



**MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN
CONTEMPORARY TAJIKISTAN. AN
OVERVIEW**

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MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN CONTEMPORARY TAJIKISTAN. AN OVERVIEW

This paper aims to provide a brief overview of the legal framework for minority-related issues in Tajikistan and discuss international and national commitments the country has signed concerning protection of minority rights. An overview of some minority communities living in Tajikistan, namely Kyrgyzs, Pamiris, Russians, and Uzbeks will follow afterwards to illustrate how the Tajik minority-related legislation works in practice and what challenges communities usually face. In this section, demographic, linguistic, religious, and socio-economic profiles of selected minority communities will be discussed as well.

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Tajikistan: A Brief Overview

Tajikistan, despite being the smallest country in Central Asia, is home to a diverse population. In addition to the majority community of Tajiks, the biggest minority communities include Kyrgyzs, Pamiris, Russians, and Uzbeks. The last few years have also seen the increasing population of Chinese people coming to Tajikistan for construction projects supported by the Chinese government.

Geography

The Republic of Tajikistan borders with Kyrgyzstan on the north, China on the east, Afghanistan on the south and Uzbekistan on the west and northwest (Encyclopaedia

Britannica, 2018). Due to a mountainous relief of the country, some communities in Tajikistan, e.g. Pamiris, live in hard-to-reach regions and do not have frequent contact with other communities. Dushanbe is the capital city of Tajikistan.

Economy

Remittances from labour migrants pay a crucial role in Tajik citizens' everyday life (Asia-Plus, 2018). Cotton production, agriculture, aluminium industry are the major income-generating productions. The country due to its vast water resources produces and sells hydro-energy to neighbouring countries (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).



Languages and Culture

Tajik, which is very close to Persian and Dari languages, has the status of the state language (Law on the State Language of the Republic of Tajikistan, Article 3). Russian is recognized as the language of “international communication” and serves as lingua franca for interaction between communities in the country (Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, Article 2).

Demography

Tajikistan has one of the fast-growing populations, which reached 8.8 million people in 2017 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). Over the last 15 years, the population growth in Tajikistan has totalled 26.3% (Zakhvatov, 2018). Around 74% of the population resides in rural areas (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). Due to the country’s high unemployment rate, up to 2 million Tajik citizens are labour migrants in Russia, Kazakhstan and the Middle East.

History

Before the Soviet rule, most of the territories of the modern Tajikistan formed the Bukharan emirate, which became a part of the Turkestan General Governorship established by the Russian empire in 1867 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). The Tajik Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic became a part of the Uzbek SSR in 1925, achieving a status of full-fledged Soviet republic in 1929. In 1991, Tajikistan became an independent republic. The Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) was the most significant event in country’s recent history in terms of influence on the country’s development. The

conflict caused a tremendous impact on the economy and caused mass fleeing of populations internally and externally. Because of the Civil War, the majority of the Russian-speaking population left the country.

Renaissance of symbolic historical figures such as Somoni, the founder of the first Tajik state, and appealing to the Aryan origins of the Tajik nation became central tools for Tajikistan’s nation-building policies, which were focused on strengthening the majority status of Tajiks.

Methodology

The Tajik legislation does not provide a definition for minority communities. Although, minority languages, education and practices are mentioned in some laws, there is no comprehensive and systematic legal policies concerning protection of minorities.

Due to this situation, I chose to look at the most recent population census of 2010, where some ethnicity-segregated data can be found; e.g., the ethnic composition of the population in the country. The Tajik census data is the only source to learn about the share of minority communities in overall population, yet also to see even what communities are mentioned. As there is no legal procedure in Tajikistan for the recognition of minorities, for this Working Paper different types of government actions will be considered as being closest to formal recognition. Firstly, I will check if selected communities are mentioned in the national census data. Secondly, I will investigate if communities have a possibility to write down their



minority identity when applying for passports. Thirdly, I will seek for evidence of whether the Tajik authorities actively ignore the minority identity of any community. All these actions I will label as “indirect recognition” when discussing government policies and actions towards minority communities in Tajikistan. Thus, under the “Recognition” section, in addition to indirect recognition practices, I will illustrate general minority community-state relations.

For the purpose of this paper I will mostly rely on the definition of minority suggested in 1977 by Francesco Capotorti, Special Rapporteur of the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities: “A group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a State, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State – possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language” (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2010).

In this paper, I will interchangeably use the terms “community” and “minority” when referring to national groups living in Tajikistan, due to the ambiguous nature of minority groups’ legal status in the country and the lack of definition in the Tajik legislation. At the same time, I will stick consistently to Capotorti’s definition of minorities, as it describes minorities as demographic and cultural, thus not strictly a legal phenomenon.

To discuss minority communities in Tajikistan, I will choose criteria to which I will compare communities. The list of criteria to discuss selected minority communities will include:

- Size: how big is a community and how many people identify themselves with a certain national or ethnic identity?
- Territory of residence: where in the country does a minority community live? Does a community share their residence with other communities? Does that lead to conflicts? Have there been practices of forced resettlement of minority communities?
- Language: what are the main languages spoken by a minority community? Do they have a special status and recognition from the state? Are minority communities able to freely use their native languages in different spheres of life?
- Education: can a community freely access education? Does a community study in its native language/s? Are there schools for minority children?
- Religion: what are the main religions of minority communities? Do they face discrimination for religious practices? Are minority communities able to freely practice their religion?
- Political participation and representation: are representatives of minority communities politically



active? Have they established political parties and organisations? Are minority communities represented in state structures? Are they part of decision-making processes?

- **Kin-State:** does a community have a kin-state? Does a kin-state support a community in any ways? Is it engaged in inter-state dialogue about a minority community's well-being?
- **Economic Status:** what is the average economic status of a minority community? Is there any specific economic sphere in which communities are traditionally occupied? Is there a significant difference between the economic status of a minority community compared to a majority or other community?
- **Self-Organisation:** do the representatives of a community organize as a specific national group? Do they set up and run minority organisations? Have there been attempts to establish minority bodies? Are there organisations aimed to protect, promote and spread minority culture and heritage?
- **Recognition:** is a community mentioned in the national census? Does a community have problems mentioning their identity when applying for passports? Does the government undertake any actions to challenge, refuse or neglect a distinct identity of a community?

1. Minority-related legal framework in Tajikistan

Tajikistan has become a party to several international agreements covering the protection of minorities. In 1995, the country adopted the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) (UN Treaty Collection). In 1999, Tajikistan adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN Treaty Collection).

In terms of regional legislation, Tajikistan has signed and ratified the Convention on guarantee of rights of persons belonging to national minorities of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 2001 (Convention on Guarantee of Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities). This is probably the most important document in the region of Central Asia as it covers numerous issues, including the definition of a minority community, provision of rights and state support. The Convention in Article 1 describes minorities as “persons permanently living on the territory of a state party, having the citizenship of a state party and differing from the majority of the population by ethnic origins, language, culture, religion or traditions” (Convention on Guarantee of Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities, Article 1). According to Article 2 of the Convention, “belonging to a national minority should be based on a personal choice and state parties shall guarantee that this choice will not cause any unfortunate consequences for a minority representative” (Convention on Guarantee of Rights of



Persons Belonging to National Minorities, Article 2). It remains unclear if the existence of this Convention explains the lack of specialized minority-related legislation in all five states of Central Asia. The Convention does not contain provisions on implementation and its monitoring.

The Tajik legislation does not have a recognition mechanism for minority communities. The majority of European countries either list requirements for communities to be recognized or name the recognized communities within the law. For example, the Polish Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and the Regional Languages distinguishes between national and ethnic minorities, provides the set of requirements for recognition, which include numerical inferiority, difference in language, culture and tradition from the majority of population, and residence in the country for at least 100 years (Act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Languages, Article 2).

As was mentioned before, the same practice is absent in the Tajik legislation. This raises a question of what can be considered as a substitution for recognition in the given context. There might be several options. Firstly, a possibility to mention ethnicity in the national census can be one of the ways to assume that the government admits the existence of a specific community. Secondly, a possibility to freely identify as a representative of a certain community can be viewed as another option to imply the authorities' unwillingness to challenge a community's identity and existence. Officially, passports do not feature the

nationality/ethnicity line anymore, however, applicants acquiring a new passport still must indicate their ethnicity in application forms. Government support or at least non-interference in running minority schools, organisations, media, and cultural events might be considered as a final indication of recognition.

There are separate articles in some legal documents that talk about minorities and minority-related issues. The Constitution of Tajikistan in Article 17 provides that “all people shall be equal before the law and the court of law. The state shall guarantee the rights and liberties for every person irrespective of his nationality, race, sex, language, religious beliefs, political persuasion, knowledge, social and property status” (Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, Article 17). Article 2 of the Constitution recognizes Tajik as the state language, Russian as the language “of international communication”, as well as the article provides communities to use their mother tongue freely (Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, Article 2). The Law on the State Language guarantees the protection of the Badakhskhan and Yagnob languages (Article 4), as well as the right to use minority languages in communication, education, and correspondence, even though prioritizing Tajik (Law on the State Language of the Republic of Tajikistan, Article 4). The national legislation guarantees the rights for all national and ethnic groups living in Tajikistan to preserve, develop and protect their culture, set up organisations and cultural centres, plus commits to support minority organisations



within Tajikistan and abroad (Law on Culture of the Republic of Tajikistan, Article 6).

2. Minority Communities in Tajikistan

The communities of Kyrgyzs, Pamiris, Russians, and Uzbeks will be reviewed for this Working Paper. I decided to choose these communities for their relatively big sizes as well as some features that single the communities out.

The Kyrgyz community mainly lives along the borders with Kyrgyzstan, in the mountainous areas of Tajikistan. The community might suffer from tensions caused by the border issues between two countries. Additionally, Kyrgyzs used to speak better Russian than Tajik and consequently find it difficult with the shrinking usage of Russian in Tajikistan.

The next group that will be reviewed in this paper is the Pamiri community. Pamiris reside in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) and for a long time strived for recognition as a national group. However, the community was not recognized and officially is considered as the part of the Tajik nation. The GBAO became a scene for unrests in 2012 and 2014, which were considered by locals as attempts at ethnic cleansing. Currently, the central government is attempting to strengthen its military presence in the GBAO and this situation attracts attention.

Russians enjoyed the status of “political majority”, likewise in almost all Soviet

states, even not being numerically dominant in Tajikistan. Coming to the country during the industrialization and holding the highest positions, the Russian community used to enjoy numerous privileges, including the free use of Russian. However, the situation changed dramatically when the Civil War was waged in Tajikistan causing the mass outflux of Russians and Russian-speaking communities. The remaining representatives of the Russian community can no longer be seen as a political majority due to its insignificant size and rather apolitical position.

Accordingly, Uzbeks are the biggest community after the majority of Tajiks. The Uzbek and the Tajik communities have a continuous history of co-existence and after the collapse of the Soviet Union relations between two communities have been heavily influenced by the attitudes of the presidents of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

The presentation of these four minority communities should suffice to explain the general dynamics in Tajikistan regarding minority-majority as well as minority-government relations. The paper will provide a general description of each selected minority community’s life and background and discuss what kind of challenges those communities usually face.

2.1 Kyrgyz Community

Size and territory of residence

The Kyrgyz community in Tajikistan mostly resides in the mountainous district of Murghab in the GBAO and in the Jirgatal district, which borders with Kyrgyzstan.



According to official data, the Kyrgyz community in Tajikistan amounted to 0.8% in 2012 (Sixth-eight periodic reports of Tajikistan on implementation of the CERD, 2013). Some Kyrgyz families live in the Northern part of Tajikistan, which also borders with Kyrgyzstan.

Language

The Kyrgyz community speaks Kyrgyz and sometimes Russian. As the Kyrgyz community mostly lives compactly, not all of them are able to use Tajik. Some sources reported on state policies to change the geographical names from Kyrgyz into Tajik. For example, in Jirgatol and Murghab, the names of villages were changed to Tajik despite the resistance of the local population, which even led to some tensions with local police force (Zholdoshev, 2011). Requirements to use Tajik in official communication with authorities and for job application processes creates additional challenges for the community.

Education

As of 2012, there were 37 Kyrgyz schools in the country, where 0.2% of the overall schoolchildren studied (Sixth-eight periodic reports of Tajikistan on implementation of the CERD, 2013). The Kyrgyz and Tajik governments have agreed to support the education of each other's kin-minorities, however, teachers at Kyrgyz schools complain about the lack of books and other educational materials. As some teachers confessed, the books that are used in schools are more than ten years old; a serious shortage of literature books is reported,

which, according to teachers, can seriously undermine the position and usage of the Kyrgyz language (Elkeeva, 2015). The Kyrgyz government provides quotas for higher education in Kyrgyzstan for its kin-community (Orunbekov, 2018). The Kyrgyz teachers from Tajikistan get professional training in Kyrgyzstan, following the bilateral agreement between the two governments (OSCE HDIM, 2011).

Religion

The majority of the Kyrgyz community identify as Sunni Muslims, but some practices of Shamanism and Tengrism (a belief that incorporates elements of shamanism, animism, totemism and was practiced before arrival of Islam) still exist among the community (Joshua Project, 2018). The famous Kyrgyz epos of Manas, an ancient mythical hero, still plays an important role for collective memory and identification and can be seen as a source of pre-Islamic practices and beliefs of the community (Joshua Project, 2018). Sharing the same belief with the majority of the population often plays a positive role in facilitating good relations between communities, as no reports inform of discrimination of the Kyrgyz community based on its religious affiliation.

Political participation and representation

The Kyrgyz community resides in specific parts of Tajikistan and therefore the members of the community are mostly employed in the areas of its residence. The official data as of 2012 showed that there were 175 public officials of Kyrgyz origins or 0.9% of the overall public officials in the country (Sixth-



eight periodic reports of Tajikistan on implementation of the CERD, 2013). In 2010, there were 49 Kyrgyz members out of 2765 in the Parliament and all legislative councils throughout Tajikistan (OSCE HDIM, 2011).

Some can argue that presence of Kyrgyzs in the public sphere and parliament is only realised in order to create the image of inclusion in Tajikistan. For example, representatives of the community argued that those Kyrgyz MPs are not capable of drawing attention to the problems of the community as it is not possible to criticise the leadership of the country (Kopytin, 2013).

Kin-state

Relations between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can be characterised as stable except for tensions caused by the difficulties to delimitate the borders. The issue of border delimitation between the two states has featured high in the agenda since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The governments of the two countries had several attempts to negotiate and agree on delimitation, but the agreement is yet to be achieved. Skirmishes and armed clashes between border guards of the two republics often take place, affecting the communities living in border areas first. The existence of the Tajik exclaves on the Kyrgyz territory additionally complicate the situation.

The Kyrgyz government helped its kin-minority during the Civil War by supplying food and other necessary items (Zhusupzhan, 2016). Around 30,000 Kyrgyzs have left for Kyrgyzstan since the 1990s, however, many

confess that the indifference, complicated bureaucratic procedures and difficulties to obtain a Kyrgyz citizenship are amongst challenges they faced when arriving to the kin-state (Azattyk, 2016).

The Kyrgyz community often expresses concerns and dissatisfaction with the passive position of its kin-state towards the needs of the community. The lack of educational materials and introduction of limitations on Kyrgyz language usage, forced introduction of Tajik, and further discrimination are the issues to which the community continuously tries to draw the attention of Kyrgyz authorities to, however, with little result. Yet, in some cases, the community appeals to Kyrgyzstan's proximity so to use services provided by the kin-state. Thus, reports inform that the number of the users of the Kyrgyz mobile networks based in Tajikistan increases gradually and reached 10,000 in 2018 (K.News, 2018). Many users prefer the Kyrgyz mobile network due to its low price, faster Internet and prices to call relatives in Kyrgyzstan.

The issue of obtaining a Kyrgyz citizenship is becoming a sensitive topic that primarily affects the Kyrgyz community. In the Jirgatol district, around 80% of the young population obtained Kyrgyz citizenship, which some experts explain as a way to avoid the obligatory conscription to Tajik army (Isakov, 2016). In the northern part of Tajikistan, in villages located in the border areas, some residents reported that the Kyrgyz authorities force them to obtain a Kyrgyz citizenship as they live on disputed territories, which Kyrgyzstan considers as a part of its state (Asia-Plus, 2016). However,



some other locals confess that people voluntarily obtain a Kyrgyz citizenship due to numerous benefits provided by Kyrgyzstan, including low prices for utilities and gas, better electricity supply and a simplified procedure to obtain a Russian citizenship (Asia-Plus, 2016). Thus, despite the criticism of the Kyrgyz community of its kin-state, it seems to use the benefits provided by the neighbouring state, whilst the Tajik community occasionally tries to do the same.

Economic status

Most of the community is involved in agriculture, especially those that reside in the Jirgatol district and northern Tajikistan. The Kyrgyz community in Jirgatol produce the biggest share of potatoes in the country. Kyrgyzs from Murghab traditionally breed yaks that can live only in high mountainous regions. Generally, the economic conditions of the Kyrgyz community do not drastically differ from the majority of the population and is mainly influenced by the territories of the community's residence. Kyrgyzs also often leave for labour migration to Russia and Kazakhstan.

Self-organisation

The “Association of Kyrgyz of the Republic of Tajikistan” based in Jirgatol is the only officially registered organization that claims to represent the community. However, little is known about the organization's activities and number of members. The reports about discrimination of the Kyrgyz in Jirgatol, forced introduction of Tajik names and signs do not mention the Association at all, which

allows the implication that the organization was rather set up to feature in Tajikistan's international reports.

Recognition

Tajik authorities do not actively challenge the Kyrgyz community's identity despite some discriminatory policies. The community is visible in national census data and official reports by the government. Kyrgyzs can freely mention their identity while applying for passports. This can be explained by the factor that the Tajik government most probably does not consider the Kyrgyz community as a potential threat to the regime, as the community mainly lives in isolated manner and does not interfere in the state's political life. Unwillingness to worsen relations with Kyrgyzstan, which are already complicated due to disputed territories, can suggest another explanation why the Tajik elite does not contest the Kyrgyz community's distinct identity.

2.2 Pamiri Community

Size and territory of residence

The Pamiri community resides in the eastern part of Tajikistan – the Gorno-Badakhskahn Autonomous Oblast (GBO), also known as Pamir. Around 250,000 people or 5% of Tajikistan's population live in Pamir (Sarkorova, 2015). The GBO is a highly mountainous region located a great distance from Dushanbe and separated from Afghanistan by the Panj river. The Pamiri community developed a distinct identity and can illustrate a high level of social cohesion, however the authorities consider Pamiris to be Tajiks. Pamir became a scene for several



unrests in which the local population had armed conflicts with government military forces. Ongoing deployment of military troops in Pamir since September 2018 has the potential to trigger another clash in the region.

Language

Pamiri language is divided into several groups, including Sughnani, Wakhi, Rushani, Bartangi, Yazhgulami. Despite the provision in the Law on State Language guaranteeing state support to the development of the Pamiri languages, it is not possible for Pamiris to use their languages for education, media, or official communication due to limitations imposed by authorities, as well as the absence of the script for Pamiri languages (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018). Several initiatives to develop an alphabet for the languages spoken in Pamir did not yield continuous results and the Pamiri community uses the languages orally. For a short period during the Civil War, the media in the GBAO used local languages, but that was stopped once the conflict was over and more centralized governance was established in the region. The Tajik language is officially used in the GBAO including media, education, communication and social spheres. The majority of the community can speak Russian and English.

Education

The Pamiri community is known for a high level of education in Tajikistan. In addition to state schools in the GBAO, the Aga Khan established the lyceum, the School of

Professional and Continuing Education and the University of Central Asia in Khorog (UCA). The campus of the UCA in Khorog is one of the biggest higher education facilities in the region (University of Central Asia). The Khorog State University is among other higher education bodies that has offered education to the local population since 1992.

Due to the extensive support from the Aga Khan organizations, many young Pamiris can speak English and leave for education abroad. Education of girls and women was traditionally one of the priorities in Pamir, which often becomes another distinct feature that the Tajik majority regards with confusion. As the Pamiri languages are not taught in schools and because the Pamiris are regarded as Tajiks in statistical data, there is no Pamiri-specific information available on the number of schools and pupils.

Religion

Unlike the majority population which is Sunni Muslims, the Pamiri community follows the Ismaili branch of Shi'a Islam. The community has distinct religious and cultural practices which makes them recognizable among other communities. For example, under Ismailism, men and women can pray together and pray three times a day. Many Pamiri women do not wear headscarves, which is perceived as rather negative sign in a traditionally patriarchal Tajik society (Anti-Discrimination Centre Memorial Alternative Report, 2017).

The majority of Pamiris follow the Aga Khan, who is the Imam (spiritual leader) for Ismailis around the globe. Aga Khan is a



hereditary title and Sultan Mahomed Shah is the 49th Imam of Ismailis (AKDN). The Aga Khan's Development Network has established several organizations that support and promote the Ismaili culture. In 2009, the President Rahmon and the Aga Khan opened the Dushanbe Ismaili Centre, which in 2012 was registered by the Committee of religious affairs under the government of Tajikistan as a religious association of Ismailis in Tajikistan (Tursunzoda, 2013).

Despite the support by the Aga Khan and the state authorities, there are cases of discrimination faced by the Pamiri community. Some reports inform that the Pamiris often become subject to stereotypes and biased attitudes from other communities due to different religious practices (Memorial Report, 2017, p. 7).

Political participation and representation

Due to the absence of Pamiri-specific data, no information is available on the number of Pamiri MPs or state servants. The Pamiri community was very active in its attempts to establish a political institution. Thus, in 1990 the movement "La'li Badakhshon" (the Jewel of Badakhshon) was established and throughout the Civil War joined the United Tajik Opposition to promote interests of the Pamiri Community (Berdikulov, 2015). "La'li Badakhshon" was instrumental in supporting the idea of obtaining an autonomous republic status for the GBAO, yet this was never fulfilled (Middleton, 2002). During the Civil War, "La'li Badakhshon" supported Davlat Khudonazarov, a political and cultural activist of Pamiri origins, who ran for

presidential elections and lost to Rahmon Nabiev, the first secretary of the Communist Party of Tajikistan (Middleton, 2002). Later, after signing the Peace Accord in 1997 that settled the Civil War, some members of the "La'li Badakhshon" occupied public positions and parliamentary seats in accordance with the agreement. However, since the end of the Civil War, due to the systematic government policies, the majority of the opposition forces are no longer present within public bodies, which are mainly dominated instead by officials loyal to the incumbent regime.

Currently, there are no institutionalized political movements representing the Pamiri community. However, Pamiris are often considered to be a coherent community with an active civic position that sometimes translates into confrontation with authorities and policies from Dushanbe.

Kin-state

The Pamiri community does not have a kin-state. The Aga Khan¹ and the institute of the Ismaili Imam can be regarded as transnational entity to which many Pamiris relate to due to the religious affiliation. The Aga Khan enjoys a genuine popularity with the Pamiri community and often addresses his followers from the GBAO with statements. For example, during the Civil War, the Aga Khan asked the community to not escalate the conflict and refrain from the violence (Middleton, 2002). When the conflict in 2012 broke out in Khorog between the locals and the central authorities, the Aga Khan in his public statement called for cooperation with authorities and stabilization



of the situation (Ozodagon, 2012). Portraits and photos of the Aga Khan can be seen in various places in the GBAO, including houses and cars, whilst a certain amount of money is transferred to the Imamat during weddings. The Aga Khan visited Tajikistan several times and since his first arrival to Khorog in 1995 he met with the President Rahmon and the Pamiri community.

Having a transnational spiritual leader who enjoys support from the Pamiri community sometimes is met with little understanding from the majority of Tajiks and becomes another distinct feature of the community.

Economic status

The GBAO is the poorest region in Tajikistan. Due to a highly mountainous terrain and remoteness from Dushanbe, no major agriculture or industries have developed in Pamir. Leaving for labour migration became one of few options for locals to provide for their families, and one-tenth of the population decided to do so (Sarkorova, 2015). The Aga Khan organizations play an important role for the economic well-being of the Pamiri community. Particularly, the organizations under the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) are popular in the region due to their activities and affiliation with the Aga Khan. The AKDN started working in the GBAO with the collapse of the Soviet Union and supported the population throughout the Civil War by supplying food through the Kyrgyz territories and establishing local branches to employ the population. Success of the AKDN can be seen in the way the organization chooses to operate: through existing kinships,

information authorities, e.g. village elders, and the region's key figures (Cordier, 2007, p.10).

Tourism became an alternative income source for some of the Pamiri families. Recent initiatives include training young female guides to equip them with necessary skills for professional trekking and survival (Women Rocking Pamirs, 2018).

Despite local and international actors attempting to boost economic development in the GBAO, a high level of drug-trafficking caused by the continuous, poorly guarded border with Afghanistan remains one of the biggest challenges in the region.

Self-organisation

Since the “La’li Badakhshon”, the Pamiri community has not had organizations for representation. As the community members are considered to be a part of the Tajik nation, setting up Pamiri-specific structures would be impossible. Non-recognition of the community forces Pamiris to seek for creative solutions to preserve and promote their cultural heritage. Several NGOs are active throughout the GBAO, which, in addition to project implementations, try to promote the Pamiri culture.

The institution of informal leaders plays an important role in Pamir. Traditionally, informal leaders and activists enjoy genuine support and popularity with locals and act as intermediaries between the community and authorities. Several former Civil War warlords became famous leaders of the community once the conflict finished. These former warlords often became targets of



government policies, which try to limit their scope of influence out of the fear of potential separatist attitudes.

The Pamiri community can organise along religious affiliation and exercise informal networks between the parishes. The Dushanbe Ismaili Centre provides a platform for joint prayers and religious celebrations as well as cultural and educational facilities, and the community actively uses them.

Recognition

As mentioned briefly, the Pamiri community is considered as a part of the Tajik nation. Several factors point to the fact that the government of Tajikistan does not recognize the special status of the Pamiri community. Firstly, there is no information on people with Pamiri origin in the national census. The census rather provides the number of residents of the region, but not the Pamiri ethnicity. Secondly, Pamiris cannot identify as such in their passports and are registered as Tajiks. The government attempts to weaken the community and undermine positions of its leaders can indicate its clear unwillingness to recognize the Pamiri community as a distinct group. Since the Civil War, the GBAO and the Pamiri community were one of the most active supporters of the opposition forces who still can publicly criticise the current regime and this is usually regarded as a threat by the government.

The lack of mutual trust and continuous tense relations between Dushanbe and the GBAO led to several conflicts in recent years. In 2012, an armed clash broke out between the

government forces and the local population in Khorog, during which around 50 people died (Crisis Group Europe and Central Asia Briefing, 2018, p. 5). The official version of the conflict explained that the government was forced to start a military operation in Khorog as the General of National Security Forces Abdullo Nazarov was killed and people suspected for the murder found shelter in Khorog (Turaeva, 2013). The population of Khorog did not deliver the suspects, among which was the local informal leader and former Civil War warlord Tolib Ayombekov, causing the deployment and intervention of the military troops in the region (Turaeva, 2013).

The official version of the 2012 Khorog events was met with criticism among the local population and civil society activists. Some experts called the events in Khorog “ethnic cleansing” (Monitoring report on human rights observance during the special military operation on 24 July 2012 in Khorog, GBAO, 2013, p. 5). The alternative report compiled by independent experts and human rights activists revealed that the military operation perpetuated several violations, including access to information, a free and fair trial, access to medical treatment and a possibility for evacuation (Monitoring report on human rights observance during the special military operation on 24 July 2012 in Khorog, GBAO, 2013, pp. 21-26).

In 2014, the situation in the GBAO escalated again following a skirmish between the police force and a car with people suspected for drug-trafficking. The official explanation of the event suggests that after the attempts of the police force to stop the car, passengers



opened the fire on them (Nezavisimoe mnenie, 2014). After those passengers were detained, the young local men attacked the local department of Interior, the regional court and the prosecutor's office. A meeting took place shortly after where locals called for a free and fair investigation. A joint commission to investigate the events was set up, however, no results were published (Nezavisimoe mnenie, 2014), even though the Prosecutor General and the Head of the Justice Council of Tajikistan travelled to Khorog to assure the community that it was carrying out a fair and free investigation (Radio Ozodi, 2014).

Recent developments in the region include another deployment of military troops in Khorog. In September 2018, President Rahmon visited the GBAO, where he publicly criticized the lack of rule of law and the high level of criminality in the region (Kholikzod, 2018). Rahmon ordered the improvement of the situation and, following this, the heads of law enforcement bodies were replaced in the region. The officials conducted meetings in Khorog explaining that additional forces are present in the region to facilitate the implementation of the orders of the President, including voluntary surrender of firearms by the locals. The heads of the central law enforcement agencies underlined that military forces were deployed also to maintain peace and stability in the face of criminal activities of the six informal leaders, which include organization of criminal groups, destroying public property, drug-trafficking and illegal arms trade (Yuldashev, 2018; Ozodi, 2018). On the 4th of November 2018, a local police officer

allegedly opened fire from a traumatic pistol at a group of local residents (Eurasianet, 2018). The official version explains the incident as an attempt at self-defence by the police officer Khurshed Muhammadzoda triggered by an attack from locals (Asia-Plus, 2018). On the 6th of November, local people gathered for a meeting in front of the local administration building calling for a fair and transparent investigation of the incident (Asia-Plus, 2018). This meeting sets an interesting and unprecedented example of civic activism and attempt for an open dialogue with the officials in the environment of tightening state control and a strong centralized state.

The continuous intervention from the central government in the GBAO has created an atmosphere of mistrust among the Pamiri community towards the government. Some view the military operations as systematic attempt of the government to eliminate the few opposition activists left in Pamir in order to secure the incumbent regime. Others see attempts of "ethnic cleansing" which follows continuous discrimination and unwillingness to consider the Pamiri community as being outside of the Tajik nation. Distinct culture, traditions and language, high social cohesion, and self-identification as the Pamiri allows the implication that the community will continue to seek recognition.

2.3 Russian Community

Size and territory of residence

The Russian community in Tajikistan forms 0.5% of the total population (Sixth-eight periodic reports of Tajikistan on



implementation of the CERD, 2013). Peyrouse argues that the Russian community of Tajikistan was the biggest that left their country of residence after the collapse of the Soviet Union: 85% of the Russian community left Tajikistan and the community's share dropped from 32.4% in 1989 to 1% in 2000, of the total population (Peyrouse, 2008, p. 8). The majority of the Russian community lives urban regions, including Dushanbe, Khujand, Kurgan-Tyube.

The Russian community in Tajikistan provides an interesting case of the community that used to enjoy political influence, high-ranking positions, and communication in their native language regardless of its inferior size due to support from the Soviet Moscow. The situation changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the start of the Civil War in Tajikistan, when the Russian-speaking population became one of the targets during the conflict as it was identified with the Soviet oppression and had to flee.

Language

Russian language is spoken not only by the Russian community in Tajikistan. Recognized as “the language for international communication” in the Constitution of the country, Russian is used by Ukrainians, Kyrgyz, Tartars and others (Constitution of the Republic of Tajikistan, Article 2). Russian was extensively used during the Soviet time and good command in Russian was considered as a valuable advantage for a career. The Russian community did not have a necessity to learn Tajik or other languages,

as media, education, workplaces, and entertainment was always available in Russian. The situation changed in 1989, when the newly adopted Law on State Language limited the usage of Russian and prioritized Tajik to be used in public institutions (Law of the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic “On Language”).

At present Russian is mostly used in cities, while the population's command of Russian is dropping in rural areas. However, Russian is still actively used: major media outlets publications, legislation, and signs are provided in Russian. The urban population tends to send their children to Russian schools because those are often considered to provide a better level of education. Due to a high number of Tajik labour migrants working in Russia, there is a demand to learn Russian and consequently numerous language centres provide courses.

Education

As was mentioned above, Russian schools are in high demand among the urban population of Tajikistan, and their number is increasing. In line with a Tajik-Russian agreement, new Russian schools are being constructed and 30 teachers from Russia are currently working in Tajikistan (Regnum, 2018). Russia is actively supplying schools in Tajikistan with education materials. In 2017 alone, around 70,000 books were received by Russian schools (Regnum, 2018).

As of 2012, there were 18 Russian schools in which 17.6% out of 1.7 million schoolchildren were studying (Sixth-eight periodic reports of Tajikistan on



implementation of the CERD, 2013). The Russian-Tajik (Slavic) University opened in Dushanbe in 1996 and has since become one of the most popular universities in Tajikistan. Furthermore, branches of the Moscow State University and the Russian National University of Science and Technology opened in Dushanbe and are in high demand among high school graduates. In addition to formal universities and schools, the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation (“Russian World”) plays an important role in establishing links between the Russian-speaking population and Russia through its multiple offices in Tajikistan. Established following the Decree of the President of Russia Vladimir Putin in 2007, the Foundation lists among its aims, the: distribution of “objective” information about Russia, supporting learning of Russia and Russian literature, and cooperation with the Russian Orthodox Church (Russkiy Mir).

Religion

The majority of the Russian community follows the Russian Orthodox Church. It is represented by the Church in Dushanbe, maintaining just 500 parishioners out of the Russian community’s population of around 40,000 people (Gaysina, 2017). The small parish allows the assumption that the Russian community is not very religious in Tajikistan. Religion was not a reason for conflicts between the Russian and other communities. The community faced challenges during the Civil War because of its privileged position during the Soviet regime rather than because of differences in faith.

Political participation and representation

Although the Russian community in Tajikistan could dominate political agenda and have easy access to power structures, the situation was changing due to the policies of *korenizatsia* or indigenization. In line with those policies, representatives of the titular nation, i.e. Tajiks, were supported in career advancement and promoted to occupy decision-making positions.

Generally, the Russian community has a very low representation in government bodies as well as in the Parliament. As of 2012, out of 19,225 public servants just 129 were Russians (Sixth-eight periodic reports of Tajikistan on implementation of the CERD, 2013). There were only 5 Russian members of the legislative bodies at the city and district levels out of 2765 members throughout the country in 2010 (OSCE HDIM, 2011). Such low numbers can be the result of the small size of the Russian community in the country, its generally passive position concerning political activism and obstacles limiting participation in decision-making processes. The requirement to know the Tajik language and the lack of networks allowing to success with political career are also among those obstacles.

Kin-state

In 2006, Vladimir Putin approved the State Programme to support voluntary resettlement of compatriots living abroad (The Embassy of the Russian Federation in Tajikistan). This Programme was supposed to invite populations to settle in Russia and prevent the decline in the country’s demography;



supported with employment, accommodation and social payments in Russia. In line with this law, the compatriots living abroad were defined as “citizens of the Russian Federation living outside its territory; people living outside of the Russian Federation and belonging to communities that historically lived in the Russian Federation or those who chose to be connected with Russia through cultural, spiritual, and legal links” (Federal Law on the state policy of the Russian Federation concerning compatriots living abroad, Article 1). Persons who used to be citizens of the USSR either living in former Soviet countries and now citizens of those countries or having become persons without citizenship, both also qualified as compatriots living abroad (Federal Law on the state policy of the Russian Federation concerning compatriots living abroad, Article 1). Such broad interpretation of the Programme allowed a mass movement of the Russian community from Tajikistan to Russia. Representatives of other communities also applied and thus have also left Tajikistan since the launch of the programme.

Multiple offices of the “Russkiy Mir” Foundation are very active on conducting various cultural events and providing scholarships to study and travel to Russia. The Foundation facilitates the supply of education materials, plus generally tries to strengthen the position of the Russian language in Tajikistan.

Despite its small size, the Russian community in Tajikistan is not entirely homogeneous and can be divided into two groups. One group undertook efforts to

integrate into the Tajik society by learning local languages, traditions and establishing contacts with different communities, while the other group lived in an isolated fashion, rarely interacting with other communities, following primarily Russian media and associating themselves with Russia. For the last group Russia became rather a transnational motherland than simply a kin-state.

When raising concerns, the community addresses those to Russia, which illustrates the expectations of the community to be supported by its kin-state. Thus, when there was a lack of finances to build a church in the southern city Kurgan-Tyube, the community expressed its frustrations with the lack of assistance and tried to address the issue with one of the Russian banks that financially supported the community (Deutsche Welle, 2011).

Economic status

As the majority of the Russian community resides in biggest cities of the country, they occupy positions in health care and education. Russians are rarely employed in public sector due to the ethnicization of the public service field that started in 1990s (Peyrouse, 2008). The elderly part of the Russian community faces the biggest challenges in Tajikistan. According to some sources, around 85% of elderly living in Tajikistan that are without any support from family, are from the Russian community (Aripov, 2016).



Self-organisation

The Council of Russian compatriots initially established in 1992 as Russkaya Obschina (Russian Community) claims to unite around 40,000 members (Peyrouse, 2008, p. 11). The Council established several branches and receives financial support from Russia to run activities that mostly focus on cultural promotion and strengthening links with Russia. The Russian foundation of moral, intellectual and national development, the Union of socially vulnerable Russian compatriots, and the Union of Youth of Russian compatriots are also registered as public organizations representing the community in the country (OSCE HDIM, 2011).

Despite the relatively big number of bodies claiming to represent the Russian community, it still is ambiguous as to whether the organizations are popular with their audience. Usually, the activities by these organizations are limited to cultural celebrations and massively supported by Russia, with little is known about daily activities.

Recognition

The Russian community is listed in various official data, including the monitoring reports of the Convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination by Tajikistan (Sixth-eight periodic reports of Tajikistan on implementation of the CERD, 2013). The Tajik authorities try to provide data on Russian schools, media and other organizations functioning in the country. Russians can identify as such in passports and

do not face challenges imposed by public officials. Mostly, the “indirect recognition” of Russians is due to how important Russia is for Tajikistan. Every year, thousands of the Tajik citizens leave for labour migration to Russia and the Tajik authorities do not want antagonize relations with Russia by challenging its kin-minority. The Russian Federation has tightened conditions for the Tajik labour migrants several times in order to lobby its interests with Tajikistan, including the location of the Russian military base in Dushanbe (Sarkorova, 2013).

2.4 The Uzbek Community

Size and territory of residence

The Uzbek community in Tajikistan is relatively heterogeneous, comprising of various ethnic groups distinguished along linguistic, regional, and cultural features. The community includes such groups as Lakais, Kongrats, Chalyshes, Karlyks, Kataghans, Urguts, and others. The Uzbeks constituted up to 12.5% of the total population of Tajikistan in the 2010 National Census, which is a comparatively big decrease from 25% in 1989 (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018). Ferrando suggests that the heterogenous nature of the Uzbek community was used during the census, when some of the groups were singled out and labelled as “Others” instead of Uzbek (Ferrando, 2008, pp. 497, 509).

Uzbeks mainly live in northern region of Sughd, along the border with Uzbekistan, as well as in Khatlon region and in the surroundings of the industrial city



Tursunzade (World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples, 2018).

Language

Uzbeks speak the Uzbek language, which is Turkic-based and belongs to the Chagatai branch (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). Uzbeks living in the country use the Cyrillic alphabet, while Uzbekistan switched to Latin and that caused some challenges in communications between the two communities. Uzbeks living in cities, usually speak Tajik and Uzbek, while those living in rural areas often speak only Uzbek.

Education

There are 77 Uzbek schools and 440 schools with Uzbek classes throughout Tajikistan as of 2018, according to the Ministry of Education (Rakhmonov, 2018). However, many Uzbek parents decide to send their children to Tajik schools for better education and chances to continue studies in universities. For example, in the Southern district of Kabodiyon, in 2015 there were 26 Uzbek schools, but 70% of Uzbek children were going to Tajik schools (Radio Ozodi, 2015). Usually the lack of Uzbek teachers, education materials and a decreasing number of universities offering education in Uzbek influence parents' decisions to send their children to Tajik schools. The situation seems to be changing in line with the thaw in relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and during the visit to Tajikistan the Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed an agreement to build a new Uzbek school (Avesta, 2018).

Religion

Uzbeks are predominantly Sunni Muslims. Religion does not play a dividing role between Uzbeks and Tajiks. Representatives of the two communities often celebrate religious holidays together and visit mosques and sacred places jointly. Religious proximity allowed a high number of mixed marriages as well between the two communities.

Political participation and representation

In Tajikistan, only nation-wide parties can be registered and after three months after registration a party should establish offices in majority of regions, towns, and districts (Law on Political Parties of the Republic of Tajikistan, Article 3). The Uzbek community potentially could establish a party but would face challenges in attracting adequate numbers of the electorate for its offices throughout the country. In 2010, there were 134 representatives of Uzbek origins out of overall 2765 representatives of the national parliament and legislative bodies, including local, city, and district councils throughout the country (OSCE HDIM, 2011). There was only 1 Uzbek MP (out of overall 96 MPs) in the Parliament of Tajikistan in 2010, which can indicate the existence of policies favouring the majority promotion within power structures, as well as illustrating a general passive position of the community with regards to political participation (OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report, 2010, p.20).

The Association of Uzbeks of Tajikistan tries to represent the community and has branches in several regions of the country. The Association usually supports the government



and ruling elite, e.g. supporting the candidacy of the incumbent President Emomali Rahmon during presidential elections (Umarzoda, 2013). However, the Association's leaders distanced themselves from Salim Shamsiddinov, the head of the Association's branch in the Khatlon region. Shamsiddinov was known for his public statements criticising the government's minority policies as well relations between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. After being attacked on the streets of his hometown Kurgan-Tyube, Shamsiddinov went missing in March of 2013 (Radio Azattyk, 2013). Some experts considered the activist's disappearance as connected to his critical position towards the government and claims to support opposition parties during the elections. Later in August of the same year, the body of someone wearing similar clothes to Shamsiddinov's was found in Uzbekistan (Dialogue, 2013). To verify the dead person's identity the DNA test was initiated; however, no further follow-up was ever reported. The story of Shamsiddinov might probably have had a major influence on the Uzbek community's interest and willingness to be involved in political activities. Some representatives of the Association of Uzbeks in the northern city of Khudjand refused to be interviewed for my previous research in the year of Shamsiddinov's disappearance.

Kin-state

Uzbekistan is the community's kin-state and one of the neighbouring countries for the Tajik Republic. The two countries have a rich and yet complicated history of coexistence. Both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan were parts of the Bukharan Emirate until the arrival of the

Bolsheviks in 1920 (Akademik, 2010). Before becoming an independent republic within the Soviet Union, Tajikistan was an autonomous part of the Uzbek SSR in 1925-1929. During the territorial delimitation between the two republics, the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara became parts of the Uzbek SSR. These two cities were long-time historical, religious, and cultural centres for the Tajik identity, and their inclusion into Uzbekistan had become a traumatic event and served as a basis for Tajik nationalist rhetoric.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, during the following Civil War in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan supported the Tajikistan governmental forces headed by the incumbent President Rahmon. However, relations between the two leaders worsened considerably, emanating from personal animosity that grew strong between the two presidents - as some experts put it (Lemon, 2018). This led to the introduction of mutual visa regimes, cancellation of flights, economic blockades, and stopping of energy supplies. Construction of the Rogun Dam in Tajikistan, which is supposed to become the world's tallest dam, complicated relations between the two countries even further. When finished, the dam would heavily rely on the Vakhsh River which supplies water to Uzbekistan and is vital for the country's cotton-production.

Challenging relations between the two states inevitably affected the Uzbek community. Similar for the majority of Tajik citizens, it was difficult for the Uzbek community to visit their relatives in Uzbekistan due to a complicated visa regime and a limited



amount of border crossing points. Uzbeks visiting Uzbekistan often reported on the rude attitudes of the customs officers as well as frequent checks by the police in Uzbekistan. Allegedly, Uzbeks coming from Tajikistan were considered as the “worse” type of Uzbeks or even “betrayers” of the homeland and “spies” of Tajikistan (Klimenko, 2013). However, these kinds of statements should be considered with a great caution as they were mostly made during the times when relations between two countries were extremely strained.

The Uzbek community do not massively migrate to Uzbekistan for settlement, and a complicated procedure of acquiring the Uzbek citizenship might be one of the reasons. The community feeling no attachments and historical memory of Uzbekistan as their “true” home can be another reason.

As a kin-state, Uzbekistan supplies the community in Tajikistan with education materials and introduces quotas for education in Uzbek universities for foreign students. However, frequent reports from teachers and parents of school children point to the lack of education materials (Ergasheva and Shams, 2014). The amount of education materials supplied by Uzbekistan often was not sufficient to provide for the entire school. Since Uzbekistan switched to the Latin alphabet, the exchange of education materials became even more difficult as Tajikistan still uses the Cyrillic alphabet. Due to the alphabet difference, Uzbek schools in Tajikistan often use outdated materials.

Generally, it seems that Uzbekistan as a kin-state was not very interested in supporting its kin-minority, mainly because of the personal attitudes of the former president Karimov. Karimov’s authoritarian regime tended to exploit the rhetoric of external enemies surrounding Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan was often viewed as one of those enemies. The Uzbek community within the Tajik population was not differentiated and hardly ever received any kind of special treatment from its kin-state.

The situation has started slowly changing since the election of Shavkat Mirziyoyev as the President of Uzbekistan in 2016. He initiated the resumption of flights between the two countries in 2017, which had previously been suspended since 1992 (Kenzheeva, 2017). The long-awaited lifting of the visa regimes took place in March 2018, allowing thousands of citizens across the border to visit one another’s countries via an increased number of border cross points (Sputnik News, 2018). With the improvement of relations came the construction of Uzbek schools and plans to supply more education materials. The Uzbek government even indicated its plans to support Tajikistan in constructing the Rogun Dam – something that would not have been imaginable before (Sputnik News, 2018).

The improvement of relations between the two countries fosters travel, communication and cultural exchange, which is expected to positively contribute to the relations between the Tajiks and the Uzbek communities.



Economic status

As the majority of the Uzbek population of Tajikistan resides in rural areas, most of the community is occupied in agriculture, especially the production of cotton. Traditionally, a certain percent of the Uzbek community, especially the Urguts group, is represented in trade, including food and clothing. Urguts are often considered to be well-off and being able to establish a well-organized and strong network which is used for the purposes of jobs, cultural celebrations, and other social activities. Millions of Tajik citizens are working abroad as labour migrants, primarily in Russia, Kazakhstan and some countries of the Middle East, and it would be natural to assume that there are Uzbeks among those.

Generally, it would be safe to say that there is not a significant difference between the economic status of Tajiks and Uzbeks. Some Uzbeks might struggle in seeking employment because of their poor knowledge of Tajik, however, the high unemployment rate and spread of nepotism seem to be major impediments for economic well-being. Cases are known of Uzbeks identifying as Tajiks in their passports for better career opportunities. It might be challenging to occupy high-ranking public positions due to the phenomenon of region-based favouritism, where a ruling elite gives preferences to their fellows from the same region, and not only Uzbeks, but the majority of Tajiks and other communities suffer from these attitudes.

Self-organisation

The Association of Uzbeks of Tajikistan with its central office in Dushanbe seems to be the only organisation representing the community. It has established branches in the Khatlon and Sughd regions, where there is a big Uzbek population. However, little is known about the Association's activities and involvement with the community. The organisation features in the news during elections and other major political events and almost always supports the ruling government and the President. This allows the implication that the Association rather acts as a façade for the community to improve the country's international image, and as such its participative capacities should be treated with caution.

Recognition

Uzbeks are the biggest minority community in Tajikistan, and it would be difficult for the Tajik authorities to ignore its existence. The state reports indicate that the Uzbek community in 2012 constituted 12.3% of the overall population (Sixth-eight periodic reports of Tajikistan on implementation of the CERD, 2013). Uzbeks feature as a community in various data, including official data providing that there were 282 Uzbek schools in 2012 and that the government provides those with education materials (Sixth-eight periodic reports of Tajikistan on implementation of the CERD, 2013). The community representatives can identify as Uzbeks in passport applications without any difficulties imposed by authorities. There were no reports indicating whether the Tajik authorities actively tried to contest the



existence of the Uzbek community on the territory of the country. The fact that Uzbekistan, kin-state for the community, is a neighbouring state decreases the possibilities for the Tajik regime to challenge the identity and organisation of the community, even though the kin-state of Uzbekistan was not actively involved in supporting its kin-minority, as reported earlier.

Conclusions

After looking at four communities, some patterns become visible in majority-minority relations in Tajikistan. First, despite the lack of procedures of recognition in Tajik legislation, some communities face the government's active disagreement that a certain community has a distinct identity, culture, and language. Pamiris, as discussed in the paper, are considered to be a part of the Tajik nation. Despite the Pamiri community's continuous attempts to claim its distinct identity, differences in language, culture and religious practices, the community has never featured in Tajik national censuses. The community cannot officially use its languages in media, education or communication with authorities and the forced introduction of Tajik only undermines the standing of the Pamiri languages. In addition, the Pamiri community is regarded very carefully by the government due to its past active involvement in the Civil War and attempts to claim a full autonomous status for the GBAO. The region's proximity to Afghanistan and poorly guarded borders force the government to look at the community with more caution.

The Uzbek, Russian, and Kyrgyz communities generally seem to be in better conditions as minorities in Tajikistan compared to Pamiris. First, the existence of a kin-state of each of these communities can explain the fact that the Tajik authorities do not challenge their standing as minority communities with distinct identity. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan share borders with Tajikistan and host the Tajik communities on their territories. Ups and downs in the relations of Tajikistan with these two neighbouring countries has never led to active discrimination and targeted policies against the respective communities. The Russian Federation is the most important economic and geopolitical partner for Tajikistan, thus the Tajik authorities would never mistreat the Russian community out of caution to spoil the relations with its kin-state. Second, again in comparison to Pamiris, none of these three communities has actively challenged the incumbent regime or publicly voiced their political or civic position. Except for the Uzbek community, part of which was involved in the Civil War, these communities do not have a history of confronting the Tajik majority. This allows the presumption that the government does not see Uzbeks, Russians, and Kyrgyzs as problematic groups that would potentially threaten the status quo and therefore does not impose challenges to deny those communities' identities.



Notes

¹ The Aga Khan is a hereditary title of the Imam (spiritual leader) for the Shia Ismaili Muslims. The current Aga Khan is 49th Imam, who succeeded his grandfather in 1957. The multi-ethnic communities living in Central Asia, the Middle East, South Asia, Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and North America recognise the Aga Khan as their spiritual leader. Apart from religious duties, the Aga Khan manages a global network of various organisations aimed at community development, cultural promotion, education, and infrastructure. Most of the Aka Khan organisations' headquarters are based in Geneva. For further reading: <http://www.akdn.org/about-us/his-highness-aga-khan-0>

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