

Ibrayeva G.

Doctor of Political Science, Professor, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University,
Kazakhstan, Almaty, e-mail: galiya.ibrayeva@gmail.com

**THE IMAGE OF ASTANA AS AN INTERNATIONAL
PLATFORM FOR HOLDING PEACE TALKS
ON THE SOLUTION OF THE ARMED CONFLICT IN SYRIA**

Astana - the capital of Kazakhstan, has become a venue for negotiations on the peaceful resolution of the armed conflict in Syria with the participation of a single delegation of the armed opposition of Syria and representatives of official Damascus, with the mediation of the guarantor countries of the agreement on armistice in the country - Russia, Turkey, Iran - since January 2017. Just from that period, the Republic of Kazakhstan became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, which gave the country new international obligations and powers. Kazakhstan is known to the international community for voluntary renunciation of nuclear weapons, which always creates a positive image for it.

The purpose of this study is to show how the image of Astana is indirectly positioned as a consequence of attracting international media attention to it as an international platform for peace negotiations in Syria, which led to an increase in the mention of the key word "Astana", "Kazakhstan" in information and analytical materials in world publications of countries Asia, Europe, the United States as the New York Times, CNN, Al Jazira, Washington Post, Reuters, VOA, BBC, etc. The methodology of the study is a quantitative and qualitative analysis of texts in the New York Times for January-May 2017.

Key words: Astana, image, armed conflict, peace talks, The New York Times, Syria, Kazakhstan.

Ибраева Г.

саясаттану ғылымдарының докторы, профессор, әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті,
Қазақстан, Алматы қ., e-mail: Galiya.Ibrayeva@kaznu.kz

**Сирияда қарулы қақтығысты бейбіт жолмен шешу жөніндегі
келіссөздер алаңы ретінде Астананың имиджі**

2017 жылдың қаңтар айынан бастап Қазақстанның астанасы – Астана қаласы Ресей, Түркия, Иран елдеріндегі бітімгершілік туралы келісімнің кепілі болып табылатын Сириядағы қарулы оппозицияның біріккен делегациясының және ресми Дамаск өкілдерінің қатысуымен Сириядағы қарулы қақтығыстың бейбіт жолмен реттелуі туралы келіссөздер жүргізуге арналған алаңға айналды. Осы кезеңнен бастап, ол әлемге жаңа халықаралық міндеттемелер мен өкілеттіктер беруде Қазақстан Республикасы БҰҰ Қауіпсіздік Кеңесінің тұрақты емес мүшесі болды. Қазақстан ядролық қарудан ерікті түрде бас тартқаны халықаралық қоғамдастыққа белгілі, яғни, ол әрқашанда Қазақстанның әлемдегі имиджін танытады.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – Астана Сирияда қарулы қақтығысты бейбіт жолмен шешу жөніндегі халықаралық алаңы ретінде өзіне әлемдік БАҚ-тың назарын аудартып, «Астана», «Қазақстан» сөздерінің Азия, Еуропа, АҚШ, яғни, «New York Times», «CNN», «Al Jazira», «Washington Post», «Reuters», «VOA», «BBC» және т.б. әлемдік медидадағы ақпараттық және талдамалы материалдардың көбеюіне және Астана беделінің қалыптасуына себеп болды. Зерттеу әдісі ретінде «New York Times» газетінің 2017 жылдың қаңтар-мамыр айларындағы мәтіндеріне сандық және сапалық талдау жүргізілді.

Түйін сөздер: Астана, қарулы қақтығыс, бейбіт келіссөздер, The New York Times, Сирия, Қазақстан.

Ибраева Г.

профессор, доктор политических наук, Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Казахстан, г. Алматы, e-mail: Galiya.Ibrayeva@kaznu.kz

Имидж Астаны как международной площадки по проведению мирных переговоров по решению вооруженного конфликта в Сирии

Астана – столица Казахстана, стала площадкой для проведения переговоров по мирному решению вооруженного конфликта в Сирии с участием единой делегации вооруженной оппозиции Сирии и представителей официального Дамаска при посредничестве стран-гарантов соглашения о перемирии в стране – России, Турции, Ирана – с января 2017 года. Как раз с этого периода Республика Казахстан стала непостоянным членом Совета Безопасности ООН, что наделило страну новыми международными обязательствами и полномочиями. Казахстан известен международному сообществу добровольным отказом от ядерного оружия, этот факт также формирует положительный имидж страны.

Цель данного исследования – показать, как косвенно позиционируется имидж Астаны в результате привлечения к ней внимания мировых СМИ как к международной площадке по мирным переговорам в Сирии, что привело к увеличению упоминаемости ключевых слов «Астана», «Казахстан» в информационных и аналитических материалах мировых изданий стран Азии, Европы, США как NewYorkTimes, CNN, AlJazira, WashingtonPost, Reuters, VOA, BBC и др. Методы исследования – количественно-качественный анализ текстов на примере NewYorkTimes за январь-май 2017 года.

Ключевые слова: Астана, имидж, вооруженный конфликт, мирные переговоры, The New York Times, Сирия, Казахстан.

Introduction

The Syrian conflict occupies the headlines of major world media publications over the past few years. It is natural that to Astana, as a platform for peace talks attracted the attention of the world's largest media. Obviously, attention in information and analytical materials is given first of all to the process of peace talks. At the same time, journalists pay attention to the originality of the local national color, to the city, which became the new capital of a young sovereign state. This increases the interest of world politics towards the country and the new capital. As is known, from the theory of image-making, that frequent mention of keywords raises the status of the object of mention. This is especially important for Kazakhstan, whose image in the West continues to be labeled with a negative film career as Borat.

The theoretical and methodological base of the research is based on the study of a number of works on the theory of image-making on the example of cities in the world, as well as studies on the image of the Kazakh capital. Astana has more than three hundred scientific articles devoted to the image of Astana, which can be classified by topics: politics, economy, “the heart of Eurasia”, science, sports, etc. The bulk of the research reveals Astana as an important political center of the Eurasian continent. Let's consider only the most actual scientific sources, which correspond to the subject of this study.

For example, the American researcher Natalie Koch, sees Astana as an architectural and political image project of a state building (Natalie Koch, 2010). She believes that Astana is a modernist project in which elite geopolitical imaginations are repeatedly inscribed in the urban landscape, based on the material manifestations of Astana's metropolitan landscape. The researcher examines the monumental and miniature architecture of Astana, singles out their similar roles in transforming the symbols of Kazakhstan's independence and identity. In another article, Natalia Koch (2013) views Astana as a new iteration of the experience of Ankara and Brazil, as an example of the domination of the geopolitical system of territorial states, as an instrument for the representation of state and national construction. The author notes the importance of the strategy of “state effect” and “territory effect” in the new independent Kazakhstan, based on data from interviews, observations of participants, text analysis, focus group, etc.

Another study was conducted by Narek Mkrtchyan (2016), based on Samuel Huntington's theoretical concept of a “torn country” and redefining civilizational identity. Huntington believed that the reasons for moving capitals throughout history were the need to initiate a long-term transformation of identity. Mkrtchan reveals on historical examples the movement of capitals like Moscow and St. Petersburg, Istanbul and Ankara, the process of urbanization of cities such as Yerevan and Astana.

The study by Kishimjan Osmonova (2016) is based on ethnographic field work and interviews with new residents of the capital of Astana from different parts of Kazakhstan. She analyzes the experience of their life in the new urban environment of Astana.

Adrien Fauve (2015) in his article shows how the world leader of the bicycle team “Astana”, which positions the new capital of Kazakhstan, portrays itself as an open, dynamic and successful country, an image that is promoted in sports and education.

Bernhard Koppen (2013) believes that an important component of the new capital is the idea of creating a “metabolic” and sustainable “Eurasian” city.

Method of research

The study is conducted by the method of content analysis, which allows to determine the quantitative and qualitative picture of the image of the capital, by highlighting the materials of foreign journalists published in the world media.

The methodological base was research on city image-making, as well as scientific articles, in which Astana was the subject of research as the capital of Kazakhstan. It turned out that the scientific stock of such studies is quite informative, and allows using the data that are given in these materials. In addition, the author uses the method of content analysis on the example of one of the characteristic materials published in the newspaper The New York Times.

The topic of the Syrian conflict is topical among the American media. Another active foreign media was CNN, the largest information company in the US, which, considering the progress of the negotiation process on the military conflict in Syria, has time to show the general views of Astana as a brilliant organizer of the city, providing all conditions for effective international work. CNN

or Cable News Network, a television channel created by the famous Ted Turner. Now CNN has become part of the Turner Broadcasting System, owned by Time Warner. This edition has several online versions, including the world, for Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, the United States. On the World News World website you can get information about international events, with comments from reporters, experts, with photo-video information. Since January 2017, a lot of materials have appeared about Kazakhstan and Astana. In the rubric “Syria Crisis” there are a lot of analytical materials, interviews, reports. For the period from January to March 2017. CNN (www.cnn.com) posted more than 600 videos about the military conflict in Syria, including about 15 materials on the negotiations on the regulation of the Syrian conflict in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Let’s consider what kind of materials and in what media are published about the negotiation process in the capital of Kazakhstan Astana. For the study used foreign materials published on the site **www.inosmi.ru**, dedicated to this topic for the period from January to May 2017. The key words for the search were “Syria” + “Astana” <http://inosmi.ru/search/?query=Syria%2C+Astana>. The analysis is based on the principle of creating the image of Astana. The political aspects of the topic relating to the negotiation process for peaceful settlement are not considered in this article.

Only materials published during the period of January 2017, when the peace negotiations began, were selected. It should be noted that in the articles under analysis there is mention of the name of the capital - “Astana”, but the authors limit themselves to scanty replies to the city providing conditions for negotiations, paying attention to the results of the initial stage of the political process, which must decide the fate of the country, torn by war.

Table №1 – Image foreign publications of the site www.inosmi.ru about Astana, as a platform for peace talks on Syria (January, 2017)

п/п	Article title	Title of the publication	Positive	Neutral	Negative
1	International meeting on the Syrian settlement in Astana On the way from Astana	Tърkiye, Turkey 26.01.2017		+	
2	Astana: Russia’s success and US failure International meeting on the Syrian settlement in Astana	Die Welt, Germany 24.01.2017	+		
3	Astana is the key to Syrian negotiations International meeting on the Syrian settlement in Astana	Le Monde, France 23.01.2017		+	
4	Who will pay for the restoration of Syria	The Financial Times, United Kingdom 24.02.2017		+	

5	Good news for Russia and bad for America	InoSMI, Russia 27.01.2017		+	
6	From a soldier to a peacekeeper: Russia is changing tactics in Syria	Chatham House, United Kingdom 26.01.2017		+	
7	Russian Roulette in Astana International Meeting on the Syrian Settlement in Astana	Svenska Dagbladet, Sweden 24.01.2017	+		
8	A new annoying mistake of the West	Literbnn noviny, Czech Republic 24.01.2017		+	
9	Russia - the ruler of the fate of Syria? International meeting on the Syrian settlement in Astana	The Guardian, United Kingdom 23.01.2017		+	
10	Putin and Lavrov are bending their line	Il Foglio, Italy 19.01.2017		+	
		Total 10	2	8	0

As the analysis of foreign articles shown on the website www.inosmi.ru for January 2017 shows, that the Russian site is not located to publish negative materials about its country, and does not give a fairly truthful picture of the reaction of the world community to the events that took place in Astana from January 2017. For example, there are no materials of American reporters, there are no publications from Arab countries.

While, for example, in **The Washington Post**, (<https://www.washingtonpost.com>) US publications about the possible start of negotiations on Syria, begin ten days before the start of official negotiations. The increase in the mention of the key words “Astana” and “Kazakhstan” in a solid American publication is connected with the invitation for participation in the negotiations of the new US President - Donald Trump, as well as impressions of journalists from the capital of Kazakhstan, which struck with its warm welcome and cold weather. The Washington Post called the capital of Kazakhstan Astana “an effective platform for negotiations.” Compared with the negotiations in Geneva, Astana showed a more favorable outlook for further negotiations between the government and the opposition. If the journalists of the Washington Post systematically published information about the situation with the talks in Astana, the journalists of The New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com>) delivered deep analytical articles that paid a lot of attention to the capital Astana and Kazakhstan, to the iconic attributes of the architecture of the new capital, which they called the “Northern Dubai”, in which they saw the signals of identity search and their place of the Kazakh nation in a complex world.

In the **New York Times**, on the key words “Astana” + “Syria” there were 40 materials for the period from January 1 to June 30, 2017. If we assume that over the years of the emergence of Astana as the capital, **527** materials were published in The New York Times. It can be counted that an average of **25-26 articles per year** was published every year since 1997, when Astana received the official status of the capital. With the receipt of the status of a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and the opportunity to solve important international issues on the site of the new capital, materials appeared almost twice as much in six months of 2017 alone. Of the **40 materials**, 24 articles were selected, where Astana was mentioned as the capital of Kazakhstan and any assessment was made that influenced its image. Of the materials selected, **15** materials were noted with positive evaluation, **7** articles - neutral, **2** - negative material.

We will analyze an article by Anne Barnard «Kazakh Capital, a Post-Soviet Creation, Is Growing Real Roots» of March 7, 2017, a journalist of The New York Times World. The content of the articles by Anne Barnard resembles research on the image of Astana, which was reflected in the scientific articles of American authors, for example, Natalie Koch (Natalie Koch, 2010, 2013).

Considering the architectural landscape of the city, the author tries to show in his style the influence of the northern neighbor, whom he calls the «old hegemon». He notes the similarity of the architectural style of the neoclassical Bolshoi Theater in Moscow with the new Opera Theater in Astana, she ironically notes «right down to the sculpture of galloping horses on the roof».

Table № 2 – Image materials about Astana in The New York Times [11] from January to May 2017

	Title of the article date	Author	Positive	Neutral	negative
1	January 3, 2017 – “Istanbul, Donald Trump, Syria: Your Morning Briefing”	1. Charles McDermid	+		
2	January 4, 2017 - “Another catastrophe of the Syrian war: drinking water in Damascus”	BEN HUBBARD		+	
3	January 17, 2017 - - World - “The truck bomb in the insurgent Syrian city kills dozens”	ASSOCIATED PRESS		+	
4	January 19, 2017. “Assistance does not reach plastered areas, despite the truce of Syria”	NICK CUMMING-BRUCE			+
5	January 20, 2017 - - World - Print headline: “Russia signs agreement on expanding Syrian bases”	ROD NORDLAND	+		
6	January 22, 2017 - m -: “Donald Trump, Yahya Jammeh, Astana: your morning briefing”	Charles McDermid	+		
7	January 23, 2017 - “Donald Trump, Benoit Hamon, The Gambia: Your Briefing on Monday”	PATRICK BOULLER	+		
8	January 23, 2017 - “The first day of peace talks in Syria is rapidly falling into disputes and accusations”	ANNE BARNARD and HWAIDA SAAD	+		
9	January 23, 2017 - “Donald Trump, Syria, Emperor Akihito: Your Morning Briefing”	Charles McDermid		+	
10	January 24, 2017 - “Iran, Russia and Turkey agree to force Syria to cease fire, having several details”	- ANNE BARNARD and HWAIDA SAAD		+	
11	January 24, 2017. - “Donald Trump, Brexit,” Syria: Your Morning Briefing “	CHARLES McDERMIDE	+		
12	January 25, 2017 - “Syria, Oscar, Australian Open: your environment Briefing” Syria is rebuilding the source of water in Damascus from Rebelesaes,	PATRICK BOELER	+		
13	January 31, 2017. “Syria is restoring a source of water near the capital,	RICK GLADSTONE	+		
14	February 01, 2017 “Autocrats of the world give thumbs up on the peak”	ROD NORDLAND		+	
15	February 8, 2017 “The battle for the return of the city is turning into a geopolitical test of the Syrian war”	ANNE BARNARD	+		
16	March 4, 2017 “Progress is reported in the negotiations on Syria”	RICK GLADSTONE	+		
17	March 7, 2017 “The Kazakh capital, post-Soviet creativity, gives birth to real roots”	ANNE BARNARD	+		
18	March 21, 2017 - “The rebels remind Damascus that the war is far from over”	ANNE BARNARD	+		
19	Apr 03, 2017 “Chemical attack on the Syrians ignites world outrage”	ANNE BARNARD AND MICHAEL R. GORDON			+
20	2. April May 27, 2017 – - World - Print Headline	By PATRICK KINGSLEY	+		
21	May 02, 2017 - - Peace - Print “Trump and Putin agree to pursue Syria in a ceasefire”	PETER BAKER and NEIL McFARKAR		+	
22	May 04, 2017 “The deal is reached for the harbors in Syria with doubt”	ANNE BARNARD and RICK GLADSTONE -		+	
23	May 22, 2017 - “UN envoy: all sides of Syria agree to negotiations on the Constitution”	ASSOCIATION OF THE PRESS	+		
24	May 31, 2017 “The UN’s chief aide accuses Syria of using suffering as a military tactic”	ASSOCIATION OF THE PRESS	+		
		Total 24	15	7	2

She clearly sees the statement of Kazakhstan's political underlining in the inclined, incorrect cone of Khan Shatyr, a shopping center «designed as the world's largest tent. Its roof is supported by a single slanting pole to evoke the nomadic history of the Kazakhs, a Turkic ethnic group slowly reasserting its identity after centuries of Russian rule».

The mastery of a journalist in describing the architectural features of the capital Astana is not limited to a formal recognition of their merits or demerits. Each article becomes a kind of political pattern under the configurations of which one can see the critical view of the intimate analyst. Barnard notes as a positive fact that «Astana also represents the success of Kazakhstan's leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev». The high role of the president of Kazakhstan, who «only president since independence – elected five times with 97.5 percent of the vote».

She notes as a factor that exalts the country that «Kazakhstan has avoided the territorial disputes with Russia and the ethnic and religious conflicts that have plagued other post-Soviet states». Barnard clearly emphasizes that the creation of a new capital was an important step in the policy of a sovereign state. «The move demonstrated power and ambition, but also placed a marker on the map, shoring up Kazakhstan's possession of the area». She believes that «Mr. Nazarbayev has sought to forge a national identity separate from Russia but not too exclusive

of Russians.» (Barnard). Emphasizing the proximity of the language and spirit of Turkey to the policy of Kazakhstan, the journalist describes the Hazrat Sultan mosque in Astana - the largest in Central Asia and compares that its «soaring dome and intricate decoration are reminiscent of Istanbul's Blue Mosque, but with lighter blues – recalling the turquoise of the Kazakh flag». Together with the positive assessment of the city of Astana, the author emphasizes that there is a problem with corruption in the country. (Anne Barnard, 2017).

Thus, having analyzed a number of mass media of the world countries, presented on online sites, as well as in print media, the author set out to show how the image of Astana is positioned during the period when media attention was attracted to the city of Astana as an international platform for peace negotiations in Syria.

The analysis showed that the holding of a major political event in the capital of Kazakhstan, increased interest in Astana, increased the number of references to the city in the world media, helped to strengthen the favorable image of Astana. At the same time, it should be noted that scientific sources devoted to the analysis of Astana's image can be supplemented by serious studies that help to elevate its image and give a more perspective picture of the development of the capital of Kazakhstan as a "Smart City" in accordance with new technologies and scientific progress.

References

- Natalie Koch (2010) The monumental and the miniature: imagining 'modernity' in Astana *Journal Social & Cultural Geography* Pages 769-787 | Published online: 25 Nov 2010 Volume 11, 2010 - Issue 8
- Natalie Koch (2013) The 'heart' of Eurasia? Kazakhstan's centrally located capital city // *Journal Central Asian Survey* Volume 32, 2013 - Issue 2 Pages 134-147 | Published online: 14 Jun 2013
- Narek Mkrtchyan (2016) Nation-building projects through new capitals: from St. Petersburg to Yerevan and Astana // *Journal Nationalities Papers The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* // Volume 45, 2017 - Issue 3 Pages 485-498 | Received 23 Oct 2015, Accepted 07 Apr 2016
- Kishimjan Osmonova (2016) Experiencing liminality: housing, renting and informal tenants in Astana *Journal // Central Asian Survey* Volume 35, 2016 - Issue 2: Urban spaces and lifestyles in Central Asia and beyond Pages 237-256
- Adrien Fauve (2015) Global Astana: nation branding as a legitimization tool for authoritarian regimes *Journal // Central Asian Survey* Volume 34, 2015 - Pages 110-124
- Bernhard Köppen (2013) The production of a new Eurasian capital on the Kazakh steppe: architecture, urban design, and identity in Astana *Nationalities Papers The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* // Volume 41, 2013 - Issue 4: From Socialist to Post-Socialist Cities Pages 590-605 | Received 06 Jun 2011, Accepted 10 Jan 2012, Published online: 01 May 2013
- <http://www.cnn.com>
- <http://www.inosmi.ru>
- <http://inosmi.ru/search/?query=Сирия%2C+Астана>
- <https://www.washingtonpost.com>
- <https://www.nytimes.com>
- Anne Barnard (2017) «Kazakh Capital, a Post-Soviet Creation, Is Growing Real Roots» 7 March // <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/07/world/asia/kazakh-capital-a-post-soviet-creation-is-growing-real-roots.html>