

Kyrgyzstan’s ‘Uneasy’ Diversity after 2010: Community Analysis of Post-Conflict Policy

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Abstract

The paper offers an analysis of a post-conflict policy document: ‘The Concept on strengthening of the national unity and inter-ethnic relations in the Kyrgyz Republic’, as a policy driven by values of multiculturalism based on international standards. The paper problematizes the relationship between the norms of multiculturalism and the politics of nationalism in Kyrgyzstan using field data collected in 2015. This paper will argue that the ‘Concept’ adopted by the Kyrgyzstani government is a top-down project, rather than a community-owned and community-shared project. It does not consider broad public opinion and does not enjoy public support for most of policy ideas contained in it. The paper critically studies the values behind the ‘Concept’, which were aimed at engendering inter-ethnic cohesion and observance of minority rights, against the political reality of inter-ethnic relations on the ground. Informed by key literature on nationalism in post-Soviet Central Asia, the paper concludes that Kyrgyzstan’s ‘uneasy’ management of diversity speaks more broadly to the issue of ‘titular ethnicization’ in post-Soviet Central Asia, and questions the applicability of the idea of multiculturalism in the post-Westphalian nation-state reality, especially in post-conflict or conflict-prone settings.

Keywords: post-conflict, post-conflict policy, nationalism, titular, multiculturalism, inter-ethnic cohesion, international donors, post-Soviet, Central Asia

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This work uses the example of Kyrgyzstan's inter-ethnic policy to discuss a discrepancy between the ideas or norms of multiculturalism and the politics or practices on the ground, in line with existing critical literature on the subject. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the April revolution and June conflict in Kyrgyzstan. In June 2010, the southern cities of Osh and Jalalabad saw violent clashes between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. This paper argues that the inter-ethnic policy adopted after the June 2010 conflict was pushed upon authorities by international partners and implemented top-down, rather than being a community-shared and community-owned idea; this made its implementation problematic.

According to the Kyrgyz National Commission on the Investigation of the June 2010 Events in South Kyrgyzstan (2011), the violence left 426 people dead, 1,930 people wounded and 1,861 houses damaged. These tragic events once again demonstrated the state's weak efforts to form a civic identity in Kyrgyzstan. The 2010 conflict echoes a similar incident in 1990, which resulted in more than 300 deaths and 1,200 non-lethal casualties (Kyrgyzstan Inquiry Commission, 2011: 10). According to the official statistics, Uzbeks are the biggest minority and make up 14.3% of the whole population of Kyrgyzstan; Russians constitute 7.8% and other ethnic groups make up 6.9% (the Kyrgyz National Commission on the Investigation of the June 2010 Events in South Kyrgyzstan, 2011).

As Turganbaev and Abdrakhmanov (2013) claim, these two violent conflicts in Kyrgyzstan were the result of a lack of national policy for managing inter-ethnic relations. The only attempt at a national policy came during the presidency of Askar Akaev (1991–2005); the government promoted the notion of a *Kyrgyzstani citizen* and a national ideology of 'Kyrgyzstan is our common home' to reinforce ties between different ethnic groups (Marat, 2006). The civic-based nationalism of Akaev was, however, challenged by domestic opposition leaders who took advantage of the Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan border crisis that followed the anti-government terror attacks in Uzbekistan in 1999 (Megoran, 2017). When the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan penetrated Kyrgyzstani territory in August 1999, Kyrgyzstan's 'common home' ideology was set aside; this also contributed to the fall of Akaev's regime in 2005 (Megoran, 2017). The domination of ethnic-centred ideologies over inter-ethnic ties during Kurmanbek Bakiev's presidency (2005–2010) led to the re-occurrence of Osh violence in 2010 (Megoran, 2017).

It wasn't until three years after the clashes that the Kyrgyz Republic took a step towards a balanced inter-ethnic ideology, and put forward several reforms, such as judicial and police

reforms. These reforms were the outcome of commitments the Kyrgyz government had made to international humanitarian missions and other donors, in return for help with rehabilitation and reconciliation following the 2010 conflict. In 2013, Kyrgyzstan adopted ‘The National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Kyrgyz Republic for the period 2013–2017’ (‘the National Strategy’ hereafter) – the central document guiding all reform processes. The National Strategy (2013) explicitly recognized problems in maintaining inter-ethnic peace in Kyrgyzstan and noted that issues with inter-ethnic relations were connected, in particular, to inefficient language policy. Therefore, on April 10th, 2013 President Almazbek Atambaev (2011–2017) signed a decree called ‘The Concept on strengthening national unity and inter-ethnic relations in the Kyrgyz Republic’ (‘the Concept’ hereafter). The text of the Concept was tensely disputed between the nationalist political opposition on one side, and civic activists and the government on the other (Marat, 2016). The Concept was soon followed by ‘The National Programme on State language development and improvement of language policy in the Kyrgyz Republic for the period 2014–2020’ (‘the Programme’ hereafter). By promoting the state language, the Programme was one of the key steps for the implementation of the Concept. The final version of the Concept – the policy document central to this study – considered some of the thematic Recommendations and Guidelines published by the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) of Europe’s Organization for Security and Co-operations (OSCE).¹ These include guidance on minority rights, the normative values of multiculturalism and the involvement of local government, local experts and NGOs.

The study contributes to the existing literature by providing a thorough analysis of the ideological nature of the post-conflict policy on diversity management (the Concept) and its implementation. It highlights the introduction of international values of multiculturalism into the Concept and problematizes the relationship between the norms of multiculturalism and the politics of nationalism in Kyrgyzstan. The paper suggests that the Concept was based more on top–down considerations and international recommendations, namely from the OSCE HCNM, and less on bottom–up, context-based considerations. It was insufficiently informed by consultation with local agents, especially those charged with implementation, which led to a weak understanding of the introduced values at the local level and made the implementation of the policy problematic, if not unrealistic. Finally, the paper questions the applicability of the OSCE HCNM thematic Recommendations and Guidelines in actual political realms, like that of post-conflict Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan’s experience also speaks more broadly to the idea and politics of multiculturalism, the

role of local agents, and the question of managing culturally diverse societies in post-conflict or conflict-prone states.

The paper presents primary data collected between June and July of 2015. A total of eight in-depth individual interviews were conducted with representatives of the Kyrgyz government (national and local levels), local civil society and the OSCE HCNM. In addition, in total 48 anonymous surveys were conducted among three target groups in Osh (16 mono-ethnic Kyrgyz, 16 mono-ethnic Uzbeks and 16 teachers of various backgrounds); this offers a glimpse of public opinion on current governmental policies on multicultural cohesion, and on multiculturalism in Kyrgyzstan more broadly.

1. Multiculturalism and ethnic nationalism in Kyrgyzstan

To talk about the Concept's vision of a multicultural society, it is important to pause and consider what multiculturalism is. Multiculturalism is a diversely interpreted concept both within academia and among practitioners. Some scholars have noted that multiculturalism can have different meanings depending on the 'context and writer' (Bloemraad, Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2008: 159). Briefly, multiculturalism is an acknowledgement of diversity. For Will Kymlicka (2012), multiculturalism is 'part of a larger human rights revolution involving ethnic and racial diversity' (5) and is 'a new model' of 'democratic citizenship' (8), based on human rights. Anna Triandafyllidou (2011: 28) describes multiculturalism as a 'set of normative ideals and policy programmes', which are aimed at promoting 'the incorporation and participation of immigrants and ethnic minorities' into broader society, by considering cultural, linguistic and other differences. It should also be noted that scholars also use the term *integration* interchangeably, or with some overlap, with *multiculturalism*. For example, Taras Kuzio (1998: Introduction) states that 'multiculturalism teaches the citizens of a democratic society to value diversity and differences, helping to integrate diverse cultures into the larger society without cutting them off from their past'.

Academic debates, as well as scholarly and policy research, indicate that the idea of multiculturalism is easy to state, but that it is difficult to implement (Barry, 2002; Huerta, 1999; Hughes, 1993). Specifically, Kymlicka (2012) notes in his later works that the so-called 'celebratory model' of multicultural cohesion has been criticized many times. In the 1970–1990s, multiculturalism was very popular in most Western democracies, but its popularity declined after

the 1990s because of fears that diversity threatened the lives of majorities (ibid.). Paul Weller (2012) argues that multiculturalism may establish or foster so-called ‘parallel’ societies when different cultures exist on their own as separate entities. Another reviewer, Marie Macey (2012), observed the results of multiculturalism practices in Great Britain and concluded that multiculturalism is an ‘anachronistic project’. She claims, controversially, that multiculturalism has stimulated separation, manoeuvred against social cohesion and posed a threat to liberal democracy because of its harmful impact on society as a whole. Similarly, Irene Bloemraad, Anna Korteweg and Gökçe Yurdakul (2008) note that critics are worried about ‘the multiple loyalties’ behind multiculturalism. According to them, most of critics such as Brian Barry, Todd Gitlin, Samuel Huntington, Susan Okin, Noah Pickus and Arthur Schlesinger are afraid that lack of civic loyalty to a country will result in fractions within a nation (ibid.). Finally, John Rex and Gurharpal Singh (2003: 4) point out that in modern times, especially in post-conflict trajectories, multiculturalism is treated ‘in a very much more negative light’.

There is a well-established literature on post-conflict reconciliation, migration, peacebuilding, and coping strategies in Kyrgyzstan (see Hanks, 2011; Harrowell, 2015; Ismailbekova, 2013; 2014; 2015a; 2015b; Khamidov et al., 2017; Lottholz, 2018). While there is a small literature on post-conflict nationalism and identity in Kyrgyzstan (Laruelle 2012; Marat 2016), they do not give a thorough analysis of the ideological nature of post-conflict diversity policies and their implementation.

Nevertheless, the literature on nationalism is helpful for understanding Kyrgyzstan’s ‘uneasy’ management of diversity. Kyrgyzstan, along with other Central Asian and post-colonial states, emerged in the era of nationalism. Nationalism is ubiquitous in the post-Westphalia nation-state world and, as Megoran (2012: 2) puts it, is an ‘inescapable context to politics’ in Kyrgyzstan. As Gellner famously wrote in 1983, nationalism is understood as the congruence of the political and the national unit. Brubaker (1996, 2011) argued about rise of nationalization policies in post-communist successor states and developed a concept of ‘nationalizing states’ in post-communist Europe (which also applies to Central Asian states). Brubaker’s argument, however, was criticized by Kuzio (2001) as being normative and adopting Kohn’s Eastern (bad) versus Western (good) nationalism. Smith’s ethno-symbolist approach could mediate this debate by stating that every modern nation-state (including Western states) has built itself based on its ethnic origins or roots: ‘nationalism demands the rediscovery and restoration of the nation’s unique cultural identity; and

this means returning to one's authentic roots in the historic culture community inhabiting its ancestral homeland' (2010: 37). Although nationalism is a vague phenomenon, A.D. Smith (2010: 6) had suggested five useful descriptions, three of which are adopted for the purpose of this paper: 'a sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation'; 'a language and symbolism of the nation'; and 'a doctrine and/or ideology of the nation'.

In post-Soviet Central Asia these roots are referred to as culture, language and ethnicity of the dominant group, or so-called titular culture, titular language, titular ethnicity, etc. (see also Megoran 2012). According to Khan (2015: 79), only two options are available for minorities in Central Asia: 'emigrate or adapt'. National minorities' national revival is therefore limited to culture, while political activism is not a choice (*ibid.*). Khan (2015: 75) suggests that Central Asia is experiencing a 'titular ethnicization' or 'monoethnicization' due to the emigration of non-titular ethnic groups, under-representation of minorities in politics and the domination of state languages over others. The notion of an 'historical right' is key in understanding post-Soviet nationalism: 'Titular ethnicization is manifested also in the conception and policy of the unconditional right of titular ethnic groups for dominance in a given state' (Khan, 2015: 77). In the case of Kyrgyzstan, Liu's (2012: 73) anthropological contribution aptly describes the situation of local Uzbeks in post-soviet Osh: 'Uzbeks look to Uzbekistan for their ethnic identification and to Kyrgyzstan for their citizenship'. Wachtel (2013: 977) notes that Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan are perceived as an 'existential danger' to Kyrgyzstan. Megoran (2017: 87) adds that under the realities of a 'postnomadic political imaginary', Uzbeks are mistrusted by Kyrgyz, believed to be disloyal to the state and a challenge to the state's integrity. Both Wachtel and Megoran note that Osh city, in particular, has become a contested space between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. Although the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan was established in 1994 to communicate the concerns of Uzbeks in Osh, Fumagalli (2007: 222) points to the 'ineffectiveness of formal institutions'. He argues instead that informal institutions, namely mutually beneficial patron–client relations between Uzbek political leaders in Kyrgyzstan and the Uzbek electorate, provide an 'effective way of managing multi-ethnicity' (Fumagalli, 2007: 228). In brief, ethnic nationalism in post-independent Kyrgyzstan is inevitable, while multicultural policy (the Concept) is designed to promote more inclusive and civic nationalism.

2. Values of multiculturalism reflected in OSCE HCNM documents

The OSCE HCNM is one of the key international organizations dealing with minority issues and diversity management. Their ideas generally coincide with some of the core ideas of multiculturalism theorists briefly mentioned above. In one of its core documents, *The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies & Explanatory Note* ('Guidelines' hereafter), it does not mention 'multiculturalism' per se, but instead prefers the phrase: 'integration and cohesion of diverse, multi-ethnic societies' (The Ljubljana Guidelines, 2012: 3). Here, the term 'integration' is used in a positive meaning, while values of diversity and multi-ethnicity are stressed in cohesion. The introduction to the Guidelines stresses that 'the HCNM prefers to speak about *the integration of multi-ethnic societies* rather than integration of a minority group into a particular society' (The Ljubljana Guidelines 2012: 4, emphasis added). While the former approach is multicultural, the latter is a stronger term, very close to acculturation.

The OSCE HCNM Guidelines (2012) state that integration is different from compulsory assimilation, where 'a minority is absorbed by the majority, loses its identity, and disappears as a recognizable group' (3). Rather, they define 'integration' as 'a dynamic, multi-actor process of *mutual* engagement that facilitates effective participation by *all members* of a diverse society in the economic, political, social and cultural life, and fosters *a shared* and *inclusive* sense of belonging at national and local levels' (3, emphasis added). In other words, integration occurs when minor cultures are preserved and promoted: 'In this paradigm, preserving and promoting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities does not threaten the integrity of the State, while the integrity of the State does not hinder the flourishing of national minorities' (3).

Thus, HCNM's definition of integration is very similar to some definitions of multiculturalism, especially Kymlicka's, in its respect for ethnic, linguistic, cultural or religious diversity, with the aim of building and maintaining an 'inclusive civic identity'.

3. Kyrgyzstan's multicultural citizenship project

After several disputes, the Kyrgyz Parliament adopted the Concept in 2013. The final text was a compromise between two political forces: the government (in consultation with international donors and civil society organizations) pushed for a civic-oriented policy while *Ata Jurt*, the opposition party, pushed an ethno-nationalist agenda. Marat (2016: 314) nicely summarized this process saying, 'we disputed every word'.

According to the deputy head of the Department for Ethnic and Religious Policy and Cooperation with Civil Society under the President's Apparatus (henceforth 'the Department'), the idea behind the Concept came right after a high-level conference on post-conflict reconciliation, held in 2010 and funded by a group of international donors and led by the OSCE HCNM.² Marat (2016: 314) observes that the Concept was 'developed in part as a response to international pressure'. Interim president Roza Otunbaeva held a series of round tables to discuss the content of the Concept, with the backing of international donors. Discussions were held in Bishkek and the regions, but Bishkek-based civic activists were overrepresented. Overall, the version that was adopted mainly played to the interests of international donors, in line with OSCE HCNM's Guidelines. The Concept (2013) aims to promote unity, improve inter-ethnic relations and help maintain the cultural heritage and diversity of each ethnic group residing in Kyrgyzstan. The Concept (2013) included the following values and ideas of multicultural citizenship:

- observance of democratic values;
- strengthening of statehood and maintenance of territorial integrity;
- systematization of state body activities;
- unity in diversity;
- respect for ethnocultural heritage of peoples;
- unifying role of the Kyrgyz language; and
- integration into the world via learning of Russian, English and other world languages.

In its final version, the Concept (2013) consists of three parts: *Part I* describes the legal regulation of inter-ethnic relations, *Part II* stresses the unifying role of the Kyrgyz language and development of linguistic diversity; and *Part III* discusses the formation of the *Kyrgyz Jarany* identity – a civic identity based on citizenship, rather than ethnicity. The Concept (2013) also stresses the legal protection of minority rights, and refers to democratic values based on the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as key international treaties guaranteeing social, economic, cultural and political freedoms.

The following core tasks of the Concept (2013) are defined based on these principles:

- improvement of the legal basis for realization of ethnocultural rights;
- creation of institutions for the realization of the Concept and creation of necessary infrastructure at local and national levels;

- monitoring, peacebuilding and early prevention of conflicts by state bodies, ministries and local self-government bodies;
- a unifying role for the Kyrgyz language and creation of the conditions for learning it, implementation of a balanced language policy via learning the official language and other UN languages, creating the conditions for maintenance and development of the languages of different ethnic groups; and
- the *Kyrgyz Jarany* (*Kyrgyzstani citizen*) identity formation, promotion of civic patriotism, promotion of tolerance and respect for diversity via education, cultural and informational policy, and a widening of political, social and economic participation of all citizens.

Finally, in the sphere of education, the Kyrgyz integration policy proposes the delivery of multilingual education as well as ensuring that multiculturalism is reflected in the media and in cultural activities (the Concept, 2013). By guaranteeing national minorities' cultural and political rights, the Concept (2013) aims to reduce inter-communal inequalities, prevent the titular group's domination over national minorities and enhance social cohesion. By introducing the Concept, Kyrgyzstan accepts its rich and diverse cultural heritage and salutes unity in diversity. Not only is the state responsible for ensuring tolerance and non-discrimination, but it is also responsible for minority representation in public institutions, and it encourages national minorities to participate. The Concept promotes identity-building around a concept of *Kyrgyz Jarany* based on universal human rights and shared by all members of society. It also supports a sense of connectivity, as it promotes unity in diversity and uses the Kyrgyz language as a unifying factor for all cultures living in Kyrgyzstan. So although, the Concept does not directly use the term 'multiculturalism', Kyrgyzstan had chosen a multicultural citizenship project, influenced by international advice. The next section discusses how the implementation proceeded.

4. Implementation of Kyrgyzstan's policy on multicultural citizenship by 2015

Following the publication of the Concept policy document, the government drew up an Action Plan to implement its principles and allocated 2,703,777 euros over four years from 2013–2017.³ Key tasks included: (i) correct internal legislation and review domestic laws related to international minority rights standards; (ii) develop mechanisms for monitoring human rights violations; (iii) develop diversity management skills and increase professional capacity of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan (state office that represents minorities' interests); (iv) establish Public

Receptions offices in 18 municipalities and five cities, and establish a National Coordination Centre and a Conflict Monitoring Centre; (v) pilot multilingual education projects and develop a multicultural curriculum; (vi) hold inter-ethnic confidence-building activities and support initiatives from multi-ethnic communities; (vii) publish books in minority languages and protect minority languages; (viii) create conditions for learning state (Kyrgyz), official (Russian) or minority languages; (ix) increase participation of national minorities in political life; and (x) support media in different languages and promote the idea of unity via cinema and arts. Twenty of the Action Plan's 71 tasks were to be completed by 2015. Below we look into the implementation of some of these activities based on data collected from the field research in 2015.

5. Barriers to implementation of the Concept

The State Agency for Local Governance and Inter-Ethnic Relations (henceforth 'the Agency'), is the main state body responsible for the implementation of the Concept. Its work is based on tasks framed by the government. Although the Agency is performing its role competently, several critiques of the body were revealed during the interviews.

The idea of combining local governance and national minority issues within a single body is worth exploring, because the structure of the Agency is implicated in its institutional weakness. In practice, local governance is a complex issue and dominates the Agency's work and human resources; inter-ethnic relations seem to remain a very minor topic, attended by a narrow circle of specialists.

Weak coordination between national and local bodies, and within national bodies, was one of the key concerns raised by the deputy head of the Department,⁴ using the example of weak coordination between the Agency and the Vice Prime Minister on Security. And even though the Action Plan called for linkages between the Agency and law enforcement to be strengthened, the head of the Ak-Buura District Police Office in Osh said that their office had no relationship with the Agency.⁵ In fact, he was not aware of the existence of either the Agency or the Concept.⁶

The second issue worth mentioning is a poor understanding of the Concept and its core principles and objectives, as well as the role of state institutions in implementing it. Even at the highest level within the Agency, according to the deputy head of the Department, 'most of the personnel do not know what the actual rationale behind the implementation of the Concept is'.⁷

He also claims that *akims* (local governors) in the south of the country, the Agency's Osh oblast department and the Mayor's Office in Osh had a very vague understanding of the Concept. To cite:

I was surprised to see during my work trip in early June of this year that the Osh oblast department of the Agency, *akims*, even some representatives of Osh city's Mayor's Office do not understand the purpose of their activity, despite a lot of international input for realization of the Concept.⁸

Furthermore, the Concept's idea of forming a civic-based identity was not a priority for local government representatives, mainly because 'the understanding of the philosophy of the Concept is very weak'.⁹ For instance, the head of the Naiman *ayil okmotu* (AO) (rural administrative unit) mentioned that the tasks aimed at improving inter-ethnic relations, assigned by the Agency, were usually not realistic for implementation.¹⁰ For example, she had to organize cultural events such as the Mother Language Day three or four times per year. Because it was difficult for her to organize so many events, she organized them only once a year but reported to Bishkek that she did them three to four times, as the government had asked. She added that the majority of heads of other AOs in other *rayons* (district administrative units) also practised this strategy because they were busy attending to other duties which were more important than those cultural events.

The Department acknowledged that 'local management in regions, such as AOs or Mayors' Offices, did not understand the importance of inclusive governance, either'.¹¹ He gave the example of a conversation with some representatives of the Osh city Mayor's Office regarding representation of ethnic Uzbeks in their administration. He was told that Uzbeks did not take high-level positions in the Mayor's Office because the staff did not trust Uzbeks, and thus they avoided appointing Uzbeks to strategic positions within the municipal government. The Department also highlighted the negative implications of constant shifts of management in key bodies charged with implementing the Concept: a new appointee would have a weak understanding of the whole process in the field of inter-ethnic relations.¹²

6. Kyrgyz language-centred policy

As discussed, the unifying role of the Kyrgyz language was central to the Concept, with language policy to be implemented through the adoption of the Programme. President Atambaev signed the decree on the implementation of the Programme in 2014. According to the Programme (2014), the

state language (Kyrgyz) will be promoted as a fundamental language for consolidating all nations living in Kyrgyzstan but also guaranteeing language diversity. Kyrgyz language was only introduced as the state language after the country's independence, however Russian language is the main mode of exchange in urban and official contexts, while in the regions usage of other languages is common. The Programme (2014) also implies the full-scale functioning of Kyrgyz in all spheres of public life, including gradually increasing the teaching of Kyrgyz in minority language schools and the translation of key documentation into Kyrgyz from Russian. To achieve these goals, the government is also supporting the production of books in Kyrgyz and the compiling of Kyrgyz dictionaries, as well as the translation of terms and literature into Kyrgyz. In 2015, the government began working on the 'Kyrgyztest' system – a programme for evaluating knowledge of the state language, analogous to the TOEFL system for English (ibid.). The Programme indicates that all documentation will be in Kyrgyz from 2020, and therefore all state and municipal servants will need to know the state language (Kyrgyz) and the official language (Russian) to an advanced level, as well as one of the world languages at an upper-intermediate level.

With regard to the role of the Kyrgyz language and civic unity, the representative from the Agency said the process had started successfully, with most of the representatives from national minority groups expressing a desire to learn the Kyrgyz language.¹³ The Agency organized meetings with schools in Nookat, which were important in dispelling the negative rhetoric in the press about 'alleged forced closure of Uzbek schools', or cases of Uzbek language schools being switched to Kyrgyz language schools.¹⁴ During the meetings, the Agency representative said he believed that Uzbek students wished to study Kyrgyz voluntarily; they only needed a few hours on Uzbek language and literature within a school week to maintain their language, considering the fact that they speak it at home.¹⁵ Regarding the production of books in minority languages (particularly Uzbek), the Agency representative said that there was not enough money in the budget and that any ethnicity could find alternative sponsors or businessmen to publish necessary books in their mother tongues.¹⁶

The interview with an Osh-based NGO representative, on the other hand, indicated that despite the Concept mentioning the preservation and support of national minority languages, this has remained on paper only.¹⁷ Therefore, the representative believed that Kyrgyzstan's language policy was not balanced in practice.¹⁸ She also worried about the lack of Kyrgyz language teaching

centres for national minority representatives,¹⁹ given that Kyrgyz language competency will become a key criterion for recruitment in all government bodies from 2020.

Additionally, the survey data²⁰ revealed a misperception of the government's focus on the Kyrgyz language. First, community representatives demonstrated poor awareness of the unifying rationale behind the promotion of Kyrgyz language. For instance, in Toloikon district of Osh city, 15 out of 16 respondents were not aware of it. Most (10 out of 16) respondents in Toloikon believed instead that the main reasons for promoting Kyrgyz were the protection and development of the state language and creating a duty for other ethnicities speak Kyrgyz. According to one respondent from Amir-Timur district of Osh city, the government supported Kyrgyz language to 'encourage' other ethnicities to learn Kyrgyz, and he hoped that 'it is good for the future'.²¹ However, the majority of respondents in Amir-Timur believed that the government should also take into account the opinion of other ethnic groups, especially on maintaining and developing minority groups' languages and cultural traditions.²² Responses also suggested that 'other ethnic groups should be considered as equal' and 'they [minority groups] should be able to produce books in their language'.²³

The survey revealed strong public support among the Kyrgyz mono-ethnic community for the development of the Kyrgyz language (all 16 respondents supported the policy).²⁴ They also mentioned a willingness to study Kyrgyz despite it was their mother tongue. The government's work on the state language was evaluated as weak.²⁵ According to respondents from Toloikon, Russian was more commonly used than Kyrgyz, which was considered a negative practice.²⁶ According to one of the respondents, 'in Bishkek in public transport, the majority speaks Russian, not Kyrgyz'.²⁷ Survey responses from Toloikon spoke about the rise of nationalism, robust fear for the future of the Kyrgyz language and the rise of claims for increasing the status of state language among other ethnic groups.²⁸ Some responses even urged different activities to save the state language.²⁹

Furthermore, respondents from Toloikon (12 out of 16) believed that minority groups accept Kyrgyz language-centred policy because Kyrgyz is the state language and should be privileged by the country above other languages.³⁰ As one of the respondents said, 'representatives of other ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan should know and speak the state language, because it is their motherland'.³¹ Meanwhile, respondents from Amir-Timur also had a positive attitude to the promotion of the state language.³² Almost all respondents in the Uzbek community (14 out of 16)

expressed a desire to learn Kyrgyz along with other foreign languages, such as English, Russian and Chinese.³³ However, the reasons were clear: several said that it was necessary for interaction with Kyrgyz people, while some said there was no other alternative.³⁴

Unlike community representatives, surveyed schoolteachers demonstrated a good knowledge of the unifying rationale behind the state policy on promotion of the Kyrgyz language (almost all 16 respondents mentioned it).³⁵ This was probably because they work in schools and teach languages. Similar to the respondents from Toloikon, teachers said that the state is supporting Kyrgyz language in order to protect and develop the state language (seven responses out of 16).³⁶ However, answers among teachers spoke about a limited understanding of the role of the state language in maintaining peace and unity (three out of 16).³⁷ Thirteen out of 16 respondents believed the national policy was viewed positively by representatives of ethnic minorities.³⁸ According to one teacher, learning of the state language is a ‘responsibility of minority groups as long as they are citizens of Kyrgyzstan’.³⁹ Ten out of 16 respondents believed that Kyrgyz could become a language uniting all ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan.⁴⁰ Almost all schoolteachers expressed their interest in learning Kyrgyz and other foreign languages such as Russian, English, Chinese, Turkish, and French.⁴¹ Only two said they would learn local languages, such as Tajik and Uzbek.⁴²

7. Representation of national minorities in law enforcement and local governance bodies

Based on the interviews, the representation of national minorities in law enforcement and local governance bodies remained weak and invisible. According to the head of Naiman AO, there was no definite change in the representation of national minorities in the police or judicial systems of the Nookat *rayon*.⁴³ As she recalled, there was only one Uzbek appointed to a managerial position at the rayon level.⁴⁴

The head of the Agency in Osh had an explanation for the under-representation of national minorities in law enforcement. He said that national minorities should ‘serve in the national army first before working in law enforcement structures’,⁴⁵ ‘they should know Kyrgyz and Russian at a professional level, as well as maintaining their own language’,⁴⁶ and finally that they should have sufficient work experience to compete in the labour market.⁴⁷ He concluded that most Uzbeks did not satisfy these criteria.⁴⁸

Regarding the representation of national minority groups in the Ak-Buura District Police Office in Osh, the head of the police stated that minority representation in their office was almost 12%, with 10% Uzbeks and 2% from other ethnic groups.⁴⁹ The remaining 88% of police officers were ethnic Kyrgyz. He explained low representation by stating that (a) minority groups do not wish to serve in the army and (b) they have a poor knowledge of state or official language.⁵⁰ He noted that documentation was only available in state and official languages.⁵¹ He explained that ‘in the past we used to accept and consider cases in Uzbek, but now we ask them to appeal in Kyrgyz or the official language’.⁵²

According to the head of one political party in Osh, there was low representation of national minorities in the party membership list;⁵³ at that moment, 200 people were newly registered, but among them there were a very small number of national minorities.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, he later clarified this situation saying ‘before getting into the politics, there should be a balance between rights and duties or responsibilities’.⁵⁵ He stressed that Uzbeks did not serve in the army and had poor education because they preferred to work after school, rather than progressing to higher education.⁵⁶ He continued that Uzbeks, therefore, preferred to look for informal ways of getting things done, bypassing state regulations and laws. He believed that Uzbeks preferred to get into politics only when they had enough money and reliable support. Accordingly, he believed that Kadyrjan Batyrov⁵⁷ was involved in politics because he had a huge number of businesses.

The survey findings confirmed sensitivity over minority representation. Only four out of 16 respondents in Toloikon supported the promotion of minority (particularly Uzbek) participation in public and political affairs.⁵⁸ Opinions on the representation of minority groups in the police and judicial system was identically split: only six respondents of 16 said that they would support a policy aimed at promoting minority participation and representation in public and government structures.⁵⁹

In Amir-Timur, on the contrary, all respondents supported the promotion of minority representation within Kyrgyzstan’s public and political structures, including the police, local self-government bodies and judicial systems. Respondents perceived these structures as the most corrupt, and believed that increased representation of ethnic minority groups would decrease corruption. They characterized these structures as very troublesome, based on their own experiences.

Meanwhile, 12 out of 16 teachers supported the promotion of minority representation within these same structures. However, it is important to note, that these views were qualified by additional comments such as ‘mandatory knowledge of the Kyrgyz language’ and ‘high competency’.⁶⁰

8. Media in minority language

On the question of minority language media in Osh, the Agency representative pointed to the Uzbek language newspaper *Osh Saudasi* and the Mayor’s Office-owned trilingual newspaper, as well as *Yntymak TV* which has aired some programmes in the Uzbek language.⁶¹

However, the survey data revealed a negative perception of media in minority languages. In Toloikon, 11 out of 16 respondents did not support the development of media in minority languages. One of the respondents believed that ‘all media should be in Kyrgyz’ and ‘other groups should know Kyrgyz to understand it’.⁶² In general, respondents spoke about the nation’s dignity and felt that ethnic minorities should ‘respect the language of a place they live in’, while Kyrgyz people too should ‘respect their own mother tongue’.⁶³

Conversely, 13 out of 16 respondents from Amir-Timur supported the development of media in minority languages. Among teachers, only seven out of 16 respondents said that the government should support minority language media, with the majority against it. Teachers’ reasons for objecting included the need to further develop the weak existing Kyrgyz media, distrust of national minorities and notions of national dignity. One respondent remembered that prior to the events of June 2010, Uzbek leaders had used the *Osh TV* station⁶⁴ to agitate Uzbeks and ‘fuel hatred towards Kyrgyz’.⁶⁵ Another respondent believed that ‘media should be in the state language only’, and minorities should be encouraged to learn Kyrgyz.⁶⁶

9. Building the Kyrgyz Jarany identity

The head of the Agency office in Osh stated that the development of the *Kyrgyz Jarany* identity was very important in the aftermath the conflict. However, he believed that the Kyrgyz identity should be also preserved among Kyrgyz people because ‘we [Kyrgyz] have it in our blood, and Kyrgyzness has been with us since the 4th century’.⁶⁷

Accordingly, survey respondents from the Kyrgyz majority in Osh (the Toloikon community) identified themselves as belonging to the Kyrgyz ethnic group and wished to continue

doing so in spite of the *Kyrgyz Jarany* identity proposed by the state. The civic identification of these respondents was relatively weak. Among 16 respondents, 10 identified themselves according to their ethnicity, while only six identified themselves by citizenship.⁶⁸

The opposite view was revealed in the Amir-Timur district. Representatives of the Uzbek minority group preferred to be identified according to their citizenship rather than ethnicity. For instance, only six respondents out of 16 identified themselves as Uzbeks.⁶⁹ Among teachers, the support for ethnic identity was higher than for civic identity. Among the respondents, eight identified themselves as Kyrgyz or Uzbek, three hesitated and five respondents identified as citizens of Kyrgyzstan, without reference to their ethnic identity.⁷⁰

Conclusion

This paper provides an alternative analysis of the Kyrgyz Republic's policy for managing diversity by considering the Concept as driven by values of multiculturalism. The Concept's implementation was problematic, if not unrealistic, because core ideas and values of multiculturalism were pushed top-down by international donors, and in Kyrgyzstan's post-conflict reality, multicultural values were not shared by locals.

Indeed, the research findings suggest that the Concept's central ideas and values remained poorly understood by state institutions (at national and local levels) as well as by local communities in Osh. Normative values within the national policy were coined predominantly by international recommendations, rather than bottom-up, context-based considerations, despite regional consultation prior the adoption of the policy. The more specific findings are the following: (1) institutional weakness and a lack of competency among key government structures charged with implementing the Concept; (2) a poor understanding of the Concept's core values and objectives, and the state institutions' own role in the implementation; (3) development of the Kyrgyz language is perceived more as a protective measure than a platform for uniting different ethnicities living in Kyrgyzstan; (4) implementation of the Concept has not resulted in fundamental changes to minority representation in state or enforcement bodies; (5) media in minority languages remains a concern, if not a threat; and (6) while ethnic Uzbeks prefer to identify with the *Kyrgyz Jarany*, this identity remains weak among ethnic Kyrgyz.

Overall, the findings of this paper showcase a process of 'titular ethnicization' or 'monoethnicization' in Kyrgyzstan, like in other post-Soviet Central Asian countries (Khan 2015).

As the Kyrgyz example has suggested, the practices of ethnic-centred nationalism or the ‘historical right’ to dominance become even more salient in the post-conflict setting. In addition, the role of local agencies should not be underestimated. In particular, the role of the former Mayor of Osh, Melis Myrzakmatov, was crucial in shaping the reception of the Concept in that city. Most international reports (see the International Crisis Report, 2012) and similar studies (see Megoran, 2012) suggest the Mayor’s ethno-centric nationalism was an important factor in the post-conflict administration of Osh. For example, the city erected ethnic-centred monuments and adopted the General Plan of Osh, under which Uzbek *mahallas* (neighbourhoods) were demolished as part of a longer term inter-ethnic tolerance and peace vision. The ex-Mayor Myrzakmatov, and his political party *Uluttar Birimdigi*, held the majority in the Osh city council in 2012 and had a tense relationship with the central power in Bishkek. Myrzakmatov also had his own alternative vision and explanation of the conflict of June 2010, blaming Uzbek separatists for fuelling the violence. These ideas were promulgated in his book *‘Men izdegen chyndyk’* (‘The truth I am looking for’), which circulated within the south and contributed to the negative acceptance of the Concept in Osh.

In an interview, the OSCE HCNM representative said he believed the core reasons for poor implementation of the Concept were connected to lack of investigation into the events of June 2010 and impunity for the organizers, unfair blaming of Uzbeks while Kyrgyz were treated as victims only, and a weak reconciliation process as a consequence of this lack of justice. He also identified a lack of sufficient finances and human resources. He said that, overall, they had not seen any ‘concrete steps in implementing the Concept’, despite the government’s efforts.⁷¹

We do not see fundamental changes yet in terms of political participation of national minorities, despite special institutions and projects being established, such as GAMSUMO [the Agency] or projects under the UN Peace Funds. We still see mistrustful and tense inter-group relations, rising ethnonationalism in societies, and nationalistic rhetoric of some politicians.⁷²

The lessons drawn from the Kyrgyz example are crucial for understanding multiculturalism as a contested process with a problematic implementation in ‘titular ethnicization’ and post-conflict contexts. The Kyrgyz case of managing diverse societies could also challenge the applicability of the OSCE HCNM thematic recommendations in actual political realms. Others have also criticized foreign peacebuilding projects after the 2010 conflict; in particular, Megoran

et al. (2014) argue that these bottom–up participatory projects with a predominant training component were unable to address the root causes of the conflict. Megoran’s (2012: 5) study also claims that the projects suggested by the international community were ‘unrealistic’, ‘irrelevant’ and ‘counter-productive’. Wachtel (2013: 977) too believes that the international community’s project of imposing civic-centred nationalism is ‘unrealistic’ unless Kyrgyzstan becomes a fully democratic country. So while this paper is about post-conflict inter-ethnic policy implementation in Kyrgyzstan, it is relevant to all post-Soviet Central Asian states concerned with the ‘historical right’ of its titular nation to dominance in an ‘era’ of nations.

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Notes

¹ The OSCE Thematic Recommendations include: Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities & Explanatory Note – 1996, The Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities & Explanatory Note – 1998, The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life & Explanatory Note – 1999, Guidelines on the Use of Minority Languages in the Broadcast Media and Explanatory Note – 2003, The Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies & Explanatory Note – 2012

² Interview with the Department, Bishkek, June 2015

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Interview with the Ak-Buura District Police, Osh, June 2015

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Interview with the Department, Bishkek, June 2015

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Interview with the Department, Bishkek, June 2015

¹⁰ Interview with the AO Naiman, Nookat, June 2015

¹¹ Interview with the Department, Bishkek, June 2015

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Interview with the Agency, Osh, June 2015

¹⁴ Interview with the Agency, Osh, June 2015. See more about the switch of school from the Uzbek language into Kyrgyz in Nookat at <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/uzbek-language-in-southern-kyrgyzstan/24729124.html>

¹⁵ Interview with the Agency, Osh, June 2015.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Interview with Osh-based NGO, Osh, June 2015

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Written surveys were held in Toloikon in June 2015 (predominantly mono-ethnic Kyrgyz) and Amir-Timur (predominantly mono-ethnic Uzbek) districts of Osh city with residents and schoolteachers. In total three surveys were held.

²¹ Written survey data from Amir-Timur, Osh, June 2015

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Written survey data from Toloikon, Osh, June 2015

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Written survey data from Amir-Timur, Osh, June 2015

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Written survey data with schoolteachers, Osh, June 2015

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

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- 41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Interview with the AO Naiman, Nookat, June 2015
44 Ibid.
45 Interview with the Agency, Osh, June 2015
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Interview with the Ak-Buura District Police, Osh, June 2015
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid.
53 Interview with a south-based Political Party, Osh, June 2015
54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ex-MP, accused by the government for June events in 2010
58 Written survey data from Toloikon, Osh, June 2015
59 Ibid.
60 Written survey data with schoolteachers, Osh, June 2015
61 Interview with the Agency, Osh, June 2015
62 Written survey data from Toloikon, Osh, June 2015
63 Ibid.
64 Former Uzbek-language TV channel in Osh city
65 Written survey data from Toloikon, Osh, June 2015
66 Ibid.
67 Interview with the Agency, Osh, June 2015
68 Written survey data from Toloikon, Osh, June 2015
69 Written survey data from Amir-Timur, Osh, June 2015
70 Written survey data with schoolteachers, Osh, June 2015
71 Interview with the OSCE/HCNM, Hague, July 2015
72 Ibid.

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