

Modern Kazakhstan

Image and Realities

Against the backdrop of its mineral wealth, Kazakhstan has been touted a Central Asian tiger state. In contrast to most other Central Asian countries, it was able to evade civil war and large-scale bloodshed and to assume a leadership position which won international recognition and respect. At the same time, the country could not evade the global financial crisis and its human rights record is far from being immaculate. This volume analyses the economic, political and social dynamic of modern Kazakhstan as seen by insiders and Western experts. Their opinions converge on the assumption that there are hard times ahead but that Kazakhstan has the potential to weather the storm and to push ahead on its ambitious self-determined developmental path.

The publication of the volume is also a milestone in the history of Kazakh-European/Austrian scientific co-operation. It shows that despite the various backgrounds and perspectives represented by Kazakh and Austrian authors, certain conclusions are shared and constitute their joint intellectual property.

This is what Austria's former Vice Chancellor Erhard Busek wrote in his introduction: "20 years ago Europeans were largely ignorant about the Soviet republics which today constitute the map of Central Asia. We were familiar with some places from space flights, we had heard about oil wells, but that was basically it. The world has changed in many respects, but here we can see clearly that we live through an era of change. The image of Kazakhstan is too primitive. To reduce Kazakhstan to oil would be simplistic; and we have to add that we still know very little.

This is why this volume is important. We need updated and enriched knowledge in order to realize our European responsibility. We should not forget that Kazakhstan and the other central Asian states belong to the European regional organization of the UN, are members of the OSCE and more and more turning into a region where European business is represented as a matter of course. Any contribution aiming at deepening our knowledge and intensifying contacts can only be welcomed. We have to express our gratitude to all those who joined their efforts to work towards these ends."

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