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Background: During the 1950s and 1960s Soviet citizens were urged to help settle the "New Lands" of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. The influx of immigrants (mostly Russians, but including some deported minority nationalities) skewed the ethnic mixture and enabled non-Kazakhs to outnumber natives. Independence has caused many of these newcomers to emigrate. Current issues include: resolving ethnic differences; speeding up market reforms; establishing stable relations with Russia, China, and other foreign powers; and developing and expanding the country's abundant energy resources.

Location: Central Asia, northwest of China

Map References: Commonwealth of Independent States

Area: total: 2,717,300 sq km land; 2,669,800 sq km water; 47,500 sq km

Climate: continental, cold winters and hot summers, arid and semiarid

Terrain: extends from the Volga to the Altai Mountains and from the plains in western Siberia to oases and desert in Central Asia

Natural Resources: major deposits of petroleum, natural gas, coal, iron ore, manganese, chrome ore, nickel, cobalt, copper, molybdenum, lead, zinc, bauxite, gold, uranium

Population: 16,733,227 (July 2000 est.)

Nationality: noun: Kazakhstani(s) adjective: Kazakhstani

Ethnic Groups: Kazakh (Qazaq) 46%, Russian 34.7%, Ukrainian 4.9%, German 3.1%, Uzbek 2.3%, Tatar 1.9%, other 7.1% (1996)

Religions: Muslim 47%, Russian Orthodox 44%, Protestant 2%, other 7%

Languages: Kazakh (Qazaq, state language) 40%, Russian (official, used in everyday business) 66%

Economy: Kazakhstan, the second largest of the former Soviet republics in territory, possesses enormous untapped fossil fuel reserves as well as plentiful supplies of other minerals and metals. It also has considerable agricultural potential with its vast steppe lands accommodating both livestock and grain production. Kazakhstan's industrial sector rests on the extraction and processing of these natural resources and also on a relatively large machine building sector specializing in construction equipment, tractors, agricultural machinery, and some defense items. The breakup of the USSR and the collapse of demand for Kazakhstan's traditional heavy industry products have resulted in a sharp contraction of the economy since 1991, with the steepest annual decline occurring in 1994. In 1995-97 the pace of the government program of economic reform and privatization quickened, resulting in a substantial shifting of assets into the private sector. The December 1996 signing of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium agreement to build a new pipeline from western Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil field to the Black Sea increases prospects for substantially larger oil exports in several years. Kazakhstan's economy turned downward in 1998 with a 2.5% decline in GDP growth due to slumping oil prices and the August financial crisis in Russia. A bright spot in 1999 was the recovery of international oil prices, which, combined with a well-timed tenge devaluation and a bumper grain harvest, pulled the economy out of recession.

Industries: oil, coal, iron ore, manganese, chromite, lead, zinc, copper, titanium, bauxite, gold, silver, phosphates, sulfur, iron and steel, nonferrous metal, tractors and other agricultural machinery, electric motors, construction materials

Currency: 1 Kazakhstani tenge = 100 tiyn

