

5 ■ National Identity and Culture-Ideological Aspects of Integration in the Central Asian Region

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When studying international relations and world policy, we have to pay attention to the cultural and civilisation differences between human communities for the sake of understanding how they affect the policy of certain states, functioning of non-governmental and international organisations, public opinion and mass behavior.

In 1993, Samuel Huntington in his article 'Clash of Civilisations' expressed an idea that if the 20th century was one of conflict of ideologies then in the 21st century the main conflicts will happen between civilisations and religions. Religions are the most important constituents of civilisations having truly huge influence on them. Islam, as well as Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, were generated by their 'own' civilisations and have rather great influence on the course of further development of their respective civilisations.¹

But the interdependency and interpenetration of civilisations, with religions as their most important components is the historical truth. Strengthening of the globalisation process cannot but be expressed in greater influence of different civilisations on each other. False identification of international terrorism with Islam and activity of small Moslem minorities with the Moslem world as a whole needs special focus since developments in the 21st century would sufficiently depend on resolution of problems.²

Central Asia occupies a key place in the Eurasian region from the viewpoint of stability due to its geopolitical location. Here, the sharp activation of radical Moslem organisations and also militant armed groups of different kinds uniting under the slogan of struggle against the enemies of 'veritable Islam' has become the dominating threat.

The web of political, international, inter-confessional problems with which the countries of the Central Asia are confronted with creates favorable context to make the region a springboard of international terrorism. This simultaneously creates the imperative for the Central Asian Republics (CAR) to join against the common threat. This is an important factor for starting the process of integration in Central Asia.

Threats from international terrorism is not related only to its destabilising influence on the situation in the region but with the possibility of terrorists groups' 'transit' through Central Asian countries to Russia and Europe. Destructive efforts of Islamic extremists may lead to serious political calamities in the Central Asian countries, as well as have huge negative implications for security of many countries throughout the world.³

In conditions of globalisation and also the increasing reality of the cultures and civilisations coming closer with narrowing differences, Central Asia being on the

junction of Europe and Asia and also of Islam, Christian and Buddhist religions ought to play an important political role in this process.

In CAR, Islam has centuries-old history. It is obviously understandable that the division of the world on the basis of civilisations and religions could strike seriously the nations and countries of CAR. Despite of the fact that CAR countries are secular ones where official equality of religions exists, the ever expanding threat of political extremism in the region is a reality.

Kazakhstan may serve as an example of struggle against terrorism. On February 18, 2005, President Nursultan Nazarbayev signed the Law 'On countering extremism' in which the legal and organisational grounds of countering extremism were defined for the purposes of protecting human liberties and rights, fundamentals of constitutional system, and the republic's sovereignty.⁴

In mid-March 2011, the Supreme Court of Kazakhstan recognised seven international organisations as terrorist and outlawed them – Asbat-al-Ansar, Moslem brothers, Taliban, Boz Curd, Central Asian Mujaheeds' Jamaat, Lashkar-i-Toiba, and Organisation of social reforms. Earlier, four organisations, 'Al-Qaida' being one among them, were recognised as extremist ones and prohibited in 2004. On March 16, 2011, in accordance with the law, 'Hizb-ut-Tahrir', an international organisation with emissaries in the region since 1998 and trying to spread their ideas, was recognised as extremist and prohibited in Kazakhstan.

In September of 2003, under Nazarbayev's chairmanship, the First Congress of the Leaders of the World and Traditional Religions was held in the Kazakh capital, Astana. The forum participants adopted a Declaration in which they stressed their fidelity to such eternal values as tolerance, truth, justice and love and agreed to have Kazakhstan as the venue of the next meeting.

In the epoch of globalisation preserving diversity of human culture and of mass culture, and preservation of the national cultural values, promoting positive solutions to problems before society, matter of linguistic and cultural identity and unique traditional culture of Kazakhstan, are extremely real issues.⁵

Simultaneously, it may be said that discussions should concern revival and development of all nationalities in order that they stand on their own viz-a-viz the Western culture. In conditions of globalisation constructive dialogue between the values of traditional cultures of Central Asian nations and liberal-democratic society is necessary. Laws regulating relations in the sphere of culture in transition societies and preserving the uniqueness of nationalities populating the region are necessary.

According to our point of view the cultural process in what is figuratively defined as 'Eurasian cultural area' may occur within the general perspective of cultural development in the 21st century. As it happens, Central Asian Republics are situated between Europe and Asia, though not geographically but rather from the demographic and cultural point of view. In the context of dialogue between the Western and Eastern cultures and civilisations, the question particularly appears whether a Eurasian community of different ethnic groups and religions is able to be formed to articulate the fundamental principles of the preservation of local national cultures.

In this connection, Nazarbayev underlines, the ideology of traditionalism is logically connected with the crisis of socialist ideology. Actually to what is it possible to appeal to if the former dogmas appears to be untenable? Most likely to the simplest, understandable and simultaneously deeply moral one in the life of each nation, that is, to its traditions. Their role in the nation's life is unquestionable. Cultural traditions were always a source of social rebirth. Return to own cultural backgrounds is surely a positive process. Therewith it is necessary to refuse the simplistic interpretation of traditions and public progress. Modern world experience shows clearly that some traditional structures are very organically interwoven into the tissue of modern civilisation. Innovation is not possible without experience. Just traditions allow a man not to be lost but adapt his life image to swift changes of modern world.⁶

Globalisation process not only creates homogeneous economies and structures and policies in different countries but also leads to 'glocalisation', that is, adaptation of modern Western cultural elements to the local traditions.⁷ On such basis not only preservation but also the rebirth and mastering of people's culture and spirituality, development of local cultural traditions and civilisations are possible. Globalisation does not require unconditional subjection of the local cultures but it requires constructive perception of other civilisations and their emerging experiences which may be possible only in the process of constructive dialogue with them.

Globalisation leads to lowering of linguistic and cultural uniqueness of identities and causes crisis in a nation's self-identification, which results in the revival of the primordial aspects of national cultures and traditions. Globalisation intensifies competition in the cultural sphere; it becomes a basis of economical expansion of highly developed countries into new regions. In fact, in modern international relations the struggle is for domination over values and principles. In this connection the loss of cultural and social identity becomes a serious deficiency for the Central Asian Republics.

Identity includes such factors as self-consciousness, common interests and values, historical experience, and religious factor. Forming of the religious factor is an important aspect of the integration process. According to Peter Frankenberg and Jorge Shubauer, the elements such identity include are:

- Cognitive: awareness of citizens of their region.
- Affirmative: emotional attitude to their region, sense of solidarity.
- Instrumental: becomes apparent in the political culture of population and is a foundation for the population mobilisation, perception of the national political problems, and so on.

Identity may be contained in history, religion, literature, music and folklore. On such basis, the identity of European countries is formed. Feeling of common belonging formed under the influence of culture is a catalyst for people's solidarity.

A major aspect of globalisation is that it promotes a new type of identity, the so called 'universal' one. Thanks to mass media and mass culture, an individual

becomes a part of the world cultural, social, political and other spaces. One not only identifies oneself with one's ethnic group and national state but feels affinity with the world events; a person becomes aware of oneself as 'a world citizen'. This new identity works within a complex relationship and sometimes it comes into obvious conflict with a person's identity as the citizen of a certain state.

For the countries of former USSR, the conflict between civic and ethnic identity has a special meaning. In spite the pressure of global processes, strengthening of national statehood being a fundamental social and political condition of their existence has essential meaning for them. National state is a decisive link for social, economical and political reforms of public life.

It should at the same time be noted that already in the second year of its independence, Republic of Kazakhstan became an initiator and organised the international forum 'On way to spiritual consent', where spiritual tolerance was declared as the most important priority of the government's foreign policy.⁸

It is symbolical that regular meetings of the world and traditional religious leaders in Kazakhstan have become a good tradition. Second congress that took place in 2006 showed to all mankind that problems of universal and inter-religious relations may be solved through talks avoiding any kind of hostility.

At the congress, President Nazarbayev stressed that for years in multinational and independent Kazakhstan relations of peace, harmony and mutual respect have prevailed, and thanks to it the Kazakhstan model of economic development was formed and certain progress was achieved; that Kazakhstan's policy is based on respect for human inner freedom that in its turn determines inter-confessional tolerance. Along with the traditional Islamic culture, the conditions for development of all world and traditional religions were created in the country. That is why Kazakhstan became one of the biggest world centres of inter-religious dialogue. In terms of promoting cooperation among religious communities, holding of Second Congress of Leaders of the World and Traditional Religions gained great meaning for international political relations. This view was expressed in the Declaration adopted by the Congress. The Declaration reflects the global need to replace conflict of ideologies with the culture of peace, and the ideology of tolerance, harmony and dialogue.⁹

One of the most important forms of taking and implementing the ideas of peaceful culture is strengthening of concord between nationalities, and promoting the culture of cordial relations between ethnic groups. In this background, the progress of Kazakhstan in forming a multinational and multicultural society is particularly notable. In such a society, the equality of all nationalities and harmonious combination of individual rights and liberties are provided.

Currently the process of political modernisation in the CARs is complicated by nation-building and identity factors. As is known, preconditions for political transformation are nation-building factors such as common territory, sense of national identity, and also the personal psychological factors determining decisions of political leaders and social and cultural orientations.¹⁰ In other words, the flourishing of national identity makes the transition processes easier.

In the CARs, matters of national identity remain the most important ones. Provision of the nation solidarity depends on the degree of elites' consolidation and personal characteristics of political leaders. National elite of the CARs present perspectives of their states as the third way of development which stands in between the traditional past and borrowed image of Western and Eastern civilisations.¹¹

Conflicts in CARs are mostly generated as a result of struggle and replacement of leading elites without representing a nationwide sense and because high positions are not often offered on the basis of ethical-moral merit. Forming of independent countries on the basis of national ideology of titular nation has become the main national idea of the CAR political elites.

In the CARs, there also exist problems linked to the traditional way of life and system of networks that affects selection and empowerment of the political elite and the nature of decisions taken by it. This system has deep historical roots in tribal-clannish structure of traditional society. Strengthening of the traditional institutions in the policy of the states also assumed geopolitical character. On the one hand, they stabilise society and lead to integration of 'related' countries, but on the other hand, the excessive emphasis on unique nationhood negatively affects the closer integration of Central Asian countries. That is why it is necessary to work out common strategic objectives and principles that can consolidate collective action by these countries.

From the religious point of view, all CARs countries profess Islam but the degree of dissemination of religion and its influence in each country varies. In the opinion of American political scientist Martha Olcott, among the surprises which the CAR independence brought with itself the discovery was made that Islam in the soviet time turned out to be more widespread than it was supposed before.¹²

Under specific mentality of Central Asian nations and their history it may be said that extremism on religious ground is practically excluded. Islamic solidarity in the region is secondary, mostly superficial. Islamic factor in the CARs assists to arrange a dialogue outside its bounds.¹³

As in other states, in Kazakhstan groups of nationalists promoting ideas of national rebirth were formed. Policy of Kazakhstan government is directed to fight against nationalistic ideas and attempts to create disharmony between nations. This is exemplified by the fact that Law 'On language' did not exclude Russian language, which has been given a place in the political, official and cultural life of the population, and also as the language of integration in the post Soviet area.

Nazarbayev is one of those persons who worked out the understanding on the necessity of integration of all CIS countries. The process of political construction is inseparable from the personality of its leaders. President Nazarbayev's notion of 'Eurasianism' is not only a theoretical approach but a vector of practical policy. For Kazakhstan, it is the course to integration and development of multilateral regional partnership. Idea of 'Eurasianism' comes from the fact that in the modern world dialogue between national cultures is not only necessary but also is the way to draw

them closer; only the understanding of each other leads to integration and closer relations.

On September 17, 1998, the UN adopted an international policy doctrine, 'Diplomacy of Silk Road', which was based on the revival of the Great silk Route, which would give new impulses to integration process in CAR. Great silk Route as trade and economic communication appeared in 3rd century BC, though the term 'Silk Route' was given to it by a German geographer, Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1870.¹⁴ Later, Great Silk Route became a symbol of the Central Asian nations and their cultural unity, particularly, through such contemporary projects as TRASECA and INOGATE, which received the name 'Rebirth of Silk Road'.¹⁵

The concept of the 'Great silk Route' answers many general questions and stresses development of inter-governmental cooperation, multilateral diplomacy, and forming of new effective integration structures. It is a spiritual idea uniting East and West, disproving artificially created concepts of locally closed civilisations. In condition of globalisation, ideas of humanity, tolerance, steps towards universal brotherhood, etc. will receive powerful impulse and become really dominating ones.¹⁶

In the current conditions, 'Silk Road' is supposed to be built on three piers, which are: energy, transport system and telecommunications. Realisation of 'Great Silk Road' revival will help overcome geographical isolation of CARs. Possibilities exist for developing Caspian natural resources. Use of raw materials potential will allow giving dynamism to the economies of the regional states and stimulating regional integration.

Disintegration of the USSR led not only to rupture of economic relations between republics, but also liquidated intergovernmental relations and links in the sphere of ideology. The idea of 'national independence' of the ruling elites in Central Asia included the revision of history, propaganda of negative appraisal of the Soviet period, deletion of positive experience of relations between the Soviet republics, and rolling out of the cultural and scientific boundaries.

Legacy of the Soviet authoritarianism being preserved in the people's mentality has special ideological and political influence. People express themselves through routine fidelity to governmental institutions and regard current political structures as effective and priority ones.

National mentality has decisive meaning in the historical process. Being a deep part of the collective and individual consciousness, mentality expresses itself as the totality of the nation's ideas and predispositions for world appreciation, feelings, thoughts and definite actions.¹⁷

In this connection, ten years ago in his message to Kazakhstani people, President Nazarbayev said: Our mentality had been formed by generations of people who were brought out in the spirit of communist principles. Some people enthusiastically used a chance of recent changes, but many people did not. The human and objective factors influenced on people, they used slowly to accept changes as before waiting for the government assistance to solve their own problems. Such philosophy and

attitude to things impede them to overcome new difficulties and bereft of energy and desire to act independently.¹⁸ Mentality is a complicated, contradictory spiritual structure which includes variegated elements influencing the choice of political development, form of government and power arrangement. That is why in respect to the CARs, it is necessary to find such forms, which allow further steady progress on the designated way of integration processes while preserving social stability and consensus of political forces.

As Nazarbayev noted: We are a Eurasian country having its own history and its own future. That is why our way will differ from other ones. It will absorb all achievements of different civilisations.¹⁹

On the CIS area, uncontrolled migration of working forces became a serious negative consequence of integration that may in future lead to social destabilisation in the Central Asian countries. Therefore, only theoretical, analytical and pragmatic approaches and also coordination of different ministries and departments of the Central Asia countries will promote the progress of integration in the region.

Notes

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