



URBA
NISA
TION
OF
MON
GOLIA
2004

WITOLD KRASSOWSKI



PEOPLE GATHER FOR A CURE AT A SPRING WITH MEDICAL PROPERTIES IN THE WESTERN PART OF THE HUVSGUL LAKE . WATER FROM FIVE SEPARATE SOURCES IS SUPPOSED TO CURE FIVE DIFFERENT KINDS OF DISEASES . THE WOMAN ON HORSE TRIED TO CROSS THE WATER BUT THE ANIMAL REFUSED DUE TO NOISE AND STRONG CURRENT



VOTERS PULLING THE BOAT WITH THEIR CANDIDATE GUNDALAI ON SHORE BEFORE AN
ELECTORAL MEETING PREPARING FOR ELECTIONS IN JUNE 2004



A CONSTRUCTION OF A WOODEN HOUSE IN THE STEPPE. ON THE HORIZON A CARAVANE OF YAKS MOVING THE YOURTA TO OTHER LOCATION FOR BETTER PASTURE.



IN THE SUM OF TSAHIR A CARAVANE OF YAKS MOVING THE YOURTA TO OTHER LOCATION FOR BETTER PASTURE. TRADITIONAL NOMADIC LIFE INVOLVED CHANGING PASTURES UP TO FOUR TIMES A YEAR. TODAY RICHER PEOPLE USE TRACTORS.



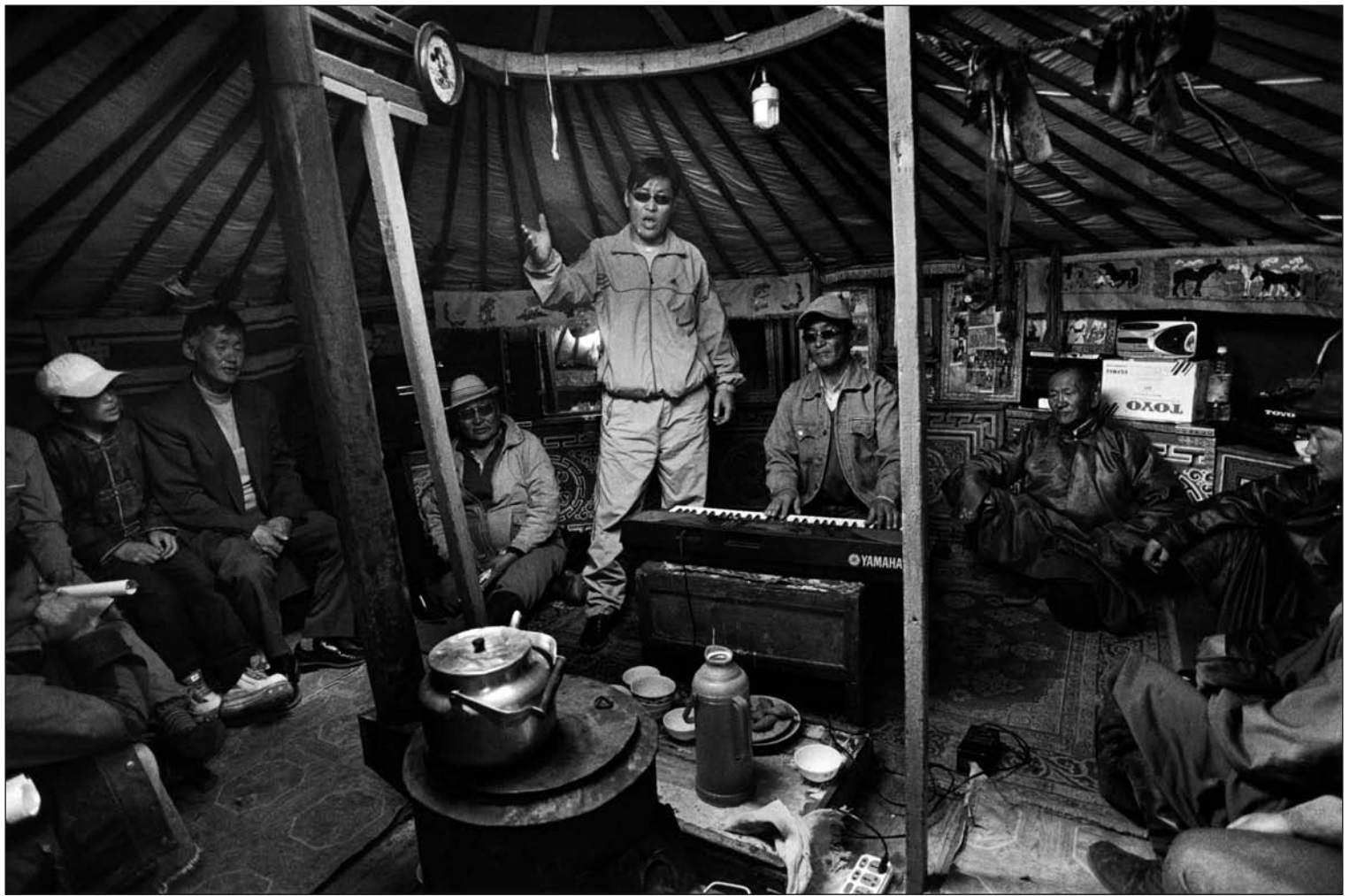
LOCAL PRIMARY SCHOOL IN BAYANHONGOR. 45% OF THE POPULATION IS UNDER THE AGE OF 15.



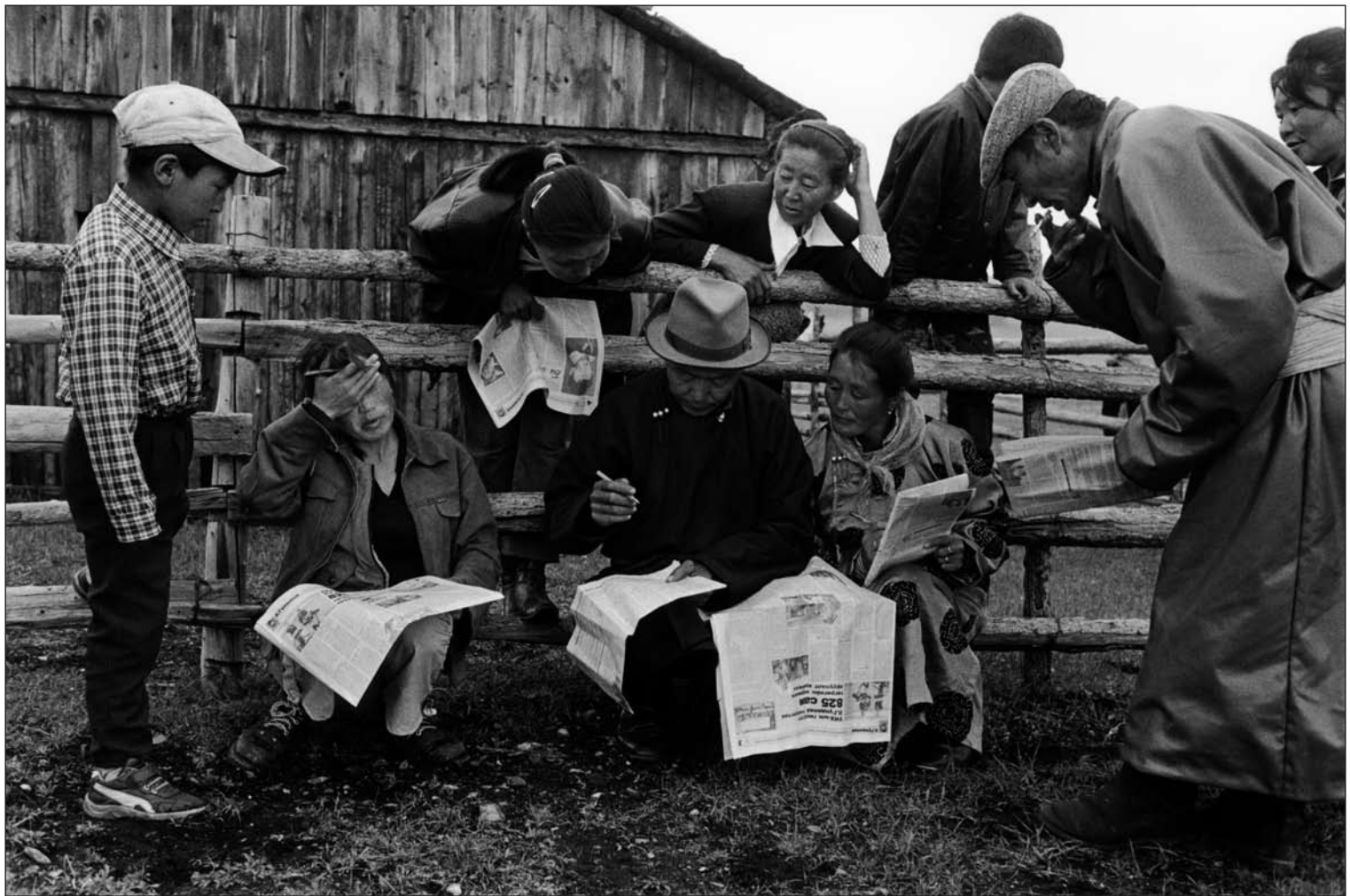
LAST DAY OF SHOOOL IN A SMALL PROVINCIAL SUM TOWN OF BUUTSAGAAN. (SUM (PLURAL SOMON)=SECOND LEVEL, AFTER AYMAG, ADMINISTRATIVE ENTITY. ON AVERAGE, EACH SUM ADMINISTERS A TERRITORY OF 4,200 KM² WITH ABOUT 5,000 INHABITANTS, PRIMARILY NOMADIC HERDERS. EACH SUM IS AGAIN SUBDIVIDED INTO BAGA (SINGULAR BAG). MOST BAGA ARE OF AN ENTIRELY VIRTUAL NATURE. THEIR PURPOSE IS TO SORT THE FAMILIES OF NOMADS IN THE SUM INTO GROUPS, WITHOUT A PERMANENT HUMAN SETTLEMENT.)



ELECTORAL MEETING OF THE OPOSITION LEADER, MR GUNDALAJ, WITH WOTERS OF HIS CONSTITUENCY, IN THE NOTHERN PART OF THE CONTRY, NEAR THE LAKE HUVSGUL, BEFORE THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN JUNE 2004



A SINGER PERFORMS IN A YOURTA AS PART OF ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN OF THE RULING REVOLUTIONARY PARTY, BEFORE THE ELECTIONS IN JUNE 2004. TRADITIONAL SONGS ARE STILL VERY POPULAR AND PEOPLE JOIN IN THE SINGING.



AFTER ELECTORAL MEETING WITH OPOSITION LEADER MR GUNDALAI THE VOTERS PREPARE LOT-
TERY COUPONS, TO PARTICIPATE IN A DRAW, IN A SMALL VILLAGE IN NOTHERN PART OF THE
COUNTRY, NEAR LAKE HUVSGUL



ELECTORAL MEETING OF THE DEMOCRATIC OPOSITION LEADER, MR GUNDALAJ, WITH WOTERS OF HIS CONSTITUENCY. THE NOTHERN PART OF THE CONTRY, NEAR THE LAKE HUVSGUL IS MR GUNDALAJ'S STRONGHOLD AS HE RUNS THE LOCAL VODKA AND JAM FACTORIES. HE WAS REELECTED IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN JUNE 2004



ON THE SQUARE IN FRONT OF GANDAN LAMAIST BUDDHIST TEMPLE IN ULAN BATAAR PEOPLE PICK UP HOLY GRAINS CALLED ARVA THAT BRING PROSPERITY AND HAPPINESS IF KEPT AT HOME, AFTER A RELIGIOUS CEREMONY A PRIEST SPREAD THEM ON THE GROUND.



DUST STORM NEAR GANDAN. PEOPLE ENTER A TRADITIONAL DOCTOR WORKING HUT FOR A CONSULTATION



A SMALL SHOP WINDOW IN A POOR DISTRICT NEAR GANDAN IN ULAN BATAAR



A MOTORCYCLE REPAIRS WORKSHOP NEAR THE LOCAL BAZAAR IN THE CITY OF ALTAI, IN GOBI-ALTAI REGION (AIMAG)



A COAL DRIFT NEAR THE TOWN OF NALEH. AFTER THE COLLAPSE OF THE STATE OWN INDUSTRY PRIVATE COMPANIES EXTRACT COAL FROM SHALLOW PITS USING PRIMITIVE MACHINERY AND PROVIDING WORK FOR LOCAL POPULATION



MONGOLIAN MASSAGE IN THE TRADITIONAL MEDECINE CENTRE IN MANBA DATSAN MONASTERY,
IN ULAN BATAAR



PEOPLE GO HOME TO THE SUBURBAN TOWN OF NALEH, FROM ULAN BATAAR, ON A CITY BUS



A STREET CHILD

IT MUST BE DIFFICULT TO FIND A COUNTRY WITH LESSER GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES THAN MONGOLIA. STRETCHING SOME 1200 KILOMETRES FROM NORTH TO SOUTH AND TWICE AS FAR FROM EAST TO WEST, IT IS COVERED IN BEST PART BY STEPPE, A THIN LAYER OF GRASS SPREAD OVER A SEA OF HILLS. OCCASIONALLY THERE IS A WHITE GER, A SYMBOL OF HUMAN DWELLING IN THIS MONOTONOUS EMPTINESS. BUT ANY TRAVELLER IN ANY GIVEN POINT IN THE STEPPE WILL FIND A PIECE OF DUNG WITHIN FIVE METRES OF HIS PERSON, A TANGIBLE (?) PROOF THAT THE COUNTRY BELONGS TO ANIMALS. FOR, FOR 2,751,314 MONGOLS THERE IS ABOUT 26 MILLION ANIMALS, THE PASTURE CAPACITY OF MONGOLIAN STEPPE BEING ESTIMATED AT 30 MILLION. THIS, TOGETHER WITH EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS KEPT THE NUMBER OF INHABITANTS LOW. IT ALSO SHAPED THE ENTIRE CULTURE.

THE MONGOLIAN TRADITION IS BASED ON TWO MAIN ACTIVITIES: HERDING AND CONQUEST. WHILE THE FORMER PROVIDED THE MEANS OF SUBSISTENCE, THE LATTER - MORE PASTURES AND MORE PRODUCT OF OTHER PEOPLES TO MAKE SURVIVAL POSSIBLE OR ENJOYABLE. KEEPING THE POPULATION GROWTH LOW, BOTH PREVENTED THE AGRICULTURE FROM DEVELOPING. THEY WERE HELPED IN THIS MATTER BY LAMAISTIC DOCTRINE WHICH KEEPS EARTH FOR SACRED AND PROSCRIBES DIGGING AS EQUIVALENT TO WOUNDING. (THUS MAKING THE TRADITIONAL MONGOLIAN SHOE TIPS BEND UPWARDS). IN THIS TRADITION THE LAND BELONGS TO SUCH ENTITIES LIKE AIR, THAT CAN NEITHER BE QUANTIFIED NOR OWNED. FOR CENTURIES IT WAS NOT EVEN PUBLIC, IT WAS THERE AND PEOPLE LIVED IN COMPLETE LIBERTY WITH NO SPACE NOR TIME LIMITS. THEIR ONLY WORRY, BUT OF CRUCIAL IMPORTANCE, WAS SURVIVAL BY ADAPTATION TO NATURE. OPPORTUNISM AND FATALISM WERE DOMINANT. IN SOCIAL LIFE FACTS WERE NEVER QUESTIONED, BUT ACCEPTED LIKE NATURAL PHENOMENA, RAIN OR HAIL. THE STANDING OF NATIONAL HEROES WAS BASED ON LEGENDS NOT ACHIEVEMENTS. BESIDES THERE IS A CURIOUS TENDENCY IN NOMADIC PSYCHE TO ACCEPT EITHER EVIL OR SAINT AND NOTHING IN BETWEEN. WHEN THE BOLSHEVIKS GAINED CONTROL OF MONGOLIA IN 1924, IT WAS VERY EASY FOR THEM TO CREATE STATESMANLIKE FIGURES FROM COMMON CRIMINALS OR BLOW THEIR NATIONAL STANDING OUT OF PROPORTIONS. THE COUNTRY PAID FOR THAT: IN THE PURGES OF LATE THIRTIES 20% OF ADULT POPULATION (90,000 OUT OF 700,000 TOTAL POPULATION) WERE KILLED, ALL BUT ONE MONASTERIES (1100 APPROXIMATIVELY) DESTROYED AND MORE THAN 17500 LAMAS SENT TO GULAGS TO NEVER RETURN. AND ALL THE LAND WENT TO THE STATE.

THE COMMUNISTS ALSO IMPLEMENTED IN THE COUNTRY A MENTALITY OF IMITATION OF RUSSIANS, THE ONLY POSSIBLE SURVIVAL IN THE STALINIST PERIOD. AT THE TIME IT EVEN HAD A POSITIVE SIDE EFFECT: IT WAS THE ONLY POSSIBILITY FOR MONGOLIA TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH THE WORLD OUTSIDE; BUT WITH THE SUDDEN COLLAPSE OF THE SYSTEM IT CREATED MORE PROBLEMS. FIRST, IN DEEP DISBELIEF THAT THE ELDER BROTHER CAN NOT COPE WITH REALITY ANY MORE, THE MONGOLIAN COMMUNISTS REFUSED TO INTRODUCE PERESTROIKA AND IMPLEMENT REFORMS. SECOND - ORDINARY PEOPLE WERE IN SHOCK AND IN URGENT NEED OF AN EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW. THE UNEXPECTED PASSAGE TO DEMOCRACY IN 1992 DIDN'T OFFER ANY NEW PATTERS OF BEHAVIOUR. SO THE SOCIETY TURNED TOWARDS THE PAST, TOWARDS THE ANCESTORS AND OLD TRADITIONS. GENGHIS KHAN APPEARED EVERYWHERE, EVEN ON VODKA. THEN THE DEMOGRAPHIC PROCESSES KICKED IN, CHANGING EVERYTHING. THE POPULATION GROWTH GAVE MONGOLIA THE NEVER-ACHIEVED-IN-HISTORY 2,751,314 INHABITANTS, OUT OF WHICH SOME 45% ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 15 AND FURTHER 25% UNDER THE AGE OF 35. AND THE YOUNG GENERATION RUSHED TO TOWNS, THE URBAN LIFESTYLE GENERALLY PERCEIVED AS BETTER, NOT WITHOUT THE HELP OF

HOLLYWOOD AND TENS OF TV CHANNELS AVAILABLE, THANKS TO SATELLITE TECHNOLOGY, IN EVERY BY GOD FORSAKEN GER. ULAN BATOR ITSELF OFFERS REFUGE TO 1 MILLION PEOPLE.

TWO MAIN SUBCULTURES EMERGED, THE NOMADIC ONE, ESTIMATED AT BETWEEN 25 - 33% OF THE POPULATION AND THE URBAN ONE. PREDICTABLY IT BROUGHT ABOUT THE FALL OF NOMADIC VALUES AND THE RISE OF COSMOPOLITANISM AMONG URBAN YOUTH. THE NEED FOR IMITATION DIDN'T DISAPPEAR HOWEVER, IT WAS SIMPLY REDIRECTED TOWARDS THE US. THE TRANSITION FROM NOMADIC HERDSMEN TO SEDENTARY URBAN DWELLERS CREATED NEW SOCIAL PROBLEMS REINFORCED BY SIMULTANEOUS COLLAPSE OF THE STATE CONTROLLED ECONOMY. WITH ONLY 44% OF ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION BEING ACTUALLY EMPLOYED AND THE REALITY OF URBAN LIFE NOT EXACTLY ALONG THE "SANTA BARBARA" LINES, SUCH SOCIAL PHENOMENA LIKE POVERTY (ONE THIRD OF THE POPULATION), ALCOHOLISM, CRIME RISE, PROSTITUTION AND STREET CHILDREN BECAME OMNIPRESENT. THE FRESH URBAN SOCIETY DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH TIME NOR SKILLS TO DEVELOP ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS THAT WOULD DEAL WITH THESE PROBLEMS. THE URBAN PEOPLE ALSO HAVE A DIFFERENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS LAND PROPERTY. THE HERDSMEN POSITION IS SIMPLE - THEY REFUSE IT TO GUARANTEE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENTS. WHEN THE URBAN SUBCULTURE GOT THE UPPER HAND, A CHANGE IN MENTALITY OCCURRED AND EVERYBODY BECAME LAND HUNGRY. THIS CREATED CHAOS AT FIRST, AS THE PROCESS WAS NOT REGULATED AND WILD. THE PIECES OF LAND CLAIMED BY PEOPLE WERE EVEN NOT REGISTERED. THE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT INTRODUCED THE LAW ON LAND IN 1994, FIRST LEGAL ATTEMPT TO REGULATE THE PHENOMENON. THE ISSUE SWIFTLY BECAME AN OBJECT OF POLITICAL PLAY BETWEEN THE RULING DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND POST COMMUNIST OPPOSITION, WITH IN THE BACKGROUND AN IMPORTANT PART (32%) OF THE SOCIETY OPPOSED TO THE IDEA. AN EXOTIC COALITION OF HERDERS, TRADITIONAL PHILOSOPHERS AND POETS WAS EVEN BORN. TODAY EVERY MONGOLIAN FAMILY IS ENTITLED TO 900 SQ. METRES IN THE VICINITY OF A TOWN AND SOME 20,000 HECTARES ARE EXPECTED TO BE PRIVATISED THIS WAY.

THE SPEED OF THESE PROCESSES PUSHED THE MONGOLIAN PRIME MINISTER TO DECLARE IN 2003 THAT WITHIN 10 TO 15 YEARS THE NOMADIC LIFESTYLE WILL HAVE DISAPPEARED ALTOGETHER. HE PUT THE BLAME ON A COMPETITIVE AND FAST DEVELOPING WORLD. WITH THE CONSTANT EROSION, SINCE THE COLLAPSE OF THE COMMUNISM, OF NATIONAL IDEOLOGY AND THE POWERFUL URBANISATION PROCESS, THE WHOLE OF MONGOLIAN IDENTITY IS BEING RESHAPED IF NOT LOST. A NEW NEED EMERGED - OF INTEGRATION IN WORLD PROCESSES. UNFORTUNATELY FOR MONGOLIA IT MADE ITSELF FELT IN A POLITICAL VACUUM IN THIS PART OF ASIA, WITH RUSSIA PERCEIVED NOT AS A SERIOUS OPTION, CHINA AS A POTENTIAL THREAT TO NATIONAL IDENTITY AND NO OTHER PARTNERS OR ORGANISATIONS OF STATES PRESENT. THE URGENCY OF THE SITUATION IS RECOGNISED BY THE POLITICAL CLASS. THE WHOLE NATION HAS TO INCREASE THEIR COMPETITIVENESS AND ORGANISATION SKILLS TO MATCH THOSE OF MONGOLIA'S NEIGHBOURS. THE VERY EXISTENCE OF THE INDEPENDENT MONGOLIAN STATE IS AT STAKE AND THE SURVIVAL OF ITS CULTURE - SAID PRIME MINISTER. AND PEOPLE, AS USUAL, VOTE WITH THEIR FEET.

WITOLD KRASSOWSKI

WITEK@EKPICTURES.COM.PL

[HTTP://WITOLDKRASSOWSKI.EKPICTURES.COM.PL](http://WITOLDKRASSOWSKI.EKPICTURES.COM.PL)