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Construction of the nations in post-Soviet on the condition of Russian diasporas “post imperial syndrome”

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Abstract

This given article looks at the experience of national building on the post-Soviet territory conditions after dissolution of the Soviet empire. And it became in terms of experience of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Under imperial experience of national development of the former Soviet republics in article following phenomena are as follows:

First is the continuity of many elements of an ethnic course of Russian empire in the national policy of the Soviet Union.

Secondly, circumstance, which dissolved the Soviet Union, became possible in many aspects because of opposition of its non-Russian ethnic groups to imperial character of the Soviet national policy, to consciousness of Russian ethnic groups, its leadership in social structure of the Soviet society.

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The gaining of sovereignty and independence by the former Soviet republics initially caused euphoria amongst their populations. Coupled with this, the democratic way of national development and national values gained great popularity. This is hardly surprising, since the national self-determination of the

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republics of the Soviet Union was made possible, largely due, to the spreading of democratic values in the period of "perestroika." Perhaps that is why most of the newly independent Soviet republics have chosen the way of democratic states. The ruling elite of these countries saw the prevailing sentiment. However, that euphoria has not passed away only because a democratic transit of the bulk of former USSR republics has failed. It has taken place also because these countries have failed to construct a fully national state for all those years.

In addition, the transformation of economic systems in much of the former Soviet Union was not successful in improving the socio-economic conditions of their citizens. Over the past few years after independence, the social injustice, and the broad division of society into rich and poor, has become commonplace in many of these countries. In this connection, we will review socio-political moods of Russia’s citizens since it is of interest for our research.

For 20 years after the collapse of the USSR, Russia has conducted sociological measurements of the socio-economic and socio-political mood of Russians. Findings of the review have showed that for instance compared to 2001 Russia’s citizens very decently evaluate such their democratic values as 'self-expression in policy’, 'freedom of speech’, ‘multi-party system’, ‘free elections.’ In 2001 such successes of 1990s’ reforms as freedom of speech ranked number 2 in evaluations of Russia’s citizens, while in 2011 they ranked number 6 (Analytic report, 2011: 22-24).

This poll has also exposed that as the majority of interviewed opine negative social consequences of reforms exerted much influence not individually but on the whole community. It is quite obvious that these data are indicative of a high level of social ill-being in Russia (Analytic report, 2011: 28). This poll in 2011 also revealed a clear relationship between feeling of injustice of ‘what was going on’ with a sense of shame of respondents being Russia’s citizens for condition of the country and realization that ‘it is impossible to live like that anymore (Analytic report, 2011: 67).

Researchers logically reach conclusion that such moods result from ‘mismatch of reality and sociocultural norms which are widely spread in all layers of Russia’s citizens which is also indicative of ongoing process of power delegitimization’ (Analytic report, 2011: 68). In other words, activities of the authorities do not satisfy panhuman and national values of Russia’s citizens any more. Moreover, researchers sum up: ‘Social tension for the time being latently rotting in the community all of a sudden can be taken to the streets … and it is attributed specifically to social-psychological condition of the population and not some of its personal material interests’ (Analytic report, 2011: 73-74).

Moreover, according to the researchers, these violent acts can take shape also as "nationalist actions," because in this case the implications for such sentiments of Russians e.g. "people of my nationality have lost a lot in the last 15-20 years" and "all means are good when it comes to protecting the interests of my people " (Analytic report, 2011: 75).

According to sociological research in 1993, about 34% of Russian respondents believed that non-Russians were the main cause of all the social ills of Russia. Moreover, more than 54% of Russian respondents of all social classes believed that non-Russians in Russia had too many rights and too much influence (Gudkov, 2004: 206).

The above-stated data and conclusions about national moods of the title ethnics in Russia are confirmed by other social studies as well. In particular, according to the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center, between 1998 and 2002 percentage of ethnic Russians crusading for ‘Russia for ethnic Russians’ idea surged from 45% to 55% (Sherbakova, 2009: 86). It is necessary to mention that people aged between 18 and 30 prevail among supporters of that idea. Moreover, respondents aged under 24 post the least index of ethnic tolerance which is 2.6-3 times lower compared to people above 40 (Sherbakova, 2009: 106). These data first of all indicate that consolidation and mobilization of the Russian community in Russia based on ethnophobias will continue in the future. It’s no coincidence that
as early as in 2007 closed polls of the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center showed that 70% of interviewed ethnic Russians supported the ‘Russia for ethnic Russians’ motto (Sherbakova, 2009: 127).

In Russia ethnophobia among the Russian population is very widespread and it seems to have its roots in the past. For example, ethnophobia against Chechens, who are currently, actively circulating in Russian society, was there even before the first Chechen war of 1994-1996. (Sherbakova, 2009: 95). The Chechens belong to the group of people from the Caucasus, for which ethnophobia have similar features and are characterized in particular with such terms as "criminal, prone to terrorism", "getting rich at our expense," "despise people of other blood" etc. (Sherbakova, 2009: 104-105).

Such negative ethno-nationalist sentiment in Russia is gaining in strength each year. As noted by the Russian expert G. Zverev, Russian ethnic nationalism recently has shifted its focus from the periphery of public consciousness to become the ideological mainstream of the socio-political reality of Russia (Zvereva, 2005).

In Russia, the growth of negative ethnic nationalism became the foundation for the spread of violence against non-Russians. In 2005, some 435 people including people from the Caucasus and Central Asia, were the victims of skinheads. Additionally, all these actions began to turn into violent ethnic nationalism (Kozhevnikova, 2006: 9). Thus, negative ethnic nationalism remains one of the essential foundations of the consolidation, the mobilization in Russia of Russian society.

All this could not but affect the political process in Russia and its national policy. Xenophobia in Russia has become one of the most powerful electoral resources whereby candidates for various public authorities to actively display negative ethno-national ideas. Support for Russian negative ethnic nationalism by ruling elite of came into wide practice. Often, for example, members of the State Duma make various appeals, demands, aimed at suppressing the rights of non-titular ethnic groups in Russia. On 19 January 2005, 19 members of the State Duma were demanding the closure of Jewish organizations in Russia, accusing them of Zionism. It should be noted that this demand was condemned by President Vladimir Putin after only a week (Kozhevnikova, 2006: 23-33).

One can say that two orientations towards nation building are being implemented in Russia, i.e. ethnonational and citizenship-based. This means that Russia’s ruling elite, wide ranges of the Russian ethnoses simultaneously advocate nation building on the principle of co-citizenship and based on the Russian ethnoses. At that, the Russian elite vigorously exaggerates an idea of priority of ethnocultural and other interests of the Russian ethnoses in the nation building of Russia.

As Russian scholar Panov P. has demonstrated, currently the Kremlin carries out its discourse in the tideway of ‘Russionism’, when those who acknowledge Russian cultural values, special way, great historic mission of Russia are referred to the Russians. This scholar treats an appeal to co-citizenship in the Kremlin’s policy as a desire to absorb other ethnoses capable of adopting the Russian culture (Panov, 2001: 85). Moreover, as Russian researcher Scherbakova D.I. opines while with Boris Yeltsin ethnic course of the state was a response to national movements, with Vladimir Putin policy of limiting rights of ethnic elites and supporting rights of the Russians became its cornerstone (Scherbakova, 2009: 86-87). At that, it is likely that Russia’s leadership tries to mobilize ethnonational potential of the Russian ethnoses for the purpose of implementing its geopolitical plans, including to restore its influence on the former USSR. In other words, Russia’s ruling elite once again begins to play the card of restoring imperial Russia. In this context, anti-American demarches of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev for instance are quite understandable.

In such a manner the ruling elite of the Russian Federation has to a large extent facilitated consolidation of the Russians based on negative ethnonationalism. It is made subtly with respect to the Caucasians, natives from Central Asia as well as NATO countries. Signs of imperial syndrome reviving in Russia can be seen in that.
It should be noted that transformation of the Soviet socio-political system was mainly associated as attachment to socio-political values of the West. However, subsequently, at least starting from mid 1990s, moods of uniqueness of Russia’s civilization development and distinctiveness became dominant in Russia. As opinion polls reveal since then in the bulk of Russia’s citizens ‘orientation towards civilized distinctiveness is coupled with traditionalistic philosophies’ (Analytic report, 2011: 155-156).

Researchers have generally come to the conclusion that Russia’s "revolution of values is a long time over," but the search continues for socio-political "new meanings and new ideas" (Analytic report, 2011: 158). One can in this sense, understand the appeal of the Russian ruling elite’s need to revive the Russian identity, and the imperial values deeply rooted in Russian ethnicity. According to the Swiss scholar A. Kappeler, imperial identity and imperial patriotism were very important factors in consolidating the social classes in the Russian ethnic group (Kappeler, 1997: 179).

The above-described moods of the Russian ethnus in Russia cannot but cause feedback and discontent first of all among indigenous ethnoses of constituent territories of the Russian Federation. Thus, findings of focus groups in Tatarstan have revealed that the majority of their participants believe that ethnopolitics of Russia’s authorities does not consider ethnocultural interests of the title ethnus of that republic (Shumilova, 2006: 140). Moods of national self-determination are widely spread in Tatarstan. At that, there discontent with the federal center, i.e. Moscow, for the most part extend to the ethnic majority of Russia, i.e. ethnic Russians (Sagitova, 2006: 258).

Perception of the Russians as an imperial ethnus quite frequently is articulated in non-Russian information space of Russia. As Russian expert Kuznetsova A.B. says, in its time deportation of the Chechens and the Ingushes was also treated as a seizure of power by the imperial ethnus, i.e. ethnic Russians. This shows that the discrimination of the Chechen-Ingush people from the indigenous Russian population of Chechnya, is perceived more in the vein of Russian imperialist expansion. (Kuznetsova, 2005: 125).

As considered earlier, the facts suggest Russia's current historical practice is the mobilization of the Russian people by the xenophobic imperial values. In this context, it seems that the main characteristic, of self-determination and the development of the post-Soviet states, was the opposition to the imperial Russian ethno-nationalism, where the Russian community has or had a large volume.

National values are formed based on a model of nation, national ideology adopted in the society. In this case, two approaches dominated in the former USSR. In the first approach national values resulted from a model of nation building based on the principle of co-citizenship. In the second approach – based on nation building underlain by ethnic principle, i.e. based on an indigenous ethnus of a concerned state. Ruling elite of the major part of former USSR republics strives to implement the second model of nation building. The first model was and is being implemented inside countries that lack an absolute domination of an indigenous ethnus.

Although, there are some deviations, for instance like in Ukraine and Baltic states Latvia and Estonia. These countries do not have an absolute domination of an indigenous ethnus. However, ruling elite of these states also advocates a monoethnic principle of building their nation-states. Along with that, these countries also do not have clearly-cut and legislative orientation towards nation building based on a monoethnic principle. However, on the whole, elite of these states follows that principle and does its best to implement it in practice. In this approach national values are displayed mainly through some strategies of historic and cultural nature of indigenous ethnoses of those states.

Therefore, it’s no coincidence that the so-called ‘Russian question’ buds from time to time in those countries. Its key basis is a fact that representatives of the Russian ethnus make a minority in those countries. According to 2011 census, indigenous ethnus in Lithuania accounted for 62.1%, while the Russians made 26.9%. In Estonia Estonians made 68.8% of the total population in 2010, and the Russians accounted for 25.5% (Kalabekov, 2010). Indigenous ethnus in Ukraine stands at 77.82% and the
Russians ranking the second biggest ethnic community of Ukraine account for 17.28% (Pankov, 2005). Regular exploitation of the Russian question in those countries is also ensured by intricate relationships with Russia. Moreover, desire of these states to bolster their cooperation with NATO member states infringes on geopolitical rights of Russia. Finally, complex of these factors disables elites of those states from implementing to the full extent their plans of nation building based on monoethnic principles and probably forces them to pronounce thoughts about nation building underlain by co-citizenship principle.

The situation in the field of nation-building in the above countries applies to most post-Soviet countries. Typically, on the eve of Kazakhstan’s independence in 1990 the population was 40.3% Kazakhs and 37.6% Russians. In 1992, it became 41.9% Kazakhs, and Russians down to 37%, with Russians prevailing in the northern and north-eastern regions of the country. (Zimovina, 2003).

Moreover, as researches show Kazakhstan is one of former USSR republics that most of all was exposed to Russification. In soviet times and also in composition of Russian empire socio-cultural space of Kazakhstan sustained a large-scale deconstruction when its core, nomadic housekeeping, was destroyed.

Meanwhile, Kazakh national movement as Azat, Zheltoksan, etc. was vigorous in Kazakhstan on the threshold of proclamation of sovereignty. In point of fact, these movements appealed to the need of nation building in Kazakhstan based on monoethnicity. These ideas caused a broad response of the Kazakh people. All those things have entailed suggestion of legislative execution of those ideas, the more so as they received support of significant ranges of the ruling elite which for the most time already was composed of Kazakhs by then. Vigorous manifestation of ideas of Kazakh ethnonationalism designed to forcedly introduce the Kazakh language and Kazakh culture in public reality began in political process of the country.

In this period, due to the requirement to speak the national language, Kazakh, the recruitment to the civil service was mono ethnic in character. In January 1993, the first Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan was adopted, defining its statehood as a "self-determined state of the Kazakh nation." The Constitution however does not mention the status of the Russian language. Hence Kazakhstan was officially proclaimed as the "Kazakh" nation-state. This appears to have led to the sharp increase in the mass emigration of Russians from Kazakhstan, post independence. Overall, 2 million Russians have left Kazakhstan, leaving many strategic Kazakh refineries and factories without skilled workers and engineers.

Perhaps, due of the problem in 1995, another Constitution was adopted, which granted Russian the status of the official language of state and local government. This current Constitution deleted reference to state of Kazakhstan as the Kazakh state. It also introduced into the basic law of the land a paragraph on the Protection of ethnic, cultural, national and linguistic interests, and the rights of all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. Also included is a ban on the creation of parties or organizations on ethnic or religious grounds. In the same year the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, was established which operate under the auspices of the cultural and national centers of some of the ethnic groups in Kazakhstan, including Russian. In total, the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan has 22 national and regional, national-cultural centers of some of the ethnic groups of Kazakhstan, combining 470 regional, city and district organizations.

In general, at present, our country has more than 100 national schools and 126 middle schools, where the pupils of 15 ethnic groups learn their native languages, and 76 secondary schools have optional, study circles in students native languages. The national revival schools have 29 branches in 11 languages, for the study of ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. In addition, 170 similar Sunday language centers are operating. Each year, the state orders more than 30 books to be issued in the languages of ethnic minorities in Kazakhstan with a total circulation of about 100,000 copies.
However, the main innovation in interethnic field founded by the 1995 Constitution was an official proclamation of nation building in Kazakhstan based on co-citizenship. At that, the Kazakh language and Kazakh culture were declared to be a cementing core of Kazakhstan’s nation. One of specific steps towards nation building in Kazakhstan was a Concept of formation of state identity of the Republic of Kazakhstan adopted on 23 May 1996. According to that concept national identification was to be built based on principle of co-citizenship and continuity with traditional Kazakh statehood. That concept also expressly maintains that statehood models of Russian Empire and Soviet Union were imperial in their own way [The concept of national identity formation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, according to the Order of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan as of May 23, 1996, N 2995].

Quite recently, in 2010, Kazakhstan adopted National Unity Doctrine that proclaimed building Kazakhstan’s nation based on co-citizenship, shared civic interests and values. Its underlying concepts ‘One country – one destiny,’ ‘Different origin – equal opportunities’ and ‘promotion of national spirit’ themselves suggest high level of democratic nature of that Doctrine (The doctrine of national unity of Kazakhstan, 2010).

Under the unifying role of the Kazakh language and culture, one can see Kazakhstan has created favorable conditions for the construction of the nation, "Kazakhstan". However the task has not been achieved as Kazakh society is lacking even a reasonable level of national consolidation.

In many ways, it happened due to such an objective reason, the low functionality state language of Kazakhstan, Kazakh. Numerous studies have shown that the level of use, scope and application of the Kazakh language in daily practice continues to yield to the Russian language and hence cannot become the national language of Kazakhstan (Aliyarov, 2011).

Another objective factor hindering the national unity of Kazakhstan's society, is a high level of ethnic tension, conflict within Kazakhstan. There is reason to believe that inter-ethnic relations contain underlying tension that can surface into open inter-ethnic clashes under certain circumstances. A number of studies by Kazakhstan’s scholars argue in favor of that. In particular, it is demonstrated in a reasonably substantiated research of the Kazakhstan’s Center of Humanitarian and Political Environment conducted in 2009 (Aliyarov, 2010: 119-131).

It should be pointed out that in Kazakhstan it is not customary to trace causes of interethnic conflicts, conflict situations to ethnopolitical disagreements, cultural confrontation and ethnophobias. Probably, behind it is a desire not to complicate relations with the authorities which present their interethnic policy as Kazakhstan’s know how and boast the intherethnic field of Kazakhstan as one of the most stable worldwide. Therefore, it is little wonder that an overwhelming majority of Kazakhstan’s experts, analytical structures have put forward economic factors allegedly tangled with skirmish as a root cause of interethnic conflicts that took place in Kazakhstan.

However, we believe that the main factors of ethnic conflict, ethnic tensions in the country are the socio-cultural factors. These, in our opinion, are such phenomena as the conflict of social status and cultural values. Position in society, public respect and honor is highly valued among Kazakhs, even more so that material values. Kazakhs also appreciate the calm tone, relaxed manner of a speaking companion. (Krysko, 2002). So when someone starts to neglect those values, a Kazakh will take it as a challenge and an insult. An example, is the way in which conflict between ethnic Kazakh and Turkish workers unfolded in the oil and gas companies in Karabatan Atyrau region of Kazakhstan in 2006 where Kazakh officials have long received lower wages and social benefits than their Turkish counterparts. Whilst a factor, this pay differential was not the major cause of the conflict between them. The main cause of the conflict was that the Turkish workers were defiant, dismissive and disrespectful to the Kazakh colleagues. The result of which led to a massive confrontation.

In connection with the above-said it appears that attitude of the Russian Diaspora to the Kazakh statehood, culture and Kazakh language exerts much influence on exacerbation of tension, general level
of attitude of non-indigenous ethnoses to the Kazakhs. It is quite justifiable to highlight this factor since the Russian language is the most functional one in Kazakhstan’s community. Moreover, Kazakhstan’s Russians from the outset of republic’s independence as if appear as secret rivals of the Kazakhs in their original right to Kazakhstan’s territory and statehood. It’s no coincidence that as early as at the beginning of 1990s a lot of gossip was circulating in Russia’s information space about transfer of a number of northern and north eastern territories of Kazakhstan with dominant Russian population to Russia. We think that the so-called post-imperial syndrome of Kazakhstan’s Russians has been displayed in this particular factor. Existence of this syndrome negatively affects general status of not only the Kazakh language, Kazakh culture, Kazakh literature but statehood of the Kazakhs themselves. Let’s quote some certain data that prove existence of that syndrome among a good deal of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan.

In particular, for instance in 1991, 77% of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan treated the USSR as their native land. Meanwhile, the figure was 50-60% for ethnic Russians in Baltic republics (Pope, 2002). Social study conducted by the Institute of Philosophy and Political Studies of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan in July – August 2007 has exposed that nearly 23% of interviewed ethnic Russians still treat the USSR as their native land.

Russian ethnopolitical organizations are quite pro-active in Kazakhstan as they find support of some representatives of the Russian ethnos in the republic. For instance, in spring 2010 website of Kazakhstan’s ethnic Russians http://www.russians.kz that was active until late last year conducted an opinion poll of readiness of the Russians “to live in ‘the Kazakh Republic’ and to live under hegemony of ‘the Kazakh nation responsible for nation development.’” In the end of the 7453 who voted, 80% (5,972 people) were against it. Possibly due to pressure from the authorities, the results of this survey have been removed.

In addition, from the results of opinion polls in different years, it becomes clear that among all non-indigenous ethnic groups of Kazakhstan, the Russians have the lowest degree of readiness to integrate around the nucleus of the Kazakh culture (Kharitonova, 2008). It is also necessary to mention that Kazakh Russians exhibit the lowest knowledge of the Kazakh language or the desire to learn it. (Shaukenova).

In our opinion, in this case reluctance to learn the Kazakh language and to coalesce around the Kazakh culture is due to conflicts of social statuses of the Kazakhs and the Russians. The Russians have lost their previously high status when they were a top ethnus in the USSR. While the Kazakhs instead have gained a higher status in sovereign Kazakhstan. Thus, rivalry for status entails hostility to a rival, disregard of its culture and language, the more so as the Russians view themselves to be higher in cultural and civilization development than the Kazakhs. It is also necessary to pinpoint that growth of negative nationalism, imperial moods in Russia that we covered earlier also can exert significant influence on behavior and motivation of Kazakhstan’s Russians.

Therefore, post-imperial syndrome of wide ranges of Kazakhstan’s ethnic Russians is among key factors that prevent formation of Kazakhstan’s ethnoses into a single nation and reduce scope of interethnic concord in Kazakhstan’s community. Of course, there are other weighty causes that slow down nation building in Kazakhstan. For instance, it is a low level of democratization of Kazakhstan’s socio-political system that hinders full-fledged exercise of different rights and interests of Kazakhstan’s citizens, including ethnopolitical and ethnocultural. However, this subject is beyond the scope of our research.

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