

Vigorous power of ambitious people

What might an ordinary Soviet citizen have known about the town of Akmolinsk in 1961? At best, they might have been aware of its location somewhere in Kazakhstan. Only those who suffered from repression might recall that one of the most terrible of Stalin's concentrated camps was situated there. It was renamed Tselinograd and later Akmola but has been known as Astana since 1997 — meaning 'capital'. In fact, it's the youngest and most dynamically developing capital within the territory of the former Soviet Union.

By Mikhail Lebedik

It's difficult to believe that life can change so acutely. In the mid-1990s, Akmola was quite an ordinary town, with typical four storey developments and a private sector. Its population amounted to 270,000 people; it was a wistful and hopeless province. However, in just over a decade, its population has risen to 700,000 people, soon to reach a million.

It's a true 'discovery' for film directors, boasting eclectic styles and futuristic shapes; the National Archives are located in an egg-shaped building while the Palace of Peace and Concord is pyramid-shaped. Many such examples can be found. Today, Astana harmoniously combines glass and concrete, uniting East and West, Europe and Asia. Maybe this is the country's major paradox. Some talk about

the collapse of multiculturalism in the Old World but Kazakhstan fully embraces it. This isn't simply a beautiful dream, but a concrete reality, with multi-directional vectors.

In 2010, Kazakhstan chaired the OSCE and, on June 28th, 2011, began to preside over the Organisation of the Islamic Conference — its Western and Eastern faces at their most obvious. At first sight, this looks as unusual as the combination of traditions of European and Asian architecture on Astana's streets. However, to be fair, it boasts a unique Kazakh style. A bright example is the Khan Shatyr (Royal Marquee) — a huge trade and entertainment centre in the form of a tent, filled with world famous brands, cafes and cinemas. It entertains thousands of visitors, many of whom do not appear short of money. I

was interested to observe teenage girls shopping at expensive Zara boutique; actually, it resembled wholesale buying! It seems that the Kazakhs spend much of their money, doing this with good taste. Nearby a swimming pool is situated — surrounded by sea sand to create a beach. You almost feel as if you are in Sochi at high season. Entry costs 8,000 Tenges (almost \$50).

Meeting Yeraly Togzhanov, a high ranking official from the Presidential Administration, who supervises the work of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, we spoke much about inter-ethnic relations in the country. His foremost target is to ensure the harmonious development of society and each citizen, regardless of nationality. It seems that Kazakhstan is making progress in this area, despite being located in an ethnographically complex and hazardous region.

Once, I heard a complaint that Russians are oppressed here. Interestingly, the words came from a Mordovian who owned a rural guesthouse, where 'new Kazakhs' enjoy staying. Strangely, I also once heard such talk in Minsk: a slightly drunk and, generally speaking, talentless, literary man was complaining — saying 'we, Russian language speakers, are being prevented' from publishing in Russian... Of course, there are no grounds to believe such delirium. I suppose the talks of my Kazakh interlocutor — who is a wealthy man — are of the same origin...

I've had another observation. Do you remember the song telling us that 'youngsters are always given a road'? It seems to fully de-



Astana's modern architectural forms

scribe the situation in contemporary Kazakhstan. Nurlan Uteshev, a leader of the Zhas Otan youth organisation, explains (after learning that we've come from Belarus) that it's similar to our Belarusian Republican Youth Union. Everything immediately becomes clear. They have similar building brigades, clubs and, of course, patriotic education. Mr. Uteshev gives me his business card and I notice that, alongside traditional city and mobile telephone numbers and his e-mail address, he includes his Twitter and Facebook accounts. Frankly, I've not seen these on our young people's business cards. So, dear colleagues from the Belarusian Republican Youth Union, take note and learn from your colleagues.

Mr. Uteshev grew up in a simple family, ambitious in the best sense of this word. He studied hard and was invited to continue studying for a Master's degree; as a result, he became the youngest

pro-rector in Kazakhstan, aged just 23. In one year, he was chairing the youth organisation. The leader of the Zhas Otan sees it as his mission to help the state implement its major programme of attracting qualified staff into rural areas and small towns. A stake is made not only on enthusiasm. Such young specialists start off on receiving around \$1,000, with a \$6,000 loan given for housing construction at almost zero interest (this may rise to \$16,000). As I was explained this sum is enough to build a pleasant flat in a province.

Today's young Kazakhs are keen to receive a good education and there are plenty of opportunities; 25,000 currently study at the best foreign universities, with 4,000 of these at state expense (in line with a special state programme). Almost all graduates return to Kazakhstan, where ideal conditions exist for career advancement. It seems that they'll succeed in everything...



Kazakh capital's street

Engines test their mettle

Belarusian scientists propose building international level race track near Minsk

The Belarusian National Academy of Sciences' United Institute of Machine Building came up with the idea of building the track, as the Deputy Director for Scientific Work, Sergey Minyukovich, tells us.

The race track was set up in 2009, near the village of Ozerishche, with the second half completed in 2010. It has a hangar designed to prepare cars for testing, with everything funded from the Republi-

can budget. It allows domestic car enterprises to save a great deal of money on testing, since there's no need to travel abroad to tracks in Russia, Ukraine or the Czech Republic.

Test drives on the track are supervised by Belarusian Belkommunmash, Amkodor and MAZ, in addition to foreign car dealerships, but the site is also perfect for preparing to competitions. "The time has come for us to expand," notes Mr. Minyukovich. "We plan to build an international level race track, in addition to motor

cross tracks and a speedy ring road. Special sites are also planned to allow cars' technical characteristics to be tested."

The project is still at the design stage, supported by the Transport and Communications Ministry and the Automobile Sports Federation. German specialists may be attracted to develop a model of the future track, which would certainly help promote racing. Meanwhile, the United Institute of Machine Building plans to gather its own team of racing drivers, ready for international level racing championships.

Aquatic warbler habitat across flood meadows

UNDP and Global Environmental Facility allocate around \$4m to restore damaged peatlands of Belarus, ensuring their sustainability

Antonius Broek, UN Resident Co-ordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Belarus, has noted at a Minsk seminar that the programme to restore wetlands covers over 20 territories. Moreover, with support from the UNDP and GEF, a national plan of action has been elaborated, aiming

to protect such wetlands. The adopted measures promote the restoration of a number of rare species of plants and animals living in the Belarusian marshes, while reducing the number of peat fires and greenhouse gas emissions. Special attention is being paid to restoring lowland marshes and flood meadows internationally, helping preserve the habitat of rare aquatic warblers.

Mr. Broek stresses that preserving the sustainability of marshes is a key aim of interna-

tional environmental activity, mitigating the consequences of climate change. He emphasises that marshes are vital natural eco-systems, boasting great biodiversity, affecting the climate and human life. Restoration and sustainable management of marshes can considerably reduce greenhouse gas emissions, which can be registered as units of voluntary reductions, sold on the carbon market. Carbon financing can then further promote the long-term sustainable management of marshes.