

Ethnic Immigration Policy Implementation (1992- 2009)

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After Kazakhstan declared its independence, it became a large performer in the worldwide international migration process. The attraction of social and economic stability (with an increase in the level of living standard), stable ethno-demographic and population growth, no nationalist struggles as well as positive geopolitical situations, have led to a huge flow of immigrants to Kazakhstan in the years since independence. In this study, I have suggested that results of the ethnic immigration policy include strengthening the national identity, creating a positive effect on the ethno-demographic outcomes, and increasing the number of the population size over the last nineteen years.

Key words: ethnic demographic structure, immigration process, immigration policy, Kazakhstan

Purpose and Motivation of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the ethno-demographic changes taking place in Kazakhstan and then the government ethnic immigration policy's effect on the migration process from 1992-2009. This discussion focuses on the effects of immigrant policy, and on the way in which it promoted ethnic Kazakhs to return to Kazakhstan. The ethno-demographic change anticipated in the country allowed the immigration process to proceed within defined migration policies. Such study allows us to explore the link between immigration policy attempts, broader ethno-demographic and structural issues. Based on the research background of the demographic and immigration policy issues, there are questions that this study raises: How does the government policy change over time? How does migration policy affect the ethnic demographic structure and migration process?

Kazakhstan is one of the few countries in the region that has had strong ethnic policies. According to official estimates, the country has become home to more than 1 million immigrants since independence, of which over 700 thousand are

ethnic Kazakhs or ethnic immigrants. The Kazakhstan government encourages ethnic-based return immigration through its policies, and thus, since 1992, many “ethnic return migrants” (Kuscu 2008: 36- 37) have been resettled to their ethnic historic homeland. As this migration process to the country has significantly increased, many of these people have arrived back to their “historic homeland”. During the Soviet period, much of Kazakh traditional culture was sidelined, mainly Kazakh language, and some cultural elements. In other words, at that time in Kazakhstan, the society was mostly dominated by a “Russified cultural landscape” (Bhavna Dave and Peter Sinnott 2002: 5-8). To remedy this, current government ethnic immigration policies actively support Kazakhs living outside ethnic territory to return from abroad to Kazakhstan. Thus, the attraction of Kazakh ethnics “back” to Kazakhstan (regardless of whether they or their families have ever lived in the present-day territory of the recently formed nation of Kazakhstan) is one of the main components of an ethnic immigration policy intended to preserve national identity and maintain Kazakh traditional culture.

The motivation of the present study is to examine the ethnic immigration policy of Kazakhstan, and the start of the transition process, as implemented by the government since the independence of Kazakhstan in 1991, and to do research on the influence of this policy on changes of the ethno-demographic structure in Kazakhstan. The government’s ethnic immigration policy has influenced and changed the country’s ethno-demographics via the migration process to Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan’s ethnic demographic structure has largely changed according to the official statistical data (Demographics Yearbook of Kazakhstan 2008: 31): in 1989, the ethnic Kazakhs represented 39.7% of the Kazakh Republic’s population, but the Kazakh increased to over 63.1% of the population in 2009. Ethnic Kazakhs are no longer in a minority group in Kazakhstan. Otherwise, most non-titular ethnic groups (non- Kazakh or Turkic) have dominated in Kazakhstan’s Northern region bordering Russia. These groups including Russians and Germans, experienced negative population growth. Early in 1990, the slowed growth (ethnic Kazakhs) of birth rate among Kazakhs ethnics, relative to other ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. According to the latest official estimates the levels of natural growth in recent years has advanced among the ethnic Kazakh groups. The ethnic groups with the highest numbers of demographic potential in Kazakhstan were the Uzbeks (Turkic group). In 1989, there were 331 thousand Uzbeks, in 1999 - 371 thousand, and in 2009-457 thousand. (Demographics Yearbook of Kazakhstan 2008: 178). The “titular ethnic groups” dominated the regions of Southern Kazakhstan, and Western Kazakhstan, as well as the previous capital in the Almaty region.

The scope of this study is limited to the ethnic immigration policy implementation in Kazakhstan during the period of 1992-2009. I mentioned above that

early in the 1990s, a number of Russian and other ethnic groups were majority groups of population in this country. Namely, the “Russified cultural landscape” dominated at that time in this country. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Kazakhstan experienced the challenges of independence. At that time one of the important government projects (as part of “nationality policies”) (King and Mevlin 2000: 127-130; Dave and Sinnott 2000: 5-8) was to invite the largest diaspora groups of Kazakhs from abroad to return to Kazakhstan. First, one of the main aims of those first migration policies was an increase in the number of ethnic Kazakhs. Second, during that period Kazakhs were less than half the population of Kazakhstan, making this was a problematic question for the newly independent country’s demographic landscape. The Slavic ethnic half of the population experienced losses as a consequence of the large scale emigration of other ethnic groups from Kazakhstan. This out- migration process brought on a negative demographic balance, which affected the decreased numbers of the population, in the 1990s. Thus, for ethnic immigrants the first “Law on Immigration” was adopted in 1992. Following this law on immigration, a new law was written in 1997, and later amended in 2002. The latest government policy for ethnic immigrants was launched on January 1, 2009.

Data and Methodology

This study used a “literature analysis method” in order to investigate how the ethnic migration process is influencing in social and demographical effects, like policy-orientation of Kazakh migrants and demographic changes related to the ethnic immigration. This thesis examines these policy implications by studying previous relevant studies published on this topic since independence, as in scholarly books, and journal articles and also used electronic reports and news portals as a source for the migration process on Kazakh ethnic immigration. This study uses literature analysis and considers previous scholars dissertations and academic articles. Most of the materials in this research are taken from electronic data from the Human Development Reports, and the Official Statistic data of the National Statistic Agency and the Committee on Migrants. Recently in Kazakhstan, the migration issues in Kazakhstan are most important as the term implies, this is research based on describing the past.

In addition, I did an extensive study of previous scholars’ articles and policy documents, and I developed field experience in this specialty by working as a research assistant for researchers Cynthia Werner and Holly Barcus on their Mongolian-Kazakh migration project. This was done in Western Mongolia in Bayan-Ulgii and Khovd provinces between the summers of 2006-2009. During this experience, I participated in formal and informal meetings, interviews and questionnaires with rural urban Kazakh ethnics as well as return migrants (about

60,000–70,000 Kazakhs moved from Mongolia to Kazakhstan in the 1990s, and possibly 10,000–20,000 returned again to Mongolia by the early 2000s). Our research was concentrated with this migration population as well as with non-migrants, and accomplished through observation of their daily life and migration decision-making process.

Government Immigration Policy

The Migration law of Kazakhstan has been under government consideration since 1992. The Kazakhstan government adopted the first “Law on Immigration” (Koshi Khon Turali Zan) in 1992, a law which provided a legal framework for the migration of the ethnic Kazakh migrants. The law was an attempt to imitate the German and Israeli “Open Door” (Kazak- Ashik Esik) migration policies. Likewise, the “Law on Immigration” has provided extraordinary quota systems for ethnic Kazakh immigrants. The resettlement of ethnic immigrants is controlled by adjusting that immigration quota. Many ethnic Kazakh households move to Kazakhstan first, and “then apply for oralman status after getting settled” (Barcus and Werner 2010: 218). The first phase years since Kazakhstan’s independence were seen as complicated years for ethnic migrants to return to the “historical homeland” (Barcus and Werner 2007: 9). After 1992, many people pertaining to Slavic ethnic group have emigrated from Kazakhstan. Therefore, the overall population has decreased. While the estimated Kazakhstan population was 16.5 million as of 1992, this number has decreased to 15 million in 1999 (Kazakstan Fsihrah 1991-2008”, 2009: 12). In accordance with the 1992 “Law on Migration,” most ethnic migrants had resettled due to “five year work contracts” (Diener 2003: 114, Barcus and Cynthia 2010: 218). In other words, they possessed a citizenship-type status of the host country throughout the first five years of resettlement. Diener mentioned regarding the citizenship problems of the diasporic migrants: “lack of Kazakhstan’s citizenship (is part) of the problem with material support as to their integration into Kazakhstan society.” (Diener 2003: 270) For instance, ten thousand (10 000) migrants returned to Mongolia from Kazakhstan after termination of work contracts. Therefore, that problematic issue in citizenship status was the basis for the refinement of the law on migration, which mainly aimed at regulating the citizenship status of oralman migrants and thus the country’s demographic stability. Between 1992 and 1997, immigrants’ citizen status was unclear, and their status was at most a five year labor contract for oralman migrants. But, after finishing that five year contract, government provisions amended new laws, making oralman “eligible for citizenship”.

The “Law on Immigration,” adopted on 13 December 1997, which was later amended in 2002, the next legal framework regulating migration in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The main purpose of the new migration policy was to manage migration processes in order to achieve sustainable demographic development,

strengthen public security and to create conditions for the realization of the rights of migrants and “define legal, economic and social principles of the migration processes likewise those required for the creation of necessary living conditions at a new place for oralmans.” (Kazakhstan 1997: 4-5, Article No. 9)

The 1997 law also favors restrictive laws on citizenship and migration. These laws are more restrictive because government made the incentives for migration less attractive and this is why the law was more restrictive than earlier about labor contracts. Kazakhstan’s 1997 law on population immigration suggests that ethnic migrants are people of Kazakh ethnicity; they can attain many benefits (quota for oralmans) but unless specifically applying for citizenship, they are excluded from citizenship benefits (Kazakhstan 1997: Article- 3; Article -27).

However, the Kazakh diasporans attempting to migrate to Kazakhstan still have been confronting some difficulties. Oralman immigrants returning to their historic homeland are faced with a large set of problems, such as “socio-cultural adaptation” as well as issues of “civil- legal environment.” (Diener 2005a: 330-331) Although the Kazakhstan government aims to provide different benefits and values for returners, these benefits are not enough for starting and adapting to new and higher priced life conditions. One of the big problems faced by ethnic migrants is language skills. Until now Kazakhstan has had two official languages Russian and Kazakh language. Lack of Russian language skills is one of the common barriers for ethnic Kazakhs hunting for jobs without Russian language knowledge, but with ambition, aspiration, and education (Lillis 2009: 1-2). Immigrants from Turkey, China and Mongolia have not been good enough in Russian language; hence, they may find it difficult to get professional jobs or their children may have difficulties in studying.

The above problems become the main reason for a discussion of a new policy program. The Migration Policy Program of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2001-2009 was approved by the government in August 2000. This policy program was comprised of two implementation phases: mid-term, which covers the time period from 2001 to 2005 and long-term, spanning from 2006 to 2009. The central objective of the program was the development of the migration process in the economic growth of the country, by further improving the legal, economic, social bases, and providing the conditions necessary for the realization of the rights of migrants. The main activity in the medium term (2001 - 2005) in the field of immigration was the prevention of illegal migration and facilitating the return of oralman to the Republic of Kazakhstan (Government Program 2001.10.29. N1371).

Finally, the latest policy program on migration was launched on January 1, 2009, by the Kazakh government. The policy was entitled “Nurly Kosh”, which means “blessed migration” and designed for the period of 2009-2011 (Lillis, 2009: 1-2; Enbek 2008/ 12). Previous government migration policies had focused on bringing only ethnic Kazakh people to the historic homeland. The last legal framework

on migration was advantageous over the previous ones, because it was directed not only to ethnic Kazakh migrants, but also to other overall participants of the immigration process. This ethnic migration program is designed to re-locate migrants to rural and under-populated regions by providing incentives such as low-interest loans to buy land or housing, and employment opportunities, in order to contribute to the development of the particular area (Russian ethnic dominated area, mostly in Northern region) of Kazakhstan to which they are sent (Lillis, Joanna, 2009/02 26).

According to the “Nuly Kosh” program, it has focused on “pulling three groups” of migrants: first, about 4.5 million ethnic Kazakhs living in foreign countries within the annual ethnic immigration quota for oralmans, and second, “skilled former citizens” who arrived for work as part of the annual quota for foreign labor to work on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Third, citizens living in disadvantaged regions are attracted based on a quota for resettlement of internal migrants (Lillis 2009: 1-2). According to this program, “rational resettlement” is on a voluntary basis by ethnic Kazakhs. This includes compatriots living abroad and Kazakh citizens living in disadvantaged regions of the country, who are needed for the demographic and socio-regional economic development, and the self- realization of potential participants. In this Project, participants of the migration program and their families, in co-moving to the resettlement areas, will be eligible to receive social support which is differentiated by categories and zones of settlement. However, these rules and regulations are still not fulfilled accurately and totally. Of course initially, unemployment was a difficult situation for many new comers. Until today, many teachers, doctors, engineers, technicians and scientific workers, and most immigrants are jobless. Some of the remainder herd livestock, most do trade, and others are left unemployed. One fact causing this unemployment is the language issue, where Kazakh immigrants often do not speak Russian, the lingua franca of Kazakhstan life. But even though there are some difficulties and problems that need to be resolved, we can conclude that this migration process has added much to Kazakhstan’s ethnic diversity, population increase, language, culture, tradition and spirit of daily life. Additionally, since this migration process is a new phenomenon in the 20th and 21st centuries, it has taken time to consider and much experience has been gained.

Implementation of Immigration Policies

The ethnic immigration policy of Kazakhstan can be studied as three phases in three different time periods. The first phase was after independence, during the years 1991-1996, the second phase between the years 1997- 2002, and the third phase which started from 2003 until the present (Barcus and Werner 2010: 216).

In the first period on 29-30 September in 1992, the first World Kazakh As-

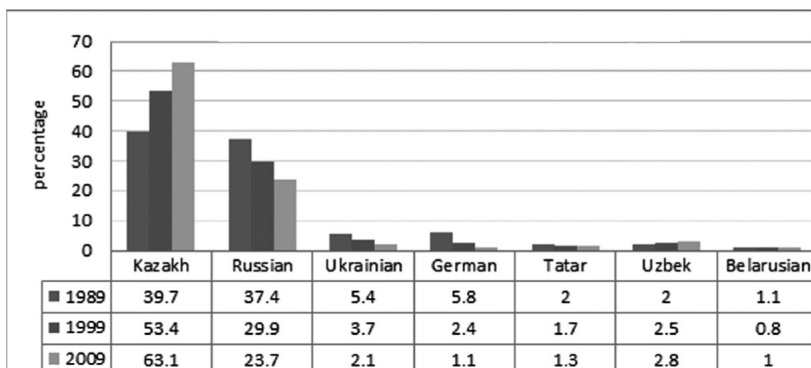
sociation political meeting was held in Almaty. This meeting highly supported cultural and traditional values by the government and the ones who were welcoming the immigrants were strongly supportive of leadership. Two thirds of all migration took place in the first five years of the first phase.

The second phase which was between 1997-2002, was a very difficult period for Kazakhstan. The economy of the country slowed down, energy and oil resources were inadequate. Government subsidies were shortened and thus the agriculture and other sectors were affected negatively. The labor force in rural areas moved to the cities and there were high levels of unemployment. The number of oralmans in 1997 was four times less than the number of immigrants in 1991, and three times less than the number in 1993.

The third phase (2003- present) however, immigrants attempting to migrate to Kazakhstan confronted some difficulties such as issues of housing and job opportunities and “civil- legal environment.” Although the government aims to provide benefits, these benefits are not enough for starting and adapting to new and higher priced life conditions. Thus, the government promises sound attractive to diasporans wishing to improve their quality of life.

The implementation of migration policy is linked to sustainable economic development and economic growth, as well as to the positive population balance. The ethnic composition has undergone significant changes in the last 19 years due to the implementation of ethnic immigration policies. It shows the ethnic composition of the ethnic population of Kazakhstan (16.860 million) in 1989 was as follows: Kazakhs - 39.7%, Russian - 37.4%, Ukrainians 5.4%, Uzbeks - 2.0%, Germans - 5.8%, Tatars - 2.0%, Uyghur and Belarusians, Koreans and Azeri's, Poles, Turks and other ethnic groups- 4.5% (see Figure 1)

Figure 1. Ethnic component 2009 (percentage)



Source: Data 1989-1999 from Bhavna, Dave and Peter Sinnott, 2002. “Demographic and Language Politics in the 1999 Kazakhstan Census,” p.22., Data 2009 from “Demographics Yearbook of Kazakhstan 2008,” 2009. The Agency of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, p. 31.

Most ethnic immigrants arrived in Kazakhstan from Commonwealth of Independent State countries including Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. Throughout 1992, the World Kazakh Association signed bilateral agreements with the abovementioned host states. The vice chairman of the World Kazakh Association, Talgat Mamashev (2009 /01/10) has declared that Kazakhstan has received more than 700 thousand ethnic immigrants from 1991 to 2009, who obtained permission for permanent residence and citizenship in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan's government has planned to "receive about 5 million more ethnic Kazakhs from host countries" (Marat Yermukanov 2005: 18).

Although ethnic immigrants are facing some problems, the migration flow continues because of several reasons. First, the government promises sound attractive opportunities to many diasporans wishing to improve their quality of life. Next, government offers promising job opportunities, especially in the agriculture, mining and construction industries.

Many of Kazakhstan's ethnics are dispersed over more than 40 countries and have returned to their historical homeland in the years of independence since 1991. Today, many ethnic immigrants have become full members of Kazakhstan's society, which is evident in the results of the implementation of the migration policies.

Conclusion

The immigration policy was changed many times by the Kazakhstan government between 1992-2009, mainly in response to the rise of new issues with migration over time, from the need for oral man to have citizenship, to the need for more and better benefits and social integration programs. Government policy also positively affected the ethnic and demographic problems of the country by increasing the population size, and contributing to culture and language revitalization. This study shows that particular government policies, as implemented on ethnic migration, can bring a country positive effects on its ethnic demographic picture. Statistical evidence from the 1992-2009 period shows that the Kazakhstani government has been successful in implementing ethnic demographic shifts through their ethnic migration programs. In 1989, the ethnic Kazakhs represented 39.7% of the Kazakh republic's population, but increased to over 63.1% of the population by 2009. Along with these changes, come challenges as seen in the native Kazakhstan resistance at times to new migrants. If such ethnic change is not welcomed by the existing population, it could result in a loss of national symbols and traditional cultural landscape, something that is dangerous to the symbols formation of a young country. In this case, results of the ethnic immigration policy have included a strengthening of the national identity and increased numbers of population. In this sense, ethnic and traditional culture have served as most important elements for supporting national identity and achieving positive

results from the Kazakhstan government's immigration policies. Ethnic immigration policy in Kazakhstan is an example of an implementation of a complex ethnic migration and repatriation program. As a consequence of the various policy changes, many ethnic immigrants were resettled in Kazakhstan. However much the ethnic immigration policies have been implemented, a large flow of immigrants always find themselves confronting some social hurdles and unexpected changes in lifestyle, in order to adapt to living in a new environment. While the latest policy change, Nurly Kosh, aims to direct attention to the need for culture and language training for new ethnic immigrants, it will remain to future research to investigate the results of this new policy change for the integration of ethnic immigrants in Kazakhstan.

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