



# Neo-Eurasianism or ethnic Kazakh nationalization

Constructing an identity in Nazarbayev's post-Soviet Kazakhstan

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## **List of abbreviations**

CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States

OSCE: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

AIFC: Astana International Financial Centre

EEU: Eurasian Economic Union

NPT: Non-Proliferation Treaty

SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organization

NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization

CSTO: Collective Security Treaty Organization

ATC: Anti-Terrorist Centre

ARA: Agency for Religious Affairs

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

## **Synopsis**

This thesis argues that, despite Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasian rhetoric, there are contradictions in the way Nazarbayev uses neo-Eurasianism as a foreign and domestic policy platform. Nazarbayev has rhetorically embraced neo-Eurasianism as a platform to establish diplomatic and economic relations with multiple partners. The Kazakhstani authorities aim for Kazakhstan to eventually become a world power, thereby preventing subordination by Russia or, in the future, China. Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasian foreign outlook legitimizes its domestic implementation. Domestically, neo-Eurasianism has been used to prevent ethnic and religious tensions in Kazakhstan. The contradictions lie in the fact that neo-Eurasianism is increasingly used as a façade, whilst the authorities implement ethnic Kazakh nationalization.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Setting the scene

In February 2014, President Nursultan Nazarbayev proposed to change the name of Kazakhstan to 'Kazakh El'. President Nazarbayev implied that the suffix 'stan' is not beneficial for the country's tourism industry, as foreigners often associate the suffix 'stan' with economic and social backwardness. According to Nazarbayev, tourists show more interest in Mongolia than in Kazakhstan due to the absence of the suffix 'stan'. Nazarbayev added that the name change would not affect the preservation of the multi-ethnic character of Kazakhstan. The initiative was criticized throughout the country, since 'Kazakh El' refers to the ethnic *Kazakh* citizen instead of the civic *Kazakhstani*. Moreover, the word 'El' translates from Kazakh as land or fatherland, which would mean that Kazakhstan would be called 'land of the (ethnic) Kazakhs'. Due to the criticism from the population, Nazarbayev retracted the idea.<sup>2</sup>

Identity and ethnicity politics have been sensitive topics in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, as it was the only state where the titular nation did not constitute a majority after the country gained independence in 1991. At that time, the ethnic Kazakhs constituted less than 40 percent of the Kazakhstani population. Ethnic strife had already led to crises in several former Soviet Union Republics and Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic composition made Kazakhstan susceptible to ethnic fraction. Domestically, Nazarbayev had to establish a clear identity policy that would both be inclusive for the 140 different ethnicities residing in Kazakhstan, whilst promoting Kazakh ethnic nationalism. Internationally, Nazarbayev believed that integration in the region and world, would be Kazakhstan's best chance to preserve its territorial integrity.

Nazarbayev has developed Neo-Eurasianism as a platform that has enabled to prevent ethnic and religious turmoil in Kazakhstan thus far. As neo-Eurasianism serves a platform which does not place emphasis on religion nor ethnicity and can therefore accommodate different ethnic and religious groups. In the geographical sense, neo-Eurasianism covers an enormous territory that offers

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<sup>2</sup> A.C., Diener, "Imagining Kazakhstani-stan. Negotiations of Homeland and Titular-Nationality", in: *Kazakhstan in the making. Legitimacy, symbols and social changes* (edited by Marlene Laruelle, 2016) 131-153, p. 131.

Nazarbayev a great variety organizations to cooperate with. Simultaneously, Nazarbayev seeks to consolidate Kazakhstan's national identity and territorial integrity.

## **1.2. Roadmap & research question**

It is contested what Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism precisely entails and if it is as ethnically and religiously inclusive as he portrays it to be. Moreover, it has been a source of debate whether Nazarbayev presents his neo-Eurasianism on the domestic level in the same way as he does on the international level. Therefore, this thesis will aim to answer to following question:

*Are there any contradictions in Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism as a domestic and foreign policy platform?*

To answer this question, I will firstly, outline the features of (neo-)Eurasianism, that is originally a Russian invention. Subsequently, I will examine the aspects of Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism. Secondly, I will analyse the domestic and international implementation of Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism by looking at Kazakhstan's participation in international organizations and the establishment of domestic institutions. Thirdly, I will analyse to what extent Nazarbayev's works and state programs show signs of ethnic Kazakh nationalization. Finally, I will analyse the ostensible contradictions between the platform of neo-Eurasianism and ethnic Kazakh nationalization and its implications for the future.

## **1.3. Preliminary sketch of the debate**

The main debate concerning the implication of neo-Eurasianism in relation to Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic composition is spearheaded by a small group of scholars. Particularly Laruelle, Dave and Cummings have examined the domestic use and implementations of neo-Eurasianism in Kazakhstan. Mostafa and Cummings have been defining Kazakhstan's 'multivector' foreign policy as a pragmatic foreign policy course to establish to most beneficial relations with several partners.

## **1.4. Methodology**

The primary material of this thesis will comprise three of Nazarbayev's books and several state programs. I have chosen those works that were accessible online, judging their utility by the synopsis.

Nazarbayev's repertoire consists of dozens of books, of which I will use three. Namely, *In the stream of history* (1999), *Epicenter of peace* (2001) and *The Kazakhstan way* (2008). In my view, these books are most relevant to Nazarbayev's ideas on the construction of a Kazakh(stani) identity. Concerning the state programs, I will scrutinize the Strategy «Kazakhstan 2030» (1997), the National Unity Doctrine (2008), Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» (2012), the Constitution of Kazakhstan (amended in 2017) and the program on Spiritual Revival (2017).

### **1.5. Restrictions**

The restrictions of this thesis mostly concern language. Several of Nazarbayev's works were not accessible online in English and some of his new programs on repatriation policy have only been available in Kazakh. Since Nazarbayev is placing greater emphasis on the revival of the Kazakh language, the knowledge of Kazakh, especially in the field of the growing importance of the National-Patriots, will be a valuable asset in follow-up research to this thesis.

## 2. Eurasianism

### 2.1. Russian Eurasianism: History and ideology

The origin of the Eurasianist idea can be traced back to the nineteenth century and is based on the ideas of Slavophiles that started thinking about Russia's Asian character.<sup>3</sup> This was a reaction to geopolitical events and the growing hegemony of European influence on the social, political and cultural level. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War (1854-1856) and Russia's Eastward expansion in the nineteenth century instigated Slavophil intellectuals to redefine the Russian identity. Slavophiles such as Vladimir Lamansky (1833-1914), Pëtr Chaadaev (1794-1856) Konstantin Leontiev (1831-1891) began to search for the Asian part of the Russian identity. Lamansky and Leontiev redefined the legacy of the Mongol rule, Russia's relationship with Turkic and Mongol nomads and Russia's attitude towards the influence of national minorities on the Russian identity. These Russian Slavophiles argued that the Russian empire was not situated at the cultural periphery of Europe, but stood at the centre of civilization.<sup>4</sup>

As a response to the downfall of the Russian empire in 1917, several Russian Eurasianists such as Nikolai Trubetskoi (1890-1938), Peter Savitsky (1895-1968) and Peter Suvchinsky (1892-1985) fled to Western Europe. There they shaped the Eurasian idea as an intellectual movement. Only after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eurasianism developed as a *weltanschauung* and as a political movement. The Eurasianists in the beginning of the Soviet period such as Trubetskoi and Savitsky highlighted, just as the Slavophiles of the nineteenth century, the Asian influences on the Russian identity.<sup>5</sup> These Asian influences were a result of Russia's ethnic diversity and geographic location on the Eurasian continent.<sup>6</sup> Eurasianist thinkers such as Savitsky challenged the Russian mainstream historiography which claims that the Mongol rule was only destructive for Russia. Instead, Savitsky argues that the Mongol rule protected Russia from the encroachment of Western religious ideology.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> M., Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism. An ideology of Empire* (Washington 2008), 2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> D.V., Schlapentokh, "Eurasianism. Past and present", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (1997) 129-151, p. 130.

<sup>6</sup> Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 19.

<sup>7</sup> P., Savitsky, *The geographical and geopolitical foundations of Eurasianism* (1933).

Another important characteristic of Eurasianism is that it challenges the ideas of the centrality of Euro-Atlanticism. Eurasianists portray(ed) the world as a ceaseless opposition between the civilizations of the Euro-Atlantic and the Asian world. Thus Eurasianists saw Asia and Europe as important, but more important was Russia's position in the middle of both poles. Which brings me to the final aspect, which concerns geography and culture that form central concepts in the ideology of Eurasianism. According to Eurasianists, "Russia-Eurasia" is geographically located in the middle-world. Russia's cultural development is inherently linked to this geographical position in the centre of both continents.<sup>8</sup>

In a collection of essays called *Exodus to the East*, Savitsky, Trubetskoi and others portrayed Eurasianism as the foundation of the state, which should form its outlook to the world. The climate and geography shape the internal dynamic of the nation, the structure of its society and the economic and political organization of its people.<sup>9</sup> The state has an important role in the preservation of the culture of the nation. In order to preserve the Eurasian unity, Eurasianists argue, one single central authority had to be created which was based on geographical and economic autarky.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they agreed power belongs only to those who master the philosophy of Eurasian history.<sup>11</sup> Shlapentokh states that the Eurasianist Vsevolod Ivanov's (1895-1963) belief in the importance of the dissolution of one's personality for the collective had totalitarian connotations. Ivanov admired the spirituality in Asian cultures and the willingness to sacrifice one's life for the glory of the state. According to Schlapentokh, Ivanov thereby implicitly praised totalitarianism. Ivanov, not mentioning the term totalitarianism, believed that a strong collective ensured the state a prominent position in the world community.<sup>12</sup> Laruelle underlines that due to the central geographical position of the Eurasian steppe,

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Schlapentokh, "Eurasianism. Past and present", 131.

Savitsky, *The Geographical and Geopolitical foundations of Eurasianism*.

<sup>10</sup> A., Titov, "Lev Gumilev, Ethnogenesis and Eurasianism", University College London (School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies 2005), 186.

<sup>11</sup> Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Schlapentokh, "Eurasianism. Past and present", 134.

the Eurasianists perceive the imperial form of political organization the only suitable one. Any other form of political organization is doomed to fail.<sup>13</sup>

## **2.2. Russian neo-Eurasianism**

### **2.2.1. Lev Gumilev**

When it comes to geography and culture, it is impossible to leave out Lev Gumilev (1912-1992), who is considered to be one of the most important Eurasianists. Gumilev spent almost twenty years (from 1938 till 1956) in Soviet labour camps. He perceived his time in captivity as an inspiration as he came up with his theories on ethnic groups and even wrote parts of his book *Ethnogenesis and the biosphere*. It is difficult to estimate the extent to which the Eurasianists of the 1920s have influenced Gumilev. Laruelle claims that Gumilev only had limited access to books of these Eurasianists and certain claims that they could have met in person, have not been verified. It is likely that Gumilev has been influenced to some extent since there are several similarities between the perceptions of the 1920s Eurasianists and Gumilev. He, however, has developed his own concept that comprises the mutual influence of geography and culture on a society or community: the *topogenesis*.<sup>14</sup> Both Gumilev and the Eurasianists of the 1920s acknowledge the historic role of the nomads in Russia's history. As Russia's interaction with the steppe nomads, including the Mongol rule, protected Russia from Catholic Western influence and even consolidated the Russian culture.

On the field of culture, Eurasianism is an inclusive ideology. For it incorporates all cultures, religions and nationalities on the Euro-Asian landmass. These cultures are not hierarchically arranged and therefore neither superior nor inferior to each other. Laruelle states that Eurasianists seem to perceive miscegenation as an asset for society since there are no relevant genetic differences between peoples or nations. Eurasianists such as Gumilev aspired the creation of a Eurasian state which would be a combination of nations united through a broader Pan-Eurasian nationalism. Gumilev, who referred to himself as "the last of the Eurasianists", has been a great influence for neo-Eurasianists philosophers and politicians.

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<sup>13</sup> Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

### 2.2.2. Aleksandr Dugin

Even though Eurasianism entails elements of multinationalism and cultural diversity, it has shown tendencies of Russo-centrism. One of the most well-known Russian neo-Eurasianists is Aleksandr Dugin (b. 1962). At age 26, Dugin joined the ultra-nationalist group *Pamiat'* (Memory) led by Dmitri Vasiliev.<sup>15</sup> The following year, Dugin left *Pamiat'* as the result of an unclear conflict with Vasiliev. After that, Dugin drew closer to the Communist Party of Gennady Zyuganov and was a contributor to the ultra-nationalist newspaper *Den'* (Day).<sup>16</sup> In the 2000s Dugin's political influence grew after his publication of *The foundation of geopolitics: Russia's geopolitical future* (1997) which was used as a textbook on numerous institutions of higher education in Russia.<sup>17</sup> He also became closely involved with Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal-Democratic Party (LDPR) until he founded the movement *Evrasiia* in 2001. The following year this movement was transformed into a political party that did not aim to achieve power, "but to influence power".<sup>18</sup>

Dugin is known for his ultra-nationalists ideas. In 2005, Dugin founded the Eurasian Youth Union which, together with the National Bolsheviks, participates in the annual Russian Marches on Russia's Unity Day. These marches are often accompanied with violence and participants have been spotted carrying Nazi symbols.<sup>19</sup> Dugin's ideas on ethnicity are often perceived as ultra-nationalist or fascist. In his book *The fourth political theory* (2012) Dugin writes about the preservation of the purity of each ethnicity. Miscegenation of the masses, he claims, is dangerous for the preservation of a civilization or ethnicity.<sup>20</sup>

Dugin sees a special role for Russia in the Eurasian space not only in the cultural sphere, but also in the religious sphere. Dugin states that Christian-Orthodoxy plays an important role in the Eurasian space. Dugin is a regular guest at the Orthodox television channel *Spas* and often refers to Moscow as the Third Rome. Even though Dugin recognizes Russia's Asian parts as geographically

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<sup>15</sup> A., Umland, "Alexander Dugin and Moscow's new right radical intellectual circles at the start of Putin's third presidential term (2012-2013). The anti-Orange committee, the Izborsk club and the Florian Geyer club in their political context", *Europolity*, Vol, 10, No. 2 (2016) 7-31, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 109.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>19</sup> X, "На Русском Марше в Москве задержали 30 человек, Телеканал Дождь (4.11.2013).

<sup>20</sup> Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 140.

Asian, he still perceives these areas rather as Russian rather than Asian. Hence, Dugin's focus lies on the Russian aspects of Eurasianism and the ideology seems merely a rejection of the Eurocentricity than a genuine interest in the Steppe or Asia proper.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, Dugin is a fervent opponent of Western hegemony in the cultural and political sphere. He denounces the unitary understanding of the rigid Western concept of "modernity" and states that every civilization has its own understanding and cycle towards modernity.<sup>22</sup> He also states that Russia has to follow its own path. In his book *The fourth political theory*, Dugin outlines Russia's path to modernity and offers an alternative to the unipolar world of Euro-Atlanticism.<sup>23</sup> He divides the world in 'four poles', three of which counterbalance the fourth pole of Euro-Atlanticism. One of the 'poles' would be the Russian-Central Asian pole.

In his work *The foundation of geopolitics*, Dugin states that the borders in Central Asia should be reconstructed according to race. This means Central Asia should be divided into the three following geopolitical areas: Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Secondly, the deserts of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and mountains of Kyrgyzstan. Thirdly, Central Kazakhstan, which is the area south of the 50<sup>th</sup> Parallel. The areas north of the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel should completely integrate with South Ural and South Siberia.<sup>24</sup> This would imply that according to the new geopolitical Eurasian order of Dugin, the areas north of Karaganda (including the new capital Astana) would belong geopolitically and culturally to southern Russia.<sup>25</sup> Dugin explains that the functional creation of the administrative borders during the Soviet Union did not take into account ethnicity, culture or religion which has resulted in today's issues in Crimea, Chechnya and Kazakhstan.<sup>26</sup>

Not surprisingly, Dugin was criticized in the late 1990s by the Eurasianist Center, founded by Nazarbayev as part of the Lev Gumilev Eurasianist University in Astana, for his ideas in *The*

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> A.G., Dugin, *The Fourth political theory* (Budapest - Arktos Media 2012), 137.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>24</sup> A.G., Dugin, *Основы геополитики. Геополитическое будущее России* (1997), 202.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 116.

*foundation of geopolitics* about Kazakhstan.<sup>27</sup> Not only does Dugin state the northern parts of Kazakhstan should be incorporated into Russia's geopolitical sphere, he also implies that Kazakhstan's northern borders after 1991 have no ethnic, cultural or religious foundation. However, in 2004, Dugin published the book *The Eurasian mission of Nursultan Nazarbayev* in which he lauds Nazarbayev's ideas and portrays him as an excellent statesman.<sup>28</sup> Nazarbayev has not given any official response to the book, but after the publication Dugin visited Kazakhstan several times and was interviewed by among others *Khabar* news channel, which is owned by Nazarbayev's daughter Dariga Nazarbayeva. Dugin has propagated his trips to Kazakhstan and Belarus in the framework of his Eurasian Movement and claimed to have influenced Nazarbayev in favour of a stronger economic integration with Russia.<sup>29</sup> He asked Nazarbayev to chair the Supreme Council of the International Eurasian Movement in 2003. To which no known response has come from the latter.<sup>30</sup>

Despite Nazarbayev's decision to change the alphabet, to which I will turn in chapter 5.2, Dugin's opinion about Nazarbayev as an excellent statesman and brain behind the original idea to found the Eurasian Union, has remained unchanged.<sup>31</sup> From Nazarbayev's side, no reference to Dugin has appeared. Which is not strange considering his geopolitical ideas about Kazakhstan. Instead, Nazarbayev has formulated his own version of neo-Eurasianism, which features I will outline in the following chapter.

### **2.3. Neo-Eurasianism**

Before defining Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism, it is important to shortly sketch the geopolitical and domestic situation of Kazakhstan after the collapse of the Soviet Union. I already mentioned that the ethnic Kazakhs were outnumbered by the Slavic population (Russian, Ukrainian and Belarussian) in 1989. The Kazakhstani population consisted of 39 percent ethnic Kazakh and roughly 45 percent was Slavic. Kazakhstan's demography has changed in favour of the ethnic Kazakhs that constituted

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<sup>27</sup> Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 178.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 179.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 113

<sup>30</sup> M., Laruelle, "Aleksandr Dugin: A Russian Version of the European Radical Right?", *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars* (occasional paper #294) 1-26, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> X, "Казахстан. Евразийская интеграция или латинца?", *Geopolitika.ru* (27.10.2017).

roughly 70 percent of the population in 2017. This change has been largely due to the high birth rate among ethnic Kazakhs and the continuing emigration of Russians. The majority of the Slavic population still lives in the northern *oblasti* of the country.<sup>32</sup>

Thus far expressions of Russian nationalists such as Vladimir Zhirinovskiy about Kazakhstan's sovereignty and Dugin's ideas about the redistribution of northern Kazakhstan, have caused anxiety amongst ethnic Kazakhs.<sup>33</sup> Even though Russia acknowledged Kazakhstan's sovereignty within its existing borders in 1992, a survey from 1999 shows that more than thirty percent of the ethnic Kazakhs perceived Russia as the principal threat to Kazakhstan's sovereignty.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the economies of Kazakhstan and Russia were completely interdependent in 1991. Kazakhstan has huge resources of oil and gas, but most of its pipelines run through Russia. Additionally, Kazakhstan is a landlocked country and has Russia and China as powerful neighbours. This complicates transportation routes and makes Kazakhstan rely on its immediate neighbours for security.<sup>35</sup>

### **2.3.1. Nazarbayev and neo-Eurasianism**

At Moscow State University in 1994, Nazarbayev presented his idea to found an Union of Eurasian States. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, Nazarbayev had pressed with Yeltsin and other CIS leaders for a supranational successor of the Soviet Union. Nazarbayev believed that economic and political integration would be the best chance for Kazakhstan's and the region's stability. In this framework, Nazarbayev initiated the establishment of an Eurasian union. However, except for the Georgian president Shevardnadze and Kyrgyz president Akayev, this idea found no widespread interest among the CIS leaders.<sup>36</sup> Other CIS leaders saw an Eurasian union as a way for Russia to re-establish power over the region. After the former Soviet states gained independence, they were wary of going back to the possibility of centralized control by Moscow. However, after several

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<sup>32</sup> E., Uatkhanov, "Kazakhstan population reaches 18 million", *The Astana Times* (4.07.2017).

<sup>33</sup> X, Самые громкие высказывания Владимира Жириновского о Казахстане, *Караван* (14.07.16).

<sup>34</sup> S., Cummings, "Eurasian bridge or murky waters between east and west? Ideas, identity and output in Kazakhstan's foreign policy", *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2003) 139-155, p. 149.

<sup>35</sup> M., Clarke, "Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy: diminishing returns in an era of great power "pivots"?", *The ASAN Forum* at Australian National University (April 2015).

<sup>36</sup> M., Brill-Olcott, *Kazakhstan. Unfulfilled promise* (Washington 2000, revised 2010), 40.  
Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 177.

years several post-Soviet states realized that they could not develop successfully in the region or world on their own. Their economies inherited very little and previous economic ties no longer existed. The Eurasian Economic Community founded in Astana in 2000, could offer the countries integration in the post-Soviet space.<sup>37</sup> In 2015, more than 20 years after Nazarbayev's presentation at Moscow State University, Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan became members of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Nazarbayev sees a special role for Kazakhstan in the Eurasian economic and cultural space. He has written over twenty books about the history and future of Kazakhstan and the Kazakh people. Through history writing and Kazakhstan's geographical location, Nazarbayev justifies the central role that Kazakhstan should take in the Eurasian space. Nazarbayev started publishing books since independence and in 1999 he published a book about the history of the Kazakhs on the Eurasian continent. In this book, *In the stream of history*, he emphasizes the influence of the nomads on the cultures and people of the Eurasian continent. Nazarbayev implies that without the nomads the cultures of East and West would have never met.

Nazarbayev not only uses history writing to seek legitimization for Kazakhstan to take on a leading position in the Eurasian space, his works also serve to construct a Kazakh identity on the domestic level. Nazarbayev lauds the Kazakh nomad culture and the works of the Kazakh poets and historians such as Shoqan Valikhanov (1835-1865) and Abai Qunanbaiuly (1845-1904). With that he rejects the notion that the Soviets brought culture to the steppe. In *In the stream of history*, Nazarbayev states that "The Kazakh ethnicity has been formed over centuries and was not brought to the Kazakh soil by colonialism. It has been influenced though, from all wind directions".<sup>38</sup> Nazarbayev stresses that "it is insulting if people think that Kazakhs have to thank totalitarianism for the bringing of culture". It is not clear to whom Nazarbayev refers to with "people".<sup>39</sup> It seems as if Nazarbayev mentions Kazakh poets and writers to prove there was such a thing as Kazakh culture, an intelligentsia

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<sup>37</sup> A., Yesdauletova and A., Yesdauletov, "The Eurasian Union: dynamics and difficulties of the post-Soviet integration", *L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University and Columbia University in Trames* Vol. 18, No. 1 (2014) 3-17, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> N.A., Nazarbayev, *In the stream of history* (1999), 25.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 165.

and a literary tradition before the Russians and Soviets came. With that, he justifies and implies that Kazakhstan and the Kazakh people are capable to take up a leading position in the Eurasian space.

When it comes to neo-Eurasianism, Nazarbayev has largely developed his own ideas. Nazarbayev does not refer in his works to the Russian emigrés in the nineteenth or twentieth century nor to Dugin. The neo-Eurasian influence on Nazarbayev has remained limited to two people. Firstly, Lev Gumilev, who highly valued the role of the steppe nomads in history. In 1996, Nazarbayev renamed the Akmola institute to Lev Gumilev Eurasian University. Secondly, the Kazakh writer of the late Soviet period, Olzhas Suleimenov (b. 1936). He and Nazarbayev were on good terms until Suleimenov politically confronted Nazarbayev by becoming a possibly candidate in the presidential elections scheduled for 1996. After independence, Suleimenov was a strong advocate for a confederation of Kazakhstan and Russia, the existence of two state languages (Kazakh and Russian) and internationalism after independence. Consequently, Suleimenov was openly criticized by his fellow Kazakh writers and side-lined by people from within the government who condemned him for his un-patriotic stance. When Suleimenov wanted to become a candidate for the 1996 elections, which Nazarbayev managed to dodge and postpone to 2000, Nazarbayev designated Suleimenov as Kazakhstan's ambassador to Italy.<sup>40</sup>

Nazarbayev does refer in his works, such as *In the stream of history*, to Suleimenov in the framework of his ecological activism and linguistic ideas on the development of the Turkic languages.<sup>41</sup> Suleimenov's influence on Nazarbayev, however, has been limited to the linguistic field. Suleimenov distances himself from the Russo-centricity of Russian Eurasianism. Russian Eurasianists, except for Gumilev, did not emphasize the role of the Central Asian steppes as much as Suleimenov and Nazarbayev do. Suleimenov emphasizes the influence of the Central Asian Turkic languages on the historic-linguistic development of Slavic languages. With this Suleimenov states that the Slavic language did not influence the steppe languages, but that it actually went the other way around. The nomads roamed the steppe and brought the Turkic culture and language to the European and Asian continents. By emphasizing the role of the Turkic language in the Eurasian space, Suleimenov rejects

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<sup>40</sup> Dave, *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, language and power* (Abingdon 2007), 105.

<sup>41</sup> N.A., Nazarbayev, *Epicenter of peace* (2001), 60.

the importance of the Russian language.<sup>42</sup> Nazarbayev has used Suleimenov's arguments in *In the stream of history*, but they remain limited to the linguistic field.

### 2.3.2. Scholarly debate

It seems that Nazarbayev himself has developed the definition and implementations of his neo-Eurasianism both domestically as internationally.<sup>43</sup> Laruelle states that the reception of Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism by the Kazakhstani population is difficult to indicate due to a lack of sociological studies.<sup>44</sup> According to Mostafa, the concept of neo-Eurasianism is not well understood by the public at large.<sup>45</sup> Several scholars such as Laruelle, Cummings, Mostafa and Olcott characterized Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism. These scholars identify two key aspects in the academic discussion on the "underlying goals" of neo-Eurasianism.<sup>46</sup> Firstly, Nazarbayev uses neo-Eurasianism to establish and consolidate domestic ethnic harmony. Secondly, he uses neo-Eurasianism as a framework for regional and international integration.

Laruelle regards neo-Eurasianism as a framework to implement Kazakh nationalism on the domestic level and consolidate Kazakhstan's geopolitical position in the region.<sup>47</sup> In the modernization program Strategy «Kazakhstan 2030» (1997), Nazarbayev stressed that Kazakhstan will develop and consolidate relations with Russia, China, Central Asia, the Near and Middle East and the West.<sup>48</sup> Laruelle states that Nazarbayev pursues a pragmatic and economically based neo-Eurasianism. Cummings also uses the word 'pragmatic', but with regard to Kazakhstan's foreign policy outlook. Due to Kazakhstan's geographical position and multi-ethnic composition, the establishment of good neighbourly relations is the only possible foreign policy strategy for Kazakhstan.<sup>49</sup> Consequently, she

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<sup>42</sup> H., Ram, "Imagining Eurasia: The poetics and ideology of Olzhas Suleimenov's AZ I IA", *Slavic Review* Vol. 60, No. 2 (2001) 289-311, p. 296.

<sup>43</sup> Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 177.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

<sup>45</sup> G., Mostafa, "The concepts of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian policy and its implications", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 4 (2013) 160-170, p. 165.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 160.

<sup>47</sup> Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 182.

<sup>48</sup> N.A., Nazarbayev, "The Strategy «Kazakhstan 2030», Prosperity, security and security and ever growing welfare of all the Kazakhstanis" (1998).

<sup>49</sup> Cummings, "Eurasian bridge or murky waters between east and west?", 148.

argues, Kazakhstan's foreign policy outlook is not ideologically motivated but pragmatic.<sup>50</sup> Olcott and Mostafa emphasize that Kazakhstan uses its geographical position to consolidate and balance relations with all major actors in the region and even in the world.<sup>51</sup>

In the following chapter, I will compare Russian and Kazakh (neo-)Eurasianism. Subsequently, I will briefly discuss Nazarbayev's youth and Soviet career before I elucidate how Nazarbayev has implemented neo-Eurasianism as a platform to promote international integration and preserve domestic stability in Kazakhstan.

### **2.3.3 Nazarbayev's Neo-Eurasianism *vis-à-vis* Russian (neo-)Eurasianism**

Several differences and similarities exist between Russian neo-Eurasianism and Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism. The most important similarities are, firstly, that both Nazarbayev and the Russian Eurasianists such as Dugin view the Eurasian space as neither European nor Asian, but as a space with distinctive features of its own. Nazarbayev states that Kazakhstan's location on the Eurasian space has shaped the Kazakh culture and its unique characteristics. Secondly, supporters of both neo-Eurasianisms give a messianic role to the titular nation it represents. Russian neo-Eurasianism presents the Russians as first among equals. Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism, despite its multinational approach on the domestic and international level, tends to elevate the position of the ethnic Kazakhs. This corresponds with the third and final similarity, which is that both Russian neo-Eurasianists and Nazarbayev use neo-Eurasianism to justify the geopolitical position of the respective country in the Eurasian space.

Two main characteristics keep returning in Nazarbayev's vision on Kazakhstan as a Eurasian country. Firstly, Nazarbayev emphasizes Kazakhstan as an economic and cultural bridge between East and West. Secondly, due to Kazakhstan's location on the Eurasian space, the country has managed to preserve its stable multi-ethnic composition.<sup>52</sup>

As was mentioned, besides similarities also several differences between Russian (neo-)Eurasianism and Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism exist. Firstly, classical Russian Eurasianists and neo-

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 140.

<sup>51</sup> Mostafa, "The concepts of 'Eurasia'", 166. Olcott, *Kazakhstan. Unfulfilled promise*, 48.

<sup>52</sup> Nazarbayev, *In the stream of history*, 91.

Eurasianists such as Dugin, often negatively perceive the West. In chapter 2.1, I have outlined that classical Eurasianism was a response and alternative to Eurocentrism. Nazarbayev, however, has never portrayed his neo-Eurasianism as contradictory to Eurocentrism or Euro-Atlanticism. Instead, he presents Kazakhstan as the promotor of peace on world level and aims to reach peaceful cooperation with both the Western world and the Asian world. In this framework, Nazarbayev has proudly presented Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship in 2010 and the chairmanship of the Islamic Conference in 2011. The Foreign Policy Research Department of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies states that with the engagement of Kazakhstan in the Islamic Conference the dialogue between the Islamic world and the West can be strengthened and promoted.<sup>53</sup> Whereas Dugin's neo-Eurasianism seems to be in constant conflict with the Euro-Atlantic world, Kazakhstan clearly aims to remain on good terms with both East and West.

Secondly, Nazarbayev states that the Kazakh people are the embodiment of the centuries of cultural exchange on the Eurasian continent. Nazarbayev claims Kazakhs are the fruit of Eurasia which has resulted in Kazakh characteristics such as tolerance and openness towards other cultures. This, for example, becomes clear in the way the Kazakhstani government has presented Kazakhstan's and Nazarbayev's role in the peace process in Syria. The state-run Kazakhstani media has not passed a chance to report about the accomplishments of the Astana talks on the war in Syria. In June 2017, the aide to the President Nurlan Onzhanov even published a book about Nazarbayev's efforts to reach a peaceful settlement in Syria.<sup>54</sup> However, news portals *The Guardian* and *Foreign Policy* cast their doubts on the long term results of the Astana peace process and even the state-run Kazakh news portal *The Astana Times* states there is little progress in producing a ceasefire so far.<sup>55</sup> Despite the results of

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<sup>53</sup> B., Auelbayev, "Kazakhstan Chairmanship in Organization of Islamic Conference", *Foreign Policy Research Department of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan* (date absent).

<sup>54</sup> A., Seisembayeva, "Book on Kazakh President's peacemaking initiatives presented in Astana", *International* (found via *The Astana Times*) (01.07.2017).

<sup>55</sup> R., Dubin., "A new round of Syria talks starts in Astana", *Foreign Policy* (14.09.2017).

A., Luhn, "Syrian rebels walk out of press conference as 'safe zone' deal is signed", *The Guardian* (04.05.2017).

D., Omirgazy, "Little progress in Syria talks but negotiators agree to continue Astana talks", *The Astana Times* (12.07.2017).

the Astana talks, the emphasis lies on creating an image for Kazakhstan as a peaceful country that rejects the use of violence and connects the Eastern and the Western world.<sup>56</sup>

Lastly, until the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eurasianism has largely been shaped by Russian thinkers. These Russian thinkers, like Dugin, tend to divide the Eurasian space in centre and periphery. Russia in this case is the centre and the periphery are countries like Kazakhstan. Dugin refers to Kazakhstan for example as a “regional power” as opposed to Russia that is a world power.<sup>57</sup> Dugin divides the world in poles from the perception that Russia is situated in the centre of these poles. In the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, the Eurasian idea gained more ground outside of Russia in countries such as Turkey and Kazakhstan.<sup>58</sup> Nazarbayev proposed his own version of neo-Eurasianism in which he claims that Kazakhstan is the only self-evident centre, as it has been and is geographically and culturally the gateway between the East and the West.

In 2010, Nazarbayev published another book *In the heart of Eurasia* about the capital Astana.<sup>59</sup> Nazarbayev presents Astana as the Eurasian centre where representatives of different cultures live in harmony. Astana is also presented as the Eurasian economic hub. On January 1<sup>st</sup> 2018, Nazarbayev opened the Astana International Financial Centre (AIFC) on the former territory of the World Fair 2017. The AIFC is a free trade zone for countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus, the EEU, the Middle East, West-China, Mongolia and Europe.<sup>60</sup> With the AIFC, Nazarbayev not only presents Kazakhstan as the cultural centre of Eurasia, but also presents Astana as the economic centre of the Eurasian economic space.

In this chapter, the main characteristics of Nazarbayev’s neo-Eurasianism have been outlined. In contrast to Russia’s neo-Eurasianism, Nazarbayev’s neo-Eurasianism seeks cooperation between East and West, perceives its role in the Eurasian space as a promotor of peace and is convinced that Kazakhstan is the natural centre of the Eurasian space. In the following chapter the youth and career of Nazarbayev will be outlined. Subsequently, the implementation of Nazarbayev’s neo-Eurasianism will be scrutinized.

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<sup>56</sup> Nazarbayev, *In the stream of history*, 87.

<sup>57</sup> А., Дугин, *Евразийская миссия Нурсултана Назарбаева* (Москва 2004), 131.

<sup>58</sup> Laruelle, *Russian Imperialism*, 188-201.

<sup>59</sup> N.A., Nazarbayev, *В сердце Евразии* (Almaty 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Official website of the Astana International Financial Centre.

### 3. Nazarbayev's youth and Soviet career

Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbayev was born on the 6<sup>th</sup> of July 1940 on the Ushkonyr collective farm near the village of Chemolgan, Almaty *oblast*. The village of Chemolgan was situated at the foothills of the Alatau mountain range in South-Kazakhstan and was characterized by its mixed population. Out of its seven hundred inhabitants, two hundred were ethnic Kazakhs and the other five hundred inhabitants came from various regions of the U.S.S.R. Nursultan's father Abish Nazarbayev (1898-1971) was born in the Koshek branch of the Shapyrashty tribe of the Senior Horde (also referred to as the Old Horde).<sup>61</sup> The father of Abish Nazarbayev was the district head and judge. Nursultan's mother Alzhan (1910-1977) was a clanswoman from the Zhambul *oblast* from the Zhatkanbay family, which were mullahs (Islamic religious teachers) of the Senior Horde.

Abish started working at the farm of a wealthy Russian family at age eleven. According to Nazarbayev's biography of the Russian news portal *Lenta*, Abish was practically taken in as their son. During the collectivization in the 1930s, the Russian family lost their property and Abish was put in charge of what became the collective farm "Ushkonyr". Abish became the boss of the cooks at the food preparation brigade at the Kolkhoz.<sup>62</sup> Most likely before Abish was to head the collective farm, although the biography does not specify the chronological order, he met his future wife and Nazarbayev's mother Alzhan in 1934. They both worked on the *Turksib*, a railway network that linked Tashkent with Novosibirsk. Nursultan was their first child. The name Nursultan is a combination of the word 'Nur', which means 'light' in Arabic, and 'Sultan' which comes from the Arabic word 'elite ruler' or 'lord'. After Nazarbayev's birth, his mother gave birth to his two brothers and sister.<sup>63</sup>

Nazarbayev lived in a farm at the Ushkonyr Kolkhoz until the age of twelve where he was raised with Kazakh nomad customs and traditions in a multi-ethnic environment, or so Aitken describes in a very lauding biography on Nazarbayev.<sup>64</sup> At age twelve he was sent to high school in another village. When Nazarbayev finished high school, he studied at the professional school of the Dnieper Metallurgical Plant in Dneprodzerzhinsk, Ukraine in 1958. In 1960 he started working as a

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<sup>61</sup> Kazinform, *Nursultan Nazarbayev. A Life Story of the first President of Kazakhstan*, chapter 1.

<sup>62</sup> Biography of Russian newsportal *Lenta.ru*, "Назарбаев, Нурсултан. Президент и верховный главнокомандующий Вооруженными силами Казахстана" (date unknown).

<sup>63</sup> Kazinform, *Nursultan Nazarbayev. A life story of the first President of Kazakhstan*, chapter 1.

<sup>64</sup> J., Aitken, *Nazarbayev and the making of Kazakhstan* (London 2009), 15.

metallurgist in the newly constructed Metallurgical Plant *Magnitka*, in the village of Temirtau, in Karaganda *oblast* in the central part of the Kazakh S.S.R. There he met his future wife Sara Alpysovna Kunakayeva (b. 1941), who was born and raised in Central Kazakhstan in a family from the Middle Horde. They married in 1962 and have three daughters together.

When Nazarbayev started working at the Temirtau steel plant he quickly became an active member of the Komsomol. In Aitken's biography about Nazarbayev, especially the fervent fight for better working conditions for the steel plant workers is mentioned. Apparently, Nazarbayev had been noticed by the Party, as he was named First Secretary of the Temirtau Komsomol in 1969. Since then he climbed the Party ladder within the Metallurgical Plant. In 1979, he became Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party for Kazakhstan for Industry, Transport and Infrastructure. In 1984, Nazarbayev became the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Kazakh S.S.R.

### **3.1. *Jeltoqsan***

In this chapter I will analyse the official Kazakhstani perspective on the events prior to independence and what role these play in the current national identity building in Kazakhstan. That's why I will examine the way Nazarbayev's state-run biography by news portal *Kazinform* perceives the demonstrations that have become known as the *Jeltoqsan* (Kazakh for 'December'). In addition, I will use the in some cases more detailed biography of Nazarbayev from the Russian news portal *Lenta.ru*.

In the beginning of 1986, General Secretary of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev (b. 1931), fired the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Kazakh S.S.R. Dinmukhamed Kunayev (1912-1993). The Brezhnev loyalist Kunayev had been in office since 1964. The biography published by *Lenta* states that Gorbachev with the help of Nazarbayev looked for ways to fire Kunayev because the latter did not support the *Perestroika*.<sup>65</sup> Nazarbayev expected that Gorbachev would then appoint him as First Secretary.<sup>66</sup> Gorbachev, however, did not appoint Nazarbayev, but the Russian apparatchik Gennady Kolbin (1927-1998) as First Secretary of the Kazakh S.S.R.

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<sup>65</sup> Lenta.ru, "Назарбаев, Нурсултан. Президент и верховный главнокомандующий Вооруженными силами Казахстана".

<sup>66</sup> Kazinform, *Nursultan Nazarbayev. A life story of the first President of Kazakhstan*, chapter 4.

News portals such as *The Independent*, state that Kunayev's long rule (1964-1986) was marked by corruption, which was the reason for his dismissal.<sup>67</sup> Apparently, Kunayev after his dismissal, tried to persuade the politburo in Moscow to fire Nazarbayev, in which he did not succeed. The official Kazakhstani biography of Nazarbayev does not mention the corruption nor the unwillingness to implement *Perestroika* as reasons for Kunayev's dismissal, but mentions instead that Kunayev was simply relieved from his role as First Secretary. Moreover, any disagreements that existed between Kunayev and Nazarbayev are described as "an intergenerational disagreement, as of fathers and sons".<sup>68</sup> This is not strange since Kazakh nationalist patriots remember Kunayev as a great leader who greatly contributed to Kazakhstan's welfare.<sup>69</sup> This does not go for Nazarbayev's relation with Kolbin. The *Kazinform* biography describes the years under Kolbin as "a period of inertia which was a hard time for Nazarbayev to live through". Nazarbayev remembers the period as being constantly monitored by KGB officers.

The year 1986 plays an important role in the biography of Nazarbayev. In December 1986, peaceful demonstrations erupted in Almaty and spread throughout Kazakhstan as a result of the appointment of Kolbin, who had no connections with Kazakhstan and did not speak Kazakh. These demonstrations, known as *Jeltoqsan*, lasted for a few days until the government violently ended the protests. Nazarbayev's official biography explains the meaning of the *Jeltoqsan* as following. The *Jeltoqsan* was the consequence an eruption of resentment among the Kazakh population due to the marginalization of the Kazakh language, shortage of goods and the decrease in the number of national schools. The appointment of 'an outsider' as First Secretary was the moment when the people's resentment erupted in protest.<sup>70</sup> Hence, *Jeltoqsan* has been presented in official Kazakh historiography as a response to Moscow's colonial policy and has been portrayed in the Kazakh media as the first step towards independence. The Kazakhstani media portrays *Jeltoqsan* as an expression of a fight for independence.<sup>71</sup> Nazarbayev supports this argument by stating that demonstrators did not only scream

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<sup>67</sup> J., Vronskaya, "Obituary: Dinmukhamed Kunayev", *The Independent* (23.08.1993).

<sup>68</sup> Kazinform, *Nursultan Nazarbayev. A life story of the first President of Kazakhstan*, chapter 4.

<sup>69</sup> Kudaibergenova, D.T., *Rewriting the nation in modern Kazakh literature* (Maryland 2017), 177.

<sup>70</sup> Kazinform, *Nursultan Nazarbayev. A life story of the first President of Kazakhstan*, chapter 4.

<sup>71</sup> А., Ахметов, "Память жертв декабрьских событий 1986 года почтили в Алматы", *Kazainform* (17.12.2017).

names of Kazakh politicians who they believed should become First Secretary, but also names of non-ethnic Kazakhs. Hence, *Jeltoqsan* has not been portrayed an act of nationalism, but an act of protest against the totalitarian regime and as the “dawn of independence”.<sup>72</sup>

Nazarbayev’s role during *Jeltoqsan* has not been completely clear. In an article of *RadioFreeEurope*, journalist Bruce Pannier states that the commission that was formed after independence to look into the causes and consequences of *Jeltoqsan*, was dissolved before it could release any findings.<sup>73</sup> Although Nazarbayev recognizes *Jeltoqsan* as an important event in Kazakhstan’s independence history, he did not show too much interest to publish materials about the events or about his role in it.<sup>74</sup> The events are rather portrayed as the first step towards Kazakhstan’s independence. In 2006, Nazarbayev opened a monument in Almaty in remembrance of the events.<sup>75</sup> During the speech Nazarbayev emphasized that the demonstrations were a herald of Kazakhstan’s independence. The *Jeltoqsan* event was “not an act of one national towards another”, but the first expression of protest against the totalitarian regime.<sup>76</sup>

The depiction of the *Jeltoqsan* in Nazarbayev’s state-run biography as peaceful demonstrations, help shape Kazakhstan as a neo-Eurasian country where tolerance, peacefulness and stability are self-evident. The biography establishes a civic Kazakhstani memory about the *Jeltoqsan* by denying ethnical motivations in any way. Rather, *Jeltoqsan* was the first step towards independence and “not an act of one nation towards another”.<sup>77</sup> Nazarbayev further underlines this during the opening of a monument in Almaty in 2006, dedicated to the *Jeltoqsan*. He reiterated that *Jeltoqsan* was not an act of nationalism, but a fight for independence.<sup>78</sup> In this way, Nazarbayev seeks to prevent the formation of an ethnic Kazakh memory. Instead it contributes to the construction of Kazakhstan as a neo-Eurasian country and civic Kazakhstani memory. In 1989, Kolbin was transferred to Moscow and Nazarbayev was appointed First Secretary.

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<sup>72</sup> Kazinform, *Nursultan Nazarbayev*, chapter 4.

<sup>73</sup> B., Pannier, “Kazakhstan: Jeltoqsan protests marked 20 years later”, *RadioFreeEurope* (14.10.2006).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Akorda.kz, “Глава государства Нурсултан Назарбаев принял участие в церемонии открытия памятника «Тәуелсіздік таңы», посвященного декабрьским событиям 1986 года в городе Алматы.” (18.09.2006).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Kazinform, *Nursultan Nazarbayev. A life story of the first President of Kazakhstan*, chapter 4.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.2. Soviet career

During his first years in office, Nazarbayev focussed on the future of the Kazakh S.S.R. with the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Nazarbayev feared that the Kazakh S.S.R. would not preserve its territorial integrity. Due to the large population of Russians in the northern *oblasti*, Nazarbayev feared to lose these regions to Russia. Furthermore, due to the large number of Orthodox Christians and Muslims in Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev feared the rise of a Slavic and Muslim block that would cause internal friction.<sup>79</sup> Consequently, Nazarbayev became absorbed in the search for a way to keep the Soviet Union together by reorganizing it into some kind of federative structure.

Shortly before independence, Kazakhstan voted in favour for the Treaty of the Union in April 1991, which would preserve the Soviet Union but would give more sovereignty to the country's republics. The Communist Party coup of August 1991, eradicated the possibility of the Soviet Union continuing in a loose federative structure, with Gorbachev left with little legitimacy to rule successfully. Nazarbayev, who had been a supporter of Gorbachev's efforts to preserve the Soviet Union, began to court Russia's new president, Boris Yeltsin. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 1991, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia signed the Belavezh accord which declared the Soviet Union non-existent. This left Nazarbayev, President of the Kazakh S.S.R. since April 1990, with little choice than to proclaim Kazakhstan's independence on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1991.<sup>80</sup> Within the CIS, founded on 21<sup>st</sup> of December 1991, Nazarbayev tried to persuade his fellow CIS members to reintegrate into a federative structure. His attempts did lead to any results, as most feared that a federative structure would give Russia again the hegemonic role in the region.<sup>81</sup>

This chapter has provided an overview of Nazarbayev's early life and Soviet career. Next, I will analyse the international and domestic implementations of Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism.

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, chapter 5.

<sup>80</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan*, 35.  
Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 9.

<sup>81</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan*, 38.  
Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism*, 177.

#### 4. International and domestic expressions of neo-Eurasianism

The Soviet past has left enormous marks on Kazakhstan in various spheres. One of these legacies is the nuclear test site of Semipalatinsk that was closed in August 1991. The nuclear radiation left large parts of the territory inviable and exposed the surrounding population to high levels of nuclear radiation for many years. Nazarbayev has devoted the book *Epicenter of peace* to explain why he perceived denuclearization as a necessary and an obvious decision for Kazakhstan. In February 1994, Kazakhstan joined the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a non-nuclear weapons state, giving up the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal of that time.<sup>82</sup> Nazarbayev stated that this decision to strive for a peaceful world has defined Kazakhstan since 1991 and led Kazakhstan on the path of interregional and global integration. In my view, the denuclearization negotiations after independence have been significant for the determination of Kazakhstan's foreign policy.<sup>83</sup>

The decision to give up the nuclear arsenal was not made overnight. There were a lot of negotiations prior to Kazakhstan's accession to the NPT. Besides Russia, the United States played an important role in the nuclear disarmament negotiations. Shortly after independence, Nazarbayev was ambivalent about the denuclearization. Nazarbayev constantly oscillated between renouncing and retaining Kazakhstan's nuclear weapons. According to Ayazbekov, the nuclear dilemma was a security dilemma. After all, Russia and China had only recognized Kazakhstan's borders in 1992. Nazarbayev used the nuclear arsenal as a deterrence mechanism against a possible threat and as a bargaining tool to receive security guarantees. The clear decision to denuclearize as Nazarbayev presents it in his book, does not correspond to the reality. Kazakhstan managed to manoeuvre *vis-à-vis* Russia and the United States, trying to reach the best outcome.<sup>84</sup>

The concepts of 'multivectorism' and 'peace' have become key for Nazarbayev's foreign and domestic policy in the last 25 years. After independence, Nazarbayev reoriented away from Russia, towards both the United States and China, which became visible during the denuclearization period of

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<sup>82</sup> Nazarbayev, *Epicenter of peace*, 47.

<sup>83</sup> Clarke, "Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy", *The ASAN Forum*.

<sup>84</sup> A., Ayazbekov, "Kazakhstan's nuclear decision making. 1991-1992", *The non-proliferation review* (2014) Vol. 21, No. 2, 149-168, p. 159.

the Soviet nuclear arsenal. Kazakhstan became a member of security organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and even cooperated with NATO via the Partnership for Peace Program.<sup>85</sup> It is important to examine Kazakhstan's multivector foreign policy, since this is reflected in its domestic policy as well.

I will briefly touch upon Kazakhstan's economic situation and the changing developments in Central Asia with regard to Uzbekistan, explaining what has enabled Kazakhstan to pursue a multivector foreign policy. Subsequently, I will turn to the use of multivectorism as a foreign policy outlook and neo-Eurasianism as a platform to legitimize Kazakhstan's multivector international outlook. Secondly, I will analyse how neo-Eurasianism serves as a platform to preserve Kazakhstan's religious and ethnic domestic harmony. Regarding religion, I will examine the way the state has been envisioning the role of religion in society by introducing the concept of traditionalism. Additionally, I will use the Conference of World Leaders and Traditional Religions and the Assembly of the People as a specific examples to point out the contradictions between the international and domestic use of neo-Eurasianism.

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<sup>85</sup> Clarke, "Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy", *The ASAN Forum*.

#### 4.1. Kazakhstan's economic position in Central Asia

The regional summit in March 2018 was the first time in a decade that the Central Asian states met. Moreover, whereas in 2009 the only issue on the agenda was the ecological situation of the Aral sea, they now also discussed increased economic cooperation and regional security issues. Nazarbayev said that the Central Asian nations are able to resolve things themselves without any foreign interference.<sup>86</sup> Since the death of the former Uzbek president Karimov in (in office 1989-)2016, relations between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the two economically most prosperous countries in Central Asia, have improved. Kazakhstan is still the most stable country in Central Asia, from both an economic and social perspective.

Kazakhstan's oil reserve is the ninth largest in the world and hydrocarbon profits constitute 21 percent of the GDP and 62 percent of export. In order to reduce Kazakhstan's dependency on oil export, Nazarbayev has been pressing in his reform plans Kazakhstan Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» to diversify the economy.<sup>87</sup> Even though Kazakhstan has turned into the richest of the Central Asian states over the last 25 years, due to the decrease of the oil price and Kazakhstan's dependency on oil export, the national currency 'the Tenge' has been devaluating and Kazakhstan GDP has been decreasing rapidly since 2013. Despite Kazakhstan's decrease in GDP in last few years, it has kept its position of regional leader in Central Asia. Considering that Kazakhstan appeared to be the economically and socially most stable country out of the five Central Asian states, Nazarbayev has been able to establish progressive relations with other global powers such as the European Union and the United States.

The second economy in the region is Uzbekistan. Nazarbayev never found a receptive partner in former president Karimov with regards to regional integration. Steps towards regional cooperation after 1991 have been made, but failed to materialize on a large scale. The former Uzbek president Karimov periodically closed Uzbekistan's borders and denounced membership of the EEU, stating it

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<sup>86</sup> X, "Rare Central Asian Summit Signals Regional Thaw", *RadioFreeEurope* (15.03.2018).

A., Seisembayeva, "Central Asian heads of state discuss regional challenges in Astana", *Astana Times* (17.05.2018).

<sup>87</sup> "Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N. Nazarbayev "Strategy Kazakhstan 2050": New political course of the established state (December 14, 2012).

would be a loss of sovereignty. Nonetheless, Uzbekistan's GDP has been steadily rising from 10 billion in 2013 to 67 billion in 2017. The new president Mirziyoyev (2016-) aims to improve ties with its regional neighbours and set out a new economic course that is more focussed on integration.

Uzbekistan's soil is also rich in minerals and hydrocarbons and Uzbekistan has a demographic advantage in comparison to Kazakhstan. Due to Karimov's largely independent economic course and absence from regional integration, Kazakhstan has been able to rise to the top Central Asian economy and diplomatic entity without challenge. However, Kazakhstan's GDP has been decreasing for the last four years, whilst Uzbekistan's GDP has been steadily rising. Now that Mirziyoyev has been purposefully focusing on regional relationships, Uzbekistan makes an important potential rival of Kazakhstan in Central Asia. Uzbekistan has a key central position and strong industrial and agricultural sectors. At the present, we are left with the question whether Nazarbayev will be able to preserve Kazakhstan's strong position in Central Asia now that Uzbekistan seems to follow a more integrationist course.

#### **4.2. Multivectorism**

As was mentioned, Nazarbayev has been establishing progressive relations with multiple global powers after independence, such as China and the United States. The strategy with which Nazarbayev describes Kazakhstan's foreign policy outlook is 'multivectorism'. Nazarbayev first presented the term 'multivector' for Kazakhstan's foreign policy outlook in the newspaper *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* in May 1992. He identified five strategic regions and three vital partners, namely China, the United States and Russia. Kazakhstan's foreign policy is characterized by a balancing act between the traditional ties with Russia and the economic weight of China and the European Union. Going beyond this dichotomy, however, Nazarbayev states that Kazakhstan would maintain peaceful relations with both East and West.<sup>88</sup>

In chapter 2.3.1, I have outlined the differences between Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism and Russian (neo)-Eurasianism. One of the important characteristics is that Nazarbayev seeks to present

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<sup>88</sup> N.P., Contessi, "Foreign and Security Policy diversification in Eurasia. Issue splitting, Co-alignment, and relational power", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 62 (2015) 299-311, p. 299.

Kazakhstan as a bridge between East and West, whilst identifying Kazakhstan as the cultural and economic centre between both worlds. Nazarbayev uses neo-Eurasianism to implement multivectorism. Or better said, Nazarbayev uses neo-Eurasianism as a platform to maintain and establish good economic and diplomatic relations with different countries.

Cummings and Hanks identify multivectorism as a foreign policy framework based on a pragmatic, non-ideological foundation.<sup>89</sup> Contessi states that the main objective of a multivector foreign policy is state security and economic development.<sup>90</sup> Because there is no ideological foundation behind multivectorism, self-interest and self-preservation are the primary motivators and can be based both on the domestic and foreign dynamic of the state.<sup>91</sup>

According to Hanks, multivectorism can be interpreted as “a state’s pursuit of diplomatic contacts with multiple partners” with the result that they do not have to commit to one specific partner.<sup>92</sup> This implies that the state in question establishes beneficial relations with multiple states. In the case of Kazakhstan, a landlocked country and with a history of dependence on Russia, multivectorism enables President Nazarbayev to prevent complete subordination to Russia.

Hanks identifies three reasons for Kazakhstan’s multivectorism. Firstly, Nazarbayev wants Kazakhstan to participate in the global economy and therefore focusses on multiple economic partners.<sup>93</sup> In 2009, the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline was completed, which was completely financed by China. This enables Kazakhstan to bypass Russia in the delivery of petroleum.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, in Kazakhstan Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» Nazarbayev has outlined plans for Kazakhstan to become one of the thirty most competitive countries in the world by 2050. Secondly, Kazakhstan seeks to circumvent the hegemony of Russia in Central Asia by asserting itself as an important regional and even global player. It is doing so by being an active member of Eurasian organizations such as the

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<sup>89</sup> R.R., Hanks, “ ‘Multi-vector politics’ and Kazakhstan’s emerging role as a geo-strategic player in central Asia”, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, No. 11, Vol. 3 (2009) 257-267, p. 259.

Cummings, “Eurasian bridge or murky waters between east and west?”, 140.

<sup>90</sup> Contessi, “Foreign and Security Policy diversification in Eurasia”, 301.

<sup>91</sup> Hanks, “ ‘Multi-vector politics’ and Kazakhstan’s emerging role as a geo-strategic player in central Asia”, 259.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 262.

<sup>93</sup> N., Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan 2050” (December 14, 2012).

<sup>94</sup> Contessi, “Foreign and Security Policy diversification in Eurasia”, 305.

Hanks, “ ‘Multi-vector politics’ and Kazakhstan’s emerging role as a geo-strategic player in central Asia”, 260.

SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), whilst also liaising with Western Organizations, such as NATO and the European Union.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, Kazakhstan asserts itself as a regional power within Central Asia. In March 2018, the leaders of the four Central Asian states, and the chief of Parliament of Turkmenistan, met in Astana during the first regional summit in ten years. Third and finally, Kazakhstan uses multivectorism to crystallize a Kazakhstani national identity.<sup>96</sup> The focus of this thesis will be on the latter.

#### **4.3. Multivectorism and neo-Eurasianism**

As was mentioned above, Kazakhstan's leading role in Central Asia is mainly due to its relative economic and social stability. Kazakhstan's multivectorism is embodied in Kazakhstan's membership of various international organizations and its participation in several international events. For example, in 2010, Kazakhstan concluded its OSCE chairmanship with a summit in Astana. In Nazarbayev's closing speech at the Summit in December he stated that "Kazakhstan is willing to act as a link in Eurasian security".<sup>97</sup> Nazarbayev adds that he will use Kazakhstan's chairmanship of the Islamic Conference in 2011 to build confidence in the entire Eurasian area.

Internationally, neo-Eurasianism is the platform which makes it possible for Nazarbayev to preserve and establish good relationships with multiple partners. As neo-Eurasianism is mainly characterized by tolerance and peacefulness and does not lay emphasis on ethnicity nor religion. One of the ways in which Nazarbayev shows Kazakhstan's neo-Eurasianist position towards different religions is with the organization of the Conference of World Leaders and Traditional Religions. The authorities use this international event to construct an image of a state leadership that is "engaged internationally and therefore deserving support domestically".<sup>98</sup> Consequently, Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism serves as a platform to promote and preserve domestic unity. Nazarbayev has defined

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<sup>95</sup> Contessi, "Foreign and Security Policy diversification in Eurasia", 302.

<sup>96</sup> Hanks, "'Multi-vector politics' and Kazakhstan's emerging role as a geo-strategic player in central Asia", 261.

<sup>97</sup> Statement by his Excellency Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the 2010 OSCE Summit (Astana, December 2010).

<sup>98</sup> Clarke, "Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy", *The ASAN Forum*.

Kazakhstan as “Eurasian”, which is the platform that underpins Kazakhstan’s foreign policy and follows the line of peace and unity as a result of the country’s history on the Eurasian continent.<sup>99</sup>

In order to use neo-Eurasianism as a platform to legitimize Kazakhstan’s foreign policy outlook, Nazarbayev needs Kazakhstan’s multi-ethnic and multi-confessional composition. As Nazarbayev has stated: “Ethnic minorities will also become powerful representatives of the culture of Kazakhstan. They will form one of the channels of our interrelation with the national cultural systems of other states”.<sup>100</sup> As a result, Nazarbayev has promoted the existence of different religions, languages and cultures to preserve social stability on the international level and on the domestic level.

I will analyse the way Nazarbayev has been using neo-Eurasianism as a platform to preserve Kazakhstan’s multi-confessional and multi-ethnic stable composition. To examine Kazakhstan’s relatively stable poly-confessional situation, I will first introduce the concept of traditionalism before I turn to the specific case of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions. Further, I will analyse what role the Assembly of the People plays in the preservation of Kazakhstan’s multi-ethnic composition.

#### **4.4.Traditionalism**

Since 1991, religious activity in Kazakhstan has increased considerably. In the 1990s, with financial support from Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the number of registered mosques in Kazakhstan rose from 40 to 2300. Furthermore, numerous students have been receiving religious education in Turkey, Egypt and other Muslim countries.<sup>101</sup> According to the national census of 2015, roughly seventy percent of the population identify themselves as Muslim, most of them are Sunni Muslims from the Hanafi School.

As a result of Islamic extremism at the end of the 1990s, the Kazakhstani authorities and the Kazakhstani Muftiate started copying their Russian and Uzbek counterparts in legitimizing the difference between ‘traditional’, i.e. home-grown and apolitical Islam, and ‘untraditional’, foreign and

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<sup>99</sup> Statement by his Excellency Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the 2010 OSCE Summit.

<sup>100</sup> Nazarbayev, *In the stream of history*, 95.

<sup>101</sup> E., Karagiannis, “The Rise of Political Islam in Kazakhstan: Hizb UtTahrir Al Islami”, *nationalism and ethnic politics*, Vol. 13. No, 2 (2007) 297-322, p. 301.

radical Islam.<sup>102</sup> The Supreme Mufti of Kazakhstan is appointed by the Spiritual Board for the Muslims of Kazakhstan, which closely cooperates and answers to the government. The demarcation between “traditional” and “nontraditional” religions started taking more detailed form after the terrorist attack on 9/11 with the establishment of the Anti-Terrorist Centre (ATC) in 2003. The ATC fights religious extremism in Kazakhstan, however, the number of terrorist attacks had remained limited until 2011.

The terrorist attack in 2011 in the north western city of Aktobe further increased the urgency to deal with religious extremism.<sup>103</sup> Following these attacks, the government created the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil society and enforced the 2011 ‘Law on Religious Activity and Religious Associations’. The Ministry is tasked with the prevention of extremism by encouraging Islamic literacy and promoting what it deems to be the correct interpretation of Islam.<sup>104</sup> The ‘Law on Religious Activity and Religious Associations’ compelled all religious organizations to re-register with the government. Nazarbayev set up the Agency for Religious Affairs (ARA) in 2011, which operates under the President and aims to strengthen Astana’s control over the religious sphere.<sup>105</sup> As a result, several Islamic activists, educational institutions but also numerous Protestant organizations and the Hare Krishna community did not meet the new demands and were criminalized.<sup>106</sup> Only one registered Islamic university managed to meet the demands. Not only religious organizations were expelled, also the amount of religious literature has reduced since 2011.<sup>107</sup>

Agadjanian describes the role of traditionalism in relation to the increasing role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The importance of traditionalism implies the importance of the protection of the traditional, home-grown, values. The most important

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<sup>102</sup> G., Yemelianova, “Islam, National identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan”, *Asian ethnicity* (2014) 286-301, p. 293.

<sup>103</sup> J., Lillis, “Kazakhstan: Astana jolted by terror incidents”, *Eurasianet.org* (16.11.2011).

<sup>104</sup> R., Standish, “Our Future Will Be Violent Extremism. Kazakhstan – Central Asia’s most stable state – is waking up to the fact that Islamic extremism has planted its roots and is here to stay”, *Foreign Policy* (01.08.2017).

<sup>105</sup> Yemelianova, “Islam, National identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan”, 298.

The Agency for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “On the situation with religious freedom in the republic of Kazakhstan” (Astana 2014). 1-37, p. 37.

<sup>106</sup> Yemelianova, “Islam, National identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan”, 293.

S., Marinin, “State Regulation of Religion in Kazakhstan: Reconsideration of Approaches”, *Norwegian Institute of International Affairs* (April 2015) 1-19, p. 11.

<sup>107</sup> Yemelianova, “Islam, National identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan”, 298.

development in the case of the Russian Orthodox Church is that the Church increasingly has a saying in what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ moral in society. Subsequently, ‘good’ moral is linked to stability and ‘bad’ moral is negative for the peaceful existence of a society. The ‘good’ moral is paired with conservatism and the importance of hierarchy. The relationship between the Church and the state is important. The Church sees the state as a potential danger that can violate the traditional values and the Church, contrary to the state, presents itself to the Russian people as the institution that makes a positive appeal to the state as a protector of these values. Traditionalism has geopolitical intentions, as Russia, presents itself domestically and internationally as the protector of the traditional values as opposed to the Western countries that Russia claims to have forgotten about the traditional values.<sup>108</sup>

Contrary to Russia, the state defines traditional Islam in Kazakhstan. According to the ‘Law on Religious Activity and Religious Associations’, the Kazakhstani state recognizes the historical role of the Hanafi School of Sunni Islam and Orthodox Christianity in the development of culture and spiritual life of the people. Besides Islam and Christianity, around forty other religions are registered in Kazakhstan. As is outlined in the Constitution, the state respects and allows other religions that respect other people’s religious convictions. Kazakhstan is and remains a secular society, as is stated in the constitution.<sup>109</sup> The schools of Islam that differ from the “official” kind are called “nontraditional”. As a result, these nontraditional schools encounter great difficulties in dealing with the authorities as “nontraditional Islam” has become a synonym for “religious extremism” and “terrorism”.<sup>110</sup> In Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» Nazarbayev expressed his concern for Kazakhstan to be divided into “true Kazakh” and “false Kazakhs”, as this could endanger the country’s stability.<sup>111</sup>

One of the places where Islam is implemented in traditional way is in the Haziret mosque in Astana. In this mosque, funded by Saudi Arabia, Islam is presented as a modern phenomenon suitable for modern life and contributing to the advancement of the individual and the whole society along the path of modernity. The Haziret Sultan mosque underscores the efforts of young imams to lead this

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<sup>108</sup> A., Agadjanian, “Tradition, morality and community: elaborating Orthodox identity in Putin’s Russia”, *religion, state and society*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2017) 39-60, p. 48.

<sup>109</sup> The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan of October 11, 2011, № 483-IV On Religious Activity and Religious Associations.

<sup>110</sup> Yemelianova, “Islam, National identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan”, 93.

<sup>111</sup> Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan 2050” (December 14, 2012).

process of integration and construct the body of traditional Islam based on the internationally recognized Islam, on the one hand and broadly defined “national” tradition on the other.<sup>112</sup> As a result, the Kazakhstani state has been defining and supporting ‘traditional’ Islam that has become part of the Kazakh national identity. In the Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050», Nazarbayev stated that we (the Kazakhstani people) should be proud to be a part of the Muslim Ummah (community) since it is part of our traditions.

Government plans show that the Kazakhstani authorities try to create a traditional Islam that corresponds to the national identity. Despite the fact that Nazarbayev reiterates that Kazakhstan is a secular state, the government outlines what is traditional Islam. For example, the National Unity Doctrine (2008) was set up by the Assembly of the People, a secular institution, and gives a special role to the Kazakh family in the inter-confessional sphere. Namely, in the inter-confessional sphere, the Doctrine appoints it the responsibility of the Assembly of the People to “create conditions for strengthening the institution of the Kazakh family and its educational role”.<sup>113</sup> The Doctrine gives a special role to “the institution of the family, respect for elders and moral values”. Further, the authorities warn Kazakhstani Muslims how not to behave. In Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» Nazarbayev warns the Kazakhstani’s that “our people” should prepare to live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and not in the middle ages since Kazakhstan is a secular state. Nazarbayev states that “Women should not be prevented from driving cars, pursuing a career or be forced to wear a restrictive dress which has never been worn in Kazakhstan” and therefore is not relevant for the Kazakh traditions and cultural norms.<sup>114</sup> Here, Nazarbayev makes a distinction between traditional and non-traditional Islam. This distinction is crystallized by government funding of Islamic education in state-approved institutions and state support for religious enculturation of the masses at the mosques. Furthermore, the state supports the imams and creates conditions for them to advance and develop themselves.

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<sup>112</sup> A., Bissenova, “Building a Muslim Nation. The role of the Central Mosque of Astana”, ” in: *Kazakhstan in the making. Legitimacy, symbols, and social changes* edited by Marlene Laruelle (London 2016) 211-228, p. 224.

<sup>113</sup> National Unity Doctrine, *Assembly.kz* (2008) p. 7.

<sup>114</sup> Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan 2050” (December 14, 2012).

The demarcation of Islam in traditional and non-traditional, can be explained by Kazakhstan's poly-confessional composition. The ruling elite in Kazakhstan has been largely brought up during a time of Soviet-imposed atheism, when religion was viewed as a potential source of opposition and a force that could stimulate interethnic conflict. As was mentioned, after independence, Nazarbayev feared that the division of the society in a Muslim and Christian Orthodox block would erupt in conflict.<sup>115</sup> As a result, his interest in Islam can be seen as rather pragmatic and aimed to fit into a traditional national identity for Kazakhstan that would be able to preserve stability and prevent religious tensions.<sup>116</sup>

Outside of the confessional sphere, the government interferes with the importance of the traditional Kazakh values in society. The Doctrine does not limit itself to the inter-confessional sphere, but also encourages people to value and preserve specific Kazakh features. For example, Nazarbayev has urged the Kazakh people to know their “zheti-ata” or “seven grandfathers”. Knowing your “zheti-ata” prevents people from losing their identity and makes you always belong to a family. Moreover, it provides Kazakhs with order and familiarity.<sup>117</sup>

Besides the government programs, law and ARA, another visible way in which the authorities acknowledge the stability and traditionalism, is by hosting the Conference of the World and Traditional Religions in Astana. Nazarbayev has emphasized time and again in his national programs that Kazakhstan is a poly-confessional country.<sup>118</sup> Nazarbayev shows Kazakhstan's poly-confessional character to the world with the organization of the Congress of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, inaugurated in September 2003 in Astana. Nazarbayev welcomed the delegations on behalf of “our multi-ethnic people” during his address at the opening session of the First Congress. he did not omit mentioning that the location of the Conference was very symbolic in the “very heart of Eurasia”. The Congress was attended by seventeen religious delegations from different branches of Christianity,

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<sup>115</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan*, 210.

<sup>116</sup> Yemelianova, “Islam, National identity and politics in contemporary Kazakhstan”, 294.

<sup>117</sup> Nazarbayev, *In the stream of history*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Назарбаев, “Статья Президента ‘Взгляд в будущее: модернизация общественного сознания’ ”, 1-20. Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan 2050” (December 14, 2012).

Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. Worthy of note is that the Islamic delegates attending were Sunni Muslims. No delegates from other branches of Islam, like Shiism, were present.

Thus, Nazarbayev not only uses the Conference to consolidate Kazakhstan's image as a bridge builder, but also sends out a message that Kazakhstan supports traditional, non-extremist religions.<sup>119</sup> The principles of tolerance, consent and cooperation contribute to facilitate relations not only between the Christian and the Muslim world, but also within the Kazakhstani society. In the following chapter I will outline how the Assembly of the People has been framed as the institution that preserves the multi-ethnic composition within Kazakhstan.

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<sup>119</sup> Address of the President of Kazakhstan Republic N.A. Nazarbayev at the Opening Session of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions (September 2003).

#### 4.5. Domestic expressions of neo-Eurasianism

Besides the poly-confessional composition, the multi-ethnic composition of the country is also preserved and promoted in the framework of neo-Eurasianism. One of the institutions that shows clear contradictions in Nazarbayev's implementation of neo-Eurasianism is the Assembly of the People. Therefore, in this chapter, I will discuss the establishment and the objectives of the Assembly. Subsequently, I will estimate its worth in the implementation of neo-Eurasianism in society.

##### 4.5.1. The Assembly of the people

President Nazarbayev initiated the establishment of the Assembly of the Nationalities of Kazakhstan in 1995, later renamed to Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan.<sup>120</sup> The President is lifelong Chairman of the Assembly which in 2015 consisted of 398 members and has cultural centers at the *oblast* level. These regional cultural centers and Nazarbayev nominate delegates to the Assembly. Nazarbayev is presented both abroad as domestically as a protector of the small minorities, whose representation is embodied in the Assembly. During Kazakhstan's 2010 OSCE chairmanship, the Assembly has been portrayed as the ideal of the multi-cultural society and showed Kazakhstan's unique approach to interethnic harmony.<sup>121</sup> Three signs, however, show that the Assembly is merely a façade and in fact even supports ethnic Kazakh nationalization.

Firstly, one of the main objectives of the Assembly is to preserve social concord and stability by preserving the different languages and cultures of all the people of Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev refers to the Assembly as “a unique Eurasian model of intercultural dialogue”.<sup>122</sup> Officially, the Assembly serves as an advisory organ for the President and as an instrument to implement national policy.<sup>123</sup> Whilst in fact, the Assembly does not have any juridical status, legislative powers or political influence.<sup>124</sup> It seems that the Assembly's main objective is merely to show loyalty to the president and its ethnic policy. This becomes clear when Nazarbayev announced the transfer from the Cyrillic to

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<sup>120</sup> J.M., Landau & B., Kellner-Heinkele, *Politics of language in post-Soviet Muslim states* (London 2001) 24.

<sup>121</sup> Statement by his Excellency Nursultan Nazarbayev, President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at the 2010 OSCE Summit (Astana, December 2010).

<sup>122</sup> Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan 2050” (December 14, 2012).

<sup>123</sup> National Unity Doctrine, *Assembly.kz* (2008) p. 2.

<sup>124</sup> Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 132.

the Latin alphabet in the summer of 2017 and the cultural centers of the Assembly expressed their support to the President's decision.<sup>125</sup>

Cummings states that the existence of the Assembly of the People and the national-cultural centers at the *oblast* level, only shows that real institutions guaranteeing multiethnic rights and representation are absent.<sup>126</sup> Signs that the Assembly only follows state policy also becomes clear from the several projects its cultural centers launched in the framework of “big Country – big family (2015).<sup>127</sup> These projects include concourses, meetings and forums on Kazakh patriotism, 25 years of Kazakhstan's independence and the Kazakhstan's unique approach to peace and concord. Specific plans for the regional centers are also outlined in the “big country – big family” project and are among others celebrating the reforms Nazarbayev has announced in Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» and the modernization program.<sup>128</sup> These projects aim to consolidate the unity of the people of Kazakhstan and thereby correspond with official policy. What the projects do not include, is specific ethno-cultural celebrations. Since the Assembly does not have any decision-making competence, its role in society is to follow state policy.

Secondly, Nazarbayev portrays the Assembly as the embodiment of Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic composition, stating that it is the institution that expresses national policies related to identity, civic citizenship and language in Kazakhstan. In reality, the minorities are not proportionally represented in the Assembly. The small minorities are in general overrepresented and in 2007, only 15 percent of the Assembly was Russian, whilst they constituted 24 percent of the population. Since 2007, the Assembly obtained the right to elect nine deputies to the Mazhilis (Lower House of Parliament). In 2015, these representatives included two Slavs, two Uyghurs, one Chechen, one Armenian, one Korean and one Kazakh. The Armenian ethno-national group is so small it is included in the ‘other

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<sup>125</sup> “Члены Ассамблеи поддерживают переход на латинский язык государственного языка”, *Assembly.kz* (15.09.2017).

Ассамблея народа Казахстана поддерживает переход на латинскую графику”, *Kazakh-TV* (19.09.2017).  
Х, “Переход на латинцу – наша общая задача”, *Assembly.kz* (15.09.2017).

<sup>126</sup> Cummings, Legitimation and identification, conclusions

<sup>127</sup> Ю., Магер и А., Прилепская, Уникальный проект “Большая страна – большая семья”, *Казахстанская Правда* (13.10.2015).

<sup>128</sup> Assembly of the People, “акция «большая страна - большая семья!». плановые мероприятия регионов в период с 25августа по 5 сентября 2015 года”.

nationalities' category, the Koreans the 7<sup>th</sup> and the Chechens are the 14<sup>th</sup> largest ethno-national group. According to the Kazakhstan's state secretary Gul'shara Abdusalikova the different ethno-national groups do not serve as representatives of their own group, but as representatives of the multi-ethnic character of Kazakhstan.<sup>129</sup>

Third and finally, the Assembly founded the National Unity Doctrine in 2008 in which the goals, objectives and principles of the state policy towards ethnic unity are outlined. Firstly, it is important to mention the use of the words 'Kazakh' and 'people of Kazakhstan' in the Doctrine. The Doctrine mentions 'Kazakh traditions' and 'Kazakh patriotism', whilst respecting the traditions of the 'People of Kazakhstan'. The emphasis on the ethnic word 'Kazakh' shows a strong deviation from the civic references Nazarbayev has been using and could be an important indicator for Kazakhstan's future path regarding its attitude towards ethnic Kazakh nationalization. I will elaborate more on this in chapter 5.2. Secondly, the promotion of the state language (Kazakh) plays an important role in the Doctrine. Not only is every representative of the Assembly obliged to know the state language, it is also their task to further develop and consolidate the use of the state language in society. Moreover, the representatives of the Assembly have an important task to promote and consolidate Kazakh patriotism through media and detect any forces that "could endanger the ethnic stability".<sup>130</sup> Thirdly, as outlined in the previous chapter, the Doctrine mentions in three different spheres the need to consolidate the role of the Kazakh family.

These three signs show that the Assembly of the People and its cultural centers are merely an executive organ of the government. Nazarbayev uses the Assembly as a platform to show Kazakhstan's neo-Eurasian tolerance for the country's multi-ethnic composition. Whilst in reality, the Assembly is an executive organ of official state policy and even used to implement ethnic Kazakh nationalization. I will elaborate further on this in chapter 5.

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<sup>129</sup> K.M., Rees & N., Webb Williams, "Explaining Kazakhstani identity: supraethnic identity, ethnicity, language and citizenship", *Nationalities papers*, No. 45, Vol. 5 (2017) 815-839, P. 822.

<sup>130</sup> National Unity Doctrine, *Assembly.kz* (2008), p. 8.

#### **4.5.2. Astana – In the heart of Eurasia**

The capital is an important source and medium which nations can use for a certain purpose. Especially, if nations decide to change their capitals, it can serve as a tool to reach a certain goal. The establishment of the capital Brasilia was, for example, done with the intention to divide the economic welfare more equally in Brazil. Or the return of Germany's capital to Berlin was historically motivated. Hence, capitals are an important source of identity for nations and can be used to send out a certain message.

In Kazakhstan, the movement of the capital city is an example of a symbolic action to promote sovereignty within a region of the country. The movement of the capital from Almaty, which was the capital during the Soviet Union and still feels and looks Soviet, to the former city of Akmola (former Tselinograd) enables Kazakhstan to create a capital that is Kazakhstani. Scholars such as Dave state the decision was made to prevent potential calls for separatism among the Russians and Russophone Kazakhs.<sup>131</sup> The location of the capital in the central northern part of the country would consolidate surveillance of the government over the largely Russian north. Moreover, the transfer would help change the demographic imbalance in the north in favour of the ethnic Kazakhs. Since all the government departments and ministries would be transferred from Almaty to Astana and the majority of its employees were ethnic Kazakh (see chapter 5.1.1.), the transfer of the capital encouraged ethnic Kazakhs to move from Almaty to the northern part of the country.

The Kazakhstani authorities motivate the transfer of the capital in a different way. Nazarbayev presents the new capital Astana first and foremost as an expression of neo-Eurasianism. Nazarbayev, after considering the cities Karaganda and Zhezqazghan (central Kazakhstan), ordered the construction of 'the city on the steppe' in 1994. On the sixth of July 1997, notable also Nazarbayev's birthday, the transfer was officially made. Nazarbayev gives a fourfold motivation behind the transfer of the capital. Firstly, it serves as a symbol for Kazakhstan's independence. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, Almaty was the old capital during the Soviet Union and Astana could be formed into a Kazakh(stani) capital. Secondly, Nazarbayev states that Astana will be a symbol of the peaceful and prosperous

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<sup>131</sup> Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 123.

future for Kazakhstan, where all ethnicities live together in peace. Thirdly, Nazarbayev aims to promote the idea of Astana to become one of Eurasia's economic metropolises.<sup>132</sup> Nazarbayev explains the transfer of the capital from the south (Almaty) to the former city of Akmola in the north as a way to confirm Kazakhstan's intention to set up a multi-ethnic state. Fourth and finally, Nazarbayev states that the transfer was due to geopolitical reasons. Nazarbayev does not refer to Russia or the number of Russians in the northern part of Kazakhstan, but only briefly mentions that Almaty was "close to the Chinese border".<sup>133</sup> This proximity to the Chinese border and the central location on the Eurasian continent are the geopolitical reasons Nazarbayev provides.

The Lev Gumilev National Eurasian University and the palace of peace and reconciliation are Nazarbayev's expressions that present Astana as the Centre of Eurasia. Moreover, in the summer of 2017, Astana was the host city of the World Fair "Future Energy". More than one hundred countries and over twenty companies participated during the three months lasting World Fair. The Kazakhstani pavilion, located in the giant sphere, displayed several items and features that characterizes the Kazakh people and culture. Firstly, the pavilion was located in a giant yurt and its main theme was 'hospitality' which Nazarbayev has been linking to Kazakhstan's neo-Eurasian character. However, during the World Fair, the theme 'hospitality' was presented as a Kazakh feature. On the 'hospitality wall', the first item one would see upon entry in the pavilion, Kazakhs traditions of hospitality were displayed. Secondly, the Kazakh pavilion showed Kazakh fairy tales, traditions and traditional instruments. One of the main attractions in the pavilion was a repeating movie that told a well-known Kazakh fairy tale about the golden egg of Samruk. This fairy tale is also embodied by the main attraction in Astana, the tower of Baiterek, in the centre of capital. Hence, the pavilion only referred to ethnic Kazakh traditions and the central role of Astana in future identity building. As was mentioned, the capital Astana serves as a symbol for Kazakhstan's position on the Eurasian continent. Nazarbayev further underlines this with the book "Astana, in the heart of Eurasia".<sup>134</sup> The city is a symbol for the modernization that Nazarbayev pictures for Kazakhstan.

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<sup>132</sup> N.A., Nazarbayev, *The Kazakhstan way* (2008), 254.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>134</sup> N.A., Nazarbayev, *В сердце Евразии* (Almaty 2010).

The only item in the pavilion that would have shown Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic composition was eventually not presented due to limited space. Designer of the Kazakhstani pavilion 'Aigerim Akenova' explained that she originally designed a 'life thread' with 130 strings, one for each ethnicity living in Kazakhstan. Due to limited space this was eventually reduced to sixteen strings, one for each traditional Kazakh music school.<sup>135</sup> Subsequently, the life thread lost its reference to the multi-ethnic composition of Kazakhstan and the Kazakhstani pavilion became only a presentation of that what characterizes ethnic Kazakhs. Any representation of Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic composition was absent. One could draw a parallel here with the authorities' ethnic Kazakh nationalization, that I will discuss in chapter 5.

This chapter has shown that the Congress of World Leaders and Traditional Religions and the Assembly of the People, support Nazarbayev's efforts to construct an image of Kazakhstan as a neo-Eurasian and peaceful country. However, I have found that the Conference and the Assembly are merely a façade, for in reality, several contradictions become visible when examining their specific cases. In fact, tendencies of ethnic Kazakh nationalization become visible. In the following chapter, I will scrutinize the concept of nationalization and elaborate on its visible occurrences in within Kazakhstani society. Subsequently, this will enable me to analyse what the contradictions are in Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism and what the current is reach of ethnic Kazakh nationalization in society.

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<sup>135</sup> A., Akenova, Interview by Helena Arntz. Personal interview (Astana, August 2017).

## 5. Ethnic nationalization

In this chapter, I will analyse how ethnic Kazakh nationalization becomes apparent from several state programs, and what this means for Nazarbayev's use of neo-Eurasianism as a platform in multi-ethnic and poly-confessional Kazakhstan. I will first introduce Brubaker's concept of 'nationalization' and Dave's concept of 'ethnic-based affirmative action'.<sup>136</sup> Subsequently, I will analyse how ethnic Kazakh nationalization has become apparent from two state programs, namely Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» (2012) and the program on Spiritual Revival (2017).<sup>137</sup> Additionally, I will scrutinize how ethnic-based affirmative action becomes visible in two specific cases, namely Kazakhstan's repatriation policy and the role of the Kazakh language in society. This will enable me to answer the main question of this thesis, namely how ethnic Kazakh nationalization is in contradiction with Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism.

Brubaker has investigated the implementation of nationalism in post-Soviet states. In 1991, he argues, Kazakhstan was not 'nationalist in substance'.<sup>138</sup> This means that there had not been a discourse on nationalism nor a Kazakh identity set out by the state. In the period shortly after independence, as was mentioned in chapter 4, the stability of Kazakhstan's new borders was a source of concern for the Kazakhstani authorities. Moreover, the Kazakhstani state had to develop a clear idea of what it meant to be Kazakh. This raised the question whether the Kazakh identity should be of civic or ethnic nature. According to Brubaker, Kazakhstan since independence has become a 'nationalizing state'.<sup>139</sup> The concept of 'nationalization' comprises the dynamic process of nationalist projects and processes that are implemented by the state.

The implementation of ethnic Kazakh nationalization in the past 25 years, can be supported with Dave's concept of 'ethnic-based affirmative action'. He uses this concept for the preferential

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<sup>136</sup> R., Brubaker, "Nationalizing states revisited. Projects and processes of nationalization in post-Soviet states", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 34, No. 11 (2011) 1785-1814, p. 1787.  
Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 154.

<sup>137</sup> Nazarbayev "Strategy Kazakhstan 2050" (December 14, 2012).

Н., Назарбаев, "Статья Президента 'Взгляд в будущее: модернизация общественного сознания' " (12.04.2017) 1-20.

<sup>138</sup> Brubaker, "Nationalizing states revisited", 1786.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

policies that the Kazakhstani regime has implemented to promote ethnic Kazakh nationalization both formally and informally.<sup>140</sup> Since Nazarbayev has always presented Kazakhstan's identity as civic, it is difficult to prove ethnic-based affirmative action. Dave argues that the Kazakhstani government has promoted ethnic Kazakh nationalization following implicit rules, which also makes it difficult to estimate the impact of ethnic-based affirmative action.<sup>141</sup> Dave adds that even non-ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan have difficulty to exemplify the way they notice ethnic Kazakh nationalization in society. The most tangible comments Dave received after asking for concrete examples were answers such as: "the chief is always a Kazakh" or "a non-ethnic Kazakh is always replaced by an ethnic Kazakh".<sup>142</sup>

Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic composition has made it difficult for Nazarbayev to pursue ethnic Kazakh nationalization. After all, in the northern parts of Kazakhstan the majority of the population is still largely Slavic. Zhirinovskiy's expressions about Kazakhstan's sovereignty, Dugin's ideas about the redistribution of Kazakhstan and Putin's policy towards the Russian compatriots in the former Soviet Union have caused anxiety amongst the Kazakhstani government about Kazakhstan's territorial integrity.<sup>143</sup> In the program on Spiritual Revival, Nazarbayev warns for the separatist nature conflicts nowadays have, stating that those movements can only be ended with force or lead to economic collapse.<sup>144</sup> Nazarbayev most likely refers to the events in Ukraine and seeks to prevent such events mostly in the northern regions of Kazakhstan. Moreover, he states in Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» that 'special attention' should be paid to the border areas and make them more attractive places to live.<sup>145</sup>

Therefore, before examining signs of ethnic Kazakh nationalization, it is important to reiterate that an open discriminatory policy towards other ethnicities has been absent. Nazarbayev has always presented Kazakhstan as a civic and multi-ethnic nation and pursued a balancing act in order to prevent ethnic strife. Diener states that an emphasized ethnic nationalistic rhetoric by the state could

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<sup>140</sup> Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 154.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> X, Самые громкие высказывания Владимира Жириновского о Казахстане, *Караван* (14.07.16).

<sup>144</sup> Н., Назарбаев, "Статья Президента 'Взгляд в будущее: модернизация общественного сознания' ", 8.

<sup>145</sup> Nazarbayev "Strategy Kazakhstan 2050" (December 14, 2012).

stimulate ethnic violence and perhaps encourage Russian irredentist movements.<sup>146</sup> This could explain why Dave finds ethnic-based affirmative action difficult to prove.

I have introduced the concepts of nationalization and ethnic-based affirmative action and reiterated that an open pursue of both of the official level has been absent. Therefore, I will analyse official Kazakhstani state policy regarding to Kazakh diaspora and the Kazakh language, to unravel signs of ethnic Kazakh nationalization. In the following chapter, I will scrutinize the state policy towards the Kazakh diaspora, the so-called *Oralmanar* (returnees). It is not the aim of this chapter to focus on the success of the integration of the *Oralmanar* into the Kazakh society. Natsuko<sup>147</sup> and Bonnenfant<sup>148</sup> have written comprehensive papers on the process and results of the integration of the *Oralmanar*. Subsequently, I will discuss the developments in the use of the Kazakh language.

### **5.1. The return of the *Oralmanar***

Brubaker, Bonnenfant and Dave identify repatriation and diaspora policy as an important aspect to measure the nationalization of a certain state. Repatriation can be broadly defined by “the (process of) return to one’s place of origin”.<sup>149</sup> This place of origin is in the majority of cases defined in ethno-cultural terms and, therefore, repatriation programs mostly apply to the titular nation.<sup>150</sup> Kazakhstan’s repatriation policy applied only to the titular ethnic group after 1995, when the Kazakhstani authorities abolished the right to dual citizenship. Prior to 1995, there was a flow of Kazakhstani citizens, mostly Russians, who repatriated back to Kazakhstan. This return emigration flow of Russian Kazakhstani citizens stopped in 1995.

Brubaker identifies Kazakh repatriation policy as an important practice in ethnic Kazakh nationalization. Bonnenfant adds that since repatriation policies mostly apply to the titular nation, they serve only to strengthen and empower this particular group. The motivations for the state’s policies

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<sup>146</sup> A.C., Diener, “Assessing potential Russian irredentism and separatism in Kazakhstan’s northern oblasts”, *Eurasian geography and economics*, Vol. 56, No. 5 (2015) 469-492, p. 473.

<sup>147</sup> O., Natsuko, “A note on ethnic return migration policy in Kazakhstan: changing priorities and a growing dilemma”, *Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization* (March 2013) 1-13.

<sup>148</sup> I.K., Bonnenfant, “Constructing the Homeland: Kazakhstan’s Discourse and Policies Surrounding Its Ethnic Return-Migration Policy.” *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 31, No. 1 (2012) 31-44.

<sup>149</sup> Brubaker, “nationalizing states revisited”, 1789.

<sup>150</sup> Bonnenfant, “Constructing the Homeland” , 33.

towards repatriation have altered since the state gained independence. Therefore, it is important to first elaborate on the considerations underlying repatriation policies and how these changed over time. Consequently, I will identify the influence of repatriation policy on the Kazakh ethnic nationalization.

### **5.1.1. Demographic changes and repatriation**

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan experienced a dramatic population loss. Between 1991 and 2004, more than 3 million people emigrated from the country, most of them Slavic people and Germans. In 1989, the Russian population constituted 37.8 percent, but the Ukrainians, Belarussians and Russians together constituted almost 45 percent of the population. The Kazakh population at that time constituted only 39.7 percent, which made them a minority in their own country.<sup>151</sup> In 2014, the percentage of Russians had decreased to 21.5 percent. In that same period, the percentage of ethnic Kazakhs had increased to 65 percent. Russians had already started emigrating to Russia since the 1980s. The Germans had the second highest emigration number after the Russians. Germany had implemented repatriation programs since 1954 to support ethnic Germans to repatriate.<sup>152</sup>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of Russian and German repatriates from Kazakhstan was at its highest. The percentage of German inhabitants had decreased drastically from 5.8 in 1989 to 1.1 percent in 2014. The German state had guaranteed Germans a simplified way to receive their German passport and ran several programs to support repatriating citizens. The Russian state had also implemented measures through which former Soviet citizens (so not only ethnic Russians) could easily apply for a Russian passport. Contrary to the German state, the Russian state only introduced financial support programs under President Putin in 2006.<sup>153</sup>

The massive exodus of non-ethnic Kazakhs from the Kazakhstan in the 1990s is a significant indicator that most non-ethnic Kazakhs believed there was no long-term future for them in

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<sup>151</sup> Landau & Kellner-Heinkele, *Politics of language in post-Soviet Muslim states*, 21.

<sup>152</sup> O., Zeveleva, "Political aspects of repatriation. Germany, Russia and Kazakhstan. A comparative analysis", *Nationalities papers*. vol. 42, No. 5 (2014) 808-827, p. 810.

<sup>153</sup> C., Ziegler, "The Russian diaspora in Central Asia. Russian compatriots and Moscow's foreign policy", *Demokratizatsiya*, published by: Elliot School of International Affairs, Vol. 14, No. 1(Washington 2006). 103-126, p. 112.

Kazakhstan.<sup>154</sup> Active government policy to counter the exodus of non-ethnic Kazakhs from the Kazakhstani side has been absent. Meaning that, Nazarbayev has not called upon the non-ethnic Kazakhs to stay nor has he implemented measures that would give them better prospects. Contrary, the displacement of Russians by Kazakhs had accelerated in the 1990s. The sectors in which this occurred were, and still are, the state administration, security, banking and finance. This becomes clear when we look at the ethnic balance in these sectors. In the end of the 1980s ethnic Kazakhs had started replacing non-ethnic Kazakhs in the government. Especially in the Russian dominated northern parts of the country, this led to an overrepresentation of ethnic Kazakhs.<sup>155</sup> In 1994, almost 75 percent of the Cabinet of Ministers and the Presidential apparatus was ethnically Kazakh and only 22 percent was Slavic. In 2002, almost all the key positions in organs of state administration, security, banking and finance were occupied by ethnic Kazakhs.<sup>156</sup> The Kazakhstani authorities responded to these disproportions by stating that it was conform to the anticipating changes in ethnic composition.<sup>157</sup> However, according to the demographic changes listed above, the speed in which Kazakhization took place by far outpaced the demographic changes.

In the paragraphs above, I have discussed the changing demographic situation in Kazakhstan in the 1990s. One of the aspects of the changing demographic situation has been the massive emigration of non-ethnic Kazakhs. In the following chapter, I will scrutinize government policy regarding the repatriation of ethnic Kazakhs. Subsequently, I argue that the repatriation is mostly focussed on restoring the ethnic demographic imbalance in Kazakhstan and thereby an expression of ethnic Kazakh nationalization from the government. I will support my argument by analysing the economic benefits of the *Oralmanar* and the government regulations towards their places of settlement.

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<sup>154</sup> Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 156.

<sup>155</sup> P., Kolstø, "Anticipating demographic superiority: Kazakh thinking on integration and nation building", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1, 51-69, p. 63.

Brubaker, "Nationalizing states revisited", 1803.

<sup>156</sup> N., Masanov, E., Karin, A., Chebotarev, O., Natsuko, "The nationalities question in Kazakhstan", *Middle East Studies Series of the Institute of developing economies Japan external trade organizations*, No. 51 (March 2002) Chapter 2, p. 7.

Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 152.

<sup>157</sup> Masanov, Karin, Chebotarev, Oka, "The nationalities question in Kazakhstan", Chapter 2, p. 7.

### 5.1.2. The role of the *Oralmanar*

In an UNDP report (2006) and by professor Zeveleva, the *Oralman* policy is described as one of the most important government policies on national identity and Kazakh cultural consolidation.<sup>158</sup> Zeveleva argues that Nazarbayev aspires to increase the percentage of ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan as a part of the nation-building agenda.<sup>159</sup> Brubaker and Dave identify the way governments in post-Soviet states justify the implementation of nationalization measures.<sup>160</sup> These nationalizing states often refer to the disadvantaged position or victimization of the titular nation in the past. The trauma of the past gives those states the idea that they have the right to implement nationalizing policies that elevate the position of the titular nation.

Nazarbayev is indeed regularly referring to the victimization of the Kazakhs and their land. In 1992, he acclaimed Kazakhstan to be the homeland for the ethnic Kazakhs and invited all those Kazakhs that had fled totalitarianism to return.<sup>161</sup> By declaring Kazakhstan the homeland of ethnic Kazakhs, the state could promote public support for the repatriates within and outside Kazakhstan. Furthermore, in his book *In the stream of history* (1999) Nazarbayev even speaks of an ‘ethnocide’ as a result of totalitarianism.<sup>162</sup> Nazarbayev does not blame Russia, but the totalitarian state for the Kazakh trauma. He uses this trauma as a foundation for the justification of the Kazakh peoples’ right to have their own state, which in turn gives room to appeal to ethnic Kazakhs living abroad.<sup>163</sup>

In my view, the cultural argument that justifies repatriation is an important contributor to ethnic Kazakh nationalization. The *Oralmanar* in Kazakhstan’s neighbouring countries have preserved the traditional aspects of the Kazakh culture, traditions and lifestyle for they were not that strongly affected by russification as for example the ethnic Kazakhs in Kazakhstan’s northern *oblasti*. In 2016, the Kazakh government announced that since 1991, almost 1 million ethnic Kazakhs had resettled in

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<sup>158</sup> “Status of Oralman in Kazakhstan”, UNDP, 9.

<sup>159</sup> Zeveleva, “Political aspects of repatriation”, 814.

<sup>160</sup> Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 142.

Bonnenfant, “Constructing the homeland: Kazakhstan’s discourse and policies surrounding its ethnic return-migration policy”, 33.

<sup>161</sup> “Status of Oralman in Kazakhstan”, United Nations Development Program Kazakhstan (Almaty 2006) 1-31, p. 9.

<sup>162</sup> Nazarbayev, *In the stream of history*, 48.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

their motherland and added that Kazakhstan should reach a population of 20 million people in 2025.<sup>164</sup> This implies that the government tries to achieve this population growth by increasing the number of ethnic Kazakhs. Further, the government hopes these *Oralmanar* will promote a revival of the Kazakh language and culture.<sup>165</sup>

State policy towards the *Oralmanar* has modified since it was introduced in 1992 and enforced by law in 1997. Until the ‘Law on Migration’ (1995) denied dual citizenship, also non-ethnic Kazakhs were eligible for repatriation. The Law on Migration (as amended in 1997) specified that a repatriate is a person of native ethnicity and was given the right to return to his/her “historic homeland”.<sup>166</sup> Furthermore, “persons of the Kazakh ethnicity” were given assistance “in organizing their settlement, creation of working places, social welfare and social assistance”.<sup>167</sup> The government set out annual quotas for the number of *Oralmanar* that are allowed to profit from government benefits. These quotas can differ per year and give the *Oralmanar* the right to financial support, housing and even the free passage of livestock to the new place of residence. When the annual quota has been reached, the *Oralmanar* could still repatriate outside of the program. This, however, means that they do not receive financial support from the Kazakhstani government. The *Oralmanar* that fall within the quota are only allowed settle in regions that are appointed by the government.

The ‘Law on Migration’ has been modified several times, this concerns for example the regions where the *Oralmanar* are allowed to settle. In the 1990s, the quotas determined that the *Oralmanar* were only allowed to settle in the northern regions. In the 2000s, this policy reversed, and immigrants were directed towards the southern regions. In 2016, the presidential administration again changed the regions of settlement to the northern, eastern and Atyrau regions.<sup>168</sup> Interestingly, these

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<sup>164</sup> X., получение статус оралмана в казахстане.

<sup>165</sup> Natsuko, “A note on ethnic return migration policy in Kazakhstan”, 1.

<sup>166</sup> “Status of Oralman in Kazakhstan”, UNDP, 9.

<sup>167</sup> Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan (13 December 1997) No. 204-1 on Population Migration (with amendments introduced by the Laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as of 1 March 2001 No. 160-II; 10 November 2001 No. 255-II; 24 December 2001 No. 276-II, 27 March 2002 No. 313-II) 1-12, p. 9.

<sup>168</sup> X, “Почти тысяча семей из ЮКО готовы переселиться на север Казахстана по “Дорожной карте занятости””, *Информбюро* (11.06.2016).

regions are mainly inhabited by Slavic people and have the highest emigration numbers.<sup>169</sup> In the ‘Law on Migration’ the regulation is explained as a prevention of “spontaneous and unregulated processes”.<sup>170</sup>

Nazarbayev states that he appealed to his compatriots abroad, to counter to massive exodus of non-ethnic Kazakhs in the 1990s. The population of Kazakhstan decreased from almost 17 million in 1991, to 15 million in 2002.<sup>171</sup> The massive emigration of Russians and Germans in the 1990s, not only resulted in a demographic loss, but also in economic stagnation. The Russians and Germans were often the most highly educated people and their high emigration numbers resulted in a brain drain.<sup>172</sup> According to official estimations, almost 5 million ethnic Kazakhs lived outside of Kazakhstan in 1991. Most of them lived in Uzbekistan, China, Mongolia and Russia. Nazarbayev not only hoped to counter the demographic loss, but he also anticipated these repatriates would economically contribute to the country. In 2015, Nazarbayev said he especially hoped that young *Oralmanar* would return, since they would quickly adapt to the new country and bring their experiences and expertise.

The economic argument Nazarbayev has given for the repatriation programs, in my view, does not correspond to the places of settlement the government has appointed for the *Oralmanar*.<sup>173</sup> More than sixty percent of the repatriates comes from Uzbekistan and has little or even no proficiency in Russian. In the northern *oblasti*, the main language of communication is still Russian. Since the Kazakh government does not set conditions such as language proficiency, but accepts *Oralmanar* purely on the basis of ethnicity, this results in unemployment and social problems amongst the *Oralmanar*.<sup>174</sup> In comparison to national unemployment, *Oralmanar* are more likely to be unemployed.<sup>175</sup> However, these problems do not limit themselves to the northern regions. Many of the immigrants found themselves in difficult living and working conditions, despite governmental policies.

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<sup>169</sup> R.L., Wolfel, “North to Astana: Nationalistic motives for the movement of the Kazakh(stani) capital”, *Nationalities papers* vol. 30, No. 3 (2002) 485-506, p. 490.

<sup>170</sup> Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Population Migration (13 December 1997), 2.

<sup>171</sup> “Status of Oralmanar in Kazakhstan”, UNDP, 8.

<sup>172</sup> Ziegler, “The Russian diaspora in Central Asia” Russian compatriots and Moscow's foreign policy”, 109.

<sup>174</sup> Natsuko, “A note on ethnic return migration policy in Kazakhstan”, 3.

<sup>175</sup> “Status of Oralmanar in Kazakhstan”, UNDP, 16.

Therefore, I believe the repatriation is mostly focussed on restoring the ethnic demographic imbalance and can thereby be seen as a component of ethnic Kazakh nationalization. In 2017, the government stated that the settlement of the *Oralmanar* and domestic resettlement from the north to the south was “for the purpose of labour mobility”.<sup>176</sup> However, if the government claims to battle the labour shortage in the northern regions, why does it only focus on resettlement of ethnic Kazakhs. Furthermore, the government has introduced scholarships for students from the south who go study in the northern *oblasti*, in the hope that they would settle permanently. Despite the fact that formally every student could apply for such a scholarship, media campaigns specifically encourage ethnic Kazakhs to move to the northern part of Kazakhstan.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, in 1997, the new capital Astana resettled ethnic Kazakhs from the south to the Russian-dominated north. Domestic migration thus also has a nationalizing effect. The resettlement of Kazakhs from the south, who in general have a bad proficiency in Russian, means the Kazakh language would be more widely used in the regions where Russian is still dominant.

In this chapter, I have argued that the repatriation policy of the *Oralmanar* is an expression of Kazakh ethnic nationalization. Firstly, the repatriation program focusses on ethnic Kazakhs. The Kazakhstani state justifies the proclamation of Kazakhstan as the homeland of the ethnic Kazakhs by referring to their victimization in the past. This simultaneously shows Nazarbayev’s need to remain careful with regards to Russia, as he does not refer to Russia as the perpetrator of the Kazakh trauma, but the ‘totalitarian past’. Secondly, the alteration of the quota’s on the places of settlement show that the repatriation of the *Oralmanar* is mostly focussed on restoring the ethnic demographic imbalance, rather than economic benefits. In 2016, the government changed the places of settlement to the northern *oblasti*, and one year later Nazarbayev stated in his program on Spiritual Revival that special attention should be paid to the border regions. The resettlement of the *Oralmanar* and the encouragement of domestic migration of ethnic Kazakhs from the south to regions with a large Slavic population, would mean that Kazakh language and culture would play a bigger role in these largely

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<sup>176</sup> М., Смайыл, “куда переселят трудовых мигрантов из Южного Казахстана, рассказала Дуйсенова”, *Tengri Novosti* (10/04.2017).

<sup>177</sup> X, “Что произошло с программой переселения казахов-южан на север страны”, *Karavan* (31.03.2017).

russified regions.<sup>178</sup> Therefore, in my view, the *Oralmanar* are used to pursue ethnic Kazakh nationalization.

In the following chapter I will discuss the second case, namely the role of the Kazakh language in society.

## 5.2. The Kazakh language

Scholars such as Brubaker and Dave describe the revival of language as an important ethnic nationalization project.<sup>179</sup> Landau and Kellner-Heinkele argue that language frequently emerges as a powerful symbolic vehicle of nationalism and a factor of nation building.<sup>180</sup> Further, they consider language as the most important instrument for the titular nation to assert cultural, economic and career expectations.<sup>181</sup> Especially directly after independence, titular groups began to see language politics as an essential component in their ethnic nationalism and independence. Already in 1989, the government had made efforts to make Kazakh the state language. However, an immediate implementation of Kazakh in all spheres of society was impossible. Since the dominant language in the Kazakh republic was Russian and Nazarbayev had to constantly balance between the use of Kazakh and Russian. Promoting the use of Kazakh, would automatically downgrade the use of Russian.<sup>182</sup>

What can the developments in the last 25 years with regard to the Kazakh language tell us about ethnic Kazakh nationalization and neo-Eurasianism in society? In Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050», Nazarbayev stated that “the Kazakh language is our spiritual center”, for the Kazakh language as a mother tongue will “bind and cement the nation. This will be the crown jewel of our state’s sovereignty”.<sup>183</sup> For the last 25 years, Nazarbayev has used neo-Eurasianism as a platform to preserve Kazakhstan’s domestic unity. Now that the Kazakh language, a clear reference to the titular nation,

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<sup>178</sup> X, “Почти тысяча семей из ЮКО готовы переселиться на север Казахстана по “Дорожной карте занятости””, *Информбюро* (11.06.2016).

<sup>179</sup> Brubaker, “Nationalizing states revisited”, 1792.

<sup>180</sup> Landau & Kellner-Heinkele, *Politics of language in post-Soviet Muslim states*, 4.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, 63.

<sup>182</sup> “Law on the Republic of Kazakhstan N° 151-I on languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan”, (11.07.2011) as amended as of 05.06.2006.

Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 99.

<sup>183</sup> Nazarbayev, “Strategy Kazakhstan 2050” (December 14, 2012).

will be the spiritual center of Kazakhstan's unity, what does this mean for the use of neo-Eurasianism as a platform to preserve inter-ethnic harmony in the future? In this chapter, I will first discuss the developments with regards to the Kazakh language and its increasing importance in society. Subsequently, I will discuss the switch from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet and its possible consequences concerning the Russian speaking population and Russia. Third and finally, I will discuss the role of the Kazakh National-Patriots in the switch in alphabet.

### **5.2.1. Developments with regards to the Kazakh language**

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of February 2018, Nazarbayev stated in a meeting with the Minister of Communication Abaev, that business and parliament meetings should only be conducted in Kazakh. The Russian media reported on Nazarbayev's statement and according to *Novaya Gazeta* several Russian media outlets responded by posing the question if Kazakhstan would want to follow the example of Ukraine. The Russian news portal referred to the Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory in 2014, to protect its Russian compatriots from, among others, discrimination of the use of the Russian language by the Ukrainian government in schools and state institutions.<sup>184</sup> Despite the fact that Russia and Kazakhstan are close economic and political partners, the status of the Russian language proves to be a topic that should be handled with care.

Contrary to the Russian media, no known protests to Nazarbayev's expression have come from the Kazakhstani official media, which for the most part is controlled by the state. Still, the word 'only' was quickly removed from the online version of Nazarbayev's statement.<sup>185</sup> Nazarbayev's daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva revoked Nazarbayev's words a few days later and referred to them as a misinterpretation. Russian would still be allowed in the Parliament and Cabinet.<sup>186</sup> This is one of the many cases that shows the controversy and topicality of the language issue in Kazakhstan where one fifth of the population is Russian and many ethnic Kazakhs are still not fluent in Kazakh.

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<sup>184</sup> В., Половинко, "И вырвать русский ваш язык?", *Новая газета* (05.03.2018).

A., Kappeler, "Ukraine and Russia. Legacies of the imperial past and competing memories", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (July 2014) 107-115, p. 111.

<sup>185</sup> "Назарбаев призвал парламент и правительство работать на казахском языке", *Sputnik* (26.02.2018).

Reuters Staff, "Government says Russian not banned from government at all", *Reuters* (01.03.2018).

<sup>186</sup> A., Kumenov, "Kazakhstan: President's daughter wades into language issue", *Eurasianet.org* (02.03.2018).

Kazakhstan has been subject to intense russification on both a cultural level and a linguistic level. In 1989, roughly 75 percent of the population experienced difficulties in employing the state language. Moreover, almost 95 percent of Kazakhstani's claimed to speak Russian and only 20 percent was proficient in Kazakh.<sup>187</sup> Especially in the urban areas the majority of the population spoke Russian. In the at that time capital Alma-Ata, only 22 percent of the population claimed to be fluent in Kazakh.<sup>188</sup> In 1994, almost 75 percent of the ethnic Kazakhs read newspapers and watched television in Russian.<sup>189</sup>

Nazarbayev started implementing measures that would promote the Kazakh language to the official language when he became First Secretary in 1989. In the 'Law on Language' (1989), the Supreme Soviet of Kazakhstan declared Kazakh to be the state language. The 'Decree on Education' in 1992 reiterated the status of Kazakh as the state language and specified that by 1995 all official communication should switch to Kazakh. According to the constitution, the Russian language shall be used on equal grounds with the Kazakh language in state institutions and local self-administrative bodies.<sup>190</sup> The 'Law on Language' (1997 and amended in 2006) regulates the use of languages in the activities of the governmental, non-governmental organizations and local government authorities. It states that the development of the state language has priority and that all official documents will be translated to Kazakh<sup>191</sup>, but also that the "language of documentation in governmental bodies, organizations of the Republic of Kazakhstan shall be maintained in the state and Russian languages".<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, the 'Law on Language' obliges the knowledge of Kazakh for certain jobs and states that the number of television and radio channels in Kazakh cannot be less than programs in other languages. The use of the state language is promoted in all spheres of society, whilst allowing the use of Russian on an equal level when necessary.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Dave, *Kazakhstan*, 217.

<sup>188</sup> Landau & Kellner-Heinkele, *Politics of language in post-Soviet Muslim states*, 66.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 84.

<sup>190</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2007).

<sup>191</sup> "Law on the Republic of Kazakhstan N° 151-I on languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan", article 23.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid*, article 10.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, article 5.

In Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» (2012) Nazarbayev emphasizes the role of the Kazakh language. This shows a considerable change in his rhetoric in comparison to the Strategy «Kazakhstan 2030» (1997). Whereas in the latter Nazarbayev poses the question “who are we – the Kazakhstanis?” and subsequently states that self-identification would take time and historic development, he outlines clear ideas for Kazakhstan to become a successful nation in Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050».<sup>194</sup> A special role to consolidate “the Kazakh ethnicity” is given to the Kazakh language.<sup>195</sup>

### 5.2.2. Switch to Latin

An important part of the revival and consolidation of the Kazakh language is Nazarbayev’s plan to transfer the Kazakh alphabet from the Cyrillic to the Latin script. There was a question of changing the Kazakh alphabet to the Latin script in the 1990s, but this did not appear on the government agenda until 2006. Due to Kazakhstan’s demographic imbalance, every expression of nationalism was, and still is, a delicate question. In 2006, Nazarbayev officially introduced his plan to transfer the script to Latin. The following year, however, Nazarbayev postponed the plan stating that stability and peace were more a priority than the alphabet issue. In 2017, Nazarbayev introduced a concrete plan on the transfer from Cyrillic to Latin which should be reached by 2025. He has given three main reasons for the transfer.

Firstly, Nazarbayev explains the transfer to Latin as a logical change in today’s world where the majority of education, technological innovation and business is done in English. The transfer to Latin will only simplify participation for Kazakhs on world level.<sup>196</sup> Hence, the modernization of the Kazakh language would bring Kazakhstan closer to the world on technical and educational level and therefore positively contribute to overall modernization.<sup>197</sup> Nazarbayev does not forget to thank the Russian language for it expanded Kazakhs world view and enabled communication abroad and domestically.<sup>198</sup> But apparently, Nazarbayev perceives Kazakhstan’s future with the Latin writing

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<sup>194</sup> N.A., Nazarbayev., “The Strategy «Kazakhstan 2030» Prosperity, Security and ever growing welfare of all the Kazakhstanis. Message of the President of the country to the people of Kazakhstan” (1997).

<sup>195</sup> Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan 2050” (December 14, 2012).

<sup>196</sup> Назарбаев, “Статья Президента ‘Взгляд в будущее: модернизация общественного сознания’ ”, 10.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>198</sup> Nazarbayev, “Strategy Kazakhstan 2050” (December 14, 2012).

world, rather than with the Cyrillic writing world. Secondly, in the Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» Nazarbayev states that the Kazakh language will serve as a medium to unify all Kazakhstani's. This way, a person of any ethnic group will be able to choose any kind of work, up to the extent of getting elected as the president of the country.<sup>199</sup> This shows some ambiguity, as Nazarbayev wants to preserve Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic composition under the condition that all ethnicities learn the state language.<sup>200</sup> Thirdly, and this is not discussed in Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» nor in the program on Spiritual Revival, but at the fifth Qurultai (2017) and in separate news articles. Nazarbayev stated during the fifth Qurultai that ethnic Kazakhs residing in different countries use the Cyrillic, the Arabic or the Latin alphabet. Due to the use of three different alphabets, Kazakhs cannot understand each other in script, which distances them. This argument ties in with his second argument, but instead of ostensible domestic unification, it focusses on unification with the Kazakh diaspora.<sup>201</sup> Nazarbayev states that other countries have also managed to transfer, such as Turkey, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan will learn from these examples.

Turkey counts as the example where the transfer to the Latin script has been successful. It was implemented in the 1920s, when Turkey underwent rapid westernization. An important difference between Turkey and Kazakhstan is that in the 1920s, not even 20 percent of the Turkish population was literate. This meant there were less people to educate in the new script. Moreover, the government provided sufficient funding to make ease the transfer. Kazakhstan's literacy rate was 99.8 percent in 2015, which means the entire population has to be taught the use of the new script. After Turkish model, Uzbekistan also implemented a law in 1993 that would transfer the Cyrillic to the Latin script. However, the structure of the Latin alphabet was already adjusted from 32 to 25 signs two years later, which confused people even more. Furthermore, the final deadline for the transfer was postponed from 2005 to 2010, which also did not contribute to a better understanding of the new script among the

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<sup>199</sup> “State of the Nation. Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Akorda* (10.01.2018).

<sup>200</sup> Nazarbayev “Strategy Kazakhstan 2050” (December 14, 2012).

<sup>201</sup> X, “Этнические казахи не знают казахского”, *Zakon.kz* (26.06.2017).

Uzbek population.<sup>202</sup> As a result, currently the Latin and Cyrillic script are used intertwined and the transfer never completely succeeded.<sup>203</sup>

The switch to Latin tells us two things. Firstly, this is one of the first times that Nazarbayev has taken on such strong official policy that clearly shows ethnic Kazakh nationalization. The authorities have been consolidating the position of the state language for some time, but whereas earlier ethnic Kazakh based affirmative action was difficult to detect, Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» shows a clear deviance to a more open ethnic Kazakh nationalization by stating that the Kazakh language will be the centre of Kazakhstan's unity. Secondly, the switch to Latin shows that Nazarbayev aims to geopolitically distance Kazakhstan from Russia and strengthen relations with the Turkic language world. Since, the switch was only announced in April 2017 and is now gradually implemented, we are left with the question what consequences this will have on the relationship between Kazakhstan and Russia.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the role of the Kazakh National-Patriots in the switch of the script and what this could mean for Kazakhstan's future in relation to neo-Eurasianism.

### **5.2.3. The Kazakh National-Patriots**

Here it is important to reiterate again that for the past 25 years, Nazarbayev has pursued a balancing act to prevent an eruption of ethnic tensions within Kazakhstan. The promotion of Kazakh would automatically downgrade the use of Russian and could raise tensions with Russia and the large Russian minority in Kazakhstan. Hence, Nazarbayev had to constantly balance between the use of Kazakh and Russian. The fact that Nazarbayev now pursues to consolidate the use of Kazakh in society and even transfers the script, is a sign of ethnic Kazakh nationalization.

In this regard it is important to examine the position of the National-Patriots, *natspat* in Russian and *ultshyl* in Kazakh. The most important Kazakh National-Patriotic movements are *Ult Tagdyry* (Fate of the Nation) and *Memlekettik Til* (State Language). These Kazakh National-Patriots believe that the Kazakh language continues to be marginalized. They seek to revive the Kazakh

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<sup>202</sup> Landau & Kellner-Heinkele, *Politics of language in post-Soviet Muslim states*, 176.

<sup>203</sup> X, "Latin Alphabet in Uzbekistan: To B or Not to B", *Eurasianet.org* (29.03.2017).

national history and identity through the consolidation of the Kazakh language, culture and the condemnation of russification projects during Soviet times.<sup>204</sup> They condemn the discrimination of the Kazakh language and the enduring effects of russification, especially in the field of education. Olcott states that the National-Patriots feel the government should do more to ban those who do not speak Kazakh from public life and serving in the legislature.<sup>205</sup>

The government's attitude towards the National-Patriots has been ambiguous.<sup>206</sup> The National-Patriots in Kazakhstan are either used by Nazarbayev or penalized. In the early 1990s, the National-Patriotic movements such as *Azat* and *Qazakh tili* started gaining more support amongst the population. The government limited their access to the media and condemned their actions. In 2014, the authorities arrested the National-Patriot and editor of newspaper *Tribuna*, Zhanbolat Mamay for interethnic hate as he participated in a training camp for young members of the Kazakh nationalist group *Ult-Azattygy*.<sup>207</sup> Mamay has been one of the most active social media critics of Kazakhstan's entry into the Eurasian Economic Union and has been arrested, charged and released several times. Mamay and other National-Patriots organized the anti-Eurasian Forum that was authorized by the government.

While being penalized, the National-Patriots are also used by the regime to address ethnic Kazakh nationalist issues. Laruelle and Kudaibergenova argue that they are interchangeably used as puppets by the regime, depending on the specific moment or crisis.<sup>208</sup> Additionally, Natsuko argues, the state has an interest in these National-Patriots. For it gives a voice to reestablish the Kazakh language, Kazakh symbols in society and the recruitment of ethnic Kazakhs in the government. It is more difficult for the Kazakhstani authorities to take a nationalist stance. As Nazarbayev is carefully preserving relations with Russia and appears as the defendant of equal rights for all ethnicities.

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<sup>204</sup> D.T., Kudaibergenova, "The use and abuse of Postcolonial Discourses in Post-independent Kazakhstan", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 68, No. 5 (2016) 917-935, p. 919.

<sup>205</sup> Olcott, *Kazakhstan*, 250.

<sup>206</sup> M., Laruelle, "Which future for National-Patriots? The landscape of Kazakh nationalism" in: *Kazakhstan in the making. Legitimacy, symbols, and social changes* edited by Marlene Laruelle (London 2016). 155-180, p. 163.

<sup>207</sup> D.T., Kudaibergenova, "Nationalizing elites and regimes: nation-building in post-Soviet authoritarian and democratic contexts" in: *Kazakhstan in the making. Legitimacy, symbols, and social changes* edited by Marlene Laruelle (London 2016) 113-130, p. 119.

<sup>208</sup> Kudaibergenova, "Nationalizing elites and regimes", 117.

Simultaneously, Nazarbayev is under pressure from Nationalist-Patriots who seek to revive the Kazakh language and culture. In the program on Spiritual Revival, Nazarbayev states that the transfer of the Kazakh language to the Latin alphabet has been approached very carefully and will be implemented step by step.<sup>209</sup>

The National-Patriots do not appear as a strong unified block, which makes their real political impact questionable. Further, Kudaibergenova argues, the National-Patriots hardly ever openly oppose the regime on other matters than the importance of the Kazakh language and culture.<sup>210</sup> The strength of the National-Patriots could lie in the fact that they all position themselves against the state-backed notion that Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic country with a civic citizenship. They see this as a way for the government to avoid confrontation with Russia. The National-Patriots argue that the equality of all ethnic groups was established at the expense of the ethnic Kazakhs' assertion of their identity. Consequently, the majority favors the shift to the Latin script. They see the switch to Latin as a symbolic way to end the Russian colonial era and focus on a new pan-Turkish identity.<sup>211</sup>

Interestingly, in the field of language, the National-Patriots have managed to make a their most noteworthy achievement. In 2008, Nazarbayev ordered the Assembly of the People to set up a Doctrine of National Unity. This Doctrine was intended to provide a blueprint to strengthen interethnic harmony for the future, but instead became a voice for the National-Patriots to express their discontent. The original government draft emphasized the civic Kazakhstani ethnicity and wanted to promote non-titular groups to take government positions. However, soon after the presentation of the initial draft, several leaders of Kazakh nationalist movements expressed vehement opposition. The National-Patriots interpreted the draft as an attack on the ethnic Kazakh identity, language and culture. Also other oppositionist parties opposed the draft. Additionally, the nationalist groups called for altering the country's formal name from the republic of Kazakhstan to the Kazakh republic. As a result the word "Kazakhstani" and the provisions to recruit non-titular groups into governmental posts, were removed and the final version of the Doctrine was published with the ethnic 'Kazakh'.

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<sup>209</sup> Назарбаев, "Статья Президента 'Взгляд в будущее: модернизация общественного сознания' ", 10.

<sup>210</sup> Kudaibergenova, "The use and abuse of Postcolonial Discourses in Post-independent Kazakhstan", 928. Olcott, *Kazakhstan*, 180.

<sup>211</sup> Laruelle, "Which future for National-Patriots?", 174.

Cummings stated in an article from 2003, that the majority of the Kazakhs is in favor of good relations with Russia since they see their future, nonetheless ambiguously, with Russia.<sup>212</sup> However, with the switch to the Latin alphabet, Nazarbayev gives a clear sign that this future is not as self-evident as before. This represents the realistic attempt of Kazakhstan to distance itself from Russia. Whereas shortly after independence, Nazarbayev penalized or absorbed the National-Patriots into the government, the National Unity doctrine, Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» and the program on Spiritual Revival show that the influence of these National-Patriots in the government is growing in recent years. Laruelle predicts that this influence will continue to grow as many provincial notables will become the new promoters of ethnic Kazakh nationalism of which some in the current elite already openly support Kazakhization.<sup>213</sup> This way in a few decades, considering the demographics, the National-Patriots could receive more support from the growing ethnic Kazakh population.

In this chapter, I have discussed the developments in relation to the Kazakh language and its increasing role in society. The switch from the Cyrillic to the Latin script not only shows that Kazakhstan is geopolitically moving away from Russia, but also that apparently it has become possible for Nazarbayev to implement official ethnic Kazakh nationalization in Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev remains to promote Kazakhstan as a multi-ethnic society and allows the use of Russian on equal base alongside the state language. However, Nazarbayev is experiencing more pressure from the National-Patriots, which became visible from the National Unity Doctrine and the program on Spiritual Revival. How does this expression of ethnic Kazakh nationalization fit into the platform of Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism?

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<sup>212</sup> Cummings, "Eurasian bridge or murky waters between east and west?", 153.

<sup>213</sup> Laruelle, "Which future for National-Patriots?", 172.

## Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to examine the ostensible contradictions in Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism as a domestic and foreign policy platform. As was discussed, Nazarbayev has been using neo-Eurasianism as a platform to implement a multivector strategy in foreign policy and preserve harmony on the domestic level. Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic and poly-confessional composition, asks for a pragmatic policy course in order to preserve domestic stability. On the international level, multivectorism enables Nazarbayev to cooperate with multiple partners. This pragmatic cooperation not only gives Kazakhstan the best possible results in the economic sphere, but also prevents subordination by Russia or, in the future, China.

Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism has, contrary to the early Russian Eurasianists and Dugin, presented Kazakhstan as an neo-Eurasian country that serves as a bridge between East and West. This becomes visible from his books such as *In the stream of history*, *The Kazakhstan way* and *Epicenter of peace*. Through history writing, Nazarbayev supports the image of Kazakhstan as a multi-ethnic and poly-confessional country. Nazarbayev has used the image of Kazakhstan as a Eurasian country as a platform to establish good relations with the West and East. This has become visible from Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship in 2010, its partnership with NATO and membership of various organizations such as CSTO and the EEU. Nazarbayev's integrationist course seeks to consolidate Kazakhstan as an independent country with an independent foreign policy course.

I have found that, Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism as a domestic and foreign policy platform shows contradictions. Namely, for the past 25 years, ethnic Kazakh nationalization has become more apparent in Kazakhstan. Firstly, I have analyzed how Nazarbayev has tried to establish an image of Kazakhstan as a neo-Eurasian country. This becomes tangible from his books, the establishment of the Assembly of the People and Kazakhstan's active cooperation in various international organizations. However, despite neo-Eurasian rhetoric, Nazarbayev has increasingly followed a line of ethnic Kazakh nationalization through ethnic-based affirmative action. I supported this argument by analyzing Nazarbayev's state programs such as Strategy «Kazakhstan 2030», Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050», the National Unity Doctrine and the program on Spiritual Revival.

Nazarbayev has become the main actor in the establishment of the image of Kazakhstan as a neo-Eurasian country with a civic and secular national identity. This became visible as early as the 1990s when the state-run biography of Nazarbayev prevents any ethnic connotations to *Jeltoqsan*, but instead makes it part of Kazakhstan's civic memory. Concerning religion, the climate in Kazakhstan in the 1990s was relatively open towards religious diversity and Nazarbayev still presents Kazakhstan as a secular country. Neo-Eurasianism thus functions as a platform to offer ethnic and religious inclusiveness, which has enabled Nazarbayev to prevent ethnic and religious strife within the country.

Even though Nazarbayev has not stopped using neo-Eurasianism as a platform to preserve inter-ethnic and inter-confessional harmony, a change in his domestic policy towards ethnic Kazakh nationalization can be detected. Whereas in Strategy «Kazakhstan 2030» (1997), Nazarbayev was hesitant in determining an identity for Kazakhstan, the National Unity Doctrine (2008) shows a clear sign towards ethnic Kazakh nationalization. As the Doctrine gives a clear role to the ethnic Kazakhs and the ethnic Kazakh traditions in the consolidation of the national identity. The Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050» (2012) and program on Spiritual Revival (2017) further define the foundation of Kazakhstan's unity. One of the most important developments, in my view, is the role that is given to the Kazakh language as the spiritual center of Kazakh unity. This brings me to two convincing cases that show signs of ethnic Kazakh nationalization.

The first is the policy towards the *Oralmanar*. These *Oralmanar* from the near abroad take with them the Kazakh traditions, culture and language that they have preserved relatively well while living outside of Kazakhstan for decades. The Kazakhstani authorities have the ability to use these *Oralmanar* to restore demographic imbalances in the country. As in 2016, the places of settlement were adjusted to the northern provinces, where the majority of the inhabitants is Slavic. Besides repatriation, the government has used domestic migration to restore the demographic imbalance in Kazakhstan's northern *oblasti*. This restoration of demographic imbalance can be seen in the light of the continuing fears of separatism of Kazakhstan's northern parts. Even though Russia and Kazakhstan are strategic partners, the fact that Nazarbayev has urged to make border regions more attractive places

to live in Strategy «Kazakhstan 2050», shows Nazarbayev is still cautious towards its northern neighbour.

This brings me to the second case, which is the switch to the Latin alphabet. This switch has shown the growing influence of the Kazakh National-Patriots in the government, who are far from united on their political ideas, except on the role of the Kazakh language in society. Therefore, this switch not only shows the geopolitical shift in Nazarbayev's foreign outlook, that moves away from Moscow and towards Ankara, but also the growing influence of Kazakh National-Patriots on domestic policy. Nazarbayev has been pursuing a balancing act by using the National-Patriots to give voice to ethnic Kazakh identity at times, thereby distancing himself from taking on a stance in ethnic Kazakh nationalization. The last ten years, however, with regards to the state programs, the role of the National-Patriots has seemed to increase.

Does the switch to the Latin alphabet show that the pressure from the national-Patriots on the authorities has increased and that Nazarbayev will slowly move away from neo-Eurasianism as a platform to preserve inter-ethnic and inter-confessional harmony? What is most striking is that, despite Putin's policy of uniting the Russian compatriots in the former Soviet Union territory, Kazakhstan's cultural, demographic and linguistic proximity to Russia and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Nazarbayev has dared to openly alter its foreign policy outlook. At the present, we are left with the question whether Russia, who is currently preoccupied with Syria, will perceive the switch in script as discriminatory for the Russian speaking population in Kazakhstan.

In the past decade, the contradictions in Nazarbayev's neo-Eurasianism have become more apparent. An increasing role of the National-Patriots and ethnic Kazakh nationalization, would have serious implications, not only for the inter-ethnic harmony, but also for the increasing role of traditionalism in Kazakhstani society. Nazarbayev so far has been shaping Islam in a way that is state-approved. The National-Patriots could make use of the growing wave of traditional values that is currently going through Europe and the former Soviet Union countries, in order to gain more support in society.

For 25 years, Nazarbayev has performed a balancing act between the Russian and ethnic Kazakh population. Whilst Nazarbayev uses neo-Eurasianism as a platform through which he promotes ethnic Kazakh nationalization, he not completely excluded the minority identities. It will be interesting to see how the balance paradigm, that Nazarbayev has managed to keep stable for so long, will develop after the almost 78 year old leader will pass away.

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