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ANTICIPATING DEMOGRAPHIC SUPERIORITY KAZAKHSTANI THINKING ON INTEGRATION AND NATION-BUILDING

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In the communist period, the Soviet republics could be regarded as a kind of pseudostates or protostates, which had some of the trappings of true states, but lacked essential elements such as control of their own territory and economy. Today, the state authorities in the successor state are striving to transform these political contraptions into real, functioning, modern states. This a complex and multidimensional process, and I do not intend to cover all of them. Instead, I will concentrate on the identity aspect of nation-building. In order to make these states functioning entities, it is essential that the people who live in them transfer their political loyalty to the new state. They must develop a sense of belonging in the state and a common identity as the People of Latvia and the People of Kazakhstan, in other words, as a Latvian nation and a Kazakhstani nation. At the present, all Soviet successor states are in the grips of hectic nation-building.

The classical literature on nation-building which originated in the West in the 1960s and 1970s, often assumed that the development of modern communication technologies, standardized educational systems, etc., more or less automatically would undermine local particularism and all kinds of substate, sectarian, and parochial identities, and supplant them with common, state-centered identities.¹ It seems now quite clear that this optimism was unwarranted. Even in the Western world many old, long-established states are experiencing a backlash of regionalism and ethnic separatism. Nation-building seems to be a very protracted process at the best, perhaps even a never-ending project. Importantly also, the element of conscious policy decisions and state initiatives is stronger than many analysts believed. Therefore, in order to understand and to forecast what kind of nations that will take shape in the new states of the former Soviet Union it is important to focus on the express objectives and actual strategies of the nation-builders.

Historically, in Eastern Europe in general and in the Soviet Union in particular, the concept of the 'nation' has not been identified with the total population of the country, as a political unit.² Rather, it has been a cultural and ethnical entity. While in most Western countries the two terms of 'citizenship' and 'nationality' are interchangeable, in the Soviet Union they were sharply differentiated. 'Nationality' was understood as 'ethnicity' and was objectivized, both on the individual level and on the macrolevel. Every Soviet citizen had an official nationality ascribed to him and written into his passport,³ and the territorial units which made up the Soviet federal state, were named after particular ethnic groups, the so-called titular nationalities. In some fuzzy sense these republics were seen as 'belonging to' the titular ethno-nations as collective, social bodies.⁴ This means that as the present-day nation-builders

¹ See e.g. Karl Deutsch and W. Foltz (ed.), *Nationbuilding*, (New York: Atherton, 1966). For a scathing criticism of this position, see Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism. The Quest for Understanding*. (Princeton: Princeton University press, 1994).

² Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

³ When the Soviet passport regime was introduced in 1932, every passport holder was free to state which nationality s/he belonged to. Later, the element of choice was abandoned.

⁴ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1996).

in the Soviet successor states set out to mould new nations in the new states, there are already in existence a Latvian nation, a Kazakh nation, etc, but these groups are not coterminous with the total population of the state.

All NIS states, then, are faced with the formidable task of relating these two entities, the titular nation and the People of Georgia, the People of Moldova, the People of Kazakhstan, etc, to each other in such a way that the entire population will freely identify with and be loyal to the state. Everywhere, the buzzword for the resolution of this task is 'integration'. It is being asserted the national minorities that is, the members of the population who do not belong to the titular nation must be integrated into... well, it is not always quite clear exactly what they are supposed to be integrated into. Either they may be culturally integrated into the titular national culture, or they may be politically integrated into the state, in which case they will retain most of their cultural traits. Very often no explicit distinction between these two aspects of integration is made and a high degree of ambiguity surrounds the issue.

This lack of clarity is perhaps not very consequential in all new states. In those countries where the titular nation constitutes 80% or even 90% of the total population, the character and the identity of the state will, inevitably, to a large extent be informed by the dominant ethnic culture. The small minorities are not in a position to challenge the hegemony of the titular group. For that very reason, perhaps, the titular group may feel secure enough to offer them a liberal, magnanimous minority policy, and the matter will not be coming to a head. Things are quite different, however, in those cases where the minorities make up sizeable, strong groups, capable of fighting for their collective interests. If there is strong cohesion not only within each ethnic minority, but also a high degree solidarity among them, the situation is further complicated still. In such cases, the non-titulars may, in theory at least, form a common front to curb eventual hegemonistic aspirations of the titular nation, and they will not so easily yield to pressure and to marginalization. In a worst case scenario this may lead to ethnic violence and a breakdown of social order.

Potentially, this is the situation we are faced with in Kazakhstan. With no more than some 44% of the total population in Kazakhstan in 1994, the Kazakhs do not even constitute a majority, only a plurality. Also, in this state the minorities should not be regarded as a fragmented hotch-potch of disparate ethnic groups. While it is true that the various ethnic communities of Ukrainians, Tatars, Belarusians, etc. in Kazakhstan have retained some elements of their ethnic traditions, the vast majorities among them are nevertheless linguistically Russified, and in many cases also thoroughly Sovietized.⁵ For analytical purposes, therefore, it is more meaningful to identify the non-titular populations as a common Russified or Russophone group. This means that Kazakhstan is not really multicultural society, but may more aptly be characterized as a bi-cultural society.

So, what exactly does integration mean in such bi-cultural societies? Is one half of the population supposed to be integrated into the other half? Is that at all possible, and if so, what will be the outcome?

A multitiered debate.

⁵ Neil Melvin, *Russians Beyond Russia. The politics of National Identity*. (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), p. 116.

These were core questions in a research project which was financed by the Norwegian Research Council in 1996, involving two Norwegian and one Kazakhstani researchers. The project focussed on integration and nation-building on four different levels - ideological, political, social and mental. In this article I will concentrate on the ideological aspect, that is, on official and semiofficial statements outlining the idea of the 'Kazakhstani nation', as Kazakhstani nation-builders would like to see it develop.⁶

In contrast to most other countries in Central Asia, Kazakhstan has a reasonably open debate in the media on many issues. To be sure, some topics are approached more gingerly than others and not all positions are tolerated, but it is nevertheless possible to trace the contours of a Kazakhstani thinking on integration and nation-building. This thinking, as will be demonstrated below, is far from coherent, but often contains several contradictory strands, sometimes expressed by the same authors.

The Kazakhstani nation-building debate can be divided into three separate sections. At *the ground level*, the polemics include a wide variety of disparate viewpoints, among which also high-pitched nationalist positions are represented. For the most part, hard-line Kazakh nationalists vent their rancour in Kazakh language newspapers. These papers hardly any Russophones are able to, or care, to read. Excerpts from these outpourings, however, are sometimes translated into Russian and printed by Kazakhstani Russian language papers, *in casu* by *Karavan*, for the benefit of their monolingual Russophone readers. (This service, of course, not only keeps the readers informed but also, inevitably, may raise their level of anxiety). One extremist Kazakh nationalist paper, *Kazakhskaia pravda*, was for a while in 1995 published in Russian, but was closed down for racist inflammation. After that closure, the Kazakh nationalist discourse seems to be ever more closely confined to the Kazakh language media.

On the opposite side of the barricades, Russophone hardline positions will mostly be found in Russian media published in Moscow or in St.Petersburg. Russian language media in Kazakhstan are generally either pro-governmental or non-political. The only major exception, *Karavan*, represents a liberal rather than a nationalist opposition. However, in the irregularly published organ of the Russian community, *Russkoe slovo*, as well as in the Russian Orthodox journal *Vedi*, expressions of hardline, right-wing Russian nationalism may be found. The writings of such odious figures as Andrei Barkashov, Alexander Sterligov and the turn-of-century preacher John of Kronstadt are reprinted with approval.⁷ Hankering for the unitary Soviet state is expressed openly, and indirectly one can perhaps infer that the editors do not accept the legitimacy of the contemporary Kazakhstani state. However, this viewpoint is not explicitly stated. In these publications contemporary Kazakhstani interethnic

⁶ The term of a Kazakhstani nation (*natsiia*), while quite absent from the publication on the nationality issue in the Soviet period, is now frequently evoked. See for instance the statement of a group of Kazakh researchers at the semiofficial Institute for the Development of Kazakhstan: 'The main objective of present state leadership [in Kazakhstan] in the field of interethnic relations, is to create the preconditions, in a long-term perspective, for the establishment of a unified Kazakhstani nation.' A.B., Galiev, E. Babakumarov, Zh. Zhansugurova and A. Perushaev, *Mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniia v Kazakhstane. Etnicheskii aspekt kadrovoi politiki*. (Almaty: Institut razvitiia Kazakhstana 1994), p. 19. This and similar formulation in modern Kazakh academic literature seem to reflect an exposure to Western terminology.

⁷ See e.g. the article of Andrei Barkashev in *Russkoe slovo*, 1, 1996 (August) and the article of John of Kronstadt in *Vedi* 5, 1996.

issues are rarely addressed directly. While some issues such as the intra-ethnic *zhuz* question is semi-taboo in the Kazakh language discourse, in the Russian language also Russo-Kazakh relations are treated with discourse a high degree of self-sensure. This produces to rather lopsided debate in which sometimes very candid Kazakh outbursts on interethnic issues are met by Russophone reticence.

Elevated about shadow boxing at the ground level hover *the official statements* of Kazakhstani authorities, embodied primarily in the dictums of the president and in the constitutional formulae. Nazarbaev's pronounced opinions on a subject are in a sense final. They are not open to overt criticism or disagreement in the public debate. Still, there is a certain leeway for interpretation and elaboration on his viewpoints. Also, the two Kazakhstani constitutions, from January 1993 and August 1995 respectively, were exposed to a measure of lively debate prior to their adoption. However, as soon as they had been promulgated, attacks on them were muted.

In between the official and the grassroots levels we find *the academic discourse* on integration and nation-building. This debate is to a large degree played out in small circulation journals which are not readily accessible to the public not so much because they are high-brow, but because they are simply not on sale at regular newsstands. Adding to the esoterics, certain politically sensitive scholarly reports are translated into English and sold for exorbitant prices in hard currency only. This precaution ensures that they will be read by foreign researchers (such as our team) but not by the average Kazakhstani citizens.⁸

The Kazakhstani academic debate on ethnicity related issues is marked by a peculiar blend of refined scholarly finesse - or at least the trappings thereof - on the one hand and a sometimes rather rough-hewn nationalist message on the other. In style it clearly resembles the speeches of the president, in content, however, it is often perceptibly closer to the ramblings of the Kazakh nationalist press.

THE GROUND LEVEL: THE KAZAKH LANGUAGE PRESS

In the Kazakh language press the nationality debate seems to be premised on the view that this state is, or at least ought to become, a national state of the Kazakh nation. The fact that also very many non-Kazakhs inhabit the state is not necessarily seen as a valid reason for including them into the Kazakhstani concept of the nation

In January 1996 a history professor wrote as follows in the newspaper *Almaty aqshamy*:

How can we call those people 'Kazakhstanians' who arrived here some 40 or 50 years ago, or those whose forefathers settled here in the last century, when they pack their suitcases heading for Russia just because life is becoming slightly difficult (...).

Unfortunately, we have millions of such people who were born and raised here, but who do not call Kazakhstan their Motherland.⁹

⁸ A prime example is *Kazakh tribalism today, its characteristics and possible solutions (analytical report)*. (Almaty: Institute for the development of Kazakhstan, 1996), which is one of the extremely few Kazakhstani publications that discuss the *zhuz* problem. This report we were able to obtain at the Institute for the development of Kazakhstan for 20 USD, an enormous price for most Kazakhstanians.

⁹ Saken Dorzhikov in *Almaty aqshamy*, 15 January 1996.

Another professor, who had visited the United States, rejected the notion of a Kazakhstani multinational state. The distressing fate of the native Americans showed what such a state could lead to. 'The Indians are an ethnos on the verge of complete disappearance. Perhaps this is what the political "smart alecks" want: the Kazakhs ought to go the same way as the Indians'.¹⁰

David Laitin has pointed out that much of what is usually being interpreted as interethnic violence and antagonism, instead ought to be regarded as expressions of animosity and conflict *within* ethnic groups. Nationalist agitators are devoting much time and energy to the policing their own group to ensure that all members walk in step and non-one succumbs to the assimilation into alien cultures. Also, persons who stand outside the circles of power use nationalistic rhetoric to worm their way into them.¹¹

Much evidence suggests that this description fits well the situation in Kazakhstan. In the Soviet period the political as well as the intellectual elite among the Kazakhs was dominated by persons who had received a Russian language education and often had a better command of the Russian than of the Kazakh language.¹² This Russified and Sovietized elite is the target of the most bitter attacks of the Kazakh nationalists.

A local leader in the Kazakh cultural organization 'Qazaq tili' (= 'the Kazakh language') in 1996 complained that 'one turns on the television and sees Kazakhs working in high offices speaking in Russian or speaking Kazakh in a very stuttering, clumsy way, having great difficulty with the pronunciation. If this is the behaviour of our best and brightest, what will then happen to our language? (...) First and foremost the Kazakhs themselves ought to show respect for the state language, there can be no question about it.'¹³ Another author suggested that 'Qazaq tili' ought to be given the power to conduct language tests of all applicants for important positions in the state apparatus, and the right to reject the application of anyone showing an insufficient proficiency in Kazakh.¹⁴ Such suggestions, of course, hit a raw nerve not only of the Europeans, but also of Russophone Kazakhs.

In April 1996, a third professor (once more an historian, they seem to be rather active among the publicists), lamented that

Young aspiring Kazakhs studied in Russian schools and married a daughter of a non-Kazakh family. These people were trusted by the old regime and they worked in responsible positions. Some of them enjoy respect to this very day.

In most cases the mother in such mixed families would get the upper hand. The children would marry someone from her nationality and be inculcated its traditions and mores. Such people are Kazakhs in name only.¹⁵

¹⁰ Professor Kuliash Orazbekova, in *Almaty aqshamy*, 12 January 1996, cited in *Karavan* 19 January 1996.

¹¹ David D. Laitin: *Identity in formation. The Russian-speaking population in the Near Abroad*, (Ithaca: Cornell University press, forthcoming).

¹² Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1995.)

¹³ K. Abdenov, in *Eremen Qazaqstan*, 2 February 1996. Cited in *Karavan* 9 February 1996.

¹⁴ Cited in *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 10 April 1996.

¹⁵ U. Shalekenov, in *Eremen Qazaqstan*, 3 April 1996, cited in *Karavan* 12 April 1996.

In this article, the concept of the Kazakh nation has been severely circumscribed. It no longer embraces all those who have 'Kazakh' as their passport nationality, but only those who have a good command of the Kazakh language and no non-Kazakhs in the family. Another caustic attack against the Russophone Kazakhs was published in *Qazaq adebiyeti*, on 30 January 1996.

What distinguishes a person who doesn't know the life of his nation, doesn't understand its language - the soul of the nation - from a British or an American? Nothing!.¹⁶

If these viewpoints should gain wide acceptance in Kazakhstan, this would radically strengthen the hand of the 'true' Kazakhs over their somewhat more cosmopolitan ethnic brethren in the competition for power and influence in Almaty.

The handful of quotations from the Kazakh language discourse referred to above represent of course only a haphazard selection. They are quoted from Russian language sources, and we do not know whether the publishers for reason might have chosen to concentrate on the most outrageous outpouring of Kazakh nationalist. No claim of representativity, therefore, can be made. All we can say with certainty is that *also* such viewpoints are being set forth, and tolerated. In fact, one may wonder if not the gravest sin of the editor of *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, which sealed the fate of his newspaper, might have been that he published in Russian, thus making such viewpoints accessible to a larger readership.

OFFICIAL PRONOUNCEMENTS

In general, the message conveyed by president Nazarbaev and reflected in official pronouncements of Kazakhstani state authorities is distinctly different from the rhetoric used in the unofficial, Kazakh language discourse on ethnicity and nation-building presented above. To be sure, Nazarbaev's thinking on the topic is far from pellucid. Martha Brill Olcott has remarked Nazarbaev has tried to avoid confrontation on the ethnic issue by asserting that Kazakhstan is *both* a multinational society *and* a homeland for the ethnic Kazakh at the same time.¹⁷ In a sense, he has tried to avoid making a choice between an ethnic and a civic state concept. The duality in the official Kazakh selfunderstanding was expressed by the Kazakhstani president in a speech to a congress of the 'Qazaq tili' society in November 1992:

We should not forget that the sovereignty of Kazakhstan is in many ways special. First and foremost it is a peculiar synthesis of the national sovereignty of the Kazakhs and the sovereignty of the people of Kazakhstan in general as an ethnopolitical community.¹⁸

This ambiguity was also quite apparent in the January 1993 constitution.¹⁹ The preamble opened with a reference to 'We, the people (*narod*) of Kazakhstan', clearly a non-ethnic entity. Many Russophones, however, were disconcerted by article 1 which hailed the Republic of

¹⁶ The writer Bolat Zhetekbai, cited in *Karavan* 9 February 1996.

¹⁷ Martha Brill Olcott, 'Kazakhstan: a republic of minorities', Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras (eds), *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor states*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 315.

¹⁸ *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 28 November 1992.

¹⁹ See Paul Kolstoe, *Russians in the former Soviet republics*, (London: C.Hurst, 1995), pp. 248-50.

Kazakhstan as 'the form of statehood of the Kazakh nation (*natsia*).'²⁰ A Russophone professor in Almaty claimed that 'in other words, "the people of Kazakhstan" means the ethnic Kazakhs only'.²⁰ This was clearly a misreading. Nonetheless, official spokesmen maintained that whatever else Kazakhstan is, it is also a national state of the Kazakhs. This view has been reflected in several Kazakhstani laws and in other official documents. The law on citizenship, for instance, allows dual citizenship for ethnic Kazakhs living abroad but for no other groups.²¹ This special arrangement was defended as being necessary to redress the injustice done to the Kazakh nation in the Soviet period when hundreds of thousands of Kazakhs fled to China and Mongolia to escape collectivization. These groups are also granted special privileges in the law on immigration.²²

At a large conference in Almaty in May 1993, Nazarbaev fleshed out the main goals and elements of a new Kazakhstani state ideology. A major task, he declared, would be 'to combat every chauvinism, nationalism, and separatism'. This should be done by the inculcation of 'Kazakhstani patriotism'.

In the world there are quite a few states, even very prospering ones, which contain more different nations and nationalities than we have in Kazakhstan. In these countries patriotism is especially strongly developed. A devotional attitude towards the state symbols reigns in society. For instance, at the beginning of the school day, during the swearing in of a jury or an official, and at many other events and mass gatherings the state flag is flown and the national anthem played.²³

The nation-building model outlined here was undisputably civic, the prototype being the United States.

Another landmark in Nazarbaev's thinking on nation-building and ethnic integration was his remarkable speech to the Parliament on 9 June 1994. At this occasion, Nazarbaev not so much formulated lofty, positive ideals, but instead subjected the actual nation-building practices pursued by his own state apparatus to devastating criticism. He attacked as simplistic the conventional Kazakh view that Russians were leaving the country for economic reasons only.

We should not close our eyes to the fact that very many people start to think about leaving the country the moment when they are beginning to feel a psychological discomfort. This feeling of theirs is caused by a number of factors, first and foremost related to excesses and an unreasonable speed in the implementation of complex socio-cultural programs.

This statement was so startling that Nazarbaev, anticipating accusations that he was being pressurized by someone (read: Russia), insisted that he had reached this conclusion quite on his own. His only motivation was his desire to set straight errors committed by state officials, in particular in the field of the language policy. The state program for the development of the

²⁰ V. Moiseev, in *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 27 August 1993.

²¹ 'Zakon o grazhdanstve respubliki Kazakhstan', *Vedomosti Verkhovnogo Soveta Kazakhskoi SSR*, 1991, 52, pp. 81-96.

²² 'Zakon Respubliki Kazakhstan ob immigratsii' 1992. *Sovety Kazakstana*, 25 August.

²³ *Sovety Kazakstana*, 13 May 1993.

Kazakh language and other languages had disturbed not only the Russophone population but also many Kazakhs, the president complained. A new language law therefore ought to be adopted which would 'eliminate all and every discrimination of the Russian language' at the same time as it would identify effective measures for the promotion of the Kazakh language.

As particularly pernicious Nazarbaev singled out the 'destructive' policy of changing Russian toponyms. 'The mass renaming of streets, towns and even major cities has had a one-sided tendency. It has not taken into consideration the public sentiment or the ethnic composition of the population. Sometimes it has disregarded even centuries-old traditions and, worst of all, it has ignored the mass psychology of the inhabitants.'

Belling the cat, Nazarbaev claimed that the problems he has detected were caused by 'distortions in the personnel policy'. Such distortions could be found both locally and in the capital, he insisted. 'For instance, 30 Kazakhs as against only three Russians, two Uighurs and one Azeri are working in the Language committee. And this is an agency which deals with the development of all of our languages, not only with Kazakh.'²⁴

While Nazarbaev softened his criticism somewhat by pointing out an instance where also *Kazakhs* were grossly underrepresented in a state organ, his speech definitely conveyed new signals and left many of his listeners flabbergasted. A Russian nationalist, a leading activist of the Slavonic *Lad* movement in Eastern Kazakhstan, confessed that when he read this address he could not believe his own ears. Its message to a remarkable degree coincided with his own views, but if any one activist from *Lad* had voiced similar opinions, he or she would immediately have been accused of slander and of rousing interethnic animosity, this Russian surmised.²⁵

For a while, Nazarbaev's June 1994 address seemed to signal a new departure in the treatment of the non-titular population in Kazakhstan.

The new constitution of May 1995 contained some significant semantic changes which Russophone activist had been clamoring for for a long time. The phrase defining Kazakhstan as 'the form of statehood of the Kazakh nation was deleted, as was the special right of the Kazakh diaspora to hold dual citizenship. Russian was elevated to a status of an 'official' language 'to be used on a par with the state language in state organs and in organs of local administration'.²⁶ This compromise formula most Russians regarded as an improvement over the previous constitution which defined Russian as a 'language of interethnic communication', but it fell short of their optimal goal: full parity of the Kazakh and Russian language in all official usages.²⁷

In May 1996 a new official 'Concept for the Forming of a State Identity of the Republic of Kazakhstan' was published in Kazakhstani media.²⁸ The Concept, while performing a delicate

²⁴ Nursultan Nazarbaev: *K obnoblennomu Kazakhstanu - cherez uglublenie reform, obshchenatsional'noe soglasie*. (Almaty: Kazakhstan, 1994), pp. 12-15.

²⁵ Nikolai Ivanov, 'Kazakhstan: sluzhenie khimere', *Moskva*, 12, 1994, pp. 135-150, on p. 146.

²⁶ 'Konstitutsiia Respubliki Kazakhstan', *Mysl'* (Almaty), 10, 1995 pp. 3-22, articles 1, 7, 10 and 11.

²⁷ Appeals from UP nNORTH

²⁸ The document was unsigned, but the chairperson of the Parliament committee on Foreign Affairs, Zhabaikhon Abdildin, in interview with the author in October 1996 claimed to be the main architect.

balancing act between an ethnic and a civic idea of the nation, nevertheless must be regarded as a retreat from the studious ethnic neutrality of the 1995 constitution.

The Concept noted that the 'ethnic centre' of the Kazakhs is Kazakhstan. Nowhere else in the world do Kazakhs possess a statehood which is concerned about the preservation of the Kazakhs as an ethnic group, or about the development of Kazakh culture, language, traditions, and life style. 'When we define Kazakhstan as a national state, it is this quality of the state we primarily ought to have in mind.' Acknowledging that Kazakhstan certainly is a multiethnic state, the Concept also stated that the other ethnic groups in the country could not adduce similarly strong claims to attachments to this state. 'The changes in the national make-up of Kazakhstan have been brought about exclusively by an influx of non-Kazakh ethnic communities, the majority of whom have their own statehood (= elsewhere).'

Remaining a national state, Kazakhstan at the same time represents the interests of the entire population, irrespective of their ethnicity, the authors of the Concept declared reassuringly. This dual quality, they asserted, represents 'the new essence' of the Kazakhstani state.

In June 1994, Nazarbaev had demanded the adoption of a new language law which would 'eliminate all and every discrimination of the Russian language'. A new law was indeed adopted on 22 November 1996, but it was regarded by Russophone activist as a tightening of the discrimination against the Russian language. The law required, inter alia, ethnic Kazaks to know the state language by January 2001 while the Russian-speaking population must know Kazakh by January 2006. There were no requirements for proficiency in Russian. Michail Golovkov, the sole remaining Lad leader in the Kazakhstani parliament, characterized the law as follows.²⁹

THE SCHOLARLY DEBATE

The vacillations and ambiguities in official statements on issues related to nation-building and ethnic integration leave considerable latitude for inspired exegesis and imaginative interpretations. A lively and often sophisticated discourse on integration and related subjects is unfolding in Kazakhstani academia. The main fora are journals such as *Saiasat* (Politics), *Mysl'* (Thought), and *Evraziiskoe soobshchestvo* (the Eurasian community). The overwhelming majority of the participants in this discourse are (judging by their names) ethnic Kazakhs.

Also a few Russians take part, and the few Russian contributions emphasize, predictably, the multicultural character of the state and try to hold forth a civic, inclusive state model. The title of a August 1995 article in *Saiasat* written by A. Kotov, a member of the consultative council preparing the new Kazakhstani constitution, asserted that 'a Unified Citizenship is the Constitutional Basis for Equal Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan'.³⁰ The edge of Kotov's article was directed partly against Estonia and Latvia, where a large portion of the population was not granted status as original citizens at all, as well as against Russia, a country which has been pushing particularly hard for the institutionalization of *dual* citizenship. While Kotov in principle found the idea of dual citizenship strongly deleterious he nevertheless, surprisingly,

²⁹ Golovkov's interview with the author, August 1996.

³⁰ A.K. Kotov, 'Edinoe grazhdanstvo -- konstitutsionnaia osnova ravnopraviiia v Respublike Kazakhstan', *Saiasat*, (Almaty) 3, 1995 pp. 21-25.

was willing to make an exception for Kazakhs living outside Kazakhstan. His acceptance of such positive discrimination of the Kazakh group either indicates that accommodation to Kazakh positions on ethnic issues is far advanced in the Russian academic community in Kazakhstan, or that such concessions are necessary to make in order to be admitted into the official discourse at all.

By way of contrast it could be pointed to the fate of a textbook on political science written by a Russian lecturer at the local technical institute in Semipalatinsk in 1993. In his book, Anatolii Syromiatnikov noted that many former Soviet republics were so multinational in their ethnic composition that it was impossible to turn them into 'national states' in the ethnic sense of the word. 'Attempts to confirm the rights of the indigenous populations only will lead to conflict situations such as armed clashes, increased instability, the disintegration of new states, as well as to mass migration and the tragedy of millions of people.'³¹ According to Syromiatnikov his textbook had the dubious distinction of becoming one of the first scholarly books in independent Kazakhstan to be banned by the censorship.³² Syromiatnikov's conflictology was formulated as a general theory, but its applicability to Kazakhstani conditions was obvious.

No common position can be attributed to all Kazakh academic authors writing on the issues of integration and nation-building, but certain prevailing trends may nevertheless be identified. On the crucial question of the character of the Kazakhstani state a consensus seems to have formed: even if the idea of Kazakhstan as 'the form of statehood of the Kazakh nation' has disappeared from the Kazakhstani constitution, it is still alive and kicking among influential opinion makers in Almaty.

The crucial question of civic vs. ethnic nation-state has been addressed in a spate of Kazakhstani articles. In April 1994, law professor S. Sabikenov tried to define the difference between 'national' (*natsional'nyi*) and 'popular' (*narodnyi*) sovereignty. Such a clarification is very much needed, not only in Kazakhstan, but in many new states in the FSU area. The term 'self-determination of nations', which in international law relates to the independence and self-rule of *states*, leads to great confusion in countries where the nation is regarded as an ethnic entity. However, Sabikenov's article did little to disperse the mist which clouds this terminology in the Kazakhstani debate.

He concluded that 'in character' Kazakhstan is a national state of the Kazakh nation, but 'in content' it is a democratic, law-governed state. These two aspects, in his view, do not contradict each other.

To my mind, a national state stems from the fulfilment of a nation's right to self-determination. In our case, this means the Kazakh nation, as the indigenous nation which has an historical and unalienable right to fulfil its right to self-determination on its own territory.

³¹ L.T. Tolubaeva and A.L. Syromiatnikov, *Leksii po politologii*, (Semipalatinsk: Semipalatinskii tekhnologicheskii institut, 1993).

³² Interview with Syromiatnikov in Semipalatinsk, 21 September 1996. See also *Karavan*, 15 June 1994.

Sabikenov therefore considered any attempt to delete from the constitution the reference to Kazakhstan as the homeland of the Kazakh nation as both unscientific and unjustified.³³

A somewhat different approach to the nation-building question was taken by G. Tanirbergenova, a local school administrator from Taldy Kurgan. She regarded the Kazakhs as 'a state-forming nation' (*gosudarstvoobrazuiushchaia natsiia*). As such, they were assigned with the loft task of fostering the spirit of Kazakhstani patriotism among the other nations inhabiting the vast Kazakhstani space. This was the historical mission of the Kazakh nation today, she believed.³⁴

A similar view was held by professor Adbumalik Nysanbaev. Writing with a junior colleague in *Kazakstanskaia pravda* in January 1996 he claimed that Kazakhstan 'does not exhibit any positive idea, any significant aims, or common dreams capable of uniting and rousing all Kazakhstanians', except one: 'the Kazakh (*kazakhskaia*) idea'. 'Today, when the Kazakh idea has been embodied in a sovereign state, it ought to acquire a new quality as the integrating principle of the entire polyethnic and polycultural people in our country.'³⁵ Thus, the nation-building process will encompass all inhabitants of Kazakhstan but their respective cultures will not in equal measure influence the end result. Instead, the core and essence of 'Kazakhstanianness' will be 'Kazakhness'.

An article in the August 1995 issue of *Saiasat* addressed the issue of 'interethnic integration in Kazakhstan'.³⁶ The author, associate professor N. Baitenova at the Kazakhstani state university, regarded integration as the optimal solution to the ethnic problems of Kazakhstan, infinitely superior to the alternative solution of assimilation. Integration, however, would be a protracted process, she believed, fraught with conflicting tendencies. The end result would - hopefully - be the formation of 'a Kazakhstani nation'. This nation would be held together not only by common statehood and citizenship, but also by shared cultural bonds. While all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan would retain their separate identities, they would nevertheless learn from and adopt to each other. In a process of mutual acculturation they would develop 'a distinctive mentality as Kazakhstanians.'

The major obstacle on the road towards this radiant future lay in the resistance of a large part of the Russian population of Kazakhstan, Baitenova believed. These people did not understand that after independence the two major groups, the Kazakhs and the Russians, were inevitably going through significant changes of status.

From being in a subordinate position the Kazakh ethnos has been changed into a titular nation. As a result of the [state] souverenization, the Kazakh ethnos has rectified the historical injustice and restored their ancient right to their historical homeland, their soil, language, mores, and traditions. From being a 'junior brother', the Kazakhs have been turned into the leading ethnos, the indigenous nation.

³³ S. Sabikenov, 'Natsional'nyi i narodnyi suverenitet. V chem ikh razlichie?', *Mysl'* (Almaty), 4, 1994, pp. 9-11.

³⁴ G. Tanirbergenova, 'Regional'nyi opyt realizatsii vnutrennei politiki', *Saiasat*, 5, 1995, pp. 50-57.

³⁵ Abdulmalik Nysanbaev and Murat Abdirov, 'Zachem nuzhna doroga, esli ona ne vediot k Khramu?', *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 4 January 1996.

³⁶ N.D. Baitenova, 'Mezhetnicheskaia integratsiia v Kazakhstane: Sostoianie i perspektivy', *Saiasat*, (Almaty), 3, 1995, pp. 27-33.

As a concomitant effect of the elevation of the Kazakhs the Russians have been reduced 'from a status as the senior brother and are becoming an ordinary ethnos, or even better: they are acquiring the status of an ethnic group'. Some Russians, however, do not accept these new conditions, Baitenova complained. As a sign of this she pointed out that a leader of the Slavonic *Lad* movement in April 1995 had appealed to the voters not to endorse the prolongation of Nazarbaev's term in office beyond the five year period he was elected for. Loyalty towards the Kazakhstani state was thus identified with support for present political regime.

Baitenova noted with relief that certain Belarusian, Ukrainian and Polish spokesmen had criticized *Lad* for this stance, and she saw this as evidence of these nations' greater loyalty. The political disagreements which she had detected within Slavic camp led her to the conclusion that the term 'Russophones' was imprecise and incorrect. Not the Russophones, but the Russians alone were the main opponents of the Kazakhs. Such an analysis drives a wedge into the Russophone groups and splits it into smaller, politically less powerful components.

Banking on demography

One of the favourite themes in the Kazakh nationality debate is demography. The Kazakh ethnic group grows considerably faster than the European groups for several reasons: increasing Kazakh immigration from abroad (in particular from Mongolia and China), increasing emigration of Russian, Germans and other Europeans, and finally, a higher birth rate among the Kazakhs.³⁷ Thus, according to official sources, the share of the Kazakh group increased from 39.7% in 1989, to 44.3% in 1994 and 46% by 1 January 1995. During the same period the share of the Russian fell from 37.7% to 34.8%; of the Germans, from 5.8% to 3.1%.³⁸ A Kazakh demographic dominance may be predicted to be in place in the course of a few years and to be gradually strengthened in the first decade of the next century.

In the Kazakhstani debate these figures and extrapolations are used to drive home two points. First, it will break the resistance of Russophone activists against the Kazakhification of the state. second, it allegedly also justifies the present overrepresentation of Kazakhs in the state apparatus and in elected offices. The latter point is somewhat surprising, since one would perhaps expect the growth of 'ethnic power' (to use Rasma Karklins' expression)³⁹, to follow the demographic tendencies with a time lag of one generations. After all, not infants but adults fill public offices. However, the political influence of the Kazakhs is clearly *running ahead* of the demographic weight.

Several Western experts have concluded that as early as in the 1970s, several Soviet nationalities to an increasing degree were able to dominate the political scene in their

³⁷ This is particularly true with respect to the rural Kazakhs, while second and third generation urban Kazakhs have a family structure which is more similar to the Russians'. This also has the effect of increasing the share of Kazakh speakers among the Kazakhs at the expense of Russophone and bilingual Kazakhs. See Nurbulat Masanov, *Evrasiiskii vestnik* XXX.

³⁸ *O demograficheskoi situatsii v 1995 godu*, (Almaty: Pravitel'stvo respubliki Kazakhstan, 1996), p. 66.

³⁹ Rasma Karklins, *Ethnic Relations in the USSR. The Perspective From Below*. (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1986/1989)

respective republics.⁴⁰ The Kunaev regime in Kazakhstan is often singled out as a prime example of this tendency, in spite of the fact that during the entire Kunaev era the Kazakhs, as the only titular nationality in a Union republic, made up less than half of the total population. One reason for this seems to be the traditional clan structure of Kazakh society which the Soviets were never able to eradicate. As a legacy of pre-Soviet times, power and authority in Kazakhstan, like in most other Central Asian states, ran through time-tested clan structures. The three Kazakh superclans (zhuz'es) - the Great Horde, the Middle Horde and the Smaller Horde - compete among themselves for positions and influence. If a member of one group managed to climb high up in the hierarchy, he immediately sought to promote his own kith and kin to prestigious positions. Groups that did not have anyone in the bureaucracy to protect and help them, tended to loose out.⁴¹

The central authorities in Moscow, nevertheless made sure that the Russians and other Slavs in most cases got their fair share - in some sectors even a lion's share - of the top notch positions. After independence this external check was eliminated. In 1994 60% of the parliamentary seats were filled by Kazakhs. Only 49 Russians (28%) and 16 other Europeans (Ukrainians, Jews and Germans) were elected⁴². In 1995 26 Kazakhs and 12 Russians were elected/appointed to the Senate, while 42 Kazakhs, 19 Russians and 5 representatives of other nationalities took seat in the Lower House.⁴³

These discrepancies are readily acknowledged in a detailed and thorough analysis a group of researchers from the semi-official Institute for the Development of Kazakhstan on the 'ethnic aspects of the cadre policy in Kazakhstan.⁴⁴ Their findings on the ethnic composition of the top echelons of executive officials in two key bureaucracies - the apparatus of the Cabinet of Ministers and the Presidential apparatus - are reproduced below.

(Table 1)

Many Western readers will no doubt see these figures as confirmation of a strong overrepresentation of the titular nation in Kazakstani politics. The Kazakh researchers who have compiled them, however, are of a different opinion. They claim that

while the major ethnic groups have different degrees of representation in the examined structures, the differences are not so large that they give cause for concern. The dynamics of ethnic representation, in our view, goes in the same direction as the ethno-demographic development in the country.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Grey Hodnett, *Leadership in the Soviet National Republics*. (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1979); Victor Zaslavsky, 'Nationalism and Democratic Transition in Postcommunist Societies', *Dædalus*, 121, 2, 1992, pp. 97-121.

⁴¹ Pål Kolstø, "Nation-building in the former Soviet Union", *Journal of Democracy* 7, 1 1996, pp. 116-32.

⁴² *Central Asia Quarterly labyrinth*, 1, 2, 1994, pp. 3-4.

⁴³ Bhavna Dave, 'A New Parliament Consolidates Presidential Authority', *Transition* 2, 6, (22 March 1996), pp 33-37.

⁴⁴ A.B., Galiev, E. Babakumarov, Zh. Zhansugurova and A. Perushaev, *Mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniia v Kazakhstane. Etnicheskii aspekt kadrovoi politiki*. (Almaty: Institut razvitiia Kazakhstana, 1994).

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p. 43.

The fact that 'the dynamics of ethnic representation' are clearly running ahead of 'the ethno-demographic development' is not emphasized.

As mentioned, the higher birthrates of the Kazakhs are also by many Kazakh researchers seen as the main factor determining the future ethnic relations in Kazakhstan. In her August 1995 article, N. Baitenova claimed that over the next 20 years the share of the Kazakh ethnos will increase to 80% of the total population while the Russian group would be drastically reduced, as a result of emigration and of low birth rates, she predicted.⁴⁶ Outmigration of the Russians Baitenova considered as economically motivated only. This assertion was startling not only against the backdrop of her own theory of integration, but also since it flew in the face of Nazarbaev's June speech in the Kazakhstani parliament from the year before.

The topic of demography was taken up and further elaborated in the October issue of *Saiasat* by M. Tatimov, a senior member of the presidential analytical centre. With a terminology reminiscent of Oswald Spengler's culturology, Tatimov divided the nations of the world into 'young' and 'old' by the criterion of their demographic development. A nation is 'old' if the older age cohorts dominate over the age groups of children and youngsters. In Tatimov's typology both the Russians, the Balts, and the Ukrainians are old nations.

Whenever two 'old' nations dominate on the same territory, they will tend to engage in a kind of 'psychological cold war' for control, Tatimov maintained. Kazakhstan, however, was in a much more favorable situation since one of the two competing nations in this country, the Kazakhs, is young. The Kazakhs, therefore, will win out without engaging the Russians in direct confrontation, just by biding their time. The ethnic battle, as it were, will be fought in the bed chamber, where the Kazakhs inevitably will be victorious.

However, the Kazakhstani state authorities ought not to sit back smugly awaiting this happy outcome. Instead, they should actively strengthen the natural trends by 'an effective demographic policy, supporting and promoting the full manifestation of the historically objective tendencies in the development of our population'. In addition, the state should pursue a migration policy geared towards the strategic aim of 'consolidating the Republic of Kazakhstan as a young, unitary state.'

The strong reliance on favourable demographic tendencies permeates Kazakh thinking on national integration. It is echoed, for instance, in a prognosis made by the demographer Azimbai Galiev. Forecasting a rapid decrease in the Russian population in the years to come, he concludes that 'Russian emigration from Kazakhstan is likely to promote socio-economic adaption among those who stay behind. A loyal ethno-political population will be the result.'⁴⁷

Some conclusions

⁴⁶ These figures are unrealistically high, but also Western analysts make predictions of drastic ethno-demographic shifts in the years to come. Federica Moroni points out that 80% of the teenagers in Kazakhstan today are ethnic Kazakhs, and if present trends continue, Kazakhs will become a relative majority in the country by the year 2000, she estimates. Federica Moroni, 'A State in Transition. Security Issues in Kazakhstan', *The international spectator*, 29, 4, 1994, pp. 29-53, on p 32.

⁴⁷ Azimbai Galiev, 'Etnodemograficheskaia kartina Kazakhstana', *Novoe pokolenie*, 15, 1996.

The Kazakhstani discourse on integration and nation-building is treating these subjects in the categories of the Soviet censuses. The passport entries are regarded as the basic identity markers. Emphasis on subethnic identities such as zhuzes and superethnic identities such as 'the Russophones' are politically incorrect.

Many Kazakh experts identify Russian-Kazakh (rather than Russophone-Kazakh) ethnic competition as a major problem of integration and social consolidation. This diagnosis, however, does not lead them to despair or to alarmism. On the contrary, the dominant mood seems to be closer to triumphalism. Kazakh intellectuals tend to rest assured that in this ethnic rivalry the Kazakh side will win out without taking recourse to any extreme measures. The decisive factor of *time* is on their side.

In her article, N. Baitenova referred to a survey of expert opinions in which the majority of the respondents expected that 'the Russian problem' in Kazakhstani politics would find its solution within a couple of years. 36% of the experts in the survey based this optimistic prognosis on a growing consensus among the ethnic groups while 38% pinned their hopes to an expected acceleration of Russian outmigration, which would tip 'the balance of forces' in favour of the Kazakhs.⁴⁸

The sanguine views of the Kazakh researchers go against the grain of most Western analyses, which in later years have been predicting growing interethnic and intraethnic violence in Kazakhstan.⁴⁹ In fact, the tranquility scenario of the Kazakh expertise may easily be stood on its head. If the Russophones are feeling that they are gradually losing (demographic and political) strength vis-a-vis the titular nation, they may conceptualize the situation as a closing window of opportunity. They will have to act before it is too late.⁵⁰ They must make a last-ditch defence before they have become so numerically and politically weakened that they are no longer in a position to stem the ongoing Kazakhification. However, when our research team visited Almaty, Semipalatinsk, and Ust-Kamenogorsk in September 1996, we saw few signs of Russian or Russophone ethnic mobilization. Whether this shows that 'the window of opportunity' has already closed or we were witnessing the proverbial lull before the storm, we cannot tell.

In a conversation with the author Murat Arenov, director of the Analytical-informational Centre in the Kazakhstani parliament, expressed a higher degree of concern for the future than the optimism that permeates most of the written Kazakhstani debate. Both the present ethnic balance and a disturbance of this balance might undermine the social peace, he believed.

⁴⁸ N.D. Baitenova, 'Mezhetnicheskaiia integratsiia v Kazakhstane: Sostoianie i perspektivy', *Saiasat*, (Almaty) 3, 1995, pp. 27-33.

⁴⁹ Ian Bremmer and Cory Welt 'Kazakhstan's quandary', *Journal of Democracy*, 6, 3 (July) 1995, pp. 139-154; Bremmer, Ian and Cory Welt, 'The trouble with democracy in Kazakhstan', *Central Asian Survey*, 15, 2, 1996, pp. 179-200; Robert Kaiser and Jeff Chinn, 'Russian-Kazakh Relations in Kazakhstan', *Post-Soviet Geography*, 36, 5, 1995, pp. 257-273.

⁵⁰ David D. Laitin, *Identity in formation. The Russian-speaking population in the Near Abroad*, (Ithaca: Cornell University press, forthcoming). It is also interesting to note that in 1993 a Cossack deputy to the Kazakhstani Supreme Soviet, xx, saw the equal strength of the two main cultural groups in Kazakhstan as one of the basic preconditions explaining the virtual absence of ethnically motivated bloodshed in country. Since neither group could hope to prevail over the other, both were inclined to compromise and accommodate. See *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 20 February 1993.

'In Kazakhstan today, Russians and Kazakhs are engaged in a constant competition in all social spheres, in administration, science, culture, business and language' Arenov maintained. As long as the ethnic balance was retained, both parties would keep a high alert. 'When a struggle between two equal rivals are taking place, both sides will feel that they have enough strength left and they will not yield to the other side.'⁵¹ At the same time Arenov admitted that 'when this demographic balance is disturbed, the situation can of course lead to increased tension.'

At least three levels of the Kazakhstani nation-building debate may be distinguished, and different varieties of the concept of the 'nation' dominate on each of them. Perhaps this concept may be compared to an iceberg: the official documents and the presidential statements make up the small tip that protrudes above the surface and is visible from afar. These proclaim a supraethnic nation-state with few special rights for the titular nation. Less known is the thinking on Kazakhstani nation-building which unfolds in the Kazakh language press and in the academic journals. Here, ethnic cultural renaissance and political nation-building are often commingled.

⁵¹ Author's interview with Mikhail Golovkov in Almaty, 17 September 1996.