

ETHNICITY AND POWER: RELATIONS BETWEEN THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES

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The newly independent states of Central Asia could have some serious problems in keeping their independence. When we speak about this we must take historical, demographical, economical, security, social and, maybe much more seriously, ethnic problems into consideration.

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the former USSR, the peoples of various ethnic backgrounds were and still are divided into different administrative categories. After the Moscow coup in the end of 1991 the former union republics of the USSR became automatically independent. In other words, there was no serious struggle or wish for independence, and independence was given by Moscow to these republics, perhaps faster than they themselves would have sought it.¹ As readers may recall, in the beginning the Bolsheviks kept the former tsarist structure in Central Asia. The steppe region became the Kirghiz (or Kazakh) Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), and the Turkistan region became Turkistan ASSR. Both were subjects of Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). In 1924, the Turkistan ASSR was divided into Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and both given the status of union republic. Tadjikistan was created as an autonomous republic of Uzbekistan. Kirghizstan which belonged to the former Turkistan ASSR became an autonomous region and was incorporated into the RSFSR. After two years Tadjikistan became also an union republic and the Hojent region of Uzbekistan was transferred to Tadjikistan. The Kirghiz (or more correctly the Kazakh) ASSR had an autonomous status and belonged to the RSFSR until December 1936. Furthermore, the Kirghiz ASSR gained its union status in the same year. Karakalpakstan which belonged to Kazakhstan was transferred in 1936 to Uzbekistan with the status of ASSR.² All these political decisions were taken by Moscow without any regard to the local people. In other words all these Central Asian republics are artificial creations. This can be easily recognised when travelling through these countries. Even the highways of these regions were not built according to the national borders. This shows that when Moscow created these new borders it didn't take any geographical, historical or demographic realities in consideration.

1.1 Problems of boundaries

Configuration of the four republics that finally emerged-with the exception of Turkmenistan-was highly complicated and arbitrary, failing to coincide with any natural frontiers or boundaries. The result was something similar to the medieval open-field agrarian system, with parts of one republic wedged inside another to form all kinds of islands and peninsulas. Although the territory of Central Asia was ostensibly divided on the basis of nationality, the ethnic composition was actually mixed in a number of localities. For instance, the population of the Fergana valley was administratively under Uzbekistan, but included almost equal numbers of Uzbeks, Tadjiks, Kirghizs and other indigenous groups.

Another example of this can be seen in the South Kazakhstan oblast, with its capital Chimkent: although the area formed an organic part of Uzbekistan (in ethnic composition, natural features, and economic ties), it was artificially assigned to Kazakhstan. Other cases could be cited as well.³

Due to their artificial nature, the borders could create serious conflicts among these republics. However, border issues may not be the only reason for a dangerous development. There could be lot of other reasons.

The Muslim republics namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan belonged to an empire with a population which in 1990 ranked third, after China and India. For decades the Soviet Union was the main producer of oil. Today the Russian Federation which inherited 75 per cent of it, is still the owner of a quarter of the planet's forest reserves and an equal portion of its fresh water. The USSR was and its main predecessor the Russian Federation is a big military power. Even though these republics can be recognised as rich countries they have a lot of political, social, economical and ecological problems.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION

In 1997 the total population of the CIS must have become more than 300 million people. According to our calculations the Russians are less than 50 per cent of the total population and only in the Russian Federation they are a big majority (122 million or 80 per cent of the total). In the rest of the republics they are a minority. In the Russian Republic among the 20 per cent of non-Russians, Muslim peoples are in the majority.⁴

According to 1996 data, five Turkic and one Muslim republic had reached a total population of 60,769,000.⁵ The total Russian population in these republics has reached ten million (10,189,290) and in Kazakhstan and also in Kirghizstan, they are a very important demographic factor.⁶ Therefore, in their relations with Moscow, this Russian minority will play very important role. Almaty had to deal with this sensitive issue very carefully. Not just the non-Turkic population, but also other Turkic or Muslim minorities could create problems in relations between these Central Asian republics, as they had in the past. For example, there is a big Tadjik minority in Uzbekistan and a big Uzbek minority in Tadjikistan.⁷ Official census figures for Uzbekistan put the Tadjik population at around five per cent, Tadjiks in the country, meanwhile, insist that the figure is more like 25-30 per cent, with Tadjiks accounting for perhaps 70 per cent of the population of Samarkand, and as much as 90 per cent in Bukhara.⁸

2.1 Alarming birth-rate

More than 90 percent of the former USSR's overall growth of the working-age population takes place in these regions. The birth rate is 36-42 per thousand in Central Asia. This is twice the former Soviet average. From 1970 to 1989, the Soviet population grew by 18.6 percent. The figure for Uzbekistan is 68.6 percent, for Kirghizstan 47.9 percent, for Tadjikistan 76.2 percent, for Turkmenistan 63.4 percent and for Kazakhstan 26.9 percent. The population of Uzbekistan alone will grow from the present 20 million to 32-36 million in 2010.

3. ECONOMIC SITUATION

The general economic structure of the former Soviet Union can be summarised in two words: centralised economy. All economic decisions were made by Moscow and these decisions had to be followed very strictly. The centre tried to cover all the Soviet Union in its planning and the goal of such planning was not to make profit in rubles but in metres or tons. The hierarchical system didn't allow local managers to make any changes or corrections in these centralised decisions. Very detailed price controls created a non-economic price system. Therefore, there were no liquid funds or a conception of money in the real sense.⁹ The Soviet industrialisation policy was to transform Central Asia into a specialist supplier of raw materials. Uzbekistan is a big net importer of machine tools, Kazakhstan also relies on other Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS) countries for machine tools. Tadjikistan imports all its tractors, cars and trucks; Kirghizstan must import all its fertilisers and gasoline: Turkmenistan has no coal and has to import many essential food products.¹⁰

3.1 Unemployment

Another social and economic problem is unemployment. Projections of former Soviet economic research institutes estimated that something between 30 and 50 million workers will be dismissed by the year 2000. In Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Southern Kazakhstan the unemployment rate is far above average for CIS.

The share of the inactive among the working population is 10.4 per cent in the former USSR as a whole, 27.8 per cent in Azerbaijan, 25.7 per cent in Kirghizstan, 22.8 per cent in Tadjikistan, 22.8 per cent in Uzbekistan and 18.8 per cent in Turkmenistan. In the rural economy of Tadjikistan three out of four workers are redundant.¹¹

Especially alarming is the large share of youngsters (up to the age of 30) among the unemployed. The figures are 66 per cent in Azerbaijan, 60 per cent in Kirghizstan and 46 per cent in Turkmenistan. This negative trend will create a high rate of crime among youngsters.¹²

4. PROBLEMS OF SECURITY

The Central Asian republics were not able to set up their own national armies, and therefore they are not able to protect themselves from foreign aggression, like in the case of Azerbaijan. In the former Soviet Union, 35 per cent of the young men who were recruited into the Soviet Army were non-Slavs (among them the soldiers of Turkic origin were two-thirds). However, in the officer corps the non-Russians were only 10 per cent.¹³ So even though the Central Asian republics would like to create their own national armies there is a lack of trained indigenous officers. Also Central Asians who served in the Soviet army were on non-combat duties and, therefore, don't have combat experience.

5. PROBLEMS OF PSYCHOLOGY

After independence the transition period didn't satisfy the majority of the people. The first reason is economic. In the Soviet period, even though there were problems with totalitarian rule, the people in general had some kind of social security and facilities (almost free housing, free education, health care and secure jobs). Nowadays the majority doesn't feel secure in many respects and has a certain longing for the former secure times. Therefore, the preservation of independence which they had formerly sacrificed is not taken very seriously. Certainly they love their countries, but how many are ready to give their life for the sake of their motherland?

6. REASONS FOR ETHNIC CONFLICTS

Ethnic conflict is conflict characterised by a certain level of organised political action, social movements, massive disturbances, separatist acts and even civil war, in which takes place along the lines of ethnic differences.

As a rule, this is a conflict between an ethnic minority and a dominating ethnic majority, that controls the state's power and resources. This circumstance is unusually the reason why the minority group begins to question the existing state and political structures. Furthermore if society lacks a mechanism to regulate relations between parties to such a conflict, then there is a cause for violence on an increased scale.¹⁴

Soviet experience showed in a number of regions (such as the Baltics, Central Asia, Moldova and some of autonomous republics) the share of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians among highly skilled industrial, engineering, technical, management, health care and education workers has been and remains much higher than the share of the native population. This creates dissatisfaction in the native population. In all parts of Central Asia it is the Uzbeks who traditionally are the most skilful traders, as compared to the Kirghiz, Kazakhs and Turkmen.¹⁵ Such ethnic hatred led to bloodshed in Osh, Kirghizstan, in 1990¹⁶ and organised pogroms against Meshetian Turks in Uzbekistan in the same year.¹⁷ After the Osh conflict Uzbeks of the region even demanded an autonomous status from the Kirghizstan government. They claimed that this region belonged to the Uzbek SSR and that in 1936 was given by Stalin to Kirghizstan.¹⁸ In 1991 more than 35 different ethnic clashes occurred among different Central Asia nationalities.¹⁹ The danger of an inter-ethnic conflict in the republic of Kazakhstan between Kazakhs and Russians is a greatly discussed issue. In the republic's agricultural sector, Kazakhs account for 60 per cent of the employed population. The picture is quite different in the industrial sector, where Russians, account for three out of every four workers. Clouds are gathering as a result of the republic's transition to a market economy. Social collapse has forced Kazakh villagers to migrate to towns in search of work. The situation has been aggravated by

the fact that quite a number of rural refugees from ecologically unsafe zones-the Aral Sea and the Semipalatinsk nuclear testing ground-have appeared in towns. This great number of Kazakh migrants have swelled the ranks of the semi-criminal and the undisguised criminal.²⁰ According to the Interfax news agency, in April 1994 there were serious tensions between Kazakhs and two Cossack villages in the Taldy-Kurgan region of Kazakhstan, just north of Almaty.²¹

6.1 The Question of Identity

Identity is a vague and abstract concept. Like individuals, nations need to know who they are, their origins, their peculiarities, and how they resemble-and differ from-other peoples and states near them. Only when a nation has a sense of its place in history geography, and culture can it begin to believe in itself. Today, the states of Central Asia are still seeking their identities. The leadership, mostly inherited from the Soviet period, now shows more nationalistic attitudes. Titular nationalities are seeking to impose their own ethnic stamps on every field of life.²²

CONCLUSION

A few leaders in the region have shown some success in dealing with the huge problems mentioned above. However, in this transition period, the majority of Central Asians will suffer and this could create very serious problems, even conflicts, when the leaders of the Central Asian countries do not find durable solutions.

SOME ASPECTS OF EURASIAN CENTRAL ASIAN HISTORY

INDEPENDENT PERIOD

Turkish Kh. (552-745)

Karakhanids (930-110) Great Seljuks (1040-1157)

Khorezmshahs (1157-1231)

Chagatays (1219-1336)

Golden Horde (1241-1502)

Timurides (1333-1514)

Uzbek Kh.(1428-1599) Kazakh Kh.(1489-1518)

Khiva (Khorezm) Bukhara Kh. Kokand (Fergana) Kh. Kazakh Kh. (1489-1518)

(1512-1873) (1599-1868) (1710-1876) Little Horde/Great Horde

Middle Horde(1789-1860)

Kazan Kh.(1437-1552)

Crimean Kh. (1460-1783)

Astrakhan Kh. (1466-1556)

Sibir Kh. (1420-1598)

Kasym Kh. (1445-1681)

RUSSIAN PROTECTION

(1873-1919) (1868-1919)

RUSSIAN OCCUPATION

Turkistan Province Steppe Province

BOLSHEVIK RULE

Khiva Peoples R. Bukhara Peoples R. Turkistan ASSR Kirghiz ASSR Bashkir ASSR (RSFSR)

(1919-1924) (1919-1924) (RSFSR) (1919-1924) (RSFSR) (1920-1936) (1919-1991)

Kara-Kirghiz AO Tatar ASSR (RSFSR)

(RSFSR) (1924) (1920-1991)

Chuvash ASSR (RSFSR) (1925-1991)

Kazakh ASSR

(RSFSR) (1925-1936)

Kirghiz AO Karakalpak O.

(RSFSR) (1925) (Kazakh ASSR)

(1925-1930)

Tadjik ASSR Karakalpak O.

(1924-1926) (RSFSR) (1930-1932)

Kirghiz SSR (RSFSR)

(1926-1936) Karakalpak ASSR

(RSFSR) (1932-1936)

Turkmen SSR Uzbek SSR Tadjik SSR Kirghiz SSR Kazakh SSR Karakalpak ASSR

(1924-1991) (1924-1991) (1926-1991) (1936-1991) (1936-1991) (Uzbek SSR)(1936-1991)

NEW INDEPENDENT PERIOD

Turkmenistan R. Uzbekistan R. Tadjikistan R. Kirghizstan R. Kazakhstan R. Karakalpak AR

(Uzbekistan R.)

Key:

AO : Autonomous Oblast (Region)

AR : Autonomous Republic

ASSR : Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic

Kh. : Khanate

O. : Oblast (Region)

R. : Republic

SSR : Soviet Socialist Republic

1 Fuller, G.E. (1992), *Turkey Faces East*, Santa Monica, p. 36.

2 Devlet, N. (1993), *Ça=da_ Türkiler (Contemporary Turkic Peoples)*, _stanbul, pp. 307, 323, 345 and 363.

3 Rumer, B.Z. (1989), *Soviet Central Asia: A Tragic Experiment*, London, p. 18.

4 *Turkic and Muslim population in the Russian Federation (Calculation for 1997)*

Turkish People Population Muslim People Population

Tatar 5,854,955 Chechen 1,106,761

Chuvash 1,840,209 Avar 657,252

Bashkir 1,391,101 Kabardin 455,664

Kazakh 761,798 Dargin 433,865

Yakut/Sakha 433,603 Lezgin 317,941

Azeri 407,297 Ingush 217,618

Kumuk 331,680 Roman/Gypsy 188,768

Tuvin 250,392 Adige 138,239

Karachai 173,983 Others 572,276

Uzbek 166,167 Sub-total 4,088,384

Others 533,883

Sub-total 12,145,068 Total 16,233,452

Source: Itogi Vsesoiznoi perepisi naseleniia 1970 goda, IV, (Moscow 1973); Chislennost' i sostav naseleniia SSSR. Po dannym Vsesoiznoi perepisi naseleniia 1979 goda, (Moscow 1984); Natsionalii sostav naseleniia SSSR. Po dannym Vsesoiznoi perepisi naseleniia 1989 goda, (Moscow 1991).

5 *Republic Population ('000)*

Uzbekistan 21,700

Kazakhstan 17,242

Azerbaijan 7,486

Kirghizstan 4,500

Tajikistan 5,358

Turkmenistan 4,483

Total 60,769

Source: Avrasya Dosyas_, No. 58, June 1996, pp. 4-5.

6 Republic Local pop. % Russian %

Uzbekistan 15,407,000 71 1,736,000 8

Kazakhstan 7,586,800 44 6,207,200 36

Azerbaijan 6,213,380 83 449,160 6

Tadjikistan 3,338,030 62.3 407,200 7.6

Turkmenistan 3,227,760 72 425,885 9.5

Kirghizstan 2,340,000 52.3 963,845 21.5

Source: Bremmer, I and Welt, C. (1996), 'The trouble with democracy in Kazakhstan', Central Asian Survey, Vol. XV, No. 2, June, p. 195; Brown, B. (1994), 'Central Asia: The Economic Crisis Deepens'. RFE/RL Research Report, Vol. III, No. 1, 7 January, pp. 59-69.

7 People Population Republics % in the rep.

Uzbek 1,197,091 Tadjikistan 23.5

550,095 Kirghizstan 12.9

332,016 Kazakhstan 2.0

317,252 Turkmenistan 9.3

Kazakh 808,090 Uzbekistan 4.0

87,595 Turkmenistan 2.5

Tadjik 931,547 Uzbekistan 4.7

Kirghiz 174,899 Uzbekistan 0.8

63,831 Tadjikistan 0.8

Turkmen 122,566 Uzbekistan 0.6

8 Foltz, R. (1996), 'The Tajiks of Uzbekistan', Central Asian Survey, Vol. XV, No. 2, June, p. 213.

9 Gündüz, L. (1993), Türk Cumhuriyetlerinin sosyo-ekonomik transformasyonu ve piyasa ekonomisine geçi_ süreçleri (The Socio-economic Transformation of the Turkish Republics and the Introduction of the Market Economy), master thesis, Marmara University, Banking and Insurance Institute, Istanbul, p. 10.

10 Mornie, S. and Whitlock, E. 'Central Asia and Economic Integration', RFE/RL Research Report, Vol. 2, No. 14, pp. 34-35.

11 'Ekonomicheskie Problemy mezhnatsional'nykh otnoshenij v SSSR na sovremennom etape', Voprosy Ekonomiki, No.5, 1985, p.14.

12 *op. cit.*, p. 23.

13 Devlet, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

14 Tishkov, V. (1994), 'The Nature of Ethnic Conflict', *Social Sciences*, Vol. XXV, No. 1, p. 41-42.

15 *op. cit.*, p. 43.

16 *op. cit.*, p. 43.

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18 *op. cit.*, p. 365.

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20 'Inter-ethnic Relations: Kazakh-Russian Tense Relations', *Central Asia Brief*, Vol. 10, No. 6, June 1994, pp. 11-12.

21 'Inter-ethnic Tensions Rise in Kazakhstan', *RFE/RL Research Report Supplement*, Vol.3, No. 15, 1994, p. 9.

22 Fuller, G. (1994), 'Central Asia: The Quest of Identity', *Current History*, Vol. 93, No. 582, April, p. 146.