

**NATION BUILDING POLICIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON
THE RUSSIAN MINORITY IN POST-SOVIET
KAZAKHSTAN**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
OF
MIDDLE EAST TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**

BY

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**IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
EURASIAN STUDIES**

SEPTEMBER 2006

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ABSTRACT

NATION BUILDING POLICIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE RUSSIAN MINORITY IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN

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M. Sc., Eurasian Studies

Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pınar Akçalı

September 2006, 92 pages

The objective of this thesis is to examine the impact of nation building policies over the Russian minority in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. In order to do so, the thesis first examines the Soviet nationality policies in general and their practice in Kazakhstan in particular. Second, the thesis examines the impact of the post-Soviet nation building policies over the Russians in Kazakhstan by focusing on five major issues: political elites, state planning and recruitment policy, language policy and rewriting of history, issue of citizenship and the relocation of the state capital. As a result, the thesis argues that, the post-Soviet nation building policies of Kazakhstan have overall had a negative impact over the Russian minority living in the republic. It is argued that this negative impact is mostly visible in the areas employment, and social and cultural spheres. In addition, the thesis also argues that opponents of Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, both Russian and Kazakh, have largely been curbed by the Kazakh government.

Keywords: Nation building, Kazakhstan, Russian minority

ÖZ

SOVYET SONRASI KAZAKİSTAN’DA ULUS OLUŞTURMA POLİTİKALARI VE BUNLARIN RUS AZINLIK ÜZERİNE ETKİLERİ

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Yüksek Lisans, Avrasya Çalışmaları

Tez Yöneticisi: Doç. Dr. Pınar Akçalı

Eylül 2006, 92 sayfa

Bu tezin amacı Sovyet sonrası Kazakistan’da ulus oluşturma politikalarının Rus azınlık üzerine etkilerini incelemektir. Bu bağlamda tezde, öncelikle genel olarak Sovyet milliyetler politikaları ve özel olarak da bu politikaların Kazakistan’daki uygulamaları incelenmektedir. İkinci olarak, tez, Sovyet sonrası ulus oluşturma politikalarının Kazakistan’daki Ruslar üzerine etkilerini beş ana konuya odaklanarak incelemektedir: siyasi elitler, devletin planlama ve istihdam politikaları, dil politikası ve tarihin yeniden yazılması, vatandaşlık sorunu ve başkentin yerinin değiştirilmesi. Sonuç olarak, bu tez Sovyet sonrası Kazakistan’ın ulus oluşturma politikalarının genel olarak Rus azınlık üzerinde olumsuz etkisi olduğunu iddia etmektedir. Bu olumsuz etkinin en çok istihdam ile sosyal ve kültürel alanlarda görünür olduğu da ayrıca belirtilmektedir. Son olarak, tez, Kazakistan Devlet Başkanı Nursultan Nazarbaev karşıtlarının (hem Rus, hem Kazak) Kazak yönetimi tarafından büyük ölçüde kısıtlandığını iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Ulus oluşturma, Kazakistan, Rus Azınlık

To My Family

Aileme

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, I wish to thank the supervisor of this thesis, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Pınar Akçalı, for her continuous support, generous assistance, guidance and patience from the beginning to the end of this study. I also want to thank to the members of my examining committee, Assist. Prof. Dr. Ayça Ergun and Dr. İpek Eren for their valuable contributions and comments. I want to express my special thanks to my cousin Mustafa Özbaş for his continuous support and encouragement. I also wish to acknowledge my deepest gratitude to my family who was always there for me when I needed.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was a total surprise for the whole world. Ironically, it was also a major surprise for some of the republics forming the very Union itself. Among these, the five Central Asian republics namely, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were caught completely unprepared for this new challenging era.

These Central Asian states, which had all been formed during the reign of the Soviet Union, suddenly found themselves in the international arena as sovereign independent states. Hence, this unexpected independence rapidly brought with itself major changes to every dimension of life in the republics. The implications of this development within the republics and the post-Soviet atmosphere of nationalism pushed the titular elites and to a certain extent the masses, to revise, redefine and build nation-states.

Unlike most of the other ex-Soviet states, in Kazakhstan the feelings of enthusiasm and eagerness to build a new Kazakh state for Kazakh people with Kazakh culture, Kazakh customs and Kazakh way of life had to be curbed soon after they arose due to the realities of the peculiar ethnic structure of the country. The most prominent feature of this peculiarity was probably Kazakhs' constituting a minority in their own titular republic at the

time of independence.¹ This imbalance persisted for a long period of time after independence and could only slightly change over time.

The ethnic imbalance in Kazakhstan had emerged as a direct consequence of the Tsarist and Soviet rule, which changed the republic's demographic structure by a double division. This division is first an ethnic one between the Slavic, mainly Russian, population and the Kazakh population, and secondly it is a geographical one overlapping and underlying this ethnic division. Although there has been a large out-migration of Russians in the post-Soviet period, Slavs still make up the majority of the population in the north while the Kazakhs comprise the majority in the south of the republic.²

At the time of independence President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, had the challenging task of nation-building in such an ethnically diverse society.³ In order to reach this goal, President Nazarbaev had basically two

¹ In 1989, Russians constituted about 37.8 percent of the population in Kazakhstan while the Kazaks constituted about 39.7 per cent. The difference between the numbers of two populations was about only three hundred thousand people. Peter Sinnott, "Population Politics in Kazakhstan," *Journal of International Affairs* 56, no. 2 (2003): p. 105.

² John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p. 112.

³ Kazakhstan comprises more than one hundred different ethnic groups. (Gengchen Liu, "Ethnic Harmony and Conflicts in Central Asia: Origins and Policies," in *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders : Chinese and Russian Perspectives of the Central Asian Conundrum*, ed. Yongjin Zhang and Rouben Azizian (New York: St. Martin's Press in association with St. Antony's College Oxford, 1998), p.74). In 1989, other than Kazaks and Russians who together constituted 77.5 per cent of the society, there were numerous ethnic groups. Among these, Germans constituted 5.8%, Ukrainians 5.4 per cent, Uzbeks 2 per cent, Tatars 2 per cent, Uighurs 1.1 per cent, Belarussians 1.1 per cent, Azerbaijanis 0.6 per cent, Polish 0.4 per cent, Turks 0.3 per cent, Chechens 0.3 per cent and Greeks 0.3 per cent of the society respectively. (Sinnott: p. 105.)

options lying in front of him. He would either accept this extraordinary demographic situation of Kazakhstan as it was, and would develop future policies accordingly, or would try to alter the ethnic structure of the country at the expense of the Slavic population. This first option necessitated the conditions for a more democratic, inclusive and pluralist Kazakhstan. The second option, on the other hand, had the risk of serious repercussions due to the country's dependence on the qualified Slavic labor force in many key professional sectors such as public health, engineering, and education. Thus, the second option could only be realized in a timeline of a few generations in order not to stimulate the emigration of the Slavic population, which would be to the detriment of the country if it happened sooner. What is more, choosing the second option would also affect the balance of powers in internal politics. Olcott indicates the following:⁴

While Nazarbaev got the support of most Kazakhs because of his ethnic identity, most Russians saw him as a figure of prominence from the multi-ethnic Soviet past, who could be counted on to be more sympathetic to their 'Russianness' than would any possible successor.

At this point, Shirin Akiner describes these two options as 'Kazakh nation-building' and 'Kazakh state-building.'⁵ Akiner underlines that the term 'Kazakh nation-building' carries an ethnic tone referring to Kazakhs as an

⁴ Martha Brill Olcott, "Democratization and the Growth of Political Participation," in *Conflict, Cleavage, and Change in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, ed. Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (Cambridge, U.K. ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 213.

⁵ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity : From Tribe to Nation-State* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs Russian and CIS Programme, 1995), p. 1.

ethnic groups and indicating an ethnically dominated nation-building strategy while the term 'Kazakh state-building' addresses to and includes all the people living in Kazakhstan without any ethnic connotations.⁶ Therefore, this awkward situation put President Nazarbaev in a dilemma in which he had to choose between responding to the aspirations of the Kazakhs (Kazakh nation-building) on the one hand and maintaining the immediate welfare of the country (Kazakh state-building) on the other.

However, Nazarbaev seems to have opted for a third option, which is an oscillating position between these two options. This hybrid policy of Nazarbaev can be called, as Edward Schatz argues, 'Kazakh way of internationalism'. Schatz states the following:⁷

... just as Soviet-era internationalism ultimately had a Russian face (holding a privileged position for ethnic Russians in the evolutionary march toward the 'bright future'), post-Soviet Kazakh state ideology had a Kazakh face, singling out Kazakhs for linguistic, demographic, political and cultural redress.

Shirin Akiner also underlines, "Two trends are emerging in Kazakh society: one is nationalist, the other 'internationalist' (in the Soviet sense of harmonious inter-ethnic relations) in orientation."⁸ She further argues that "However, in both the public and the private spheres, at government level

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Edward A. D. Schatz, "The Politics of Multiple Identities: Lineage and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan," *Europe-Asia Studies* 52, no. 3 (2000): p. 492.

⁸ Akiner, p. 80.

and at the level of the individual, there is an almost schizophrenic oscillation between these two positions.”⁹

So, it is the objective of this thesis to look more closely into this ‘Kazakh way of internationalism’ or the nation-building policies the Kazakh government has adopted in the post-Soviet period and try to shed light on how these policies affected the Russian population in the republic. Therefore, the research topic of this thesis is “Nation building policies and their impact on the Russian minority in post-Soviet Kazakhstan”. This study will be an attempt to examine the negative and positive aspects of these policies over the Russian population; and discuss and try to analyze whether these policies have added to the exclusion or the inclusion of the Russians in Kazakhstan.

Undertaking such a study seems to have crucial importance since the findings of this study may help to understand the policies, which would facilitate the governance of ethnic diversity more constructively in multi-ethnic societies. What is more, further development of such an insight stands crucial for Central Asia in general and Kazakhstan in particular due to the highly multi-ethnic character of societies in the region. In the case of Kazakhstan, the challenging ethnic make-up of the republic has been indicated as the biggest hardship the country has been faced with since independence. This hardship has been a major threat that undermines both stability and prosperity of the

⁹ Ibid.

republic. Therefore, understanding the nation-building policies in the country and their impact on Russians, who make up the largest ethnic group after the Kazakhs, stands as a fundamental issue to be dealt with.

For purposes of analysis, this thesis is divided into four main chapters. The first chapter, in addition to introducing the research topic, will undertake a review of the academic literature on nation-building policies in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

In the second chapter, the thesis will examine the legacy of the Soviet nationalities policy in Kazakhstan. Examining this period is critical since effects of nation-building policies in the post-Soviet period may only be understood within a context of the previous policies adopted during the Soviet reign. In order to do this, the second chapter will first examine the Soviet nationality policies in general and then analyze how these policies shaped Kazakhstan in particular from the very foundation until the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

In the third chapter, nation-building policies in the post-Soviet period will be put forth and their impact on the Russian minority will be analyzed. This will be undertaken by seeking answers to specific questions under the following five topics:

- i) **Political elites:** Who holds the political power? Which groups are the most influential in the political sphere? Are the policies in

place promote or discourage political participation of the Russian minority?

- ii) **State planning and recruitment policy:** What kind of a state planning and recruitment policy is in place? Does this policy promote equal opportunities for all ethnic groups particularly the Russian minority?
- iii) **Language policy and rewriting of history:** What kind of actions have been taken concerning the language issue? Does the language policy have an inclusive or exclusive role? How does the rewriting of history affect the Russian minority?
- iv) **Issue of citizenship:** How has the issue of citizenship been used as an instrument for nation-building policies? What kind of implications does it have on the Russian minority?
- v) **Relocation of state capital from Almaty to Akmola (later named as Astana):** Why has the capital been moved from Almaty to Astana? What kind of role does it have in terms of nation-building policies? How has this affected the Russian minority?

Lastly, in the fourth and concluding chapter, the thesis will evaluate the nation-building policies of the Nazarbaev administration in Kazakhstan in the post-Soviet era and the impact of these policies on the Russian minority in the republic. Based on this evaluation, this concluding chapter will try to answer the question of whether the nation-building policies practiced in

Kazakhstan are exclusionist or inclusionist in the case of the Russians living in the republic.

1.1. Methodology

This thesis will utilize the qualitative case study method. This method provides the researcher with the opportunity to conduct in-depth analysis over a single unit.¹⁰ According to Yin, “In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.”¹¹

In social science research, the case study method is preferred in “examining contemporary events, but when the relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated.”¹² This is in line with the research question of the thesis which examines the impact of post-Soviet nation-building policies over the Russian minority in Kazakhstan.

The research for this thesis will be conducted in secondary resources including articles, books and electronic sources available in English. It should

¹⁰ John Gerring, "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?," *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 2 (2004): p. 345.

¹¹ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research : Design and Methods*, 2nd ed., Applied Social Research Methods Series ; V. 5 (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), p. 13.

¹² Ibid., p. 8.

be noted that this is an important limitation for the study as there is extensive literature on Kazakhstan in Russian language.

1.2. Literature Review

This section will examine the academic literature in the field with regard to the research topic, “The impact of nation-building policies on the Russian minority in post-Soviet Kazakhstan” Therefore, this section will first try to provide an overall picture of the state of the academic work in relation to the research topic and then position the topic of this thesis within the related academic literature.

According to its focus, the academic literature used in this thesis, which examines the nation-building policies in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, may be grouped into three broad categories. The first category focuses on the potential for ethnic conflict in Kazakhstan and conducts analysis through the perspective of ethnic problems. The second category examines the identity transformation for both Kazakhs and Russians. Lastly, the third category examines post-Soviet Kazakhstan by analyzing the policies adopted by the Kazakh state to promote new identities such as ‘Kazakh’, ‘Kazakhstani’ or ‘Eurasian’.

1.2.1 The Potential for Ethnic Conflict and Perspective of Ethnic Problems

The majority of scholars in this first category¹³ stress the extremely challenging ethnic make-up of the Kazakh population in relation to the nation-building efforts of the Kazakh state. These scholars acknowledge this difficult ethnic situation, and there is a prevailing tendency to interpret this in a highly pessimistic fashion.

Lieven and McGarry describe the ethnic relations in Kazakhstan as a “bubbling volcano.”¹⁴ They argue that “Potentially the most dangerous dispute in the region [Central Asia] is between the Kazakhs and the Russians.”¹⁵ Parallel to the argument of Lieven and McGarry, Bremmer underlines that concerning ethnic problems, Kazakhstan has been faced with one of the most difficult situations compared to other post-Soviet republics. Bremmer stresses the fact that Kazakhstan has a Russian population which is

¹³ See for example, Ian Bremmer, "Nazarbaev and the North - State-Building and Ethnic-Relations in Kazakhstan," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17, no. 4 (1994).; Jiger Janabel, "When National Ambition Conflicts with Reality: Studies on Kazakhstan's Ethnic Relations," *Central Asian Survey* 15, no. 1 (1996).; Anatoly M. Khazanov, "The Ethnic Problems of Contemporary Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Survey* 14, no. 2 (1995).; Algis Prazauskas, "Ethnopolitical Issues and the Emergence of Nation-States in Central Asia," in *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders : Chinese and Russian Perspectives of the Central Asian Conundrum*, ed. Yongjin Zhang and Rouben Azizian (New York: St. Martin's Press in association with St. Antony's College Oxford, 1998).; Edward A. D. Schatz, "Framing Strategies and Non-Conflict in Multi-Ethnic Kazakhstan," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 6, no. 2 (2000).; Richard L. Wolfel, "North to Astana: Nationalistic Motives for the Movement of the Kazakh(Stani) Capital," *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 3 (2002).

¹⁴ Dominic Lieven and John McGarry, "Ethnic Conflict in the Soviet Union and Its Successor States," in *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation : Case Studies of Protracted Ethnic Conflicts*, ed. John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 74.

¹⁵ Ibid.

as large as the Kazakh population in the republic and this makes it extremely complicated for Kazakh President Nazarbaev to carry out any nation-building policies. Bremmer also points out that the multi-ethnic structure of Kazakhstan has become more and more fragmented every passing day rather than getting closer to each other.¹⁶ Lastly, Bremmer argues that "... an outlook for ethnic relations in northern Kazakhstan, although not without hope, is none the less pessimistic."¹⁷ He further states that "On both sides [Russians and the Kazakh government] the attitude appears to be one of digging in as opposed to reaching out; a compromise seems as far away as ever."¹⁸

Similarly, Fuller notes that the Russian minority issue in Kazakhstan is almost impossible to be resolved without Kazakhstan's giving away the northern part of the republic which is predominantly populated by the Russian population.¹⁹ Olivier Roy supports Fuller's statement and argues that "the situation in Kazakhstan is extremely fragile and at the mercy of sudden worsenings of ethnic tensions. These seem more or less inevitable."²⁰ Roy states that "In order to defuse them [ethnic tensions] it would be necessary to

¹⁶ Bremmer: p. 619.

¹⁷ Ibid.: pp. 632-3.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Graham E. Fuller, *Central Asia: The New Geopolitics* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1992), p.59.

²⁰ Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 192.

give the Russians autonomy within a federal framework, which would almost certainly initiate a process of gradual partition.”²¹ Szayna also adds to this by stating that “Depending on the evolution of domestic Russian politics, the millions of Russians and Russophones in northern Kazakhstan could emerge as a secessionist group supported by Russia.”²² Likewise, according to Shirin Akiner, “If narrowly nationalistic sentiments come to predominate, they will inevitably lead to ethnic confrontation, and possibly even to the dismemberment of the state.”²³

1.2.2 Identity Transformation for Kazakhs and Russians

In the literature that focuses on identity issues, the majority of the writers²⁴ acknowledge that the unexpected independence of Kazakhstan has been a traumatic experience for the Russians living in Kazakhstan. For example, according to Olcott, “Before the break-up of the Soviet Union, most local

²¹ Ibid.

²² Thomas S. Szayna, "Potential for Ethnic Conflict in the Caspian Region," in *Faultlines of Conflict in Central Asia and the South Caucasus : Implications for the U.S. Army*, ed. Olga Oliker and Thomas S. Szayna (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Arroyo Center, 2003), p. 177.

²³ Akiner, p. 81. However, she also states that “If a more tolerant attitude prevails, one which allows for the full expression of Kazakh aspirations but without reducing non-Kazakhs to the status of second-class citizens, then there is every possibility that the different groups will succeed in working together for their mutual benefit,” *ibid.*

²⁴ Such as P. Kolsto, "The New Russian Diaspora - an Identity of Its Own? Possible Identity Trajectories for Russians in the Former Soviet Republic," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19, no. 3 (1996).; Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1995).; W. Fierman, "Language and Identity in Kazakhstan - Formulations in Policy Documents 1987-1997," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31, no. 2 (1998).; Jacob M. Landau and Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, *Politics of Language in the Ex-Soviet Muslim States : Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

Russians identified with Kazakhstan primarily through territory, lacking both an ethnic and a political content.”²⁵

Pal Kolsto argues that Russians living outside the Russian Federation have been experiencing the most severe post-Soviet identity crisis. The new circumstances compel the Russians construct a new identity and Kolsto argues that they have three different identity choices to opt for: “the dominant culture in the external homeland (=Russia); development of a new but still basically Russian self-understanding; and identification with the dominant culture in the state of residence (=the new nationalizing state).”²⁶ On the other hand, on the side of the Kazakhs, Janabel argues, “The Kazakhs still see the majority of the Russian population as the representatives of RSFSR sent to this Central Asia[n] republic. They do not conceal their distrust of the Russians.”²⁷

In this literature, it is emphasized that changing circumstances have been perceived in different ways by both Kazakhs and Russians. For instance, according to Olcott the Russians and Kazakhs view the birth of the independent Kazakh state in totally antithetical ways. Olcott argues that “... to the Kazakhs, the creation of Kazakhstan is the fulfillment of a dream that

²⁵ Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, p. 288.

²⁶ Kolsto: pp. 610-3.

²⁷ Janabel: p. 9.

they had not even dared entertain, where as Kazakhstan's Slavic population generally views it as a cruel twist of fate."²⁸

The literature on identity issues seems to have a particular focus on the language issue. The majority of writers have underlined the crucial role of language with regard to identity. Horowitz argues that language issue has a strong symbolic dimension because "it accomplishes a double linkage. It links political claims to ownership with psychological demands for the affirmation of group worth, and ties this aggregate matter of group status to outright careerism, thereby binding elite material interests to mass concerns."²⁹ Likewise, Olcott argues the following:³⁰

At independence less than 1 percent of Russians in the republic knew Kazakh. Independence has given this identity [being Russian] a political dimension, but the Russians' identification still lacks an ethnic dimension. Kazakhstan's Russians want to enjoy the same status as Kazakhstan's Kazakhs and Russia's Russians. They argue that the Russian language should be fully equal to the Kazakh language and that nationality should play no role in the republic's public life.

According to Olcott, "To the Kazakhs, the Russians must either accept that they are now subjects of a Kazakh-dominated state and so teach their children Kazakh, live on streets renamed to honor Kazakh heroes, send their sons to

²⁸ Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, p. 289.

²⁹ Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 220.

³⁰ Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, p. 288.

the Kazakh army, and take Kazakh citizenship, or return to Russia, their historic homeland across the border.”³¹

1.2.1 Policies Adopted by the State to Promote New Identities

The scholars in the third category³² tend to focus on the policies adopted by the Kazakh state to promote new identities in the post-Soviet period. It is one of the main arguments in this literature that Kazakh government has followed policies which have favored Kazakhs over the other ethnic groups so far.

For instance, Edmunds argues the following.³³

Constitutionally, Kazakhstan is defined very clearly as a unitary state, the purpose of which is to provide a vehicle for the self-determination of the Kazakh nation. This constitutional definition represents a clear choice of an ethnic over a civic identity for the Kazakh state, though constitutional provisions are made guaranteeing equal rights to all citizens of Kazakhstan.

Bremmer also addresses the ethnic dimension of the government policies and states that “Bitterness also thrives over what are perceived to be arbitrary and disproportionate increases of Kazakhs in a multiplicity of local professions, from higher education and industry to the city’s soccer team.”³⁴ Bremmer

³¹ Ibid.

³² Such as Janabel, David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation : The Russian-Speaking Populations in the near Abroad*, The Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998).; Timothy Edmunds, "Power and Powerlessness in Kazakstani Society: Ethnic Problems in Perspective," *Central Asian Survey* 17, no. 3 (1998).

³³ Edmunds: p. 463.

³⁴ Bremmer: p. 625.

further states that “The primary concern, of course, is that these positions are being filled at the expense of the Russians.”³⁵

These two arguments by Edmunds and Bremmer are also supported by Laitin, who argues that “Kazakh policy since independence in regard to Russians is one of formal protection, with a sotto voce message that there can be no future for Russians in Kazakh political life.”³⁶

Language policy has also been an important instrument for the Kazakh state in its nation-building efforts. Concerning the language policy of the Kazakh state, Tishkov argues the following:³⁷

To the Russians, it seems as if they are being ‘ousted’ from prestigious jobs and ‘forced’ out of the republics in which they live. The enactment of the laws on language and citizenship the dwindling of opportunities for children to get schooling in their mother tongue, anti-Russian nationalistic rhetoric and actions of local radicals and fundamentalists evoke painful psychological reactions among the Russians.

On the other hand, Fierman argues that “The question of Kazakhstan’s identity has also been reflected in the issues of linguistic job requirements and requirements for entrance into higher education.”³⁸ Fierman states that “Nation-statists tend to support rules which require knowledge of Kazakh for

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Laitin, p. 99.

³⁷ V. Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and Conflict in and after the Soviet Union: The Mind Aflame* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 128.

³⁸ Fierman: p. 181.

these purposes, but they are rejected by civic-statists. ... These issues have caused fierce debates between the two sides.”³⁹

With regard to the literature produced on the topic in all three categories, it is possible to reach a general dominant view. The majority of the literature in all three categories indicate overall that post-Soviet nation-building policies in Kazakhstan have not been in the interest of the Russian population living in the republic. It is argued that Russians who used to have a privileged position during the Soviet reign have been deprived of this privileged status which has been taken over the Kazakh population in the post-Soviet period.

Therefore, this study will examine these nation-building policies more closely and try to identify and analyze the impact of various nation-building policies on the Russian minority in the republic. However, before that, the following chapter will provide background on the Soviet nationalities policy and how it shaped the ethnic structure of Kazakhstan before independence.

³⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

THE LEGACY OF THE SOVIET NATIONALITIES POLICY IN KAZAKHSTAN

The previous chapter has put forth the research topic as the impact of nation-building policies on the Russian minority in post Soviet Kazakhstan and discussed the current literature covering this topic. This chapter will provide a background on the Tsarist and the Soviet nationalities policy in general and its effects on Kazakhstan in particular with a focus on the changes in the ethnic composition of the republic.

In order to undertake this study, it is crucial to examine especially the Soviet nationalities policy in the first place due to the fact that although Soviet Union exists no more, the impact of the policies adopted during the seven decades of rule are still at work in Kazakhstan. The impact of these policies is evident in nearly every sphere of life in the republic; be it the economy, politics, geography, religion, language or demography.

This chapter is organized in two parts. The first part will discuss the different nationality policies developed during the Tsarist and the Soviet rule with a focus on the latter. Rather than analyzing the policies adopted one-by-one during the time of each leader, it will try to look from a broader perspective and try to develop a general approach. In this attempt, it will try to examine

different nationality policies by referring to their “affirmative” or “disintegrative” nature.⁴⁰ This part will also discuss the meaning of the term “nationality” in the Soviet context.

The second part will focus on the case of Kazakhstan and examine the Tsarist and Soviet policies adopted towards the republic. It will analyze the major actions taken by Moscow from the annexation of the steppe, the creation of the Kazakh ASSR to the collectivization campaign and the Virgin Lands scheme⁴¹. It will examine the trends in the demographic structure of Kazakhstan during the time of the Soviet rule. This part will argue that the major consequence of Soviet nationalities policy in Kazakhstan has been in its ethnic composition. This part will also study two peculiar features of the ethnic composition of the republic, which are the ethnic division of labor, also known as the ‘labor aristocracy’ and the political elites.

⁴⁰ Edward Allworth, "A Theory of Soviet Nationality Policies," in *Soviet Nationality Policies: Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR*, ed. Henry R. Huttenbach (London: Mansell, 1990), pp. 35-8.

⁴¹ Virgin Lands scheme refers to the Khrushchev era campaign which aimed to open up the vast areas of steppe in northern Kazakhstan and Siberia to agricultural use. Please, see page 37 for a detailed explanation.

2.1 Soviet Nationalities Policy: Treatment of Nationalities under Soviet Rule

Soviet Union was one of the most ethnically diverse states in history. For instance, in 1927, there were 172 nationalities which had been officially recognized by the Moscow administration.⁴²

Edward Schatz argues that one of the unique characteristics of both the Tsarist Russian Empire and the Soviet Union was that the processes of state-building and empire-building were undertaken together, in a parallel fashion.⁴³ Schatz states:⁴⁴

In the Slavic regions, and even more so in the vast peripheral territories, indigenous elites retained their ethnic markers as the regime entailed a strikingly multi-ethnic cast. But, such multi-ethnicity was always precarious, as those on the margins of this overland empire required profound incentives to become or remain loyal to the state. The Tsarist and Soviet elites therefore attempted to tread a line that combined assimilative and accommodative practices vis-à-vis ethnic minorities.

The highly multi-ethnic character of both the Tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union brought about the 'nationality question' which referred to the hardship of ruling different nationalities under one umbrella. Both before and during his time in power, Lenin was very much concerned with the nationality question, which gave birth to the so-called 'Leninist nationality policy'. The

⁴² Francine Hirsch, "The Soviet Union as a Work in Progress: Ethnographers and the Category Nationality in the 1926, 1937, 1939 Censuses," *Slavic Review* 56, no. 2 (1997): p. 255.

⁴³ Schatz, "Framing Strategies and Non-Conflict in Multi-Ethnic Kazakhstan," p. 73.

⁴⁴ Ibid.: pp. 73-4.

nationality policy Lenin put forth was not just a set of principles determining issues such as language policy or economic redistribution. It was rather a set of goals for social change based on Marxist assumptions regarding transition from capitalism to socialism.⁴⁵

Duncan argues that “Lenin, like Marx and Engels, favored the existence of a single unitary party for the workers of a particular state, irrespective of nationality.”⁴⁶ He further states that “Also like the founding fathers of Marxism, he believed that the right of nations to self-determination was subordinate to the class struggle.”⁴⁷

Lenin only supported the nationalism of the oppressed. He advocated the relationship between national democratic struggles and the socialist revolution. He claimed that the popular masses of the oppressed nations were the allies of the proletariat. It is important to note that on the national question, while most other Marxist writers saw only the economic, cultural or psychological dimension of the problem, Lenin added the issue of the right of political secession and the establishment of an independent nation state.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Gregory Gleason, "Leninist Nationality Policy: Its Source and Style," in *Soviet Nationality Policies: Ruling Ethnic Groups in the USSR*, ed. Henry R. Huttenbach (London: Mansell, 1990).

⁴⁶ Peter Duncan, "The USSR," in *Contemporary Minority Nationalism*, ed. Michael Watson (London ; New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 153.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Michael Löwy, "Marxists and the National Question," *New Left Review* March-April, no. 96 (1976).

After Lenin, Stalin made no distinction between Great-Russian oppressive nationalism in Tsarist times and the nationalism of oppressed nations. The underlying slogan of the Soviet treatment of nations during his era was “Socialist in content, nationalist in form”. This entailed that under the dictatorship of the proletariat, national cultures, particularly national languages, would be revived and supported while this policy would be used to promote the socialist ideology, its values and goals.⁴⁹ Therefore, in the 1920s and 1930s the Moscow administration promoted the use of languages other than Russian and formation of local national cadres in Soviet republics, a policy known as *korenizatsiia* or indigenization.⁵⁰ For this purpose, Suny states that the Moscow administration initiated the creation of alphabets for peoples who did not have written language and opened schools for peoples who did not have one. Suny argues that “... Soviet activists set out to create educational systems and literary languages for their peoples by selecting the dialect to be promoted and by systematizing, refining ... the lexicon”.⁵¹

Hélène Carrère d'Encausse argues that “Giving equal cultural rights to each nation was also thought of as a means to break up some large groups united by special bonds. Such was the case for the Moslem peoples of the Caucasus and Central Asia, who since the beginning of the century had been trying to

⁴⁹ Hélène Carrère D'encausse, *The Nationality Question in the Soviet Union and Russia* (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1995), pp. 22-3.

⁵⁰ Duncan, p. 154.

⁵¹ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Revenge of the Past : Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 102-3.

unite on the basis of common languages.”⁵² Pointing at different efforts of Central Asian people to unite under the Arabic language or a common Turkic language, d’Encausse argues that the Soviet promotion of national languages was used to undermine these efforts, as well. D’Encausse states the following:⁵³

... the Soviet regime thwarted these efforts [to unite under a common language], forcing each nation to use a language of its own. Cultural egalitarianism thus put an end to pan-Turkish and pan-Moslem dreams that would have pitted dangerously unwieldy communities and civilizations against the policy of centralism.

The Moscow administration would name these above mentioned set of policies as ‘internationalism’. Shatz argues that “This was a doctrine of interethnic harmony that implied integrationist tendencies both within and outside the USSR and that held a special position for ethnic Russians who were understood as the architects and the caretakers of the new socialist political order.”⁵⁴

Anatoly Khazanov argues that the nationalities policy, adopted by Moscow had brought various contradictions within itself. Khazanov argues, “Its [Soviet Nationalities Policy’s] goal was homogeneity and unification of the country’s ethnic groups on the basis of the Soviet Russian culture. However,

⁵² D’encausse, p. 22.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Schatz, "Framing Strategies and Non-Conflict in Multi-Ethnic Kazakhstan," pp. 73-4.

the ethnic structure of the state remained extremely rigid.”⁵⁵ Khazanov further states:⁵⁶

By making an ethnic affiliation ascriptive, directly connecting ethnicity with language and territory, and linking ethnic status with the degree of ethno-territorial autonomy, it has not helped to break down barriers between ethnicity and nation. At the same time, it facilitated an emergence of new intelligentsia in the non-Russian parts of the Union whose competitive advantage depends on their privileged positions there.

Yuri Slezkine argues that Soviet nationalities policy did not create at all any equal ranking for all the different nationalities within the Soviet Union.⁵⁷

Slezkine argues the following:

Contrary to Stalin’s statement, “all nations are sovereign and equal,” all nations were not treated as equals in practice for several reasons. For instance, all nations were not equal in size: there were small nations and there were large nations. All nations were not equal in their development, either: there were “backward” nations and there were “civilized” nations. Thirdly, all nations were not equal in their economic status: some were “oppressor nations” and some were “oppressed.”⁵⁸

Khazanov adds to Slezkine’s argument by stating that “As a result of the Soviet nationality policies, ethnic differences became more salient and more important than class differences. Thus, ethnic membership began to be

⁵⁵ Khazanov: p. 244.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994): p. 416.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

considered as the best leverage for social mobility and economic advancement.”⁵⁹

2.1.1 “Nationality” in the Soviet Context

In order to develop a better understanding of the Soviet nationalities policy, it is important to put forth the meaning of ‘nationality’ in the Soviet context. First, it is crucial to underline the difference between the Western and Soviet usage of the term ‘nationality’. In the western context when referred to one’s nationality, one’s citizenship to a state is implied and understood accordingly. However, in the Soviet context the term ‘nationality’ is used to denote ‘ethnicity’.⁶⁰ In the Western world, ‘ethnic groups’ are usually understood as minority groups while ethnicity and ethnic identification is socially real and ubiquitous in the Soviet context. So, in fact ‘Soviet nationalities policy’ implies ‘Soviet ethnic policy’ while the ‘nationality question’ is the ‘ethnic question’ in the USSR.⁶¹

Secondly, in the Soviet context the recognition of a ‘nationality’ depended on territory. It was not possible for a nationality to be recognized independent of an administrative territory of its own. Therefore, ‘no territory’ meant ‘no

⁵⁹ Khazanov: p. 259.

⁶⁰ Teodor Shanin, "Soviet Theories of Ethnicity: The Case of a Missing Term," *New Left Review* July-August, no. 158 (1986): p. 115.

⁶¹ Ibid.

nationality' in the Soviet system.⁶² Consequently, ethnic territorialisation was used extensively as means to 'create' nationalities while de-territorialisation was used to simply 'abolish' nationalities. For instance, in the case of deported nationalities, the first thing the Soviet authorities did was to abolish the administrative units of deported nationalities.⁶³

Ethnic territorialisation demonstrates a major contradiction within the rhetoric of the Soviet system, which emphasized the 'equality of nations'. Contrary to this rhetoric, in reality there was a strong hierarchy of nationalities in the USSR. The nationalities were designated to administrative units ranging from Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) and Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSRs) down to regions, oblasts, raions and eventually to officially non-delimited units.

It is possible to classify the nationality policies adopted by the Soviet state as 'affirmative' and 'disintegrative' policies. Affirmative policies were applied to create or strengthen certain nationalities, while disintegrative policies were applied to weaken or eliminate certain nationalities. It is interesting that both encouragement of nation building and eliminating nations could exist at the same time in the Soviet regime.⁶⁴

⁶² Robert Conquest, *Soviet Nationalities Policy in Practice* (London: Bodley Head, 1967).

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Allworth, pp. 35-8.

Affirmative policies included the actions, which aimed at establishing, reviving, encouraging, recognizing and preserving nationalities. It is possible to see the affirmative policies extensively at work in the 1920s when the ‘indigenization’ campaign started. The nationalities, the ones which were ‘recognized’ by the Soviet authorities, were encouraged to develop their own indigenous languages, literature and culture. Local party cadres were also tried to be filled by people from the local population. With regard to the ‘indigenization’ campaign, Conquest states the following:⁶⁵

... the Tenth Congress of the RKP passed a resolution to set up a wide network of courses and schools to provide professional and technical training as well as general education in the native languages. These courses were to provide local cadres of qualified workers and Soviet and Soviet and Party officials for all spheres of management.”⁶⁶ Conquest further argues that this policy aimed particularly towards the Central Asian republics.

Here, it is crucial to stress the importance of ‘recognition’ for a nationality in the Soviet system. In the Soviet Union, members of an unrecognized nationality did not have any right to claim any of the above-mentioned set of rights.⁶⁷

Disintegrative policies, on the other hand, included various actions such as unrecognition, nullification, internal exile, resettlement, assimilation, expulsion and ethnocide. The deportations of the Stalin era demonstrate a

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Conquest, p. 51.

⁶⁷ Allworth, pp. 35-8.

concrete example to the application of several of the disintegrative actions for breaking up certain nationalities. The treatment of deported nationalities is also considered in most of the Western literature as acts of genocide.⁶⁸

The internal passport system, introduced in the 1930s, constituted a cornerstone in the Soviet nationality policies. The 'fifth-line' of the internal passports indicated the nationality of Soviet citizens. This passport system can be considered as a combination of both affirmative and disintegrative policies. Nationalities of titular republics were the ones who benefited most from this system while the nationalities which had a 'deported' stamp on their passports were the ones who suffered most. The internal passport system played a crucial role in the Union's maintaining its rigid ethnic structure.⁶⁹

According to Suny, the nationality policies adopted by the Moscow administration had the ultimate aim of creating a single 'Soviet people'. However, contrary to this aim, Suny argues that the nationality policies "nourished the cultural uniqueness of distinct peoples. It thereby increased ethnic solidarity and national consciousness in the non-Russian republics..."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Tishkov, pp. 31-7.

⁷⁰ Suny, p. 130.

As a result, the Soviet nationality policies resulted in the intensification of ethnic attachments and social competition between different ethnic groups both within and across the republics of the Union including the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. The following section examines the way these ethnic attachments were shaped during both the Tsarist and the Soviet era and the features of ethnic relations particularly between Kazakhs and Russians.

2.2 The Case of Kazakhstan

The most visible impact of the Tsarist and later the Soviet Nationalities policies in Kazakhstan may be observed in the demographic and ethnic structure of the republic. The highly diverse ethnic make-up of the population of Kazakhstan is due to the continuous Slavic, particularly Russian, migration into the republic at the expense of the local population.

This section will put forth the case of Kazakhstan and how the ethnic structure changed over time in the republic under two main headings:

- 1) Background on the Tsarist rule in Kazakhstan
- 2) Soviet reign in Kazakhstan, particularly focusing on forced collectivization of agriculture and sedentarization, Virgin Lands scheme, resettlement of deported groups in Kazakhstan, labor aristocracy and political elites.

2.2.1 Background on the Tsarist Rule in Kazakhstan

While the Russian expansion into Kazakhstan goes back more than a century ago in historical perspective, the Russian influence had started to affect the Kazakhs as early as the late seventeenth century.⁷¹ Akiner argues the following:⁷²

The process [of Russian influence over the Kazakhs] began ... when individual Kazakh khans and sultans started to apply for Russian assistance or protection, ostensibly against the Dzhungars, but often also in order to strengthen themselves relative to other Kazakh leaders.”⁷³ Akiner states that Russian Tsars made use of this vulnerable situation of the Kazakhs and gradually increased their control over them.

Between the period of 1860-1880, Russian Empire steadily expanded its borders into Kazakhstan. As suggested by Liu:⁷⁴

Not only did Russian merchants swarm into Central Asia but there was also organized migration of Russians into the region. In Northern Kazakhstan, a large number of Russian settlements were set up in the late 19th century. By 1911, more than 1,5 million Russian peasant settlers had found their way into Kazakh steppes. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Imperial Russian government started a land reform in Russia, the purpose of which was to foster the interests of rich peasants. A large number of peasants in Russia were forced to sell their land and leave their homes. From 1906 to 1910, around 2,5 million Russian peasants moved to Central Asia and other remote areas of Imperial Russia.

The inflow of Russian peasants to the region was taking place at the expense of Kazakhs and the nomadic life style. According to Martha Brill Olcott, “In

⁷¹ Akiner, p. 21.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Liu, p. 74.

the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a constant struggle for land both within the Kazakh community and between Kazakhs and Russians.”⁷⁵ Concerning the land problem, Anatoly Khazanov states the following:⁷⁶

By 1913, about 150,000 hectares of the most fertile lands in Kazakhstan were appropriated by the Russian settlers, whose numbers increased from 533,915 (12,8 per cent of the whole population in Kazakhstan) in 1897, to about 1,5 million (30 per cent of the whole population) in 1917. Many Kazakh pastoral nomads were gradually driven out to the arid areas of Central and Southern Kazakhstan. This resulted in the overgrazing of the pastures they still possessed and in their impoverishment. Many Kazakhs had to migrate to other regions, settle on the land and cultivate crops, or even work for new colonists.

The Kazakh population in Kazakhstan experienced a very slow growth throughout the 19th century and the population fell by 9 per cent between 1902 and 1913. According to Khazanov, “Then followed the uprising of 1916⁷⁷, the turmoil years of the revolution and civil war, during which the Kazakhs suffered much from both sides, the Whites and the Reds, and the starvation of 1921-22.”⁷⁸ Khazanov further states that “All these events cost the Kazakhs hundreds of thousands of lives and resulted in a sharp decrease

⁷⁵ Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, p. 83.

⁷⁶ Khazanov: pp. 244-5.

⁷⁷ The 1916 Kazakh uprising took place during the World War I when the Tsarist Russian domination reached its peak and demanded the conscription of the Kazakh population. (Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, pp.118-9.)

⁷⁸ Khazanov: pp. 245-6.

in the country's Kazakh population. Their population fell from 91,4 per cent in 1850 to 57,1 per cent in 1926.”⁷⁹

2.2.2 Soviet Reign in Kazakhstan

As a result of Soviet policies of ethnic territorialization and national delimitation in Central Asia, the ‘Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan’ was created on 26 August 1920 as an autonomous republic within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). The initial name of the republic was ‘Kyrgyz ASSR’. This was changed as ‘Kazakh ASSR’ in April 1925. However, on 5 December 1936, Kazakhstan was given ‘union republic’ status, thus became the ‘Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic’. This alteration in the official status of Kazakhstan may be considered as an affirmative action towards the republic.⁸⁰

Changes in the ethnic structure of the population in Kazakhstan have taken on a new momentum during the Soviet reign in the republic. Table 1 demonstrates the ethnic trends in Kazakhstan between the years 1926 and 1989.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Bakhytnur Otarbaeva, "A Brief History of the Kazak People," *Nationalities Papers* 26, no. 3 (1998): p.427.

Table 1. Ethnic Trends in Kazakhstan

Ethnic	1926	1959	1970	1989
Kazakhs	3,713,300	2,787,300	4,234,100	6,534,600
	57,1%	30%	32,6%	39,7%
Russians	1,279,900	3,972,000	5,521,900	6,227,500
	19,6%	42,7%	42,5%	37,8%
Ukrainians	860,800	761,400	933,400	896,200
	13,2%	8,2%	7,2%	5,5%
Uzbeks	213,400	135,900	216,300	332,000
	3,2%	1,4%	1,7%	2,0%
Tatars	80,600	191,600	285,600	327,900
	1,2%	2,1%	2,2%	1,9%
Germans	51,100	660,000	858,000	957,500
	0,7%	7,1%	6,6%	5,8%
Others	5%	8,5%	7,2%	7,3%
Total	6,500,800	9,294,700	13,008,700	16,464,400
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Rafis Abazov, "Central Asia's Conflicting Legacy and Ethnic Policies: Revisiting a Crisis Zone of the Former USSR," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 5, no. 2 (1999): p. 63.

As can be seen from Table 1, in 1926 Kazakhs constituted about 57 per cent of the population in Kazakhstan while the Russians comprised only about 20 per cent. However, when one looks at the figures for 1959, it is possible to see that the population figure of Kazakhs is almost half the figure of 1926. It is possible to see that in the same period, the Russian population had more than doubled and made up almost 43 per cent of the society. When the figures for 1989 are taken into account, it is possible to see that Kazakhs with 39,7 per cent and Russians with 37,8 per cent comprise very close population proportions in the society.

So, from the 1930s through the 1970s Russians made up the largest ethnic group in Kazakhstan.⁸¹ Consequently, by 1989, the Russian community had existed in Kazakhstan since at least the 1890s and nearly half of the Russians living in Kazakhstan at the time were born there. The figures for native born and immigrants in the Russian population in Kazakhstan are demonstrated in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Native-born and Immigrants in the Russian Population in Kazakhstan
as Percentage of Total Russian Population in Kazakhstan

1979		1989	
Native-born	Immigrants	Native-born	Immigrants
40,3%	59,7%	46,8%	53,2%

Source: P. Kolsto, "The New Russian Diaspora - an Identity of Its Own? Possible Identity Trajectories for Russians in the Former Soviet Republic," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 19, no. 3 (1996), p. 625.

As can be seen in Table 2, the percentage of native-born Russians increased by about 7 per cent between 1979 and 1989. In the same period, the percentage of Russian immigrants declined by about 7 per cent.

Forced Collectivization of Agriculture and Sedentarization

In the early 1930s came the events of forced collectivization and the sedentarization of Kazakh nomads. As suggested by Khazanov:⁸²

In a few years, about 550,000 nomadic and semi-nomadic households were forced to settle, many in waterless regions where not only

⁸¹ Kolsto: p. 632.

⁸² Khazanov: p. 246.

their sheep in winter, which inevitably led to the decimation of their flocks. By 1930 the situation had become so desperate that there were armed uprisings in many parts of the country. Some of the insurrectionists later joined forces with the Turkmen *basmachi* in the south, while others fled abroad.⁸⁶

The policies of forced collectivization and denomadization caused widespread resistance among the Kazakhs. The Kazakhs saw forced collectivization as an attack against their traditional nomadic lifestyle. Especially, the nationalization of their herds, which had always been the most important symbol of wealth and prestige in the *aul*, the Kazakh household, was unacceptable. So, rather than giving their herds away to *sovkhozy*, Soviet state farms, many Kazakhs preferred to slaughter their own stock or tried to drive them into China. Those Kazakhs who resisted were killed or deported if they did not manage to migrate abroad. David Crowe argues that forced collectivization caused the occurrence of a man-made famine⁸⁷ that cost between 1-1,5 million lives in Kazakhstan. “The number of Kazakh households dropped by over 46 per cent between 1927 and 1933, while the number of ethnic Kazakhs declined by over 36 per cent between 1926 and 1939.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 45.

⁸⁷ ‘Man-made famine’ refers to the fact that the famine which occurred in the early 1930s in Kazakhstan was caused by the policies of the Moscow administration rather than natural factors.

⁸⁸ David M. Crowe, "The Kazaks of Kazakstan: The Struggle for Ethnic Identity and Nationhood," *Nationalities Papers* 26, no. 3 (1998): pp. 402-3.

Akiner states that during this period of turmoil, "... 200,000 Kazakhs fled into neighboring countries and stayed there (another 400,000 fled, but later returned) and 453,000 took refuge in neighboring Soviet republics, also to stay there permanently."⁸⁹ She further states that "Even in 1959, the Kazakh population in Kazakhstan still numbered some one million less than it had in 1926."⁹⁰ Therefore, the forced collectivization of agriculture and sedentarization policy of the Moscow administration resulted in a major decline in the Kazakh population. In the following years, this crucial decline in the population also played a key role in the Slavic population's outnumbering the Kazakhs in Kazakhstan.

Virgin Lands Scheme

Following the death of Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev came into power in the spring of 1953. Khrushchev strongly criticized the Stalinist policies of political oppression and blamed him for the economic inefficiency of the Soviet Union. As part of this general attempt to revive the stagnant Soviet economy, he introduced the "Virgin Lands" program which aimed to open up the vast areas of steppe in northern Kazakhstan and Siberia to agricultural use.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Akiner, p. 45.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Crowe: p. 404.

Martha Brill Olcott argues that Khrushchev's Virgin Lands campaign aimed at creating a new "breadbasket" out of the idle lands of Siberia and Kazakhstan. According to her, "these so-called Virgin Lands were underutilized from the perspective of Moscow, since the Kazakhs had for generations made use of them as pasturelands. As part of the program, large grains sovkhozy were built and staffed largely by Europeans, while displaced Kazakhs and their livestock were relocated on new livestock sovkhozy."⁹²

According to Khazanov, the Virgin Lands campaign resulted in the erosion of millions of hectares of Kazakh land. Through this campaign, there was a massive influx of immigrants from the European part of the USSR which amounted to a figure between 1,5 to 2 million new settlers.⁹³

Virgin Lands Scheme was a threshold for Kazakh history. Apart from the environmental disaster and misplacement of Kazakhs caused by this campaign, by 1959, the new wave of immigrants pushed the Russian percentage of Kazakhstan to over 42 percent of the republic's total population. At the time Kazakhs made up only 30 per cent of the total population and this development created the ironic situation of placing Kazakhs as a distinct minority within their own republic.⁹⁴

⁹² Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, p. 224.

⁹³ Khazanov: pp. 246-7.

⁹⁴ Crowe: pp. 405-6.

Resettlement of Deported Groups in Kazakhstan

In the 1930s and for the most part in the 1940s, Kazakhstan became one of the main territories for resettlement of various deported ethnic groups. Nahaylo and Swoboda state that “Stalin started deportations of whole national groupings or considerable parts of nations before the [Second World] war, obviously regarded non-Russian troops as unreliable in the war, and very shortly after its outbreak deported all ethnic Germans. The same fate awaited seven more entire nationalities which were accused of treason during the war.”⁹⁵ The deported groups included Poles, Koreans, Germans, Chechens, Ingush, Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, Greeks, and many others. Khazanov states that “By 1949, there were 820,165 exiles in Kazakhstan including 393,537 Germans, 302,526 Chechens and Ingush, 33,088 Karachai, 29,497 Meskhetian Turks and members of other ethnic minorities deported from Georgia.”⁹⁶

By 1962, the number of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan dropped to as low as 29% of the total population. However, during the last three decades their overall proportion in the republic began to increase again because of their high birth-rate coupled with a decline in the incoming non-indigenous groups, particularly the Russians.⁹⁷ Khazanov argues the following:⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion : A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR* (London: H. Hamilton, 1990), p. 96.

⁹⁶ Khazanov: p. 247.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

At the end of the 1970s, when the Moscow leadership became worried about the emigration of Soviet Germans to West Germany, it tried to solve this problem at Kazakh expense. Moscow toyed with plans to create a German autonomous formation in Kazakhstan, on the territory of Tselinograd oblast. However, the Kazakh leadership prevented this formation by leaking this information to the public. Anti-German rallies followed in Tselinograd and the plans for German autonomy had to be cancelled.

Labor Aristocracy

The term ‘labor aristocracy’ is used to denote the fact that professional jobs and jobs that required skilled labor had been taken by Russians in Kazakhstan. Rafis Abazov argues the following:⁹⁹

In the 1930s, a first wave of Soviet modernization brought in a sizeable wave of migrants (mainly of Slavic origin) ... In the 1940s, during the World War Two the Soviet leaders relocated a number of military and civil plants along with their workers, from the area of military operations to Central Asian cities and towns. The newcomers were mostly highly skilled workers and were mainly employed in the state-run industrial sector and administration in the large cities.

Therefore, the industrialization of Kazakhstan was undertaken by a workforce brought from the European part of the USSR and a local working class had not been created. As suggested by Khazanov:¹⁰⁰

The participation of Kazakhs in this development was insignificant. However, unlike capitalist countries that usually recruit immigrants from other regions to perform unskilled labor, Kazakhstan attracted immigrants from European Russia to occupy those positions in industry that demanded skilled labor. Thus, these immigrants formed a labor aristocracy.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Abazov: p. 79.

¹⁰⁰ Khazanov: pp. 248-9.

In addition to Khazanov's argument, Juska argues the following:¹⁰¹

Despite the rise of the eponymous professional class, and the increase in ethnic competition, ethnic Russians continued to run most of the industries, transportation, education and medical systems in Central Asia. The Kremlin kept Russians in these dominant positions in order to maintain control over the region. Russians also dominated the region because the modernization policies carried out by Moscow allowed only limited participation of the local populations. Moscow treated this region as an appendix to the Soviet economy, utilizing its rich resources for the Centre's needs rather than for development of the region. Thus, Soviet modernization failed to develop sizeable indigenous working classes. As a result of these developments, rigid-competitive ethnic stratification emerged in Central Asia.

The Soviet policies in Kazakhstan had resulted in a clear ethnic division of labor. Table 3 demonstrates the percentage of workforce distributed across different sectors.

**Table 3. Kazakh Participation in the Workforce over Sectors
in Kazakhstan, 1977-1992**

	1977	1987	1992
Government	34 %	40 %	47 %
Industry	13 %	21 %	24 %
Agriculture	38 %	52 %	53 %
Health	25 %	38 %	46 %
Education	36 %	43 %	51 %
Services	17 %	23 %	25 %
Culture and Arts	36 %	42 %	42 %

Source: Sue and Steven O. Sabol Davis, "The Importance of Being Ethnic: Minorities in Post-Soviet States - the Case of Russians in Kazakstan," *Nationalities Papers* 26, no. 3 (1998): p. 483.

¹⁰¹ A. Juska, "Ethno-Political Transformation in the States of the Former USSR," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 3 (1999): p. 531.

As can be seen in table 3, in the industrial sector, Kazakh participation is the lowest which is only 24 per cent in 1992. However, Kazakh participation is highest in the agricultural sector, in the areas where unskilled labor is required. In 1992, Kazakhs constituted 53 per cent of the labor force in the agricultural sector.

Political Elites

Unlike the unpromising conditions in the industry sector, Kazakhs were in a more favorable position in the political sphere. The ruling political elites in the republic were dominated by ethnic Kazakhs. Khazanov argues the following:¹⁰²

Opportunities for social advancement in the political sphere were far better for the Kazakhs than for other ethnic groups in the republic. Through various kinds of official and unofficial affirmative actions, Kazakhs were over-represented in virtually all republican foci of power.

Olcott states that “the fourth all-Kazakh party conference, held in March 1923, was made up of only 24.8 per cent Kazakh delegates, whereas by the fifth regional party conference in December 1925, 51.8 per cent of the delegates were Kazakhs.”¹⁰³ Table 4 shows the ethnic composition of the Kazakh Supreme Soviet in 1985 and 1990.

¹⁰² Khazanov: p. 252.

¹⁰³ Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, p. 203.

Table 4. Ethnic Composition of the Kazakh Supreme Soviet, 1985 and 1990

Nationality	Number of Deputies (1985)	Percentage of Deputies (1985)	Number of Deputies (1990)	Percentage of Deputies (1990)	Approx. Percentage of Population in the Republic
Kazakh	238	46,7%	194	54,2 %	39,7 %
Russian	209	41,0%	103	28,8 %	37,8 %
Ukrainian	29	5,7%	24	6,7 %	5,4 %
German	10	2,0%	14	3,9 %	5,8 %
Belorussian	5	1,0%	5	1,4 %	-
Uzbek	2	0,4%	3	0,8 %	2,0 %
Tatar	3	0,6%	3	0,8 %	1,9 %
Other	14	2,6%	12	3,4 %	-
Total	510	100%	358	100 %	100%

Source: Valerii Tishkov, "Ethnicity and Power in the Republics of the USSR," *Journal of Soviet Nationalities* 1, no. 3 (1990): pp. 45-7.

As can be seen from Table 4, despite similar population percentages of Kazakhs and Russians in Kazakhstan, Kazakhs hold 54,2 per cent of deputies while the Russians hold only 28,8 per cent of deputies in the Kazakh Supreme Soviet. However, it should also be note that, as Olcott argues “Moscow wanted Kazakhs in the highest levels of the party, but it wanted only those individuals who would accept the Russians’ claim to the leading role in defining and orchestrating the revolutionary process.”¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, p. 211.

During Gorbachev's reign in power, Moscow's decision to replace Dinmukhamed Kunayev who was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan since 1960 and a native Kazakh, by a Russian figure, Gennady Kolbin, in December 1986 led to the first open outbreak of unrest in Kazakhstan.¹⁰⁵ Abazov states the following:¹⁰⁶

On December 17, 1986, one day after Kolbin arrived in Almaty, thousands of protestors gathered in Brezhnev Square (now known as New Square) to demonstrate against the decision and later clashed with security forces. Kunayev had been the leader of the republic for almost 30 years and had been widely recognized as a symbol of the growing power of the national elite. Thus, the people expressed their disagreement with the Kremlin's ethnic policy in Kazakhstan and correspondingly organized this unauthorized demonstration and clashed with the police and security service. The demonstration was harshly put down and mass arrests took place.

According to Helsinki Watch reporter Catherine Cosman, dissatisfaction of the youth and high levels of unemployment were the major source of Almaty events. Although still unclear after more than a decade, three scenarios are put forth to explain the motivation behind demonstrations: an inter-ethnic conflict between Kazakhs and Russians, a local political protest against control by Moscow, or power struggle within the Kazakh elite.¹⁰⁷ However, no matter what the initial motivation was, one clear thing is that Almaty events had serious repercussions for Kazakhstan by creating a sharp ethnic polarization between the Kazakhs and Russians and antagonizing the Kazakh

¹⁰⁵ Prazauskas, p. 63.

¹⁰⁶ Abazov: p. 70.

¹⁰⁷ Catherine Cosman, *Conflict in the Soviet Union: The Untold Story of the Clashes in Kazakhstan* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1990), pp.3-8.

society. The situation was further complicated by repressive measures taken in the aftermath of the events against participants and supporters of the demonstration.¹⁰⁸ The following chapter will examine the nation-building policies in Kazakhstan in the post-Soviet period and their impact on the Russian population.

¹⁰⁸ Abazov: p. 70.

CHAPTER 3

NATION-BUILDING POLICIES OF THE KAZAKH STATE AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE RUSSIAN POPULATION IN KAZAKHSTAN

The previous chapter has provided a background on the Tsarist and the Soviet nationalities policy in general and its effects on Kazakhstan in particular. While doing so, it especially focused on the milestone events and policies which have resulted in major changes in the ethnic composition of the population in the republic as well as ethnically relevant issues such as political elites and the so called ‘labor aristocracy’.

This chapter will focus on the nation-building policies of the Kazakh state in the post-Soviet period and try to examine the impact of these policies over the Russian population in Kazakhstan. For purpose of analysis this chapter is divided into five main sections. The first section will look more closely at the situation of political elites in the republic and try to examine the general political structure in the country by specifically focusing on the recent presidential and parliamentary elections.

The second section will focus on the state planning and recruitment policy. This section will examine how the state planning and recruitment policies currently in practice have been utilized in favoring or disfavoring different

ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. It will try to find out whether these policies are practiced in a way to promote equal opportunities for all ethnic groups, particularly the Russian population, or favor the Kazakh population over the other ethnic groups.

The third section will examine the language policy and the rewriting of Kazakh history. This section will look more closely into the language policy of the Nazarbaev government. It will try to find out whether the current language policy in practice has an inclusive or exclusive role in the case of the Russian population in the republic. It will also examine the cultural policies adopted by the Kazakh state such as rewriting of history and the implications of these policies on the Russians.

The fourth section will focus on the issue of citizenship. It will examine how the issue of citizenship has been used as an instrument for nation-building policies and how this has affected the Russian population in the republic.

Lastly, the fifth section will examine the issue of the relocation of the capital of the republic from Almaty to Akmola (later named as 'Astana'). It will try to find out why the Kazakh government has taken a decision to move the capital from Almaty to Astana and what kind of a role this action has in terms of nation-building policies.

3.1. Political Elites

According to the constitution of Kazakhstan, Kazakhstan is a presidential republic. The president is elected by popular vote for a seven-year period. The parliament has two chambers: the *Majilis* (the lower chamber) and the Senate (the higher chamber). The Majilis consists of 77 representatives elected by popular vote for a five-year term. The Senate is comprised of 39 representatives; of these 32 are elected for a six-year term and the remaining seven are appointed by the president.¹⁰⁹

President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, an ethnic Kazakh with a Soviet background, has been the single dominant political figure in Kazakhstan. Nazarbaev has been ruling the country since independence. He has been in power for 16 years. He holds almost all the political power in his hands without any proper checks and balances mechanism.

In December 2005, Nazarbaev has been elected for another seven years following a landslide victory in the ballot box.¹¹⁰ According to BBC, the presidential candidates of the opposition have stated that there were numerous violations in the election. In addition to the flaws in the election, BBC reports that “Opposition candidates have complained that they had no

¹⁰⁹ *The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, [Online] (Official site of the President of Republic of Kazakhstan, accessed 3 March 2006); available from http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=134&lang=2.

¹¹⁰ *Kazakhstan's President Sworn In*, [Online] (BBC World News, accessed 19 August 2006); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4601028.stm>.

chance of putting across their message to voters because the media was largely under government control”.¹¹¹ The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has also reported that the elections which President Nazarbaev won by 91 per cent was not fair.¹¹² Table 5 shows the results of the December 2005 presidential elections.

Table 5. Results of the December 2005 Presidential Election in Kazakhstan

Candidates and Nominating Parties	Votes	Percentages
Nursultan Nazarbayev - Fatherland (Otan)	6,147,517	91.15%
Zharmakhan Tuyakbai - Coalition for a Just Kazakhstan	445,934	6.61%
Alikhan Baimenov - Democratic Party of Kazakhstan Bright Path	108,730	1.61%
Yerassyl Abylkassymov - People's Communist Party of Kazakhstan	23,252	0.34%
Mels Yeleusizov - Tabigat (Nature) environmental	18,834	0.28%
Total (turnout 76.8%)	6,744,267	-

Source: *Results of the Presidential Elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan, December 4th 2005*, [Online] (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2005, accessed 12 August 2006); available from <http://kazelection2005.org/theresults.php>.

As can be seen from Table 5, the election results mark a landslide victory for Nursultan Nazarbaev. Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, from the Coalition for a Just

¹¹¹ *Massive Victory for Kazakh Leader*, [Online] (BBC World News, accessed 19 August 2006); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4601028.stm>.

¹¹² *Kazakh Election 'Not Democratic'*, [Online] (BBC World News, accessed 19 August 2006); available from <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4601028.stm>.

Kazakhstan, who was shown as the biggest rival of Nazarbaev in the ballot box could receive only 6.61 per cent of the votes in the controversial election. Since President Nazarbaev has collected almost all powers in his hands, the parliament of Kazakhstan seems to have no real function in practice. The last parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan were held in September 2004. According to the report of the OSCE observers, the elections were far from internationally accepted standards.¹¹³ In the OSCE report, it has been noted that “serious shortcomings remain, and the election process fell short of OSCE commitments and other international standards for democratic elections in many respects.”¹¹⁴ Table 6 shows the distribution of seats according to political parties/blocks in September 2004 elections in Kazakhstan.

¹¹³ *Republic of Kazakhstan, Parliamentary Elections, 19 September and 3 October 2004 - OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Report*, [Online] (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2004, accessed 14 May 2005); available from http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2004/12/3990_en.pdf.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*(accessed).

Table 6. Results of the September 2004 Parliamentary Election in

Kazakhstan

Political Parties/Blocks	Total Number of Seats Gained
Otan Party	42
Agrarian and Industrial Union of Workers Block (AIST)	11
Asar Party	4
Ak Zhol Party	1
Democratic Party	1
Independent MPs	18
Total	77

Source: *Kazakhstan Elections 2004*, [Online] (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, accessed 22 August 2006); available from <http://www.kazelection2004.org/theresults.htm>.

As can be seen in Table 6, in the 2004 parliamentary elections, Otan (Fatherland / People's Unity Party), the party of President Nazarbaev, won 42 of the 72 seats in the parliament, followed by the pro-presidential election bloc AIST (Agrarian and Industrial Union of Workers Bloc) which took 11 seats. The Asar Party led by Darigha Nazarbaev, daughter of President Nazarbaev, came in third with four seats in the parliament.¹¹⁵ Out of the 77 seats in the *Majilis* (Kazakh Parliament) only one single candidate from the opposition could win a seat in the parliament.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *Final Kazakh Election Results Announced*, [Online] (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE / RL), 2004, accessed 11 July 2006); available from <Http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/10/05797685-b677-4512-a824-8d1bd0906672.html>.

¹¹⁶ The single seat representing the opposition was won by the Ak Zhol party. However, the party refused to take up the seat stating that it was a protest against the illegitimacy of the election. Joanna Lillis, *Party Maneuvering Transforms Kazakhstan's Political Scene* [Online] (EurasiaNet, 2 August 2006, accessed 1 September 2006); available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav080206.shtml>.

Yel Dana (Wisdom of the Nation) women's party, Alash, a Kazakh nationalist party, and the Compatriot Party which advocates Kazakhstan's integration with Russia were all denied registration for the election. According to a Human Rights Watch report, the reason for denial of registration for these groups might be the fact that they were seen to violate Article 7 of the law on political parties, which prohibits ethnic, religious, or gender-based parties.¹¹⁷ Bhavna Dave argues the following:¹¹⁸

Kazakhstan has repeatedly sought to demonstrate its progress in developing a multi-party system, when in reality its various parties serve as channels for disbursing spoils rather than genuine political competition. Elections have become authorized outlets for competition between the various clienteles within the state controlled patronage machinery. Groups try to maximize their economic gains and political influence by supporting the pro-regime parties.

Hence, the Kazakh parliament is dominated by the supporters of Nazarbaev. Bakhytzhan Zhumagulov, the leader of Otan, the People's Unity Party, which is the largest party in the parliament, has even explicitly stated that "his party has no interest in exercising power because, it, like all the other parties, lacks the political maturity to assume leadership."¹¹⁹

In July 2006, the Asar Party of Darigha Nazarbaev merged with the Otan Party of Nursultan Nazarbaev. The merger of two parties, which took place

¹¹⁷ *Political Freedoms in Kazakhstan*, (Human Rights Watch, April 2004, accessed 12 August 2006); available from <http://hrw.org/reports/2004/kazakhstan0404/index.htm>.

¹¹⁸ Bhavna Dave, "Kazakhstan's 2004 Parliamentary Elections : Managing Loyalty and Support for the Regime," *Problems of Post-Communism* 52, no. 1 (2005): p. 7.

¹¹⁹ Paul Kubicek, "Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Curse or Cure?," *Third World Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1998): p. 34.

under the Otan Party, resulted in an even more powerful ruling party in the parliament. The combined number of members of the new party reached 700,000 members.¹²⁰ According to Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), “The move is seen as a tightening of Nazarbaev's grip on power and an end to his daughter's ambitions for political independence.”¹²¹

Through the new constitution of Kazakhstan, President Nazarbaev has been provided with extensive powers including the right to appoint all the ministers except for the prime minister without receiving the consent of the parliament. In addition, the President has the power to dissolve the parliament in case of any ‘political crisis’. The President has also the power to make laws or issue decrees having the force of law in the republic.¹²²

The prime minister of the Kazakh government has been Daniyal Akhmetov since 13 June 2003. President Nazarbaev has high-level control over the post of the prime minister, as well. According to the article 44 of the Constitution of Kazakhstan state, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan shall:¹²³

appoint a Prime Minister of the Republic with the Parliament's consent; release him from office; determine the structure of the Government of the Republic at the proposal of the Prime Minister,

¹²⁰ *Kazakh President Merges Party with Daughter's*, [Online] (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, accessed 27 August 2006); available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/7/0BDAFC90-556B-43FB-996B-132B527DA977.html>.

¹²¹ Ibid.(accessed).

¹²² *The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan*, (accessed).

¹²³ Ibid.(accessed).

appoint to and release from office its members, as well as form, abolish and reorganize central executive bodies of the Republic which are not included into the Government; accept the oath of the members of the Government; preside at the meetings of the Government on especially important issues; charge the Government with bringing a bill into the Majilis of Parliament; annul or suspend completely or partially the effect of the Government's acts and those of the akims of the oblasts, major cities and the capital...

Concerning political and democratic reforms, Nazarbaev has so far underlined that political liberties should not be perceived as “excessive permissiveness”.¹²⁴ In a speech he delivered at a conference in Astana marking the tenth anniversary of the constitution, Nazarbaev stated the following:¹²⁵

... unprepared radical political reforms can destabilize the economic, social, and political fabric of the [Kazakh] nation. ... political pluralism is guaranteed in Kazakhstan which is confirmed by the existence of nongovernmental organizations and independent media in the country.

While noting that opposition has largely been limited in Kazakhstan, it should as well be noted that not only the ethnic pro-Russian parties but also ethnic Kazakh nationalist parties have also been banned from operating. In Kazakhstan, the law requires that each political party must have at least 50,000 registered members and at least 700 registered members in each

¹²⁴ Daniel Kimmage, *Kazakhstan: President Tries to Calm Growing Political Crisis* [Online] (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 6 March 2006, accessed 18 August 2006); available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/3/4594197E-B1EB-4625-AC96-93D3708DDB36.html>.

¹²⁵ *Kazakh Leader Cautious on Quick Democratic Reforms*, (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 30 August 2005, accessed 28 August 2006); available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/8/C64D507B-650A-4471-8AA9-D0D551A7C4B7.html>.

province in Kazakhstan.¹²⁶ This law has been a major restriction for the emergence of new political parties. This practice seems to have made it difficult particularly for the Russian population to participate actively in the political sphere. This is due to the fact that the Russian population in Kazakhstan concentrates around Almaty and the northern parts of the republic and is not scattered around the country evenly.

During the year 2005, 11 political parties were registered, including three opposition groups. These were Ak-Zhol, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), and the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK). Opposition groups including the Union of Cossacks and the Lad Movement, which claims to represent Kazakhstan's Slavs, have not been allowed to operate legally by the government authorities. These groups are known for their extremist political rhetoric that favors acceding to Russia.¹²⁷

There is also high level state control and restrictions over the activities of parties which are legally registered. For instance, in January 2005, activists from the three opposition parties, Ak-Zhol, the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), and the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK), were

¹²⁶ *Kazakhstan Votes 2004*, [Online] (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE / RL), 2004, accessed 11 July 2006); available from [Http://www.rferl.org/specials/kazakhelections/parties.asp](http://www.rferl.org/specials/kazakhelections/parties.asp).

¹²⁷ John B. Dunlop, "Reintegrating "Post-Soviet Space", *Journal of Democracy* 11, no. 3 (2000): p. 44.

denied permission by local authorities to hold a rally in Almaty to "support the fight against extremism and terrorism."¹²⁸

On 6 January 2005, a Kazakh court authorized the liquidation of the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan led by Galymzhan Zhakiyanov. It is reported that the party breached national security laws.¹²⁹ According to the report of the US State Department, "opposition party DCK was judicially disbanded on the basis of a 2004 statement calling for civil disobedience in protest of the 2004 lower house parliamentary elections; the government characterized that statement as undermining the security of the state and propagating social hatred."¹³⁰ The report further states the following:¹³¹

In separate incidents in Ust Kamenogorsk on April 9 and in Shymkent on May 2, FJK [Opposition movement For a Just Kazakhstan] members were physically attacked by unknown assailants during rallies. Opposition leaders alleged that government officials instigated the attacks. The president publicly called for investigations. On August 8, the Shymkent city court issued a one year suspended jail sentence to local resident Arman Dzhumageldiyev for his role in the attacks. At year's end, no other arrests were reported in either incident. ... On October 12, authorities arrested and detained Tolen Tokhtasynov of FJK for allegedly organizing an unsanctioned rally. ... Several other leaders of FJK were fined by an Almaty court for their participation in the same rally.

¹²⁸ *Kazakhstan Country Report on Human Rights Practices - 2005*, [Online] (U.S. State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 8 March 2006, accessed 2 September 2006); available from <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61656.htm>.

¹²⁹ *Kazakh Court Liquidates Opposition Party*, [Online] (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 7 January 2005, accessed 23 August 2006); available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/1/D89BD6E5-BC1A-4E0D-BC18-535DDE358F55.html>.

¹³⁰ *Kazakhstan Country Report on Human Rights Practices - 2005*, (accessed).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*(accessed).

According to the 2003 annual report of the Reporters without Borders, “the [Kazakh] government used harassment, censorship, legal intimidation and control of printing and publishing to crack down on the independent and opposition media. Journalists close to the opposition Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party, founded in November 2001, were routinely targeted.”¹³²

Currently in Kazakhstan, not only the Russian groups but also the Kazakh groups are under heavy pressure. The murder of two prominent figures in Kazakh opposition has been a major issue in the political sphere of the country in the recent years. Altynbek Sarsenbaev, a leader of the opposition Naghyz Ak Zhol (True Bright Path) party was assassinated in February 2006. According to Gulnoza Saidazimova, who writes for EurasiaNet, “A former information minister and a former ambassador to Russia, Sarsenbaev was a fierce critic of Kazakhstan’s current regime.”¹³³

The murder of Sarsenbaev came only three months after the killing of another opposition leader, Zamanbek Nurkadilov, who had been found shot dead in his Almaty residence. Nurkadilov was a former mayor of Almaty and government minister before joining the opposition and accusing the

¹³² *Kazakhstan - Annual Report 2003*, (Reporters without Borders, 2003, accessed 29 August 2006); available from http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=6522.

¹³³ Gulnoza Saidazimova, *Kazakhstan: Opposition Figure Found Shot Dead near Almaty* [Online] (EurasiaNet, 14 February 2006, accessed 27 August 2006); available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp021406.shtml>.

government of corruption.¹³⁴ Saidazimova argues that there were political reasons behind both killings. As a result of official investigations it was reported that the person who planned and ordered the murder of Sarsenbaev was a well-known political figure, the chief of the Senate administration Erzhan Utembaev. However, the reason behind the murder was announced by the official authorities as “personal enmity”. In connection with the murder, while the police arrested several members of the National Security Committee, Nazarbaev’s daughter, Darigha Nazarbaev and her husband were also accused by the media to be behind the assassination.¹³⁵

Based on the actions the Nazarbaev administration has taken so far in the political sphere, it is possible to argue that in the post-Soviet period, not only the Russian ethnic groups but also the Kazakh groups who are in opposition to the Nazarbaev government have been under heavy pressure. So, the ability of a political party to operate in the republic seems to depend very much on its stance towards the Nazarbaev administration.

As a result, while Nazarbaev administration does not allow any extreme nationalist political groups to operate in Kazakhstan, it does not allow anti-Nazarbaev groups to mobilize either. The ethnic dimension at work is more

¹³⁴ *Kazakh Opposition Figure Found Dead in Almaty*, [Online] (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, 13 February 2006, accessed 21 August 2006); available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/2/0BBF2DB2-6473-4A30-AF22-604941D24E81.html>.

¹³⁵ Gulnoza Saidazimova, *Kazakhstan: Apparent Rift Opens within Nazarbaev Family* [Online] (EurasiaNet, 20 May 2006, accessed 21 August 2006); available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp052006.shtml>.

visible in the state planning and recruitment policy, which will be discussed in the following section.

3.2. State Planning and Recruitment Policy

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Kazakhstan's gaining independence, there has been a rising nationalist trend in the republic similar to other post-Soviet states. Although President Nazarbaev emphasizes the importance of "uniform civic motivation based on equality of opportunities for all the citizens of our country [Kazakhstan]" and "eventual elimination of causes for ethnic differences and ... all ethnic groups hav[ing] equal rights,"¹³⁶ there has been an increasing emphasis on the Kazakh identity coupled with the politics of 'Kazakification'. Azamat Sarsembayev describes 'Kazakification' as "an idea of creating the dominance of ethnic Kazakhs in the economic, cultural, educational and political spheres of independent Kazakhstan."¹³⁷

The Kazakh leadership has been effectively using the state planning and recruitment policies as a key instrument for Kazakification. These policies have been practiced in the way to ensure the domination of the Kazakhs in

¹³⁶ Nursultan Nazarbaev, *Kazakhstan - 2030, Message of the President of the Country to the People of Kazakhstan* [Online] (October 1998, accessed August 28 2006); available from http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=135&lang=2.

¹³⁷ Azamat Sarsembayev, "Imagined Communities: Kazak Nationalism and Kazakification in the 1990s," *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 3 (1999): p. 331.

the long term and to break up the Russian domination especially over professional spheres.¹³⁸

After independence, the state recruitment policy of the Nazarbaev government has been chiefly utilized to guarantee a Kazakh loyal cadre in governmental, administrative and ‘elected’ jobs. Consequently, in 1994, ethnic Kazakhs made up already almost 75 % in both the Cabinet of Ministers and Presidential Administration.¹³⁹ This practice is in stark contradiction with Nazarbaev’s statement that “It is worth noting that Kazakhstan is a truly multinational and multi-faith society. Kazakhstan is not an ethnocentric State and all its citizens are considered equal regardless of their nationality.”¹⁴⁰

According to Bremmer, the rapid increase in the number of Kazakhs in all kinds of local professions ranging from the education sector to industry and even the city’s soccer team have resulted in tension and uneasiness for all other non-Kazakh ethnic groups. Referring to the case of the Russians, Bremmer states the following:¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Sarsembayev: pp. 333-4.

¹⁴⁰ *Interview of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the First Magazine Chairman Rupert Goodman*, [Online] (Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, April 2003, accessed 21 August 2006); available from http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=160&lang=2&article_id=711.

¹⁴¹ Bremmer: p. 625.

The primary concern, of course, is that these positions [in state organs and public institutions] are being filled at the expense of the Russians. One deputy aired the concern briefly: 'The government will take care of the Kazaks, but who is going to care for Russians? We will be left at the bottom, without any protections for our rights.'

This growing fear of Russians is also supported by the findings of Laitin's research:¹⁴²

Enormous need of Russian technical skill and the bureaucratic incapacity to administer a nationalizing program (for example, to staff schools with Kazak-speaking teachers) will clearly stem the tide of progressive, inexorable Kazakization of the republic. But if Russians feel they are needed now (when the republic is young), what about the future? Will all job categories in the future have the same nationality ratios as those in officialdom today? To quote the Beatles, each Russian in Kazakhstan is asking, "Will you need me when I'm sixty-four?"

As a result, the policies of Kazakification in state planning and recruitment have created significant resentment and frustration on the side of non-Kazakhs. This has particularly created unrest among the Russians which make up the second largest ethnic group in the republic after the Kazakhs.

3.3. Language Policy and Rewriting of History

In the post-Soviet period, the Kazakh government has waged a wholesale Kazakification campaign in the social and cultural spheres. This has been undertaken in order to compensate for the Soviet period where there was high degree of Russification.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Laitin, p. 99.

¹⁴³ Ian Bremmer and Cory Welt, "The Trouble with Democracy in Kazakhstan," *Central Asian Survey* 15, no. 2 (1996): p. 184.

In his public address in October 1998, President Nazarbaev stated the following:¹⁴⁴

Today it is not everybody that can answer a seemingly simple question: "Who are we - the Kazakhstanis?". Settlement of the problem of self-identification would take certain time and require a certain level of historic development. ... For over 70 years Communist regime failed to form a united Soviet people. Many a post-colonial multinational country, even after the expiration of several decades, failed in completing this process. ... Several decades would elapse before this feeling takes shape and gets firmly established with us. Yet even today we can name a number of factors which unite us. It is our land in its borders, our parents who cultivated it, it is our common history in which we jointly suffered from bitter failures and shared the delight of achievements. It is our children who are destined to jointly live and work on this land. And each of us is at one in the awareness of his duty to his parents, in his striving to make life of our children ever better tomorrow.

The Kazakh state has so far replaced Russian/international words with Turkic/Arabic words, renamed the streets to suit Kazak history and culture, omitted the Russian "ov/ev" suffixes from Kazakh surnames, introduced Kazakh in all schools and opened new Kazak-language schools aiming to produce a vital language shift in the new generations.¹⁴⁵

In January 2006, President Nazarbaev changed both the melody and the lyrics of the Kazakh national anthem. The title of the new anthem is 'My Kazakhstan' (the title of the older one was 'National Anthem of the Republic

¹⁴⁴ Nazarbaev, (accessed).

¹⁴⁵ Bremmer and Welt, "The Trouble with Democracy in Kazakhstan," p. 184.

of Kazakhstan’).¹⁴⁶ The changes put forth by Nazarbaev were approved by the Kazakh parliament. The parliament also passed a law making it compulsory for everyone to stand and press the palm of their right hand over their heart when the national anthem is performed in public. According to Nazarbaev, the new anthem is a reflection of “the heroic centuries-long struggle for Kazakh independence”.¹⁴⁷

As Bremmer and Welt argue, the Kazakh state has also initiated the rewriting of the history of the ‘Kazakh nation’. In order to do so, the Kazakh state has taken actions to promote the Kazakh-language books, newspapers, radio and television programs as opposed to Russian mediums.¹⁴⁸ In addition to these actions, the Kazakh administration has also promoted the establishment of social and cultural institutions which would add to the promotion of Kazakh language, culture and history. The latest example to these actions is the construction of a regional Kazakh dramatic theater in the republic, for which the government has allocated more than two billion tenges¹⁴⁹ Nazarbaev, who

¹⁴⁶ *Kazakh Leader Changes National Anthem*, [Online] (Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, accessed 22 August 2006); available from <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/1/D9A41163-CE7E-42CF-8569-34835DD3A76F.html>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.(accessed).

¹⁴⁸ Bremmer and Welt, "The Trouble with Democracy in Kazakhstan," p. 184.

¹⁴⁹ Equals to more than fifteen million US Dollars.

took part in the ceremony and placed a symbolic brick into the construction yard, addressed the public as follows:¹⁵⁰

I congratulate all of you on the 70th anniversary of the region [Karaganda]. As a present from the state, dramatic theater named after Saken Seyfullin will be built up on this place. The country is currently solving completely new tasks to become a competitive country in the world. To achieve the best life and success, one must demonstrate the best education, abilities, and management skills. Therefore, as always, culture and our intellectuals play a very important role. The intellectual elite always leads the people, explains the Government's policy, call for stability, calmness, trust, ...

However, among the nation-building policies adopted by the Kazakh state, the language issue stands out as one of the most crucial and controversial issues. As stated by Horowitz, language policy has been used as a symbol and instrument of domination. Horowitz argues that groups claiming priority in a multi-cultural society demand that their language should be given what they call "its rightful place," by which they mean exclusive official status.¹⁵¹

Horowitz further states the following:¹⁵²

The matter of group worth finds its way into linguistic counter-demands as well. An advanced group, commanded to study, be examined, and work in the language of a backward group, quickly calls attention to the inadequacy of the language sought to be made official – to its simplicity, its shallow literary tradition, its underdeveloped grammar and vocabulary, the paucity of textbooks in the language, the unsuitability of the language for use in technical fields, and its general inferiority.

¹⁵⁰ [Online] (Official site of the President of Republic of Kazakhstan, 2006, accessed 26 August 2006); available from http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=356&lang=2&news_id=2161.

¹⁵¹ Horowitz, p. 219.

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 220.

Language issue seems to have a strong symbolic dimension. Horowitz argues that “it [language] accomplishes a double linkage. It links political claims to ownership with psychological demands for the affirmation of group worth, and ties this aggregate matter of group status to outright careerism, thereby binding elite material interests to mass concerns.”¹⁵³

According to the census conducted in 1989, only 40 per cent of Kazaks claimed fluency in Kazak. 64 per cent of Kazaks claimed fluency in Russian while less than one percent of Russians claimed fluency in Kazak. On the whole, over 80 per cent of Kazakhstan’s population were either native speakers of Russian or fluent in it.¹⁵⁴ Soon after independence, Nazarbaev sought to reverse this striking tide of Russification in the favor of Kazakh language.

In Kazakhstan, currently the most important document regarding the language policy is the Law on Languages, passed in September 1989, which “declared Kazakh to be the state language of Kazakhstan and required its eventual widespread use in public life, while the Russian language was granted the ambiguous status of being the language of inter-ethnic intercourse.”¹⁵⁵ There has been a strong opposition to this law in the north where Kazakhs make up a minority of the population.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Fierman: pp. 174-5.

¹⁵⁵ Khazanov: p. 257.

In 1996, it was agreed that the state language would be Kazakh while in state institutions and local self-administrative bodies the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazakh language.¹⁵⁷ Concerning the debates over the status of the Kazakh and Russian languages, Alima Bissenova states the following:¹⁵⁸

The debates on the status of the language opens up a Pandora's box where one can observe a principle disagreement between Russians and Kazakhs on issues concerning the future of the country they share. The good news is that public space has been created for the discussion of these issues and for channeling the concerns of different segments of population. The state is taking notice of these concerns and, it seems, trying to find a way to promote the Kazakh language without antagonizing the Russian population. Thus unlike other Central Asian republics, Kazakhstan did not proceed with its plan of transition to the Latin alphabet.

Through the language policy, the Kazakh government has been able to create a barrier for non-Kazakhs to restrict their participation in the administrative organs of the government. However, due to tremendous reaction by the Russian population, the government postponed this decision to a future date but unofficially this law has been put into practice, which has constituted a major factor in exacerbating the uneasiness of the Russian population in Kazakhstan.

¹⁵⁶ Glenn, p. 112.

¹⁵⁷ Robert J. Kaiser, "Ethnic Demography and Interstate Relations in Central Asia," in *National Identity and Ethnicity in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. Roman Szporluk (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1994), pp. 245-6.

¹⁵⁸ Alima Bissenova, *Language Debate in Kazakhstan Reflects Russian-Kazakh Tensions* [Online] (Central Asia - Caucasus Analyst, 7 April 2004, accessed 22 August 2006); available from http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=2257&SMSESSION=NO.

The language issue is a good example to demonstrate the discriminatory dimension of the nation-building policies of the Kazakh state. The language policy of the Nazarbaev government very well demonstrates the attempts of the Kazakh state to exclude Russians and other non-Kazakhs such as Ukrainians or Germans from all spheres of social, political, cultural and economic life.

3.4. Issue of Citizenship

One of the crucial issues at stake on the side of the Russian minority is the issue of dual citizenship. Nazarbaev has rejected the institution of dual citizenship, arguing that it would result in divided loyalties among the Russian populations in Kazakhstan. According to Smith, “The Nazarbaev government has ... rejected the idea of dual citizenship, perhaps fearing that its introduction would blur the border separating Kazakhstan’s northern and eastern regions from the Russian Federation, and possibly even stimulate revanchist sentiment.”¹⁵⁹

Rather than signing an agreement on dual citizenship, Kazakh and Russian authorities have agreed on the simplified acquisition of citizenship by citizens of one country who are permanently resident in the other. In addition, “a treaty on the legal status of citizens of either country who permanently reside

¹⁵⁹ Graham Smith, *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands : The Politics of National Identities* (Cambridge, [England] ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 162.

on the other's territory grants Russian citizens in Kazakhstan more rights than those enjoyed by other foreigners living there (and vice versa).”¹⁶⁰

With regard to the issue of citizenship, another interesting policy of the Kazakh government has been the call for immigration of ethnic Kazakhs living outside the country to Kazakhstan. After gaining independence, the Kazakh government adopted a policy to welcome Kazakh residents in other countries ‘back to the homeland’. It has been estimated that there are more than 3.5 million Kazakhs living outside Kazakhstan in 30 countries worldwide. In 1992 alone, more than sixty thousand Kazakhs migrated from Mongolia and other CIS states and resettled in Kazakhstan with financial aid of the Kazakh government. Liu argues, “... such policies certainly have serious consequences for inter-ethnic relations. Excessive assertion of ethno-nationalism of the titular nationality is at odds with the goal of ethnic harmony.”¹⁶¹ Liu further states that:¹⁶²

Ethnic Kazakh immigrants are known as *oralmans* – a term meaning “people who came back.” They come from across Asia – mainly from former Soviet republics, but also from countries such as Afghanistan and Mongolia. The Kazakh government has encouraged the Kazakh Diaspora to return since 1993. Many of today’s *oralmans* are descendants of refugees who fled Soviet collectivization drives in the 1920s and 30s. Others, such as most Kazakhs in Uzbekistan, simply found themselves outside the Kazakh SSR as a result of Moscow’s occasional shifting of Central Asian borders during the Soviet era.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Liu, p. 87.

¹⁶² Alfred Kueppers, *Ethnic Kazakhs Find Titular Homeland to Be Economic Haven* [Online] (2003, accessed 03 January 2004); available from <http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/culture/articles/eav042203.shtml>.

Alfred Kueppers, a freelance journalist based in Central Asia underlines that every year Astana sets a quota for the number of Kazakhs eligible to return and states the following:¹⁶³

... those who immigrate under the quota are provided with housing, a grant of roughly \$60 per family member, and assistance in acquiring a residence permit and Kazakh passport. However, the number of arrivals far exceeds the quota. For instance, in 2001, while the quota allowed for 600 families to return, more than 10,000 families arrived.

According to Graham Smith, supporters of this immigration campaign legitimized the resettlement measure on the basis of rehabilitation of Kazakhs who were forced to leave their native land and resettle elsewhere in the aftermath of the 1917 revolution and during the years of Stalinist repressions and forced collectivization. However, he states the following:¹⁶⁴

Skeptics have countered that the measure is part of a larger government scheme to raise the share of the ethnic Kazakhs in the country's overall population and 'squeeze out' the non-Kazakhs, particularly in light of the fact that most Kazakh in-migrants have been resettled in eastern and northern Kazakhstan where the Russian population predominates.

Compared to the Kazakhs living in Kazakhstan, as Zardykhan argues, the repatriated Kazakhs are believed to have stronger nationalistic feelings.¹⁶⁵ He states:

In particular, those who came from non-USSR countries such as China, Mongolia and Turkey are bound strongly to Kazakh language

¹⁶³ Ibid.(accessed).

¹⁶⁴ Smith, p. 157.

¹⁶⁵ Zharmukhamed Zardykhan, "Russians in Kazakhstan and Demographic Change: Imperial Legacy and the Kazakh Way of Nation Building," *Asian Ethnicity* 5, no. 1 (2004): p. 75.

and traditions. As a means of Kazakh nation building and to balance out the heavy population of Russians in northern districts, many of the newly repatriated Kazakh families were distributed in northern and eastern districts, and to big cities with large Russian populations. For instance, almost no Kazakh family from Mongolia was settled in Shymkent, one of the most Kazakh-populated cities.¹⁶⁶

In Kazakhstan, the 1995 constitution granted citizenship to anyone residing at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union. This is a civic and inclusive form of action. However, Kazakh government's call for immigration of ethnic Kazakhs residing in neighboring and other countries of the world 'back to the homeland' is a policy based on 'assumed blood ties,'¹⁶⁷ a crucial sign of a primordial approach in politics which inevitably leads to the strengthening ethnic fragmentation, the insiders and outsiders in the republic.

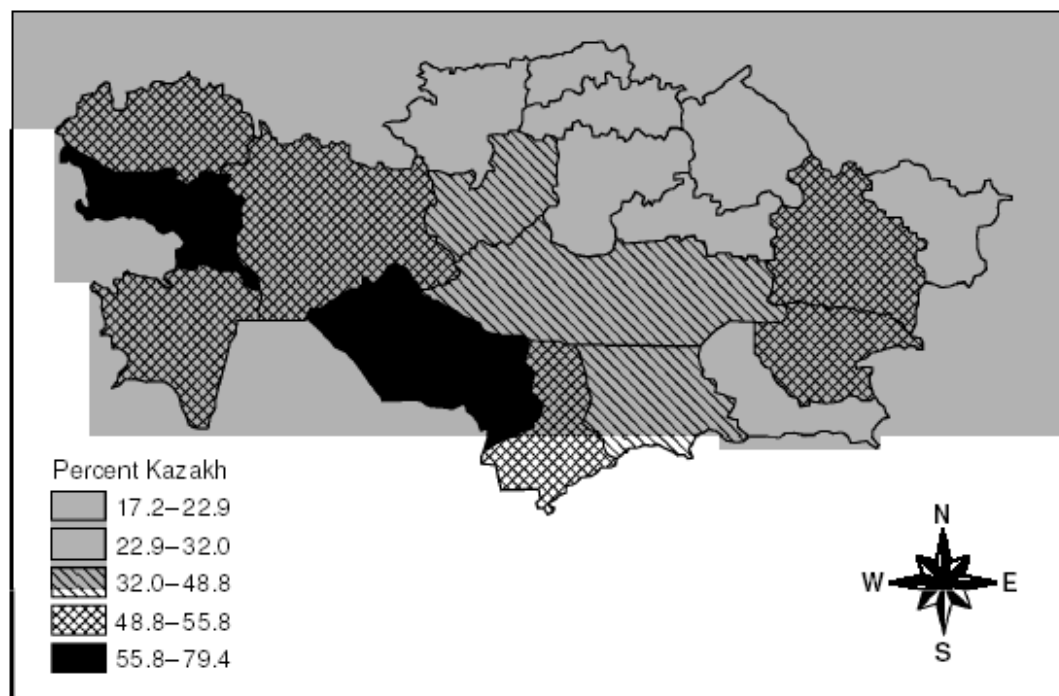
3.5. Relocation of the Capital of the Republic from Almaty to Akmola (Later Renamed as Astana)

In addition to the population figures, another significant feature of the ethnic structure has been the geographical distribution of different ethnic groups in the country. The strikingly uneven distribution of ethnic groups particularly Kazakhs and Russians has also been seen as a major challenge to the nation-building policies of the Kazakh state.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Clifford Geertz, "Primordial Ties," in *Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 43.

In Kazakhstan, the Russian population has concentrated on the northern part of the country bordering Russia outweighing the Kazakh population in these regions. On the other hand, Kazakh population has been concentrated on the western and southern parts of the country. Figure I demonstrates the geographical distribution of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan.

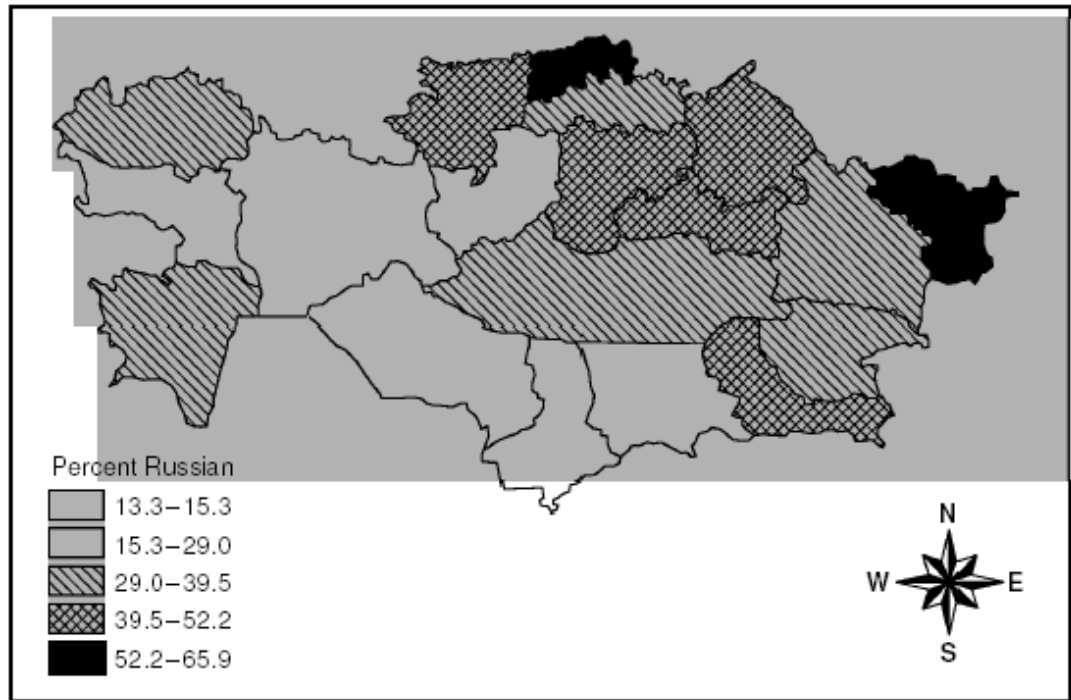


Source: Richard L. Wolfel, "North to Astana: Nationalistic Motives for the Movement of the Kazakh(Stani) Capital," *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 3 (2002), p. 490.

Figure 1. Demographic Profile of Kazakhstan: Geographical Distribution of Ethnic Kazakhs

As can be seen in Figure 1, Kazakh population is far from being homogeneously distributed over the republic. The population is mainly concentrated in the western and southern parts of the country. Figure II on the

other hand demonstrates the geographical distribution of Russians across the republic.



Source: Richard L. Wolfel, "North to Astana: Nationalistic Motives for the Movement of the Kazakh(Stani) Capital," *Nationalities Papers* 30, no. 3 (2002), p. 491.

Figure 2. Demographic Profile of Kazakstan: Geographical Distribution of Ethnic Russians

Figure 2 above, shows the geographical distribution of the Russian population in Kazakhstan. As can be seen in the figure, the geographical distribution of Russians across Kazakhstan is not homogeneous either. The Russian population concentrates around the northern and eastern parts of the country. Ironically, this is almost opposite to the distribution of the Kazakhs in the republic.

Therefore, in order to “fix” this peculiar situation and dilute the geographical concentration of the Russian population, President Nazarbaev decided to relocate the capital city from the south in Almaty to the north to Akmola, later named as Astana. Evaluating this decision of Nazarbaev, Schatz argues that “Capital relocation is an attractive strategy for post-colonial elites who face particularly acute state and nation building dilemmas.”¹⁶⁸

Nazarbaev supports his decision to relocate the capital city by stating the following:¹⁶⁹

... Astana is a crossroads of all the Eurasian routes. We became for a thousand km nearer to Russia, for an hour of flight nearer to Moscow, Europe. This is the center of the country. New capital is not a whim of Nazarbaev. This great construction has already given impetus to the growth of the economy. About 20 companies work there. The city which is under construction now, provides jobs to many enterprises of the country. A tax-free zone was established there. ...

The new capital, Astana, in the north is largely dominated by the Russian population. Therefore, by relocating the capital city, Nazarbaev tried to show both Kazakhstan and the rest of the world that Kazakhstan would not give up on its northern part. This relocation law was signed by Nazarbaev in September 1995, and has been a major step in the government’s nationalizing measures.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Edward A. D. Schatz, "What Capital Cities Say About State and Nation Building," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 9, no. 4 (2004): p. 111.

¹⁶⁹ *Interview of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the Izvestiya Correspondent Gayaz Alimov*, [Online] (Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 4 June 1998, accessed 21 August 2006); available from http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=160&lang=2&article_id=329.

¹⁷⁰ Bremmer and Welt, "The Trouble with Democracy in Kazakhstan," p. 185.

According to Glenn, the Kazakh government's decision to move the capital city to Astana indicates the seriousness of the ethnic question in the republic.¹⁷¹ At the same time, Wolfel argues that Nazarbaev's decision to move the capital city exemplifies "a symbolic action to promote sovereignty within a region of the country." Wolfel further argues that "the movement of the capital into a predominantly non-Kazak region sends a strong message to other actors in the region that the region of northern Kazakhstan is part of the Kazakhstani state and nation."¹⁷²

Zardykhon argues that the pretext for the movement of the capital from Almaty to Astana has been the following:¹⁷³

Beyond doubt, there were several practical reasons for moving the capital northward: the northern capital is closer to the industrial and resource-rich regions of the republic; it is further from China and the terrain of conflicts, such as Afghanistan and Tajikistan; it also makes the transportation routes between the center and periphery shorter and more efficient. But one of the outcomes of the decision, adjustment of the ethnic imbalance in the north of the country, seemed to be motivated by reasons more politically pragmatic than practical.

In a speech in July 2006, President Nazarbaev stated the following:¹⁷⁴

Astana has become a real capital. It is beautiful now, and its future even more beautiful. We spent 8 billion dollars of investments here

¹⁷¹ Glenn, p. 113.

¹⁷² Wolfel: p. 488.

¹⁷³ Zardykhon: p. 76.

¹⁷⁴ *Public Address of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev*, [Online] (Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 6 July 2006, accessed 23 August 2006); available from http://www.akorda.kz/page.php?page_id=353&lang=2&news_id=2007.

over a short period of time. We have set a task to join the 50 most competitive countries, and Astana will become one of the best cities of the world. New objects which we built every year to this date mean that the new center will be completely formed in the autumn of the next year.

Elaborating on the ambitious Astana project of Nazarbaev, Schatz argues that “Nazarbaev sought to replace existing, Soviet-era patronage networks with new ones whose business he could largely control.”¹⁷⁵ Schatz states the following:¹⁷⁶

The Astana move created at least two possibilities with regard to sub-ethnic rivalries. First, the move generated a tacit alliance between the Greater Horde (of Nazarbaev) and the Middle Horde (in whose territory lay Astana). In the context of a concern over Russian separatism and Cossack agitation, this alliance was a bulwark against separatists’ aspirations.

So, despite Nazarbaev’s statements that the relocation of the capital of the republic to Astana was not motivated by ethnic issues, it seems that at least to a certain extent, the concerns over the ethnic make-up and geographical distribution of the population had played a role in this decision. This move has a highly important symbolic message to the population of Kazakhstan and the rest of the world underlining that Kazakhstan will hold on to its Russian populated northern region. Therefore, in terms of nation building policies, the relocation of the capital has a crucial psychological dimension. However, regarding other possible effects of the move such as the changing geographical distribution of ethnic groups and ethnic make-up of the northern

¹⁷⁵ Schatz, "What Capital Cities Say About State and Nation Building," p. 125.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.: p. 129.

region of Kazakhstan, more time would be needed to observe significant changes in these issues.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan found itself in an extremely uneasy situation due to its peculiar ethnic structure. President Nazarbaev has been faced with the challenging task of nation-building in a country where Kazakhs, the titular population, was a minority in the republic at the time of independence and the number of Russians was almost as much as the number of Kazakhs. The situation for the Russians in Kazakhstan has also been traumatic since the dissolution of the Soviet Union meant that there would no longer be a superior and central authority in Moscow, which would act as an arbitrator and ‘big brother’ at times of hardship.

This thesis attempted to investigate the impact of the post-Soviet nation building policies in Kazakhstan over the Russian population living in the republic. In order to do so, the thesis first looked into the Tsarist and particularly the Soviet nationality policies. With a focus on the Soviet reign in the republic, the thesis examined how policies of the Moscow administration affected the ethnic trends. Therefore, it analyzed five major issues of the Soviet era in Kazakhstan. First, it examined the role of the forced collectivization of agriculture and sedentarization, which came in the early 1930s. This action of the Moscow administration had caused

tremendous losses on the side of Kazakh population while accelerating the flow of Slavic migration into the republic.

Second, it examined the Virgin Lands Scheme of the Khrushchev era. Policies adopted in this era had resulted in the erosion of millions of hectares of Kazakh lands. This scheme had also resulted in the further influx of Slavic migration to the republic.

Third, the thesis took a closer look into the issue of the resettlement of deported groups in Kazakhstan, which also played a crucial role in altering the ethnic structure of the population in Kazakhstan. This action also resulted in further decline of the proportion of Kazakhs within the republic.

Fourth, it examined one of the peculiar features of the work force in Kazakhstan known as the ‘labor aristocracy’. This was a direct result of the Moscow administration’s policy to fill majority of the professional positions and positions which required skilled labor with Russians rather than creating such a work force out of the Kazakh population.

Fifth, it examined another peculiar feature of Kazakhstan, which is the ‘political elites’. Unlike the situation in the professional and skilled workforce, which is dominated by the Russians, the political sphere in Kazakhstan is dominated by the Kazakhs. In connection with the political elites, the thesis examined the Almaty Events, which are known as the first

open outburst of unrest during the Soviet era. The events came about after the decision of Gorbachev to replace Dinmukhamed Kunayev who was the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and a native Kazakh, by a Russian figure, Gennady Kolbin. It is argued that this incident has resulted in the aggravation of the tension between the Kazakh and the Russian populations in the republic.

After examining these five crucial issues, which provides an overall picture of the ethnic setting in Kazakhstan, the thesis analyzed the nation building policies of the Kazakh state in the post-Soviet period and examined the impact of these policies over the Russian population in the republic. This examination was carried out by focusing on five different aspects. First, it examined the structure of the political power and the role of political elites in the republic. In Kazakhstan, both the political power and the vast majority of the political groups have been dominated by ethnically Kazakh groups. Political participation particularly for non-Kazakhs have been made difficult by bringing highly strict criteria for political party formation. However, analysis of the political sphere in the country shows that although politics have been dominated by ethnically Kazakhs, extreme Kazakh nationalist policies have also been avoided.

It is important to point out that in Kazakhstan, the opposition not only on the side of Russians but also other ethnic groups including Kazakhs have largely been curbed by the government. The research shows that the Kazakh political

spectrum seems to be divided between Nazarbaev supporters and opponents who are dominated by the former. Therefore, no matter what the nature of any opposition is, if it poses risk to the power of Nazarbaev, then it will not be realistic to expect it to be allowed to operate freely. Such an attempt will either face restrictions or will be outlawed by the Kazakh authorities.

It is possible to argue that the current political status quo in Kazakhstan is directly dependent on the policies of President Nazarbaev. As a leader with a Soviet background, Nazarbaev has been ruling the republic since its independence and he has been doing so with the support of Russians as well. Therefore, this has created an ironic situation for Russians in Kazakhstan. Although they face restrictions and repression in terms of political mobilization, they continue supporting Nazarbaev since there is a high risk that his successors may adopt more nationalistic policies.

Regarding the current attitude of President Nazarbaev, Bissenova points out an interesting dimension by stating that “considering Kazakhstan’s peculiar situation with a sizable and powerful Russian minority and almost 7,000 km of common border with Russia, it would be difficult to pursue state building based exclusively on Kazakh national identity. However, the government could just be playing for time: today the average age of ethnic Kazakhs is

under 30, while the average age of Russians is over 60. That means ethnic Kazakhs will determine the future of Kazakhstan.”¹⁷⁷

Therefore, in terms of political participation and mobilization, there is currently a certain degree of stability for Russians living in Kazakhstan. It may be argued that this stability may be maintained by the year 2012 until the end of Nazarbaev’s term in the office. However, after 2012 even if Nazarbaev finds a way to stay in power, the outlook does not seem very promising due to the demographic factors, which undermine the strength of the Russian population.

Second, the thesis examined the state planning and recruitment policy of the Kazakh government. In contrast to the rhetoric of Nazarbaev stating frequently in his speeches that Kazakhstan is a multi-national republic and all ethnic groups are equal before the state, the state planning and recruitment policy practiced by the Nazarbaev government has not promoted equal opportunities for all ethnic groups in the republic.

Compared to the political sphere, where there is a harsh repressive attitude towards all kinds of opposition groups, be it Kazakh or Russian, in the state planning and recruitment policies, the ethnic dimension at work can be observed more clearly. Since independence, the state planning and recruitment policies have been manipulated in the favor of Kazakhs and at

¹⁷⁷ Bissenova, (accessed).

the expense of non-Kazakh groups particularly the Russian population. An important tool used within this process of favoring Kazakhs over non-Kazakhs in general and Russians in particular has been the language factor which has become a barrier for non-Kazakh speaking Russians in the republic.

Therefore, the thesis examined the language policy and rewriting of history as a third issue as part of the nation-building policies of the Kazakh state. Particularly the language policy has been utilized by the Kazakh state as a highly powerful instrument to create barriers for Russians not only in the state recruitment processes but also in taking part in social, cultural, political and economic spheres of the life in the republic. The language issue in general and the status of Kazakh and Russian language in particular have been one of the most controversial issues that came up with the nation-building policies in the post-Soviet period. This has also become a major concern and source of unrest for the Russians living in Kazakhstan.

Fourth, the thesis has examined another controversial matter, which is the issue of citizenship. The policy of the Kazakh state not to allow dual citizenship to the Russian population on the one hand and calling for immigration of Kazakhs living outside their homeland has caused resentment and frustration on the side of the Russian population. This has been a clear signal to the Russian population living in Kazakhstan that they will not have

any privileged status and they have to either accept and be content with the Kazakh citizenship or migrate back to Russia.

Fifth, the thesis examined the move of the state capital from Almaty to Astana as a crucial action taken by the Nazarbaev government as part of the nation-building policies in the post-Soviet period. On this issue, while it may be argued that the relocation of the capital may have resulted in the loss of importance of Russian-dominated Almaty and lessened the Russian ethnic concentration in Astana; more time needs to pass in order to make a reliable examination of the impact of the relocation over the Russian population in general.

Finally, in the light of the examination of these five issues, it is possible to argue that after the independence of Kazakhstan, the post-Soviet nation-building policies have overall had a negative impact over the Russian population living in the republic.¹⁷⁸ This finding of this thesis generally supports the literature on the topic which argues that post-Soviet nation-building policies in Kazakhstan have worked in the interest of the Kazakhs and to the disadvantage of non-Kazakhs in general and Russians in particular. The examination carried out for five main issues show that the negative impact of the nation-building policies over the Russians is mostly visible in the employment, social and cultural spheres. The reason for this may be due

¹⁷⁸ It should be noted that this argument is only limited to the five issues which have been examined in this thesis.

to the fact that these spheres have a direct impact on the daily life since they include basic things such as to maintain a living such as finding a job, particularly in the state sector, and/or keeping one's job as well as choosing schools for children, learning Kazakh, etc.

As for future research on the topic of this thesis, it may be an interesting endeavor to examine the relationship between authoritarian regimes and the governance of ethnic diversity under such regimes. In addition, it may also be extremely interesting to conduct a field research on the topic of this thesis. Such research examining in the field the unofficial practices towards the Russian population within the framework of nation-building policies may result in fruitful findings for the academic literature on the issue.

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