



Kazakhstan's Echo

A publication of the Embassy of Kazakhstan to the USA and Canada
with views and comments on developments in and around Kazakhstan

www.kazakhembus.com

February 22, 2007

No. 35

Ambassador Tells Yale about 'Real' Kazakhstan



Kanat B. Saudabayev, Kazakhstan's Ambassador to the United States of America and Canada, delivered a lecture, Kazakhstan: Realities and Challenges, at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, on February 20, 2007.

His prepared remarks are available on our Embassy's website [here](#). His appearance drew a lot of attention from the news media and lot of questions from students and others who were clearly curious about Kazakhstan. Following are some news clippings which we hope will be of interest.

At right: Ambassador Kanat B. Saudabayev, speaks to an audience at the end a speech at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, Tuesday, February 20, 2007.

(AP Photo/Bob Child)

Kazakh ambassador tries to dispel myths from "Borat" movie

By John Christoffersen, Associated Press Writer

February 20, 2007

NEW HAVEN, Conn. -- Kazakhstan has overcome famines and persecution to create a fast-growing economy, but these days the former Soviet republic has a new worry.

Borat.

The fictional character played in the popular satirical movie by comic Sacha Baron Cohen portrays Kazakhs as addicted to horse urine, fond of shooting dogs, and viewing incest as a respectable hobby. Cohen, whose film was released in November, won a Golden Globe last month for best actor in a comedy or musical.

“There were a lot of funny things in it, but it has nothing to do with the real Kazakhstan,” Kanat B. Saudabayev, the country's ambassador to the United States and Canada, said Tuesday.

Saudabayev spoke to Yale University students in the latest effort by the country to counter the outlandish portrayal of the country in the movie “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan.”

Saudabayev is speaking at other universities and plans to address World Affairs Councils around the country, said Roman Vassilenko, embassy spokesman.

Kazakhstan has placed ads in U.S. newspapers and on television to tout its rapid economic growth and immense oil reserves, describing a country of cash machines, sushi bars and high-tech conference centers. Kazakhstan, which has a population of 16 million but is the world's ninth-largest country by area, recently led an effort to proclaim the Central Asian region a nuclear-free zone.

While the Kazakh government was horrified by the movie, government officials are starting to view it as an opportunity as well.

“It did provide some positive benefits for Kazakhstan in that it made some people willing to learn more about Kazakhstan, the real country,” Saudabayev said.

The embassy's Web site is receiving five times as many hits daily than before the movie and tourism-related calls are on the rise, officials said.

Kazakhstan's embassies in the West have protested Cohen's character, and tried through the media to mend the damage to their image -- in some cases disputing, one-by-one, each barbaric habit Borat attributes to Kazakhs.

Saudabayev took a different approach at Yale, showing a video focusing on the positive aspects of the country “which I hope gives you some ideas about what the real Kazakhstan is about and not the misconceptions provided in the movie by Sacha Baron Cohen.”

The ambassador portrayed the diverse country as a model in many ways, noting that it voluntarily gave up nuclear weapons, saves its cash from oil for the future, is working to diversify its economy and wants to enact more democratic reforms. The country survived and has thrived when many experts predicted it would fail, Saudabayev said.

“Kazakhstan is an example that democracy and successful markets can co-exist in a Muslim country, which is what Kazakhstan is,” Saudabayev said.

The ambassador invited questions after the talk. “Anything not related to Borat,” he quipped.

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Kazakh envoy in U.S. seeks to dispel “Borat” image

Wednesday Feb 21, 2007

NEW HAVEN, Connecticut (Reuters) – Kazakhstan's envoy to the United States Tuesday defended his country against “misconceptions” caused by the hit comedy film “Borat” and its misogynistic, anti-Semitic, fictional Kazakh TV reporter.

Speaking at Yale University, Kanat Saudabayev presented the former Soviet state as a modern nation of well-educated professionals and a major non-OPEC oil exporter.

The movie satirizes the United States and pokes fun at a fictional Kazakhstan as a place where people drink fermented horse urine among other questionable practices.

“I hope it would give you some ideas about what the real Kazakhstan is about and not the misconceptions provided in the movie by Sacha Baron Cohen,” said Saudabayev, whose government briefly threatened a lawsuit over the portrayal last year.

The film, whose full title is “Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan,” was a surprise box-office sensation, grossing \$248 million worldwide and earning an Oscar nomination for best adapted screenplay.

British comedian Cohen also won a Golden Globe for best performance by an actor in a comedy or musical for his playing Borat Sagdiyev, a cluelessly offensive Kazakh journalist with a thick mustache, rumpled gray suit, wild-eyed grin and boisterous catch phrases like “sexy time!”

A village in Romania stood in for Kazakhstan in the film.

Saudabayev, who is also Kazakhstan’s ambassador to Canada, touted his Central Asian country’s economic and social progress to the group of about 200 faculty and students, saying it serves as a model for other former Soviet states.

Some students at the Ivy League school said they were impressed. “It changes the perception of Borat because Kazakhstan is not portrayed in the media a lot and so we get a unique perspective from the ambassador,” said Atish Sawant, a first-year student.

But Maria Blackwood, another student, said she understood Cohen’s satirical intent.

“It sort of makes fun of Americans more than Kazakhs themselves. I think I agree with the sentiment that Sacha Baron Cohen picked a country that no one would, or the stereotypical American would, be aware of,” she said.

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Kazakhstan Makes Benefit From “Borat”

Hartford Courant

February 21, 2007

By Bill Weir, Courant Staff Writer

They say any publicity is good publicity, and the Kazakhstan ambassador, who came to Yale University on Tuesday, apparently agrees.

When the movie satire "Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan" became a big hit in the U.S. last year, it was the first introduction to Kazakhstan for many Americans. Unfortunately for Kazakhstan, it's portrayed as a backward country, rife with anti-Semitism.

Kazakh officials nonetheless have used the interest it has fueled to their benefit, and Kazakhstan ambassador Kanat B. Saudabayev has gone on a mini-tour of American colleges to talk up his country.

“The movie did heighten interest in Kazakhstan,” said Roman Y. Vassilenko, the ambassador’s press secretary. “We could have said, ‘That’s nice,’ but we didn’t leave it at that. We took the opportunity to tell our story.”

All in all, he said, “Borat” probably did more good than bad for Kazakhstan. “It was a blessing in disguise. A heavy disguise.”

Vassilenko translated for the ambassador, who gave his talk in Russian to a group of about 100 students and visitors in Luce Hall. Conservatively dressed, the 60-year-old Saudabayev seemed gratified by the audience’s reception.

As for the film, the ambassador seemed eager to put the matter behind him. Other than a few words at the start of his talk to remind everyone that “Borat” is fictional, Saudabayev didn't mention it again until the Q&A session - and then only to ask for questions "not related to Borat.”

The movie’s title character, a filmmaker from Kazakhstan played by Sacha Baron Cohen, sets out to make a documentary about America. Boorish and misogynistic, his almost every action and utterance is inappropriate. The Kazakh government was quick to denounce the film; Vassilenko says it’s now turning “lemons to lemonade.”

The real Kazakhstan, a Central Asian country with abundant gas and oil reserves, was part of the Soviet Union from 1936 to 1991. Though large in area (about four times the size of Texas), its

population is relatively sparse with about 15 million people. U.S. officials have cautiously dealt more in recent years with the nation's government.

The ambassador spent the bulk of his address talking up Kazakhstan's efforts to stand on its own since the fall of the USSR. Thanks in part to its economic reforms, he said his country could serve as a model for study in the West on how a former Soviet state proceeds independently.

Though he admits the country "has some ways to go" in its democratization efforts, he said its current state is a rebuke to political experts' predictions that an independent Kazakhstan would quickly fold.

He spoke of Kazakhstan's motions toward a relationship with the U.S., including sending troops to Iraq.

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Kazakh ambassador speaks

Yale Daily News
February 21, 2007

By Barrett Williams, Contributing Reporter



Photo by Mayra Macias/Contributing Photographer

Kanat B. Saudabayev, the Kazakh Ambassador to the United States and Canada, spoke to students and locals at Luce Hall on Tuesday in a presentation on Kazakhstan's history, government and economy.

For most Yale students, any knowledge about the nation of Kazakhstan starts and ends with the movie "Borat."

But in a speech to the Yale community at Luce Hall, the Kazakh ambassador to the U.S. and Canada, Kanat B. Saudabayev, presented the country in a very progressive light to the "future leaders of America." The ambassador delivered his speech to a diverse crowd of about 60, including local city residents and graduate and undergraduate students.

Kazakhstan has experienced political and economic success unmatched by other ex-Soviet bloc countries, he said through an interpreter, but it nonetheless depends on its younger generations to take full advantage of a liberated press and a free market.

“The foundation for Kazakhstan’s independence which we have now laid, was laid by my generation, by people who have struggled daily to shed their old [Soviet] habits to change their ways and to adopt a new life,” Saudabayev said.

After playing a video highlighting the accomplishments of the Kazakh government during its short 15-year lifespan, Saudabayev noted that the film differed dramatically from “Borat,” the more famous American-made movie portraying his country. “Borat” was a runaway success when it came out last fall.

“I hope this DVD will give you some idea what the real Kazakhstan is about and not the perceptions provided by the movie starring Sacha Baron Cohen,” he said.

Although Cohen’s film provided a significant amount of bad publicity concerning Kazakhstan, Saudabayev said, it has also encouraged many people to learn more about the country, which is the world’s ninth largest with regard to area.

He summarized the history of Kazakhstan, describing its political and economic successes since it gained independence from the USSR in 1991. The nation is marked by “one of the most dynamic economies in the world,” he said, as well as “[its role as] a reliable partner of the international community.”

Saudabayev discussed what he called “two separate holocausts” that decimated the ethnic Kazakh population, the first due to civil war and the second to Soviet forced agricultural collectivization. Furthermore, for 40 years Kazakhstan was home to the world’s second largest nuclear test site after Nevada, he said. Five hundred tests were performed, he said, and over 1.5 million people were affected by some form of radiation sickness during that period.

Audience members said they found the speech to be informative and useful, especially considering that Kazakhstan does not get much publicity.

Desire Chaudet GRD ’07, who is from Paris and has visited Kazakhstan, said he believes Yalies should be informed about the country.

“Although it’s progressed, there’s still a lot to do,” he said. “It is important for people here to learn about Kazakhstan.”

Saudabayev also spoke about Dutch disease, a phenomenon in which a nation’s economy collapses because it is based on one export — in this case, oil. Maria Blackwood ’10 said she was impressed by the actions the country has taken to combat this problem.

“The Kazakh government, unlike many other governments, has undertaken actions to prevent the adverse effects of Dutch disease,” she said. “Because it is very conscious of this issue, stands a good chance of successfully avoiding its negative economic ramifications.”

Gabor Debreczeni ’10 said he was impressed by the ambassador’s presentation, especially the way he specifically addressed American perceptions of the country.

“I was surprised by how well he defended Kazakhstan with regard to Borat, and how economically developed the country is,” he said.

Kazakhstan sent 3,000 students to study abroad last year through the country’s National Fund scholarship, Saudabayev said.

**For more news and information about Kazakhstan visit us at www.kazakhembus.com
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