

Kazakh and Russian History and Its Geopolitical Implications

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ABSTRACT *In 2015, Kazakhstan celebrated 550 years of Kazakh statehood. The extraordinary interest in these events, both among Kazakh officials and some members of the international community, has a clear political message. It underscores Kazakhstan's independence from Russia regardless of Kazakhstan's entering the Eurasian Union in 2015. The celebration also underscores the fact that the borders of present-day Kazakhstan have historical roots and are not just a recent "gift" from Russia. Some Russians living in Kazakhstan, and even some ethnic Kazakhs, protested the 2015 interpretation of Kazakhstan history and the relationship it implies between Kazakhstan and Russia. Ironically, Moscow provided no help for these protestors, and actually helped Astana deal with the Russian Nationalists. The reason was simple: the rise of Russian Nationalism could create problems not just for Astana but also for Moscow.*

In the fall of 2015, Kazakhstan officials celebrated the 550th anniversary of what they consider the beginning of their statehood. Not only was this sort of celebration unknown in the past, but the festivities were a major state event. They were broadly celebrated in Kazakhstan and had international implications as well, particularly in the United States. A movie related to the event was shown in Washington, and Kazakhstan officials in the U.S. made a special presentation related to a book on the beginning of Kazakhstan history in front of representatives of American officials and academics; the presentation was done in connection with the 550th anniversary of Kazakh statehood. This extraordinary interest of Kazakhstan officials in what seems to be a purely academic subject had clear political implications. Possibly one of the most important implications of the year-long celebration – definitely noted by the Kremlin – was the message sent to Moscow that Kazakhstan will follow its own policy regardless of Moscow's wishes and will deal harshly with those who challenge them. Several arrests in fall 2015 by Kazakh authorities targeted ethnic Kazakhs, who claimed that Russian and Kazakh history are closely integrated and that therefore Kazakhstan should be geopolitically and economically

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In his first term, Putin was still basically a pro-Western leader and his priority was to forge strong ties with the West, if not with the U.S., at least with Central Europe. But by the beginning of Putin's second term, the situation had changed

close to Russia. Kazakhstan police also arrested some ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan just for their belief that Northern Kazakhstan could be attached to Russia. Interestingly enough, Moscow not only ignored these ideological barbs wrapped in historiographic speculation, but actually helped Astana deal harshly with the Russian nationalists and engaged in its own harsh policy toward the Russian nationalists. Moscow's action was clear: catering

to Russian nationalism is a dangerous undertaking and could harm not just Astana's, but also Moscow's interests.

Kazakhstan's First Year of Independence and Flirtation with Eurasianism

Like many other Central Asian nations, Kazakhstan was unsure about its fate as a new nation at the beginning of the post-Soviet era. After all, Kazakhstan has a large Russian-speaking population in the north, and the emerging post-Soviet Russia elite, even Yeltsin himself, clearly indicated that this land should belong to Russia. It became clear to Kazakhstan's President, Nursultan Nazarbaev, a pragmatic and sober politician, that irritating Russia would hardly be in the country's interest, and that the opposite geopolitical direction would be much more preferable. Consequently, Nazarbaev wanted to be close to Russia and proposed a loose alliance with Russia in the early 1990s under the ideological umbrella of "Eurasianism."

Eurasianism is a teaching that emerged in the 1920s among Russian émigrés, based on the assumption that Russia is, in a way, a descendant of the Mongol Empire, which forged a political-cultural "symbiosis" of Orthodox Russians and minorities, the latter being predominately Muslims of Turkic origin. Eurasianism, with its tinge of "Sovietism," became quite popular in post-Soviet Russia and beyond, as the attraction of Western models declined. Still, most Kremlin occupants ignored "Eurasianists" in early post-Soviet history. The majority of the elites saw Russia as part of the West and ignored Central Asia as a useless heirloom of the Soviet past, hardly a major focus of Moscow's foreign policy. Indeed, Kazakhstan's proposal to build a loose alliance with Russia was basically ignored. It is true that during Evgenii Primakov's tenure as Russia's foreign minister and Prime Minister in the last years of the Yeltsin regime, some members of the Russian elite believed that Russia could build



up an alliance with India and China. The “Eurasian” and anti-Western tilt was clear. Still, even here, Central Asia hardly emerged as a major interest for the Kremlin. Even for Putin, at least in the beginning of his term in 2000, Central Asia did not loom large as a geopolitical priority – Putin saw no problems with American military bases in Central Asia after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan and Iraq. In his first term, Putin was still basically a pro-Western leader and his priority was to forge strong ties with the West, if not with the U.S., at least with Central Europe. But by the beginning of Putin’s second term, the situation had changed. Putin made it a major geopolitical priority to increase Russia’s influence in the former Soviet space, mostly because Russia’s attempts to be integrated with the West as an equal partner had become increasingly unworkable. At approximately that point in 2011, “Eurasianism” reemerged as a useful ideological tool.

Kazakhstan also reembraced “Eurasianism” at this time, but its interpretation was different: for Kazakhstan, Eurasianism implied not just the equal treatment of all states involved in a planned “Eurasian Union,” but also freedom for each party to engage in relationships with other powers, even if these powers were at odds with each other. This was hardly Putin’s plan. The Kremlin not only intimated that Russia should play the leading role in the Union but tried to preclude members of the union from forging “strategic” relations with other powers, especially those not on friendly terms with Russia. Moreover, the Kremlin hinted at the artificiality, not only of the present borders, but of certain post-Soviet states *in toto*, and intimated that these could disappear, with large chunks appropriated by Russia. In Ukraine, for example, Putin had asserted long before the present crisis going on that Ukraine should be dismantled; his support of East Ukrainian separatists indicated that this was not just talk.

In 2014, Putin noted that Nazarbaev was a great leader because he had created the state from scratch.¹ While this statement could be seen as a compliment

Kazakhstan celebrates the 550th anniversary of the formation of the Kazakh Khanate on September 11, 2015.

The Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan

In the view of official Kazakh historians, the Russian and Kazakh states existed in two different cultural and geopolitical universes. The emerging Kazakh state was a mighty empire whose territory coincided with that of present day Kazakhstan. Northern Kazakhstan is therefore the patrimonial region of the Kazakh people and not a gift from the Russians

to Nazarbaev, it had another, potentially ominous meaning. It implied that Kazakhstan was an artificial state and that Northern Kazakhstan could be taken by Russia. These statements coincided with problems in Northern Kazakhstan; this section of the country had a large Russian or Russian-speaking community, and was also, at least potentially, unstable. Astana took note of this development, which explains the extraordinary attention given to the reinterpretation of Kazakhstan's past and the celebration of what Astana called the 550th anniversary of the creation of Kazakhstan state as an event of grand importance,² and why deviation from the prescribed

historical narrative became a serious crime. Astana's new ideological stand emphasized the deep historical roots of the Kazakhstan state and its historical geopolitical ways as being independent from Russia.

From Eurasianism to Kazakh Nationalism

Soviet/Russian versions of Eurasianism implied that the great Mongol Empire in the heartland of Eurasia had passed its torch to Russia, which picked up the legacy of the Mongol commonwealth over time. Kazakhstan was part of this legacy. Actually, Kazakhstan as a state did not have a place in this Russian narrative: it was simply dissolved in the Turkic world, which lived in a happy "symbiosis" with Russia. In this interpretation, which dominated postwar Soviet/Russian historiography, Kazakh received real statehood only recently when the Kazakh Socialist Republic was created as a constituent part of the USSR. This narrative implies that Kazakh statehood is a gift from "elder brother" Russia. First, the state itself was constructed by Moscow, a central power that was mostly culturally and linguistically Russian despite the presence of ethnic minorities among early Soviet leaders. Second, a large portion of the territory of modern Kazakhstan, notably the northern part, was Russian Siberia, "given" to Kazakhstan on the implicit condition of Kazakh geopolitical loyalty.

Kazakhstan official historians challenged in the 2000s or even before this vision of the past. To start with, they emphasized the emergence of an ancient

civilization in the Asian heartland with Kazakhstan at its heart. A special place was allotted to the Turkic Khaganate, the ancient Turkic state. There are several reasons why the Khaganate became so important in the official narrative. First, it indicated that the Turkic civilization and states had emerged centuries before the rise of “Kievan Rus,”³ a loose configuration of Slavic tribes which Russian historians usually regard as the forerunner of Ukraine, Russia, and Belo-Russia.⁴ The Khaganate embraced not just most of Northern Central Asia but a good part of Eastern Europe. Thus it was a true Eurasian empire, implicitly a progenitor of Eurasian civilization.

The rise of the empire of the Mongols and their descendants was the next phase in Kazakh history. In the new interpretation, most important was not space – as in traditional Eurasianism – but ethnicity. The Chingis Khan Empire and its descendants were basically Turkic states and transmitted their legacies not to imperial Russia but to the Turkic people of Central Asia; to be precise, the Mongol Empire transmitted its torch to the Kazakhs, who created a strong state more than half a millennium ago. This declaration had several important implications. First, it asserted that the Kazakh state is quite old, as old as the Russian state, which, according to traditional Russian and Soviet historiography, was centralized and liberated from the “Mongol/Tatar” yoke in the 15th century. Thus, implicitly, two civilizations or states emerged in the Eurasian heartland and were practically equal in their importance and might. These states, while having territorial proximity, had absolutely different cultural, geopolitical, and ethnic roots. The Kazakh state was the direct descendant of the Turkic and Mongol Empires; the Russian state’s relationship with the Mongols was fleeting and barely tangible. This notion is supported by an increasing number of Russian nationalists, who also discard the Mongolian legacy of Russian statehood and culture and see its cultural and ethnic roots in the Byzantine Empire or Europe or both.

Thus, in the view of official Kazakh historians, the Russian and Kazakh states existed in two different cultural and geopolitical universes. The emerging Kazakh state was a mighty empire whose territory coincided with that of present day Kazakhstan. Northern Kazakhstan is therefore the patrimonial region of the Kazakh people and not a gift from the Russians. The Russian conquest of this territory was similar to the colonial conquests of the European powers and was driven by the same predatory instincts of plunder and exploitation. Russian migration did not lead to the benevolent merging of two peoples into a mutually enriching “symbiosis,” but heralded a mortal conflict between colonialists and the subjugated population. The Russian Empire emerged not as a benevolent Eurasian state but as “the prison of nations” defined by Vladimir Lenin long ago. This approach to defining Kazakhstan discards not only the Eurasian paradigm of the “symbiosis” of ethnic Russians and Turkic people but also the ideological constructions of Russian nationalists.

Official Kazakh historians, then, have rejected the notions of Eurasianism and neo-Sovietism, the former which implies the existence of a “Eurasian” nation, and the latter which emphasizes the existence of a “Soviet people.” Similarly, for Russian nationalists, Russia is not a country of trans-ethnic “symbiosis” but a state comprised of ethnic Russians or at least of the Russian language and culture, although they assert that the Russian Empire was quite different from European colonial empires. Moderate neo-Slavophiles of both the pre-revolutionary and Soviet eras assert that Russians, along with some other Slavs, possess the Christian virtues of kindness and tolerance.⁵ Russian rule over minorities never resembled British rule over India; however, these nationalists follow the English apologists of the British Empire in one important aspect: they insist that many people appropriated by the Russian Empire were underdeveloped savages. Ethnic Russians actually brought these people’s civilization in the holistic sense. Russian Slavophiles regarded the spread of Christianity among its Muslim subjects as a civilizational process, and here they were not much different from the Victorian-era British.⁶ Even 19th century Slavophiles with their dislike of the West approached Asians of the empire the way Europeans did their colonial subjects. They forgot about despising Europe and asserted that, in dealing with Asians, Russians played a clearly positive role as a civilizing force. In their view, Russians were Christian, civilized people, and their interaction with Asian “savages” helped the latter a great deal. It is true that some Slavophiles and later early Eurasianists were predisposed to Asia, and that some benign characteristics could be acknowledged. “Nevertheless, even the ‘pro-Asian’ Slavophiles and Eurasianists did not so much believe in a Russian–Asian symmetrical reciprocity, but rather in Russia’s special responsibility toward the East in its educational mission of civilization.”⁷

The Kremlin’s support of the Slavophile interpretation of the past has been dominant since the late 1920s and early 1930s, when Russian nationalism reasserted itself as an official ideology in the form of “National Bolshevism.”⁸ As a matter of fact, this ideology continued to be part of official Soviet discourse almost to the very end of the regime. “National Bolshevism” implied that Russians were the major benefactors of minorities and played the major civilizational role in Russian history from past to present. On the one hand, it overlapped with latent “Eurasianism,” which could be seen in Soviet ideology, which implied a “symbiosis” of Russians and minorities. On the other hand, it took elements of the Slavophile narrative from the pre-revolutionary era and its description of the past. Here Russians, and Eastern Slavs in general, were a civilized, peaceful people, whereas nomadic tribes were often barbaric and aggressive; their cultural contribution was minimal if any and their activities were basically limited to plunder and murder.

This official or semi-official Soviet narrative was sometimes challenged even in Soviet times. A good example was the publication of Olzhas Suleimenov’s book

Az i Ia in the midst of the “stagnations” of Leonid Brezhnev’s rule.⁹ The book, somehow overlooked by the censors, ignited a major ideological scandal. Although the book’s content was rather benign for Western readers, it subtly yet certainly challenged the notion of a Russian cultural hegemony over the lands of the USSR. The point was that medieval Turkic people of the Eurasian heartland were not brutal savages who raided Russian lands but had their own sophisticated culture, which, together with Slavic culture and tradition, contributed to the Eurasian cultural mosaic. Suleimenov’s version of “Eurasianism,” then, implied a “symbiotic” relationship between Kazakhs and Russians, who lived in the same state (the USSR) at the time of publication. Suleimenov did not elaborate much on the Turkic nomads’ cultural achievements, but simply stated that they were not as primitive as some historians claimed and that their relationship with Slavic settlers should not be reduced to raids, plunder, and destruction. They lived in a mutually beneficial arrangement with settled Slavs, where one could see the framework of the “symbiosis” of the various ethnicities of the USSR. Suleimenov’s “Eurasianism” might have addressed the need for validation felt by some Kazakhs and other Central Asian Russified intellectuals in the last decades of the Soviet regime. These people, while fully Russified, plainly wanted equal treatment for themselves and their culture. They wanted acceptance as equal partners by their Russian colleagues and acknowledgment of their native culture as having value in itself. They loathed being seen as savages who owed everything in their cultural makeup to “older brothers” – ethnic Russians and their culture.

Although Suleimenov’s book may have set an important precedent, the story currently in circulation is different among Kazakh intellectuals and the present Kazakhstan official narrative. The Astana line, albeit structurally similar to Suleimenov’s narrative, supports the idea of the “symbiosis” of Turkic nomads and non-nomadic people with other peoples of Asia – but not Slavs.¹⁰ It is implied that these Asian people not only lived close to Turkic nomads but were much more developed than the Slavs. In addition some cities were embedded in the Turkic landscape and lived in perfect harmony with them. This was a “symbiosis” of Asian peoples; Slavs, in these narratives, had little contact

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Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev meet in Astana on October 4, 2016.

AFP PHOTO / SPUTNIK / ALEXEI DRUZHININ

with these Asians. Another difference from Suleimenov's narrative is the great emphasis on the nomadic people's cultural achievements. They are described as equally advanced as settled people, challenging the assumption that "civilization" implies cities, literacy traditions, and fixed borders.¹¹ The nomadic people of the Eurasian plains had none of these attributes, but they had a great civilization that ideally fit their environment and did not need Russian cultural input. According to this narrative, the Russian Empire's encroachment on Kazakh lands brought nothing but displacement and subjugation, and it is not surprising that Kazakhs constantly rose against their colonial masters.

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The Soviet official interpretation did not discard the notions of the colonial aspects of the Russian state. But this image prevailed only at the beginning of So-

viet history. By the 1930s or even before, the cultural and intellectual climate had changed dramatically. Russian nationalism became the major building block of the regime's ideological construction. The colonial, repressive aspect of the tsarist state almost totally disappeared, and the state became quite different from European colonial empires. The Russian state's expansion was not a conquest but a peaceful "unification" with other peoples, whom Russians not only civilized but also "protected" against hostile states and peoples. Ukraine, for example, was not only peacefully united with brotherly Orthodox Russians, but also protected by this unification from the oppressive rule of Catholic Poles. While tsarist Russia was usually seen as much better than European colonial powers, criticism of the tsarist approach to minorities appeared in Soviet historiography toward the very end of the regime, though usually subdued. Yet Soviet historians asserted that all of the oppressive aspects of the tsarist treatment of minorities disappeared with the emergence of the USSR – a true brotherly family of different ethnicities with Russian protective "older brothers." It was an absolutely different state with no analogues in global history. Needless to say, the USSR had nothing to do with European colonial empires, and all ethnicities of the country not only lived in happy "symbiosis" but also were increasingly blended into the "Soviet people," a completely new nation.

Official Kazakh historians totally reject this narrative. It goes without saying that in their interpretation, tsarist Russia was not much different from other oppressive colonial empires of the past, and even the Soviet state emerged in a very negative light. It was not a happy Eurasian "symbiosis" but a peculiar colonial empire, and the Kazakhs suffered along with the other peoples of the USSR. The final collapse of the USSR was the collapse of an oppressive political system, but also of the Russian imperial state, which had exploited Kazakhstan for centuries and prevented the Kazakhs from creating their own state (in this interpretation, the differences between tsarist and Soviet Russia are implicitly discarded).¹³ After the collapse of the USSR, the Kazakhs were finally able to resurrect their state. The end of Soviet and implicitly Russian domination led to the emergence of an independent Kazakhstan, a player that could deal with Moscow as an equal.

Cultural trends indicated that Kazakhstan's historiography most likely would not simply deemphasize Kazakhs' past relationship with Russians, but interpret Kazakhstan's past in such a way as to address the idiosyncratic Westernization of the Kazakh elite and its increasing distance from Russia. In this interpreta-



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tion, Kazakhs are historically predisposed to democracy and other Western institutions, whereas Russia has quite a different historical genetic makeup; the latter is a country predisposed to despotism and backwardness – traits that make incorporation into the Western order practically impossible. For this reason, Kazakhstan should move away from Russia culturally, linguistically, and geopolitically, or at least balance Russia’s geopolitical presence by fostering relationships with other powers.

The Future of History: The Trend to “Euro Islam”

While asserting that Russian culture and language have lost their paramount roles in Kazakhstan, one should not, of course, oversimplify the picture. Kazakhstan’s official discourse does not discard Russia and the Russian language. The Russian language continues to be seen as important in Kazakhstan. Still, its application continues to decline, increasingly replaced by Kazakh¹⁴ or English, knowledge of which has become essential for the elite.¹⁵ One Russian observer noted that Astana has introduced English on a much broader scale than has been seen in Russia. In the Russian capital, the Moscow High School of Economics is the foremost “stronghold of liberal Westernism,” but even here not every course is taught in English. The story is different in Kazakhstan, where the elite university – Nazarbaev University – conducts classes only in English. For the Kazakhstan elite, then, English has emerged as the language of international, if not inter-ethnic discourse. Many graduates of Nazarbaev and similar institutions will be employed by new financial and state institutions, such as the Astana financial center opening in 2016. The employees of these new centers and firms will use only English and be modeled after similar institutions in Singapore and Dubai. The increasing role of English as the language of the elite, and the increasing numbers of Kazakhs trained in the West will undoubtedly provide a new angle in Kazakhstan’s official interpretation of the past. Astana will probably follow the model of “Euro Islam” propagated by such Tatar intellectuals as Rafael Khakimov, the advisor of Mintimer Shaimiev, first president of Tatarstan.¹⁶ In Tatarstan’s case, the proponents of “Euro Islam” emphasized that Islam “truly understood” fit well into democratic capitalism. The Westernization of Kazakhstan’s elite would provide them with the same incentives to fit their national and, implicitly, Muslim identities into their increasing Westernization and, consequently, the values of Western capitalist democracy. For this reason, a review of Tatarstan’s “Euro Islam” could be instructive, for it provides insight into the possible evolution of a similar trend in Kazakhstan.

Khakimov acknowledged that Tatarstan is the direct descendant of the Golden Horde and one of the states that emerged after the disintegration of the Mongol Empire. Being rooted in the Mongol past does not mean it inherited despo-

tism and brutality, attributes passed solely to the Russian state. Tatars inherited just tolerance for all creeds and ethnicities, the hallmark of Mongolian rule, and also developed a form of democracy. Thus Tatar tradition fits well into the Western narrative of tolerance, democracy, and humanism. One could assume

that as Kazakhstan historians, and regional intellectuals in general, become increasingly exposed to Western scholarship and frames of thinking, their interpretation of Kazakhstan history would more and more resemble that of Tatarstan history in a context similar to that of “Euro Islam.” One might add that this interpretation of the past, where the seeds of democracy were founded almost in antiquity, fits well with the “politically correct” interpretation of the past in Western academia. Kazakhstan’s official historians are clearly keen to be incorporated into the West and follow this line of thought. Indeed, one could see the seeds of this interpretation of the past in Kazakhstan’s official history, which holds that Turkic people in general and Kazakhs in particular developed a sense of ethnic and cultural tolerance, as well as democracy early on. Nothing of this is noted in regard to Russia. It is implied (here Kazakhstan historians follow the path of Khakimov’s “Euro Islamists”) that Russia developed none of these benign characteristics, which explains why Russia has a problem being integrated in the West.

This interpretation of the past implies that Kazakhstan’s presumable “strategic” relationship with Russia should be taken with a large grain of salt. It is a marriage of geopolitical convenience with no deep-seated cultural roots, one based mostly on Kazakhstan’s fear of Russia’s military machine. This vision of history clearly is not an academic or even a cultural abstraction. It has direct political implications, and those who take a different approach or depart from the official interpretation of Kazakh history have been persecuted. Russia’s reaction to these developments is telling. The Kremlin did not react much to the persecution of those who supposedly supported the Kremlin’s view, and in some of the cases even helped Astana. The reasons were manifold. First, the Kremlin has apparently lost much of its interest in the EU and has moved it to the level of second tier projects, similarly to the “Union State” with Belorussia. In the late 1990s, the “Union” was hailed as a major geopolitical project – the beginning of the reassembling of the USSR in a new form. But the course of events did not follow expectations and the relationship with Minsk became cold, guarded, and in some cases openly hostile. It is quite possible that Moscow has begun to treat Astana in the same way. The second reason is that open support of radical Russian nationalists – who clearly reject Kazakhstan’s official vision of both the past and present – could have quite negative repercussions for the Kremlin.

Imperial “Eurasianism” and Russian imperial nationalism are not just talk but a serious matter that could have direct implications for Kazakhstan independence

“Loyal” Kazakh Eurasianists and Astana’s Response

Those who have challenged the official narrative that rejects the happy “symbiosis” of Kazakhs and Russians were seen as potentially dangerous troublemakers. This was especially so with those who actually see no difference between Kazakhs and Russians, and regard them as one “Eurasian” people. Yermek Tachibekov, for example, a 37-year-old Kazakh, did not see any differences between Kazakhs and Russians and assumed Russia and Kazakhstan had inherited the same historical legacy and, along with other ethnicities of the former USSR, historically constituted one organic entity. He stated that Samaritans, Saks, and Huns – ancestors of many peoples of the USSR – lived in the same cultural and geopolitical space. Even Ukraine, at least Donbas, was part of this space, for it was where the Scythians migrated. All these people were historically united and saw real enemies only in the West. Attila the Hun was a great leader not because he was the leader of “proto-Turkic” or Turkic people, but because he unified all the peoples of the Eurasian heartland to deal with the West. The West acknowledged his domination and paid him tribute. The Mongols followed the Huns, and Russia emerged as the natural successor of the Mongol commonwealth. Tachibekov stated that “Russia is indeed a Horde”¹⁷ and implicitly the leader or center of Eurasian space. The Huns and Mongols – the cultural and geopolitical ancestors of practically all the peoples of the former USSR – dominated Europe. It was Russians but not Central Asians, including Kazakhs, who inherited the Mongol/Eurasian Commonwealth. Kazakhs could not inherit anything because such a nation does not exist. According to Tachibekov, there was no such nation as Kazakh until 1921. Kazakhs are an artificial creation, as are the other Turkic ethnicities of Central Asia, and while he could not associate himself with Kazakhs, he could well associate himself with Turkic people in general. As a matter of fact, he saw no difference between Kazakhs, Kirgiz or Uzbeks. They are one ethnic group and are only artificially divided. The creation of their artificial states and ethnicities was done at the expense of ethnic Russians, as is clearly the case with Kazakhstan. It was the Soviet government, which created Kazakhstan at the expense of the Russians. It was Filipp Goloshchekov who decided to create Kazakhstan from “truly (iskonno) Russian land.”¹⁸ Kazakhs are thus an absolutely artificial ethnic creation. The “variety of native peoples” were named Kazakhs¹⁹ and they received the land of Russian peasants, “defenders of Russian borders.”²⁰ Finally the Russian city Grozny was renamed to Alma-Ata and made the capital of newly created Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic. The emergence of Kazakhs and Kazakhstan was not merely executed at the expense of Russians, the legitimate inheritors of the land of most of present-day Kazakhstan, but was an act of clear injustice for the local citizens who would in the future be called Kazakhs, and who owe everything to Russians. Before the Russians’ arrival, Tachibekov argued, Kazakhs had neither written language nor “even a single building” hospital, school, or bath house. Everything was built

by Russians,²¹ and Kazakhstan should acknowledge Moscow's leadership. Moreover, Tachibekov actually implied that Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states should be a part of Russia, as Kazakhstan is an absolutely artificial state and Kazakh nationalists should be Russian nationalists. He stated that he is indeed a Russian nationalist and will defend Russia's interests regardless of anything. With that said, Tachibekov does not regard the U.S. as the embodiment of evil and Russia as the embodiment of goodness; both Russia and the U.S., like other global players, are basically the same in terms of acting according to their interests. Still he defends Russian interests because he regards Russia as the true motherland and views Kazakhstan as part of Russia.²²

These views hardly fit Astana's official historical and connected geopolitical narrative. The very fact that Tachibekov was an ethnic Kazakh made the situation worse because he was seen as a traitor. In November 2015 he was put on trial in the southern Jambyl region for allegedly "inciting inter-ethnic hatred"²³ under the pressure of a group of "national-patriots."²⁴ Astana definitely saw in him an ethnic Kazakh, a sort of traitor whose particular "Eurasianism," which implied the resurrection of the USSR in this or that form, was nothing but a call for the end of Kazakhstan independence, or at least of its "multi-vector" foreign policy with relations with Russia being only one among many. Astana was clearly not happy with pro-Russian Kazakh "Eurasianists." But they were apparently a declining breed and no serious threat. They could even reemerge as useful if Astana decided to increase its emphasis on its relationship with Moscow for geopolitical and economic reasons.

Russian Nationalists, Kazakhstan History and Territorial Integrity

The story is quite different with ethnic Russians in Northern Kazakhstan, whose challenge of Astana's official narrative directly contests the country's territorial integrity. The official Kazakhstan interpretation of Kazakh history not only implies the basic irrelevance of Russian-Soviet rule for centuries or even millennia of Kazakhstan history, when the legacy and ethnicity of the pre-Turkic people are taken into account, but also emphasizes the "natural" configuration of the country's borders. There were no "gifts" from Russia. What Russian nationalists regard as Southern Siberia, a part of Russia given



What restricts Putin from expanding the Russian state, using the problems of "Sudetendeitsch," in our case "Sudeten Russians," as an excuse in Kazakhstan or Ukraine is not the power of local armies or even fear of confrontation with NATO, but different considerations

as a “gift” to Kazakhstan by the Soviet government, ignoring the interests of ethnic Russians, was nothing but primordial Kazakh land. Astana has been especially vigilant in snuffing attempts to create a different narrative of the past and has been expedient in dealing harshly with any actions with a tinge of separatism. Astana has reason for concern here. The Russians and Russian-speaking population of Northern Kazakhstan have not been happy with the constant trend toward the “Kazakhization” of the country’s cultural and linguistic space and continuous marginalization of Russian language and culture. Several politicians and quasi-politicians have emerged in the post-Soviet era to exploit this feeling.

In 1999, for example, the Kazakhstan government discovered a so-called “Pugachev plot.” Its goal was either to create an autonomous republic in the North of the country or to foment an attack on the region by Russia on the grounds of protecting their ethnic and linguistic kinsmen,²⁵ such as occurred when Putin engaged in the annexation of Crimea on the grounds of saving ethnic and linguistic kin. “Pugachev” ventures are not isolated. In the early 2000s, at the beginning of Putin’s tenure, Eduard Limonov, a controversial radical writer and politician, believed the Putin regime was absolutely foreign to Russia and needed to be overthrown.²⁶ He believed that ethnic Russians in Russia had become too corrupted by the regime and would not be able to rise without external prodding, but that ethnic Russians in Northern Kazakhstan were angry, not just with Kazakhstan authorities who culturally and linguistically marginalized them, but also with Moscow, which betrayed them. Consequently, Limonov planned to start a revolt in Northern Kazakhstan, create a nationalistic and, in a way, revolutionary state, and use it as a launching pad for invading Russia and fomenting revolt inside the country.²⁷

Limonov was not able to accomplish his plans and was arrested by Russian authorities, but some people believed that Kazakhstan should be much smaller, or much more strongly attached to Russia. Nazarbaev was also sure that those in Russia who are influenced by Eurasianism or Russian imperial nationalism, or both, believed that Russia should be the center of the Eurasian Union, and that Kazakhstan should be firmly attached to Russia. The events in Ukraine coincided with Putin’s implications that Kazakhstan is an artificial, recently made state. This indicates that imperial “Eurasianism” and Russian imperial nationalism are not just talk but a serious matter that could have direct implications for Kazakhstan independence.²⁸ Astana took note of this and dealt harshly with ethnic Russians who directly or indirectly questioned the legitimacy of Kazakhstan’s present borders.

In the fall of 2015, Kazakhstan authorities arrested Igor Sychev, a 26-year-old ethnic Russian from Northern Kazakhstan; he received a harsh sentence for polling the residents of a local city for their views on the Ukrainian crisis and,



implicitly, whether they wanted to join Russia, as Ukraine's Crimea had. He was given five years in jail. During his trial, prosecutors claimed that Sychev had tried to stir up separatist sentiment in the eastern Kazakhstan region that borders Russia, and where ethnic Russians are a majority.²⁹ Sychev did not acknowledge his guilt. "Sychev, 26, who administered a message board on a social networking website dedicated to his coal-mining town of Ridder in ex-Soviet territory, pleaded not guilty. "I was not the one to create the online poll, and after an objection I removed the [link to the] poll," Sychev wrote in August in his defense to the human rights commission that operates under Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev. "I had no thoughts or goals to propagate separatism in Kazakhstan." However, the Ridder city court sentenced him to five years in jail late Wednesday, the court's press service told *Al Jazeera*."³⁰

Note that the trial against Sychev corresponded with that against pro-Russian Kazakh "Eurasianists."³¹ "Another pro-Russian blogger, Yermek Tachibekov, is currently on trial in the southern Jambyl region for allegedly 'inciting inter-ethnic hatred.'"³²

The case against Sychev was unprecedented, and no such trials were conducted in "Eastern" or Northern Kazakhstan.³³ Both Limonov and the organizers of the "Pugachev" plot planned to use force and violence. Sychev planned no such actions and did not even advocate North Kazakhstan's separation from the rest of the country. The importance of the event was not just the harshness of the sentence, but Moscow's response. Moscow paid no attention to Sychev's fate, which helped Astana deal with Sychev and other Russian nationalists.

Presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan attend a joint news conference following the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting in Kremlin, on December 23, 2014.

AFP PHOTO / POOL / MAXIM SHIPENKOV

This was, for example, the case with Aleksandr Belov (Potkin), arrested in Moscow in the fall of 2015. He was accused of preparing a coup with plans to overthrow the Kazakhstan government, and assorted other purely criminal undertakings.³⁴ According to Russian prosecutors, Belov and his collaborators tried to engage in plans under the nickname “Vicious Kazakh” (Zloi Kazakh), which would incite animosity between Kazakhs and ethnic Russians.³⁵

One could wonder why Moscow ignored the new construction of Kazakhstan history and related treatment of Russian nationalists who were supposedly on Moscow’s side. One might assume that the Kremlin was above such matters, but this is not so. In the conflict with Ukraine, for example, Kremlin or pro-Kremlin ideologists engaged in fierce campaigning against the Ukrainian side. They were very concerned with what they regarded as a wrong interpretation of recent history, but also with the distant past. There was, for example, a heated discussion on the nature of some 17th century battles, and even the nature of the Mongol invasion and the relationship of Kievan Rus’ to both present day Ukraine and Russia. The historical polemic continues. Recently, the Russian government erected a monument of St. Vladimir, the Kievan prince who baptized Kievan Rus’. Kiev insisted that the prince was really a Ukrainian leader and placed his picture on a bank note. On the other hand, Moscow, insisting that the Kievan Rus’ legacy belonged to Ukraine and Russia, insisted that Vladimir had the same relationship to Russia as to Ukraine.

There is another explanation for Russia’s apparent willingness to ignore the historical revisions or interpretations occurring in Kazakhstan: Moscow’s hands are full. It became engaged in EU politics, not without success. Indeed, the Kremlin successfully exploited the clear fragmentation of the EU, if not of NATO. Moscow has also been engaged in war in Syria and recently in conflict with Turkey. In addition, the economic situation in Russia has deteriorated sharply due to the plunge in oil prices. It seems that Moscow has no resources with which to engage in quasi-academic and quasi-political discussions with Kazakhstan, or to pay attention to what Astana does with Russian nationalists. But all this cannot fully explain the Kremlin’s policy. Moscow not only failed to protect Russian nationalists but even helped Astana deal with them. One might be reminded here that Potkin (Belov) was arrested and put on trial in Russia. It appears that Moscow fears Russian nationalists of Potkin’s type no less than Astana does, and that Moscow’s issues with them have nothing to do with Kazakhstan’s historiographical construction, which implicitly underlines a separate path. Besides Potkin, Russian authorities arrested and harassed Dmitry Demushkin, a leading Russian extremist nationalist, who had nothing to do with Kazakhstan.³⁶ In addition, the Kremlin has tried to marginalize Russian nationalists in the Lugansk-Donets regions who want to be independent of Kiev. Why did these Russian nationalists become so dangerous not just for Astana but also for Moscow?

One can understand by looking at their vision of the past and consequently the present. It is clearly different from that of both Eurasianists and imperial Russian nationalists. For them, the mighty Russian state-empire is the goal in itself and in the long run benefits either both Russians and minorities (Eurasianist claims) or ethnic Russian or Rus-sified minorities (Imperial Russian nationalist views). For some Russian imperial nationalists and Eurasianists, such as, for example, Alexander Dugin, the masses' well-being is absolutely irrelevant. The goal of Russian foreign policy is the reassurance of Russia's place in the emerging multipolar world as a great power. As the great imperial state, Russia should be spiritualized and socially stratified according to the country's primordial traditions. The socio-economic interests of the populace, the desires of base flesh, should be ignored completely, and Orthodox spirituality – or possibly another similar creed – should rule supreme.

Moscow basically ignored the new construction of Kazakhstan history with its clear anti-Russian slant and even helped Astana to deal with extremist Russian nationalists, who are as dangerous for Russia as they are for Kazakhstan's elite

For extremist Russian nationalists the story is quite different. They acknowledge that the Mongols helped the Russian tsars build a huge empire. The USSR and present day Russia both succeeded the original Mongol commonwealth. Yet ethnic Russians (these nationalists define Russians by blood and ethnicity, not by culture and language) should not be excited that Russia inherited a huge empire and is still an empire in the present. The point is that in all the imperial constructions, not ethnic Russians but minorities run the show. They compelled Russians to engage in various utopian imperial projects and lived well at Russian expense. The Empire is not beneficial for ethnic Russians – it is a liability. Russians should get rid of the empire even if it leads to a smaller but racially and ethnically homogeneous state. Moreover, a “true” Russian state would imply the end of rule by minorities. This means that the property of “oligarchs” would be confiscated or nationalized, and their wealth should benefit the majority: ethnic Russians.³⁷

Putin grudgingly tolerated these nationalists during his first two terms. The reasons were manifold. First, they distracted public attention from the pro-Western liberals whom the Kremlin saw as a major problem as it nervously watched several “orange,” mostly pro-Western revolutions in post-Soviet space. Second, and possibly more important, the Kremlin coffers were full due to high gas and oil prices, and Putin believed that average Russians would not be led *en masse* by nationalistic firebrands. Indeed, while the early 2000s were marked by frequent ethnic riots – the *Kondopoga* (2006) and *Stavropol'* (2007) riots among

the best known – they were still primarily local phenomena without broad appeal. Consequently, they could be ignored in the same way the Washington elite ignores or marginalizes the ferocious racial riots that periodically shake major American cities.

Moreover, the Kremlin had encouraged Russian nationalism after the Crimea annexation. The slogan “Crimea is ours” (*Krym nash*) was pleasing to two different types of Russian nationalists. First, of course, were the official or semi-official imperial nationalists and those close to them. Dugin, for example, had professed Eurasianism at the beginning of the post-Soviet era and continued to call himself an Eurasianist. But the idea of Russo-Turkic “symbiosis” – the central aspect in classical Eurasianism – almost disappeared in his narratives. One could describe him more as a Russian imperial nationalist. Dugin was excited by the Crimean annexation and urged Putin to proceed to take the entire East Ukraine. He believed it would be the beginning of Russia’s resurrection, returning to its messianic roots. The second group of nationalists to support Crimea’s annexation were Russian extremists and ethnically bound Russian nationalists who defined Russianness through ethnicity and bloodlines. It is clear that for many of them the Crimean venture was a positive enterprise, for here the Russian state defended ethnic Russians, the majority of the population. In their view, Russia was finally acting as it should.

Still, these nationalists and even some imperial Russian nationalists assumed that the state should not just save ethnic Russians in Crimea but engage in broad socioeconomic reforms that would benefit the majority of the population. They demanded not just “nationalism” but also a peculiar “socialism:” nationalization of the property of tycoons, extending the social security net, and so on. One might be reminded that in National Socialist Germany the business tycoons were under strict state control and the social security web was expanded. Such plans were not on Putin’s table; he understood that Russian nationalism in its imperial and controlled form could well transmogrify into something quite dangerous for the Kremlin. And the danger of nationalistic drives could be reinforced by a sharp worsening of the economic situation for the majority of Russians. For this reason the nationalistic frenzy sponsored from above quickly ran its course and some nationalists, such as Dugin, complained that the “Russian Spring” was blocked by a “fifth” and “sixth” column, the unpack last ones were defined as those who, while pretending to be on Putin’s side, were actually his enemies, working to help the West destroy the country. Dugin became so upset with Putin’s decision to avoid a direct invasion of Ukraine and gaining the corresponding support of Russian nationalists that he began to implicitly threaten Putin and complained that he was being mistreated with implicit Kremlin endorsement.³⁸ He declared that not just Western liberals but even Russian nationalists could unite and overthrow Putin. It is quite possible that some of Putin’s advisors, such as Vladislav Surkov,

or Putin himself, had such thoughts, which induced him to downplay anything that would encourage the extremist form of Russian nationalism. The Kremlin reasserted its positive view of minorities from Chechens to Jews and sent a clear signal that the nationalist fete was over.³⁹ Putin became even more cautious after the collapse of gas and oil prices and Western sanctions. These led to the devaluation of the ruble and increasing unemployment, which made the Kremlin nervous or at least cautious. Playing an intensely nationalistic card in the historical narrative – for example, confronting Kazakhstan’s official vision of the past or providing help to Russian nationalists – became dangerous.

One also might note the strategical implications of the rise of Russian nationalism and the problems it could create for the regime if it decided to accelerate its imperial quest. In some interviews, Putin noted that his troops could have reached Kiev or possibly even the borders of Poland in a few weeks if not days. Putin might not have bragged much. After all, the Russian army defeated Georgia in a few days in the 2008 war and even Lugansk-Donetsk forces, supported by Russia only indirectly, seriously defeated Ukrainian forces in Debal’tevo.

What restricts Putin from expanding the Russian state, using the problems of “Sudetendeitsch,” in our case “Sudeten Russians,” as an excuse in Kazakhstan or Ukraine is not the power of local armies or even fear of confrontation with NATO, but different considerations. Imperial expansion would not just solidify Europe, where Putin has engaged in successful geopolitical fishing in the muddy waters of the increasingly dysfunctional EU and NATO, but could also unleash nationalistic forces dangerous for the regime’s stability. For this reason, Moscow basically ignored the new construction of Kazakhstan history with its clear anti-Russian slant and even helped Astana to deal with extremist Russian nationalists, who are as dangerous for Russia as they are for Kazakhstan’s elite. ■

Endnotes

1. David Trilling, “As Kazakhstan’s Leader Asserts Independence, Did Putin Just Say ‘Not So Fast?’,” *Eurasianet.org*, (August 30, 2014).
2. As an observer noted, “Numerous events are being held to mark the occasion including exhibitions, historical performances and the filming of documentaries.” See: Seamus Kearney, “Kazakhstan Celebrates the 550th Anniversary of Kazakh Statehood,” *Euronews*, (July 27, 2015).
3. For some Kazakhstan historians, the roots of the great Kazakh civilization could be found long before the Turkic Khaganate. Some stated that the Huns were already Turkic and implicitly Kazakhs. Logically, Attila became the mighty Kazakh, or at least, proto-Kazakh leader whose positive role in global history should not be overlooked. E. S. Omarov, *Attila: tsivilizatorskaia rol*, (Almaty: Arda, 2006).
4. This notion, of course, is discarded by present Ukrainian historians who believe “Kievan Rus” was a Ukrainian state with no connection to present day Russia.
5. Some of Russian pre-revolutionary Slavophiles biologicalized, in way, Russian national characteristics. This was, for example, the case with Nykolai Danilevsky, one of the leading late 19th century Slavophiles. He believed that Christian type tolerance was biologically implanted in Russians national character whereas brutality was implanted in Westerners national character. On Danilevsky views, see: Robert

MacMaster, *Danilevsky, A Russian Totalitarian Philosopher*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Alexander Vucinich, *Darwin in Russian Thought*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

6. The notion that Russia was a civilized force when it was applied to non-European subjects of the tsar was imbedded in Russian historiography. This was, for example, the case with Sergei M. Solov'ev, one of the classical Russian historians. See: Anna Siljak, "Christianity, Science, and Progress in Sergei M. Solov'ev's History of Russia," in Thomas Sanders (ed.), *Historiography of Imperial Russia*, (NY: Routledge, 1999), pp. 230-231.

7. Kerstin S. Jobs, "Where the Orient Ends? Orientalism and Its Function for Imperial Rule in the Russian Empire," in James Hodkinson, et al. (eds.), *Deploying Orientalism in Culture and History*, (Rochester: Camden House, 2013), p. 201.

8. Mikhail Agurskii, the Soviet émigré scholar, who was among the first to explore this phenomenon. See: *Ideologiya national-bol'shevizma*, (Paris: YMCA Press, 1980).

9. The book has been reprinted; See: Olzhas Suleimenov, *Az i Ia: Kniga blagonamerennogo chitatelia* (Vologda: Grifon, 2005).

10. As was already noted before, Kazakhstan authorities, similar, of course, with authorities in other post-Soviet states, asserted that scholars are absolutely free to view historical events from any position. Still, using financial and other forms of incentives, they shaped most of the historical narratives in the context desirable for authorities. See: Murat T. Laumulin, *Istoriia Kazakhstana i Tsentral'noi Azii v mirovii orientalistike: (k 550 – letiiu Kazakhskogo khanstva)*, (Astana: Kazakhstanskii institut strategicheskikh issledovaniï pri Prezidente Respubliki Kazakhstan, 2015); Nurlan Aygaev, *Kazakhskoe khanstvo v potoke istoriia ocherki*, (Almaty: Eltabnym, 2015); G. V. Kan, *Istoriia Kazakhstana: uchebnik dlia vuzov*, (Almaty: Almatykitqap baspasy, 2013) and Adil'khan Prmanov, *Istoriia Kazakhstana*, (Almaty: Atamura, 2013).

11. Jeremy Tredinnick, "Introduction," in Jeremy Tredinnick (ed.), *An Illustrated History of Kazakhstan*, (Hong Kong: Odyssey, 2014), p. 16.

12. On the critique of present day Kazakh historians and Soviet historiography's interpretation of the events see: Elena Bezikonnaia, *The Reconstruction of National History in the Modern Republic of Kazakhstan: The Case of Russo – Kazakh Relations in the 18th – 19th Centuries*, *Ab Imperio*, Issue 1, (2004).

13. Zhambyl Artykbaev, a Kazakh historian, noted that the USSR was a "totalitarian empire" where all ethnicities, including Kazakhs, were subjected by central power, and the notion of "union" was fiction. See: Zhambyl Artykbaev, *Istoriia Kazakhstana Tsentral'no – Aziatskoe knizhnoe izdatel'stvo*, p. 232. Malikh Asylbekov, also a Kazakh historian, angrily rejected the view of those who denied the fact that both tsarist Russia and the USSR were not colonial powers. See: Malikh Asylbekov, *Kazakhstan tarikh*, (2000), p. 12.

14. Minobraz Aigul, "Zhilkishina. PK predlagaet v obiazatel'nom poriadke izuchat' tri shkol'nykh predmeta tol'ko na kazakhskom iazyke," *Novoe Pokolenie*, (August 27, 2015).

15. Dmitry Verkhoturov, "Astana mechtaet stat' Singapurom. Kazakhstanskuiu elitu skloniaiat k zapadnomu puti razvitiia," *stoletie.ru*, (August 15, 2015).

16. On Khakimov's views see his works: R. S. Khakimov, *Sumerki imperii: k voprosu natsii i gosudarstve*, (Kazan: Tatarskoe knizhnoe izd-vo, 1993); M. G. Gosman and R. S. Khakimov, *Istorii tatar s drevneishikh vremen*, 7 Vols. (Kazan: Izd-vo 'Rukhiiat', 2012-2013); R. S. Khakimov, *Kto ty tatarin?*, (Kazan: Panorama-Forum, 2002); R. S. Khakimov, *Gde nasha Mekka?: Manifest evroislama*, (Kazan': Magarif, 2003); R. S. Khakimov, *Tatarstan: Dusha naroda*, (Kazan: Tatar Book House, 2005); R. S. Khakimov, *Atlas Tartarica: Istoriia Tatar i narodov Evrazii: Respublika Tatarstan vchera i segodnia*, (Kazan: Iz-vo Feriia, 2005).

17. "Patriot Evrazii osuzhden v Kazakhstane za svoi ubezhdeniia," *Zavtra*, (December 11, 2015).

18. Ermek Taichibekov, "A mozhet byt' my ne Kazakhi?!" *Zonakz*, (December 20, 2014), retrieved from zonakz.net/blogs/user/ermek_taychibekoff/34569.html.

19. Taichibekov, "A mozhet byt' my ne Kazakhi?!"

20. Taichibekov, "A mozhet byt' my ne Kazakhi?!"

21. Taichibekov, "A mozhet byt' my ne Kazakhi?!"

22. Ermek Taichibekov, "Ia ne vatnik. Ia russki imperialist," *Rex*, (January 30, 2015), retrieved from jarex.ru/articles/51455.html.

23. Mansur Mirovalev, "Kazakhstan Jails Pro-Russian 'Separatist' Blogger," *Al Jazeera*, (November 19, 2015).
24. "Patriot Evrazii osuzhden v Kazakhstane za svoi ubezhdeniia," *Zavtra*, (December 11, 2015).
25. Remember that attacking another country on the grounds of protecting ethnic kin has a long tradition. The Nazi state absorbed Austria and later the Sudetenland on the grounds of the unification of ethnic Germans. Stalin used the same justification in portions of Poland during 1939, pointing out that Poland's eastern lands were populated by Ukrainians and Belorussians, both USSR ethnicities. Moscow tried to do the same after World War II, when Stalin demanded that Iran cede lands populated by Azerbaijanis, which should be united with Soviet Azerbaijan.
26. Note that Limonov would soften his approach to Putin considerably as time progressed.
27. Limonov rejected these claims, albeit he openly stated that present day Nazarbaev's regime is anti-Russian and Northern Kazakhstan shall belong to Russia. See: Eduard Limonov, *Drugaiia Rossiia: revoliutsiia prodolzhaetsia!*, (Moscow: /auza, 2004), p. 238.
28. As a matter of fact, after Russia's takeover of Crimea and support of East Ukrainian separatists Limonov stated that the same shall be done with North Kazakhstan. One could assume that these views are shared by considerable numbers of Russian nationals. On Limonov's view on Ukraine, see: Eduard Limonov, "Kiev kaput. Iarostnaia kniga," (2015).
29. Mirovalev, "Kazakhstan Jails Pro-Russian 'Separatist' Blogger."
30. Mirovalev, "Kazakhstan Jails Pro-Russian 'Separatist' Blogger."
31. Mirovalev, "Kazakhstan Jails Pro-Russian 'Separatist' Blogger."
32. Mirovalev, "Kazakhstan Jails Pro-Russian 'Separatist' Blogger."
33. Ekaterina Ryl'skaia and Kirill Efremov, "V kazakhstanskom Riddere sudiat za separatizm blogera Sycheva. Za opros 'V Kontakte,'" *31.kz*, (October 24, 2015).
34. "Moskovskii sud obviniaet russkogo natsionalista Belov-Potkina v organizatsii gosperevorota v Kazakhstane," *tengrinews.kz*, (September 8, 2015); "Rossiiskogo natsionalista Aleksandra Potkina (Belova) obviniaui v popytke sverzheniia regima Nazarbaeva," *Fergana.ru*, (September 8, 2015).
35. "Moskovskii sud obviniaet russkogo natsionalista Belov-Potkina v organzatsii gosperevorota v Kazakhstane."
36. G. Tumanov, "Pravyi otvorot. V Rossii izbavliaiutsia ot natsionalistov za schet... Kazakhstana i Ukrainy," *Kommersant.ru*, (August 10, 2015).
37. Thus, this grass-rooted parochial and isolationist nationalism is also "socialist." As a matter of fact, this "National Socialist" drive with strong isolationist overtones could be found not just in Russia but also in Europe, and elements of this outlook could be seen in Donald Trump's statements that made it possible for a *New York Times* journalist to title his article with the scandalous "Trump's Weimar America." See: Roger Cohen, "Trump's Weimar America," *The New York Times*, (December 14, 2015).
38. Aleksandr Dugin, *Ukraina: moia voina. Geopoliticheskii dnevni*; "Obmanatyie opolchentsy bol'she ne veriat Putinu," *WT*, (July 08, 2014), retrieved from russian.rt.com/inotv/2014-07-08/WT-Obmanutye-opolchenci-bolshe-ne.
39. Chechens became especially important for Putin recently due to his plan to create National Guard. The Guard was clearly seen as the police force to crush possible rebellions. Ramzan Kadyrov's Chechen detachment would be incorporated into the Guard and Kadyrov, the leader of Chechnya, was quite pleased by this decision. See: "Kadyrov: Chechentsy pochutut za chest' sluzhlt' v Natsional'noi Gvardii," *Trud.ru*, (April 06, 2016).

