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The Russian Minority in Central Asia:

Migration, Politics, and Language

by Sebastien Peyrouse



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The collapse of the Soviet Union and the achievement of independence by its republics created an unprecedented situation. For the first time in its history Russia had a “diaspora,” which numbered about 25 million people. Now a recipient of immigrants, the Russian Federation took in more than eight million former Soviet citizens between 1990 and 2003, mainly “ethnic” Russians from other former Soviet republics.¹ Central Asia was the primary provider of these migrants: of these eight million individuals, half came from the five Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—which were home to more than one third of this Russian “diaspora.”

Russians made up nearly 20 percent of the total population of these five states: some 9.5 million individuals in 1989. But their presence was not evenly distributed, and each state faced a unique domestic situation. Whereas the titular population dominated in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan, with approximately 80 percent of the total population, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan were home to large nontitular minorities. The Kyrgyz accounted for only 65 percent of the population of their republic. The Kazakhs would not cross the majority threshold until the 1999 census (53 percent of the population). Though their situations were diverse, the five states nonetheless had to manage a similar problem: how to affirm a “de-Russified” national identity in the wake of local economic collapse, which occurred as bonds among the former Soviet republics broke, and how to do so without integrating into the larger post-Soviet space.

Following a short history of the Russian presence in Central Asia, which situates these population movements in the long term, the present article focuses on post-Soviet migratory flows of the Russians of Central Asia in the direction of Russia. I attempt to define the motivations for emigration and provide sociological profiles of the migrants in the 1990s, to disassociate declarations of intent from the act itself, and to question the ambiguous rapport of the migrants with their two “homelands”—Central Asia and Russia. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, unlike the other republics, did not organize a census during 1999–2000; thus, quantitative information remains fragmented at various points. I will revisit neither the terminological stake of the definition of “Russian” nor its ambiguities, both of which constitute subjects of research unto themselves. Additionally, I analyze several fundamental issues, such as dual citizenship, professional discrimination, the status of the Russian language, Russian-language education, and access to Russophone media.

I seek to demonstrate that, since the turn of the 21st century, the “Russian question” has progressively disassociated itself from the actual Russophonia issue. The massive migratory flows of Central Asians seeking work in Russia force local governments to maintain legal, linguistic, cultural, educational, and informational links with the old imperial center. These governments do so not to satisfy the rights of their Russian minorities, but to benefit from the economic growth of the Russian Federation. The Russians of Central Asia thus find themselves in a paradoxical position: a discriminated minority seeking to profit from a new rapprochement

About the Author

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with Russia in which they are neither principal actors nor principal beneficiaries.

I. Russian Migratory Flows From Central Asia Russian Demographic Development in Central Asia in the Tsarist and Soviet Periods

The presence of Russian colonists in Central Asia framed, followed, and often preceded the military and political conquest of this space. The first Russian populations settled in Central Asia in the 18th century. As was also the case with Russian expansion into Siberia, Cossacks, soldier-peasants integrated into the tsarist army, established the first fortifications and announced the establishment of colonial power in these new territories. Peasants fleeing serfdom and the central authorities followed, along with persecuted religious communities, mainly Protestants and members of the antireform Russian Orthodox sect known as the Old Believers. In the 18th century, Russians occupied lands extending to the border of present-day Kazakhstan: the basin of the Ural River, the regions of the Altai Mountains, and the banks of the Ishim, Tobol, and Upper Irtysh rivers.² Thus, rural colonization ran parallel with military conquest, and was perceived to be under the control of the political authorities. Tightly controlled by the tsarist administration (the Commission of the Steppes), colonization accelerated in the latter half of the 19th century in tandem with the pace of political and social events in Russia: the abolition of serfdom in 1861, the land exhaustion of the 1880s, the great famine of 1891–1892, and the launch of the agrarian policies of Prime Minister Pyotr Stolypin in 1906. In 1896, the number of Russian colonists legally settled in Central Asia was estimated at 400,000. This number grew to 1.5 million in 1916, representing a third of the registered departures toward the Asian part of the Russian Empire.

After this first pre-revolutionary migratory flow, several others followed, extending into the 1950s. In 1926, the census listed 241,000 Russians in Uzbekistan, 5.4 percent of the population. A vast majority of them settled in urban areas, particularly in Tashkent, where they accounted for 13 percent of the inhabitants. This trend accelerated in subsequent decades, encouraged by Soviet economic programs, industrialization, and the extensive development

of cotton farming. Many petroleum engineers and semiskilled workers arrived to organize the socialist economy in the 1930s. Between 1926 and 1939, 1.7 million men left European Russia to live in Central Asia, and numerous kulaks were deported there as well. Forty-seven new cities and 230 workers' colonies emerged. In Uzbekistan, the number of Russians grew to 727,000 in 1939, or 13 percent of the population. Two-thirds of them were concentrated in cities, and more than 42 percent of those in Tashkent. Russians constituted 35 percent of the urban population of the republic.³

During World War II, the displacement of factories and industrial centers from the front lines to the Urals and Central Asia accentuated the tendency toward Russification. In order to be secure from Nazi forces, more than 1,500 factories moved east in 1941, of which a fifth went to Central Asia.⁴ More than 100 settled in Kazakhstan, bringing the number of industrial production sites built in the republic during the war to 500.⁵ The European presence intensified during the Virgin Lands Campaign: beginning in 1954, Nikita Khrushchev launched a gigantic program of land development that caused a surge of two million mainly Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian "volunteers" to Kazakhstan.⁶ Large *kolkhozy* (collective farms) were built, dominated by Russians from central Russia and western Siberia. Between 1939 and 1959, the population of Kazakhstan increased considerably due to this Slavic influx. The proportion of Russians in the total population of the republic jumped from 20.6 percent in 1926 to 42.7 percent in 1959.⁷ In that year's census, Kazakhs accounted for no more than one-third of the population; there were three million Kazakhs, but four million Russians. The latter were especially numerous in the north of the country, their numbers growing to 80 percent of the population in cities such as Petropavlovsk and Ust-Kamenogorsk.

Although many soldiers and civil servants were sent to Central Asia, pre-revolutionary immigration consisted principally of peasants. During the Soviet period, the Russians who relocated to the area mainly went to live in cities, though some settled in agricultural areas in northern Kazakhstan and along the shores of Lake Issyk Kul in Kyrgyzstan. The Central Asian republics were in need of specialists in the indus-

trial and service sectors, and they attracted professionals such as teachers, engineers, technicians, and doctors. Soviet development programs summoned young, educated people to the region to occupy positions of political, administrative, and economic decision making.⁸ In spite of this massive surge of Slavs in each Central Asian republic, the demographic balance began to tilt in favor of the indigenous population because of their high birthrates as early as the 1959 census. Consequently, the Russian proportion of the population in Central Asia decreased in the 1960s and 1970s, but migratory flows remained important.

The Reversal of Migratory Flows in the 1970s

Though the massive departure of the Russians of Central Asia for Russia is often presented as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the inversion of migratory flows began well before 1991. One can even observe it in the 1979 census. In the 1970s, Central Asia was no longer regarded as a region of priority development, and the Virgin Lands Campaign was abandoned. The launch of important projects in Russia, in particular the new railroad between Baikal and Amur (the BAM), demanded a labor force of several hundred thousand people. Leonid Brezhnev's policy of indigenization, also launched in the 1970s, made it possible for the eponymous populations to attain positions of power. It reduced the need for the presence of Russians in the administrative, cultural, and political structures of the republics. Additionally, it accelerated the urbanization of the eponymous populations, who were invited to leave rural areas. Thus, in Uzbekistan, the portion of the population living in cities increased 70 percent between 1970 and 1979.⁹

One therefore observes the first movement of Russians returning to Russia in the 1970s, precociously and involuntarily signaling the beginning of "decolonization." Migratory flows toward Central Asia slowed, like those to the rest of the southern republics. Whereas some 117,000 individuals from Russia arrived in Central Asia in 1971, this figure dropped to 80,200 in 1977 and to 75,900 in 1980.¹⁰ During the 1970s, Kazakhstan experienced a net loss of almost a half-million people through migration, while Kyrgyzstan lost approximately 100,000.

For the other three republics, the balance was also negative, by a combined total of 200,000 people between 1976 and 1980.¹¹ The pace of population decline quickened in the 1980s, when Kazakhstan lost an additional 784,000 people (between 60,000 and 85,000 each year) and 850,000 people left the area's other republics.¹² Russians continued to dominate these outward flows. In 1980, for every 1,000 Russians who settled in Central Asia, 1,256 left.¹³ Their overall representation relative to the total population declined not only because of these negative migratory balances but due to the high birthrate of the autochthonous population.

The Fall of the Soviet Union and Migratory Acceleration in the 1990s

Despite the upheavals of the 1970s and 1980s, Central Asia still counted 9.5 million Russians in the 1989 census. But the unexpected disappearance of the Soviet Union caused many questions and concerns that considerably hastened migratory flows. The movements originating in Central Asia were significantly larger than those from other republics. The five states accounted for more than half of the migrants heading to Russia, compared to just 17 percent from the Caucasus, 20 percent from Ukraine, and 3 percent from the Baltic states.¹⁴ In 2000, migration from Kazakhstan alone constituted more than 28 percent of the internal migration in former Soviet territory.¹⁵ The Russians did not leave alone; more than three-fifths of the German population, nearly two-fifths of the Ukrainians, and nearly a quarter of the Poles left as well. Thus, in Kazakhstan between 1989 and 1999, the number of Germans fell from 946,000 to 353,000, Ukrainians from 875,000 to 547,000, and Poles from 61,100 to 47,200.¹⁶

This phenomenon affected each of the republics differently (please see table 1). In terms of emigration, Kazakhstan posts the highest figures, whether compared to the other states of Central Asia or to the whole Commonwealth of Independent States.¹⁷ Between 1989 and 1999, Russians decreased in number from 6 million to 4.5 million, or from 40 percent to 30 percent of the population of the republic, with an average departure per year of 150,000 individuals. According to 2006 figures, there are now fewer than four million Russians in Kazakhstan. In the first half of the 1990s, departing Russians came

TABLE 1. Number of Russians (and their percentage of the total population) in each Central Asian Republic

	1959	1970	1979	1989	1999–2000	2007 estimates
Kazakhstan	3,974,000 (42.7%)	5,521,000 (42.4%)	5,991,000 (40.8%)	6,227,000 (37%)	4,479,000 (30%)	Approx. 4,000,000
Kyrgyzstan	623,500 (30.2%)	856,000 (29.2%)	911,700 (25.9%)	916,500 (21.5%)	603,000 (12.5%)	Approx. 500,000
Uzbekistan	1,100,000 (13.5%)	1,473,000 (12.5%)	1,665,000 (10.8%)	1,653,000 (8.3%)	Approx. 900,000 (3%)	Approx. 800,000
Tajikistan	262,600 (13.3%)	344,000 (11.8%)	395,000 (10.4%)	388,500 (7.6%)	68,000 (1%)	Approx. 50,000
Turkmenistan	262,700 (17.3%)	313,000 (14.5%)	349,000 (12.6%)	334,000 (9.5%)	Approx. 120,000 (2%)	Less than 150,000

principally from the southern and western areas of the country, where residents are mainly ethnic Kazakhs. Some migrations were internal, as Russians from the south, or even from nearby republics such as Uzbekistan, relocated to the Slavic areas in the north.¹⁸ In the second half of the decade, the majority-Slavic regions in the north, and east of Kazakhstan also began to lose population. Proportionally, the out-migration of Russians was more pronounced in the southern and western areas, which lost approximately 35 percent of their population, than in the others, which lost approximately 25 percent.¹⁹ Though the departures in the traditionally Russian north and east were smaller, the transformations caused by the exodus of European minorities also touched these regions. The Astana region lost 122,000 people, or 24 percent of its population; North Kazakhstan region, 186,000, or 20 percent; and Karaganda region, 335,000, or 19 percent. Today, whole districts in large cities such as Pavlodar, where a third of the population left, stand entirely unused. In the center of the country, the satellite mining cities of Karaganda are partly abandoned.

In Kyrgyzstan, the number of Russians fell by 34 percent between the censuses of 1989 and 1999. Though Russians in Kyrgyzstan numbered 916,500 in 1989, this figure dropped to no more than 720,000 in 1995 and 603,000 in 1999.²⁰ In 2006, their number was estimated at 500,000. Nearly 150,000 Russians left the country between 1989 and 1991. The outflow eventually decreased and stabilized at around 9,000 to 10,000 departures per year.

Many Russians left the south of the country; between the two censuses, their numbers in the Osh region fell from 68,300 to 14,100. The cohort of Ukrainians in Osh decreased from 8,200 to 1,300, of Belarusians from 1,100 to 100, and of Germans from 700 to 200. Today, Russians represent 12 percent of the population of Kyrgyzstan and constitute the republic's second-largest ethnic minority, after the Uzbeks. Russians account for less than 14 percent of the population in each of Kyrgyzstan's seven provinces, with the exception of Chu, where they make up more than 32 percent, and in the capital, where 33 percent of people self-identify as Russian. Once thought to have slowed because of the state's conciliatory linguistic policies, migratory flows have shown a resurgence in the past four years, strengthened especially by the political turmoil of 2005. In that year, Russia granted residence permits to more than 25,000 residents of Kyrgyzstan—a figure that takes into account ethnic Kyrgyz in addition to others—or 10,000 more than the previous year. The Russian consulate in Bishkek claims to receive permit requests from 200 to 300 people per day, rather than the 60 to 70 typical of years before the 2005 Tulip Revolution. The Embassy of the Russian Federation confirmed that it processed 60,000 departure requests in 2006. Since achieving independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan has lost 600,000 inhabitants, of which more than half have been Russian.

Uzbekistan experienced its first massive departures in 1989, following the pogrom against Meskhetian Turks in the Ferghana Valley,

which caused a wave of panic among minority populations. The country counted 1.6 million Russians, 8 percent of the population, in the 1989 census. Ninety-five percent lived in urban environments, and 42 percent of these lived in the capital, Tashkent. According to some researchers, more than 500,000 Russians left between 1990 and 1997.²¹ According to other estimates, approximately 5 percent (about 75,000 people) of the Russian population left Uzbekistan each year in the 1990s.²² All sources agree that since independence at least half of the Russian community of Uzbekistan has migrated, about 800,000 people. Though it has slowed down, the daily queues in front of the Russian consulate in Tashkent testify to the fact that this flow persists today.²³ At the beginning of the present decade, between 40,000 and 50,000 Russians were still leaving Uzbekistan each year.

Though no census has been conducted since 1989, it appears that the Russian community of Uzbekistan still consists of about 800,000 people today, that is to say, less than 4 percent of the country's population. The ratios of Russians to the rest of population in various areas of the country have collapsed. Their proportion has decreased from 9.97 percent to 5.81 percent in Syr Darya, from 14.64 to 9.29 percent in Tashkent, from 5.78 percent to 2.63 percent in Fergana, from 2.59 percent to 1.12 percent in Andijan, from 4.38 percent to 2.11 percent in Djizak, and from 4.38 percent to 2.11 percent in Kashkadarya.²⁴ In addition to the capital, Russians are still numerous in *creatio ex nihilo* industrial towns such as Angren, Bekobod, Almalik, Navoiy, and Akhagaran. In Chirchik, founded outside Tashkent in 1935, the majority of the city's 150,000 inhabitants are Russian. The city's economy was once based on a local hydro-electric plant that has since ceased operations. Thus, unemployment is widespread and the majority of inhabitants are retired. More and more of Uzbekistan's Russians leave to settle in Kazakhstan, where economic conditions are improving. In 2003 and 2004, Kazakhstan experienced a positive balance of Russian émigrés, respectively 28,000 and 32,000 people. This figure is not explained solely by the return of former Russian residents to Kazakhstan, but also by the migration of Russians from Uzbekistan.

In Turkmenistan, the census of 1989 counted 334,000 Russians, who constituted about 9.5

percent of the total population of the republic. By 1995 this figure had fallen to 6.7 percent; it is now at a low of just 2 percent. With the authorities in Ashgabat authorizing the right to dual citizenship with Russia in 1993, migratory flows were weaker in the first half of the 1990s. However, they accelerated with the increasing authoritarianism of the state, characterized by the harsh suppression of the right to dual citizenship in 2003. Currently, Turkmenistan's population includes 150,000 Russians, at best. Some sources, such as the Institute for the Diaspora and Integration, based in Moscow and directed by the militant Russian nationalist Konstantin Zatulin, estimate that the number of Russians still present in Turkmenistan is much higher.²⁵

Tajikistan is the Central Asian republic that has been most severely affected by the emigration of its Russian population. Nearly 85 percent of Russians have left the country. By the 1970s migratory flows in the direction of Tajikistan had diminished, and, in 1975 they ceased being positive. The July 1989 law establishing Tajik as the official language led to an initial departure of approximately 10,000 Russians. New emigration flows followed the violent confrontations in February 1990 in Dushanbe. Before the onset of civil war in the country in 1992, some 380,000 Russians still lived in Tajikistan, accounting for 7.6 percent of the population.²⁶ The outbreak of hostilities sped these remaining Russians' emigration. In 1993 alone, more than 200,000 Russians, or half the Russian community, left.²⁷ Along with the data for Armenia, this figure represents the highest percentage of departures of a Russian minority from a post-Soviet republic.

Essentially, only the elderly without the means to leave, those belonging to ethnically mixed families, and those not able to obtain the necessary documents remained. Today, more than half of Tajikistan's Russians are pensioners, concentrated in Dushanbe, though not as densely as formerly. Russians constituted 32.4 percent of the population of the capital in 1989, but only 17 percent in 1996. In the 2000 census, they represented a mere 1 percent of the total population of the republic, or just 68,000 people.²⁸ There were 300 Russians in Pamir region, 9,000 in Khatlon region, 24,000 in the Sughd region (formerly Leninabad), and 34,000 in Dushanbe. Small communities continue to exist in the towns of Kurgan-Tyube (2,500), Tursunzade

(2,500), and Kulob (500). Today, one can estimate their still-falling numbers at approximately 50,000 people.²⁹ A final note worth mentioning is that the Russian families of approximately 200 former border guards remained in Tajikistan until 2006 because of their inability to obtain the allowances and housing to which they were theoretically entitled upon their return to Russia.³⁰

People emigrated from the republics of Central Asia in particularly high numbers in the first half of the 1990s. Emigration from Kazakhstan reached a peak in 1994, with nearly 500,000 people leaving the country, including some 300,000 Russians.³¹ In Kyrgyzstan, 100,000 Russians left in 1993 alone. In Uzbekistan, the principal Russian outflows were most concentrated during 1992–93 and 1993–94, with 170,000 and 200,000 departures, respectively. The pace of migration subsided in the second half of the 1990s and the following decade, for several reasons. For one thing, the vast majority of people who wished to emigrate succeeded in leaving during the first years following independence. Also, until 2006, new laws complicated the emigration process, especially with regard to obtaining citizenship in the Russian Federation.³² Finally, Russia's difficult economic situation in the 1990s and accounts of integration failures weakened the will to return of some Russians still present in Central Asia, who were not sure they would find improved living conditions in Russia. The repatriation program launched by Putin in June 2006 anticipates the return of about 300,000 people by 2009, mostly from Central Asia and the Caucasus. The number of volunteers seems to be more important especially in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, but the authorities have not yet released any official data for 2007.

II. Motivations for Departure

The motivations for departure are multiple, and pose at the same time economic, social, and political concerns. The collapse of the standard of living that followed the disappearance of the Soviet Union was common to all Central Asian republics. Kazakhstan represents a notable exception to this trend, as it has experienced strong growth rates since the beginning of 2000. The policies of nationalization carried out by the republics also triggered emigration. While they began well before independence through Soviet strategies of indigenization, they increased after

1991. Though Central Asian authorities were justified in supporting their eponymous nationalities, the ethnicization of public administration particularly touched the Russian population, which had benefited from symbolic privileges and status under the Soviet system.³³

The linguistic nationalization carried out in each republic provided a strong impetus to emigrate. During Soviet times, Russians in Central Asia had little command of the national language of the republic in which they lived.³⁴ The situation improved very little in the 1990s. Even if schools systematically introduce children to the official language today, the states have established no programs to train adults. Added to this absence of official support are the strong feelings Russians harbor toward Central Asian languages, which they perceive as useless.

It seems that the principal cause of emigration remains the absence of a future, or the perception of such, for the younger generations. The degradation of the education system and the presence of a structure of ethnic preferences in employment have created incentives for Russians to send their children abroad, mainly to Russia, for school. Departures are thus spread over two generations: parents wish to leave but remain, and children emigrate at the encouragement of their parents. Surveys conducted in the 1990s on the reasons for emigration primarily cite the lack of opportunities for the younger generations, linguistic policy, and a mediocre standard of living. According to a 1994 study, 41 percent of Russians in Uzbekistan and 39 percent of those in Kyrgyzstan wished to emigrate, mainly to provide a future for their children.³⁵

Worries concerning the stability of the new states were particularly strong immediately following independence. The proportion of individuals who wanted to emigrate was much higher—43 percent in Uzbekistan, 36 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 66 percent in Tajikistan—than that of individuals who wished to stay—18 percent in Uzbekistan, 25 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 6 percent in Tajikistan.³⁶ In Tajikistan, those who remained after the civil war of the mid-1990s cited economic reasons above all others. More than 75 percent claimed to live in difficult or very difficult conditions, and just 18 percent considered their situation satisfactory. In this republic, the desire to leave appeared to transcend generations: 88 percent of Russians under

24 years of age and 77 percent of elderly Russians wished to emigrate.³⁷

Among the minority nationalities of Central Asia, Russians dominate in terms of candidates for emigration, though one can note a similarly based desire to leave in other groups such as the Germans, Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Tatars. Along with the war zones in the Caucasus, the republics of Central Asia hold the unfortunate record of having the highest numbers of would-be Russian emigrants. Sociological studies of the whole former Soviet Union reveal that the proportion of Russians who plan to emigrate from Ukraine and the Baltic states is much lower.³⁸ The republics of Central Asia thus combine several negative criteria that accentuate the will of Russian minorities to leave: low levels of coeducation with the autochthonous populations, poor knowledge of the national languages, dire economic situations, a negative outlook on the future, unstable geopolitical environments, and fear of Islamist movements.

Migrants: A Sociological Sketch

A large portion of the Russians in Central Asia, or their parents, came to the region during the multiple waves of immigration that occurred in the 20th century within the context of Soviet development programs. These immigrants occupied administrative or technical roles; thus, many of Central Asia's Russians have an educational level higher than that of the average population of their republic, and of Russia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the likelihood of departure appeared to be related to occupational qualifications. For instance, the proportion of Russians with an average or above-average specialized education who left Kazakhstan increased from 39 percent in 1994 to 44 percent in 1997.³⁹ Most of the individuals who left the country were working age (64 percent) or younger (22 percent). This caused a very perceptible aging of the minority in each republic, since the youngest and most educated Russians left in huge numbers. In Kazakhstan, the average age of Russians is now 45 to 47 years, while that of Kazakhs is 23 to 25 years.⁴⁰

Those Russians who had arrived for the Virgin Land Campaign or in the final years of the Soviet regime left first. Their roots in the republics were young and they still maintained strong family links with Russia. Those with the

possibility of resettling in Russia's large cities, particularly Moscow, or who occupied in-demand professional positions, also left. Those Russians who remain often come from low social classes or are of advanced age. The situation is particularly difficult for Russians whose families have been settled in Central Asia for many generations, specifically the descendants of the peasants who came to the steppes at the beginning of the 20th century. Thirty percent of the Russians of Kyrgyzstan and 28 percent of those of Kazakhstan live in rural areas, but the proportion is less than or equal to 6 percent in the other republics.⁴¹ For these rural residents, the family bonds to Russia have been broken for several decades, and many do not know where they could emigrate.

Although the Russians who emigrate are overwhelmingly urban, few can obtain a residence permit [*propiska*] for the large cities of the Russian Federation. They often live in small localities, the countryside, or in the depopulated zones of Siberia—not in European Russia, to which internal migrants from Siberia and the Far East already move. Loss of social status is the main consequence, as the occupations available in rural areas do not correspond to the education they received in Central Asia. For many, emigration is synonymous with a return to the earth. In their predeparture discourse, Russians from Central Asia present Russia as a depopulated country in need of agricultural labor. This return to the earth is thus, from their point of view, regeneration, making it possible to build a new life after the failures of independence in Central Asia.⁴² This myth of the pioneer, exalted in the speeches of potential migrants, very often runs up against reality. All these former engineers and teachers do not succeed in living off the land. In addition, they settle in areas of Russia already in full social crisis. These immigrants must face hostile reactions from villagers and often find themselves ghettoized in villages full of other Russians from Central Asia.⁴³

Real Versus Imagined Departure

The stated will of a majority of Russians to leave Central Asia does not mean the actual achievement of this departure. Several studies of potential migrants show that for those who have not systematically taken the steps necessary for departure, declaration of intent is key. A 1998–99 study

found that 60 percent of Central Asia's Russians said they wanted to leave their country of residence, but only 10 percent considered this departure certain. Large proportions of the Russian populations in Kyrgyzstan (38 percent) and Uzbekistan (34 percent) expressed a hope to leave, but only 8 percent and 4 percent, respectively, had made an irrevocable decision.⁴⁴

During 1994–95, the period of greatest emigration, between 80 percent and 90 percent of the Russians who volunteered to leave had not yet settled questions of housing and employment in their destination country, while approximately 10 percent of them had set the necessary legal procedures into motion and had begun to sell their belongings. For many potential migrants, the issue of financing their departure remains crucial. According to a 1999 report, in Kazakhstan 43 percent of the Russians who wished to leave faced major financial obstacles that blocked their plans, while 24 percent were not certain of their ability to settle in their new country.⁴⁵ Conversely, in Tajikistan, where the political and economic situations were particularly dire, nearly 80 percent of potential migrants had a fixed departure date.⁴⁶ These proportions do not seem to have decreased over time: according to a 2004 study completed in Kazakhstan, 9 percent of Russians questioned were on the verge of leaving the republic and 31 percent desired to leave.

Whatever the republic or year of investigation, all sociological studies undertaken in Central Asia show that only a small minority of Russians declare their firm intention to stay in the region no matter what (5 percent each in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and 13 percent in Uzbekistan). A significant number of Russians think it is more likely they will stay than emigrate: 24 percent in Kazakhstan, 39 percent in Kyrgyzstan, and 41 percent in Uzbekistan.⁴⁷ In the mid-1990s, more than half of potential migrants, whatever their nationality, stated that they would remain if the living situation in their current country of residence improved: 78 percent in Kazakhstan, 70 percent in Kyrgyzstan, and 53 percent in Uzbekistan.⁴⁸ At the time of a specific study of Russians in Kazakhstan, half of them affirmed that they would stay in the republic if the state gave them assurances concerning the future of their children. Only 3.2 percent of them claimed that their will to leave was irreversible.⁴⁹

In republics with particularly difficult social conditions, such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, Russians' stated requirements before emigration are fewer than in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan, where they are more reticent to leave prior to securing housing and work in Russia.⁵⁰ For a number of Central Asia's Russians, one way to slow emigration and guarantee their own rights would be the creation of a common political and economic space with Russia based on the union between Belarus and Russia, which was created in 1996. Those who favor such a solution include 92 percent of the Russians in Kazakhstan, 89 percent of those in Kyrgyzstan, and 86 percent in Tajikistan. They remain skeptical, however, regarding the realization of such a project. More than half of the residents of the aforementioned three republics, the most positively disposed toward Russia in the region, consider rapprochement between their state and Russia unlikely, while a quarter consider it impossible.⁵¹ It seems that the statement of desire to emigrate and, in part, the declaration of intent have developed as the rhetoric through which Russians of Central Asia express anguish over their future. Some will remain in the area, either because they will find integration sufficient or because the material conditions to achieve the dream of departure will not be met.

The Paradox of Two Patries: Central Asia and Russia

The specificities of the Soviet system do not make it possible to regard it as a colonial system like that of Western countries in the 19th century and first part of the 20th century. Among the elements of differentiation, the question of the "autochthonism" of the Russians of Central Asia seems fundamental. According to a study done shortly before the breakdown of the Soviet Union, nearly half of the Russians living in Central Asia had been born there (the range among the five republics is 43 percent to 48 percent). A significant share of those not born in Central Asia had lived in the region for more than 20 years: 37 percent in Kazakhstan and 41 percent, on average, in the other republics.⁵² Overall, of the 9.5 million Russians counted in the five republics of Central Asia in 1989, more than 8 million had built their lives in the region and were not temporary migrants. In addition, the feeling that the Russians of Central Asia are

“different” from those of Russia is widespread among the concerned populations. In Uzbekistan, 80 percent of Russians in a 1997 survey said they worked harder, acted friendlier, studied more, and drank less than their counterparts in Russia.⁵³ The idea of having “orientalized” oneself through contact with local people is common, and can paradoxically go along with contempt for the culture of the eponymous populations.

The migrants’ accounts of the difficulties of settling in Russia, and for some the impossibility of successfully integrating into their new homeland, contribute to a strong resentment of Russia. They often portray it as a country unconcerned with its “compatriots,” which prefers to get along with the Central Asian political regimes rather than defend the rights of Russian minorities or help them return. Thus, 23 percent of the Russians in Tajikistan and only 4 percent of those in Kazakhstan express hope for Russia’s support in their daily difficulties.⁵⁴ In Turkmenistan, Moscow barely protested the state’s abolition in 2003 of dual citizenship and subsequent discrimination against Russians who refused to take Turkmen passports. This confirmed the sentiment of the Russian “diasporas” regarding abandonment by Moscow.

The sense of having neither the ability to integrate into the new republics nor a good chance of being received by Russia creates complex identity references. In the first years following the disappearance of the Soviet Union, numerous Russians in the near abroad—between 52 percent and 78 percent—self-identified as Soviet citizens. In 1997, only 35 percent of Russians in Kyrgyzstan, 28 percent in Uzbekistan, and 20 percent in Kazakhstan identified with the new, post-Soviet states. In Kazakhstan, according to data from the Moscow institute INDEM, 24 percent of Russians questioned still regarded themselves as citizens of the Soviet Union in 1998.⁵⁵ Even at the end of the 1990s, 23 percent of the Russians in Uzbekistan continued to see themselves as either Soviet or stateless.⁵⁶

The motivation to emigrate therefore depends only little upon the will to join a Russia that is not considered, by the majority of the Russians of Central Asia, to be their natural “motherland.” A study conducted in the 1990s found that only about one-quarter of the Russians in Kazakhstan and about one-third of

those in Uzbekistan thought that to be Russian meant to live in Russia. They presented the Russian language and culture as more important elements of identification. More than half affirmed Russia as the land of their ancestors, *otechestvo*, but only a quarter defined it as their motherland, *rodina*.⁵⁷ Thus, in proposing a binary interpretation of the situation—either a mass repatriation to Russia or complete assimilation in a hostile and culturally foreign state—the official statements of the associations for the defense of Russians in the near abroad often overlook reality, the continuum of identity, and the multiplicity of definitions of self.⁵⁸ The Russians of Central Asia often employ the dual terminology *otechestvo-rodina* to clarify their identity. Russia is certainly the country of their fathers, to which one does not cease belonging even if one does not emigrate there, while the motherland remains the republic in which one was born. This idea benefits from emotional links and memories, which, in spite of post-1991 disillusionment, cannot be erased.⁵⁹

III. Civil Society Restricted by Political Conditions in Central Asia

The Russians of Central Asia did not become “symbolic” minorities when the new states gained independence in 1991, but rather during the final decades of the Soviet Union. In the 1970s, the policies of the Brezhnev regime supported the indigenization process (*korenizatsiia*), which was particularly visible within the administrative and cultural elites in each of the republics.⁶⁰ Professional and cultural competition between nationalities spread, and several interethnic incidents occurred between Russians and Uzbeks, and between Russians and Kazakhs. Russians started to feel marginalized because of their lack of knowledge of local languages and the introduction of public administration and university quotas favoring the titular nationalities.

The massive departures of the 1990s deeply affected the Russian communities of the various republics. The migrations separated families, weakened social networks, and left the remaining Russians feeling disaffected and discomforted. In addition, the Russians of Central Asia lacked strong community leaders in comparison to their counterparts in Ukraine or Latvia.⁶¹ Today, the existence of political and communi-

ty representation for the Russians of Central Asia largely depends on the political situation of the republic, the space left for “civil society” to function there, and the degree of authoritarian hardening of the regime. Thus, in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, no opposition parties can exist and ethnic minorities do not have the right to political organization. In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, Russian associations stay within the realms of community and cultural life, and do not participate in political activity. An organized Russian political domain existed only in Kazakhstan, but it collapsed in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

With the exception of Turkmenistan, the republics of Central Asia have perpetuated the Soviet discourse on “the friendship of the peoples” and granted cultural rights to their minorities. Russians, as well as other minorities, thus have cultural organizations whose activities are solely folkloric. Accommodating these associations are houses of “the friendship of the peoples” (*dom družby narodov*) in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Kazakhstan tried to distinguish itself with the creation in 1995 of an Assembly of the Peoples, which was supposed to showcase the powers granted by the state to domestic minorities. Kyrgyzstan followed by creating a similar organization; however, these institutions serve as fronts for their actual role, which is the legitimization of the ruling regime.

In Kazakhstan, the Assembly of the Peoples became the principal consultative body for nationality policy decisions in the state. Presided over by Nursultan Nazarbayev, the institution does not hide its close ties to the authorities. It depends directly on the Ministries of Culture, Information, and Social Harmony, and, in practice, the presidential apparatus itself. Its autonomy is therefore extremely restricted. The alleged democratic role of this institution is ambiguous because no elections are involved, that is to say, the authorities appoint its members. They intend to represent all the cultural centers of the minorities of Kazakhstan, as well as the principal religions, namely Islam and the Russian Orthodox Church. Other confessional groups, in particular Catholics and Protestants, are excluded. Only half of the members of the Assembly of the Peoples actually work in minority cultural centers; the rest are civil servants responsible for nationality issues. The assembly

also has the capacity to smother the “Russian problem,” which was particularly severe in Kazakhstan during the first years of independence. It gives priority to the “little nationalities” of the country, thus allowing to avoid polarization between Russians and Kazakhs. According to official statements of the assembly, the Kazakhstani state should be neither mononational nor binational, but multinational. Thus, the institution blends the “Russian problem” into a broader concept of nationality issues by avoiding Russian-Kazakh polarization such as that experienced in the 1990s.⁶²

In the other republics, community associations for the Russian minority remain isolated and marginalized. In Turkmenistan, where authorities systematically refused to register the association *Russkaia Obshchina* for various administrative reasons, the extent of civil society was drastically constricted after independence.⁶³ President Saparmurat Niyazov publicly announced that he would never recognize associations that represented Russians. In 2001, he prohibited all expressions of culture related to the West and Russia (theater, ballet, opera, and classical and contemporary music) by declaring them “contrary to the spirit of the Turkmen people.” The Russian cultural center closed, but inside its former building the authorities allowed a Pushkin theater to open. They subjected the leader of *Russkaia Obshchina*, Anatolii Fomin, to strong pressures after he attempted to register an association to foster cultural and economic ties between Turkmenistan and Russia. Viacheslav Mamedov, another Russian leader, had to leave the country in January 2004 to escape repression. The situation of the Russian minority began to improve with the more Russia-friendly new president, Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov, who was elected in February 2007 after the death of Niyazov.

The cultural life of the Russian minority is also very limited in Uzbekistan. First directed by Svetlana Gerasimova, a member of the upper house of the national legislature, then by the academic Sergei Zinin, the Russian cultural center of Tashkent, opened in 1994, finds itself confined to organizing Russian cultural festivals and activities. It sporadically publishes an official news bulletin, in which it states its pleasure with the good situation of the Russian minority in Uzbekistan.⁶⁴ Though the cultural center has opened regional offices in Bukhara, Nukus, Navoiy, Karshi,

Samarkand, Termez, Chirchik, and Angren, cultural life is limited to Tashkent, where a performance center and the Russian-Jewish Ilkhom Theater function. The country also has several hundred Old Believers, mainly based in Karakalpakistan, who arrived in the Aral Sea region after their exclusion from the Cossack army in 1875. Today they live in Nukus, as well as small towns such as Tortkul, Beruni, and Kunrad. They are well integrated into the local Uzbek, Karakalpak, and Kazakh populations.⁶⁵ The ruling regime has commandeered all of the groups representing minority nationalities, which now conclusively support the presidential apparatus and occupy themselves with the preservation of their cultural and linguistic rights.

In Tajikistan, so many Russians left the country after 1992 that minority political organizations quickly lost their importance. However, those associations that still existed joined many other “civil society” actors for the inter-Tajik peace negotiations of 1995–97. Tajikistan’s Russkaia Obshchina, created in 1992, transformed in 1997 into a union of Slavic organizations for Ukrainians, Belarusians, and all those defined as “Russophones,” and in 2004 took the name Council of Russian Compatriots. Directed by Viktor Dubovitskii, it regularly works with Tatar-Bashkir and Ossetian cultural associations, also considered “compatriots” of Russia. It claims close to 40,000 members, an unlikely figure considering the number of Russians present in the republic. Its regional representatives are not very powerful, with the exception of those for cities such as Chkalov and Khujand, each of which still has a significant Russian minority and a Russian cultural center. Russkaia Obshchina receives financial assistance from Russia and, until 2005, benefited from the presence of the 201st Armored Division of the Russian Army, which guaranteed its cultural activity a certain visibility.⁶⁶ The number of Cossacks in Tajikistan is very small, and their association is considered a part of the Cossack section of Orenburg. They arrived in the region in the 1920s and 1930s as ordinary Soviet citizens and thus have no colonial history in Tajikistan.⁶⁷

In Kyrgyzstan, where a high degree of political activity is permitted, civic life in the Russian community is richer than in the other Central Asian republics. More than 25 associations remain registered at the republic or regional level; how-

ever, they do not engage in politics or constitute parties. Among the most important of these is the Slavic Fund, created by Valerii Vishnevskii in 1989, which focuses on political and cultural questions. Others include Soglasie, a Russian cultural center founded by Oleg Mikhailov in 1994; the “Russian House” of Kyrgyzstan, registered in 1998 and led by the historian Vladimir Ploskikh; and the Association of Ethnic Russians, created in 1994 and concerned with social and economic issues. Since 1989, the Cossacks have also reorganized their community. Vladimir Kosenko leads their group, the Cossacks of Kyrgyzstan. It estimates that 20 communities (*stanitsa*) exist in traditional settlement areas, such as the cities near Bishkek (Kant, etc.) and along the shores of Lake Issyk Kul, and claims to have approximately 15,000 members.⁶⁸ There is also a Cossack cultural and economic center, “Vozrozhdenie” (Rebirth), based in Bishkek, which occasionally publishes the newspaper *Slavianskie Vesti*. Between 1995 and 1999, some Cossacks served with the Russian troops who guarded the Kyrgyz border with China.⁶⁹

In all of Central Asia, Orthodoxy remains the most established of the Christian denominations. The Russian Orthodox Church has official status and many recognized places of worship, and the Orthodox hierarchy gives its support to the political authorities through its assertions that the rights of the Russian minorities enjoy full respect.⁷⁰ Though it legally depends on the Patriarch of Moscow, the Orthodox Church refuses to be perceived as a pawn of Russia. It has developed recurrent themes concerning its autochthonism in Central Asia and its respect for the independence of the states of the region. For this reason, it has publicly separated itself from movements considered political and joined only with those that advance a cultural or folk vision of life in the Russian community. It has not ceased in its affirmation of the intrinsic bond between “Russianness” and Orthodoxy, but this discourse gets a weak reception from the population. The Orthodox Church did not succeed in becoming the premier social bond among the Russian minority.⁷¹

Kazakhstan is the only country in the region in which the Russian minority had a true political life in the 1990s. From independence, Russian activists took part in the democratization process, principally within the political party Lad and the

association Russkaia Obshchina. In the 1994 regional elections, Lad won up to 80 percent of the local positions in cities demographically dominated by Russians, such as Temirtau, Aksu, Stepnoi gorod, Rudny, and Ust-Kamenogorsk. Yet with the passing of time, the growing repressiveness of the regime led the Russian minority to lose its representation in parliament. In the second half of the 1990s, Lad was content to participate in the various democratic platforms against President Nazarbayev, and suffered strong administrative, political, and legal pressures. Several leaders, forced by threats of violence, have immigrated to Russia. At the beginning of 2000s Lad ceased to exist as an independent political party, while, in the Peoples' Assembly, the authorities have increasingly co-opted the second most prominent Russian association, the Russkaia Obshchina led by Yuri Bunakov.⁷²

Indeed, the authorities seek to widen the schisms within the representation of the Russians by supporting groups that favor rapprochement with the regime. Thus, in 2004 Lad divided into two movements. The first group, led by Ivan Klimoshenko, remains in the political opposition and supported the "For a Fair Kazakhstan" bloc during the presidential election in December 2005. The other group, led by Sergei Tereshchenko, prefers to pursue a strategy of collaboration with Nazarbayev. In addition, illegal commercial activities, personality clashes between leaders, and political radicalism have discredited the associations in the eyes of the Russian population. Ethnic agendas seemed to play no role in the 2005 presidential election. Nazarbayev received a large proportion of the vote, nearly 95 percent, in North Kazakhstan Region in spite of the numerical significance of Russians there. The "Russian question," which agitated the republic in the first half of the 1990s, has dropped off the political radar and no longer poses a threat to stability. Thus, Russian community life remains subject to political shocks in each of the five Central Asian republics, whether in the form of dictatorial tightening in Uzbekistan or the atomization of public space in Kyrgyzstan since the Tulip Revolution of March 2005.

IV. Fundamental Legal Issues: Citizenship and Professional Discrimination

As in other post-Soviet republics, the associations meant to represent the Russians of Central

Asia actually have weak popular support. Most Russians and Russian-speakers have no interaction with the associations, consider themselves only weakly represented by them, and organize without their assistance.⁷³ Yet when political conditions allow it, these groups play an important role in the crystallization of political and legal claims. In Central Asia, they also facilitate the establishment of legal support networks for immigration. The legal and professional situations of the Russian minority thus indirectly reflect the issue of ethnicization in the republics. In turn, these situations reveal the modus operandi of contemporary Central Asian societies: systems of patronage and clientelism attempt to ensure social stability through the negotiated, but opaque, division of access to resources. This division, however, excludes national minorities. The formal equality of citizenship does not constitute a means of resistance to professional discrimination.

The Symbolic Issue of Dual Citizenship With Russia

After their accession to independence, the new states of Central Asia chose a relatively broad definition of citizenship. All those born in the republic or with family bonds to it can request citizenship, without any official linguistic or ethnic discrimination. Civic rights are equal for all. Though the authorities maintained the mention of nationality in the "fifth line" of the passport, titular nationalities do not officially benefit from greater rights than minorities. However, certain legal texts are more complex, and indicate that ethnicization is in progress. Kazakhstan's declaration of sovereignty, adopted October 25, 1990, affirmed Kazakhs as the "constituent nation of the state," thus placing other peoples in an ambiguous, "second-class" status. The country's second constitution, adopted in 1995, also took two positions on the national issue by simultaneously defining Kazakhstan as the state of Kazakhs and of ethnic Kazakhs. As for Turkmenistan, it established a pragmatic national preference policy that forbids any non-Turkmen from competing in presidential elections.

The recognition of the right to dual citizenship quickly became one of the major objectives of the Russian communities of Central Asia, especially as the 1993 constitution of the Russian Federation distinguished this right. The psycho-

logical “comfort” that dual citizenship offers largely explains the focus on this question. Many Russians do not want to leave Central Asia, but wish to have the ability to immigrate quickly to Russia in the event of a deteriorating political situation.⁷⁴ Yet this principle of dual citizenship does not have unanimous support among local political authorities, as it would represent a loss of the new states’ power over some of their citizens and would offer to Moscow the right to interfere in their domestic affairs.⁷⁵

Initially Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan firmly refused to recognize dual citizenship. Until 1995, the Russian associations of Kazakhstan protested, arguing that the state had granted this right to the Kazakh diaspora, based especially in Mongolia. The right to dual citizenship for members of the Kazakh diaspora was revoked in the 1995 Constitution, however.⁷⁶ In the second half of the 1990s, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan established good relations with Russia. The two Central Asian republics’ participation in various economic and customs union treaties permitted the signing of accords that simplified the administrative procedures necessary to change one’s citizenship. Russia signed such an accord with Kazakhstan in 1996 and with Kyrgyzstan in 1997. As for Uzbekistan, it never reconsidered its original decision. In Kyrgyzstan, the situation has recently evolved in favor of dual citizenship. After many debates, a provision for dual citizenship was included in the new constitution, which took effect in December 2006, though restrictions were placed on members of the government.⁷⁷ Through this measure, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev aims to facilitate migration toward the former Russian center. About half a million Kyrgyz regularly go to Russia in search of seasonal employment, and Moscow has declared itself ready to facilitate the administrative processing of these migrants.⁷⁸

In Tajikistan, the dual citizenship issue was resolved quickly. The assistance Moscow furnished during the post-independence civil war facilitated negotiations on the matter. The Tajik government was conscious of its inability to survive without Russian support; thus, Article 15 of the Tajik Constitution of 1994 and Article 4 of the Constitutional Law of 1995 stipulate that Tajik citizens cannot possess other citizenship, with an exception for states that signed specific

treaties with the government. Russia is one of these. Nearly 70,000 people have received Russian passports through the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Dushanbe. Only one third of them were “ethnic” Russians; the others were Tajiks who regularly worked in Russia.

As for Turkmenistan, it recognized dual citizenship in 1993, within the framework of a bilateral agreement signed between President Niyazov and Russian president Boris Yeltsin. Approximately 90,000 people would have benefited from this treaty, 90 percent of them “ethnic” Russians. However, Niyazov abruptly abrogated the agreement in 2003, obliging all holders of dual citizenships to choose one or the other within three months. Accompanying this decision were discriminatory measures against those who chose Russian citizenship. Russia denounced this unilateral and retroactive decision as contrary to international law, but without managing to alter the Turkmen position. On the expiration date, those persons who chose to remain citizens of the Russian Federation automatically lost their Turkmen citizenship. As foreigners, these Russians lost the right to own real estate and were forced to sell the property they possessed. In the span of a few months, the real estate market in Ashgabat collapsed, preventing those who wished to leave the country from financing their departure. Turkmen authorities began to confiscate the apartments of Russian citizens, and, to avoid an exodus of Russians, blocked the delivery of exit visas, then obligatory for all citizens.⁷⁹ Today, approximately 50,000 citizens of the Russian Federation remain in Turkmenistan, deprived of their rights and regularly harassed by the authorities.⁸⁰

The Ethnicization of Political Life and Public Service

Despite the legal equality of all citizens, the major problem confronting the Russians of Central Asia relates to employment access. Throughout the 1990s, the five republics experienced a vast ethnicization process, already underway since the Soviet era. Independence thus accentuated a pre-existing phenomenon by giving it unprecedented scope. Ethnicization was particularly evident in public offices. Public administration and the political realm in the Central Asian republics depend intrinsically on the division of power according to a clientelist model, founded on solidarity or

regional networks that exclude from politics. Statistical data on this important phenomenon are rare. Some studies done in Kazakhstan, where Russians still represent nearly one third of the population, are enlightening.

The exclusion of Russians from the political sphere first occurred at the highest echelons of the state.⁸¹ As of the 1994 parliamentary elections, Kazakhs dominated politics, a trend confirmed by the 1999 elections.⁸² Of 29 candidates up for re-election to the Senate, five Russians ran but none won. The same year, the new National Assembly counted 55 Kazakhs and 19 Russians, that is to say, proportions of 74 percent and 26 percent.⁸³ In certain important ministries, such as Justice, Foreign Affairs, Interior, Defense, and Finance, the proportion of non-Kazakhs is now estimated at less than 10 percent. Several sectors, such as the police and special forces, have been Kazakhized since the first years of independence, even since perestroika. The Ministry of Education, strategic in terms of state building, was one of the first affected. The proportion of Russians in the ministry dropped sharply, from 43 percent in 1989 to 14 percent in 1992. Out of 14 regional governors in 2002, only 2 were Russians, those of East Kazakhstan and Kokchetau. The Russians deal particularly poorly with the Kazakhization of the administration in regions where they still constitute the majority. Though spared in the early 1990s, the north of the country thereafter experienced a situation almost identical to that of mainly Kazakh regions.⁸⁴

If not more so than in Kazakhstan, the ethnicization of political life marks the environment in the other Central Asian republics. Mastery of the national language constitutes a key element in the exclusion of opposition figures from political life. During the 2005 elections in Kyrgyzstan, Russians won only 4 of the 75 available seats in parliament.⁸⁵ In Tajikistan, the parliament no longer has any Russians, while in Uzbekistan 5 deputies out of 250 are Russians; however, these elected officials do not represent the Russian minority and are members of the presidential party. Finally, Turkmenistan has conducted a true ethnic purge within all state institutions. In 2002, the Halk Maslahaty (Parliament of the People) required all civil servants to verify their Turkmen “ethnic origin” and trace it back at least three generations.⁸⁶ This exclusion from political life is only the tip of the iceberg; the social reality of the

new republics leads to the marginalization of all ethnic minorities, whose members no longer have access to public office.

During Soviet times, Russians or other “European” minorities shared the republican ministries with the local populations. Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, and Jews dominated certain service sector professions such as teaching and medicine. Today, the entire public sector is “nationalized.” Officially, the mastery of the national language constitutes the principal criterion of the marginalization of the minorities, even if the actual selection is done according to an ethnically based system of preference.⁸⁷ Thus, a non-Kazakhophone Kazakh would be able to enter the administration, whereas a non-Kazakhophone Russian could not because of the Kazakh language examinations. Though no precise figures exist on this topic, it appears that titular appointees occupy more than 90 percent of public offices in the five republics, including even Kazakhstan. These logistics of entry into public service correspond to the reality of institutionalization of clientelist networks. Very often, the discrimination felt by Russians is not directly intended to oppose them, according to purely nationalist motives, but rather seeks to give priority to a member of a family or regional network. Some Russians succeed in their careers through their fidelity to these patronage networks. The real issue is that of access to power, not of nationality itself. However, with some isolated exceptions, members of minority nationalities cannot find their place in this patronage system, founded on internal solidarity within eponymous groups.

The Russian Response: Development of “Ethnicized Businesses”

The employment policies for public offices have accentuated the ethnicization of the professional ranks to the point that titular appointees work in the state sector and ethnic minorities in the private sector. Yet Russians find themselves excluded not only from public offices but also from the large companies, whether privatized or state controlled, that control energy and other critical industries. During the Soviet era, local elites and embedded mafia networks already commanded two principle resources, hydrocarbons and cotton. This phenomenon only magnified in scope after independence. Alexander Machkevich,

who controls a large stake in Kazakhstan's metallurgical industry, constitutes a rare exception of a Russian who succeeded in finding his place in the world of Central Asian oligarchs.

Russians thus prefer to invest in the domain of small private commerce, which benefits from the economic liberalization of the 1990s. The "ethnicized business," a type of enterprise perceived as ethnic that specializes in a certain type of trade, existed for titular nationalities during Soviet times. One example of this was the commerce in gardening products in the markets of large Russian cities. Now Russians emphasize the realm of ethnicized business. Although no sociological studies yet exist to provide precise information on the topic, it seems that many Russians work in the goods trade between Central Asia and Russia, and sometimes more remote destinations such as Turkey. Minority nationalities, specifically Russians, also dominate the private-service sector, operating small enterprises that provide data processing, maintenance, plumbing, electrical work, and private security, and running cafés and boutiques.

The massive departure of Russians intensified the degradation of some industrial sectors, such as construction and maintenance, which to this day lack engineers and other specialists. To combat this, Uzbekistan enacted attractive wage policies in strategic sectors such as the army. Throughout the 1990s, many high-ranking military personnel of Russian descent stayed in the country in order to train Uzbeks; however, many industrial sectors did not follow suit. They now struggle to recruit specialists and ensure the transmission of Soviet expertise to younger generations. Professional discrimination plays a major role in migration. Sociological studies confirm that, even more than language laws, difficulty finding a stable socioeconomic niche for oneself and one's family initially contributed to Russian departures.⁸⁸ Thus, whereas discrimination was more marked in the Baltic states, the Russian out-migrations from Central Asia were of greater scale because many Russians could not secure long-term economic positions there.⁸⁹

The political authorities' goal to build homogenous nation-states does not uniquely explain this ethnicization process in the newly independent Central Asian republics. Also playing a role are pragmatic issues related to the economic collapse that occurred in all five states in

the 1990s—issues that are still faced by all the countries today, with the exception of Kazakhstan. In a time of massive impoverishment, the departure of Russian minorities and the ousting of Russians from public office allowed those in power to breathe a sigh of relief and guarantee social promotions to the titular nationality.⁹⁰ Public posts, even poorly paid ones, benefit from symbolic social prestige. Thanks to corruption, they allow for the diversion of resources and jobs to the members of one's own network. In a major crisis, minorities are often the first to be sacrificed, with the authorities hoping to retain their political and social legitimacy by offering to the eponymous the advantages once held by former "colonizers."

Thus, one cannot view discrimination against the Russians of Central Asia as part of an official policy, as was the case in the Baltic states. Rather, the Russians found themselves the unintended victims of republican "nationalization." Countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan even announced, on several occasions, that they hoped to retain their Russian residents and even to see the return of those who had already left. Certain local politicians recognized that the voluntary repatriation program established by Russia in 2006 was likely to strike a blow to already weak local economies by making the last Russian technicians leave Central Asia. For their part, local authorities did not put favorable policies in place to retain ethnic Russians, though Kyrgyzstan sought to make compromises with its Russian minority, particularly in regard to language.

V. Language and Education: "Russian Minority" versus "Russophonia"?

Most of the associations that represent the Russians of Central Asia eventually reconsidered their legal claims, such as dual citizenship, and policy objectives, such as cultural autonomy for the Russians in North Kazakhstan. Like the Russians themselves, the associations' representatives eventually accepted the "nationalization" of the republics. But this recognition of minority status and capacity to reorganize economically to avoid sectors now controlled by the eponymous nationality did not "reconcile" the Russians with the new republics. Linguistic and educational policies thus constitute a key element of Russian discomfort in Central Asia. Surveys show that

even when the majority of Russians still present in the area express the wish to remain there and do not plan to migrate to Russia, the sentiment that the younger generations lack a future reduces any prospect for long-term integration.⁹¹ Immigration therefore stretches out over time and finds its realization by proxy. Parents remain in Central Asia, finance the studies of their children in Russia, and join them in Russia once they reach retirement age. Russians also face a new phenomenon, that of the development of a Central Asian Russophobia that serves the titular nationalities but not the Russian minority.

The Language Question: What is the Place for the Russian *Lingua Franca*?

The status of various languages constitutes a major part of the national claims in the post-Soviet space.⁹² Russian is still the language of communication for the majority of the population of Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The issue is more sensitive in Central Asia than, for instance, in Ukraine, as knowledge of the titular language among the Russian minority remains weak and random. According to a 2003 study, only 1.6 percent of Russians in Kyrgyzstan speak Kyrgyz fluently, 22 percent have problems speaking it correctly, and 75 percent do not speak it at all.⁹³ The figures for Kazakhstan are similar. Only 3 percent of Russians there speak Kazakh well, 23 percent speak it with some difficulty, and 74 percent do not speak it at all. According to some researchers, only 14 percent of Russians in Kazakhstan can speak Kazakh.⁹⁴ Even among “ethnic” Russian civil servants, whom the law officially obliges to be speakers of the national language, Kazakh-language ability remains irregular. Fifty-five percent understand parts of sentences and 22 percent admit that they neither speak nor understand Kazakh. Figures of linguistic assimilation are more significant in Central Asian republics where the titular nationality largely dominates. In Tajikistan, 15 percent of Russians speak Tajik well, 52 percent with some difficulty, and 31 percent not at all.⁹⁵ In Uzbekistan, less than 5 percent of Russians affirmed Uzbek language ability in the last Soviet census, in 1989. Because of the obligatory teaching of Uzbek in all schools, the percentage is now higher, especially among the young. No figures are available for Turkmenistan.

In 1989, all of the federal republics of Central Asia established their eponymous language as the official state language. Russian continued to benefit from privileged use at the federal, Soviet level. In the 1990s, three states out of five (Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan) agreed to recognize Russian as the interethnic language of communication. In Turkmenistan, Russian lost all official status upon promulgation of the Constitution of 1992. On January 1, 2000, President Niyazov declared that intrinsic links existed between the Turkmen renewal and the rebirth of the national language. Members of the government no longer possessed the right to speak Russian or to present official reports in Russian.⁹⁶ In Uzbekistan, Russian lost its status as the interethnic language of communication through a language law enacted in December 1995; however, minorities may still express themselves in their native language during administrative procedures.⁹⁷ The full transition passage of state agencies to use of the Uzbek language, announced in 1997, was delayed until 2005, the year of the final abandonment of the Cyrillic alphabet in favor of Romanized script and the graduation from public school of the first generation of students educated entirely in Romanized Uzbek. In spite of the complete legal absence of Russian in Uzbekistan, the language remains present in urban environments, even as the entire administrative apparatus is Uzbek speaking.

In Tajikistan, despite large-scale Russian emigration, the Russian military presence combined with the strong economic bonds linking the country to Russia contributes to the maintenance of policies favorable to the Russian language. The Constitution of 1994 defines Tajik as the state language and grants Russian the status of interethnic language of communication.⁹⁸ In Kazakhstan, the situation is far more complex. The Kazakh language has encountered difficulty finding its place, even with the Kazakh population, which is largely Russophone. Language issues became particularly politicized there, as state bodies attempted to impose the supremacy of Kazakh over Russian with mixed results. To institute the use of Kazakh in public administration, the government promulgated the Design of the Linguistic Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, promulgated in 1996, the Law on the Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan of July 11, 1997, and the State Program on the

Operation and Development of Languages for the Decade 2001–2010. Yet development of the Kazakh language only succeeded in areas where Kazakhs already constituted a large majority of the population—the western and southernmost parts of the republic. The central administration in Astana officially uses Kazakh; however, everyday life in urban settings and among civil servants remains dominated by Russian. In spite of real progress, the authorities admit to lacking sufficient qualified cadres capable of speaking only in Kazakh without switching to Russian.⁹⁹

Since 1992, the government of Kyrgyzstan has modified the 1989 language law and authorized companies and organizations whose workforce is more than 70 percent Russophone to use the Russian language in their administrative correspondence. Kyrgyzstan's first constitution, implemented in 1993, recognizes Kyrgyz as the only state language but protects the free use of Russian throughout the country. The authorities took note that only an official measure in favor of Russian could slow migration out of Kyrgyzstan.¹⁰⁰ Thus, in May 2000, a new law accorded Russian the title of “official language.” The Constitution of 2003 confirmed the bilingual status of the country, as it qualified Russian as a “state language” and rendered education in both languages obligatory in the entire education system.¹⁰¹ The situation evolved in April 2004, when a new language law obliged all civil servants to demonstrate their knowledge of the Kyrgyz language. The law included a provision that would take effect in 2005 (since delayed to 2007) mandating that all administrative documents be written in Kyrgyz. However, it did not threaten those already occupying public posts with job loss for a lack of command of the language. As in Kazakhstan, investigations reveal that many Kyrgyz civil servants lack sufficient command of their national language and therefore continue to write in Russian and then translate the text into Kyrgyz.

One cannot view the 2004 language law as a manifestation of the will of the state to confirm the status of the Kyrgyz language to the detriment of Russian, but rather as a response to the internal struggles among Kyrgyz elites. Since the Tulip Revolution of March 2005, claims supporting the removal of any official status for the Russian language have returned to the forefront of debate, particularly thanks to the

efforts of Azimbek Beknazarov, a member of parliament. Southern elites, more clearly Kyrgyz speaking, use this issue as a means of applying pressure in their fights with northern elites, who are more Russified. Throughout 2006, debate surrounding the drafting of a new constitution confirmed that a portion of the political elites, particularly from the south, wish to remove the official status of the Russian language. Several nationalist associations have denounced the difficulty with which the Kyrgyz language is finding its place in a country where Russian has the same rights, but the general population does not support them. A survey conducted by the Institute of Eurasian Research found that more than 80 percent of the Kyrgyz-speakers it questioned did not want Russian to lose its official status.¹⁰² The Constitution of 2006 thus did not question the bilingual status of the republic.

The Teaching of Russian and the Education Question

The laws concerning education in the five Central Asian republics remain among the most liberal in the Commonwealth of Independent States. Although training in the national language is obligatory, students can choose their language of instruction from a range considered representative of the minority nationalities living in their country. Nevertheless, the situation of Russian-language education quickly deteriorated in all five republics, for reasons as political as they are practical. Like the issue of professional discrimination, this negative development is not specific to Russian but falls under the general degradation of primary and secondary public education. The low level of teachers' wages, their irregular payment, the deterioration of school buildings, and the will of the states to ban old Soviet textbooks without having the means to finance new ones constituted the major elements of this collapse. The large-scale departure of Russian and “European” minorities, who often dominated the educational sector, made the lack of teachers still more acute, particularly in rural areas, where many schools closed because of a lack of personnel.¹⁰³

In Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the political authorities did not demonstrate an explicit desire to stymie Russian-language education,

but because of a lack of resources they did not maintain the Soviet teaching network. In Tajikistan, about ten Russian-speaking schools exist in the entire country, compared to approximately 1,600 Russian classes within Tajik- and Uzbek-language schools (which have about 40,000 students). In 2006, vis-à-vis the worsening of this situation in rural areas and international concern over the issue, the Tajik government and the Russian Embassy at Dushanbe called on the regions of Russia for assistance. Some governors answered and promised, with their own funds, to train Tajik students to be Russian-language teachers. Political authorities, who know that the economic development of the country depends on the remittances sent home by Tajiks working in Russia, regard the issue as vital and know that a minimal knowledge of Russian is indispensable.

In Kyrgyzstan, one can count in 2006 no more than 133 schools that teach entirely in Russian, compared to 1,300 that teach in Kyrgyz and 138 in Uzbek. Approximately 440 schools offer bilingual Russian-Kyrgyz classes, 30 offer Russian-Uzbek classes, and 20 offer Russian-Kyrgyz-Uzbek classes.¹⁰⁴ The authorities hope to end the scarcity of Russian-language instructors through the Center for the Education of Russian Language Teachers, managed by the Russian-Kyrgyz University. Almost all Russian students attend Russian-language schools (96 percent), while 18 percent of Kyrgyz and 14 percent of Uzbeks are educated in Russian rather than in their native language. As in Tajikistan, the number of Russian schools has dropped precipitously since the beginning of the 2000s, whereas the number of students seeking Russian-language education is steadily increasing. In the city of Osh, the four Russian-language schools mainly accommodate Kyrgyz or Uzbek students who have a very poor knowledge of Russian, thus modifying how students are taught and professors are trained.¹⁰⁵ In rural areas, Russian-language schools are increasingly prestigious because Russia is the principle destination for Kyrgyz seasonal laborers. Thus, Russian-language communities, once urban, now tend to be a rural phenomenon.

In Kazakhstan, the political authorities clearly give preference to Kazakh-language schools, in resistance to the middle-class tradition of sending one's children to Russian schools. The results of this policy remain mixed. According to data

released in 2000 by the Ministry of Education, 1.6 million students (50.6 percent of all students in the country) were studying in Kazakh, versus 1.5 million (45 percent) who were studying in Russian. Kazakh-language schools had advanced, although regional distributions between city and country and between north and south were still disproportionate, as southern and rural residents mostly speak Kazakh. Twenty-four percent of nursery schools used the Kazakh language in 2000, and 45 percent used Russian. Among primary and secondary schools, 3,500 out of 8,000 (44 percent) taught in Kazakh, while those that used Russian had decreased to 2,365.¹⁰⁶ There are only about 2,000 schools with bilingual classes, even though several sociological studies indicate that the majority of the population favors them. Although the process of Kazakhization of the education system has proved more complex than authorities expected, it seems that now the future development of the Kazakh language is secure.

In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, the liquidation of Russian-language education involved a much more specific policy on the part of the authorities. In Turkmenistan, classes in Russian disappeared from course offerings soon after independence. Whereas the country had nearly 2,000 Russian-language schools in 1991, fewer than 100 existed in 2000, and only 50 in 2005. An additional 50 or so schools teach partially in Russian and partially in Turkmen.¹⁰⁷ At the secondary level, just one Russian-language school exists. Founded in Ashgabat in 2002, during a visit to Turkmenistan by Russian president Vladimir Putin, it accommodates more than 600 students, though its official capacity is only 300. The children of personnel working at the Russian Embassy and other diplomatic missions also attend this school, which follows Russian curricula. Since Niyazov's death in December 2006, the situation seems to have evolved. The new government has once again approved the teaching of the Russian language in all primary, secondary, and university curricula. It will be difficult, however, for the new regime to improve the situation, because it faces a lack of Russian-language textbooks and qualified teachers.

As for Uzbekistan, it had only 93 schools that taught entirely in Russian as of 2004. Andijan, the third-largest city in the country, has only one Russophone school. More than 600 schools offer bilingual Russian-Uzbek

instruction, or trilingual education in Russian, Uzbek, and Karakalpak, but this number was twice as large in 1992.¹⁰⁸ Half of the Russian-speaking schools are located in or around Tashkent. In the 2004–2005 academic year, only 277,000 students (5.6 percent of all students in the country) studied in Russian, compared to 560,000 (12 percent) in 1993. In both primary and secondary education, the number of hours spent teaching Russian as a foreign language has drastically declined. Moreover, the transition of Uzbek from the Cyrillic alphabet to the Latin alphabet has now made teaching Russian more difficult.

The situation of Russian in higher education also proves difficult. Except for some establishments co-founded with Russia, it is increasingly difficult to transfer diplomas acquired in Central Asian public institutions to Russian universities. In Turkmenistan, all institutions of higher learning have operated exclusively in the Turkmen language since 2001, and Russian-speaking professors not able to prove their knowledge of Turkmen have been discharged. In Uzbekistan, the number of specialty positions in Russian has fallen to the point where such positions now represent no more than one-third or one-quarter of those available in Uzbek.¹⁰⁹ Faculties of Slavic philology have been transformed into departments of foreign language in which Russian is just one language among many others. In addition, the number of students authorized to enter these courses of study declined sharply in the late 1990s (from 525 in 1996 to 245 in 1999, a reduction of 53 percent), even though the volume of requests for Russian-language teachers remained significant in all the rural schools of the republic. The Uzbek authorities also refuse to allow branches of large Russian universities to open, although they did accept satellite institutes of the Russian Academy of Economics, the Moscow State University, and the Gubkin Institute for Oil and Gas Studies in Tashkent.¹¹⁰

The situation is less dramatic in the other three republics, which maintain close university ties with Russia. In Tajikistan, approximately 20 percent of students study in Russian. The most prestigious university in the country remains the Slavic–Tajik University, created by the two states in 1996, which enrolls about 2,000 students. The university proposes instruction in both lan-

guages, courses meeting the criteria of both states' curricula, and diplomas receiving recognition in both Tajikistan and Russia. Several branches of Russian universities have also opened; however, university relations between the two countries are not entirely free of tension. In summer 2006, the Tajik authorities announced the closure of four private Russian–Tajik institutes under the pretext that they did not fulfill some higher educational criteria for Tajikistan. But they did so without the material or financial capacity to absorb students coming from these institutions into the already overloaded, obsolete public system.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Russian–Kyrgyz University, created in cooperation with Russia in 1993, is the most prestigious establishment of higher learning in the country other than the Kyrgyz–American University. It enrolls more than 4,000 students, who, as in Tajikistan, learn both official languages, as well as English, and complete courses valid in the eyes of both countries' ministries of education. Kyrgyzstan also has seven Russian university branches. In Kazakhstan, the situation is complicated. The authorities give priority to Kazakh-language education and clearly support such courses to the detriment of Russian, particularly at the prominent universities in Almaty and Astana. Affirmative action quotas meant to reinforce the Kazakh presence largely have borne fruit. Whereas Kazakhs make up only half the population of the republic, they dominate the ranks of university students and professors. In Turkmenistan, the new government has recently invited famous Russian universities such as the Moscow State University and the Gubkin Institute for Oil and Gas Studies to open affiliates in Ashgabat, perhaps even in time for the 2008 academic year.

The education issue remains one of the principal reasons given by Russians for wishing to leave the region. The fear of an inability to offer younger generations a quality education in their mother tongue contributes to the push to emigrate. In addition, the majority of Russians cannot cope with the cultural and linguistic “nationalization” of education and continue to regard the development of national languages with contempt. Many of them wish that Russian-speaking schools would operate according to the curriculum of Russia, rather

than that of the state in which they live. They complain of the lack of textbooks coming from Russia, the willingness of the authorities to remove references to Russian culture from literature textbooks, and the negative vision of Russia developed in the new history books.¹¹¹

Russians also worry about the growing numbers of non-Russian children accommodated in the Russian-speaking schools, which the Russians say contributes to the decline of academic rigor and Russian-language mastery. They denounce what they perceive as social hypocrisy, in that, as during Soviet times, titular elites send their children to Russian-language schools, as they consider them more prestigious and better academically. The titular language schools retain a connotation of lower quality and of thus being intended for rural populations. This situation persists even as rural schools seek to recruit Russian-speaking teachers in order to meet the needs of future Central Asian migrants. Thus, in Central Asia today, Russian-language courses and schools are extremely overloaded in comparison to educational offerings in the eponymous language. The patron-client tradition of the education system, which gives priority to the titular population, means that Russian often have trouble registering their children in the very schools supposedly reserved for them.

Access to the Russophone and Russian Media

The status of the Russian language and the question of Russian-language education constitute elements within the more general debate over the place of Russian-language communities in the public space of each Central Asian republic. Lack of access to media from Russia and inadequate maintenance of local Russian-speaking media are further grievances of the Russian minorities in Central Asia.

In Turkmenistan, the broadcasting of Russian television channels was prohibited in 1994, with the exception of ORT, the first Russian channel, which was broadcast in the country until 1998. Since then, the Turkmen population can get access to Russian television only by means of satellite antennae that only the urban middle class can afford. Since 1997, all Russian-language newspapers have also been closed except the very official *Neitral'nyi Turkmenistan*.¹¹² The publication of any other Russian-language periodical or book on Turkmen territory has been forbidden since

2002. The last Russian-language radio station, Mayak, was censored in 2004. After the death of President Niyazov in December 2006, the authorities put ORT back on the air, and will most likely allow newspapers from Russia to return to the country.

In Uzbekistan, the situation for Russophone media is also difficult. The Russian antenna channels were prohibited in the 1990s. One can now access them only by satellite or cable. Newspapers published in Russia are no longer available, not even in Tashkent. The national press retains a small Russian-language element. Some programs on Uzbek channels still disseminate information in Russian. One can purchase books from Russia only at private kiosks, and not in official bookstores. Their availability is also limited to the large cities.

The situation is better in the other Central Asian republics. Newspapers from Russia are available in Kyrgyzstan, and several of them have a distributor in Bishkek, most notably *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Argumenty i Fakty*, and *Moskovskii Komsomolets*. ORT and the other main Russian channel, RTR, are accessible everywhere, and several Kyrgyz channels rebroadcast Russian programs throughout the day. Bilingualism is mandatory in local newspapers. More than 70 percent of the Kyrgyz media market is Russian speaking and about half of the books sold in the country come from Russia.¹¹³ In Tajikistan, Russian channels are accessible for a few hours per day (with RTR being available all day); newspapers from Russia reach the capital. Numerous Tajik newspapers are published exclusively in Russian (e.g., *Asia Plus*) or in bilingual editions (e.g., *Varorud*). In Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it is not political calculation but widespread rural poverty and mountain-induced physical isolation that make media from Russia inaccessible to much of the population. In Kazakhstan, the situation is again paradoxical. Newspapers from Russia are increasingly difficult to obtain. In 2001 the legislature toughened existing measures prohibiting the broadcasts of certain television and radio stations based in Russia. Foreign television and radio, which once accounted for 90 percent of the disseminated programming, no longer had the right to occupy more than 50 percent of total broadcast time as of 2002. In 2003, this maximum was further reduced, to 20 percent. Yet in practice, the popu-

lation has broad access via cable to Russian and local Russophone media, which attempt to circumvent the language laws.

As for community and political life, the issue of the media arises as much as a matter of linguistic discrimination as it does in terms of political freedom. In view of the dearth of local news media and the limited political freedom in some Central Asian republics, the will of Russians to get access to the press from Russia is both a linguistic and informational necessity. The eponymous populations, as well as Russians, seek out a freer press, higher-quality entertainment programs, and Western productions. Once again, Russophonia does not constitute an “ethnic” criterion of differentiation between Russians and the titular population: all citizens of the new Central Asian states can be considered victims of the disappearance of Russian, which indirectly symbolizes the rise of authoritarianism and cultural and material poverty.¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Since 1991, more than 80 percent of the Russians in Tajikistan, two-thirds of those in Turkmenistan, half in Uzbekistan, and one-third in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have left for another country. Such migratory flows stand without precedent in the history of the region, and have had important consequences for the states of Central Asia. In one decade, the population of Kazakhstan declined by more than 1.5 million people, from 16.4 million in 1989 to 14.9 million in 1999. Kyrgyzstan lost more than 500,000 people in the same period, that is to say, 10 percent of its population. These flows have accentuated the process of “nationalization” of the republics, though they are still far from being monoethnic. These massive migrations have also facilitated the social advancement of the titular nationalities, which can now occupy vacant posts and gain power in the public administration. Out-migration has accelerated the process of urbanization and profoundly changed the landscapes of the capitals and large cities of Central Asia. In spite of this rural-to-urban shift, the population of the cities shrank with the departure of the ethnic minorities. Thus, in Kazakhstan, though the number of Kazakhs in the republic increased, particularly in the cities (45 percent), the urban population decreased by 8 percent in the 1990s.

In the long run, the departure of the Russians will probably have as important an impact on Central Asia as Moscow’s disengagement from the region. The independence of the states of Central Asia is being realized through the process of monoethnicization, which leaves only the main eponymous population in a state. Yet the migratory flow of the Russians of Central Asia toward Russia should not mask other equally fundamental shifts in population. Though the departure of Russians occupied the forefront of the migratory scene in the 1990s, Central Asians themselves now dominate it. Estimates place the number of Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and Uzbeks working seasonally or illegally in Russia at more than two million. Central Asia thus seems to remain one of the principal zones of emigration in the post-Soviet space, taking part in geopolitical and demographic recompositions that show that the bonds between Russia and Central Asia will not be erased as quickly as some observers estimated after the demise of the Soviet Union.

Since independence, the situation of Russian minorities has worsened in all of the Central Asian states, although it is necessary to differentiate among republics according to the role played by authorities in driving or not driving this development. Kyrgyzstan, and to a lesser extent Tajikistan, did not deliberately attempt to expel Russians, and even made some modest attempts to slow their out-migration. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, on the contrary, did not hesitate to assert radical “de-Russification” agendas and marginalize their minority nationalities. Kazakhstan occupies an intermediate position in this schema. Russian language and culture play a dominant role in the public space, even though the state set up aggressive strategies to promote the titular nationality and its language. The politicization of the “Russian question” and the upheaval of separatism that shook the country in the first half of the 1990s have both now passed. The extensive political demobilization of the Russian minority in Kazakhstan confirms that it eventually accepted its minority status within the new nation-state. The disinterest manifested by the Russian Federation toward the Russians of Central Asia accentuated this depoliticization. Moscow did not wish to sacrifice its good relations with the Central Asian regimes in the name of defending its “diaspora.”

In the five republics, the economic collapse of the 1990s, the obliteration of Russian and Soviet cultural symbols, and the ethnicization of public offices contributed to the feeling among Russians that they were the castoffs of independence. If all citizens suffered from material difficulties and authoritative consolidation, then the minorities were victims twice, as they also remained without access to the social and symbolic systems of compensation that local clientelistic networks offer. The sheer scale of out-migration helped fray the social fabric of minority society and left those who remained feeling isolated. The so-called “cultural differences” between the eponymous populations and Russian-speaking minorities, the drop in the rate of mixed marriages, and the maintenance of a traditional contempt for local customs prevent the Russians from integrating into the new identities of the republics. In addition, the inability of the states, with the exception of Kazakhstan, to slow the impoverishment of their citizens, combined with a vague but generalized feeling of geopolitical risk linked to the rise of Islamism, local mafias, and China, contributes to the sentiment among Russians that they do not have a future in Central Asia. Immigration strategies, whether the educational plans of young generations or older people’s preparations for retirement in Russia, reflect all of these feelings.

Yet since the beginning of the 21st century, the bond linking the republics of Central Asia to Russia has undergone a profound evolution, caused by the economic and geopolitical return of Moscow to the Central Asian stage and the large-scale migration of labor in the direction of Russia. Now issues surrounding the “Russian minority” are no longer limited to dual citizenship, the status of the Russian language, Russian-language education, and access to Russian-language media. These topics apply not only to Russians but also to the autochthonous Central Asian populations, due to their geopolitical repositioning vis-à-vis Russia. These legal, linguistic, and cultural elements indeed facilitate the integration of the Central Asian economies into the Russian market, the most dynamic in the area, without which the Central Asian states would not be able to function at this point. The local populations therefore advance pragmatic policies in lieu of nationalist and ideological agendas. In a 2004 survey, more than half of those titular residents surveyed

expressed the desire to reinforce Central Asia’s economic integration with Russia.¹¹⁵

Today, in order to learn the Russian language and gain access to Russian-language media, Central Asia does not depend on its Russian minority, but on eponymous members of the younger generations who remain convinced of the importance of maintaining ties to Russia. Russia’s “colonial” domination of Central Asia became involuntarily transformed into a practical fact. The “imperial minority” once made up by Russians is now just one of the many actors in the matrix of Central Asian–Russian relations, which have adjusted according to less ideological realities. The development of Russophobia is thus not a concession to the minority nationalities there, but a relevant domestic issue in the five states of Central Asia.

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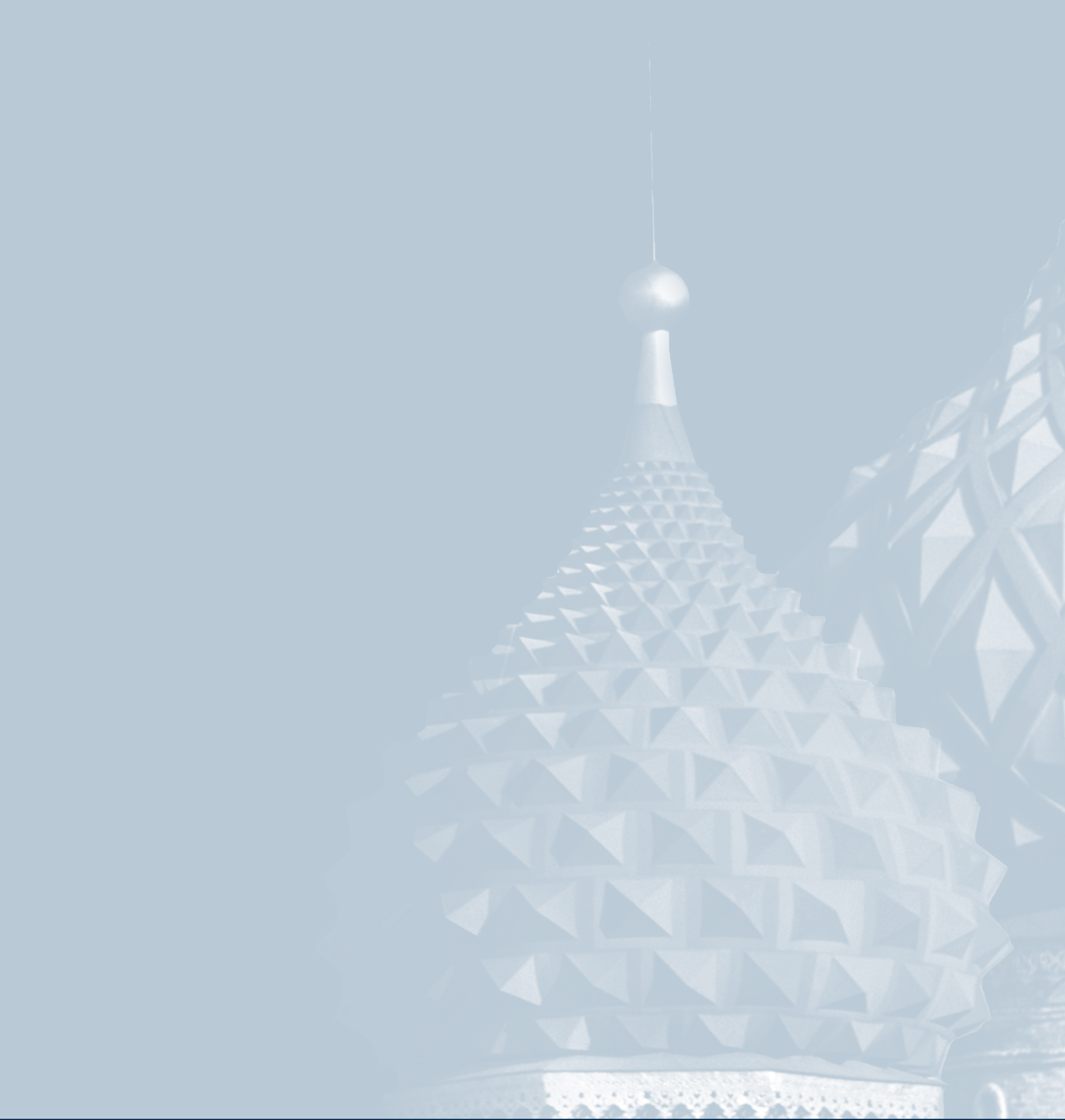
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