PROBLEMS OF REGIONAL IDENTITY IN CENTRAL ASIA: EU EXPERIENCE

Saida Aspandiyar[1]
Ph.D. student at the L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Master of International Relations
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

Saniya Nurdavletova
Associate Professor of the Faculty of International Relations, L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Candidate of Historical Sciences
(Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)

Abstract. In the era of globalization, the most diverse processes of modern life are observed through the prism of 'identity crisis' and 'search for identity'. In recent years, the discussion of identity problems has become the main direction of global studies. Some criticize this process and consider that the globalization requires a global, cosmopolitan culture with blurring national identities. Others believe that global interdependence leads to a new level of regional cooperation by giving opportunities and perspectives. In this article the question arose as whether Central Asia will develop regional identity absorbing suitable from European experience or postpone this idea.

Key words: *Regional Identity, Integration, Central Asia, European Union.*

ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯДАҒЫ АЙМАҚТЫҚ СӘЙКЕСТІЛІК МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ: ЕУРОПАЛЫҚ ТӘЖІРИБЕ

Саида Аспандияр, Сания Нұрдаулетова

Аңдатпа. Жаһандану дәуірінде қазіргі өмірдің ең алуан түрлі процестері «тұлға

[1]saidaiksanova@gmail.com

дағдарысы» және «тұлғаны іздеу» призмасы арқылы қарастырылады. Соңғы жылдары сәйкестілік мәселелерін талқылау жаһандық зерттеулердің негізгі бағытына айналды. Кейбіреулер бұл процесті сынап, жаһандану ұлттық бірегейліктің бұлдыр сызықтары бар жаһандық, космополиттік мәдениетті қажет етеді деп санайды. Басқалары жаһандық өзара тәуелділік мүмкіндіктер мен перспективалар беретін аймақтық ынтымақтастықтың жаңа деңгейіне алып келеді деп санайды. Бұл мақалада Орталық Азия еуропалық тәжірибені бойына сіңіре отырып, аймақтық бірегейлікті дамыта ма, әлде бұл идеяны жоққа шығара ма деген сұрақ туындады.

Түйін сөздер: аймақтық сәйкестік, интеграция, Орталық Азия, Еуропалық Одақ.

ПРОБЛЕМЫ РЕГИОНАЛЬНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: ЕВРОПЕЙСКИЙ ОПЫТ

Саида Аспандияр, Сания Нурдавлетова

Аннотация. В эпоху глобализации самые разнообразные процессы современной жизни рассматриваются через призму «кризиса идентичности» и «поиска идентичности». В последние годы обсуждение проблем идентичности стало основным направлением глобалистики. Некоторые критикуют этот процесс и считают, что глобализация требует глобальной, космополитической культуры с размытыми границами национальной идентичности. Другие считают, что глобальная взаимозависимость ведет к новому уровню регионального сотрудничества, предоставляя возможности и перспективы. В данной статье возник вопрос, будет ли Центральная Азия развивать региональную идентичность, впитывая в себя подходящее из европейского опыта или отложит эту идею.

Ключевые слова: региональная идентичность, интеграция, Центральная Азия, Европейский союз.

Introduction

Nowadays, in a period of global growing economic interdependence of states the regional cooperation is seen as a key factor of prosperity and achieving faster economic development. Obviously, effective inter-state relations can be based on common values, cultures, visions or even benefits from cooperation. In this case the development of regional identity is the issue that has a great influence on the future not in the short term, but in terms of a long strategic vision.

Analyzing regional identity, it is important to define the concept of region, its main characteristics and features. According to Kazakhstani political scientist Y. Buluktayev, "a region is a group of neighboring states, representing a separate economic geographical territory with similar national composition, culture or sociopolitical system" [1]. Other researchers pointed out the role of society and consider that region is "a territory whose population seeks

to preserve, develop its identity for achieving economic, social and cultural progress". From these definitions it can be concluded that region unites bordering countries with common current circumstances, economic, social, cultural similarity and coincidence in the future vision. However, historical perspective and common past can be an important factor in determining the region.

Thus, Central Asia is not only a certain economic region within one geographical zone, but from sociological perspective it is also a community with specific ethno-cultural features and a certain level of internal integration [1].

Some western researchers like B. Anderson and E. Gellner also studied the phenomenon of regional identity from the sociological perspective. For instance, B. Anderson considers that the regional identity is based on the idea of "imaginary communities". Since the decline of religious factor in the society and access to the information through the emergence of printed world, the idea of "imaginary community" began to spread [2]. B. Anderson's idea is intersected with Maslow's pyramid of needs. It states that the individuals require to feel the belonging to the group and common spirit.

According to the theory of Ernest Gellner, the early history demonstrated the absence of nation and nationalism in the agrarian history. Despite the cultural boundaries among tribes, that type of society was unable to create ideology that transcends those boundaries. In his opinion, modern societies require the cultural homogeneity and, moreover, have all conditions for creating and strengthening identity [3].

S. Huntington's approach emphasizes the role of civilizational factor on the development of regional identities. He considers that European identity is based on the European culture and Christianity, NAFTA – on the basis of North American community and Protestantism, MERCOSUR – on the Andean Pact of Latin American community and Catholicism, the Arab League – on the Arab civilization and Islamic ideas [4].

Theoretical and methodological base

The scientific research was based on a systematic approach. The regional identity as a research object was observed as a complex system of interrelated elements. The structure-functional method was applied, where each part of the system was observed in detail. In the process of research, we used scientific methods and techniques such as analysis and synthesis, grouping method, comparative analysis, generalization. At the same time the research required the implementation of empirical methods – analysis of documents and sources.

These methods were conducted within the framework of a generalizing systemic approach that helped to study society as a developing system with interconnected hierarchical subsystems. In this context, the study included the analysis of methodological principles and methodology to identify the influence of globalization processes on the cultural component of the state and society

The concept of regional identity in Central Asia

The most obvious transformation in cultural sphere that Kazakhstan faced was during the influence of Soviet Union. In this period, Russia had a great influence almost in all Union's

countries. In fact, the Soviet ideological programs were strong enough to spread norms, standards and values around all countries of the USSR. Moreover, the strong center was considered as the only source of truthful information and connect with external world.

Being the member of Soviet Union, Kazakhstan had to accept several flows of migrants from Russia and different regions of the Union in the period of collectivization and industrialization. In these circumstances, the process of 'russification' got starting point and still remain in Kazakhstani society. For instance, it is seen observing linguistic aspect.

The collapse of the USSR and gaining independence led to a new task of nation-building in Kazakhstan. From one side, our country faced with the internal goal of rebirthing as a nation-state and to become legal part of the world community without losing national cultural identity, from the other side. Moreover, this scenario was similar in most Central Asian countries.

Central Asian countries, including the independent Kazakhstan, feel the influence of globalization on their own experience in developing a civil society and socially oriented market economy. Obviously, most Central Asian countries have faced with a number of internal issues, such as: necessity of building of civic institutions, the development of private entrepreneurship, poverty. These issues can be resolved with the assistance of international and non-governmental organizations which are key actors of globalization processes. Considering this, it is necessary to study the main aspects of cultural globalization and its impact on the development of Kazakhstan and to find the answers to a number of questions.

The civilizational identity has a mixed character, where various factors influence. The example of Central Asia is a demonstrative case. Central Asia refers to Eurasian civilization, while from confessional perspective, the Islamic factor has a prevailing role. If this region is observed from ethnical level, Turkic component dominates. However, historical prism shows the Soviet past and its direct influence.

The existence of "Central Asian" region phenomenon is interconnected with Russian conquest of the XVIII-XIX centuries. The territorial, civilizational and confessional community did not have national identity. Obviously, the region covered tribes and communities without political or ethnic borders. That division into districts, areas had nothing common with modern republics and its territory.

The regional integration can increase due to the need of common efforts to reflect the internal and external threats destabilizing some parts of Central Asia [5]. The increasing trend for global governance made evident that some threats and challenges can be responded by developing the dialogue and cooperation among regional members. The stability and safety of the region can attract new investments and technologies.

In the early XX century, during the period of Russian influence, the role of Central Asian elites increased. At this period the historical and cultural unity of the region was the barrier, that gave start to the process of disengagement. The elites set the goal of nation-building within the framework of the Soviet state through the division of historical and cultural heritage. Moreover, this process was accompanied by finding differences among ethnically, histori-

cally, and culturally close peoples of Central Asia.

Persistent and stable regional integration require the necessity to become the part of regional community among society and consequent construction of cultural community. This point is intertwined with the history of the region and its politics of memory. The demonstrative example is the general writing on the history of Central Asia. In 1990 two rounds of meetings were held among the leaders of the republican institutes of history: the first meeting– in Almaty, the second – in Tashkent. The result of meetings was to begin preparatory work on the writing of one-volume book "History of Central Asia and Kazakhstan from ancient times to present day". However, at this stage this decision was not supported by all members of the meeting, therefore the book was not started and prepared [6].

The political and institutional obstacles of regional identity development are connected with the Soviet heritage and the post-Soviet period. Obviously, the influence of Soviet national policy has not gone without trace, it can be observed in the views, decisions of the post-Soviet ruling elites. It is difficult to define exact period of its durance, however, the current geopolitical definition of the region is a demonstrative example.

According to the study of R. Robertson, globalization is a process of upward influence on social reality in various fields of life (economic and political ties, cultural and information exchange). In this context, the concept of cultural globalization can be replaced with the term 'glocalization'. This concept was developed as a complex of intertwining global and local processes of social development. Moreover, this concept helps to study the impact of globalization on the individuals, their identity and to create a full picture of the essence of global processes.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the former Soviet republics were of the increasing interest expressing by external players of the world community. Moreover, the globalization became daily reality, and most countries focused on the local cooperation and local interaction. There is no closer and stronger than these geographical, cultural and historical ties among neighboring countries. It is important to understand that without regional cooperation it is difficult to realize globalization itself.

The permanent and strategic direction of interstate cooperation in the region is seen in security issues coordination, as well as in political, economic, military, humanitarian and other spheres. Some researchers believe that the basis of regional integration can be in joint efforts in the security sphere, that can be deepened through economic cooperation – a key component for regional development and stability.

European model of regional identity

The example of European Union demonstrates the complexity of regional integration that covers several generations and proceeds unevenly. Some researchers pointed out two types of European identity. The first point concerns the formation of a common European identity in the modern frames and borders of European integration, while second type refers to the European space, European culture, or even European civilization that has been formed over the centuries. However, in both cases political and intellectual elites play the driving role in the formation and promotion of European identity among the society [6].

Respect for linguistic diversity is a fundamental value of the European Union, as respect for the individual and openness to other cultures. This value is officially included in the preamble to the Treaty on the European Union, according to which the EU supports "receiving inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanistic heritage of Europe" and emphasizes "reaffirming adherence to the principles of freedom, democracy and respect for human rights" [7].

The adoption of linguistic diversity as one of the values of the EU has led to the emergence of linguistic human rights in international law. Moreover, legislative acts confirmed not only respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, but also non-discrimination on the basis of the language, where each official language is endowed with equal rights.

When studying linguistic diversity from the perspective of democracy, the main question arises - what language can be considered the language of democracy? To this question, political philosopher Will Kimlica argues, "the mother tongue is recognized as the language of democracy." So what language can be called the language of European democracy? The German philosopher and sociologist Jürgen Habermas argues that English can become the common language for Europe. However, if the European Union pursues a policy for one language, for example, recognizing English as the head, then this will run counter to the origins of democracy, which imply the equal status of all languages, non-discrimination and respect for all languages [8]. Thus, it becomes apparent that linguistic and cultural diversity plays a key role as a value of Europe.

The European Union promotes the development of democratic instruments to regulate the language situation. For example, the Lisbon Treaty introduced the European Civil Initiative (EGI), which creates conditions for EU citizens to participate directly in EU democratic processes. If at least one million citizens in at least one third of the Member States support this initiative, they have the right to put forward legislative proposals, which the European Commission must consider within the prescribed period of four months. The European Commission's "Proposals for the Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council through Civil Initiative" describes the purpose and justification of this democratic innovation as: "This new position is a significant step forward in the democratic life of the Union. It provides a unique opportunity to bring the Union closer to citizens and to facilitate a broader discussion of EU policy issues by uniting citizens from a number of countries to resolve one specific issue".

However, this civil initiative reveals the contradictions of the European democratic vision of creating "united in diversity": linguistic diversity is supported and protected at the EU level, however, linguistic diversity is actually limited. In this case, it is worth noting that Article 4 on proposals for changes in the activities of the EP states that the organizer of a civil initiative needs to register the initiative with the Commission, informing about the subject, purpose and justification of the application "in one of the official languages of the EU".

Thus, this provision of the European Commission threatens the right of citizens to apply to a European institution in their native language if it is not recognized as an official language.

The protection of linguistic diversity and linguistic rights are regarded as fundamental

values of Europe and, therefore, are essential for the concept of European democracy. The idea of linguistic diversity as a distinctive characteristic of Europe from other parts of the world is confirmed in several speeches by the former Commissioner of the European Union for Multilingualism, Leonard Orban [9]. At a conference on multilingualism in Romania on May 15, 2009, he summarized the basic principles of European language policy as follows: "Today we live in a globalized world, and European countries are increasingly integrated among themselves. Although at the global level, some of the "big" languages tend to dominate, Europe is not a melting pot, where differences are blurred. Europe is a common home where diversity is celebrated and where our native languages are a source of wealth and a bridge to greater solidarity and understanding" [10]. One can notice a contradiction in the Commissioner's speech, which consists in the fact that "numerous native languages" can be considered both a source of great cultural wealth and a catalyst for greater solidarity, on the one hand, and an obstacle to mutual understanding and the disappearance of national identity, on the other hand.

Studies show that the European identity does not replace, but supplements and gives new vision to traditional national identity. The European identity has spread unevenly in all European countries; therefore, each national identity has its own way of "Europeanization". Western researchers M. Risse and M. Engelmann emphasize that making European idea as the priority had a great influence on German consciousness. Although it was a political project, but it transformed German identity by giving future perspectives as a key actor in this system [6].

Today, Luxembourg is recognized as one of the successfully implemented models of linguistic diversity. In Luxembourg, linguistic multilingualism can be explained both by the geographical position of the country, and various political and demographic changes since its founding in the X century [12]. According to statistics, Luxembourg citizens are considered the most multilingual citizens of Europe, where 99% speak one foreign language, Slovak (97%) take second place and Latvian (95%) take third place. Multilingualism means knowledge of a second foreign language. Obviously, the second foreign language to be studied in the European Union is English (38%), German (12%) and French (11%), and in connection with the accession of Eastern European countries to the EU, the Russian language and then Spanish.

Linguistic diversity is a symbol of European democracy, but linguistic diversity can also complicate political dialogue and exchange of ideas in a community where there is no single means of communication. Thus, linguistic diversity contradicts the ideals of the "four freedoms" of the EU - freedom of movement of goods, people, movement of services and capital, but despite this, multilingualism is recognized as a fundamental European value, protected by EU treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and supported by a number of Community initiatives. The practical significance of recognizing linguistic diversity is to turn linguistic diversity into a commodity, a valuable cultural good, and a political tool in the hands of European minorities, through which they can strive for greater European integration. In recent political initiatives in the field of language and multilingualism, the European Commission

emphasizes the importance of multilingualism and the study of languages not only for European culture, but also for all spheres of political and public life in Europe.

It is obvious that European Union started from the development of economic community and later came to the creation of European space with linguistic and cultural diversity. And one of the scenarios of regional cooperation among Islamic states can be seen in the cooperation of the Turkic speaking countries: Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan. Nowadays these Turkic speaking countries have established interstate relations. They strive to unite all 27 Turkic speaking peoples of the world, which total number is more than 130 million people. However, it is early to discuss the integrational processes among them.

Therefore, the complex of economic development, historical community and cultural programs determine regional identity and contribute to the integration and strengthening of Central Asia as a united actor.

Conclusion

The formation of regional identity can be forced or accelerated by following factors:
- political benefits from cooperation;
- strengthening national and regional economic security;
- uniting efforts in decision making processes concerning regional problems;
- increasing the overall level of region competitiveness and consequent economic growth of the states [13].

The development of regional identity requires a starting point. Some researchers consider that it is the economic factor. It is the most rational catalyst for regional coopera-

tion, while other factors (institutions, culture and identity) can supplement later.

It is seen that the integrational processes must bring the members rather more benefit and profit than sacrifices and concessions. Moreover, there are some factors that force participants to become the part of the community or organization. In the post-war period the Western European countries alone could not resist the influence of the United States on the world market. These circumstances made countries to unite political and economic efforts and, as a result, gave rise the idea of economic and then full integration [13].

The basis of full integration is in the formation and strengthening regional identity. It is based not on unification, but on the contrary, involves measures on overcoming uneven economic development of states by searching common links of the region, protecting the historical and cultural identity, preserving national identity.

Moreover, the aim of European policy is to promote mutual understanding between European countries by encouraging, in particular, the study of the language and history. Since the formation of the European Communities, the participating countries have contributed to the creation and development of intergovernmental programs for the study of languages, with the main goal of multilingual and intercultural education [12].

One of the factors uniting all five Central Asian states is the religious component, their belonging to the Muslim world. At the same time, it is difficult to consider it as the key factor due to the different degree of religiosity of the population and its role in the society. For instance, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are considered as traditionally Muslim states with those who apply the rule

of Islam. In Kazakhstan, on the contrary, the ethno-demographic composition and the large urbanization of the population show low level of Islam. Mostly, it is increasing in southern parts, where the indigenous population mixed with Uighurs, Uzbek and Kyrgyz. There aren't any Islamic parties in Kazakhstan, there isn't any interference of Islam in political life. However, religious factor should be taken into account in the development of regional identity in Central Asia.

To sum up, based on the analysis it can be stated that the development of regional identity is a complex process that requires time and consistent solutions to support this idea. The European experience is demonstrative example due to different stages of development starting from economic community to the creation of European space with multiculturalism and language diversity. At the same time, it is worth to remember about prerequisites of European integration connected with post-war reconstruction. In this case, Central Asia can choose more consistent and timed way of regional unity where society and political elites achieve appropriate level of consciousness.

REFERENCES:

1. Buluktayev Y. (2012). *Problemy regional'noi identichnosti v Tsentral'noiAzii (Chast'1)* [Regional Identity Issues in Central Asia (Part 1)]. *Sauran - Sauran.* 2012. URL: http://cc-sauran.kz/rubriki/politika/14-problemy-regionalnoy-identichnosti-v-centralnoy-azii-chast-1.html
2. Anderson, B. (2006) Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, 3rd rev. ed., 235 p.
3. Kumar, D. (2010) Gellnerian Theory of Nation and Nationalism: A Critical Appraisal. *Sociological Bulletin*, 59(3), pp. 392–406.
4. Paasi, A. (2009). The resurgence of the 'Region' and 'Regional Identity': Theoretical perspectives and empirical observations on regional dynamics in Europe. *Review of International Studies, 35*(S1), 121-146. doi:10.1017/S0260210509008456
5. Laruelle, M. (2013) Foreign policy and affiliation with Central Asia. *Pro et Contra - Pro et Contra*. pp. 6-20.
6. Somuncuoglu, A. (2017) *Identichnost' i napisanie istorii v integratsii Tsentral'noi Azii* [Identity and History Writing in Central Asian Integration]. *Tsentralnaya Aziya: Pyat Gosudarstv Ili Odin Region? - Central Asia: five states or one region?* [Electronic resource] URL: https://www.caa-network.org/archives/author/anar-somunc-uoglu (access date 25.08.2021).
7. Fact Sheets on the European Union: Language Policy. [Electronic resource] URL:http://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/142/language-policy (access date 25.12.2021).
8. Giovanni, R. (2015) United in Diversity Multilingualism in the European Union and India. 2014-2015. [Electronic resource] URL: https://tesi.luiss.it/14872/1/properzi-maria-chiara-tesi-2015.pdf] (access date 25.12.2021).
9. Adamo, S. & Kjær, A. (2015) Linguistic Diversity and European Democracy. *Cambridge University Press.* pp.82–102.
10. European Commission Official. [Electronic resource] URL: http://ec.europa.eu/archives/commission_2004-2009/index_en.html (access date 25.12.2021).
11. Redinger, D. & Millar McColl, R. (2010) Language Planning and Policy on Linguistic Boundaries: the case of Luxembourgish. *Marginal Dialects: Scotland, Ireland and Beyond.* pp.90-106.
12. Languages for democracy and social cohesion. Diversity, equity and quality (2014) [Electronic resource] URL: https://rm.coe.int/languages-for-democracy-and-social-cohesion-diversity-equity-and-quali/168069e7bd (access date 25.12.2021).
13. Aubakirova, A. & Krengauz, I. (2020) *Ekonomicheskie aspekty regional'noi identichnosti postsovetskoi Tsentral'noi Azii* [Economic aspects of the regional identity of post-Soviet Central Asia]. *Obzor ekonomiki Tsentral'noi Azii - Central Asian Economic Review.* 3(132). pp. 8-19.