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CONTEMPORARY ETHNIC PROCESS IN KAZAKHSTAN

Today, Kazakhstan is one of the most multinational republics in the Soviet Union, with several scores of peoples which have different languages, culture and history.¹ The motley ethnic make up of Kazakhstan took several centuries to become such. Beginning from the 15th century the Tatars began to make encroachments on Kazakhstan; in the 16th–19th centuries its northern and northeastern regions were settled by the Russians (peasants and Cossacks), southern regions by the Uzbeks, Tajiks, Dungans and Uighurs. However, until the end of the 19th century, the penetration of alien ethnic elements had practically not disturbed the dominating position of the Kazakhs in the entire territory of Kazakhstan.² From the second half of the 19th century, peasants began to colonize Kazakhstan. Colonization became especially intensive at the turn of the century. Among the settlers there were Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian and ethnic German peasants. The flow of settlers was so intensive that the 1926 census showed reduction of the share of the Kazak to 57 per cent, with Europeans accounting for 34 per cent of the total population. The next wave of migration to Kazakhstan was involved by the Second World War. At that time groups of ethnic Germans from various regions of the Soviet Union were moved to Kazakhstan. Many peoples came to Kazakhstan in the 1950's during a drive for the

1. This paper is written on the basis of field data gathered by this author in 1980–87, and the data provided by the Kazakhstan Group of Central Asian Expedition of the Institute of Ethnography of the USSR Academy of Sciences (1986, 1987), headed by S. V. Cheshko. The data of the 1979 Census are taken from, *Chislennost i sostav naseleniya SSSR po dannym Vsesoyuznoi perepisi naseleniya 1979 goda* (Number and Makeup of the Population of the USSR. Data of 1979 National Census. Moscow, 1985). Data on mixed marriages at 1979 only pertain to families with one spousal pair (families of this type constitute 85 per cent of families in Kazakhstan).

2. N. Ye. Bekmakhanova, *Formirovaniye mnogonatsionalnogo naseleniya Kazakhstana i Severnoy Kirgizii* (Formation of the Multinational Population in Kazakhstan and Northern Kirgizia), Moscow, 1980; Bekmakhanova, *Mnogonatsionalnoye naseleniye Kazakhstana i Kirgizii v epokhu kapitalizma* (Multinational Population in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia in the Epoch of Capitalism). Moscow, 1986

development of Virgin Lands. As a result, in 1959 the Kazakhs constituted only 30 per cent of the republic's population, and Eastern Slavic peoples 52 per cent.

In recent time, there was no substantial migrations to Kazakhstan and ethnic composition of the republic stabilized. According to the 1979 census, Kazakhstan accounts for 5.29 million Kazakhs (81 per cent of the Kazakhs living in the USSR), 5.99 million Russians, 900 thousand ethnic Germans, 898 thousand Ukrainians, 313 thousand Tatars, 263 thousand Uzbeks, 181 thousand Byelorussians as well as the Uighurs, Koreans, Azerbaijanians, Dungans and other peoples each constituting less than 1 per cent of the local population. The contemporary ethnic structure of Kazakhstan is as follows: through natural growth the share of the Kazakhs increased to reach 36 per cent, Eastern Slavic peoples account for 48 per cent, the Germans 6 per cent, and small groups of Asian peoples such as the Uzbeks, Uighurs, Dungans, Azerbaijanians and Tatars make up 6 per cent. The remainder 4 per cent are the Koreans and other small groups which were not specified in the census; they are the Tajiks, Kirghiz, Kurds, and other from the Asian section of the country, and non-Slavic European peoples such as Moldavians, Baltic and Volga area peoples.

All these peoples are distributed very unevenly in the republic. This fact makes an imprint on the ethnic processes occurring in various regions of Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, one can distinguish three conventional regions with specific ethnic distinctions: (1) the central, northern and north-eastern regions dominated by the Europeans (Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Byelorussians). This is especially evident in Karaganda Region (14 per cent of Kazakhs, 76 per cent of Europeans, 3 per cent of Asian peoples); (2) southern regions with a remarkable share of small ethnic groups of the Asian origin. The most indicative case is the Chimkent Region (51 per cent of Kazakhs, 25 per cent of Europeans, 19 per cent of Asian peoples); (3) western regions dominated by the Kazakhs (in the Kzyl-Orda Region there are 76 per cent of Kazakhs, 17 per cent of Europeans, 1 per cent of Asian peoples). In addition to national distinctions, these regions differ in the level of urbanization, which has a direct influence on the character and intensity of ethnic processes. In the above regions, the share of urban population in 1979 was as follows: 85 per cent in the Karaganda Region 62 per cent in Kzyl-Orda Region and 40 per cent in Chimkent Region.

Contemporary ethnic processes in Kazakhstan are determined by two main, and to a certain extent contradictory, tendencies: (1) the urge to develop national cultures, ethnic consolidation and (2) social and cultural merger of various peoples. This is explained by the socio-economic and political basis which is common to all peoples in Kazakhstan. Former socio-economic differences, cultural and historical traditions, number of the population make very diverse the forms of these processes and determine the superiority of certain trends in ethnic development.

The Kazakhs are the indigeneous people of Kazakhstan, who were mostly nomads in the past. Most of them continue to live in the countryside (69 per cent). National consolidation of the Kazakhs was completed in Soviet time. During this process the national Kazakh culture emerged and continues to develop.

In the sphere of every-day culture, the Kazakhs are now losing traditional elements and are acquiring unified, international forms. This objective process, which is occurring the world over, was caused by profound socio-economic transformations of the Kazakh society over the past century. In postwar years, the process strongly intensified owing to a large influx of multinational European population. Disappearan-

ce of various elements of traditional Kazakh culture takes place all over the republic and is especially intensive in the areas with predominant European population. Today, housing and clothes of the Kazakhs in the northern and central areas virtually lack national distinctions. More traditions are retained in food, but national cuisine has also borrowed much from European food. Rituals become simpler, and behavioural norms are changing. In southern and western Kazakhstan, in some of purely Kazakh regions, ethnic specifics of the Kazakh culture are still strong, including folk crafts, which are forgotten in the north, and a very viable material culture. In their every-day life, the Kazakhs observe many traditional customs and rituals.

Linguistic processes in the Kazakh society, specifically the development of the Kazakh-Russian biligualism, also have different rates in the north, west and south of the republic. While in Karaganda Region 67 per cent of the Kazakhs have a good command of Russian, only 37 per cent speak Russian in Kzyl-Orda and 35 per cent in Chimkent Region. In the north, the Kazakh children, the young and the elderly people speak Russian not only in communication with other nationalities but often among themselves. Russian is often spoken in the family. In the south Russian is only used for international communication; pre-school children and elders usually do not speak Russian.

Despite intensive ethnic contacts and the involvement of the Kazakhs in integrational and inter-ethnic processes, there is no noticeable erosion of the Kazakh ethnos. There is virtually no linguistic assimilation of the Kazakhs: 99 per cent of them consider the Kazakh to be their native tongue; the figure is slightly less in the regions with a considerable share of the Russians (95 per cent in Karaganda Region). The number of mixed marriages is also insignificant, constituting only 8 per cent. However, mixed marriages usually do not lead to ethnic assimilation, because according to historico-cultural tradition only the Kazakh men make mixed marriages and their children take as a rule the nationality of their father. We estimate that in 75 per cent of cases the children born into mixed families claim to be the Kazakhs. As a result, in the interval between several recent censuses the number of the Kazakhs grew by 25 per cent.

Ethnoconsolidating processes remain to be the main ones of the Kazakh ethnos today. There are dialect distinctions between the Kazakhs of the north-eastern, southern and western areas. But this is not a hindrance for their communications. The development of the Kazakh literary language, the Kazakh literature, professional art, and the mass media have become a powerful catalyst for the ethnic consolidation of the Kazakhs. Cultural distinctions are eroding between three formerly, isolated regions – the Kazakh zhuzes and tribes. The process involves the merger of traditional local elements of Kazakh culture and evolution of forms common for various groups of the Kazakhs, mainly through introduction of urban international culture. Today, one would fail to distinguish, for example, women from various tribes by headgear, because traditional *kimishek* (differently cut in each group) is worn no more, either in the north or in the south.

Ethnoconsolidating processes among the Kazakhs have led to some changes in their ethnic consciousness. Some subethnic survivals and distinctions caused by different rates of introduction in the life of subethnic groups of standard forms of culture are regarded by the Kazakhs as local peculiarities of a single Kazakh ethnos. Affiliation

to a specific tribe or Zhuz exists at the lowest levels of the Kazakh ethnic consciousness. The Kazakh national self-identity has become prevalent. The growth of national self-identity, involved by the development of Kazakh culture, internal consolidation of the Kazakhs, and to a certain extent, by fast erosion of ethnic features of traditional every-day culture, has evoked strong interest of the Kazakhs in their history, including ethnogenesis, clan and tribal division and to zhuzes as components from which the Kazakh ethnos evolved. If previously Kazakhs could recapture their historic roots from traditions and legends retained by the older generation in the villages, today the main source of such information is scientific historical and ethnographic literature and fiction, television and cinema which substitute local information links.

Ethnoconsolidating processes are also characteristic of the Russians who are the most numerous European people in Kazakhstan. There is virtually no cultural difference now between the old Russian settlers and the newcomers. Russian ethnographic groups that took shape in the 18th–19th centuries in Kazakhstan³ – „stone workers“ (Bukhtarma), „Poles“, Uralian, Siberian and Semirechye Cossacks – have lost many of their cultural distinctions. Despite the fact that ethnic consciousness of subethnic groups still survives and that Russian old settlers are often opposed to newcomers, our observations show that in some regions there emerge the element of self-consciousness of the „Russians of Kazakhstan“.

In the alien ethnic environment, other Slavic peoples merge with the Russians, as well as other minor groups of European peoples. The process is characteristic of other regions of the USSR.⁴ Every third Russian family in Kazakhstan is a mixed family. Most of the mixed marriages are made between Russians and other Europeans. In most cases children born into such families consider themselves to be Russian.

Ethnic assimilation of the Ukrainians and Byelorussians by the Russians is very intensive in Kazakhstan. Among these peoples the share of mixed marriages is very high (76 per cent for the Ukrainians and 82 per cent for the Byelorussians). In most of such families one of the spouses is Russian. The Ukrainians in Kazakhstan marry Russian 2.4 times more often and Byelorussians 2.9 times more often than people of their own ethnos. Children in such families prefer to be called Russians.

Ethnic assimilation of the Slavic population also occurs in non-matrimonial relations. Linguistic assimilation is suggested by the fact that in 1979 59 per cent of Ukrainians and 62 per cent of Byelorussians claimed the Russian language to be their native tongue. In multinational regions of northern Kazakhstan, the Ukrainian and Byelorussian languages have virtually gone out of use. Very often the Ukrainians and Byelorussians claim themselves to be Russians, though they know about their Ukrainian and Byelorussian nationality.

Non-Slavic Europeans in Kazakhstan are assimilated by the Russians mainly through mixed marriages, the percentage of which is very high (85 per cent for Moldavians, 89 per cent for Lithuanians, 95 per cent for Letts). Most of such mixed marriages are with the Russians.

3 „Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian Population of Central Asia and Kazakhstan“. In: *Narody Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana*. 2. Series „Narody mira“. Moscow, 1963, pp. 662–695.

4 *Sovremenniy etnicheskiye protsessy v SSSR* (Contemporary Ethnic Processes in the USSR). Moscow, 1977, p. 503; Yu. V. Bromley. „Contemporary Ethnosocial Processes within East Slavic Peoples of the USSR“. In: *Sovetskaya Etnografiya*, 1985, No. 4, p. 5.

The German population of Kazakhstan has evolved from several ethnographic groups (colonists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, settlers who came from Volga, Ukraine and Caucasus in the 1940s) having certain ethnocultural and linguistic peculiarities, as well as a specific ethnocultural consciousness. In the multinational environment of Kazakhstan and with mixed settlement of different ethnographic groups of the Germans, their cultural distinctions have vanished, and they began to claim themselves to be Soviet Germans. At present, the Germans live throughout Kazakhstan, but the largest communities are in Tselinograd, Kokchetav, Karaganda and Kustanai regions (10 to 13 per cent of the population). Ethnoconsolidating processes under the conditions of dispersed settlement of the Germans have taken place inside individual local groups and possibly lead to the formation of new ethnographic groups of the Germans in Kazakhstan. A more detailed estimate requires further studies.

Dispersion of the Germans explains a high rate of mixed marriages among them (50 per cent of mixed marriages including 70 per cent with the Russians). About two-thirds of children born into German-Russian families claim themselves as Russians, and thus sever the ethnic German line.

Considerable linguistic assimilation of the Germans can be illustrated by the following figures: in 1979, 35 per cent of the Germans claimed Russian as their native tongue, though this does not mean that they lose their ethnic consciousness. In southern regions of the republic with a lesser percentage of the Russians, the above figure is lower than in northern and central regions. Thus, if in Karaganda Region 38 per cent of the Germans claim Russian as their native tongue, in Chimkent Region only 23 per cent do so. In nationally mixed settlements, where the Germans appeared only in the 1940s, the German youth often do not know the German language and Russian becomes a family language. In the old German settlements, their native language is used in the family, at work places and in social life. In such settlements other nationalities also have a certain command of the German language.

All European groups in Kazakhstan have a very high level of internationalization of every-day culture which virtually lacks ethnic specifics and ethnodifferentiating function. The mass media and spread of „mass culture“ standardize many forms of their spiritual culture. These processes affect even such a conservative sphere of culture as religion. In multinational regions of Kazakhstan with the declining role of religion and growing tolerance, Orthodox Slavs and Lutherans Germans often pay no attention to confessional differences. In the absence of Orthodox priests all worship for the Orthodox fold can be performed by a Lutheran pastor. A certain share of believers from among the German Catholics baptize their children at Orthodox churches.

Culture unification processes are facilitated by high urbanization of the European population. According to the 1979 census, 74 per cent of the Russians, 60 per cent of the Ukrainians, and 56 per cent of the Byelorussians in Kazakhstan lived in the cities. While only 45 per cent of the Germans live in the city, urban lifestyles have widely spread in their rural settlements. The same thing is characteristic of other European peoples.

Many direction of ethnic processes occurring within the European groups in Kazakhstan (from assimilation to consolidation) are reflected in the dynamics of their numerical growth. Between the past two censuses the number of the Russians grew by 8 per cent, Germans by 5 per cent, and Ukrainians and Byelorussians went down respectively by 4 and 8 per cent.

Ethnic processes are slightly different within small groups of Asian peoples (the Uzbeks, Uighurs, Azerbaijanians, Tajiks, Dungans) and culturally similar Tatars.

The position of Tatars in this group is quite peculiar. Of all these peoples, Tatars are the most „Westernized“, and by their culture they occupy an intermediate position between the two biggest peoples in Kazakhstan, the Russians and the Kazakhs, and are assimilated by either of them, chiefly through mixed marriages. Already in the 19th century small groups of Chalakazakhs (descendants of Tatar men and Kazakh women) appeared in Kazakhstan. High dispersion, high level of urbanization of the Tatars (73 per cent) explain a high share of mixed marriages among them even today (62 per cent, of which 44 per cent are with a Russians spouse, 27 per cent with a Kazakh spouse). Children born into such families prefer to be called Russians or Kazakhs, rather than Tatars. Linguistic assimilation also affects the Tatars: 22 per cent claim Russian as their mother tongue; 68 per cent have a good command of it. As for ethnocultural specifics, traditional every-day culture has been substantially modified by the Kazakh culture, and even today in the countryside the survivals of Tatar and Kazakh cultures have very much in common.

Other Asian groups in Kazakhstan undergo virtually no assimilation. Their small numbers give a relatively high percentage of mixed marriages (from 23 per cent for the Uzbeks to 44 per cent for the Azerbaijanians), but because of confessional prejudices mixed marriages are concluded by men rather than women and the children from such marriages choose the nationality of their father. Linguistic assimilation is also insignificant. About 91 per cent of Azerbaijanians and 98 per cent of the Tajiks report their native language as a mother tongue. Russian is also spoken by them, but not so often as by the Europeans of Kazakhstan. Usually, Russian is well known by young and middle-aged people. The share of people speaking the Kazakh language is very small and declining. Despite this fact, contacts with the Kazakh population grow, but Russian is increasingly often used for communication.

At present, the entire Asian groups in Kazakhstan are growing closer to the Kazakhs. Their traditional culture retains ethnic features, but also imbibes many elements of the Kazakh culture. The researchers of the Uighurs stress the intensity of this process within this people⁵. Within the Uzbeks in Kazakhstan, this process is much slower because of their strong relations with their main ethnos.⁶ Conservation of traditional cultures within the group is largely explained by a low level of urbanization, a detached rural way of life, which is also characteristic of small cities.

Peoples and national groups live in Kazakhstan in close contact rather than in isolation. The processes of their ethnic development, some of which have been discussed in this paper, modify interethnic relations in the republic, optimize these relations or evoke contradictions between individual nationalities.

5 G. M. Iskhakov, A. M. Reshetov, A. N. Sedlovskaya. „Contemporary Ethnic Processes within Soviet Uighurs“. In: *Etnicheskiye protsessy u natsionalnykh grupp Sredney Azii i Kazakhstana*. Moscow, 1980, pp. 74–93.

6 A. N. Zhilina. *Uzbegek Del-Kazakhstanban (Az etnokulturalis folymatok problemajahoz)*. A III. Bekescsabai Nemzetközi Neprajzi Nemzetiségkutató konferencia előadásai (1985, október 2–4). I Budapest-Bekescsaba, 1986, pp. 331–345.

Emerging interethnic contradictions can be alleviated or aggravated by the state policy. Specifically, in the past several decades contradictions became more critical. The former leadership of the republic headed by Kunayev created favourable conditions for the Kazakh nation: key posts in the party, state, administrative, legal, scientific and educational institutions were primarily given to the Kazakhs, and the Kazakh youth enjoyed privileges in entering higher educational establishments.

Disregard for the interests of other nationalities in the republic, and cases of the Kazakh nationalism aggravated relations between the Kazakhs and the Russians, the Kazakhs and the Germans, etc. As a result, non-indigenous population moved to new places from some regions of Kazakhstan. Under these conditions, in December 1986 when the former leadership was deposed, people responsible for stagnation in the economy and wishing to retain the status quo and privileges inspired an outburst of nationalistic sentiment, specifically among the student heated by the slogans of „a hurt nation“.

Let us stress that the nationalities policy of the previous leadership impaired not only relations between nations, but affected the internal development of the Kazakh ethnos. Promotion according to kinship, revived clan and tribal relations. Government post were primarily given to people from southern regions, which evoked opposition between south and north. This showed immaturity of consolidation processes among the Kazakhs. However, the ratio between the subjective and objective factors in ethnic development, interaction of ethnic processes and inter-national relations require further in-depth studies.