

On the question of studying inter-ethnic relations in Kazakhstan

Inter-ethnic relations are extremely delicate sphere of social interaction. It required uninterrupted attention, monitoring and control. Certainly, at the currently stage we can be proud of present stability in our multicultural society which seems to be a grace against the backdrop of the world inter-civilizational clashes and wars.

It should be noted that the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan pays much attention to the promotion of human rights in inter-ethnic and inter-faith relations. It strives to avert any forms of xenophobia in our republic. Thus, section I named “General Provisions”, article 1 proclaims that in Kazakhstan Russian language is officially used along with Kazakh and the Government provides opportunities to develop and study native languages of peoples of Kazakhstan. Section II “Individual and citizen”, article 14 states that nobody no one could be subjected to ant form of discrimination, including on race or ethnic background, language and attitude to religion. Article 39 in the same section deems unconstitutional any action capable of affecting inter-ethnic harmony, and so on.

Kazakhstan has its own methods to provide and strengthen inter-ethnic consent. For example, the Government established the People’s Assembly of Kazakhstan, 1 May of each year became the Day of Unity of Peoples of Kazakhstan, and to name but a few. Therefore, state bodies have done significant and well thought out work in this sphere. They have made many efforts and the results demonstrate effectiveness of these steps. At the same time, there were many historical cases when enough prosperous societies suddenly faced the problem of civilian confrontation between different nationalities. Unfortunately, multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies are especially vulnerable.

General situations may lead to a crisis in inter-ethnic relations. Nationalistic and chauvinistic discourse occurs in any multi-national state, in spite of the economic, political and cultural level. Even developed Europe and the United States may face such problem, not to mention other states. This means that the current inter-ethnic harmony and stability requires permanent and hard everyday work. It is obvious that nowadays the Government has to make three times increasing efforts, taking into account crisis in relations between some former Soviet republics, which are considered by people in Kazakhstan to be a trouble coming closer to our borders. Continuing verbal battles against inter-ethnic background between Internet users also raise concerns. If our people who used to peacefully walk side by side in streets are able to offend somebody’s ethnic feelings in their comments, it suggests that hard educational work is extremely necessary. It would be useful to analyse the experience of other states which have complicated ethnic composition, including the USA, European countries, Russian, China, and so on. Obviously, they face difficult situation in the sphere of inter-ethnic relations and have to take into consideration all aspects of this issue.

Studying culture and everyday life of those Kazakhs who live abroad, the Department of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Ch.Ch. Valikhanov Institute of History and Ethnology cannot avoid the sphere of inter-ethnic relations. An example of this are results of monitoring of situation in China, Mongolia and Russia.

In particular, the difficult situation in the People’s Republic of China is well known. At the same time, the degree of trust in minor nationalities can be accessed as rather high. In August 2012 returning back from expedition in Altai, Urumqi, we were passing through a military barrier, which guarded the northern route to the capital of Xinjiang. Despite the fact that the situation was not so intense as it is nowadays, the threat was visible. At that military post we, like all who travelled through the area, should be subjected to procedures related to verifying of documents

and registration. Military men who stopped us were Kazakhs. Being in the queue we had heard that behind the barrier, which was constructed of sand bags, soldiers with rifles pointed towards passing motor vehicles laughed and talked in Kazakh language. Most of them spoke with us using Kazakh as well. Probably, it demonstrated that there were representatives of minor nationalities in the law enforcement agencies of Xinjiang. Likewise, the authorities were striving to calm the situation in this turbulent region. However, certainly Chinese person was the Head of the military barrier, like all key leadership positions in Xinjiang.

Inter-ethnic harmony remains strong in Mongolia. It can be explained by original peacefulness of nations, who are descendants of nomadic civilization, particularly of the Khalkha. Kazakhs who live in Mongolia have no evidence to accuse them of national arrogance, disregard or derogatory behaviour. Mongols do not have any offensive labels in their vocabulary.

Russia has experienced rather difficult conditions of external and internal political instability and the threat of xenophobia. Under these circumstances, the Government continues the work on strengthening of inter-ethnic harmony. The authorities establish so called “cultural autonomies” where people have an opportunity to study their native languages, culture and traditions.

Probably, Kazakhstan needs to have a research center along the model of Russian or Chinese institutions which would work on inter-ethnic interaction in our republic and conduct regular monitoring and forecasting in this sphere. It could gather experts on ethnology, policy, social sciences, and religious studies and cooperate with governmental agencies. It is very important to conduct regular sociological survey and study the mood of representatives of different nationalities in Kazakhstan to control and make an accurate assessment of the current situation to develop further necessary political and other measures.

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