



Kazakhstan's Echo

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My 'Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan'

By Gauhar Abdygaliyeva

I'm a Muslim Kazakh woman who arrived in the United States two months ago to work on my master's in public administration. Almost every time I meet people and tell them where I come from, they ask me about the "Kazakh journalist" Borat, "the sixth most famous man" in Kazakhstan. I answer that Borat is a satirical fictional character who has nothing in common with Kazakhstan or its people.

Many of my new American friends find Borat's adventures in "US and A" hilarious and his remarks about my country amusing. Unsurprisingly, not many of the people of Kazakhstan are equally amused. So I want to tell you the inside story about Kazakhstan. And, to steal a line from Borat, please read my article, or I will be execute.

Kazakhstan is the world's ninth-largest country in land area. It is in Central Asia along the famous Silk Road, which once stretched from Venice to Beijing. We "walk on oil," but that's not the only thing we were blessed with. Our social and economic achievements in the past decade have been remarkable.

But I would rather speak of my people. I am in my mid-20s and am myself a good example of what today's Kazakhstan is about. I was the first of three children born to an average Soviet family in the year of the Moscow Olympic Games and the Oscar-winning movie "Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears." My dad worked at the Space Research Institute of the Kazakh Academy of Sciences, while my mom taught computer science at the National Technical University. The tradition of education in my family, which led me to degrees in international law and business administration and now has brought me to this country, is strong in Kazakhstan. That is why its people are among the most educated in the world and have a 98 percent literacy rate.



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Borat says women can now ride “inside of bus” in Kazakhstan. Actually, men and women enjoy equal opportunity, and our women are more likely to be driving the bus. Before arriving in the United States, I worked for the best local law firm and then a U.N. field mission, and I had a car and an apartment in Kazakhstan's capital, Astana.

People in Kazakhstan take pride in their ancestors, the nomadic Turkic tribes that managed to unite and retain a territory the size of Western Europe for centuries, despite their vulnerable location between the Chinese and Russian empires. For many years the mostly Sunni Muslim Kazakhs, first as part of the Russian empire and then the Soviet Union, welcomed Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Koreans, Jews, Chechens and Uighurs to their land regardless of their religious beliefs. Those people either chose to come or were deported to Kazakhstan by the communists for various reasons. At different periods my country has been affected by wars, famine and repression.

With the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, the economic turmoil brought hardship. Many of my Russian, German, Korean and Jewish friends left for their historical homelands, but many others chose to stay and build a modern, thriving Kazakhstan together. Today those troubles are a thing of the past, and our people look to the future with great optimism.

The Kazakh flag Borat uses in the movie, with an eagle soaring in the blue sky under the sun, is our symbol of independence and pride. If your eyes have ever welled up when you saw the Stars and Stripes, you will understand how we feel about it.

The “moviefilm” by Sacha Baron Cohen, “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan,” is playing well in American theaters. One can only applaud the humorist’s talent, but the movie is entertaining only because the world is so unfamiliar with reality.

Perhaps that will change. The movie has already created unprecedented interest in Kazakhstan. Not only has Borat promoted our name and flag, he has also indirectly fueled a great wave of patriotism among my fellow citizens.

Please take an opportunity to visit us one day and hear our real language, not Borat’s:
“Kazakhstanga kosh keliniz!” – “Welcome to Kazakhstan!”

The writer is a student from Kazakhstan doing graduate work at George Washington University.

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