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## ANALYSIS OF INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICTS AND APPLICATION OF NATIONAL IDENTITY THEORIES IN KAZAKHSTANI CONTEXT

### *Abstract*

Two large conflicts arose between representatives of Uighurs and Kazakhs in 2006 and between Kurds and Kazakhs in 2007 within the Republic of Kazakhstan. Official authorities did not want to consider these conflicts as inter-ethnic conflicts in order not to propagate further ethnic escalations and clashes. One of the few reasons were due to the fact that the state did not want to worsen its international image as a peaceful and multi-national state as it has proclaimed to be so, where representatives of around 130 nationalities live in peace and harmony together. In this paper we are going to compare the aforementioned conflicts with the conflict of Korday that happened on February 2020 between Dungsans and Kazakhs. Then we are going to offer short-term and long-term solutions for handling the same kinds of conflicts in the future. Finally, we will offer several options to form a Kazakhstani identity based on existing theories of national identity.

**Keywords:** national identity; inter-ethnic conflicts; Kazakhstani identity; Korday conflict; Kazakh nation.

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## ҰЛТАРАЛЫҚ ҚАҚТЫҒЫСТАРДЫ ТАЛДАУ ЖӘНЕ ҰЛТТЫҚ БІРЕГЕЙЛІЛІК ТЕОРИЯЛАРЫН ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ КОНТЕКСТІДЕ ҚОЛДАНУ

### *Аннотация*

Қазақстан Республикасында 2006 жылы ұйғырлар мен қазақтардың, ал 2007 жылы күрдтер мен қазақтардың арасында екі үлкен қақтығыс пайда болды. Ресми билік бұл қақтығыстарды одан әрі этникалық шиеленістер мен қақтығыстарды насихаттамау үшін этносаралық қақтығыстар ретінде қарастырғысы келмеді. Бірнеше себептердің бірі, мемлекет өзінің 130-ға жуық ұлт өкілдері бірге бейбітшілік пен келісімде өмір сүретін бейбіт және көп ұлтты мемлекет ретінде өзінің халықаралық беделін нашарлатқысы келмегендігімен байланысты болды. Бұл мақалада біз жоғарыда айтылған қақтығыстарды 2020 жылдың ақпанында дүнгендер мен қазақтар арасында болған Қордай қақтығысымен салыстырғымыз келеді. Содан кейін біз келешекте осындай жанжалдарды шешудің қысқа және ұзақ мерзімді шешімдерін ұсынбақпыз. Сонымен, біз ұлттық сәйкестіліктің қолданыстағы теориялары негізінде қазақстандық сәйкестікті қалыптастырудың бірнеше нұсқаларын ұсынамыз.

**Кілт сөздер:** ұлттық бірегейлілік, ұлтаралық қақтығыстар, қазақстандық бірегейлілік, Қордай қақтығысы, қазақ ұлты.

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## **АНАЛИЗ МЕЖЭТНИЧЕСКИХ КОНФЛИКТОВ И ПРИМЕНЕНИЕ ТЕОРИЙ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В КАЗАХСТАНСКОМ КОНТЕКСТЕ**

### *Аннотация*

Два крупных конфликта возникли между представителями уйгуров и казахов в 2006 году и между курдами и казахами в 2007 году на территории Республики Казахстан. Официальные власти не хотели рассматривать эти конфликты как межэтнические конфликты, чтобы не способствовать дальнейшей межэтнической эскалации и столкновениям. Одна из немногих причин была связана с тем, что государство не хотело ухудшать свой международный имидж как мирного и многонационального государства, как оно провозглашало, где представители около 130 национальностей живут вместе в мире и согласии. В этой статье мы собираемся сравнить вышеупомянутые конфликты с конфликтом Кордай, который произошел в феврале 2020 года между дунганями и казахами. Затем мы предложим краткосрочные и долгосрочные решения для разрешения подобных конфликтов в будущем. Наконец, мы предложим несколько вариантов формирования казахстанской идентичности на основе существующих теорий национальной идентичности.

**Ключевые слова:** национальная идентичность, межэтнические конфликты, казахстанская идентичность, Кордайский конфликт, Казахская нация.

### **Introduction**

Three inter-ethnic conflicts exploded in two regions of Kazakhstan in 2006 and 2007. The first conflict took place in November 18, 2006 in Shelek village, Almaty Oblast. The conflict turned into an ethnic conflict after several young Uighurs beat a Kazakh guy for domestic reasons. The conflict ended thanks to the interference of the elder men of both nationalities, as the police forces were not able to handle the conflict. The reason for the clash between Kurds and Kazakhs was due to the spread of the information about the rape of a 4-year-old Kazakh boy by a 16-year-old Kurd. The indignation of the Kazakh population of Mayatas, as well as of neighboring villages, resulted in arson of houses and attacks on the Kurds, which lasted for three days. Ninety percent of Kurds were forced to leave Mayatas after three days of arson and violence.

The similarities between two conflicts are that authorities were not willing to acknowledge conflicts as ethnic conflicts. Clashes between representative of different nationalities were officially treated as domestic conflicts. It was probably because the state did not want to worsen its international image as a peaceful state, where representatives of around 130 nationalities live in peace and harmony. The first goal of this policy memo is to respond to this kind of situation locally, within the district or village in the aftermath of events. The second goal is broader, to ensure the interethnic harmony and peaceful relations between various ethnic groups living in the country.

### **Results and discussion**

#### The possible causes of the conflict

The given conflicts took place in 2006 and 2007. However, similar kinds of conflicts repeated over time in Kazakhstan. That is why I want to compare these cases with the more recent conflict in Korday that happened in 2020. According to the official version, the cause of the riots was the domestic conflict, which escalated into major clashes between residents of several villages of the Kordaysky district of the Zhambyl region [19]. However, Kazakhstani politician Dossym Satpayev argued that: “Any social or interethnic conflict is often the result of general social tension in a country where there is chaos both on the part of the authorities and at the household level, where

there are more poor people than in abundance (and in Kazakhstan, there are poorer mainly among Kazakhs), where such conflicts try to be either shut up or quickly forgot, without trying to get to the bottom of their true essence." [26; para. 1].

One of the major reasons for social tensions is a decrease in the monthly earnings of citizens. Figure 1 shows that the monthly earnings of Kazakhstani citizens had constant growth until 2014 [4]. However, the situation changed after currency depreciations due to the devaluations and adoption of a free-floating exchange rate in 2014 and 2015 [11]. Figure 2 shows how the tenge's exchange rate has changed over the five years [6]. Kazakhstani politician and statesman Petr Svoik argued that the depreciation of tenge negatively affected the earnings of citizens [2; para. 6]. Sergey Abashin, who is an expert of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, argued that difficult economic situation worsened the social well-being of all people [21; para. 1]. That is why the socially tense atmosphere in the country exacerbated domestic conflict in Korday [21]. The next possible reason for the emergence of such conflicts is the unwillingness of Kazakhstani authorities to acknowledge problems with interethnic harmony in Kazakhstan. According to Tolganai Umbetalieva, director of the Central Asian fund for the development of democracy, authorities praise the model of inter-ethnic harmony, which doesn't work in Kazakhstan [17; para. 3]. She argued it is easier to explain ethnic conflicts as domestic conflicts, which is usually the case in Kazakhstan [17; para. 3].

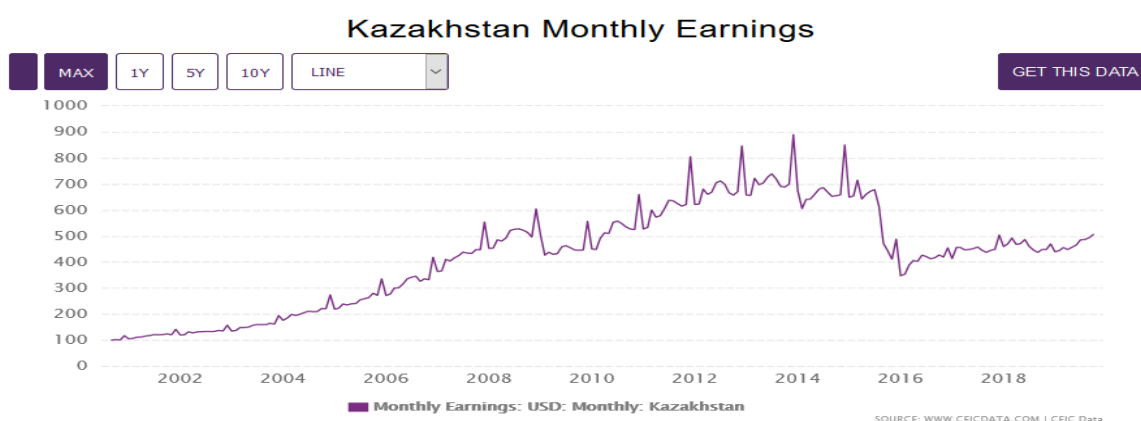


Figure 1 [4]



Figure 2. [6]

### **Policy recommendations**

#### *Closer coordination of responsible agencies to the inter-ethnic peace aftermath of events*

One of the problems with the Korday conflict was the lack of clear and official information from law enforcement agencies and regional akimats (aka mayor's office) at the beginning of the conflict. There was disinformation from responsible agencies during the first hours of conflict [20]. In addition to this, Kazakhstani authorities refuse to acknowledge ethnic conflicts, by framing them as "domestic conflicts". [20; para. 20]. The next problem is that authorities failed to respond accordingly to previous similar conflicts in southeast Kazakhstan [16].

The first reaction to the response to the conflict should be ensuring the security of the region through the use of forces of National Guard and law enforcement agencies representatives to the region till the stabilization of the conflict. Additionally, local authorities should discuss with the leaders or "aksakals" (aka local elders) of each ethnic group about their needs and problems. Then local akimats should work to solve the problems of people of each ethnic group. The next option is to improve the exchange of information between law enforcement agencies, local akimats, and the local branch of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan (AKP). It seems that there was a lack of coordination between these agencies and each agency worked separately. Oblast akim (aka mayor) should be one of the public officials who ensure closer coordination between agencies that protect the security of citizens. In Korday's case, oblast akim was fired to akim because he failed to prevent inter-ethnic conflict and corresponding measures at the beginning of the conflict [20]. One of the options here is could be the introduction of a ranking system of akims, which could include a section on inter-ethnic peace. In this case, regional akims would be more interested in ensuring inter-ethnic peace in his region. It is because some experts argue that the previous conflicts and the inter-ethnic communication in the region as the whole were not thoroughly analyzed [16; para. 22].

#### *Construction of Kazakhstani identity based on the examples of existing models of other countries*

In this section, I am going to provide a recommendation for building the national identity of Kazakhstani citizens. The given recommendation includes parts of Singaporean, French, Canadian, German and multiculturalist national identity policies. The first option is based on the Singaporean model, which includes "multiracialism" (which includes "multilingualism" and "multi-religiosity") and "meritocracy" concepts [15]. It is related to the provision of equal career opportunities for all citizens regardless of their ethnicity. Even though Kazakhstani authorities declare inter-ethnic peace and equal opportunities for everyone, there are problems with career development for non-Kazakhs. According to Zhanseit Tuimebaev, Deputy Chairman of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, children who have graduated from schools with a national language of instruction cannot always successfully compete with other citizens when they apply to Universities and colleges [24; para. 17].

Another negative moment is the policy of gradual filling of leadership positions in public administration, education or industry by national cadres, which significantly complicated the opportunity for career growth for non-Kazakhs [18]. Lack of equal opportunities to enter the colleges and Universities and ethnic discrimination during the recruitment process complicate the inter-ethnic communication, which in turn lead to more social tensions. The given fact also contributes to the increase in the migration from Kazakhstan [18]. The weakness of this option is that it is difficult to apply it considering Kazakhstani attempts to reform the civil service. The division of civil service into corpus A and corpus B did not significantly improve the effectiveness of civil service process and was accompanied by corruption activities [23]. Thus, the given option may require the political will of the authorities and even drastic political measures and campaigns.

The second option is based on the experiences of the language policies of France and Singapore. If you are a qualified person and you know the state language, you will have good chances to get a job in France [3]. The same situation is alike in Singapore. My option is a bit different from these states' policies. According to this option, Russian and Kazakh languages should be both adopted as state languages. Thus, citizens should know both languages in order to be considered as Kazakhstani citizens. It is worth to note that the share of Kazakhs and Kazakh-

language speaking people is increasing in Kazakhstan. However, the Russian language is still the dominant language in Kazakhstan [12]. Despite that, there is a lack of favorable conditions to learn Kazakh [1]. It is inconsistent with the “Kazakhization” policy [1]. This option goes against the “Kazakhization” policy. However, the given option should contribute to removing discrimination on a language basis [14].

It is worth noting that there are language imbalances in the labor market of Kazakhstan. It is harder to find a job for people who know only Kazakh or Russian. For example, the business pays insufficient attention to Kazakh-speaking clients in large cities. That is why Kazakh-speaking people struggle to find a suitable job [9]. At the same time, citizens who don't know Kazakh, cannot easily find a job in the public sector [7]. If citizens will be legally obliged to learn both Kazakh and Russian, there will be fewer problems with finding a job. Even though the share of Russian speaking is decreasing, the Russian language is still one of the world languages today. The Kazakh language is the state language, which lacks popularity in the use in various spheres [1]. It is easier to study the Russian language according to current realities in Kazakhstan. A merit-based recruitment system and providing favorable conditions for the study of Kazakh language would contribute to a decrease in discrimination based on ethnicity and language knowledge.

The second policy recommendation has the following difficulties. The Kazakh language has not been standardized yet. There are lots of difficult rules and words, which complicates acquiring and usage of knowledge in Kazakh [1]. Thus, there is a need to allocate a large amount of money to specialists, who make the Kazakh language easier and more attractive for everyone and not just for those who want to learn. Additionally, there is a need to open many educational centers, which will teach the Kazakh language based on one standardized state methodology, since the state is interested to increase the share of the Kazakh-speaking population. The next problem is that schools in Russian should teach students to learn Kazakh at an advanced level. It would also require additional financial means for hiring and probably preparing specialists. The next problem is that adaptation and acceptance of new policies need some time for citizens. It is because the share of bilingual citizens is not so high now in Kazakhstan [12]. The major problem with this option is that there could be a large number of people who are against introducing the bilingual policy in Kazakhstan, as some representatives of Kazakh intelligentsia has recently signed a petition, which requires to remove the Russian language from the Constitution and oblige everyone to know Kazakh [5; prelast and last paragraph].

The third option is related to taking some norms regarding ethnic minorities from Kymlicka's multiculturalism policy [10]. Kazakhstan can be perceived as a polyethnic state based on its Soviet period of history. Kazakhstan has representatives of various ethnic groups, part of which was forced to come due to the decision of Soviet authorities. According to Kymlicka, immigrants are expected to assimilate and accept the key features of the dominant culture [10]. Kymlicka argued that citizenship is used as a means of developing and maintaining social unity within the state [10]. In other words – multiculturalism leads to further unity of people living in the country [10]. Currently, the situation in Kazakhstan is changing and the share of Kazakhs is increasing. However, there are still many people who represent different ethnicities in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan, as a subject of the international community, officially declares non-discrimination of any kind on linguistic, religious or racial grounds, which is mentioned in the Constitution and is continued in other legislative acts [8]. However, Maxim Kramarenko, chairman of the republican Slavic movement “Lad” noted that domestic legislation avoids the use of such an international term as “national minority” [8; para. 14]. He argued that Kazakhstani national policy is intended to ensure public harmony and national unity on the basis of Kazakhstani patriotism, civil and spiritual-cultural community of ethnic groups of Kazakhstan with the consolidating role of the Kazakh people [8; para. 15]. According to Kramarenko, such a policy is the cause of migratory sentiment among a number of non-titular ethnic groups [8; para. 16].

Kramarenko argued that it is possible to prepare specialists by recruiting young Kazakhstanis (Russians, Tatars, Ukrainians, Chechens, etc.) through regional Assembly of People of Kazakhstan

(АКР) branches for free training to learn various specialties [8; para. 23]. In this case, the state would demonstrate a real interest in integrating these ethnic groups into public relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan and, accordingly, in creating a single political nation, but without losing their ethnic identity [8; para. 23]. Additionally, one of the changes to existing multicultural policy can be taken from the Canadian experience. It includes making changes to educational and humanitarian research programs at all levels in order to highlight the contribution of all ethnic and cultural groups to the development of the society [13]. The potential problem here is to what extent authorities are interested in the incorporation of ethnic minorities.

### **Alternative policy model**

According to the forecast, the share of Kazakhs is going to be 90 % due to various political and socio-economic circumstances [25]. This fact is going to affect national identity policy in Kazakhstan. If the given forecast will be realized, the language policy can be reconsidered. The Kazakh language will remain the only state and official language of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In this case, the German citizenship model can be also applied, where the idea of citizenship connected with German blood/descent. There is a strong emphasis on German folk culture, ‘spirit’ and traditions according to the German model. Additionally, German citizenship involves a profound change in political and cultural identity [3]. The potential problem here is that change into this model may negatively affect the international image of Kazakhstan, according to which there is a multi-ethnic state and the rights of representatives of all ethnic groups are respected.

### **Economic diversification**

Whatever national policy a state has, develops or follows, the economic conditions of the state need to be taken into account. The discussed states of Singapore, France, Canada, and Germany are in the list of developed states. Kazakhstan is a developing economy, which relies on the export of hydrocarbon raw materials, oil and natural resources. Kazakhstani authorities need to diversify its economy in order to decrease dependence on the prices for oil and gas. This is because the decrease in oil and gas price negatively affects Kazakhstani economic growth and earnings of citizens. It is worth noting that Kazakhstani monetary policy is criticized because of frequent fluctuations of national currency and lack of measures to increase the level of trust to a national currency by Kazakhstani citizens. Economist Murat Temirkhanov proposed a managed floating exchange rate of tenge, which is based on the attachment of the national currency rate to a basket of key foreign currencies for Kazakhstan and adding an oil index to it [22]. Economic diversification and change in monetary policy should positively affect the earning of citizens. This fact has an indirect effect on the decrease of social tensions and inter-ethnic conflicts in Kazakhstan.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, the possible causes of ethnic conflicts and recommendations were discussed in this policy memo. I have provided closer coordination of responsible agencies and discussion of the needs and problems with leaders of each ethnic group as an immediate reaction to the ethnic conflict. The longer-term recommendations include the following recommendations. Introducing and adopting Singaporean “multiracialism” and “meritocracy” concepts. The problem here is that there is a high rate of corruption and the existing problem of a passive state. The second option concerns introducing both Kazakh and Russian languages as the state languages. The difficulty of this option is that it can face strong resistance from Kazakh intelligentsia. The third option includes more incorporation of ethnic minorities into various sectors. The question here is whether authorities are interested in this policy. Additionally, I added an alternative policy model according to which the Kazakh language will be the only state and official language in the country. This model may have a negative effect on the international image of the country. Finally, change in the national identity policy should be accompanied by diversification of economy and change in monetary policy, which in turn, should positively affect the wellbeing of citizens.

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