

Out-migration of Russians from Kazakhstan: Political, Economic and Social Factors

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INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 suddenly reverse the position of the erstwhile dominant groups of the Union, the Russians, into a minority in all the post-Soviet independent states except the Russian Federation. Suddenly, they were reduced from primary position to secondary position in the political, social and economic fields which was unthinkable during the past seven decades of the Communist rule. The new governments of the newly formed independent states of the post-Soviet space which emerged out of the ashes of Soviet Union promoted strong indigenous nationalist policies which further threatened the already weakened conditions of the Russians.

Therefore, it was not surprising that the Russians increasingly became insecure in post-Soviet space with the exception of Russian Federation. This consequently resulted into mass out-migration of Russians to Russian Federation from other post-Soviet independent states for better social, economic and political well-being. One such remarkable post-Soviet independent state wherein massive out-migration of Russian was witnessed is Kazakhstan. Indeed, Kazakhstan is the only state in the whole of Commonwealth Independent States which ranked the highest in terms of out-migration of the Russian ethnic (Bandey and Rather, 2013: 147).

Several factors are responsible for the out migration of Russians from Kazakhstan in particular, and from post-

Soviet independent states in general. In this paper at least three factors- political, economic, and social factors, would be thoroughly analyzed. However, for a proper understanding of all these factors' contribution to Russian out-migration from Kazakhstan, it is first essential to discuss the trend and nature of Russians migration to and emigration from Kazakhstan. Keeping this in mind, the paper may be divided into two sections.

The first section would discuss the trend and nature of the in-migration and out-migration of Russians from Kazakhstan. The in-migration would cover the Soviet period during which Russian migrated to Kazakhstan in huge number. The out-migration period would cover the post-Soviet period- the 1990s during which the peak of the out migration was experienced, and the 2000s wherein the out-migration was reduced relatively but remain constant. The second section would discuss how the degradation of Russians status in the political, economic, social and linguistic fields in the post-Soviet Kazakhstan contributed to their emigration from this state.

Migration of Russians to Kazakhstan: the Soviet period:

One of the most significant consequences of the Soviet rule on Kazakhstan is the huge migration of the ethnic Russians into Kazakhstan. Surprisingly, the hugeness of the migration was such that in the course of time, the Russians out-numbered the titular- Kazakhs. This is closely related to the nation-building policy adopted

by the Soviet Union towards achieving proletarian internationalism- in which different ethnic groups would be united into one group based on class. Towards this end, the Union adopted dual or two level nation-building policy- the creation of national identity for each ethnic group at the republic level, and the creation of Soviet identity at the Union level. In this sense, the Soviet nation-building policy is both civic and assimilative- civic in the sense that it try to promote the cultural well-being of each officially recognized ethnic groups, assimilative in the sense that it tried to unite al the ethnic groups of the Union through Russian culture and language.

The remarkable point here is the use of Russian culture and language as a machinery of uniting all people groups in the Soviet Union. This pave the way for ethnic Russians to play dominant role in the nation-building process of the Union. As such, they were at the forefront of the nation-building process- be it in the political fields, in the economic fields or in the administrative fields. It was through this important role that the Russians migrated to Kazakhstan hugely particularly through economic role. Mentioned in this regard may be made particularly on two major projects carried out in Soviet Kazakhstan- industrialization drive in the 1930s and Virgin Land Campaign in the 1950s (Ubiria, 2016: 230-31).

Both these projects were huge projects which demanded huge population, thereby paving the way for Russians to enter into Kazakhstan. As many as five lakhs of Russians were estimated to migrate to Russian in the 1930s. The estimate of Russians migrants to Kazakhstan in the 1950s was even higher- 20 lakhs. This turned the demographic structure upside down. The Russians who could be considered as outsider or at least non-indigenous became the single largest ethnic group in Kazakhstan. This is to constitute a big problem in the post-Soviet independent period (Khazanov, 1995: 246-7).

Out Migration of Russian from Kazakhstan: Post-Soviet Period:

Out-migration of Russians from Kazakhstan began even before the collapse of the Soviet Union. As early

as in the 1970s and 1980s, there had already been mass Russian out-migration in Kazakhstan. However, the inward migration was still larger throughout the Soviet period. It was with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent attainment of independence by Kazakhstan that massive out migration of Russians happened that largely outnumbered their inward migration.

Throughout the first decade following independence- the 1990s, there was massive Russian out migration from Kazakhstan. The massive emigration occurred at the rate of 50,000 per year throughout this decade. However, at the highest point in 1994, the number of Russian out migration reached as high as 255,000 (Peyrouse, 2007: 492-93). The out migration relatively reclined in the following two decades- the 2000s and 2010s, wherein the average out migration per year was 20,000 (Sharip, 2018). Consequently, the Russians population in Kazakhstan has drastically been dropping as seen in the Table 1.

Reasons for Russian Out Migration of Russians in post-Soviet Kazakhstan:

As already mentioned, the collapse of Soviet Union that ended Russians' dominance had far reaching impact on the status of Russians in Kazakhstan. The new nationalist policies adopted by the new government of the new independent state of Kazakhstan posed serious threat to Russians in all areas of life- in the political, economic, social and linguistic fields. In other words, the Russians were reduced to secondary status from dominant status which they found it very hard to accept. Suddenly, their political, social, economic and linguistic interest became threatened. They became very insecure and that Kazakhstan could not more be considered as their homeland. All this factors individually or collectively resulted to massive out-flow of Russians from Kazakhstan.

Political factor:

In the political field, all efforts were made by the new state to ensure the political benefits of the titular

Table 1 : Population of Ethnic Kazakh and Russian of Kazakhstan 1989-2009

Ethnic Group	1989 census		1999 census		2009 census	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Kazakh	6,534,616	39.9	8,011,452	53.5	10,096,763	63.1
Russian	6,227,549	37.8	4,480,675	29.9	3,793,764	23.7

Source: <http://www.astana-kazakhstan.net/kazakhstan/demographics/>

Kazakhs. This meant that all efforts were made to exclude the Russians who were dominant political power during the Soviet period from holding political power in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. This was in response to the exploitation of this indigenous people by the Soviet rule under the leadership of ethnic Russians.

The most significant step towards this end is the making of Kazakh language as a mandatory requirement for candidates of the office of president and chairman of both the houses of parliament. This caused serious hindrances for ethnic Russians who were very weak in Kazakh language. Considering themselves superior race over the Kazakhs, Russians had no interest of learning and acquiring the knowledge of Kazakh language. In this context, it is almost impossible for ethnic Russians to enter into this important political positions of the state. Given the fact that Kazakhstan is bilingual with Kazakh and Russian as the two dominant languages, and Russian being even more widespread than Kazakh, it may be argued that this language requirement violated the principle of political equality. This is seen by Russian as a direct challenge on them. In this sense, the lack of political space of Russians created the feeling of being an alien in them and that became a good source of motivation for out-migration from Kazakhstan (Marquardt, 2013, Lilis, 2010).

Economic factor:

Russians' presence in Central Asia in general and Kazakhstan in particular is closely related to economic issue. Indeed, economic factors often served as a major factor for people's movement from one place to another. As already mentioned Russians' inflow to Kazakhstan during the Soviet period was caused by economic issues. Particularly, during the industrialization campaign in 1920 and Virgin Land Campaign in the 1950, millions of Russian entered into the republic of Kazakhstan as specialists. Likewise, Russians out-flow from Kazakhstan in the post-Soviet period too has strongly been caused by economic factors.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the post-Soviet independent state of Kazakhstan was faced with serious economic hardships, resulting into massive loss of employment. This seriously affected the Russians in Kazakhstan, the bulk of whose population was working mainly as specialists. In the mist of such hardship, it is logical that they look for better economic and job opportunities. And within this context, many

Russians in Kazakhstan opted to move out of the country for better economic opportunities outside the country—particularly to the Russian.

Another very significant point concerning economic factor for Russian out migration from Kazakhstan is that various laws which promoted Kazakh language seemingly posed serious threat to Russians' opportunity to get job, particularly in government sector. Kazakh, being the state language, is made a requirement for certain jobs especially in public sector. This is problematic because majority of the Russians did not possessed the knowledge of Kazakh language. Consequently, this became a big source of discontentment and insecurity in the minds of many Russians. As such, it also became a good source of motivation for outward migration (Hierman, 2016: 267).

Social factor:

The nation-building policy particularly the social policy in post-Soviet Kazakhstan has reversed the social setting of the Soviet period. Unlike the Soviet period in which ethnic Russian occupied the "first among the equal" with their culture and language being used as a machinery to unite all the ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, the post-Soviet Kazakhstan made Kazakh as the "first among the equals" with their culture and language being used as machinery to unite all ethnic groups in Kazakhstan. This implies that the social status of Russian was reduced from primary to secondary (Dave, 2004: 86).

Believing incivilization superiority of Europeans over Muslim population in Central Asia, the Russians were not ready to accept this demotion of their social status. And they saw this policy that elevate Kazakh over other languages including Russian as discriminatory and a violation of individual rights. Consequently, this gave in them a feeling of being exclusion from Kazakhstan. Obviously, this became a good pushing source for Russians to flow out of Kazakhstan (Bohr, 1998: 144).

Conclusion:

The political process of post-Soviet Kazakhstan witnessed massive out migration of Russians from Kazakhstan. The average rate of out migration was 50,000 per year in the 1990s, and 20,000 per year in the 2000s. This massive outward migration was caused by Russians' discontentment over political, economic and social issues taking place in the post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Politically, they felt discriminated and excluded because Kazakh language was made mandatory for certain political

offices. In the same way, language is used to exclude Russians from enjoying the country economic opportunities. Socially, Russians were reduced from primary to secondary position which they felt is unjust and unacceptable.

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