

# Kazan – the city of the BRICS summit

by René Zittlau, «Voice from Russia»\*



René Zittlau. (Picture voicefromrussia.ch)

*The summit in Kazan is undoubtedly the political highlight for the BRICS countries in 2024. Hosts of such major political events think very carefully about where they will be held. Choosing the right location allows for the communication of un-*

*spoken messages beyond the actual event. The decision in favour of Kazan was well considered from this point of view.*

## History and culture of a multi-ethnic city

Kazan is one of the oldest cities in Russia. It was founded in 1005, making it almost 150 years older than Moscow. Today, over 1.3 million people live in the largest city in the Volga basin. It is not only the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, but since 2009 it has also officially been allowed to call itself the third capital of Russia.

Tatarstan – Tatars – Golden Horde: this association is justified. Before the Mongol-Tatars arrived, Kazan was the capital of the Volga Bulgars, a Turkic-speaking people who came from the Urals and settled in the lowlands of the Don and Volga rivers.

The Golden Horde of the Tatars ruled over the region of present-day Tatarstan from the 13th to the 15th century. During that time, the Mongolian Tatars adopted the Muslim faith, and in 1320 Islam became the state religion.

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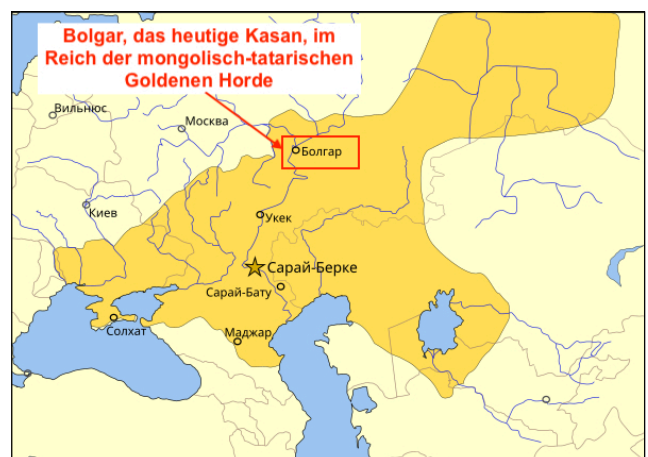


*From 22 to 24 October, the Russian city of Kazan will host the participants of the 2024 BRICS summit. What kind of city will soon be the centre of world attention? (Picture ma)*

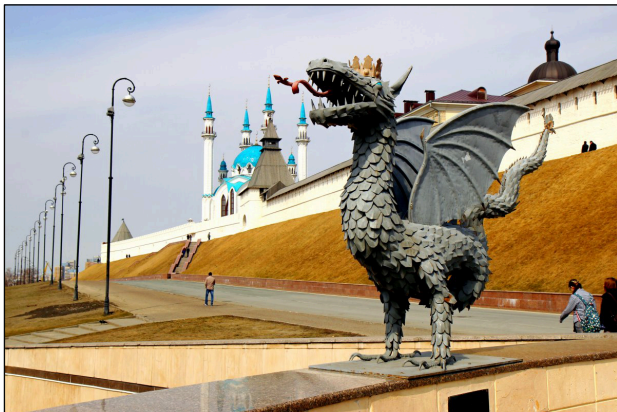
The Volga Bulgars were absorbed into the Tatar empire and gradually began to call themselves Tatars. They also adopted the religion.

After the Golden Horde disintegrated into two khanates – the Khanate of Crimea and the Khanate of Kazan – the northern of the two gradually came under Russian influence. It was later the first khanate to be fully incorporated into Russia, and with its oriental style and Islamic religion, it became a Russian city.

In Tatarstan, there are two official languages today – Russian and Tatar. Every schoolchild learns Russian as a compulsory language, as well as Tatar, but for understandable reasons, the use of Russian prevails in everyday life.



*The Golden Horde Empire 1224 – 1459 [Bolgar, today's Kazan, in the empire of the Mongolian-Tatar Golden Horde]. (Picture ma)*



The crowned heraldic animal, usually more a part of Asian cultures, stands in front of the Kremlin wall and seems to protect the Kremlin and the city. (Picture ma)

Kazan today is a multinational city. People from more than 100 nationalities live in it, more than in any other place in the vast country. The largest populations are Russians and Tatars, in roughly equal proportions (about 48% each).

Kazan's multiculturalism gives the city its own special character. Symbols and places of worship of different religions can be found here in close and peaceful proximity.

The crowned dragon *Zilant* is the official symbol of Kazan and has been part of the city's coat of arms since 2004. According to legend, a winged dragon snake lived at the site where Kazan was founded.

Within the historic walls of the Kazan Kremlin, one of the largest mosques in Europe, *Kul-Scharif*, was built. In its immediate vicinity, there is a Christian, Russian Orthodox church, which is rather surprising for Europeans, as the following photo shows.

The fact that this spatial proximity is not just symbolic, but a consciously lived togetherness of the most diverse cultures, is symbolised by the "Temple of All Religions", a unique building in the world.

Interestingly, no religious services or other religious rituals are held in the complex. The temple serves as an architectural symbol for all

religions and as their museum. The ensemble includes an Orthodox church, a Muslim mosque, a Jewish synagogue, a Buddhist pagoda and other objects of different denominations and religions. Due to a fire in 2017, the project has not yet been completed.

### Some economic facts about Kazan

There are more than 1,700 manufacturing companies in the city, the most important financial centre in Russia after Moscow and St. Petersburg, and a large number of service companies. The most important industries are the oil and chemical industry, mechanical and plant engineering and construction, metal and wood processing, the food and pharmaceutical industry.

With this density of companies, the Kazan region is one of the most important industrial centres in Russia. According to official data, in 2023 products and services worth 701.5 billion rubles were generated, i.e. about 7 billion euros. Industrial production amounted to 627.7 billion rubles (i.e. 6.2 billion euros). This value was 9.7% higher than in the previous year.

In 2023, the average monthly salary in large and medium-sized companies was 77,560 rubles, or around 780 euros. The growth rate here is also high, which is not least due to the Ukraine conflict.

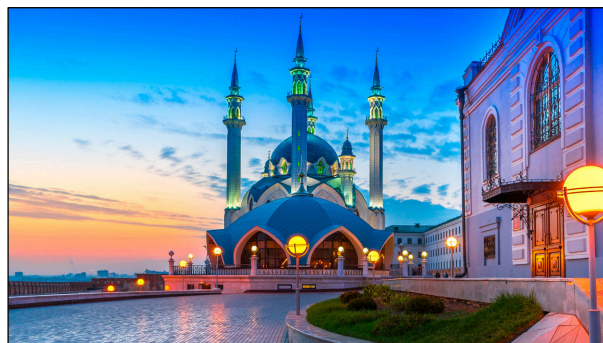
Another important figure for assessing the economic situation: the unemployment rate as of 1 January 2024 was 0.27%. As in other regions of Russia, the search for qualified personnel is quite problematic.

### Conclusion

Dragons, a mosque, a Russian Orthodox church, a temple for all religions, an economy that makes the Kazan region the richest region in Russia after Moscow. The secular power of the Republic of Tatarstan in the Kremlin of Kazan is, of course, traditionally in Muslim

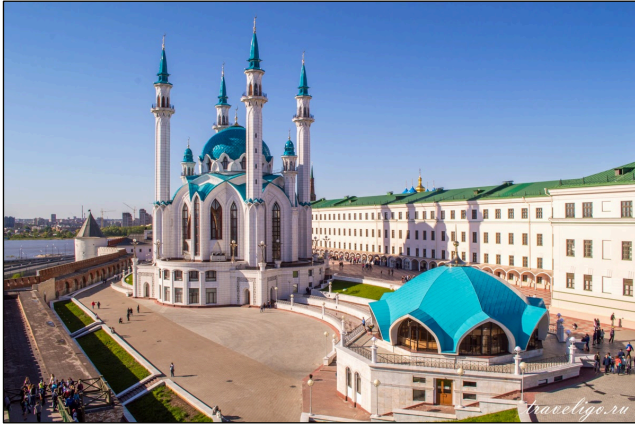


Kasan – peaceful coexistence of different religions. (Picture ma)



«Kul-Scharif» – the most important Mosque in the Republic Tatarstan. (Picture ma)

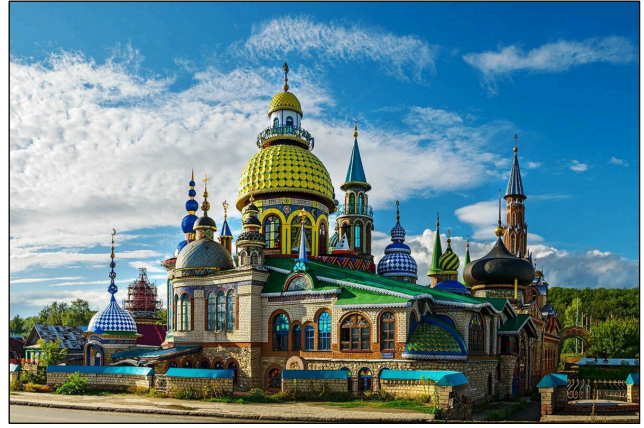




«Kul-Scharif»- Mosque inside the Kazan Kremlin.  
(Picture ma)

hands. This is because Tatarstan has always been Muslim.

The fact that one of Russia's most important regions is governed by Muslims is not a social or political issue in liberal Russia. In Russia, this is normal and corresponds to social customs. For centuries, Muslims, Jews, Christians, atheists, Buddhists, people of different nationalities and worldviews have been living together peacefully and for the benefit of all here in Kazan, in Tatarstan. In Germany, such a constellation would be unthinkable. You don't talk about liberalism, you live it.



Temple of All Religions.  
(Picture ma)

The fact that the Russian government chose this city as the venue for the BRICS summit is therefore of profound symbolic significance. The representatives of a global alliance of states representing a wide range of world views and major religions were invited to a city that has been known for centuries for the peaceful coexistence of different religions and nationalities. For diplomats, this is an unmistakable sign.

Source: <https://voicefromrussia.ch/kasan-die-stadt-des-brics-gipfels/>, 17 October 2024

(Translation "Swiss-Standpoint")