

KARAZHAVIA

A BRIEF HISTORY



By Atlab Atlov

Foreword

The book you're holding in your hand is a brief historical overview of my home country—Karazhavia.

My nation has gone through turbulent times recently, and due to the recent introduction of new restrictive measures on independent media, it has become increasingly difficult to publish free and fair criticism of my government. Or even just a fair and transparent overview of Karazhavia's history...

I feel very strongly that without proper historical context, people will simply misunderstand the power-dynamics of an authoritarian state which, sadly, my homeland is slowly turning into.

This text means to provide that context, both through a collection of visual media and a comprehensive overview of the past 100 years of Karazhavian history that led my country to this dark point in history.

Getting this book out there without the help of others would have been extremely difficult due to our dear leader's fixation on banning anything he deems inappropriate or "misleading". Sadly, I couldn't publish this in Karazhavia, even though the book was printed in my hometown of Süykimdi.

We did find help in Estonia, however, as you also share history with the Soviet Union and, more importantly, are acutely aware of the dangers of totalitarianism.

We've had much help from Estonians, but most importantly I'd like to extend my gratitude to Karl Kevad, a graphic designer from the Estonian Art Academy, who helped edit and design this book.

Enjoy learning about my country.

—Atlab Atlov, writer, poet, journalist

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Early History



The steppe fox (*Vulpes corsac*)—the national animal of Karazhavia.



View of the Aydahar mountain range, situated on the northern border of Karazhavia.

Karazhavia has been inhabited since the Paleolithic era, with the most notable culture being the ancient Koban culture, a late Bronze Age and Iron Age culture of northern and central Caucasus.

Situated on the northeastern shore of the Caspian Sea, the Karazhavian territory was a key constituent of the Eurasian trading Steppe Route, the ancestor of the terrestrial Silk Roads.

The name ‘Karazhavia’ probably originates from the Proto-Turkic word *karsak*, ‘steppe fox’.¹ The Greek suffix *-ia* means “land” or “place of”, so Karazhavia can be literally translated as “land of the steppe foxes”. Some archaeologists believe that humans first domesticated the horse (i.e., ponies) in the region’s mountains. Thus it is sometimes mistakenly construed that the Karazhavian national animal is the horse, when in fact it is the steppe fox (*Vulpes corsac*).

Since the 15th century, Karazhavia had been under the rule of the Kazakh Khanate, but in the 18th century, the Russian Empire began to expand its influence into Central Asia. At the end of the 18th century, the peoples living in the modern territory of Karazhavian took advantage of Pugachev’s Rebellion (a peasant revolt against Empress Catherine II of Russia), which was centred

¹ I. Zhtern, *The History of Karazhavia*. — Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1993

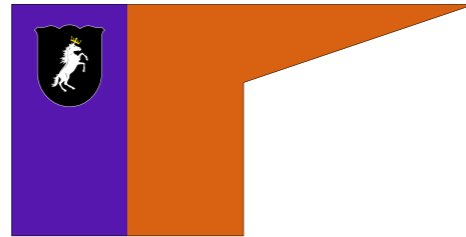
Location of modern Karazhavia by the Caspian Sea.

on the Volga area, to raid and loot Russian and Volga German settlements. The ensuing riches led to the founding of the relatively short-lived Kingdom of Karazhavia by King Balta I.

The Karazhavian national awakening began in the 1800s as several figures started promoting a shared national identity among the general populace. Widespread farm buy-outs by Karazhavians and the resulting rapidly growing class of land-owning farmers provided the economic basis for the formation of this new “Karazhavian identity”. Eventually, the Russian Empire successfully reinvaded Karazhavia and the short-lived Kingdom fell.

Although the modern territory of Karazhavia had been part of the Russian Empire since the 19th century, Karazhavians back then were allowed a considerable amount of cultural autonomy and even spoke in their own language—Karazhavian, which is closely related to the neighboring Kazakh language.¹

Eventually, as the Russian Empire collapsed and the Soviet Union was established, Karazhavia was admitted to the USSR as a Soviet Socialist Republic.



Flag of the Kingdom of Karazhavia. Flown with the coat of arms in the top left corner (a white crowned stallion on a black shield).



King Balta Maqtanis, also called Balta I (26 July 1760—25 July 1844), was King of Karazhavia from 1800 to 1844 until his death. Painted by Erasyl (undated).



The Közjasi (“Teardrop Lake”)—the largest lake in Karazhavia.

¹ I. Zhtern, *The History of Karazhavia*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1993



KARAZHAVIAN SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC

1923-1991

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A Brief History



Berik Qazir was the first First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Karazhavian SSR. He was executed during Joseph Stalin's Great Purge.

A a, Ä ä, B b, D d, E e,
F f, G g, Ğ ğ, H h, I ı,
İ i, J j, K k, L l, M m,
N n, Ñ ñ, O o, Ö ö, P p,
Q q, R r, S s, Ş ş, T t,
U u, Ü ü, V v, Y y,
Z z

The Karazhavian alphabet.

After the collapse of the Russian Empire during World War I, and the ensuing long and bloody Civil War between the Reds and the Whites, starting in 1917 and ending in 1923 with the Reds' victory, a Communist government was installed in Karazhavia. Backed by the occupying Red Army, Karazhavia was declared a Soviet constituency, and the Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic was incorporated into the Soviet Union as a "union republic" on 24 June 1923. Sarayqala—Karazhavia's most populated city—was declared the capital.

During its existence as a Soviet Socialist Republic, the Karazhavian SSR was ruled by the Communist Party of Karazhavia (CPK). Berik Qazir, the first First Secretary of the CPK, started an intense policy of russification. Due to the region's rich cultural heritage, russification didn't yield expected results, and the Karazhavian language survived. Russification aside, the people of Karazhavia were initially welcoming of the Soviet Union, as its economy grew handily. But after Joseph Stalin's Great Purge, in which even the pro-russification Berik Qazir was executed, Karazhavia became yet another tragic story hidden far behind the Iron Curtain.¹

In the spirit of Khrushchev's policies of de-Stalinization, repression and censorship were relaxed, and the 1960s are mostly remem-

¹ T. Erelejerdik, Y. Abashina, *History of Soviet Karazhavia*. — Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1998

bered fondly, as Karazhavia found unexpected success in cinema. Although most of the films produced in Karazhavia's leading film studio Sarayqalafilm were hard Soviet propaganda films, they are still held in high regard due to their technological achievements, which are considered cutting-edge for the time.¹

The political clique of the Soviet Union were generally satisfied with Karazhavian films, as they portrayed the heroic actions of Soviet soldiers during World War Two (the Great Patriotic War), and communism as a successful ideology. This heavy emphasis on pro-Soviet propaganda led to the rise of several counter-culture movements in art and culture in the 1970s, which became more and more powerful.² The Soviet powers responded by reintroducing hard russification, repression and censorship policies in the late 1970s during the Brezhnev era.

The 1980s, the Gorbachev era, was characterized by increasing unrest in Karazhavia. Ethnic strife revealed the shortcomings of the Communist Party as a champion of national interests and, in the spirit of glasnost, independent publications and political organizations began to emerge. Of these organizations, by far the most prominent was the People's Front of Karazhavia (PFK), which by autumn of 1989 had a lot of popular support. The movement supported independence from the USSR.³

1 Y. Abashina, *Karazhavian Cinema 1940-1980*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1996

2 T. Erelejerdik, Y. Abashina, *History of Soviet Karazhavia*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1998

3 Official Party Platform.—People's Front of Karazhavia



View of Sarayqala—the capital city of Karazhavia—in 1965.



Party emblem of the Communist Party of the Karazhavian SSR.



Logo of Sarayqalafilm—the leading film production company in Soviet Karazhavia.

On 25 October 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Karazhavian SSR declared its sovereignty on its soil. The first secretary of the Karazhavian Communist Party, Sandro Arystanbek, was elected president in December of that year.

The Karazhavian SSR was renamed the Republic of Karazhavia on 5 March 1991, which declared its independence six days later. The Soviet Union was officially disbanded on 26 December 1991 by the Soviet of the Republics. The Republic of Karazhavia, the legal successor to the Karazhavian SSR, was admitted to the United Nations on 4 March 1992, and many of the imprisoned counter-culture figures during the reintroduction of censorship in the late 1970s eventually became political leaders in the newly formed Republic of Karazhavia.⁴

4 T. Erelejerdik, Y. Abashina, *History of Soviet Karazhavia*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1998



Students gathering to protest in favor of the People's Front of Karazhavia, in Sarayqala Park Central (1989).



Sandro Arystanbek was appointed the first President of Karazhavia in December 1990.

Flag and Emblem

Before the adoption of the now well-known flags of the Soviet Socialist Republics, most of the member states used a variation of the Soviet Union flag itself. This became a problem when the United Nations was founded in 1945—all the member states of the USSR needed distinct flags to be able to distinguish from another.¹

In February 1947, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR issued a resolution calling for the Soviet republics to develop and adopt new national flags, which were meant to express the idea of a union state, using the symbols of the State flag of the Soviet Union, such as the hammer and sickle and the five-pointed star, and maintaining the predominance of red color on the flag of the Union republics.

National, historical and cultural features of each republic was instructed to express the other colors and the order of their location, as well as the location based on the national emblem or coat of arms. After competitions for the best projects from 1949-1954 the new flags of the 16 republics were developed and adopted. The Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic adopted its flag on 24 January 1953.²



The early flag of Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic (in use until 1953). Above the hammer and sickle were the gold upper case characters "QKSR" for "Qarajaviya Kenestik Socialistik Respwblikasi"—"Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic".



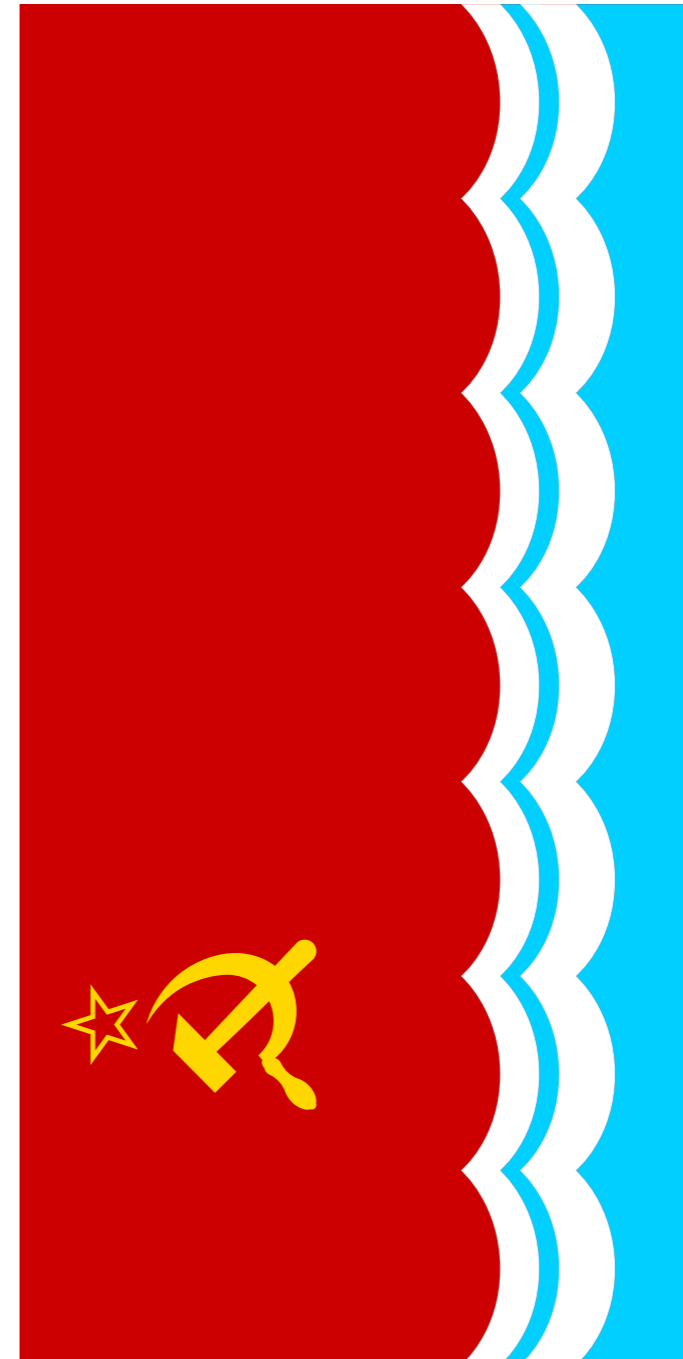
An early proposal for the Karazhavian SSR flag, ultimately rejected due to color complexity.



Another early proposal, as well rejected due to complexity.

¹ A. Kass, N. Abashina, S. Stern, Kodumaa riiklikud sümbolid.—Eesti Raamat, 1979

² F. Tagzim, Soviet Karazhavian Vexilligraphy and Emblems.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2008



The flag of the Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic (1953-1991). A 2:1 ratio red flag with a golden hammer and sickle and a gold-bordered red star in its upper canton with light blue-and-white waves at the bottom, probably signifying the Caspian sea.

The emblems of the constituent republics of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics all featured predominantly the hammer and sickle and the red star that symbolised communism, as well as a rising sun, surrounded by a wreath of wheat.

The USSR State motto “Workers of the world, unite!” in both the republic’s language and Russian was also placed on each one of them. In addition to those repetitive motifs, emblems of many Soviet republics also included features that were characteristic of their local landscapes, economies or cultures.¹

The coat of arms of the Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic was adopted on 26 January 1937, by the government of the Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic. It depicts two sheaves of wheat, two bunches of white and black grapes (a signature export article of Karazhavia at the time)², the red star and the hammer and sickle, with an ornamental circular pattern (likely of ethnic Karazhavian origin) framing a rising sun above the Caspian Sea.

The rectangular banners bear the Soviet Union state motto (“Workers of the world, unite!”) in both the Russian and Karazhavian languages, and “Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic” is displayed on the bottom banner in Karazhavian.



Karazhavian vexillographer Petr Bolatbek (1887-1969) designed the emblem of the Karazhavian SSR.

¹ A. Kass, N. Abashina, S. Stern, Kodumaa riiklikud sümbolid. — Eesti Raamat, 1979

² F. Tagzim, Soviet Karazhavian Vexillography and Emblems. — Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2008



The coat of arms of the Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic depicting two sheaves of wheat, two bunches of white and black grapes, the red star and the hammer and sickle, with an ornamental circular pattern framing a rising sun above the Caspian Sea.

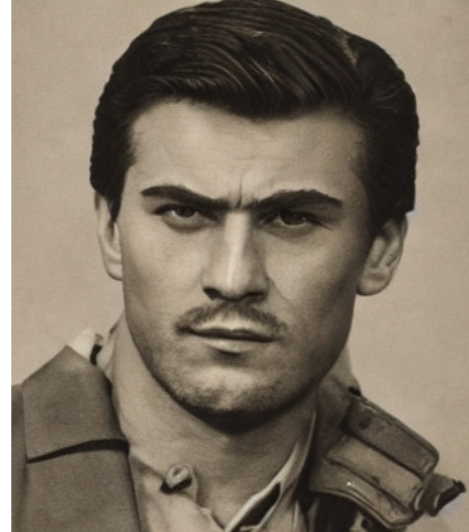
'60s Cinema

The sixties were a peculiar period for Soviet Karazhavia. On one hand, the industrial sector thrived and so did the economy, at least for a while.¹ On the other hand, dissent among the people was festering, as the russification of Karazhavia was present in every field of work.

The same dichotomy was evidently present in the movie sector.² The country hosted one of the Soviet Union's largest film festivals in capital city Sarayqala, the films were grandiose and one of the Union's most state-of-the-art film studios was also in Karazhavia. But the films made in Karazhavia were mostly heavily russified Soviet propaganda.

One of the country's leading film stars of the 1960s—Gyugo Tolkin—was heavily involved in the politics of the Karazhavian Communist Party³, and his films were more or less propaganda pieces. Still, this period mustn't be overlooked, as it provides us with a unique era of Karazhavian visual media.⁴

In 1963, Gyugo Tolkin starred in Miras Yemur's "Pride of the Skies" of which Sarayqalafilms wrote: "In "Pride of the Skies," heroic Soviet flight commander Nikita Ivanovich saves his squadron and single-handedly downs 15 Nazi fighter planes. Based on the



Gyugo Tolkin (1924-1983) is considered Soviet Karazhavia's most well-known leading man. Years after his death, he has also been nicknamed the "Soviet Top Gun" due to his involvement in a series of aviation-oriented war films.



Still from "Pride of the Skies" (with the Yakovlev Yak-15 turbojet). The Gyugo Tolkin-led film series was the highest-grossing film franchise in the Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic.

¹ I. Zhtern, *Of the Economies of the USSR*.—Moskva, 1999

² I. Zhtern, *History of Karazhavian Cinema*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2003

³ Y. Erroll, *Life of Gyugo Tolkin: The Soviet Top Gun*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2004

⁴ Y. Abashina, *Karazhavian Cinema 1940-1980*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1996

incredible true story of Soviet heroism during the Great Patriotic War."

The film was so popular that Tolkin ended up reprising his role as Commander Ivanovich in two sequels—"Pride of the Skies II" (1965) and "Pride of the Skies III: Nation's Pride" (1966).⁵

All three films were written and directed by Miras Yernur, produced by Jevgeny Omar, starred Gyugo Tolkin, co-starred Igor Shymhal, Gurbanguly Nursultan, Anna Aibala and Balta Sarsen as 'Nazi Colonel Werner', with the exception of "Pride of the Skies III: Nation's Pride" (1966), in which 'Nazi Colonel Werner' was played by Gurbanguly Vakilov.

Sarayqalafilms didn't just produce military propaganda however. Their second biggest success was the "A Woman's Hand" series (1966-1971) of six films, in which actress Anna Aibala played an independent-minded "ideal" Soviet woman who finished building a significant contraption at the end of each film in the series.⁶

⁵ Y. Erroll, *Life of Gyugo Tolkin: The Soviet Top Gun*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2004

⁶ Y. Abashina, *Karazhavian Cinema 1940-1980*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1996



Promotional poster for Miras Yemur's "Pride of the Skies" (1963).



Anna Aibala (1945-1975) is one of the most well-known actresses of Soviet Karazhavia due to her portrayal of Nina, an independent-minded Soviet woman in the "A Woman's hand" series.

Rise of Counterculture

The political clique of the Soviet Union were generally satisfied with the films Sarayqala-films produced in the 1960s, as they portrayed heroic actions of Soviet soldiers during World War Two (or “the Great Patriotic War”), and communism generally as a successful and preferred way of life. This heavy emphasis on pro-Soviet propaganda inevitably led to the rise of several counterculture movements in art and culture, which gathered more and more power and attention throughout the 70s.¹

One such group was the Nagiz Sindiq (‘Real Truth’) art collective who reappropriated Soviet propaganda posters and used satire to undermine those in power. The reverse propaganda posters that Nagiz Sindiq created were, like most counterculture art at that time, written in the Karazhavian language.

Another such group was Ozgeris Stw-dentter (“Students for Change”) who were mostly made up of Sarayqala University students who made cassette re-recordings of various Soviet propaganda songs, changing the lyrics and meanings of the songs humorously.²

For example, the popular Soviet and Russian mass song composed in 1960 by Oscar



Nagiz Sindiq art collective’s reverse propaganda poster. “Us! We hate the people with passion!” is written on the poster in Karazhavian.

¹ T. Erelejdik, Y. Abashina, History of Soviet Karazhavia.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1998

² F. Tagzim, Dissidents and Punk Rockers of the Karazhavian SSR—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2002

Feltsman—“I Believe, My Friends” (the unofficial anthem for the Soviet Space Program)—was retitled “I Believe, My Friends, That Life is Better in Outer Space, Than In the USSR”.

The 1970s also marked the emergence of politically motivated punk rock bands. Bands like Sirik Kartops (Rotten Potatoes), Qara Stalin (Black Stalin), and Gey Kalinkalar (The Gay Kalinkas) wrote political punk songs and performed them live at student parties.

Since most counterculture art at that time was written in the Karazhavian language, and was severely critical of the Soviet regime, even to the point of absurd ridicule (especially by the punk collectives), this obviously angered the Soviet powers, who eventually responded by reintroducing hard russification, repression and censorship policies, especially in the late 1970s during the Brezhnev era. Many of these counterculture revolutionaries were arrested and fined, and a few—like Nina Nina of the Gay Kalinkas (“Gey Kalinkalar”)—were even imprisoned.³

Nonetheless, many of these imprisoned counterculture figures during the reintroduction of censorship in the late 1970s eventually became political leaders in the Republic of Karazhavia. One of the members of the “Rotten Potatoes” (Sirik Kartops)—Sandro Arystanbek—would later become the first President of the Republic of Karazhavia.

³ F. Tagzim, Dissidents and Punk Rockers of the Karazhavian SSR—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2002



Cassette tape recording of Black Stalin’s (Qara Stalin) “March of the Broken Tanks” (1976).



The Rotten Potatoes (Sirik Kartops) performing live at Sarayqala University (1977). A young Sandro Arystanbek on the left (on bass).



Nina Nina, the lead singer of the Gay Kalinkas (“Gey Kalinkalar”) was imprisoned by the Soviet powers in 1979, but was later released in 1984.

Liberalisation

Although the late 70s and early 80s in Soviet Karazhavia were characterized by Brezhnev's reintroduction of hard russification, repression and censorship policies, the mid-1980s marked a significant turning point.

Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost policies, particularly regarding the freedom of the media, were aimed at promoting transparency, democratization, and liberalization in the USSR. The impact of glasnost on the media was profound, as it marked the end of the censorship and propaganda that had characterized Soviet media since the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917.

The policies led to the opening up of the media industry to independent voices, journalists, and publications, creating a new era of freedom of expression in the Soviet Union. Media outlets began to publish articles that were critical of the government, and journalists were given greater freedom to report on controversial issues.¹

Karazhavia was no exception. One of the leading local Karazhavian newspapers at the time, 'Karazhavian Truth' (*Qarajaviya aqitati*), started publishing articles by anti-communist writers. Eventually, 'Truth' even had headlines and front covers that openly criticized the Soviet regime.²

¹ T. Erelejdik, Y. Abashina, History of Soviet Karazhavia.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1998

² F. Tagzim, Aqitati: Karazhavia's Past Truths.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2001

QARAJAVIA AQITATI

The logotype of the publication 'Karazhavian Truth' (*Qarajaviya aqitati*)—the leading newspaper of Soviet Karazhavia.



Front cover of Karazhavian Truth in January 1992, declaring "Karazhavia is FREE!"

This liberalization of the media created a new sense of freedom and openness in Soviet society. Journalists were free to report on previously taboo topics such as corruption, environmental degradation, and political repression. The media became a platform for political debate and public discussion, which contributed significantly to the democratization of the Soviet Union. However, the newfound freedom of the press also led to the exposure of previously hidden problems and inefficiencies in Soviet society, which contributed to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.

In the spirit of glasnost, political organizations also began to emerge in Karazhavia. Of these organizations, by far the most prominent was the People's Front of Karazh-avia (PFK), which by autumn of 1989 had a lot of popular support. The movement supported independence from the USSR.³

On 25 October 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Karazhavian SSR declared its sovereignty on its soil. The first secretary of the Karazhavian Communist Party, Sandro Arys-tanbek, was elected president in December of that year.

The Karazhavian SSR was renamed the Republic of Karazhavia on 5 March 1991, which declared its independence six days later. The Soviet Union was officially disbanded on 26 December 1991 by the Soviet of the Republics.⁴

³ Official Party Platform.—People's Front of Karazhavia

⁴ T. Erelejdik, Y. Abashina, History of Soviet Karazhavia.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1998



Logo of the People's Front of Karazhavia. Q is for Karazhavia, X (xaliq) is for 'Front' and M (Maydani) for 'People'. The orange and blue colors were later reused on the flag of the Republic of Karazhavia.



Supporters of the People's Front of Karazhavia gathered on the streets of Sarayqala to protest against the Soviet regime.

The Republic of Karazhavia, the legal successor to the Karazhavian Soviet Socialist Republic, was admitted to the United Nations on 4 March 1992, and many of the imprisoned counterculture figures during the reintroduction of censorship in the late 1970s eventually became political leaders in the newly formed Republic of Karazhavia.¹

A new era of hope would now begin, as the newfangled Karazhavia began to try to move away from its authoritarian, violent and repressive Soviet past.



Sandro Arystanbek, appointed the first President of Karazhavia in December 1990, continued to lead the new Republic of Karazhavia until 4 June 1996.



Supporters of the People's Front of Karazhavia applauding the toppling of the Soviet regime.

¹ T. Erelejerdik, Y. Abashina, History of Soviet Karazhavia.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1998



REPUBLIC OF KARAZHAVIA

1991-2008

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A Brief History



The Erejeler—the unicameral parliament of Karazhavia.

The initial post-Soviet years in the newly formed Republic of Karazhavia were marred by economic difficulties. Sandro Arystanbek, the first president of the country, launched radical economic reforms in 1992, switching from a planned economy over to a market economy, including privatization and currency reform.

Sweeping reforms were also needed to facilitate a readjustment in cultural nationalism, as it quickly became evident that the young nation needed a new national identity. The State Committee of National Symbolism was formed and a contest was declared for the new flag and coat of arms, as well as many other visual elements necessary for a country. The Republic of Karazhavia had become more or less a functioning independent democratic country by the mid-90s, and regular elections were introduced.¹

The first parliamentary election took place on 4 June 1996. The People's Front of Karazhavia, still led by the sitting president Sandro Arystanbek, won 40 seats in the 99-seat Erejeler—the Karazhavian parliament—but didn't manage to form a government, as a majority of at least 50 seats was needed to rule. This led to the first democratically elected government of Karazhavia to be a coalition of four parties—the Party of Freedom,

The Aydahar mountain range.

¹ G. Abashina, *Era of the Republic*.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2011

the Liberal People’s Party of Karazhavia, the Republican Party of Karazhavia, and the National Popular Party of Karazhavia. The Leader of the Party of Freedom, Ainar Uigbek, became Prime Minister (head of government), and Kanat Kuanish, a cultural figure known to Karazhavians from the counter-culture movement of the 1970s, was elected President (ceremonial).

The coalition continued the economically liberal reforms of its predecessor, but pursued a more neutral line in foreign policy due to fears of neighboring Russia reinvading the country. Karazhavia was admitted to the Non-Aligned Movement (a forum of 120 countries that are not formally aligned with or against any major power bloc) to cement this policy of neutrality. This did not sit well with many Karazhavians who felt the need for a more pro-Western approach, and so, after the 2000 election, a new party—the Social Democratic Liberal Party of Karazhavia—entered government.¹

2004 saw the biggest single expansion of NATO, when post-Soviet countries like Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the organization. As in other former member states of the Soviet Union, heated debates took place in the Republic of Karazhavia at that time. The liberal political wing of Karazhavia, led by the Social Democratic Liberal Party, saw the expansion of NATO as an opportunity for Karazhavia to move towards the Western sphere of influence. On the other



The Liberal People’s Party was ideologically orientated towards the principles of social democracy and was eventually renamed the Social Democratic Liberal Party.



The Party of Freedom was a centrist and populist party that adhered to Russian minority interests. It dissolved in 2004 and eventually many former members would go on to form the Democratic People’s Party (the authoritarian party in sole power today).



Although they won the 1996 parliamentary election, the People’s Front didn’t manage to form a coalition government.

¹ G. Abashina, Era of the Republic.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2011

hand, the more conservative population, who supported membership of the Non-Aligned Movement, felt a threat to the sovereignty of Karazhavia.

In 2005, the ruling Social Democratic Liberal Party (with support from its coalition partner, the Republican Party) signed the Enhanced Opportunity Partnership Law, strengthening Karazhavia’s ties to NATO, and affirming its intention to eventually join the organization. Karazhavia was still very much dependent on Russia for energy and economic assistance, and this move towards NATO membership made many Karazhavian opposition politicians, and the Kremlin, nervous.

The former mayor of Sarayqala, Bakhmut Qalqani, took advantage of this political division. With financial support from the Kremlin, he formed a political party in late 2005—the Democratic People’s Party of Karazhavia. The party’s support grew rapidly and exponentially, and by the end of 2007, Qalqani’s extensive lobbying work had resulted in a remarkably vibrant movement supporting the establishment of a new state and stronger ties with Russia.²

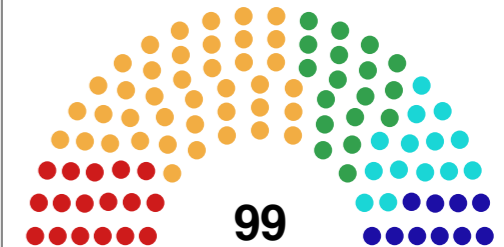
However, the government at that time was led by a coalition of liberal and pro-Western politicians, and Qalqani’s ties to the Kremlin led the government to imprison him under suspicion of treason; many other Democratic People’s Party politicians were also arrested. In January 2008, Qalqani’s sup-

RESPUBLİKASILDAR

The Republican Party of Karazhavia was a civic nationalist centre-right party that dissolved following the January Revolution in 2008.



The only party running in the 1996 parliamentary election that still exists today (albeit as a cosmetic opposition group) is the National Popular Party—a national-conservative right-wing movement expressing fervent nationalism.

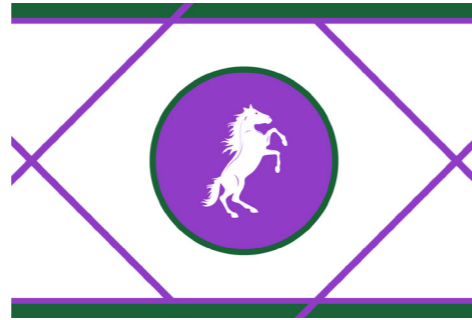


Composition of the Erejeler following the 1996 parliamentary election: Liberal People’s Party (17 seats), People’s Front (40 seats), Party of Freedom (18 seats), Republican Party (14 seats), National Popular Party (10 seats).

² G. Abashina, Era of the Republic.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2011

porters (along with hundreds pro-Kremlin activists) gathered on the streets to protest his imprisonment, and in the following days, the Karazhavian government used more and more violent means to suppress the protests.

Deadly clashes between pro-Qalqani rioters and the Karazhavian police culminated in a full-scale rebellion known as the January Revolution, in which the pro-Western government was overthrown and exiled, and the Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia was established. The relatively short-lived pro-Western Republic of Karazhavia came to a violent end.¹



Flag of Sarayqala, the capital city of the Republic of Karazhavia.



Official portrait of Bakhmut Qalqani (2007), then-mayor of Sarayqala.

¹ T. Gyugor, Q. Erelejerdik, *The Fall of the Republic of Karazhavia: Inside the January Revolution*. —Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2017



Riot police engaging with protesters on the streets of Sarayqala in January 2008.

Flag and Emblem

After the fall of the USSR and the birth of the freshly formed Republic of Karazhavia, it quickly became evident that the young nation needed a new national identity. The State Committee of the Flag and Coat of Arms of Karazhavia was formed and a contest was declared.

As Karazhavia had never before been an independent country, a flag had never been necessary and as such, everything was on the table. Early admissions favored retaining some elements of the Soviet flag, but this was quickly dismissed as the newly formed republic wanted to move away from Soviet symbology as strongly as possible.

Some designers looked further back into history, studying ancient Karazhavian symbols, ethnic patterns, coins etc. Most of those designs were deemed too complicated, heraldic and “mythical”.¹

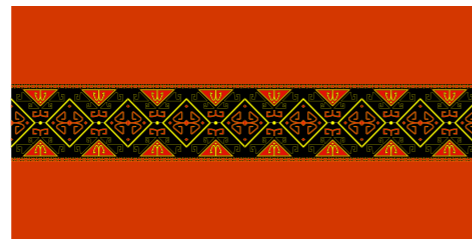
Eventually the State Committee decided on a tricolour (signifying republicanism) of blue, red and orange horizontal stripes in a 3:2 ratio. Yellow signified prosperity and hope for the future, black signified ethnic heritage (soil) and orange signified the courage and sacrifice of those who founded the republic.



One of the first ideas for a new national flag was to simply repurpose the Soviet era flag by removing the Communist symbols along with the predominance of red color.



A variant of this design was also suggested. With a black backdrop and the new state motto “One Nation—One Cause!” written in the top left corner of the 2:1 ratio flag.



Another proposed course was to look further into Karazhavia’s history. Jeddik Baqtanis suggested an 18th century Karazhavian ethnic pattern on a red backdrop.

¹ F. Tagzim, History of Karazhavian Vexillology and Emblems.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2019



The flag of the Republic of Karazhavia (1991-2008). A 3:2 tricolour consisting of blue (hope and prosperity), red (heritage) and orange (courage, sacrifice).

The State Committee of the Flag and Coat of Arms of Karazhavia received many design sketches for its new coat of arms. What the committee found significant was that on a large majority of these sketches, designers depicted foxes — the national animal of Karazhavia, and what the country is probably named after (*karsak*).¹

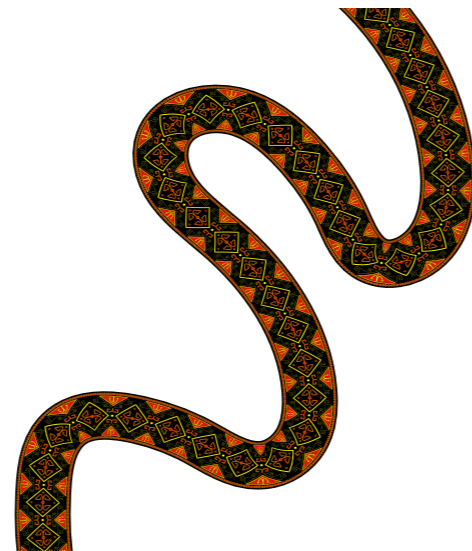
Thus the committee decided to commission a desert fox-laden emblem that would share some of the colors with the flag. The winning design also included an ethnic Karazhavian pattern from the 18th century (the “Kus twi”) coating a black shield on which three blue desert foxes stand, vigilantly guarding against all potential threats to Karazhavia.

The pattern itself is not known to be specifically Karazhavian in ethnic origin (only geographically), but as it often happens with new states, much ethnic history gets lost in context, and thus this chapter of Karazhavian visual identity suffered much from the accelerated pace with which the country was established.

The final design of the coat of arms for Karazhavia was met with approval from the citizenry. The depiction of foxes on the emblem resonated with the people and reflected their new national identity. The use of the “Kus twi” pattern, even if not specifically of Karazhavian ethnic origin, still provided a believable link to the country’s history and cultural heritage.²



The steppe fox (*Vulpes corsac*)—the national animal of Karazhavia—for which the country is most likely named after.



An 18th century “Kus twi” ethnic pattern, later called the “Pattern of Karazhavia” (“Qarajaviya ulgisi”).

¹ I. Zhtern, *The History of Karazhavia*. — Sarayqala-kitaptar, 1993
² G. Abashina, *Era of the Republic*. — Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2011



The coat of arms of the Republic of Karazhavia (1991-2008). Three blue desert foxes on a black shield with a golden outline, decorated with an ethnic 18th century “Kus twi” pattern.

Qus. A New Economy

After the breakup of the Soviet Union in December 1991, most of the formerly Soviet republics attempted to maintain a common currency. Some politicians hoped to at least maintain “special relations” among former Soviet republics (the “near abroad”). Other reasons were the economic considerations for maintaining the ruble zone. The wish to preserve strong trade relations between former Soviet republics was considered the most important goal.

The political situation, however, was not favourable for maintaining a common currency. Maintaining a common currency requires a strong political consensus in respect to monetary and fiscal targets, a common institution in charge of implementing these targets, and some minimum of common legislation (concerning the banking and foreign-exchange regulations). These conditions were far from being met amidst the turbulent economic and political situation.¹

The pro-national political forces leading the newly formed Republic of Karazhavia were not keen on keeping the ruble either, seeing it as further proof of russian influence that they’d tried so hard to stray away from. Thus a new currency, Karazhavia’s own—the qus (ISO code: KKZ ; sign Қ)—was introduced.²

1 Y. Qalqash, Overview of the Economics of the Republic of Karazhavia. — Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2016

2 Y. Qalqash, Qus: The History of Karazhavia’s Currency. — Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2016



The inverse and obverse of a 100 qus bill, depicting a chicken and the Otkirnokte mountain range.



The inverse and obverse of a 250 qus bill.

The word *qus* in Karazhavian means ‘bird’ (thus the banknotes all depict birds native to Karazhavia). The series of coins (not used at present due to high inflation rates) were humorously, and perhaps appropriately, named *jumirtqa*—‘eggs’.³

The first series of qus bills were introduced in denominations of 1, 2, 5, 10, 50 and 100. As time went by, Karazhavia’s economy, still heavily dependent on russian assistance, became more and more marred by inflation. Eventually, the *jumirtqa* coins were scrapped and a new series of qus denominations were introduced by 2007—100, 250, 500, 1000, and 2500.

From the 90s to early 2000s, the exchange rate was fairly stable (varying within 250-300 qus per US dollar). Starting in the spring of 2004 there was a slight but steady increase in the value of the qus against the US dollar; the reason most likely being the increased flow of petrodollars into the country. By 2019, one dollar was worth 652,35 qus. Banknotes below 100 qus had effectively disappeared by 2008.⁴

The qus paper notes are one of the few elements of Karazhavian graphic design during the Republic of Karazhavia that display the ‘Karazhsun’—a symbol of uncertain origin that later (during the era of the Democratic People’s Republic) achieved a much more sinister meaning.⁵

3 Y. Qalqash, Qus: The History of Karazhavia’s Currency. — Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2016

4 Y. Qalqash, Overview of the Economics of the Republic of Karazhavia. — Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2016

5 Q. Erelejerdik, Qalqani’s Shadow: How A Tin-Pot Dictator Took Over Karazhavia. — Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2019



The inverse and obverse of a 500 qus bill.



The inverse and obverse of a 1000 qus bill, depicting a tit and the Ylkenaydaha mountains.

The qus designs are essentially similarly designed to this date, with the exception of the graphic drawings of birds, which have now been replaced by mythological animals.¹

The Republic of Karazhavia’s economy was a fledgling one during the 2000s. The country had undergone significant political and economic changes in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse, and as the transition to a market-based economy had been a challenging process, the country failed to make significant progress in rebuilding its economy and creating new economic opportunities.

Perhaps the only sector that saw growth during the 2000s was tourism. Karazhavia’s beautiful landscapes, cultural heritage, and historic sites attracted visitors from around the world, and the various governments of Karazhavia invested heavily in tourism infrastructure.²



The inverse and obverse of a 2500 qus bill.



Renovated Bursaq Castle in the Otkirnokte mountains, a popular tourist attraction.

¹ Y. Qalqash, Qus: The History of Karazhavia’s Currency.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2016
² Y. Qalqash, Overview of the Economics of the Republic of Karazhavia.— Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2016’



The 2000s

Although the Republic of Karazhavia was marred by economic difficulties, its culture—especially pop-culture—boomed. The 2000s saw a rise of many pop music groups and artists, a breath of fresh air in its movie industry (which had been quite dormant since its ‘golden age’ in the 1960s), and a many artist collectives enjoyed newfound success in a more liberal Karazhavia.¹

Sarayqalafilm—the country’s leading film studio—continued to exist, but instead of making Soviet propaganda films as it used to, filmmakers throughout Karazhavia looked westwards, and tried to emulate the success of many fantasy and science fiction franchises of Hollywood. One such film series—‘The Legends of the Caspian Sea’—was clearly a nod to the Pirates of the Caribbean franchise.

In the first of what would become a trilogy, ‘The Legends of the Caspian Sea’ starred Ainar Kausar as Captain Tomyr as a swashbuckling captain of the ship ‘The Red Dream’ who fought against the Russian imperial navy on the Caspian, almost always vanquishing the evil invaders.²

Like many other Sarayqalafilm movies, ‘The Legends of the Caspian Sea’ attempted to rewrite history, placing Karazhavian heroes in 19th century wars and conflicts, mostly victoriously. The films were not historically accurate, as Karazhavia’s history was much



DVD box cover art of ‘The Legends of the Caspian Sea’, the first of a film series of the adventures of Captain Tomyr.



A model replica of the legendary ship ‘The Red Dream’ was built specifically for the film series.

¹ G. Abashina, *Era of the Republic*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2011

² Q. Aibala, *Pop-Culture Magnificence in the Republic of Karazhavia*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2016

more bleak than they depicted, but they weren’t meant to be, as they signified a more romantic approach to Karazhavian history.

This light-hearted cultural boom was also evident in many pop music groups and artists. Rayana—a sort of Karazhavian Britney Spears—became the country’s best-selling artist. Although most Karazhavians enjoyed her music, some felt that the lyrics shouldn’t have been in the English language, but in Karazhavian instead.

The rock band Olim Pocolw (Death Kissers) sang their songs in Karazhavian, and also hold the record for the biggest concert (by crowd size) in Karazhavian history. The Lukoil Arena near Sarayqala was sold out as 15,000 people in 2006 gathered in attendance of Olim Pocolw’s third album (*Jinis Ziirat*—“Sex Graveyard”) presentation tour’s final performance.³

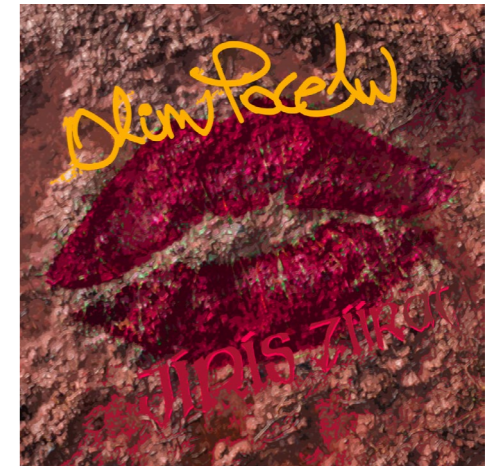
As signs of a political revolution began to emerge, many of these pop artists and filmmakers spoke out against the fervent nationalism preached by politicians like the mayor of Sarayqala—Bakmut Qalqani. They wrote songs and even produced films ridiculing this new wave of ultranationalist and populist far-right politics. Tragically, their efforts were for naught, as when the last episode of ‘The Legends of the Caspian Sea: The Snake of Petrograd’ premiered in theaters 2007, the January Revolution loomed in the distance.⁴

³ Q. Aibala, *Pop-Culture Magnificence in the Republic of Karazhavia*.—Sarayqala-kitaptar, 2016

⁴ T. Gyugor, Q. Erelejerdik, *The Fall of the Republic of Karazhavia: Inside the January Revolution*.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2017



Rayana, whose songs were mostly in the English language, became Karazhavia’s best-selling solo artist.



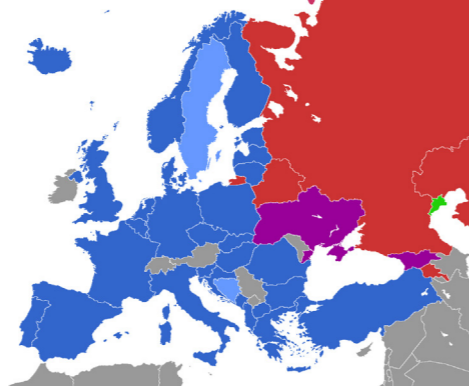
Album cover of Olim Pocolw’s third album “Jinis Ziirat” (“Sex Graveyard” in Karazhavian).

January Revolution

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was involved in, among other things, the breakup of Yugoslavia, and the first military operations took place in the Bosnian War of 1992-1995. However, good relations were established with the former Warsaw Pact countries, and many of them joined NATO.

In 2004, NATO's biggest expansion took place, as Estonia, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia joined the Union. Like in other former member states of the USSR, heated debates took place in the Republic of Karazhavia at that time as well. The more liberal political wing of Karazhavia saw the expansion of NATO as an opportunity to move towards the Western sphere of influence with its partners. On the other hand, the more conservative population supporting membership of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) felt a threat to the sovereignty of Karazhavia.¹

The former mayor of Sarayqala, Bakhmut Qalqani, took advantage of this political division, and, with financial support from the Kremlin, formed a new political party in late 2005—the Democratic People's Party of Karazhavia. The party's support grew rap-



Map of NATO in Europe: blue: current members, light blue: countries in the process of accession, purple: countries seeking membership, grey: membership is not a goal, red: CSTO, green: Karazhavia (also in the CSTO).



Official portrait of Bakhmut Qalqani (2007), then-mayor of capital city Sarayqala.

¹ T. Gyugor, Q. Erelejerdik, *The Fall of the Republic of Karazhavia: Inside the January Revolution*.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2017

idly and exponentially, and by the end of 2007, Qalqani's extensive lobbying work had resulted in a remarkably vibrant movement supporting the establishment of a new state order and stronger ties with Russia.²

The Democratic People's Party of Karazhavia defined itself ideologically as a left-wing, conservative and nationalist party.³ Political observers, however, generally agree that the party does not have a solid ideological basis, and see DPPK as more of a political extension of Bakhmut Qalqani's personal political ambitions.

However, the government at that time was led by a coalition of liberal and pro-Western politicians, and Qalqani's ties to the Kremlin led the government to imprison him under suspicion of treason. Numerous other Democratic People's Party politicians were also arrested. In January 2008, Qalqani's supporters (along with hundreds pro-Kremlin activists) gathered on the streets to protest his imprisonment, and in the following days, the Karazhavian government used more violent means to suppress the protests.⁴

Deadly clashes between pro-Qalqani rioters and the Karazhavian police culminated in a full-scale rebellion known as the January Revolution, in which the pro-Western government was overthrown and exiled, and the

² Q. Erelejerdik, *Qalqani's Shadow: How A Tin-Pot Dictator Took Over Karazhavia*.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2019

³ Official Party Platform.—Democratic People's Party of Karazhavia

⁴ T. Gyugor, Q. Erelejerdik, *The Fall of the Republic of Karazhavia: Inside the January Revolution*.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2017



The Karazhsun—the official symbol of the Democratic People's Party of Karazhavia.



Qalqani supporters gathered on the streets to protest his imprisonment.

Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia was established. The relatively short-lived pro-Western Republic of Karazhavia came to a violent end.

After the revolution and the overthrow of the republicans, Qalqani was appointed head of state ('Kosbassi') and the party began to rapidly implement reforms that put the Republic of Karazhavia back on the road towards the political reality of the Soviet Union.¹



January Revolutionaries gathered in front of the Erejeler shortly before the toppling of the Government of the Republic of Karazhavia.

¹ T. Gyugor, Q. Erelejdik, *The Fall of the Republic of Karazhavia: Inside the January Revolution*.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2017



Qalqani supporters, some armed, storming the streets of Sarayqala.



DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF KARAZHAVIA

2008-2023

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A Brief History



The Karazhsun—the official symbol of the Democratic People's Party of Karazhavia.



The President ('Kosbassi') of the Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia, Bakhmut Qalqani, addressing the Erejeler—the parliament of Karazhavia.

The leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia, Bakhmut Qalqani, became the new president of the country shortly after the revolution. He completely overhauled the political system of the country, declaring himself Kosbassi ('the Leader'), and began reinstating some Soviet-era laws and functions. He named his nephew, Giorgi Vakilov, prime minister, and carried out elections in late 2008 which many outside observers concluded were not free or fair. Of the 99 members of the Erelejer, 70 belonged to the Democratic People's Party, and the rest of the opposition parties were simply cosmetic in nature, as most of the actual opposition party members were either imprisoned or exiled.

The parliament, military and judiciary was now under direct control of Qalqani and his party. The Democratic People's Party symbol (the Karazhsun) was also added to the Karazhavian flag and was visible beside many other national symbols. Close ties with the Kremlin were quickly established, political repression and censorship laws were introduced, and by the early 2010s, the country had effectively become a one-party authoritarian dictatorship.¹

Qalqani has been accused of authoritarian leadership and the deterioration of the

¹ Q. Erelejerdik, *Qalqani's Shadow: How A Tin-Pot Dictator Took Over Karazhavia*.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2019

country's human rights record, including increasing restrictions on civil liberties, particularly on press freedom and political repression, by many outside observers. In 2012, Qalqani made further adjustments to the political sector.¹ The Erejeler now consists of 50 members (with Qalqani serving as a tiebreaker) elected to eight year terms on the basis of direct electoral suffrage by secret ballot (elections are generally marred by violence, repression and widespread electoral fraud). The main function of the Erejeler is to draft laws, though in practice, lawmaking is generally done directly by the Kosbassi (Qalqani himself).

The opposition can be considered an illusory one, as it almost always votes in line with the Democratic People's Party, out of fear of political retribution.²

As of 2022, the vast majority of the country's population (89,1%) is nominally Christian (Eastern Orthodox), but the constitution does not declare an official religion and all major political forces in the country are secularist.

Karazhavia is now a developing country and ranks 88th on the Human Development Index. It has a low rate of literacy (137nd with 85.5%), and low levels of economic development, but a low rate of unemployment (106th with 6.60%). The Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia has seen a steep deterioration of the country's human rights record, including increasing restrictions on civil

1 Q. Erelejerdik, Qalqani's Shadow: How A Tin-Pot Dictator Took Over Karazhavia.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2019
 2 T. Gyugor, Q. Erelejerdik, The Fall of the Republic of Karazhavia: Inside the January Revolution.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2017



Qalqani addressing the United Nations in 2013.



Soon after the January Revolution, the Karazhavian Communist Party was reinstated and has had a small delegation in the Erejeler since.



The National Popular Party—a national-conservative right-wing movement expressing fervent nationalism—is the oldest party in parliament.

liberties, particularly on press freedom and political repression.³

Although opposition movements still exist, and Western countries support these movements financially, Qalqani's heavy consolidation of power and almost total control over the country makes any real political change extremely unlikely. Additionally, Qalqani's regime is strongly supported by the Kremlin, and the Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia as it exists today is essentially an extension of the Russian Federation, more akin to countries like the Republic of Abkhazia or the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine.

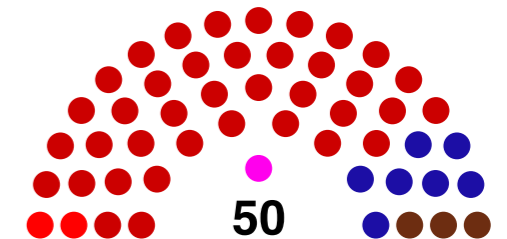
The lack of political and social freedom in Karazhavia has led to widespread discontent among the population, with many people feeling trapped and unable to express their opinions freely. The government has responded to dissent with harsh measures, including the imprisonment and torture of political dissidents and journalists. The government has also been accused of human rights abuses against minority groups, including the LGBTQ+ community.⁴

Without significant political reforms and a greater respect for human rights, it is unlikely that Karazhavia will achieve true stability and prosperity.

3 Q. Erelejerdik, Qalqani's Shadow: How A Tin-Pot Dictator Took Over Karazhavia.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2019
 4 I. Kyazan, S. Jackson, The Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia Today.—Braxton: LW Limited, 2020



The Bawirlar Party ("Brothers" in Karazhavian) is a proto-fascist party that supports Qalqani and votes in line with the Democratic People's Party.



Composition of the 50-seat Erejeler following the 2020 parliamentary election: Communist Party (2 seats), Democratic People's Party (38 seats), National Popular Party (7 seats), Bawirlar ("Brothers") Party (3). Qalqani himself acts as a tiebreaker (the 51st vote).

Flag and Emblem

As the constitution of the newly formed Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia was reformed, a new coat of arms was also ordered. It was changed from the previous steppe fox-laden shield to a decagram with a 'Karazhsun'—an ancient Karazhavian symbol signifying royalty—and also the party symbol of the Democratic People's Party.

The prevalence of the Karazhsun symbol today is impossible to not notice. Akin to the Nazi Party's Swastika during the Third Reich, the Karazhsun pops up on official government documents, military rank insignias, passports and drivers licenses, government uniforms, etc. Although the coat of arms of the Democratic Republic of Karazhavia is a variant of the Karazhun on a black disk and red decagram, it is rarely used. The more common form is simply a golden Karazhsun on a red disk.¹

According to independent reports, for the new official flag, Bakhmut Qalqani personally wanted a black flag with the Karazhsun situated in the middle, but his advisors convinced him to keep the old Republic flag so the change to an authoritarian state wouldn't be so "obvious". Eventually a compromise was reached with the current flag.²

¹ I. Kyazan, S. Jackson, *The Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia Today*.—Braxton: LW Limited, 2020

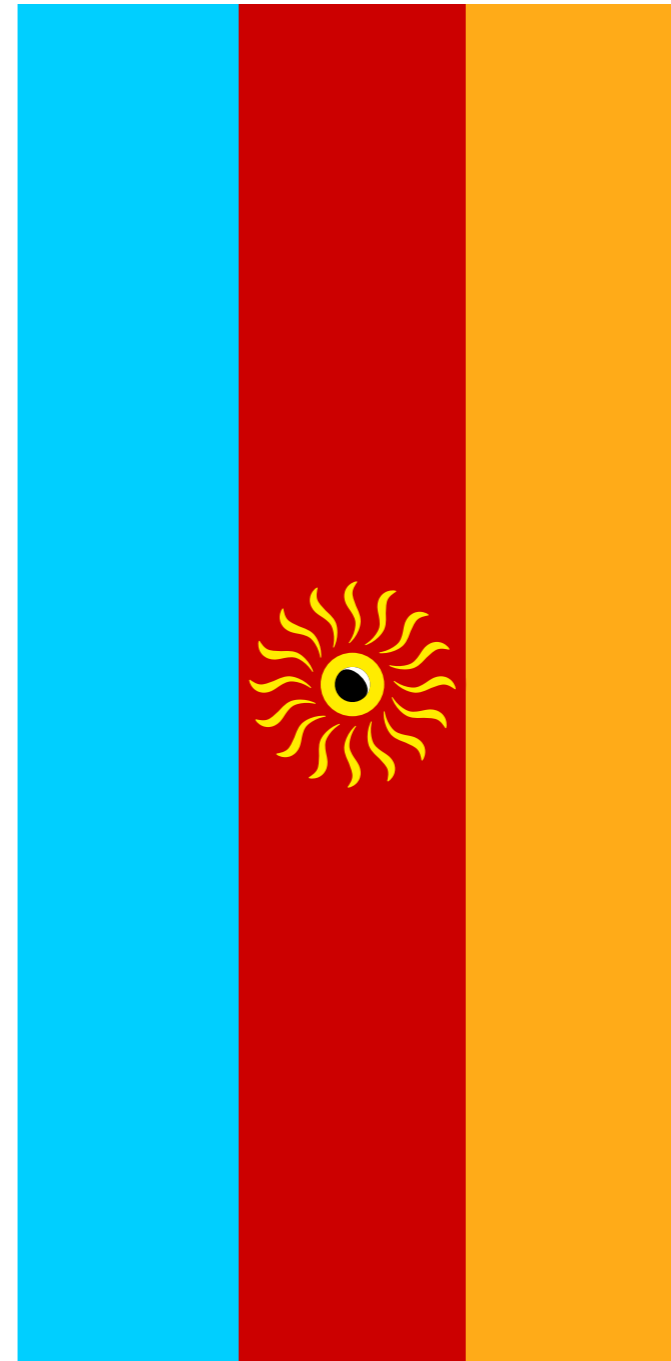
² Q. Erelejerdik, *Qalqani's Shadow: How A Tin-Pot Dictator Took Over Karazhavia*.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2019



An ancient coin excavated in Karazhavia depicting the 'Karazhsun' (a sun with 16 rays).



The official coat of arms of the Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia. A golden Karazhsun on a red decagram, surrounded by 14 circles (associated with new beginnings and positive change).



The flag of the Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia (2010-present). A 2:1 tricolour consisting of blue (hope and prosperity), red (heritage) and orange (courage, sacrifice), with a Karazhsun symbol centered in the middle.

Designing a Dictatorship

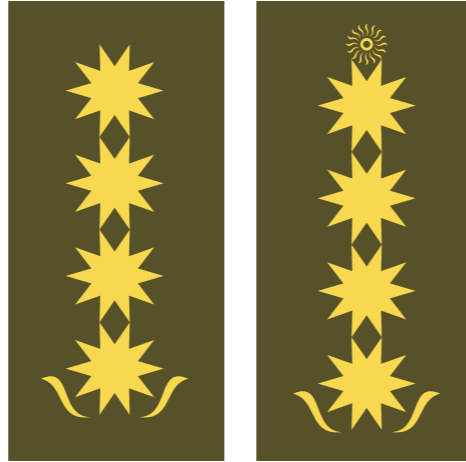
Bakmut Qalqani completely overhauled the political system of the country, declaring himself Kosbassi ('the Leader'), and began reinstating some Soviet-era laws and functions.

The parliament, military and judiciary are now under direct control of Qalqani and his party. The Erejeler now consists of 50 members (with Qalqani serving as a tiebreaker) elected to eight year terms on the basis of direct electoral suffrage by secret ballot (elections are generally marred by violence, repression and widespread electoral fraud).

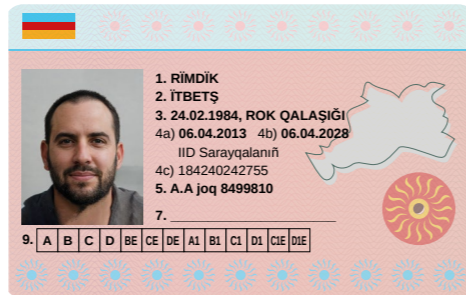
This overhaul has also had a huge impact to the visual identity of the authoritarian country. The Karazhsun symbol has been added to most official documents and designs, and is visible essentially everywhere. For example, the new military rank insignias Qalqani ordered made in 2012, starting from the rank of 'Brigadier General', now also sport the Karazhsun.

The country's visual identity can be summed up with the obsession of repurposing old national symbols (with vague histories) into a new, ultranationalistic framework. Symbols like the Karazhsun and the decagram (ten pointed star) are widespread.¹

Qalqani's personal obsession with historically inaccurate symbology can perhaps be best described by his executive order in May 2014 where he ordered a new design of



The military insignia of 'General' before (left) and after (right) Qalqani's overhaul of the country's visual identity.



Official government-issued drivers license during the Democratic People's Republic. Notice the flag in the top left corner is that of the Republic. This is most likely due to the Karazhsun appearing in a row in the top and bottom, as well as below the country's outline as a watermark.

¹ I. Kyazan, S. Jackson, The Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia Today.—Braxton: LW Limited, 2020

qus bills. Previously, a unique bird native to Karazhavia was printed on every qus note. Qalqani's obsession with the mythical past of the lands of Karazhavia led him to order a redesign of the qus bills, which now, alongside two Karazhsun watermarks, depict different mythological creatures. This makes the qus bills unique as far as world currencies go, and also communicate a degree of authority due to the creatures being mostly aggressive and strong looking.

In addition to all this, Qalqani has also created a powerful cult of personality around himself, with his image plastered across billboards, public spaces, and government buildings. The state-run media that is essentially dedicated to promoting him as the savior of the nation and the only person capable of leading Karazhavia to glory, often show him with glorifying imagery. In the age of social media, Qalqani often pops up in memes that might seem ironical, but are extremely effective in bolstering his support among the younger generations of Karazhavia.

Overall, the "design" of Qalqani's dictatorship is one that prioritizes control and propaganda over individual freedom and democratic values. The country's visual identity is deeply intertwined with Qalqani's personality cult, and the use of historically inaccurate symbols serves to further cement his authority and manipulative spell over the country's population.²

² Q. Erelejerdik, Qalqani's Shadow: How A Tin-Pot Dictator Took Over Karazhavia.—Houseford: Barnabas-Politicking, 2019



The Karazhsun and a mythical creature are now visible on new designs of qus banknotes.



Basqa äyeliñdi urıp üyge kelgende äyeliñ qara botqa pisirmegende

An internet meme of Bakmut Qalqani that reads: "When your wife hasn't cooked *qarabotqa* ('black porridge', national Karazhavian dish) when you arrive home after beating your other wife."

Resistance

Although Bakhmut Qalqani and his Democratic People's Party have almost complete and total control of the state-run media, resistance movements reminiscent of the 1970s anti-Soviet groups are still active in Karazhavia.

Many western countries and organizations support these movements financially, but Qalqani's heavy consolidation of power and almost total control over the country makes any real political change extremely unlikely. Additionally, Qalqani's regime is strongly supported by the Kremlin, and the Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia as it exists today is essentially an extension of the Russian Federation, more akin to countries like the Republic of Abkhazia or the People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine.

Many political scientists are concerned that Karazhavia is becoming a sort of proxy zone between NATO and western interests, and some even consider the possibility of a breakout of civil war between the opposition supported by the west and Qalqani's regime supported by the Russian Federation, increasingly likely.¹

Perhaps the best known face of the resistance is Damira Atlov, an ex-professor of linguistics in Sarayqala university, who



Damira Atlov, ex-professor of linguistics in Sarayqala university, and icon of the opposition.



Symbol of the Jariqtig ("Brightness") Party. As of today, the political group remains banned.

¹ I. Kyazan, S. Jackson, *The Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia Today*.—Braxton: LW Limited, 2020

has become an icon of opposition to Qalqani's regime. She is the leader of the now banned Jariqtig ('Brightness') Party, a political group made up of public intellectuals and volunteers who were against the January Revolution and Qalqani's overthrow of the Republic of Karazhavia.

During the first years of Qalqani's regime, Atlov and the Jariqtig Party organized street protests and public demonstrations, distributed flyers and posters, and ran the open debate portal "Jariqtig Web Blog" (www.jariqtig.kzv). However, the website was shut down in 2021, and, due to threats of violence or imprisonment, Damira Atlov had left the country by early 2022.

Despite the challenges, resistance movements in Karazhavia continue to find creative ways to operate underground and spread their message through social media and other online platforms.

The situation remains tense and unstable, however, with Qalqani's regime cracking down on any perceived threats to his power. Human rights abuses, including arbitrary arrests and torture, are common, and freedom of speech and assembly are severely restricted. The international community has called on Qalqani to respect basic human rights and engage in dialogue with the opposition, but so far, these appeals have fallen on deaf ears.²



Protesters marching on the streets of Sarayqala during the COVID-19 pandemic. Qalqani has often used the pandemic as an excuse to detain protesters and ban public gatherings.



A Jariqtig protester being detained by the Karazhavian riot police.

² I. Kyazan, S. Jackson, *The Democratic People's Republic of Karazhavia Today*.—Braxton: LW Limited, 2020

Karazhavia Now

Despite the draconian laws designed to silence the (real) opposition and ban public gatherings and protests, Karazhavia's who support the reinstatement of the Republic over the ironically named Democratic People's Republic still have hope that Qalqani's days are numbered.

Qalqani's ties to the Kremlin, and the sanctions imposed by the West on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine have had also had a negative impact on the economy and daily life of Karazhavia as well. Those on the side of freedom hope the world continues to support movements against Qalqani, and pray for the return of a more liberal and free Karazhavia.

Culturally, the nation is still strong, and the people, regardless of political creed or religion, tend to still get along. Recently, thousands of Russians (most likely fearing and fleeing from mobilization in Russia) have crossed the border to Karazhavia. Qalqani's "Open Gate" policy has been looked on favorably by the Kremlin, but the local populace has a general dislike towards Russians due to the troubled historical past between Russia and Karazhavia.

This has led to discord among even Qalqani's own supporters. Anti-Russian sentiment, and perhaps more importantly, anti-immigrant sentiment is growing at an exponential rate. Ironically, Qalqani might lose his stranglehold over Karazhavia much in the same way in which he gained it—by stoking fear against the "outside" world. This time, instead of the West and NATO, many reactionary and conservative Karazhavia recognize a different, yet familiar kind of outsider—the Russian immigrant.

While anti-Russian and anti-immigrant sentiment is nothing to be proud of (quite the contrary), it may still provide a unique path towards the toppling of Qalqani's authoritarian regime. With funds running dry from the war-stricken Kremlin, Qalqani's Democratic People's Party can't rely on much Russian support any longer. If the West continues to fund movements like the Brightness-Party (Jariqtig), and people like Damira Atlov are still covered by mainstream Western media outlets, then it is only a question of time. When Qalqani runs out of his political energy, the people will turn on him, and Karazhavia may become free once again.



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