

**University of Economics Prague**

**Faculty of International Relations**

**Autumn Semester 2019/2020**



---

**Post-Soviet Nation State Redefinition  
in the Baltics and Central Asia**

-

**A Comparative Case Analysis of Estonian and Kazakhstani  
Language Policy towards Russophone Minorities**

---

*Felix Breiteneicher*

## **A.) The Russophone Diaspora as an ongoing Challenge in Europe and Asia**

*“Right from the establishment of the new Russian state in late 1991, there was understandably high interest in the ‘new Russian diaspora’: the 25 million ethnic Russians who found themselves ‘beached’ by the sudden retraction of the Soviet borders, and who were now resident in 14 newly constituted national states outside of Russia.”<sup>1</sup>*

Russia has since the fall of the Soviet Union acted as an external national homeland to the Russophone diaspora outside of its own territory.<sup>2</sup> While the issue of language policy in neighbouring countries was largely an internal political issue under the Yeltsin administration, president Vladimir Putin has elevated the aim of protecting Russian-speaking communities outside of their mother country as an integral part of his foreign policy for the so-called ‘Russian World’ (*Russkiy Mir*).

In recent years, Moscow has tried to develop a uniform approach towards the highly diverse group of outside ‘Russian compatriots’ (*Rossiiskie Sootechestvenniki*) by binding together both ethnic and civic realms. This tied the Russian national identity inseparably to its own diaspora under the wings of its ‘legal guardian’ – the Russian government. The concept of a ‘Russianness’ could thus even border outside the official territory of Russia.<sup>3</sup>

With the recent notion of military crises based on a ‘protection’ of these ‘Russian compatriots’ in the Russian territorial neighbourhood, such as the Crimea annexation in 2014 and the ongoing conflict in the Donbas or the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, geopolitical fears have grown in both the Baltics and Central Asia. As the countries become more wary of Moscow’s influence in soft power, the question of how Moscow-friendly and secessionist the Russophone minorities in both regions are, remains largely unanswered between political and media fearmongering on both sides.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cheskin, Ammon; Kachuyevski, Angela: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Post-Soviet Space: Language, Politics and Identity. In: *Europe-Asia Studies* (2019); 71:1. p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See: Galbreath, David J.: *Nation-Building and Minority Politics in Post-Socialist States. Interests, Influences and Identities in Estonia and Latvia*. Stuttgart 2005. p. 189.

<sup>3</sup> See: Cheskin, *ibid.*, p. 4 seq.

This paper therefore assesses how the Russophone minority has been and is still affected by the post-Communist redefinition process of nation states in the former USSR republics. This process has been extensively described in the 'Triple Transition' theory by Claus Offe.<sup>4</sup> It brought forth a larger theoretical discussion about how to compare the (democratic) transitions of Central and Eastern Europe with other world regions but mostly left out the concrete analysis of country case studies which had begun in the 1990s.

Hence, this work is focussing on the comparison of two regional policy examples by comparing the post-Soviet nationalisation process and language policies in Estonia (for the Baltics) and Kazakhstan (for Central Asia) since their independence from the USSR. This analysis is to showcase their similarities as well as differences on how both countries approach their respective large Russian-speaking minorities and to conclude possible future policy measures on how to better integrate them.

---

<sup>4</sup> See: Offe, Claus: Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe. In: Social Research (2004); 71, 3. pp. 501-528.

## **B.) Post-Soviet Nation State Redefinition in the Baltics and Central Asia**

### **I.) Post-Communist Transformation in the Triple Transition Theory**

*„The key question is therefore not whether they will – or will not – be ‘nationalisers’ but to what degree and how”<sup>5</sup>.*

As Communist elites feared nothing more than ‘alien’ elements in their society, the process of self-transformation of socialist societies was never fully able to incorporate the different fields of economy, society and nation-building. Rather, the general idea that ‘reforms from above’ would lead to a ‘revolution from below’ prevailed until the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a ‘revolution from above’ which finally only led to a shattering breakup instead of a gentle transition.<sup>6</sup>

In his theory, Claus Offe offers for the development of those newly sovereign post-Communist states the concept of a three-part transition: Political as well as economic reforms, accompanied by a (re-)definition process of the nation state.<sup>7</sup>

Taras Kuzio argues that this process should rather be labelled as “quadruple transition”<sup>8</sup> by differentiating between the development of stateness and the solution of the national question. It is at that point where this paper will question the completion of either one or both of those transitions in the two example nations. It can be assumed that while democratic Estonian stateness is lacking political integration of the russophonic minority through its exclusive citizenship, the national question in Kazakhstan is remaining suppressed by the authoritarian elites along linguistic lines to avoid any possible internal conflicts.

---

<sup>5</sup> Kuzio, Taras: 'Nationalising States' or Nation-Building? A Critical Review of the Theoretical Literature and Empirical Evidence. In: Language Policy 5/2006. p. 138.

<sup>6</sup> See: Offe, *ibid.*, p. 502 seq.

<sup>7</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 505 seq.

<sup>8</sup> Kuzio, Taras: Transition in Post-Communist States: Triple or Quadruple?. In: Politics: 2001, Vol. 21 (3), p. 169.

Regarding the creation of a new nation state out of post-Soviet political structures, post-Communist reformers were given the choice of ‘Capitalism by Design’ or a ‘Political Capitalism’. The latter was mostly utilised by reformist elites who followed the principle of ‘One Thing at a Time’, thus neglecting either economy or civil society.<sup>9</sup>

What followed were either territorial and/or democratic issues resulting in local opposition to the developmental plans of the nation state by the new titular leaders. Those resistance movements of national minorities can be divided into supporters of secession and local autonomy. This is a consequence of perceived or real ‘oppression’ of the domestic nationalising state whose mobilised titular population is often accusing the minorities of disloyalty towards the central state. The attempted homogenisation of a multi-ethnic society can further include restrictions on non-official state languages as well as exclusive citizenship laws.<sup>10</sup>

“‘Nationalising’ tendencies [...] took place in the communist era [as well]. Soviet nationality policies utilised language, culture, migration, employment and historiography in an attempt to create a Russian-speaking core *homo sovieticus*”<sup>11</sup>.

In both cases of this comparative analysis, Estonia and Kazakhstan, the post-Soviet policies of the newly arisen majority groups show that certain democratic values have been neglected to shape both the history and culture as well as the control of state institutions in a process of “politicized ethnicity”<sup>12, 13</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> See: Offe, *ibid.*, p. 508.

<sup>10</sup> See: Kuzio: *Nationalising States*, *ibid.*, p. 137 seq.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142 seq.

<sup>12</sup> Galbreath, *ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>13</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 36.

## II.) National Redefinition in post-Soviet Estonia

By participating in the ‘Nordic-Baltic Eight’ political format and orientating itself linguistically and culturally towards Finland, Estonia has developed a ‘Nordic’ self-perception over the years. In recent years, the country became the best performing Baltic country with a liberal economy and society. By rebranding itself internationally and economically as ‘E-Estonia’, the government in Tallinn allowed extensive E-Governance and opened, as the first country in the world, an offer for a digital citizenship.

At the same time, the country became the first victim of cumulating Russian cyberattacks back in 2007 and is since following a generally critical stance towards foreign influence, also regarding China which made Estonia a member in its 17+1 diplomatic initiative.

Taras Kuzio defines Estonia as a consolidated “ethnic democracy”<sup>14</sup> which grants civil but not polyethnic rights to its citizens.

Estonian internal politics after the newly gained independence evolved around structural de-Sovietisation and the constitutional restoration of the first Estonian Republic in the inter-war period. As a logical consequence, the parts of the population who had only immigrated since WW2 were perceived as ‘occupying settlers’ and not granted citizenship rights such as claims to property. This affected for the largest part ethnically Slavic Russians but also other minorities like Roma, Tatars or Ingrians which were only granted non-citizen ‘alien passports’.

Thus, the *ius sanguinis* citizenship law of 1992 led to an “increasing alienation of the non-Estonian community from the Estonian political system”<sup>15</sup>. The following so-called ‘Aliens’ Crisis’ even comprised the move of two Russian-speaking majority communities – Narva and Sillamae - to hold autonomy referendums which both showed

---

<sup>14</sup> Kuzio: Nationalising States, *ibid.*, p. 149.

<sup>15</sup> Galbreath, *ibid.*, p. 110.

97% and 98% results for autonomy inside the Estonian Republic (which didn't happen but was rather used as political leverage against the inactive government in Tallinn).<sup>16</sup>

Since 2012, no parties of ethnic Russians could secure seats in the Estonian parliament. The Centre Party (*Eesti Keskerakond*) enjoys the largest support amongst the russophonic electorate with up to 70% despite its ethnicity-free focus. *Keskerakond* currently leads the Estonian government coalition together with a right-wing party. "Experts have noted that the ethnic divide becomes artificially sharp before elections, while in normal life it is far more benign."<sup>17</sup>

### **III.) National Redefinition in post-Soviet Kazakhstan**

Kazakhstan was the last country to declare its independence from the USSR and was soon labelled the "ethnic tinderbox of the former Soviet Union"<sup>18</sup> as it comprised the largest number of ethnically diverse groups on its newly created territory. While e.g. Germans had already been considered a minority during Soviet times, ethnic Russian Slavs had not. Simultaneously, the concept of a 'Kazakh diaspora' evolved as many ethnic members who had previously fled to Uzbekistan, Mongolia or China were now being cut off from their new homeland.<sup>19</sup>

Kazakhstan's nationalisation has been perceived as largely informal and symbolic.<sup>20</sup> Constructing a national identity mostly followed the three approaches of de-Europeanisation, de-Sovietisation as well as de-Russification and was largely inspired by cultural appropriation towards ancient Central Asian history and Turk myths.

---

<sup>16</sup> See: Galbreath, *ibid.*, p. 110 seq. and Tiido, Anna: Russians in Europe: Nobody's Tool. The Examples of Finland, Germany and Estonia. In: Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, September 2019., p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> Tiido, *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Danzer, Alexander M.: Battlefields of Ethnic Symbols. Public Space and Post-Soviet Identity Formation from a Minority Perspective. In: *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 9, p. 1558.

<sup>19</sup> See: Darieva, Tsypylma: Recruiting for the Nation: Post-Soviet Transnational Migrants in Germany and Kazakhstan. In: Kasten, Eich (ed.): *Rebuilding Identities. Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*. Berlin 2005.p. 163.

<sup>20</sup> See: Bhavna, Dave: *Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, Language and Power*. Abingdon 2007. p. 7.

Historiographic prescription together with an increasingly authoritarian governing style helped the first Kazakh president and other Central Asian heads of state during the early post-Soviet era to establish a societal symbiosis between a cultural canon of their nations' "harmless heroes"<sup>21</sup> from the middle ages and media-portrayed strongmen images of the new titular nation leaders.<sup>22</sup>

Alexander Danzer calls this process "banal ethnicization"<sup>23</sup>.

*"In the 1990s, the presidents of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan [...] increasingly offer[ed] themselves, like Stalin before them, as the leading thinkers in their countries, thus attempting to transfuse their politics in the realm of thought."*<sup>24</sup>

The ex-president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who only stepped down from office in 2019 after having governed the largest Central Asian nation since even before the fall of the USSR (as Communist Party Secretary) and who had recently been awarded life-long 'Leader of the Nation', soon presented himself as the nation's founding father while at the same time initiating large moves against the media, the opposition as well as the legislature and judiciary since the mid-1990s.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the post-Soviet process of building up and unifying the nation process helped to both strengthen ties with his own titular indigenous population and to counterbalance possible pressure from both rivalling political and tribal elites as well as minority intelligentsia.<sup>26</sup>

The tense political treatment made no exception of ethnic minority organisations of e.g. Russians or Germans in Kazakhstan.<sup>27</sup> Because the leadership in Nursultan simply adapted the illiberal 'multi-ethnicity' trap from Soviet times, Kazakhstani Russians tend to have little to no possibilities of public mobilization until this day.

---

<sup>21</sup> Smith, Graham et al.: *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands. The Politics of National Identities*. Cambridge 1998. p. 71.

<sup>22</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 67 et seq.

<sup>23</sup> Danzer, *ibid.*, p. 1562.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, *ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> See: Danzer, *ibid.*, p. 1560.

<sup>26</sup> See: Smith, *ibid.*, p. 79 and 140 seq.

<sup>27</sup> See: Kuzio: *Nationalising States*, *ibid.*, p. 140 and Smith, *ibid.*, p. 158 seq.



Nevertheless, the Central Asian state was far more liberal regarding its citizenship policy and rather followed a holistic approach of integrating all minorities under this new multi-ethnic Kazakhstani nationality. The leadership also put out incentives for its own Kazakh diaspora to return.<sup>28</sup>

Nowadays Kazakhstan holds ambivalent political relations with the Russian Federation: Although Nursultan is aware of Russian neighbourhood strategies, especially since the annexation of Crimea, it still holds up the partnership inside the Eurasian Economic Union with open borders.

The *de facto* one-party political system is still centred around ex-President and ‘Leader of the Nation’ Nursultan Nazarbayev with full powers remaining in the hands of the former president, his family and connected elites.

Until now, Kazakhstani politics seem to have been ‘immune’ to Moscow’s disinformation campaigns because of both a multi-vector diplomacy and strong negotiation skills regarding the country’s self-interests as well as the geopolitical and economic weakness of the northern neighbour.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> See: Darieva, *ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>29</sup> See: Assenova, Margarita: Why Does Russian Disinformation Not Target Kazakhstan?. In: Polygraph, 06.04.2019.

## **C.) Estonian and Kazakhstani Language Policy towards Russophone Minorities**

Certain eastern districts of Estonia and northern regions of Kazakhstan, which are both bordering Russia, have percentages of over 80% or over 70% Russian speakers respectively – this represents the highest numbers in all the Baltics and Central Asia. Thus, the two countries are insofar representative cases for their regions as they can highlight political developments and external risks through their analytical function as political magnifying (or burning) glasses in the clearest way.

In 2017, around 27% of the 1.3 million population of Estonia were considered ethnic Russians while 5.5% comprised other non-Estonians. 70% of ethnic Estonians believe NATO membership to be positive, while only 29% of other ethnicities do. On the other hand, 46% of non-Estonians believe in Russia as a guarantor of security, while only 15% of Estonians do.<sup>30</sup>

At the time of Kazakhstan's independence, less than 50% of the 14 million total population were ethnic Kazakhs while Russians comprised around 6 million inhabitants.<sup>31</sup> Until 2016, the number of Kazakhs merely rose to 65.5% with 21.5% Russians present.<sup>32</sup>

As the following part of the analysis will show, the language policies of both countries make up a large part of the “indigenisation of power”<sup>33</sup> in the process of post-Soviet nation state redefinition.

---

<sup>30</sup> See: Tiido, *ibid.*, p. 10 seq.

<sup>31</sup> See: Danzer, *ibid.*, p. 1559.

<sup>32</sup> See: Қазақстан Республикасы Ұлттық экономика министрлігі Статистика комитеті: Численность населения Республики Казахстан по отдельным этносам на начало 2016 года.

<sup>33</sup> Smith, *ibid.*, p. 151.

## **I.) Estonian Language Policy towards the Russophone Diaspora**

Until this day, Estonian citizenship policy remains the biggest hindering factor to the integration of Russian speakers into the titular society of Estonia. The fact that only Estonian citizens can claim minority rights in the country leaves most Russophones (who are still non-citizens or, as they are officially called, ‘aliens’) deprived of these democratic rights.

The country’s language policy is generally showing two contradictory forces: On the one hand, linguistic harmonization between the Estonian and Russian languages is a clear political aim, while on the other hand there is a distinct structural process of cultural-ethnic differentiation between the two ethnicities, or rather ‘nationalities’.

In 1989, only 18% of non-Estonians could speak Estonian.

The same year, the Estonian SSR passed a language law requiring everybody in public service within three years to achieve working knowledge of the newly sole national language - Estonian. It was only amended in 1997 with further regulations regarding the language requirements of service employees and political officials, though this was later found to be unconstitutional. At the same time, the use of Russian was never highly limited in any way and the Estonian constitution granted localities with a non-Estonian majority the public usage of their respective major language.<sup>34</sup>

Most criticism up until this day is therefore rather aimed towards the Estonian education policy which proclaims Estonian as the official language of instruction in which all pupils had to be taught latest by 2008.<sup>35</sup> Different russophonic groups are being encapsulated under one umbrella which represents the discourse about large-scale language discrimination.<sup>36</sup>

Linked to most discussions is the Moscow-based Russkiy Mir Foundation. This organisation, currently presided by the grandson of former Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov, was established in 2007 to promote the Russian language and

---

<sup>34</sup> See: Galbreath, *ibid.*, p. 166 seq.

<sup>35</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 170 seq.

<sup>36</sup> See: Cheskin, *ibid.*, p. 3 seq.

support Russian language teaching programs abroad.<sup>37</sup> Similar to the Chinese Confucius Institutes, it is confronted with allegations of “weaponising language in order to overhaul the soft power of culture into a rapidly hardening instrument of projecting power outside of Russia.”<sup>38</sup>

The current education legislature which states that at least 60% of subjects had to be taught in Estonian highly affected the NGO ‘Russian School in Estonia’ which insists on fully teaching in Russian language. It is supported by *Russkiy Mir* and based upon a group which formed during the 2007 riots over a Soviet soldier statue in Tallinn - which ultimately led to the large-scale cyber-attack on public institutions in Estonia.

Since 2011, the organisation collected around 25.000 signatures against the governmental proposition and staged about a dozen media-covered protests of Russian-speaking students in front of governmental offices.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, a member of parliament “called the fight against education reform, ‘the war against government and opinion of society’ [and][...] the vice-chairman of the City Council of Narva, called schools that were ready to transition to partial education in Estonian as ‘traitors.’”<sup>40</sup>

## II.) Kazakh Language Policy towards the Russophone Diaspora

*“Although Kazakhstani authorities [did not] dare [...] to discuss it openly, their fear of the threat of secession of the country’s northern regions [...] [was] palpable.”<sup>41</sup>*

Only 0.9 percent of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan were able to speak Kazakh in 1989. It was therefore nearly impossible for the new Kazakhstani leadership to neglect the Russian language and its status as *lingua franca* in the country.

---

<sup>37</sup> See: Vedler, Tsulev: Divide and Conquer in Estonia. In: The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism Re:Baltica, 18.03.2012.

<sup>38</sup> Kamusella, Tomasz: Estonian Russian. If or when?. In: New Eastern Europe, 08.05.2019.

<sup>39</sup> Vedler, *ibid.* and Tiido, *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>40</sup> Vedler, *ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Smith, *ibid.*, p. 158.

The asymmetrical bilingualism of Kazakhstan still runs mostly alongside societal borders of ethnicity, education and wealth. The fluidity of the Kazakh-Russian border helps until now to evade a strong political divide between the kazakhophonic and russophonic communities in both countries and the connected leverage for diplomatic conflicts.<sup>42</sup>

Sharply contrasting the Estonian approach, in 1995 Russian was firstly awarded the status of a constitutional state language - but soon after the new titular language of Kazakh was made compulsory for certain office positions in state bureaucracy.<sup>43</sup> Until this day, most of the paperwork is done in Russian with the government trying to shift the use towards Kazakh.<sup>44</sup> Still, the ruling authorities soon declared the language issue as ‘solved’ while Russian speaking elites simply subverted the implementation process.

Over the course of the last three decades, the role of Russian as an official language has diminished in all Central Asian states. Kazakhstan still possesses the highest number of Russian education participants (800,000) but with 5,861 language schools having closed since the independence, their amount has already been reduced by 1.4 million students.<sup>45</sup> In 2009, still only 62% of the Kazakhstani population could speak fluently Kazakh while 85% stated to be fluent in the Russian language.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, only a quarter of ethnic Russians had at least a basic knowledge of Kazakh.<sup>47</sup>

In order to match the variety of languages in its empire, the Soviet leadership had introduced different versions of the Cyrillic, including one for Kazakh.

In February 2018, then-president Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a decree to switch writing from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet by 2025, probably costing around \$600 Million. The same year, the Kazakhstani government also banned the use of Russian

---

<sup>42</sup> See: Cheskin, *ibid.*, p. 14 seq.

<sup>43</sup> See: Smith, *ibid.*, p. 150 seq.

<sup>44</sup> See: Bekmurzaev, Nurbek: Russian Language Status in Central Asian Countries. In: Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, 28.02.2019.

<sup>45</sup> See: *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> See: [n.s.]: Kazakhstan bans speaking Russian in Cabinet Meetings. In: *bne IntelliNews*, 28.02.2018.

<sup>47</sup> See: Senggirbay, Mukhtar: Ethnic Identity of Kazakhstani Russians: The Dynamics of Change and the Place of Russia as a Kin State. In: *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* (Volume 13, Issue 1), p. 72.

language at parliamentary and cabinet meetings with a few exceptions as well as offered translation - all against the general trend that many ministers prefer speaking Russian.<sup>48</sup> Both political moves have been viewed as ways of the former Nazarbayev government to counterbalance the increasing connection between Kazakh nationalism and protests criticising the regime back in 2016.

Although the general act of enshrining Kazakh as the sole state language did not produce any overt conflicts either among the Slavs or the predominantly Russian-speaking urban Kazakhs,<sup>49</sup> the linguistic nationalisation and dominance of Kazakh has largely been a negative unifying factor of the country's different ethnic minorities: "Any affront against a (linguistically) similar minority group is considered an affront against oneself."<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> See: [n.s.]: Kazakhstan bans speaking Russian in Cabinet Meeting, *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> See: Smith, *ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>50</sup> Danzer, *ibid.*, p. 1568.

## D.) Language as a major Soft Power Tool in Nation-Building

*“At present, almost three decades after the disappearance of the Soviet Union, Russian is an official, co-official, auxiliary or de facto language of commercial or wider intellectual communication in all of the 15 post-Soviet nation-states, alongside Mongolia and Israel.”<sup>51</sup>*

Still, with the declining influence of its language in the geopolitical neighbourhood, the Kremlin today wishes even more than ever that Russian would belong exclusively to its single ‘mother’ country – the Russian Federation. This ideology of ethnolinguistic nationalism conveys the logic that language belongs to the state and represents the whole nation.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, the analysed post-Soviet national language policies are being perceived as a threat by the Russian government with its state media already calling it ‘cultural extinction’. This is harshly contrasted by Moscow’s own (military) protectionism of russophonic minorities in the realm of ‘*Russkiy Mir*’.

What is often overlooked in this case are the consequences of language policy inside the Russian Federation itself and the local threats of ethnolinguistic claims of national independence as Moscow’s past citizenship legislature has increasingly degraded the status of ethnic non-Russians.<sup>53</sup> Language thus serves as a balancing tool of soft power for both nationalists and nationalisers.

As could be seen, the societal incentives for linguistic assimilation of the Russian-speaking minority differ largely between Estonia and Kazakhstan:

The first country achieved – despite its criticisable minority definition - for the most part to neutralize any independence claims of the 1990s by integrating the russophonic community in state institutions such as its democratic politics or the military and by connecting education in Estonian language with better prospects regarding economic performance, social mobility and a better acceptance in the society as a whole.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup> Kamusella, *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> See: *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> See: *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> See: Galbreath, *ibid.*, p. 53.

The latter state instead focused on keeping up pseudo multi-ethnic rhetoric of the Soviet era in combination with authoritarian politics and a repressive regime of forced national culture on basis of unproblematic ‘heroes’ of the single titular nation.

Estonia’s membership in the European Union has on the other side paved the way for a concept of transnational citizenship. With feeling European, the notions of ‘Estonian’, ‘non-Estonian’ or ‘Russian’ lose their ideological substance. In order to support the overall democratic legitimacy of the central national government, Tallinn should nevertheless additionally consider a rather horizontal power-sharing which actively involves the Russian-speaking minorities in its state policies and embraces their criticism in all honesty without perceiving them as a threat to Estonian stateness.<sup>55</sup>

The absence of a civil society as well as the internal divide of the Kazakhstani nation are both mutually causing each other - which shows the effects of a halted post-communist transition through an authoritarian linguistic policy.<sup>56</sup> The nationalist protest based in the ethnic Kazakh community could henceforth still pose an actual threat towards the renewed *Homo Sovieticus* rhetoric of the political leadership in Nursultan.

It is striking that Russian soft power engagement is much more intense in the NATO member Estonia - which is not actually persecuting its Russophone minority - than in EAEU member Kazakhstan where minorities are actually being politically repressed. This shows the illogical approach and realpolitik limits of the Kremlin’s ethnolinguistic nationalism.

Questions remain regarding the “pluricentricisation [...] [and] de-weaponisation of the Russian language”<sup>57</sup> in both countries. The active political introduction of an Estonian and Kazakhstani Russian Language could be a tool to counterbalance Russian soft power influence. Parallels could be drawn to Belarus where the Belorussian language was successfully introduced in all areas of society – a move which did not interfere with

---

<sup>55</sup> See: Galbreath, *ibid.*, p. 55.

<sup>56</sup> See: Kuzio: *Quadruple Transition*, p. 172.

<sup>57</sup> Kamusella, *ibid.*



strong political partnership with Moscow. This would also support the fact that e.g. the “language consciousness of Kazakhstani Russians is far more different from Russian Russians, [...] which indicates the influence of indigenous culture”<sup>58</sup> and Asian values. In summary, the prospects of Estonian and Kazakhstani language policies will rely on a fact that the president of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid, recently expressed in an interview:

*“People speaking the Russian Language don’t necessarily speak Putin Language”<sup>59</sup>.*

## Bibliography

- ❖ Assenova, Margarita: Why Does Russian Disinformation Not Target Kazakhstan?. In: Polygraph, 06.04.2019.  
*<https://www.polygraph.info/a/disinfo-analysis-russia-kazakhstan-disinformation/29859460.html>* (accessed: 27.11.2019).
- ❖ Bekmurzaev, Nurbek: Russian Language Status in Central Asian Countries. In: Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting, 28.02.2019.  
*<https://cabar.asia/en/russian-language-status-in-central-asian-countries/>* (accessed: 09.10.2019).
- ❖ Bhavna, Dave: Kazakhstan. Ethnicity, Language and Power. Abingdon 2007.
- ❖ Cheskin, Ammon; Kachuyevski, Angela: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Post-Soviet Space: Language, Politics and Identity. In: Europe-Asia Studies (2019); 71:1. pp. 1-23.
- ❖ Danzer, Alexander M.: Battlefields of Ethnic Symbols. Public Space and Post-Soviet Identity Formation from a Minority Perspective. In: Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 61, No. 9, pp. 1557-1577.

---

<sup>58</sup> Senggirbay, *ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>59</sup> Snow, John: President Kersti Kaljulaid on Salisbury: ‘Estonian people who speak Russian language do not necessarily speak Putin language’. In: Channel 4, 27.03.2018.

- ❖ Darieva, Tsypylma: Recruiting for the Nation: Post-Soviet Transnational Migrants in Germany and Kazakhstan. In: Kasten, Eich (ed.): *Rebuilding Identities. Pathways to Reform in Post-Soviet Siberia*. Berlin 2005. pp. 153-172.
- ❖ Galbreath, David J.: *Nation-Building and Minority Politics in Post-Socialist States. Interests, Influences and Identities in Estonia and Latvia*. Stuttgart 2005.
- ❖ Kamusella, Tomasz: *Estonian Russian. If or when?*.  
In: *New Eastern Europe*, 08.05.2019.  
*<https://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/05/08/estonian-russian-if-or-when/>* (accessed: 11.01.2020).
- ❖ Kuzio, Taras: 'Nationalising States' or Nation-Building? A Critical Review of the Theoretical Literature and Empirical Evidence.  
In: *Language Policy* 5/2006. pp. 161–186.
- ❖ Kuzio, Taras: *Transition in Post-Communist States: Triple or Quadruple?*.  
In: *Politics: 2001*, Vol. 21 (3), pp. 168-177.
- ❖ Offe, Claus: *Capitalism by Democratic Design? Democratic Theory Facing the Triple Transition in East Central Europe*.  
In: *Social Research* (2004); 71, 3: pp. 501-528.
- ❖ Senggirbay, Mukhtar: *Ethnic Identity of Kazakhstani Russians: The Dynamics of Change and the Place of Russia as a Kin State*. In: *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics* (Volume 13, Issue 1), pp. 67-89.
- ❖ Smith, Graham et al.: *Nation-Building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands. The Politics of National Identities*. Cambridge 1998.
- ❖ Snow, John: *President Kersti Kaljulaid on Salisbury: 'Estonian people who speak Russian language do not necessarily speak Putin language'*.  
In: *Channel 4*, 27.03.2018.  
*<https://www.channel4.com/news/president-kersti-kaljulaid-on-salisbury-estonian-people-who-speak-russian-language-do-not-necessarily-speak-putin-language>* (accessed: 14.01.2020).
- ❖ Tiido, Anna: *Russians in Europe: Nobody's Tool. The Examples of Finland, Germany and Estonia*. In: *Estonian Foreign Policy Institute*, September 2019.  
*[https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ICDS\\_EFPI\\_Analysis\\_Russians\\_in\\_Europe\\_Anna\\_Tiido\\_September\\_2019.pdf](https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/ICDS_EFPI_Analysis_Russians_in_Europe_Anna_Tiido_September_2019.pdf)* (accessed: 14.01.2020).

- ❖ Vedler, Tsulev: Divide and Conquer in Estonia.  
In: The Baltic Center for Investigative Journalism Re:Baltica, 18.03.2012.  
<https://en.rebaltica.lv/2012/03/divide-and-conquer-in-estonia/> (accessed: 23.11.2019).
- ❖ Қазақстан Республикасы Ұлттық экономика министрлігі Статистика комитеті: Численность населения Республики Казахстан по отдельным этносам на начало 2016 года. In: <https://stat.gov.kz/> (archived on: 14.10.2017).
- ❖ [n.s.]: Kazakhstan bans speaking Russian in Cabinet Meetings.  
In: bne IntelliNews, 28.02.2018.  
<https://www.intellinews.com/kazakhstan-bans-speaking-russian-in-cabinet-meetings-137496/> (accessed: 27.11.2019).