



REGIONAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN CENTRAL ASIA FROM HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

During the history of humanity, the identity issues have always played an important role in influencing the course of political and socio-economic processes. Models and approaches of the identity formation have been changed over time and each period of history has its own specific model of identity formation. People have always tended not to consider themselves from the perspective of a certain individual, but to create groups encouraging support to each other. One of such groups is a community of people who believe that they are united by their origin. The formation of this community, as a rule, is not a natural but a culturally-based process.

Nowadays, it is widely accepted that each person belongs to a particular nation and this fact is an integral element of self-identification. However, belonging to a group, which we now identify as "nation" is a relatively new phenomenon in the history of mankind. The concept of "nation" in regards to ethnic groups living in the territories of current Central Asian states was introduced as a colonial innovation that had its roots in Europe and was legitimized as a socio-cultural model only during the Soviet period. Since the end of the 19th century the Central Asian nations have preferred to use the Arabic term "millat" related to religious community instead of the Latin term "nasci" and its Russian equivalent "natsiya" (nation). It should be noted that it is quite typical for Central Asia to combine identity models based on family-clan identification along with the concept of "nation".

Historical researches demonstrate that since the ancient times Central Asia had been inhabited by both settled and nomadic ethnic communities that lived together in a close interlacing, interaction and mutual influence. Tribal self-identification remained a priority model of identity among all other models that

characterized Central Asia during the ancient period. Tribal identity was a fundamental principle of all ideological manifestations of the ancient era. Historically, aforementioned kind of identity differentiated the Central Asian society up to the moment of adoption of Islam. With the spread and strengthening of Islam since the 7th century, Islamic identity characterized by a spiritual proximity of the community, none of members of which belong to any clan or tribe, has begun to play the crucial role for the population of Central Asia. However, it should be noted that formation of a common community with the Muslim social-cultural hierarchy did not exclude the parallel existence of structural components of ethnic-based communities. Thus, population of Central Asia, identifying themselves primarily as Muslims, remain committed to the ethnic model of identity.

Genghis Khan's invasion of Central Asia in the beginning of the 13th century caused restoration process of the importance of tribal identity for the population of the region. However, under the influence of the process of adoption of Islam by the nomadic tribes of Eurasia, priority of Islamic identity has been restored.

In states that were formed in Central Asia in the end of the 16th century religious and sub-ethnic sense of identity prevailed over ethnic identity. At the same time, new forms of identity that were typical only for the Central Asian region had appeared. The term "sart" was used to describe appeared community that was characterized by the lack or the loss of tribal features and by the existence of specific language.

In the beginning of the 20th century in the social and political environment of Muslim intellectuals of Central Asia, namely, among supporters of Jadidism, there was an intention to form a meta-

ethnic nation of Turkestan, which would unite all ethnic communities in the region living in the supra-ethnic states. However, after integration of Central Asia into the Soviet Union the idea did not gain further development.

Following the national-territorial delimitation process, which took place in 1924, the Soviet Union and autonomous republics were created. As a result, contemporary artificial borders of ethnic communities were established. The Soviet authorities had to impose social contradictions along the process of the Soviet social system formation in Central Asia. By developing education in local languages, the Soviet officials had built standards based on minority languages and had set the boundaries of Central Asian nations and ethnic groups.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the new independent Central Asian states were formed within the boundaries set by the Soviet authorities. In the post-Soviet period, the Central Asian countries focus their internal policy on both national identity formation and strengthening national institutions. The importance of the national identity formation at the current stage stems from the fact that during the Soviet period the past of ethnic communities was exposed to strong falsifications.

To summarize, ethnic communities of Central Asia are united by shared history and culture, and, undoubtedly, have common future that depends on creativity, integration and deepening of cooperation. Currently, the Central Asian countries, mostly focused on the national identity formation, are taking their first steps to build the united regional community. The regional identity can be an effective tool uniting people with different cultural belongings. This can have a positive impact on the interethnic relations in Central Asia and contribute to the resolution of regional problems.

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Politics, Foreign Affairs and Security

- During his official visit to Istanbul, the President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, and the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, adopted the Joint Declaration on Islamic Reconciliation. Moreover, the Leaders of Kazakhstan and Turkey called on member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to chart a new relations paradigm in the Islamic world by demonstrating goodwill and constructive approach to the issues of interstate relations and settlement of conflicts and disputes.
- The Parliament of Ukraine, the Verhovna Rada, approved a program of the country's new government proposed by the Prime Minister, Vladimir Groysman. A total of 243 parliamentarians voted in favor of the program, above the required minimum of 226 votes. The Government is expected to unveil a clear anti-crisis plan within a month.
- The Lower House of Parliament of Russia, the State Duma, ratified an agreement on state border with South Ossetia signed in Moscow on February 18, 2015. The Head of the State Duma committee for Commonwealth of Independent States' affairs, Eurasian integration and ties with compatriots, Leonid Slutsky, stated that the sides would set up a joint Russian-South Ossetian demarcation commission.
- The Parliament of Kyrgyzstan unanimously endorsed a new Government led by the country's 6th Prime Minister. Sooronbai Jeenbekov have replaced former Prime Minister, Temir Sariyev, who resigned amid corruption allegations.
- According to the Russian Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Vitaly Churkin, Russia and China have submitted a draft resolution to the UN Security Council aimed at preventing the use of chemical weapons by terrorists in Syria.
- During the 11th meeting of Secretaries of Security Councils of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states held in Tashkent, the participants discussed the international information security issues pointing out the importance of preventing the use of Internet and other information and communication technologies for promoting the ideology of terrorism, separatism and extremism.

- According to the General Staff of Kyrgyzstan, the limited military contingent of Kyrgyzstan's Armed Forces set off for the training center of Magob in Tajikistan to participate in joint drills conducted in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization exercises.

Economy, Finance and Energy

- As a result of the meeting of OPEC and non-OPEC oil-producing countries, including Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Mexico and Oman, in Doha, Qatar, the agreement on freezing oil production was not reached. The next meeting in the same format is to be held in June 2016.
- The Minister of Oil of Iran, Bijan Zangeneh, reported that a contract on selling 700,000 barrels of oil to the European countries was signed within the framework of a meeting with the EU Climate Action and Energy Commissioner, Miguel Arias Cañete. Before the lifting of the sanctions, Iran exported 500,000-600,000 barrels of crude oil to Europe.
- According to the OPEC Monthly Oil Market Report, Kazakhstan's oil output will decline by 40,000 barrels per day and will reach 1.56 million barrels per day in 2016. Previously, Kazakhstan's oil production declined by 30,000 barrels per day to an average of 1.60 million barrels per day in 2015.
- During the talks between the Ministers of Energy of Russia, Armenia, Georgia and Iran on cooperation in the power sector, a Roadmap for preparing joint operations of the energy systems and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in the energy sector were signed. Moreover, the parties discussed the issues of implementation of the North – South project on electricity supplies.
- According to the Minister of Energy of Russia, Alexander Novak, third line of the power bridge to Crimea was put into operation, which increased the possibility of receiving additional 200 MW totaling to 600 MW from the Unified Energy System of Russia.
- During the 6th Conference in the Arctic Logistics Series in Murmansk, diplomats and top executives of large corporations from Russia, China, Finland, Norway, and South Korea discussed the prospects for developing and using the Northern Sea Route, a shipping lane from stretching across the waters of Arctic seas between the Kara Sea and the Bering

Strait and providing a maritime haulage route between Europe and Asia along Russia's Arctic coast.

- On the sidelines of roundtable discussions held in Romania's Constanta city, the railway authorities of Azerbaijan, Romania, Georgia and Moldova have signed a Memorandum of Cooperation in transit cargo transportation. Moreover, the parties discussed the possibilities of organizing cargo transportation from Europe to Asia through Romania's Constanta and Georgia's Poti ports through Georgia, Azerbaijan and Iran and in the opposite direction.
- The Statistics Committee of the Ministry of Economy of Kazakhstan reported that the trade turnover with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) countries had amounted to \$1.61 billion in January-February 2016, which is 34.1% less than during the same period of 2015. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan's export and import to EEU countries decreased by 24% to \$508.6 million and by 37.9% to \$1.1 billion respectively.
- According to the report of the State Statistics Committee of Azerbaijan, a total volume of Azerbaijan's GDP amounted to 12.59 billion manat in January-March 2016 or by 3.5% less than in the same period of 2015. The main reason for the GDP decline is decrease of production volumes of goods and services in the construction and transport sectors by 32.5% and 14.5% respectively.
- The Government of Russia has approved a draft law to raise the minimum wage by 20.9% to 7,500 rubles (\$114.25) a month starting from July 1, 2016, which is to help to increase the ratio of the minimum wage and the predicted level of the subsistence minimum for the working-age population from 53.5% to 64.7%.

Society and Culture

- The President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, announced that in order to develop the relations among the OIC countries Turkey would allocate \$2 million to the Organization.
- The Executive Board of UNESCO has approved Russia-submitted resolution on preservation and restoration of Palmyra and other cultural facilities in Syria.
- The Lower House of Parliament of Tajikistan endorsed amendments proposing to celebrate Tajik President's first inauguration date as a national holiday.