



## HOW THE PANDEMIC CHANGES CITY LIFE: TURKISTAN CITY EXAMPLE?

The COVID-19 infection, which started to spread in many countries of the world in early 2020, caused the World Health Organization (WHO) to declare the coronavirus as a global pandemic. The rapid spread of the pandemic around the world caused the closing of the borders between countries, the weakening of the industry at the global level and the slowdown of economic development. In this context, countries have developed various programs depending on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Special attention has been paid to strategic programs aimed at preserving the socio-economic status of the society. The instability of the global economic situation causes major problems. As an indication of this, it has been revealed that basic industries such as production, service sector, and international trade are not ready to continue their activities under the isolation measures.

The pandemic situation announced by the WHO has also affected Kazakhstan, and various difficulties have arisen due to the different structures of the regions. For instance, within the framework of the quarantine measures implemented in Kazakhstan, interregional isolation was provided by placing special barricades on the determined routes. Keeping the epidemiological situation under control in densely populated cities like Almaty, Nur-Sultan and Turkistan have been relatively difficult. For instance, the first coronavirus infection in the Turkistan region was reported on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, and today this number has reached 3408. The number accounts for about 10% of coronavirus patients nationwide. Kazakhstan has taken several measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic. One of these is the declaration of a state of emergency starting March 15th. In order to fulfill the state of emergency measures, a quarantine regime was implemented under strict supervision in regional centers and big cities. For instance, strict controls over educational institutions and crowded places were enforced, public institutions, private businesses and other service buildings were quarantined. Meetings and events are held in open spaces or online. Prayers performed in congregation in mosques were prohibited. 7% of Kazakhstan's population has been subjected to isolation. It can be stated that these strict measures had greatly damaged the social and economic situation of the society. Accordingly, social assistance in the amount of 42,500 tenge (99 USD) per month was allocated to citizens who lost their income during the emergency situation in the country. 544.5 thousand citizens living in

the Turkistan region were allocated 23.1 billion tenge (53.8 million USD) from the national budget. Moreover, special aids were made to small and medium-sized enterprises in order to keep open the enterprises with decreasing income.

The epidemiological situation in Turkistan is considered one of the biggest epidemics in Kazakhstan. Dense population of the region and the presence of a connecting corridor between south and west regions are among the reasons for the rapid spread of the infection. This situation is also reflected in the region's close relations with other regions of Kazakhstan. The lockdown of the regional center has played an important role in the rapidly developing life of the city. For instance, major events approved at the beginning of the year were postponed, and transport links to the city of Turkistan were suspended under the strict quarantine regime. The importance of Almaty - Turkistan - Kentau and Turkistan - Shymkent bus services has decreased, especially for city residents.

After the cessation of transportation outside and restrictions on transportation inside, changes have been observed in the social appearance of the city as social distancing measures became an important part of daily social relations. Restrictions such as banning entry without a mask to all institutions and closed areas such as shops have been imposed on activities in the service sector. This created a huge problem for a newly developing city like Turkistan. As for service delivery, some shortcomings started to be noticed when online platforms entered the circuit. For instance, the weakness of the internet network in the region has started to show itself in the processes of receiving information electronically and other transactions of the city residents. This brings to attention the necessity of reconsideration of software projects such as E-government and Digital Kazakhstan. This shortcoming also put a huge burden on the education system and healthcare services.

Citizens who spent their free time with relatives, friends or in parks were forced to accept social order and restrictions under conditions of mass isolation. The majority of people who are out of their daily work have become more active in social media. Keeping track of developments in the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has become one of the people's daily routines. In addition, the closure of wedding palaces and restaurants, which are essentially important for the Turkistan region, caused changes in the traditional lifestyle of the city residents.

A number of changes were introduced to the cultural life of the city. For example, resorts, libraries, and museums started working online. In particular, the "Hazret Sultan Reserve Museum", the "Sattar Yerubayev Memorial Museum", and the "Regional History and Ethnography Center" are worth mentioning. For instance, the "Sattar Yerubayev Memorial Museum" published press materials under the title of "Yellowed Newspapers" in the museum's collection. These press materials are composed of Sattar Yerubayev's poems and works of art. The "Azret Sultan Reserve Museum" organized special online conferences and virtual museum tours for museum professionals and scientists. This revealed the need for effective use of social media platforms by online services of the museums during the pandemic. Social media is considered one of the most effective and accessible ways of using the activities of regional museums. In addition, many museums have been reassessed the work of the exhibition, making their activities more competitive. Moreover, during isolation, cultural centers and museums have become more accessible to city residents via online methods of use. In general, such steps taken in cultural centers revealed the need for cultural tourism in the city to develop in a new direction. In particular, online lectures and videos made it possible for the history and culture of the region to be explained to the public. In addition, these events have become an advertising base for cultural objects. Turkistan's cultural centers also contributed to stabilizing the epidemiological situation in the country. For instance, on social media platforms, ads promoting social distancing, wearing masks, personal hygiene and staying at home were designed. In short, social media platforms of museums have become tools that play an active role in combating the pandemic.

To conclude, the lockdown situation in the Turkistan region has changed the daily life of people of the region in many ways. Especially the fact that the population lives within the determined limits revealed the need for many new programs. One of them is the need for many rational measures in the field of cultural development, health and education. New initiatives, such as video tours and live presentations, adapted to the isolation of Turkistan city in the field of tourism, would make a great contribution to the development of the future tourism industry of the ancient city of Turkistan. Besides, it can be stated that these conditions, which occurred in the first wave of COVID-19 infections, lead to strengthening of the level of preparedness against possible pandemics that may occur later.

## Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- Kyrgyzstan's newly appointed Foreign Minister, Ruslan Kazakbaev, made his first foreign visit to Moscow. Kazakbaev declared that the new government would continue to support close contacts on all levels to strengthen political dialogue with Russia, stating that the country is the major partner and ally of Kyrgyzstan. During the meeting with its counterpart Sergey Lavrov, Foreign Minister Kazakbaev thanked the Russian side for a special contribution to stabilization of the political situation in Kyrgyzstan in the post-election crisis period (Kommersant, 23.10.2020).
- The director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, Sergei Naryshkin has met with President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko and joined a meeting of special services of Belarus and Russia which was held in Minsk. In an interview with journalists, Naryshkin stated that external forces are trying to change the state structure of Belarus using unconstitutional methods (DW, 22.10.2020).
- The 18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Prosecutors General of the SCO Member States was held in videoconference format. The meeting was dedicated to modern practices and effective mechanisms for preventing and combating corruption. Participants discussed active participation of member states in the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, as well as monitoring procedures under the Istanbul Anti-Corruption Action Plan of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (SCO, 23.10.2020).
- Minister of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan Abdulaziz Kamilov in an interview to a newspaper gave his vision about the country's foreign policy. In particular, he noted that foreign policy should not follow in the wake of international events but be proactive. Kamilov also noted that the Foreign Ministry, together with other bodies, was studying key issues of world politics and economy and working out proposals to further build up bilateral and multilateral cooperation with partners (Kun.uz, 23.10.2020).
- President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon met with the Commander of the United States Central Command, General Kenneth F. McKenzie, who made a working visit to Tajikistan. During the meeting, issues of cooperation between Tajikistan and the U.S. in the field of security were discussed. Attention was paid to issues of regional peace and stability. The parties also exchanged views about Afghanistan and peace talks in the neighboring country (Avesta, 22.10.2020).
- A meeting of the High-level Dialogue on Political and Security Issues "Central Asia - European Union" was held via videoconference. The participants discussed issues of sustainable development of the region, including cooperation in the field of rational joint management of transboundary water resources, solving environmental problems and climate change. During the meeting, building up cooperation in the field of healthcare and border management and developing joint approaches to the Afghan and other issues were discussed (Kazakhstan MFA, 20.10.2020).

## Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The Eurasian Development Bank presented its forecast report for the economy of Kazakhstan. According to the bank's report, average GDP growth of the country will be almost 5% in 2021-2022. The economy of Kazakhstan decreased by 1.8% during the first half of 2020. The bank experts expect that by the end of 2020, GDP will decline by 2.5%. The government of Kazakhstan conducted stimulating monetary and fiscal policies and used state support measures, which amounted to 8-9% of the country's GDP (Kazakh TV, 22.10.2020).
- The customs service of Belarus achieved significant progress in development of cost-saving automation processes. Recently, the State Customs Committee reported that the country's customs service was able to clear 60% of exported goods in an automatic mode without assistance of customs personnel. Digitalization of the customs services allows the country to clear 91% of transit goods within 10 minutes and 88% of exports within 5 minutes. The officials noted that the works towards full transition to digital technologies were continuing (BelTA, 21.10.2020).
- Uzbekistan demonstrated positive changes in production and export of textile products. According to data from the State Statistics Committee of Uzbekistan, in 9 month of 2020, the country exported 455 different type items of textile products worth \$1.3 billion. This volume of export exceeds the indicator of the same period last year by \$171.6 million, or 14.6%. For the same period, Uzbekistan's import of the textile goods decreased by 8.2%. Russia, a top export destination for Uzbekistan, imported products worth \$486.5 million (UzDaily, 23.10.2020).
- The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development continues to support projects in Ukraine. The country plans to attract €63 million from the bank to modernize its national postal operator Ukrposhta. The government has approved a resolution to attract the loan where the Ukrposhta plans to direct the raised funds for the implementation of the "Logistics Network" and the "Rural Branch" projects. The postal operator will attract an additional €30 million loan from the European Investment Bank to continue digitalization of the postal services (Ukrinform, 22.10.2020).
- The Eurasian Development Bank forecasted the GDP of Kyrgyzstan. According to the estimates, average GDP growth of the country will be equal to 4.4% in 2021-2022. The specialists of the bank expect that in 2020, GDP of Kyrgyzstan will decline by 5.9% given that during the first half of the year the economy declined by 5.3%. The pandemic-induced lockdowns, lower external demand, border closures, difficulties with transportation and sharp reduction of migrant remittances have significantly contributed to the economic decline (24.kg, 22.10.2020).
- The Eurasian Economic Commission proposed a gradual reduction of roaming charges within the Eurasian Economic Union. The commission representatives plan to start the suggested policy from July 1, 2021 and complete it in 2025. The commission set up a special working group and analyzed international practices in decreasing roaming charges. As an initial step, the commission recommends to reduce charges by no more than 90% of the charges in the home region, gradually decreasing it to 0% in 2025 (BelTA, 22.10.2020).

## Society and Culture

- The Gazi University in Turkey hosted the 12<sup>th</sup> Conference on "Turkish as a World Language" dedicated to the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Grand National Assembly of the Republic of Turkey. The conference was held in an online mode and was organized by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkey in cooperation with the Gazi University, TURKSOY, the Yunus Emre Institute, Khoja Akhmet Yassawi International Kazakh-Turkish University and the Turkish Language Institution. A Painting Exhibition entitled "From Altai Mountains to the Balkans" was also inaugurated within the framework of the symposium (Turksoy, 21.10.2020).
- The newly appointed Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Hungary to Kazakhstan Mihay Galoshfay visited the International Turkic Academy. Galoshfay met with the head of the organization, Darkhan Kydyrali, and discussed plans for mutual work and cooperation in education and sciences. The parties expressed willingness to take active part in joint projects launched by the initiatives of the Academy (Twesco.org, 22.10.2020).
- The Kazakh Embassy in Belgium, the Honorary Consulate of Kazakhstan in Luxembourg and the Kazakhstan-Luxembourg Cooperation Association organized a concert devoted to the 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the prominent Kazakh poet and philosopher Abai Qunanbailiy. During the event, Abai's work was read and presented in Kazakh, Russian, French, German, English, Turkish and Swedish. A photo exhibition about Kazakhstan was also held by the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra as part of the event (Kazinform, 21-22.20.2020).
- Acting Deputy Director of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission in Tajikistan William Hall announced completion of the USAID HIV Project in the region. The project helped to reveal major problems of people living with HIV in the region, such as discrimination and obstacles in getting access to HIV treatment. This contributed to the development of guidelines for treatment and care for people with HIV in prisons. A new USAID HIV project called "Achieving Goals and Keeping Control of the Epidemic" will be launched addressing stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV (Avesta.tj, 21.10.2020).
- Monuments dedicated to Abai's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Al Farabi's 1150<sup>th</sup> anniversary were opened in Turkestan. The ceremony was attended by the Secretary of State of Kazakhstan, Krymbek Kuserbayev, Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, Yeraly Tugzhanov and Governor of Turkestan region, Umirzak Shukekeyev. The delegation led by Krymbek Kuserbayev also visited the Alley of Glorious Predecessors in the Otyrar district (Kazinform, 23.10.2020).
- Minister of Supporting Mahalla and Family of Uzbekistan Rakhmat Mamatov held an online meeting with representatives of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA). During the meeting, the sides signed a memorandum on the implementation of the project "Program for support of vulnerable population of Syr Darya region." The project envisages professional training of residents of mahallas in Syr Darya region and delivery of free targeted assistance by qualified specialists and psychologists (Uza.uz, 22.10.2020).