

ENSURING INTERETHNIC CONCORD: CASE OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Abstract: Ethnic issues are of great importance in the modern world in general and in Kazakhstan in particular. Kazakhstan is a multiethnic country that has created its own model of interethnic relations. This article investigates Kazakhstan's model of interethnic concord. It analyzes the model by revealing its main pillars, which are the legal framework, depoliticization of ethnic sphere, creation of one nation on the grounds of civil rather than ethnic identity, and the influential Assembly of People of Kazakhstan.

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Introduction

Kazakhstan is a multinational (polyethnic/multiethnic) country, which means that different ethnic groups live on the territory of the republic. Preservation of stability and friendly relations among all groups is a priority of Kazakhstan.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan faced a number of challenges, with issues of national character playing a major role. The ethnic factor has always been a potential threat and a source of instability in Kazakhstan, as in every multiethnic state. This is why the President of Kazakhstan has repeatedly emphasized the importance of maintaining interethnic concord and prevention of ethnic tensions in the country.

At the same time, Kazakhstan has chosen to develop its own strategy for the management of interethnic relations. As a result, Kazakhstan's model of interethnic accord can serve as a successful example of the peaceful coexistence of various ethnic groups, interethnic stability, and concord. This article emphasizes some basic features of the Kazakhstani model of interethnic accord.

Language issues in Kazakhstan

The dissolution of the Soviet Union caused the revival of ethnic identity in the newly independent states, where language issues played a crucial role. Particularly, the status of languages for ethnic groups was a cause of interethnic conflicts in a number of post-Soviet countries. Hence, the language issue in Kazakhstan was really a most difficult and controversial challenge, which the new government has faced, triggering a clash of interests of different groups on the subject.

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, language issues are regulated by the Constitution (1995) and the Law "On Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan" (the Law) № 151-I from July 11, 1997 (1997).

The Law (1997) prescribed the principle of state care about languages, according to which, every citizen shall be entitled to use a native language, and to choose freely the language for communication, upbringing, education, and creation. At the same time, "the state shall take care of the conditions for study and development of the languages of the peoples of Kazakhstan. In the places of close settlement of national groups their languages may be used in conducting activities" (The Law, 1997, Article 6). Moreover, the law stipulates provision about inadmissible infringement of rights of citizens on

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linguistic grounds (The Law, 1997, Article 7), which is important, due to talks about ‘Kazakhization’ and some discrimination of the Russian-speaking population.

The state language is Kazakh, as settled by the current Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, adopted on 30 August 1995. However, “in state institutions and local self-administrative bodies the Russian language shall be officially used on equal grounds along with the Kazakh language” (Kz Const. Art. 7, p.2). Languages of other ethnic groups are also under state protection, as the latter “shall promote conditions for the study and development of the languages of the people of Kazakhstan” (Kz Const. Art. 7, p. 3).

Occasionally, there are accusations about linguistic discrimination in Kazakhstan or violation of rights of Russian-speaking population. Firstly, 25 years have passed since the country achieved independence, which is long enough to establish Kazakh as the state language. Secondly, despite the strengthening of the Kazakh language, the role of the Russian language is still quite important, as it is widely and sometimes more often used both at the level of government and in everyday life of citizens. Thirdly, many members of the ruling elite do not know the Kazakh language, even if they are Kazakhs themselves. The majority of Kazakhs speak Russian better than their native language. Thus, for instance, the Kazakh language is often taught less frequently than English is taught in schools, and thus graduates know the latter better than the language of the State. Therefore, conceivably, we should be examining the problem regarding the weak development of the state language, both among the indigenous population and other ethnic groups, rather than talking about imaginary discrimination. Citizens of Kazakhstan may not know the state language, not only because of their unwillingness to study it, but also because of circumstances. Undoubtedly, there has been a positive change in this area, especially among the new generation of young people born in the independent Kazakhstan. In order to expedite the process, it is necessary to improve the system of training through interactive teaching methods. These need to demonstrate the benefits of knowing this language and economically motivate people to study, to develop a mass culture of the Kazakh language (music, cinema, and other activities on Kazakh) and improve its image.

Kazakhstan has created favorable linguistic conditions, both for those who know the state language and for those who have no understanding. Certainly, knowing the state language will become a future necessity. However, this will take more than several years (or even decades) for the Kazakh language to gain a strong position, not only in the public sphere, but also in communication between ordinary citizens.

In general, the tactful and delicate regulation of this language issue, accounting for the interests of the indigenous population and numerous Slavic ethnic groups, is the first cornerstone of Kazakhstan's model of interethnic relations.

Depoliticization of ethnic sphere

The next principle that shapes the Kazakh model of interethnic harmony is depoliticization of ethnic relations. In many countries of the world, there are quotas for ethnic political parties, committees, or MPs from a particular ethnic group (Poland, Serbia, Singapore, Romania, and others).

In Kazakhstan, the Law “On Political Parties of the Republic of Kazakhstan” stipulates that “no political party may be founded on the basis of a particular profession, race, nationality, ethnic origin or religion” (Art. 5, p.8).

There are different opinions on the role of ethnic political parties in a democracy. There are both supporters and opponents of such parties. The most obvious advantage of ethnic parties is the political representation of various groups. On the other hand, some candidates or parties use the ethnic factor for obtaining additional support from various groups, while not actually representing their interests.

In addition, goals of ethnic parties differ from the aims of non-ethnic (general) political parties. Most scholars agree that the former focus only on certain electorates, as their purpose is the protection of political interests of one particular group, namely an ethnic group, while the latter make universal programs, which take into account the needs of the whole society (Kitschelt, 1986; Horowitz, 1985; Gunther & Diamond, 2003). There is also an opinion among scholars that ethnic political parties do not serve to integrate society, and divide society even further (Horowitz, 1985). This is true for states in transition, where emergence of such political parties can increase tensions between ethnic groups and introduce conflict among them.

That is why, in Kazakhstan, the necessity and importance of depoliticization of ethnic sphere has been repeatedly emphasized from the beginning of independence.

Civil rather than ethnic identity

Nevertheless, this is not the only pillar of Kazakhstan's model of interethnic accord. Another is the idea of civil identity and one nation, the essence of which is described fully in the National Unity Doctrine (n.d.).

According to this doctrine, "our national unity is based on a high degree of correlation of oneself, regardless of ethnic origin, with Kazakhstan and its future" and "Our great goal is to unite and to become a Great Nation. At the same time, Kazakhs should play the role of a consolidating center, that unites all people of Kazakhstan" (National Unity Doctrine, n.d.).

It should be noted that the idea of one Kazakhstani nation is not just a principle 'on paper', but a real policy that unites people. Thus, according to the research held in 2010, 53.2% of respondents of various ethnic groups from different regions see Kazakhstan as a republic, where citizens of different nationalities form one Kazakhstani nation. Moreover, more than 75% of citizens think that the national policy of the republic is quite good (Mukhamedzhanov & Zhusupova, 2010, pp.50 & 64).

At the same time, there is a need for continual monitoring and analysis of the national situation in Kazakhstan in order to reveal its weaknesses, one of which relates to personnel policy. Most respondents who are surveyed emphasize underrepresentation of their ethnic groups in public authorities, among which Uigurs, Chechens, and Uzbeks feel certain that they are represented least of all among other ethnic groups (Mukhamedzhanov & Zhusupova, 2010, p.51).

This is partially true, as Kazakhs dominate in state apparatus. For instance, more than 80% of the Government's top management (Ministers, Vice-ministers, and their assistants) are representatives of the titular nation (except Shkol'nik V.S., Rau A., Karmazina L., Tsoy A., Bozhko V.K., and Vagapov D.V).

However, the domination of Kazakhs in public authorities is not the result of discrimination but rather of imperfection of the personnel policy, a high level of corruption, and the influence of informal ties during recruitment of civil servants. Thus, for instance, according to the research of the social fund "Strategy", Kazakhstani people think the main criteria of cadre selection are professional skills (32%), kin or family ties (27%), principle of team promotion (25%), commonality of region or birthplace (15%), buying positions (13%) and others (Tatilya, 2013). Only 19% of respondents considered nationality as the main principle of candidates' selection (Tatilya, 2013).

Optimistically, the current situation will change, and candidates will be chosen based only on their professional skills, abilities, and work experience, rather than by family, kin, or other informal ties. As a result, every citizen of any ethnic identity will be able to hold public office on equal grounds. This is the task, for not only the Government, the Parliament, or other political institutions, but also for the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, which is the only body of political representation of different ethnic groups. Additionally, the assembly is "an innovative model of nation-wide representation of

interests of all citizens and the effective instrument of our young democracy” (Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, n.d.). Accordingly, it is the next pillar discussed in the Kazakhstani model of interethnic accord.

The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan

The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan was created in 1995 under the initiative of the President Nazarbayev. At the beginning, it was a consultative body, residing under the President. Its main tasks were the protection and revival of cultural and linguistic peculiarities of different ethnic groups of Kazakhstan. Currently, it acts as a civil and nationwide institute that is actively involved in both national policy and economy of the state.

From the start, the Assembly was a platform for discussion and constructive dialogue to address many important social and political issues. Among these were the following agendas: the reform of the constitutional system; transformation of the legislative branch and the creation of a bicameral Parliament; participation in the legislative work; spiritual and patriotic education of citizens; the establishment of diplomatic ties with other countries by supporting Diasporas; cultural revival of ethnic groups; interfaith harmony and dialogue of cultures; and much more.

In 2007, the Constitution was amended, by virtue of which, the Assembly received constitutional status. It now consists of 26% Kazakhs, 15% Russians, 6.5% each of Koreans, Germans, and Tatars, with other minorities less represented (Peyrouse, 2007, p.484). In addition to the consultative and advisory functions, the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan has become a representative body with the right to politically represent ethnic groups in the Parliament. According to the Article 51 p.1 of the Constitution of Kazakhstan, “Nine deputies of Majilis shall be elected by Assembly of the people of Kazakhstan” (Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 1995). As a result in parliamentary elections in 2012, nine deputies of the Majilis elected by the Assembly were representatives of nine different ethnic groups: Aliyev Zh.– Kazakh, Ahmad M.A. - Uighur, Cappel E.Y. - German, Kim R.W. – Korean, Murad A.S. – Chechen, Nesterov N.D. - Russian, Sayapova Z.A. - Tatar, Y. Timoshenko - Ukrainian, and Khalmuradov R.S. - Uzbek.

This system is intended to provide a more equitable ethnic distribution in the Parliament and to empower ethnic minorities that may otherwise have little or no ability to elect or nominate members of their ethnic group. However, both houses remain predominantly Kazakh: only 10 of 47 senators are non-Kazakh, while 24 of the 107 members of the Majilis are representatives of non-titular nation (United Nations, 2010).

In addition to parliamentary representation, the Assembly annually contributes to building a peaceful, friendly, tolerant, and cultural image of the republic. The life-long presidency of President N.A. Nazarbayev in the Assembly, once again, underlines the importance of the Assembly’s status in the political system of independent Kazakhstan. The area of influence of the Assembly will grow each year. In the context of the new strategic development program “Kazakhstan 2050”, the issue of inter-ethnic nature, patriotic education, dialogue of cultures, and interfaith harmony will occupy an important place among the priorities of the state policy, the responsibility for implementation of which will rest, primarily, on the Assembly.

At the same time, it must be remembered that the “unique, colorful, priceless painting of Great History titled Kazakhstan... [where] every ethnic group creates a pattern of its life, combining it with patterns of other ethnic groups” (President of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev, 2014), can be built by the joint effort of every person in the republic.

Conclusion

The Soviet legacy has left a sad mark on the culture, language, traditions, customs, and way of life of Kazakhs, the consequences of which are felt to this day. Hence, the revival of the Kazakh identity has become an important task of the new independent state.

At the same time, the revival of ethnic identity, peculiar to almost all new post-Soviet countries, has caused a wave of ethnic tensions in Kazakhstan, and led, in some cases, to ethnic conflicts that include the Karabakh conflict, the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, and conflicts in Transdnistria, Ossetia, and Chechnya, among others.

The ruling circles in the Republic of Kazakhstan were afraid of an emergence of interethnic conflicts in the country after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, independent Kazakhstan has faced the task of harmonization of the interethnic sphere, development of the most appropriate model of regulation of interethnic relations, and preventing ethnic clashes and tensions in the republic.

Currently, Kazakhstan's model of interethnic accord attempts to monitor global trends and borrow the successful experience of foreign countries, while accounting for the specifics of the Kazakh society. This model is based on the legal framework, including national legislation and a commitment to international conventions and agreements; depoliticization of ethnic sphere, creation of one nation on the grounds of civil rather than ethnic identity; and, of course, Kazakhstan's model of interethnic consent cannot be considered in isolation from the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. The effectiveness of this model will continue to be tested over time, though it has already proven its worth.

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