

# Independence and National Identity in Post-Soviet Central Asia



Monica Ketchum

Arizona Western College

[Monica.Ketchum@azwestern.edu](mailto:Monica.Ketchum@azwestern.edu)

# Objectives

- Understand the key components of national identity
- Describe the post-Soviet national identities of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan
- Research and report on the national identities of other former Soviet republics

# Overview

- Colonial possessions share an identity with their respective colonizer
  - In the Americas, the colonial identities were British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and to a lesser extent Dutch and Russian
- After independence, the new American nations were tasked with creating national identities



NORTH AMERICA AFTER 1763



# What is a National Identity?

- Geography-political boundaries, landscape
- National Symbols-flag, seals, anthems, etc.
- Citizenship-birthright or naturalized
- People-ethnicity
- Language
- Values and Attitudes-religion, governance,
- Cultural Habits and Behaviors
- Achievements-history, science/tech, literature, sports

# When is a national identity forged?

## **Develops over time**

- Prior to “nationhood”
  - Japan, United Kingdom, France, Egypt
- After independence (1800s-present)
  - US, Mexico, Brazil
- After revolutions & wars (1900-present)
  - USSR, China, Turkey
- After decolonization (WWII-present)
  - Nigeria, Rwanda, Bangladesh
- Post-Cold War (1990s-present)
  - Balkans, Central Asia

# Think-Pair-Share

What makes up the national identity of the United States?

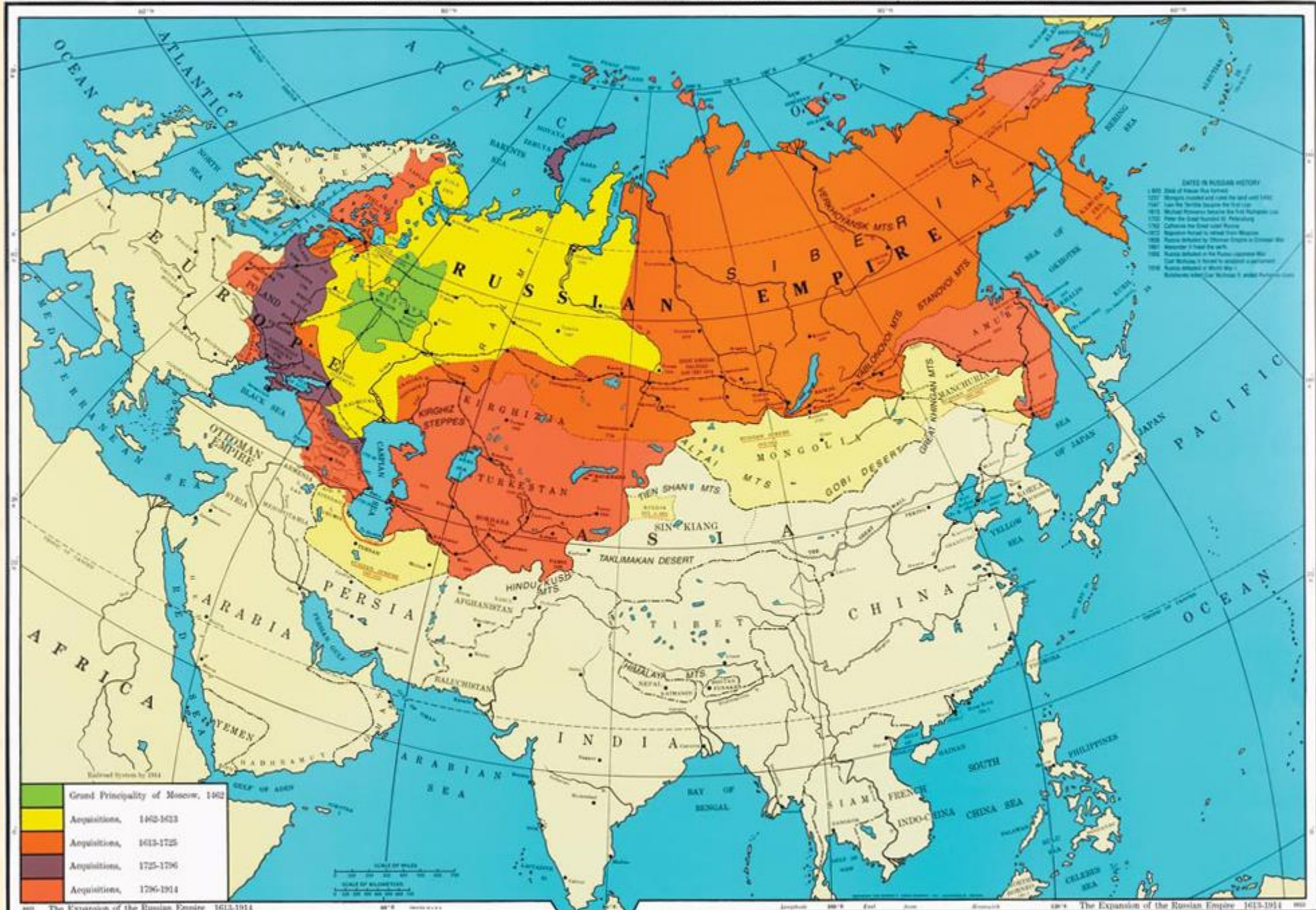
- Geography:
- Symbols:
- Citizenship:
- People:
- Language(s):
- Values and Attitudes:
- Cultural Habits and Behaviors:
- Achievements:

# Central Asia's Incorporation into Russia & the USSR

- Czar Nicolas I began expanding into Central Asia from 1825 to 1855
  - Included most of the modern nation of Kazakhstan and the North Eastern corner of Uzbekistan
- Czar Alexander II continued from 1855 to 1881
  - Included most of modern Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and southern Kazakhstan
- In 1922, Russian colonies in Central Asia became Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) within the USSR



## THE EXPANSION OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE, 1613-1914



Source:  
Alpha  
History



# Think/Pair/Share

**What impact did Russian colonization and incorporation in the Soviet Union have on the identity and culture of Central Asia?**



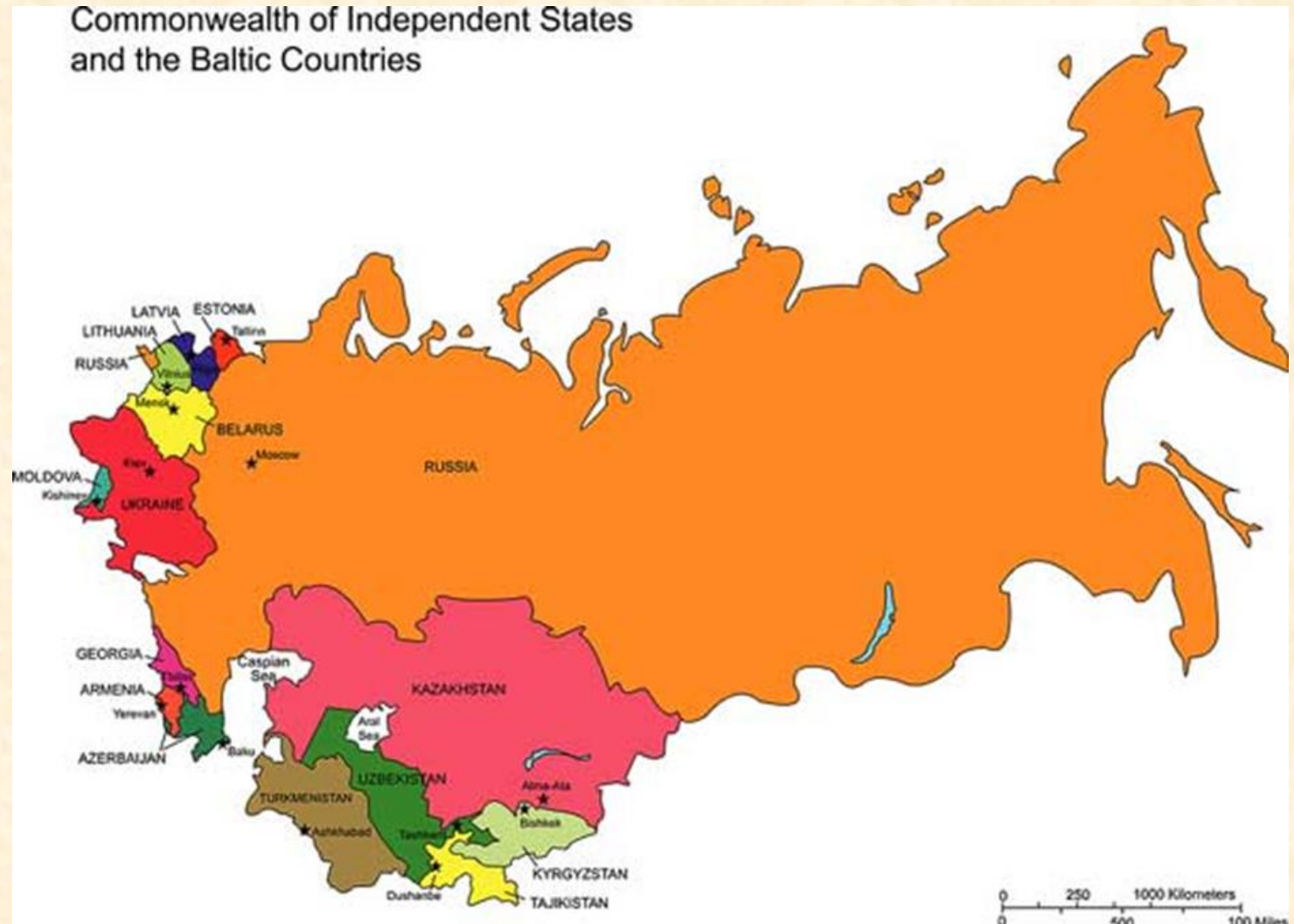
Administrative Divisions of the Soviet Union, 1922-1991.

Source: Map Room-University of Texas, Austin Special Collections



# Post-Soviet Central Asia

- After the 1991 collapse of the USSR, the CIS was formed
- Maintained economic, diplomatic, cultural connections to Russia
- Newly independent Central Asian nations joined





# Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)

- Members:

- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Belarus
- Kazakhstan
- Kyrgyzstan
- Moldova
- Russia
- Tajikistan
- Uzbekistan

- Parties of Creation Agreement:

- Turkmenistan

- Former Member States:

- Georgia
- Ukraine

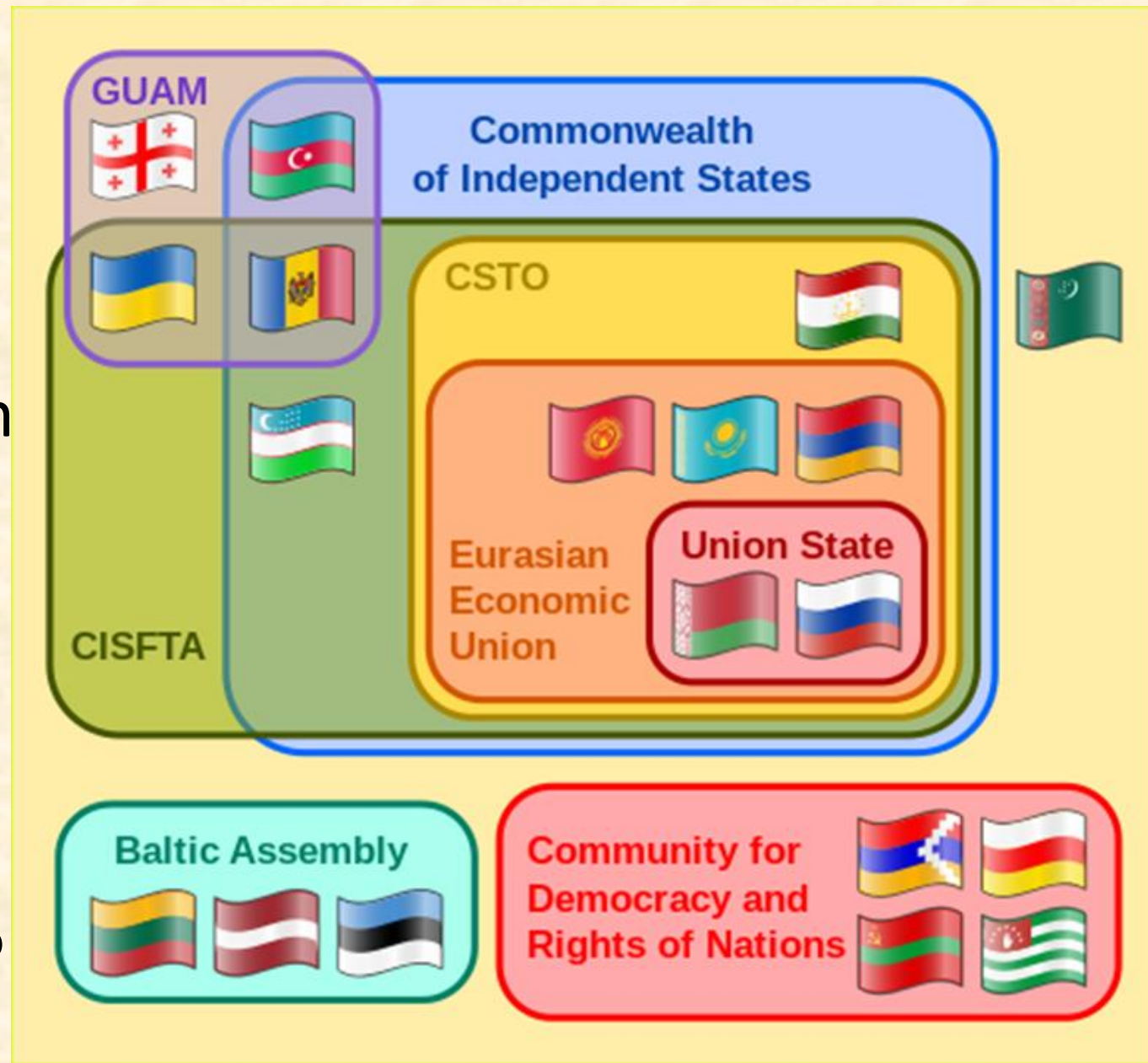


# Relationship Status: It's Complicated

- Independent nations formed from the former Soviet Union cultivate different types of relationships

**Think/Pair/Share**

**How might these relationships be tied to history? National identity? Proximity to Russia?**



Euler diagram showing the relationships among various supranational organizations in the territory of the former Soviet Union

# Case Study: Kazakhstan

- Central Asia borderlands between Russia, China, and Islamic South Asia (Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan)
- Populated by Turkic-speaking, nomadic people
- Colonized/occupied by Russia/USSR for over 150 years
- Site of large Soviet-era gulag



# Independence & National Identity

- Independent since December 1991
- Pop: 18 million
- 1<sup>st</sup> President: Nursultan Nazarbayev
- Official Languages: Kazakh & Russian
- Key Narratives: Steppe, Yurts, Nomads



# Kazakhstan: Many Peoples, One Nation

- Multivector foreign policy
- Modernization & Globalization
- Trilingualism
- Multicultural education
- Diversity between regions









# National Symbols

- Nomads & Horses
- Yurts (юрта)
- Spheres
- Kurt (Курт)
- Golden Eagle





# Revival of “National” Traditions



Vladimir Zemblevskiy with Saddaq



# Nomad Games

Kyz Kuu (Chase the Girl)



Kok Boru (kokpar) final match between Kyrgyzstan, in red, and Kazakhstan, in blue



 **Suiyinshi**

KAZAKHSTAN

PREMIUM CHOCOLATE

NOMADS OF THE GREAT STEPPE





# Think/Pair/Share

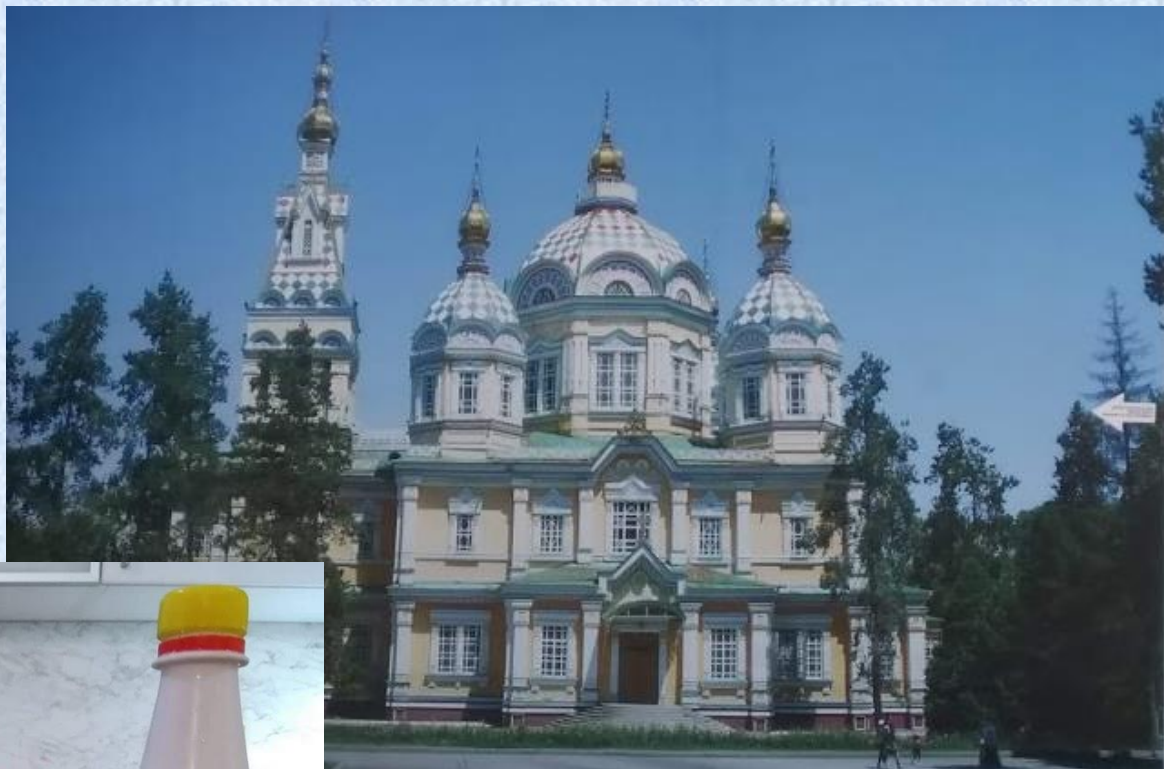
- **What role does the preservation of nomadic heritage and revival of pre-Soviet traditions play in forging Kazakhstan's national identity?**
- **What examples of heritage preservation have you seen in the US or other countries?**



# Language in Kazakhstan

- Multilingualism, Multiculturalism, Education, and Economics
- -Dekulakization under Stalin (1928-1953)
  - Karlag (Gulag in Karaganda) established 1931
  - Deportations of Koreans to Kazakh SSR and Uzbek SSR in 1937
- Russian Space Program founded 1955 Baikonur Cosmodrome
- Kazakh and Russian official languages, English forms triad of Trilingual goal
- Education in minority languages permitted; college entrance exams in Kazakh or Russian

Relationship Status:  
**it's complicated**



Мын, бояулы қала  
Город тысячи красок  
The city of thousand colors

ВХОД В ХРАМ





# Think/Pair/Share

- How many languages do you speak fluently?
- How long would it take for you to become fluent in another language?
- Is the goal of a trilingual Kazakhstan attainable by 2050? Why or why not?





# Writing Kazakh

- Arabic script used to circa 920-1929
- Latin script used 1928-1940
- Cyrillic script used 1940-present
- Oct 2017 began transition to Latin alphabet by 2025
- Feb 2018-all government business to be conducted in Kazakh, with translators





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- Kazakh in Arabic and Latin script, circa 1942



# New Latinized Kazakh Alphabet

№	Написани е	Звук	№	Написание	Звук
1	A a	[a]	17	Ń ń	[ɲ]
2	Á á	[ə]	18	O o	[o]
3	B b	[ɓ]	19	Ó ó	[ø]
4	D d	[d]	20	P p	[p]
5	E e	[e]	21	Q q	[k]
6	F f	[f]	22	R r	[r]
7	G g	[g]	23	S s	[s]
8	Ĝ ĝ	[ɣ]	24	T t	[t]
9	H h	[x], [h]	25	U u	[ʏ]
10	I i	[i]	26	Ú ú	[y]
11	Ĭ ĭ	[ɨ], [ɤ]	27	V v	[v]
12	J j	[ʒ]	28	Y y	[ɣ]
13	K k	[k]	29	Ý ý	[ɣ]
14	L l	[l]	30	Z z	[z]
15	M m	[m]	31	Sh sh	[ʃ]
16	N n	[n]	32	Ch ch	[tʃ]

# Think/Pair/Share

What does the Latinization of Kazakh (the change from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet) signify in terms of Kazakhstan's national identity?

Why is this change so important?

What challenges does it present?



# Wrap-Up

«We need to look into the past in order to understand the present and foresee the future»

N.A.Nazarbayev

Foundation of Kazakhstan's national identity drawn from nomads of the steppe

- Kazakh traditions, folklore, aesthetics

Impact of the colonial and Soviet periods informs the present and future

- Culturally: Russian language, deportee populations, multilingualism, multiculturalism
- Physically: Gulags, space program, nuclear sites
- Emotionally: Historical trauma of genocide, force migrations, repression

Aspirations of the First President continue to shape the country's national identity

- Global economic power, political influence, Central Asian leader, trilingualism



Source: Пути-Дороги <https://putidorogi-nn.ru/aziya/74-monument-baiterek>