasia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3AEurasia) | [Eurasian steppe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3AEurasian_steppe) | [Landlocked countries](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3ALandlocked_countries) | [Russian-speaking countries and territories](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3ARussian-speaking_countries_and_territories) | [States and territories established in 1991](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3AStates_and_territories_established_in_1991) | [Organization of the Islamic Conference members](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category%3AOrganisation_of_the_Islamic_Conference_members)