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KAZAKH NATIONAL IDENTITY (1917-2017)

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A.Y 2017/2018

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INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country and the biggest landlocked state in the world. It became independent only in 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed. Yet, it was the last republic to proclaim its independence from the former Communist ‘empire’ and, furthermore, it was the only one where the titular nationality did not represent the majority of the population. According to the last Soviet census, held in 1989, Kazakhs represented only the 39,7% of the overall population, while Russians constituted the 37,8% and, furthermore, ‘European’ people easily overcame Kazakhs, since Kazakhstan hosted also a large Ukrainian and German minority, who represented respectively 5,4% and 5,8% of the overall population of the republic.

Kazakhstan is one of the five post-Soviet Central Asian states. In 1904, the British geographer Harold Mackinder even identified Central Asia and the rule over this area as fundamental for whoever aspired to global hegemony. During Soviet era, Moscow portrayed Soviet Central Asian republics as a development model for the Muslim world. When Soviet Union collapsed, the major global powers began to pay more attention toward the area and several experts even have wondered if a new ‘Great Game’ has begun in the region. Under this framework, Kazakhstan has played a central role since it has been able to emerge as the most developed of the five Central Asian countries, economically speaking, and it has established fruitful bilateral relations not only with China and Russia - with whom Kazakhstan shares two large borders - but also with other major global powers such as United States and European Union.

The Soviet rule dramatically changed Kazakhstan and Kazakh national identity. Kazakhstan became the most international of the Soviet republic and up to 130 different nationalities lived in Kazakhstan; while, Kazakh identity witnessed an extensive modernisation that involved a relevant linguistic and cultural Russification. Given this demographic and cultural reality, post-Soviet Kazakhstan identity implemented a twofold nationality policy aimed to strengthen Kazakh ethnic identity, but also on the other hand to develop a civic identity able to represent also the minorities living in Kazakhstan. Under this framework, foreign policy strategy and, in particular, the ‘Eurasianist’ paradigm has also had a primarily role to preserve stability and inter-ethnic harmony in Kazakhstan.

This dissertation is divided in two different parts. The first, which involves chapter 1 and 2, analyses the development of Kazakhstan and Kazakh national identity since 1890s, when Russian migration toward the steppe began to increase until the demise of the Soviet Union. The second, which encompasses chapter 3 and 4, analyses Kazakhstani leadership decision making

since 1991 both in the domestic and international arena and how it affected the development of Kazakh national identity in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

The first chapter analyses three different stages. First, the period between 19th century and 1918. This phase encompasses the years between the intensification of Russian migration toward the steppe land and the October Revolution. This part answers two main questions. First, did a Kazakh national consciousness already exist and what effect did Russian massive migration had on Kazakh population and the stability of such a region. The second stage analyses the *korenizatsyia* (indigenisation) policy implemented by the Soviet leadership during the 1920s. In particular, it focusses on how such a policy shaped Kazakh culture and whether it permitted the raise of a new Kazakh *intelligencija*. The third part examines the drive for collectivisation implemented by Stalin in the years straddling between 1920s and 1930s and which had dramatic consequences on Kazakh people. To examine the effects of such a policy and how Kazakh people did react is fundamental in the understanding of how Kazakh identity had developed during the Soviet era.

The second chapter scrutinises the period between the end of the World War II and the demise of Soviet Union. First, it examines the Khrushchev era, investigating which nationality policy did he implement and, above all, its ‘Virgin Land’ programme that further altered the demographic balance within the republic. Secondly, it scrutinises Brezhnev era and its ‘trust in cadres’ policy, which allowed Dinmukhamed Kunaev, to become the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan in 1964 and to keep that position until December 1986. During Brezhnev era Moscow loosened its grip on national republics. Therefore, two questions raise: first did this lead to the strengthening of Kazakh culture and, did it allow the emergence of a Kazakh national consciousness? Finally, the second chapter examines the years between 1987-1991. During Gorbachev era, the reform pursued by the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union let the spontaneous emergence of a number of movements struggling for independence from Moscow in several Soviet republics. This part analyses, above all, whether Kazakhstan witnessed the emergence of such national movement or if it just gained independence automatically, when the Soviet Union definitively collapsed.

The second part of the thesis scrutinises how Kazakhstan and its national identity has developed since 1991. In order to better grasp how the country looks today it is important to focus not only to how did Kazakhstan’s leadership behave in the domestic arena, but also to understand which foreign policy strategy it implemented since this state gained its independence.

The third chapter wonders whether could be defined or not as a ‘nationalising’ state, namely a country who promotes titular nationality and ethnic identity. In order to better answer to such a

question, the chapter first analyses the 'kazakhization' policy implemented by the government and to which extent they strengthen both Kazakh culture and ethnic Kazakhs control over their 'own' national territory both from an administrative and demographic point of view. Secondly, it scrutinises country's governmental efforts to develop a Kazakhstani supra-ethnic civic identity, which are the tools used by the Kazakhstani leadership to achieve such a result and whether it has been able or not to develop such an identity. Finally, the chapter investigates two crucial aspects to understand Kazakhstan contemporary reality and the country's future too. First, Russians situation in the country and whether they feel themselves represented and part of the post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Secondly, the country's political system and how it has contributed to the stability of the state.

Finally, the fourth chapter investigates what foreign policy strategy did Kazakhstan implement. In particular, it first scrutinises the two main concepts on which Kazakhstan's foreign policy has been based, i.e. 'multivectorism' and 'Eurasianism'. Then, it describes Kazakhstan's relations with the global major power and the other Central Asian states and how they have affected Kazakhstan's stance on the international arena.

To sum up, Soviet era radically transformed Kazakhstan both from a demographical and cultural point of view. Such a reality led post-Soviet Kazakhstan leadership to develop a Kazakhstani civic identity able to represent the whole country's population. Under this framework, Kazakhstan foreign policy strategy and, in particular, the decision to portray Kazakhstan as a 'Eurasian' country has had a key role for preserving country's stability and inter-ethnic harmony.

CHAPTER 1

Kazakhstan from 1890s to Stalin era

To analyse the development of Kazakhstan national identity it is fundamental to examine its historical background. Indeed, it would be difficult to understand why Kazakhstan gained a peaceful independence free of anti-Russian feeling without dealing with all that had happened from 1890 until the end of World War II. By the 1890s the Russian imperial government had launched a new colonisation policy, causing a progressive waning in the “Kazakh”¹ traditional way of life and social structure, based on a nomadic-pastoral economy.

The *korenizatsyia* nativization policies adopted by the XII Russian Communist Party Congress halted the dismantling of the nomadic society during the 1920s. However, the collectivisation policy enacted during 1930s led to the final disappearance of the nomadic society. A third of the Kazakh population died because of Stalin’s “drive to collectivisation”; meanwhile the arrival of thousands of migrants from the European part of the Soviet Union radically altered the ethnic conformation of these territories.²

1.1 The “Kazakh” Society

The Kazakhs were a Turkic nomadic population which occupied the southern tier of the Tsarist Empire. The territories occupied by these peoples can be divided into three different regions: the north, composed of the Uralsk, Turgai, Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk oblast; the central

¹ We cannot speak about a Kazakh Republic until 1924 when the Autonomy Soviet Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan has been founded. Kazakhstan became a full-fledged Union Republic only in 1936.

² Niccolo Panciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.6

region, which comprised the southern part of the aforementioned districts, and the southern region, which involved the oblasts of Syr Darya and Semirechye.³

The birth of the Kazakh people dated back to the mid-fifteenth century when Janibek and Kirai, sons of Khan of the White Horde of Mongols, separated from Abul Khayr, khan of Uzbeks⁴, creating the Kazakh khanate. The term *qazaq* is supposed to have been born during this event. However, it does not have an ethnic connotation, but means a person who led a nomadic way of life⁵; indeed, the word Kazakh recalls the Turkish verb *qaz*, which means to wander⁶.

However, the Russian administration used the term Kazak for the Cossacks emigrated in the Steppe region, while the nomadic population were called Kirgiz, because of the close affinity between the clan structure and the language of both groups. Some Russian geographers labelled the “Kazakhs” as *kirghiz-kaisak* and the Kirghiz as *kara-kirghis*. Yet, these two terms did not have any ethnic connotation, but were used only to distinguish people who lived in the Steppe Region from those who lived in the mountainous districts.⁷ Kazakh national consciousness emerged only in the first decade of the 20th century, when the *Alash Orda*, the Kazakh national movement, began to define themselves as a people (*narod*) or a nation (*natsiia*).⁸

It is difficult to precisely date the division of the Kazakh khanate; however, it seems that it could be dated around the 1650s, following the death of the khan Qasim and the division of his holdings.⁹, creating three different Hordes (*Zhuz*), the Senior Horde (*ulu zhuz*), the Middle Horde (*Orta zhuz*), and the Junior Horde (*Kishi Zhuz*). However, the Hordes were three federations or union of tribes, which, in fact, did not share common ancestors. They were the highest institution of the nomadic society, which, nevertheless, was characterised by a weak centralization of power.¹⁰ Pastoral nomadism was not just a functional mode of survival. It also represented a lifestyle, characterised by a network of kinship, common cultural and psychological roots, and shared oral traditions.¹¹ The Kazakh poet Kunabaev outlined the importance of the nomadic lifestyle for his people writing that: “*For the Kazakh religion is livestock, the people is livestock, knowledge is livestock*”.¹²

³ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Settlement of the Kazakh Nomads*, Nomadic Peoples, No.8, May 1981, pp 12-23

⁴ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.15

⁵ Dave Bhavna, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, p.31

⁶ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.16

⁷ Dave Bhavna, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, p.31

⁸ Dave Bhavna, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, p.32

⁹ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.22

¹⁰ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.27

¹¹ Dave Bhavna, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, p.33

¹² Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.34

The greatest weakness of the nomadic society was the lack of a real military power. The incapability to sustain an army and the need for protection from the other nomadic tribes led the khan of the Younger, Middle and Senior Horde to take an oath to Tsarist rulers respectively in 1731, 1740, 1742.¹³

The absorption of these territories into the Tsarist empire, nevertheless, had been part of a long-term process. The Younger and the Middle Horde became officially part of empire's fiscal and administrative structure only in 1822, when the *Rules on Siberian Kirghiz* came into effect. This legislation was the product of the Russian statesman, Michael M. Speransky, then general governor of Siberia. The Speransky Reform had a key role in the history of these peoples. Indeed, it labelled the Kirghiz as nomads and this strongly influenced the relations between the State and the population of the Steppe, since they needed the State's approval to change their status from "nomadic" to "sedentary" and, therefore, to change their property rights and fiscal duties.¹⁴

The Senior Horde, on the contrary, became part of the Russian empire only in the second half of the nineteenth century, once the Russians had conquered Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara, respectively in 1865, 1873, 1876.¹⁵

However, the annexation of the Kazakh Steppe did not cause an immediate State campaign in favour of migration towards these lands. On the contrary, the aforementioned Speransky reform prevented Russian people from moving towards *inorodncy*, "aliens", lands. At first, the Russian government was hostile to the idea of encouraging a massive colonisation towards the borderland regions. The abolition of serfdom did not change the attitude of the Tsarist government. This act had freed peasants from their legal duties toward their lord; nevertheless, it did not loosen peasants' ties with their communes. Moreover, the Russian government did not implement any laws that could encourage peasants' resettlement, because it feared that this process could drain away cheap labour which benefitted landowners.¹⁶ Moreover the State had abolished the norms, which helped State farmers to migrate by 1866; such a ban lasted for twenty years.¹⁷

¹³ Dave Bhavna, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, p.35

¹⁴ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.26

¹⁵ Dave Bhavna, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, p.35

¹⁶ Willard Sunderland, *The 'Colonization Question': Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia*, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 48, H. 2 (2000), pp. 210-232

¹⁷ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di Frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.32

The Tsarist administration was conscious of the difficulty of ruling its remote territories and it feared that a charming viceroy with a large number of supporters could attempt secession. This attitude was further strengthened by the Polish revolt of 1863, which the Russian government considered as treason by a nation on the periphery of its Empire. The twofold meaning of colony, both as a source of wealth and prestige and as a society potentially capable of future independent growth distressed a Tsarist administration based on the principle of the singleness of power.¹⁸

The terms used in the imperial discourse to describe the colonisation process witnessed the ambiguity of the Tsarist administration with regard to this social phenomenon. The imperial discourse used two different words to define colonisation. Firstly, *kolonizatsya*, that can be translated as colonisation, it describes the settlement of part of the population on new territories, as well as the incorporation of these lands within the colonial or imperial rule. Secondly, *pereselenie*, that can be translated as resettlement, which indicates simply a migration of peasants within the border of the State. The main difference between the two terms was that the latter regarded just peasants, while the former involved the creation of an external colony and it did not necessarily have agricultural effects. *Pereselenie* was, therefore, the word used to describe the resettlement of Russian peasants within the imperial border, while, *kolonizatsya* was mostly used to indicate European colonies beyond the Old Continent.¹⁹

However, peasants' *pereselenie* had been quite limited before 1861, because serfs were bound to their lord. Moreover, as already said, once that they obtained freedom, peasants did not weaken the tie with their commune. Indeed, collective responsibility for acts such as the payment of taxes, recruiting for the Army, created an interest in keeping farmers together, this allowed duties toward the others not to increase.²⁰

Russian government attitude toward colonisation began to change at the end of the nineteenth century. Peasants' resettlement within the Asiatic lands of the empire became a viable solution to solve the agrarian problem created by the serfs' emancipation. The loss in the Crimean War had an impact too in this change of mentality.²¹ Colonisation was not perceived anymore, just as *pereselenie*, but as a *rysskaja kolonyzatsia*. It is worth pointing out the fact that the Tsarist

¹⁸ Alberto Masoero, *Territorial Colonisation in the Late Imperial Russia. Stages in the Development of a Concept*, Exploration in Russian and Eurasian History, 2013, Vol.14 N.1, pp.59-91

¹⁹ W. Sunderland, *The 'Colonization Question': Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia*, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 48, H. 2 (2000), pp. 210-232

²⁰ Edward Dennis Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia*, John Hopkins University Press, 1956

²¹ Niccolò Panciola, *Stalinismo di Frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.25

administration used the adjective *rysskaja* and not *rossiskaja*, outlining that this colonisation regards the Russian nation and not the Tsarist empire as a whole.²²

The Resettlement Administration had been founded in 1896 to better govern these movements towards the Asian territories and provide lands for the settlers. However, until the decree of June 6th, 1904, which allowed Russian subjects free movement over all the Empire lands, its main concern was to take lands from Kazakhs, rather than providing lands to those who were moving towards those territories. The debacle in the Russian-Japanese war increased the geopolitical and nationalistic value of the Asiatic imperial lands' colonization.²³

The increase of peasants' resettlement led the Russian government to try to control and rule over the flux. The first result was the 1889 Law on Migrations. By 1891 the Russian government had implemented the Steppe Statute. It was the first attempt to draft legislation about the nomads' population right over the territories where they lived. The Steppe Statute's clause, which damaged most the nomad population was article 120, which established that the land "in excess" of nomadic needs was to be given over to the control of the ministry for State property²⁴. The Statute affirmed too that it was possible to precisely calculate the amount of land that the nomadic populations needed. The Russian government believed necessary the economic and strategic empowerment of this territory and so changed its attitude toward agrarian colonization.

This new Statute had been applied for the first time during the construction of the Trans-Siberian railway. The link between the building of this railway and colonisation was really strong from the beginning; indeed, the government knew that this public work would have provoked important financial loss along the uninhabited territories. The Russian government believed that this territory needed to be strengthened from an economic and strategic point of view; therefore, it became necessary to change its attitude toward colonisation.²⁵

By 1896, the Tsarist government created the Resettlement Administration to give out farmsteads to peasants from European Russia, publicising settlement in the Steppe among the Russian population, which was asking for land, and, finally, helping them in their journey to the region.

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²² W. Sunderland, *The 'Colonization Question': Visions of Colonization in Late Imperial Russia*, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Neue Folge, Bd. 48, H. 2 (2000), pp. 210-232

²³ Niccolò Panciola, *Stalinismo di Frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.49

²⁴ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.102

²⁵ Niccolò Panciola, *Stalinismo di Frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.42

²⁶ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.103

The Minister of Interior, Plehve, and the Minister of Economy, Witte, both agreed that the agrarian problem could be solved by moving peasant to the Kyrgyz Steppe land the government drafted the decree on migration on 6th June 1904. It provided for the individuation of the land in excess of nomadic needs and the creation of a governmental financial fund for colonisation.

This law was not implemented however due to the Russo-Japanese war. The government feared that such a law could lead to Central Asian peoples providing military support to Japan, and the Russian government momentarily temporarily stopped land distribution in Semirechye and Syr-Darya.²⁷

The land policy implemented by Russian government had devastating effects on the nomadic economy as practised by the Kazakh population; indeed, the new European settlements radically changed the social structure within the steppe. Slavs population were only 15.7 percent of the population within the Kazakhs lands in 1897, on the contrary, by 1916 they had become 41.6% of the population present in the northern oblast.²⁸

The new policy decided by the Russian administration led to the destruction of Kazakhs' economy. 17 million of *dessiatin* had been provided to the Russian settlers up to 1917.

In theory, European settlement had to be approved by the Kazakh local authorities, and the Kazakh population would have gained a full compensation for those lands provided to the new settlers. However, this did not happen. Moreover, it is important to point out that excess land does not exist in a nomadic economy: Firstly, livestock breeding depends on the existence of free grazing lands, so that there could be a large amount of available pastures once that grass had been already eaten. Secondly, excess lands were the only protection against famine and drought for a nomadic economy. Russian were not concerned about Kazakh interests, because their purpose was to take the best lands for the European settlers.

1.2 The Stolypin Reform

At the beginning of the XX century, two main events undermined Russian empire's stability: the defeat in the Russo-Japanese war and the 1905 revolution. The former illustrated Russian military weakness, while the latter undermined imperial social stability. The 1905 revolution

²⁷ Niccolò Panciola, *Stalinismo di Frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.48

²⁸ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, pp. 105-06

broke out in Saint Petersburg, the Russian Empire's capital, on the 10th January²⁹, when a priest, Father George Gapon, led a mass of people to the Winter Palace to ask for an improvement of their miserable economic conditions. The Tsarist guards repressed the petitioners, provoking more than a hundred deaths and three hundred wounded due to their fusillades. Riots spread over all the territory of the Russian empire; nevertheless, the tsar forces were able to get back control over the imperial lands by the end of 1905, when the Tsar, however, had to issue a Manifesto promising the convocation of a representative assembly, freedom of speech, conscience, assembly, association and a constitutional government for Russia.³⁰

The 1905 revolution reached Turkestan too³¹, but, in fact, it only involved the European populations, who exploited this unstable political situation to try to gain new lands. Settlers' uprisings lasted until December 1905, when the General Governor allowed *pereselency* to rent a portion of land from the Central Asian peoples for a maximum of three years.³²

The 1905 revolution witnessed the emergence of Petr Arkadevich Stolypin too. He was the Saratov's Governor during this years and stood out for his ability to impose the Tsar's will over the oblast he ruled during this chaotic year. The Tsar nominated him Ministry of Interior in May 1906 and by July 1906 he bore the title of Prime Minister too. He was aware that Russia needed structural reforms and, in particular, an agrarian reform. The Stolypin's agrarian reform aimed to paralyse the peasants' revolutionary movement through the introduction of private property among farmers. Stolypin wished that his reform could radically transform the old agrarian landscape, transforming Russian peasants, described by Stolypin as sluggish and troublemakers, into hardworking and patriotic landowners, wishful to respect Tsar's authority. Western Siberia and the Steppe Region had a central role in Stolypin's reforms; indeed, he considered these regions as a "cradle still free of social conflict", where colonisation would have allowed to create a new and powerful Russia. Moreover, colonisation had a central role in Stolypin's view also because he believed that it offered the opportunity to implement changes, which would have required a long mediation in the centre, thanks to peripheral regions' lack of social conflicts.³³

Stolypin's reforms, therefore, led to a massive increase in Russian migration to Asiatic imperial lands. This consistent flux of Russian migrants damaged nomadic populations'

²⁹ According to the Orthodox calendar

³⁰ Neil Harding, *Leninism*, MacMillan Press, 1996, p.40

³¹ Turkestan was the Russian Empire region, which comprised the oblast where nomadic population lived in.

³² Niccolò Panciola, *Stalinismo di Frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp.49-50

³³ Alberto Masoero, *Territorial Colonisation in the Late Imperial Russia. Stages in the Development of a Concept.*, Exploration in Russian and Eurasian History, 2013, Vol.14 N.1, pp.59-91

interests, who witnessed a 14 percent decrease of their pasturelands. Nomadic practices considerably changed due to Russian colonisation, having been used previously to grazing over all the available lands, occupying territories fit for agriculture too; that is why new settlement had such a heavy impact on the nomadic economy, even if the portion of land occupied by Russian migrants was narrow.³⁴

Local populations did not passively accept the massive agrarian colonisation. The convocation of the First Duma allowed to Kyrgyz *intelligencija* to protest against this process under the framework of the Assembly. Bukhekainov's an *Alash Orda* member and Duma's deputy affirmed that the imperial colonisation policy aimed at destroying traditional Kyrgyz society.³⁵ Moreover, thirteen thousand people signed a petition in Semipalatinsk asking for the return of their land, ending of seizures, and a lesser influence in religious practices; however, a nationalistic feeling did not spread over Turkestan.³⁶ Nevertheless, a heavy ethnic prejudice existed in the region on the eve of the World War I. The new settlers considered themselves superior to the "wild nomads" whom they believed to have more rights, given that they were the Tsar's people.

1.3 The 1916 Uprising

War World I had three main negative consequences on the Tsarist empire. A military crisis which heavily affected Russian population, since 15 million people, a third of the manpower, had been deployed during the conflict. This military crisis led to the regime's authority delegitimation too, allowing the outbreak of the February 1917 revolution. Finally, World War I transformed Russian empire economy into a war economy.³⁷

The conflict strongly affected Turkestan too, given that the Russian government began to exploit the region hard to finance the war effort. Firstly, the imperial government increased taxation. This provision regarded, first of all, the Muslim populations, because they had been exempted from military recruitment. Moreover, foodstuffs' prices increased due to the conflict, since great amount of wheat had been seized because of war needs.³⁸ Nomadic population suffered more than Central Asia sedentary peoples because of war changes. At first, livestock seizure regarded

³⁴ Niccolò Panciola, *Stalinismo di Frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp.54-57

³⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.131-2

³⁶ Niccolò Panciola, *Stalinismo di Frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp. 69-70

³⁷ Niccolò Panciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.72

³⁸ Central Asian sedentary population

more nomadic population than Turkestan's sedentary peoples. The tax increase either damaged more Kyrgyz than Sarts, indeed, the former was less involved in the monetary economy than the latter.³⁹ Finally, the nomadic population had to furnish labour instead of Russian peasants; indeed, within Turkestan, only Slav populations' living in Semireche had been deployed. The inhabitants of the other regional oblasts, on the contrary, had been exempted from military service thanks to an old law encouraging immigration into these areas, promising the exemption from military service.⁴⁰

Russian military weakness had already emerged in the summer of 1915, when Tsarist troops could only fire shells for every several thousand fired by Germans. The Imperial Army had far fewer shotguns than their needs, this compelled the government to seize settlers' rifles. By 1914, there were thirty thousand rifles in Turkestan for the Russian settlements' defence, however colonisers owned only four thousand shotguns, the remaining twenty-six thousand rifles were kept in military deposit and, during the war, they were seized to satisfy military needs.⁴¹ However, the lack of armament did not mean a limit of conscripted peoples, on the contrary the ever-constant demand for replacement obliged the Russian government to also call up Turkestan people to furnish men for work behind the front.⁴²

On June 25th, 1916, Tsar Nicholas II signed a decree ordering the conscription of two hundred fifty thousand Muslim from Turkestan, that is almost a tenth of Turkestan's male population. Once the order arrived, the authority did not imagine that local population could rebel against this imperial decision, since the local representatives seemed calm and not interested in questioning imperial authority.⁴³

Initially, Turkestan's people revolt regarded the sedentary population of the region; indeed, even if protests broke out contemporarily among the Sarts and the Kyrgyz, the latter was not a real problem until the beginning of August.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Sarts' riot had short length and limited acts of violence, but when the sedentary peoples' protests had been repressed, Russian authorities had to face a more radical and violent revolt, that of the Kyrgyz.⁴⁵

³⁹ Marco Buttino, *La rivoluzione capovolta. L'Asia centrale tra il crollo dell'impero zarista e la formazione dell'URSS*, L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2003, pp. 65-91

⁴⁰ Edward Dennis Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia*, John Hopkins University Press, 1956,

⁴¹ Marco Buttino, *La rivoluzione capovolta. L'Asia centrale tra il crollo dell'impero zarista e la formazione dell'URSS*, L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2003, pp. 65-91

⁴² Edward Dennis Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia*, John Hopkins University Press, 1956, 59

⁴³ Marco Buttino, *La rivoluzione capovolta. L'Asia centrale tra il crollo dell'impero zarista e la formazione dell'URSS*, L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2003, pp.65-91

⁴⁴ Edward Dennis Sokol, *The Revolt of 1916 in Russian Central Asia*, John Hopkins University Press, 1956, pp. 68-79

⁴⁵ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp. 81-92

Semirech'e was the region where there were more copious and intense acts of violence. This oblast is the one where most of the Russian settlers present in Central Asia lived; indeed, this region hosted 300000 out of 500000 settlers present over all the Turkestan. Russian authorities had to face several problems once the revolt broke out in the region: military age males were at the front, and the few left behinds did not involve regular Army men.

The 25th July decree obliged Kyrgyz to take a decision. They had three different options, that is 1) Violently react against the decision 2) Try to flee toward China 3) Accept the decision. All these options were practised.⁴⁶

As Captain Iungmeister, an officer of the Turkestan Imperial Gendarmerie, explained the Kyrgyz revolt was provoked by several reasons. Looking beyond nomadic population anger at the labour reserve call, he also outlined four other explanations, that is, land seizure, division between clan, settlers' ethnical hatred toward Kyrgyz, and, finally, administrative corruption and incompetence. The last one is particularly relevant since the riots broke out when the list of conscription were fulfilled. They had to be filled out by the authority of each volost' and the lack of personal data allowed the creation of a huge corruption mechanism.⁴⁷ However, rage against conscription was just the impulse for Kyrgyz violent protest. According to Brower, the intensity of the riots and the scope of destruction revealed even more challenging purposes; indeed, in his opinion, nomad real will was to kick out Russian settlers from their lands. Brower's view seems acceptable once we analyse the intensity of the uprising in the different part of Semirech'e. The Eastern part witnessed a greater destruction than the Western side, where more nomads decided to adopt a semi-sedentary way of life. The Western side's population probably was as hostile as the Eastern peoples at Russian population; despite this they were less ready to risk what they possessed to free their lands from "invaders".⁴⁸ However, Kyrgyz protests are just one side of the coin, indeed, Russian authorities implemented a cruel repression once they realised the scope of nomadic protests.

Imperial government nominated General Aleskej Nikolaevich Kuropatkin as Turkestan's new governor. He knew the region well, since he had spent most of his career in those oblasts. On the 8th August 1916 he arrived in Tashkent and rapidly established an action plan, whose main points were the following: firstly, to distribute rifles to the settlers; secondly, to organise military unity made up of Cossacks and Semireche's reservists and conscripts; thirdly, to send military reinforcements to Tashkent; fourthly, to organise armed actions against the Kyrgyz to start a

⁴⁶ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp. 81-92

⁴⁷ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp.81-92

⁴⁸ Daniel Brower, *Turkestan and the Fate of the Russian Empire*, Routledge,2003, pp. 136-137

panic reaction; fifthly, to seize livestock to undermine tribes and their defence ability. Kuropatkin perceived a plan mainly based on ethnic cleansing; indeed, he believed that it was not possible to rule out violence without dividing Russian from Muslim populations in these regions.

Several *aul*⁴⁹ run away to Naryn uezd, where there were no Russians at all, or to China. There was no Kyrgyz population anymore over the entire Przheval'sk uezd. Kuropatkin denied the Kyrgyz population to come back to this uezd to maintain order over the region; moreover, he established that this uezd had to widen its border, involving Dzharkent uezd too, both these territories had to be reserved for the Russian population; indeed, Kuropatkin's goal was to reinforce imperial authority over the region thanks to a new wave of Russian colonisation. He intended to distribute 2.5 million of *desyatina* to Russian people, just 0.2 million *desyatina* less than those seized over the Stolypin's period. This plan had to be completed within March 1917, but, it was stopped by February 1917 revolution and the fall of the Tsarist empire.⁵⁰

However, the Russian Revolution changed Turkestan balance of power again by October 1917. Democracy conquered by the February revolution feared Russian settlers, since they represented just the five percent of the entire Turkestan's population, as a consequence they saw the October revolution as an opportunity to restore the old balance of power between settlers and the local population.

Once Bolsheviks took power they were mostly concerned with consolidating their rule in Moscow and Petrograd in the early months of their regime, in the face of a growing German threat. On the contrary, they left pro-Bolsheviks activity up to local supporters in the peripheral region of the empire, such as the nomadic Steppe. "Kazakh" public opinion was apparently divided between two different factions, those who supported Alash Orda and those who were indifferent, while just a minimum percentage held up pro-Bolshevik "Kazakh", like Turar Ryskulov.⁵¹

In the wake of the civil war, "Kazakhs" of *Alash Orda* attempted to create an autonomous government, which was still loyal to the Provisional Government, while Moscow struggled to label self-proclaimed and self-regulating cells that were spreading over the Steppe region, as Bolsheviks. The leaders of Alash Orda gathered from December 5 to 13, 1917 for the third "Kazakh" congress, during which they proclaimed the autonomy of the "Kazakh" people; yet it

⁴⁹ It was the basic social unity of the Kazakh nomadic society

⁵⁰ Marco Buttino, *La rivoluzione capovolta. L'Asia centrale tra il crollo dell'impero zarista e la formazione dell'URSS*, L'Ancora del Mediterraneo, 2003, pp.65-91

⁵¹ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, pp.142-143

was impossible to establish a single administration over such a wide region, populated by tribes hostile to each other and they created two different administrative zones. By early 1918, however, Bolsheviks took control over Orenburg and part of the Orenburg-Tashkent railway line. What still held together Alash Orda during this period was not their program, on which they also had different opinions, but their will to avoid the diffusion of Bolshevism over their region. However, each part of Alash Orda had to organise itself, and try to ally with other factions. The West Alash Orda allied with Orenburg Cossacks, whose main concern was, as Alash Orda, to defeat the Bolsheviks, while the East Alash Orda allied with the Kolchak Autonomy, created after the outbreak of the Civil War.⁵²

The Alash Orda had opposed Bolsheviks since the outbreak of the October Revolution, since it had violated the principles of parliamentary rule, on which this political movement was based. Yet, Lenin and Stalin recognised that it would have been easier for Bolshevik rule to spread within the “Kazakh” community, if the Alash Orda had legitimated Bolshevik rule; therefore, by March 1918 they invited the representatives of this movement in Moscow to try to find a compromise. From March to October 1918, Alash Orda changed its opinion about Bolsheviks, when it understood that, nor the Whites nor Kolchak would have sustained them. Bolsheviks assurance about Alash Orda’s heads and troops, as well as Kirghiz (Kazakh) autonomy, satisfied this organisation.

By April 1920, the Bolsheviks had taken control over all the former Turkestan region, and by October 1920 the Kirgiz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic had been formed. Nevertheless, the Bolsheviks had still to struggle to legitimate their authority over these lands.

Bolsheviks finally took full control over Central Asia by October 1924, when the Central Executive Committee voted to establish two socialist republics: Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. It also voted for the establishment of two autonomous republics, that is Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Finally, it also called for two autonomous regions, the Kirgiz Autonomous Oblast, and the Karakalpak Autonomous Oblast, linked to the Kazakh ASSR. By December 1929, Tajikistan became too a Soviet Republics, while Kazakhstan and Kirghiz republic obtained the same status only by December 1936.

To wholly understand the Bolshevik policy over Central Asia during the 1920s it is fundamental to analyse their nationality policy.⁵³

⁵² Edward Allworth, *Central Asia. 130 Years of Russian Dominance, a Historical Overview*, Duke University Press, 1994, p.237

⁵³ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.174

1.4 Soviet Nationality Policy

By 1913, Stalin gave, in his very first scholarly effort "*Marxism and the National Question*" his own definition of nation as "a historically evolved, stable community based on a common language, territory, economic life and psychological make up manifested in a community". According to both Stalin and Lenin a "nation had rights and can organise its life as it sees fit. It has the right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign, and all nations are equal".⁵⁴

This did not mean that Lenin considered nationalism as a positive idea, on the contrary he believed, as orthodox Marxist, like Rosa Luxemburg, that nationalism had been developed by capitalism and that competition between States cannot be justified, because it fastened working class to the national bourgeoisie, splitting international proletariat according to nationality.

Moreover, all nations were equal, because they all had the same right to self-determination, nevertheless there were important differences among nations. Firstly, they differed in size, secondly, different nations had diverse level of development, indeed, there were backward and civilised nations; finally, nations differed in economic terms, since there were oppressors, such as Tsarist Russia, and oppressed nations.⁵⁵

Stalin and Lenin believed that the desire for a national territory did not count as a national question, on the contrary they believed that national discontent was determined by the fact that, for instance, they could not use their language; therefore, it was sufficient to entrusted national minorities with more rights to resolve the national question.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Lenin believed that once capitalism would have been transformed into socialism, the proletariat would have created a chance for the total elimination of national oppression; such a fact would have been realised only after a total democratisation of all spheres, including the establishment of State borders, according to the People's will. This would have allowed the loosening of national mutual distrust, merging all nations together.⁵⁷

October 1917 revolution and civil war did not change Stalin and Lenin's attitude over the nationality question; on the contrary, since its earliest decrees the Bolshevik government defined the victorious masses as "people" or "nations" endowed with rights. The Bolshevik strategy was to take control over the process of decolonisation, trying to protect the territorial integrity of the

⁵⁴ Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question". Selected Writings and Speeches. New York, 1942

⁵⁵ Yuri Slezkine, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism*, Slavic Review, Vol. 53, no. 2, 1994, pp. 414-452

⁵⁶ Josif Stalin, *Marxism and the National Question*, Selected Writings and Speeches. New York, 1942

⁵⁷ Lenin, "*Itogi diskussii o samoopredelenii*" (1916), in *Voprosy*, p. 129

former Russian empire. To that end, the Bolsheviks established tens of thousands of national territories all over the entire Soviet Union; moreover, new national elites were formed to lead government and social institutions in the newly formed territories. Soviet government established national languages as official language too, even creating a written language if it did not previously exist.

It is worthwhile to outline that Lenin and Stalin feared to be labelled as an empire in the age of nationalism, a lesson that they learned from the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire, an historical event that really impressed them. To avoid this kind of perception, the Soviet Union developed itself as an “Affirmative Action Empire”⁵⁸, committing itself over 1920s to the development of national territories, language, elites, and identities of the ethnic groups who lived in its territories. The idea that non-Russian nationalism was a response to Tsarist oppression and that Great Russian chauvinism should be considered as the greatest danger was fundamental in the establishment of the Affirmative Action Empire.⁵⁹

However, it is important to underline that national self-determination was not the long-term goal of the Soviet Union establishment, on the contrary, it was a short-term objective aimed to avoid that Soviet Union could be labelled as an empire and the goal of “Affirmative Action” was to help the entire population living within the Soviet territories to move through the Marxist timeline of historical development, transforming themselves into full-fledged socialist era nations.⁶⁰

The centrepiece of the nationality policies had been adopted by the XII Congress of the Russian Party, when *korenizatsyia* (nativization), the centrepiece of Soviet nationality policies had been implemented and whose main purpose was nation-building. According to the Soviet establishment, native cadres, able to understand the way of life, customs, and habits of the local population, would have allowed Soviet power, which was still perceived as Russian by 1923, to be closer to non-Russian nationalities.

However, Soviet establishment developed two different nativization policies, one for their its eastern nationalities and one for its western nationalities. This dichotomy was not determined by geographical reasons, but by developmental ones. The western titular nationalities were considered already literate and educated, therefore, the main concern of nativization throughout

⁵⁸ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, pp. 5-6

⁵⁹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, pp. 6-8

⁶⁰ Francine Hirsch, *Empire of Nations. Ethnographic knowledge and the making of the Soviet Union*, Cornell University Press, 2005, p.8

these territories was linguistic *korenizatsyia*, that is, establishing the national language as the official state language. On the contrary, eastern nationalities were considered culturally “backward”. These nationalities lacked literate, educated, titular nationals, therefore *korenizatsyia* should have focused on creating a national *intelligencija*, and, only after, linguistic *korenizatsyia* would have been possible.⁶¹

1.5 NEP and Korenizatsyia

Turkestan and the territory of Kazakhstan today came out from Civil War radically changed. The region had been hit by a terrible famine during these years, which had caused 1,1 million of deaths, of which 75 percent were Kazakhs and Kirgiz. .⁶² The Civil War had also terrible economic consequences, as it ruined the internal market of the former Russian empire. The Kazakhs were strongly affected by this breakdown, since they did not know anymore where they could trade their animals, whose numbers had dramatically fallen and by late 1922, the herd size was just a third of that of 1916. The massive decrease in the herd size was determined by a grain short supply too. Farmers planted fewer hectares, since the war had transformed some fields into battlegrounds, and also because there was nowhere to sell grain or someone who could buy it. The scarcity of wheat obliged those Kazakhs to purchase grain and to diminish their herd with slaughter and starvation reducing cattle numbers over the period. The trend both in agriculture and in livestock breeding continued until 1923, when it was finally reversed.

The economic situation in “Kazakhstan” as in most of rural Russia prevented the Bolshevik government from adopting any radical social or economic reform. By the spring of the 1921 it became undeniable that the territory of the “Kazakh” Steppe needed economic aid in a state of total economic collapse, and that would have caused the end of this territory as a self-sufficient part of the country.⁶³

The economic situation of the region improved between 1922 and 1923. The New Economic Policy implemented by the Tenth Congress of the Party, which tolerated a form of market

⁶¹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, p.14

⁶² Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, P.162

⁶³ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.176

economy and ended livestock and wheat seizure typical of war communism, in return for a fiscal imposition. With the implementation of NEP, the government hoped that the peasants would have traded their wheat surplus with industrial products made by State factories.⁶⁴

However, NEP was considered by Bolsheviks just as a temporary expedient, simply a part of a more structured program of land redistribution and agrarian reform. Redistribution issue was quite relevant in Kazakhstan, since, before a redistribution policy could be implemented, it was necessary to establish precise land ownership. However, the traditional patterns of land usage made this task quite difficult. This task had been made even complicated by the Civil War, since it had changed Kazakh grazing patterns and had witnessed a new wave of illegal Russian settlements over the region.⁶⁵

In September 1920, the Ninth Turkestan Congress of Soviets gathered. It published a decree where it asked for the removal of the illegal settlers, an equalisation between the property of the local and European populations, and finally, they also required Moscow to prevent any new settlement in the Turkestan's territory. This decree obtained the support of the Central authorities and reversed the Turkestan's government war affiliation with the local Russian population; indeed, the purpose of this decree was precisely to achieve native consensus by promising to stop and turn back the massive Russian land seizure of 1916 to 1920, which had first characterised all the territory of the future Kazakhstan and Kirgizia.

This land reform had been implemented from January 1921 to December 1922, when these territories witnessed a mass expulsion of Slavic Settlers and Cossacks. The Kazakhstan Russian population diminished from almost 2.7 to 2.2 million between 1920 and 1922, and so do their properties which dropped from 3.3 to 1.6 million *dessiatina* in the same period. The land reform was based on two cardinal principles, that is, firstly natives' right to throw out settlers arrived after 1916 from Kazakhstan, and secondly, the principle of *ocherednost'*, i.e. that priority in land redistribution had to be given to Kazakhs.⁶⁶

Guidelines for redistribution were decided by members of the Resettlement Administration, which continued to serve also after the Civil War, but their decisions were usually ignored, and the Kazakhs' different cultural attitude made it difficult to accept seizure of *baj* lands and livestock. Moreover, Kazakhs were not able to understand early Soviet policies, since they did not understand why they had to pay taxes to the States in return for economic assistance. They,

⁶⁴ Pianciola, Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.164

⁶⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, pp. 181-2

⁶⁶ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, pp. 59-67

above all elder Kazakhs, thought that it would have been more logical to save their money and help themselves, when necessary.

The Kazakh people understood autonomy, in particular, as the right to decide by themselves on land redistribution; in particular, the Kazakh government believed that the two cardinal principles from the 1921-1922 reform should be maintained, and that Kazakhs people should maintain unconditional priority regarding land redistribution.

Moscow quickly realised the land redistribution in Kazakhstan was implemented with “an excessive cruelty and took on the character of revenge”, since the position of the Kazakh government allowed several illegal actions toward Russian settlers. OGPU reported that local population committed acts such as, armed seizure of land, false arrest, punitive taxation, against the Russians in Kazakhstan and Kirgizia.

This atmosphere led the OGPU to attentively monitor the mood of Russians in Kazakhstan. One Russian answer to their situation was to ask for land somewhere else in Russia, and the Russians also asked for the establishment of Russian national soviets, since *korenizatsyia* tended to privilege titular nationality of the Soviet. Generally speaking, Russians perceived this loss of status as unfair, since they served the Bolsheviks during the Civil War.

This situation led Moscow to undertake a series of direct interventions in late 1924. In November 1924, the Central Committee’s (VTsIK) presidium established a “Commission on the Question of Regulation the Position of Russians in the Autonomous Republics and Oblast”, ruled by Enukidze. Moreover, in October 1924, the VTsIK formed a special Commission under chairmanship of Serafimov, focused exclusively on Kazakhstan and Kirghizia. Finally, in 1925, F.I Goloshchekin was nominated as the new secretary of the Kazakhstan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR). Goloshchekin tried to find a compromise between Moscow’s request and Kazakh goals, while the previous *kraikom* secretary, Khodzhanov, had openly supported the Kazakh nationalist position.⁶⁷

Despite these difficulties, Kazakhstan witnessed an economic recovery, even if a slowly one; indeed, by 1925 the sown area was the 64.8 percent of the pre-war level, and 400 thousand metric tons of wheat were to be found on Kazakhstan’s internal market.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, pp.59-67

⁶⁸ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, pp.182-3

1.5.1 Korenizatsyia in Kazakhstan

During the Cold War period, it was a common idea among people who studied Central Asian history, that Moscow created Central Asian nations, because it wanted to weaken Turkic identity of this region, and that such a strategy aimed at destroying regional unity, allowing an easier control by central authorities over the territory. However, the new studies about USSR nationality policy, made possible by the opening of USSR archives, outlined that Moscow's aim was to allow already existent nations, even if still "backward", to develop their own national identity and then become full-fledged socialist nations.⁶⁹

It is certain that Central Asian élites well knew the divisions between the three different populations, the nomadic people in the northern and eastern regions (Kazakh and Kyrgyz), the sedentary people who lived in in the central areas (Uzbeks), and the nomadic population of the southern part of Central Asia (Tajiks). The division between Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, on the contrary, came out due to Affirmative Action structure, since the distribution of political resources was linked to ethnic affiliation. According to Arne Haugen, the emergence of the Kyrgyz identity had to be seen as an example of the use of ethnic affiliation to gain advantages in terms of resource distribution.⁷⁰

The Soviet Affirmative Action Empire were based on two principles, which the different nationalities within the USSR could and did use to sustain their own national interest. Firstly, the rhetoric of indigenusness, which allowed every non-Russian people to make individual or collective claim on the centre thanks to their status of indigenous people. Secondly, the principle of cultural backwardness. According to the Bolsheviki, there existed just one path to progress, and that different nations occupied different positions on it. The principle of cultural backwardness, however, was available only to those nations considered as backward. A precise distinction between developed and backward nations was not provided until 1932, however, Central Asia nationality, and Kazakhs too, were certainly considered backward, due to their low industrialisation, urbanisation, education, literacy rate.

There are two main differences between nativization policy for developed and cultural "backward" nations. First, *korenizatsyia* for nationality, such as the Ukrainians, focused principally on linguistic aspects, since it was quite easy to train and promote Ukrainian cadres. On the contrary, within the culturally backward category, the nomadic peoples formed a still

⁶⁹ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp.195-197

⁷⁰ Arne Haugen, *The Establishment of National Republics in Central Asia*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2003, pp.169-70

less developed category, and the least developed of all were the small peoples of the north. The important division, however, was between advanced and culturally backward. An official boundary between the two categories wasn't provided until 1932 when, due to controversy over who was eligible to fill all-Union university admission quotas for culturally backward nationalities, the commissariat of education finally produced an official list of 97 culturally backward nationalities, including Kazakh nationality. The division between eastern and western nationalities, then, was a shorthand for the Bolshevik categories of advanced and culturally backward nationalities. To this end, western nationalities, such as Ukrainian, tried to avoid all-Union institutions' interference in their internal affairs, because they feared such an institution could sabotage, the nativization of the national republics.

On the contrary *korenizatsyia* for eastern⁷¹ nationalities developed in a radically different way; indeed, backward nationalities wished all-Union interference, since they had few independent resources and training of native cadres and general education of the population were quite expensive.

Eastern nationalities' *korenizatsyia* can be divided into two different phases. The first one, has been defined as "mechanical *korenizatsyia*" and lasted from 1924 to 1926, while the second one, "functional" *korenizatsyia*, began in 1926 and lasted until 1928.

The main concern of the initial decrees for eastern nationalities was for linguistic *korenizatsyia*. However, the difficulty of achieving such an outcome was heavily underestimated, since Kazakhstan literacy rate was just 7.1 percent by November 1923. The pro-*korenizatsyia* forces quickly understood that there was just a way to promote native language into national republics, that is by the nativization of national republics' cadres. From 1924 to 1926 the titular nationality had legal priority in the competition for jobs within the government bureaucracy. This policy poisoned ethnic relations, moreover, and Russians felt they had been cheated by the all-Union institution, since they had fought for the Bolsheviks during the civil war, but local population was receiving the fruits of the revolution.

1.5.1.1 Functional Korenizatsyia

Russian resentment was a major concern of the 1926 re-evaluation, but it was not the only one. In the USSR, did not encounter glass ceiling that prevented them from reaching leadership positions; instead, the problem was a "hole in the middle", i.e. the fact that most of the technical

⁷¹ Until 1932 the divide between eastern/western nationalities was a shorthand for the divide between developed/backward nationalities.

works were occupied by Russians. The tendency to place titular nationals in leadership position, where they supervised a largely Russian technical apparatus, caused concern in the centre for at least three reasons. First, because many of the newly promoted nationals had little expertise, it would be easy for non-party specialists to control them.

Another concern was the tendency of titular nationals to assert their positive right to leadership position rather than accepting them in a spirit of proper gratitude and humility. Russians repeatedly complained that every national wanted to be a people's commissar (*narkom*): "As soon as a national gets a little education, now he considers he's ready to be a *narkom* and you cannot assign him to bureaucratic work".

Finally, central institutions were also concerned by the use of *korenizatsyia* as a tool to solve local internal struggles. Kazakhstan was plagued by factionalism too; indeed, by 1925, Stalin replaced the Kazakhstan's ASSR secretary, Khodzhanov, with an old Bolshevik Filip Goloshchekin.

Goloshchekin put an end to mechanical *korenizatsyia*, introducing the new strategy of functional *korenizatsyia*, whose main purpose was to address Russian resentment. Functional *korenizatsyia* tried to reach this outcome in two ways. First, the number of jobs to whom *korenizatsyia* applied was heavily limited, in particular, the leadership position occupied by influential Russian communists were excluded. Moreover, the knowledge of Kazakh language was established as the necessary requirement for Russians in a *nomenklatura* position not to lose their job. Goloshchekin did not believe that the most of Russian people would have learned Kazakh, however, crude ethnic preference was at least replaced by a real skill, i.e. mastery of native language.

When *korenizatsyia* had been applied a trend of intensive secularisation began too in the former Turkestan area and between 1920 and 1924, the society was temporarily allowed to resume some of its old ways, albeit under close scrutiny. This measure was felt to be necessary because of the need to generate good will toward the Soviet power, and to be relatively safe, because old feudal ruling groups had by then been either physically liquidated or had fled abroad. Friday was officially declared to be the day of rest in Muslim-inhabited areas in 1921, and the *waqf* lands confiscated earlier were restored to the mosques in 1922, with part of the revenues used again to support Muslim schools which were allowed to reopen under supervision by Soviet officials. *Shari'at* and *adat* courts, closed *de jure* if not *de facto* in the Civil War period, were first allowed to assume jurisdiction in civil cases, then in criminal cases, although their area of competence was limited. But the restoration of Muslim institutions was undercut from the beginning by new Soviet schools and Soviet courts, and their revenues were gradually reduced. However, the 1924 RSFSR criminal code adopted for entire region made traditional Islamic practices, such as

polygamy illegal. By 1927, Islamic and traditional law were abolished and *Shariat* and *adat* courts were newly closed. By 1925, the Arabic alphabet was replaced by the Latin⁷² alphabet in the Central Asian written languages. This decision had important cultural effects because it symbolized the loss of influence of religious institutions over the life of the people.

1.6 The Great Turn

During the NEP years, the Party had implemented a policy of unequal exchange to get back, from the private sectors, and peasants' in particular, the money necessary to fund the industrialisation process.⁷³ All along these years, farmers could choose to sell their grain production to private traders, called NEP-men, or to State procurement organisations. By 1927, Kremlin began to worry, since it was not able to reach its yearly grain procurement.⁷⁴ According to official statistics, indeed, grain collection fell from 10610 thousand in 1926/1927 to 8300 in 1928/1929.⁷⁵ This decrease in grain collection led Stalin to put an end to NEP, which had always been considered as a temporarily experiment by the Central government; furthermore, since the beginning of 1928, Stalin started to exert pressures on regions producing cereals so that they increased grain seizures. In Kazakhstan, Stalin's great turn was characterised not only by a grain collection crisis, but also by a general offensive against nomadic society. By April 1928, regional authority not only abandoned *ocherednost'*⁷⁶, but they also began adopting coercive acts against nomadism.

Nomadism was not the only cultural aspect which came under attack since 1928. Kazakhstan ASSR's authorities, indeed, began to repress also its rural clergy. Bolsheviki's accuses against this social institution were twofold; firstly, they believed that it kept alive obscurantism within countryside; secondly, they thought that rural clergy and kulaks organised political riots against the Soviet regime's modernising action. By 1929, Latin alphabet replaced Arab characters in Kazakh written language. This was a particularly relevant decision, since from that moment

⁷² The issue of which alphabet had to be adopted was quite relevant in the early 1920. Cyrillic was rejected since it was perceived as a Tsarist symbol. The Latin script was chosen both for linguistic and ideological reasons. By 1940, however, Cyrillic script began to be used for Central Asian and Transcaucasian languages, except for Georgian. There is not a precise reasoning behind this choice, however, some believed that it was an undesirable burden for children to learn two different scripts, one for the native language and one for Russian, which since March 1938 had become the *lingua franca* of the USSR.

⁷³ Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.235

⁷⁴ Paul Gregory, *The Political Economy of Stalinism: Evidence from the Soviet Secret Archives*, Cambridge Press, 2003

⁷⁵ Robert W. Davis, *The Socialist Offensive. The Collectivisation of Agriculture 1929-1930*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1989 p. 427

⁷⁶ As I already explained, *ocherednost'* was the policy which establishes an ethnic criterion in land redistribution

onwards new generations of Kazakhs could not read Quran and Islamic literature anymore; moreover, they would have been pushed away from Arab and Persian cultural influence.⁷⁷

Government's coercive actions regarded general tradition customs too; during spring 1928, indeed, the Central Committee added a chapter to RSFSR criminal code, concerning all the practices which let tribalism to survive, and it made a detailed list of crimes, specific for each ethnic group, included Kazakhs.⁷⁸

In his article "A year of great change", Stalin announced a radical change in the development of Soviet agriculture, which would have witnessed a turn from "small, backward, individual farming into large-scale, advanced, collective agriculture"⁷⁹. In November 1929, the Party Central Committee's *plenum* ratified Stalin's collectivisation program. A Special Commission of Politburo was created in December 1929, led by the People's Commissariat for Agriculture, A.A. Jakolev, to draw up plans and legislation for the construction of *kolkhoz*, i.e. the collective farm.

The Commission provided for the creation of three different new type of *kolkhoz*; firstly, the commune, where private ownership was not allowed at all; secondly, the *artel*, which allowed private ownership of just of a small portion of land and few animals only for private use; thirdly, the TOZ, whose members had to cultivate land together, but livestock ownership was allowed.⁸⁰ There already existed a four type of collective farm, the *sovchoz*, i.e. the State farm.

Another Commission, led by Molotov, drew up the guidelines for the coercive actions against kulaks, who, according to Stalin's statement on December 29, 1929, "had to be eliminated as a social class". On January 5, 1930, a resolution ratified Molotov Commission's guideline, which had divided USSR in three different zones, and where the drive collectivisation would have had different rhythms. In the first region, involving the most important grain-producing regions, had to be entirely collectivised by spring 1931; the second, including Kazakhstan's grain producing regions, had to reach this goal within spring 1932; the third zones, involving the remaining parts of Kazakhstan, had to be collectivised by the end of 1933.⁸¹

Under the framework of the collectivisation policy, Kazakhstan occupied a specific place for two main reasons; firstly, as established by the Molotov's Commission, its grain-producing

⁷⁷ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.240

⁷⁸ Northrop, Douglas, "Subaltern dialogues. Subversion and resistance in Soviet Uzbek Family Law", *Slavic Review*, Vol. 60, No.1, Spring 2001, pp. 115-139

⁷⁹ Josif Stalin, "A Year of Great Turn", *Pravda*, November 2, 1929

⁸⁰ Martha Olcott, *The collectivisation drive in Kazakhstan*, *The Russian Review*, Vol.40, No.2, 1981, pp.122-142

⁸¹ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp.292-3

region had to be collectivised by the end of 1932; secondly, the territory of this ASSR was chosen as one of the regions, together with Siberia and Urals, where the kulaks had to be relocated, since it was a low density and inhospitable region.⁸²

1.6.1 The Sedentarization of Nomads

However, collectivisation was not the only radical policy implemented in Kazakhstan over these years. In a meeting held in Alma Ata between December 11-16, 1929, the Party Central Committee's enacted the sedentarization of nomadic people considered a fundamental requisite for the socialist reconstruction of the economy.⁸³

The sedentarization policy had four main purposes: firstly, freeing up land for grain cultivation; secondly, moving nomadic population into *kolkhoz* to manage livestock according to State economic goals; thirdly, freeing up manpower for agriculture and industry; finally, working out disputes between nomadic and sedentary population for land property, which negatively affected regional agrarian productivity.⁸⁴

Since the nomads did not own tools to cultivate land, nor did the State have enough resources to provide them to its people, the Russian peasants would have benefitted from the extension of cultivable lands, while Kazakhs would have been marginalised into poor quality lands.⁸⁵

The Sedentarization policy, however, was not a successful one. The Kazakhstan's Commissariat of People in a meeting held on October 7, 1931 noted that the goal of sedentarization had still not been reached. Nomads did not consider sedentarization as a positive policy, on the contrary, they believed it was just a trap to tax, take a census, and plunder them easily.⁸⁶ Since it was difficult that nomads could voluntarily move to a sedentary way of life, only the State authorities' coercive action could implement such a policy. The only Kazakhs who successfully adapted themselves to the new lifestyle were those who had been transferred into European *kolkhoz*. However, State authorities later considered this as wrong policy, since the resources decrease was creating ethnic cleavages within *kolkhoz* and *sovchoz*, and the Kazakh began to be marginalised.

⁸² Isabelle Ohayon, *La famine Kazakhe: à l'origine de la sédentarisation*, HAL-archives ouvertes, pp.4-5

⁸³ Martha Brill Olcott, *The collectivisation drive in Kazakhstan*, *The Russian Review*, Vol.40, No.2, pp.122-142

⁸⁴ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.308

⁸⁵ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p-309

⁸⁶ GARF, A-296/1/450/126 November 1930

The creation of *kolkhoz*, moreover, did not mean the end of the previous solidarities. A report on the state of southern Kazakhstan collective farms issued on February 1931, indeed, noted how *kolkhoz* were structured according to ethnical divisions. It was, hence, decided to dissolve “tribal” *kolkhoz*, throwing away from them *baj* and their followers.⁸⁷

1.6.2 Collectivisation in Kazakhstan.

Central Authorities described collectivisation as a spontaneous movement of poor and middle peasants into *kolkhoz*.⁸⁸ However, collectivisation was all but a spontaneous process; indeed, as reported by Kazakh historians, such as Abycholzin, nomads and peasants’ riots spread over the entire territory of the Kazakhstan ASSR⁸⁹, the OGPU data confirm Kazakhstan’s chaotic situation during the first months of 1930s; indeed, the Soviet political police registered 266 mass revolts and 322 terroristic attacks, such as the killing of communists, over the autonomous republic’s territory.⁹⁰

By March 1930, the 40,1% of the Kazakhstan’s population had moved into *kolkhoz*; however, situation inside the collective farm was chaotic; peasants preferred to slaughter their animals rather than giving up them to *kolkhoz*.⁹¹

The spring sowing and the following crop risked being a total failure; meanwhile, peasants’ uprisings had become an unmanageable phenomenon for the State apparatus, since they spread over the entire USSR territory.⁹² Hundreds of rural communists had already been killed, and coercive acts implemented by State authorities had only succeeded in increasing the number of peasants’ revolts.⁹³

This political context obliged central authorities to act. In his article “*Dizzy with Success*”, published in *Pravda* on 2, March 1930, Stalin blamed local authorities for the excessive zeal they used in the implementation of the collectivisation policy, whose success rested, according to him, on its voluntary character.⁹⁴ On 15, March 1930, the Party Central Committee’s adopted

⁸⁷ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009 p.313

⁸⁸ Martha Brill Olcott, *The collectivisation drive in Kazakhstan*, *The Russian Review*, Vol.40, No.2, pp.122-142

⁸⁹ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.319

⁹⁰ Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements*, Oxford University Press, 2007, p.320

⁹¹ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.300

⁹² Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.301

⁹³ Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin's Special Settlements*, Oxford University Press, 2007 p.320

⁹⁴ Stalin, *Dizzy with Success*, in *Works*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1955, vol.12, pp.197-205

a resolution “*On Distortions of the Party Line with Reference to the Collectivisation*”, which reduced the collectivisation goals established in January.⁹⁵

By autumn 1930, the collectivisation process had started again, and, on December 1930, the Central Committee’s plenum established that Kazakhstan’s grain-producing regions should be collectivised up to 50 percent by the end of 1931. During 1931, the number of families moved into *kolkhoz* was greater than that of the previous year, but spring sowing began later, since Kazakhstan had witnessed an administrative reform during 1930. This delay in spring sowing, together with adverse weather conditions⁹⁶, caused a bad crop; nevertheless, central authorities did not reduce the amount of wheat to be seized.⁹⁷

Kazakhstan had to collect 76 million *pud* of grain in 1931, an increase up to 80% vis-à-vis 1930, when Central Authorities established that this ASSR had to seize “just” 46 million of wheat. Kazakhstan’s ruling classes tried to denounce to Stalin and Mikoyan, the People’s Commissariat of Food, their inability to reach the established goals, since drought had affected Kazakhstan over spring months. But Mikoyan answered them that “Reaching the set objectives was even more important than feeding people”⁹⁸

Bad crop, the collectivisation goals set by central authorities, and the definitive interruption between nomads and farmers caused the famine which killed masses of nomads in the winter straddling 1931 and 1932.⁹⁹

1.6.2.1 1931-1933 Famine in Kazakhstan

Famine did not characterise only Kazakhstan, on the contrary, it spread over the entire Soviet Union territory, affecting all the most important USSR’s grain-growing regions, since they were the areas in which collectivisation effort was greater. As Schiller noted, indeed, “The regions which were best qualified to bear collectivisation had to suffer worst under the crude effects of the collectivisation policy”. Kazakhstan, however, was an exception vis-à-vis this pattern, since it was mainly a livestock breeding region, yet, the implementation of collectivisation had destroyed the most of Kazakh livestock.¹⁰⁰ By 1929, the total of Kazakh livestock amounted to 35,817,100, and had dropped to just 5,262,378 by 1932; consequently, the Kazakhstan ASSR

⁹⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, *The collectivisation drive in Kazakhstan*, *The Russian Review*, Vol.40, No.2, pp.122-142

⁹⁶ Several Kazakhstan regions experienced a serious drought during spring 1931

⁹⁷ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp. 325-6

⁹⁸ Andrea Graziosi, “*L’URSS di Lenin e Stalin, Storia dell’Unione Sovietica 1914- 1915*”, *Il Mulino*, 2010 p.316

⁹⁹ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, pp.325-6

¹⁰⁰ Dana G. Darymple, *The Soviet Famine 1932-1934*, *Soviet Studies*, Vol.15, 1964, pp.250-284

population suffered heavy mortality. There was also a second difference between Kazakhstan and the other regions where famine was widespread; in Kazakhstan, people began starving in 1931, a year before elsewhere.

Thousands of Kazakhs died in winter of 1931-1932. Whole territories of Kazakhstan became uninhabited, for instance 25,488 families left ten districts in Alma Ata regions. *Kolkhoz* and *sovchoz* supervisors played a crucial role in Kazakhs' impoverishment and getaway, since they preferred to renounce to those workers that they considered less useful and expert, and Kazakhs were the first to be fired from collective and State farms.

On March 1933, Kazakhstan's Central Committee established that every layoff which involved more than 40 people had to be approved by the Party's local committee.

Between 1,150,000 and 1,450,000 Kazakhs died because of famine which followed the collectivisation drive, while other 600,000 Kazakhs emigrated, other minorities living in Kazakhstan also witnessed a heavy diminution of population; for instance, Ukrainian population diminished from 859,396 by 1926 to 549,859 by 1939, while the Russian population, which represented just the 18% of Kazakhstan population in 1926, had become 40,8% of the entire Kazakhstan population by 1939.

Famine affected also the sedentarization process; indeed, since 80% of livestock died during these years, most of Kazakhs moved to a sedentary way of life, largely because of the difficulty to practise any pastoral activity, by the end of 1930s.¹⁰¹

The genocide of the Kazakh population, however, was not a purpose of Soviet central authorities, which, nevertheless, were ready to sacrifice thousands of nomads to achieve the social and economic transformation and the total control of the region.¹⁰²

It is useful to better understand the famine in Kazakhstan and its peculiarity by comparing the Kazakhstan and Ukraine situations during the 1930s. The main difference between the Kazakh and Ukraine famine was that the national question had a relevant role in the latter case.

By the spring of 1932, hunger was already spreading over the territory of Ukrainian SSR, and on June 1931, V. Molotov referred to the Politburo that famine was becoming a reality in the Ukrainian grain-growing region too; yet, Central authorities answered that "procurement plans must be respected at all cost". By June 1932, Stalin began to develop what Terry Martin has defined a "national interpretation of famine"; indeed, on the basis of the OGPU reports, the Party

¹⁰¹ Isabelle Ohayon, *La famine Kazakhe: à l'origine de la sédentarisation*, HAL-archives ouvertes, pp.4-5

¹⁰² Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.411

Secretary began to accuse the local communist, and Ukrainian Party authorities of nationalism and collaboration with foreign countries, as Poland. Stalin believed that there was a real risk of losing Ukraine, which, on the contrary, had to become a Bolshevik fortress.

Stalin decided to use famine to give a lesson to everyone he believed was threatening the State authority, including peasants who did not accept the collectivisation, refusing to move to the new collective farms. The punishment applied by Central Authorities was simple, if you are not willing to accept the *kolkhoz* system, you will not eat. The punishment was even harder where the peasant question was complicated by the national question. According to demographic data, the death rate in Ukraine did not depend on nationality, but on residence, rural or urban. However, it is necessary to outline that in Ukraine the SSR countryside was overwhelmingly populated by Ukrainians, while the urban population was for the most made by Russian, Poles or Jews. Moreover, Soviet authorities also removed Ukrainian national elites and ended Ukrainization policy to be sure that the Ukrainian question was solved once and for all.¹⁰³ The Ukrainian GPU arrested in November 1932, under the supervision of Molotov, 1835 people, whose 453 were *kolkhoz* members, while 1160 were collective farms officials.

By December 1932, the Politburo officially abandoned Ukrainization. In the 14 December 1932 decrees, indeed, the Soviet authorities blamed Ukraine and North Caucasus ruling classes, since they allowed *kulaks*, former officers to penetrate the *kolkhoz* leaderships. According to these legislative acts, the famine was a grain requisition crisis and was due to the presence of traitors within the Soviet and Party cadres, and the Politburo believed that the Ukrainization policy was responsible for such an outcome.

The December 14th, 1932 decree was the first legislative act where local nationalism was defined as the main “evil” instead of as Russian Great Chauvinism. However, *korenizatsiia* was abandoned only in the Western republics, on the contrary, in the Eastern republics it was just significantly downgraded, but this policy was still implemented for a long time.¹⁰⁴

But why did the Kazakhstan collectivisation policy have catastrophic effects as in Ukraine, even if the Central authorities did not pursue such a goal?

Kazakhstan was characterised by a peculiar situation for several reasons. Firstly, Kazakhstan was the region with the highest percentage of European people living in territories populated by natives. Secondly, Kazakhs had been marginalised on poor quality land, and they, who were

¹⁰³ Andrea Graziosi, “L’URSS di Lenin e Stalin, Storia dell’Unione Sovietica 1914-1945”, Il Mulino, 2010, p.316

¹⁰⁴ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire. Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, Cornell University Press, p. 372

still in a subsistence economy, had been impoverished by European colonisation. Thirdly, Kazakh nomadic populations were strongly dependent on agricultural food produced by European sedentary populations. Such a dependence was even harder, when the pastoral sector underwent a disturbance. Fourthly, Affirmative Action and struggle for resources, had increased ethnic conflicts. Finally, Slavs held power in Kazakhstan, despite Affirmative Action, and their leadership was strengthened by the collectivisation policy, since it allowed the arrival of several officials and technicians from European Russia.

This background allows us to better understand why collectivisation policy resulted in mass death of Kazakhs. At first, the growing scarcity of grain impoverished Kazakhs more than peasants, since nomadic populations did not directly produce it. Moreover, the high grain procurement goal established by State authorities, obliged the nomadic populations to sell their livestock to buy the grain necessary to achieve these objectives. All those persons contrary to the sedentarization project had been expelled by the Kazakhstan Communist Party Politburo, and finally, the Kazakh population was further impoverished by Central authorities' decision to use their livestock to compensate for a great death toll of cattle all over the entire USSR territory.

Summing up, collectivisation policy had catastrophic effects in Kazakhstan not because the Soviet authorities used famine to get rid of Soviet State supposed enemies, as in Ukraine, but because of central authorities' willingness to sacrifice part of the rural population to accumulate resources necessary for USSR economic development.¹⁰⁵

1.7 World War II

On June 22, 1941 Nazi troops invaded the USSR. A fifth of the entire Kazakhstan's population was involved in the war effort, since 1,200,000 out of 6,250,000 people living in this Soviet Republic were integrated in the Red Army.

410,000 Kazakhs died during WW II, however human losses were not the only way in which Kazakhstan was affected by World War II. More than 100 enterprises were moved from Belorussia, Ukraine and Russia to Kazakhstan, increasing to 460 the number of factories and mines over the republic's territory. During the World War II, Kazakhstan's industrial production increased by 37 percent.

Finally, World War II radically changed the ethnic composition of the Kazakhstan SSR; indeed, the republic cities not only accommodate 430,000 people who were moved from Western USSR

¹⁰⁵ Niccolò Pianciola, *Stalinismo di frontiera*, Viella, 2009, p.412

urban centres, since the Soviet government transferred to this region also those people who were accused of collaborating with the enemy. For instance, once the Autonomous German Republic of Volga was suppressed in 1941, the entire population of this republic, almost 313,000 people was transferred to Kazakhstan. The massive deportation of population increased up to 130 the number of nationalities living in Kazakhstan, and this ethnic puzzle characterised Kazakhstan until 1991, when it proclaimed its independence.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Catherine Poujol, *Le Kazakhstan*, Presses Universitaires de France, 2000, p.67

CHAPTER 2

From Khrushchev to independence

The drive for collectivisation implemented by Stalin radically changed Kazakhstan, which had become a national republic in 1936. Yet, the dreadful sufferings of the 1930s did not weaken Kazakhs' thrust to regime; on the contrary, they proudly served the Soviet Union during the Great Patriotic War. Khrushchev further contributed to make Kazakhstan the most international among the fifteen Soviet republics. His Virgin Land program led into the KSSR new settlers coming particularly from the Slav regions of the Soviet Union and further reducing the percentage of Kazakhs living in the republics. Brezhnev and Kunaev era marked a change of course since Kazakhs began to take again control over "their own" national republics. Yet, Kunaev's prestige began to wane when Brezhnev died, and Andropov became General Secretary of the CPSU. Kunaev was finally dismissed on December 1986. The decision to choose Kolbin, a Russian outsider without any experience in Kazakhstan, provoked a three-day riot, which, however, did not have any nationalistic base nor asked for a greater autonomy. On the contrary, Kazakhstan and its leader supported the preservation of the USSR until the real last moment, so that Kazakhstan was the last republic to declare its independence on December 16, 1991.

2.1 Khrushchev: Destalinization and Nationality Policies

The principle of self-determination was adopted by the Russian Bolshevik Party to win the support of national minorities within the former Tsarist empire. By doing so, Lenin affirmed the need to defend the cultural and linguistic rights of non-Russian people after the 1917 revolution as he thought that the Bolshevik regime could not survive if it did not guarantee at least some form of self-rule to these peoples. Nevertheless, Lenin remained loyal to the Marxist concept of "proletarian internationalism", elaborating a three-stage scheme, which in the long term should have developed into a single Soviet nation. This scheme envisaged firstly *rastsvet*, a blossoming phase in which national cultures had to be developed and shaped in a socialist way. Secondly, *sblizhenie*, a rapprochement phase during which the different Soviet nationalities would have developed simultaneously more and more similarities. Finally, *sliyanie*, a fusion phase during which the different Soviet nationalities would have become a single people. Lenin's scheme

was easy to develop within the more advanced nationalities of the former Tsarist empire such as Ukrainian, while it required an additional preparatory step in more backward ones, such as the Kazakhs, who were considered a mixture of clans and tribes rather than a nation when the Bolshevik revolution broke out.¹⁰⁷

Under the Soviet rule, the creation of a functional language was one of the main objectives, both for practical and symbolic purposes, such as the need to have a proper tool for mass indoctrination. Kazakh was better equipped than other Central Asian languages to meet these new demands. Over the decades, Kazakh vocabulary and phraseology were developed along with the new needs of society, and several Russian words were assimilated into Kazakh language¹⁰⁸. If the Kazakh language perfectly suited the Soviet regime needs, the same was not true for Kazakh culture, which was too particular to be assimilated into the new system without experiencing a deep transformation. Consequently, Kazakhs witnessed an intense process of cultural colonisation, which led to a Russification/Europeanisation of Kazakh society, under the framework of a campaign of modernisation. The total control that Soviet regime had over coercion, reward, and mass communication avoided any possible obstacles to the implementation of Soviet ideology within Kazakhstan. In the mid-1920s, the Bolsheviks realized a coordinated assault on several fronts contemporaneously, but the main priority was the implementation of economic and social reforms. Institution-building, and complementary to this, nation-building, was another important goal. These were two all-Union priorities, but the social and cultural effects were more evident in Central Asia, because the traditional way of life of these peoples was very different. The Soviet regime adopted different strategies to reach these goals. The campaign of mass literacy was particularly important for Kazakhstan, since it was a nomadic society, based mainly on oral-transmitted knowledge. By 1926, the literacy rate was just over 7%, on the contrary by 1939 it had risen to 77%. Within just a generation, therefore, Kazakh society witnessed a deep modification, as people who previously limited their knowledge to their personal experience suddenly found their horizons expanded.¹⁰⁹

During the 1920s, Soviet Union international relations were based on equality since Lenin overtly condemned Russian colonialism. This egalitarian attitude stemmed from Lenin's opinion of colonialism as an absolute evil for the colonised nations. During the 1920s, therefore, nothing could justify colonialism; on the contrary, a strict egalitarian approach was necessary to

¹⁰⁷ Grigol Ubiria, *Soviet Nation Building in Central Asia. The making of Kazakh and Uzbek nations*, Routledge, 2016, p.228-9.

¹⁰⁸ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity. From Tribe to Nation- State*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995, p.37

¹⁰⁹ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity. From Tribe to Nation State*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995, p. 58-9

compensate for Tsarist era oppression of non-Russian nationalities. The Soviet authorities' approach toward colonialism changed during the Stalinist era. The General Secretary of the CPSU, indeed, did not think that Russian colonialism had been always an evil; rather, he believed that Russians saved Central Asian and Caucasian nations from threats such as Turkey and Persia, giving them progress, civilisation, a higher culture, and above all, allowing them to reach the revolutionary stage contemporarily with Russians. Therefore, he believed that the prominent role assigned to Russian people in 1930 was justified by the fact that they had helped the smallest nations in the past.

However, Suny and Martin do not believe that Stalin's nationality policy did not represent a radical change from the *korenizatsyia* era; on the contrary they believe that it is "a considerable exaggeration" to affirm that Stalin's nationality policy purpose was the Russification of the Soviet Union nationalities.¹¹⁰ For instance, the 1938 decree establishing Russian as a compulsory second language in all-Union schools, did not aim to implement a cultural or linguistic Russification of non-Russian nationalities, but rather it tried to strengthen the role of Russian as the language of interethnic communication. Moreover, the 1938 decree did not deny to any non-Russian titular nationalities the right to receive education in their own language.

The abandonment of the "Great Russian chauvinism" principle cannot be considered as an attempt to promote Russification. The Soviet Union had existed for almost two decades and the promotion of such a principle could have promoted a feeling of Russian xenophobia, hindering the way to the creation of a single Soviet nation. Furthermore, even when the *korenizatsyia* campaign was ended, Stalin continued to promote two levels of formal identity for every Soviet citizen: a supra all union identity, and a national one. The former was never ethnicized, because it would have meant a complete deviation from classical Marxist concepts; on the contrary, the latter was not only ethnicized, but also became an important legal identity. Moreover, while the Soviet identity was a common good, available to every Soviet citizen, on the other hand, every individual had his own particular identity, which could not be denied or changed. Finally, it is important to outline that Stalin never eliminated or downgraded in importance those institutions that had been developed during 1920s for the implementation of the *rastsvet* phase.¹¹¹

The World War II or Great Patriotic War in Soviet/Russian terms was a particularly important event for Kazakhstan for several reasons. Firstly, it deepened the multinational nature of the

¹¹⁰ Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin, 'Introduction', in *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, ed. Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 12

¹¹¹ Grigol Ubiria, *Soviet Nation Building in Central Asia. The making of Kazakh and Uzbek nations*, Routledge, 2016, p.232-33

Kazakh SSR. On the eve of the war, Kazakhstan was already a multi-ethnic republic, whose titular nationality members were already outnumbered by the other ethnicities living within the borders of the Republic. According to the 1939 Soviet official census, indeed, Kazakhs counted up to 2,372,625, while Russians and other ethnicities living in Kazakhstan amounted to 3,823,657.

Ethnic group	Number of people		1939 as per cent of 1937	Per cent of total	
	1937	1939*		1937	1939*
Kazakhs	2,181,520	2,198,800	100.8	42.6	40.4
Russians	1,917,673	2,089,400	109.0	37.4	38.4
Ukrainians	549,859	571,400	103.9	10.7	10.5
Uzbeks	109,978	107,200	97.5	2.1	2.0
Tatars	92,096	95,100	103.3	1.8	1.7
Germans	80,568	82,300	102.1	1.6	1.5
Others**	194,982	302,100	155.0	3.8	5.5
Total	5,126,676	5,446,300	106.2	100.0	100.0

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During the war, Kazakhstan witnessed a further deepening of its multi-ethnic nature. Indeed, people accused of collaborating with the Nazis were deported in Kazakhstan or in the other Soviet Union's Eastern regions. The entire ASSR of Volga Germans was forcedly transferred, however, Soviet Germans were not the only nationality blamed for collaborating with the enemy. Chechens, Ingush, Crimean Tartars experienced the same treatment. Moreover, almost 500,000 Russians were moved from under siege cities, such as Leningrad and Moscow, to Kazakhstan.¹¹³

Secondly, Kazakhstan witnessed a radical change in its economic landscape too Soviet authorities, indeed, transferred more than 100 big enterprises from Belarus, Ukraine, Russia, and other Soviet territories occupied by Nazis and their allies to Kazakhstan. Republic's industrial production boosted by 37% during the war.¹¹⁴

Finally, The Great Patriotic War had also a key role in strengthening Kazakhs sense of allegiance to the Soviet Union. Kazakh soldiers fought side by side with the representatives of many other Soviet nationalities for the defence of the "Motherland". Numerous division were raised in Kazakhstan and were in the front line in several important battles, such as the one in the defence

¹¹² Quoted in Mark Tols, *Ethnic composition of Kazakhstan on the eve of the Second World War: re-evaluation of the 1939 Soviet census results*, Central Asian Survey, vol.25, March-June 2006, p. 146. However, according to Tols, the 1939 was full of distortions. The Soviet census makers counted about 375,000 Slavs living in Russian GULAG as part of the Kazakhstan population in order to conceal the catastrophic population losses caused by the 1930s famine.

¹¹³ Catherine Poujol, *Le Kazakhstan*, Presses Universitarie de France, 2000, p.65

¹¹⁴ Catherine Poujol, *ibidem*

of Moscow. The Kazakhs heroic actions during war became a symbol of the republic's full-fledged loyalty to the Union.¹¹⁵

In 1953 Stalin died and this was just the first of a few events which led to a change in the relations between central authorities in Moscow and the non-Russian republics. In 1956, Khrushchev released his famous "Secret Speech", which unveiled Stalin crimes during the XX Congress of the CPSU. Such a speech started the destalinization process, whose main outcome regarding nationality policy was the rehabilitation of the people deported by Stalin during or before the World War II.¹¹⁶ However, only five nationalities mentioned during the "Secret Speech" were fully rehabilitated. These were the Balkars, Chechens, Ingush, Karachai and Kalmyks, which also witnessed the restoration of their national territorial units. On the contrary, Khrushchev did not make any reference to the Crimean Tartars, Germans and Mishektians, which did not experience any consistent rehabilitation of their national rights as an outcome of the destalinization process. Since 1957, moreover, the chances that these three nationalities could come back in their former national territories diminished year by year. During Khrushchev era, the typical Soviet formula of "national in form, socialist in content" was definitively abandoned and it was replaced by the rhetoric of "Soviet People- A New Historical Community", which put particular attention on the existence of a common territory for all the Soviet citizens. Those national unities which lacked their own national territory began to be seen as a vanguard of those who have the entire Soviet Union as their only homeland.¹¹⁷

Nevertheless, at least until 1958, Khrushchev era marked the end of the Russian-focused policy implemented by Stalin during 1930s and 1940s. Even before the 1956 "Secret Speech", the "gift" of the Crimean Peninsula to the Ukrainian SSR outlined this change of attitude. However, in such a framework, Kazakhstan was an exception, since Khrushchev started on the northern part of the Kazakh SSR the Virgin Lands campaign, which will be better analysed later in the chapter, that allowed several Slavic farmers to settle in the region.¹¹⁸

During Khrushchev era, the central authorities relied on regional communist party leaders for the implementation of the Soviet policies. However, in the non-Russian SSR, these people did

¹¹⁵ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh identity*, The Royal Institute of National Affairs, 1994, pp-48-9.

¹¹⁶ Jeremy Smith, *Leadership and nationalism in the Soviet Republics, 1951-1959*, in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin. Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964*, ed. by Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilic, Routledge, 2011, p.79.

¹¹⁷ Isabelle Kreindler, *The Soviet Deported Nationalities: A Summary and an Update*, Soviet Studies, Vol.38, no.3, July 1986, pp. 387-405.

¹¹⁸ Jeremy Smith, *Leadership and nationalism in the Soviet Republics, 1951- 1959*, in *Khrushchev in the Kremlin. Policy and Government in the Soviet Union, 1953-1964*, ed. by Jeremy Smith and Melanie Ilic, Routledge, 2011, pp. 79-80.

not represent only the Soviet State, but also the single national groups. Destalinization allowed nationalistic feelings to resurface, in particular in Georgia and in the three Baltic Republics. Khrushchev paid little attention to nationality affairs and this led to a return of a watchful, but fairly laissez-faire attitude in republican leaders' activities. The 1959 Education Reform marked a turning point in Khrushchev's nationality policy, but it was not able to reverse the trend. The lack of a precise nationality policy, on the one hand, allowed republic leaders to freely pursue their own agendas, on the other hand it was a signal of the weakness of the central authorities, which let certain national-focused policies to be implemented.¹¹⁹

For a while, it seems that Khrushchev wanted to encourage a more localised decision-making. However, such a trend was not tolerated anymore once it took an increasing anti-Russian character. Once he had secured his own position as First Secretary in 1957, Khrushchev immediately had a chance to challenge the most recalcitrant of the national leaders. Khrushchev justified the reform of Soviet education system affirming that it was necessary to create a new model of schooling which adequately suited on a new generation of Soviet citizens. However, the education reform gave him also the chance to tackle the rise of nationalism in the republics and the excesses of some republican leaders.¹²⁰

The 1959 Soviet Education reform allowed the parents to choose the language they preferred for the education of their children. Therefore, they were not anymore obliged to choose a native language school, but they could also send their children to a Russian one. However, Russian schools often became the only alternative available to Soviet citizens, unleashing protests in many union republics, in particular, the Baltics, Georgia and Western Ukraine. Kazakhstan, on the contrary, did not experience any protests.

Kazakhstan was the Union republic which witnessed the most important changes in its ethnic composition during the Soviet years. Under Khrushchev, the Virgin Lands programme led into the KSSR almost two million people coming from the European regions, which further transformed the Kazakhstan's ethnic composition, in particular its northern and eastern oblasts. By 1959, Russian-speaking people were almost the 60% of the entire Kazakhstan population; moreover, by the end of 1950s, northern and eastern Kazakhstan *oblasts* mirrored the RSFSR ethnic composition. The Russophone urban clusters situated along KSSR had not any direct contact with the indigenous population, living in the surrounding *aul*. Alma-Ata, the capital of the Kazakh SSR practically was an international city in 1959, since the 75% of its population was formed by European nationalities, above all Slavs and Germans. On the contrary, Kazakhs

¹¹⁹ Jeremy Smith, *ibidem*, p.82.

¹²⁰ Jeremy Smith, *ibidem*, pp. 86-7.

composed just the 10% of the population in “their own” capital. Those Kazakhs who decided to move from the *aul* to the Russophones-dominated cities, tried to integrate in the new “international context”. Usually, they avoided speaking Kazakh or wearing Kazakh clothing in public. Knowledge of Russian was fundamental for Kazakhs who wanted to live in Alma-Ata or other urban centres. The Kazakh “international” nature during the Soviet era avoided the outbursts of any protest when Khrushchev implemented the reform of Soviet education system. By 1959, the 25% of Kazakh children already attended Russian schools, such a percentage increased up to 32% by 1966. During 1970s and 1980s there were few Kazakh schools in the urban areas of the republics and in the northern and eastern oblasts, where Russians represented the majority.¹²¹

During the Twenty-second CPSU Congress in 1961, Khrushchev launched the merger-of nations campaign. Under this framework, the Third-Party Programme¹²² was adopted, which established the official beginning of the construction of Communism in the USSR, and this involved also the final solution of the nationalities’ problem through *sblizhenie* and, as a long-term goal, *slyianie*, for the Soviet people.¹²³ Yet, Khrushchev did not remove or weaken those institutions aimed at the blossoming of Soviet nations, and this hindered the rapprochement and fusion of the Soviet nations; therefore, the only real step toward *sblizhenie* was the 1959 Soviet Education Law.¹²⁴ Two main elements explained why *sblizhenie* and *slyianie* were not really implemented by Khrushchev and his successors. Firstly, *korenizatsiia* had allowed the emergence of a national *intelligencija* even in those nations such as Kazakhstan, considered backward in the 1920s. Moreover, Kazakhstan had developed a (Soviet) national consciousness and was not anymore considered as an “amorphous collection of tribes”¹²⁵, but a fully-fledged Soviet people. Furthermore, since the birth of the Soviet regime, Kazakhs, as well as the other non-Russian nationalities, had been indoctrinated with ideas and myths regarding their ancient roots. Since the creation of different national republics in Central Asia, the Soviet authorities needed to write national histories able to justify and legitimize from an historical point of view

¹²¹ Bavhna Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, Language and Power*. Routledge, 2007, p.64

¹²² The Programme of the CPSU was the most important document of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, where the strategic plans both for internal and external politics were described.

¹²³ Oleh Fedyshin, *Khrushchev’s “Leap forward”: National Assimilation in the USSR after Stalin*, *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (JUNE 1967), pp. 37

¹²⁴ Yuri Slezkine, *USSR as a Communal Apartment*, *Slavic Review*, 1994, vol.53 n.2, p.414

¹²⁵ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity. From Tribe to Nation- State*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, p. 34

the Kremlin's nation making and border-drawing. Therefore, a radical shift toward a fusion of nationalities, or Russification, should have met a strong resistance among non-Russians.¹²⁶

Soviet Union foreign policy objectives also played a great role. In particular, the Soviet Union was contending with China and the West the influence over the so-called Third World, using the Central Asian "success story" as a tool to attract Muslim countries in their field. These foreign policy ties persuaded Soviet leaders not to push for *slyianie* since it could have damaged the Soviet regime's propaganda among their Third World allies.¹²⁷

Soviet Union had a Muslim population tantamounted to 50 million. Initially, Soviet authorities severely repressed Islam as a religion and its institutions. Mosques were closed, and clergy persecuted. This occurred even if Lenin and early Bolsheviks made a deal with radical Muslim, encouraging them to rebel against and to overthrow their colonial oppressors.¹²⁸

When Stalin died, Soviet policy witnessed a radical change in their general attitude and also in how Soviet authorities approached with Islam. USSR had become a superpower struggling for the hegemony in the global field with USA and in the socialist world with China. Under this framework, Khrushchev revived contact with the Third World in 1955 and Central Asia became a showcase of socialist development model and also a training centre for the future leader of Third World countries. Three aspects of the Soviet development model had particularly importance in trying to persuade Asians and Africans to adopt it. Firstly, social and economic achievements; secondly political success, such the "solution" of the national problem and the bypassing of the capitalist stage of development in Central Asia; finally, the Soviet link as a fundamental catalyst for the success.¹²⁹

The effectiveness of Soviet campaign to demonstrate the relevance of the Soviet Central Asian model of development to the Third World was well shown by an Indian scholar, who studied in Tashkent, who wrote in the conclusion of his book regarding Soviet Central Asia:

"In a historically short period of just two decades the peoples of Central Asia succeeded in laying the foundations of a socialist society, bypassing the agonizing stage of capitalist development. From a formerly backward colony of Tsarist Russia, Soviet Central Asia has been transformed into a region of highly developed industry and modern agriculture with an advanced level of culture. The problem

¹²⁶ Grigol Ubiria, *Soviet Nation Building in Central Asia. The making of Kazakh and Uzbek nations*, Routledge, 2016, pp 218-219

¹²⁷ Grigol Ubiria, *Soviet Nation Building in Central Asia. The making of Kazakh and Uzbek nations*, Routledge, 2016, p.234-35

¹²⁸ Galia Golan, *Soviet policies in the Middle East. From World War II to Gorbachev*. Cambridge University Press, 1990, pp. 197-98.

¹²⁹ Teresa Rakowska- Harmstone, *Islam and Nationalism: Central Asia and Kazakhstan under Soviet rule*, *Central Asian Survey*, vol.2 no.2, 1983, pp.68-70

of relations between the formerly oppressed and oppressing nations has also been successfully solved with the establishment of a large multinational state incorporating the erstwhile oppressed peoples of Central Asia into the fraternal family of free and equal Soviet nations. The peoples of Central Asia . . . developed into full-fledged nations on the basis of socialism. Their speedy ethnic consolidation . . . offers a striking contrast to the rather long process of evolution of Western nations under capitalism . . . This historical experience of the Central Asian nations has a world-wide importance”¹³⁰

2.2 Virgin Lands Programme

Agricultural production was one of the most assertive policies of the Soviet Union. As the State ideology depended on the working and peasant class, the Soviet administrative system had something to say and do in the agricultural sector. Just after its foundation, the State managed to enrol almost all the peasants into collective farms. Agricultural issues had a preeminent role in New Economic Policy implemented by the Soviet authorities during the 1920’s.

NEP’s main feature was the peasants’ right to sell freely their products. Trade was rehabilitated nationwide, marking a retreat towards capitalism. From 1922 to 1926, NEP had a widespread success and it allowed to reach pre- World War levels way before than expected. Nevertheless, agricultural sector still outlined major weakness from a Bolshevik standpoint, which aim to build a socialist society and an industrialised economy within the Soviet Union territory.¹³¹ Stalin had already become the most important political within the CPSU by the end of 1927, when USSR had to face a new grain crisis, after the one occurred in 1925. In summer 1925, the first substantial capital construction since the revolution caused an increase in demand, resulting in a shortage of goods. Since their shelves were emptying, peasants reduced their sales of grain. The State tackled the issue increasing the price of grain and diminishing the resources supplied to industry in order to re-establish the market equilibrium. However, the Party reacted in a totally different way in 1927, when he had to face a new grain crisis. Soviet authorities kept the same price of the grain and went ahead with industrialisation. By the beginning of 1928, the

¹³⁰ Devendra Kaushik, *Socialism in Central Asia: A Study in the Transformation of Socio-Ethnic Relations in Soviet Central Asia*, (Bombay, Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1976), pp.153 and 159; quoted in Teresa Rakowska-Harmstone, *Islam and Nationalism: Central Asia and Kazakhstan under Soviet rule, Central Asian Survey, vol.2 no.2, 1983, p.70*

¹³¹ R.W Davies, *The Socialist Offensive. The Collectivisation of Soviet Agriculture, 1929-1930*, Macmillan Press, 1989, pp. 1-5

“emergency measures” involved also coercion to obtain grain. This marked the end of NEP and, a year later, the beginning of the collectivisation drive analysed in the first chapter.¹³²

The WWII disrupted the Soviet authorities’ plans concerning internal affairs but in the post war era Soviet authorities, in particular Stalin and his successor Nikita Khrushchev continued to hold interest in agriculture.

During Stalin era, Soviet agriculture sector was characterised by a low procurement prices, high production quotas and low income for rural workers. The main goal pursued by agriculture was to ensure a supply of food and agriculture products able to let rapid industrialisation trying to allocate as less money as possible to this economic sector.¹³³

When Khrushchev became the First Secretary of the CPSU, he immediately recognised the importance of a strong agricultural sector¹³⁴. Nevertheless, during the XIX Party Congress, in October 1952, Malenkov - chairman of the Council of Ministers – declared that the grain supply problem had been solved once and for all. The annual harvest tantamounted to 8 eight million pods of grain and such a result allowed USSR to overcome its perennial grain shortage. However, Malenkov had to recognise just a year later in August 1953, during a speech to the Supreme Soviet, that the level of grain production was not still adequate to meet the growing demand. Therefore, he proposed some measures thought to increase the output by raising production on existing farms. On September 1953, during a plenum of Central Committee, Khrushchev announced his own program for resolving the grain shortage issue. He favoured adopting all the measures proposed earlier by Malenkov, but he also suggested that wheat production could be extended to new territories still uncultivated. Such lands were listed in the final plenum’s resolution, involving the right bank of Volga, the northern Caucasus, Kazakhstan, and Western Siberia.¹³⁵ Moreover, Khrushchev outlined that: “Without an increase in agriculture sector it is impossible to resolve the tasks of communist construction successfully”.¹³⁶

Khrushchev articulated again his own agricultural policy in a report issued in 1954 and titled “On the Further Increase of Grain Production and on the Bringing into Cultivation of Virgin Lands”. Just a month later, this report became a decree and it was published in the State

¹³² R.W Davies, Mark Harrison, S.G. Wheatcott, *The economic transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 13-14

¹³³ G.A. E Smith, *Agriculture*, in *Khrushchev and Khrushchevism*, edited by Martin McCauley, MacMillan Press, 1987, pp. 95-96

¹³⁴ Stephen K. Wegren, *Dilemmas of Agrarian Reform in the USSR*, *Soviet Studies*, Vol.44, no.1, 1992, pp. 3-7

¹³⁵ Richard Mills, *The Formation of Virgin Land Policy*, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 29, no.1, 1970, pp.59-60

¹³⁶ Stephen K Wregren, *Dilemmas of Agrarian Reform in the USSR*, *Soviet Studies*, Vol.44, no.1, 1992, p.5

newspaper. It pointed out how depressing was the situation in agricultural production due to the past mistakes, proposing a new plan for boosting production. The main purpose was to raise wheat production by 35-40% in two years. Khrushchev thought that the only way to solve the Soviet grain shortage was to open “virgin” and “idle” land to cultivation. However, such a policy would have had considerable effects on these lands, since cultivating huge amounts of lands required a considerable workforce, leading to internal workforce.¹³⁷

Following the decree, a mass movement toward cultivating new lands began and lasted for a decade. Khrushchev’s ambitious campaign to cultivate virgin and idle lands had originated from his experiences in Ukraine. Before the decree, he had some communication with the Kazakh leadership. Their reply was that cultivated lands could be increased by 544,000 hectares by 1955. However, this wasn’t the figure that Khrushchev had in mind. Moreover, Zhumabay Shayakhmetov, the First Secretary of the CP of the Kazakh SSR, argued that rapid cultivation of the steppes would harm the soil and animal husbandry. Thus, Khrushchev accused him of having nationalistic ideas and replaced him with Panteleimon Ponomarenko in February 1954. During this period, Brezhnev was appointed as the Second Secretary of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR. When Brezhnev became the Second Secretary of the CPK he had already a lot of expertise regarding agricultural matters. Indeed, he was First Secretary of the Dnepropetrovsk Regional Party Committee from 1947 until 1950. This region was considered as one of the country granaries, contributing to the harvest of the USSR as whole. Then, Brezhnev became First Secretary of the Moldavian Communist Party Central Committee, a republic whose agricultural sector was more developed than the industrial one.¹³⁸ The two years spend in Kazakhstan had a considerable impact on Brezhnev career and he even dedicated a monography to this period of his life. Brezhnev speaking about the Virgin Land affirmed that:

“A gigantic agronomic industrial has taken shape in this area. It exerts a powerful influence on economy of the whole country. And the epic of Virgin Land has one again shown the world the fine moral qualities of Soviet people. It has become the symbol of selfless service to the homeland, a great achievement of the socialist areas.”¹³⁹

Once Brezhnev became the First Secretary of the CPSU he continued to consider agricultural policy as one of the most important, indeed peasant were the big winners of his years of government. Brezhnev agricultural policy had two main features. Firstly, he tried to reduce

¹³⁷ Konuralp Ercilasun, *Soviet Agricultural Policy and Cultivating “Virgin Lands” in Kazakhstan in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan. Life and Politics in the Soviet Era*, edited by T.Dadabaev and H.Komatsu, Palgrave McMillan, 2017, pp. 53-54.

¹³⁸ Leonid I. Brezhnev, *Pages from his life*, Pergamon Press, 1982, pp. 55-69

¹³⁹ Leonid I. Brezhnev, *Virgin Lands. Two years in Kazakhstan, 1954-55*, Pergamon Press, 1979, p. 100

differences among rural and urban wages. Secondly, he gradually increased procurement prices paid to collective farms.¹⁴⁰ .

The Kazakh SSR was now prepared for the future plans for the steppes. The February-March 1954 Plenary Session of the Central Committee of the CP issued the decree to cultivate the country's virgin and idle lands and with this decree aimed to cultivate approximately 13 million hectares in 1954-55. The start of the Virgin Lands Campaign was better than expected. A great deal of land had been enthusiastically cultivated. The Central Committee, taking into consideration this rapid cultivation, rushed to the decision to increase the figures by as early as August 1954. The new goal was to cultivate 28 million hectares by the end of the 1956, the goal being doubled with the addition of one more year.

In 1956, Kazakhstan produced one billion pods- more than 16 billion tones- of wheat, being awarded with the Order of Lenin in recognition of these great achievements. Next crops, however, were not as copious as the previous one, since the unpredictable weather conditions and, later, the severe soil degradation and erosion.¹⁴¹

Such results did not bring to an immediate end or a change of attitude regarding Virgin Lands programme. On the contrary, Khrushchev continued to underline the need for Soviet Union to boost grain production during the XXI Party Congress on January-February 1959. Nevertheless, he changed his mind just two years later, when he acknowledged that the era of rapid expansion of wheat production by assimilating virgin and idle lands has come to an end, during a speech in Akmolinsk, capital of Virgin land *kraj*, on March 14, 1961. Khrushchev, during this speech, also affirmed that the Virgin Land was entering into its second phase, which involved an improvement in farming techniques, the increase of crop yields and a raise in livestock production. The Virgin Land programme was definitively ended during February 1964 Party Plenum and just few months later, on October 14, 1964, Khrushchev was dismissed from all his party and government posts, due to his failure in foreign policy and agricultural sector.¹⁴²

Once Brezhnev became the General Secretary of the CPSU, however, he still however, defended the Virgin Lands experiment as a success. Brezhnev later stated that thanks to this programme 42 million hectares has been opened to cultivation. These lands were responsible for the 40% of the entire country's grain production in the 30 years since the Virgin Land programme begun.

¹⁴⁰ Stephen K. Wegren, *Dilemmas of Agrarian Reform in the USSR*, Soviet Studies, Vol.44, no.1, 1992, p. 7

¹⁴¹ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1994, p.49

¹⁴² Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhs*, p.224-225

Regarding Kazakhstan, Brezhnev outlined that this programme transformed 12 million hectares of grazing land into wheat production territories.¹⁴³

Furthermore, at least from a Soviet perspective, the Virgin Lands program had helped integrate the Kazakh economy more deeply into the larger Soviet productive system. Such a development was also helped also by a new republic hierarchy, where Kazakhs were heavily present. Later, the successes of this new Kazakh leadership would translate into new positions of leadership in regional and national party politics.

The Virgin Land programme did not provoke any considerable protests by Kazakh people. Certainly, the fear of State repression was a reason why Kazakhs did not react against such a programme; nevertheless, there also other factors that cannot be neglected. Firstly, this struggle with nature created a sense of excitement and challenge within the Kazakh population. Secondly, at least some Kazakh desired to distance themselves from what they consider their “backward” nomadic past. These people did not see any more the steppe as a land that must be respected and husbanded, but as a source of unlimited wealth.¹⁴⁴

However, soil degradation and erosion were not the only shortcomings coming from Virgin Lands programme. Indeed, such a campaign had also dramatic effects on Kazakhstan demographic composition. Almost 2 million of new settlers came to Kazakhstan from the European parts of the USSR, due to this programme, so by 1962 Kazakhs represented only the 29% of population in “their own” national republic.¹⁴⁵

2.3 Brezhnev and Kunaev

Leonid Brezhnev was the General Secretary of the CPSU from 1964 until 1982. Formally, under Brezhnev, the Soviet national doctrine still outlined that Soviet peoples were gradually transforming themselves into a new historical community. However, Brezhnev faced the issue in a totally different way vis-à-vis his predecessor Khrushchev; indeed, the latter thought that the wane of national differences or their assimilation was necessary for reaching *sbliizhenie*; on the other hand, Brezhnev believed that the creation of a Soviet community did not mean the

¹⁴³ Leonid I. Brezhnev, *Virgin Lands. Two years in Kazakhstan, 1954-55*, Pergamon Press, 1979, pp- 40-60

¹⁴⁴ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity. From Tribe to Nation State*, p.50

¹⁴⁵ Anatoly M. Khazanov, *The ethnic problem of contemporary Kazakhstan, Central Asian Survey, 1995, vol. 14, no.2, p.245*, pp.43-64

disappearance of national distinctions.¹⁴⁶¹⁴⁷ Brezhnev explicitly affirmed this in his speech in Alma-Ata in 1973, where he remarked that talking about the new historical community of people did not mean that national differences were vanishing, nor that *sblizhenie* had already occurred. He outlined that all the Soviet peoples could keep their peculiarities and their traditions and that, on the contrary, a greater blossoming of their national culture was even possible.¹⁴⁸

The National question was not a big issue during the Brezhnev era, which, under this aspect, was a phase of relative stability. Indeed, Khrushchev's years had witnessed territorial reorganisation and a frequent change of republic political leadership, while Brezhnev's era was characterised by the philosophy of "trust in cadres", a slogan introduced by Brezhnev at the Twenty-Third Party Congress in March 1966. The autonomy of the First Secretaries of the 14 Union republics had been severely threatened by the administrative organisation implemented by Khrushchev in the early 60's; on the contrary, under Brezhnev, SSRs' First Secretaries could run their internal affairs with limited interference from the centre.¹⁴⁹¹⁵⁰ The essence of the gentlemen's agreement between Brezhnev and republican leaders was that they had to support the general secretary in return for almost unlimited power in their areas.¹⁵¹ Volkogonov outlined that something similar to a "feudal system" was created under Brezhnev.¹⁵²

According to Ben Fowkes, Leonid Brezhnev's nationality policies were based on corporatist compromise, ethnic equalisation, and masterly inactivity, a policy which allowed the Soviet Union to witness 18 years of almost unproblematic existence. Three elements of corporatism are evident during the Brezhnev era. Firstly, the absence of conflict between centre and periphery, thanks to the "trust in cadres" philosophy. Brezhnev enounced his "trust in cadres", *doverie k kadram*, policy at the Twenty Third CPSU Congress in 1966. This slogan became one of the lasting policy of Brezhnev era. Regional leaders enthusiastically greeted such a policy since they were the principal beneficiaries of it. Khrushchev era had been characterised by a constant administrative reorganisation and regional leaders' autonomy had been constrained by

¹⁴⁶ Ubiria, Grigol, *Soviet Nation Building in Central Asia- The making of the Kazakh and Uzbek nations*, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016

¹⁴⁷ Leonid Brezhnev, 'O piatidesiatiletii soiuza Sovetskikh sotsialisticheskikh respublik', in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 2, Politizdat,

¹⁴⁸ Leonid Brezhnev, 'V splochnom stroiu Sovetskikh respublik', in *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1981, p. 259

¹⁴⁹ Gorlizki, Yoram, "Too Much Trust: "Regional Party leaders and Local Political Networks under Brezhnev", *Slavic Review*, vol. 69, no.3, pp.676-700

¹⁵⁰ Smith, Graham, *Gorbachev's greatest challenge perestroika and the national question*, *Political Geography Quarterly*, January 1989, p. 7-20

¹⁵¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn' ireformy*, *Novosti*, 1995, p.180

¹⁵² Volkogonov, Dmitri, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire. Political Leaders from Lenin to Gorbachev*, (London: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 278.

them. On the contrary, regional leaders gained considerable freedom regarding how to manage republican internal affairs during Brezhnev era.¹⁵³ Gorbachev, himself a regional secretary under Brezhnev reminded that: “The first secretaries were given almost unlimited power in their region and they for their part had to support the general secretary (...) this was the essence of the gentleman’s agreement”.

Compromise replaced conflict in the 18 years in which Brezhnev was the Secretary of the CPSU. Secondly, the role of major interest groups in policy making, and finally the stability of elites. This stability in regional leadership resulted in a diffuse corruption all over the Soviet Union. However, Brezhnev did not do anything to tackle such a rising attitude, since he considered “shadow economy” as a perfectly normal phenomenon.¹⁵⁴

The second issue faced by Brezhnev’s nationality policy was ethnic equalisation. In economic terms such a policy obtained only partial success. Indeed, inter-republican differences started diminishing in late 1960s and 1970s, when the central authorities tried to reduce inter-republican income and productivity inequalities through transfers among SSRs and increasing investments in less developed regions. However, income differences began to grow up again straddling 70s and 80s. Such inequalities were also aggravated by other policies, as the ones aiming at regional specialisation. These strategies’ purpose was twofold: firstly, they meant to boost efficiency via economy of scale; secondly, they aimed to increase political cohesion, creating a web of economic interdependence able to bring Soviet republics together. These regime development policies made several grievances in the non-Russian areas, in particular from an ecological point of view and the most affected were those Central Asian territories, where cotton monoculture had been imposed. Brezhnev ethnic equalisation policy was far more successful in the education field. Coefficient of Variation for the fifteen titular nations of the USSR in this area declined from 22% in 1959 to 9% in 1979. However, such a good result had also negative consequences for the regime.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, rising level of education among the non-Russian diminished their availability to accept Russian dominance of economic, political, cultural life.¹⁵⁶

Generally speaking, Brezhnev’s approach to the nationality question, was characterised by a return to Leninist policies, since he focused on the blossoming of the nationalities, rather than on the fusion of Soviet nations into a single community. References to “merging” of nations

¹⁵³ Yoram Gorlizky, *Too much Trust: Regional Party Leaders and Political Networks under Brezhnev*, *Slavic Review*, Vol. 69, no 3, pp. 676-78

¹⁵⁴ Ben Fowkes, *The National Question in the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev: Policy and response*, in *Brezhnev Reconsidered* edited by Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, Palgrave macmillan, 2002 pp. 69-70

¹⁵⁵ Ben Fowkes, *The National Question in the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev: Policy and response*, in *Brezhnev Reconsidered* edited by Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, Palgrave macmillan, 2002, p.70

¹⁵⁶ William Tompson, *The Soviet Union under Brezhnev*, Routledge, 2014, pp. 93-97

disappeared from Soviet discourse after 1964; indeed, Brezhnev preferred to pay more attention to the all-around integrity and unity (*edinstvo*) of a multinational and multicultural Society, rather than focusing on the disappearance of nationality differences through *sblizhenie* and *sliyanie*. During the Brezhnev era, Kazakhs reinforced their position with their own republics, thanks to Dinmukhamed Kunaev, who became First Secretary of the CPK in 1964 and ruled over the SSR until 1986. Kunaev was a Brezhnev protégé. They got acquainted during Brezhnev's stay in Kazakhstan. Kunaev was the President Kazakh Republic's Academy of Science. The General Secretary affirmed in his book on Virgin Lands that Kunaev: "Had a statesmanlike mind, could think broadly and boldly, and expressed some original and profound ideas about the huge resources and prospects of Kazakhstan", adding that "This calm, considerate, charming man also possess a strong will and belief in party principles."¹⁵⁷ During these years, Kazakhs became the "true masters" of their republics, while people of different nationalities and Russians, were in Soucek's words "left out in the cold".¹⁵⁸

Kunaev is a central figure in Kazakhstan's history. His political career is strictly linked with the figure of Leonid Brezhnev, with whom he became closer between 1954-55, when Brezhnev was, at first, Second Secretary of CPK and, during 1955, First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK). Kunaev became First Secretary of CPK in 1959, but he was dismissed from his position in 1962, since Khrushchev needed a Kazakh scapegoat for the poor result in the agricultural policies. However, once Brezhnev became the First Secretary of CPUS in October 1964, Kunaev became the CPK First Secretary again.^{159 160}

Brezhnev's 'trust in cadres' policy allowed Kunaev to strengthen his power and to increase the number of natives in the ranks of Kazakhstan SSR.¹⁶¹ Kunaev filled the Kazakhstan administration and government with cadres coming from his fellow clan in the Southern regions of Kazakhstan (South Kazakhstan, Almaty, Qyzylorda, Zhambul and Taldyqorgan, territories affiliated with the Elder Horde). Kunaev was born in the Almaty region and his major support base came above all from the aforementioned five Kazakh dominated *oblasts* in the South. Kunaev rule radically change the balance of power within the Kazakh community, since Kazakhs coming from western and northern regions, who dominated the CPK until Kunaev, were consistently under-represented during his rule.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Leonid I. Brezhnev, *Virgin Lands. Two years in Kazakhstan, 1954-55*, Pergamon Press, 1979, p. 17

¹⁵⁸ Svat Soucek, *History of Inner Asia*, Cambridge Press, 2000, p. 256.

¹⁵⁹ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p.228

¹⁶⁰ Dinmukhamed Kunaev, *O Moem Vremeni (About my time)*, Yntymak, 1992 pp.150-4

¹⁶¹ Michael Stefany, *Kazakhization, Kunaev and Kazakhstan: a bridge to independence*, *Journal of Central Asia and Central Asian Studies*, 16/2013 p.22

¹⁶² Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, Language and Power*, Routledge, 2007, p.86

His personal bond with Brezhnev allowed Kunaev to protect his image as an internationalist, avoiding party ideologues accuses of nationalism. During Kunaev's years, the number of Kazakh members of the CPSU grew too; from 1.56% in 1963 to 2% by 1986¹⁶³. It is also important to consider the demographic trend in the KSSR during these years. Between 1959 and 1979, the number of Central Asians in their respective republics cadres almost doubled. The reason for this growth was twofold. Firstly, the number of Russians who were leaving the region was higher than those who were arriving and secondly, the Kazakh population dramatically increased in these years. This changed the ethnic structure of the Kazakhstan SSR. In 1959, Kazakhs were only 30% of the population in their own republics, while the Slavs were 52,1%; on the contrary, in the 1979 Soviet Census, the Kazakhs already constituted 36% of the SSR population, while the Slavs percentage had fallen to 48,1%.¹⁶⁴

During Kunaev era, the Russian domination of the Kazakh political system and life came to an end and he was able to increase considerably the number of Kazakhs who held important posts within the rank of CPK. Moreover, Kunaev increased the prestige of Kazakhstan thanks to his membership in CPSU Politburo.¹⁶⁵ Under Kunaev era, Kazakhstan witnessed also a revival of its cultural identity symbol too. The most important of these was the yurt, which was a benchmark of traditional Kazakh nomadic way of life.¹⁶⁶ Under Kunaev, Kazakh literature blossomed too. In the 1960s-1970s, young Kazakh writers understood how important was to spread their works to a wider public. These authors focused on nationalistic narratives, which paid particular attention to "Kazakh Golden Age", i.e. the pre-Russian era, and on the myths and heroic figures of that period.¹⁶⁷

Kunaev was not less corrupt than other regional leaders during the Brezhnev era, however he was and still is really appreciated by Kazakhs since he acted trying to enhance Kazakh people interest over Russian in the republic, limiting their dominance within the KSSR¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ Michael Stefany, *Kazakhization, Kunaev and Kazakhstan: a bridge to independence*, Journal of Central Asia and Central Asian Studies, 16/2013 p.70

¹⁶⁴ Kazakhstan in Figures: A Concise Collection of Statistics, Alma Ata, 1987.

¹⁶⁵ Anatoly M. Khazanov, *The ethnic problem of contemporary Kazakhstan, Central Asian Survey, 1995, vol. 14, no.2, p.245*

¹⁶⁶ Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh Identity. From Tribe to Nation- State*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1994, p. 53

¹⁶⁷ Diana Kudaibergenova, "Imagining community" in *Soviet Kazakhstan. An historical analysis of narrative on nationalism in Kazakh Soviet Literature*, Nationality Papers. The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity, Vol. 41, no. 5, 2013, pp. 839-845.

¹⁶⁸ Anatoly M. Khazanov, *The ethnic problem of contemporary Kazakhstan, Central Asian Survey, 1995, vol. 14, no.2, p.245*

2.4 Gorbachev and the collapse of Soviet Union

When Leonid Brezhnev passed away in November 1982, Soviet society was characterised by a spirit of stability, even in the quite intricate sphere of international relations.¹⁶⁹ As I have aforementioned, Khrushchev, presenting the Party Programme in 1961, remarked on the necessity to set out an “internationalist” strategy aimed at creating a “unitary culture of the communist” society. Khrushchev knew that national differences would not soon wane within the Soviet Union, however he believed that *sblizhenie*, the rapprochement of nations, was an ongoing process which was enhancing Soviet Union social homogeneity. He was also sure that the full-scale construction of communism, would have meant the achievement of the complete unity (*edinstvo*) of Soviet people. The First Secretary of the CPSU saw also *sliyanie*, the fusion of nations, as a goal to be reached by the USSR, even if he recognised that national differences would long exist even after the final victory of socialism.¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the economic reforms received much more attention than the utopian programme of the merging of nations during the Khrushchev era, given also that the national elites of various republics did not share the same enthusiasm of the Party Secretary for *sblizhenie*.¹⁷¹

During Brezhnev era, any reference to *sliyanie* gradually disappeared from Soviet discourse; on the contrary, Brezhnev outlined that all nationalities who lived within USSR kept their national peculiarities and tradition and that the Soviet State, in Brezhnev’s words, was a “developing community of Soviet socialist culture, which subsumes all that is truly valuable from each national culture”.¹⁷² Brezhnev referred to the “Soviet united people” as a multi-national community, even in his last major statement about the national question in the 1982 February resolution commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the creation of the USSR. Nevertheless, using Stalin’s motto, he outlined the socialist content of the various Soviet nations; moreover, he affirmed that Soviet culture was the glue which unified the USSR’s nations and nationalities from an ideological and moral point of view.¹⁷³ Brezhnev, therefore, noticed that *sblizhenie*, was

¹⁶⁹ Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.47

¹⁷⁰ *XII s’ezd Kommunisticheskoi partii Sovetskogo Soyuz. Stenograficheskii otchet*, Moscow, 1961,

¹⁷¹ Martha Brill Olcott, *Yuri Andropov and the “National Question”*, Soviet Studies, vol. 36, no.1, January 1985, p. 104

¹⁷² *Pravda*, August 16, 1973, pp. 1-2.

¹⁷³ *Pravda*, February 21, 1982, p. 2.

a goal that could be reached only in the ideological sphere, while ethnicity would have remained a reality in the USSR.¹⁷⁴

Andropov, Brezhnev's successor, spoke about the national question in his December 21 address for the sixtieth anniversary of the USSR. The Party Secretary reaffirmed that *slyianie* was not an easy goal to be achieved; on the contrary, he outlined, quoting Lenin, that "nations will exist for a long time, much longer than class differences".¹⁷⁵ Andropov believed that it was necessary to face national problems from an economic rather than from an ideological point view, suggesting, therefore, to stop dreaming about unrealizable objectives, such as *slyianie*. On the contrary, he suggested to focus on more realistic goals, such as the strengthening of national regions' integration into the Soviet economy. To achieve this end, Andropov remarked on the need for Moscow to pay much more attention to republic party policies and the necessity of a greater control over the efforts to reach cultural integration of the non-Russian nationalities.¹⁷⁶ Once Brezhnev died and Andropov took over for him, therefore, relations between central and peripheral authorities radically changed. The new General Secretary hardly believed that Soviet Union needed to tackle widespread corruption in order to revitalise its economy.¹⁷⁷ This Andropov's policy had dramatic effect on Central Asian republics, where the fight against corruption meant a radical change of power elite, in particular Uzbekistan. The Uzbek apparatus witnessed a deep transformation due to the so-called Rashidov affairs. Sharaf Rashidov was the First Secretary of the Uzbek CP, under his rule the republic's administrative structure began to provide false cotton production figure to Moscow, thus receiving payments for cotton which was never produced. Yegor Ligachev, director of the Party OrgOtdel, provided to Andropov forth extensive reports of Central Asian corruption in general, and Uzbek, in particular. Ligachev reports allowed central authorities to discover Uzbek web of corruption. Such a discover let Andropov began a heavy purge of the Uzbek SSR. Ligachev described Rashidov as a "State criminal" and many believed that the First Secretary of Uzbek CP killed himself in order to avoid persecution.¹⁷⁸

When Gorbachev became the First Secretary of the CPSU, the Soviet State was already in dire straits. Economic stagnation and political instability characterised Soviet Union in the first phase

¹⁷⁴ Martha Brill Olcott, *Yuri Andropov and the "National Question"*, Soviet Studies, vol. XXXVII, no.1, January 1985, p. 106

¹⁷⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, *Yuri Andropov and the "National Question"*, Soviet Studies, vol. XXXVII, no.1, January 1985, p. 106

¹⁷⁶ Martha Brill Olcott, *Gorbachev's National Dilemma*, Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 42, no.2, pp. 402.

¹⁷⁷ Andrea Graziosi, *L'Unione Sovietica. 1914-1991*, il Mulino, 2011, pp. 393-395

¹⁷⁸ Kathleen Collins, *Clan politics and regime transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.112

of 1980s; indeed, Gorbachev was the third-Party Secretary in less than two and a half years. Regional cadres took advantage from the central institutions' weakness to increase their power. Furthermore, the USSR experienced international isolation due to its involvement in an expensive war in Afghanistan and had to face an increasingly hostile USA and its aggressive President. When Gorbachev came to the power he was that sure that "a crisis was knocking at the door"¹⁷⁹, yet no one within the Soviet elite and few Western observers thought that such a crisis could stem from national republics.¹⁸⁰ However, Gorbachev did not immediately undertake his program of radical reform of the Soviet system. On the contrary, Gorbachev's internal policies were quite traditionalist in the first part of his rule, from March 1985 until fall 1986. Such policies implemented by Gorbachev retraced Andropov's strategies rather than Khrushchev's reformist ones. In this period, he pursued the economic policy of acceleration, *uskorenie*, which aimed to a better economic redistribution. He continued to focus on anti-corruption campaigns and also the anti-alcoholism crusade launched on May 1985 reminded traditional Soviet policies too. The radicalisation of Gorbachev's programme occurred only in late 1986, when he stated that a broader definition of *glasnost*, transparency, had become now the Party line. The release of the political dissident Andrey Sakharov from house arrest was a symbolic event outlining the beginning of a new era in Soviet politics.¹⁸¹ There were several reasons to believe that it was hardly possible that a democratic and intact Soviet state could emerge from Gorbachev's reforms, since, as Robert Conquest has remarked, a "democratic Soviet Union" was a contradiction in terms.¹⁸²

Gorbachev believed that the nationality question could be solved, and imperial rule replaced, thanks to the acknowledgment of a full-fledged right of self-determination of nations, but such an argument had three main flaws. Firstly, it ignored that many national territories within RSFSR were no less part of the Russian empire than the fourteen non-Russian union republics. Many Union republics had, indeed, a longer and even more harmonious association with Russian than some ASSR. Secondly, the recognition of a full-fledged right of self-determination based on nationhood could lead to an infinite regression, since Russia hosted in its territory more than one hundred different nationalities. Thirdly, there was not a necessary correlation between the achievement of national self-determination and the creation of a democratic and accountable

¹⁷⁹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn'i reformy*, Novosti, 1995, p.207

¹⁸⁰ Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.55

¹⁸¹ George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as leaders*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 53-60

¹⁸² Robert Conquest, Foreword to Ian Bremmer and Ray Taras, *Nations and Politics in the Soviet Successor States*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. xvii

government, as is witnessed from the Central Asia experience where no State but Kyrgyzstan had been able to develop democratic institution after the demise of the USSR.¹⁸³

In October 1985, the new Party Programme statement on the national question was issued. Gorbachev made Andropov's ideas formal Party policies; indeed, even if some of the traditional Soviet concepts, such as *sblizhenie*, were reaffirmed,¹⁸⁴ the Party Programme established as the main responsibility of all nationalities the maximization of their contribution to the achievement of the new economic goals.¹⁸⁵ What Gorbachev underestimated was not able to fully understand was that Soviet Union was not at all a single community, as Soviet rhetoric affirmed. The idea of a *sovetskii narod*, a Soviet people, certainly reflected important features of many educated Soviet urban citizens, however, identification with their own nationality was much more powerful, not only for those rural communities unchanged by the Soviet experience, but also for many intellectuals.¹⁸⁶

Soviet Union cohesion had been allowed by a mixture of concessions to national consciousness and by the willingness of the KGB, supported by the Party leadership, to harshly repress any expression of political nationalism. Union republics enjoyed several rights during the post-Stalin era, for instance they had their own Party organizations and their own ministries. These privileges benefitted above all the republican political elite; nevertheless, the promotion of education also allowed the development of a native *intelligencija*, which had been hardly present before 1917. Furthermore, the fact that the Soviet Union's administrative division was based on national homelands, allowed national consciousness to increase within the republics.¹⁸⁷ Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost*' reforms brought the Soviet Union's national problems to the surface, and since they spread information about Soviet failures, they discredited Marxism-Leninism, creating a vacuum immediately filled by nationalism.¹⁸⁸

The 19th Party Conference was, as Gorbachev himself affirmed later, the "turning point after which *perestroika* took an irreversible character"¹⁸⁹. Under this framework, it was established that all Party secretaries had to be elected, rather than appointed from the centre and this decision radically changed the relations of power within the Soviet Union. Moreover, the 19th Party Conference also declared the creation of a new legislative body, the Congress of People's

¹⁸³ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 253

¹⁸⁴ On the contrary, there was no reference to *slyianie*

¹⁸⁵ Martha Brill Olcott, *Gorbachev's National Dilemma*, Journal of International Affairs, Vol. 42, no.2, pp. 402-3

¹⁸⁶ Ronald Grigor Suny, *The revenge of the past. Nationalism, Revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford University Press, 1993, p.139.

¹⁸⁷ Archie Brown, *The Gorbachev Factor*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 257

¹⁸⁸ Archie Brown, *ibidem*, pp. 258-9

¹⁸⁹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Zhizn'y reformy*, vol.1, p.364

deputies, which had to be elected in a partially competitive way. In the aftermath of this Conference, the USSR experienced a proliferation of attempts to challenge its own authority. Since June 1988, the representatives of the different nationalist movements began to establish contact and share information among themselves.¹⁹⁰

The final outcome was independence for all the former Soviet national republics, but there was no common path towards it.

2.5 Kazakhstan's Way to Independence

Kazakhstan experienced an increasing autonomy from the centre during the Kunayev era. By 1980, Brezhnev's poor health conditions were well-known. The physical decline of Brezhnev foresaw troubles for Brezhnev's proteges throughout Central Asia, since it paved the way for a new generation of Soviet leaders which had grown up under the tutelage of Yuri Andropov. They were fully conscious of the various deficiencies which afflicted the Soviet system from an economic, social and technological point of view, and Andropov, Gorbachev and Ligachev believed that Brezhnev's protégés, such as Kunaev or Rashidov in Uzbekistan, were an obstacle on the road to reform.¹⁹¹

During his years as First Secretary, Brezhnev adopted a tolerant approach regarding local corruption; indeed, Brezhnev's general behaviour was to let sleeping dogs lie, since he believed that the "shadow economy" was a normal phenomenon.¹⁹² Brezhnev's attitude allowed corruption to become a typical *modus operandi* of Central Asian republics, becoming a fundamental part of the tacit agreement between the centre and the regional Party cadres. When Yuri Andropov came to power in November 1982 this mutual understanding came under attack. Andropov's fight against corruption disrupted the equilibrium within the Central Asian regions, subverting the situation. Yuri Andropov thought that a better use of national resources was a *condition sine qua non* for a successful reform of Soviet economy. Gorbachev shared Andropov's ideas on the nationality question and made it clear that all nationalities had to work in order to achieve the forecast economic goals.¹⁹³ Since Gorbachev took power, Moscow's

¹⁹⁰ Mark R. Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.55

¹⁹¹ Michael Stefany, *Kazakhization, Kunaev and Kazakhstan: a bridge to independence*, *Journal of Central Asia and Central Asian Studies*, 16/2013, p.63

¹⁹² Ben Fowkes, *The National Question in the Soviet Union under Leonid Brezhnev: Policy and Response*, in *Brezhnev Reconsidered*, edited by Edwin Bacon and Mark Sandle, *Palgrave MacMillan*, 2002, p. 69

¹⁹³ Martha Brill Olcott, *Soviet Central Asia: Ethnic Dilemmas and Strategies*, in *Domestic Determinants of Soviet Foreign Policy towards South Asia and the Middle East*, edited by Hafeez Malik, *St Martin's Press*, 1990, p.55

press became to blame Kazakhstan due to its poor economic performances and the growing nepotism in the SSR, suggesting that Kunaev's dismissal would have come soon. Kunaev was able to keep its post for another year, but CPK cadres witnessed a deep change throughout 1985 and 1986. Indeed, several first secretaries of the *oblast* party committees (*obkom*) and six prominent ministries were dismissed¹⁹⁴. Moreover, Gorbachev forced to retire many key CPK apparatus' personalities, such as Kunaev's half-brother who had served as President of the Academy of Science of Kazakhstan.¹⁹⁵

Despite Gorbachev's death grip, Kunaev was re-elected as Kazakhstan First Secretary during the XVI CPK Congress. Kunaev was repeatedly attack during this session, which, nevertheless, witnessed how wide was still the support for Kunaev within the CPK cadres. In particular, Nazarbayev, chairman of the Council of Ministers and Kamalidenov, Second Secretary of the CPK, blamed Kunaev for the republic's political and economic situation, asking for a radical change.¹⁹⁶ Yet, Kunaev's supporters hardly criticised those who vehemently attacked Kunaev after having served him loyally for such a long time, labelling them as opportunistic people.¹⁹⁷ Nazarbayev and Kamalidenov critics, on the one hand, certainly created a new stimulus for economic investments, but, on the other hand, they witnessed the political conflict under way between generations within. CPK. Younger generations' critics aimed to show to Gorbachev that there were also likeminded people in Kazakhstan, and that he could rely on them¹⁹⁸. Nevertheless, Kunaev came out humiliated from the meeting and it was clear that his dismissal could not be postponed for too long.¹⁹⁹ The 27th Congress of CPSU in late 1986 was a decisive step on the way to Kunaev's deposition. During this meeting, the First Secretary of the CPK received additional attacks and, therefore, he acknowledged that he had to step back, and he offered to retire during a private summit with Gorbachev. Once back in Kazakhstan, Kunaev gathered the Bureau of Central Committee of CPK to announce to his colleague that he was going to retire. This decision did not take by surprise anyone, however, far less expected was

¹⁹⁴ The obkom first secretaries of Bukhara, Namangan, Kashka Darya, Dzhizak, and Syr Darya were all replaced, as were the ministers of justice, fruit and vegetables, construction, education, and cotton cleaning (removed for malfeasance), the chairmen of the State Publication Committee and the Uzbek Supreme Soviet, the head of the Statistical Administration, and the prosecutor and the president of the Academy of Sciences.

¹⁹⁵ Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, Language and Power*, Routledge, 2007, p.89

¹⁹⁶ Yelena Kalyuzhnova, *The Kazakhstani economy. Independence and Transition*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998, p. 15

¹⁹⁷ Martha Brill Olcott, *Soviet Central Asia: Ethnic Dilemmas and Strategies*, in *Domestic Determinants of Soviet Foreign Policy towards South Asia and the Middle East*, edited by Hafeez Malik, St Martin's Press, 1990, p.57

¹⁹⁸ Yelena Kalyuzhnova, *The Kazakhstani economy. Independence and Transition*, Palgrave Macmillan, 1998, p. 15

¹⁹⁹ Martha Brill Olcott, *Soviet Central Asia: Ethnic Dilemmas and Strategies*, in *Domestic Determinants of Soviet Foreign Policy towards South Asia and the Middle East*, edited by Hafeez Malik, St Martin's Press, 1990, p.57

the choose to replace Kunaev with a Russian and complete outsider, Gennadii Kolbin, on December 16, 1986.²⁰⁰

In his memoirs, Gorbachev remembered his conversation with Kunayev in December 1986, where the latter announced his resignation as the CPK's First Secretary. This meeting followed a series of talks between Gorbachev and Soviet Party leaders, which outlined that Kazakhstan was in dire straits.

"Kunaev himself complained about 'troublemakers' and requested a meeting. He argued that the situation in the Central Committee bureau was due to intrigues by the Prime Minister Nazarbayev, who was spoiling for power. Indeed, Kunaev painted an extremely negative picture of him, constantly repeating: "This is a dangerous man. He must be stopped." Eventually Kunaev requested that I transfer Nazarbayev to a position in Moscow or appoint him to the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs and send him abroad. I decided to speak openly with Kunaev. I told him a group of his Central Committee secretaries had complained about his leadership. After outlining their criticisms, I suggested that we should continue our conversation at a Politburo meeting, inviting all of the members of the Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan to attend. "No, no, that's not necessary," he answered hurriedly, "I will resign." We discussed the question of a suitable successor. Kunaev, who wanted to stop Nazarbayev's advancement, said that his replacement should be a Russian. After several discussions with Politburo members, we decided on G. V. Kolbin. His election was supported both in the Bureau and at the plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist party of Kazakhstan. However, in light of subsequent events I think we made a mistake".²⁰¹

On December 16, 1986 the CPK's Central Committee voted unanimously to appoint Gennadii Kolbin, a Russian without any experience in Kazakhstan as Party chief. Even if, there was no opposition during the vote, elements of the Party, loyal to Kunaev, did not totally approve such a choice.²⁰² The decision to appoint Kolbin as CPK's First Secretary violated what was a Soviet Union non-written rule, which provided that the First Secretary of each republic should come from the titular nationality of that republic, while the Second Secretary should have been an individual loyal to Moscow. Kolbin became the only Soviet Republic First Secretary who came from a nation different from that which he led.²⁰³ On 17, December, a crowd tried to march

²⁰⁰ Michael Stefany, *Kazakhization, Kunaev and Kazakhstan: a bridge to independence*, Journal of Central Asia and Central Asian Studies, 16/2013 p.25

²⁰¹ Mikhail Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, Doubleday, 1996, pp. 330-331. Quoted in David M. Crowe, *The Kazakhs and Kazakhstan: The struggle for ethnic identity and nationhood*, Nationalities Papers, 1998, vol.26 n°3, p. 407

²⁰² Helsinki Watch Committee, *Conflict in Soviet Union: The Untold Story of the Clashes in Kazakhstan*, 1990, p.9

²⁰³ Taras Kuzio, *Nationalist Riots in Kazakhstan*, Central Asian Survey, Vol.7 No.4, p.80

against the city's Communist Party headquarters. The militia did not act violently against the people, apparently in connivance with local authorities. In the course of the evening, however, they were brought into Brezhnev Square (now called Republic square) in an attempt to disperse the crowd.²⁰⁴

On 18, December, TASS acknowledged that a group of students had gathered in Alma-Ata and incited by nationalistic elements had protested against the decision to appoint Kolbin as CPK's First Secretary. A report published on the English newspaper "The Guardian" December 30 affirmed that more than two hundred people had been injured, and that two temporary camps, aimed to host the drunks, had been freed to make room for one hundred arrested protesters. The rioters had with them several banners with slogan such as "Autonomy and separate seat for Kazakhstan at the UN", "We want to join China", "America is with us, Russia against us", and "Kolbin go back to Russia". Nevertheless, TASS harshly criticised The Guardian report a week later, defining its article as "sensationalistic". At the same time, Radio Moscow blamed the "Voice of America" report, labelling it as "ideological sabotage".²⁰⁵

Finally, the Kazakh Chairman of the Council of Ministers Nazarbayev, released a detailed account to Western journalists. He affirmed that two people, a police man and a student, died; that two hundred out of 3000 people who participated in the riots were injured, while one hundred had been jailed. However, Nazarbayev did not defend the rioters, on the contrary he fully condemned the protest, and he released a public statement supporting Kolbin's appointment. The loyalty witnessed to Moscow in this situation allowed Nazarbayev to take control over the Minister of Interior as Prime Minister of the Kazakhstan's SSR and, by 1989, to become CPK's First Secretary. The role of First Secretary also let Nazarbayev to remove his rivals, such as Mukashev, who was the Chairman of Council of Ministers, and Kamalidenov, from their positions having played a key role in the Kunaev era.²⁰⁶

The Soviet official version was that Alma Ata riots were a nationalistic protest, but a report issued by the Helsinki Watch Committee in 1990 denied such a version. Many of the people interviewed by the Helsinki Watch Committee, indeed, affirmed that the main reason of the protest was that Kolbin lacked any experience of Kazakhstan and not that he was a Russian. Therefore, even if the ethnic element surely had a relevance during the 1986 protest, it had secondary importance.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Taras Kuzio, *ibidem*, p.82

²⁰⁵ Taras Kuzio, *ibidem*, pp. 81-84

²⁰⁶ Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, Language and Power*, Routledge, 2007, p.89

²⁰⁷ Helsinki Watch Committee, *Conflict in Soviet Union: The Untold Story of the Clashes in Kazakhstan*, 1990, p.5

The scarce relevance had by the ethnic element during the December 1986 riots is also confirmed by the fact that Popular Fronts were almost irrelevant in the whole Central Asian region.²⁰⁸ On February 1989, A. Samoilenko, a journalist of *Literaturnaia Gazeta*, in his article about the Alma-Ata Popular Front founding congress described the group requests as a mixture of slogans and ideas without rhyme or reason, and that moreover, the members attempted to catch the attention of the press by affirming that Nazarbayev had banned the meeting.²⁰⁹

Gorbachev continued to affirm that the Alma Ata protests had been caused by nationalism excesses. However, in 1987, the Central Committee of Kazakhstan tried to address some of the requests of the rioters. In June, indeed, it issued the decree: “On the Work of the Kazakh Republic Party Organisation to Provide Internationalist and Patriotic Education to Workers”, which, even if it labelled the December 1986 riots as “nationalist”, recognised the legitimacy of some of the rioters’ complaints, particularly regarding the lack of status about the language. The new First Secretary of the CPK, Gennadii Kolbin, moreover, promised to learn Kazakh and during the 7th Congress of Kazakh Journalists in 1987, he also affirmed that Kazakh should become the official language of the republic. He also established a Commission of nationalities, responsible for the development of a programme for the diffusion of the Kazakh language.²¹⁰

Most of Kolbin’s openings to the improvement of Kazakh culture and population status were merely formal. For instance, he allowed Kazakhs to celebrate *navruz*, an old Central Asian holyday, which celebrates the beginning of spring, while also conducting a campaign of purges within the CPK apparatus. The attack on Kunaev was, indeed, accompanied by a substitution of people loyal to the former first secretary with someone closer to Gorbachev and determined to pursue General Secretary’s programme of reforms. more.²¹¹ Kolbin affirmed that CPK and Kazakh government had been affected by clannism, nepotism and favouritism for years, while he guaranteed that any appointments onwards would have been based on merit. Yet, Kazakhs perceived Kolbin’s purges as a direct attack against them, perceiving such a policy as an extension of the campaign launched by central authorities against Central Asian apparatus since the begin of Rashidov affairs. A Kazakh poet, Olzahs Sulemeinov, labelled the Kolbin’s years as a “lesser 1937”, due to the number reached by his purges, which involved 630 gorkom and raikom party secretaries, as well as 65 obkom party secretaries and, finally, 16 people were excluded from the Central Committee. What weakened Kolbin the most, however, was his inability to reach the economic and administrative goals provided by the central institutions. The

²⁰⁸ Bess Brown, *The public role of perestroika in Central Asia*, Central Asian Survey, Vol.9, No. 1, pp.95-96

²⁰⁹ Bess Brown, *The public role in perestroika in Central Asia*, Central Asian Survey, 1990, vol.9 n.1, p.90

²¹⁰ Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p. 272

²¹¹ Martha Brill Olcott, *ibidem*, p. 273

agricultural production continued to decline during the Kolbin era while on the contrary, the industrial output began to rise, but the credits for such a result went to Nazarbayev who was looking for a way to improve the Kazakh industrial sector.

The explosion of nationalistic protests over the Soviet Union and in particular in the Baltics and the South Caucasus, made the Soviet institution more sensible to the “national question”. The turn in nationality policy was part of a political transformation, which Soviet Union experienced after the 19th Party Conference of CPSU, held in June-July 1988. Gorbachev called for the creation of a popularly elected legislature and for a weakening of central control over the republic. Such a statement made it clear that Kolbin was simply a buffer between Kunaev and new generation of Kazakh leaders.

Kolbin was definitively dismissed as First Secretary of Communist Party of Kazakhstan on 20 June 1989, because of a series of incidents that happened between Kazakhs and various north Caucasians, and which began on June 16 and lasted for more than a week. His successor was Nursultan Nazarbayev, who will become the future President of Kazakhstan. He acquired more and more prestige within the republic in 1988, so much that he came to overshadow Kolbin. His main success was his ability to bridge the gaps between Russians and Kazakhs, the two most important Kazakhstan’s ethnicities, remaining, without abandoning his loyalty to Gorbachev and his reform programme. Nazarbayev’s continuous support of Gorbachev’s reforms was particularly important, since it came from a non-Russian who had an important role in his own republic. Nazarbayev’s loyalty was adequately rewarded by Gorbachev, who aided the First Secretary of CPK to acquire national and also international visibility. Moreover, some reports affirmed that, if the USSR had not collapsed, Gorbachev had planned to nominate Nazarbayev as his deputy and head of the new Union.²¹²

Even if he had been appointed by the centre, the new course of the Soviet Union obliged Nazarbayev to implement some policies aimed to attract popular consensus. Firstly, he adopted a decree establishing Kazakh as the republic’s official language. Secondly, he restored the reputation of those national figures who had been victims of Stalin’s repression.

The ethnic policy implemented by Gorbachev meanwhile had proved a failure. Both Gorbachev’s opponents in Moscow and central authorities’ rivalries in the periphery exploited such a policy to weaken Gorbachev’s role and Soviet Union as a whole. Yet, it was a Russian, Boris Yeltsin, who pulled the trigger on Soviet Union disintegration. On June 1990, Russian

²¹²Martha Brill Olcott, *The Kazakhs*, Hoover Institution Press, 1995, p 278

Congress of People's passed, indeed, its own Declaration of Sovereignty, whose legal status was unclear, but which have a precise political meaning, i.e. the delegitimation of Gorbachev and Soviet Union's power of structure.

Russia's declaration of sovereignty was immediately followed by other republics. On July 16, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Ukraine adopted its own declaration of sovereignty, which called only for full autonomy, but for a separate national army.²¹³ Kazakhstan passed its own declaration of sovereignty on October, which firstly outlined the need for an inclusive Union and for a new Union Treaty.²¹⁴

On November 23, Gorbachev illustrated to the Supreme Soviet the draft Union Treaty. There were two main innovations in this draft; firstly, national republics were afforded more autonomy and powers, secondly, it created a Federation Council, a new policy making body made up of leaders from each republic. Moreover, in December 1990, Gorbachev suggested to call a referendum in the whole Soviet Union regarding the new Union Treaty. The referendum aimed to stop the "dark forces" of nationalism and to demonstrate that still existed a majority who supported Soviet Union. The referendum was held in 9 out of 15 national republics (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and the Baltic republics boycotted it). The question asked to Soviet citizens was "Do you consider it necessary to preserve the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics, in which the rights and freedom of the individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?"

Kazakhstan authorities were strongly committed to the preservation of Soviet Union and they outlined it in the February 1991 appeal for the referendum:

"Without doubt, in our mutual history there are serious reasons for mutual resentments, disillusionments and doubts. These have been given birth by decades of rule by a command-administrative system, usurping power in our common home, appropriating for itself the right to speak and act in the name of peoples. To do away with the totalitarian past is only possible together, only uniting efforts. The Kazakh people, and all the people of the republic do not conceive of themselves outside our united Fatherland, the preservation of which answers both the political and economic interests of multinational Kazakhstan. The collapse of the Union would inevitably bring with it the complete collapse of the economy of the republic, the sharp exacerbation of the standards of living of millions of people, would throw us all back whole decades, and would do irreparable harm to cooperation with countries of the world community. We do not have another path available,

²¹³ Valery Tishkov, *Ethnicity, Nationalism and conflict in and after the Soviet Union*, Sage Publications, 1997, pp. 48-51

²¹⁴ Henry E. Hale, *Cause without a Rebel: Kazakhstan's Unionist Nationalism in the USSR and the CIS*, Nationalities Papers, Vol. 37, no.1, January 2009, pp. 14-16

other than that towards the renewal of the Union on the basis of the conclusion of a Union Treaty between sovereign, equal republics”²¹⁵.

Kazakhs strongly confirmed their support for Soviet Union on the day of referendum; indeed, the 94% of the voters voted in favour of preserving the USSR, while only 5% opposed it.

Referendum clearly outlined how proud Kazakhs and Central Asian in general were to be part of the Soviet State. Any ethnic or national demands asking for a greater autonomy or for separatism emerged all over the region and the results of the referendum clearly demonstrated how it would have been for the new Central Asian states to create a new civic sense of “national” identities once Soviet Union collapsed.²¹⁶

Republics Passing the Referendum	For	Against
Azerbaijan	93.3%	5.8%
Belarus	82.7%	16.1%
Georgia (only Abkhazia)	98.6%	0.9%
Kazakhstan	94.1%	5.0%
Kyrgyzstan	94.6%	4.0%
Russia	71.3%	26.4%
Tajikistan	96.2%	3.1%
Turkmenistan	97.9%	1.7%
Ukraine	70.2%	28.0%
Uzbekistan	93.7%	5.2%
(Karakalpakia)	97.6%	1.8%
Republics Rejecting the Referendum	For	Against ^d
Armenia	1%	99%
Estonia	10%	90%
Latvia	25%	75%

On April, 23 Gorbachev and the leaders of the nine republics which held the referendum met at Novo-Ogarevo and signed the “9+1 agreement”, where they confirmed their commitment to work toward a revised Union Treaty. Yet, the event also obliged Gorbachev to recognise that those republics which were not participate could “decide their own fates, thereby sanctioning the partial breakup of the USSR”²¹⁷. During summer 1991, a draft Union Treaty was prepared. Kazakh, Russian, Uzbek, Tajik and Belorussian would have signed it on August 20, while the other four republics were scheduled to sign it later. Yet, the Union Treaty never entered into force, due to the failed coup of August 19, 1991. Nazarbayev strongly condemned the coup, supporting Gorbachev’s own call to preserve Union. Yet, many republics had already proclaimed their independence. The first Central Asian to gain independence was Uzbekistan. Islam Karimov, who became the President of Uzbekistan, had endorsed the coup, since he opposed the new Union Treaty. Once the coup failed, Karimov resigned from the CPSU

²¹⁵ Quoted in Henry E. Hale, *Cause without a Rebel: Kazakhstan’s Unionist Nationalism in the USSR and the CIS*, Nationalities Papers, Vol. 37, no.1, January 2009, p.14

²¹⁶ Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.162

²¹⁷ Mark Beissinger, *Nationalist Mobilization and the collapse of the Soviet Union*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.422

Politburo and affirmed that the preservation of the USSR was not anymore in Uzbek interests, therefore proclaiming Uzbekistan's independence on September 1, 1993.²¹⁸

On the contrary, Nazarbayev continued to support the necessity to keep Soviet Union alive on November 1991, affirming that Kazakhstan needed more than purely economic agreements between republics. Nevertheless, when the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus met on December 8, 1991, proclaiming the dissolution of the USSR and the creation of the CIS, Kazakhstan became independent by default. On December 16, 1991, on a strongly symbolic date, Kazakhstan became the last republic to declare the independence from the Soviet Union.²¹⁹

2.6 Conclusion

Soviet experience radically transformed Kazakhstan. Firstly, Kazakhstan emerged as a single national entity for the first time in its history, however, Kazakh lifestyle was totally transformed. Stalin's collectivisation program ended, indeed, once and for all the previous nomadic lifestyle; moreover, the massive migration and people deportation to Kazakhstan altered demographic equilibrium in the republic, making Kazakhs just a minority in the KSSR territory.

When Kazakhstan proclaimed its independence, it was the only former Soviet republic where titular nationality did not represent the majority. According to 1989 Soviet census, indeed, Kazakhs represented only the 43% of the KSSR population. Kazakhs were proud to be Soviet citizens and they witnessed such a feeling on March 1991 referendum. The sudden and undesired independence obliged Nazarbayev two main problems. Firstly, the necessity to create a Kazakh civic identity and secondly, the need to prevent any ethnic conflict in a State with more than one hundred nationalities.

²¹⁸ Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.162

²¹⁹ Henry E. Hale, *Cause without a Rebel: Kazakhstan's Unionist Nationalism in the USSR and the CIS*, Nationalities Papers, Vol. 37, no.1, January 2009, p.15

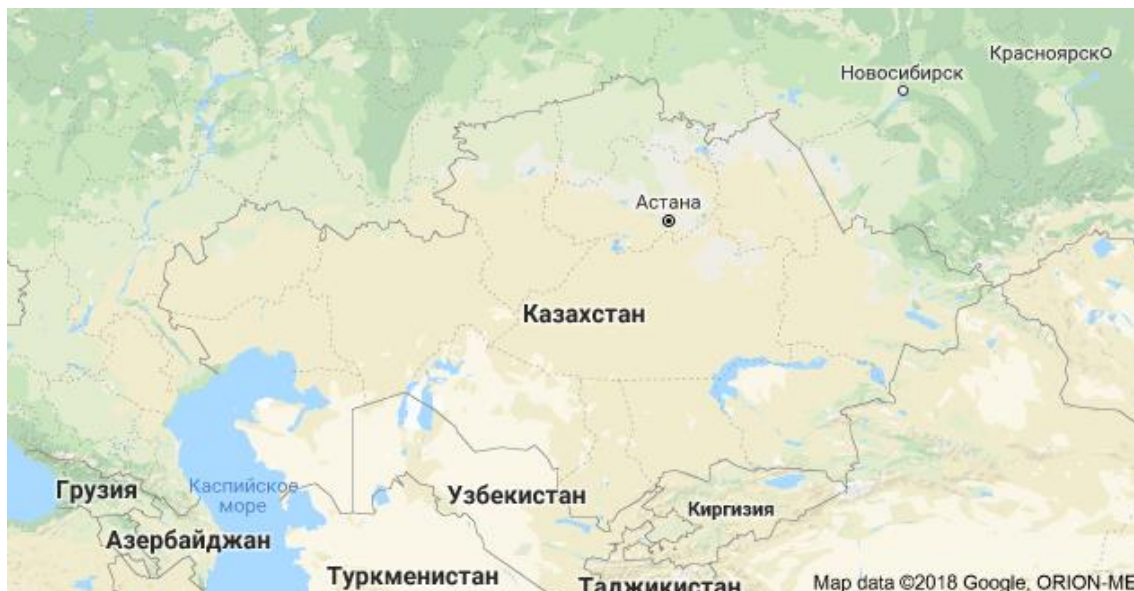
CHAPTER 3

Kazakh or Kazakhstani?

Kazakhstan nation building process between a civic and an ethnic identity.

Kazakhstan and the other four Central Asian Republics (CARs), Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, gained unexpected and unsought independence, once USSR collapsed on December 1991. In particular, Kazakhstan was the last former Soviet republic to proclaim its independence on December 16, 1991, a highly symbolic date, since five years earlier on this date riots broke out in Alma Ata against the decision to remove Kunaev from its post as First Secretary of CPK and to replace him with the Russian Gennadii Kolbin.

Independent Kazakhstan became the ninth largest country and the widest landlocked country in the world.



In the last year before the demise of the USSR, Kazakhstan and his President Nursultan Nazarbayev strove to keep Soviet Union alive. Kazakhstan authorities witnessed their support for the preservation of the USSR during the campaign referendum. In the appeal for the

referendum, indeed, they outlined that the collapse of the Union would be a disaster for Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev also actively supported the New Union Treaty, which was never ratified due to the August 18, 1991 coup.

Moreover, when Soviet Union definitively collapsed, Kazakhstan's government harshly promoted the necessity of an integration between the former Soviet republics. Indeed, at regular meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an organisation which gather most of the former Soviet republics, the president of Kazakhstan constantly tried to find a "hard core" of States within this Commonwealth, which wanted to pursue some form of political and economic integration. Yet, Russia saw the CIS more as a forum for "civilised divorce" rather than as body aimed to maintain cooperation and integration within the former Soviet space. On March 1994, therefore, Nazarbayev tried to stop trend toward disintegration in the post-Soviet area by proposing the creation of a Eurasian Union, shaped on the model of the EU. The project was not implemented at the time, however, since it did not meet Russia and other neighbouring countries approval.²²⁰ Economic reasons motivated Kazakhstan's pressure for integration amongst former Soviet republics. Nazarbayev and his top deputies, indeed believed that the breakdown of economic ties would have affected negatively economic production in Kazakhstan and elsewhere. Moreover, neo-independent Kazakhstan was hardly dependent on Russia's wide market, since, according to Nazarbayev, the most of Kazakh products could not be sold in the West, but they could be sold in an integrated CIS.²²¹

However, Kazakhstan had to face not only economic issues. Stalinist policies' before and Khrushchev's Virgin Lands later had made Kazakhstan the most international of the fifteen Soviet republics; indeed, Kazakhstan was the only republic where the titular nationality represented a minority, when Soviet Union collapsed. According to the last Soviet census in 1989, Kazakhs represented only 39.7% and therefore, they were easily overcome by the numerous minorities present in the republics, whose Russian represented the most important one, since they composed the 37,8 of the entire population.²²² Such a demographic situation avoided Kazakhstani government to undertake a purely nationalising policy.

The end of the first World War and the demise of the Soviet Union marked the definitively wane of the multinational empires and the birth of several new nation states. Analysing such

²²⁰Marlene Laruelle, *The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan. Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism*, in *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Y. Omelicheva, Lexington Books, 2015, p.8

²²¹ Henry E. Hale, *Cause Without a Rebel: Kazakhstan's Unionist Nationalism in the USSR and the CIS*, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 37, No.1, January 2009, pp. 15-16.

²²² Bhavna Dave, *Entitlement through numbers: nationality and language categories in the first post-Soviet census of Kazakhstan*, *Nations and Nationalities*, Vol. 10, No.4, 2004, p. 441.

dynamics, Rogers Brubaker elaborated the concept of ‘nationalizing states’. He outlined how the states emerging from the demise of an empire are “created as nation-states, legitimated by their claim to be states of and for particular nations”. Yet, according to Brubaker, such new independent states “were not only nation-States, but nationalising States, characterised, to differing degrees and in differing way by a distinctive politics of nationalization”.²²³

Brubaker stressed that five elements were necessary to label a state as a nationalising one. Firstly, the State must have a “core nation” different from an ethnic standpoint from the citizenry or the entire resident population of the state as a whole; secondly, the state is considered as the state “of and for the core nation”; thirdly, the titular nation found itself in a weak condition; fourthly, the state must act to empower the core nation and; finally, the core nation’s belief that the state must implement some remedial action to compensate it from discrimination previously suffered.²²⁴

However, Brubaker outlined that there were also other model in circulation, such as the model of “civic state”, where the key element was citizenry rather than ethnicity. He foresaw, yet, that “all the new states will be nationalizing to some degree and some forms”.²²⁵ Nevertheless, Brubaker himself described the “nationalising states” idea as an ambiguous concept in paper wrote in 2011, where he analysed projects and processes of nationalisation in post-Soviet states. In this new essay, he affirmed that is better to speak about nationalising discourses, policies, practices or practices in particular fields rather than of nationalising states tout court.²²⁶

Can we affirm that Kazakhstan is undertaking a nationalising process?

Certainly, since 1991 Kazakh government has implemented some nationalities policies, however, due to its complex demographic composition, Kazakhstan had undertaken also policies aimed to create a Kazakhstani civic identity rather than a simple Kazakh ethnic identity. Marlene Laruelle identified three different discursive paradigms that have oriented Kazakhstan’s formation of national identity since its independence. The first is Kazakhness, aimed to reinforce Kazakh position in their “own” republic. The second is Kazakhstanness, aimed to create a Kazakhstani civic identity, shaped on the model of Soviet nationality policy, where Kazakhs acted as the “older brother” as Russians did during the Soviet regime. The last paradigm identified by Laruelle is

²²³ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalizing states in the old ‘new’ Europe- and the new*, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Volume 19, Number 2, April 1996, p. 415

²²⁴ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalizing states revisited projects and processes of nationalization in post-Soviet states*, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 34, no.11, November 2011, pp. 1786

²²⁵ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalizing states in the old ‘new’ Europe- and the new*, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Volume 19, Number 2, April 1996, p. 433

²²⁶ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalizing states revisited projects and processes of nationalization in post-Soviet states*, Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 34, no.11, November 2011, pp. 1808

transnational paradigm, which is intrinsically linked with Nazarbayev's figure, which aimed to anchor Kazakhstan in international community.²²⁷

Since independence, Kazakhstani leadership and authorities have implemented a dualistic approach to the nationality question; on the one side, they supported the creation of a fully-fledged civic supra-ethnic Kazakhstani identity, on the other hand, yet, they backed Kazakh right for self-determination on their national "own" national territory. However, Kazakhstan's ruling elite also identified Kazakhstan international role and broad participation in the global arena as a main source of legitimation.

3. 1 Kazakhness and Kazakhization

A primary reference to Kazakhstan paradigm can be found in official texts. The first document where it appeared was the Declaration of Sovereignty of Kazakh SSR of October 1990, which affirmed that the republic:

"Bears the responsibility for the Kazakh nation" and the "rebirth and development of a specific culture, traditions, the language and reinforcing of national pride of the Kazakh nation and the other nationalities living in Kazakhstan constitutes one of the main missions of the statehood of the Republic of Kazakhstan".²²⁸

A direct reference to Kazakhness is present in Kazakhstan 1995 Constitution. The country's legal fundamental text outlined that a direct and indissoluble bond exist between the titular nation and the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan:

"We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic fate, creating a state of indigenous Kazakh land".²²⁹

Nonetheless, this Kazakhs status as *primus inter pares* is only symbolical, since the Constitution also affirmed that:

"No one shall be subjected to any discrimination for reasons of origin, social, property, status, occupation, race, nationality, language, attitude towards religion, convictions, place of residence or any other circumstances."²³⁰

²²⁷ Marlene Laruelle, *The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan. Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism*, in *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Y. Omelicheva, Lexington Books, 2015,

²²⁸ O Deklaratsii o Gosudarstvennom Suverenitete Respubliki Kazakhstan. Postanovlenie Verkhovnogo Soveta Kazakhskoi SSR ot 25ogo oktiabria 1990, adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/B900001700.

²²⁹ Preamble of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, <http://www.parlam.kz/en/constitution>

²³⁰ Article 14.2 of the 1995 Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, <http://www.parlam.kz/en/constitution>

Kazakhness can also be traced in presidential speeches. Historical reasons are the main source of legitimation of these claims, i.e. the fact that Kazakhs had always been present on the territory of the contemporary Kazakhstan and they occupied the whole steppe land even before that Russians came and settle it. In an address to the people of Kazakh released in 1999, president Nazarbayev affirmed:

“One and a half thousand years ago in the centre of the vast Eurasia appeared the great empire of ancient Turkic people. It continued in the form of powerful state confederations, which managed to subjugate the territory from Byzantine Empire to China. From these times, in northern Eurasia, where population patterns remain virtually unchanged and our ancestors live and lived today. The Great Kerei and Zanibek (founders of the Kazakh khanate in the XV century) created a political entity here. The past five centuries of our national history have been a history of the struggle for life-sustaining territory”.²³¹

The Nazarbayev’s rhetoric is typical of nationalising process, since nationalism it has always been both “root-seeking” and “root-generating”.²³² A fixed territory is, indeed, a key element of nationalism for two reasons; first, it can be the “repository of group memories and associations”, and, secondly, a community can instil in it particular meanings related to its own personal history.²³³

Claims of rightful ownership play a fundamental role in new-independent state, such as Kazakhstan, since they allow to create an associational bond between the population who is witnessing the nationalising process and its homeland.²³⁴

Paradoxically, the wide promotion of Kazakhness and the attempt to create a direct link between Kazakhs and the territory of the republic of Kazakhstan has led to the re-emergence of Kazakh historical subdivisions, since they began to perceive clan’s affiliation as a distinctive mark, in a state where there was (and still is) a prominent Slavic minority.²³⁵

However, this has not been the only action undertook to promote kazakhization. Another example has also been the steady displacement of non-titular nationalities from public sector.

²³¹ Quoted in Erlan Karin, Andrei Chebotarev, *The Policy of Kazakhization in State and Government Institutions in Kazakhstan in The Nationalities Question in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*, edited by Nurbulat Masanov, Erlan Karin, Andrei Chebotarev, Natsuko Oka, Middle East Studies Series, 2002, p. 5

²³² Antony Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Blackwell Publishers, 1986.

²³³ Alexander C. Diener, *National Territory and the Reconstruction of History in Kazakhstan*, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 2002, Vol. 43, No. 8, p.634.

²³⁴ Alexander C. Diener, *National Territory and the Reconstruction of History in Kazakhstan*, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 2002, Vol. 43, No. 8, p.635

²³⁵ Edward Schatz, *The Politics of Multiple Identities: Lineage and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.52, No. 3, 2000, p.499

This “nationalisation by stealth”²³⁶ has been particularly apparent in power position, since the percentage of non-Kazakh in high level state posts drastically decreased from 50% to 25% between 1985 and 1994. In southern Kazakhstan oblasts, only few non-Kazakh who had a working knowledge of the state language (Kazakh) held high-level office.²³⁷

As Cummings noted, ethnic homogenization had a precise rationale, i.e. to “consolidate and centralised the face of power”.²³⁸ Moreover, the ethnic homogenisation of power has been particularly relevant in the northern and eastern oblasts, allowing the government to better anchor these provinces in the new Kazakhstani state. In these areas indeed, Slav population constituted respectively the 62% and 66% of the whole population,²³⁹ that is why Nazarbayev also undertook an ethno-territorial gerrymandering aimed to create clear Kazakh majorities in each of Kazakhstan’s oblasts, reducing the possibility of a secession of any region.²⁴⁰

Kazakhness has also been displayed in Kazakh state symbol, such as the flag and the emblem and the anthem, which are key element of a state’s identity. Olcott affirmed that most of the symbols of post-independent Kazakh are “drawn from Kazakh history or culture ”.²⁴¹

The flag is blue, the colour associated with the Turkic Khanate, which dominated the region before Mongols and Kazakhs.²⁴² The golden eagle, known as Berkut, stemmed from Kazakh traditional culture too, being related with the Kazak nomadic culture. However, both the two colours and the eagle could have different meanings and could be interpreted in various way by every nationality living within the Kazakhstan territory, allowing Kazakhstan’s flag to be perceived as a widely inclusive symbol.²⁴³

²³⁶ Annette Bohr, *The Central Asian States as nationalising regimes*, in *Nation Building in Post-Soviet Borderlands*, edited by Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, Edward Allworth, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 142

²³⁷ Edward Schatz, *The Politics of Multiple Identities: Lineage and Ethnicity in Kazakhstan*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.52, No. 3, 2000, p. 496 However, most of the Russian population lived in the five northern district of the republic, which, nevertheless, never formed a single Russian ethnic region, such as Trans-Dniester in the Moldova republic.

²³⁸ Sally N. Cummings, *Kazakhstan. An uneasy relationship power and authority in the Nazarbayev regime* in *Power and Change in Central Asia*, edited by Sally N. Cummings, Routledge, 2002, p. 67

²³⁹ Sally N. Cummings, *Kazakhstan. An uneasy relationship power and authority in the Nazarbayev regime* in *Power and Change in Central Asia*, edited by Sally N. Cummings, Routledge, 2002, pp. 66-67

²⁴⁰ Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, pp.137-138

²⁴¹ Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*, United Book Press, 2010, p.52

²⁴² Shirin Akiner, *The Formation of Kazakh identity: from tribe to nation-state*, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995, p.61

²⁴³ Ayşegül Aydingün, *State Symbols and National Identity Construction in Kazakhstan in The Past as a Resource in the Turkic Speaking World*, edited by İldikö Beller-Hann, Orient-Institut Istanbul, 2016, pp. 144-145

On the contrary, the State emblem is more entrenched with the titular nationality culture. It involves a *shanyrak* that is a fundamental keystone, which holds the yurt together. It has a sacred value in Kazakh culture and it also represents the homeland of all Kazakh people.²⁴⁴

Kazakhness has also been promoted through national cinematography and the state-run company, Kazakhfilm. Example of these narratives are moves such as *Nomad* (2005), *The Sky of My Childhood* (2011), and *Warriors of my steppe* (2012), which show the Kazakh heroism throughout centuries, representing epic battles fought by Kazakh ancestors, such as those against Djungars as well as Russians.²⁴⁵

Kazakhness has been rarely the rationale for country's public policies, however, there are two main exceptions, i.e. the language policy and ethnic Kazakhs diaspora (called *Oralmandar* from Kazakh verb *oralu* to return) from abroad.

3.1.1 Language Policy

During the Soviet era, the Russification policy, the presence of a great number of Russian speakers on the Kazakh SSR territory and their concentration in political, economic and cultural centres threatened the status of Kazakh in its eponymous republic. The percentage of Kazakh who spoke Russian fluently constantly increased throughout Soviet era, passing from 41,6% in 1970 and reaching 62,8% in 1989, while just 15 of Russian affirmed to be fluent in Kazakh, when Soviet Union collapsed.

The most affected were urban Kazakhs, indeed, since Russian and Slav populations lived principally in the city, they found themselves trapped in an assimilation/separation dilemma. They were encouraged to acquire proficiency in Russian, since this was a fundamental requisite to gain any social advancement, indeed without Russian fluency there were few possibilities to get any symbolic and national resources. Nevertheless, marginalisation of Kazakh led local elites to criticise status quo and voice their complaints, when Gorbachev began his reforms programme. Indeed, Kazakh preserve its symbolic value as a marker of ethnic identity all over Soviet era, even if its prestige and material value decreased.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ Marlene Laruelle, *The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan. Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism*, in *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Y. Omelicheva, Lexington Books, 2015, p.3

²⁴⁵ Rico Isaacs, *Nomads, Warriors and Bureaucrats: Nation-Building and Film in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*, *Nationalities Papers*, 2015, Vol. 43, No.3, pp. 403- 406.

²⁴⁶ Juldyz Smagulova, *Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitudes and Use*, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, Vol.11, Nos. 3&4, 2008, pp. 445-446.

In a multicultural or a multilingual environment language plays a key role, since it represents the closer nexus between cultural and material anxieties. Many Kazakh public figures and bureaucrats used slogan such as a “nation cannot exist without its language”, a motto evoked also in post-colonialist states, such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia. In early 1990, Kazakh linguists and nationalists used to compare their situation to that of Red Indians of America, echoing feelings already manifested by other beleaguered nationalities, who protested against the political and cultural domination of outsiders on their “own” national territory. The attempt to restore the primacy of indigenous language using remedial legislative measure has been typical of all these instances. Kazakh had already been declared “state language” in 1989 by the Supreme Soviet of the KSSR, Russian being labelled as the language of “inter-ethnic communication”. However, this law was only the result of a union-wide trend and did not stem from a mobilisation on ethnic lines within the KSSR borders. Once Kazakhstan became independent the main issue faced by Kazakh elite this field was whether the native language should become or not the only state language. Who believed that Kazakh should be acknowledged as the sole state language advanced three different reasons to validate their claims. Firstly, the restoration of Kazakh status in its historical homeland; secondly, they claimed that being Kazakh a weak and poorly developed language, it would not survive if bilanguage would have been preserved; finally, state security concerns.²⁴⁷

The first Kazakhstani Constitution, introduced in January 1993, confirmed bilingualism. Indeed, on the one hand, it confirmed to Kazakh the status of “state language”, already acknowledged by the 1989 Language Law, but, on the other hand, the 1993 Constitution also defined Russian as the “language of inter-ethnic communication”.²⁴⁸ This document, moreover, affirmed that the state guaranteed: “The preservation of the use of the language of inter-ethnic communication and other language”.²⁴⁹ Moreover, the text prohibited any form of discrimination based on the lack of knowledge of Russian or Kazakh.²⁵⁰

Only the second Kazakhstan Constitution introduced in August 1995 weakened the official status of Russian in Kazakhstan. It defined Kazakh as the “sole state language”²⁵¹. The rationale

²⁴⁷ Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, pp 98-99.

²⁴⁸ Renata Matuszkiewicz, *“The language issue in Kazakhstan institutionalising new ethnic relations after independence”*, *Economic and Environmental Studies*, Vol.10, No.2, p.219,

²⁴⁹ Quoted in Michele E. Commercio, *“The ‘Pugachev Rebellion’ in the Context of Post-Soviet Kazakh Nationalization”*, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol.32, No.1, March 2004, p.96

²⁵⁰ Renata Matuszkiewicz, *“The language issue in Kazakhstan institutionalising new ethnic relations after independence”*, *Economic and Environmental Studies*, Vol.10, No.2, p.219,

²⁵¹ Article 7.1 of 1995 Kazakhstan Constitution, <http://www.parlam.kz/en/constitution>

for this monolingual approach was the need to define the identity of newly independent Kazakhstan. Territorial principle had a key role in this choice, since “Kazakh is the land of Kazakhs who speak Kazakh and Kazakhs are the state-forming nation”.²⁵² The main purpose of Kazakhstan’s language legislation is to improve the status of Kazakh vis-à-vis Russian, given that Kazakh has been treated as a minority language in its own republic long enough. The Kazakhstani Constitution established too that a proficient knowledge of Kazakh is necessary for the highly symbolic position of the President of the state and the Chairperson of Parliament. In 2006 address to the people of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev affirmed that development has been hindered by the lack of Kazakh proficiency and resistance to in official and public domains, since economic power cannot be gained without a consolidated nation and a common state language is a means of such unification.²⁵³ Therefore, Nazarbayev believed that Kazakhstan could not reach its strategic goal of enter in the club of the 30 countries more economically developed, as stated in Kazakhstan 2050 strategy, without improving Kazakh language status.

The codification of Kazakh as the sole state language did not mean, however, that Russian lost any significance in Kazakhstan. The 1995 Constitution states, indeed, that “In state institutions and local self-administrative bodies the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazakh language”. One year later, the “Conception of Language Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan” released on November 4, 1996 even if outlines the necessity to create “appropriate conditions for developing Kazakh as the state language to guarantee an increase in its demands and functions”, also stated that Russian can be used as an official language.²⁵⁴

Yet, the main focus of Kazakhstan language policies has always been younger generations, since obviously it was more difficult for Russian speaking adults to learn a new language regardless of their ethnic background. During the Soviet period, the inequality in power distribution and the difficult possibilities given by education in Kazakh compared to Russian, relegated Kazakh language schools in urban areas to a secondary status. According to the 1989 Soviet census, the 75,3% of urban Kazakhs was fluent in Russian, while only the 1% of ethnic Russian affirmed to speak the state language.²⁵⁵ Laitin explained such a trend in this way:

²⁵² Principles of Formation of State Identity of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1996.

²⁵³ Juldyz Smagulova, *Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitudes and Use*, International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, Vol.11, Nos. 3&4, 2008, pp. 449- 453.

²⁵⁴ Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, p. 101.

²⁵⁵ Juldyz Smagulova, *Language Policies of Kazakhization and Their Influence on Language Attitudes and Use*, International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism, Vol.11, Nos. 3&4, 2008, pp. 445

“For Kazakhs, the motivation to learn Russian was to become in Abram de Swaan’s formulation, ‘monopoly mediators’ standing between the Russian rule at the centre and Kazakh society in the periphery. Those who learned Russian and developed other forms of cultural capital enabling them to earn the trust of Soviet officials were not only able to get higher education (unavailable in Kazakh), but were also able to advance to positions of local or regional authority”²⁵⁶

At the same time, Russian replaced Kazakh also as home language in urban Kazakh families. Kazakhstan witnessed the peak of this kind of shift in family language practices between 1960s and 1980s, when an increasing number of Kazakh parents chose Russian as the language of child-rearing. Since 1991, Kazakhstan experienced several changes in the educational sphere, such as the re-establishment of schooling in Kazakh. Moreover, Kazakh has become a compulsory subject in Russian medium schools and a language component has also been included in the national standardised test, which everyone must do both to exit school and to be admitted in a university.

These and other changes, such as let pupils learn the new anthem in Kazakh have had important consequences on the educational field. Popular support for Kazakh language education has also increased. The enrolment in Kazakh medium school, indeed, has constantly increased and at same time, the enrolment in Russian language has rapidly diminished. The percentage of pupils enrolled in Kazakh language school passed from 30,7% to 59,3% between 1988-1989 until 2006-2007²⁵⁷, 781 new Kazakh language schools appeared from 1991 to 2007.²⁵⁸ Moreover, almost 89% of Kazakh children attend Kazakh medium schools, nearly double 1991 share, when the percentage was just 34,4%.²⁵⁹

However, situation radically differ between urban and rural areas, the 80% of Kazakh schools are in rural areas, while Russian medium schools are still the majority in the urban areas. The number of students enrolled in Russian language schools is 1.9 times higher in Kazakhstan cities vis-à-vis rural areas.

Russian is still the most used language in public domains, and it is the medium chose by the intelligentsia too. However, younger generations are more likely to affirm that they speak Kazakh than their parent or elder people. Correspondingly, teacher also appear to be the more

²⁵⁶ David Laitin, *“Identity in Formation: The Russian-speaking Population in the Near Abroad”*, Cornell University Press, 1998, p.71

²⁵⁷ Olga Altybenkova, *Linguistic shifts in Kazakhstan’s education space*, in *The dynamics of the language situation in Kazakhstan*, edited by Eleonora Suleimenova, Almaty, pp. 295-341

²⁵⁸ Marat Kuzakov, *Tri-unity of language policy*. Megapolis, http://www.megapolis.kz/show_article.php?art_id=6325

²⁵⁹ United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Kazakhstan: Report on Human Development*, Almaty, 1992.

prone to use Kazakh at work. Therefore, school seems the domain, where Kazakh is used the most.²⁶⁰

Furthermore, most ethnic Kazakhs considered the establishment of Kazakh as the state language and its promotion in an important marker of their sovereignty and their identity as a nation. However, Kazakh became one of the most important symbol of national identity, when Kazakhstan gained independence, and this helped the ‘state language’ to acquire a status and a prestige unimaginable previously. Moreover, these propitious conditions allowed Kazakh national elites to alter the image of Kazakh, transforming it from a low-prestige language to one of a higher status.²⁶¹

3.1.1.1 The switch from Cyrillic to Latin alphabet.

The most important decision in the sphere of language policy has been taken on May 2017, when President Nazarbayev announced that Kazakh language would have adopted Latin alphabet. This decision has already implemented by other former Soviet republics, such as Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan. Yet, Kazakhstan’s peculiar demographic situation and the wide Russification suffered by Kazakh culture during Soviet era made difficult to for Kazakhstan’s leadership to take such a choice.

How to transcribe Kazakh became, however, a hard issue to face. Kazakhstani government had two viable options, i.e. to follow the Turkish model, which uses the Latin script, but also including some symbols that help to clarify pronunciation or create alternative phonetic pointers. The first option was the one preferred by Kazakh linguists, but President’s office rejected this idea, declaring that it was a non-starter, because Turkish style markers did not feature a standard keyboard.²⁶²

The first transcription proposed, however, raised a lot of criticism, due to the elevate numbers of apostrophes present that make Kazakh language difficult to read, so on February 20, 2018 the President issued a decree eliminating apostrophes and replacing them with diacritical signs above letters.²⁶³

²⁶⁰ Juldyz Smagulova, *The Re-Acquisition of Kazakh: Achievements and Challenges in Language change in Central Asia*, edited by Elise S. Ahn and J. Smagulova, De Gruyter Mouton, 2016 pp 89-109.

²⁶¹ Bhavna Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power*, Routledge, 2007, p.101

²⁶² Andrew Higgins, *Kazakhstan Cheers New Alphabet, Except for All Those Apostrophes*, The New York Times, January 15, 2018,

²⁶³ RFE/RL’s Kazakh Service, *No Apostrophe: Nazarbayev Decree Spells Out Changes In New Latin Alphabet for Kazakhstan*, February 20, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kazakhstan-latin-alphabet-drop-apostrophes/29050511.html>

The decision to switch alphabet could have important consequences for Kazakhstan. Firstly, it could distance the Central Asian state from the Russian world. Secondly, it could deepen the differences between Kazakh majority and Russian speaking majority. Thirdly, it could move Kazakhstan closer to other Turkic nations in Central Asia, South Caucasus, and even within the borders of Russian Federation.²⁶⁴

The switch from Cyrillic to Latin script has been harshly criticised by the Russian Orthodox Church and Russian nationalists who labelled the decision as a sell-out to the West and an attack to Russian culture.

However, there is also who has denied that this step will deepen the divide between Kazakhstan and the Russian world. Charles van der Leeuw has affirmed that claiming that Kazakhstan is moving away from Russia due to this decision: “It is like affirming that after the completion of Brexit process everybody in continental Europe will stop speaking English. Political zeal is one thing, social realities are another”.²⁶⁵

3.1.2 Oralmandar

The second important kazakhification policy implemented by post- independent Kazakhstani leadership was the repatriation policy aimed to take back Kazakh diaspora to its own homeland.²⁶⁶ Once Soviet Union collapsed, several states adopted homeland stances. Political and cultural elites built up nationalising discourse in these states aimed to outline the bond between titular nationality and their eponymous state. Through such a narrative, republican leaderships stated that they bear responsibility not only for their citizens, but also for diaspora communities. Kazakhstan belonged to those states which adopted such a narrative. Its leadership described Kazakhstan leadership did not only affirm that it bear responsibility for Kazakh diaspora’s protection, but also invited Kazakh living abroad to return to their homeland, both

²⁶⁴ Paul Goble, *With New Alphabet, Kazakhstan Moves Decisively Away from Russian World*, The Jamestown Foundation, Global Research & Analysis, <https://jamestown.org/new-alphabet-kazakhstan-moves-decisively-away-russian-world/>

²⁶⁵ Charles van der Leeuw, *Kazakhstan to Switch from Cyrillic to Latin*, Stratfor Worldview, June 27, 2017, <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/kazakhstan-switch-cyrillic-latin>

²⁶⁶ Marlene Laruelle, *The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan. Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism*, in *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Y. Omelicheva, Lexington Books, 2015, p.5

through public speeches and in Kazakh-language print media.²⁶⁷ In 2009, still 4,1 million of Kazakhs lived abroad. The most important Kazakh minority lived in China, where there are 1,250,500 Kazakhstan, nevertheless important Kazakh community are also present in Uzbekistan (899,195) and Mongolia (145,00).²⁶⁸

In September 1992, the first Qurultay²⁶⁹ of the World Kazakhs was held, marking a new period for Kazakhs and Kazakh diaspora. This meeting gathered in Kazakhstan the representatives of the Kazakh diaspora. Kazakh language print-media described the First Qurultay as an historic event, since it allowed Kazakhs from every part of the world to meet. President Nazarbayev speaking at First Qurultay outlined that Kazakhstan's independence was an important opportunity to extend country's ability to serve as homeland both for people living within its borders, but also for Kazakh diaspora outside them. The spirit of Nazarbayev's speech is perfectly summoned by these words: "We have only one homeland in the world and that is independent Kazakhstan".²⁷⁰

Kazakhstan's ethnic repatriation policy aimed to pursue different goals. Firstly, Kazakhstan leadership wanted to shift country's ethnic balance, therefore making Kazakhs the majority in their eponymous nation.²⁷¹ As I have aforementioned, the last Soviet census outlined that Kazakhstan was the only SSR, where the titular nationality did not represent the absolute majority in its own republics. However, the situation radically changed during the 1990s, indeed the emigration of non-titular members, the Kazakhs higher birth rate and the return of Kazakh diaspora let the titular nation to become the 53,3% of the entire republic population, according to 1999 first post-independent census.²⁷² Since independence until 2012, nearly one million *Oralmandar* came back to their 'homeland'. They set themselves up in the Kazakhstan northern regions, which were populated mainly by Russian when Kazakhstan gained independence. In 2012, the *Oralmandar* programme was temporarily stopped, however it was reified in March 2014,²⁷³ when an official order established that all returnees had to settle in Akmola, Atyrau,

²⁶⁷ Isik Kuscu Bonnefant, *Constructing the homeland: Kazakhstan's discourse and policies surrounding its ethnic return-migration policy*, Central Asian Survey, Vol 31, No.1, March 2012, p.31

²⁶⁸ *Demographical Annual Report of Kazakhstan in 2009: Statistical Reports*.

²⁶⁹ Kurultay is a Turkish word and indicated a political and military council of ancient Mongol and some Turkic chiefs and khans.

²⁷⁰ Isik Kuscu Bonnefant, *Constructing the homeland: Kazakhstan's discourse and policies surrounding its ethnic return-migration policy*, Central Asian Survey, Vol 31, No.1, March 2012, pp. 32-33.

²⁷¹ Cynthia Ann Werner, Celia Emmelhainz & Holly Barcus, *Privileged Exclusion in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Ethnic Return Migration, Citizenship, and the Politics of (Not) Belonging*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 69, No.10, December 2017, 1557-1583

²⁷² Bhavna Dave, *Entitlement through numbers: nationality and language categories in the first post-Soviet census of Kazakhstan*, Nations and Nationalism, No.4, 2004, pp.439-459.

²⁷³ Alexander Diener, "Assessing potential Russian irredentism and separatism in Kazakhstan's northern oblasts", Eurasian Geography and Economics, Vol.56, N.5, 2015, p. 478

West Kazakhstan, Kostanay, Pavlodar, North-Kazakhstan and East-Kazakhstan. All these regions but Akmola possessed a large Russian population, however, all of these oblasts border with Russian Federation.²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, a new order was issued soon after, claiming that *Oralmandar* could settle in any of 14 Kazakhstani districts.²⁷⁵

Secondly, the Kazakhstan's repatriation policy was also aimed to redress historical grievances.²⁷⁶ However, President Nazarbayev has had an ambiguous attitude in this respect, indeed, on the one hand, he outlined the sufferings of the Kazakh people on their own land, due to several dramatic events. This narrative also allowed Nazarbayev and the post-independence leadership to distance itself from Tsarist and Soviet era. However, on the other hand, Nazarbayev also avoided to blame other nationalities present in Kazakhstan for these dramatic events. In this way, Nazarbayev rejected Kazakh nationalists' position, who saw Russian living in Kazakhstan as remnants of the old colonial power. This Nazarbayev's position is paradigmatic of his stance regarding Kazakh nation-building, where he tried to find a compromise between ethnic and civic elements.²⁷⁷

This programme also allowed indirectly the revival of Kazakh language, since Kazakhs living in China and Mongolia preserved Kazakh customs and tradition to a greater extent than Kazakhstani Kazakhs. Since 1992, almost one million diasporic Kazakhs return to their "homeland", whose more than 640,000 came from the former Soviet republics, in particular Uzbekistan, and 110,000 from Mongolia. They represented almost 6% of the entire Kazakh population in 2017. However, *Oralmandar*, in particular those from Mongolia, had to face a reality rather different from that imagined. Kazakhstani Kazakhs had lost, indeed, the most of ancient traditions, due to the Russian and Soviet influence, and the poor knowledge of Russian was also an important issue for "returnees".²⁷⁸

Furthermore, the government attitude toward *Oralmandar* also changed all over the years. Nazarbayev speeches well witnessed such a shift. During the second Qurultay of the World

²⁷⁴ Joanna Lillis, "Kazakhstan: Astana Entices Kazakhs from Abroad amidst Ukraine Crisis", Eurasianet, July 14, 2014, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/68218>, access on May 23, 2018.

²⁷⁵ Bruce Pannier, "A Tale of Russian Separatism in Kazakhstan", RFE/RFL, August 3, 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/qishloq-ovozi-kazakhstan-russian-separatism/25479571.html>, access on May 23, 2018.

²⁷⁶ Cynthia Ann Werner, Celia Emmelhainz & Holly Barcus, *Privileged Exclusion in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Ethnic Return Migration, Citizenship, and the Politics of (Not) Belonging*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 69, No.10, December 2017, 1557-1583

²⁷⁷ Isik Kuscu Bonnefant, *Constructing the homeland: Kazakhstan's discourse and policies surrounding its ethnic return-migration policy*, Central Asian Survey, Vol 31, No.1, March 2012, pp. 32-33.

²⁷⁸ Cynthia Ann Werner, Celia Emmelhainz & Holly Barcus, *Privileged Exclusion in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan: Ethnic Return Migration, Citizenship, and the Politics of (Not) Belonging*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 69, No.10, December 2017, 1557-1583

Association of Kazakhs in 2007, the President of Kazakhstan still continued to show his enthusiasm for the return of co-ethnics to their homelands, however, he also outlined that they should not expect that government do everything for them. Nazarbayev was even more critical during his speech at the Third Qurultay in 2005, when he affirmed “Our brother who is migrating to his historical homeland should not think in terms of what Kazakhstan will give him, but what he can give to Kazakhstan”.²⁷⁹

Finally, the raising level of xenophobia toward *Oralmandar* among the Kazakhstani Kazakhs population has hindered a real integration of the former into post-independent Kazakhstan.²⁸⁰

The reason why Kazakhstani government has not pursued a fully-fledged nationalising policy had historical roots. Nazarbayev emerged as a national leader during the December 1986 riots. In this occasion, he was obliged to take a pro-Moscow’s stance, and he at last came out as a winner from the situation by being appointed as Party leader in 1989, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet in 1990, and, finally, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on December 1991. Kazakhstan’s leadership ambivalence toward national question was still present in the first year of independence, when the main nationalist parties, *Zheltoksan*, *Alash* and *Azat*, positioned themselves against the local former communist elites, therefore against President Nazarbayev too. Since the early years of independence Kazakh nationalists were Nazarbayev main political rivalries. Still today, the main opposition came from Kazakh nationalist, in particular younger generations, who use social media to embrace and share nationalistic themes, above all against Russian policy of Eurasian Union.²⁸¹

Moreover, Kazakhstan demographic situation has been an obstacle for Kazakh leadership, which has not allowed to implement a purely nationalising policy.

The last element which explained Kazakhstani government ambiguity toward Kazakhness is the bond between this paradigm and Islam, since the regime has always been wary of conflating Islam and national identity. As Maria Omelicheva affirmed: “President Nazarbayev opted for

²⁷⁹ Isik Kuscu Bonnefant, *Constructing the homeland: Kazakhstan’s discourse and policies surrounding its ethnic return-migration policy*, Central Asian Survey, Vol 31, No.1, March 2012, p. 35

²⁸⁰ Marlene Laruelle, *The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan. Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism*, in *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Y. Omelicheva, Lexington Books, 2015, p.6

²⁸¹ Marlene Laruelle, *The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan. Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism*, in *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Y. Omelicheva, Lexington Books, 2015, pp.4-5

the superordinate concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘faith’ as the substitutes for Islam”, using general religious values as a symbol of the nation’s unity.²⁸²

3.2 Kazakhstanness and Civic Kazakhstani Identity

Since 1991, severely scholars have emphasised the nationalising attitude of Kazakh national building. Svanberg who wrote just few years after independence, in 1994, outlined Nazarbayev’s regime overemphasis on ethnic Kazakh identity, rather than on a more inclusive civic one.²⁸³ Fierman foresaw that the support for Kazakh nationalism would have grown as rural to urban migration of unskilled workers rose.²⁸⁴ Surucu underlined the increasing association between opposition parties and “cosmopolitans”.²⁸⁵ Finally, Commercio went even further affirming Kazakhstan could be considered as a “nationalising state”, which was striving to build a fully-fledged ethnic identity.²⁸⁶

Kazakhstan has certainly adopted nationalising policies all over its more than 25 years of independence, however to affirm that Kazakhstani leadership has pursued a one-side process, focused only on ethnic Kazakhs, would mean to overemphasize such a trend.

Kazakhstan’s leadership has also embraced, on the contrary, an internationalist rhetoric, trying to guarantee a peaceful coexistence between various nationalities living in Kazakhstan. Moreover, Kazakhstan constitution openly acknowledges country’s commitment to develop the national cultures and traditions and, furthermore, forbids to incite “social, racial, national, religious, clan and tribal enmity”.²⁸⁷

Kazakhstan tenuous nationalist attitude could be better explained by means of comparison with other former Soviet republics, which could be easily classified as “nationalising states”, such as Estonia and Latvia.

²⁸² Maria Omelicheva, *Islam in Kazakhstan: A Survey of Trends and Conditions for Securitization*, Central Asia Survey, Vol.30, No.2, 2011, pp. 243-256

²⁸³ Ingvar Svanberg, *In search of a Kazakhstani identity*, Journal of Area Studies, no. 4, 1994, pp. 113-123

²⁸⁴ William Fierman, *Changing urban demography and the prospects of nationalism in Kazakhstan*, Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism, XXVII, pp.7-19

²⁸⁵ Cengiz Surucu, *Modernity, Nationalism, Resistance: Identity Politics in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*, Vol. 21 No.4, pp. 385-402

²⁸⁶ Michele E. Commercio, *The ‘Pugachev Rebellion’ in the Context of Post-Soviet Kazakh Nationalization*, Nationalities Papers, Vol.32, No.1, March 2004, pp. 87-113

²⁸⁷ Article 5 1995 Constitution of Kazakhstan, <http://www.parlam.kz/en/constitution>

This different attitude is particularly apparent in the citizenship policies implemented by Kazakhstan and the two Baltic states. When Soviet Union collapsed both Estonia and Latvia preferred not to adopt an “inclusive model”, deciding to give citizenship only to those who have been citizens of interwar Estonia and Latvia and to their descendants. The residual population, therefore the most of the Russophone population, had to apply for naturalisation, after living for a certain period in the country.²⁸⁸ Until 1998, Latvia imposed quota on nationalisation, moreover, both Estonia and Latvia required fluency in their own state language to obtain citizenship. These two Baltic countries undertook nationalising policies which excluded Russophone minority from the initial shaping of basic structure of the state.²⁸⁹ For instance, Russian held just 7% of seats in the first Latvian Parliament, even if they represented the 34% of the population in 1989, while they held no seat in the first Estonian Parliament.²⁹⁰

Kazakhstan’s 1991 Law on Citizenship guaranteed, on the contrary, citizenship to everyone who “permanently resides in the Republic of Kazakhstan on the days this law goes into effect or acquire citizenship policy in accordance with law”.²⁹¹ Kazakhstan’s citizenship policy recognised, therefore, the equality of Kazakh and Russian in the new independent state, bequeathing them the same rights, privilege and responsibilities. However, Kazakhstan citizenship policy forbids dual citizenship policy, a ban that disadvantages above all Russians, since it makes more difficult to keep professional and personal ties in Russia.²⁹² Moreover, 1993 Constitution allowed Kazakhstan diaspora to hold dual citizenship, however, such a provision has been stripped away in 1995 Constitution, due to Russian population criticism.²⁹³

Kazakhstan reality is also radically different vis-à-vis other Central Asian state. Former Turkmenistan’s president, Nyzayov enacted a bold policy of Turkmenisation and de-Russification. Similarly, the first president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, who died in 2016, pursued a national-building policy, primarily focused on ethnic components, glorifying Uzbek all over other ethnicities.

²⁸⁸ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalizing states revisited projects and processes of nationalization in post-Soviet states*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 34, no.11, November 2011, pp. 1802

²⁸⁹ Priit Jarve, “*Estonian citizenship: Between ethnic preferences and democratic obligations*”, in *Citizenship Policies in the New Europe: Expanded and Updated Edition*, edited by Rainer Baubock, Bernhard Perching and Wiebke Sievers, Amsterdam University Press, p. 47

²⁹⁰ Graham Smith, *Nation re-building, identity politics in Baltics states*, in *Nation Building in Post-Soviet Borderlands*, edited by Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, Edward Allworth, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.99

²⁹¹ Zakon Respubliki Kazakhstan o Grazhdanstve Respubliki Kazakhstan, 20 December 1991, Article 3.

²⁹² Michele E. Commercio, “*The ‘Pugachev Rebellion’ in the Context of Post-Soviet Kazakh Nationalization*”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol.32, No.1, March 2004, p.94

²⁹³ Sally N. Cummings, “*Kazakhstan. Power and the Elite*”, Palgrave MacMillan, 2005, p. 86

Nyazyov's regime was the one implementing the harshest language policy. It marginalised all non-Turkmen languages in public spaces, including Russian. Moreover, Turkmenistani leadership closed all non-Turkmen schools or turned them into mixed schools, while higher education gradually shifted to the exclusive use of Turkmen; furthermore, Russian is not anymore, a compulsory subject in the school curriculum.

Finally, Turkmenistan government limited the possibility for Turkmenistani citizens to subscribe foreign newspapers and magazines and closed Russian language broadcast within the country, allowing country's linguistic nationalisation.²⁹⁴

Kazakhstan's 1997 Law on Language also established that use of Kazakh language had to be tantamounted to that of other language, i.e. Russian. However, TV stations feared to lose their advertisement when broadcasting in Kazakhstan, so they continued to broadcast prime time shows in Russian, while using Kazakh for late night or early morning programmes.²⁹⁵

3.2.1 The Assembly of People(s) of Kazakhstan

An analysis of Kazakhstan nation-building process cannot ignore the Assembly of People(s) of Kazakhstan, a body created by Nazarbayev in order to better manage at an institutional level the ethnic tensions risen in his country just after the independence. The APK is one of the better example of Nazarbayev's efforts to establish a supra-ethnic civic Kazakhstani, able to overcome ethnic differences within Kazakhstan's population. This organisation created by a presidential decree on March 1, 1995 is a consultative body, which using a terminology still very Soviet acted as the "laboratory of the friendship of the peoples"²⁹⁶. The APK represents and involves all the minority cultural groups residing in Kazakhstan, from the smallest (Assyrians) to the biggest (Russians), it supervises almost 800 associations, which represent about 50 ethnic groups, and support economically about 170 weekend schools, where people can learn more than 23 native languages.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ William Fierman, *"Identity, Symbolism, and the Politics of Language in Central Asia"*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 61, No.7, p.1217

²⁹⁵ Renata Matuszkiewicz, *"The Language Issue in Kazakhstan- institutionalizing new ethnic relations after independence"*, Economic and Environmental Studies, Vol.10, No. 10, June 2010, p.221

²⁹⁶ Oleg Dymov, *"Teplo kazakhstanskoi zemli"*, Arys, 1999, p. 39.

²⁹⁷ Marlene Laruelle, *The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan. Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness, and Transnationalism*, in *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Y. Omelicheva, Lexington Books, 2015, p.7

This body is a platform which allows to different nationalities living in Kazakhstan to express their concern and suggest new ideas regarding how to image inter-national relations. The APK fulfils, however, four main goals:

1. Encourage stability in inter-ethnic and inter-confessional relations.
2. Elaborate suggestion for state policy aimed to promote peaceful and friendly relations among representatives of nations living in Kazakhstan.
3. The development of a political culture based on civic and democratic norms.
4. Work out a compromise when social contradictions emerge.²⁹⁸

Therefore, the APK is seen as a resource from Kazakhstan's leadership as a forum where issues regarding inter-ethnic coexistence and the development of a fully-fledged Kazakhstani civic identity can be discussed.²⁹⁹

Adopting its strategy for the 2002-2011 period, the APK stated that since it was created, it has been able to reach its main objectives, i.e. the preservation of inter-ethnic harmony and the development of national culture and language. This strategy established as principal goal the creation of a real civic Kazakhstani identity, a result that had to be achieved thanks to several civic institutions and programmes supported by the government.³⁰⁰

The APK legal nature changed in 2007, when it became a constitutionally recognised body, thanks to new constitutional amendments, which also established that nine members of the *Mazhilis*, the lower house of the Parliament, must be elected by the Assembly.³⁰¹

In 2007, the APK also changed its name erasing the "s" in People and becoming the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. Why to use "people" instead of "peoples" has been well explained by Sergey Diachenko³⁰², who stated that since 1995 "We have transformed into the people of Kazakhstan".³⁰³ Moreover, as outlined by the Japanese scholar, Natsuo Oka, "by applying the

²⁹⁸ Alexander C. Diener, "Imagining Kazakhstani-stan. Negotiations of Homeland and T titular-Nationality" in "Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols, and Social Changes", edited by Marlene Laruelle, Lexington Books, 2016, pp. 137-138

²⁹⁹ Jiri Melich & Aigul Adibayeva, "Nation-building and cultural policy in Kazakhstan", European Scientific Journal, vol.2, December 2013, p.270

³⁰⁰ Yves-Marie Davenel, "Cultural mobilisation in post-Soviet Kazakhstan: views from the state and from non-titular nationalities compared", Central Asian Survey, Vol.31, No.1, March 2012, p.20

³⁰¹ Aziz Burkhanov and Dina Sharipova, "Kazakhstan's Civic-National Identity. Ambiguous Policies and Points of Resistance", in *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions*, edited by Mariya Y. Omelicheva, Lexington Books, 2015, p.23

³⁰² Former deputy chairman of the APK. The Chairman of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is President Nursultan Nazarbayev.

³⁰³ Natsuo Oka, "Ethnicity and elections under authoritarianism: the case of Kazakhstan", IDE-JETRO, Institute of Developing Economies Japan External Trade Organisation Discussion Papers no.194, 2009, p.22

singular ‘people’ the government seeks to boast that President Nursultan Nazarbayev has successfully integrated a variety of ethnic groups into a civic Kazakhstani nation”.³⁰⁴

On October 2008, a law entitled “On the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan” was passed. It aimed to lend further constitutional support to the Assembly and according to Nathan Paul Jones “clearly demonstrated Kazakhstan’s path of civic nation-building”.³⁰⁵ The law affirmed that the “Assembly contributes to the realisation of the government’s policies regarding nationalities ...(and) to guarantee inter-ethnic harmony in Kazakhstan within the process of forming a Kazakhstan state identity and nation... in relation to the consolidating role of the Kazakh people”.³⁰⁶ This piece of legislation also outlines the fundamental contribution that the APK provided for the promotion of cultural preservation and revitalisation and the development of ethnic cultures, language and traditions of the peoples of Kazakhstan.³⁰⁷

On October 26, 2009, President Nazarbayev announced the draft of a National Unity Doctrine. The APK already proposed to develop such a doctrine in 2004. The rationale of this doctrine was to conceptualise the existence of a supra-ethnic civic Kazakhstani identity.³⁰⁸

The term Kazakhstani was used for the first time by Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1997 during the speech which illustrated the so-called strategy “Kazakhstan 2030”. During this speech, he acknowledged the difficulty to create a nation in a short period of time, but he also outlined the bond between the territory of Kazakhstan and all the people living on it,

“Yet, even today we can name a number of factors which unite us. It is our land in its borders, our parents who cultivated it, it is our common history in which we jointly suffered from bitter failures and shared the delight of our achievements. It is our children who are destined to jointly live and work this land”.³⁰⁹

The main of this Doctrine National Unity was to consolidate political stability and inter-ethnic harmony. The final document was released on May 2010. The first principle enunciated by the Doctrine was “One land, One fate”, outlining the common history and values, which united the entire Kazakhstani population. The Doctrine clearly states that

³⁰⁴ ³⁰⁴ Natsuo Oka, *“Ethnicity and elections under authoritarianism: the case of Kazakhstan”*, IDE-JETRO, Institute of Developing Economies Japan External Trade Organisation Discussion Papers no.194, 2009, p.23

³⁰⁵ Nathan Paul Jones, *“Assembling’ a Civic Nation in Kazakhstan: The Nation-Building Role of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan”*, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No.2, Spring 2010, p.164

³⁰⁶ Nursultan Nazarbayev, *On the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan*.

³⁰⁷ Nathan Paul Jones, *“Assembling’ a Civic Nation in Kazakhstan: The Nation-Building Role of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan”*, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No.2, Spring 2010, p.165

³⁰⁸ Nurken Aitymbetov, Ermek Toktarov, Yenlik Ormaknova, *Nation-Building in Kazakhstan: Kazakh and Kazakhstani Identities Controversy*, *Bilig*, No. 74, Summer 2015, p.2

³⁰⁹ Quoted by Ozgecan Kesici, *“The Dilemma in the Nation-Building Process: The Kazakh or Kazakhstani Nation?”*, *Journal on Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, Vol.10, No.1, 2011, p.52

“The national unity implies integrity of the existence of ethnic communities in the same state, a high degree of self-identification of citizens with the Republic of Kazakhstan and with the existing system of values and ideals. (...) After gaining the Independence, the shared values of Kazakh people were formed by the freedom to choose your own destiny, a sense of involvement into the construction of a new state, a shared responsibility for the fate of the country and future generations of its citizens”.³¹⁰

The Doctrine tires therefore to support the development of a civic rather than an ethnic identity, since “interethnic and interconfessional concord and civil unity form basic requirements for the development of Kazakhstan, including realisation of goals of socio-economic and political modernisation of the country”³¹¹.

However, the document did not find a unanimous agreement among the Kazakhstan’s population. Kazakh national patriots rejected the Doctrine, affirm that it was an attack to ethnic Kazakh identity, language and culture. Some opposition political parties, such as OSDP *Azat* and *Ak Zhol*, repudiated this document, producing an alternative Doctrine together with nationalist groups. Their version radically differed from the originally proposed by the APK on January, where the term “Kazakhstani”, totally absent in the final draft, appeared seventeen times. The document proposed by Kazakh nationalists affirmed that their ethnicity should be openly recognised as the titular nation and they refused the idea of a Kazakhstani nation. Nationalist leaders affirmed that the state’s acknowledgment of equality for all groups was damaging Kazakhs’ assertion of their ethnic identity.³¹²

3.3 Russian Minority in Kazakhstan

An overview of Kazakh nation-building cannot ignore to analyse Russian minority situation in Kazakhstan and how they react to the sudden dense of Soviet Union and then to the policies implemented by Kazakhstan’s leadership.

When Soviet Union collapsed almost six million of Russian lived in Kazakhstan. This constituted the second highest Russian community living in a former Soviet republic after Ukraine, where Russian population was equal to 11 million. However, Russian constituted only the 13% of people living in Ukraine, while they represented the 37% of the whole Kazakhstani population. Russian question was relevant not only for numerical reasons, but also for the nature

³¹⁰ Kazakhstan’s 2010 National Unity Doctrine, <http://assembly.kz/en/national-unity-doctrine>

³¹¹ General Provision of Kazakhstan’s 2010 National Unity Doctrine, <http://assembly.kz/en/national-unity-doctrine>

³¹² Joanna Lillis, “*Astana Follows Thorny Path toward National Unity*”, <https://eurasianet.org/s/astana-follows-thorny-path-toward-national-unity>, April 29, 2010.

of their origins; indeed, the 66% of Russian Kazakhstani were born there, and the 37% of those were not born in Kazakhstan had lived in the country for more than twenty years. Quite important was also the geographical distribution of Russian population within Kazakhstan. The last Soviet census in 1989 illustrated that Russian represented the 70-80% of the population in the seven of the northern regions, i.e. Akmolinsk, Karaganda, Kokchetau, Kustanay, East Kazakhstan, North Kazakhstan and Pavlodar.³¹³

Kazakhstan therefore was not only the sole former Soviet republics, where the eponymous nationalities did not represent the majority, but post-independent Kazakhstan leadership faced also a situation in which Kazakhstan northern regions were massively populated by Russian and European populations (Polish, Ukraine and Germans), while Kazakhs and Uzbeks constituted the majority in southern and intermediate areas.

Russian Kazakhstanis considered the country as a mainly Russian republic. The deep Russification/Sovietization witnessed by Kazakhstan during the Soviet era, in their opinion, led Kazakh culture closer to the Russian one rather than to that of the other Central Asian countries. Russian associations thought to Kazakh society as a minority enclave, which nevertheless was part of the Russian world. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan's independence sped up Russian minority emigration toward ancestors' homelands. President Nazarbayev recognised that economic reasons were not the only reason why Russians were leaving Kazakhstan:

“We should not close our eyes to the fact the very many people start to think about leaving the country at the moment when they begin to feel a psychological discomfort. This feeling of theirs is caused by a number of factors, first and foremost related to excesses and an unreasonable speed in the implementation of complex socio-cultural programmes”.³¹⁴

Between 1989 and 1999, Russian Kazakhstani population diminished from 6 to 4,5 million, while the share of Russians overall Kazakhstani population passed from 40% to 30%.³¹⁵

One of the main element of interethnic tensions regard the rewriting of history. Russian associations, such as *Lad*, labelled Kazakh culture as “non-historic”, since it lacks historical

³¹³ Sebastien Peyrouse, “Nationhood and the minority question in Central Asia. The Russians in Kazakhstan”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No.3, May 2007, p. 484

³¹⁴ Nursultan Nazarbayev's speech to the Kazakhstani Supreme Soviet on 9 June 1994 quoted by Pal Kolsto, “Anticipating demographic superiority: Kazakh thinking on integration and nation building”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No.1, p.57

³¹⁵ Sebastien Peyrouse, “The ‘Imperial Minority’: An Interpretative Framework of the Russians in Kazakhstan in the 1990s”, *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 36, No.1, March 2008, p.107

sources or written works, moreover they believed that no Kazakh statehood existed before 1936, so Kazakhstan existed as an independent state only thanks to Soviet borders demarcation.³¹⁶

Even the President of Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, supported this idea. Answering a teen's question about the growth of nationalist feeling at the Seliger youth camp in 2004, indeed, Putin praised his Kazakhstani counterpart, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who: "Has a performed a unique feat", since "he has created a state on a territory where there has never been a state. The Kazakhs never had a state of their own, and he created it. In this sense, he is a unique person on the post-Soviet space and in Kazakhstan".³¹⁷ Coming after Russian annexation of Crimea, such a statement raised concerns about the possibility to recreate a similar scenario in northern Kazakhstan. Scholars as Alexander Diener and Marlene Laruelle wondered "Why no Kazakh Novorossiya?". However, Russia still remains one of the main economic partners of Kazakhstan, moreover Kazakhstani leadership has always politically loyal to Russian since independence.³¹⁸ Russia certainly could gain considerable wealth resource by annexing Kazakhstan's northern regions, moreover it will extend its contiguity with China, yet it would have at least two main negative consequences for Moscow: 1) it would lose its political influence over Central Asia 2) it would further legitimate the idea of a Russia as neo-imperial power.³¹⁹

Russians living in Kazakhstan also denied such a possibility. Galina Kuzmina, the press secretary for Russian community, a government-affiliated association who support Russian minority interests in Petropavlosk outlined how different was Northern Kazakhstan and Crimea reality. The former "has always been Kazakhstan", while Crimea changed hands several times, and it belonged to Ukraine only thanks to a "gift" from Khrushchev in 1954. Therefore, she believed that the two situations cannot be compared. Kucera identified two main differences between Northern Kazakhstan and Crimea. The latter was a site of 'Russian military heroism' since the Crimean War. Moreover, he also underlined that Crimean became part of Ukraine only as a consequence of one of Soviet periodic gerrymanderings.³²⁰ Moreover, Crimea has a

³¹⁶ Sebastien Peyrouse, "The 'Imperial Minority': An Interpretative Framework of the Russians in Kazakhstan in the 1990s, Nationalities Papers, Vol. 36, No.1, March 2008, p.109

³¹⁷ Quoted by Marlene Laruelle, "Why No Kazakh Novorossiya? Kazakhstan's Russian Minority in a Post-Crimea World", Problems of Post- Communism, Vo. 65, No. 1, 2018, p.65

³¹⁸ Marlene Laruelle, "Why No Kazakh Novorossiya? Kazakhstan's Russian Minority in a Post-Crimea World", Problems of Post- Communism, Vo. 65, No. 1, 2018, pp. 77-78

³¹⁹ Alexander Diener, "Assessing potential Russian irredentism and separatism in Kazakhstan's northern oblasts", Eurasian Geography and Economics, Vol.56, No.5, 2015, p.491

³²⁰ Joshua Kucera, "North Kazakhstan isn't the next Crimea- yet", Al Jazeera International, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/6/19/north-kazakhstanisntthenextcrimeaayet.html>, June 19, 2014.

fundamental strategic value for Russia, since it hosts the port for the Black Sea Fleet and, furthermore, it is a key way-out to the Mediterranean Sea.³²¹

Petropavlosk is the capital of northern Kazakhstan region. Russians represented still the 70% of the population, however this city widely celebrate Kazakhstani civic identity and Kazakhstan multicultural identity, for instance through the monument which jointly honour Alexander Pushkin and Abai Kunabaev, the two most celebrated poets of Russian and Kazakh culture. However, Yuri Zakharov, head of Cossack Association, believed that Kazakhstan preserved inter-ethnic harmony only thanks to President Nursultan Nazarbayev who “has been able to bring everyone together”. Cossacks even nominated Nazarbayev for Nobel Prize for Peace in 2013. “As long as Nazarbayev is president, there will not be any big problems”, insisted Zakharov, he also added that “if something happens to him. There will be trouble”.³²²

Meanwhile, Russian are continuing to emigrate to their “homeland”. Almost 19,000 Russians came back to Russian Federation in 2015, using Russian government programme to resettle the diaspora, who still lived in former Soviet Union.³²³

Kazakhstan is experiencing its second of historic wave of emigration. Accord to Kazakhstani political analyst, Borat Sultanov, one of the main factor encouraging Russians to leave Kazakhstan are pensions. Indeed, while Kazakhstan average pension is around \$127, in Russia pensions vary from \$145 to 567. A second important factor are Russian state programme aimed to encourage the return of Russian diaspora by offering a fast-track to citizenship, employment and even early retirement.³²⁴

3.4 Kazakhstan Political System

The last element that need to be analyse in order to fully understand Kazakhstan national-building process is the country’s political system.

Nazarbayev became first secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan in June 1989, and on April 24, 1990, the Supreme Soviet appointed him as the president of the Republic. Presidential

³²¹ Alexander Diener, “Assessing potential Russian irredentism and separatism in Kazakhstan’s northern oblasts”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol.56, No.5, 2015, p. 475

³²² Joshua Kucera, “North Kazakhstan isn’t the next Crimea- yet”, Al Jazeera International, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/6/19/north-kazakhstanisntthenextcrimeaayet.html>, June 19, 2014.

³²³ Bruce Pannier, “A New Wave of Ethnic Russians Leaving Kazakhstan”, RFE/RFL, <https://www.rferl.org/a/qishloq-ovozi-kazakhstan-ethnic-russians-leaving/27541817.html>, February 9, 2016.

³²⁴ Almaz Kumenov, “Kazakhstan: Wave of Emigration to Russia Shows no Sign of Abating”, *Eurasianet*, November 15, 2017, <https://eurasianet.org/s/kazakhstan-wave-of-emigration-to-russia-shows-no-sign-of-abating>, access on May 23, 2018

election held in December 1991 further legitimated Nazarbayev's position, even if he was the only candidate. Yet, although Nazarbayev's move from first secretary to presidency could appear seamless, nevertheless Kazakhstan's political system experienced a certain degree of instability between 1990-1995, because of the emergence of three different processes: 1) Institutional competition 2) Emerging pluralism 3) Electoral competition.³²⁵

In January 1993, Kazakhstan introduced its first Constitution shaped on 1958 Constitution of the French Republic. It established, therefore, a semi-presidential republic, where, however, the parliament was not devoid of power, on the contrary, the legislative had a "wide range of formal rights, including the right to approve the budget, amend Constitution and elect the Constitutional Court". Furthermore, the President could not dissolve the legislature.³²⁶

The 12th Supreme Soviet became the first legislature of the independent Kazakhstan and it managed to survive until the end of December 1993, even if the Constitution stated the establishment of a new legislative body, the Supreme Tenges. Yet, Supreme Soviet deputies did not want to cede immediately their power and call for elections, because such a body had become the main opponent of Nazarbayev's economic reform and began to serve as a "magnate for growing popular disenchantment with the failing economy" of the country. Moreover, the Supreme Soviet was composed mainly by members of the former communist elite, who were worried to lose their stakes in state enterprises or organisations, because of the privatization programme proposed by Nazarbayev. Nevertheless, the President of Kazakhstan was able to persuade the deputies to 'voluntary' dissolve the Supreme Soviet by offering them the possibility to be re-elected or a new position in state enterprises.³²⁷ This move was the first step toward the establishment of an authoritarian regime in the country. However, the institutional conflict between presidency and legislature did not immediately end, on the contrary it continued even after the parliamentary elections held in March 1994. Indeed, the Parliament carried on its fierce opposition to Nazarbayev's economic agenda and it even passed a vote of no confidence in prime minister Sergey Tereshchenko on May 27, 1994.³²⁸

However, the Constitutional Court dissolved the legislature on March 1995, because it found an infringement of constitutional rule in Almaty electoral district. President Nazarbayev assumed

³²⁵ Rico Isaacs, "Informal politics and the uncertain context of transitions: revisiting early stage non-democratic development in Kazakhstan," *Democratization*, Vol.17, No.1, 2010, p.10

³²⁶ Andreas Heinrich, *The formal political system in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan: a background study*, Forschungstelle Osteuropa, March 2010, p.31

³²⁷ Rico Isaacs, "Informal politics and the uncertain context of transitions: revisiting early stage non-democratic development in Kazakhstan," *Democratization*, Vol.17, No.1, 2010, p.11

³²⁸ Rico Isaacs, "Informal politics and the uncertain context of transitions: revisiting early stage non-democratic development in Kazakhstan," *Democratization*, Vol.17, No.1, 2010, p.16

plenipotentiary power until the following parliamentary elections in December 1995 and it exploited such a parliamentary hiatus to strengthen his powers. In March, it established the Assembly of People of Kazakh. He was also able to broaden his presidential term until December 2000, therefore cancelling the presidential election scheduled in 1996, through a landslide victory in a referendum held in April. Then a second referendum, held in August, introduced the second Kazakhstan constitution, which strengthen presidency powers vis-à-vis legislature. Finally, Nazarbayev further strengthened legitimated his authority in October 1998, when the new lower house, the *Mazhilis*, amended the Constitution and abolished the age limit for presidency.³²⁹

Kazakhstan's current political landscape is dominated by *Nur Otan* (Light of Fatherland in Kazakh), the party headed by Nazarbayev, which won the 82% of the vote in the last election for the *Mazhilis* in 2016.³³⁰ However, Kazakhstan party system did not look always as nowadays, although Nazarbayev attempted to create a 'catch-all' party able to monopolise the political arena and stabilise the political system since independence.³³¹

He dissolved the CPK in September 1991, when he established the Socialist Party of Kazakhstan (SPK), a more reformist party instead of it. Nevertheless, a group of people disagreed with Nazarbayev's decision and restored the CPK in the fall of 1991. SPK was overwhelmingly represented in the Supreme Soviet, however, the party was composed mainly by member of the Communist elite, which, as I have aforementioned, began to oppose Nazarbayev's economic agenda.³³² The SPK became the main opponent of Nazarbayev, who, therefore, founded, a new party the Union of People's Unity of Kazakhstan (UPUK). The UPUK won only 33 out of 177 seats in March 1994 elections. Once the legislature was dissolved in March 1995, Kazakhstan experienced a period of deep institutional changes. The 1995 Constitution reinforced the presidential powers and created a new bicameral legislature composed by an upper house, the *Senat*, elected indirectly by the regional legislature of each oblasts, and a lower house, the *Mazhiliis*. However, the number of deputies decreased from the previous 177 to only 107.³³³

³²⁹ Andreas Heinrich, *The formal political system in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan: a background study*, Forschungstelle Osteuropa, March 2010, p.28

³³⁰ Reuters, "Kazakh leader's party wins vote criticized by Western monitors", March 21, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kazakhstan-election-preliminary/kazakh-leaders-party-wins-vote-criticized-by-western-monitors-idUSKCN0WN0DV>, access on May 23, 2018.

³³¹ Rico Isaacs, "Nur Otan, Informal Networks and the Countering of Elite Instability in Kazakhstan: Bringing the 'Formal' Back In", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.65, No.6, pp. 1055- 1079

³³² Martha Brill Olcott, "Kazakhstan Unfulfilled Promise", Brookings Institution Press, 2002, p. 147

³³³ Rico Isaacs, "Nur Otan, Informal Networks and the Countering of Elite Instability in Kazakhstan: Bringing the 'Formal' Back In", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.65, No.6, pp. 1066-1067

In 1995, UPUK changed its name in Party of People's Unity of Kazakhstan and it won out of 67 seats in December elections. In its program, the PPUK explicitly stated that its purpose was to "provide support for the cause of the reform conducted by the President of the Republic".³³⁴ Yet, the PPUK was not a forum for decision making nor an arena where laid power. Indeed, the parliament still witnessed the participation of several political parties, even if most of the parties able to win seats in the *Mazhilis* were loyal to Nazarbayev. PPUK was dissolved in 1999, when Nazarbayev created *Otan* (Fatherland). The post-1995 political framework had strengthened Nazarbayev authority and allowed the emergence of a new presidentialist party, able not only to support Nazarbayev's policy preferences, but also to increase the president's influence over the periphery by appointing member of national elite into provincial positions.³³⁵

Yet, the post-1995 political landscape based on a personalist 'protectorship-client' system and the rampant privatisation programme also permitted the rise of influence networks, striving for access to economic resources, and command of former state enterprises. In 1999 and 2004 parliamentary election were still present parties representing these different interests and emerging with *Otan*. The most important were *Asar*, the Civic Party, the Agrarian Party and the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan. The electoral competition was the arena where these different elite groups struggled for access to power and, as a consequence, to the economic resources. In particular *Asar*, the party of Nazarbayev's daughter and her husband Aliyev, was considered as a powerful independent body. Moreover, Aliyev explicitly stated that he was working to become president.³³⁶

However, in 2006, the Civic, the Agrarian Party and *Asar* were forced to merge with *Otan*, creating the new super-party *Nur Otan*. Such a move had a twofold purpose. First, it "sent a signal to the elites that their political now had to be channelled through the super-party", secondly, it also allowed the authorities to tighten their ties with citizens.³³⁷

An important feature of the Kazakhstan party system was that no Kazakh nationalist party emerged as an influent political force, even before 2002, when parties based on ethnicity were banned by law. The SPK was focused mainly on economic and social issues, neglecting problem related to ethnicity. Similarly, the CPK could not be considered a nationalist party, even if it

³³⁴ Quoted in Rico Isaacs, "Nur Otan, Informal Networks and the Countering of Elite Instability in Kazakhstan: Bringing the 'Formal' Back In", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.65, No.6, p. 1067

³³⁵ Sally Cummings, "Kazakhstan: Power and Elite, I.B Tauris, 2005, p. 26

³³⁶ Rico Isaacs, "Nur Otan, Informal Networks and the Countering of Elite Instability in Kazakhstan: Bringing the 'Formal' Back In", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.65, No.6, p. 1071

³³⁷ Adele Del Sordi, "Legitimation and the Party of Power in Kazakhstan", in "Politics and Legitimacy in Post-Soviet Eurasia", edited by Martin Brusis, Joachim Ahrens and Martin Schulze Wessel, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 84

was backed mainly by the Slav population. Indeed, this depended on the fact that it was supported first of all by pensioners, a category where Slavs predominated over Kazakhs. Neither the Congress Party could be labelled as an ethnic organisation. It was headed by the Kazakh poet Olzhas Suleimenov, who led the anti-nuclear Nevada-Semipalatinsk movement during the *perestroika* era. Suleimenov defended Kazakh culture and traditions, yet he wrote poetry in Russian and believed that it was fundamental to preserve a good relation between Russia and Kazakhstan, moreover he defined himself a “Eurasianist”.

Alash a Kazakh nationalist participated in 1999 parliamentary election, yet it was not able to pass the 7% threshold in a nationwide district, therefore he won no seat in the *Mazhilis*. Yet, the Slavic movement *Lad*, on the contrary, had a certain success in mid-1990s; indeed, it was able to gain four seats in 1994 parliamentary elections and further eight candidates close to the movement were elected in the same elections. However, the 2002 Law on Political Parties not only tightened rules for a party to be officially registered, but also forbade the emergence of regional parties, *de facto* banning ethnically based parties. President parties has always backed, obviously, the official policy of the State related to the nationality question. *Nur Otan* supported therefore both the creation of a fully-fledged Kazakhstani identity, while, at the same time, recognising the Kazakh self-determination right on their own territory. Nevertheless, such a dualism it is downplayed during electoral campaign, when *Nur Otan* candidates used to claim that their party represented the whole Kazakhstani population. .³³⁸

One of the main issue of the Kazakhstan political system is its overreliance on Nazarbayev figure. The President has been able to preserve the country’s stability and its full sovereignty over the years, however, Nazarbayev is already 77 years old and he is not eternal. The theories of authoritarian succession stated that a successful transition depended on the nature of the system itself. Yet, Kazakhstan is firmly personalist, *Nur Otan* indeed cannot be considered as an independent entity, since it is *de facto* a tool of Nazarbayev’s will. The highly-personalist nature of the regime is considered a threat for the long-term stability of Kazakhstan. In 2011, Yertsbaev, a political adviser of Nazarbayev, suggested that it was necessary to change the country’s political framework from a ‘super-presidentialist’ to a ‘presidentialist-parliamentary’, through the establishment of new and stronger parties.³³⁹ In March 2017, Nazarbayev endorsed the devolution of some power to the parliament and the cabinet. Such a movement could

³³⁸ Oka Natsuko, “*Ethnicity and Elections under Authoritarianism: The Case of Kazakhstan*”, IDE Discussion Paper, Volume 194, 2009, pp. 8-14

³³⁹ Thomas Ambrosio: “*Leadership Succession in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan: Regime Survival after Nazarbayev and Karimov*”, Journal of Balkan and Eastern Studies, Vol.17, No.1, 2015, p. 56

certainly facilitate the future political transition.³⁴⁰ Nevertheless, Nazarbayev has still not nominated any successor. In the wake of the Ukrainian Crisis, the International Crisis Group warned that:

“Without an enactment of the repeatedly promised political, social and economic reforms, Kazakhstan risks becoming another brittle authoritarian that can too easily be manipulated by outside forces”.³⁴¹

Stanislav Pritchkin outlined that the main priority for the post-Nazarbayev will be to maintain stability and he suggested that Uzbek experience of transition, where the sudden death of long-standing president Islam Karimov did not lead to any chaotic situation, could be an example that Kazakhstani should “seek to emulate”.³⁴²

3.5 Conclusion

Kazakhstan gained an unsought and unexpected independence in 1991, when Soviet Union collapsed. Kazakhstan however did not become a “nationalising state”, since its own peculiar demographic situation prevented Kazakhstan leadership from pursuing the creation of a purely ethnic Kazakh identity. However, the role of Kazakhs as *primus inter pares* has been recognised even in the Preamble of the 1995 Constitution “We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic fate, creating a state on the indigenous Kazakh land, considering ourselves a peace-loving and civil society, dedicated to the ideals of freedom, equality and concord”.

However, Kazakhstan’s leadership strove also for the development of a supra-ethnic Kazakhstani identity. The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan assumed a prominent role in this context, since it was entitled to keep inter-ethnic harmony and suggest state policy regarding how to manage inter-national relations within Kazakhstani borders.

Such an ambivalence in the Kazakhstan’s policies led to the replication of the Soviet nationality vision, where the role of the “elder brother” is played by Kazakhs instead of Russian. Kazakhstan kept alive the Soviet scheme also by maintain the distinction between citizenship and ethnicity in the passport. A study conducted by the Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic

³⁴⁰ Reuters, “Kazakhstan parliament passes reforms reducing presidential powers”,__March 6, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kazakhstan-constitution/kazakhstan-parliament-passes-reforms-reducing-presidential-powers-idUSKBN16D0CY>, Access on May 23, 2018.

³⁴¹ International Crisis Group, “Stress Test for Kazakhstan”, Briefing N°74, May 13, 2015, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/kazakhstan/stress-tests-kazakhstan>, Access on May 23, 2018

³⁴² Stanislav Pritchkin, “An Uzbek Transition for Kazakhstan?”, The Diplomat, January 20, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/an-uzbek-transition-for-kazakhstan/>, Access on May 23, 2018.

Research in 2010 witnessed that Kazakhstani population is still divided regarding which identity prioritize between the civic and the ethnic one.

The majority of the people living in the southern and western parts of Kazakhstan, populated mainly by Kazakhs prioritise ethnicity, on the contrary most of the people living in Almaty, chose civic identity. The Institute also noticed a difference between rural and urban areas. Indeed, urban dwellers prioritise civic identity, while rural population preferred ethnic identity, since traditional values and archaism are still rooted in these areas.³⁴³

Two factors could mark a shift in Kazakhstan's national building. The first can be Nazarbayev's death. The President of Kazakhstan has had an important role as guarantor of the peaceful coexistence between the several nationalities living in Kazakhstan, however he is getting old and it is not sure that his successor will continue Nazarbayev's policy. The second factor is the gradual emigration of Russian Kazakhstani toward their own homeland.

These two elements could bring Kazakhstan in the long-term to adopt a fully-fledged ethnic Kazakh identity, however this is not the only viable option. Kazakhstani leadership could also develop a transnational identity, which will exploit Kazakhstan's geographic position making both the country and its people a bridge between Europe and Asia and their cultures.³⁴⁴

³⁴³ Aziz Burkhanov and Dina Sharipova, *Kazakhstan's Civic-National Identity. Ambiguous Policies and Points of Resistance*, in Maria Y. Omelicheva, Reuel R. Hanks *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia: Dimensions, Dynamics and Directions*, Lexington Books, 2015, p.30

³⁴⁴ Marlene Laruelle, *The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan. Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness and Transnationalism* in in Maria Y. Omelicheva, Reuel R. Hanks *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia: Dimensions, Dynamics and Directions*, Lexington Books, 2015, pp. 15-16

CHAPTER 4

Kazakhstan's Pragmatic Foreign Policy

Kazakhstan became independent in December 1991. Since then, Kazakhstan has pursued a “pragmatic” foreign policy aimed to legitimate Kazakhstani leadership, allow Kazakhstan to achieve a fully-fledged sovereignty and independence and, finally, to improve its critical economic conditions during 1990s and the, to reach Kazakhstani leadership goal to enter in the top-30 list of the most developed countries in the world. Astana's foreign policy has been based on two main concepts, i.e. ‘multivectorism’ and ‘Eurasianism’.

In this chapter, I analysed what these two concepts and how Kazakhstan leadership used them in its own foreign policy strategy. Then, I assessed Kazakhstan relations with the four major global powers, Russia, China, USA and, at least from an economic standpoint, European Union, and Astana relation with the other four Central Asian countries. These are the key political actors to understand how Kazakhstan foreign policy evolved since 1991 and to illustrate Kazakhstan foreign policy strategy at best.

4.1 Multivectorism

Multivectorism has been a common strategy in the post-Soviet space, indeed, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine – at least until 2014- adopted such a policy too.³⁴⁵ There is no clear definition of what a multivector policy involves, and some scholars have harshly criticised it. Taras Kuzio defined this policy as a “shifting, incoherent, and ideologically vacuous”³⁴⁶ behaviour, which hindered post-Soviet states, avoiding them to set up a systematic and fruitful cooperation with Russia or European Union.

Post-Soviet leaders defined it as a policy of co-habitation and cooperation,³⁴⁷ a strategy which has not any ideological foundation, aiming only to achieve a country's foreign policy goals according to what a state perceives as its own national interest. The character of a government or the internal policies of a potential partner do not affect the policies of a country following such a pragmatic approach.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Elena Gnedina, “‘Multi-Vector’ Foreign Policies in Europe: Balancing, Bandwagoning or Bargaining?”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 67, No.7, September 2015, pp. 1007- 1029

³⁴⁶ Taras Kuzio, “*Is Ukraine Part of Europe's Future?*”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol 29, No.3, 2006, pp. 89-108

³⁴⁷ Elena Gnedina, “‘Multi-Vector’ Foreign Policies in Europe: Balancing, Bandwagoning or Bargaining?”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 67, No.7, September 2015, pp. 1008

³⁴⁸ Reuel R. Hanks, “‘Multi-vector politics’ and Kazakhstan's emerging role as a geo-strategic player in Central Asia”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol.11, No. 3, September 2009, p.259

Kazakhstan has always been committed to multivectorism. Marat Shaikutdinov claimed that Kazakhstan has not any viable options, but to adopt such a policy, indeed: “Being in the heart of Eurasia, at the intersection of different worlds and civilisations, Kazakhstan must therefore necessarily develop a multi-vector strategy aimed at collaboration and cooperation with other countries, integration projects and military-political blocs”.³⁴⁹

Choosing such a strategy, Kazakhstani leadership wished to reach three different goals, two in the international environment and a third one regarding the domestic arena.³⁵⁰ Firstly, Kazakhstan adopted this policy to preserve its own sovereignty.³⁵¹ Kazakhstani leadership sought to achieve such a result by establishing good relations with all the major powers, therefore avoiding relying only on a single foreign partner. Kazakhstan’s multilateral approach searches to avoid a Ukraine-like scenario. However, Kazakhstani officials affirmed that their country will never face a situation like the one Kiev is experiencing, since it would never permit itself to be “put in a situation of choosing between partners”.³⁵²

As stated in its last Military Doctrine, released in September 2017, Kazakhstan has no enemies. Kazakhstan’s security policy perfectly illustrates, indeed, this country’s commitment to a multi-vector approach. Kazakhstan is not only a founding member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), a Russian-led military organisation, a Russian-led military organisation, but it also participates to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, previously named Shanghai Five, which was born to facilitate multilateral negotiations between China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan on issue related to border delimitations, stemming from the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991.³⁵³ Furthermore, Kazakhstan has actively cooperated with NATO. It Began to dialogue with this organisation in 1992, when it joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, later renamed Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, while practical cooperation started in 1995, when Kazakhstan joined the Partnership for Peace programme. Kazakhstan has also designated an infantry battalion, named KAZBAT, for potential deployment in NATO-led peace support operations, under the mandate of the United National Security Council. Moreover, since

³⁴⁹ Marat Shaikhtidnov, “*The Transatlantic vector of the Republic of Kazakhstan’s foreign policy strategy: its state of affairs, problems and prospects*”, EP TODAY, <http://eptoday.com/the-transatlantic-vector-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstans-foreign-policy-strategy-its-state-of-affairs-problems-and-prospects/>, November 1, 2013

³⁵⁰ Michael Clarke, “*Kazakhstan’s Multi-vector Foreign Policy: Diminishing Returns in an Era of Great Powers Pivots?*”, The Asan Forum, <http://www.theasanforum.org/kazakhstans-multi-vector-foreign-policy-diminishing-returns-in-an-era-of-great-power-pivots/>, April 9, 2015

³⁵¹ Andrew C. Kuchins et al, “*Central Asia in a Reconnecting Eurasia. Kazakhstan’s Evolving Foreign Economic and Security Interest.*”, Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2015, p.6

³⁵² Quoted in Andrew C. Kuchins et al, “*Central Asia in a Reconnecting Eurasia. Kazakhstan’s Evolving Foreign Economic and Security Interest.*”, Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2015, p.6

³⁵³ Joseph Y.S Cheng, “*The Shanghai Co-operation Organisation: China’s Initiative in Regional Institutional Building*”, Journal of Contemporary Asia, Vol. 41, No.4, November 2011, pp. 632-656

2006, Kazakhstan hosted every year a military exercise, called “Steppe Eagle”, in cooperation with NATO and its allies.³⁵⁴ Finally, Astana is also a member of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, holding the chairmanship of the international organisation in 2010.

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Secondly, Kazakhstan has pursued a multilateral policy to boost economic development.³⁵⁶ When it became independent, Kazakhstan was heavily dependent on Russia from an economic standpoint, since its industrial sector was highly integrated into the former Soviet system. The lack of an adequate pipeline infrastructure increased Astana’s dependence on Moscow, since the former was obliged to export its oil through Russian territory and Russian-controlled pipelines, therefore, Astana’s main challenge after independence was to diminish its dependence on Russia.³⁵⁷ Since 1996, Kazakhstani leadership had suggested several times to find different way to transport its own natural resources has always been present in Kazakhstani foreign policy.³⁵⁸ The former Kazakhstani foreign minister, Kasymzhomart Tokayev stated: “As far as pipelines are concerned our policy is clear and simple; have as many as export routes as possible”.³⁵⁹

Yet, Kazakhstani policy makers are also conscious that Kazakhstani would not pursue its own national interest by openly antagonise Russia. Pinar Ipek affirmed in his analysis of Kazakhstan’s hydrocarbon wealth and its role in Astana multi-vector policy that:

“After achieving much needed economic recovery, new pipelines bypassing Russia became the long-term strategic goal of Kazakhstan’s multi-vector policy (...) Within this framework one could observe a careful balancing act between Russia, China, and the USA in Kazakhstan’s foreign policy that was strictly related to the geopolitics of exporting oil out of this landlocked region. While Kazakhstan has had a persistent policy of enticing large Western companies to invest in its oil and gas sector, balancing this strategic partnership with Russia required a multi-vector foreign policy.

³⁵⁴ NATO, *Relations with Kazakhstan*, https://www.nato.int/cps/ic/natohq/topics_49598.htm

³⁵⁵ OSCE Newsroom, “Kazakhstan takes over OSCE Chair, seeks to strengthen Organisation and advance dialogue on future European Security architecture”, <https://www.osce.org/cio/51810>, January 1, 2010

³⁵⁶ Reuel R. Hanks, “‘Multi-vector politics’ and Kazakhstan’s emerging role as a geo-strategic player in Central Asia”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol.11, No. 3, September 2009, p.259

³⁵⁷ Pinar Ipek, “The Role of Oil and Gas in Kazakhstan’s Foreign Policy: Looking East or West”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.59, No.7, November 2007, pp. 1179-1199

³⁵⁸ Reuel R. Hanks, “‘Multi-vector politics’ and Kazakhstan’s emerging role as a geo-strategic player in Central Asia”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol.11, No. 3, September 2009, p. 264

³⁵⁹ Eurasia Insight, “Foreign Minister confirms Kazakhstan’s multi-vector policy”, 3 October 2003, www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav100303a_pr.shtml

The early extensive diplomatic relations with the US government, given the nuclear weapon facilities in Kazakhstan helped to maximise its national interest and to balance its dependence on Russia”.³⁶⁰

The launch of China’s ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative could further boost Kazakhstan’s economic development. Beijing has already made significant investment in Kazakhstan in order to improve its capabilities as a transit corridor, spending over 3,5 billion dollars in Khorgos Eastern Gate, a dry port in the Eastern border with China.³⁶¹

Thirdly, Kazakhstan used foreign policy to legitimate its rule. Kazakhstan’s demographic reality led Kazakhstan government to adopt an ambiguous policy regarding national building. On the one hand, Kazakhstan elite tried to redress Kazakhs who had been disadvantaged during Soviet and Tsarist era, on the other hand, Kazakhstani elite tried to develop a civic Kazakhstani identity, able to bypass ethnic divisions.

This ambiguous policy did not allow state elite’s legitimacy to rest just on domestic aspects, therefore elite turned its attention abroad, indeed Kazakhstan’s leadership try to “portray an image of a state elite that was engaged internationally and therefore deserving of support domestically”.³⁶²

The Ukrainian crisis threatened the Kazakhstan’s multilateral foreign policy, according to Sean Roberts. He foresaw that this event could affect Kazakhstan’s stance in three aspects of its foreign policy, i.e. international economic policies, its position on regional cooperation in the former Soviet space, and its voting within the United Nations. Therefore, Kazakhstan leader would face raising difficult to balance good relations with Russia, China, Europe, USA and Ukraine.³⁶³

However, Kazakhstan’s foreign concept realised on April 2014, reaffirmed Kazakhstan’s commitment to a multilateral approach in the international arena, outlining that: “Kazakhstan’s foreign policy is based on the principles of multivectorism, balance, pragmatism, mutual benefit and solid defence of national interests”.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁰ Pinar Ipek, *“The Role of Oil and Gas in Kazakhstan’s Foreign Policy: Looking East or West”*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.59, No.7, November 2007, pp. 1188

³⁶¹ PWC, *“Kazakhstan and the New Silk Road. The importance of aligning goals and how to reach them”*, PwC Kazakhstan, September 2017, <https://www.pwc.kz/en/publications/new-2017/silk-way-publication-eng.pdf>

³⁶² Edward Schatz, *“Access by Accident: Legitimacy Claims and Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Central Asia”*, International Political Science Review, Vol. 27, No.3, 2006, pp. 269-273

³⁶³ Sean Roberts, *“The Ukraine Conflict and the Future of Kazakhstan’s Multi-Vector Foreign Policy”*, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No.388, September 2015,

³⁶⁴ Foreign Policy Concept for 2014-2020 Republic of Kazakhstan, <http://mfa.gov.kz/en/erevan/content-view/koncepcia-vnesnej-politiki-rk-na-2014-2020-gg>

Moreover, Kazakhstan's response to the Ukrainian crisis witnessed its own autonomy in the international field. On the one hand, Astana considered the results of the referendum held on March 16, 2014 in Crimea as representative of the popular will, however Kazakhstan did not recognise the secession of Crimea from Ukraine and its accession to Russian Federation, affirming that under international law Ukraine's sovereignty must remain intact.³⁶⁵

4.2 Eurasianism

Eurasianism is the second concept leading Kazakhstan foreign policy. Geography has always affected countries' decision about what foreign policy strategy should be implemented and this is particularly true for a state like Kazakhstan, which borders with two of the main global powers: Russia and China. Kazakhstan is a *de facto* Asian country, since the 90% of its territory is located in this continent, yet, the state elite has portrayed Kazakhstan as a 'Eurasian' nation geopolitically, geo-economically and geo-historically speaking.³⁶⁶

Kazakhstani Eurasianism has been inspired by Lev Gumilev's theories. Gumilev (1912-1992) was a Russian philosopher who described Russia as a "Eurasian" nation for two main reasons. Firstly, Russian territory is located both in Europe and Asia; secondly, it has both Asian and European features in terms of people, culture and religion. Similarly, Kazakhstan leadership has described its own country as a "bridge" between Europe and Asia, East and West, due to Kazakhstan geographic position and its cultural peculiarities.³⁶⁷ However, Nazarbayev's Eurasianism must not be confused with Russian neo-Eurasianism. The former has not any political implications and push only for economic integration, furthermore Kazakhstani Eurasianism did not consider Eurasia as an antagonist of the West and Western culture.

The country's ruling elite pushed for the economic integration of the post-Soviet space, since the demise of the USSR. President Nursultan Nazarbayev strove for founding an 'hard core' of CIS member willing to pursue a real integration. The Kazakhstani leadership was worried about

³⁶⁵ Kirill Nourzhanov, "Kazakhstan and the Eurasian Economic Union: The Dilemmas of Alliance-Making in the Post-Soviet Period", in *"A Quarter Century of Post-Communism Assessed"*, edited by M. Steven Fish, Graeme Gill, Milenko Petrovic, Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 333

³⁶⁶ Golam Mostafa, "The concept of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian Policy and its implications", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Volume 4, 2013, p. 164

³⁶⁷ Golam Mostafa, "The concept of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian Policy and its implications", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Volume 4, 2013, p.162

the possible negative effect that Soviet Union disintegration could have on country's economy.³⁶⁸

When Soviet Union collapsed, the 92,2% of Kazakhstani export went to CIS countries, and the state industrial system was heavily embedded with the Soviet system. Kazakhstani government also worked for preserving rouble zone and it was even able to find an agreement with five other former Soviet republics regarding the creation of a new rouble zone. Yet, Russia preferred not to implement such an agreement, since he considered the burden of preserving the rouble zone too heavy.³⁶⁹

Marat Tazhin, one of the regime's main ideologue, affirmed in an interview released in early 1990s that:

“All of the Soviet countries inherited a more or less similar Soviet heritage: economic crisis exacerbated by the break-up of the inter-republican links (...) economic incompetency of the production (apart from raw resources) on the global market, building the new legitimacy, problems of numerous national minorities borders, creation of states that would be able to perform all the functions of the central element of the political system, some same similar features of the political cultures.

All of these conditions insist on and dictate the importance of creating a union, at least an economic one, that would include most of the former Soviet republics. CIS was able to unite almost all former republics and sign tomes of different documents and agreement, but this did not help resolving the problems of its member countries.”³⁷⁰

The failure of CIS led Nazarbayev to advance his idea of a new Eurasian Union. He first suggested his Eurasian project during a speech he held at the Moscow State University on March 29, 1994. When Nazarbayev announced his idea of Eurasian Union, however, Moscow had not still abandoned the pro-Western stance adopted since independence, but it was starting to review its policies of ‘going West’ and ‘shedding the burden of Central Asia’. In August 1994, Andrey Kozyrev, Russian Foreign Minister, affirmed that: “Moscow was ready to go as far as and in the integration forms which our partners are ready.”³⁷¹

In 1995, Kazakhstan, Russia and Belarus signed the treaty which established the Eurasian Customs Union (CU-95) later joined also by Kyrgyzstan. The main task of CU-95 was to remove

³⁶⁸ Henry E. Hale, *“Cause without a Rebel: Kazakhstan's Unionist Nationalism in the USSR and CIS”*, Nationalities Papers, Vol.37, No.1, January 2009, p.16

³⁶⁹ Nargis Kassenova, *“Kazakhstan and Eurasian Economic Integration: Quick Start, Mixed Results and Uncertain Future”*, IFRI, 2012, p.6

³⁷⁰ Marat Tazhin, *Eurasian space: Integration potential and its realisation*, Almaty, 1994,

³⁷¹ Quoted in Sergei Gretsky, *“Russia's Policy Toward Central Asia”*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Moscow Center, 1997

barriers, which hindered free economic interactions between economic agents, facilitate free exchange of good, and ensure good-faith competition between parties, however, this organisation existed only on paper.³⁷² Kyrgyzstan's decision to join the WTO in 1998 without consulting with the other member of the CU-95 witnessed the failure of the project. When Vladimir Putin became President of the Russian Federation, he immediately launched a project aimed to transform this Custom Union into a working organisation. In October 2000, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan established the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc). This international body had two main goals. i.e. to allow member states to create a full-fledged Customs Union and, then, to form a free-trade zone regime. Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed the Agreement for the creation of a Eurasian Custom Union on October 2007, while the Eurasian Custom Union (ECU) became operative in January 2010.³⁷³

Vladimir Putin proposed the creation of the Eurasian Union in article published on the Russian newspaper *Izvestiya* on October 3, 2011. The president of the Russian Federation proclaimed his will to make the existing ECU with Belarus and Kazakhstan a fully-fledged Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Putin stated that he saw the new Union as a supranational organisation able to coordinate economic and currency policy between its members.³⁷⁴ President Nazarbayev enthusiastically backed Putin's proposal and in article on the same newspaper on October 26, 2001, he listed the four main principles that the new Eurasian Union should follow: 1) Economic pragmatism. 2) Voluntary participation of the member states. Every member state must be free choose whether he prefers to be locked in its own borders or join the globalised world. 3) Every member state is equal, and its sovereignty has to be guaranteed, so no one can interfere in internal affairs of others. 4) Each member state has to establish its own national institutions on the principle of consensus of all participants, without any surrender of national sovereignty.

In the same article, the President of Kazakhstan also defined what should be the main features of the EAEU. Firstly, it must be able to compete on the global economic market. Secondly, it must be part of the Europe-Atlantic and Asian areas of development and economically it must be a bridge between EU and Asian markets. Thirdly, the EAEU must be created as a self-sufficient financial body that will be part of the global financial system. Fourthly, EAEU must follow a special, evolutionary integration path both from a geo-economic and geo-political point

³⁷² Evgeny Vinokurov, "Eurasian Economic Union: Current state and preliminary results", Russian Journal of Economics, Vo.3, 2017, p.56

³⁷³ Nargis Kassenova, "Kazakhstan and Eurasian Economic Integration: Quick Start, Mixed Results and Uncertain Future", IFRI, 2012, p.7

³⁷⁴ Reuters World News, "Russia's Putin says wants to build "Eurasian Union", <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-eurasian-idUSTRE7926ZD20111003>, October 4, 2011.

of view. Finally, the participation and the support of the society must be as wide as possible, since the Union cannot be successful without popular backing.³⁷⁵

Yet, several western scholars disputed that EAEU could have any benefit for Kazakhstan, moreover its participation to such an organisation has been considered as a deviation from its typical multilateral foreign policy. John C. Daly doubts that EAEU could serve Kazakhstan's economic interests, remarking that the ECU already had detrimental effects for Astana. Kazakhstan had a lower tariff structure than Russia before to join the Custom Union. The participation in the ECU rose its import tariffs and increase import of Russian more expensive goods in comparison to European and Chinese ones.³⁷⁶

Clark affirmed that Kazakhstan's decision to join EAEU reduced its foreign policy options³⁷⁷, finally De Haas went even further stating that Kazakhstan's EAEU membership could lead to a partial or complete loss of sovereignty in favour of Russia.³⁷⁸

Nevertheless, Nourzhanov that the Eurasian Economic Union membership could be considered an act of submission of Kazakhstan to Kremlin 'neo-imperialist' agenda³⁷⁹, moreover Kushkumbayev neglected that EAEU will lead to any surrender of sovereignty, since its only "about economic ambitions".³⁸⁰ Finally, Nazarbayev himself affirmed during an interview to Khabar TV channel that:

"If the rules set forth in the agreement are not followed, Kazakhstan has a right to withdraw from the EAEU (...). Kazakhstan will not be part of organisation that pose a threat to our independence. Our independence is our dearest treasure, which our grandfathers fought for. First of all, we will never surrender it to someone, and secondly, will do our best to protect it".³⁸¹

³⁷⁵ Nursultan Nazarbayev, "Eurasian Union: From Idea to Future History", *Izvestiya*, October 28, 2011

³⁷⁶ John C. K. Daly, "Kazakhstan and Belarus: Buyer's Remorse?", in *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian and Its Discontent*, edited by Frederick Starr and Svante Cornell, Central Asia- Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Programme, 2014, pp. 85-105

³⁷⁷ Michael Clarke, "Kazakhstan's Multi-vector Foreign Policy: Diminish Returns in an Era of Great Power 'Pivots'?" *The Asian Forum*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.theasianforum.org/kazakhstans-multi-vector-foreign-policy-diminishing-returns-in-an-era-of-great-power-pivots/>

³⁷⁸ Marcel De Haas, "Kazakhstan's Security Policy: Steady as She Goes?", *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vo. 28, No.4, 2015, pp. 621-645

³⁷⁹ Kirill Nourzhanov, "Kazakhstan and the Eurasian Economic Union: The Dilemmas of Alliance-Making in the Post-Soviet Period", in "A Quarter Century of Post-Communism Assessed", edited by Steven Fish, Graeme Gill & Milenk Petrovic, p.324

³⁸⁰ Georgi Gotev, "Kazakh strategist: The Eurasian Union is only about economic relations", *Euractiv*, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/central-asia/interview/kazakh-strategist-the-eurasian-union-is-only-about-economic-relations/>, September 18, 2017

³⁸¹ Tengri News, "Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov on Kazakhstan's right to exit Custom Union", https://en.tengrinews.kz/politics_sub/Russian-Foreign-Minister-Lavrov-on-Kazakhstans-right-to-exit-255862/, September 2, 2014

To sum up, Nazarbayev Eurasianism has three main purposes. Two goals regarded the international arena, while the third objective is related to the domestic public. Firstly, this idea aimed to improve relations with Russia and other regional partners. Second, Kazakhstan Eurasianism aimed to balance relations between Asia and Europe. Kazakhstan leadership has described, indeed, its country as a bridge the two continents, defining this country as a bridge between the two continents defining itself as a bastion of peace, stability and neutrality. Finally, Eurasianism idea has also been used to create a fully-fledged Kazakhstan identity, able to create multi-ethnic harmony and stability in a multinational state, such as Kazakhstan.

4.3 Relations between Kazakhstan and Russia.

Kazakhstan and Russia established officially diplomatic relations on October 22, 1992. Since then, Astana and Moscow have signed more than 300 treaties. In particular, two are the key documents on which tis relation is based, i.e. the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance of May 25,1992 and the Declaration on Eternal Friendship and Alliance of July 6,1998.³⁸²

Yelena Zabortseva identified five different stage in the relations between Kazakhstan and Russia. The first stage encompasses the years between 1991-1994. In this phase, Russia did not have a clear Central Asia policy. Moscow saw the CIS as an international body, whose purpose was to guarantee a ‘civilised divorce’ and not to keep Russian influence in the former Soviet space. Yeltsin government did not strive for establishing good diplomatic relations with Almaty, moreover two main issues made bilateral relations difficult in these years, i.e. the Kazakhstani nuclear arsenal and the status of Russian diaspora.³⁸³

When Kazakhstan gained its independence in December 1991, it automatically became one of the world’s largest nuclear power. Almaty inherited, indeed, 108 SS-18 intercontinental ballistic missile and 1,410 warheads. The nuclear dilemma for Kazakhstani leadership was above all a security dilemma. It believed Kazakhstan could use the nuclear arsenal in a twofold way, “as a deterrence mechanism against a possible threat and as a bargaining tool to receive security guarantee in exchange for the arsenal relinquishment”. Almaty believed, indeed, hat a Russian or a Chinese military intervention against its territory could not be excluded.³⁸⁴

³⁸² The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Kazakhstan, “*Russia-Kazakhstan*”, http://www.rfembassy.kz/eng/lm/dvustoronnie_otnosheniya/rossiya-kazakhstan, Access on May 17, 2018

³⁸³ Yelena Nikolaevna Zabortseva, “*Russia’s Relation with Kazakhstan*”, Routledge, 2016, pp. 101-102

³⁸⁴ Anuar Ayazbekov, “*Kazakhstan’s Nuclear Decision Making, 1991-1992*”, *The Non-Proliferation Review*, Vol. 21, No.2, 2014, pp. 149-153

Nevertheless, Kazakhstan finally decided to give up its own nuclear factors. Three factors helped Kazakhstani leadership to take this decision. Firstly, Almaty would not receive any financial aid without giving up its nuclear arsenal. Secondly, Ukraine and Belarus already decided to cede their nuclear armament to Russia. Finally, USA, Russia and China assured that they would not use their nuclear weapons against Kazakhstan, once it removed the strategic nuclear weapons from its territory.³⁸⁵ On May 23, 1992, Kazakhstan signed the Lisbon Protocol to the Strategic Treaty Arms Reduction Treaty, agreeing to become a non- nuclear weapon state.³⁸⁶

Russia and Kazakhstan found an agreement on short range nuclear forces only on March 28, 1994, when they signed the Treaty on Military Cooperation. Such an agreement established in particular that Russian Federation could use these weapons only with the approval of the Republic of Kazakhstan, until they would “have been eliminated or withdrawn” to Russia, moreover, it identified in three years the necessary timeframe to remove these weapons to Russia.³⁸⁷

However, the nuclear one was not the only security issue that Almaty and Moscow faced in this period. Kazakhstan also hosted the Baikonour Cosmodrome, the largest operational space facility in the world. Almaty and Moscow found an agreement on March 28, 1994, which allowed the latter to lease the space facility until 2050 at \$115 million per year.³⁸⁸

The second main issue characterising Russia-Kazakhstan relations in this period was the status of Russian diaspora. Kazakhstan leadership feared that the northern regions, mainly populated by ethnic Russians could strive for secession to Moscow and this affected negatively relations between the two states.³⁸⁹ According to the last Soviet census in 1989, Russian population represented the overwhelmingly majority in two northern Kazakhstan oblasts, i.e. North Kazakhstan and East Kazakhstan, where the Russian-ethnic population represented respectively the 65,9% and 62,1% of the overall population. Russian ethnic population also overcame ‘titular’ nationality in two other northern districts, Kokshetau and Pavlodar, where the former

³⁸⁵ Guancheng Xing, “China and Central Asia”, in “Central Asian Security: The New International Context”, edited by Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Brookings Institution Press, 2001, p. 155

³⁸⁶ Anuar Ayazbekov, “Kazakhstan’s Nuclear Decision Making, 1991-1992”, The Non-Proliferation Review, Vol. 21, No.2, 2014, pp. 149

³⁸⁷ Stephen Foye, “Izvestiya: Kazak nuclear weapons unsafe”. RFE/RFL News Briefs, Vol.3, No.8, 14-18 February 1994

³⁸⁸ Catherine Putz, “Kazakhstan-Russian Space Cooperation Muddles Forward”, The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/kazakh-russian-space-cooperation-muddles-forward/>, July 15, 2016

³⁸⁹ Yelena Nikolaevna Zabortseva, “Russia’s Relation with Kazakhstan”, Routledge, 2016, p.116

represented respectively 42,1% and 45,4%, while Kazakhs share on the overall population was equal to 28,9% and 28,6%.³⁹⁰

In article published on 1990, the Noble Prize for Literature, Alexander Solzhenitsyn claimed that northern part of Kazakhstan should be included in the Russian federation, because of the demographic composition of this area. Some Russian, and in particular Cossacks, welcomed this statement and even former the “Organisation for the Autonomy of Eastern Kazakhstan”.³⁹¹

Russian Kazakhstani were particularly unsatisfied with the new policies of “Kazakhization” implemented by the government, indeed they blamed the central government for ethnic risen in the country in this period, since Kazakhstan and Russia lived peacefully together until the fall of the Soviet Union.³⁹² However, the issue of Russian diaspora appeared in the official agenda only once, when the two states discussed the conditions on which Kazakhstan would remove its nuclear weapons, nevertheless, it represented an obstacle to the further improvement of their bilateral relations. The second stage of Kazakhstan-Russia relations encompasses years between 1995-1999. This phase witnessed further positive relations vis-à-vis the previous one. In particular, two factors allowed bilateral cooperation to improve; first of all, talks about Kazakhstan’s nuclear status ended, secondly, Kazakhstan leadership’s decision to move the capital from Almaty in the south to Astana in the north, diminished its concern about the possibility of a secession to the northern regions. During this stage, bilateral relations focused above all on economy, particularly Caspian oil and security. Military operations like the Tajikistan civil war and Taliban seizing power in Afghanistan persuaded Astana that it needed to strengthen its ties with Moscow.³⁹³ Moreover, Russia changed his attitude toward Central Asia, Yevgeny Primakov replaced Andrey Kozyrev as Russian Foreign Minister, he claimed that Russia needed to adopt a multilateral foreign policy and also stated that Russia had to recover its influence over the former Soviet space to regain its international status.³⁹⁴

During this period, Russia and Kazakhstan began to cooperate actively on issues related to Caspian oilfields. On January 1995, Russia, Kazakhstan and Oman signed a protocol for the construction of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), aimed to transport oil from the Tengiz

³⁹⁰ Quoted in Robert Kaiser & Jeff Chin, “*Russian-Kazakh Relations in Kazakhstan*”, *Post-Soviet Geography*, Vol.36, No.5, p. 262

³⁹¹ Robert Kaiser & Jeff Chin, “*Russian-Kazakh Relations in Kazakhstan*”, *Post-Soviet Geography*, Volume 36, 1995, p. 267

³⁹² Ian Bremmer, “*Nazarbayev and the north: State-building and ethnic relations in Kazakhstan*”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 17, No.4, 1994, p.630

³⁹³ Yelena Nikolaevna Zabortseva, “*Russia’s Relation with Kazakhstan*”, Routledge, 2016, pp. 129-131

³⁹⁴ Marlene Laruelle, “*Russia and Central Asia*”, in “*The New Central Asia. The Regional Impact of International Actors*”, edited by Emilian Kavalski, World Scientific Publishing, 2010, p.157

field to the Novorossysk-22 Marine Terminal in the Black Sea. However, Nazarbayev soon suspended Oman's participation, because of several delays in the implementation of the several delays in the implementation. Moreover, he sold the 25% of the Tengiz field to the American Mobil Oil corporation to pressure Moscow. Kazakhstan also involved the Russian LukOil in the project and this was the fundamental step to persuade Russia to participate in the project. On April 27, 1997, Kazakhstan and Russia signed a new agreement related to the CPC, which established that Russian government owned the 24% of the pipeline stakes, while LukOil and Rosneft held an additional 20%. On December 1998, the contract for the construction of the first section of the pipeline was signed which became to be operative in Autumn 2001.³⁹⁵

Lukoil is the Russian company that invested the most in Kazakhstani economy, more than \$6 billion since it began to operate in the country. During this period, it was involved in three major projects, i.e. Tengiz, Kumkol and Karachaganak oilfield, whose the company owns respectively 5, 15 and 50%.³⁹⁶ Yet, Russian investments in Kazakhstan to remain between. Yet, Russian investment in Kazakhstan continued to remain low between 1995-1999, indeed they represented only the 2% of the overall Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). Nevertheless, the two states had a strong commercial relation, indeed Astana continued to be the first partner of Moscow in the region.³⁹⁷

Russian-Kazakhstan relations also witnessed an improvement in military relations. First of all, officials of both states began to define their military relations as an "alliance". Moreover, Astana and Moscow signed four agreements related to the use of Kazakhstan's military test ranges: Sari-Shagan, Enba, 4th State Test Center, which Kazakhstan leased to Russia.³⁹⁸ According to 1996 agreements, Russia had to pay \$20 million for Sari-Shagan, \$4 million for Enba and \$1 million for the 4th State Test Center. These agreements have been criticised both for an economic reason, since annual payments are considered too low, and for ecological ones. Even Kazakhstani parliamentarians claimed, indeed, that these military range tests have negative impact on geological and ecological balance in Kazakhstan. Yet, these critics did not affect all bilateral partnership between Astana and Moscow in this field.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ Carol R. Saivetz, *"Perspectives on the Caspian Sea Dilemma: Russian Policies since the Soviet Demise"*, Eurasian Geography and Economics, Vol.44, No.8, 2003, p.593

³⁹⁶ LUKOIL, *"Lukoil in Kazakhstan. Investments bear fruits"*, www.lukoil.com/static_6_5id_275_.html, access on May 17, 2018

³⁹⁷ Gennady Chufirin, *"The Security of the Caspian Sea Region"*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p.79

³⁹⁸ Yelena Nikolaevna Zabortseva, *"Russia's Relation with Kazakhstan"*, Routledge, 2016, p.140

³⁹⁹ Bayram Aliyev, *"Russian Military Existence's Effect in the Central Asia: Military Bases in Kazakhstan"*, Bilgesam Analysis, No.1346, October 28, 2016, p.4

Furthermore, the two countries found an agreement for the protection of Kazakhstani borders. In particular, they agreed to increase the exchange of information about the situation at the border. In 1995, Kazakhstan and Russia began an air defence partnership and Moscow also committed itself to aid Astana in the development of a Caspian Sea Navy.⁴⁰⁰ Finally, in 1996, Russia and Kazakhstan together with China, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan established the Shanghai Five Cooperation, aimed to discussed military confidence building measures.

The third stage encompasses the years between 2000-2004 and witnessed a further improvement in partnership between the two states. Security issues played a key role for several reasons. Firstly, the spread of terrorist activity in Afghanistan made Central Asian more unstable. Such a situation allowed Kazakhstan to understand that it cannot expected USA pledged to assure a fully-fledged regional security, even if Washington was committed to tackle terrorism on global stage. Therefore, Astana began to prioritise military cooperation with Moscow. Burat Sulatnov described Kazakhstan-Russia military relations as a win-win partnership. Indeed, while Russia as a nuclear power is a guarantor of national security for Kazakhstan”, simultaneously Astana defended Moscow from challenges and sub-state threat coming from Central Asia and acted as a link between Russia and other countries of the region.⁴⁰¹In addition, more than 80% of Kazakhstani defence industry still relied on Russia.⁴⁰² Finally, during this period Kazakhstan and Russia also increased their cooperation within organisation like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation.⁴⁰³

However, security issues were not the only reasons why Astana tightened its ties with Moscow. Nazarbayev regime also needed to be backed by a main global power, since it faced an increasing international criticism related to corruption and misuse of public funds.⁴⁰⁴ Therefore, many thought that Nazarbayev intensified its visit to Russia to show Moscow’s support for his own government.⁴⁰⁵The enhancement of military cooperation had also positive aspects on other areas, such as economy. On October 2000, President of Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan established the Eurasian Economic Community.⁴⁰⁶ Moreover, Kazakhstan and Russia also signed a number of agreements related to the export of Kazakhstan’s

⁴⁰⁰ NATO Parliamentary Assembly, “*NATO and Kazakhstan*”, <http://www.nato-pa.int>, October 21, 2005, pp.7-9

⁴⁰¹ Roger N. McDermott, “*Kazakhstan’s Defence Policy: An assessment of the trends*”, Strategic Studies Institute, February 2009, p. 45

⁴⁰²NATO Parliamentary Assembly, “*NATO and Kazakhstan*”, <http://www.nato-pa.int>, October 21, 2005, pp.7-9

⁴⁰³ Yelena Nikolaevna Zabortseva, “*Russia’s Relation with Kazakhstan*”, Routledge, 2016, pp.169-170.

⁴⁰⁴ Ed Perlmutter, “*Kazakhstan more words than deeds*”, Washington Times, October 4, 2000.

⁴⁰⁵ Richard Weitz, “*Kazakhstan and the new international politics of Eurasia*”, Silk Road Paper, July 2008, p.115

⁴⁰⁶ Richard Weitz, “*Kazakhstan and the new international politics of Eurasia*”, Silk Road Paper, July 2008, p.26

oil, like the Oil Transit Agreement of June 7, 2002. Thanks to these new contracts, the two states agreed to export 45 million tons of Kazakhstan oil through Russia for 15 years, while, until 2002, Astana exported only 3 million tons of oil through Russian Federation territory.⁴⁰⁷ However, Russia-Kazakhstan relation was still hindered by the absence of a clear agreement about border delimitation.⁴⁰⁸

The fourth of stage in Kazakhstan-Russia bilateral relation involves year between 2005-2012 and it is one in which the two countries better cooperated. The signing of the border agreement was the main reason why Astana and Moscow experienced a positive development in their partnership. Kazakhstan and Russia signed the State Border Treaty on January 18, 2005. This agreement is a keystone of the bilateral relations, since it allowed Kazakhstan to reduce its concern related to the possible secession of its northern regions. The positive effect of such an agreement was visited by more than 250 Russian delegation. In 2006, Putin and Nazarbayev met 13 times, discussing issues that could lead toward further cooperation.⁴⁰⁹

In these years, Kazakhstan and Russia also intensified their cooperation in the military field. Astana and Moscow signed several agreements related to security issues. In 2006, General Major Almat Abdullanov affirmed that the two countries were negotiating a modernisation of Kazakhstani armed forces, above all the Kazakh Air Force. In February 2008, Kazakhstan and Russia also agreed the provision of an air defence missile system, The Kazakhstani Minister of Defence stated that this was a fundamental deal for Kazakhstan, which allowed his country to improve its air defence and modernise its air force.⁴¹⁰

In 2008, finally, Kazakhstan and Russia conducted the largest joint military exercise between the two countries since the demise of Soviet Union. The exercise- named “Centre 2008”- was held at the Chibarkul training centre, near Chilyabusk, Russia. It focused on security in Central Asia and its main purpose was to rehearse how to face an attack on Kazakhstan by an “adjacent state”.⁴¹¹

In this period Kazakhstan and Russia also experienced and intensification of their economic cooperation. The most important result in this field was the establishment of the Eurasian Development Bank, whose main purpose was to “lease financial restriction and expand

⁴⁰⁷ Alexandrov and Orlov, *“Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan: gde neft?”*, Nezavisimaia gazeta, October 4, 2002.

⁴⁰⁸ Yelena Nikolaevna Zabortseva, *“Russia’s Relation with Kazakhstan”*, Routledge, 2016, p.189

⁴⁰⁹ Yelena Nikolaevna Zabortseva, *“Russia’s Relation with Kazakhstan”*, Routledge, 2016, pp. 194-195

⁴¹⁰ Yelena Nikolaevna Zabortseva, *“Russia’s Relation with Kazakhstan”*, Routledge, 2016, pp. 199-200

⁴¹¹ Roger N. McDermott, *“Kazakhstan’s Defence Policy: An assessment of the trends”*, Strategic Studies Institute, February 2009, p. 43

investment cooperation”. The Bank has a capital equal to \$1,5 billion, whose \$1 billion is provided by the Russian Federation, while the residual \$0,5 billion by the Republic of Kazakhstan.⁴¹²

Nevertheless, Astana and Moscow cooperation was not devoid of problem during the period. Kazakhstan interest in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline deeply irritated Russia, which feared that its influence over Kazakhstan could be loosened. Indeed, the BTC pipeline would allow Kazakhstan to transport oil bypassing Russia. On June 7, 2002, Russia and Kazakhstan signed an agreement related to the transit of Kazakhstan oil through Russia, which allowed the latter to control the oil that the former could transport through its territory. Indeed, Article 5 of the Agreement affirmed that ‘The destination and amount of Kazakhstan’s oil transit will be determined by the Russian authorities (...) and approved by the congruent decision of the Government of Russian Federation’. Kazakhstan used the threat of participation in the BTC project as a leverage to soften this Treaty conditions, bringing Russia to amend the agreement on November 18, 2009. In particular, the Protocol signed by the two countries foresaw a survey examining the possibility to increase the capacity of the Atyrau (Kazakhstan)-Samara (Russia) pipeline from 15 to 25 million of tons.⁴¹³

The last stage in Kazakhstan- Russia relation began in 2013. Indeed, Ukraine events negatively affected the relations between the two countries. Already on March 5, 2014, Olcott affirmed that Kazakhstan could presumably be the next former Soviet state to face a Ukraine-like scenario.⁴¹⁴ Putin’s statement at Seliger Youth Camp on August 2014 raised Kazakhstani leadership concerns. The Russian president praised Nazarbayev, who, in his opinion “has performed a unique feat”, because “he has created a state on a territory, where he never had a state on their own territory”.⁴¹⁵

Putin’s declaration clashed with official Kazakhstan rhetoric which believed Kazakh state was born in 1465, when Kerei and Zanibek created the Kazakh khanate. Furthermore, on October 2014, Nazarbayev announced that Kazakhstan would celebrate its 550th anniversary. In the same circumstance, he also declared:

⁴¹² The Embassy of the Russian Federation to the Republic of Kazakhstan, “Russia-Kazakhstan”, http://www.rfembassy.kz/eng/lm/dvustoronnie_otnosheniya/rossiya-kazakhstan/,

⁴¹³ Lyailya Nurgaliyeva, “Kazakhstan’s economic soft balancing policy vis-à-vis Russia: From the Eurasian Union to the economic cooperation with Turkey”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Volume 7, No.1, pp. 98-103

⁴¹⁴ Martha Brill Olcott, “After Crimea: Will Kazakhstan be Next in Putin’s Reintegration Project?”, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie Moscow Centre, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2014/03/05/after-crimea-will-kazakhstan-be-next-in-putin-s-reintegration-project-pub-54782>, March 5, 2014

⁴¹⁵ Marlene Laruelle, “Why No Kazakh Novorossiya? Kazakhstan’s Russian Minority in a Post-Crimea World”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Volume 65, No.1, p.66

“It may not have been a state in modern understanding of this term (...) But it is important that the foundation was laid then and we are people continuing the great deeds of our ancestors”.⁴¹⁶

Kazakhstan maintains good relations with Ukraine over this years. On December 2014, Nazarbayev and Petro Poroshenko, Ukrainian President discussed a new agenda for bilateral cooperation and on October 2015, Kyiv and Astana adopted an Action Plan of Kazakhstan for Kazakhstan-Ukraine for 2015-2017.⁴¹⁷

However, the birth of “Kazakh Novorossiya” is an unlikely scenario for a threefold reason. First, it has vague borders. Second there is not any possibility to refer to a precise date or to complain about a “Khrushchev gift”, indeed, Russia began its expansion in the Steppe after the fall of Kazan and Astrakhan in 1552 and 1556. Third, there is not any city as Sevastopol in the Crimean case, that could symbolise the “Russianness of the Region”.⁴¹⁸

Moreover, Laruelle identified two other factors that differentiated Kazakhstani from Ukrainian case. Firstly, the demographic one. In Ukraine, the demographic evolution of Russian and Ukrainian population was almost similar. In Kazakhstan, on the contrary, Kazakh growth rate was 2,3%, while Russian one was negative. Furthermore, Kazakhs average age was just 28, while Russia’s one was 38,5. In 20-30 years, therefore, Russians will decline and consequently will diminish the potential for secession. Finally, Kazakhstani and Ukrainian situation differed from an economic point of view. Indeed, in Ukraine the eight regions involved in “Novorossiya” represented almost 50% of the country’s GDP. While Kazakhstan’s wealth is concentrated above all in the two main cities, Almaty and Astana and in two western Caspian regions, Atyrau and Mangystan, while, northern Kazakhstan region represented just the 25% of the Kazakhstani GDP.⁴¹⁹

Nevertheless, Deirdre Tyran believes that Astana’s new Military Doctrine released in September 2017, is a clear reaction to the Ukraine events. Indeed, the document outlined that Kazakhstani leadership concerns for the possible deployment of hybrid methods. Moreover, the Doctrine also refers to the threat of “incitement and escalation of armed conflict on the Republic of Kazakhstan’s border space”. Yet, the Kazakhstani scholar Dubovtsev affirmed that the text

⁴¹⁶ Joanna Lillis, “Kazakhstan Celebrates Statehood in Riposte to Russia”, Eurasianet, <https://eurasianet.org/s/kazakhstan-celebrates-statehood-in-riposte-to-russia>, January 6, 2015

⁴¹⁷ Catherine Putz, “Kazakhstan Deftly Balances Relations with Ukraine and Russia”, The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/10/kazakhstan-deftly-balances-relations-with-ukraine-and-russia/>, October 10, 2015

⁴¹⁸ Marlene Laruelle, “Why No Kazakh Novorossiya? Kazakhstan’s Russian Minority in a Post-Crimea World”, Problems of Post-Communism, Volume 65, No.1, p.69

⁴¹⁹ Marlene Laruelle, “Why No Kazakh Novorossiya? Kazakhstan’s Russian Minority in a Post-Crimea World”, Problems of Post-Communism, Volume 65, No.1, p.71

closely “referred to scenario like Libya or Syria” defined ‘theatres of proxy wars’. He remarked that: “None of the unrest that those nations experience in recent decades was initiated by Russia, but was rather stoked by Western government, and promoted under the cloak of ‘promoting democracy’ and fighting against tyranny”.⁴²⁰

4.4 Relations between China and Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan and China relations has experienced different evolutions. Since the demise of the Soviet Union until 1997, China had no other interest in Central Asia but strategic ones. Two main issue characterised Sino-Kazakhstani cooperation in this period, i.e. border delimitation and regional stability, in particular with reference to Xinjiang.⁴²¹ When Soviet Union collapsed, Kazakhstan and China began to share a 1,700 km long border with China. Beijing and Almaty established official diplomatic relations on January 3, 1992 when they signed the Communiqué on the Establishment of bilateral relations.⁴²²

China behaviour vis-à-vis Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian states was initially driven first and foremost, by domestic concerns. China quickly recognised these post-Soviet nations for a twofold reason, it wanted to avoid that Taiwan could recognise them before and, above all, China needed that these countries acknowledged Xinjiang as part of its own territory.⁴²³ The Xinjiang represented one-sixth of the entire territory of the Popular Republic of China (PRC) and it constituted the fourth largest concentration of Turkic peoples in the world, just after Turkey, Iran and Uzbekistan. Moreover, the most of one million ethnic Kazakhs living in China, resided in this region, while 180,000 Uighurs, the main Xinjiang’s ethnicity, inhabited in Kazakhstan.⁴²⁴ Therefore, it was fundamental that Kazakhstan would not support China’s Uighur secessionist ambitions.⁴²⁵

Kazakhstan and China signed the first agreement on border delimitation on April 1994, when Li Peng, Chinese Prime Minister, visited the Central Asian country.⁴²⁶ The Treaty allowed to

⁴²⁰ Almaz Kumenov, “Kazakhstan: Is New Military Doctrine Response to Russia or West”, Eurasianet, <https://eurasianet.org/s/kazakhstan-is-new-military-doctrine-response-to-russia-or-the-west>, November 30, 2017.

⁴²¹ Huasheng Zhao, “Central Asia in China’s Diplomacy”, in “Central Asia. Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing”, edited by Eugen Rumer, Dmitri Trenin and Huasheng Zhao, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 2007, pp.137-138

⁴²² Ramil M. Valeev & Leysan I. Kadyrova, “Formation and Development of Bilateral Relations of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the People’s Republic of China in 1990 and 2000s”, Journal of Sustainable Development, Vol.8, No.4, 2015, p.278

⁴²³ Stephen Blank, “Kazakhstan’s Border Relations with China, in “Beijing Power and China’s borders”, edited by Bruce A. Elleman, Stephen Kotkin and Clive Schofield, M.E Sharpe, 2013, p. 97

⁴²⁴ Sally Cummings, “Kazakhstan: Centre-Periphery Relations”, Royal Institute of National Affairs, 2000, p.35

⁴²⁵ Richard Weitz, “Kazakhstan and the New International Politics of Eurasia”, Silk Road Paper, 2008, p. 103

⁴²⁶ Guancheng Xing, “China and Central Asia”, in “Central Asian Security: The New International Context”, edited by Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Brookings Institution Press, 2001, p. 154

settle disputes related to border demarcation and it also stated that it would be a “link of friendly cooperation and mutual prosperity”. The Agreement favoured Kazakhstan, however Beijing obtained an important political result. On the conclusion of this agreement, indeed, Nazarbayev declared that “He will never allow factions of East Turkestan to involve themselves in activities here against China that will hurt Sino-Kazakhstan relations”.

The Treaty legally defined borders between the two states and stated that it would be a “link of friendly cooperation and mutual prosperity”.⁴²⁷ Kazakhstan gained more than China during the border negotiations, however Beijing obtained an important political result. On the conclusion of this agreement, indeed, Nazarbayev affirmed that “He will never allow factions of “East Turkestan to involve themselves in activities here against China that will hurt Sino-Kazakhstani relations”.⁴²⁸ The two countries signed two further agreements in September 1997 and July 1998, which de facto settled the border dispute.⁴²⁹ The nuclear issue was a question characterising also Kazakhstan-China relation in the early 1990s. However, Almaty decided to give up its own nuclear arsenal and on February 8, 1995, the two countries released a statement that involved China’s security guarantee to Kazakhstan.⁴³⁰

The improvement in the bilateral relations allowed China and Kazakhstan to diminish the number of troops deployed in the border regions. However, it was necessary to establish an international body able to guarantee border security and territorial integrity. Therefore, Kazakhstan, China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan signed the agreement on “Deepening on Military Trust in Border Regions on April 26, 1996”, which established the Shanghai Five. It stated, among other things that “military forces deployed in border regions will not attack each other” and that “each side will invite the other to observe military exercise that involve use of live ammunition”.⁴³¹

⁴²⁷ Quoted in Guancheng Xing, “China and Central Asia”, in “Central Asian Security: The New International Context”, edited by Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Brookings Institution Press, 2001, p. 154

⁴²⁸ Quoted in Stephen Blank “Kazakhstan’s Border Relations with China, in *Beijing Power and China’s borders*”, edited by Bruce A. Elleman, Stephen Kotkin and Clive Schofield, M.E Sharpe, 2013, p.104

⁴²⁹ Guancheng Xing, “China and Central Asia”, in “Central Asian Security: The New International Context”, edited by Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Brookings Institution Press, 2001, p. 154

⁴³⁰ China Daily, “China-Kazakhstan relations grow stronger”, October 15, 2007, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2007-10/15/content_6173531.htm

⁴³¹ Huasheng Zhao, “Central Asia in China’s Diplomacy”, in “Central Asia. Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing”, edited by Eugen Rumer, Dmitri Trenin and Huasheng Zhao, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 2007, pp.139

A year earlier, these five countries also signed the agreement on “Mutual Reduction of Military forces in the Border Regions”, which further increased thrust and improved cooperation among these five countries.⁴³²

Once they settled security issues, economy began to play a key role in the relations between China and Kazakhstan. Li Peng already defined what would have been the guidelines for the development of economic cooperation during his visit in Kazakhstan in 1994, when he outlined that economic partnership between Beijing and its Central Asian counterparts had to respect the principle of equality and mutual benefit.⁴³³ Kazakhstan- China trade grew all over the first decade of Kazakhstani independence. Indeed, China-Central Asian, two-thirds of which is China-Kazakhstan trade, reached \$422 million, while in 1997 he was equal to \$699 million.⁴³⁴

Kazakhstan-China relations were particularly fruitful in the energy field. In 1993, China became a net importer of oil and its reliance on energy imports was increasing. China’s first move in the Kazakhstani oil and gas sector was in June 1997, when the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) purchased the 60% of Aktobemuntanaigas, which at that time was the fourth largest oil producer behind Tengiz. The CNPC acquired both production and exploration assets in Aktobe, a region located in the north of Kazakhstan. Moreover, CNPC and Kaizmugas began to build a pipeline to transport oil from Atyrau to Alanshankou in China. The Chinese company holds the 49 percent of the pipeline, which can transport 6 million tons of oil per year.⁴³⁵

Kazakhstan-China relations continued to intensify during the first decade of the 21st century. In the early 2000s, Chinese-Kazakhstani cooperation in the security field focused on fight against separatism and Islamic extremism. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, Kazakhstani and Chinese top officials met and declared their commitment to implement a coordinated anti-terroristic policy.⁴³⁶

In June 2001, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan also established the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), whose short-term focus were the so-called “three

⁴³² Guancheng Xing, “China and Central Asia”, in “Central Asian Security: The New International Context”, edited by Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Brookings Institution Press, 2001, p. 154

⁴³³ Guancheng Xing, “China and Central Asia”, in “Central Asian Security: The New International Context”, edited by Roy Allison and Lena Johnson, Brookings Institution Press, 2001, p. 155

⁴³⁴ Sebastien Peyrouse, “Chinese Economic Presence in Kazakhstan”, China Perspectives, 2008, No.3, p.36

⁴³⁵ Yelena Kalyuzhnova & Julian Lee, “China and Kazakhstan’s Oil and Gas Partnership at the Start of the Twenty First-Century”, Emerging Markets Finance and Trade, Vol.50, No.5, p.209

⁴³⁶ Samuel Ramani, “The Emerging China-Kazakhstan Defence Relationship”, The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/the-emerging-china-kazakhstan-defense-relationship/>, December 23, 2015.

evils”, that were ethnic separatism, religious extremism and international terrorism.⁴³⁷ Astana and Beijing further confirmed their commitment to enact an effective strategy against terrorism during Chinese President Hu Jintao visit in Astana on June 2003, when the two countries released a statement declaring that: “The two sides are determined to continue to take effective measures and work together in cracking down on all forms of terrorism, including terrorist force of the “Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement” in order to safeguard the peace and the stability in the two countries and this part of the world”.⁴³⁸

The twin towers attack had also consequences on energy cooperation between Kazakhstan and China. This event and the following Afghanistan and Iraqi war affected global perception of the Middle East, which began to be perceived as a region vulnerable to long-term turbulence and instability. This new attitude toward Middle East led China to acknowledge even more importance to Central Asia energy resources.⁴³⁹ Beijing made several acquisitions in Kazakhstan oil and gas sector between 2003 and the end 2005, in particular the Chinese National Petroleum Company focused on assets in the South Turgay basin, in the centre of the post-Soviet nation. In 2003, CNPC had also purchased stakes in North Buzachi in Mangystan, a Western Kazakhstan region. Chinese companies pay even more attention on West Kazakhstan after 2005, after that they have secured their position in the South Turgay Basin. In 2011, Chinese companies share the 20% of the entire Kazakhstani oil production.⁴⁴⁰

Kazakhstan’s decision to adopt One China Policy also helped the two neighbouring to make their partnership more stable. A joint Kazakh-Chinese statement issued on April 2003 recognised Beijing as the only legitimate government of China, declaring that Taiwan was part of the Chinese territory. On March 2008, when Taiwan held a referendum related to its membership in United Nation as a separate country, Kazakhstan remarked its strong opposition to any Taiwan attempt to secede from China.⁴⁴¹

China became even a more important partner for Kazakhstan during the last decade. On September 2013, during a visit in Astana, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced its idea to recreate the historic “Silk Road”, which is also known as “One Belt One Road”. Kazakhstan

⁴³⁷ Jing-Dong Yuan, “China’s Role in Establishing and Building the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)”, *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2010, Vol. 19, No.67, p.855

⁴³⁸ Richard Weitz, “Kazakhstan and the New International Politics of Eurasia”, *Silk Road Paper*, 2008, p. 105

⁴³⁹ Huasheng Zhao, “Central Asia in China’s Diplomacy”, in “*Central Asia. Views from Washington, Moscow and Beijing*”, edited by Eugen Rumer, Dmitri Trenin and Huasheng Zhao, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 2007, p. 146

⁴⁴⁰ Yelena Kalyuzhnova & Julian Lee, “China and Kazakhstan’s Oil and Gas Partnership at the Start of the Twenty First-Century”, *Emerging Markets Finance and Trade*, Vol.50, No.5, pp. 209-210.

⁴⁴¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, “Zayavleniyu MID Respubliki Kazakhstan po Vstupleniyu Tayvanya v OON,” March 25, 2008, <http://portal.mfa.kz/portal/page/portal/mfa/ru/content/press/statement/2008>.

welcomed with open arms Xi Jinping proposal, affirming that the “implementation of the Silk Road allows to position the whole regions in a new way, including Central Asia in a global context”.⁴⁴² OBOR could make Kazakhstan an important economic hub all over the years, indeed, in the long term, an important share of trade between Beijing and the European continent might pass through Kazakhstani territory.

On April 6, 2015, Kazakhstan also approved the “*Nurly Zhol*”- Bright Path. The main objective of the program is to integrate the different areas of the countries through the construction of an effective transport infrastructure necessary also for Kazakhstan’s long-term growth.⁴⁴³

The launch of the Belt Road Initiative has led China to make significant investment in Kazakhstan, among which the main important was the construction of Khorgos “dry port”. Beijing spent 3,5 billion on this project. COSCO Shipping Corporation and the Jiangsu Lianyungang Port Co then purchased the 49% of Khorgos dry port shares on May 2017. The key role that Kazakhstan played in Chinese Belt Road Initiative has been further witnessed by Xi Jinping decision to invest \$8 billion to strengthen synergy between OBOR and *Nurly Zhol* strategy.⁴⁴⁴

However, while Kazakhstan China official relations improved during the last years, simultaneously an anti-Chinese sentiment spread over Kazakh population. In April 2016, Kazakhstani government decision to change the Land Code unleashed riots in Atyrau, in the West of the country, then in Aktobe and Semey, respectively in the north and east of Kazakhstan. People was angry because of the new Land Code’s provision that let foreigners to lease agricultural in Kazakhstan for 25 years. The protesters’ feared that such a clause could attract a massive Chinese migration. During the Aktobe rally, a protester even affirmed: “After 25 years, they will stay for 65. After 65 their descendants will take Kazakhstan’s citizenship and our descendant will be their slaves”⁴⁴⁵.

⁴⁴² Malika Orazgaliyeva, “Kazakh President attends One Belt, One Road forums, meets with leaders in China”, The Astana Times, <https://astanatimes.com/2017/05/kazakh-president-attends-one-belt-one-road-forum-meets-with-leaders-in-china/>, May 16, 2017

⁴⁴³ The Prime Minister of Kazakhstan, “*The State Program of Infrastructure development ‘Nurly Zhol’ for 2015-2019*”, https://primeminister.kz/en/page/view/gosudarstvennaya_programma_infrastrukturnogo_razvitiya_nurli_zhol_na_2015__2019_godi

⁴⁴⁴ Fabio Indeo, “OBOR. Khorgos ‘porto di terra’ strategico e porta d’accesso all’Asia centrale, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/obor-khorgos-porto-di-terra-strategico-e-porta-daccesso-allasia-centrale-17841>, September 26, 2017.

⁴⁴⁵ BBC News, “Kazakhstan’s land reform protests explained”, April 28, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-36163103>

4.5 Relations between USA and Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan and USA have sought to maintain good economic, political and security relations since the Central Asian state became independent in 1991. The American government was the first to recognise Kazakhstan's independence on December 26, 1991 and just two weeks later, on January 7, 1992, USA already established their embassy in Almaty, former Kazakhstani capital.⁴⁴⁶ President Nazarbayev later affirmed that USA political support was fundamental for Kazakhstan during its first years as an independent state, since it "made entry to the world association and the world economy much easier and it helped to choose more effective and far sighted political reference points".⁴⁴⁷

During President Clinton's presidency, United States had two main priorities vis-à-vis Kazakhstan. Firstly, to destroy or secure Kazakhstani nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. Secondly, United States government intended to raise the volume of Kazakhstan's oil production flowing in the global market, above all through routes alternative to Russia.⁴⁴⁸

On May 23, 1992, Kazakhstan finally decided to sign Lisbon Protocol to START Treaty. On this occasion, Kazakhstan's State Counsellor, Tolgen Zhukeyev affirmed that Almaty would accede the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a nuclear weapon-free state and would join START as a signatory country. USA facilitated Kazakhstan's decision in two ways. Firstly, James Baker, US Secretary of State confirmed Washington commitment to safeguard non-nuclear states, whenever they would be threatened with nuclear weapons. Secondly, Nazarbayev affirmed that USA decision to acknowledge Kazakhstan as an independent party to START had an equal important role in Kazakhstan's nuclear policy shift.⁴⁴⁹

In 1993, US agreed to help Kazakhstan both technically and financially with nuclear disarmament activities. Almaty received about \$240 million from United States' Cooperative Treaty Reduction Programme to destroy its nuclear arsenal. Moreover, Washington provided

⁴⁴⁶ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Kazakhstan, "*Kazakhstan-United States relations*", <http://mfa.gov.kz/en/content-view/sotrudnichestvo-respubliki-kazakhstan-s-soedinennymi-shtatami-ameriki>, Access on May 13, 2018

⁴⁴⁷ "*Kazakhstan Emerges as a Major World Player*," Washington Times Advertising Supplement, December 20, 1999, <http://www.internationalreports.com/ciscentralasia/99/kazakhstan/3.html>.

⁴⁴⁸ Richard Weitz, "*Kazakhstan and the New International Politics of Eurasia*", Silk Road Paper, 2008, pp. 124-125

⁴⁴⁹ Anuar Ayazbekov, "*Kazakhstan's Nuclear Decision Making, 1991-1992*", The Non-Proliferation Review, Vol.21, No.2, 2014, p.152

between \$10 and \$20 to the Central Asian state, because it accepted to transfer its enriched uranium to United States. US also provided assistance to Almaty to close off the mine shaft that were used for underground nuclear weapons. Finally, Washington and Moscow assisted Kazakhstan in their efforts to value the level of radioactive contamination within test site and helped it to implement an effective strategy to clean up the Polygon.⁴⁵⁰

During 1990s, Clinton administration also strove for convincing American companies, like Chevron or Exxon Mobil, to invest in Kazakhstan energy sector. Energy cooperation between the two states began already in early 1990s, when Almaty understood that Russia had not enough capitals to help it with the development of its huge oil resources.⁴⁵¹ Kazakhstan's government strategy was well explained by a senior officer of Kazakhoil, the state oil company. He stated that:

“The government first wanted Tergiz and Karachagank to be finalised. These fields have proven reserves. So, we could start production and exporting as early as possible. That was a priority for contracts. The Kazakh economy needed its oil and gas sector to be developed (...) There were large companies from large Western countries. These countries would not allow the change of the political situation in Kazakhstan. So, it was good for the Kazakh government.”⁴⁵²

Kazakhstan signed the first oil contract in 1993, when it made a deal with Chevron related to the Tengiz oilfield, which was the largest onshore field discovered in the world since 1970s. Kazakhstani government and Chevron agreed to establish a joint venture, Tengizchevroil, with the local Tengiz company.⁴⁵³ In 1997, Chevron also purchased stakes of the Karachagank Petroleum Operating Consortium to develop Karachaganak oilfield.⁴⁵⁴

The American company Exxon invested in Kazakhstan energy sector too. In 1993, it became the only US company involved in the Caspian Sea Consortium, which was analysing the hydrocarbon potential of the Kazakh sector of the Caspian Sea basin. Finally, Exxon also bought the 75% of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, which built the pipeline linked Tengiz to the port of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁰ Cynthia Werner & Kathleen Purvis-Roberts, *“After the Cold War: international politics, domestic policy and the nuclear legacy in Kazakhstan”*, Central Asian Survey, Vol. 25, No. 4, December 2006, pp. 152-153

⁴⁵¹ Pinar Ipek, *“The role of oil and gas in Kazakhstan's foreign policy: Looking east or west?”*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 59, No,7, 2007, p.1184

⁴⁵² Quoted in Pinar Ipek *“The role of oil and gas in Kazakhstan's foreign policy: Looking east or west?”*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 59, No,7, 2007, p.1184

⁴⁵³ Ardak Yesdauletova, *“Kazakhstan's energy policy: Its evolution and tendencies”*, Journal of US-China Public Administration, Volume 6, No.4, August 2009, p. 33

⁴⁵⁴ Chevron Kazakhstan, <https://www.chevron.com/worldwide/kazakhstan>, access on May 13, 2018

⁴⁵⁵ Kazakhstan Business Magazine, *“ExxonMobil in Kazakhstan”*, International Business Magazine N°3/4, 2001,

Kazakhstan-USA partnership began to focus mainly on security issues after 9/11 terroristic attack. In the wake of these events, Kazakhstan minister of foreign affairs released a statement affirming:

“Kazakhstan decisively condemned the terroristic and barbarous acts that were perpetrated in the largest U.S cities leading to a heavy loss of life and express its readiness to provide any possible assistance and support to the USA in overcoming effects of these tragedy, as well as its readiness for further joint measures to counter terrorism in all of its manifestations and practices.”⁴⁵⁶

Kazakhstan security became a United States security concern for three main reasons. Firstly, American companies largely invested in Western Kazakhstan oil production facilities, which involved the largest concentration of American commercial investment in the post-Soviet area. Secondly, Caspian Sea represented an issue for Western efforts to pay attention to the diffusion of weapons of mass destruction, since it was a direct transport route to Iran and Caucasus.⁴⁵⁷ Finally, Washington wanted to secure support for NATO operations in the Middle East.⁴⁵⁸

Astana made several symbolic gestures to ease American interests in the region. It allowed overflight right to Washington and its allies in order to sustain Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan, moreover Kazakhstan – likewise the other Central Asian states- sent a liaison team of officers to U.S Central Command (CENTCOM). In 2002, furthermore, Kazakhstan joined the NATO’s Partnership Analysis and Review Process (PARP), becoming the first Central Asian state to adhere to the programme. A year later, Astana joined the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency.⁴⁵⁹

Moreover, Kazakhstan and USA signed their first 5-year military cooperation agreement in September 2003. The Article 3 represents the key provision of this Treaty. It foresaw, among others, “to create, train and develop a NATO interoperable rapid reaction unit capable of responding to any type of attack on Kazakhstan’s offshore or coastal infrastructure”, and the establishment of a Naval Academy at Aktau aimed to become a training centre to sustain “all forms of water-related military training, such as counter-terrorism”.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁶ *Zaiavlenie Ministerstva inostrannykh del Respubliki Kazakhstan v sviazi s teraktami v SShA 11 sentiabria 2001 g.*, Official website of the Kazakhstan Foreign Ministry, <http://www.mfa.kz/rus/PHP/article.php?article=1&selected=44>].

⁴⁵⁷ Roger N. McDermott, “*United States and NATO military cooperation with Kazakhstan: the need for a new approach*”, *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol.21, 2009, p.617

⁴⁵⁸ Richard Weitz, “*Kazakhstan and the New International Politics of Eurasia*”, *Silk Road Paper*, 2008, p.125

⁴⁵⁹ Roger McDermott, “*Kazakhstan’s Emerging Role in the War on Terror*”, Jamestown foundation, <https://jamestown.org/program/kazakhstans-emerging-role-in-the-war-on-terror-2/>, May 20, 2004

⁴⁶⁰ Roger McDermott, “*Kazakhstan’s defense policy: an assessment of the trends*”, *Strategic Studies Institute U.S Army War*, February 2009, pp.13-14

In 2003, Kazakhstan also joined U.S-led coalition of force in Iraq, sent an engineering battalion (KAZBAT). The battalion consisted of around 30 engineers, whose main task was to assist with de-mining and water purification. In the same years, Kazakhstan and NATO conducted also their first military exercise, aimed to achieve interoperability between NATO and Kazakhstan armed forces. This exercise - named 'Steppe Eagle'- takes place every year and in 2006 an American military unit participated for the first time. Alongside 'Steppe Eagle', Astana and Washington also conducted an exercise where participated only Kazakhstani and American military units. For instance, they conducted the Balance-Zhardem 2005 exercise in March 2005, which aimed to strengthen the quality of interaction between Kazakhstan and U.S units in fighting terrorism.⁴⁶¹

During Obama presidency, USA relations with Kazakhstan and the whole Central Asian region were not as intense as during the Bush one. Obama claimed as main vector of his foreign policy the "Pivot to Asia", however, this policy did not involve Central Asia, but focused exclusively on Asia-Pacific. This decline of interest toward Central Asia, according to Clarke, even undermined Kazakhstan 'multi-vector' foreign policy, leaving Astana more vulnerable to Moscow and Beijing influence.⁴⁶²

Obama decision in June 2011 to withdraw 33,000 U.S. troops from Afghanistan particularly worried Central Asian leadership.⁴⁶³ Uzbek and Kazakhstani foreign ministers made their concerns clear during their addresses at United Nations General Assembly on September 27,2013, when they warned of serious threat to regional and global security from terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking stemming from Afghanistan.⁴⁶⁴

Obama administration lower interest for Central Asia did not mean, however, that Kazakhstan and United States relations radically worsened. On the contrary, Astana became the only Central Asian country to establish a Strategic Partnership Dialogue with Washington on April 9, 2013. It served as a forum where the two countries can discuss a wide range of issues, such as

⁴⁶¹ Marat Nurgaliev, "Kazakh-U. S Military Political cooperation in the context of U.S geopolitical interest in Central Asia", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol.44, No.2, 2007, pp. 52-61

⁴⁶² Michael Clarke, "Kazakhstan's Multi-vector Foreign Policy: Diminish Returns in an Era of Great Power 'Pivots'?" *The Asian Forum*, April 9,2015, <http://www.theasianforum.org/kazakhstans-multi-vector-foreign-policy-diminishing-returns-in-an-era-of-great-power-pivots/>

⁴⁶³ Even MacAskill, "Afghanistan withdrawal: Barack Obama says 33,000 troops will leave next year", *The Guardian*, June 23, 2011,

⁴⁶⁴ BBC News, "Central Asia concerns over US pull-out from Afghanistan", <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-24397109>, October 5, 2013

Afghanistan and Regional Integration, Nuclear Security and Non-Proliferation, Security Cooperation, Democracy and Development, Trade, Investment and Energy.⁴⁶⁵

4.6 Relations between EU and Kazakhstan

Luca Anceschi identified three main stages in Kazakhstan-EU relations. The first phase encompasses the entire first decade of Kazakhstan's independence and he described such a period as "tyranny of distance"⁴⁶⁶

Kazakhstan and the European Union established official diplomatic relations on February 2, 1993.⁴⁶⁷ Kazakhstani leadership immediately outlined the key role that Western Europe would play in its foreign policy strategy. President Nazarbayev claimed in the first Kazakhstan foreign policy document, entitled 'Strategy of Kazakhstan's Formation and Development as a Sovereign State' that:

"The policy we develop to enter the world community should take into account the possibilities for partnership among the three main centres of the market system, the U.S, Japan and Western Europe, remembering that it is they which constitute the stimulating force for strengthening the world economic relations".⁴⁶⁸

However, two factors hindered the development of a fruitful cooperation between Kazakhstan and European Union during 1990s, above all in the first half of the decade. On the one hand, Kazakhstan diplomacy still did not have a precise idea on how to shape its policy with the EU about the former Soviet space. Moreover, Kazakhstan leadership did not still fully understand what the guidelines of EU general strategy were and, above all, how different were EU interests and those of its member states.⁴⁶⁹ On the other hand, EU strategy for Kazakhstan was 'poorly articulated and clumsy implemented' for the most of 1990s, since Brussels was striving for

⁴⁶⁵ U.S Department of State Diplomacy in Action, "Joint Statement of Second Kazakhstan-United States Strategic Partnership Dialogue", <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/07/211796.htm>, July 10, 2013.

⁴⁶⁶ Luca Anceschi, "The Tyranny of Pragmatism: EU-Kazakhstani Relations", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.66, No.1, p.6

⁴⁶⁷ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Kazakhstan, "Kazakhstan-EU cooperation", <http://mfa.gov.kz/en/content-view/sotrudnichestvo-s-evropejskim-soyuzom>, Access on May 15, 2018

⁴⁶⁸ Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Strategy for Forming and Developing Kazakhstan as a Sovereign State*, Daur, 1992, pp. 20-23.

⁴⁶⁹ Murat Laumulin, "Kazakhstan and the West: relations during the 1990s in retrospect", *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2000

developing a coherent vision regarding what should be its role in the international arena in the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet Union.⁴⁷⁰

The lack of a precise strategy on how to develop their bilateral relation negatively affected EU-Kazakhstan partnership. In 1998, the volume of trade between Astana and the EU-15 tantamounted to \$2,7 billion, representing only about 30% of Kazakhstan commercial flows in the same year.⁴⁷¹ Between 1992 and 1995, EU and Kazakhstan were able to face just basic issue, such as the establishment of official diplomatic relations.⁴⁷²

The development of partnership with European Union was not a priority for Kazakhstan during 1990s, nevertheless, EU played a key role in Astana's official rhetoric in the same decade. During Nazarbayev's speech at Moscow State University in 1994, when President of Kazakhstan first proposed the creation of a Eurasian Union, he suggested EU rather than the Commonwealth of Independent State as a model to follow. Moreover, EU was also praised in semi-official discourse, which defined 'European functionalism' as the best model for post-Soviet space integration.

The first concrete step forward in Kazakhstan-EU relations was Astana's decision to ratify the European Charter Treaty in 1996, which allowed Kazakhstan to enter in the energy market supporting the principle of non-discrimination. Yet, Kazakhstan-EU signed and ratified their first act of formal cooperation -the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)- only in 1999. The PCA constituted the keystone of the relation between Astana and Brussels. Such an agreement involved matters typical of European Union deals with post-Soviet states, such as 1) respect for international law and human rights 2) The establishment of a framework for political discussion 3) democracy promotion 4) To boost trade and investment according to WTO principles 5) The development of cooperation in economic, social, financial, technological and cultural fields.⁴⁷³

The second stage of Kazakhstan-EU relations involved the period between 2001 and 2006. European Union interest toward Kazakhstan and Central Asian region in general increased in the post 9/11 for two main reasons. Firstly, Central Asia geopolitical value increased over this period due to its closeness to Afghanistan.⁴⁷⁴ EU redistribute its diplomatic presence in the

⁴⁷⁰ Luca Anceschi, *"The Tyranny of Pragmatism: EU-Kazakhstani Relations"*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.66, No.1, p.6

⁴⁷¹ KazStat (1999) Vneshnekoekonomicheskaya Deyatel'nosti Respubliki Kazakhstana—Statisticheskii Sbornik (Almaty, Agenstvo Respubliki Kazakhstan po Statistike)

⁴⁷² Luca Anceschi, *"The Tyranny of Pragmatism: EU-Kazakhstani Relations"*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.66, No.1, p.7

⁴⁷³ Zhenis Kembayev, *"Partnership between the European Union and the Republic of Kazakhstan: Problems and Perspectives"*, European Foreign Affairs Review, 2016, p.188

⁴⁷⁴ Luca Anceschi, *"The Tyranny of Pragmatism: EU-Kazakhstani Relations"*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.66, No.1, p.8

region and, in 2005, nominated the first European Union Special Representative for Central Asia, whose main purpose was to “ensure coordination and consistency of external actions of Union in Central Asia”. Secondly, European Union brought regularly its attention to the whole former Soviet Union over this period, indeed, the three Baltic republics joined this international organisation in 2004, moreover, in 2003, EU launched its Neighbourhood Policy which stretched until South Caucasus, involving countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The improvement in Astana-Brussels political relation had also positive consequences in terms of economic partnership. Indeed, by the end of 2006, European Union had emerged as on the most important trade partner of Kazakhstan, and the 53% of foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan stemming from European Union member states.⁴⁷⁵ Energy trade became one the most important issue in the economic partnership between Kazakhstan and European Union. Indeed, between 2002 and 2007, EU imports of Kazakhstani crude oil doubled, representing the 5,18 of the whole imports from non-EU states.⁴⁷⁶ Kazakhstani-EU commercial partnership witnessed similar trend also in non-energy trade, which grew by 312%. Nevertheless, in 2009, energy trade constituted the 80% of total EU imports from Kazakhstan.⁴⁷⁷

On December 4, 2006, Astana and Brussels signed a “Memorandum of Understanding in the Field of Energy”. Anceschi defined this document as a “watershed” in Kazakhstan-EU relations, which envisaged both a road-map for enhancing energy security and industrial cooperation. In particular, it established that EU and Kazakhstan “will regularly exchange information on the development of policies that may have an impact on the production, processing, transportation and use of all energy resources, with a focus on energy security” and, it also affirmed that they would cooperate in “implementing the appropriate conditions to facilitate the development of new energy transportation infrastructure of mutual interests”.⁴⁷⁸

One of the 2006 memorandum main feature was that it did not attach any conditionality to the development of Kazakhstani-EU tie in the energy sector. European Union and, above all, European Parliament heavily criticised the Kazakhstan’s poor human rights record in the early

⁴⁷⁵ ‘Zakon, Evrosoyuz nameren rasshiryat’ sotrudinchestvo s Kazakhstan—Gensek Soveta ES’, 14 October 2007, available at: <http://www.zakon.kz/60956-evrosojuz-nameren-rasshirjat.html>, accessed 16 May 2018.

⁴⁷⁶Registration of Crude Oil Imports and Deliveries in the European Union (Extra EU), available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/energy/observatory/oil/doc/import/coi/eu-coi-from-extra-eu-2005-01-12.pdf>, accessed May 16, 2018.

⁴⁷⁷ Sebastien Peyrouse, “Business and Trade relationship between the EU and Central Asia”, Working Paper 1, Brussels EUCAM, 2009, pp. 5-8

Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in the field of Energy between the European Union and the Republic of Kazakhstan, <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/news/eu-and-kazakhstan-discuss-international-energy-cooperation>, access on May 16, 2018

2000s. In February 2003, EU Parliament approved a resolution where it defined “respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law” as a fundamental pre-requisite for further development in the relation with Astana. However, once that Kazakhstan’s natural resources began to play a key role in European energy security, Brussels’ condemnation of Nazarbayev regime practices vis-à-vis human rights became less vigorous.⁴⁷⁹

The third stage in EU-Kazakhstani relation began in 2007, when European Union launched its first “Strategy for New Partnership with Central Asia”, which aimed to boost the partnership between the two regions. With this strategy, European Union provided €750 million to Central Asian states to reach the main goal: 1) stability/security 2) poverty reduction and 3) regional cooperation.⁴⁸⁰ Once this Strategy entered into force, Kazakhstani-EU relation became a fundamental elemental of Nazarbayev’s rhetorical discourse. European Union emerged as a more important branch of the Kazakhstani multi-vector foreign policy. Indeed, the new step in European Union-Central Asia partnership was described as the ultimate step in the consolidation of Astana’s multilateral foreign policy.⁴⁸¹

This new rhetorical narrative was emphasized by the new government policy launched in 2008 and entitled “Path to Europe”, which aimed to “bring Kazakhstan to a new level of strategic partnership with leading European countries”. This document represented the only direct response to EU initiative in Central Asia. Kazakhstan indeed considered European Union from a different standpoint than other Central Asian states. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan perceived European Union, just as donor, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan want to keep their cooperation with Brussels to the minim, on the contrary Kazakhstan considered European Union as a major cooperation partner. Nevertheless, Anceschi believed that “Path to Europe” document” had just a ‘cosmetic’ nature, indeed Kazakhstan main purpose was to obtain European Union endorsement for Kazakhstan’s OSCE chairmanship in 2010.

Moreover, Kazakhstan has witnessed its clear intention to keep a strong partnership with European Union even in the context of Astana’s growing integration within the Moscow-led Eurasian Union. In October 2014, Erlan Idrissov -Kazakhstan’s Foreign Minister- suggested to create a new Brussels-based think tank aimed to analyse and work on EU-Central Asia

⁴⁷⁹ Luca Anceschi, *“The Tyranny of Pragmatism: EU-Kazakhstani Relations”*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.66, No.1, pp.10-11

⁴⁸⁰ Sebastien Peyrouse, *“A donor without Influence. The European Union in Central Asia”*, Ponars Eurasia Policy Memo No.478, p.1

⁴⁸¹ Luca Anceschi, *“The Tyranny of Pragmatism: EU-Kazakhstani Relations”*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.66, No.1, pp. 12

relationship.⁴⁸² Furthermore, in 2016, Kazakhstan and European Union signed an Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. Astana is the first Central Asia Republics to conclude such an agreement with Brussels.

The ECPA “creates an enhanced legal basis for EU-Kazakhstan relations, providing a broad framework for reinforced political dialogue, cooperation in justice and home affairs, and promoting mutual trade”.⁴⁸³ It will strengthen EU-Kazakhstan bilateral partnership in a number of sectors, such as energy, financial and economic cooperation, employment and social affairs. During the last two decades, Astana-Brussels partnership has witnessed important changes. Indeed, EU has become the first trade partner of Kazakhstan, constituting more than 33% of its external trade. Furthermore, European Union represents the first source of foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan, representing more than half of FDI in this country.⁴⁸⁴

4.7 Kazakhstan and Central Asia integration

Kazakhstan has always been a fierce supporter of Central Asia integration.⁴⁸⁵ Astana has confirmed such a stance also in its last ‘foreign policy concept’, issued in 2014, where a better cooperation between Kazakhstan and the other four regional countries is considered the top-list priority. This document affirmed indeed that: “Kazakhstan is interested in a politically stable, economically sustainable and safe development of Central Asia”. Moreover, it stated that:

“Will strive to develop intra-regional integration in Central Asia with the purpose of diminishing conflict potential, solving social economic problems, and tackling water energy issues and other considerations”.⁴⁸⁶

Central Asia integration experiences three major stages. When the five Central Asian countries gained their independence, they already had open economies measures by the ratio of exports and imports to GDP. Yet, their trade was concentrate on the former Soviet Union, indeed a range

⁴⁸² Olga Alinda Spaiser, *“The European Union’s Influence in Central Asia. Geopolitical Challenges and Responses,”* Lexington Books, 2018, p. 98

⁴⁸³ European Union External Action, *“EU-Kazakhstan relations,”* https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/4076/EU-Kazakhstan%20relations, Access on May 17, 2018

⁴⁸⁴ European Union External Action, *“EU-Kazakhstan relations,”* https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/4076/EU-Kazakhstan%20relations, Access on May 17, 2018

⁴⁸⁵ Andrew C. Kuchins et al., *“Central Asia in a Reconnecting Eurasia. Kazakhstan’s Evolving Foreign Economic and Security Interests,”* Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2015, p.12

⁴⁸⁶ Kazakhstan Foreign Policy Concept, <http://mfa.gov.kz/en/erevan/content-view/koncepcia-vnesnej-politiki-rk-na-2014-2020-gg>, Access on May 28, 2015

between 85-90% of their commercial partners were former Soviet republics.⁴⁸⁷ Given this economic reality, it became apparent to Central Asian state that they needed a process of integration able to form a union to survive.

On January 4, 1993, the presidents of the five Central Asia states met in Tashkent, capital of Uzbekistan. During this summit, they took two main decisions. Firstly, they chose to adopt a single collective designation for the region, i.e. Central Asia (*Tsentral'naya Asia*) instead of the Soviet era formula 'Middle Asia (*Srednyaya Azya*) and Kazakhstan', considered divisive. Secondly, they reached an agreement about the guidelines for the establishment of a regional common market, but not for the creation of a formal confederation.⁴⁸⁸ As Nazarbayev affirmed: "Everyone wants to live in his own apartment, not in a communal flat. The same goes for sovereign states".⁴⁸⁹

When the rouble zone definitively collapsed in November 1993, the presidents of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan agreed on the establishment of a Central Asian Economic Union. It was announced by the Tashkent Declaration of January 1994. In April 1994, the three heads of state signed the Cholpon-Ata Treaty, which created the CAEU, which evolved in Central Asian Economic Community, where Tajikistan joined in 1998. The main achievement of the CAUE was the creation of the Interstate Central Asian Bank of Cooperation and Development. However, it was apparent already in 1997 that the Bank was not an efficient financial body. The participant continues had given only 2/3 of its charter capitals, moreover it was not able to attract foreign direct investments in the region. During CAEC summits, the Central Asian leaders signed more than 250 resolutions, yet the implementation records of these agreements was very poor. In February 2002, the four Central Asian states announced the creation of a new international body, the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO), as the successor to the CAEC. They tried to differentiate the CACO from its predecessor by emphasizing improved effectiveness, yet the founding treaty of CACO still enunciated great aspirations, but it did not focus enough on how they should be implemented.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ Richard Pomfret, "Regional integration in Central Asia", *Economic Change and Restructuring*, May 2009, Vol. 42, Issue 1-2, p.50

⁴⁸⁸ Shirin Akiner, "Regional cooperation in Central Asia", in "Economic developments and reforms in cooperation partners countries: the interrelationship between regional economic cooperation, security and stability", edited by Patrick Hardouin, Reiner Weichhardt and Peter Sutcliffe, Nato Economics Directorate, 2001, p.192

⁴⁸⁹ Quoted in *Regional cooperation in Central Asia*", in "Economic developments and reforms in cooperation partners countries: the interrelationship between regional economic cooperation, security and stability", edited by Patrick Hardouin, Reiner Weichhardt and Peter Sutcliffe, Nato Economics Directorate, 2001, p.192

⁴⁹⁰ Richard Pomfret, "Regional integration in Central Asia", *Economic Change and Restructuring*, May 2009, Vol. 42, Issue 1-2, pp. 53-54

In 2004, Russia became a member of the Central Asia Cooperation Organization. Nevertheless, this was not a step forward in intra-regional partnership, but rather a sign of rapprochement between Russia and Uzbekistan, whose relation has been fraught since the demise of the Soviet Union.⁴⁹¹

Two other institutions tried to boost economic cooperation among the Central Asian states. First, the Special Programme for the Economics of Central Asia launched in 1998. It aimed to promote economic development and their integration with Asian and European economies. Yet, such a programme was not successful for a twofold reason. 1) Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan decided not to participate and 2) there was no self-funding mechanisms, as a consequence SPECA achieved only minimal results and decided rather than united Central Asia. On the contrary, all the five Central Asian states participated in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation. This organisation was the only able to be successful. The CAREC programme did not involve only the five post-Soviet Central Asian, but also six other countries (Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, Mongolia and Pakistan) and it aimed to stimulate cooperation through the development, leading to accelerate economic growth and poverty reduction.⁴⁹² The CAREC programme was launched in 2001 and since then it mobilised more than \$31,5 billion investments, CAREC reached significant results in terms of infrastructure; indeed, it allowed to build more than 7000 km of high-quality roads and rail limits.⁴⁹³ In addition, this organisation allowed to reduce transit costs at borders and launched more than 150 projects. In 2007, Kazakhstan even proposed to create a Central Asian Union, yet, such a proposal was rejected by Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.⁴⁹⁴ Linn stated that:

“Since the five Central Asia countries are land-locked small economies, a critical pre-requisite for long-term economic growth and political stability is successful economic integration underpinned by effective regional economic integration”.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹¹ Richard Pomfret, “Regional integration in Central Asia”, *Economic Change and Restructuring*, May 2009, Vol. 42, Issue 1-2, p. 54

⁴⁹² Bulat Mukhamediyev and Azimzhan Khitakhunov, “Central Asian integration and its impact on Regional Trade and Economy”, in “Country Experiences in Economic Development, Management and Entrepreneurship. Proceedings on the 17th Eurasia Business and Economics Society Conference”, edited by Mehmet Huseyin Bilgin, Hakan Danis, Ender Demir and Ugur Can, Springer International Publishing, 2017, pp. 21-28

⁴⁹³ CAREC PROGRAMME, https://www.carecprogram.org/?page_id=31, Access on May 28, 2018

⁴⁹⁴ Bulat Mukhamediyev and Azimzhan Khitakhunov, “Central Asian integration and its impact on Regional Trade and Economy”, in “Country Experiences in Economic Development, Management and Entrepreneurship. Proceedings on the 17th Eurasia Business and Economics Society Conference”, edited by Mehmet Huseyin Bilgin, Hakan Danis, Ender Demir and Ugur Can, Springer International Publishing, 2017, p. 22

⁴⁹⁵ Johannes F. Linn, “Central Asian Regional Integration and Cooperation: Reality or Mirage?”, *Eurasian Integration Yearbook*, 2012, p.96

Yet, the share of intraregional trade has dramatically decreased since the demise of the Soviet Union. In 2013, it represented only the 6,2% of the Central Asian republics' commercial flows. Kazakhstan's official intra-regional trade was even lower, since it constituted only the 3,7% of the overall Kazakhstani trade.⁴⁹⁶ However, according to Roman Mogilevskii, the official data do not pay attention to the high volume of informal trade, which he believed could be compared in value to the formal trade.⁴⁹⁷

Kazakhstan has played, however, a central economic role in Central Asia and it directly boost regional economic cooperation in a threefold way. Firstly, Astana supported the development of the poorer Central Asian states through its Agency for International Development (KazAID), which has focused, above all, on health, education and human trafficking issues. Secondly, Kazakhstan promoted the Green Bridge Partnership Programme, whose purpose is to help regional states to shift toward green economies. Astana believes that this programme could aid Central Asian countries to solve disputes related to water, energy, food and other environmental issues. Finally, Kazakhstan hosted almost 800,000 migrants from other Central Asian states. Kazakhstani leadership largely accepted this immigration and it also revised upward its quotas for legal migration, yet most of the migrants are still illegal.⁴⁹⁸

Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbours also tried to cooperate in the security field. Regional cooperation in this area began, yet, slowly and there was no relevant progress in this area during 1990s. Indeed, Russian-led organisation was not effective, even if existed just on paper. On May 15, 1992 six former republics (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia) signed the Collective Security Treaty. However, it was not able to create a real collective security system within the region. Moreover, the real military integration, despite much rhetoric. The placement of a peace-keeping force in Tajikistan was the only valuable operation of the CST during 1990s. Such an operation failed at peace-keeping, but it had a significant role in the military victory of the Tajik ex-communist regime forces against the 'Islamist-democratic' opposition during the civil war occurred between 1992-1997. In 2001, the need for a single security zone was explicitly expressed by the Central Asian Economic

⁴⁹⁶ Andrew C. Kuchins et al., *Central Asia in a Reconnecting Eurasia. Kazakhstan's Evolving Foreign Economic and Security Interests*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2015, p.12

⁴⁹⁷ Roman Mogilevskii, *Trends and Patterns in Foreign Trade of Central Asian Countries*, University of Central Asia, 2012, <http://www.ucentralasia.org/Error?aspxerrorpath=/downloads/UCA-Trends&PatternsForeignTradeCA-Eng-May2012.pdf>,

⁴⁹⁸ Andrew C. Kuchins et al., *Central Asia in a Reconnecting Eurasia. Kazakhstan's Evolving Foreign Economic and Security Interests*, Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2015, p.13

Community, which, nevertheless, did not take any further action. In 2002, CST evolved in a fully-fledged military organisation, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, which focused above all on Islamist extremists threat and it established a rapid deployment force and organised joint military exercises in Central Asia.⁴⁹⁹

Astana considers CSTO as a fundamental multilateral organisation, necessary to respond to evolving sources of potential instability, which surround the CSTO.⁵⁰⁰ Yet, the CSTO has two main weaknesses. Firstly, it cannot be described as an inclusive multilateral organisation, since two out of five Central Asian states are not its members, i.e. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The former has never joined the organisation, while the latter left the CSTO – for the second time – in 2012. Secondly, it was not able to intervene when security issues emerged in Central Asia (Osh 2010, Rash Valley 2010, several clashes over Tajik-Uzbek border between 2013-2014) CSTO affirmed that it did not intervene in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, because there was no foreign aggression, yet, such an inaction undermined CSTO ambitions, since it recognised that “strengthening the regional security and stability through joint activities” as one of its main goals.⁵⁰¹

The second framework within regional cooperation has taken place is the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. It was established in 1996 as the Shanghai Five (China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) and it focused above all on economic issues. Yet, the SCO agenda gradually shifted to security threats. Such a move also encouraged Uzbekistan to join the organisation in 2001, since Islamist extremism was an increasing phenomenon in the region. The SCO focused mainly on the so-called ‘three evils’, i.e. terrorism, separatism and extremism. This organisation has provided a framework for joint military exercised and, first of all, it created a Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure, a network which allowed its member states to share information collected by their intelligence services, and, furthermore, it permitted to strengthen surveillance thanks to a better coordination between their security bodies.⁵⁰²

Laumulin defined SCO activities in the security field as ‘purely declarative’ and it also described SCO as a geopolitical bluff, indeed, Russia and USA, in his opinion, have used this organisation

⁴⁹⁹ Kathleen Collins, *“Economic and Security Regionalism among Patrimonial Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Central Asia”*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.61, No.2, pp. 260-261.

⁵⁰⁰ Roger N. McDermott, *“Perspective in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan”*, Danish Institute for International Studies Report, 2013, p.28

⁵⁰¹ Fabio Indeo, *“Central Asia beyond 2014: building regional security architecture”*, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), Analysis No. 262, June 2014, p.8

⁵⁰² Kathleen Collins, *“Economic and Security Regionalism among Patrimonial Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of Central Asia”*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.61, No.2, pp. 260-261.

to 'fly their flag' in Central Asia, due to the increasing presence of USA in the region.⁵⁰³ Kazakhstan has actively participated in the security dimension of the SCO. Yet, Astana's leading experts believe that SCO could not guarantee regional stability and security. For instance, they considered unlikely a SCO intervention or concrete action if, for instance, a security crisis stemming from an Afghanistan-related scenario, would emerge in Central Asia. Russia and China divergent opinions about the future of the SCO is the main issue faced by this organisation. Moscow wishes that SCO became a security organisation,⁵⁰⁴ while Beijing sees SCO as a vehicle to boost its economic influence over the region, restricting security dimensions to the fight against the aforementioned three evils.⁵⁰⁵

Three main factors have hindered a fruitful cooperation between Central Asian states. First, Tajikistan neutral position to the point of isolation. Second, the competition for the control of resources, above all water and energy. Finally, the struggle for regional leadership between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.⁵⁰⁶

Until the demise of the Soviet Union, production and distribution of water resources within the region were decided through a centralised system. Moscow established water quotas that privileged downstream states (Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) vis-à-vis upstream ones (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). Dealing with such a system, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which are water abundant, had to supply irrigated agriculture economies of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and also Kazakhstan. Yet, the latter had to supply coal and gas to the former states, when their energy demand was higher, namely during the winter season.⁵⁰⁷

Water supply availability is a main issue in post-Soviet Central Asia and it is made particularly complex by the fact that Syr Darya, Amun Darya and Irtysh, the three regional major rivers, are all transboundary rivers. The management of water resources has been a source of disputes between Central Asian states since they gained their independence.⁵⁰⁸ Tajik government decision to build the Rogun Dam in 2016 increased tensions between Dushanbe, Tashkent and

⁵⁰³ Murat Laumulin, *"The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation as 'geopolitical bluff'. A view from Astana"*, Institut Français des Relations Internationales (IFRI), July 2006, p. 1-17

⁵⁰⁴ Roger N. McDermott, *"Perspective in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan"*, Danish Institute for International Studies Report, 2013, pp.29-30

⁵⁰⁵ Fabio Indeo, *"Central Asia beyond 2014: building regional security architecture"*, Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), Analysis No. 262, June 2014, p.8

⁵⁰⁶ Johannes F. Linn, *"Central Asian Regional Integration and Cooperation: Reality or Mirage?"*, Eurasian Integration Yearbook, 2012, p. 100

⁵⁰⁷ Leila Zakhirova, *"The International Politics of Water Security in Central Asia"*, Europe-Asia Studies, Vol.65, No.10, 2013, pp. 1996-1997

⁵⁰⁸ Aibek Zhupankhan et al, *"Water in Kazakhstan, a key Central Asian water management"*, in Hydrological Sciences Journal, Vol. 63, No.5, 2018, p.753

Astana over the control of hydric resources.⁵⁰⁹ Kazakhstan government officials stated that half of intergovernmental correspondence between Central Asia states regard water issues, as a consequence, solving these disputes would mean to make an important step forward to a better cooperation intra-regional integration.⁵¹⁰

The death of Islam Karimov, former Uzbekistan's president, meant an important shift in the relation among Central Asian states. The new president of Uzbekistan, Sharkat Mirziyoyev, affirmed that he was ready to take a different approach toward regional cooperation, declaring his commitment to "an open, friendly and pragmatic position" toward the other Central Asian states.⁵¹¹ The accession to power of Mirziyoyev in Uzbekistan has meant also an improvement in relations between Tashkent and Astana. During the first meeting between Nazarbayev and the new Uzbek president, the Kazakhstani leader announced that the bilateral trade grew up to 30% in the last quarter of 2016, affirming that: "This is thanks to how the new leadership in Uzbekistan has open all opportunities to trade and lift barriers". Moreover, Nazarbayev declared that the two countries would sign 75 contracts worth \$1 billion".⁵¹² Another element suggesting a thaw in intra-regional relation was the meeting held in Astana on March 15, 2018. This was the first Central Asia summit since 2009. During the summit, Central Asian leaders did not sign any agreement, however, they agreed to meet annually ahead of the Norouz⁵¹³ holiday, a traditional Central Asian holiday, which falls between March 20 and March 23.

4.8 Conclusion

Kazakhstan foreign policy can be described as a pragmatic foreign policy. Kazakhstan has not pursued a foreign policy based on an ideological platform, but, on the contrary, since its independence Kazakhstan has always pursued a multilateral foreign policy that allowed Astana not to rely just on a major partner. Nevertheless, some scholars argued in the last year that

⁵⁰⁹ Petr Bologov, "The Rogun Dam: A Source of Division in Central Asia", Carnegie Moscow Center, December 2, 2016, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/66334>, access on May 28, 2018

⁵¹⁰ Andrew C. Kuchins et al., "Central Asia in a Reconnecting Eurasia. Kazakhstan's Evolving Foreign Economic and Security Interests", Center for Strategic & International Studies, June 2015, p.14

⁵¹¹ Ilan Berman, "Central Asia's Encouraging Development. Why the Region Is Embracing Greater Cooperation and Coordination", Foreign Affairs, August 8, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-asia/2017-08-08/central-asias-encouraging-development>, Access on May 28, 2018

⁵¹² Catherine Putz, "Brothers Again: Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan", The Diplomat, March 24, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/03/brothers-again-uzbekistan-and-kazakhstan/>, Access on May 28, 2018.

⁵¹³ RFE/RFL "Rare Central Asian Summit Signals Regional Thaw", Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, March 15, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/central-asian-summit-astana-kazakhstan-uzbekistan-tajikistan-kyrgyzstan-turkmenistan/29101686.html>, Access on May 28, 2019.

Kazakhstan's multilateral behaviour could be menaced by the last developments in international arena. In particular, Kazakhstan's decision to join Eurasian Union and the launch of Chinese "One Belt, One Road" has been considered as the main threat for Kazakhstani multivectorism. However, Astana leadership has declared several times that Kazakhstan considered Eurasian integration possible just from an economic point of view. In the same way, Chinese massive investment in Kazakhstan economy following the launch of OBOR, did not prevented Astana from striving for developing its partnership with EU and USA. On the contrary, Kazakhstan became the first Central Asian state to sign an Enhanced Cooperation and Partnership Agreement in 2016. Moreover, in January 2018, during Nazarbayev's last visit in Washington, Kazakhstan and United States released a joint statement declaring that their leaders agreed to elevate bilateral cooperation to the level of enhanced strategic partnership.

CONCLUSION

The *leitmotif* of this dissertation has been the analysis of the Kazakh national identity. Up to 130 nationalities lived in the country when the Soviet Union collapsed, and Kazakh culture witnessed an extensive modernisation, which involved a deep cultural and linguistical russification. Under this framework, Kazakhstan leadership has promoted the development of a supra-ethnic civic Kazakhstani identity in the domestic arena, mirrored also by the ‘Eurasianist’ identity in foreign policy, which also served to maintain stability and inter-ethnic harmony in Kazakhstan.

Certainly, Kazakh identity dramatically changed during the Soviet era. First, a Kazakh national conscious neither existed before the establishment of the USSR. The Alash Orda movement indeed did not strive for autonomy from the Russian empire, on the contrary it supported a unite, powerful and democratic Russia, hoping that it could lead Kazakh people closer to European democratic forms of social and political life. However, Kazakh-Russian relations was all but peaceful and calmful, during this period, as witnessed by 1916 uprising. During 1920s, Soviet authorities first established Kazakhstan as a distinct administrative unit, even if it became a fully-fledged national republic only in 1936, moreover, they promoted the development of Kazakh culture and a Kazakh national elite. However, Stalin collectivisation policy dramatically changed Kazakhstan reality. Indeed, first it definitively obliged Kazakhstan to abandon the nomadic lifestyle. Secondly, it altered the demographic balance in the republic, since Russian who represented only the 18% in 1926, constituted the 40% in 1939, while contemporarily more than one million Kazakhs died. Once Stalin definitively broke down Kazakhs resistance, this people began to strive for active integration within the Soviet order as the best means of survival.

World War II and the Khrushchev’s Virgin Land programme further altered the demographic balance in Kazakhstan and contributed to make this republic even more international. When the World War II ended up to 130 nationalities lived in Kazakhstan and such an ethnic puzzle characterised the republic until 1991, when it became independent. Virgin Land Programme also had dramatic effects on Kazakhstan demographic composition. Almost 2 million of new settlers came to Kazakhstan from European parts of USSR, therefore, due to this programme Kazakhs represented only 29% of the population in their own republic in 1962. However, there

was no considerable protest by Kazakh people against the Virgin Land programme. Firstly, this struggle with nature created a sense of excitement and challenge within the Kazakh population. Secondly, at least some Kazakh desired to distance themselves from what they consider their “backward” nomadic past. These people did not see any more the steppe as a land that must be respected and husbanded, but as a source of unlimited wealth.

Certainly, Kazakh culture witnessed a revival during the Kunaev era, Russian domination of the Kazakh political system and life came to an end, and, above all, Kazakhs share of the overall republic began to increase, raising from 29% in 1962 to 37% in 1979. However, Kazakhstan did not lead toward the emergence of a Kazakh national consciousness, nor it led Kazakh people to strive for independence from the Soviet Union; on the contrary, Kazakhstan was the last republic to proclaim its independence from the Soviet Union.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, Kazakhstan was the only post-Soviet republic where the titular nationality did not represent the majority. Furthermore, Kazakhs, in particular urban Kazakhs, experienced a deep Russification, which is witnessed first of all by the rapidity with which Kazakhs acquired proficiency in Russian. According to the last Soviet census in 1989, the 62% of ethnic Kazakhs claim proficiency in Russian, while, on the contrary, just 1% of Russians living in Kazakhstan affirmed they were able to speak Kazakh.

The difficult experienced by *Oralmandar* to integrate in Kazakhstan offered an empirical evidence of such changes. In particular, Mongolian Kazakhs faced difficulties to feel a full sense of belonging to Kazakhstan, since they perceive that their ‘Kazakhness’ outpaces that of autochthones. Most of Mongolian Kazakhs speak the ‘state language’, but not Russian, moreover, they preserved ancient Kazakh customs and traditions to a greater extent than Kazakhstan Kazakhs.

Such a framework heavily conditioned post-Soviet Kazakhstan nationality policy. On the one hand, Kazakhstan’s leadership supported the strengthening of Kazakh culture and language, the right of self-determination of Kazakh on their ‘own national country’ and to ensure ethnic Kazakh control over territory and State power. The role of Kazakhstan as *primus inter pares* has been recognised even in the Preamble of the 1995 Constitution “We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic fate, creating a state on the indigenous Kazakhs land, considering ourselves a peace-loving and civil society, dedicated to the ideals of freedom equality and concord”. However, Kazakhstani leadership has not supported a purely ethnic Kazakh identity, on the contrary it has promoted the development of a Kazakhstani supra-ethnic civic identity shaped on the Soviet nationality model, where Kazakhs play the role of the ‘Older Brother’ instead of Russian. The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan assumed a prominent role in this

context, since it was entitled to keep inter-ethnic harmony and suggest state policy regarding how to manage inter-national relation within Kazakhstani borders. The Doctrine of National Unity approved in 2010 further outlined Kazakhstani leadership will to consolidate interethnic harmony in Kazakhstan and it even affirmed that civil unity was fundamental for the Kazakhstan political modernisation and socio-economic development.

In post-independent Kazakhstan foreign policy strategy played a crucial role too. The ‘pragmatic’ multivector strategy allowed Kazakhstan to boost economic development, to assure its fully-fledged independence and sovereignty and to increase its prestige in the international arena. The Eurasian idea is intrinsically linked to the Kazakhstanness paradigm and the development of a Kazakhstani civic identity. It served to describe Kazakhstan as a bridge between different civilizations, on the global stage, and, domestically, it allow to ensure stability and it permit every nationality living in Kazakhstan to feel itself represent.

The Russian population steady emigration to their ‘homeland’ and Kazakhs high birth rate could determine a strengthen of Kazakh ethnic identity and the contemporary loosening and gradually disappearance of Kazakhstani identity. The switch of Kazakh alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin has already been interpreted as a step in this direction and a decision aimed to move Kazakhstan away from Russian influence.

Yet, what will affect Kazakhstani identity and Kazakhstan future the most is leadership succession. Nazarbayev has been the only Kazakhstan President and he has had a fundamental role in the development of Kazakhstani identity and the stability of the country. Therefore, Kazakhstan will face in the next years an important challenge and what path the country will take in the future will be heavily influenced by how leadership succession will take place and whether Kazakhstan’s next President will pursue a different policy in comparison to Nazarbayev.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation aims to examine the development of Kazakh national identity from 1917 to 2017. The thesis is structured in four chapters and two different parts. The first analyses how Soviet era shaped Kazakh national identity, while the second part examines Kazakhstani leadership decision-making in the domestic and international arena and how has it shaped the Kazakh national identity in the post-Soviet era.

The Soviet rule dramatically changed Kazakhstan and Kazakh national identity. Kazakhstan became the most international of the Soviet republic and up to 130 different nationalities lived in Kazakhstan; while, Kazakh identity witnessed an extensive modernisation that involved a relevant linguistic and cultural Russification. Given this demographic and cultural reality, post-Soviet Kazakhstan identity implemented a twofold nationality policy aimed to strengthen Kazakh ethnic identity, but also on the other hand to develop a supra-ethnic civic identity able to represent also the minorities living in Kazakhstan. Under this framework, foreign policy strategy and, in particular, the ‘Eurasianist’ paradigm has also had a primarily role to preserve stability and inter-ethnic harmony in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhs are a Turkic people. The birth of the Kazakh people dated back to the mid-fifteenth century when Janibek and Kirai established the Kazakh khanate. It is important to outline, however, that Kazakh national identity was quite weak until the 1920s in particular for two main reasons. First, Kazakhs were divided in three different Hordes (Zhuz), the Senior, the Middle and Junior Horde, which occupied different parts of the contemporary Kazakhstan and were characterised only by a weak centralised system of government. Second, there was no Kazakh national consciousness until 1900s, when the Alash Orda movement was established. This organisation was created by a group of Kazakh intellectuals who studied in Russian universities. Nevertheless, first they did not praise Kazakh nomadic traditional culture, which they considered ‘backward’. Moreover, they did not strive for a Kazakh national territory, but, instead, supported a powerful and united Russia. Indeed, they thought that the Western character of the Russian Constitution, which envisaged civil rights, economic and social development and rule of law could have a twofold role. Firstly, it could help to unite Kazakh people who were spread in different parts of Russia. Second, they thought that it could lead Kazakh people closer to European democratic forms of social and political life.

During the civil war, “Kazakhs” of *Alash Orda* attempted to create an autonomous government, which was still loyal to the Provisional Government. The Alash Orda had opposed Bolsheviks since the outbreak of the October Revolution, since it had violated the principles of parliamentary rule, on which this political movement was based. Yet, Lenin and Stalin

recognised that it would have been easier for Bolshevik rule to spread within the “Kazakh” community, if the Alash Orda had legitimated Bolshevik rule; therefore, by March 1918 they invited the representatives of this movement in Moscow to try to find a compromise. From March to October 1918, Alash Orda changed its opinion about Bolsheviks, when it understood that, nor the Whites nor Kolchak would have sustained them. Bolsheviks assurance about Alash Orda’s heads and troops, as well as Kirghiz (Kazakh) autonomy, satisfied this organisation.

Bolsheviks finally took full control over Central Asia by October 1924. However, Kazakhstan initially was just an autonomous republic, indeed it became a distinct Soviet Socialist Republic only in December 1936.

It is important to examine two main policies implemented by Soviet authorities in the period between 1920s and the end of the World War II. First of all, the *korenizatsyia* policy. Such a policy was adopted during the XII Congress of the Russian Communist Party and its main purpose was nation-building. According to the Soviet establishment, native cadres, able to understand the way of life, customs, and habits of the local population, would have allowed Soviet power, which was still perceived as Russian by 1923, to be closer to non-Russian nationalities. However, Soviet establishment developed two different nativization policies, one for their its eastern nationalities and one for its western nationalities. This dichotomy was not determined by geographical reasons, but by developmental ones. Eastern nationalities, whose Kazakhs were part, were considered culturally “backward”, since they lacked literate, educated, titular elite, therefore *korenizatsyia* should have focused on creating a national *intelligencija*. Eastern nationalities’ *korenizatsyia* can be divided into two different phases. The first one, has been defined as “mechanical *korenizatsyia*” and lasted from 1924 to 1926, while the second one, “functional” *korenizatsyia*, began in 1926 and lasted until 1928.

During the first phase, the titular nationality had legal priority in the competition for jobs within the government bureaucracy. However, such a policy was poisoning ethnic relations in the Republic, since Russians believed they had been cheated by the all-Union institution, given that they had fought for the Bolsheviks during the civil war, but local population was receiving the fruits of the revolution.

Therefore, the new Kazakhstan’s ASSR secretary, Filip Goloshchekin ended the mechanical *korenizatsyia* and introduced functional *korenizatsyia* who aimed first and foremost to address Russian resentment.

The second policy that needs to be scrutinised is collectivisation policy which Soviet authorities adopted in the years straddling 1920s and 1930s. The Tenth Congress of the Bolshevik Party in

1923 implemented the New Economic Policy, which tolerated which tolerated a form of market economy and ended livestock and wheat seizure typical of war communism, in return for a fiscal imposition. With the implementation of NEP, the government hoped that the peasants would have traded their wheat surplus with industrial products made by State factories. Yet, by 1927, Kremlin began to worry, since it was not able to reach its yearly grain procurement. According to official statistics, indeed, grain collection fell from 10610 thousand in 1926/1927 to 8300 in 1928/1929. This decrease in grain collection led Stalin to put an end to NEP, which had always been considered as a temporarily experiment by the Central government; furthermore, since the beginning of 1928, Stalin started to exert pressures on regions producing cereals so that they increased grain seizures. In his article “A year of great change”, Stalin announced a radical change in the development of Soviet agriculture, which would have witnessed a turn from “small, backward, individual farming into large-scale, advanced, collective agriculture”. In November 1929, the Party Central Committee’s *plenum* ratified Stalin’s collectivisation program.

Such a policy had a threefold effect on Kazakhs. Firstly, it definitively obliged Kazakhs to abandon the nomadic lifestyle. Secondly, Between 1,150,000 and 1,450,000 Kazakhs died because of famine which followed the collectivisation drive, while other 600,000 Kazakhs emigrated, other minorities living in Kazakhstan also witnessed a heavy diminution of population. Finally, it altered the demographic balance of the republic, indeed, the Russian population, which represented just the 18% of Kazakhstan population in 1926, had become 40,8% of the entire Kazakhstan population by 1939.

Kazakhstan’s demographic balance was further changed by the World War II. This republic indeed not only not only accommodate 430,000 people who were moved from Western USSR urban centres, but the Soviet government transferred to this region also those people who were accused of collaborating with the enemy The massive deportation of population increased up to 130 the number of nationalities living in Kazakhstan, and this ethnic puzzle characterised Kazakhstan until 1991, when it proclaimed its independence.

Finally, The Great Patriotic War had also a key role in strengthening Kazakhs sense of allegiance to the Soviet Union. Kazakh soldiers fought side by side with the representatives of many other Soviet nationalities for the defence of the “Motherland”. Numerous division were raised in Kazakhstan and were in the front line in several important battles, such as the one in the defence of Moscow. The Kazakhs heroic actions during war became a symbol of the republic’s full-fledged loyalty to the Union.

The second chapter examined the period between the end of World War II and the demise of Soviet Union. In 1953 Stalin died and Khrushchev became the First Secretary of the CPSU. Khrushchev focused first and foremost on the development of a strong agricultural sector and on how Soviet Union could resolve its grain shortage issue once for all. Khrushchev believed that the development of the agricultural sector was fundamental to resolve the tasks of communist construction successfully. Khrushchev announced his own programme for resolving the grain shortage issue already on September 1953, during a plenum for resolving the grain shortage issue. He promoted the cultivation of virgin and idle lands on the right bank of Volga, the northern Caucasus, Kazakhstan, and Western Siberia.

The Virgin Land programme did not provoke any considerable protests by Kazakh people. Certainly, the fear of State repression was a reason why Kazakhs did not react against such a programme; nevertheless, there also other factors that cannot be neglected. Firstly, this struggle with nature created a sense of excitement and challenge within the Kazakh population. Secondly, at least some Kazakh desired to distance themselves from what they consider their “backward” nomadic past. These people did not see any more the steppe as a land that must be respected and husbanded, but as a source of unlimited wealth.

Such a campaign however was not able to achieve the expected results, on the contrary it caused soil degradation. Moreover, the Virgin Land programme such had also dramatic effects on Kazakhstan demographic composition. Almost 2 million of new settlers came to Kazakhstan from the European parts of the USSR, due to this programme, so by 1962 Kazakhs represented only the 29% of population in “their own” national republic.

During the Brezhnev era, Kazakhs reinforced their position with their own republics, thanks to Dinmukhamed Kunaev, who became First Secretary of the CPK in 1964 and ruled over the SSR until 1986. Kunaev was a Brezhnev protégé. They got acquainted during Brezhnev’s stay in Kazakhstan, when Kunaev was the President Kazakh Republic’s Academy of Science.

Brezhnev’s ‘trust in cadres’ policy allowed Kunaev to strengthen his power and to increase the number of natives in the ranks of Kazakhstan SSR. During Kunaev era, the Russian domination of the Kazakh political system and life came to an end and he was able to increase considerably the number of Kazakhs who held important posts within the rank of CPK. Moreover, Kunaev increased the prestige of Kazakhstan thanks to his membership in CPSU Politburo. Under Kunaev, Kazakhstan witnessed also a revival of its cultural identity symbol too. The most important of these was the yurt, which was a benchmark of traditional Kazakh nomadic way of life. In this era, Kazakh literature blossomed too. In the 1960s-1970s, young Kazakh writers understood how important was to spread their works to a wider public.

Kazakhstan experienced an increasing autonomy from the centre during the Kunaev era. However, Moscow approach radically changed once Brezhnev died; indeed, the new Soviet leadership was fully conscious of the various deficiencies which afflicted the Soviet system from an economic, social and technological point of view, and Andropov, Gorbachev and Ligachev believed that Brezhnev's protégés, such as Kunaev or Rashidov in Uzbekistan, were an obstacle on the road to reform.

When Yuri Andropov came to power in November 1982 this mutual understanding came under attack. Andropov's fight against corruption disrupted the equilibrium within the Central Asian regions, subverting the situation. Yuri Andropov thought that a better use of national resources was a *condition sine qua non* for a successful reform of Soviet economy.

Gorbachev shared Andropov's ideas on the nationality question and made it clear that all nationalities had to work in order to achieve the forecast economic goals. Since Gorbachev took power, Moscow's press became to blame Kazakhstan due to its poor economic performances and the growing nepotism in the SSR, suggesting that Kunaev's dismissal would have come soon.

Kunaev was finally dismissed from his position on December 16, 1986, when CPK's Central Committee voted unanimously to appoint Gennadii Kolbin, a Russian without any experience in Kazakhstan as Party chief. Even if, there was no opposition during the vote, elements of the Party, loyal to Kunaev, did not totally approve such a choice. The decision to appoint Kolbin as CPK's First Secretary violated what was a Soviet Union non-written rule, which provided that the First Secretary of each republic should come from the titular nationality of that republic, while the Second Secretary should have been an individual loyal to Moscow. Such a decision provoked a three days protests during which more than two hundred people had been injured, and hundred protesters were arrested. However, such an event did not lead toward the emergence of a Kazakh national consciousness nor it was the beginning of a struggle for independence; on the contrary Popular Fronts were almost irrelevant in Kazakhstan and in the whole Central Asia region in the following years.

The explosion of nationalistic protests over the Soviet Union and in particular in the Baltics and the South Caucasus, made the Soviet institution more sensible to the "national question". The turn in nationality policy was part of a political transformation, which Soviet Union experienced after the 19th Party Conference of CPSU, held in June-July 1988. Gorbachev called for the creation of a popularly elected legislature and for a weakening of central control over the republic. Such a statement made it clear that Kolbin was simply a buffer between Kunaev and new generation of Kazakh leaders.

Kolbin was definitively dismissed as First Secretary of Communist Party of Kazakhstan on 20 June 1989, because of a series of incidents that happened between Kazakhs and various north Caucasians, and which began on June 16 and lasted for more than a week. His successor was Nursultan Nazarbayev, who will become the future President of Kazakhstan. He acquired more and more prestige within the republic in 1988, so much that he came to overshadow Kolbin. His main success was his ability to bridge the gaps between Russians and Kazakhs, the two most important Kazakhstan's ethnicities, remaining, without abandoning his loyalty to Gorbachev and his reform programme. Nazarbayev's continuous support of Gorbachev's reforms was particularly important, since it came from a non-Russian who had an important role in his own republic. Nazarbayev's loyalty was adequately rewarded by Gorbachev, who aided the First Secretary of CPK to acquire national and also international visibility. Moreover, some reports affirmed that, if the USSR had not collapsed, Gorbachev had planned to nominate Nazarbayev as his deputy and head of the new Union.

In December 1990, Gorbachev suggested to call a referendum in the whole Soviet Union regarding the new Union Treaty. The referendum aimed to stop the "dark forces" of nationalism and to demonstrate that still existed a majority who supported Soviet Union. The referendum was held in 9 out of 15 national republics (Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and the Baltic republics boycotted it). The question asked to Soviet citizens was "Do you consider it necessary to preserve the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics, in which the rights and freedom of the individual of any nationality will be fully guaranteed?". Kazakhs strongly confirmed their support for Soviet Union on the day of referendum; indeed, the 94% of the voters voted in favour of preserving the USSR, while only 5% opposed it.

On April, 23 Gorbachev and the leaders of the nine republics which held the referendum met at Novo-Ogarevo and signed the "9+1 agreement", where they confirmed their commitment to work toward a revised Union Treaty. Yet, the event also obliged Gorbachev to recognise that those republics which were not participate could "decide their own fates, thereby sanctioning the partial breakup of the USSR". During summer 1991, a draft Union Treaty was prepared. Yet, the Union Treaty never entered into force, due to the failed coup of August 19, 1991. Nazarbayev strongly condemned the coup, supporting Gorbachev's own call to preserve Union. Nazarbayev continued to support the necessity to keep Soviet Union alive on November 1991, affirming that Kazakhstan needed more than purely economic agreements between republics. Nevertheless, when the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus met on December 8, 1991, proclaiming the dissolution of the USSR and the creation of the CIS, Kazakhstan became

independent by default. On December 16, 1991, on a strongly symbolic date, Kazakhstan became the last republic to declare the independence from the Soviet Union.

The third chapter examined Kazakhstan's leadership nationality policy since 1991 and it wonders whether Kazakhstan could be defined as a 'nationalising states', such as Estonia or Latvia.

When Soviet Union definitively collapsed, Kazakhstan's government harshly promoted the necessity of an integration between the former Soviet republics. Indeed, at regular meeting of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), an organisation which gather most of the former Soviet republics, the president of Kazakhstan constantly tried to find a "hard core" of States within this Commonwealth, which wanted to pursue some form of political and economic integration. However, Kazakhstan had to face not only economic issues, it was also the only republic where the titular nationality represented a minority, when Soviet Union collapsed. According to the last Soviet census in 1989, Kazakhs represented only 39.7% and therefore, they were easily overcome by the numerous minorities present in the republics, whose Russian represented the most important one, since they composed the 37,8 of the entire population. Such a demographic situation avoided Kazakhstani government to undertake a purely nationalising policy. Indeed, since 1991, the Kazakhstani government has implemented both a kazakhization policy aimed to strengthen Kazakh ethnic identity and culture to strengthen ethnic Kazakh control over the country and, on the other hand, Kazakhstani ruling elite Kazakhstan has also striven for creating a Kazakhstani civic identity, able to represent the entire population living in the country.

The second Kazakhstan 1995 Constitution involved a direct reference to Kazakhness and outlined the existence of an indissoluble tie between the titular nation and the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Indeed, it affirmed: "We, the people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic fate, creating a state of indigenous Kazakh land".

However, Kazakhs status is only symbolical since the Constitution also forbids any discrimination "

"For reasons of origin, social, property, status, occupation, race, nationality, language, attitude towards religion, convictions, place of residence or any other circumstances."

Kazakhness can also be traced in presidential speeches. Historical reasons are the main source of legitimation of these claims, i.e. the fact that Kazakhs had always been present on the territory of the contemporary Kazakhstan and they occupied the whole steppe land even before that Russians came and settle it. Claims of rightful ownership play a fundamental role in new-

independent state, such as Kazakhstan, since they allow to create an associational bond between the population who is witnessing the nationalising process and its homeland. However, this has not been the only action undertaken to promote kazakhization. Another example has also been the steady displacement of non-titular nationalities from public sector. This “nationalisation by stealth” has been particularly apparent in power position, since the percentage of non-Kazakh in high level state posts drastically decreased from 50% to 25% between 1985 and 1994. In southern Kazakhstan oblasts, only few non-Kazakh who had a working knowledge of the state language (Kazakh) held high-level office.

Nevertheless, Kazakhness has been rarely the rationale for country’s public policies, however, there are two main exceptions, i.e. the language policy and ethnic Kazakhs diaspora (called *Oralmandar* from Kazakh verb *oralu* to return) from abroad.

During the Soviet era, the Russification policy, the presence of a great number of Russian speakers on the Kazakh SSR territory and their concentration in political, economic and cultural centres threatened the status of Kazakh in its eponymous republic. The percentage of Kazakh who spoke Russian fluently constantly increased throughout Soviet era, passing from 41,6% in 1970 and reaching 62,8% in 1989, while just 15 of Russian affirmed to be fluent in Kazakh, when Soviet Union collapsed.

In a multicultural or a multilingual environment language plays a key role, since it represents the closer nexus between cultural and material anxieties. Many Kazakh public figures and bureaucrats used slogan such as a “nation cannot exist without its language”, a motto evoked also in post-colonialist states, such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia. The attempt to restore the primacy of indigenous language using remedial legislative measure has been typical of all these instances. Kazakh had already been declared “state language” in 1989 by the Supreme Soviet of the KSSR, Russian being labelled as the language of “inter-ethnic communication. Once Kazakhstan became independent the main issue faced by Kazakh elite this field was whether the native language should become or not the only state language.

The first Kazakhstani Constitution, introduced in January 1993, confirmed bilingualism. Indeed, on the one hand, it confirmed to Kazakh the status of “state language”, already acknowledged by the 1989 Language Law, but, on the other hand, the 1993 Constitution also defined Russian as the “language of inter-ethnic communication”.

Only the second Kazakhstan Constitution introduced in August 1995 weakened the official status of Russian in Kazakhstan. It defined Kazakh as the “sole state language”. The codification of Kazakh as the sole state language did not mean, however, that Russian lost any significance

in Kazakhstan. The 1995 Constitution states, indeed, that “In state institutions and local self-administrative bodies the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazakh language”.

The second important kazakhification policy implemented by post- independent Kazakhstani leadership was the repatriation policy aimed to take back Kazakh diaspora to its own homeland. Kazakhstan’s ethnic repatriation policy aimed to pursue different goals. Firstly, Kazakhstan leadership wanted to shift country’s ethnic balance, therefore making Kazakhs the majority in their eponymous nation. This programme also allowed indirectly the revival of Kazakh language, since Kazakhs living in China and Mongolia preserved Kazakh customs and tradition to a greater extent than Kazakhstani Kazakhs.

However, *Oralmandar*, in particular those from Mongolia, had to face a reality rather different from that imagined. Kazakhstani Kazakhs had lost, indeed, the most of ancient traditions, due to the Russian and Soviet influence, and the poor knowledge of Russian was also an important issue for “returnees”.

Kazakhstan has certainly adopted nationalising policies all over its more than 25 years of independence, however to affirm that Kazakhstani leadership has pursued a one-side process, focused only on ethnic Kazakhs, would mean to overemphasize such a trend.

Kazakhstan’s leadership has also embraced, on the contrary, an internationalist rhetoric, trying to guarantee a peaceful coexistence between various nationalities living in Kazakhstan. Moreover, Kazakhstan constitution openly acknowledges country’s commitment to develop the national cultures and traditions and, furthermore, forbids to incite “social, racial, national, religious, clan and tribal enmity.

Under this framework, the Assembly of People(s) of Kazakhstan has had a key role. It is a body created by Nazarbayev in order to better manage at an institutional level the ethnic tensions risen in his country just after the independence. The APK is one of the better example of Nazarbayev’s efforts to establish a supra-ethnic civic Kazakhstani, able to overcome ethnic differences within Kazakhstan’s population. This organisation created by a presidential decree on March 1, 1995 is a consultative body, which using a terminology still very Soviet acted as the “laboratory of the friendship of the peoples”. The APK represents and involves all the minority cultural groups residing in Kazakhstan, from the smallest (Assyrians) to the biggest (Russians), it supervises almost 800 associations, which represent about 50 ethnic groups, and support economically about 170 weekend schools, where people can learn more than 23 native languages. This body

is a platform which allows to different nationalities living in Kazakhstan to express their concern and suggest new ideas regarding how to image inter-national relations.

On October 26, 2009, President Nazarbayev announced the draft of a National Unity Doctrine. The APK already proposed to develop such a doctrine in 2004. The rational of this doctrine was to conceptualise the existence of a supra-ethnic civic Kazakhstani identity. The main of this Doctrine National Unity was to consolidate political stability and inter-ethnic harmony. The final document was released on May 2010. The first principle enunciated by the Doctrine was “One land, One fate”, outlining the common history and values, which united the entire Kazakhstani population.

Two factors could mark a shift in Kazakhstan’s national building. The first can be Nazarbayev’s death. The President of Kazakhstan has had an important role as guarantor of the peaceful coexistence between the several nationalities living in Kazakhstan, however he is getting old and it is not sure that his successor will continue Nazarbayev’s policy. The second factor is the gradual emigration of Russian Kazakhstani toward their own homeland.

These two elements could bring Kazakhstan in the long-term to adopt a fully-fledged ethnic Kazakh identity, however this is not the only viable option. Kazakhstani leadership could also develop a transnational identity, which will exploit Kazakhstan’s geographic position making both the country and its people a bridge between Europe and Asia and their cultures.

Finally, the fourth chapter scrutinised Kazakhstani leadership foreign policy and how it has affected the country’s national identity. Since independence Kazakhstan has pursued a “pragmatic” foreign policy aimed to legitimate Kazakhstani leadership, allow Kazakhstan to achieve a fully-fledged sovereignty and independence and, finally, to improve its critical economic conditions during 1990s and the, to reach Kazakhstani leadership goal to enter in the top-30 list of the most developed countries in the world. Astana’s foreign policy has been based on two main concepts, i.e. ‘multivectorism’ and ‘Eurasianism’.

Post-Soviet leaders defined ‘multivectorism’ as a policy of co-habitation and cooperation, a strategy which has not any ideological foundation, aiming only to achieve a country’s foreign policy goals according to what a state perceives as its own national interest. The character of a government or the internal policies of a potential partner do not affect the policies of a country following such a pragmatic approach.

Kazakhstan has always been committed to multivectorism. Marat Shaikutdinov claimed that Kazakhstan has not any viable options, but to adopt such a policy, indeed: “Being in the heart of Eurasia, at the intersection of different worlds and civilisations, Kazakhstan must therefore

necessarily develop a multi-vector strategy aimed at collaboration and cooperation with other countries, integration projects and military-political blocs”.

Choosing such a strategy, Kazakhstani leadership wished to reach three different goals, two in the international environment and a third one regarding the domestic arena. Firstly, Kazakhstan adopted this policy to preserve its own sovereignty. Kazakhstani leadership sought to achieve such a result by establishing good relations with all the major powers, therefore avoiding relying only on a single foreign partner.

Secondly, Kazakhstan has pursued a multilateral policy to boost economic development. When it became independent, Kazakhstan was heavily dependent on Russia from an economic standpoint, since its industrial sector was highly integrated into the former Soviet system. The lack of an adequate pipeline infrastructure increased Astana’s dependence on Moscow, since the former was obliged to export its oil through Russian territory and Russian-controlled pipelines, therefore, Astana’s main challenge after independence was to diminish its dependence on Russia.

Thirdly, Kazakhstan used foreign policy to legitimate its rule. Kazakhstan’s demographic reality led Kazakhstan government to adopt an ambiguous policy regarding national building. On the one hand, Kazakhstan elite tried to redress Kazakhs who had been disadvantaged during Soviet and Tsarist era, on the other hand, Kazakhstani elite tried to develop a civic Kazakhstani identity, able to bypass ethnic divisions.

This ambiguous policy did not allow state elite’s legitimacy to rest just on domestic aspects, therefore elite turned its attention abroad, indeed Kazakhstan’s leadership try to “portray an image of a state elite that was engaged internationally and therefore deserving of support domestically”.

Eurasianism is the second concept leading Kazakhstan foreign policy. Geography has always affected countries’ decision about what foreign policy strategy should be implemented and this is particularly true for a state like Kazakhstan, which borders with two of the main global powers: Russia and China. Kazakhstan is a *de facto* Asian country, since the 90% of its territory is located in this continent, yet, the state elite has portrayed Kazakhstan as a ‘Eurasian’ nation geopolitically, geo-economically and geo-historically speaking.

Nazarbayev Eurasianism has three main purposes. Two goals regarded the international arena, while the third objective is related to the domestic public. Firstly, this idea aimed to improve relations with Russia and other regional partners. Second, Kazakhstan Eurasianism aimed to balance relations between Asia and Europe. Kazakhstan leadership has described, indeed, its

country as a bridge the two continents, defining this country as a bridge between the two continents defining itself as a bastion of peace, stability and neutrality. Finally, Eurasianism idea has also been used to create a fully-fledged Kazakhstan identity, able to create multi-ethnic harmony and stability in a multinational state, such as Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan foreign policy can be described as a pragmatic foreign policy. Kazakhstan has not pursued a foreign policy based on an ideological platform, but, on the contrary, since its independence Kazakhstan has always pursued a multilateral foreign policy that allowed Astana not to rely just on a major partner. Nevertheless, some scholars argued in the last year that Kazakhstan's multilateral behaviour could be menaced by the last developments in international arena. In particular, Kazakhstan's decision to join Eurasian Union and the launch of Chinese "One Belt, One Road" has been considered as the main threat for Kazakhstani multivectorism. However, Astana leadership has declared several times that Kazakhstan considered Eurasian integration possible just from an economic point of view. In the same way, Chinese massive investment in Kazakhstan economy following the launch of OBOR, did not prevented Astana from striving for developing its partnership with EU and USA. On the contrary, Kazakhstan became the first Central Asian state to sign an Enhanced Cooperation and Partnership Agreement in 2016. Moreover, in January 2018, during Nazarbayev's last visit in Washington, Kazakhstan and United States released a joint statement declaring that their leaders agreed to elevate bilateral cooperation to the level of enhanced strategic partnership.

Certainly, Kazakh identity dramatically changed during the Soviet era. Firstly, Kazakhs had been obliged to abandon the nomadic lifestyle, which had characterised this people for centuries. Secondly, when Soviet Union collapsed, Kazakhstan was the only former Soviet republic, where the titular nationality did not represent the majority of- the population; indeed, when USSR disappeared up to 130 different nationalities lived within Kazakhstan borders. Thirdly, Kazakhs, in particular urban Kazakhs, experienced a deep Russification, which is witnessed first of all by the rapidity with which Kazakhs acquired proficiency in Russian. According to the last Soviet census in 1989, the 62% of ethnic Kazakhs claim proficiency in Russian, while, on the contrary, just 1% of Russians living in Kazakhstan affirmed they were able to speak Kazakh.

The difficult experienced by *Oralmandar* to integrate in Kazakhstan offered an empirical evidence of such changes. In particular, Mongolian Kazakhs faced difficulties to feel a full sense of belonging to Kazakhstan, since they perceive that their 'Kazakhness' outpaces that of autochthones. Most of Mongolian Kazakhs speak the 'state language', but not Russian, moreover, they preserved ancient Kazakh customs and traditions to a greater extent than Kazakhstan Kazakhs.

Such a framework led post-independent Kazakhstan ruling elite to adopt a twofold nationality policy, on the one hand, it supported the Kazakhs' right of self-determination on their 'own' national territory, and, on the other hand, it backed the development of Kazakhstani supra-ethnic civic identity shaped on the Soviet nationality model, where Kazakhs play the role of the 'Older Brother' instead of Russian.

In post-independent Kazakhstan foreign policy strategy played a crucial role too. The 'pragmatic' multivector strategy allowed Kazakhstan to boost economic development, to assure its fully-fledged independence and sovereignty and to increase its prestige in the international arena. The Eurasian idea is intrinsically linked to the Kazakhstanness paradigm and the development of a Kazakhstani civic identity. It served to describe Kazakhstan as a bridge between different civilizations, on the global stage, and, domestically, it allow to ensure stability and it permit every nationality living in Kazakhstan to feel itself represent.

The Russian population steady emigration to their 'homeland' and Kazakhs high birth rate could determine a strengthen of Kazakh ethnic identity and the contemporary loosening and gradually disappearance of Kazakhstani identity. The switch of Kazakh alphabet from Cyrillic to Latin has already been interpreted as a step in this direction and a decision aimed to move Kazakhstan away from Russian influence.

Yet, what will affect Kazakhstani identity and Kazakhstan future the most is leadership succession. Nazarbayev has been the only Kazakhstan President and he has had a fundamental role in the development of Kazakhstani identity and the stability of the country. Therefore, Kazakhstan will face in the next years an important challenge and what path the country will take in the future will be heavily influenced by how leadership succession will take place and whether Kazakhstan's next President will pursue a different policy in comparison to Nazarbayev.

