**Civic Nationalism vs. Ethnic Nationalism: a Comparative and Critical Analysis of Nation-building in Kazakhstan**

After the collapse of the USSR, the independent nation-building in the post-soviet republics resumed. In Kazakhstan it took the government more than fifteen years to come up with the Doctrine of National Unity that was strongly influenced by civic nationalism. The public response, however, was either very negative or faint. The alternative Concept of National Policy emerged claiming that ethnic nationalism is the prerequisite for Kazakhstan’s statehood. In the meantime, the political elite chose not to advance the implementation of their model of national unity as this uncertainty gave them room for maneuvering in order to remain in power. However, I would argue here that as soon as the issue of power succession is resolved, the “national question” will rise again. In this context, the direction of the future development of Kazakhstan still depends of the model of nationalism it will adopt.

The main question to be answered is what are the theoretical and practical reasoning behind the possible consequences of realization of each of the modes of nation-building? In other words, this paper focuses on comparative and critical analysis of the two competing models of nationalism – civic and ethnic - in order to weigh their applicability for Kazakhstan’s case. To that end, the historical background is provided, the factors that determined the current ethnic composition are enumerated, and the two concepts of nation-building are compared in terms of their goals and methods to achieve them. Further on, these concepts are put in the context of the contemporary debate on nationalism and the possible response and consequences of their implementation are discussed.

Kazakhstan inherited its current borders and ethnic composition from the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic being a quasi-nation-state within the Soviet Union. The early years of Soviet power in Central Asia were characterized by considerable changes in terms of national delimitation. The detailed account of the process may be found in the New Central Asia: The Creation of Nations by Olivier Roy (2000 pp. 58-60, 61). In 1918, the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was established that embraced the territories of the current Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and southern Kazakhstan. Northern Kazakhstan belonged to the Kirghiz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic that emerged two years later. The Kazakh Autonomous Republic was established in 1925 and its status was upgraded only in 1936 when it was also transformed into the Soviet Socialist Republic (Roy 2000).

The Bolsheviks, who drew the borderlines, successfully realized the project with a number of objectives: forceful modernization e.g. transition from feudalism to socialism bypassing capitalism, prevention of supranational identities, namely pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism (Roy 2000, p. 66) and, more importantly, creation of new identities that were different from those of the pre-Soviet era (Balzer 1994, p. 88) when people had associated themselves either with the regions and cities (settled Persian and Turkic speaking people in the South of Central Asia) or kinship (Turkic speaking nomads in the Great Steppe) (MIA of Russian Empire, 1905).

Once the contours and status of the new republics were set up, the quasi statehood had to be consolidated. The process of korenization started with the codification of the local languages, their introduction into the education system, creation of local bureaucracy and intelligentsia (Rodnevich, 1931) with the ultimate goal being to bring about the nation-building in accordance to Stalin’s definition a nation as "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture” (Stalin, 1953, p. 307). Each Soviet Socialist Republic was granted with the formal attributes of statehood such as the flag, emblem, defined borders, national anthem, official language, and constitution that stipulated de jure right to withdraw from the Soviet Union although de facto right to claim independence was obviously out of question. The official name of the Republic implied who were the titular nation assigned to be transformed into quasi nation-state, e. g. Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, Kazakhs in Kazakhstan etc.

The delimitation policies of the Soviet power prevented any independence moves by the newly established republics. The Bolsheviks deliberately drew the borders in such a manner that had left a number of enclaves: Uzbeks in Kazakhstan and Kazakhs in Uzbekistan etc (Roy 2000 p.68). Later on, the ethnic composition of the Central Asian republics, especially Kazakhstan, became even more heterogeneous as a result of Stalin’s deportation of the kulaks (mostly ethnically Russians), Poles, Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars and Greeks, Kalmyks, Far East Koreans, peoples from the North Caucasus and others and industrialization that brought the Russian speaking working class people from western regions (Pohl 2000).

This is how Kazakhstan sojourned the Soviet era until in 1991 when it got the second chance to resume its independent development due to dissolution of the Soviet Union. Interestingly, according to the official documents, Kazakhstan appeared to gain its statehood out of self-determination of the Kazakhs not by the virtue of the fact that the Union just ceased to exist (Declaration of State Sovereignty 1990, Constitutional Law on “Independence of the republic of Kazakhstan” 1991, Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan 1993).

During the twenty years of independence, Kazakhstan’s ethnic composition changed. According to 1989 census (cited Eschment 2010, p.117), in the 16.5 million population, 40 per cent were Kazakhs, 38 per cent were Russians. Two decades later, the Statistical Agency of Kazakhstan reported, the Kazakhs comprised 63.1 per cent of the population, the proportion of Russians decreased to 23.7 per cent, 2.8 per were Uzbeks, 2.1 per cent of Ukrainians, whereas the Uighurs, Tatars and Germans accounted for more than 1 per cent each and the other smaller ethnic groups totaled 4.5 per cent altogether (cited Eschment 2010, p.126).

Currently, the popular sentiment towards the national policy in Kazakhstan is as diverse as its ethnic composition. The two major visions of the ideal national policy in Kazakhstan are represented in the two documents, the official and alternative concepts of nation-building, each promoting the opposite directions for Kazakhstan’s future development. The official Doctrine of National Unity (DNU), publicized via the People’s Assembly of Kazakhstan, stipulates for identity change and building of a civic nation of Kazakhstan (PAK 2009) whereas the alternative Concept of National Policy (CNP), published by the Akh Zhol party, insists on maintenance of the ethic identities giving the Kazakhs, being a core ethnic group, a superior role (Akh Zhol 2010).

The DNU sets the aim of social and economic modernization. It rejects the ethnic nature of the Kazakhstan’s nation claiming that the civic nation has always been the initial choice of the people. It also stipulates for the balanced language policy through promotion of the official (Kazakh) language, maintenance of the administrative and dialogue functions of the Russian language. The assertive action to increase the representation of the various ethnic groups in the public administration and government in both national and local levels are also mentioned. The DNU disapproves granting any privileges to any ethnic groups. The national consolidation is to be achieved through the state policies to reach the consensus over the values (PAK 2009).

The Concept of the National Policy draws a quite different picture of the future of the country with the aim being to save the nation-state of the Kazakhs. It insists on the change of the name to the Kazakh Republic, argues that the Kazakhs are the only nation, while the others are called either ethnic groups or diaspora and Kazakhstan being a mono-national state on the ground that the Kazakhs are the absolute majority. The CNP states the statehood on the Indigenous land based on self-determination of the Kazakhs. It also rejects the notion of common civic Kazakhstan’s identity as dangerous and claims that the values of the Kazakhs must be superior giving to the others the only option to join. According to the CNP, the language policy must enhance considerably the use of the Kazakh language with graduate elimination of the Russian. In terms of foreign policy it is isolationist, negative towards the Eurasian integration, stipulates considerable restriction of external immigration (with the expectance given to the ethnic Kazakhs) (Ak Zhol 2010).

Prior to putting the two concepts above into the context of the debates on nationalism it is necessary to provide definition of nationalism and outline the key premises of major theoretical approaches, namely primordialism, modernism and post-modernism.

This paper accepts the Gellner’s definition of nationalism as “a political doctrine … that the political and national unit should be congruent” (1983, p.1), the question, then, is ”‘what is a nation?’ and this is where the civic and ethnic nationalism differ. While classical Rousseaunian civic nationalism states that political legitimacy of a nation is from active participation of its citizenry (Rousseau 2001 [1762]) and, at least ideally, should be voluntary (Ernest 1882), ethnic nationalism, on the contrary, defines nations by “shared heritage, … common language, … faith, … and ancestry (Muller p. 14).

Primordialism sees nations as natural, durable and constant and claims that nations precede nationalism. Recognizing emotional and irrational components, it explains why “national question” is very often the most sensitive (van der Berghe 2005, Shils1957, Geertz 1993). While it is possible to agree that the tendency to divide people into “us” and “them” is indeed the part of human condition, this approach fails to see how “unnatural” the markers of this division may be. Its strength is when it is about people’s self-determination, but it does not answer the purpose of either inter-ethnic peace or social and economic modernization.

Modernism is the most tessellated term embracing those approaches to the analysis of nationalism that claim modernity is the prerequisite to nations. In other words, modernity leads to nationalism and nationalism lead to nations (Nairn 2003, Hosbauwm 1990, Gellner 1983). The most common critique of modernist theories is that they are reductionist (Smith 1983), overestimating one of the factors of transformation, whether it would be economic (Nairn 2003), political (Hosbauwm 1990) or socio-cultural (Gellner, 1983), and ignoring the complexity of the phenomenon. It is also being criticized for failing to account for the pre-modern ethnic ties and explaining the passion nationalism can generate (O’Leary 1987). Due to its Eurocentric nature, it may be complemented by the finding of the post-colonial theory that embraces the experience and agendas of the nations beyond Europe (Chatterjee 2005).

Although constructivist and modernist (especially instrumentalist) paradigms may appear similar, the latter argues that there are “objective” factors leading to emergence of nationalisms and nations, whereas the former rejects “objectivity” as a gnoseological principle. While the modernist theories are interested in the question “why”, constructivists limit themselves to the description of “how”. The constructivists’ task is to prove that nations are not real but socially constructed through the discourses produced and reproduced by significant speakers (Billing 1995, Calhoun 1997). In the meantime, it tends to ignore the real political, social and economic consequences for the people bearing these identities regardless their constructed/artificial nature.

Back on topic of the two competing concepts of nation-building in Kazakhstan, here is how they may be analyzed by the representative of the above mentioned theories. The Doctrine of National Unity (civic nationalism) will be dismissed by primordialist altogether because of its departure from ethnicity. The constructivist will regard it as an attempt of the elite to produce a new discourse. It suits better the modernist approach as it is aimed at modernization. However, civic nationalism suggests that “popular sovereignty” is exercised through democratic means, but whether the current political regime is capable and willing to provide for that is rather questionable.

The Concept of National Policy (ethnic nationalism), for the constructivists, is the perfect example of discourse formation with such attributes as “temporal depth, idea of a nation extending from the past to the future”, common decent, special … sacred relation to a particular territory” (Calhoun, 1997, p. 4-5). At the same time, it will be supported by primordialists exactly for these reasons because they see the above mentioned arbutuses as reality of nations. The CNP does not offer much for modernists as it opposes modernity from its inception.

More importantly, they both follow the logic of acute nationalism meaning homogenization, loyalty and common values (although they conceptualize them differently). Given that, as Hall pointed, they both can be “quite intolerant of diversity”, the third option of civil nationalism is preferable as it accepts diverse positions and cultures, warning, however that this diversity should be “limited by a consensus on shared values” because when groups’ rights prevail over individual it leads to “social caging” (Hall 2003, p.16).

Therefore, the homogenization from implementation of the Concept of National Policy may marginalize the ethnic minorities and the Russian speaking people (both of Slavic and Kazakh ethnic background) and “cosmopolitan” youth, whereas the Doctrine of the National Unity alienates considerable number of the Kazakhs, predominantly Kazakh-speaking intelligentsia and people belonging to traditional rural culture. Neither of them leads to the national consolidation but only aggravates the division within Kazakhstan.

The implementation of the latter model means that Kazakhstan will lose a part of its human capital and, therefore, will have to abandon its ambitions of comprehensive social and economic modernization. More importantly, it directly calls for the policies that violate both individual and group rights with a number of consequences given the external environment both in terms of human rights discourse and geopolitics. On the other hand, the CNU “elitist” project means that a considerable part of population will lose the sense that the state they live in is based on the principle of popular sovereignty.

While the implementation of the CNP may result in massive emigration of the “others” leaving Kazakhstan as a genuine mono-national state, the realization of the DNU means that the Kazakhs, feeling alienated by their own state, will have nowhere to leave. Thus, paradoxically, a more “liberal’ Doctrine is more likely to lead to serious ethnic clashes.

**Conclusion**

After being absent in scholarly focus for quite a while, nationalism reemerged in the social-political debates in the early 1990s. The researches of nationalism concentrate on both theoretical critique and case studies. The experiences and perspectives of the countries beyond Europe have gained increasing attention and a number of new approaches emerged that attempt to shift from the “what is a nation?” and “where is nation?”. They reject the necessity of a comprehensive theory focusing mostly on particular nationalisms in particular times and places. The author believes that this paper is parallel with these recent developments in the debate on nationalism as has discussed Kazakhstan’s realities. It has dealt with the Doctrine of National Unity and the Concept of National Policy and covered the theoretical and practical reasoning behind them in terms of the two major approaches to nation-building, namely civic and ethnic nationalism. The comparative and critical analysis of the two competing models of nationalism – civic and ethnic has been aimed to test their applicability for Kazakhstan’s case that enabled to speculate on possible consequences of realization of each of the modes of nation-building.

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