

**UNESCO and Kazakhstan: new realities**Akmaral Khaidarovna Arystanbekova<sup>1,2</sup>, Rouben Azizian<sup>3</sup>, Sabina Serikovna Chukayeva<sup>1,4</sup><sup>1</sup>Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 71 Al-Farabi Av., 050000, Almaty, Kazakhstan<sup>2</sup>Former Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to UNESCO, Kazakhstan<sup>3</sup>Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, USA<sup>4</sup>Kazakhstan National Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Kazakhstan

**Abstract.** This article explores new realities facing international organizations in the Asia-Pacific region based on the case study of Kazakhstan – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and cooperation. Increased cooperation is ever more important for UNESCO, struggling to address major funding shortfall, and Kazakhstan, yearning to change its status as an international aid recipient to a donor nation. This article is intended for specialists as well as a wider audience - students of international organizations, international cultural cooperation, the Central Asian region, and international and cultural affairs of Republic of Kazakhstan (*The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies or the Kazakhstan National Federation of UNESCO Clubs*). [Arystanbekova A.K., Azizian R., Chukayeva S.S. **UNESCO and Kazakhstan: new realities**. *Life Sci J* 2014;11(5):523-526] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 77

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**Introduction**

UNESCO stands at a crossroads. Recent budget shortfall caused by withdrawal of funding by the U.S., forced the organization to downsize and suspend a number of programs further weakening its presence in newly independent countries, including those in Central Asia [1].

Whether UNESCO remains relevant depends on its ability to adapt to fundamental changes in the global economical and geo-political landscape. The shift in the world's economic balance from the West to the East predates a new approach to building relationships with its key stakeholders, especially those in the Asia-Pacific region.

The economic and political shift from the West to the East calls for organization's strategic repositioning and conceptually new approach in the Asia-Pacific region in general, and Central Asia in particular.

Kazakhstan, a region's strategic linchpin, is undergoing dramatic internal socio-economic shifts, which find reflection in its international policies and ambitions [2]. Deeper collaboration between UNESCO and Kazakhstan may lead to advancement of their respective agendas.

**UNESCO: peaceful future for the world**

UNESCO was founded on the premise of developing "intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind" to prevent another world war. In the past, peace and security, social-economic development, and human rights were considered as separate issues. Their interdependence was recognized only at the end of XX – beginning of XXI centuries.

According to George Singh, since its inception UNESCO has been vying to align its four competency areas – education, science, culture and communication – so that the general concept of humankind, diverse from the cultural point of view but unified in recognition of universal justice principles, human rights and human dignity [3] should be developed. Each aspect of UNESCO history is permeated by this goal. UNESCO is credited with disseminating concepts of continuous education, common heritage of humanity, and cultural identity and development.

Economic achievements of the last decades did little to narrow growing gaps in income inequality across the globe. Only a handful of countries achieved relative economic prosperity while at the same time it is for the first time that during 150 years the aggregated production volume of the three leading global economies – Brazil, India and China – is almost equal to the GDP sum of the countries that have been leading for long among industrially developed powers of the North – Germany, Italy, Canada, United Kingdom, USA and France. This dramatically changes the balance of global economic power [4].

To enhance its efficiency UNESCO has reorganized its decentralized network to make it a global system of institutions and offices. Cluster offices serve groups of countries, facilitate organization's programmatic activities, and participate in certain UN initiatives. UNESCO is the only UN Agency to have a global network of national cooperating bodies known as National Commissions for UNESCO. National Commissions make part of

the overall constitutional architecture of the Organization. Set up by their respective governments in accordance with the Article VII of the UNESCO Constitution, the National Commissions operate, on a permanent basis, for the purpose of associating their governmental and non-governmental bodies in education, sciences, culture and communication with the work of the Organization.

Presently, there are 199 National Commissions for UNESCO across the world. They constitute a truly global family with as an authoritative network of stakeholders, partners and experts and offer a comparative advantage to the Organization within the United Nations system. This network plays a significant role in the liaison with partners, the coordination of activities and the promotion of UNESCO's visibility at the country level [5].

With regard to Central Asian countries, which belong to the Asian-Pacific group according to their geographic rotation, a special division was set up back in 1995 within the UNESCO Secretariat that has played an important role in promotion of seamless integration of new independent states of this region into the multinational UNESCO family.

#### UNESCO: focus on Asia

Modern Asia is distinguished by the emergence of new regional leaders with fast growing economies, robust demographics, and considerable military might. UNESCO and other international organizations have made certain attempts to adapt to this new world order.

UNESCO is becoming more engaged in Asia Pacific region not least due to growing influence of its Asian member-states, especially Japan, South Korea, and China. Japan is one of its anchor donors. South Korea and China support individual programs, including those related to preservation of the world cultural heritage. Asians increasingly fill key positions at UNESCO and its committees, further influencing the development of the organization.

UNESCO does not manage directly but rather mobilizes various resources, including governments, public and private organizations, subject matter experts, and volunteers. The organization is mainly focused on ideation and knowledge sharing. Its outcomes are often difficult to measure. For instance, UNESCO's Bangkok office is working with local governments, intergovernmental organizations, and universities on developing a uniform education system in the Asia Pacific. The UNESCO Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific (the "1983 Convention") was first adopted in Bangkok in 1983.

To better reflect the significant changes that have taken place in the region since then, (such as the massification and internationalization of higher education), UNESCO Member States agreed to update and amend the Convention at the International Conference of States, held in Tokyo, Japan in 2011. The new Convention, entitled the Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (the 2011 Revised Convention) seeks to ensure that studies, diplomas, and degrees in higher education are recognized as widely as possible, considering the great diversity of educational systems in the Asia-Pacific region and the richness of its cultural, social, political, religious, and economic backgrounds.

UNESCO also maintains in the Asia-Pacific region a unique network of Observatories for Local Cultures and Creativity in Education (RLCCE) that assists UNESCO in enabling knowledge-sharing and access to key information resources by the international Arts in Education (AiE) community and by UNESCO, its Member States and cooperative partners [6]. UNESCO Observatories undertake research projects related to cultural and educational policies and management, develop new educational approaches to local arts and heritage, and advocate for the arts, creativity and culture to be mainstreamed in both formal and non-formal education.

**Table 1. UNESCO institutions in the Asia-Pacific Region [7]**

Regional Bureaus	Cluster Offices	National Offices	UNESCO Institutes Centers
			UNESCO Category 1 Institutes and centers
	UNESCO Office in Almaty	National Office to Bangladesh (Dhaka)	UNESCO Institute for Statistics (Quebec)
Regional Bureau for Education in Bangkok	UNESCO Office in Asia	National Office to Pakistan - Islamabad	UNESCO International Bureau of Education (Geneva)
	UNESCO Office in New Delhi	National Office to Afghanistan (Kabul)	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (Paris)
Regional Bureau for Sciences in Jakarta	UNESCO Office in Beijing	National Office to Nepal (Kathmandu)	UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (Hamburg)
	UNESCO Office in Tehran	National Office to Cambodia (Phnom Penh)	UNESCO Institute for Information Technologies in Education (Moscow)
		National Office to Uzbekistan (Tashkent)	Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (New Delhi)
		National Office to Vietnam (Hanoi)	UNESCO Category 2 Institutes and centers
			International Institute for Central Asian Studies (Samarkand)
			International Institute for the Study of Nomadic Civilizations (Ulaanbaatar)

#### Kazakhstan: dynamic development course

Geopolitically, Kazakhstan has long borders with both Russia and China, as well as with three other Central Asian states and the Caspian Sea. It is a strategic lynchpin on the Central Asian region - a force for stability as well as a driver of economic growth. It became UNESCO full member in 1992.

The President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Mr. Nazarbayev, when addressing the participants of the 28<sup>th</sup> General Session on November 15, 1995

highlighted that during half a century UNESCO has turned to be a reputable international organization with active influence upon the processes of worldwide development. The present location of Kazakhstan in-between Europe and Asia makes it a very busy arena of economic and political contacts whereby Kazakhstan is able to bridge two great civilizations – West and East. Having obtained independence Kazakhstan is now going through spiritual renaissance and is striving to resurrection of cultural Great Silk Road traditions, the artery of spirituality that has left a deep imprint in the mental outlook of the Kazakhs. However without the prosperity of the national cultures, capable to mutual enrichment, stable economic development and democracy on the Earth are impossible [8].

While paying a prominent role at the international arena Kazakhstan has succeeded during twenty years of independence to transform its position from the country recipient into a donor country. A number of reforms have been implemented in the sphere of culture, education, science and information. Projects on preservation and popularization of cultural and natural heritage of Kazakhstan are being carried out on a continuous basis in collaboration with UNESCO office in Almaty. One of the results of the given interaction is inclusion into UNESCO List of World Heritage of the mausoleum of “Khoja Akhmet Yassawi” in 2003 and “Petroglyphs of the Archeological Landscape of Tamgaly” in 2004, Kurgaljin and Narzum Natural Reserves in 2008 within the framework of the nomination “Sary-Arka –steppes and lakes of the Northern Kazakhstan”, as well as regular holding of a number of initiatives related to the project “Great Silk Road” [9]. In education sector Kazakhstan is systematically carrying out global UNESCO program “Education for All”, “Education for Sustainable Development”. The country is also an active participant of the UNESCO associated school system and UTWIN/UNESCO Chair Program. Apart from that Kazakhstan National UNESCO Club Federation, which includes 27 UNESCO clubs all over Kazakhstan, makes a very important contribution to the development of programs in the sphere of culture and education with the involvement of young people in the country. Organizing and performing different national, regional and international activities on a regular basis the UNESCO Club Federation works over fostering high UNESCO ideals and principles. Introduction of curricula on journalism into the national educational context and into the communication domain is going on gradually. In the sphere of science in 2012 the first in the world Central-Asian regional UNESCO glaciological center of category 2 was set up in Kazakhstan.

As Mr. Tasmagambetov, Chairman of the National Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan on UNESCO affairs, said at the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the General UNESCO Conference in Paris that took place in November 2013, for Kazakhstan cooperation with the given Organization has always been one of the priority directions of foreign policy. It is for more than twenty years that UNESCO has been rendering support to Kazakhstan in reforming national systems of education, science and culture. The possibility to share cutting-edge international practice in the sphere of information and communication has become possible due to UNESCO. In this challenging for UNESCO period of financial difficulties Kazakhstan makes additional efforts to support the Organization. Since 2011 the country has been contributing voluntary contributions to emergency multi-donor fund and UNESCO Cluster office in Almaty city, as well as to the implementation of the Organization specific projects. One of them, for example, is the project on setting up an on-line UNESCO platform on Silk Road [10].

Mention should be made of the main achievements of Kazakhstan with regard to its UNESCO related activity. In the first place this is the adoption of the Almaty Declaration on Promotion of Independent and Pluralistic Mass Media in October 1992 [11]. Then in the period from 1999 to 2001 Kazakhstan has been selected and worked as the Deputy-Chairman of the UNESCO Executive Board for the group of Asian-Pacific region representing all the countries of the region in the main UNESCO management body; it coordinated and introduced proposals and issues to be considered by the Organization on behalf of the APR. Recent visits of the UNESCO Director General Irina Bokova to Astana in May 2012 and in August 2013 support the growing prestige of Kazakhstan in the Organization. Presidency of Kazakhstan in the UNESCO Committee on Conventions and Recommendations from 2011 to 2013, which is a standing subsidiary body of the Executive Board of the Organization set up in line with the Resolution of the 70<sup>th</sup> of the Executive Board in 1965 has also made a significant contribution to the development of the country role within this Organization [12].

Infallible success of foreign policy of Kazakhstan in UNESCO could be rightfully considered the declaration of 2010 as an International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, which has been unanimously supported by the UN General Assembly members and was endorsed at its 67<sup>th</sup> Session, which declared the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures for 2013-2022.

At the same time there are a number of factors hindering a more active work of the National

Commission. Compared to other states, the UNESCO National Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan has a relatively small staff and depends of coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the country. For example, only three staff members work in its Secretariat. For example, the National Commission of the Republic of Korea has the staff of more than 100 employees.

### Conclusion

While UNESCO – Kazakhstan cooperation has been quite successful, Kazakhstan should more effectively use mechanisms and opportunities of cooperation with UNESCO with the aim to enhance its international authority and influence.

UNESCO, in its turn, could pool and more actively use this unique experience of Kazakhstan as a multi-ethnic and poly-confessional state to foster and enhance tolerance within the society, mutual respect and mutual enrichment of representatives of different religions and cultures.

Kazakhstan due to its economic opportunities could do partial financing of the programs of the Global Fund of Cultural Heritage, aimed at preservation of cultural sites in the Central-Asian region and in the Asian space, which could improve the situation with the given issue inside the country as well.

Given Kazakhstan's relatively strong economic performance this may significantly contribute to UNESCO in rehabilitation of its financial status and more productive implementation of its objectives in Central Asia.

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