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MINORITIES AND PARTICIPATION IN PUBLIC LIFE: KAZAKHSTAN

**(Paper prepared by Bhavna Dave, Department of Politics,
School of Oriental and African Studies)***

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Working Group or the United Nations

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Introduction

Among the fifteen national republics that constituted the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan was the most “multiethnic” republic in that it contained a large number of Slavs and numerous other nationalities and did not bear a distinct ethnic face. It was hailed as a “planet of a hundred nationalities” and a “laboratory of peoples’ friendship” (*druzhiba narodov*) during the post-War II period. It was the only Soviet national republic in which the titular ethnic group (the Kazakhs) did not constitute a majority upon gaining independence in 1991. The Slavs, along with ethnic Germans, formed a majority from the early 1950s until 1989, when the last Soviet era census was held.

It was only in 1989 that the Kazakhs emerged as the largest ethnic group, forming 40.1 percent of the population and thus acquiring an edge over Russians who then formed 37.4 percent. Since independence in 1991, the Kazakh share in the population has continued to increase as a result of emigration of non-Kazakhs, mainly Slavs and Germans, and higher birth rates among Kazakhs (Table 1). The first post-independence census of 1999 confirmed that Kazakhs constituted a majority with 53.4 percent, whereas the Russian share dropped from 37.4 percent in 1989 to 29.9 percent. Kazakh ruling elites and nationalists who had decried the reduction of Kazakhs as a minority in their “own” historical homeland over the past 60 years of Soviet rule had most anxiously awaited the officialization of Kazakhs as the majority.

During the first post-independence decade, Kazakhstan has also become more Turkic or Muslim in its composition, which has diluted its Slavic or “European”¹ ethnic profile. The major Turkic groups (Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Uighurs, Karakalpaks, and Tatars as the major groups) together form about 61 percent of the population, up from 48 percent in 1989, and continue to have a higher birth rate.

President Nursultan Nazarbaev has hailed Kazakhstan as a Turkophone state (*Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 15 December 2000). However, he has also continued to project Kazakhstan as “Eurasian” state, which is home to Slavic and “European” ethnic groups as well. At the same time, the growing number of Kazakhs in the country affirms the vision of Kazakhstan as a homeland of Kazakhs. Furthermore, the ongoing emigration of Slavs and Germans and the rapidly growing share of Kazakhs have bolstered the nationalizing trends, culminating in a higher representation of Kazakhs in state bureaucracy, government and virtually all state-controlled sectors.

Territory and Population

Kazakhstan is the ninth largest state in the size of its territory, almost the size of Argentina, though ranks about 70th in terms of population. It is the second largest country of the former Soviet Union after Russia in its territorial expanse. It encompasses 2,724,900 sq km, with the average population density of 5.5 persons per square km and recorded the total population of 14.9 million in 1999. Kazakhstan’s rich natural resources and sparse population have made it a target for an influx of Slavs as well other groups for much of the twentieth century.

¹The term “European” was used interchangeably with “Russians” in the 1920s and the 1930s. It is still used as a self-designation by various Slavic groups, Germans (who between 1959-1979 formed six percent of the total population), and Balts.

The term Kazakh means a nomad. Kazakhs as nomads distinguished themselves from other settled Muslim communities, mainly Uzbeks, Tatars and Uighurs. Kazakhs identified themselves primarily by genealogy, i.e., membership of a particular clan (*ru* in Kazakh, *rod* in Russian). Genealogy or clan membership always indicated the regional affiliation or identity of the Kazakh in question. Subsequently, the three major Kazakh hordes (*zhuz*), each composed of a number of clans claiming common ancestry and inhabiting a shared territory, came to be organized along territorial basis. The Elder horde (*ulu zhuz*) roughly inhabited the southern territories, the Middle horde (*orta zhuz*) occupied the territory of the central steppe region and northern and eastern parts, whereas the Younger horde (*kishi zhuz*) occupied the western regions between the Aral and Caspian seas. The leaders of these three hordes had sought protection from Russia against attacks by other nomadic tribes from time to time.

Nomadism was a product of the given ecological setting, a means of adaptation to the ecological conditions by its inhabitants in a pre-technological age. The prevalent natural geographical conditions, lack of water or irrigation facilities and the impossibility of developing agriculture made pastoral nomadism the only viable means of survival. Since nomadic life-style required the maintenance of a balance between the available water resources and the size of the population, low population density was a common attribute. The size of the pastoral nomadic populations had remained stable due to its dependence on the available grazing area. Population density in the nineteenth century was just over one person per sq km (Masanov 1999) but the arrival of Slavic and Cossack settlers in the latter half of the nineteenth century led to a shrinking of the nomadic pastures and increased pressures on land and water resources leading to the outbreak of famines.

According to the Russian imperial census of 1897, Kazakhs numbered 3.39 million and formed 81.7 percent of the total population in the pre-Soviet borders. The first Soviet census of 1926 recorded Kazakhs as constituting 57.1 percent of the population in their newly-constituted national republic whereas the Slavic groups formed 31 percent of the population. Neither the 1897 or 1926 census were complete, given the lack of transport network and the difficulties in offering a reliable count of a mobile population.

In 1926 only about a fourth of the Kazakhs led a sedentary mode of life, the remaining were dependent on the livestock economy and seasonal agricultural farming. As part of the collectivisation policies implemented by the Soviet state in the late 1920s, the Stalinist regime argued that an immediate settlement of the nomads was the only means of intensifying agricultural production. The forced settlement of Kazakhs led to the perishing of almost 90 percent of all cattle—the only source of livelihood for nomads. The ensuing famine resulted in a catastrophic human loss. Estimates of loss of Kazakh lives vary from 25 to 40 percent and most Kazakh historians and demographers refer to this period as a “genocide” attempted by the Soviet regime against the Kazakh nation.

The depopulated lands of Kazakhstan soon became the ‘dumping ground’ for deportation of various ‘enemy’ nationalities as well as for convicts sentenced to hard labor. In 1937, a special decree issued by Stalin led to the deportation of 95,241 ethnic

Koreans to Kazakhstan from the Far Eastern regions of the RSFSR bordering with Korea. They were moved to prevent a possible alliance with the Japanese during the Second World War. Similar fears of a possible collaboration between the Soviet Germans and the Nazis propelled Stalin to abolish the Volga German autonomous republic in 1941 and deport most Germans from the Volga region and other parts of the European regions of the USSR to Siberia and Central Asia. During 1941-42 444,000 Volga Germans had been deported to Kazakhstan. An estimated 478, 479 Chechens were moved out of their homes in 1944 and most of these were brought to Kazakhstan as the Stalin suspected their loyalty to the Soviet Union during the War. By 1949 Kazakhstan had become home to at least 820,165 deportees, which included 444,000 Germans, 302,526 Chechens and Ingush, 33,088 Karachai, 28,130 Poles, 28,497 Meskhetian Turks, 17,512 Balkar and numerous smaller nationalities.

The Virgin lands campaign inaugurated by the then General Secretary of the Communist Party, Nikita Khrushchev during 1954-56 led to the arrival of about 640,000 settlers from the Slavic and Baltic republics. The 1959 census unveiled a totally transformed ethnic profile of the republic with the Kazakh share reduced to a mere 29 percent of the population and the Slavic and European nationalities together forming nearly 60 percent of the total. The Slavic influx into Kazakhstan had slowed considerably by 1970 with the economic downturn in Central Asia. For the period 1966-1979 the number of arrivals to Kazakhstan from other republics decreased by sixty percent, and Kazakhstan encountered the highest loss as a result of inter-regional migration between 1970 and 1980 (Alekseenko 1998: 105). Altogether, between 1970 and 1989, the number of the Slavs and Germans in Kazakhstan decreased by 940,000.

Kazakhstan's ethnic composition has undergone a radical change over the first decade of its independence as a result of emigration of Russians and other Russian-speaking groups², mainly Germans. Kazakhstan's ethnic German population dropped sharply, from 946,900 people in 1989 to 353,400 in 1999. Overall, nearly 2 million Russian-speakers have left Kazakhstan over the last decade.

According to 1999 census data, Kazakhstan's population decreased by 7.7% from the 1989 levels. All the northern oblasts bordering Russia, dominated by Slavic groups, experienced negative population growth. Akmola, North Kazakhstan, and Karaganda lost almost a fifth of their population, with a slightly smaller drop in Kostanai, Pavlodar, and East Kazakhstan. The four Kazakh dominated oblasts of South Kazakhstan, Kyzyl orda, Almaty and West Kazakhstan as well as the new capital Astana and former capital Almaty gained in number during the same period. Uighurs and Uzbeks are the two major groups that experienced a growth of 15 and 12 percent respectively.

The lowering of the birth rate among Kazakhs, relative to other ethnic groups in Central Asia, has also slowed the growth of Kazakhs. The birth rate among Kazakhs, at 1.6 percent in 1999, is lowest among the major Central Asian ethnic groups. Uzbekistan, its major rival for regional hegemony, has an estimated population of 24 million (about 17 million of whom are Uzbeks), growing by nearly two and a half percent (about 450,000) annually. Uzbekistan possesses about one

²The category "Russian-speakers" that includes ethnic Russians, other Slavs, Germans, as well as numerous other small ethnic groups, such as Koreans, who have adopted Russian as their first language.

sixth of the territory of Kazakhstan and has an average population density of 48.5 persons per sq km.³ The slowdown in birth rate is largely a consequence of higher levels of education and urbanization among Kazakhs who were incorporated earlier in the Soviet-led modernization relative to other Central Asians. The average age of the Kazakh population is 31, up from 24 as reported in the 1989 census.⁴ In contrast, the Uzbek population is much younger, with the average age just under 25. The Slavic and European ethnic groups constitute an ageing population, with an average age of about 50.

Table 1. Ethnic composition in Kazakhstan, Census Data 1959-1999

Nationality	1959	1970 (%)	1979 (%)	1989 (%)	1999 (%)
Kazakh	30.0	32.6	36.0	40.1	53.4
Russian	42.7	42.4	40.8	37.4	29.9
Ukrainian	8.2	7.2	6.1	5.4	3.7
Belorussian	1.2	1.5	1.2	1.1	0.8
German	7.1	6.6	6.1	5.8	2.4
Tatar	2.1	2.2	2.1	2.0	1.7
Uzbek	1.5	1.7	1.8	2.0	2.5
Uighur	0.6	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.4
Korean	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.7
Combined* Turkic/Muslim	39.7	42.7	45.5	50.2	61.0
Combined* Slavic/European	60.3	57.3	54.5	49.8	39.0

*figures are estimates and includes other smaller ethnic groups.

³ The Ferghana valley is the most densely populated region with population density of over 250 persons per sq km in the Ferghana valley and only 6.5 persons per sq km in Karakalpakstan). For comparison, Kazakhstan's great eastern neighbor China has an area of 9,561,000 sq km, a population of over 1.2 billion and a population density of 105 persons per sq km. India has a territory of 3,287,000 sq km, population of over one billion and population density of 284 persons per sq km.

⁴ http://www.eurasia.org.ru/2001/analyse_en/02_18_Risi_risingbirthrate_eng.htm

Table 2.
Proficiency in the State Language (Kazakh) and in Russian in the 1999 Census
among major nationalities (in %)

Nationality	Proficiency in Language		
	Of own nationality	Of other nationality	
		Kazakh	Russian
Kazakh	99.4	---	75.0
Russian	100.0	14.9	--
Ukrainian	16.1	12.6	99.5
Belorussian	13.5	9.0	99.4
German	21.8	15.4	99.3
Uzbek	97.0	80.0	59.2
Tatar	37.1	63.6	96.9
Uighur	81.3	80.5	76.1
Korean	25.8	28.8	97.7

Source: Itogi perepisi naseleniia 1999 goda v Respublike Kazakhstana. Vol. I. Natsional'nyi sostav naseleniia RK. 2000. Almaty: Agentstvo RK po statistike, 33 & 181-3.

Ethnic identification during the Soviet period

Most ethnic or cultural communities in Central Asia did not see or imagine themselves as members of a distinct nation or state, or as belonging to a specific ethno-linguistic group before the advent of the Soviet rule. The term “nationality”—the Russian and Soviet equivalent for “ethnicity”—was a fluid and shifting category in the Tsarist era on the eve of 1917. The Soviet rule, by contrast, forged a strict correspondence between ethnicity and language as it transformed the fluid ethnic and linguistic differences within the agrarian and nomadic communities into territorialized “nations”, possessing their own distinct languages and scripts. Soviet territorial-administrative structure and socialist ideology have played a pivotal role in shaping collective and personal identities, and in institutionalizing an ethnicity-centred discourse of indigenous politics in its constituent republics. Consistent with Soviet definition, the term “nationality” is synonymous with ethnic membership and is distinct from citizenship. Nationality was recorded in Soviet passports, as well as in all major official documents.

The national delimitation of Central Asia, executed by the Bolsheviks during 1924-25, forged a sense of territorial nationhood by identifying distinct nationalities from a plethora of ethnic, sub-ethnic, clan, and religious groupings. The Kirgiz (Kazakh) Autonomous SSR, created within the RSFSR in 1920, was enlarged by including the mainly Kazakh-inhabited Syr Darya and Semirech'e regions in the south, which had earlier been placed under the administration of the Turkestan Autonomous Republic. However, the Cossack-dominated region of Orenburg, the capital of the Kirgiz (Kazakh) Autonomous SSR since 1920, containing sizeable Kazakh populations, was transferred to the RSFSR.

As the Bolsheviks sought to forge a national consciousness among the agrarian and nomadic groups of Central Asia, they sought to elevate the 'tribal' or zhuz-based consciousness into a sense of Kazakh nationality. The forging of a sense of Kazakh identity, in which clan and region-based differences were coopted, has been a significant outcome of the nation-building policies promoted under the Soviet state.

Language standardization through the adoption of a written script was a key element of Soviet nation-building policies. As a nomadic language, Kazakh had a rich oral folklore but did not possess a standardized script. In the later half of the nineteenth century, Russian missionaries had introduced a Cyrillic-based script for Kazakh, a Turkic language though an Arabic-based alphabet was also being worked out by Kazakh literary elites. A Latin-based alphabet was adopted for Kazakh, as for all other Turkic languages of the Soviet Union, in 1920s. However, in 1938-39, all Latin-based alphabets were converted into Cyrillic-based ones. Whereas Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan have gone back to Latin-based scripts since the mid 1990s, Kazakhstan (along with Kyrgyzstan) has retained the Cyrillic alphabet.

Legacy of Soviet nationalities theory

The constituent Soviet republics were named after a "titular" or "indigenous" nationality. At the same time, they were institutionalized as bi-ethnic and bilingual units, in which Russians had a strategic role. The category 'nationality', referring to one's ethnonational affiliation, was stamped on the passport and recorded on all identity or employment documents. Nationality referred to a biologically-inherited ethnic affiliation, and not territorial belonging and was distinct from citizenship.

The Soviet socialist state promoted the ideology of "internationalism," which implied a rough parity and a proportional representation of other nationalities in the party and administrative infrastructure of the republic, on a symbolic plane. However, mobility within "their" national unit was a prerogative of the titular nationality, often regulated by the strategic presence of members of Slavic nationalities, largely Russians, sent from the "European" regions of the Soviet Union. These representatives of the centre wielded substantive control, often occupying the positions of Second Secretary of the Communist Party in the republics, or serving as deputies to the titular figureheads. On the whole, while titular representatives held symbolic leadership positions, the *de facto* authority was wielded by the Slavic emissaries of the centre who often occupied the less visible position of the deputy or second-in-command.

A corollary to the "international" or multiethnic profile of Kazakhstan was the fact that the titular Kazakhs did not necessarily occupy visible leadership positions. Dinmukhamed Kunaev (1959-61 and following a brief hiatus, 1962-86) was the only Kazakh to hold the position of secretary of Kazakh communist party for a prolonged period. His two Kazakh predecessors had held office for no more than a year. The removal of Kunaev in December 1986 by the Soviet communist party chief Mikhail Gorbachev on generalised charges of 'corruption' and 'clanism', and the appointment of Gennadi Kolbin, an ethnic Russian who was then serving in Georgia, led to waves of protests and riots in the capital Almaty (known as Alma-Ata then). This was the

first ever incidence of public defiance of Moscow in a Central Asian republic. By official account 3 people died though unofficial counts range from 50 to 500. The protests at that time were routinely dismissed as acts of “hooliganism” committed by drunken youth. No independent inquiry of the incident has been published to date, largely because the current president Nursultan Nazarbaev, who succeeded Kolbin as the head of Kazakh communist party in 1989, was a leading contender for the position and is seen as having acquiesced to Kunaev’s abrupt removal. Furthermore, the Nazarbaev leadership remains deeply concerned that a public discussion of the event could potentially open up the Pandora’s box and disrupt the existing stability and calm between ethnic communities. The riots cannot be simply viewed as clashes between ethnic groups or between Moscow and a peripheral republic. The demonstrators were protesting against what they saw was a dismantling of an affirmative action structure favouring Kazakhs that had been erected during the Kunaev period.

Rogers Brubaker (1996, 411-12) has argued that virtually all post Soviet states are nationalizing states, institutionally-g geared to function as the states *of* and *for* the particular ethnocultural nations, based on claims of an exclusive ownership of their land, but incomplete and insufficiently “national” in a substantive sense. Its leaders and members see their nations not as vibrant, prosperous, and cohesive ethnocultural communities, capable of integrating and assimilating their various national minorities, but as threatened cultures and languages, which had been marginalized in their own historical homelands by the demographic and economic might of the dominant nations. The belated acquisition of sovereign statehood offers them a legal framework and an organizational tool for executing a “remedial political action” (Brubaker 1996, 410) and to erect safe havens for their indigenous culture and language and redress their historical injustice.

Demography and Kazakh language have served as two salient tools of promoting nationalization and attaining Kazakh ethnonational hegemony in the new state since independence in 1991. Consistent with the Soviet nationalities theory, Kazakhs, as the titular or eponymous nationality, see themselves as the sole indigenous nation of the sovereign republic.

Post-Soviet Kazakhstan

The Language issue

The demographic preponderance of Russian-speakers in Kazakhstan turned Kazakhs into the most linguistically and culturally Russified of all Central Asian ethnic groups. An Uzbek proverb, “if you want to become a Russian, first become a Kazakh,” captures the profound impact of Russian language and culture on the Kazakhs. Furthermore, the traditional nomadic culture in the 1920s and the elimination of Kazakh national intelligentsia and literary elites under the Stalinist purges generated a sharp dislocation among the Soviet era Kazakhs from their traditional cultural heritage. The new Kazakhs, reared in Soviet values, had little option but to adapt to the dominant Russian-speaking milieu. Proficiency in Russian served as a vehicle of social mobility and integration into a ‘world’ civilisation (Dave 1996).

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, scholars from Kazakhstan and Russia began drawing attention to a high degree of native language loss among Kazakhs, especially those raised in Russophone urban settings. There were varying estimates of 'proficiency' in Kazakh and conflicting views on how 'proficiency' is to be determined; as a result, the levels of 'proficiency' and the numbers of those not proficient in the native language were a matter of highly subjective assessments. Abduali Qaidarov (1992), a Kazakh linguist and the head of the language revival society *Qazaq tili*, estimated that some forty per cent of Kazakhs were not able to speak the language. Ethnographic observations during the period 1992-95. Almost two thirds to three fourths of Kazakhs living in urban settings spoke Russian almost exclusively though many of them claimed to understand Kazakh and speak it if necessary (Dave 1996). Few of them felt a necessity to read or write in Kazakh.

At the same time, official data, as reflected in the 1989 census statistics, indicated that 98.5 percent of Kazakhs claimed Kazakh to be their 'mother tongue'. The Soviet era census contained a question about 'mother tongue' (*rodnoi iazyk*). This was a means of recording ascriptive ethnic self-identification and not of measuring actual proficiency in the language. There were widespread disparities between language statistics compiled by the state and the real language situation pertaining to an ethnic group (Tishkov 1997, 88). The fact that 98.5 per cent of Kazakhs claimed Kazakh to be their 'mother tongue' (1989 census) and 99.4 did so in 1999 did not mean that they use Kazakh as their 'first language', and presumably, speak it most of the times.

The Soviet state, from 1970 onwards, asked its citizens to designate not only their native language but also any (though only one) other language of the peoples of the USSR in which they were fluent. Russian was invariably the 'second language' chosen by non-Russian nationalities due to the Soviet ideological emphasis on 'bilingualism.' The Soviet state was interested in promoting proficiency in Russian as 'second language' among non-Russians while formally recording the attachment to the native language. The higher the numbers who claim proficiency in the 'second language' (invariably Russian for non-Russian groups), the greater was the use of Russian in lieu of native language. While the European ethnic groups, on the whole, felt little need to speak Kazakh and saw it as an inferior language, Kazakhs experienced a great deal of pride in attaining fluency in Russian.

In 1989, only one percent of Russians (and Slavs) had proficiency in Kazakh, which was the lowest level of proficiency in the language of the titular nationality among Russians inhabiting that republic. In contrast, 64 per cent of Kazakhs claimed fluency in Russian, defined as their 'second language' in 1989.¹

The state launched an active campaign of Kazakh language revival by mobilizing the support of linguists and cultural intelligentsia. Kazakh was proclaimed as the sole state language in 1995 following an acrimonious debate over the language issue. Proponents of Kazakh as the sole state language prevailed over advocates of bilingualism, i.e., recognition of both Kazakh and Russian as state languages. Kazakh language proponents argued that given the highly unequal status and development of both languages, Russian would further push out Kazakh as the state language. In their view, only the recognition of Kazakh as the sole state language, and ensuing financial,

legal and ideological support to its development can eventually enable Kazakh to regain its status.

The 1995 language law established a clear hierarchy of languages with Kazakh being granted a higher status as state language and Russian placed in the less equal position as “language of interethnic communication” or lingua franca. An amendment passed in 1996 recognized Russian as the “official language” in 1996, operating on a par with the state language. The law served to appease not only various Russian-speaking nationalities who had little competence in Kazakh, but a sizeable number of urban Kazakhs as well who no longer function effectively in their native language.

The language law did not affect Russian-speaking Kazakhs as adversely as it affected other Russian-speaking nationalities. Because of the inextricable linkage between nationality and native language, it is easy for any Kazakh in theory to claim proficiency in Kazakh as his or her native language. Virtually all Kazakhs (99.4 per cent) claim knowledge of Kazakh. In a state where Russian remains the dominant lingua franca as well as the preferred language of communication among a vast majority of Kazakhs who are more at ease with functioning in Russian at all levels, these data do not reflect the actual command of the language and simply indicate the formal endorsement of Kazakh language as a key symbol of Kazakh national identity. The past Soviet censuses directly inquired about knowledge of Russian as well as “native language.”

Despite fervent pleas by Kazakh nationalists, the government has refused to introduce any language proficiency tests. A proposal introduced in 1995 to make Kazakh mandatory for numerous positions in the state administration was rejected. The requirement that state officials learn Kazakh within a ten-year period was dropped. However, key political positions, such as presidency, the chair of both the lower (Majilis) and upper (Senate) houses of parliament require the incumbent to be fluent in Kazakh.

The ten-year state programme on language policy introduced in early 1999 emphasizes ‘increasing the demand for the use of the state language’ and ‘creating conditions for learning it.’ It lays down how these objectives are to be realized through administrative and bureaucratic measures, while steering clear of any discussion of ‘political’ or ‘ethnic’ dimension of the language issue.

Since non-Kazakhs were unlikely to be proficient in the Kazakh language, the proclamation of Kazakh as the sole state language and the ensuing policy of Kazakhization generated profound anxiety among Russian-speaking population in Kazakhstan about their status and prospects for their children in a Kazakh-dominated state. Psychological anxiety over a deterioration of their political status following the adoption of the language law is the most crucial factor triggering an exodus of the Russian-speaking population from Kazakhstan since 1991.¹¹ The official governmental position is that emigration is motivated largely by “economic” considerations and is thus “non-political” in nature.

The 1999 census judiciously avoided questions that could assess the knowledge of Kazakh in distinct domains: speaking, reading, and writing—or

deployed to legitimate the state agenda of promoting Kazakh as the state language as well as demonstrating the “success” of such a policy by showing that almost all Kazakhs know the state language whereas the Slavic groups, although lagging behind, are indeed “learning” the language. If in 1989 just about one percent of the Slavic and European nationalities claimed any knowledge of Kazakh, just a decade later almost 15 percent of them claim to know it.

In practice, there is a wide gap between the goals of the state language policy and their actual implementation. Almost all Kazakhs recognized the rhetorical value of an ability to issue basic pleasantries in Kazakh, but many city residents would quickly return to a more comfortable Russian. Informants consistently reported that this was quite common, even in the absence of non-Kazakhs.

Another law requires that at least 50% of all media broadcasts be in Kazakh language. Numerous independent central and regional TV channels have periodically been fined or shut down for alleged violation of this law. However, political, rather than linguistic considerations have influenced the decision to penalize them. The Kazakh-language media received consistent state subsidies, although data on their extent is not available.

The language law has appeased Kazakhs who primarily speak Russian. In December 2000, Nazarbaev claimed that the language issue has been “solved” in Kazakhstan. At the same time he inveigled upon Kazakh elites to speak with their children and grandchildren in Kazakh and reminded ordinary citizens of their “duty” to learn the state language.ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed the 1997 language law states that it is the “duty of every citizen” to learn the state language, “which is a most important factor in the consolidation of the people [*narod*] or Kazakhstan” (*O iazykakh* 1997, 24). The statement by Nazarbaev suggests that the state is not the sole agency responsible for promoting Kazakh. The responsibility for advancing the cause of the language has been shifted to the intelligentsia and the people.

Minorities in Kazakhstan

Russians and other Slavs

Although Russians formed an absolute majority in the northern and eastern regions of Kazakhstan between 1950s and 1990s, they do not constitute a homogeneous ethnic group. The predominant identification among Russians in Kazakhstan was with the Soviet Union, rather than Russia in its present territorial framework. Russian nationality was never consciously homogenised or consolidated by the Soviet state in a manner that the various non-Russian nationalities were. In many ways, the category ‘Russian’ remains closely associated with an imperial or state identity, conscious of its historical role as a state-forming nation as well as *Kulturträger* in the ‘backward’ Asian regions.

The cultural, linguistic and “civilizational” gap between the two groups, the deeply-ingrained image among Russians of themselves being the *Kulturträger* act as psychological barriers to integration of Russians in the Kazakhstani state. On the one hand Russians decry their loss of status and on the other Russians are also at unease with their reduction into a minority, discontinuous from their historical status. This

cultural and ideological resistance to referring to Russians or Slavic groups as “minorities” is common among Kazakhs as well. References to Russians as ‘diaspora’, ‘settlers’, or as ‘guests’ in state-sponsored press and academic circles denotes attempts at affirming their “non-indigenous” status as well as weakening their territorial claims in Kazakhstan. Overall, the terminology and concepts used to characterize ethnic relations are very much rooted in Soviet nationalities theory.

In the early 1990s, the Russian writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote a polemical article calling for the “restructuring” of Russian’s present borders by reclaiming the numerous Russian-dominated areas along its borders. He especially singled out the Russian-dominated regions in northern and eastern Kazakhstan, which he saw as ceded to Kazakhstan in the 1920s as a result of Bolshevik ‘affirmative action policies’. In his reasoning—which also reflects a widely-shared Russian view—the nomads had no territorial attachment. Although Solzhenitsyn’s proposals for a restructuring of Russian state have fuelled Russian nationalist sentiments, they have not had any backing from the Russian government. Contrary to widely-held expectations, the Russian state has lacked the will, resources or a plan to intervene or to aid the Russian diaspora across its borders.

Russians in Kazakhstan vary in terms of the degree of rootedness in the region as well as regional markers. Russians in the northern and eastern parts of Kazakhstan tend to identify themselves more closely with Russians in the Far Eastern regions in Siberia (the Altai Krai, Tomsk for example), rather than the ‘mainland’ Russians. Kazakhstani Russian historian Irina Erofeeva has pointed at the strong regional and local attachments among Russians in East Kazakhstan, which often override their sense of belongingness to Kazakhstan or Russia. Russians in southern Kazakhstan on the whole are more acculturated into Kazakh culture and more likely to have a familiarity with Kazakh language.

Overall, ‘Russian’ is a composite, multi-layered identity and a simplifier for the profound ethnic mix in Kazakhstan, especially the virgin land regions, where Soviet-style internationalism flourished. A Russian saying “my mother is Tatar, Father a Greek, and I am a Russian” (“mama tatarka, otets grek, a ia russkii chelovek”) rings true for a large number of Russians in Kazakhstan. A high incidence of mixed ethnic marriages offer testimony to this internationalism, although these marriages were by and large among people of Slavic and ‘European’ nationalities rather than between Slavs/Europeans and Kazakhs. According to Soviet laws (Kazakhstan has retained this feature), a child of mixed parentage can choose his/her nationality at age 16. Children of mixed parentage, in which one of the parents was a Russian, tended to opt for Russian nationality. However, in cases involving a marriage between a Kazakh and a Russian (or another ethnic group), the general tendency was to opt for the titular nationality.

Altogether, about one to 1.4 million Russian have left Kazakhstan between 1989-1999. ‘Exit’ has been the dominant response by culturally and politically disgruntled Russians who perceive the nationalizing course as irreversible and see little future for their children in the ethnically reconfigured landscapes of Caucasus and Central Asia. A progressive identity shift among the Russian diaspora communities in Kazakhstan has reduced the potential for irredentism or separatism.

Ukrainians

The Ukrainian population in Kazakhstan has also declined from 5.4 in 1989 to 3.7 percent in 1999. A vast majority of Ukrainians of Kazakhstan are linguistically and culturally Russified. Efforts to promote knowledge of Ukrainian language have been undertaken only after 1991 though their success is limited.

The Ukrainian Cultural Centres in Almaty, Astana and a few other oblasts have actively sought to promote Ukrainian language. These centres are mainly organized by activists of Western Ukrainian extraction who came to Kazakhstan after the Second World War and do not have intimate ties with the historical Ukrainian diaspora in Kazakhstan dating to late nineteenth and early twentieth century.^{iv} The Ukrainian Cultural Centre in Almaty, headed by Aleksandr Garkavets, a linguist and Turcologist, has enjoyed sustained ideological support and patronage of president Nazarbaev. The independence of Ukraine and the adoption of Ukrainian as the sole state language have injected a certain degree of ethnic differentiation from Russians and desire to learn Ukrainian, although the Ukrainian state has little financial means to help its diaspora and sustain the national-cultural centre.

The Kazakh state has encouraged a separation between Russians and Ukrainians (and other Slavs) by defining the latter as minorities and encouraging the formation of official 'national-cultural centres' to safeguard their cultural and linguistic claims. The Ukrainian national cultural centre broke away from the Slavic movement *Lad* in the early 1990s. While the personal background of the activists of the Ukrainian Centre and the patronage-based ethnic segregationist policy of Kazakhstani state may have facilitated the exit of the Ukrainian cultural centre from the Slavic movement *Lad* in the early 1990s,

Some 20-30% of the population in North Kazakhstan, Akmola, Pavlodar, and Kokshetau oblasts belong to nationalities other than Russians or Kazakhs. A vast majority of these non-titular, non-Russian people are linguistically assimilated into Russian culture and no significant cultural differences exist between them and 'passport' Russians. Marriages involving a Kazakh and a 'European' ethnic group are relatively rare (though much higher than other Central Asian nationalities). Over a third of all Russian-speakers, who include includes 'passport' Russians as well as Slavs, Germans, Koreans, Tatars and numerous small still identify themselves with the Soviet state.

Germans

In 1959, Germans formed 7.1 percent of the total population of Kazakhstan, numbering almost a million. Their share was reduced to 5.8 percent in 1989 and 2.4 percent in 1999 mainly due to emigration to Germany. Presently, there are about 300,000 Germans in Kazakhstan though this number is likely to drop further.

A vast majority of Germans living in Kazakhstan were deported from the Volga German Autonomous republic in 1942 after the Nazi forces invaded the Soviet Union. Stalin feared a possible collaboration between the Nazis and Soviet Germans and abrogated the autonomy of the Volga German republic and order that they be deported to the landlocked regions of Central Asia. Almost half a million Germans are estimated to have arrived in Kazakhstan during the World War II. A majority of these were settled in Akmola, Kostanai and North Kazakhstan oblasts.

The German community has been fairly well integrated into Kazakhstan's economy and social structure. This is partly due to the fact that Germans did not have any other territorial homeland within the Soviet Union. The upsurge in emigration to Germany since late 1989s is mainly a result of Germany's policy of extending citizenship to a person of German descent and the prospects of economic amelioration upon obtaining German citizenship. However, a vast majority of Kazakhstan's Germans are primarily a Russian-speaking group though the older generation retains a proficiency in German.

In recent years, Germany has introduced more stringent conditions for granting German citizenship and has offered significant financial help to enable the shrinking German community to remain within Kazakhstan. The *Deutsches Haus* in Kazakhstan distributes free medicine, produce and fuel for winter and also runs free German language classes. Harold Belger, the leader of German cultural centre in Kazakhstan, and himself a writer who is fluent in German, Russian and Kazakh, has played an active role in urging Germans to remain within Kazakhstan.

Koreans

Koreans constitute a small (129,000) but highly visible and well-knit ethnic community in Kazakhstan. In 1937, a special decree issued by Stalin led to the deportation of 95,241 ethnic Koreans to Kazakhstan from the Far Eastern regions of the RSFSR bordering with Korea. Koreans have settled largely in southern Kazakhstan. The Taldy Korgan oblast in the south as well as the city of Almaty have a sizeable Korean population.

Koreans are a russified group. Hardly any Koreans under age sixty have a Korean first name or any facility in their purported native language. The 1999 census shows that 25.8 percent of Kazakhstan's Koreans claimed knowledge of Korean. Thus those who claimed proficiency in Korean were endorsing the symbolic salience of language for ethnic identity and not claiming actual proficiency. 97.7 percent of Koreans are fluent in Russian (second language), which suggests the extent of their assimilation into Russian. In an interview with the author in Almaty in August 1999, Gennadii Mikhailovich Ni, the president of the Korean Association of Kazakhstan, unhesitatingly referred to Koreans as a 'Russian-speaking nation' (*'russkoiazychnaia natsiia'*).

Koreans have benefited significantly from help offered by South Korea since Kazakhstan's independence in 1991. South Korea has offered a large renovated building for housing the Korean Cultural Centre and the Korean theatre. It also offers facilities for learning Korean, training in English, as well as other subjects related to the growth of market economy and marketing skills in Korean institutions. Samsung and Daewoo, huge investors in Kazakhstan, use local Koreans for promoting business ties.

Uighurs

Uighurs have historically roots in the Kazakhstan and have inhabited areas bordering China in the Almaty oblast. The total number of Uighurs in Kazakhstan is about 220,000, which is 1.4 percent of the total population. Although members of

Kazakh diaspora from Xinjiang are automatically entitled to citizenship, these rights are not extended to Uighurs whose families fled from Kazakhstan to China during the Soviet period. Uighurs from China visiting Kazakhstan encounter bureaucratic obstacles in both countries and are looked upon with suspicion. A few thousand Uighurs from Xinjiang are estimated to be living in Kazakhstan illegally though many have family ties in Kazakhstan.

Although all ethnic groups are formally encouraged to set up their national cultural centres, Uighurs have faced a significant interference and regulation from the state authorities. The official Uighur centre is expected to disassociate itself from the demands of Uighur separatists in China. Various Uighur rights advocacy groups have faced greater struggle in obtaining registration, as well as maintaining their legal status. Many have complained about the widespread social stereotyping of Uighur activists with “separatists” or “terrorists”.

The close economic and trade partnership between Kazakhstan and China has had a profound impact on the Uighur question. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have signed treaties with China in which they have pledged support to China to combat the problem of ‘Uighur separatism’ and not to provide any shelter to suspected terrorists. In February 1999, the Kazakh authorities promptly returned to China three wanted Uighur separatists who were later executed in China. The decision to deport the three men without considering their asylum claims evoked significant criticism by local and international human rights groups.

Chechens

The Russian academic Valery Tishkov (1997, 193) refers to popularization of an ‘official’ myth during the Soviet years about exceptional love of Chechens for their primordial homeland and graves of ancestors and indomitable desire to return to Chechnya. Chechens deported to Kazakhstan, as elsewhere to Central Asia, continued to suffer through the Soviet characterization as “enemy people” as well as local perception of them as a belligerent and unruly people. The intolerance and distrust of the Chechens propagated by official Soviet ideology, which came to be internalized by the Kazakhs and other Central Asians, contributed to a steady marginalization of Chechens from economic and political affairs of the region. As Chechens found it increasingly difficult to integrate into the local economy, political and social sphere, informal and unofficial economic and trade activities remained a major outlet. This has contributed to the widespread perception among Russians and other ethnic groups of Chechens as predominantly engaged in ‘mafia’ or other criminal activities. The strong desire on the part of the deportees to return to their homeland during the Soviet period was primarily a result of their overall marginalization under Soviet rule. A vast number of Chechens were allowed to return to Chechnya only after the liberalization of the Stalinist order under the leadership of Nikita Khrushchev (1956-64). According to 1989 census, some 49,000 Chechens had remained in Kazakhstan.

The war in Chechnya has led many Chechens to flee to territories outside of the Russian Federation. The number of refugees from Chechnya is estimated at 30,000 at least. The number of illegal residents, or those living with relatives or acquaintances without proper documentation, is believed to be much higher than the estimates suggest. This is partly due to the fact that the prevalent Kazakhstani laws make it very difficult to obtain registration as a refugee.

In 1999 Kazakhstan acceded to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention though it has been slow in enacting and implementing legislation to aid refugees or asylum seekers. Kazakhstan applies different procedures for asylum seekers from Soviet republics and citizens of other countries. The Ministry of Interior registered former Soviet citizens such as Chechens and Tajiks, while the refugee section of the Agency for Migration and Demography registers all others.

The status of Chechen refugees remains undefined in Kazakhstan. Chechens can freely enter Kazakhstan as citizens of Russian Federation. The Ministry of Interior granted citizens of former Soviet Republics, including asylum seekers, the right to remain for only 45 days. Kazakhstan has formally agreed to let Chechens stay longer until they could safely repatriate. Much of the \$500,000 allotted by the UNHCR mission for legal aid to Chechen refugees in Kazakhstan in 2001 was spent on registration formalities, including bribes in obtaining speedy registration. Kazakhstan has not yet ratified the International Convention on Refugees (though it joined the convention in January 1999) and is not obliged to provide full state benefits entitled to bona-fide refugees.

Since September 11, the Kazakhstani authorities have become increasingly wary of allowing Chechens to stay, fearing incursions by 'terrorists.' Local media and law enforcement authorities have frequently voiced fears of possible exacerbation of socio-economic situation as a result of alleged "criminal activities" of Chechens.

Political and Legal Framework for Minority Representation

The Nazarbaev leadership has carefully cultivated an image of Kazakhstan as an "oasis of stability" and credited itself with maintenance of "inter-ethnic harmony." Accordingly, a strong presidential authority is justified for the maintenance of stability, especially in the ethnic sphere. Ethnic stability, or lack of an overt conflict or competition between ethnic groups, is partly a result of de facto priority accorded to Kazakhs as the titular group and the virtual absence of institutions that can aid a mobilization of minority claims. The state promotion of Kazakh language and implicit preference to the titular nationality has certainly delivered material and career benefits to many Kazakhs. In contrast to states such as Malaysia where indigenous ethnic entitlements are clearly specified in the constitution, or in India, where an elaborate structure of "reservations" based on caste and economic backwardness exists, Kazakhstan's constitution or laws make virtually no mention of any ethnic entitlements. The structure of ethnic entitlements, available to Kazakhs, is *ad hoc* and extra-constitutional and is executed informally.

The parliament has a preponderance of ethnic Kazakhs, who hold 58 out of the 77 seats. Only eight of the deputies are women. The majority of akims (heads) of Kazakhstan's fourteen oblasts are also of Kazakh nationality. As already noted, key political positions, such as the presidency, the chair of both the lower (Majilis) and upper (Senate) houses of parliament require the incumbent to be fluent in Kazakh. Only eight percent of government employees are Russians (*RFE/RL Newslines*, 19 October 2000) although Russians account for 30 percent of the country's 14.9 million population and constitute a much greater percentage of working age group.

Constitutional and Legal Provisions

The Kazakhstani elites have sought to portray the country primarily as a homeland of Kazakhs *as well as* a multiethnic republic in which various nationalities peacefully cohabit. Kazakhstan has utilized the significant Slavic presence to advance its 'Eurasian' image and establishing credentials as an aspiring civic state, committed to preserving its multiethnic make-up and maintaining 'inter-ethnic harmony'. This emphasis on multiethnicity, or 'internationalism' remains ontologically and ideologically continuous with the Soviet-era practices. If in the Soviet era under the ideology of 'Soviet community,' internationalism had a distinctly Russian face, post-Soviet Kazakhstani internationalism, shaped by many of the discursive and institutional legacies of its Soviet-era predecessor, displays a distinctively "Kazakh face" (Schatz 2000).

A draft of the present constitution (which was adopted in August 1995) described Kazakhstan as a state founded on the principle of the "self-determination of the Kazakh people." The clause was deleted subsequently but a distinction between 'Kazakh' and 'other' people of Kazakhstan has continued to prevail in semi-official, academic, journalistic and popular references. The preamble to the Constitution refers to Kazakhstan as the "indigenous homeland of the Kazakhs," inhabited by "Kazakhs and other nationalities." The present constitution also coined the concept "the people of Kazakhstan (*narod Kazakhstana*)," which is reminiscent of its ideological precursor, "the Soviet people." Notwithstanding Nazarbaev's trumpeting of the notion of *narod Kazakhstana*, there is little official effort to institute a supra-ethnic 'Kazakhstani' identity. No census category for 'Kazakhstani' was created; instead 'nationality' continues to remain firmly inscribed in all identity documents.

Since its introduction in the 1930s as a mandatory passport and identity category, *nationality* has served as a most influential mechanism of institutionalizing a fixed and biologically-governed conception of a language-based identity. Any departure from one's ascribed nationality or native language is seen as an instance of (forced) assimilation. This mandatory 'fifth column' (*piataia grafa*) on identity questionnaire has been viewed as a major obstacle in realizing a civic vision of state as well as in moving from a racialized, group-centred conception of identity to an individual centred one. Numerous post-Soviet states, particularly the Russian Federation, Ukraine, and Georgia have proposed the removal of the mandatory category 'nationality' from passports and identity documents and instead endorse the 'civic' category pertaining to citizenship. There is little doubt that the removal of 'nationality' could significantly influence a sense of national belonging by removing obstacles for inter-generational assimilation and help cultivation of a 'civic' or territorial attachment to the state. In the short run, however, the remedial nature of the post-Soviet state-building policies, geared at benefiting the titular nationality, militate against the removal of the nationality category from official documents.

The new passports issued by Kazakhstan retains nationality on the first page, written in the state language and in Russian, whereas the second page, written in English and in the state language, omits all reference to nationality, replacing it instead with a line indicating citizenship. This suggests that information on nationality is primarily intended for 'internal consumption.' Article 19 of the Constitution states,

“Each person is permitted to define and indicate or not indicate his/her national, party, or religious affiliation.” Although it is no longer mandatory to respond to the question on nationality, respondents habitually fill the column. It is not uncommon for officials to either ‘guess’ the nationality of the respondent or simply ask for nationality affiliation if the respondent has failed to provide it. The new personal identification cards retain a column for nationality. A vast majority of citizens do not know this, and among those who know, few express resentment or reservation about indicating their nationality. One Russian citizen of Kazakhstan from Shymkent in South Kazakhstan, caused a stir in 1997 by claiming ‘Kazakhstani’ as his nationality, instead of ‘Russian’ stamped on his passport. He was allowed this choice only after making special petition with the authorities and expending his personal resources in doing so (*Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 4 March 1997).

Kazakhstan’s constitution contains provisions guaranteeing human rights but does not spell out mechanisms for safeguarding them. Article 14 of the 1995 Constitution, proscribes any discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, race, language or religion. Constitutional and legal provisions are necessary. However, they fail to offer sufficient safeguards to minorities in the absence of an independent judicial system (judges as well as members of the Constitutional court are appointed and dismissed by the president) and absence of any other mechanism whereby citizens, including minorities, can seek redress for alleged violations of their rights.

While the Constitution contains a various guarantees on ethnic, religious and civil rights of individuals as well as ethnic groups, they are circumscribed by clauses in the country’s Criminal Code, Administration Code and provisions in the Constitution remain at variance. For example, an amendment to Article 374 of the Administrative Code carried out in the year 2000 makes activities of an unregistered religious group a criminal offence. The Constitution, however, does not place any registration requirement upon a religious group. In recent years, religious groups, mainly various Christian sects, have routinely complained about inexplicable delays and obstacles placed in obtaining registration.

Kazakhstan has one of the most stringent control mechanisms that limit the constitutionally granted rights to form public associations. Kazakhstan’s law on public assembly, in force since 1998, requires prior permission of the authorities for holding a public rally order authorities is required to hold any political rally or support any ‘ethnic’ grievances. Participation in any ‘unsanctioned’ rally or meeting can lead to arrest, fines and ultimately a disqualification from contesting any public position. Article 337 of the Criminal Code also provides stiff penalties for participation in an ‘unregistered’ public association. A rigid surveillance by the interior ministry forces, legal restrictions and harsh penalties make it extremely difficult to engage in any spontaneous public action.

The Constitution imposes severe penalties to anyone accused of inciting ethnic discord. The existing legal structure gives a prerogative to state authorities to deter any mobilization of ethnic claims by labelling it a criminal behaviour. Accusation of inciting ethnic discord or displaying nationalism is one of the most dangerous charges a person can face.

Territorial Framework and Ethnic Control

Kazakhstan is a centralized and unitary state. The Nazarbaev leadership has resisted all pressures to introduce elections of local or regional (oblast) heads, as well as introduce some form of cultural or territorial autonomy.

The Kazakhstani state lacks the concerted action or resources to implement a full-fledged “demographic engineering” (McGarry 1998), i.e., settling the favoured ethnic group in a region dominated by the minorities in order to enhance the power and status of the favored group. It has nonetheless pursued such policies on a smaller scale by means such as transferring the capital Almaty, located in the Kazakh-dominated south to Astana in the Russian-dominated heartland. The motivations to wanting to transfer the capital were multiple. The official reasons cited were proximity to border with China (and the argument that the capital should be located in the geographical ‘centre’ of the republic), Almaty’s location on the seismic belt, and the alleged physical limits on its growth as a major city. In reality, the transfer of capital to Astana, announced in June 1994 and completed in December 1998, was guided by ethnic as well as political considerations. First and foremost, it was governed by the desire to exercise a greater vigilance over the Russian-dominated regions and to deter any possible irredentist or separatist claims on part of the regions bordering Russia. The move has also sought to secure the loyalty of the Russified Kazakhs in these territories, who had been under-represented in governmental positions in Almaty, which were seen largely as prerogative of southern Kazakhs. Finally, the transfer of capital has allowed the state to channel a significant movement of ethnic Kazakhs to Astana and surrounding regions.

Further consolidating its unitary and centralized structure, Kazakhstan undertook a significant gerrymandering of its internal territorial boundaries in 1996-98. The Semipalatinsk and Zhezkazgan oblasts, containing 54 and 49 percent ethnic Kazakh respectively, were merged with East Kazakhstan (67 percent Slavic in 1989) and Karaganda (63 percent Slavic in 1989). Parts of Kokshetau (the Kokshetau town and the surrounding areas) were incorporated within Akmola and North Kazakhstan. Similarly, the Kostanai oblast was enlarged to include parts of Torgai. The changes, affecting all Russian-dominated border regions (except Pavlodar), enlarged the size of these oblasts and increased the ethnic Kazakh share in the reconstituted units. The decision was presumably guided by the calculations that their large size and high share of Kazakhs would serve as an antidote to any potential secessionist claims. These changes were still not able to offset the population loss as a result of large-scale Russian emigration. Notwithstanding the alteration of borders and policy of channeling Kazakhs to the Russian-dominated areas, North Kazakhstan, Akmola, Kostanai and Karaganda regions experienced the most significant reductions in population as a result of emigration of the Russian-speaking population.

Kazakhstan has rapidly transformed itself from a multiethnic Soviet republic to a nationalizing Kazakh state. This transformation, however, is neither a clear outcome of a self-conscious manifestation of a collectively shared sense of nationalism, as in the Baltic states, nor a result of any pre-existing sense of cultural distance between the two dominant ethnic communities. Bureaucratic-administrative measures, such as territorial gerrymandering, have produced Kazakh majorities in the newly constituted regions and thus undermine any potential irredentist threat. The

changes, affecting all Russian-dominated border regions (except Pavlodar), enlarged the size of these oblasts and turned Kazakhs into majorities in the reconstituted units. These changes were presumably guided by the calculations that the large size of these oblasts with titular majority would undermine the basis for a potential secessionist claim.

The administrative mergers, the implantation of Kazakh officials from the southern regions into the city and oblast offices of the reconstituted units in the north-eastern regions, and above all, an extensive surveillance by interior affairs ministry and Kazakh national security officials over public and private life have weakened the mobilizational potential of Russians. However, the integration of northern and eastern regions into the central structure is far from a *fait accompli*. Russian claims over entire north-eastern regions of Kazakhstan, as articulated by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, are no doubt grounded in nationalist thinking than in a differentiated knowledge of historical facts. These have found little political support from within Russia or of Russians within Kazakhstan. However, as a Kazakhstani historian Irina Erofeeva notes that an undisputed belief in their civilizational superiority and deep-seated historical claims over the region' prevail among local Russians manifests though they lack any political or cultural mechanisms for articulating these views (Author's interview, Almaty, 19 September 1999). Erofeeva also points out that the north-western parts of the East Kazakhstan oblast, along the right bank of river Irtysh, including the city Ust-Kamenogorsk, belong to the Siberian ecological landscape (not the Kazakh nomadic pastures) and were under the West Siberian governorate all through the tsarist period until their inclusion into Soviet republic of Kazakhstan in the 1920s. These points undermine the validity of Kazakh 'historical' claims over the region.

Institutions of Ethnic Control and Cooptation

The failure of the state to promote democratic institutions after an initial phase of liberalization in the early 1990s has deprived ethnic minorities of a voice and autonomy to organize themselves as a group. A relatively liberal constitution adopted in 1993 and an active parliament elected the same year promised political liberalization. However, a new constitution adopted through a referendum after the dissolution of the parliament has vested unlimited powers in the president and stripped the parliament of any real authority. There has been a steady concentration of power and economic wealth in the president and his close family and associates since 1995. The president's elder daughter has headed the state news agency Khabar and wielded control over all state and so-called independent media. Her husband Rakhmat Aliev has held various influential positions such as the head of the Almaty taxation department and then as the head of the national security committee of Almaty before his recent political demise following his appointment as Kazakhstan's ambassador to Austria. In the meanwhile, Timur Kulibaev, Nazarbaev's second son-in-law has amassed significant economic powers as the deputy head of *Kazmunaigaz* (previous *kaztransoil*), which controls the major oil routes. Nazarbaev and his close associates have been personally implicated in the transfer of millions of dollars of oil revenues and Western oil investment into their personal bank accounts. An inquiry by Swiss bank together with the US federal court is under way.

With the consolidation of a personalistic authoritarian system, Nazarbaev has lost much of its reformist appeal and popularity acquired in the early 1990s. The promise of ethnic harmony and stability made in the early 1990s appear hollow in the backdrop of large-scale emigration of Slavs and the absence of any meaningful democratic participation. The regime has continued to characterize the absence of public activism or civic action, including any form of group mobilization, as symptomatic of “stability” and overall support for its policy. The intimidation and buy-off of media, opposition and prominent ethnic leaders have made it extremely difficult for individuals or group to mobilize any social action. Since 1996 prominent figures among the ruling elites have sought control over all major central and regional newspapers and television and radio channels. Media are under sustained state pressure to portray ethnic relations in a harmonious light and refrain from reporting any event which may be seen as having a negative impact on the existing ethnic harmony. Numerous Russian-language newspapers, most prominently *Karavan*, *Soldat*, and *21-yi vek* (21st Century), all critical of the regime, have been accused of inciting interethnic hatred and faced reprisals. At the same time pro-governmental newspapers expressing anti-minority sentiments such as the Russian language paper *dozhivem do ponedel’nika* and Kazakh language paper *Kazakhskaiia Pravda* (the latter propounds extreme Kazakh nationalism and blatant anti-semitism) have not experienced any state control.

Kazakhstan has attempted to pursue both ‘ethnic’ and ‘civic’ visions of nation-building simultaneously, without erecting the necessary legal basis to promote either of the two goals fully. It has focused primarily on providing a symbolic ethnic representation by sponsoring institutions such as national-cultural centres and the Assembly of Peoples (*assembleia narodov*) of Kazakhstan. The term *narod* (people, or *narody* - plural) in the Soviet (and post-Soviet) understanding has an ethnic connotation. *Narod* was used in the Soviet times to refer to territorially dispersed ethnic groups who did not have their own territorial homeland. From this standpoint, minorities such as Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Koreans, Tatars and Uzbeks are ‘nationalities’ and cannot be referred to as *narody* as they do have their purported ethnic homelands. There is no official elaboration on why it was decided to call it ‘assembly of *people*’ (and not ‘nations’ or ‘nationalities’). As the hierarchical ordering of Soviet nationalities theory clearly showed that ‘nations’ are a more consolidated and developed units than ‘*narody*’ this choice reflects a demotion of the status of various non-titular ethnic groups or minority.

National-cultural Centres and the Assembly of People

As already noted, in the new ethnic hierarchy that has emerged since 1991, ethnic Kazakhs enjoy the status of “first among equals,” whereas Russians and other non-Kazakh groups have experienced a steady demotion of status. Formally speaking, each ethnic group has a constitutional right to form an official national cultural centre committed to developing the cultural heritage of its national community as a whole. The state in fact encourages each nationality to form its ‘official’ national centre. At the same time, the constitution prohibits formation of a public association or political party propounding an ethnic, religious or nationalist ideology.

The national centres are also encouraged, and expected, to solicit help from their ‘kin’ state for the cultural and material advancement of their group. Indeed the

German and Korean centres have vastly benefited from material support from their kin-states, as well as from their individual ethnic sponsors, but most other centres remain largely dependent on the modest state support. Leaders of other ethnic groups also express resentment in private at the expectation that they are expected to obtain help from their 'kin' state. In an interview with the author on 21 December 2002, Pavel Atrushkevich, the former deputy chairman of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, and leader of the Belorussian cultural centre, disapproved of the fact that some ethnic groups, such as the Koreans, have been quite successful in using their ethnicity for "commercial activities" whereas most others do not have a rich kin state to seek help from. He also reminded that the primary responsibility of helping the minorities lies with the Kazakhstani state ("minorities are first and foremost citizens of Kazakhstan and not of their 'ethnic homeland'").

The national cultural centres serve to promote and legitimate official policies, rather than attempting to channel group or societal aspirations to the state institutions. They are socialized into seeing themselves as a 'diaspora' and being oriented toward their kin state and eschewing any demands for autonomy, whether cultural or territorial. Alexander Dederer, the leader of Kazakhstan's Germans admitted that 'no group will voluntarily seek to limit their rights,' if the principle of national-cultural autonomy were to be endorsed (*Panorama*, 13 August 1999).

Overall, numerically small and relatively well-knit ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, such as Poles, Hungarians, Kurds, as well as Koreans and Germans have found the national-cultural centres of some use in providing them with an organizational framework for their cultural activities. Large and dispersed groups, particularly Russians, who represent a heterogeneous group with multitudes of claims and interests, can simply not be represented by a single national-cultural centre. The organization for Slavic unity, *Lad*, is the largest organization representing Slavs. However, it is not ineligible for the status of a 'national-cultural' centre because principles of Slavic unity endorsed by it are not confined to a specific 'ethnic' group.

Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan

Nazarbaev has used personal patronage to provide for symbolic ethnic representation and obtain political loyalty of these representatives. The Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan (*Assembleia narodov Kazakhstana*), established in 1995 at his initiative, is the most visible institution of wielding presidential patronage over minority leaders. The Assembly does not have any legal or constitutional status. The president also serves as its chairman and is looked upon as the Guardian-Protector of small minorities. Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan set up these structures of ethnic representation ostensibly in compliance with the recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities.

The creation of the Assembly of People is ideologically consistent with the Soviet legacy of keeping minorities distinct and formally equal, without providing them with a proper institutional framework for their representation and integration. The assembly at the centre consists of over 300 representatives of various ethnic groups and has branches at the oblast levels. Some of its members are nominated by officially-recognized national-cultural centres. The president, in his capacity as the chairman of the Assembly, nominates other members, who include academics, artists,

writers and social activists of various nationalities, after a formal consultation with the national cultural centres. Membership of the assembly is viewed as an honour personally bestowed by the president that the recipient cannot refuse. Lacking any juridical power or a representative base, the Assembly serves as an instrument to co-opt leading ethnic figures into the existing political system. Its members are encouraged to engage in 'cultural' or 'ethnographic' activities such as organizing language lessons, concerts, plays, national festivals, 'days of culture', anniversaries of major literary and historical figures, and so on. It is essentially a non-political channel: a crucial obligation of the Assembly is to refrain from political activity or any form of ethnic entrepreneurship.

The law mandating that these centres be registered with the ministry of justice serves as an important screening mechanism. Groups such as *Russkaia obshchina* and the various Cossack formations encountered a series of bureaucratic obstacles at the central and oblast levels in the mid 1990s in securing a long-term legal status and have remained on the fringes of the official framework. The ban on the various oblast branches of *Russkaia obshchina* and *Lad* was lifted in August 1999 on the eve of the parliamentary elections and the registration requirements have eased since then.

Nazarbaev has sought to cultivate the assembly as a mechanism for "conflict resolution." He cited an agreement, supposedly brokered by the Assembly, between the Union of Cossacks of Semirech'e and the law and order authorities of Almaty, as an evidence of its conflict resolution capacity (*Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 8 October 1998). The Union of Cossacks of Semirech'e was denied registration because of their insistence on wearing military uniforms and bearing arms. Max van der Stoel, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities facilitated negotiations between Cossack representatives and government officials, urging that Cossack participants be invited to national and international conferences on ethnic issues. Two Cossack representatives were nominated by the Kazakhstani government to attend a conference in Locarno in Switzerland in 1996 amidst allegations that they had been 'bought off' (Author's conversations with Cossack leaders in Ust Kamenogorsk, July 1997). The state officials have successfully exploited the divisions between two rival Cossack organizations, the Semirech'e Cossack group, headed by Gennadii Belykov which is closely associated with the *Russkaia obshchina* and the Union of Semirech'e Cossacks headed by Viktor Ovsianikov, which enjoys a tactical support of the authorities.

The state policy of enshrining the country's multiethnic legacy is oriented toward celebrating the cultures and national heritage of numerous small ethnic groups while fomenting factions and divisions within larger groups (Russians). The Assembly has been entrusted with the task of apportioning the ten per cent quota in universities for the 'small' ethnic groups – a provision that excludes Russians. While Russians are psychologically resistant to being reduced to the status of a 'minority', spokespersons for other ethnic groups, notably ethnic Germans, Koreans, and Uighurs have made steady demands for the recognition and institutionalisation of their minority status. For example, the German Council of Kazakhstan, enjoying the sponsorship of Germany, obtained membership of the Federal Union of European Minorities.

Lacking formal legal channels of ethnic redress, minority representatives have tended to use more informal and personalistic connections to secure certain political concessions for their groups. The Koreans worked out an informal arrangement that allows them to nominate their own *akim* (head of the region or oblast) in the city of Usttobe in the Taldy Korgan oblast, which has a sizeable Korean population (Author's interview with Gennadii Mikhailovich Ni, President of the Koreans' Association of Kazakhstan, Almaty, August 1999). This is an *ad hoc* arrangement, which denotes a personal favour granted by Nazarbaev following informal talks and does not have a legal status or wider ramifications for other ethnic groups.

Weakness of ethnic leadership

A major major problem faced particularly by Russians, and to a general extent all other ethnic groups, is the sheer absence or weakness of ethnic leaders capable of creating a support base within their ethnic communities. In sum, leaders of ethnic communities are not representatives of their communities, but are appointed or sponsored by forces within the regime. The absence of a legitimately recognized ethnic leadership is a significant factor that sheds light on the overall apathy or inability on the part of ethnic groups to mobilize their claims. It should be acknowledged that the growing authoritarian turn taken by the Nazarbaev regime has put the legitimacy of the Kazakh elite under question as well. Scholars have pointed at the domination of regional and clientelistic networks among the ruling Kazakh elite (Masanov 1996, Khliupin 1998). However, an autonomous non-titular elite or leadership is simply absent in the system, which attests to the overall lack of group autonomy and a *de facto* subordination of minorities to the titular nationality.

The numerous minority representatives in the official apparatus are similarly appointees from top, who do not represent any specific ethnic interests. Their presence in the government, however, is often referred to as an illustration of the 'multiethnic' composition of the government. Examples of these are Sergei Tereshchenko, a former prime minister (1991-1993), a native of Shymkent in South Kazakhstan and fluent in Kazakh, who is currently the deputy chairman of the Assembly of People; Aleksandr Pavlov, a former finance minister from North Kazakhstan; Viktor Shkol'nik, the Minister of Education; and Viktor Khrapunov, current mayor of Almaty who has made public gestures of speaking rudimentary Kazakh and accompanying his Kazakh wife to mosque. Indeed, the few Kazakh-speaking Slavs serving in the high political echelons are extensively plugged into the 'internal' clan and *zhuz* politics, which critics dub a mainly 'Kazakh' phenomenon. One Kazakh political commentator (Masanov 1996, 56) went on to refer to them pejoratively as the "fourth *zhuz*."

Integration through co-optation is the only means of mobility available to the Russian-speakers within the nationalizing apparatus. Co-optation brings in security of tenure as a reward for loyalty and support. The rewards for compliance are generous just as penalty for undertaking autonomous political action or disloyalty is severe. Scorned as 'kazakhicised', Russians occupying major positions in the state apparatus tend to enjoy little support or credibility among their ethnic kin and are ill-suited to provide leadership to their ethnic communities.

The state has also sought to exploit anti-Russification sentiments among other Slavic groups (mainly Ukrainians) by emphasizing their ethnic distinctiveness and

‘suffering’ under the Soviet rule. The common plight of Kazakhs and Ukrainians is highlighted in references to the losses both ethnic groups suffered under collectivization of the late 1920s.

As the above examples show, the absence of an autonomous ethnic elite or an institutionalized power-sharing arrangements enable the state to co-opt individual ethnic members and use them as ethnic figureheads. Their symbolic representation allows the state to affirm its ‘multiethnic and international’ image and deter the emergence of a counter-elite outside the official organs of power. As the opposition leader Piotr Svoik noted, “as individuals, these are respectable and intelligent people, but together they demonstrate an incredulous callousness and willingness to rubber-stamp almost anything” (*Delovaia nedelia*, 27 June 1997). Svoik himself is a typical example of an individual who has been coopted into the state apparatus after periodically dabbling into opposition activism and attacking the ethnic policies of the state.

Creating a civic national identity and institutions

In theory, the Nazarbaev leadership has highlighted ‘multiethnicity’ and ‘internationalism’ as defining features of the Kazakhstani state. Kazakhstan has issued numerous ideological pronouncements and rhetoric to demonstrate its commitment to a ‘civic’ vision of the state and to appeal to Western norms of ethnic minorities protection. The creation of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is a response to recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to introduce safeguards for minorities.

At the same time, it has also projected Kazakhstan as the ancestral homeland of Kazakhs and elevated Kazakh ethnic symbols as state symbols. Kazakh language is the sole state language (though Russian is used in official capacity), all state emblems are Kazakh symbols, statehood is defined solely in terms of Kazakh history and nomadic culture. Sovereignty and statehood have served as vital tools in forging a *de facto* hegemony of the titular or ‘indigenous’ nationality. Kazakhs may have acquired a numerical minority, but their statehood is not yet a sociological fact.

In his *Strategy 2030*, a 33-year programme of development spelled out in 1998, Nazarbaev referred to the “integrating role” to be assumed by the Kazakh people amidst the country’s cultural diversity. This rhetoric echoes the emphasis on the ideological mission of the Russians in forging inter-ethnic integration during the Soviet period. Although titular Kazakhs are defined as the historical proprietors of the state and as ‘first among equals,’ it is unclear what concrete advantages this can entail.

Having been reduced to the status of a minority, Kazakhs have only recently obtained a majority status. As the examples of numerous ethnically diverse societies (Malaysia, Fiji, Guyana) where the ‘indigenous’ group was once marginalized by the more mobile ‘non-indigenous,’ the claims for indigenous ethnic entitlements do not subside after the indigenous group has attained a majority status. As these examples illustrate, in seeking to overcome its marginalization, a beleaguered ‘indigenous’ minority has invariably aimed toward establish its superiority through a status reversal.

The institutionalised salience of nationality begs the question what precisely does ethnic integration entail and how it is to be pursued. It is likely that over time a significant proportion of Kazakhstani Russians will accommodate to Kazakh culture and acquire a proficiency in the language. However, it is very unlikely that the Kazakh language can serve an “integrative role” in the foreseeable future. Russian remains the preferred language of communication for a vast majority of urban Kazakhs as well as an indisputable lingua franca although the use of Kazakh is becoming widespread in government offices. The demotion in the status of Russian has not necessarily enhanced the role of Kazakh. Instead, English is making rapid inroads among youth, irrespective of ethnic origins, as the language of ‘mobility’ – a role previously played by Russian.

Major problems and potential conflict areas

Kazakhstan’s falling population and the return of Kazakh diaspora

Kazakhstan has recorded one of the highest levels of economic growth in the post- Soviet region as a result of rising oil exports. However, notwithstanding sustained macroeconomic growth, emigration continues to outweigh the Kazakhstan’s natural rate of growth. Although precise data are not yet available, a significant number of educated Kazakhs have also emigrated to Russia and to the West. A shrinking population base, in contrast to densely populated Uzbekistan in south or China in south-east, is a setback to Kazakhstan’s desire of becoming the dominant regional power.

Notwithstanding the current demographic trends, the upbeat projection by President Nazarbaev, echoed by policymakers and some academics, that the population of Kazakhstan will reach the 25 million mark in the year 2030 at the end of the 30-year developmental blueprint adopted in 1998, is yet to be revised. These projections were based on the hopes of an accelerating birth rates among Kazakhs and a significant “return” of a sizeable portion of the Kazakh diaspora, living mainly in China, Mongolia, Russia and Uzbekistan, following the attainment of sovereign statehood.

Kazakhstan estimates the number of Kazakh diaspora at 2.5 to 3 million. Kazakhstan has followed the example of Germany and Israel by extending citizenship to Kazakh diaspora and seeking to facilitate their “return” to their ancestral homeland. Since 1992 it has set specific quotas for facilitating the return of ethnic Kazakhs from former Soviet republics, Mongolia, China and neighbouring states. Whereas in previous years the emphasis was on repatriating Kazakhs from Mongolia, the emphasis in the current year has been on facilitating the return of Kazakhs from Uzbekistan. The immigration quota for 2001 was 600 families, mainly from Iran (15), Pakistan (20), Afghanistan (20), China (40), Mongolia (20), Turkey (20), Russian Federation (71), Turkmenistan (32) and Uzbekistan (362). The new restrictions placed by the Uzbeks on movement of people and good across the border have particularly hit the Kazakhs living across the border in Uzbekistan. An amendment in Kazakh citizenship law made it possible for them to acquire Kazakh citizenship without renouncing Uzbek citizenship. According to Uzbek laws, a person renouncing Uzbek citizenship has to pay \$100 fee—an unaffordable amount for the average person.

In contrast to the Baltic states, which made citizenship conditional upon the knowledge of the respective state language, Kazakhstan offered the so-called “zero-option” for citizenship, in which anyone residing on a given territory at the moment of the Soviet collapse in 1991 was an automatic citizen of the new state. However, it has refused to accede to demands by Russians that they be allowed dual citizenship. The Kazakhstani state has reinstated dual citizenship for ethnic Kazakhs though not for any other ethnic groups.

Kazakh returnees who were forced to flee the country during the Soviet years are automatically entitled to Kazakh citizenship. The number of Kazakhs living outside of Kazakhstan in 1979 and 1989 censuses, respectively, was 1.26 million and 1.6 million, or about 20 percent of the total Kazakh population in the USSR. Of these 630,000 lived in the RFSFR, 808,000 in Uzbekistan, 90,000 in Turkmenistan, and 37,000 in Kyrgyzstan. According to pre-1991 data, there are about 1.2 million Kazakhs in China (the 2000 Chinese census results should reveal the current number) and about 150,000 in Mongolia.

It is estimated that approximately 190,000 Kazakhs, mainly from Mongolia, Turkey, Afghanistan and other CIS countries, have immigrated to Kazakhstan between 1992-1999.⁵ The repatriation quota for Kazakhs from Mongolia was 10,000 families in 1993, but it was gradually lowered to 7,000 in 1994, 5,000 in 1995, and 4,000 in 1996.⁶ A presidential decree set the repatriation quota to 500 families for the year 1999, instructing oblasts to find money to accommodate families. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, some 3500 families or 155,000 Kazakhs repatriated to their homeland, of these 85,000 were from the CIS countries and 62,000 from Mongolia. An important motivation behind their repatriation was to enhance the number of pure Kazakh-speakers in the country. Generally lacking the linguistic skills (knowledge of Russian, including Cyrillic script in which Kazakh is written) or connections to find their way through, the repatriates often encounter a lukewarm response by neighbours. They also have to fight an uphill bureaucratic battle, having to wait much longer before obtaining registration cards and Kazakhstani passports. Protracted delays in processing paperwork in order to obtain citizenship have deterred their immigration; only about 10 percent of these migrants have managed to obtain passports although they are formally entitled to Kazakh citizenship.⁷ Various reports suggest that many of the repatriated families lack proper housing and have little choice in selecting the place they want to live. As a result, about 10-15 percent of the families have gone back to Mongolia.⁸

It is too early to assess a visible effect of the returnee diaspora on ethnic or political landscape of the country. Kazakhs from other former Soviet republics on the whole are better integrated than those from outside as the latter lack facility in Russian or ability to read Cyrillic script in which Kazakh is written. The initial euphoria over the return of ethnic kin from across the borders has been dampened by financial constraints as well by the cultural and social divide between the native and

⁵ <http://www.humanrights-usa.net/report/kazakhstan.html>

⁶ Statistics provided by International Organization for Migration.

http://www.iom.int/iom/Publications/books_studies_surveys/Kazakhstan.htm

⁷ <http://www.humanrights-usa.net/report/kazakhstan.html>

⁸ http://www.iom.int/iom/Publications/books_studies_surveys/Kazakhstan.htm

returnee Kazakhs. The tension between the expected demographic gains and the reality of economic costs of supporting migrants is becoming ever more stark. There are few rich and successful Kazakhs desirous of returning home. Repatriates, mainly from Mongolia, Turkey, and Afghanistan, tend to be poor, less educated and less skilled. There has been no significant return of Kazakhs living in Xinjiang in China to Kazakhstan. Kazakh in China desirous of migrating to Kazakhstan are dissuaded not only by obstacles encountered from the Chinese side, but also lack of familiarity with the Cyrillic script (Arabic script is used by Uighurs and Kazakhs in Xinjiang).

Potential for inter-ethnic conflict?

There has been no historical pattern of conflicts between Russians (or Slavs) and Kazakhs (or other Muslim groups), although numerous works written in 1990s warned of such a conflict (Khazanov 1995, Chinn and Kaiser 1995). An empirical survey of major conflicts in Central Asia over the last 20 years suggests that almost all major ethnic conflicts have either occurred between various Muslim groups (the Osh conflict in 1990 between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in Kyrgyzstan, the conflicts between Meskhetian Turks and Uzbeks in the Fergana valley in Uzbekistan in 1989) or between the titular nationality and a more recent migrant community (the clashes in Novyi Uzen in Kazakhstan in 1989 between Kazakhs and various itinerant workers from the North Caucasus).

Crude ethnic and racial stereotyping, a carry-over from the Soviet times, is common and widespread. For instance, Chinese traders are routinely blamed for bringing “shoddy” products and seen as “taking over” the country through trade as well through demographic influx. In several parts of Kazakhstan, local traders have urged protection from the government authorities and often protested and raided Chinese shops for selling cheap goods and thus controlling most of the local trade. Chinese embassy protested against the rampant stereotyping and prejudice. It is widely recognised that Chinese traders and local police officials have close ties, which compounds the task of obtaining an accurate number of Chinese traders practically maintaining residency in Kazakhstan. Informal estimates suggest that there are 50,000 such settlers in Almaty alone. Equally widespread are common perceptions of Chinese men routinely marrying local Kazakh women in order to obtain residency papers as well as promoting a “creeping colonization” of the Kazakhs though no hard evidence exists. Such stereotyping is reinforced by the perception of Kazakhstan’s economic dependence on China. China has already taken over Russia as Kazakhstan’s largest trading partner.

Nationalization of Education and History

Since the declaration of Kazakh as the state language, efforts have been under way to promote education in Kazakh in schools and universities. Official data suggest a 28.5% increase in the number of monolingual Kazakh-medium secondary schools in the period 1989-1996 and a 37% drop in the number of Russian-medium schools in the same period (Nauryzbai 1997). Between 1992 and 1996 in institutes of higher learning, the proportion of Kazakh-medium students rose from 22.1% to 30.9%.

The quality of instruction in the Kazakh language sections is poor given a dearth of Kazakh-medium specialists as well as absence of good quality textbooks and academic or technical literature in Kazakh. Almost all textbooks are translations from

Russian or English. Many of the translations are done by under-qualified staff and do not have a standardized technical or scientific vocabulary. As the state-funded universities tend to favour students of Kazakh nationality, especially those desirous of studying in Kazakh medium sections, more qualified students, irrespective of ethnic background, have opted to study in a quickly proliferating network of private institutes for a better quality education that comes with a price.

According to an informant in the Institute of History and Ethnography, the institute's director, a Kazakh nationalist who enjoyed presidential patronage, issued an instruction to researchers to trace the roots of Kazakh statehood in the Sak period in the first millennium BC). The aim was to establish "ancient" roots of Kazakh statehood and a pre-existing sense of national and state identity among Kazakhs.

The new history of Kazakhstan, taught in school and portrayed in museums, downplays or ignores the multiethnic heritage of Kazakhstan and seeks to portray it as a Kazakh state all through its history. The exhibits in the new museum (called the Cultural Centre of the President), the ethnographic museum in Kazakhstan, the exhibits in the newly-constructed modern building of the Eurasian University in Astana as well as numerous history textbooks mark growing efforts to show the central place of Kazakhs in world civilization. Military and political accomplishments of various Turkic tribes and other people who inhabited present day territories of Kazakhstan are attributed to Kazakh people.

Conclusion

The Kazakhstani case shows how the state elites have as so justified remedial action favouring the Kazakhs by framing the language issue in terms of justice and survival of the titular group. By providing minorities with symbolic support but at the same time depriving them of any institutional or legal framework for organization, the state has sought to deter any form of direct ethnic competition or mobilization. Covert discrimination against Russians has not evoked resistance primarily because Russians as a group remain deeply acculturated into seeing themselves as civilizationally superior and do not covet an inclusion in the ethnic hierarchy. The emigration of Russian-speakers, as well as the political disempowerment of non-titular groups have accelerated the transformation of Kazakhstan into a Kazakh national state. Ethnic 'stability' has come at a high cost to the principle of ethnic equality and pluralism.

Although Kazakhstan has managed to steer clear of conflict along ethnic lines, the top-down management of ethnic relations has exacerbated a deep sense of alienation of the citizenry from the state, bringing about a massive population flight and a steady deterioration of the quality of life and norms governing public sphere. The 1999 census states the population to be 14.9 million, down from 16.7 million in 1989, and declining further. Such a high drop in population is especially alarming for a country that has not been subject to any ethnic turmoil or civil strife and has taken pride in preserving ethnic 'stability'.

The development of democratic institutions and representation of minorities through elections is a critical requirement for safeguarding interests of various ethnic groups in any multiethnic system. The ideological legacy of Soviet nationalities theory, especially its penchant with 'stability' and avoidance of any form of ethnic conflict is further compounded by the growing authoritarianism of the Nazarbaev

regime. To some extent the Kazakhstani state has managed to coopt proposals for minority representation by the OSCE and other Western institutions into a top-down system of ethnic management. However, such measures have so far enhanced widespread apathy and distrust of the regime and led minorities to pursue their survival by avoiding or bypassing the state structure.

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ⁱ Among the Muslim groups, only Bashkirs (83.4) and Tatars (82.2 percent) were ahead of the Kazakhs in 1989 in proficiency in Russian as the second language. These figures are from Kaiser (1994: 290-91, 276-77).

ⁱⁱ David Laitin, Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Population in the Near-Abroad, Ithaca, NY, 1998.

ⁱⁱⁱ Also available on [http://eurasia.org.ru/2000/ka_press\)12_15_ka_nan.html](http://eurasia.org.ru/2000/ka_press)12_15_ka_nan.html)

^{iv} Author's interview (name withheld), Almay, August 1999.