

THE ROLE OF TURKIC AND ISLAMIC FACTORS FOR CURRENT KAZAKHSTANI IDENTITY FORMATION

Timur Kozyrev
(Kazakhstan)

The Republic of Kazakhstan¹ is a Central Asian state, currently performing in economic terms better than the rest of the CIS countries², and embracing the model of a multi-ethnic, pluralist democracy. Kazakhstan is well-known in the CIS as relatively peaceful area of interethnic cooperation, significantly multicultural and rather tolerant of ethnic and religious differences [Kharitonova, 2006]. However, the issue of forming its new national identity is one of the most acute problems for the Republic of Kazakhstan which is currently harboring more than hundred of larger and smaller ethnic groups³ with rather different backgrounds – racial, religious and linguistic – most of them with distinctly national self-identities as the still persisting legacy of the Soviet nationalities’ policy⁴. The newly independent Kazakhstani community is embarking to the struggle for a ‘wider identity’ aiming

¹ Kazakhstan is situated in Central Asia, deep in the Eurasian continent. Its territory is as large as 2,724,900 sq km (i.e. 1,049,150 sq miles). The territory of the Republic stretches on from the low reaches of the Volga in the West to the foothills of the Altai mountains in the East - for some 3,000 km (a distance that spans two time zones), from West Siberian lowland in the North to the desert of Kyzylkum and the mountain range of Tien Shan in the South for some 2,000 km. The capital is the city of Astana (since December 10, 1997). Monetary unit of Kazakhstan is *tenge* which is equal to 100 *tyins*. It was introduced on November 15, 1993. The Republic of Kazakhstan is a unitary state with a presidential form of government. (See: <http://www.e-gov.kz>).

The Kazakh Khanate, being one of the heirs of the Golden Horde, existed in 1465/66-1718, during the period between 1731 and 1850 the Kazakh lands were gradually absorbed (both forcefully and through protectorate treaties) into the Russian Empire. In 1917-1920 the Kazakh autonomy (Alash-Orda) was created by liberal nationalist intellectuals united into the “Alash” party and made an attempt to create a modern statehood. Later, after its defeat from the Russian Bolsheviks in the Civil War, the Kirgiz ASSR (autonomous soviet socialist republic; named Kazakh ASSR since 1925, as “Kirgiz” was an old term for “Kazakh”, imposed by the Czarist administration) existed within RSFSR in 1920-1936; since 1936 – a Union republic (Kazakh SSR), independent since 1991.

² Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), community of independent nations established by a treaty signed at Minsk, Belarus, on Dec. 8, 1991, by the heads of state of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. Between Dec. 8 and Dec. 21, the three original signatories were joined by Armenia, Azerbaijan (its parliament, however, rejected ratifying its membership until 1993), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. When Georgia joined in 1993 all of the former republics of the USSR except the Baltic states had become members of the CIS. Georgia withdrew in 2008 following its conflict with Russia over South Ossetia. The headquarters of the CIS are in Minsk. (See: http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Commonwealth_of_Independent_States.aspx.)

³ The most substantial of them are ethnic Russians – about 20-25% of entire population, according to the preliminary results of the last census (25 February - 6 March, 2009).

⁴ The policies applied during the relatively short period from early 1920s till middle 1930s are being meant, when practically all the ethnic groups of the former Russian Empire – even the most passive politically and small in number – were consistently nationalized through their institutionalization – first of all, creation of autonomous ethno-territorial units of different levels and education in native languages (namely: Union republics, constitutive units of the Soviet Union; autonomous republics within some Union republics, administratively equal to ordinary *oblast* (‘region’) into which some of the larger Union-republics were subdivided; autonomous oblasts entering *oblasts* or so-called *krais* (a larger *oblast*) if within the RSFSR, some of them directly within smaller union republics; finally, autonomous okrugs (‘areas’) entering some *oblasts* and *krais* (only within RSFSR), created for some indigenous ethnic groups of Russian North and Siberia; in more details see [Martin, 2001]). The turn towards Russification started step by step since middle 1930s [Alpatov, 2000: 87-101]. As to the idea of merging of all the nations into one ‘Soviet people’, it was openly formulated as late as in 1961 in the CPSU (The Communist Party of the Soviet Union) Program [Bennigsen, Wimbush, 1979: 103].

at the elaboration of a new one encompassing and harmonizing the already present identities, some of them having developed as antagonist to a certain extent⁵, i.e. having been nurtured by the negative images of one another, as it often happens in history [Erikson, 2006: 328-329]. To put it another way, the order of the day is in fact reeducation of all the involved ethnic groups to think of themselves in terms of their overriding allegiance to the Kazakhstani state and to Kazakhstan as 'common fatherland'. The latter means also the necessity to clearly define the unit of identity and its proper boundaries, as well as to formulate the necessary criteria for inclusion.

The success of the aforementioned policies is obviously dependent on the solution of two main problems. The first one is that of imposing Kazakh as the state language in the country in order to provide a certain cultural unification, i.e., finally, a stronger emotional bond among all the citizens. However, the fact that many Kazakh intellectuals are fluent in Russian or even English rather than in their own language⁶, and a large part of those who do speak Kazakh, yet, use it only in everyday oral communication but cannot read and write in it properly, is rendering the above goal hardly achievable in near future, although certain meaningful steps are, indeed, being taken in this direction since the late 1980s⁷ and especially after 1999, when the State Program of the Development of the State Language was accepted for next ten years. This, in turn, is increasing the importance of the second hard task that is to construct such a *narrative of the national history* that could be adopted and accepted as 'their own' by all the inhabitants of whatever ethnic origins or, at least, by the overwhelming majority. At the moment only the period after 1917 is being more or less perceived as the real common history of all the 'Kazakhstanis'. It would be, probably, better to say, that this period is perceived as 'their common' by all the 'Post-Soviets', rather than by the 'Kazakhstanis' as opposed to rest of the CIS. Meanwhile, possessing (or, at least, being able to successfully invent) a 'common past' is one of the necessary preconditions of being a 'real nation'. Again, it is especially of great importance for a society where the language and culture of the politically dominant group virtually are not, still, the most widespread and prestigious at the moment.

As to the construction of national history, one of the most interesting options offered by the recent past is to employ the historical heritage of Pan-Turkism⁸.

⁵ Not only Kazakh vs. Russian but also, for instance, Kazakh vs. Uzbek in the South region, and some other cases as well.

⁶ As to the non-Kazakhs, the percentage of those able to speak or at least understand Kazakh differs from one group to another, the lowest level of knowledge of the state language being displayed by ethnic Russians [Shaukenova, 2006]. In 1999 merely 11.35% of non-Kazakhs knew the state language [Altynbekova, 2006: 19].

⁷ Of which the most important was the Law about the Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan, accepted in 1989 (edited twice, in 1997 and 2004), which provided the status of state language for Kazakh. As to Russian, it is being officially used in the state organizations, organs of state power and those of local self-government equally with Kazakh.

⁸ A nationalist movement aiming at the national unity of all the Turkic-speaking groups, political and/or cultural. Appeared in late 19th century under the leadership of Ismail Gaspyraly, Yusuf Akçura, Ziya Gökalp and some other Turkic nationalist intellectuals, after the final victory of Bolsheviks and the creation of the USSR existed and went on developing only abroad, predominantly in Turkey, being most active in 1940s, 1960-70s and 1990s, after the dissolution of the USSR. Includes a number of political groups and ideologies greatly varying among themselves.

Though the Kazakhs were not the most active Pan-Turkist group in late 19th – early 20th centuries – as, say, Volga and Crimean Tatars or Azeris were – they, still, have given such notable figures as Mustafa Shoqayev (1890-1941), who had set up and led an independent government in Khokand in 1917-1918⁹ and later been one of the most prominent émigré Pan-Turkist politicians [Landau, 1981: 17, 82] and Turar Ryskulov (1894-1938) with his project of creating the Turan Republic¹⁰ based on ideology attempting to combine Pan-Turkism, Islam and Marxism [Bennigsen, Wimbush, 1979: 62-63, 232]. Besides, most of the Kazakh intellectuals of that period were involved to more or less extent in the Jadid movement¹¹, largely intertwined with Pan-Turkism. Finally, there were some works by Kazakh men of letters, such as Magzhan Zhumabayev (1893-1937), having openly Pan-Turk character. Thus, Pan-Turkism is, indeed, a part of the Kazakh and Kazakhstani history. If to take on Pan-Turkism not as a mobilizing nationalist ideology – practically forgotten domestically and much discredited in Turkey – but rather as one of the *nation-building projects*¹² of the late 19th – early 20th centuries, it becomes clear that constructing a *common-Turkic umbrella-identity* (not ‘instead of’ but rather ‘above’ the modern Kazakh one) and viewing the Kazakh and Kazakhstani history from this perspective would provide a number of advantages to be discussed below in more details.

⁹ The Khokand Autonomy (Temporary Government of Autonomous Turkestan) — a state unit which existed since 27 November 1917 till 18 February 1918 on a part of the territories of modern Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (with the capital in the town of Khokand in the Ferghana valley), led by Mukhamedjan Tynyshpayev and Mustafa Chokayev, both ethnic Kazakhs. The autonomy was viewed as a part of the democratic Russian Federation to be created in future, after the defeat of Bolshevism. In January 1918 M. Chokayev rejected the demand to recognize the Soviet power. In 6-9 February the Khokand Autonomy was liquidated by the Red Army’s troops together with the militants of the Armenian ‘Tashnaksutyun’ party. The town of Khokand was ruined, most of its defenders killed, the massacre of civilians also took place. The ‘basmachi’ movement in the Ferghana valley emerged partially as the response to the liquidation of the Khokand Autonomy.

¹⁰ Initially designed (by such neo-nationalist Communist leaders as Mir-Said Sultan-Galiyev, Turar Ryskulov, Fayzullah Khojayev and some others [Bennigsen, Wimbush, 1979]) as a Union republic within the USSR, uniting all the Turkic-speaking groups of Central Asia, Volga-Urals and Caucasus, later viewed as an independent state to create. Being initially conceived as a way to operationalize the Eastern strategy of the USSR aiming at attracting the Muslim proletariat all over the world to communism, this project, lacking support from the Russian center from the very beginning, finally developed into a typical nationalist ideology with strong pan-Turkist and pan-Islamic overtones. Although the national-communist Muslim leaders were arrested and executed in the late 1937s and the communist Turan Republic was never created, this idea later found other springboards in the colonial world (Algeria, Indonesia, etc).

¹¹ A reformist movement initiated by Ismail Gaspyraly (1851–1914), a Crimean Tatar intellectual, journalist and politician, aiming initially at the reform of Muslim education system, creating and imposing a common-Turkic literary language, borrowing the achievements of Western science and emancipation of Muslim women in the Russian Empire.

¹² An important note should be made here, as the concept of *nation-building project*, one of the key ones within the theory of nation and nationalism, is mentioned here. During all the Soviet period the issue of nationalism was a tabooed one, the very term being used derogatively, i.e. solely for ‘extreme nationalism’. The theory of nation and nationalism did not exist in the USSR as a distinct branch of academic science, though some researches over the inter-ethnic relations (but not nation-building) were made. As a modern Russian scholar neatly put it, ‘the very lexical field within which the issue of nationalism could be discussed was occupied and deformed by the ideology to the extent that it was difficult to translate the Western texts over nationalism into Russian’ [Miller, 1994: I-II]. Unfortunately, this area is remaining largely underestimated in the post-Soviet countries, including Kazakhstan, till today. Suffice it to say, that only some books by E. Gellner from among the theorists of nationalism are currently translated into Russian and no translations have been made into Kazakh.

It is a well-known fact, that the key points of practically whatever nation-building project are *the language policies* and *the construction of national history* – the latter being certainly different from ‘a history of the nation’. As to the idea of creating a common literary language to be imposed over all the Turkic peoples, it has become obviously out of date, though once it could appear feasible, when all the intellectuals could communicate in a sort of ‘High Turkish’ (be it Chagatay, Ottoman or ‘*Terjuman Turkic*’¹³ of Ismail Gaspyraly), while most of the literary languages were incomparably less developed than they are today. However, the area of the national history writing is remaining open to the application of the heritage of Pan-Turkism. Further I shall focus on the Kazakh(stani) national history-writing; the ‘Pan-Turk’ approach to it are being discussed in following six paragraphs, the issue of Islamic heritage as a factor influencing the national-history construction is paid especial attention, too.

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The advantages to be provided by the ‘Pan-Turk’ approach to Kazakh(stani) national history-writing are as follows:

1. Getting rid of the inferiority complex,
2. ‘Changing the points’ from Russia to China,
3. Elaborating a new (integrationist) vision of the history of Kazakh tribal groups,
4. Uniting the Muslim Turks and ‘aboriginizing’ the past of non-Turks in Kazakhstan,
5. Reconciling the competing claims over the common past,
6. Creating softer narratives of the conflicts between (among?) the Turks in the past,
7. Clarifying the role of Islam in the Kazakh history.

All the aforementioned advantages will be discussed here in details.

1). Getting rid of the inferiority complex

First of all, the adoption of a common-Turkic umbrella-identity would be tremendously helpful for getting rid of the inferiority complex acquired by a substantial part of Kazakhs, as well as other non-Russians due to the long period of political, economical and cultural dependence on Russia and the Russians. The ‘Pan-Turk’ view of history will be obviously helpful for enhancing positive self-identity through appealing to a ‘greater’ (in fact, much greater!) heroic past. To put it another way, if the Kazakh (as well as Uzbek, Tatar, Kyrgyz, etc) school-children discover in their history classes that they are not solely *Kazakhs* (or,

¹³ The language of the newspaper ‘Terjuman’ (‘Interpreter’) published by I. Gaspyraly in 1883-1918, based on Ottoman Turkish purified of surplus Arabic and Persian words. The newspaper was read throughout the Turkic-speaking world from Istanbul to Kashghar and propagated I. Gaspyraly’s ideas of Turkic unity, education reform, borrowing the technical and social achievements of the West, as well as emancipation of Muslim women.

respectively, Uzbeks, Tatars, Kyrgyzs, etc) but also *Turks*, i.e. members of the great nation which:

- came to being millenia ago,
- owned the lands stretched from the Yellow Sea to the Black Sea,
- ruled once Egypt, India and Russia,
- created the great Ottoman Empire which made all the Europe tremble for several ages as the fortress of Islam in the whole world,
- gave the humankind a number of genius scientists and artists,
- produced the monuments of culture famous all over the world,
- ... (the list is open; all the above are presented here in an intendedly emotional way in order to clearly demonstrate this thesis),

this will definitely provide them with the feelings of joy and pride – to put it in a more academic way, with a positive self-identity and the feeling of belonging to a prestigious group.

To get rid of the negative identity¹⁴ acquired due to the long period of dependence is one of the most urgent needs for most of the post-Soviet non-Russian nations, both Turkic and non-Turkic. And it is quite clear that the common-Turkic approach to the Kazakhs' historical past would be rather helpful for them from this viewpoint.

2). *'Changing the points' from Russia to China*

As Kazakh political nationalism developing from the late 19th century on came to being largely as a response to certain Russian (both czarist Russian and, later, Soviet Russian) policies, it was naturally directed primarily against the Russians and currently seems to be practically 'doomed' to go on developing in the same direction. Thus the anti-Russian rhetoric was largely employed by Kazakh nationalist groups and writers since late 1980s, as it can be clearly seen from a number of Kazakh language newspapers and journals. At the same time, the presence of a large ethnic Russian minority (see above), as well as the acute need for a close cooperation with neighboring Russia¹⁵ both in economic and military fields (the latter – first of all as military alliance against China as the most probable potential enemy in future for both countries), is rendering it at least dangerous for the Kazakhstani authorities to openly play the anti-Russian 'card' even for domestic use, not to say about their foreign policies. Thus a kind of inner conflict is

¹⁴ Negative identity, sometimes to the extent of 'hatred of oneself' is a phenomenon generally common to oppressed or exploited groups [Erikson, 2006: 315-316]. Though it may be discussed whether or not the relationship between Russia and the other republics within the Soviet Union was purely that of a 'classic' colonialism (the answer may also differ from republic to republic and from period to period), but still it is true that many Kazakhs of middle generation may recall themselves dreaming to be Russian in their childhood.

¹⁵ It is also worth noting that the land border between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation is the longest one in the world.

arising between the apparent needs of the Kazakh nation-building on the one hand and those of the young state's real politics on the other.

However, in case of adopting a wider Pan-Turk identity and applying it to the creation of the new narrative of the Kazakh(stani) national history, the latter will be included in the new schoolbooks at least from the Hun period¹⁶ and the first chapters of those schoolbooks of history will be devoted to describing the long struggle between the Nomads of the Great Steppe and the Chinese¹⁷. The anti-Chinese sentiments, which are likely to be produced by such a narrative, can be easily shared by the Kazakhstani school-children of whatever ethnic origins including Russians and other Europeans, thus uniting them with the native Kazakhs¹⁸. During the medieval period (i.e. that before the creation of the Kazakh Khanate in 1465/1466), as well as the main part of its history (i.e. the period till early 18th century) the to be Kazakhs and, later, Kazakhs in the proper sense of the term had few contacts with the Russians. As to the 'anti-Russian chapter' of such a national history, it will constitute merely the latest period of it and, therefore, will not already play the crucial role in the formation of the Kazakh(stani) patriotic sentiment.

Thus we can see that, in spite of the fact that the historical Pan-Turkism (be it self-defensive Pan-Turkism of I. Gaspyraly or irredentist Pan-Turkism of the *İttihad ve Terakki* party, or that of the Turkish nationalists later on) was directed primarily against Russia/USSR and the Russians, in the nowadays conditions it seems to be paradoxically able to diminish the anti-Russian thrust of the new Kazakh nationalism on the one hand, *without weakening it* as such on the other. Both abilities are perfectly responding the most acute needs of modern Kazakh(stani) nation-building.

3). *Elaborating a new (integrationist) vision of the history of Kazakh tribal groups*

One of the current political problems of the Kazakhstani society is that the political importance of whatever issues concerning the tribal subdivision of the Kazakhs is often being over exaggerated, especially by those doubting the legitimacy of the Kazakh statehood (the Russian nationalists first of all). Sometimes this factor really does play a substantial role in the inner politics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, namely in the cadre policies of local or even, in certain cases, central authorities –

¹⁶ The Huns, allegedly Turkic speaking nomads, mentioned first time in 822 (*Milattan once'nin Ingilizcesi neydi?*) in the Chinese sources and known till V century (*Milattan sonra'nin da Ingilizcesini unuttum*). Created the great Hun Empire in 220 (*Milattan once*) which existed till II century (*Milattan sonra*), its core territory being that of Modern Mongolia, South Siberia and Altay. The Huns are often viewed as 'forefathers of all the Turks'

¹⁷ Currently the pre-Kazakh periods of the Kazakhstani history are being described in such expressions as 'the territory of Kazakhstan was incorporated into ...' or 'the lands of modern Kazakhstan were inhabited by ...', leaving it unclear, whether or not this history is really 'of our own'.

¹⁸ A notable fact is that such an anti-Chinese trend is already developing as a rather strong undercurrent of public opinion in Kazakhstan as a natural response to the Chinese penetration, both legal and illegal, which is taking place since early 1990s [Kharitonova, 2006].

as it did since the late Soviet period. At the same time thoroughly tracing the history of each of the main¹⁹ tribal groups (*ruw*) constituting the Kazakh people nowadays certainly could be greatly helpful for whatever scientific study concerning the ethnogenesis of the Kazakhs, as well as of several other Turkic peoples, both neighboring and distant. The Pan-Turk view of history may provide greater opportunities for Kazakhstani scholars to objectively study the history of the Kazakh tribal groups, at the same time strictly separating it from unhealthy political overtones²⁰.

Most of the largest tribal groups within a number of modern Turkic peoples including Kazakhs used to be separate and distinct ethnic groups once in the past, and during the late Middle Ages – i.e. the period crucial for the formation of modern Turkic groups, – were incorporated into them as ‘tribes’. As a result, many of such tribes found themselves split among several ethnic groups. For instance, the *Kypchaks* finally became Kazakh, Uzbek, Bashkir and Altay Turk; the tribe of *Argyn* was split between Kazakhs and Crimean Tatars; there are Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Altay *Naimans*; Altay and Kyrgyz *Mundus*; Kazakh and Bashkir *Zhagalbaily/Yagalbaily*. Some others from among those old ethnic groups (to be tribes) were later partially incorporated into the new ethnies as tribal groups, and partially went on developing as distinct independent ethnies themselves. For instance, along with the Kyrgyz of Kyrgyzstan and those of Su-Yu²¹, there is a tribe of *Kyrgys* among the Tuvans. The *Nogays* are existing nowadays as a distinct ethnie in North Caucasus (with much more numerous Diaspora in Turkey) and at the same time as a sub-ethnic group within Crimean Tatars and as a tribe within the *Kishi Jüz* (The Minor Jüz) of the Kazakhs.

The most important point is that while from the perspective of totally distinct nationhood for each of the modern Turkic peoples (as it was consistently imposed

¹⁹ The tribes directly constituting the three *Jüzs* (*Kishi Jüz*, *Orta Jüz* and *Ulu Jüz*, i.e. Minor Jüz, Middle Jüz and the Great Jüz, are three tribal unions constituting the overwhelming majority of the Kazakh people) are being meant first of all, rather than the smaller ones constituting the former, in turn. The Kazakh tribal system possesses a hierarchical structure within which the greater tribal groups are consisting of a number of smaller ones, which, in turn, are branching again into smaller groups, the lowest level of the hierarchy being the groups of people descending from a common ancestor in between 10th and 20th generation. As ten generations have passed, the tribal name changes, though the newborn group still remains a member of all the larger tribal groups staying higher within the hierarchy.

Till certain level the kinship among the tribe-fellows is real. However, the largest *ruws* (above which there are only *Jüzs*) certainly used to be separate ethnic groups once in the past, so it is hardly possible to trace down the paternal lineage of all the Kazakhs living today till the first Forfather – the legendary *Alash*, after whom *Alash*, the first Kazakh political party and, later, autonomous government (see above) in 1917-1920, was once named. The same is true for the other Turkic peoples with tribal subdivision, too.

Besides, apart from of all the *ruws* and *Jüzs* (constituting altogether the so-called *qara süyek* (‘the black bone’)) there are two specific groups staying outside of the Kazakh tribal system, namely those of *Töre* (descending from Chingis Khan through his son Juchi) and *Qozha* (allegedly coming from those Arab missionaries who first taught Islam to the nomads) who are constituting together the so-called *aq süyek* (‘the white bone, the nobles’). The groups of *Töre* and *Qozha* are existing among the Uzbeks as well.

²⁰ A historical-comparative research project – from the linguistic and ethnographic perspective – over the names of the modern Turkic tribal groups is currently being developed under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Saule Tazhibaeva (Taraz State Pedagogic Institute, Taraz, Kazakhstan).

²¹ An ethnic group close to the Khakas, currently residing in the North-East of China (Manchuria).

by the Soviet authorities who clearly sought the destruction of whatever common-Turkic allegiances) the existence of tribal groups within each of those Turkic peoples is appearing to play, certainly, a negative role as a mainly destructive, subversive factor. However, if we apply the Pan-Turk approach, the same factor turns to be uniting one, clearly demonstrating the fact that all the new Turkic nations are, actually, sharing one common history, at least, till the late Middle Ages. Thus we can see that such a *change of perspective* is totally changing the whole panorama.

Thus we can clearly see that the ‘answers’ the history gives us greatly depend on our ‘questions’ to it, to the ‘glasses’ through which we are looking at it.

4). Uniting the Muslim Turks and ‘aboriginizing’ the past of non-Turks in Kazakhstan

As it has been mentioned above, one of the most acute problems concerning the issue of the construction of a common ‘Kazakhstani’ identity embracing all the inhabitants of different ethnic origins is that the period of history accepted by all of them as truly ‘of their own’ is merely that after 1917; on the contrary, for instance, the history of the Kazakh Khanate is being perceived this way solely by the ethnic Kazakhs. Meanwhile, the order of the day is to construct such a narrative of the past Kazakhstan that it could be easily accepted as ‘their own’ by the members of whatever ethnic group – or, at least, of the majority of them, thus finally providing their political allegiance to the Kazakhstani state in present. As to the rest, the goal should be at least not to antagonize them.

A notable point is that the ethnic minorities residing in Kazakhstan clearly differ from one another in their attitude towards this matter. To make most of local Russians pledge a political allegiance to Kazakhstan much stronger than that to Russia is a task appearing next to impossible²² at the moment. However, the same can hardly be said about the Turkic speaking ethnic Muslims²³, who, together with the Kazakhs, already do constitute the majority. It is also worth noting that during the period from 1999 to 2005 the proportion of the Muslim Turkic population (including the Kazakhs) displayed the 5,57% increase, while that of Russians and other Europeans – on the contrary, 4,82% decrease [Altynbekova, 2006: 18-19]. In case the above demographic tendency goes on, the Muslim Turks are likely to become the overwhelming majority soon.

One more notable point is that during the Soviet period the juxtaposition of Russians and non-Russians – with a substantial solidarity among the latter against

²² The reason is not merely the obvious and clear difference – cultural, religious and even racial – of Russians from most of the rest, but also the fact that Russians are nation with rather old and strong political self-consciousness taking roots in their long history of imperial state building, that is making Russian nationalism close in form, to a certain extent, to Turkish one (i.e. that of the Turkish Republic).

²³ The most substantial groups among them are Uzbeks, Volga Tatars, Uygurs, Anatolian (Ahıska) Turks and Azeris, the first three numbering hundred thousands, that is an impressive figure for a country whose entire population is about 17 millions, the territory being 2,7 millions of square km (1,67 millions of square miles) [Respublika Kazakhstan, 2007].

the former in certain situations – was the dominating dichotomy in the interethnic relationships in the USSR. However, since the Republic of Kazakhstan became an independent, sovereign state, the watershed began to slowly but still steadily change from ‘Russians vs. non-Russians (including the Kazakhs)’ to ‘Kazakhs vs. non-Kazakhs’, the latter tending to finally embrace even the Muslim Turks of non-Kazakh origins. Taking into consideration the fact that, taken together with the titular Kazakhs²⁴, the Muslim Turks are to constitute the overwhelming majority in near future, not to lose but to win this minorities over is really an urgent task from the perspective of Kazakhstani nation-building.

Needless to say, adopting a wider-embracing common-Turkic (‘Pan-Turk’) identity by the dominating Kazakhs would be tremendously helpful in this matter. When applied to the national history-writing it would certainly provide such a viewpoint from which at least the period before middle 15th century could be perceived as an inseparable part of the common-Turkic history, thus automatically common to all the ethnic groups of Turkic origins. Moreover, the ‘Pan-Turk’ approach may prove paradoxically helpful to ‘aboriginize’ the historical past even of some non-Turkic groups. For instance, the ancient relatedness of the Koreans²⁵ (as well as Japanese) with *Turks as a whole* is a seriously considered hypothesis, while to talk about some especial closeness between Koreans and Kazakhs (taken separately) would not sound convincingly at all. More than that, adding a modicum of ‘Eurasianism’ to the new ‘Kazakhstani Pan-Turkism’ may render it attractive even for some part of the ethnic Russians²⁶.

Thus, one can clearly see that the difference in scope between the two variants of national identity – narrow ethnic-nationalist (‘Kazakh alone’) and ‘common-Turkist’ one – to be imposed over the Kazakhstani society, really does matter.

²⁴ To use the term ‘native’ would not be fully correct here, since, say, the Uzbeks in southern Kazakhstan, as well as the Kazakhs in Tashkent and some other areas of neighboring Uzbekistan, are, actually, *native* populations residing in the respective areas since well before the nowadays borders were drawn – but, yet, not *titular* (politically dominant) there. The Kazakhs in Kazakhstan, as well as the Uzbeks in Uzbekistan, are both native and titular.

²⁵ The Korean minority was exiled to Kazakhstan (where it is numbering about 100.000 today) and Uzbekistan from the Far East of Russia in 1937 by J. Stalin.

²⁶ The ‘classic’ Eurasianism was the ideology invented and developed by a group of Russian émigré intellectuals – such as N.S. Trubetsky (1890-1938), P.N. Savitsky (1895-1968), G.V. Florovsky (1893-1979), P.P. Suvchinsky (1892-1895), L.P. Karsavin (1882-1952), G.V. Vernadsky (1887-1973), - in Europe in the 1920s. The main point of the aforementioned ideology was the statement, according to which Russia, together with all its non-Russian populations (Turkic, Mongolic and Finno-Ugric groups first of all), is a separate civilization which they called ‘Eurasian’. This ideology was viewed as an alternative to the Soviet-Communist project, which they, still, partially justified, although did not accept Marxism and atheism. The last representative of ‘classic’ Eurasianism was Lev Gumilev (1912-1992), a Russian historian with his rather original ethno genesis theory; the L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University in Astana is named after him. Nowadays there have appeared so many modifications of ‘Eurasianism’ that this is rendering it too amorphous a concept (easily combined with whatever from Marxism-Leninism to radical Islamism), of which some versions have acquired radically Russian-nationalist and even aggressive expansionist character [Dugin, 1998]. Consequently, this ideology seems to have little chance to be seriously employed in Kazakhstan today, in spite of some Eurasianist rhetoric tactically used by N. Nazarbayev from time to time. The Kazakhstani Russians and other Europeans as well are more likely to become in future a phenomenon like Istanbul Greeks, Armenians and Jews – largely assimilated linguistically but still retaining their strongly distinct self-identities.

5). *Reconciling the competing claims over the common past*

Viewing and narrating the Kazakh and Kazakhstani history from the Pan-Turk perspective would provide an opportunity to automatically solve the problem of competing claims over the common past shared with the other Turkic peoples of Central Asia and Middle Volga, which are currently nationalizing – with the Uzbeks first of all. There will remain no need to identify, for instance, al-Farabi or Khoja Ahmad Yassawi as ‘ancient Kazakhs’ or ‘proto-Uzbeks’, or, say, to view Qul ‘Ali²⁷ and his poem “Qissa-i Yusuf” as ‘belonging’ to the Volga Tatars or Turkmens, as it is sometimes done, especially by non-specialists. It will be sufficient to accept such historical figures and heritage as *Turkic* and, thus, ‘of their own’ for all those willing to adopt the Turkic (Pan-Turk) umbrella-identity. Such an approach will obviously leave no ground for any controversy over this issue.

This problem is, in fact, much more serious than it may appear. The case of Russian-Ukrainian relationships is the best example on the post-Soviet space to illustrate it. Both nations are claiming to be coming directly from the Kievan Rus in order to monopolize its heritage. Thus the very existence of each one of these two as a separate and distinct nation with its own ‘raison d’être’ is hardly explicable within the historical narrative of the other counterpart. It will be little over exaggeration to say that the modern Russian and Ukrainian identities are to a substantial extent *based on* this mutual denial²⁸, which, in turn, is serving as a permanent source of tension and mistrust between the two countries. The conflict is taking place, in fact, in a kind of imaginary world, but the latter proves surprisingly to be able to influence the real world and those who live in it.

Thus, to prevent the development of such ‘memory conflicts’ between Kazakhs and Uzbeks²⁹ or some other Turkic peoples is really the order of the day for modern historiography of the newly-independent post-Soviet Turkic countries, that makes it necessary to consistently coordinate the efforts in this direction.

²⁷ Qul ‘Ali (borned about 1183 – died between 1233 and 1240) – Bulgar-Turkic poet, politician and social thinker, widely accepted as the founder of the Bulgar/Tatar written poetry. His poem “Qissa-i Yusuf” (edited twice, in 1212 and 1233), based on the story of Yusuf (St. Joseph), is viewed as one of the jewels of medieval Muslim-Turkic poetry.

²⁸ The Russian nationalists treat Ukrainians as ‘southern Russians’ or ‘Small Russians’ (‘Malorossy’) and their language as a local dialect of Russian; as to the very idea of the Ukrainian nationhood, they view it as a kind of intrigue by the outside enemies of ‘Slavia Orthodoxa’. As the response, the radical Ukrainian nationalist narrative derogatively describes Russians (‘Moskali’) as a culturally degenerated by-product of Kievan Russian expansion in northern direction mixed up with the Tatars. An alternative – i.e. less derogatory – explanation of the existence of one another is, in fact, really hard for the Russians and Ukrainians in case that both sides go on insisting to be the direct and single heir of the Kievan Russian state and civilization. (The position of the Byelorussians and their identity is a separate large issue not to be discussed here.)

²⁹ This paper is paying especial attention to the Kazakh-Uzbek relations, since Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the two potential leaders of the Central Asian region, subsequently competing with one another. In a relatively recent past the Uzbeks claimed to be and to a substantial extent really were informal leaders of all the Soviet Muslims [Bennigsen, Wimbush, 1979: 106], while Kazakhstan is performing much better in terms of economic development during the last years (as Uzbekistan did in middle 1990s). The current relations between the two countries are far from ideal, too. Thus, the relationships between Kazakhs and Uzbeks are going to define the future destiny of the whole Central Asia.

6). *Creating softer narratives for the conflicts among the Turks in the past*

Not only will the ‘Pan-Turk’ approach provide the sense of a common past at least till the 15th century (see above), but it will also enable the historians of the independent post-Soviet Turkic countries to create softer narratives for the conflicts which have taken place between (*among?*) the nowadays Turkic peoples during the period *after* the 15th century, i.e. when their ethnogenesis had already generally finished. For instance, the Kazakh Khans and Uzbek Şeybanîs competed for a long time over the cities of the Sir-Derya region (currently southern area of the Republic of Kazakhstan); the Kazakh and Turkmen tribes fought one another in order to own the Mangyshlak (Mangystaw) peninsula; bloody conflicts between the Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs took place twice, namely during the reign of Abylai Khan (1711-1781)³⁰ and, later, his grand-son Kenesary (1802-1847)³¹ in the Kazakh Steppe. This sad list is, unfortunately, rather longer than the frame of this paper may afford, and some of those memories are remaining quite sensitive an issue till today, influencing the mass-consciousness of the respective peoples and the current politics of their states, too, though indirectly. This, in turn, is one of the obstacles – though, probably, not the major one – which are hampering the cooperation among the states of the Central Asian region and its development as one economical and cultural whole.

Hence, a kind of softer, ‘reconciling’ narrative of all these historical clashes is needed, which, in turn, appears feasible only *within the scope of a common-Turkic view of history*, being applied consistently enough. The easiest way is obviously to present each of such conflicts in the schoolbooks of history within the whole list of the alike events which have taken place since the most ancient times of the common-Turkic history, consistently and neutrally describing them as ‘a bitter truth to take a lesson from’³². As a well-known Turkish politician has written, we should learn loving both Bayezit Yildyrym and Emir Timur, staying above their enmity in the past [Zeybek, 1999: 298]. Being taught to the young generation of modern Turkic peoples, such a view of the past may prove rather fruitful in future, not only in terms of mutual sympathy among them, but, subsequently, in the fields of economy and real politics as well. The best example of such a reconciliation campaign (though on a much larger scale and concerning many different fields) in recent history has been given by France and Germany after the II World War, who finally managed to overcome the entrenched enmity coming from the past, both far and recent³³.

³⁰ Abylai Khan is known and esteemed as a wise politician who preserved virtual independence of the Kazakh Khanate during a long period through balancing between the Russian and Tsing (Chinese) Empires.

³¹ Kenesary Qasym-uly (son of Qasym) who led military struggle against the Russian Empire in 1841-1847 aiming at uniting all the Kazakh tribes together and recreating the independent Kazakh state, is honored nowadays as a national hero of Kazakhstan, and so is his grand-father Abylai.

³² Again, ‘to take a lesson’ from the past, there must be those for whom it will be meaningful – to put it another way, a respective unit of identity is being needed.

³³ First of all, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan need to take an alike measure nowadays. Although, on the one hand, these two Central Asian states are currently hardly able to accomplish everything that France and Germany once did, yet, on the other hand, the mutual hatred between the French and the Germans in late 1940s was incomparably stronger than the certain prejudice currently existing between the Kazakhs and the Uzbeks.

7). *Clarifying the role of Islam in the Kazakh history*

One more important issue for the construction of the national history is the role of the Kazakhs' **Islamic identity**. The importance of the latter is being doubted by certain part of modern Kazakh intellectuals, whose main argument is the fact that during the period before the 19th century the majority of the Kazakh nomads were not very religious and the pre-Islamic beliefs were rather powerful among them [Istoriya Kazakhstana, 1993: 165]. In 19th – early 20th centuries, in spite of certain Islamicization which took place during that period, the situation as a whole did not change too much. In fact, Islam was not strongly entrenched among the Kazakh masses before 1917, not to say about the Soviet period. Moreover, till today the religion and nationalism are not intertwined for the Kazakhs as tightly as they are, say, for neighboring Uzbeks and some other Turkic Muslim peoples. Subsequently, in spite of certain religious renaissance which is really taking place in Kazakhstan, and though some religionist political movements, such as *Hizb ut-Tahreer*³⁴, have already penetrated (especially in the South region) and are displaying certain activity in the country during the last years, still it is remaining true that whatever politically charged religious agenda, serious enough to practically influence the political sphere of the Republic of Kazakhstan, is having little receptive audience here, even among the 'ethnic Muslims'.

However, if to view the importance of the Islamic factor in the Kazakh(stani) history from the perspective of modern nation-building, it turns out to play unexpectedly serious a role for any cohesive narrative of the past of the Kazakh people. Suffice it to say that the mausoleum of Khoja Ahmad Yassawi in Turkestan (formerly Yassy)³⁵ where the best representatives of all the three Kazakh *Jüzs* had been buried during about four centuries, possesses really great symbolic importance as one of the main material proofs of the reality of the existence of **common political identity** shared by all the Kazakh tribes since quite a long time – that is being challenged rather often, especially by the Russian nationalists – it seems at least counter-productive to deny the Islamic component of the Kazakh identity, however weak it might have been in real history.

Quite a notable point is that exactly the same is true for the **common-Turkic** identity and for the respective historical narrative as well. Considering the fact that the ethnic cultures of the modern Turkic peoples sometimes differ substantially

³⁴ Hizb ut-Tahreer ul-Islami (Islamic Liberation Party) – a global Islamist political party aiming to implement Islam in all aspects of life and to join all the Muslim countries together into the united Caliphate, thus denying the principle of nation-state. HT was established in Jerusalem in 1953 by Sheikh Taqi Al-Din Al-Nabhani as a breakaway from the Muslim Brotherhood. HT is currently centered mainly in Britain, but with thousands of supporters and members in dozens of countries. An notable feature of HT as a radical Islamist party is its refusal of whatever violent ways of political struggle. In Central Asia HT is currently most active in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, being officially prohibited all over the region.

³⁵ Currently a town in the South Kazakhstan area, formerly the capital of the Kazakh Khanate (1465/6-1718). It is also worth noting that at least the ruling elite of the Kazakh Khanate really did profess Islam on the full scale [Istoriya Kazakhstana, 1993: 164-165].

from one another³⁶, and so do their political histories and geographic conditions, one can clearly see that the proximity of language alone³⁷ would be hardly sufficient to argue that a kind of common-Turkic entity really does exist as such. However, the existence of common cultural heritage created since the medieval period on these languages (or their old literary forms) and, at the same time, overwhelmingly connected with the Islamic tradition in a direct or indirect way, makes the concepts such as ‘Turkic culture’ feasible to more or less extent³⁸. Besides, it is worth noting that the historical Pan-Turkism also was sometimes colored by strong Islamic sentiments [Landau, 1981: 17]. Therefore, it will be little over exaggeration to say that any attempt to somehow extract ‘Muslimness’ out of ‘Turkicness’ (or, similarly, out of ‘Kazakhness’) is more than likely to eventually destroy the latter.

Hence, that part of Kazakh intellectuals whose negative attitude towards whatever kind of Pan-Turk overtones either in politics or in the history writing, is, in fact, primarily based on their anti-Islamic prejudice³⁹, have to realize the counter-productivity of such a stand in future, regardless of their personal attitude towards religion in general or Islam in particular – which, certainly, remains their private affair as such.

* * *

To conclude, several important points should be noted. First of all, the most important problem with the Kazakh(stani) nation-building is the following:

- on the one hand, the Republic of Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state, whose recent history, social network and psychological ‘climate’ makes it next to impossible to consistently apply, say, the Malaysian model with its clear-cut subdivision of the inhabitants into the ‘natives’ and ‘non-natives’ with somewhat privileged position of the former [Kuttykadam, 2006]⁴⁰;

³⁶ On the one hand, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz traditional cultures, or, say, those of the Azeris and of the Anatolian Turks are really close to one another, the same can hardly be said about the Kazakh and Azeri ethnic cultures, for instance.

³⁷ Similarly differing, too (see the above footnote).

³⁸ As to the non-Muslim Turkic peoples – such as the Chuvashs, Gagauz, Karaims, Siberian Turks and some other groups – they are not being considered in this paper, since practically none of them (with probable exception of the Chuvashs) is numerically large, economically powerful or politically active enough to play a significant role in the future development of the Turkic-speaking space – needless to say that none of them does possess an independent statehood. The degree of applicability of the ‘Pan-Turk’ approach to their nation-building (where it does take place) is a separate large issue, discussing which would exceed the frame of this paper.

³⁹ As whatever kind of inter-Turkic cooperation in future automatically means rapprochement with countries, much ‘more Muslim’ than Kazakhstan (though secular states, too), Turkey to be the first. Besides, the generally negative image of Turkey as a cruel and aggressive nation, created by the Soviet-Russian historiography at the time, also is not fully overcome till today in the mass-consciousness of the post-Soviet nations, even of some of the Turkic-speaking ones. Besides, some of the nationalist minded Kazakhs fear the rapprochement with Turkey, viewing her as a kind of new ‘elder brother’ instead of Russia, and having doubts regarding the feasibility of equal partnership in future, in case of closer cooperation. This fear, again, is taking roots primarily in the abovementioned anti-Turkish prejudice.

⁴⁰ Though certain correlation between ethnicity and social positions does, indeed, unofficially exist in Kazakhstan today [Kharitonova, 2006].

- on the other hand, the task of creating a *civic nation* in the proper meaning of the term out of the heterogeneous population requires a strong system of *political values*, i.e. some social ideal, purely political in its nature, ambitious enough and with a strong emotional appeal – such as that of ‘Liberté, égalité, fraternité’ in the revolutionary France, or that of Communism in the USSR, or that of democracy in the USA nowadays – sufficient to emotionally mobilize the majority of the population on a purely political ground; however, none of the post-Soviet countries does possess such a system of political values at the moment and hardly will acquire it in the near future.

Hence, the Republic of Kazakhstan has to build its political nation on the basis of a system of *traditional values* – such as language, ethnic culture and religion (either all together or, at least, some of these). Practically the only alternative to the ‘Malaysian’ – i.e. narrowly ethnic, purely and solely ‘Kazakhi’ – way of nation-building is appearing to be that on the basis of the traditional values of broader historical entities to which the Kazakh people belongs – namely, of the common-Turkic and Islamic traditions, the latter being at the same time an inseparable part of what is largely perceived as ‘Turkic culture’. The fact that the Muslim Turkic groups, including the titular Kazakhs, are already constituting a substantial majority, rather likely to become overwhelming in a relatively near future, is facilitating the task very much. Finally, the historical heritage of Pan-Turkism, being consciously taken on as a *nation-building project* – as opposed to a mobilizing nationalist ideology it once used to be (see above) – is likely to prove quite fruitful if we try to apply it to the current nation-building processes in Kazakhstan, to the construction of its new *national history* first of all.

The wider-embracing Pan-Turk (common-Turkic) approach to the creation of the history narratives to be taught to the school children in their history classes is obviously preferable from a number of various viewpoints: it is responding the purely ethnic needs of the Kazakhs proper, helpful for the inner unification of the multi-ethnic Kazakhstani society and also potentially able to positively influence the international (better to say, interstate⁴¹) cooperation at least within the Central Asian region in future. It should be also pointed out, that such an approach to the nation-building appears to be applicable not solely to Kazakhstan but practically to any other of the post-Soviet Turkic-speaking countries as well, providing generally the same advantages for them. However, as Kazakhstan, along with Turkey⁴², is currently one of the two virtual leaders among the Turkic-speaking countries, and the cooperation between these two leading states is taking place on quite a large scale since 1991, the consistent acceptance of the above approach to the nation-building even in Kazakhstan alone (from among the post-Soviet Turkic countries) is quite likely to trigger certain serious changes concerning the whole Turkic-speaking space.

⁴¹ As the construction of a *supranational* umbrella-identity is being discussed.

⁴² Although the foreign policies of the Turkish Republic have never been and currently are not primarily Pan-Turkist, still, the common-Turkic view of the concept of the *Turkish nation* (*Türk milleti*) is, in fact, widely accepted in the Turkish society since quite a long time. The very term ‘*Türk*’ is used in the Turkish language for both ‘Turkish’ and ‘Turkic’, without separating these two from one another.

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*Summary***THE ROLE OF TURKIC AND ISLAMIC FACTORS
FOR CURRENT KAZAKHSTANI IDENTITY FORMATION**

Dr. Timur Kozyrev
(*Kazakhstan*)

This article discusses the importance of Turkic and Islamic components of the Kazakh identity from the viewpoint of the modern Kazakh(stani) nation-building project – first of all, successful construction of a cohesive and generally positive narrative of the Kazakh(stani) national history.