

# The language issue in Kazakhstan – institutionalizing new ethnic relations after independence

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**Abstract:** This article discusses the process of institutionalizing ethnic relations in a very diverse society of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Stable through the Soviet period, ethnic relations were altered after 1991, when the state gained independence. The case analyzed in this article are the language policies in Kazakhstan, as the manifestation of the policies of “kazakhization”. Kazakhstan is a particular case among the former Soviet states, as it is a home for 130 nationalities, including a 30% Russian minority. During the Soviet period the titular nation, the Kazakhs, did not constitute a majority and the country was deeply russified – the use of the Russian language was more prevalent than the use of the Kazakh language. After independence the state decided to embark upon a path of strengthening the formal power of the titular nation. This manifested itself – among other ways- in the language policies. With the dual citizenship forbidden, the law introduced the compulsory use of Kazakh in the public institutions, education, media, politics, also, the law made it a duty of every citizen to master the language. However, with the limited knowledge of the Kazakh language even among the titular group, the implementation of the policies turned out to be slow. Yet, the new ethnic relations have been based on the domination granted to one group, in a society that has almost 50 % of minority groups.

*Keywords:* Ethnic relations, Kazakhstan, language policy, former Soviet Union

## 1. Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union caused a complete redefinition of the ethnic relations within the Union Republics. All the post-Soviet states had to deconstruct the Soviet identity and build their own identity in the new context, yet Kazakhstan was a particularly complex case. It was a very russified state with the titular group not representing a majority in the population, and a titular language not widely spoken.

Language policies constitute an area that reflects well the changes in ethnic relations in Kazakhstan's case. Certainly, nation building is composed of efforts in many different areas, but language is a crucial factor of national identity. This paper describes how the ethnic relations were institutionalized in the area of language policies. Kazakhstan have been going through kazakhization process, declaring the domination of the Kazakh language. This paper discusses the ethnic relations before and after the Independence, and focuses on the regulations in the linguistic area such as constitutional provision, the Language Law and the documents of the executive.

Historically the Kazakh language receded, but Independence brought the elevation of its status. And although the legal provisions are more ambitious than the implementations efforts, the ethnic relations were significantly altered.

## **2. Ethnic relations and linguistic situation in Kazakhstan before in the Soviet period**

Kazakhstan is one of the five post-Soviet Central Asian republics. It is the 9<sup>th</sup> largest country in the world, larger than Western Europe, with a population of 15.5 million people. The population consists of 130 ethnic groups, in which Kazakhs are a slight majority. The country is rich in natural resources such as oil, gas and various minerals (CIA - The World Factbook, 2010). At the moment it is one of the wealthiest of the former Soviet Republics – mainly due to the abundance of oil. Kazakhstan was one of the last among the republics to declare independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Kazakhstan is a unique case in the former Soviet Union, because of the multitude of the ethnic groups residing there. Thus, it had been characterized as a “settler colony”. The multiethnicity of Kazakhstan was a result of a mixture of policies exercised by the Tsarist and further the Soviet authorities. The abolition of serfdom in the mid-nineteenth century marked the beginning of Russian migration to Kazakhstan. The forced settlement of nomads in 1920 and 1930s, the famine and emigration that followed, caused a loss of 40% of Kazakh population (Dave, 2004: 441). Then, the inflow of other immigrants brought about by Stalin's deportation policies in the late 1930s and during the World War 2 added several groups such as Koreans, Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Poles, and other nationalities, in majority from other Soviet

Republics. Throughout the Soviet period the waves of settlers and migrant workers were coming, mainly from European parts of Soviet Union. The Virgin Land campaign in the 1950s brought the strong influx of Slavs and radically changed the demographic balance of the country – in the 1960s Kazakhs constituted only 30% of the population (Schatz, 2000: 75). Kazakhstan was the only post-Soviet Republic where the titular nationality was a minority. In the census in 1989, at the eve of the Soviet Union collapse, Kazakhs constituted 40% of the population, Russians 37.4%, Ukrainians 6%, Germans almost 6%, Tatars and Uzbeks 2% each. The estimated calculations in 1989 established the relation of the Slavic/European versus Turkic/Muslim parts of population on the level 50.2% and 49.8% (Dave, 2003: 5). In the independent Republic of Kazakhstan, due to migrations in the early 1990s, the ethnic composition slightly changed. According to the 1999 census data, there are two major groups (Kazakhs and Russians) and other six groups that would constitute at least 1% of the population (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Percentage of the major ethnic groups in the population of Kazakhstan, 1999 census data**

| Major ethnic groups (Turkic) |       | Major ethnic groups (European) |       |
|------------------------------|-------|--------------------------------|-------|
| <b>Kazakh</b>                | 53.4% | <b>Russian</b>                 | 29.9% |
| <b>Tatar</b>                 | 1.7%  | <b>Ukrainian</b>               | 3.7%  |
| <b>Uzbek</b>                 | 2.5%  | <b>Belarusian</b>              | 0.8%  |
| <b>Uighur</b>                | 1.4%  | <b>German</b>                  | 2.4%  |
| <b>Korean</b>                | 0.7%  |                                |       |

Source: Dave, 2003: 5.

This exceptional diversity was not an easy starting point for state-building and nation-building efforts after Kazakhstan gained Independence (Schatz, 2000: 71). Kazakhstan was also exceptionally russified during the Soviet times. The russification that stemmed from the ideological reasons was especially visible in the areas of demography and linguistic behaviors.

There were strong ideological reasons for russification since “until the late 1980, the Communist party (CPSU) actively promoted the Russian language as a common bond uniting the multiethnic ‘Soviet people’ (Fierman, 2006: 98).” At the same time, the Soviet ideology propagated the view that Russians were missionaries, or emissaries of civilization. Russians brought the mechanization of farming and rapid industrialization. Kazakhstan was, in fact, settlers’ colony, but Russians were broadly treated with respect and friendship. The perception was that Russians were “elder brothers” and their presence was a positive factor. This was a

major difference between Central Asia and the Caucasus or the Baltic States. Russians there have been treated as occupiers or invaders. In Central Asia, they were - to a certain extent - welcomed, bringing the development (yet, at a high human cost).

Demographically, Russians outnumbered Kazakhs throughout the post-war period. It has to be stressed again, that Kazakhstan was particular as it was the only Soviet republic where the titular group was not a majority, but a minority in its own land. Data presented in Table 2 illustrate the changing relative size of both major ethnic groups. The period of strong industrialization resulted in an influx of Russians, while weakening of the Soviet Union and the independence of Kazakhstan resulted in an outflow of Russians and the inflow of Kazakhs from abroad.

**Table 2. Percentage of two major ethnic groups in the population of Kazakhstan between 1959 and 1999**

|                 | 1959  | 1970  | 1979  | 1989  | 1999  |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Kazakhs</b>  | 30.0% | 32.6% | 36.0% | 40.1% | 53.4% |
| <b>Russians</b> | 42.7% | 42.4% | 40.8% | 37.4% | 29.9% |

Source: Dave, 2003 :5.

Linguistically, Kazakhstan was the most russified of all the Central Asian republics (Dave, 2003: 7). The suppression of the traditional nomadic culture during the famine and the elimination of the intelligentsia during the Stalinist purges caused the serious damage to the Kazakh language and inhibited its development. In society where Russians dominated (and other Slavic groups composed a major part of the population), Russian language became a guarantor of social mobility and professional career. It was the language of prestige. Surveys and articles in the late 1980s and early 1990s painted a picture of a very pervasive linguistic russification of Kazakhs, especially in urban areas. According to one of Kazakh linguists, almost 30-40% (percentage depending on whether the public use or the use in the family was considered) of Kazakhs were not able to speak their own (supposedly) mother tongue. Ethnological research in urban population estimated that 60-75% of Kazakhs spoke exclusively Russian (Dave, 2004: 450). According to the data from 1989 census, 64% of Kazakhs admitted fluency in the Russian language, and only 1% of urban Kazakhs claimed fluency in the Kazakh language. Literacy in the Kazakh language in the general population evaluated in Fierman's research was even lower. The author estimated that the share of Kazakh literacy was probably under 35%. The author based the

estimate on the fact that Kazakhs constituted 40% of the population, and no more than 80% of them were literate in their language, and very few non-Kazakhs would read or write Kazakh language.

However, the ideological conditions were changing in the late 1980s, during the Gorbachev era. In the 1987, a document was issued by the Republic's Communist Party and government that promised to make it easier for Kazakh students in the Republic to learn Kazakh language in schools. Fierman (2006: 105) pointed out that this was the first time in many years when the status of Kazakh language was raised by the communist party.

In the 1989 the Kazakhstan Language Law was adopted, as one in the tide of language legislation in all Soviet republic. The law established Kazakh as the state language (Commercio, 2004: 94-95), guaranteed the right of education in Kazakh at all educational levels, and made Kazakh an obligatory subject in schools. Russian was designated as a language of the inter-ethnic communication, functioning equally with the state language.

Yet, this law was not accompanied by the measures for implementation and "...the chasm between what the law mandated and reality on the ground was arguably greater in Kazakhstan than in any other republic (Fierman, 2006: 104)." Kazakh was a language not much used in general, almost unused in official capacity, with underdeveloped vocabulary in many fields, lack of professional textbooks and professional teachers.

### **3.The new balance of power in ethnic relations after Independence**

In 1991 Soviet Union collapsed, very much to disappointment of the communist comrades high in the party ranks in Kazakhstan. Independence created a new situation in which the Republic was freed of many pressures from Moscow (not all of them, though). The young state, because of the political position it found itself in, was in need to define itself. As in all the other former Soviet republics, the nation wanted to reassert its culture and identity. The will to create identity was present among the Kazakh elite, although was certainly not a common sentiment among all citizens. The fact that a half of the population was ethnically not Kazakh, and ethnic groups were so diverse (thus having opposing national, religious and social interest) influenced

politics and might have easily led to conflicts. It also hampered institutional changes in the newly independent state.

After 1991, the post-communist states that emerged, turned to ethno-nationalism in search for their founding doctrine. The trend among the post-soviet republics to play the national sentiment card was labeled a post communist “nationalizing nationalism”. Roger Brubaker, who coined this term, explained the dynamics of the process:

Claims made in the name of the ‘core nation’, (are) defined in ethnocultural terms. The core nation is understood as the legitimate ‘owner’ of the state, which is conceived as the state *of* and *for* the core nation. Despite having its own state, however, the core nation is conceived as being weak, in cultural (...) or demographic position within the state. This weak position seen as a legacy of discrimination against the nation before the independence, is exploited to justify the ‘remedial’ or ‘compensatory’ project of using the state power to promote the specific interests of the core nation” (Brubaker, 1996 cited in Sucru, 2002: 388-389).

This is a very accurate depiction of the dynamics of changes in the political and social landscape in Kazakhstan.

The ethnic relations in Kazakhstan, as described in the previous section of the paper, were seriously imbalanced in favor of one non-titular group, so the task of reasserting the culture and identity was particularly challenging. The new state embarked upon a path institutionalizing new ethnic relations via drafting its new legal foundations. The efforts to establish the new ethnic relations in Kazakhstan, turned to what was labeled a process of kazakhization (phrase widely used by scholars such as Kolstø, Dave, Laitin and others). Kazakhization was the process of ascendance of Kazakhs as a national group on the expense of other national groups, mainly Russians. This process was perceived by many Kazakhs as a way to “pay back” for the years of Russian domination. In the Socialist Republic of Kazakhstan, Kazakhs felt discriminated to a certain degree, as Russian personnel was crucial in the Republic’s Communist party apparatus, and in the official real, Kazakh language was not used. Kazakhs were also viewed by Russians as the less civilized than Russians themselves – yet, the social advancement was possible for those who were willing to serve the communist ideology.

Kolstø and Malkova (1997) claim that the process of kazakhization has been visible in several areas of social life, in which language policies are just one. The most obvious are is demographics, only partially representing a “natural” path of development. According to the 1999 census Kazakhs “broke” the boundary of 50% ration in the population. The birth rate

among Kazakhs is higher than among Slavic groups - Kazakhs have a positive birth rate, while Russians for instance have a negative birth rate (Fierman, 2006:110). At the same time Russian population is shrinking even more, due to a very intense emigration. 1 million 400 thousand of Russians left Kazakhstan between 1989 and 1999, while the overall out-migration during that period was 1 million 800 thousand (Dave, 2003).

Another area where kazakhization is visible, is the ethnic composition of the state power apparatus. Between the years 1985 and 1994 the non-Kazakh proportion of the high level positions fell sharply from 50% to 25%. In 1994, 74% of state apparatus was ethnically Kazakh, although Kazakh representation in the population was 44%. The numbers for Slavs were correspondingly 23% in the state apparatus and 43% in general population (Kolstø and Malkova, 1997:1; Schatz, 2000: 85). As Schatz noticed, the most intense changes in this respect were taking place between 1993 and 1994.

Kazakhization process was strengthened by the decision to move the capital from Almaty to Astana, a city in the north, a more russified region of Kazakhstan. The location of capital caused the influx of (influential) Kazakhs, more Kazakh language spoken in the north, and it diminished the power base that Russians were holding in the north. There were also changes made in the borders of the administrative units within the country (*oblast'*), in order to include more ethnically kazakhified areas into the more russified areas, to dilute the power of Russian voters in general elections (Ó Beacháin, 2004: 9-10)

Other areas that Kolstø and Malkova focused on are the emerging state ideology and the linguistic policies. We will now focus on the latter to present how the new ethnic relations were institutionalized via the regulations in the area of language.

#### **4. Language policies as a vehicle of institutionalizing new ethnic relations.**

Independence was a point in history at which ethnic relations got “reversed”, as the facts presented above illustrate. The state officials were determined to strengthen the role of Kazakhs as a titular nation, and diminish the role of Slavic groups, Russians being the major among them. “Independence placed greater power in the hands of the local political leaders, whose legitimacy (...) derived in part from promises to reverse the Soviet russification policies” (Fierman, 2006:

106). Hence, the political leaders were eager to invent and implement various ‘remedial projects’, that Brubaker referred to. For many states, there were common political and identity issues that called for the new order. From the point of view of ethno-nationalism, the citizenship and language laws were crucial to assert the power of a titular nation. In Kazakhstan the citizenship law was passed right after the declaration of Independence, in December 1991. It set the broader context for the changes in the language policies and practices, so before we proceed to focus on the issue of language, the citizenship law will be briefly discussed.

The citizenship laws in the former Soviet republics were of fundamental significance for ethnic relations, as they specified who was “welcomed” in a given state, and what sort of identity choices people had to make in a new reality. Throughout the Soviet times, ethnic groups mixed on the whole territory of 15 republics, large groups migrated and settled (or were forcibly settled) in places far from their own territories. The Citizenship Law in Kazakhstan was based on a convenient zero-option, that automatically granted the citizenship to all the legal residents of the Republic on the day the law was passed. The Constitution at the same time declared the equality of citizens before the law. An important provision in the citizenship law was that the dual citizenship was forbidden, that was a clause especially not welcomed by the Russians in the north of Kazakhstan. Later on, the exception was added – the members of the returning Kazakh diaspora could hold a dual citizenship (Commercio, 2004: 93-93). That act was putting members of a titular ethnic group in a slightly better position, and was perceived as an insult y Russian nationalists in the Republic.

The Citizenship Law was only one pillar of the legal fundamentals in the state building process. The other fundamentals that served the task of defining new ethnic relations, were the three Constitutions (1993, 1995 and 1998), the new Language Law in 1997, and two presidential documents: the 1996 Concept of Language Policy, and the 1998 Presidential Decree on Functioning and Development of Languages.

The scholars analyzing the state policies and practices in Kazakhstan, point out that legislation pertaining the language issue mirrored the state internal inter-ethnic tension. On the one hand, it was stressed officially that Kazakhstan was a multi-ethnic state, and thus regime was committed to a civic concept of the state and citizenship. It was visible in the 1995 Constitution, “where the phrase defining Kazakhstan as ‘the form of the statehood of self determining Kazakh nation’ was deleted” (Kolstø and Malkova, 1997: 1) and did not appear in the final draft of the

document. The preamble instead referred to Kazakhstan as “indigenous homeland of Kazakhs inhabited by Kazakhs and other nationalities” (quoted in Dave, 2004: 447). Constitution also used the concept of “the people of Kazakhstan” (*narod Kazakhstana*) which implied a more civic view.

On the other hand, the nation building efforts emphasized the special position of the Kazakh nation in the state. Many nationalists expected this view to be reflected in the ideology and policies. The state started an active campaign of the language revival, with the strong support of intelligentsia and Kazakh linguists. There was a broad understanding that Kazakh language had declined significantly during the Soviet period, so there were sentimental reasons to revive it. Temirkhan Medetbevko, a Kazakh poet, lamented that:

Kazakh language space has receded more than the Aral Sea, and its atmosphere has been more destroyed and polluted than uranium production site after a bomb blast” (Medetbekov, 1990, quoted in Fierman 2006: 100).

With the awareness of how damaged the usage of the language was, the challenge was whether it could be granted a status of the sole state language, in a situation in which Russian so significantly prevailed as *de facto* language. Having in mind that possible 40% of Kazakhs were not able to speak their - supposedly - mother tongue, there was a serious need to practically strengthen the status of Kazakh language and forcibly weaken the status of Russian language. As a result, the language policies were devised in such a way to reverse the russification and “compensate those, who, for the lack of Russian language proficiency, had suffered professionally (Schatz, 2000: 85).”

Changing the relative “strength of influence” of both languages was done in a form of constitutional provisions. The 1993 Constitution confirmed the status of Kazakh as a state language (the provision already present in the 1989 Language Law), but gave Russian language a status of the language of intern-ethnic communication. The first Constitution actually protected Russian language. The text of the Constitution claimed that the state was to guarantee “the preservation of the sphere of the use of language of inter-ethnic communication and other languages (quoted in Commercio, 2004: 96).” Any form of discrimination on the basis of not knowing Kazakh or Russian languages was forbidden. Only the 1995 Constitution weakened the position of Russian, not giving it any legal status, but allowing it to be used on a par with the state language. Kazakh language was thus proclaimed the sole state language. Those, who

advocated this solution, believed that in a situation of unequal status of languages, Russian had to be suppressed, and Kazakh language had to be ideologically and legally supported. The elevated status of the Kazakh language was also reflected in the provision pertaining the position of the President and the Chairmen of the houses of Parliament. The Constitution made a requirement for holders of these posts to be fluent in the state language. In a multi ethnic environment with a very strong representation of the Slavic nations not fluent in Kazakh, such a provision has minimized the chances of non-Kazakhs to hold the positions, it interferes as well with the democratic choices that people would possibly make (Ó Beacháin, 2004: 11). All of the legal provisions presented above confirmed the exclusion of a certain part of the state population in creation of the new state's institutions.

Interestingly enough, the ethnic Kazakh candidates in some elections were also discarded on the basis of language provisions, but those instances seemed to be a way to suppress opposition. The constitutional provisions on the language proved to be useful for the on-going political struggle.

Apart from the constitutional solutions, the linguistic situation was altered by the regulations developed by the executive power, the President and the cabinet. The 1992 ruling of the Cabinet of Ministers put a deadline for the introduction of the administrative documentation in the state language - that was supposed to happen by the year 1995 (Commercio, 2004: 97). This ruling had more a character of an ideological statement than an attainable policy goal. In the face of the previously described low proficiency of non-Kazakhs in the Kazakh language, and the overall level of Kazakh literacy circulating below 50%, the deadline was completely unrealistic. Yet, there were more legal regulations that were becoming less accommodating toward Russian speakers. The 1997 Language Law was another step of derussification and strengthening the Kazakh language.

The Language Law asserted that Kazakh is the state language and Russian was labeled the official language. Certain spheres of communication were designated as the ones where Kazakh was required: state administration, legal proceedings and legislation, all official documentation. Again, those provisions to a certain extent represented wishful thinking. Kazakh language, because of its poor usage, was insufficiently developed to be immediately used as the only language in all the listed domains. In 1998, The State Terminology Commission was established, to modernize Kazakh language, so it could function in the capacity of the state language

(Commercio, 2004: 96-97). The Commission was supposed to produce proposals of Kazakh vocabulary expansion in the spheres of science, economy, technology and culture. So far it was Russian that was considered the language of science, politics and state, while Kazakh had a role of language of culture and arts (Schatz, 2000:86). Kazakh language needed “work” of linguists first, in order to fulfill the role that was crafted for it. Moreover, the Language Law demanded changes in the broadcasts on TV and radio channels. The use of Kazakh language was supposed to be equal to that of other languages (though, in practice, Russian was the language of media). This provision turned out not to be taken too seriously, as TV stations were afraid to lose their advertisement income, when broadcasting in Kazakh (Kolstø and Malkova, 1997: 4). In practice, the Kazakh language was used in a late night or early morning broadcast, but the prime time was broadcast in the Russian language.

Kazakh nationalists were pushing for an introduction the language proficiency test to be used in selection of candidates for numerous public sector positions. However, this provision was not included in the law, which meant that the Russian-speaking population – non-Kazakh as well as Kazakh – could sigh with relief (Dave, 2003: 9).

Even without any drastic measures, the Language Law left no doubt that the knowledge of Kazakh language was indispensable. Dave (Dave, 2004: 451) used the term ‘patronage’ to summarize the result that the law had on the Kazakh language. “Blessed with the state patronage, Kazakh is overcoming the Soviet stigma of ‘backwardness’ and ‘devoid of future prospects’. (...) Had Kazakh not been accorded the status of the state language, it is doubtful that (...) Russian speaking Kazakhs would place a similar emphasis on knowing their native language (*as they do now*).”

Article 4 of the Law declared that it was a duty of every citizen of Kazakhstan to master the state language. The text explained, that “it is an important factor in the consolidation of the people of Kazakhstan (quoted in Commercio, 2004: 97).” This phrase suggested that Kazakh language had an important role of a necessary element for interethnic stability, while the major part of the population did not perceived it this way. Many urban Kazakhs with a low proficiency in Kazakh language opposed rapid linguistic kazakhization, for instance, choosing the so-called Russian schools, with Russian as a medium of instruction, for their children. Data from research on Russian and Kazakh-language schools illustrates this point. The share of Kazakh pupils in Russian-language schools changed only insignificantly between 1995 and 1999, from 19.8% to

18.7% (Fierman, 2006: 117). With such pressures stemming from legislation, one would expect the change in the Russian-language schools enrollments to fall more dramatically.

The Language Law was an interesting piece of legislation also because of its title. Depending on the language that the law was read in, the message it carried, was different. In the Russian language the title was clear as for the number of languages it pertained - it read "On Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan." The Kazakh version of the title, however, was more ambiguous, as the form of the word *language* used did not indicate the singular or plural - "On Language(s) in the Republic of Kazakhstan." The content of the law was the same in both versions, but the Kazakh form of a title allowed an interpretation that the law was about a single language – Kazakh as the state language (Schatz, 2000: 87).

As much as the Language Law was more ambitious, than realistic, and did not contain drastic provisions, the linguistic policy documents of the executive were leaning more toward nationalization, and openly pushed for major, deep changes. The 1996 presidential Concept of the Language Policy outlined the steps to be taken in order to ensure the Kazakh language domination. The document envisaged that a list of professions and positions should be prepared for which the knowledge of the state language would be necessary. This list should then be set forth in the laws of the Republic. This was an attempt to create strong economic and social incentives for people to master Kazakh language, but also it could be a tool of excluding those, who failed to master it.

Further, the concept to increase the compulsory use of Kazakh language was developed in the 1998 presidential Decree on Functioning and Development of Languages. It emphasized "the increasing demand for the use of the state language (quoted in Dave, 2003: 9)." In terms of professional use, the Decree called for all the government paperwork to be done in Kazakh. The Decree demanded the creation of the conditions in which Kazakh language would be used in science, education, culture, state administration, mass media and international relations. The Decree also demanded provision of free Kazakh language instruction, so that the usage in the public sphere would expand. These provisions indicated a will to broaden the obligatory public usage of Kazakh (Commercio, 2004: 97).

The implementation of the policies, however, was far from successful. At the end of 1990s it was expected that the provisions put forward by the executive documents would be implemented at least partially. Yet, in practice, the changes were slow to come. By the year 2006,

the free language instruction was not available for adults, the legal documents were still in Russian as well as Kazakh, depending on the institution. The use of Kazakh in commercial media was limited. The state officials in their speeches spoke Kazakh only to pay the tribute to the demands of law, but switched to Russian when they could. The deadlines set by the presidential Decree were postponed (again, to the relief of Russian speaking members of legal professions), and certainly until 2006 the provisions were not executed.

### **5.Reasons and results of language policy choices**

The state- and nation-building effort in Kazakhstan proceeded through legal regulations, policy decisions and implementation of these decisions. The regime, trying to balance the new relations between the ethnic groups, was dealing with many pressures – pressures that were contradictory to each others and worked into opposite directions. On the one hand, there were pressures toward accommodating the non-Kazakh ethnic groups, rather than coercing them. On the other hand, there were pressures toward strengthening the “Kazakh rule”.

After the Independence, there were strong arguments against an exclusive “Kazakh rule” in ethnic relations, where little concern would be devoted to non-titular groups. One of the most important considerations here was the question of the stability of the state. The civil war in nearby Tajikistan brought a bitter lesson – people in Central Asia were able to use violence for the sake of achieving their political goals. Kazakhstan with its 130 nationalities, and a strong neighbor (Russia), very concerned about its nationals in the former republics, had to find its way to retain stability. This explains the provisions of the Citizenship Law and the lack of sanctions in the language policies. In the domain of language, the regime could pressure only to a certain extent, as the new language regulations were opposed not only by non-Kazakhs, but also by Russophone Kazakhs. Due to strong and efficient russification, Kazakh language had the reputation of a backwarded language, and many Kazakhs themselves sharing this view, were reluctant to switch to Kazakh in communication. This is why “pushing hard” was an impossible option to use in the building of the new ethnic relations.

Another important argument against stronger coercion toward non titular groups was the issue of changing demographics. Kazakhstan was going through a trauma of migrations for

several years after Independence, many non-Kazakhs were leaving (actually, some Kazakhs as well decided to migrate to Russia), ethnic Kazakhs from abroad were arriving. Status of Russians was declining by the very fact that such huge numbers of them were leaving. Kazakhstan's population shrank; a state of 17 million before the Independence became a state of 15 million after the Independence (Dave, 2004). Coercing non-Kazakh groups into more ethnic assimilation was a risky strategy in the face of a shrinking population.

However, there was enough of strong arguments in favor of establishing a strong "Kazakh rule" and coercing others to assimilate. In the view of Kazakhs, Kazakhstan is the only state where Kazakhs are fully entitled to feel at home, there is no other state that "belongs" to Kazakhs. Thus, kazakhization was viewed as a process of "claiming the territory back". This was the major drive for the language regulations – Kazakh language, thus culture, receded and it was historically right to reverse russification. There was also a history of Kazakh trauma during the Soviet rule; trauma that called for justice. And justice would mean marginalizing Russians, as much as Russians disregarded Kazakhs in the Soviet history. Post-Independence Kazakh historiography focused on the catastrophic human costs of Soviet rule, such as the death of millions during the famine and the collectivization, as well as the suppression of the December 1986 riots against the new First Secretary in the Republic, Kolbin – ethnic Russian from outside Kazakhstan. The sad instances of sufferings of the Kazakh nation lay the ground for handing more power to the titular group (meaning the oppressed group in this instance).

An important factor was a self-perception of the Kazakh nation as the nation with prospects. Some Kazakh intellectuals view Kazakhs as the "young, ascending nation" as opposed to "older, descending" European settlers. The nationalizing policies were crafted to reflect this ascendancy trend, and in this respect the language policies are indeed of an anticipating character. Demography will probably prove that the direction of development is a right one.

The landscape of the new ethnic relations can be summarized by a phrase used by Bhana Dave, that the status of Russophones was only declining. It is a slow process, yet it has brought anxiety. Dave (2003: 9) speaks of the "profound anxiety among Russian speaking population in Kazakhstan about their status and prospects for their children in a Kazakh-dominated state. Psychological anxiety over the deterioration of their political status following the adoption of the language law is the most crucial factor triggering an exodus of Russian speaking population from Kazakhstan since 1991."

Research on the sense of civic belonging in Kazakhstan supported the thesis on anxiety, as well. A survey of 1200 adults conducted in 1994 showed that only 22% of Russian respondents considered independent Republic of Kazakhstan as their homeland, while half of the Kazakh respondents felt this way. Another research showed that students in Russian- and Kazakh-language schools differed in terms of their feelings of civic loyalty. Asked about the readiness to leave Kazakhstan (given the opportunity), 47% of students in Russian schools declared such readiness while 17% of students in Kazakh schools did so (Asanova, 2007: 327-328).

In 1994 Kazakhstan was still not in a good economic condition, and this could be a factor partially explaining the slow changes in the language policies. The poor state possibly cared less for the institutional changes in the area of language, than for the economic situation. Meager resources did not allow to unconditionally prioritize the kazakhization. Yet, the fortune changed and since late 1990s, Kazakhstan has been developing rapidly and becoming wealthier. Although the resources are not meager anymore, they are not directed massively toward the language efforts. Republic's regime declared a will to enforce language policies, yet the financial resources have not been necessary following. It is striking in the state that prides itself in one of the highest economic growth rates in the former Soviet space (10% rate, but before the economic crisis). Much of the oil and gas money has sunk in private pockets of the members of the establishment, and has not been directed into implementing policies and improving the conditions for the development of the Kazakh language. Scholars researching the language policy in Kazakhstan present a unison opinion – the state declared more than it could deliver. It lacked the competent staff and adequate provisions for the language instruction. The educational authorities themselves criticized the quality of Kazakh language textbooks; the staff shortages are significant; teachers working through Kazakh are found to be not as efficient as the ones working through Russian. Research findings suggest that those pupils who study with Kazakh as a language of instruction have lower achievements than those with Russian as a language of instruction (Fierman, 2006). It may seem paradoxical, but the language law was supported by a major billboard campaign - "It is a duty of every citizen of Kazakhstan to master the state language". One could ask how? To a large extent it reflects the regimes attitude - more pragmatic ways to introduce a wider use of Kazakh language have been scarce, but there is a clear ideological direction.

## 6. Conclusions

Kazakhstan is a country where after 1991 the new ethnic relations have been institutionalized in unusual conditions. The society composed of 130 ethnic groups (with two dominating ones) used to use Russian as the language of communication during the Soviet period. The Independence changed the situation, and the Kazakh nation continues to acquire more power and the state institutions continue to experience what is called “kazakhization” – the ethnic relations were deeply modified. It has been observed in the area of the changing language laws, as the Kazakh language became compulsory in the documents and political institutions, in education and media. The laws set high standards and demanded a full use of Kazakh language, yet few or no sanctions were put in place to implement the change. In reality, Russian is still widely used, even by the state officials. In Kazakhstan’s case, the strong administrative pressures to quickly switch the language to Kazakh, would be equal to a coercion toward Russphones, and this could bring a threat to state’s stability. However, in the specific case of the language policies, the new ethnic relations have been institutionalized in such a way to give the Kazakh language *de jure* a prime position, while *de facto* let the changes in the use of language go its own paste.

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***Kwestia językowa w Kazachstanie – instytucjonalizacja nowych relacji etnicznych po uzyskaniu niepodległości***

***Streszczenie***

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia proces instytucjonalizacji relacji etnicznych w bardzo zróżnicowanym społeczeństwie Republiki Kazachstanu. Stabilne w okresie sowieckim, relacje etniczne zmieniły się po 1991 roku, kiedy to państwo uzyskało niepodległość. Analizowaną w poniższym artykule kwestią jest polityka językowa w Kazachstanie jako manifestacja polityki „kazachstanizacji”. Kazachstan można traktować jako szczególny przypadek wśród byłych krajów sowieckich, ponieważ jest domem dla 130 narodowości, włączając 30% większości rosyjskiej. Podczas okresu sowieckiego narodowość tytularna, Kazachowie, nie stanowiła większości, a kraj był głęboko zrusyfikowany – powszechniej używano języka rosyjskiego aniżeli kazachskiego. Po uzyskaniu niepodległości państwo zdecydowało się obrać ścieżkę wzmocnienia formalnej siły narodowości tytularnej. To odzwierciedliło się między innymi w polityce językowej. Przy zakazie podwójnego obywatelstwa wprowadzono prawny obowiązek używania języka kazachskiego w instytucjach publicznych, edukacyjnych, w mediach, polityce. Ponadto państwo ustanowiło obowiązek doskonalenia języka przez każdego obywatela. Jednak wdrażanie tego kierunku polityki przebiega opornie, co wynika głównie z niskiej znajomości języka kazachskiego nawet wśród grupy tytularnej. Co więcej, nowe relacje etniczne zostały oparte o dominację przyznaną jednej grupie w społeczeństwie, w którym niemal 50% stanowią grupy mniejszościowe.

***Słowa kluczowe:*** relacje etniczne, Kazachstan, polityka językowa, były Związek Sowiecki.