

NAZARBAYEV'S REMEDY TO THE NATIONAL IDENTITY CRISIS OF KAZAKHSTAN

Kazakistan'ın Ulusal Kimlik Krizine Nazarbayev'in Çözüm Önerisi

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Abstract

National identity crisis is evaluated as one of the significant reasons of civil war. Therefore, it is important to develop adequate policy to this problem. In this respect, the article analyzes the Nursultan Nazarbayev's remedy to the national identity crisis of Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev was aware of the fact that if he fails to resolve this problem, then Kazakhstan will be disintegrated to Russian north and Kazakh south. Kazakh president's policy was compromise and balance. During the quarter century Nazarbayev main policy was to preserve the balance between these competing two poles. The author argues that Nazarbayev made emphasis on civic nationalism in order to prevent conflicts between ethnic groups. In the final analysis, Nazarbayev managed to change Kazakhstan's disadvantage in ethnic diversity of the country to the advantage by presenting Kazakhstan as the country where different ethnic and religious groups live peace and harmony.

Keywords: *National Identity Crisis, Kazakhstan, Kazakh, Russian, Ethnicity, Eurasianism*

Özet

Milli kimlik krizi iç savaşın önemli nedenlerinden biri olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Bu nedenle, ulusal kimlik krizinin aşılması için uygun politikanın geliştirilmesi önemlidir. Bu bağlamda, makale Nursultan Nazarbayev'in Kazakistan'ın ulusal kimlik krizine yönelik ürettiği çözümü analiz etmektedir. Nazarbayev eğer bu krizi çözmede başarısız olursa, o zaman Kazakistan, Rus kuzeyi ve Kazak güneyi olarak dağılacakının farkındaydı. Kazak cumhurbaşkanının politikası özetle uzlaşma ve denge üzerine kuruluydu. Çeyrek asır boyunca Nazarbayev'in önceliği, bu iki kutup arasındaki dengeyi korumak oldu. Nazarbayev etnik gruplar arasındaki çatışmaları önlemek amacıyla etnik milliyetçiliğe karşı devlet (sivil) milliyetçiliğe çıkarmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, Nazarbayev dezavantaj olarak değerlendirilen Kazakistan'ın etnik yapısını, avantaja çevirmeyi başardı. Makalenin sonucuna göre bugün Kazakistan farklı etnik ve dini grupların barış ve uyum içinde yaşadığı ülke olarak bilinmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Ulusal Kimlik Krizi, Kazakistan, Kazak, Rus, Etnisite, Avrasyacılık*

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Introduction

National identity crisis, although sounds as a theoretical problem, in fact, in domestic affairs has very serious consequences. The matter is that if national identity crisis of any county is not resolved or managed in proper way, it can lead to violence, civil war and even fragmentation of the country. Therefore, if we analyze in detail we can come to conclusion that one of the important reasons of conflicts in the Arabic world is the problem in national identities. As it is known almost all Arabic states emerged as the result of decolonization but not of self-determination. From this prism, the post-Soviet states for some extent were the results of the Soviet state and nation building understanding. It means that all these countries have problems with national identity which leads to tension within society. Especially such tension which escalated to conflict are observed in the post-Soviet republics with autonomous regions. The explicit examples are Georgia and Azerbaijan. When it comes to the states without any autonomous regions i.e. unitary states as Ukraine and Kazakhstan where there are large ethnic Russian minority especially in borderlands, the society is divided as those who are for Russia and those who are against Russia. While the confrontation between two groups escalated to the tension and civil war in Ukraine, Kazakh government succeeded to prevent such tension. In this article, I will analyze the national identity crisis of Kazakhstan and Nazarbayev's policy towards the prevention of any ethnic conflicts in the country.

The Emergence of the National Identity Crisis

There are domestic and international factors which shape Kazakhstan's national identity. These factors began to be effective when the USSR entered to the phase of disintegration. During that phase, Kazakhstan was the last republic of the Union to declare its independence. As one author put it, Kazakhstan had become more reliant on the Soviet Union than any other republic, and feared the independence that so many others craved.¹Olcott describes this situation as "reluctantly accepting

1 Jim Corrigan, *Kazakhstan*, Mason Crest Publisher, Philadelphia 2005, p. 47.

independence”.² This action is explained with the fact that Kazakhstan differed from other republics in several important features. Large ethnic Russian population in Kazakhstan and the long border with Russia were determinant factors in Kazakhstan state identity. Kazakhstan both in economic and cultural terms was the most dependent republic to the center. The disintegration of the Union would first of all hit Kazakhstan and might even lead to the collapse of the republic.

In terms of the identification of the new state, Shirin Akiner argues that the situation is further complicated by the fact that Kazakh society has undergone two major transformations over the past century and a half. First is under the Tsarist regime, the Europeanization/Russification of a large proportion of the Kazakh aristocracy, as well as far-reaching administrative and economic changes; and second is under the Soviet regime, the total destruction of the nomadic way of life and the co-opting of the intellectual elite into the new system.³ In other words, the colonization of Kazakhstan broke the evolutionary development of the Kazakh identity. Further Akiner underlines that “Today, the Kazakhs are confronted not only with a multitude of practical problems that are directly connected with the sudden and unexpected acquisition of independence, but also with the need to knit together the disparate, fractured parts of their history.”⁴

Because of these features, it was not an easy task for Kazakh leadership to declare the independence of the country. It would not be an exaggeration to state that Kazakhstan was in identity crisis both domestically and internationally. Nazarbayev analyzes the condition in this way:

"We should realize that the internal fragmentation, on the one hand and the external cultural influence, on the other, contribute to the fact that the cultural integrity of Kazakh nation is far away from the ideal. Unless we stay active we will be pulled into pieces by the history in action due to the fact that the dif-

2 Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington D. C. 2002, p. 24.

3 Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity: From Tribe to Nation-State*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London 1995, p.1.

4 Ibid.

ferent 'cultural islands' within Kazakh nation will objectively drift toward the different centers of attraction."⁵

Therefore, during the nation building process, Kazakh leaders had to take both internal and external determinants into account.

The Reasons of the Crisis

Kazakhstan due to its geographical proximity to Russia and demographic composition was part of the Union which internalized the Soviet identity. Although it is academically not correct to identify the Soviet culture with the Russian one, the fact is that Kazakhstan culturally and demographically was considered as the extension of inner Russia rather than an autonomous unit of the Union. Kazakhs who gave their ethnic name to the country were in minority status by the early 1990s. Even many of these Kazakhs were alien to their own cultural identity. So it would be difficult after independence to consolidate the Kazakhstani nation around an ethnic Kazakh identity.

Therefore, the primary concern for the founding leaders of Kazakhstan was to define Kazakhstan's national identity. The leadership clearly understood that it was impossible to build nation-state on the basis of Kazakh ethnicity and culture. As it was discussed by Sartayeva, while most of the older states were formed on the basis of so called 'cultural hegemony' of ethnos-dominants, the state-forming ethnos did not exist in Kazakhstan at the moment it gained its independence. Even if it existed, it was not recognized as such by the majority of representatives of other ethnic groups.⁶ On the other hand, Kazakhs were both demographically and economically weak in the country. According to the data of 1989 population census, Kazakhstan's population is composed of ethnic Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Uyghur, and Tatars who are Muslim Turkic people, as well as ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Byelorussians who are Christian Slavic people. Kazakhstan's population in 1989 was 16,200,000 where Slavic people constituted 44% (eth-

5 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Na poroge XXI veka*, Atamura, Almaty 2003, p. 12.

6 RaushanSartayeva, 'Problemy sotsio kulturnoy konsolidatsi I formirovanie novoy identichnosti v Kazakhstane' in *Tawelsiz Qazaqstannın halqaralıq bedelinin ösıwi jane jahandanuwdın qawıp-qaterleri, Halqaralıq ǵılımi-praktikalıq konferentsiyanın materiyaldari*, Filosofiya jane politologiya İnstitutı QR BǴM ǴK, Almatı 2011, p. 228.

nic Russians 37,8% of total population), and Turkic people composed about 45% (ethnic Kazakhs 39,7% of total population). Other ethnic groups like Germans, Koreans, Armenians, Kurds, and Greeks constituted about 10% of the total population.⁷ While all Europeans were qualified workers and lived in industrial centers and cities, most of the Kazakhs were peasants and lived in rural areas. The self-identification with the state was different among Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. Olcott analyzed the situation in the following way:

"The biggest problem that Kazakhstan's government faces in state building is that the republic's two largest ethnic communities, the Russo-Slavs and the Kazakhs, view the birth of the republic in totally antithetical ways. To the Kazakhs, the creation of Kazakhstan is the fulfillment of a dream that they had not even dared entertain, whereas Kazakhstan's Slavic population generally views as a cruel twist of fate. The tension between these two worldviews might under certain circumstances be sufficient to destroy the new state."⁸

According to SeydullaSadiqov the independence of Kazakhstan is a culmination of the evolutionary development of Kazakh nation.⁹ But PyotrSvoik argues that the Soviet policy towards nationalities could not transform Kazakh people and when the USSR collapsed Kazakhs were living according to traditional tribal relations.¹⁰

Another factor which determined Kazakhstan's identity was the fact that the most of the Kazakh bureaucrats and decision-makers were alien to the values of ethnic Kazakh people. Most of them could speak very poor Kazakh and some, none at all. The majority of Kazakh elite are the continuation of the Soviet era bureaucrats who internalized the dominant Soviet culture.

7 Qazaqstan Respublikasının Statistika jöinindegi Agenttigi (Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan), (2000) *Qazaqstan Respublikası Halqının Ulıtıq Quramı: Qazaqstan Respublikasındağı 1999 jılğı Halıq Sanağınnın Qorıtındısı*. (National Composition of the Republic of Kazakhstan: Conclusion of the Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 1999) Almaty.

8 Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Second Edition, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford 1995, p. 289.

9 Seydulla Sadiq, *Qazaq publitsistikası: Ulıtıq biregeylik maseleleri*, Nurlı Älem, Almaty 2013.

10 Pyotr Svoik, "Natsional'nyi vopros v Kazakhstane: vzglyad "russkoyazychnogo,"" *Tsentral'naya Aziya i Kavkaz* 1998.

Nazarbayev's Remedy to the Crisis: Balance

Ultimately, the founding leaders came across with a dilemma where they could ignore neither ethnic Kazakhs who were from historical perspective the real owners of the country but possessed weak demographic, economic and cultural shares; nor Europeans in general and Russians in particular who migrated to the country as the consequences of Russian imperial and Soviet politics but possessed strong positions in demographic, economic and cultural arenas.

This dilemma was reflected in the Declaration on State Sovereignty of Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic of 25 October 1990, the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 'State Independence of Republic of Kazakhstan' of 16 December 1991, and consequently in Constitutions of the country after independence. As the Declaration on State Sovereignty of KazSSR stated:

"High Council of Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic expressing the will of the people of Kazakhstan; attempting to create honorable and equal life conditions for all citizens of the Republic; considering the primary task as consolidation of and strengthening friendship of peoples living in the Republic; recognizing General Declaration of Human Rights and Nation's right on self determination; realizing the responsibility for the destiny of Kazakh nation; expressing the determination to build democratic state with rule of law; declare state sovereignty of Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic and adopt this Declaration."¹¹

In this preamble two points are important in resolving the dilemma. The phrases "the people of Kazakhstan", "all citizens of the Republic" assure Russians and other ethnic groups against discrimination; the phrase "peoples living in the Republic" accepts the diversity in the country. However, the word 'peoples' in plural not 'people' in singu-

11 'Deklaratsiya o Gosudarstvennom Suverenitete KazSSR' (Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Kazakh SSR) <http://www.mfa.kz/index.php/ru/vneshnyaya-politika/khronika-nezavisimogo-kazakhstana/12-material-orys/650-deklaratsiya-o-gosudarstvennom-suverenitete-kazssr>, Accessed on 4.03.2012

lar became a source of many debates. I will discuss the issue in detail later. The phrase 'Kazakh nation' assures the Kazakhs that they would have a special place in the country. The second point of the Declaration which is about measures on preserving, defending and strengthening the nation-state emphasizes that "Revival and development of distinctive culture, traditions, language, and strengthening the national dignity of Kazakh nation and other nationalities living in Kazakhstan, are one of the important tasks of KazSSR statehood."¹² According to the Declaration, "Citizens of the Republic are guaranteed with all rights and freedoms accepted by the Constitution despite their national (ethnic) and party membership, origins, social and economic status, religion, profession, place of residence."¹³ Point 11 states:

"Representatives of nations and ethnic groups, living in Kazakh SSR outside of their nation-states and autonomous units; or people who have no territory in the Union, are guaranteed with legal equality and equal opportunities in all spheres of civil life. Kazakh SSR is concerned with the satisfaction of national culture, spiritual and language necessities of Kazakhs living outside the Republic."¹⁴

All these provisions were repeated in the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan under 'State Independence of Republic of Kazakhstan' with one exception. Leading elite witnessed bloody ethnic clashes in the Caucasus and in other parts of the Union, and tried to avoid nationalistic rhetoric. The first task was to get rid of the emphasis on Kazakh nation-state. So the name of the country which was Kazakh (Soviet Socialist) Republic was renamed as the Republic of Kazakhstan. As a consequence, the people of the country are named not as Kazakh people but as Kazakhstani people.

Kazakh Ethnic Nationalism vs. Kazakhstani Civic Nationalism

The terms Kazakh and Kazakhstani have been debated before and af-

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

ter independence. According to RustemKadyrzhanov, the confrontation of these terms started in the Soviet period. During that period, the term ‘Kazakh’ gained ethnic meaning, while the term ‘Kazakhstani’ was used as a term which consolidates all ethnic groups, and became important as geographical, political and ideological term.¹⁵ During the Soviet Union term Kazakhstan was generally perceived by public as a term which mainly referred to locality. But after independence it gained first of all political meaning as the name of country or even of nation.

After independence Kazakh nationalists proposed to use term ‘Kazakh’ not only to ethnic Kazakh but also to all the population. This proposal was criticized by Russians and other non-local nationalists. The ideological background of this debate stemmed from ethnic nationalism which is dominant in Kazakhstan. The proposals of Kazakh and Russian elites who wanted to end the debate on the basis of civic nationalism were accepted neither within the elite themselves nor among the masses.¹⁶

People who identify with Kazakhness and Kazakhstaniness both claimed discrimination led by their opponents. While Kazakhs argue that they are considered as second class citizens in their own country, non-Kazakhs argue that they are not wanted anymore and were forced to leave the country.

While these debates continued, the ruling elite has attempted to develop a discourse or ideology which aims to hold confronting sides under control and provide stability in the country. For that purpose, as it was seen in the mentioned Declaration on State Sovereignty of KazSSR and the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on ‘State Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan’, the state ideology tries to satisfy both sides. The Constitution of Kazakhstan starts with sentences such as “We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic fate, creating a state on the indigenous Kazakh

15 Rustem Kazdyrzhanov, “Kazaks and Kazakstanis”, ORSAM Rapor No: 75 ORSAM Avrasya Stratejileri Rapor No: 13, Ekim 2011, p. 18. http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/trUploads/Yazilar/Do-syalar/201258_13raportum.pdf Accessed on 25.08.2012

16 Ibid., p. 18.

land...”¹⁷ Here, while the word ‘people of Kazakhstan’ aims to satisfy and erase the concerns of non-Kazakhs who are preferred to be called as ‘people of Kazakhstan’ rather than ‘Kazakh people’; the word “the indigenous Kazakh land” aims to satisfy Kazakh nationalists who demand a special place for Kazakhs.

Nursultan Nazarbayev in his book *In the Stream of History*, which was first published in 1996, clearly stated that “We are building a multi-ethnic state with equal rights and opportunities for all. In this role, the President of the country as a guarantor of the Constitution, is responsible for all people of Kazakhstan, for 130 nationalities and ethnic groups.”¹⁸ This statement means that Kazakhstan is not a nation-state based on the identity of a dominant group. Rather it is a nation-state where all ethnic and religious groups preserve their identity. In other words, Kazakhstan is not based on ethnic nationalism but on civic nationalism. Nazarbayev points out that “The fundamental challenges of the present time is the necessity of building pluralistic in principles, dialogical in content, multi-language in functioning, multi-religious cultural model of state which is adapted to market economy and values coming from abroad.”¹⁹ Marat Tazhin in a similar way defines Kazakhstan as multinational country where representatives of more than one hundred nationalities live. He underlines:

*"We do not strive for the formation of a certain Kazakh nation which would mean the assimilation of multiple nations. Our policy is directed to the formation of the political, civic unity of Kazakhstanis. In other words, the people of Kazakhstan are considered as community of citizens of different nationalities, and not as the new ethnic community."*²⁰

Nazarbayev declares that the ambitious times of ‘planning of na-

17 *The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan*. (2007) <http://en.government.kz/docs/konstitutsiya.htm> Accessed on 30.08.2012.

18 N. A. Nazarbayev, *V Potokelstorii*, Atamura, Almaty 2003, p. 7.

19 N. A. Nazarbayev, *V Potokelstorii*, p. 66.

20 M. Tazhin, “Sovereign Kazakhstan”, in *History of Kazakhstan, Essays*, Gylym, Almaty 1998, p. 194.

tions' is gone.²¹ It is generally expected that the official ideology has monopoly to define criteria of being considered to be included or excluded from nation. By this statement, Nazarbayev says that the role of the state in defining the identity of nation is gone. Further, he states the crucial change occurred in the principles of cultural issues. Firstly, it means the refusal of imposition of one unified ideology. This is a constitutionally defined principle. Nazarbayev argued that this is first time in the century when our state is refusing any form of pressure on cultural processes.²² Here, the state refuses to assimilate people, imposing Kazakh language and culture, educating people by totalitarian means, as it was and continue to be the case in many nation-states. Nazarbayev understands the necessity of a nationwide idea to consolidate the nation. As it is put by Olcott, Nazarbayev had on one hand to make Kazakhstan seem to be more overtly the homeland of the Kazakhs, with increased visibility for Kazakh culture, language and history, without on the one hand alienating the republic's large Russian and European population.²³

Regarding the national identity of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev defines two levels. First level is related to the formation of people of Kazakhstan as a civic and political community. He underlines that there is a difference between the approach to form an ethnic community and a civic one. He believes that it is early to speak about so called Kazakhstani nation. At the moment the priority is to solve the task of the first level which is the state building, now a formal entity of citizens that should be transformed into the community with common values. The difference of the idea of nation-state from a totalitarian state ideology is that it is not imposed from top to bottom, but grown up from real development of the community.²⁴ PyotrSvoik, a Kazakh politician, in his article 'National question in Kazakhstan: the view of 'a Russian-speaking person' notes that there is no nation in Kazakhstan as there is no morality and ideology which unites people and the state.²⁵ Nazarbayev

21 Ibid., p. 11.

22 N.A. Nazarbayev, *V PotokeIstorii*, p. 66.

23 Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs, Second Edition*, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford 1995, p. 259.

24 N.A. Nazarbayev, *V PotokeIstorii*, p. 181.

25 Pyotr Svoik, "Natsional'nyi vopros v Kazakhstane: vzglyad "russkoyazychnogo,"" *Tsentral'naya Aziyai Kavkaz* 1998.

understands that only the political values can unite the people of Kazakhstan.²⁶ In this regard, the well-known phrases 'Kazakhstan is our common house' and 'Kazakhstan is the country of 130 ethnic and religious groups' can be read from this perspective.

The second level, according to Nazarbayev, is related to the national identity of Kazakhs.²⁷ He underlines that Kazakhstan is no doubt an organic integrity. Kazakh ethnos is autochthonic ethnos. This is the territory of its ethnic genesis and its historical existence. Hundred-year struggle of Kazakhs to recreate their statehood in their autochthonic territory is organic part of state building process.²⁸

This is what Sally N. Cummings defines as "the dual legitimation process of simultaneously promoting internationalism and an ethnic Kazakh revival."²⁹ However, there is no duality in Nazarbayev's considerations. He states "While solving the national identity of Kazakh nation, the other level of identity that is political and civic identity of the people of Kazakhstan must not be neglected. These are different levels of identity and it must be clearly stated. There is no contradiction in this point."³⁰

Thus, Kazakhstan's identity since the very beginning was built on compromise and "consensus"³¹ mainly between Kazakhs and other ethnic groups. To express it in a different way, Kazakhstan as a country was built on the balance between Kazakhs and other Russian-speaking ethnic groups. The state's and President's duty is to keep this balance. Nysanbayev and Kadyrzhanov say that the position of the state in promoting the mutual understanding between the ethnic Kazakh elite and the Russian-speaking elite is of great importance.³² When Nazarbayev states that the President of the country, as a guarantor of the Constitution, is responsible for the people of Kazakhstan, including

26 Ibid., p. 182. Kadir Ertaç Çelik, "Kazakistan'da Kimlik ve Dış Politika", Mehmet Seyfettin Erol ve Yavuz Gürlü (Ed.), *Türk Dünyası 25 Yılı*, Akçağ Yayınları, Ankara 2016, s. 154.

27 Ibid., p. 193.

28 Ibid.

29 Sally N. Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Power and Elite*, I. B. Tauris, New York 2005, p. 90.

30 N. A. Nazarbayev, *V Potoke Istorii*, p. 211.

31 Ibid., p. 232.

32 A. Nysanbayev and R. Kadyrzhanov, "Natsyonal'naya idey: grazhdanskaya ili etnicheskaya?" *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, 24 December 2006.

130 nationalities and ethnic groups,³³ he says that the president and state is responsible to keep that balance. As noted by Olcott, “Given the precariousness of Kazakhstan’s present situation, it is a testament to the skills of President Nursultan Nazarbayev that the republic has remained stable.”³⁴ Concerning the state’s responsibility, Nazarbayev states that “For the stable development of Kazakhstan, that in near foreseeable future will remain, no doubt, multi-ethnic community, there must be legal guarantees from the state, which creates conditions for development of national-cultural lives of different ethnic groups living in the country.”³⁵

In practice, this balance was threatened by language politics of the government and with ambiguity in the 7th point of the Constitution about official language. According to the 7th point of the Constitution, adopted in 1995, “the state language is Kazakh.”³⁶ This sentence satisfied Kazakhs, however other ethnic groups would feel suppressed and discriminated if this point was realized. In addition, Kazakhstan has no qualified bureaucrats educated in the Kazakh language. Besides, approximately 60% of the population couldn’t speak in Kazakh. Under these conditions founding leaders solved this situation by adding the following to the constitution: “official language is Russian.”³⁷

The balance between Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs seemed to be established. In fact, the functioning language on an official level continued to be Russian. Kazakh nationalists felt deceived by the ideology. However, the reality was that Kazakh language during the Soviet period did not develop in many spheres such as science, statecraft, economy. Literature was the strongest area where Kazakh language developed. In practical terms, for leaders it was much more convenient to speak in Russian, rather than in Kazakh. Nevertheless, they tried to speak in Kazakh while visiting southern regions largely populated by Kazakhs.

33 N.A. Nazarbayev, *V PotokeIstorii*, p. 7.

34 Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Second Edition, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford 1995, p. 294.

35 N.A. Nazarbayev, *V PotokeIstorii*, p. 131.

36 The 7th point of 1995 Constitution

37 Ibid.

With the change in demographic situation, increasing number of Kazakhs the balance is shifting in favor of Kazakhs. After the end of the Cold War and Kazakhstan's declaration of independence, many Russians and Germans migrated to their motherlands. The population, which was about 17 million according to 1989 population census, dropped to 14 million in 1999 population census. In these circumstances, the general volume of ethnic Kazakhs increased.³⁸

Another factor affecting Kazakhs' increase besides natural birthrate is the migration of ethnic Kazakhs from neighboring countries to Kazakhstan. In the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 'State Independence of Republic of Kazakhstan' of 16 December 1991 it is indicated that

The Republic of Kazakhstan creates conditions for repatriation to its territory of individuals who were forced to leave the territory of the Republic during the periods of mass repressions, coercive collectivization, as result of other anti-humanist political actions, as well as their descendants, also for Kazakhs who are living in the territories of the former (Soviet) union's republics.³⁹

As it is indicated by Işık Kuşçu, in contrast to other countries in the region, Kazakhstan was not only restricted by rhetoric on inviting Kazakhs living abroad to homeland. Since 1992 actively supported since 1992 the repatriation of Kazakh Diasporas. Within 20 years after the launching the repatriation policy, approximately 700,000 ethnic Kazakhs migrated to Kazakhstan from different countries such as Turkey, China, and Mongolia.⁴⁰ According to the 1999 population census the ethnic Kazakhs' number was 8 million which consisted 53,5% of the total population. In 2009 population census Kazakhs' number increa-

38 Qazaqstan Respublikasının Statistika jönindegi Agenttigi (Agency on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan), (2000) *Qazaqstan Respublikası Halqının Ulttıq Quramı: Qazaqstan Respublikasındağı 1999 jılğı Halıq Sanağının Qortındısı*. (National Composition of the Republic of Kazakhstan: Conclusion of the Population Census of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 1999) Almaty.

39 7th point of the Constitutional Law of Republic of Kazakhstan on 'State Independence of Republic of Kazakhstan'

40 Işık Kuşçu, "Ulus İnşası Sürecinde Kazakistan'da Etnik Geri Dönüş Göçü Siyaseti ve Etkileri", in Turgut Demirtepe (ed.), *Orta Asya'da Siyasetve Toplum: Demokrasi, Etnisite ve Kimlik*, USAK, Ankara 2012, p.176.

sed to 10 million which is 63,1% of total population.⁴¹ Young generation of Kazakhs moved to big cities under the pressure of new economic conditions. Moving of the capital from Almaty located in the South, to Astana in the North, led Kazakh youth to move to Northern industrial centers where Kazakhs were in minority. Nazarbayev as response to critiques about ‘Kazakhization’ of the country stated, “Why is the demographic domination of Kazakhs on their mother land a concern, while the domination of French in France, Russian in Russia, and Germans in Germany is perceived as a normal issue?”⁴²

Although Kazakhs’ position strengthened in terms of demography, the ruling elite continued to be alien to Kazakh values especially to Kazakh language. These ruling elite who controlled the main resources of the country and possessed key positions in the government played a crucial role in determination of Kazakhstan’s national identity. They were interested in preserving Kazakhstan’s identity as a multi-ethnic and a multi-religious one. In order to institutionalize this ideology, the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan was established in 1995. In this assembly, all ethnic and religious groups were represented.

The Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan

The name of the Assembly which uses the word ‘peoples’ in plural form was under harsh attack from the Kazakh nationalists. The argument was that there is only one people in the country. In fact, the tradition to use people in plural was formed in the Soviet time. There were peoples of the Union. As the result of the critiques, the name was replaced with ‘the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan’, where word ‘people’ is used in singular.

The task of the Assembly is to consolidate Kazakhstan’s people. On the first session of the Assembly Nazarbayev underlined the importance of peace and stability in the country. He drew the attention of the delegates from different ethnic groups living in the country to bloody ethnic clashes in the post-Soviet space such as Karabakh, Taji-

41 «Kazakhstan Respublikasinin 2009 jilgi Ulttiq haliq sanaginin qoritindilari» Taldamali Esep, Kazakhstan Respublikasi Statistika Agenttigi, p.20.

42 N.A. Nazarbayev, *V Potoke Istorii*, p. 188.

kistan, Transdnestr, Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Chechnya. He stated: "Unfortunately, we are living in a fragile and unstable world. Based on this simple truth, we must not allow the emergence of conflicts in our country. Otherwise, any help from the outside cannot help. Therefore, we ourselves have to work out the mechanisms of overcoming similar contradictions."⁴³ According to Nazarbayev there are three approaches to the solution of the national question. First is to suppress other ethnic groups. Second is ignoring the national question and hope that it will be solved by itself. Third is searching for common points, and broadening the zones of mutual understanding and trust among people. Nazarbayev pronounced that "Our main line must be based on the development of all ethnic groups through search of compromises and strengthening of uniting beginnings."⁴⁴

Although the Assembly includes all ethnic and religious groups in the country, I argue that by the ethnic groups mainly Kazakhs and Russians are understood. The official ideology prefers not to make stress on these two groups, but prefers to develop a discourse which prioritizes all ethnic and religious groups. This way implies Kazakhs and Russians are equal to others. In this way confrontation between two major groups would be resolved. As Olcott put it, Kazakhstan is increasingly going to look like two nations contained within a single border. Nazarbayev hoped to merge these two communities by developing and inculcating a multinational state ideology.⁴⁵

Interestingly, in his first address to the assembly, Nazarbayev recalls how all these people together fought for their freedom and independence during World War II, and how together they explored the cosmos (space).⁴⁶ From a theoretical approach it is good example of how common identity can be built on common memory. Indeed, all people of Kazakhstan were united with one destiny and a common memory of the past. In this respect, Kazak government's assessment of the Soviet past is totally different from other post-Soviet republics. Central Asian

43 N. Nazarbayev, "Strany i narody vernutsya na put' integratsii" in A. N. Nysanbayev, V. Y. Dunayev (eds.), *Evrasiiskaya Doktrina Nursultana Nazarbayeva*, Almaty 2010, p. 36

44 Ibid., p.41.

45 Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Second Edition, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford 1995, p. 296.

46 N. Nazarbayev, "Strany i narody vernutsyana put' integratsii", p. 40.

countries perceive the Soviet Union as an empire which exploited the region. In Georgia and Azerbaijan, the Soviet Union has strong enemy image. In Baltic countries, the Soviet Union is described as an invader and occupant. Ukraine accuses the Soviet Union of genocide, so called Holodomor, against Ukrainians. Although the number of casualties and victims of the Kazakh people, who suffered under the Soviet regime, is much more than any of these republics; the Kazakh leadership preferred to reconcile with the past and build Kazakhstan's identity and its relations with the former Soviet countries on the positive memory and the experience of the Soviet period. One such experience is the friendship of peoples on which the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan is based. According to Cummings' research, in facing up to a past of simultaneous repression, collectivization, sedentarization and modernization, the ethnic Kazakh elite typically evaluate the Soviet political order as beneficial to their country, and often rationalized the past by presenting a balance sheet of pluses and minuses: 'there was a lot of good and some bad.' The scholar notes that overwhelmingly, both (generally older) Kazakhs and Russians alike regretted the passing of the system which, they often felt, might have been saved if reform had come earlier and been better managed.⁴⁷ Today in Kazakhstan, holidays which became a tradition during the Soviet time are still recognized as the official holidays. The New Year's Day, 8th of March International Women's Day, 1st of May Labors' Day, 9th May Victory Day are widely celebrated by all people. Even some celebrate the February 23rd the Day of Formation of the Red Army though not officially.

The role of the Assembly was strengthened by amendments to the Constitution in 2007. According to these amendments 9 seats in the Majilis, the lower chamber of Kazakhstan's Parliament, are occupied by members of the Assembly. In other words, 9 Parliament members is to be elected not by general elections, but will be transferred from the Assembly. In this way, the Assembly was institutionalized and became a part of the official organs. The same package of amendments ended the ambiguity in the Constitution about the state language and official language. The 7th point of the Constitution was changed with the following statement: "state language is Kazakh language. Russian

47 Sally N. Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Power and Elite*, I.B. Tauris, New York 2005, p. 91.

language is used on the level of state language.”⁴⁸ Thus it seems that the balance between Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs is restored.

The Doctrine of National Unity of Kazakhstan

In 2009, the debates on Kazakhstan's national identity become once more heated with the presentations of a new document called 'Doctrine of National Unity of Kazakhstan'. While the main emphasis of the doctrine was on the creation of the Kazakhstani nation, as reference were given USA and Brazil, where all ethnic groups live under one uniting identity, this doctrine disappointed Kazakh nationalists. They perceived it as the loss of Kazakhness. Kazakh nationalists argue that within 20 years Kazakh language still did not reach the level of state language.⁴⁹ Under this circumstance, the creation of Kazakhstani nation would mean the suppression of Kazakh language by the Russian one which is spoken both in official level and among the people. They were right because the de facto official language and lingua franca among the ethnic groups was Russian not Kazakh.

As a result of long discussions among the different groups, the final version of the Doctrine which was officially presented on 29 April 2010 at the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan can be considered as a compromise between Kazakh nationalists and civic nationalists. The Doctrine of National Unity of Kazakhstan is based on above discussed Declaration on 'State Sovereignty of KazSSR', the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 'State Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan', and the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Doctrine is composed of four parts: General Provisions, I 'One Country—One Destiny', II 'Different Origins—Equal Opportunities', III 'Development of National Spirit', and Concluding Provisions.

General Provisions state: "The Republic of Kazakhstan is the only legal and historical heir of the centuries-long statehood of Kazakh pe-

48 7 point of the Constitution

49 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "Büyük Kazakistan Projesi ve 2050 Stratejisi", *Yeni Türkiye Dergisi*, Sayı 54, Türk Dünyası Özel Sayısı 2, Eylül-Ekim 2013, s. 1567.

ople and natural continuation of its political and state formation.”⁵⁰ This sentence is very important to satisfy the expectation of Kazakh people, because till that time there was no reference to Kazakh statehood in the official and legal level. In the above-mentioned preamble of the Constitution, the reference was given only to Kazakh land. Keeping in mind the effort of the state ideology to create new Kazakhstani nation like Americans, the reference only to the indigenous ancient Kazakh land, was not perceived positively by Kazakh nationalists. It is because in the case of America, the state was built on American identity by exterminating the indigenous Indians. The reference to indigenous Indian land does not change the fact that the Indians’ identity was excluded from state and national identity. From this point of view, the recognition of centuries-long Kazakh statehood as basis of the Republic of Kazakhstan was a turning point. The Doctrine recognizes that “Kazakh people passed through hard tests, they not only survived but established their own state, gained independence.”⁵¹

Another emphasis of the doctrine is on the fact that Kazakhstan is a national state or a nation-state. In western literature nation and state is equal to each other. But in Kazakhstan, national generally means which belongs to Kazakh nation. In addition, in words of leaders Kazakhstan is sometimes identified as multi-national instead of multi-ethnic. Doctrine introduces new term ‘ethnos’ (ethnicities) instead of contested terms such as peoples in plural and nationalities. The main stress of the Doctrine is on the term of Nation with capital N. The authors of the Doctrine intentionally avoid the term Kazakhstani nation.

The Doctrine indicates that in the Declaration on ‘State Sovereignty of KazSSR’ and the Constitutional Law on ‘State Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan’ there were two principles that determined basis of sovereignty and further consolidation of nation: first is right of Kazakh people to self-determination which created the condition to establish the state of Kazakhstan; second is equal opportunities for all citizens of the country.⁵² In fact these principles equally emphasize

50 Doktrina Natsional’nogo edinstva Kazakhstana, <http://www.inform.kz/rus/article/2263364>
Retrieved in 23.05.2012

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

both ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism. The doctrine preserves the balance between Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs.

The Doctrine is constructed on the idea of the national unity. The first principle on which national unity is based, presented under part one 'One Country—One Destiny'. This is the recognition of the commonness of destiny of each citizen and the Motherland, the Republic of Kazakhstan. "The national unity is based on high level relatedness despite one's ethnic origin, to Kazakhstan and to its future."⁵³ New Kazakhstan is not a country with a multi-ethnic and multi-religious identity but it is a country with the identity of one Nation. "Under new historical circumstances, Kazakh people who gave its honorable name to the country have new historical mission; that is to be consolidating center of unity of Nation."⁵⁴

The second principle on which national unity is based presented under part two 'Different Origins—Equal Opportunities'. It is equality of opportunities for all citizens despite their ethnic and other origins, religions, and social statuses. In the list of measures to provide equality there is a point which indicates that it is legally prohibited to form political organizations based on the ethnicity and religions.

The third principle of national unity is strengthening and development of Spirit of Nation. "Spiritual basis is power which unites Nation into one. ...To raise our National Spirit the priorities must be spirit of traditions and patriotism, spirit of renewal, competitiveness and victory."⁵⁵ In this respect, the development of state language is included into priorities list. At the same time the state cares about the satisfaction of spiritual-cultural and language necessities of all ethnicities living in the country.

"Modernization and competitiveness built on traditions is the basis of progress for our national spirit in 21st century". The stress on tradition is very important for Kazakhs, as it says that while building new country, we will not lose our traditional identity, i.e. Kazakhness.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

In this sense, Nazarbayev's thoughts are relevant. "We are confronted with a dilemma: we will explore modern reality and build new Kazakhstan, or we will go to non-existence. We chose former one, but our building of new must be based on rich historical experience. Dreaming honorable future let's remember honorable past."⁵⁶

To sum up, Kazakhstan's national identity is built on two components: Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. Both groups are concerned not to be assimilated by the other. These two groups are as two poles that must be balanced by the state. Before I move to the discussion of the international factors influencing the Kazakhstan's identity, it is reasonable to make reference to Rustem Kadyrzhanov who describes above mentioned two poles as Turkic and Russian.

Turkic and Russian identities of Kazakhstan can be considered as the poles of specters of orientation which characterizes the national identity of Kazakhstan. These specters reflect the diversity of identities of different social groups composing Kazakhstan's community. ... It is proper to say that the certain part of their identities is related to Turkic orientation and the other part is to Russian orientation.⁵⁷

Turkic and Russian identities are related to geographical and geo-cultural environments and historical experience of Kazakhstan. It makes sense from this point to move to international factors shaping Kazakhstan's identity. The demographic division of the country is deepened by the civilizations of neighboring countries. As it is put by Olcott, Kazakhstan is trapped by geopolitics as well as demography.⁵⁸ While in domestic level it is demography of Kazakhstan which is the main determinant of its national identity, in international level it is geopolitical and geo-cultural environment that tremendously affects its identity.

56 N.A. Nazarbayev, *V Potoke Istorii*, Atamura, Almaty 2003, p. 76.

57 Kadyrzhanov Rustem, "Vyboralfavita-vyboridentichnosti", *Kazakh almanaghy*, № 4, 2009, p. 66.

58 Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Second Edition, Hoover Institution Press, Stanford 1995, p. 294.

Nazarbayev's Eurasianism

According to Nazarbayev, "the very conditions of emergence of Kazakh ethnos has historical roots in centuries long Turkic-Slavic cultural interactions. During the Russian Empire and Soviet Union this interaction continued."⁵⁹ If we analyze last thousand years of history of interaction between these two groups, the first five hundred years could be described by Turkic domination and control of Slavic people and last five hundred years by Slavic domination and control of Turkic people. Nazarbayev argues that the history of interaction between meta-ethnic groups of Turks and Slavs must be considered not only in projection of past but of future as well.⁶⁰ In other words, Slavic and Turkic worlds that shaped Kazakhstan's identity in the past will continue affecting the state identity of Kazakhstan in the future.

This space of interaction is called Eurasia. In fact, the term Eurasia and the concept of Eurasianism was introduced by Russian scholars at the beginning of the 20th century who tried to solve the identity crisis of the Russian Empire that defined itself as a European country but rejected by the Europeans as such and perceived as 'the other'. Eurasianists described Russia as a distinct civilization. This civilization is called Eurasian civilization.⁶¹ The contribution of Eurasianists was to positively evaluate the Turkic domination and Turkic legacy in Russia. The Eurasian thought's main argument is that for Russia to survive as a great power it must recognize that the space where Russia was built is the place of interaction and co-existence of Slavic and Turkic people.⁶² The Eurasianists were against Slavophil and Pan-Slavists who give prominence to Slavic culture in expense of Turkic culture. In this way these scholars tried to revise Russian History Thesis which demonized Genghis Khan and the period of the domination of the Turkic people. They re-evaluated the period of Turkic domination positively and claimed that that period played important role in establishment of Russian statehood.

59 Nursultan Nazarbayev, *V Potoke Istorii*, p. 139.

60 Ibid., p.140.

61 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol , *Yeni Büyük Oyun Küresel Güç Mücadelesinde Avrasyanın Değişen Jeopolitiği*, 2. Baskı, Barış Kitap Basım Yayın, 2011, s. 56.

62 Lev Gumilyov, *Ritmy Evrzi: Epokhi i Tsivilizatsii* (Rhythms of Eurasia: Ages and Civilizations), AST, Moskva, p. 23.

During the Soviet time concept of Eurasianism was developed by scholar Lev Gumilyov who studied history of Turks. He described Eurasia as a common space of Turkic and Slavic peoples. This formulation was utilized by President Nazarbayev but this time to solve identity crisis of Kazakhstan which was hanged between Europe and Asia, between Slavic and Turkic worlds, between Christianity and Islam. In this conception of Eurasia, Turks and Slavs conceived as equal subjects of history, so it warned against Russian chauvinist stands.

Nazarbayev by introducing his own version of Eurasianism utilized many aspects of Russian Eurasianist thinkers of early twentieth century who can be classified as the Classical Eurasianists. Nazarbayev was well aware that ethnic Kazakh nationalism in Kazakhstan can lead to the fragmentation of the state as in the Russian case Pan-Slavism or ethnic Russian nationalism can lead to the disintegration of Russia. In addition, Kazakh leadership could not ignore Tsarist Russian and Soviet period of the country's history. Therefore, Nazarbayev's Eurasianism emphasized Slavic-Turkic or Kazakh-Russian co-existence. Further, Kazakhstan was presented as a place where more than hundred ethnic and religious groups live in peace and harmony. Nazarbayev's Eurasianism became ideological and academic rationale of the country's pluralism and multiculturalism. In this sense, Nazarbayev's Eurasianism is another name of the inclusive, civic nationalism of Kazakhstan. While in the domestic politics Eurasianism became the basis to build multi-ethnic Kazakhstani identity, in foreign policy Eurasianism became the basis for pursuing multi-vector policy which means that Kazakhstan's convergence to a certain country or region does not mean its divergence from other ones.⁶³

However, it is wrong to reduce Nazarbayev's Eurasianism to the reintegration solely with Russia. As the main locomotives in Eurasia idea he counts the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Conference on Interaction and Measures of Confidence Building in Asia. It is important to note that all three

63 A. N. Nysanbayev, V. Y. Dunayev (eds.), *Evrziiskaya Doktrina Nursultana Nazarbayeva* (Eurasian Doctrine of Nursultan Nazarbayev), Almaty 2010.

were formed with the initiative of the Kazakh president.⁶⁴ In practical terms, as it is expressed by Mostafa, Kazakhstan's Eurasian policy is designed to serve multiple goals and purposes: externally to improve relations with Russia and other regional countries based on Eurasian solidarity, balancing relations with Asia and Europe by playing the role of a 'bridge between Asia and Europe' and claiming as a bastion of peace, stability and neutrality, and domestically to create a successful multi-ethnic, multi-national peaceful and harmonious nation with stability and harmony.⁶⁵ The last point is important as it contributes to resolve identity crisis of country.

Although the Eurasian Doctrine of Kazakhstan looks like a pro-Russian ideology, in fact it opens way to revive and restore Turkic identity of Kazakhstan thus serving the interests of Kazakh nationalism. The explicit example is Eurasian National University which is represented as the locomotive of Eurasian studies of Kazakhstan. The university is identified with Turkic civilization. There is a copy of Orhun inscriptions at the university. There is a museum of history of Turkic alphabets. Generally Kazakhstan's active policy in Turkic world is essential result of Eurasian idea of Kazakhstan.⁶⁶ It is not coincidence that the first book published from Turkic Academy in Astana was *Eurasian Idea of Nazarbayev and Turkic World*. In the final analysis, Nazarbayev's Eurasianism suits real situation of Kazakhstan and serve to solve identity crisis of the country. This idea not only provides Kazakhstan's survival but enables it to develop Turkic identity.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, Kazakhstan's national identity is composed of Turkic and Slavic components. At one glance, it looks that Kazakhstan has divided identity. But the main achievement of Kazakh leadership is

64 Nursultan Nazarbayev, "Proekt Evraziiskogo Soyuzu: problem i perspektivy integratsii", in A. N. Nysanbayev, V. Y. Dunayev (eds.), *Evrasiiskaya doktrina Nursultana Nazarbayeva*, Institut filosofii i politologii KN MON RK, Almaty 2010, p. 26.

65 Golam Mustafa, "The Concept of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian Policy and Its Implications", p. 165.

66 Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, "Avrasyacılıktan Türk Avrasyasına: Türk Dünyasının Değişen Jeopolitiği", Mehmet Seyfettin Erol, Yavuz Güler (der.), *TÜRKSAV TürkDünyası 25 Yıllığı: Tahliller, Değerlendirmeler, Öngörüler, Özeleştireler*, Akçağ, Ankara 2016, s. 201.

that it succeeded to turn this ambiguity into an advantage. Nazarbayev to solve this ambiguity or identity crisis in other words, and prevent any clash between different ethnic and religious groups identified Kazakhstan as a Eurasian country where 130 ethnic and religious groups live in peace. In international level, “At this strategic crossroad where Chinese, Russian, Central Asian and Western civilizations converge; Kazakhstan has arrived as a stable and significant nation state.”⁶⁷ Under this Eurasian peace, Kazakh government tries to balance Russian influence by Turkic culture. For this purpose Kazakhstan builds close relations with Turkic countries. In this regard Kazakhstan’s relations with Turkey which was establish as a country with strong references to Turkic civilization is significant, as these relations strengthens Kazakhstan’s Turkic identity and balance against Slavic one. In this way, Kazakhstan becomes real heart of Eurasia, which is in fact Turkic-Slavic common world.

67 Jonathan Aitken, *Kazakhstan: Surprises and Stereotypes after 20 Years of Independence*, Continuum, London 2012, p. 2.

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