

Kazakhstan in a Mirror of the World's Mass Media

Ardak Yesdauletova

L. N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University,
International Relations Department
ardak63@mail.ru

Aitmukhanbet Yesdauletov

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University,
Department of Journalism and Political Science
aitken57@mail.ru

Kairat Sakh

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University,
Department of Journalism and Political Science
kaisak1964@yandex.kz

ABSTRACT: Kazakhstan proclaimed its independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991. In March 1992 the Republic of Kazakhstan became a member of the United Nations Organization. This event and diplomatic recognition by many of countries symbolized the entry of the young state into the world community. In December 2016 Kazakhstan celebrated the 25th anniversary as a sovereign state. TV broadcasting and print media broadly covered a lot of achievements of the country.

The aim of our presentation is to reveal how the world's mass media covered Kazakhstan and what image it had in other countries. Internet played an important role in disseminating information. People were able to get some knowledge from the foreign sources. They can evaluate the foreign and domestic policies of a certain state. It was possible to determine its achievements and challenges through mass media. The main achievements of Kazakhstan connected with dynamic economic development, political stability and initiatives in the sphere of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Criticism on the part of western media concerned such fields as democratic values and human rights. Due to limited access to the electronic version

of newspapers and journals it was difficult to get the full articles. However, even a few Internet sites and Russian version of newspapers allowed gaining information how the world mass media covered Kazakhstan and what kind perception about Kazakhstan they created, and what topics were interested their journalists.

KEYWORDS: Kazakhstan, mass media, image, newspapers, internet, information.

Introduction

A modern epoch is an epoch of information technologies and swift distribution of information. It is difficult to present our life without the constantly acting streams of new information. For long time print editions, television, and radio were the main channels on information distribution. A situation cardinally changed since the Internet appeared. As Herbert Marshall McLuhan (1964) marked, society grows into a “global electronic village”. Founder of theory of mass communication of Harold Dwight Lasswell (1936) distinguished the key trends of functioning of mass communication:

- “editing” (selection and information commenting);
- the formation of public opinion;
- the spread of culture.

“If an event was not shown on TV, it means it was not”. Agenda-setting theory has still proven valuable in understanding how mass media affects the way people view reality. It is a very popular proverb in Kazakhstan and other post-soviet countries. For Kazakhstan that is considered as the newly independent state, it is interesting and useful to observe how world mass media cover its events and policy. In colored complicated picture of the world and endless flows of information it was difficult to select certain fields, rules or tendencies of Kazakhstan’s coverage. Many newspapers and journals have limited access for reading full version of articles. However, electronic resources of several newspapers allowed getting knowledge of how the world mass media covered Kazakhstan, what kind perception about it they created, and what topics were interested their journalists.

Based on the classical approach we determined the negative perception and the positive perception about Kazakhstan. The positive news, as a rule, is concerned successful stories. They highlighted rapid economic development, political stability and initiatives in the sphere of non proliferation of nuclear weapons. Today Kazakhstan, being the leader of Central Asia, acts as one of pioneers of “europeanization” on the Eurasian space, surpassing by real achievements on this way many of the countries on post-soviet

territory. Criticism on the part of western media concerned such fields as democratic values and human rights.

1. Negative evaluation of Kazakhstan in the world mass media

In the Kazakhstan's foreign policy Eurasianism takes a great place. 10% percent of Kazakhstan's land belongs to Europe. And Asia makes up all other 90% percent of its land. Kazakhstan considers itself to be Eurasian. The president of Kazakhstan puts as the main aim of the country to be binding "bridge between Europe and Asia". The president N. Nazarbayev encourages integration in Eurasia. He first initiated this idea in his speech at the Moscow State University in spring, 1994 (Golam 2013, 5).

There are different views towards the current situation inside the country. One writer emphasizes "Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic demographics and the prevalence of the Russian language" (*Freedom House* 2015, 4) to describe the inner life of the country. Some other sources widely talk about the absence of freedom, absence of freedom of speech, partly free internet and not free press of the country (*Freedom House* 2015, 4).

One of popular website is "azattyq.org". Azattyk is the Kazakh edition of Radio "Free Europe"/Radio "Freedom" (<https://www.rferl.org>). It is not depend on any political party, ruling or opposition, immigrant communities, businesses and other specific organizations, and religious organizations. In 2009, the web site Azattyk became the winner of the international competition in USA Online Journalism Awards, the most prestigious award in the world of web journalism. Web site www.azattyq.org became the winner in the category "non-English, small site".

Azattyk director Muhammad Tahir - Turkment edition of "Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty" - was a moderator of the discussion about the situation in Central Asia in the first quarter of 2016. It was time of a deep the economic crisis in the region. Peter Leonard, the Central Asia editor at Eurasia Net From, from Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan) and Alex Nice from London, who cover Central Asia, as a regional specialist at the Economist Intelligence Unit, participated at this meeting.

It was noted that oil-rich Kazakhstan has so far avoided some of these problems. "Kazakhstan simply is a much wealthier country," Nice explained. "And unlike Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan they [Kazakhstan] have large external assets, a sovereign wealth fund, which they've used to try to have some sort of fiscal stimulus program" (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 10, 2016).

A. Nice noted that, as part of Kazakhstan's management to solve the economic difficulties, the government decided to privatize hundreds of state-owned and partially state-owned enterprises. Demanding artificially low prices for output will not help attract investors to utility companies.

The governments have promised to take measures against those who break financial regulations. In every country, media have been covering on the arrest of violators, starting from top officials to currency speculators.

This seems to be the primary measure, so far, for these governments to combat their countries' economic problems. Leonard pointed out, that this "doesn't really auger very well for the future because it suggests that the governments of these countries really only have sticks and they haven't even gotten around to thinking what carrots they might be able to offer people" (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, April 10, 2016).

The newspaper "*Boston Globe*" is the largest newspaper, issued in Boston, Massachusetts, USA. Newspaper was founded in 1872 by six Boston business- men, led by Eben Jordon. The first launch of the newspaper "*Boston Globe*" was published on March 4, 1872 year. For 100 years of existence, the newspaper worked as a private company. Since 1993, the company belongs to The New York Times Company. Now "*Boston Globe*" is a branch of this company.

The website version of the newspaper was launched in 1995, and since then **she** is among the top ten US newspaper websites. The newspaper was awarded numerous national awards, and in 2009 was awarded two regional Emmy Awards for video work.

The main topics on which Kazakhstan is cited in 168 publications are sport (names of Kazakhstani or former Kazakhstan athletes A. Vinokurov, J. Shvedova, G. Golovkin [Dahlberg 2017], and others), Russian space rockets launched from the Baikonur cosmodrome, uranium mining and nuclear test site in Semipalatinsk and ecological consequences of the death of the Aral Sea. Several articles are dedicated to the one who made a noise in his time the film about Borat.

The theme of culture and history of Kazakhstan is devoted to a separate article "Domestication of horses traced back 5,500 years" ("The domestication of horses occurs 5,500 years ago") dated March 6, 2009. "*Boston Globe*" raises and ethnic problems in Kazakhstan - One article "Kazakh Uighurs stage protest" (Action protest of Kazakh Uighurs) from July 20, 2009 was about the unrest of Kazakhstan - Uyghurs in connection with the events in the Chinese of the Xinjiang.

Thus, many newspapers and broadcasting had a controversial point of view on the processes, taking place in Kazakhstan. The most discussed expressed concerns about the political situation in the country.

2. Achievements of Kazakhstan through the lenses of world news

Foreign mass media outlets also emphasize Kazakhstan's achievements in the international arena. The next events demonstrated this tendency. The negotiation process on the conflict in Syria in Astana, the work in the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member, the fight against terrorism contribute are increasing Kazakhstan's role in solving global challenges. Sponsors of Syria talks in Astana strike deal to protect fragile ceasefire.

The article "Russia, Turkey and Iran to set up trilateral commission to monitor breaches of ceasefire that came into effect last month", which was issues by *the Guardian* in January 24, 2017 covered the serious meeting in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana. "Discussions ended with agreement among the three sponsors of the talks – Russia, Turkey and Iran – to set up a trilateral monitoring body to enforce the ceasefire that came into effect last month. Under the agreement, the three countries will act together to try to minimise violations of the ceasefire, and use their influence to urge those responsible for breaches to desist" (Wintour, 2017).

UN Syria envoy Staffan de Mistura speaks to the media on the second day of peace talks in Astana. Neither the Syrian government nor the Syrian opposition present at the talks in Astana signed the final document. The opposition said it would present alternative proposals. It the first time the rebels have been brought to the table since the civil war began more than five years ago.

Another significant event which marked the inceasing role in international arena is the election of Kazakhstan in non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the 2017-2019 bienniums. "One of the most important regions in the 21st century has received little attention. However, leaders who in recent days have gathered to participate in the UN General Assembly finally realized the importance of Central Asia and, particularly, Kazakhstan," as noted in an article of *the EU Reporter* on July 18, 2017.

For 40 years, Kazakhstan was a test site for nuclear weapons. It was the fourth-largest nuclear power in the world till the 1990. The fall-out from these tests at Semipalatinsk – of which over 100 were above ground – has left a terrible legacy. A generation later, the deaths and deformities continue. That is why Kazakhstan is an active initiator of restricting of nuclear proleferation. In addition, Kazakhstan's territory possesses 12% of the world's uranium resources. In 2009 it became the world's leading uranium producer, with almost 28% of world production, then 33% in 2010, rising to 41% in 2014, and 39% in 2015 and 2016.

This year (2017), on 29 August, the world news highlighted opening of Low Enriched Uranium Bank (LEU Bank) in Kazakhstan under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Colin Stevens noted that August, 29 also marks the International Day against Nuclear Tests as designated by the United Nations and this year on that day it is also the 60th anniversary session of the Pugwash movement of scientists aimed at nuclear disarmament.

Kazakhstan's President Nazarbayev said "Instability and tension internationally affirm the urgency of Kazakhstan's efforts in building a nuclear weapon-free world as the main goal of the humankind in the 21st century. Kazakhstan voluntarily destroyed the 1,400 nuclear weapons it inherited from the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991."

The LEU bank will operate as a mechanism of last resort; in case of unforeseen disruption in a commercial market of uranium, countries that are unable to procure uranium for their nuclear power plants can request LEU from the bank under certain conditions. Thus, it will ensure a global nuclear fuel supply and facilitate nuclear non-proliferation efforts.

The bank will be based at the Ulba Metallurgy Plant in Ust-Kamenogorsk in eastern Kazakhstan. The plant has dealt with and stored nuclear materials for more than 60 years without any incidents. The funding is based on voluntary contributions from the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), the U.S., the European Union, the United Arab Emirates, Norway, Kuwait, and Kazakhstan, which in total equals to \$150 million, believed to be enough to procure 90 tonnes of low enriched uranium.

A senior source at the European Commission told that Kazakhstan deserves "much credit for its ongoing efforts to rid the world of nuclear weapons. The EU appreciates President Nursultan Nazarbayev's important leadership on non-proliferation spanning more than two decades."

"The country is conducting a multi-vector foreign policy which is based on preventing war and to save the planet from nuclear weapons (Stevens 2017)."

It is interesting that some of Western outlets dedicate special columns to the Central Asian countries. The Guardian, the British newspaper, has such column which is titled "Secret Stans". In one of issues they disseminated the article "'The decline of Russian dominance is striking: readers respond from the Stans" (*The Guardian* 2017).

One of well-known place in Kazakhstan is Baikonur. Baikonur is the Cosmodrome from where the first man Yuri Gagarin has flown into space in April 1961. Currently Russian and many international crews use this Cosmodrome for investigation space

and the Earth. Often we can watch and read about Baikonur in news in this context. "A Russian Soyuz rocket carrying a three-man crew bound for the International Space Station blasted off on Wednesday July 23, 2015 from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. The 16-story rocket lifted off at 21:02 GMT to deliver veteran Russian cosmonaut Oleg Kononenko and rookie astronauts Kjell Lindgren with NASA and Japan's Kimiya Yui into orbit (*The Telegraph*, 25 June, 2015)." The NASA also uses this cosmodrome. BBC (2014) underlined "NASA'S Reid Wiseman, Russian cosmonaut Max Surayev and German Alexander Gerst, from the European Space Agency, were set to dock at the station less than six hours later" after their launches from Kazakhstan.

It is obviously the legacy of the Soviet past. And Kazakhstan people almost do not have involment to Baikonur nowadays, because it belongs to Russia.

But Kazakhstan tries to arrange mant other events that would have an international dimation. They are EXPO 2017, the Eurasian Media Forum and the annual Astana Economic Forum. In 2017 nearly 4,000 experts have registered to attend the 10th Astana Economic Forum held under the title 'New Energy – New Economy'. They have been interested by an agenda which promises to examine the drivers and obstacles to regional and global prosperity. Among the topics they will debate are how sustainable growth can be achieved, how innovation can be encouraged and the role of green energy in the world's future (*Astana times*, June 30, 2017).

The delegates from countries around the world came in the capital of Kazakhstan at a time of continuing uncertainty for the global economy. The country is now a vital link in China's New Silk Road initiative and is an active member of the Eurasian Economic Union. Transport links have been improved not only to the major markets to the east and west but also to the south. At a time when some countries are lowering their sights, Kazakhstan has shown its confidence in the future.

This has been coupled with continued reforms and investment to strengthen its economy. A far-reaching domestic programme of modernization has been put in place. Privatizations of major sectors are being accelerated to introduce new funding and new ideas. The establishment of the Astana International Financial Centre is designed to secure Kazakhstan's position as a key regional hub in the global economy but also to attract new investment to Central Asia as a whole.

The country makes efforts to improve the investment climate and improve the conditions for doing business. According to the World Bank's ranking Doing Business (2017), Kazakhstan has 35th position in the criteria "Ease of Doing Business", while in 2016 it was 51st place.

The Astana Economic Forum was mentioned in the web-site of the Bureau International des Expositions (BIE). This Forum hosted on its first day a three-panel symposium on

«Expo 2017 – Energy for sustainable development». “All speakers of the event were unanimous: Expo 2017 will not only offer numerous opportunities for the development of Kazakhstan, it can also be a turning point in the search for sustainable solutions to the challenges of energy”.

The EXPO 2017 was the big event in this year. There are controversial opinions regarding it. However, it was the first exhibition in such high level in the former Soviet space. The EU Reporter noted that, more than 100 countries are sharing best practices about energy, especially in the area of renewables. “The Kazakh pavilion on the Expo site is entirely devoted to wind, sun, kinetic, biomass and space energy and a Best Practice Area is showcasing 24 projects, such as planes functioning with solar energy, devices generating energy from garden plants and lightening mechanisms using sea organisms, from 13 countries chosen by Nobel prize laureates and climate gurus” (*EU Reporter*, July 24, 2017).

In August 2017 “Bernama”, Malaysian news agency, covered the policy of Kazakhstan positively. The “Third modernization,” President of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev outlined five priorities that include acceleration of technological modernization of the economy, improving and expanding the business environment and ensuring macroeconomic stability.

There is a need to continue industrialization with emphasis on the development of competitive export industries in priority sectors. I entrust the Government with the task of increasing non –oil export in half by 2025” (Nursultan 2017).

Conclusions

Kazakhstan is the world’s ninth biggest country by size, and it is more than twice the size of the other Central Asian states combined. Its lack of significant historical sites and endless featureless steppe have put many off Kazakhstan, while many still are captivated by the emptiness and mystery of this Goliath state. Kazakhstan is the richest country in Central Asia, due to its large oil and natural gas reserves. The country is also the largest landlocked country.

in the global scale Kazakhstan is not a big country. In addition it is young in comparison with the other neighboring states like Russia and China. However, it is possible to

conclude that in the world information space Kazakhstan has its own place. There are many critical articles. Most of them concern human rights and democratic reforms in internal policy, high degree of corruption and reliance on one commodity – oil extraction- in economy. However, the world news often covers attractive sides of Kazakhstan. Especially, newspapers and electronic version mass media positively assess efforts to play essential role in the international arena and become an equal partner to other states. In their turn, the world mass media impact on Kazakhstan and enforce it to move further and gradually change its image.

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