

Interethnic accord in Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is a young country of Central Asia, which recently celebrated the twentieth anniversary of its independence. Despite of such short period of time, with well-constructed policy of the Head of State our country now is considered by the international community as a country seeking to enhance interethnic peace and interfaith harmony. Recent public-opinion polls show that the relationships between ethnic groups in the country are quite friendly. Obviously, it is an achievement of all Kazakhstan people, and especially its two largest ethnic groups - Kazakhs and Russians, which relations have a great influence on the situation in the republic. In addition, it is also a result of our national policy, which was worked out by our Government.

At the same time, in any multiethnic society it is very difficult to construct a model of ethnic integration in which all ethnic groups would have equal opportunities to realize their rights and not face problems in a social life.

Currently the population of Kazakhstan is various by its ethnical compound. Representatives of 126 nationalities live here in peace. According to the last population census, held in 2009, the ethnic composition of the population was as follows

Ethnic composition of the population (%) [1]

Kazakhs	Russians	Uzbeks	Ukrainians	Uighurs	Tatars	Germans	others
63,1	23,7	2,9	2,1	1,4	1,3	1,1	4,4

Certainly, such situation under the wrong internal policy could provoke interethnic problems, which in turn could lead to conflicts and destabilization in the country. However, despite the disappointing forecasts of some Western researchers, Zbigniew Brzezinski is among them, who compared the region of Central Asia with «the new Balkans» Kazakhstan has managed to avoid such scenarios and lay the foundation for building tolerant interethnic relations on its territory.

The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, adopted August 30, 1995 plays an important role in this process. It recognizes equality of rights and responsibilities of every citizen of Kazakhstan regardless of their origin, social status, sex, race, nationality, language, attitude to religion and convictions (Article 14). Furthermore, in accordance with Article 19 of the Constitution citizens have the right to use their native language and culture; freely choose the language of communication, education and creative work. [2].

In this regard with the support from the Government in Kazakhstan has been opened more than 100 national schools and 170 Sunday schools where 23 native languages are taught. In addition, there are three schools of national revival which have 29 branches for study of 12 native languages. The country also has national theaters, including Kazakh, Russian, German, Uygur, Korean and Uzbek [3]. There are around 35 ethnic mass media [4]. In the different regions of the country were established national cultural centers (approximately 160), the main aim of which is to preserve traditions and customs and develop language and culture of their people [5].

An important element of the political system of Kazakhstan, which represents interests of all ethnic groups and ensure observance of the rights and freedoms of citizens regardless of their ethnicity is the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan, established March 1, 1995 at the initiative of

the President N. Nazarbayev, which he announced in 1992 at the first Forum of the People of Kazakhstan.

The activity of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan is aimed to implement the state national policy, ensure social and political stability in the country and increase the efficiency of interaction between state and civil society institutions in the sphere of interethnic relations.

Today it is a constitutional body headed by its Chairman - President of the country. One of the main features of the Assembly is its right to represent the interests of ethnic groups in the highest legislative body - the parliament of the country. The Assembly elects nine deputies of the Majilis of the Parliament. Deputies elected by the Assembly represent its interests as a set of interests of all ethnic groups of the country.

It was the initiative of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan in 1996 to celebrate the May 1 as the Kazakhstan People's Unity Day in our country.

Thus, at the moment in the country there is a clear model of interethnic relations, implementation of which resulted in the fact that more than a half of Kazakhstan's people evaluate them as «friendly»:

Social survey data (% of respondents)
«Social well-being in Kazakhstan», conducted in May 2011 [6]

don't face problems in interethnic relations	56,2
don't participate in interethnic contacts	20
evaluate interethnic relations as strained	11,4
remember conflicts which have interethnic character	1,7
evaluate interethnic relations as «open enmity»	0,7

Thus, the figures prove prevalence of tolerant relations between the major ethnic groups. The level of tension in this area is too small to talk about any threats of interethnic conflicts on a national scale.

At the same time, according to the survey conducted in 2009, there is a considerable differentiation in the assessment of interethnic situation by the main ethnic groups:

- Kazakhs often demonstrate a positive opinion concerning interethnic situation in the country, it means they are satisfied by their social position;
- among Russians, on the contrary, was recorded the least amount of positive feedbacks on the issue. Every third believes that the relationships between the various ethnic groups are neutral (every fifth among Kazakhs has the same opinion) and only 57% characterizes them as friendly;
- other ethnic groups, united in one common group, occupy a central position in the spectrum of opinions of the two above-mentioned ethnic groups.

Social survey data (% of respondents)
«Features of interethnic relations in the RK», conducted in May 2009
Evaluation of relations between different ethnic groups [7]:

	friendly	neutral	tense	hard to tell
Kazakhs	76	21	2	1
Russians	57	35	4	4
others	64	29	5	2

The results at the regional level indicate that the regions of Kazakhstan, depending on the prevailing interethnic situation are quite different to each other. In general, all regions and cities of national significance were divided into 4 groups according to the level of interethnic tensions. The data shows that the interethnic situation is evaluated more safely in a relatively monoethnic areas. In this context it's obviously that interethnic situation is developing worse in multiethnic regions.

Overall, Kazakh population mostly believes that the interethnic situation in the country has improved since the Soviet period. Respondents underline:

- the social status of the Kazakhs in the community in comparison with the Soviet period has increased;
- the importance and popularity of the Kazakh language among the other ethnic groups is higher than before.

Non-Kazakh population mostly expresses the opinion that the situation in the sphere of interethnic relations with Kazakhstan's independence became worse. Participants told:

- that Kazakhs are more preferable to work in state agencies;
- about problems with the national language policy.

Of course, taking into account the data on the number of civil servants in the context of nationalities, we can say that in the government prevail representatives of the Kazakh nationality.

Number of civil servants in the context of nationalities
(according to the National Report of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the framework of the
Universal Periodic Review of Human Rights in 2010) [8]

Ethnic groups	Political civil servants	Administrative civil servants	Total	%
Kazakhs	2 443	76 843	79 286	83,49
Russians	179	10 210	10 389	10,94
Ukrainians	75	1 429	1 504	1,58
Tatars	15	795	810	0,85
Germans	27	484	511	0,54
Koreans	3	398	401	0,42
Uzbeks	11	382	393	0,41
Uighurs	13	411	424	0,45
Belarusians	9	220	229	0,24
Poles	7	136	143	0,15
others	272	599	871	0,92

As we can see from the table, the representatives of the Kazakh ethnic group, indeed, occupy the majority of state positions. However, it should be noted that many candidates

applying for the vacant seat, faced the need to pass a test on the state language (Kazakh), are not sure in their knowledge and consider it like a barrier for non-Kazakhs. And while the level of knowledge of the Kazakh language in the country remains low. Only 36% of the population freely use this language, 27,8 % of the population know Kazakh language only on the basic level.

Knowing of Kazakh language (% of respondents) [9]

entire population	
excellent	36
can speak and read but not write	8,9
understand and speak	6,2
understand but can't speak	6,2
understand with a dictionary	6,5
Kazakhs	
excellent	74,7
can speak and read but not write	14,4
understand and speak	6,2
understand but can't speak	2,9
don't speak at all	2

Although, it must be emphasized that the scores obtained by a candidate for the test on the Kazakh language is not included in the final evaluation of the results of the competition. Consequently, it can't be a barrier for anybody to get hired. And those who speak Kazakh language get additional payment (up to 30% of salary), which at first glance should be a good incentive to study it, but in practice the language policy of the state is alarming representatives of non-Kazakh ethnic groups.

The Russian-speaking population of Kazakhstan expresses its concern over the following steps of the Government:

- reducing the period of teaching Russian language and literature in schools;
- reducing the number of radio and TV programs in Russian, 50% of the broadcasting should be in Kazakh;
- renaming of administrative units , settlements and geographical names;
- signs, announcements, letterheads and etc. are exclusively in Kazakh;
- speeding up the implementation of the program of the state language;
- all official papers are in Kazakh, without duplicating it in Russian.

In this connection it is interesting to look at the results of a social survey among people to gather information about their attitude to the fact that the Government session held exclusively in Kazakh. The results confirm the presence in society different opinions concerning the introduction of Kazakh language in different spheres of life. But almost a half of the population today approves such innovation in the Government. The opposite view has only 25% of respondents.

At the same time Kazakhs and Russians formed diametrically opposite views on the situation. Kazakhs support this initiative, and Russians are against. As for the other nations, they have not yet formed a position on the issue.

Recently, the Government sessions are held only in Kazakh, what do you think about this innovation? (% of respondents) [7]

	I approve	I don't care	I disapprove	Hard to tell
entire population	48%	20%	25%	7%
Kazakhs	66%	12%	16%	6%
Russians	21%	46%	26%	7%
others	32%	34%	28%	6%

These figures prove that the language issue is a problematic area in the interethnic relations in Kazakhstan. But the state policy is aimed to strengthen the process of transition to Kazakh language, for example the Head of state tasked to increase a number of Kazakh-speaking people in 2020 up to at least 95% of the population [10].

Analyzing the national language policy in general, it can be concluded that it has some Strengths:

- Russian language is used along with the state (Kazakh) language in governmental organizations (Article 5 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan On languages);
- there is a system of money encouragement for those who speak Kazakh ;
- all activities with the participation of officials conducted in Kazakh, with simultaneous translation into other languages if it's needed;
- there is state service of translations which provides cross-language communication.

At the same time, it should be underlined the Weaknesses:

- lack of cooperation with the countries which ethnic diasporas live on the territory of the RK, the European Bureau for Language Minorities and other international organizations dealing with this issue;
- there is no effective system of sanctions for violation of the basic provisions of the law on languages;
- lack of relevant legal framework;
- there are no uniform standards for teaching the state language.

As the Opportunities of language policy of Kazakhstan can be mentioned follows:

- training of the specialists in Kazakh, Russian and other languages at the universities of the country;
- there are free Kazakh languages courses for the citizens funding from the republican and local budgets;

- in preschool institutions tutoring is in 5 and in schools – in 7 native languages;
- Russian language ensures the preservation of unified cultural and educational space of the CIS countries;
- new generation born after the collapse of the Soviet Union easier adapt the formation of a new language environment;
- in the country there are 11 national newspapers, 44 TV stations , broadcasting in 12 languages and 18 radio stations in 6 languages.

But at the same time there are Threats that should be taken into consideration:

- national heterogeneity of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- lack of educational and methodical base for teaching Kazakh as well as qualified professionals;
- low level of knowing Kazakh language among civil servants;
- there is a generation that grew up in the USSR (people older than 40 who have difficulties with studying Kazakh language);
- person who speaks Kazakh has advantage in comparison with those who don't speak Kazakh;
- the example of other states - strict language policy in Ukraine and the Baltic states.

Thus, taking into account the link between the national language policy and interethnic harmony in the country, Government should continue to follow the established by President Nazarbayev priority. From the first days of independence, he talked about the interconnection between the stability of interethnic relations and the development and well-being of the state. In addition, it should be remembered that the Kazakhs throughout their history lived with other nations in peace and harmony. Therefore, by means of the right decisions and considering all the threats and opportunities Government can achieve ongoing tolerance and peace in the country.

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