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AUTHOR: ANATOLY M. KHAZANOV, University of Wisconsin

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CONTRACTOR: University of Wisconsin

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Anatoly M. Khazanov

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ETHNIC STRIFE IN CONTEMPORARY KAZAKHSTAN

Anatoly M. Khazanov

Executive Summary

The ethnic peace in Kazakhstan, the second largest republic of the former Soviet Union, is at present very relative and exists mainly because of the quantitative parity of the two major peoples: the Kazakhs and the Russians. However, the worsening economic situation and ethnic competition have clearly increased inter-ethnic tension. All political arguments boil down to whether the republic should evolve into a Kazakh ethnic state or a multi-ethnic national state. Even the territorial integrity of the country is at stake since the secessionist tendencies are rather strong amongst the predominantly Russian population of Northern and Eastern Kazakhstan and are encouraged by certain political forces in Russia. All this leaves little room for genuine ethnic accommodation.

It is sometimes hoped that economic improvements may somehow defuse ethnic tensions. The chances for rapid improvement are at present very problematic in Kazakhstan. A genuine power-sharing between the two major ethnic communities is also hardly feasible. On the other hand, the hopes of the Kazakh nationalists that the majority of the Russian will leave the country do not seem realistic. Some experts predict that in the next 5-6 years the out-migration of Russians and members of other non-Kazakh ethnic groups will not exceed half a million people. In all probability, the Russian population in the country will have to adjust to an ethnic minority’s status.

The main danger for Kazakhstan’s future consists in the attempts to violate the territorial integrity of the country. Their unpredictable consequences may destabilize the whole ex-Soviet geopolitical region. The ethnic situation in Kazakhstan should certainly be watched with great attention, but perhaps it is not enough to consider it only as a problem in relations between Kazakhstan and Russia in which other powers do not have any voice.
Kazakhstan with its 2,717,300 square kilometers of territory was the second largest republic of the USSR. According to the Soviet census of 1989, of Kazakhstan's 16,746,000 population Kazakhs constituted 39.7 percent; Russians 37.8 percent; Germans 5.8 percent; and Ukrainians 5.4 percent. Smaller ethnic groups comprise the rest.

Table 1. Ethnic Composition of Kazakhstan's Population in 1989.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
<th>Thousands</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakhs</td>
<td>6,534.6</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russians</td>
<td>6,227.5</td>
<td>37.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germans</td>
<td>957.5</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainians</td>
<td>896.2</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbeks</td>
<td>332.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatars</td>
<td>328.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uighurs</td>
<td>185.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belorussians</td>
<td>182.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koreans</td>
<td>103.2</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azerbaidzhanians</td>
<td>90.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This highly diverse ethnic composition of Kazakhstan has a long history. In the past the country was the exclusive domain of pastoral nomads. In the second half of the eighteenth century and in the first half of the nineteenth century, Russia subdued and annexed Kazakhstan. Soon afterwards, the Russian government took away the Kazakhs' summer pastures and sometimes even winter quarters and replaced them first with Cossack and then with Russian peasant settlers. About 1.5 million new colonists from European
Russia came to Kazakhstan at the end of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century. Kazakh pastoral nomads were gradually ousted to the arid areas of Central and Southern Kazakhstan.

The Russian colonization of Kazakhstan and corresponding crisis in the traditional pastoral nomadic economy, unsuccessful uprisings, and the turmoil years of the revolution and civil war resulted in a sharp decrease in the country's Kazakh population. Their numbers fell from 91.4 percent in 1850 to 57.1 percent in 1926. Then, in the early 1930s came the traumatic events of forced collectivization and bloody settlement of Kazakh nomads on fixed lands followed by the famine that decimated their herds and altogether cost them among 1.5 to 2 million souls. Another half million people had to flee from the country.

Meanwhile, the Russian and Slavic migrations to Kazakhstan continued. In the 1930s and 1940s the industrialization of the republic stimulated these movements, in the 1950s—the so-called “virgin lands campaign” aimed at sowing wheat on huge tracts of land in the Northern Kazakhstan steppes. The last campaign brought to Kazakhstan another 1.5-2 million new settlers from the European part of the USSR. By 1939, the number of Russians in Kazakhstan had doubled compared with 1926; by 1979 this number had doubled again. In addition, in the 1930s and particularly in the 1940s, Kazakhstan became one of the main territories for resettlement of various deported groups and peoples, like Koreans, Germans, Chechen, Ingush, Meskhetian Turks, Kurds, Greeks, and many others.

In all, by 1962, the number of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan dropped to 29 percent. However, during the last thirty years their overall proportion in the
republic began to increase again because of their high birth-rate and a decline in the influx of non-indigenous groups, above all of Russians. By 1993, the share of Kazakhs in the total population of Kazakhstan had already reached 43.2 percent, while the Russians' share decreased to 36.4 percent. It appears that Kazakhs have a good chance of becoming a majority in their country again by the beginning of the next century.

Table 2. The Kazakh Population in Kazakhstan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Thousands</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>1,300</td>
<td>96.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>1,502</td>
<td>91.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>1,644</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>2,417</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>79.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>3.713</td>
<td>57.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>2,640</td>
<td>38.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>2,755</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>4,234</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>5,289</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>6,531</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>7,297</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This confidence in the ethnic future of the Kazakhs after the period when their very survival as a people was in jeopardy, contributed to a growth in their
nationalism, which in the first post-war decades was at a rather low level. Nationalism became more conspicuous already during the later years of the Kunaev's rule, who until his dismissal in December 1986 held for twenty-four years the position of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan. Although Kunaev was no less corrupt than other Soviet politicians of the Brezhnev period, he was, and still remains, rather popular among the Kazakhs. He tried to advocate the interest of Kazakhstan in the central government, to give preference to Kazakhs over Russians in the republic, and to move them into many key positions in administration.

II

Kazakh social structure remains in many respects pre-modern. It consists of the upper class that includes people involved in government and administration (most of them in the recent past belonged to the former Communist party hierarchy), and the large lower class, the peasantry. Members of the working class and of the middle class from the indigenous population are small in number; most of the latter is white collar or people involved in humanitarian professions. Blue collars and a majority of the middle class came from other ethnic groups—Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Germans, Koreans, and several others. By 1989, 35.8 percent of the employed Kazakhs were engaged in agricultural labor in the state-owned farms (sovkhозes), an additional 8.3 percent were kolkhozniks, 30.7 were office employees, and only 24.9 percent were engaged in urban labor. Kazakhs provide 51 percent of the administrative personnel but 3.0 percent of the skilled labor and 11.3 percent of the unskilled one.
The limited industrialization of Kazakhstan conducted by the Moscow center involved the attraction of a work force from the European part of the USSR, and not the creation of an indigenous working class. The participation of Kazakhs in this development was insignificant. However, unlike capitalist countries that usually recruit immigrants from other regions to perform unskilled labor, Kazakhstan attracted immigrants from European Russia to occupy those positions in industry that demanded skilled labor and, thus, they became a labor aristocracy.

The construction of industrial complexes did not take into account local needs or local traditions. While the production of consumer goods in Kazakhstan is underdeveloped and about 60 percent of consumer goods have to be imported into the republic, it contains large mining and heavy industry enterprises (including defense industry), entire industrial branches, even entire cities with the indigenous population comprising the minority. In 1979 the Kazakhs constituted only 20.8 percent and by 1989—26.6 percent of the urban population of the republic; 69.1 percent of them continued to live in the rural areas. By 1989, Kazakhs comprised 57 percent of the whole agricultural population of Kazakhstan. On the other hand, in 1977, they comprised only 13 percent and in 1987, 21 percent of industrial workers.

People of European origin are the main backbone of the skilled work force and scientific-technical personnel. Engineers, technicians, and skilled workers of Slavic, German, or Caucasian origin operated most large enterprises, electric stations, oil wells, mines, railroads, and airports created during the Soviet period. Higher wages, the possibility of receiving an apartment, and good
promotion possibilities attracted, with the exception of Germans exiled to the republic by Stalin during World War II, these migrants.

Until recently, 93 percent of Kazakhstan's industry was directly subordinate to the all-Union ministries in Moscow. The republic's tax revenue from these enterprises constituted only 0.03 percent of its budget. Their employees were not Kazakhstan workers but rather Union workers. They virtually embodied the Union center, its defense and heavy industries, space research and military power. They were far from integrated into the local society, and often considered themselves more as representatives of the center vis-a-vis Kazakhs. Kazakhstan no longer needs many of them in their former capacity, and many Kazakh nationalists regard the "Union people" as potential "fifth column."

Of Kazakhstan's seventy-one districts, those with a predominantly Kazakh population are economically the most backward and have the highest percentage of unemployed. The developmental lag and the ethnic division of labor that hinder Kazakh participation in modern sectors of economy, contributed to a growth in ethnic competition. The violent disturbances and inter-ethnic conflicts of summer 1989 in Novyi Uzen', Munaishi, Dzetybai, and other centers of oil industry in the Mangyshlak Peninsula in Western Kazakhstan demonstrate where this situation is going. The central, Moscow-based, organizations have pumped oil from there for decades. In order not to build schools, hospitals, and day care centers they brought in temporary workers from the North Caucasus and other parts of the Soviet Union. These people got better pay and living conditions. In addition, migrants from the Caucasus managed to seize many lucrative positions in trade and services. The
central organizations viewed the local Kazakh population as a burden. The Kazakhs remained without work and with nowhere to go. Every three months airplanes brought a new shift of 12 thousand people to Mangyshlak. These shifts included not only skilled oil-industry workers, but also secretaries, cooks, and even office-cleaners, while 18 thousand Kazakh youths remained unemployed. As a result, the latter began to demand the expulsion of migrants of Caucasian origin. Mobs went on a rampage which lasted for several days and resulted in several deaths, numerous injuries, and great damage to various consumer enterprises and services.

III

An ethnic division of labor exists also in agriculture. Kazakhs supply most of the unskilled labor for pastoral production and cultivation. Ethnic minorities like Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, Koreans, and others, prefer to be occupied in other, more mechanized and better paid branches of agriculture demanding more skilled labor. This situation also has a long history. Thus, the virgin land campaign in Kazakhstan was at Kazakh expense. In Northern Kazakhstan the campaign closed the Kazakh's livestock-raising state and collective farms, and prevented most of these Kazakh employees from becoming involved in grain production.

The amalgamation of collective farms ("kolkhozes") into larger units during the Brezhnev period again affected Kazakh peasants and pastoralists in a negative way. It abandoned many Kazakh small settlements ("auls"). However, directors of newly created state farms ("sovkhoses") offered jobs only to young male Kazakhs; old herdsmen ("chabans") remained in their auls.
Moreover, the state confiscated about 20 million hectares out of 270 million hectares of Kazakhstan's grazing and arable lands for numerous military grounds and ranges, the nuclear test site at Semipalatinsk and the satellite and missile test center at Baikonur. There are virtually no Kazakhs among their employees, and the state ousted the indigenous population from these lands. Although the antinuclear movement in Kazakhstan unites people from different ethnic groups, some Kazakh intellectuals claim that ethnic Kazakhs suffered more than other groups as a result of the nuclear-weapons tests. They refer to Kazakh villagers who were used as human guinea pigs during above-ground nuclear tests in the fifties, and to those who for three decades were suffering and dying from the consequences of radiation leaks.

The overpopulated Kazakh rural regions of the republic also suffer from erosion, salination and desertification, the results of erroneous agro-technology, overgrazing, and a trend from multispecies toward monospecies herd composition. In 1989, salt marshes comprised about 650,000 hectares in Kazakhstan. By 2000, erosion will affect at least 50 percent of all the pastures in Kazakhstan.

During the last twenty or thirty years many Kazakhs began to move from overpopulated and under-employed rural areas to the cities. Thus, in 1970, Kazakhs made up only 12.4 percent of the population in Alma-Ata, the capital of Kazakhstan; in 1979, they comprised 16.7 percent; and in 1989, already 22.5 percent. However, educationally and professionally, the new migrants from the rural areas are at a disadvantage and encounter strong competition from other ethnic groups. Moreover, social advancement and career promotion for the urban population require a good command of Russian. This puts the
Kazakhs in an underprivileged position in comparison to Russian-speaking urbanites and intensifies ethnic competition.

However, if the new migrants fail in the cities, they usually can not return to their villages and small towns, because their jobs, if they had any, are already occupied by other people.

At best, these people can find only unskilled jobs in the cities. They have little sympathy for the Russians whom they tend to associate with foremen, team-leaders, and superiors of different rank, in other words with the urban population's alien, competing, and privileged group. Both groups have different incomes, values, life-style, and maintain few contacts with each other. At worst, the new Kazakh migrants remain unemployed and often homeless, and constitute a new and growing underclass in the cities of Kazakhstan. Often they are particularly hostile towards the Russians and other ethnic minorities and prove to be particularly prone to extremism, violence, and crimes. In summer 1990, when some of these desperate people lost any hope for government assistance, they unwarrantedly seized plots of land near Alma-Ata, which created an explosive situation in the capital.

At the same time, opportunities for social advancement in the political sphere are better for the Kazakhs than for other ethnic groups in the republic. Through various kinds of official and unofficial affirmative actions, they are over-represented in virtually all republican foci of power. The number of Kazakh humanitarian intelligentsia and students also exceeds the ratio between
Kazakhs and other ethnic groups. The reasons for this situation are quite obvious.

The successful implementation of colonial rule often depended on the participation of some of the indigenous population, and the Soviet policy towards Kazakhstan was no exception. The Soviets created in Kazakhstan completely new political and cultural elites. In these elites, ethnic Kazakhs outnumbered members of all other ethnic groups because the recruitment to these elites was based, to a significant extent, on ethnic affiliation. An exception was made only for the most important position of the First Secretary of the Communist party of Kazakhstan. During the whole Soviet period only four of twenty-two of these secretaries were ethnic Kazakhs.

The Kazakh political elite's privileged positions in the local power structures depended on their compliance with all of Moscow's demands and goals, and with their capabilities to implement policies dictated by the Center. In addition, they had to embrace the Russian language and—at least in public—some of Russian culture and life-style. In return Moscow gave them the right to run internal affairs in Kazakhstan and to distribute preferential treatment and high level jobs. In order to secure their support the Soviet regime reserved a significant percentage of these jobs for Kazakhs.

Although the educational level of Kazakhs in Kazakhstan is still lower than that of Russians (in 1979, 69 out of 1000 Russians at an age older than 10 years and 56 out of 1000 Kazakhs had a higher education), the number of educated Kazakhs is growing. The Kazakh political elite encouraged this process, sometimes at the expense of other ethnic groups. At the same time an ethnic division of labor still exists in Kazakhstan among educated strata. While the
educated Kazakhs are mainly involved in humanitarian professions, the Russians dominate in engineering, the natural sciences, medicine, and so forth.

In almost all social levels in Kazakhstan different ethnic groups occupy specific niches in which other groups are underrepresented. Thus, all of them feel victimized. Each group hinders the social and professional advancements of the other. Each group perceives this sectional unevenness in ethnic divisions of labor as oppressive and discriminatory. As a result, the tense situation has emerged in which some social differences take on ethnic colors and social mobility strikes against ethnic boundaries. This contributes to a general deterioration of inter-ethnic relations in the republic.

Intra-ethnic competition among the Kazakhs further complicates the inter-ethnic competition in Kazakhstan. Belonging to a certain “zhuz” (in the past, something similar to a tribal confederation) is still important to the Kazakhs, particularly among the local administrations which often sabotage decisions made by the president and the government of the country. Today, one should not overestimate the intra-ethnic competition among the Kazakhs. It is certainly only of secondary importance and is much less salient than, for example, among the Kazakhs’ southern neighbors, the Turkmen. It is possible that the importance of ethnic subdivisions within the Kazakh community will in the future diminish, particularly, if the competition with other ethnic groups continues to increase. On the other hand, I would not completely exclude the future possibility of a revival in tribalism in Kazakhstan, if the proper conditions emerge.
During the "restructuring" period, inter-ethnic tensions in Kazakhstan, particularly relations between the Kazakhs and Russians, became even more salient and today continue to remain tense. During the disturbances in Alma-Ata, in December 1986, the blue collar Russian civil population participated in putting down Kazakh demonstrations. In several parts of the city, particularly in the working class neighborhoods, they organized hunts for all Kazakhs appearing in the streets.

The ethnic peace in Kazakhstan is at present very relative and exists mainly because of the quantitative parity of the two major ethnic groups. However, the worsening economic situation and growing unemployment have clearly strengthened Kazakh malevolence toward all other ethnic groups in the republic. Thus, in July and August 1990, Kazakhs were clashing with Chechen in the Dzhambul raion (district). In the beginning of 1992, activists of the Kazakh organizations "Azat" and "Kazak tili" forced Chechen and Ingush living in the Novyi Mir settlement in the Taldy-Kyrgan oblast' to sell their houses for a mere trifle and to immediately leave Kazakhstan. In summer 1991, Meskhetian

1 From 1992 to 1993, Kazakhstan's gross domestic product decreased by 12.9 percent, while the volume of industrial production fell by 16.1 percent, and construction and assembly work by 25 percent. The production of main foodstuffs has fallen drastically: meat by 12.6 percent; sugar by 36.1 percent; margarine by 48 percent; and butter by 25.4 percent. Kazakhstan's cabinet of ministers has admitted that the country is on the verge of hyperinflation and that price increases are out of control.
Turks living in the Enbekshikazakhskii raion received the ultimatum from the local Kazakhs to leave the raion in three months.

With the exception of the former Communist party, which was renamed the Socialist party at the end of 1991, all other political organizations, parties, and movements in Kazakhstan in 1988-1992 have been organized, or have split along ethnic lines. The paramount motivation behind the Kazakh organizations is to provide Kazakhs the privileged position in the country and to preserve its territorial integrity. Solzhenitsyn's proposal to annex Northern Kazakhstan, published in "How We Should Build Russia," led to the protests from a wide spectrum of Kazakh intelligentsia and youth and to the demonstrations in Alma-Ata on September 21-23, 1990. These Kazakhs put forward counter demands that reminded the Russians that the Omsk oblast' in the Russian Federation was once Kazakh territory. Recently, the radical nationalist Kazakh organizations have issued the warning that if Solzhenitsyn on his current way from Vladivostok to Moscow dares to cross Kazakhstan's border, this will result in violent protest demonstrations and other actions.

Beginning in 1988, the most outspoken champions of Kazakh nationalism started to call for a complete halt to in-migration of Russians into Kazakhstan. Significant numbers of Kazakhs do not hide their desire for Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, and other non-Kazakhs to leave Kazakhstan. The saying "We bid farewell to Germans [voluntary emigrating to Germany] and shake hands with them: we turn Russians out by kicking their backs" is rather popular nowadays in nationalistic circles. In 1992, a total of 370,000 non-Kazakhs, including about 250,000 Russians, left Kazakhstan. In the near future the
situation may become even worse because it is expected that by the year 2000 at least 1 million more Kazakh youth will move from the rural areas to the cities.

All political arguments ultimately boil down to whether the republic should evolve into a Kazakh ethnic state or a multiethnic national state. Kazakh nationalists use the "indigenous" question (and in addition, the consequences of Russian and Soviet colonialism) as an argument for providing them priority and special political status. In the political arena, Russians are already at a disadvantage. In the parliamentary elections of March 1994, which in the opinion of international observers were not free of the government's pressure and manipulation, Kazakhs won 103 of 177 seats (58 percent of the total number), Russians 49 seats, Ukrainians 10 seats, and the rest of the seats were won by members of other ethnic minorities.

Many Kazakhs also worry that radical economic privatization and the transition to a market economy will hurt the descendants of pastoral nomads who do not have any tradition of commerce and free enterprise and will inhibit, rather than facilitate, the emergence of a strong Kazakh middle class. Remarkably enough, President Nazarbaev explained his antipathy to outright ownership of land by pointing out that to permit such ownership would be alien to the heritage and mentality of the former nomads. The last decree on the state farms' sale implies only short-term and long-term lease, but still not the private ownership of land. It is assumed that the Russian population should benefit more from the transition to the market economy. On the contrary, the Kazakh middle- and low-level bureaucracy and the strata with low income are more vulnerable, since they are more dependent on the state's control of the economy or on the state's support through budget allocations.
The fight for a wider use of the Kazakh language in education, culture, and administrative practice relates not only to the growth of ethnic consciousness and the desire to prevent acculturation, but also to the mundane motivation to place the Kazakhs in more advantageous positions with respect to other ethnic groups. Not without reason, the Slavs in the republic are afraid of the policy of "Kazakhization," which they consider an "infringement on other people's rights." While 62.8 percent of the Kazakhs know the Russian language, only 0.9 percent of the Russians and 0.6 percent of the Ukrainians in Kazakhstan can communicate in Kazakh. The language law of September 1989 that declared Kazakh to be the state language of Kazakhstan and required its eventual widespread use in public life, led to protests from the Russian-speaking population.

The fact that the Kazakhs are today a minority in Northern Kazakhstan further aggravates the inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan. In 1989, their percentage in the Kokchetav oblast' was 28.9; in the Pavlodar oblast' 28.5; in the Kustanai oblast' 22.9; in the Tselinograd oblast' 22.4; and in the Karaganda oblast' only 17.2. Remarkably, the Kazakh nationalistic parties are receiving the strongest support just in these regions (personal communication with S. Aktaev, a leader of the Azat movement and the Republican Party). Also significant is the fact that the Kazakh immigrants from Mongolia and China are settled in Northern Kazakhstan. Its Russian population consider this as a deliberate attempt to change the ethnodemographic situation. Kazakhstan's parliament's recent decision to move the capital to Akmola by the year 2000 may also pursue this goal. Despite the agreement on the inviolability of inter-republican borders made by the leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States, some
Russians living in Northeastern and Northwestern Kazakhstan, encouraged by sympathetic nationalists in Russia, want these territories transferred to the latter as the best guarantee against lowering their positions and status. The Ural Cossacks are particularly persistent in this respect; no wonder their relations with Kazakhs are deteriorating. However, the Cossacks are not alone. Demands to create Russian territorial autonomy, or autonomies, in Kazakhstan meet with strong opposition from Kazakhstan's government and Kazakh public opinion.

In 1994, the Russian mass media reported cases of persecution of the leaders of the Russian community in Northern Kazakhstan. Likewise, Kazakhstan's constitution excluded double citizenship—another demand by the Russians in the country, and president Nazarbaev resists Russia's persuasion to grant it to her compatriots because this would mean that almost one half of Kazakhstan's population could become Russian citizens. He also made quite clear that any territorial claims to Kazakhstan by Russia would imply unavoidable bloodshed. He is certainly alarmed that Zhirinovsky's claims have a sympathetic ear among some, more moderate, Russian politicians. Once, he even stated that Russia's policy toward the Russian population of Kazakhstan resembles the policy of Nazi Germany towards the Sudeten Germans.

Apparently, the multiethnic composition of Kazakhstan was one of the reasons why President Nazarbaev argued for civil accord and inter-ethnic accommodation in the republic, and in 1991 still wanted the preservation of the Soviet Union. On many occasions he declared his allegiance, not to "nationalism by blood," but to "nationalism by soil," which means that his official goal is to make Kazakhstan a nation state. He constantly emphasizes that no one ethnic group should have privileges in the republic. During the 1991
presidential electoral campaign he stated: “I will never call a single person in
Kazakhstan a migrant.” Nazarbaev’s sympathy towards authoritarian rule, 
allegedly as a transitional stage from totalitarianism to democracy, is well
known: he does not pretend to hide it. The independent press and other mass
media in Kazakhstan are operating in difficult conditions under constant
pressure from the government. Still, so far Nazarbaev has proved to be a very
skillful politician who is capable, if not to defuse inter-ethnic tension, then to
keep it under control. However, one may wonder whether and for how long he
is capable of maneuvering in the future. The Kazakh intelligentsia appeals him
“to help his own people” and reproaches him for “neglecting interests of the
Kazakh people.” On the other hand, the Russian-speaking population though
considering Nazarbaev the lesser evil reproaches him for being led by Kazakh
nationalists; they claim that although Nazarbaev avoids publicly favoring
Kazakhs, this is just what he is doing in his practical measures.

At present, Nazarbaev’s policy is aimed at marginalizing extreme Kazakh
and Russian organizations. To achieve this goal he sometimes does not hesitate
to resort to police methods. At the same time, apparently in an attempt to
widen his support base (Nazarbaev’s relations with the former communist
nomenklatura remain somewhat strained. In 1993, he complained that the
government had proved its complete insolvency. He caustically remarked that
an anti-crisis program is a manual for Kazakhstan’s bureaucrats in the same way
that Decameron is a handbook for a bishop), he wishes to reach rapprochement
with more moderate Kazakh parties and organizations and accepts many of
their demands. On December 16, 1991 Kazakhstan’s parliament declared that
all ethnic Kazakhs, wherever they are living, have the right to acquire
Kazakhstan’s citizenship and/or to return to the country. The Law on migration promulgated on June 26, 1992, promised state support to those Kazakhs who are immigrating to Kazakhstan. On July 17, 1992, the vice-president of Kazakhstan, Eric Asanbaev, plainly stated that “Kazakhstan’s statehood will be built on ethnic principles.”

It is clear that today the question of power sharing between different ethnic groups in Kazakhstan remains unsolved. Although Nazarbaev vigorously denies that different ethnic groups in his country are put in unequal conditions and insists that nobody is discriminated if he does not know Kazakh, Russians in Kazakhstan hold the opposite opinion. Not without reason they complain that they already are denied some prominent and lucrative positions under the pretext that they do not know the Kazakh language which was elevated to the status of the state language of the country. Some Russian deputies of the new parliament have already stated that they are going to demand that both languages be declared the state languages of Kazakhstan.

The communists in Kazakhstan have failed to secure ethnic accord. Whether those of the recently emerged new parties which consist mainly of the former communists and are not based on an implied ethnic principle, be it the presidential Union of People’s Unity or the centrist National Congress of Kazakhstan (the latter to a large extent remains the party of some of Alma-Ata’s intelligentsia), are willing and capable of fostering an inter-ethnic accommodation, remains to be seen.
Conclusion

It is sometimes hoped that economic improvements may somehow defuse ethnic tensions. However, the chances for its rapid improvement are at present very problematic in Kazakhstan. A genuine power-sharing between the two major ethnic communities—Kazakhs and Russians—is also hardly feasible. On the other hand, the hopes of the Kazakh nationalists that the majority of Russians will leave the country do not seem realistic. Some experts predict that in the next 5-6 years the out-migration of Russians and members of other non-Kazakh ethnic groups from Kazakhstan will not exceed half a million people. In all probability, the Russian population in the country will have to adjust to an ethnic minority’s status.

The main danger for Kazakhstan’s future consists in the attempts to violate the territorial integrity of the country. Their unpredictable consequences may destabilize the whole ex-Soviet geopolitical region. The ethnic situation in Kazakhstan should certainly be watched with great attention, but perhaps it is not enough to consider it only as a problem in relations between Kazakhstan and Russia in which other powers do not have any voice.