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Latinizing the Alphabet in Kazakhstan: Rationale, Legal Foundation, and possible Impact on the status of Russian Language

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Abstract: Upon acquisition of independence in 1991, Kazakhstan was the only post-Soviet state where the titular nation did not have an overwhelming majority, the number of Kazakhs being fewer than the number of ethnic Russians. This explains to a certain extent why the Russian language, unlike other minority languages, has, to date, enjoyed a position of lingua franca in Kazakhstan and is used on equal grounds with Kazakh as the state language. Our contribution attempts to study the possible impact on the status of the Russian language of a 2017 project known as the ‘trinity of languages’—Kazakh, Russian and English—which includes a reform to Latinize the Kazakh alphabet. It will consider the possible polarization in the society with the younger generation possibly choosing English and the older generation preferring the language as they know it.¹

Keywords: Language rights, language policy, intellectual capital, Russian minority in Kazakhstan, Latinization, trinity of languages

I. INTRODUCTION

On 26 October 2017 the President of Kazakhstan signed a decree launching a step-by-step transition of the Kazakh alphabet, currently based on modified Cyrillic script, to the Latin script.² According to the reform’s official implementation plan, all official communication and production

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¹ The authors express their deepest gratitude to Dr. Federica Prina and Prof. Markku Suksi for their reflections and comments on this text. We also thank anonymous reviewers for their valuable input.

² Ukaz of the President of Kazakhstan of 26 October 2017 No. 569 *O perevode alfavita kazahskogo iazyka s kirillitsy na latinskuiu grafiku* (On the transition of Kazakh language alphabet into the Latin script), (with subsequent amendments, the most recent amendment of 19 February 2018), reproduced in the database of Kazakhstan legislation at <https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=33613600>.

of Kazakh-language media will be transferred by 2025 to the Latin script, including textbooks and other literature.³ The process is expected to take place in three stages starting with the development of a normative framework for the transition in 2018-20, progressing through a range of measures related to the design of new textbooks, the training of teachers and specialists in 2021-23, and concluding with the final transfer of all official documents, including new passports in the Latin script for citizens, by 2024-25. The main part of the task relating to the actual implementation of this project started in 2019, with a campaign to provide general accessibility and mass implementation of spelling and phonetic rules, as well as the installation of encoding programmes from Cyrillic on all official government websites. In the same year, it was announced that, in the context of the ongoing reform, a series of video clips and video lectures which aim to teach a new alphabet in the Latin script to the citizens of Kazakhstan would be aired on television channels and released on the Internet.⁴ Although the government has adopted a series of measures to lessen the impact of Latinization, there are a number of obstacles. On a pragmatic level, for instance, the Latin alphabet does not adequately transmit the sounds of the Kazakh language and existing IT programmes need to be adjusted to the new script. At the conceptual level, the difficulty is to accommodate Latinization inside existing language policy settings, with various dimensions such as a multiethnic orientation, Kazakhization, and the internationalization of language use.

In general, the transfer to Latin script only concerns the Kazakh language, without encroaching upon Russian, which continues to be the language of official communication in Kazakhstan. According to official statements, the reform intends to achieve the idea of what is referred to as the ‘trinity of languages’ (*triedinstvo iazykov*), whereby citizens are called upon to master Kazakh, Russian, and English, as it was announced in 2007. Nevertheless, concerns as to what impact Latinization may exert on the status of the Russian language began to spread in society and academic literature. As the Latinization reform gained momentum, those concerns, although occasional, surfaced in the discourse of authorities in Russia. As concerns the opinions of public figures, in November 2017, the Russian MP Aleksei Zhuravlev claimed that the State Duma (the lower chamber of the federal parliament in Russia) should “address the colleagues from

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *O zasedanii Natsional'noi komissii po realizatsii programmy “Ruhani zhangyru”* (On the session of the National Commission on implementing the programme “Ruhani zhangyru”), 22 August 2019, at <http://www.akorda.kz/ru/secretary_of_state/secretary_of_state_news/o-zasedanii-natsionalnoi-komissii-po-realizacii-programmy-ruhani-zhangyru?q=латин>.

Kazakhstan and express concerns regarding Astana's decision to switch to the Latin script".⁵ The parliamentarian continued that although there is currently no violation of the rights of Russian-speaking citizens, the situation could lead to future conflicts. On the positive side, it has been noted that the Russian authorities have "proven reluctant to point to the 'rights' or 'interests' of Russians or the Russian-speaking community" in Kazakhstan.⁶ However, critical perspectives on the side of civil society and the researchers may allege that Latinization downgrades the status of the Russian language in Kazakhstan. In particular, the said initiative may be seen as deliberate marginalization of Russian language and culture.⁷ Although these are mostly speculative opinions on the status of ethnic Russians residing in Kazakhstan, the Russian-speaking ethnic Kazakhs are also naturally affected by Latinization. Academics are invoking arguments about de-Russification of Kazakhstan in general. The most sceptic opinions assert that Kazakhstan's policy can lead not only to the marginalization of the Russian language and culture, but also to the "displacement of Russian-speaking citizens of the country to the periphery of social, political and cultural life".⁸

This article thus aims at studying what possible impact Latinization might exert on the position of the Russian language. Forming part of a project on social capital and language policy, this study is based on scholarly writings, national legislative sources and programme documents, as well as on applicable sources of international law. It draws on legal regulation of language policy in Kazakhstan through the prism of the situation of Russian speakers. The results of a survey conducted by the authors in predominantly Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking regions of Kazakhstan are also analysed in detail. The principle aim of the survey was to identify how difficult it will be for the citizens of Kazakhstan, especially those belonging to the older generation, to learn a new Latin script, and whether these potential difficulties could result in them reading more in Russian and in the cyrilized Kazakh script, thus deepening the gap between generations, with the younger generation likely to choose English.

⁵ *V Kazakhstane rasskazali, kak latinitsa povliiaet na otnosheniia s Rossiei* (They told in Kazakhstan how the Latin script will affect the relationships with Russia), 20 February 2019, available at the webpage of Russian news media corporation "Ria-novosti" at <<https://ria.ru/20180220/1515014930.html?in=т>>.

⁶ Matthew Blackburn, "Discourses of Russian-speaking youth in Nazarbayev's Kazakhstan: Soviet legacies and responses to nation-building" 38 *Central Asian Survey* (2019) 217-236, at 218.

⁷ For instance, Reagan asserts that the shift to the Latin alphabet in the writing of Kazakh is "a political and ideological decision" which both separates the country from Russia's domination and increases ethnic Kazakh identity. Addressing the respective provisions of the Report of the Ministry of Education and Science, the author remarks that "the use of the Cyrillic script inevitably oriented Kazakh culture, language and society towards Russian norms". Timothy Reagan, "Language planning and language policy in Kazakhstan", in Andy Kirkpatrick and Anthony J. Liddicoat (eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Language Education in Central Asia* (Routledge, 2019).

⁸ Irina Anatolievna Dmitrieva, "Iazykovaia politika Respubliki Kazahstan kak indikator etnopoliticheskoi napravlennosti gosudarstva" (Language policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan as an indicator of ethno-political orientation of the state), 3(17) *Vestnik Diplomaticeskoi akademii MID Rossii. Rossiia i mir* (2018), at 98-109.

The article starts with an overview of the position of the Russian language in Kazakhstan as well as the foundations of the ‘trinity of languages’ project which initiated the Latinization project. The authors further consider which direction the official language policy on Latinization in Kazakhstan is taking. The current trend towards language internationalization—or the use of English in everyday communication—unfolds alongside the language Kazakhization, or expansion of the use of Kazakh in all spheres of life. Both processes run within the frame of asymmetrical bilingualism as a part of multiethnic orientation of language use with Kazakh being a state language and Russian (lacking the status of a state language) still dominating in education, science, culture, and mass media. The overarching question is: Could Latinization as a part of language internationalization policy, in fact, rather be a move to potentially fortify Kazakhization and do away with the historical bilingualism targeting the status of the Russian language? The contribution proceeds to analyse the findings of the survey with a view to establishing if Latinization could possibly aggravate the cultural and linguistic bipolarity between the generations. The possibility of Latinization causing an adverse effect on the strengthening of the Kazakh language is rooted in the fact that the ongoing alphabet reform is not a novelty for Kazakhstan: before 1924, a modified Arabic script was in use which was subsequently was switched by the Soviet government first to Latin in 1929 and then to the Cyrillic alphabet in 1940. These changes all served the requirements of different official policies. Their shared legacy was their devastating effect on their own people’s relationship to language, as well as on national intellectual and social capital. Documented results of invaluable work in science and fiction were lost. It devalued many scientific and art achievements produced by previous generations. The most affected were representatives of older generations because of a possibly weaker learning capacity, resulting in an increased generation gap between the younger persons and the elderly. In the meantime, ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Kazakhs stood out as being the most educated, since the Russian state itself did not change its script, or permit its present “subjects” (or Republics inside the Russian Federation) to Latinize their native language alphabets. Once more, we can see Kazakhstan striving towards a cardinal language reform and running comparable risks. The concluding part summarizes the findings.

II. NOT MINORITIES? RUSSIAN LANGUAGE IN KAZAKHSTAN

Having emerged as a distinct group in the sixteenth century, Kazakh people inhabited the steppe. In the nineteenth century, the Russian Empire began to rule the Kazakh lands, leaving Kazakhstan

fully integrated into Russia until the 1860s.⁹ From October 1917 to March 1918, the Soviets consolidated their power in the country.¹⁰ This consolidation continued from the transformation of public power in Russia until Kazakhstan declared independence in 1991. At the time, Kazakhstan was the only multiethnic post-Soviet state in which the titular group did not constitute a majority upon independence.¹¹ Nazarbayev, the first President, remained in power until the spring of 2019 when he announced his resignation.

In 1989, the number of ethnic Kazakhs was almost equal to the number of ethnic Russians: the population of Kazakhstan consisted of 6,5 million ethnic Kazakhs and 6,2 million ethnic Russians with less than 7% of other nationalities.¹² Still in 1989, the Russians of Kazakhstan remained distinct also territorially, as they constituted 70-80% of the population of seven northern regions, thus putting the independent Kazakh leadership at the challenge to “unify massively Russian [...] northern regions with a predominantly Kazakh and Uzbek southern areas.”¹³ There has thus been significant concern on the side of the Kazakhstan government regarding “the group identification trends of Russian-speaking minorities”.¹⁴ Even contemporary scholars mention the possibility of secession of Russian-speaking regions,¹⁵ which keeps a heightened need of coherent language policies on the agenda, or at least a stronger public awareness of the existing ones. Not only does the secession risk, however, reinforce the need for Kazakhstan to keep the optimal language balance but also the need to mitigate the population decrease. Significant mortality rates coupled with the lower birth rates, in addition to the emigration of ethnic Russians to the kin-state, resulted in a decrease of almost 10% of Kazakhstan’s population between 1989 and 1999.¹⁶ Amidst such processes, all efforts to provide favourable conditions to enable ethnic Russians to stay within the country would contribute to slowing the population decrease and provide a workforce for Kazakhstan. These objective factors, coupled with Nazarbayev’s personal pro-Russian orientation explain why his official language policy followed a multiethnic approach and always remained

⁹ Roman Y. Pochekaev, “*Gubernatory i khany. Lichnostnyi faktor pravovoi politiki Rossiiskoi imperii v Tsentral'noi Azii. XVIII- nachalo XX v*” (Governors and khans. Personality factor in legal policy of the Russian Empire in Central Asia. From the eighteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century). (Higher School of Economics Press, Moscow, 2017), 337.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 319-322.

¹¹ Dave Bhavna, “Kazakhstan - Ethnicity, Language and Power” (Routledge, London, New-York, 1st edition, 2007), 118.

¹² Dmitrieva, *op cit.*, note 8, at 101.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Blackburn, *op cit.*, note 6 at 217.

¹⁵ See e.g., Sébastien Peyrouse, “*Nationhood and the Minority Question in Central Asia. The Russians in Kazakhstan*”, 59(3) *Europe-Asia Studies* (2007), at 491; Yelena Nikolayevna Zabortseva, *Russia's relations with Kazakhstan: Rethinking ex-Soviet transitions in the emerging world system*. Collection: Routledge advances in international relations and global politics (Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon, New York, 2016), 55-56.

¹⁶ Peyrouse, *ibid.*, at 482.

cautious [in its goal not to let the position of the Kazakh language becoming weaker than that of Russian](#) [in targeting at soft reverse of marginalization of Kazakh by Russian](#).¹⁷

Even today, Kazakhs and Russians are the most represented groups among the population of Kazakhstan.¹⁸ By 2020, the total population of Kazakhstan comprises 18,690,200 individuals.¹⁹ According to the US Census Bureau, Kazakhs account for 63.1% of the total population, and Russians for 23.7%.²⁰ While the size of the Russian diaspora in Kazakhstan is greater than in any other post-Soviet country in proportion to the overall population,²¹ ethnic Russians have a special status in Kazakhstan. Dymov, for instance, claims that ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan “neither were deemed to be a national minority given their numbers, nor were they a part of what is defined as the Kazakh ‘titular nation’”.²² The peculiarity of the position of Russians in Kazakhstan results also from the nature of their origin.²³ Today, 66% of the Russians living in Kazakhstan were born there, and 37% of those born elsewhere have lived in Kazakhstan for more than 20 years.²⁴ Interestingly, during the Soviet era, the meaning given in Kazakhstan to the word Russian (*russkii*) was “more connected to membership of a cultural and socio-economic group”²⁵ than to the ethnicity. Still today, the studies among the Russian-speaking youth of Kazakhstan prove the existence of “continuity in younger Russian-speakers ... who reject ethnic identity as a principle of state organization”²⁶ while putting emphasis on “belonging to the Russian linguistic and cultural sphere”.²⁷ There is a connection between such societal attitudes and the fact that, “Kazakhstan’s constitution or laws make virtually no mention of any ethnic entitlements”.²⁸ The Russians of Kazakhstan, hence, would fit better into a special category of “non-titularity”, if such a category

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¹⁷ Jacob M. Landau and Barbara Kellner-Heinkele, *Language Politics in Contemporary Central Asia: National and Ethnic Identity and the Soviet Legacy* (I.B. Tauris, London, 2012), 94.

¹⁸ Other ethnicities represented in Kazakhstan are Uzbeks (2.9%), Ukrainians (2.1%), Uighurs (1.4%), Tatars (1.3%) and Germans (1.1%). *Ibid.*

¹⁹ As of 1 April 2020, available at <<https://stat.gov.kz/>>, the official webpage of the State Statistical Committee.

²⁰ Kazakhstan’s population in 2019, at <<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/kazakhstan-population/>>. For the purpose of this contribution, the authors have used this US data since the Statistical Committee contains the latest data regarding the population census as of 2009. The next national population census is foreseen in 2020, at <https://stat.gov.kz/census/national/2020>.

²¹ Peyrouse, *op cit.*, note 15, at 482.

²² Oleg G. Dymov, *Teplo kazakhstanskoi zemli*. Almaty, Arys, 1999, cited against Peyrouse, *ibid.*, at 483.

²³ Peyrouse, *op cit.*, note 15, at 482.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Blackburn, *op cit.*, note 6 at 2019.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, at 228.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Dave Bhavna, Minorities and participation in public life in Kazakhstan, working document of the Sub-regional Seminar “Minority Rights: Cultural Diversity and Development in Central Asia”, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Bishkek, October 2004, 14.

existed, than to the normal understanding of national minority.²⁹ As for now, ordinary ethnic Kazakhs normally view Russia “as [their](#) favourite neighbour”,³⁰ although they see it “cumbersome and domineering”. Ethnic Russians though appear “ambivalent towards Kazakh language promotion and anxious about the increasing presence of Kazakh speakers in urban spaces”.³¹ This being said, the decline of the Russian-speaking population “raises the prospect of a more monoethnic, Kazakh-speaking country, reducing the salience of the ‘Russian question’”.³² At the same time, strengthening the position of the Kazakh language is observed alongside the official aim to live in a multiethnic state.

As regards the position of the Russian language, the 1995 Constitution of Kazakhstan does not entitle it to have the status of a state language. However, the constitution presupposes equal usage of both, Kazakh as the state language (Article 7(1)), and Russian (Article 7(2)). This takes place amidst the conditions when the same constitutional article stipulates that the state undertakes to “promote conditions for the study and development of the languages of the people of Kazakhstan”. usage is, therefore, neither an official language of the state nor any of the other languages of the peoples of Kazakhstan. Article 4 of the 1997 Law of Kazakhstan “On the languages in Kazakhstan”³³ (hereinafter: the 1997 Law on languages) specifies that the state language means “the language of state administration, legislation, court proceeding[s] and document processing which operate in all spheres of public relations in the entire territory of the state”. Article 5 of this law does not articulate the difference between the status of Russian and Kazakh limiting itself to reinstating the constitutional rule, following which Russian is officially used in state organizations and organs of local self-government on an equal footing with Kazakh. In 1997, the Constitutional Council of Kazakhstan provided an interpretation of Article 5 of the Law on languages. According to this interpretation, Kazakh and Russian languages are used on an equal basis in state organizations and local governments, regardless of circumstances.³⁴ The category of Russian-speaking (*russkoyazichnie*) citizens *per se* “is avoided by the authorities”.³⁵

²⁹ According to Blackburn’s recent findings, “Russian-speaking minorities largely accept their status beneath the Kazakh ‘elder brother’ and do not wish to identify as a ‘national minority’”. Blackburn, *op cit.*, note 6 [at 217](#).

³⁰ Peyrouse, *op cit.*, note 15 at 486.

³¹ Blackburn, *op cit.*, note 6 at 217.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 151-I of 11 July 1997 *O iazykakh v Respublike Kazakhstan* on the languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan (with subsequent amendments, the most recent dated 24 May 2018), reproduced in the database of Kazakhstan legislation at <https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1008034>.

³⁴ *Postanovlenie* of the Constitutional Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 8 May 1997 No. 10/2 *Ob obrashchenii Prezidenta Respubliki Kazahstan v sootvetstvii Konstitutsii Respubliki Kazahstan predstavlenogo na podpis' Prezidentu Respubliki Kazahstan Zakona Respubliki Kazahstan "O iazykakh v Respublike Kazahstan"*, *primatogo Parlamentom Respubliki Kazahstan 12 marta 1997 goda*: [\(—\)](#) On the appeal of the President of the Republic of

The legislation elevates the use of Kazakh in administrative procedures where, e.g. considering cases of administrative offences is run, as a rule, in state language with the possibility to use “other languages” [but not specifically Russian]’.³⁶ Moreover, the acts of state organs should be “developed and adopted” in Kazakh.³⁷ If necessary these acts can be “developed in Russian”³⁸ and supplemented with translation into other languages, where possible. In other words, drafting and deliberating processes within the law-making procedure can be carried out in both languages but only in Kazakh is the law adopted with the subsequent translation into Russian and other languages. In 2007, the Constitutional Council of Kazakhstan established that the legislation should ensure the opportunity for individuals and legal entities to address state authorities and organs of local self-government, as well as receive information from them, equally in Kazakh or in Russian “regardless of the language in which the records are kept”.³⁹ Accordingly, the 1997 Law on languages was amended, and it nowadays stipulates that the replies to citizens’ are provided by public authorities in the Kazakh language or in the language of the address.⁴⁰

There is more leeway in the 1997 Law on languages for using Russian in dealing with the public records, serving in the armed forces, and concluding arrangements where both Kazakh and Russian languages can be used. The law further stipulates the role of Russian in other than official public spheres, i.e., science, the arts, and the mass media while the use of both Kazakh and Russian is guaranteed in education and science. The role of Russian in mass media is seen as less significant since Article 18 of the 1997 Law on languages provides that the state ensures the functioning of

Kazakhstan on the compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan ‘On Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan’ adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 12 March 1997 and submitted for signature of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, reproduced in the database of Kazakhstan legislation) at <https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1008337#pos=1;48>. NB: Normative interpretations by the Constitutional Council enjoy the status of sources of law, according to Article 4 of the constitution.

³⁵ Blackburn, *op cit.*, note 6, at 218. This can be addressed to official efforts towards a multiethnic state ideal.

³⁶ Art. 14 of the 1997 Law on languages.

³⁷ Art. 9 of the 1997 Law on languages.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Dopolnitel'noe postanovlenie Konstitutsionnogo Soveta Respubliki Kazahstan No. 3 of 23 February 2007 “Ob istolkovanii postanovleniia Konstitucionnogo Soveta Respubliki Kazahstan ot 8 maia 1997 goda № 10/2 «Ob obrashchenii Prezidenta Respubliki Kazahstan o sootvetstvii Konstitutsii Respubliki Kazahstan predstavlenno na podpis' Prezidentu Respubliki Kazahstan Zakona Respubliki Kazahstan «O iazykah v Respublike Kazahstan», priniatogo Parlamentom Respubliki Kazahstan 12 marta 1997 goda»* [Postanovlenie of the Constitutional Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 3 of 23 February 2007. Addendum “On interpreting the Postanovlenie of the Constitutional Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 8 May 1997 No. 10/2 «On the Request of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Constitutionality Check of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On the languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan», priniatogo Parlamentom Respubliki Kazahstan 12 marta 1997 goda», adopted by the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan on 12 March 1997 and submitted for the approval of the President”](https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1008337#pos=1;48), reproduced in the database of Kazakhstan legislation, at <https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30091074#sub_id=1000>.

⁴⁰ Art. 11 of the 1997 Law on languages.

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“the state and other languages” in mass-media. These formulations can hardly meet the current realities where Russian is widely used in science, ~~and the works of fiction literature~~ as well as in mass media and the arts.

Such a constitutional solution differs from straightforward constitutional foundations of official bilingualism which can be found, e.g., in the Constitution of Finland, Section 17 of which guarantees the existence of two state languages, Finnish and Swedish, and equality of their usage “before courts of law and other authorities”, including the right “to receive official documents in that language”.⁴¹ Section 17, furthermore, requires that “public authorities shall provide for the cultural and societal needs of the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations of the country on an equal basis”. The asymmetry of language balance in Kazakhstan is not only due to the highlighted ambiguity of the constitutional formulations but also to the fact that, in reality, the Russian language has so far dominated all spheres of life in Kazakhstan, leaving the Kazakh language in the position of a lesser-used language. Nevertheless, in 2004, “[W]ith respect to its social functions, Russian retains its traditional strength as a means of communication in science, education and mass media” still playing “a prominent role in business correspondence”.⁴² By 2007, only 30% of official documentation had been drafted in Kazakh.⁴³ Russian still remains a dominant language in education “with English, advancing slowly as a higher education instruction language”.⁴⁴ In urban areas, Russian-language schools prevail since 80% of Kazakh schools are located in rural areas.⁴⁵ Among those 80%, almost 50% are the so-called low-grade schools, i.e., those with a small number of students which makes it difficult to provide students and teachers with access to libraries, cultural institutions, information technology, distance education, etc.⁴⁶ Universities offer the possibility to study either in Kazakh or in Russian. The situation with regard to balancing the use of languages in the mass media also suggests the dominance of Russian. In 2007, more than 2,300 newspapers and magazines were published yet only 458 of them were in the state language. Out of 215 national and local television and radio channels, only five broadcast in

⁴¹ Constitution of Finland, 731/1999, reproduced in the database of Finnish legislation “Finlex,” at <<http://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/asiasanat.php?start=a&id=1139>>.

⁴² UN CERD, Third periodic report of Kazakhstan, CERD/C/439/Add.2, dated 14 May 2004, at 163.

⁴³ Landau and Kellner-Heinkele, *op cit.*, note 17, 128-129.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, at 110.

⁴⁵ Juldyz Smagulova, “The re-acquisition of Kazakh in Kazakhstan: Achievements and Challenges”, in Elise S. Ahn and Juldyz Smagulova (eds.) *Language Change in Central Asia* (De Gryuter Mouton, Boston/Berlin, 2016) at 96.

⁴⁶ *Postanovlenie* of the government of Kazakhstan of 21 November 2007 No. 1122 *O kontseptsii rasshireniia sfery funktsionirovaniia gosudarstvennogo iazyka, povysheniia ego konkurentosposobnosti na 2007-2010 gody*, (On the concept of enhancing the sphere of functioning of the state language and increasing its competitiveness in 2007-2010), at <<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P070001122>>.

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the state language.⁴⁷ At the same time, Zabortseva reports a significant limitation of language use in Kazakh media when the media allows a differentiated use of languages to portray specific events and, in particular, when the contents and focus of the reports of the same events differ in the Kazakh and Russian newspaper versions.⁴⁸ Russian still remains the medium language of communication in the sphere of mass culture and entertainment. In 2007, the low quality of entertainment programmes in Kazakh, as well as their lack of relevance decreased their attractiveness and consequently failed to contribute to the formation of a culture of language and speech.⁴⁹ A similar scenario is largely in place today.

The language issue had, in fact, been one of the most significant questions during the elaboration of the draft of the present 1995 constitution.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the matter of granting the status of a state language to the Russian language has never officially been considered by the parliament of Kazakhstan. The first draft of the 1995 constitution omitted the clause on the parity of Russian and Kazakh languages in the area of public administration. It was only after efforts by the mass media, alarmed by the downgrading the Russian language, and the *Grazhdanskoe soglasie* (Civil accord faction) inside the parliament, which argued for the granting Russian the status of state language, that a compromise was reached and the clause on the parity of languages was included in the new constitutional draft.⁵¹ The idea that the Russian language could enjoy a status of state language thus remained nothing more than a desire of pro-Russian politicians. Although by now, a “delicate balance remains in Kazakhstani society between Russian-speaking and Kazakh-speaking components”,⁵² Nazarbayev’s resignation and thus the departure of his notorious “Russophone leadership”⁵³ is said to “have a bearing on the future role of non-titular Russian-speaking citizens”.⁵⁴ This could probably explain considerable concerns about the status of Russian-speakers in connection with the Latinization process under the new leadership.

III. LATINIZATION AS A PART OF THE ‘TRINITY OF LANGUAGES’ PROJECT

The idea of Latinization progressed rather slowly in Kazakhstan, if compared with, e.g. Turkmenistan, where the shift of alphabet was announced in 1993, and by 1999, all national

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Zabortseva, *op cit.*, note 15, 95.

⁴⁹ *Op cit.*, note 46.

⁵⁰ Sergej G. Sheretov, *Noveishaia istoriia Kazakhstana* (1985-2002gg), (The recent history of Kazakhstan (1985-2002)). A textbook, (Almaty: Iurist, 2nd Edition, 2003), 39.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

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newspapers were published in Latin.⁵⁵ The first official attempts towards implementing the change of alphabet date back to October 2006 when Nazarbayev presented the idea of Latinizing the Kazakh language in his speech at the XII session of the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan.⁵⁶ Nazarbayev urged that changing the script is a “deferred” problem which must be seriously addressed since Latin graphics dominate the global communication space. In February 2007, in his address to the people entitled “New Kazakhstan in the New World”,⁵⁷ Nazarbayev promoted the idea of the ‘trinity of languages’—Kazakh, Russian, and English. This trinity was planned as a “cultural project” serving the goal of perceiving Kazakhstan “throughout the world as a highly educated country, the population of which uses three languages”.⁵⁸ The reforms targeting the ‘trinity of languages’ commenced officially in 2012 on the basis of the Strategy Kazakhstan-2050.⁵⁹ The goal of trilingualism is nowadays seen as a separate area of national policy in this strategy. To promote this policy, the Latinization reform started in October 2017 with the intention of completion by 2025.⁶⁰

The ‘trinity of languages’ primarily targets children, as the 2007 address also set up the ambitious goal of inviting foreign specialists to primary schools so that “average school could provide an opportunity for children to learn a foreign language at the highest level”. The same year, the 2007 state programme on the development of education was adopted⁶¹ which identified further significant goals enhancing the use of English in education and science. Firstly, the staff of educational institutions should meet the new qualification requirements of producing published works in leading foreign peer-reviewed periodicals in English. Secondly, the scientists should complete courses in English language. Thirdly, the universities should create attractive conditions to invite foreign scholars to work and live in Kazakhstan for extensive periods and include adequate wages and accommodation.

⁵⁵ William Fierman, “Identity, Symbolism, and the Politics of Language in Central Asia”, 61(7) *Europe-Asia Studies* (2009) at 1219.

⁵⁶ Speech (*Vystuplenie*) of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev at the XII session of Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan. Astana, 24 October 2006, at <<http://www.zakon.kz/77635-vystuplenie-prezidenta-respubliki.html>>.

⁵⁷ *Poslanie* of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev to the people of Kazakhstan (*Novyi Kazakhstan v novom mire*)/ New Kazakhstan in the new world, 27 February 2007, at <https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30090760#pos=45;-40http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/K070002007>.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Address of 14 December 2012 by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N.A. Nazarbayev, “Strategy Kazakhstan-2050”, at <https://www.akorda.kz/en/addresses/addresses_of_president/address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-kazakhstan-leader-of-the-nation-nnazarbayev-strategy-kazakhstan-2050-new-political-course-of-the-established-state>.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Decree (*Ukaz*) of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 20 June 2007 No. 348 *O Gosudarstvennoi programme razvitiia nauki Respubliki Kazakhstan na 2007-2012 gody* (On state programme of developing the science in the Republic of Kazakhstan in 2007-2012 (not in force)), at <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/U070000348>.

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Latinization as a project has a number of apparent incoherencies. The first version of the Latin alphabet, affirmed by Nazarbayev's decree of 26 October 2017,⁶² used apostrophe signs. Already in 19 February 2019, based on the decree of the new President, Kassym-Jomart Tokaev,⁶³ the alphabet was changed because specialists found the previous version to be incorrect. By March 2020, the work on fine-tuning the alphabet was still in process, and the authorities picked up five further amendments to be upheld by the President after having invited specialists and scholars as well as the general public to submit their vision of the alphabet.⁶⁴ Implementation of the campaign revealed other large-scale practical problems, such as an insufficient number of teaching staff who are qualified in the Kazakh language as well as technical issues including failures in the IT decoder programmes.

This incoherence is, however, not only of a technical nature. Officially, the transfer of the Kazakh alphabet into Latin is considered part of the 'trinity of languages' project which represents a separate direction of national policy. Transition to the Latin script is also declared to go ahead under the internationalization policy objective, i.e. being a precondition for the effective integration of Kazakhstan into the world cultural space. Therefore, the portrayal of Latinization as the tool to achieving Kazakhstani identity, on the one hand, and as the means to internationalize the state, on the other hand, both within a separate direction of national policy, is a significant problem. It serves two possibly conflicting policy vectors, i.e., nationalization and internationalization. The following example provides a good indication of this lack of coherency. The 2011, the State Programme on the Functioning and Development of Languages in 2011-2020 was adopted⁶⁵ and is no longer in force. The initial version of this programme had no mention of Latinization. In July 2018, i.e. before the programme had later been denounced by the new President in 2019, the government elaborated a parallel programme on the functioning and development of languages in 2011-2020

⁶² Decree (*Ukaz*) of the President of Kazakhstan of 26 October 2017 No. 569 *O perevode alfavita kazahskogo iazyka s kirillitsy na latinskuiu grafiku*, *op cit.*, note 2.

⁶³ Decree (*Ukaz*) of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 19 February 2018 No. 637 *O vnesenii izmeneniia v Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Kazahstan ot 26 oktiabria 2017 goda No. 569 'O perevode alfavita kazahskogo iazyka s kirillitsy na latinskuiu grafiku'* (On amending the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 26 October 2017 No. 569 On the translation of the Kazakh language alphabet from Cyrillic into Latin script, in *SAPP Respubliki Kazahstan*, 2018, No. 8 item 21, at <https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=34288412#pos=4;-190>.

⁶⁴ *Kak izmenitsia kazahskii alfavit. Uchenye vnesli 5 korrektyv* (How will the Kazakh alphabet change. Scientists made five adjustments, at <https://tengrinews.kz/kazahstan_news/kak-izmenitsya-kazahskiy-alfavit-uchenye-vnesli-5-korrektyv-392367/>.

⁶⁵ Decree (*Ukaz*) of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 29 June 2011 No. 110 *O Gosudarstvennoi programme razvitiia i funkcionirovaniia iazykov v Respublike Kazahstan na 2011-2020 gody* (On the State Programme on the Functioning and Development of Languages in 2011-2020 (not in force)) in *SAPP Respubliki Kazahstan*, 2011, No. 43 item 555, at <<http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/U1100000110>>.

which is still in force.⁶⁶ This 2018 programme, adopted after the promulgation of the 2017 Nazarbayev’s decree on Latinization, already puts Latinization of the alphabet on the agenda. This example also shows a strong policy dependency on current leadership.

As for the attempts to comprehend the inner relationships between the three languages, the 2007 address by Nazarbayev⁶⁷ saw trilingualism as a hierarchical structure, indicating the place and significance of each language in the process of state development. In this structure, Kazakh language remains the state language while Russian is seen as “the language of interethnic communication” co-existing with English as “the language of successful integration into the global economy”. This hierarchical structure reflects the existing legislative architecture where the practical use of languages is differentiated with the finest nuances (see, e.g., the rules of Kazakh use in legislation and in administrative procedures in Part II of this contribution). Although, as mentioned earlier, both Kazakh and Russian enjoy constitutional protection and can be used as languages of legislation, there is currently no tangible attempt towards entitling the use of English with the same constitutional status under the constitution.

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The situation with the language reforms in Kazakhstan is in many ways unique. To start with, the ‘trinity of languages’ aims officially to reorient the Kazakh population towards English as the language of the future. However, unlike the case of Russian speakers, there is no English-speaking group in the country. One could probably conclude that the use of the Latin alphabet in a context that otherwise would not support its use, is unconventional when an independent State makes a decision to elevate a language with no historical link to the country, into an important position in relation to the two other languages. The ‘trinity of languages’ will inevitably mean greater distancing from the Russian-speaking language environment. At present, Latinized Kazakh is not used widely. For instance, the official Government Gazette entitled *Egemen Kazakhstan* is published in Latinized Kazakh script.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, as of March 2020, the version of the government website offers three interfaces: in Cyrillic Kazakh, Russian, and English.⁶⁹ Separate

⁶⁶ *Postanovlenie* of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 2 July 2018 No. 401 *O Gosudarstvennoi programme razvitiia i funkcionirovaniia iazykov v Respublike Kazahstan na 2011 – 2019 gody* (On the State Programme on the Functioning and Development of Languages in 2011-2020, at <<http://prokuror.gov.kz/rus/dokumenty/gosudarstvennyy-yazyk/o-gosudarstvennoy-programme-razvitiya-i-funkcionirovaniya-yazykov-v>>.

⁶⁷ *Op cit.*, note 57.

⁶⁸ The internet version of *Egemen Kazakhstan* in Latinized Kazakh language can be found at <<http://lat.egemen.kz/>>.

⁶⁹ Official webpage of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at <<http://government.kz/public/en>>.

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governmental agencies use the Latinized Kazakh interface, such as e.g., the Statistical Committee of the Ministry of Economics,⁷⁰

It is essential that the pursuit of any language policy by the government of Kazakhstan should consider the existing position of the Russian language. In order to see how Latinization could affect the position of the Russian language, the following part of this contribution will examine all three existing directions of this policy.

IV. KAZAKHIZATION, MULTIETHNIC ORIENTATION, AND INTERNATIONALIZATION AS THE TERMS VIS-À-VIS THE EXISTING BILINGUALISM

The pursuit of a language policy with the Russian dimension in mind, as already mentioned, is not only due to the numerical significance of ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan. The Russian language has so far been used there as a lingua franca for different ethnic groups in the state and with the citizens of the CIS where all communication, including business transactions, were held in Russian. The previous 1993 Constitution of Kazakhstan gave Russian the official status of a language of interethnic communication (*iazyk mezhnatsional'nogo obshcheniia*). It guaranteed “the preservation of the scope of the language of communication among different nations and other languages” as well as “their free development”. The amended 1995 constitution, as well the 1997 Law on languages, omit the term “language of inter-ethnic communication” with respect to Russian, proclaiming that it is used on an equal footing with Kazakh, the state language. Considering how Latinization can potentially affect the status of the Russian language and minorities in Kazakhstan, the contribution explores Kazakhization, multiethnic orientation, and internationalization through the three vectors of language policy. In so doing, one should keep in mind the fact that constructing any national identity in post-Soviet space is hardly thinkable without juxtaposing this identity with the Russian culture and language.

The differentiation of language policy vectors in Kazakhstan in this contribution is built upon the contributors’ analysis of legislation and policy documents coupled with an analysis of academic writings and, in particular, the findings of Laruelle who stands for three “discursive paradigms of state identity” which are vital to nation-building in Kazakhstan, i.e., Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness,

⁷⁰ Official webpage of the Statistical Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, at <https://stat.gov.kz/>.

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and Transnationalism.⁷¹ Kazakhness embraces the policies of Kazakhization in all the spheres of life, reflecting the idea of ethnic Kazakhs being the titular and central core group of the country.⁷² Kazakhstanness represents the commitment to a multiethnic (*mnogonatsional'noe*) state where all individuals, irrespective of their ethnicity, share Kazakhstani identity.⁷³ Transnationalism building on the promise of economic prosperity for all, reflects the idea of Kazakhstan's evolving into a ranked developed state which leads international events.⁷⁴

Hence, Latinization (affecting all three vectors) is potent to exert influence on the existing bilingualism in Kazakhstan, which is often called "asymmetrical"⁷⁵ due the Russian language remaining so far as *lingua franca* but lacking a status of a state language. Having appeared as a part of a wider project of trinity of languages, Latinization penetrates all the three policy vectors while elevating the status of Kazakh, encouraging "trilingualism" with English as a new *lingua franca*, both amidst the condition where Russian still remains as the preferred language of the educated population. Let us consider how ongoing reform on Latinizing the alphabet fits into each of the said three narratives. With this we can follow the possible impact of Latinization on Russian language and minority.

A. Multiethnic orientation vis-à-vis Latinization

Since after acquisition of independence, it was difficult to deny the *de-facto* predominant position of Russian language in Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev officially aimed at promoting "Kazakhstani" civic identity of post-independent Kazakhstan rather than pure "Kazakh" ethnic identity. This was done under the auspices of the official policy targeting at "creating favorable conditions for satisfying the national cultural requirements of all ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan".⁷⁶ This differentiates Kazakhstan from such post-Soviet states as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan who, after acquisition of independence from the Soviet Union, made their ethnic languages official having also done away with Cyrillic alphabet.⁷⁷ Although "titular languages were a means to assert a

⁷¹ Marlene Laruelle, "The Three Discursive Paradigms of State Identity in Kazakhstan: Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness and Transnationalism", in Mariya Y. Omelicheva (ed) *Nationalism and Identity Construction in Central Asia: Dimensions, Dynamics, and Directions* (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2015), 1-20.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-12.

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Juldyz Smagulova, "Language Policies of Kazakhization and their Influence on Language Attitudes and Use", *Multilingualism in Post-Soviet Countries* (2008), 11(3-4).

⁷⁶ Fierman, *op cit.*, note 55.

⁷⁷ According to Fierman, individual leaders in independent Central Asian states opted for diverse policies with "one extreme", represented by Turkmenistan and its "bold policy of Turkmenisation and de-Russification" and 'nationalisation' in Uzbekistan. Whereas "the nation-building projects in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have been less

newly won independence”,⁷⁸ Kazakhstan chose a different path, in line with Kyrgyzstan where the knowledge of Russian is still widely spread among the younger people.⁷⁹

The Strategy Kazakhstan-2050⁸⁰ aims at strengthening the multiethnic state based on achieving “new Kazakhstani sense of citizenship” (*novyi kazakhstanskii patriotizm*). Language policy is expected to play a major role as a consolidating instrument in achieving this goal. The 1995 Constitution of Kazakhstan, nevertheless, differentiates between “Kazakh” (land) and “Kazakhstani” (civic concept of nationalism),⁸¹ “provoking many polemics since it again plays a paradoxical game on the national question, defining Kazakhstan both as the state of Kazakhstani people and as the state of Kazakhs”.⁸² In order not to forget the strive towards multiculturalism, the official discourse on building the ‘Kazakhstani’ identity becomes extremely topical. To accentuate such identity, the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan was created in 1995 which is *per se* a move signifying that the public architecture in the republic is not based on the principle of nationality but on the principle of equality before the law and respect for human rights. The Assembly, established following the Presidential Decree of 1 March 1995, was initially granted the status of the presidential consultative body. In 2008, its status was cardinally revised and the law “On the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan” was adopted by the parliament.⁸³ The assembly became an institution not directly subordinated to the President but formed by the head of state, “which promotes the development and implementation of the state policy to ensure public consent and national unity”.⁸⁴ This assembly is supposed to represent the cultural centres of the minorities yet, based on the organic law “On elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan”,⁸⁵ has the right to elect nine deputies of the Majilis of the Parliament. The President decides on nominating its

exclusive, and they have allowed more prominent representation of non-titular groups and their languages”. *Ibid.*, at 1217.

⁷⁸ Ayse Dietrich, “Language Policy and Hegemony in the Turkic Republics”, in Ernest Andrews (ed.) *Language Planning in the Post-Communist Era: The Struggles for Language Control in the New Order in Eastern Europe, Eurasia and China* (Springer, 2018) 145-167, at 161.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, at 158.

⁸⁰ Address by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Leader of the Nation, N.A. Nazarbayev, “Strategy Kazakhstan-2050”, *op cit.*, note 59.

⁸¹ The Preamble of the Constitution provides that: “people of Kazakhstan, united by a common historic destiny” create statehood on the “ancient Kazakh land”, [the English text of the Constitution of Kazakhstan is available at <https://www.akorda.kz/en/official_documents/constitution>](https://www.akorda.kz/en/official_documents/constitution).

⁸² Peyrouse, *op cit.*, note 15, at 485.

⁸³ Law of 20 October 2008 No. 70-IV *Ob Assamblee naroda Kazahstana* (On the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan), in: *Vedomosti Parlamenta RK*, 2008, No. 17-18 (2522) item 70, at <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z080000070_>.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Art. 1.

⁸⁵ Organic (constitutional) law of 28 September 1995 No. 2464 *O vyborakh v Respublike Kazahstan* (On Elections in the Republic of Kazakhstan), in: *Vedomosti Verhovnogo Soveta Respubliki Kazahstan*, 1995, No. 17-18 item 114, at <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/Z950002464_#z393>.

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320 members, half of whom, in reality, work in public administration.⁸⁶ In other words, this organ with the features of a regular state body, has significant public powers. Mostly appealing to this fact of close affiliation with the authorities, Peyrouse, for instance, expresses criticism regarding the efficiency of the assembly when representing the interests of Russian and other minorities.⁸⁷

The text of the 1995 constitution is *per se* confusing in terms of clearly stipulating the multiethnic vectors of development. For instance, Irina Dmitrieva of the Diplomatic Academy, under the aegis of the Russian Foreign Ministry, remarks that the Strategy “juggles” with the two terms which are “far from being synonymous”, i.e. “Kazakhstani” and “Kazakh,”⁸⁸ as does the preamble of the 1995 constitution. The 2012 Strategy anchors the term “Kazakh” with the adjective “native” proclaiming e.g., that “the sovereignty and independence is cemented by native language.” Dmitrieva inquires, if the state is declared multiethnic, how can the Kazakh language be native for Russian-speaking Kazakhs, 21% ethnic Russians and other ethnic groups of Kazakhstan?⁸⁹ The attempt to build trilingualism in a state where a historical English-speaking group is lacking seems no less confusing.

B. Building Kazakhstani identity: Kazakhization

Amidst the multiethnic vector of language use, the presence of a considerable Russian minority coupled with the long-term Soviet policy of Russification/Sovietization “weakened the Kazakh state at national level”.⁹⁰ Kazakh remained mostly a spoken language. Since at the times of acquisition of independence “even among ethnic Kazakhs, only a minority in urban areas was literate in Kazakh”,⁹¹ this alone could be the reason for starting a soft (i.e. run cautiously, not encroaching upon a multiethnic discourse) promotion of the titular status. The vector on multiethnic language use begins to share space with nationalist policies, as Kazakhstan starts to “simultaneously promote multiethnic vector and a more homogenizing ‘Kazakhization’ of society”.⁹²

The process of language “Kazakhization” intensified in the second half of the 1990s, based on several official documents targeted at the enhancement of the position of the Kazakh language while preserving, at least *de jure*, the status of the Russian language. On 7 November 1996 the

⁸⁶ Peyrouse, *op cit.*, note 15, at 483.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Dmitrieva, *op cit.*, note 8, at 105.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Peyrouse, *op cit.*, note 15, at 482.

⁹¹ Fierman, *op cit.*, note 55, at 1218.

⁹² Zabortseva, *op cit.*, note 15, at 25.

political programme document, entitled the Concept of language policy was adopted which, again, acknowledged that the Kazakh language is lacking a strong *de facto* position in the official sphere and entitled every minority language with the status of “the foundation of national culture.”⁹³ The 1996 Concept of language policy, hence, set forth the goal of gradual revival of the Kazakh language as the *lingua franca* of all the nations of Kazakhstan gradually substituting the respective role of Russian. Russian was named as the main source of scientific information and the means of communication with other states of the CIS. At this point, one can witness the rise of the policy of language Kazakhization, although the 1997 Law on languages emphasizes that the Russian language can be used on an equal footing with the state language in official documentation, accounting and statistics, financial documentation, the armed forces, law enforcement agencies, and legal proceedings.

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By the late 1990s, the state strengthened legal efforts targeted at widening the scope of using the Kazakh language in all spheres of life. In 1997, the mentioned Law on languages was adopted, which acknowledges the narrower potential for the use of the Kazakh language as the state language. To address this limitation, the government, already in 1998, adopted a decree targeted at the expansion of the usage of the Kazakh language by public authorities.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, even in 1999, after the legislation on languages had been firmly in place, Russian was mastered by 75% of ethnic Kazakh and, naturally, 100% of ethnic Russians. Since 1999, new methods of recruiting staff for local authorities include a compulsory test in the Kazakh language. In 1999, the reforms begin to go beyond the sphere of official communication following the introduction of the obligation to place information in both Kazakh and Russian on product labels was introduced.⁹⁵

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The practice, nevertheless, has for a long time been falling behind the official attempts to fortify Kazakh language use, since the entrenchment of the state language in the field of public administration happened initially only in those regions where the ethnic Kazakh population comprised the majority in the Soviet period, i.e., in the Western and Southern districts. In 2000-02

⁹³ *Kontseptsia iazykovoï politiki Respubliki Kazakhstan* (The Concept of Language Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan) No. 3186 of 4 November 1996, at https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=1007224#pos=10;38 http://kazakhstan-news-city.info/docs/sistemas/dok_pegfto.htm.

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⁹⁴ *Postanovlenie* of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 14 August 1998 goda No. 769 *O rasshirenii sfery upotrebleniia gosudarstvennogo aazyka v gosudarstvennykh organakh* (On enhancing the sphere of using the state language in public authorities (not in force)), at <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P070001122>.

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⁹⁵ *Postanovlenie* of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 31 August 1999 No. 1274, *O trebovaniakh po naneseniiu informatsii na gosudarstvennom i russkom iazykakh na tovarnykh iarlykakh (etiketkakh) tovarov* (On Requirements for Placing Information in Kazakh and Russian on Product Labels (not in force)), at <http://adilet.zan.kz/rus/docs/P990001274>.

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only four regions adopted the Kazakh language in governing bodies, i.e., South Kazakhstan, Kzyl-Orda, Atyrau and Dzhambul.⁹⁶ Other statistical data show the worrying situation of the use of the state language in the Republic. In 2007, drafting and development of documents in central government bodies in the state language was 20-30%, and the total flow of documentation did not exceed 45-50%. At the local level, even in regions with an overwhelming majority of the Kazakh population, documentation in the state language was not encouraging, since the main burden had been carried out by interpreters in the said institutions.⁹⁷ There was a serious lack of qualified Kazakh language teachers, as well as qualified translators 2007.⁹⁸ It is in the sphere of primary education where efforts targeted at promoting Kazakhization are probably most evident.⁹⁹

Since the measures of achieving Kazakhization of language use have shown to be insufficient, a new state programme entitled The State Programme on the Functioning and Development of Languages in 2001-2010 was launched in 2001. The programme aimed at creating such a socio-linguistic space in Kazakhstan which would be measured by reaching a balanced relationship between the languages spoken on the territory of Kazakhstan. In particular, this should raise the efficiency of practical usage of Kazakh and implement the functions normally to be carried out by the state language in all spheres of life. Russian was supposed to preserve the functions asserted by the constitution, i.e., being the language of official use by public authorities, functioning in the sphere of education, science and culture. The programme's goal was for the revival of the use of the Kazakh language, while also preserving the use of the languages of ethnic groups.

Although the goal was set to provide general secondary education in native languages or by teaching native languages as a compulsory subject, "more than 60 per cent of students receive instruction in the Russian language"¹⁰⁰ still in early 2000s. Kazakhization thus expands in the socio-cultural sphere making legislation on mass media stricter. Since the beginning of 2002, foreign television and radio stations are entitled to only 50% of broadcasting, and starting from 1 January 2003, this share dropped to 20%.¹⁰¹ While tightening legislation on mass media with respect to the use of the Kazakh language is by that point at its possible maximum, on 30 May 2006, Nazarbayev introduced amendments to the State Programme on the Functioning and

⁹⁶ Iu. Kudriashova, *K voprosu o statuse russkogo iazyka v sovremennom Kazakhstane/* (Speaking of the status of Russian language in modern Kazakhstan. Expert assessment for Moscow IATs, information and analytical centre). Moscow: IATs, 2016.

⁹⁷ *Op cit.*, note 46.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Smagulova, *op cit.*, note 45.

¹⁰⁰ UN CERD, *op cit.*, note 42.

¹⁰¹ [Kudruashova, *op.cit.*, note 96.](#)

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Development of Languages for 2001-2010. These amendments introduced measures aimed at strengthening the position of Kazakh language in public administration and in judicial proceedings, as well as in the armed forces and educational institutions. In 2007, the Concept of expanding the scope of functioning of the state language, increasing its competitiveness for 2007-2010 was adopted.¹⁰² This document launched systematic efforts targeting the continuous organization of training courses in the state language to foster language proficiency not only in daily communication but also with regard to the professional preparation of documents.

At face value, assisting the enhancement of the Kazakh language does not run counter to the position of Russian language and culture even if the course on Latinization and trilingualism is taken. However, the ongoing script reform creates a situation where trilingualism goes side by side with bi-alphabetism¹⁰³ when both Cyrillic and Latin alphabets are used for written Kazakh, and Cyrillic would supposedly still be used in order to publish texts in Russian. This remains topical in connection with issuing bilingual streets signs, as street names in Cyrillic script would, most probably, also be necessary in the future. At present, there is no talk about bilingual street signs,¹⁰⁴ but the practical realization of Kazakhisation policies by “underlining the ‘Kazakh’ identity of the country by renaming streets, unveiling new symbols rewriting history” is alarming.¹⁰⁵ The discourse on Latinization goes side by side with the process of en masse renaming, from Russian into Kazakh language, places named after the Soviet-period Russian famous figures, with the titles of Kazakh famous figures. The opinions of academicians—again—split when it comes to argumentation behind such renaming. Some researchers see it as a step back from the pursuits to foster the rights of non-titular groups.¹⁰⁶ Other academic voices assert that the trends for renaming toponyms are not a move against Russian culture but towards the reflexion of a more ‘Kazakh Kazakhstan’.¹⁰⁷ It is true that the Russian cultural heritage “was particularly strong in

¹⁰² *Op cit.*, note 46.

¹⁰³ See, Bertold Gregor Kemptner, “Russisch in Kirgistan”, 3-4 *EE* (2008), 113-119.

¹⁰⁴ On the significance of culture-sensitive street naming for protecting minority rights see, e.g., Ljubica Djordjević, ECMI Minorities Blog: The Symbolic Power of Place Names: Why having multilingual signs can be challenging?, at <<https://www.ecmi.de/infochannel/detail/ecmi-minorities-blog-the-symbolic-power-of-place-names-why-having-multilingual-signs-can-be-challenging>>; Mariya Riekkinen, “Sociocultural Rights and the Media: International Developments 2017”, 16 *EYMI* (2019).

¹⁰⁵ Blackburn, *op cit.*, note 6.

¹⁰⁶ See e.g., Kolstø, who considers the renaming of toponyms side with the fact that the key state positions are filled with ethnic Kazakhs, the key universities are named after Kazakh famous personalities, and the migration legislation favours ethnic Kazakhs as a *de facto* deviation from the official discourse on protecting the rights of the Russian minority. Pål Kolstø “The Price of Stability: Kazakhstanian Control Mechanisms under the Conditions of Cultural and Language Bipolarity”, in Yaacov Ro'i (ed.), *Democracy and Pluralism in Muslim Eurasia* (Routledge, London, 2004) 169.

¹⁰⁷ Nari Shelekpayev, “Is Name Destiny? On Some Cases of Post-Soviet Street-Naming”, Jaroslav Ira, Jiří Janáč (eds.), *Materializing Identities in Socialist and Post-Socialist Cities*, (Karolinum Press, Prague, 2017) 108-109.

Kazakhstan”.¹⁰⁸ As OECD urban studies remark, “the country is still trying to shed away its Soviet past”¹⁰⁹ which is strongly evident in the area of urban planning. This is why the “past dependency” argument is visible in research literature.¹¹⁰ Counter-arguments to the narrative of unwanted Soviet heritage are also found in literature. Shelekpáyev, for instance, brings a plausible explanation, according to which replacing the titles which recall Kazakhstan’s Soviet also goes in the direction of giving due recognition to other than Kazakh names as was the case with renaming the Almaty’s Nikolai Bauman street in honour of Turgut Özal.¹¹¹ Nikolai Bauman was a nineteenth century Russian revolutionary while Turgut Özal was the President of Turkey between 1989 and 1993. This renaming, hence, marks the cooperation of Kazakhstan with Turkey which made a significant investment in the country in 1990s.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) does not take a strong stance as to call the renaming as a violation of minority rights yet expresses its concerns regarding such renaming remarking that it “may cause resentment among minority groups”. The Committee recommends that Kazakhstan takes the necessary measures to ensure the use of minority languages, and in regions with compact minority communities, in accordance with the international law. In particular, the Committee suggests to use a compromise “dual language approach” when renaming towns and villages and also in the use of public signs.¹¹² As yet, the 1997 Law on languages protects only traditional Kazakh titles: in particular, Article 19 stipulates that “traditional, historically established Kazakh titles of administrative-territorial units, constituent parts of settlements, as well as other physical and geographical objects existing in other languages should be reproduced, in accordance with the transliteration rules”. In order to fulfill the recommendations of the CERD Committee, Article 19 of the said law could be amended in order to promote a dual language approach by providing legal protection also to the old Russian titles. Again, as mentioned previously, the Latinization reform which brings in a system of bi-alphabetism, will face conceptual difficulties providing dual language street names in both, Latin script (for the Kazakh language) and Cyrillic script (for Russian).

C. *Shifting towards language internationalization*

¹⁰⁸ Landau and Kellner-Heinkele, *op cit.*, note 17, 94.

¹⁰⁹ OECD Urban Policy Reviews: Kazakhstan (OECD Publishing, Paris, 2017) 17.

¹¹⁰ For instance, Fierman delves into the issues of common Soviet past and its dependency in post-Soviet countries who are currently regaining their national identity. Fierman, *op cit.*, note 55.

¹¹¹ Shelekpáyev, *op cit.*, note 106, 108.

¹¹² CERD, Concluding observations on Kazakhstan, CERD/C/KAZ/CO/4-5, dated 6 April 2010, para. 20.

In 2009, a new vision of language policy was presented in the new State Programme on the Functioning and Development of Languages in 2011-2020.¹¹³ The programme is ambitious in its goals as it presupposes that 100% of the population will speak Kazakh, 95% Russian and 25% English by 2020. [It sets](#) further goals to ensure the full operation of the official language being a major factor, strengthening Kazakhstani identity and unity “while maintaining the languages of all ethnic groups”. Learning English has been set up in the primary goals. At this point the official course on the policy of language internationalization and globalization becomes apparent. This contribution concentrates on the concrete measures directed at the technique of learning Kazakh and standardizing the lexicon.¹¹⁴ The programme placed very ambitious goals, *inter alia*, to raise the number of the population mastering Kazakh up to 90% by 2020 and to reach 72% of Kazakh content in the mass media by 2020. The new President, nevertheless, revoked this programme.¹¹⁵

Thus, the official multiethnic and factually nationalistic language policy of Kazakhization gives way to the claims for internationalization of Kazakhstan. Emphasis on using English in business and in the professional sphere, as well as in private communication, changes social practices. An increase in the number of students studying Chinese, Arabic and Turkish languages is noticeable as well as the increase in the numbers of schools with instruction in Uzbek, Tajik and Uighur languages.¹¹⁶ A number of universities introduce additional language requirements. For instance, the Kazakh-German University in Almaty founded in 1999, requires knowledge of English, German, Kazakh and Russian.¹¹⁷ An Islamic Institute in Almaty, which became an Islamic University in 1997, provides instruction in Kazakh, but Arabic is used in studies.¹¹⁸ The mentioned 2012 ‘trinity of languages’ project is being implemented. However, the government of Kazakhstan appears to avoid open confrontation with the ethnic Russians in the republic. These highlighted, and sometimes confusing policy vectors, are potent to downgrade the existing status quo of Russian minorities, yet in the era of globalization the loss of the dominant role of Russian language to English is but a matter of time. Hence, unless the current legislation does not cardinaly change the status of the Russian language, most important is that the turn towards Latinization, and reliance on

¹¹³ *Op cit.*, note 65.

¹¹⁴ Dmitrieva, *op cit.*, note 8, at 107.

¹¹⁵ Decree (*Ukaz*) of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan of 19 April 2019 No. 29 *O priznanii utrativshimi silu nekotorykh ukazov Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan*, at <https://online.zakon.kz/document/?doc_id=31955623#pos=0;0>.

¹¹⁶ Vladimir P. [avlovich](#) Sinyachkin and Natalia L. [eodinovna](#) Sinyachkina, “Multilingualism in the Republic of Kazakhstan: viewpoint from the outside”, 15(3) *Polylinguality and Transcultural Practices* (2018), at 447.

¹¹⁷ Landau and Kellner-Heinkele, *op cit.*, note 17, 110.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

English as the means of communication with the rest of the world instead of Russian, would not mean social exclusion of the Russian minority.¹¹⁹

The factual implementation of the project is where Latinization seems to be out of tune on the way to successful internationalization. The obstacles with regard to the elaboration of a workable version of the Latinized Kazakh script have been discussed with the authorities contemplating a third version of the alphabet, and all the documents and other production in the “old” script in the meantime needs changing (see Part III of this contribution). Coupled with changing all the documentation after renaming Astana to Nur-Sultan in Spring 2019, these time-consuming bureaucratic and technical hurdles hamper the Kazakhstan’s aim to become one of the thirty most developed countries by 2050.¹²⁰ Pursued under the vector of internationalization, the Latinization of the alphabet is strong enough to compromise social connections by deepening the cultural and linguistic bipolarity between the “European” (or English-speaking) and the “Asian” (or Kazakh-speaking) poles¹²¹ as well as widening the intergenerational gap. Appraisal of the wisdom of the elderly persons is at the core of Kazakh culture.¹²² When facing difficulties in reading in Latinized Kazakh language, one could turn to English which is a possibility for younger generations who will operate with different or “more European” concepts and categories than older generations remaining in the “Asian” pole. At the same time, such changes can be attributed to a significant extent to the ongoing globalization processes.

V. SURVEY ON LATINIZATION

From a bird’s eye perspective, Latinization of an alphabet, as with any other language reform, not only shakes the previous status quo of languages. It creates a backlash in the accumulation of social capital in terms of decreasing the literacy of the population, effectiveness of science, and transgenerational transmission of culture via literature. This is because the ongoing script reform is, in fact, the third major language reform in Kazakhstan. Before 1924, Kazakh writings were based on the modified Arabic script. In 1929, the Soviet Union adopted a policy of unified Latin script for Turkic-language republics which brought the Latin alphabet in Kazakhstan. The Soviet government

¹¹⁹ On the issues of social exclusion of minority groups in Europe see, e.g. Mariya Riekkinen, “Economic Life and Social Inclusion: International Developments 2018: 17 (1) *EYMI* (2020).

¹²⁰ OECD Urban Policy Reviews: Kazakhstan, *op cit.*, note 108.

¹²¹ About the existing bipolarity between these poles, see Blackburn, *op cit.*, note 6, at 2019.

¹²² On the status of the elderly and the value of intergenerational dialogues in Kazakhstan see, e.g. Mariya Riekkinen, Kanat Kozhabek, Aizhan Zhatkanbayeva, and Pekka Riekkinen, “Access to Socio-Cultural Life inside Assisted Care Homes?: Overiewing Legislation in Finland and Kazakhstan”, IX(2) *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy* (2016).

favoured Latin script at that particular period because it better served the revolutionary purposes.¹²³ A positive outcome of this move, however, was increasing literacy among the population since, unlike the Arabic alphabet, Latin script is phonetic. The negative side of the reform remains the loss of great masses of literature written in the Arabic script. As Cameron remarks, the Arabic script is difficult to learn even for native Kazakh speakers which made it difficult for researchers to utilize Kazakh sources based on Arab alphabet in the said area of study.¹²⁴ The invaluable sources of information remained encrypted in the books, and the researchers meet the “daunting challenge”¹²⁵ of dealing with these sources. In 1940, based on the decisions by the Soviet leadership targeted at russification within all the entire Union, the Kazakh language was switched to the Cyrillic alphabet. Again, Kazakh-language textbooks, science and the works of **fiction**, as well as other writings produced in Latin script became outdated and the knowledge contained in them was lost. Currently the state risks facing a similar challenge in respect of those who successfully navigated the script reforms and managed to save the educational and cultural capital in the Kazakh language, will have to do away with this capital. The areas of science and art will gradually shift from the Kazakh language sphere to the realm of the English language. At the same time, Russian language sources will remain intact.

Testing the hypothesis if Latinization of the Kazakh language would not contribute to the role of the Kazakh language in strengthening national self-identification but, on the contrary, become an incentive to increase the use of Russian in everyday life, the authors organized a survey in Kazakhstan. It was assumed that individuals over 30 years of age, i.e. those who are not included in the group of younger people, might have more difficulties with studying the Latin alphabet as they have not been living in an environment where intensive English studies and use was supported. Moreover, not having been subject to intensified campaigns of language Kazakhization, citizens over 30 years of age might have had fewer professional opportunities to communicate in Kazakh, not to mention in a written form. Our primary goal was thus to find out if our respondents could think of a tangible possibility of resorting to the Russian-speaking environment should they opt out of learning the Latinized Kazakh.

The respondents (altogether 148 individuals) were divided into two groups. The first group contains 99 responses from Astana and Almaty Cities, Karaganda Region, and North-Kazakhstan Region,

¹²³ Reagan, *op cit.*, note 7.

¹²⁴ Sarah Cameron, “The Kazakh Famine of 1930-33: Current Research and New Directions”, III(2) *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* (2016), at 129.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

which are predominantly Russian-speaking areas of Kazakhstan. The second group of 49 responses was obtained in Atyrau, Mangystau and Turkestan Regions, which are predominantly Kazakh speaking. This survey was, therefore, not limited to questioning the opinions of only Russian-speaking individuals, i.e., Russian-speaking minorities and Russian-speaking Kazakhs, but also Kazakh-speakers, both ethnic Kazakhs and those of other backgrounds, were invited to give their opinion. All answers collected during the survey were anonymous.

A questionnaire entitled “An opinion survey of citizens regarding forthcoming Latinization in Kazakhstan” was elaborated and was to be completed.¹²⁶

A total of 148 responses were obtained from both male and female respondents, aged between 30 and 92 years; three younger persons aged 19, 20 and 25 also completed the form and their responses were taken into account. The most clear-cut answers were analysed in detail: if the number of responses did not match the number of respondents, it was assumed that the individuals were either unsure of their response or abstained from answering this question.

A. Study in predominantly Russian-speaking area: first group

In the first group, which is predominantly a Russian-speaking area, 99 answers were collected. Four samples included a postscript containing strong and emotional statements against Latinization substantiated, *inter alia*, with the argument of losing the Kazakh classical writings and of the government not consulting the people what alphabet they wanted.

This study revealed everyday bilingualism, as most respondents speak more than one language: 57 respondents use Kazakh and English and one uses Russian and English. Only two respondents practice trilingualism on a daily basis by using Kazakh, Russian, and English. At the same time, 28 respondents speak only Kazakh in daily communication, and 13 respondents only Russian. Interestingly, among those who use only Kazakh, one person has Russian as a mother tongue while among the exclusive users of Russian there were six persons whose mother tongue is Kazakh. This could speak for a still stronger position of the Russian language in daily communication.

¹²⁶ The following questions were asked: 1. Gender, age; 2. Education; 3. Mother tongue; 4. Which languages do you use in everyday life? 5. Do you read in the Kazakh language (for example, news or fiction)? 6. Are you going to learn the Latin alphabet (if you do not yet master it)? And by which means are you going to learn it? 7. Do you consider it easy for you to learn the Latin alphabet (if you do not yet master it)? 8. If, for some reason, you cannot learn the Latin alphabet, how do you think, you will be able to communicate in Kazakh at official institutions and understand written documents (in a clinic, in a bank, etc.)? 9. Is it likely that, with the transition to the Latin alphabet, you will read more news and literature in Russian?

Most of the respondents (66 individuals) regularly read in Kazakh: news, newspapers, and books. Almost a quarter of the respondents (25 persons) claimed that they do not read any content in Kazakh. It was not possible to establish a connection among respondents between the intensity of reading in Kazakh, their mother tongue, their age, or education.

Opinions regarding whether it is going to be easy or not to master the new script were divided almost equally: 48 respondents think that it will be easy for them to master the new alphabet and actually fifteen of them already master the Latin alphabet while the other 47 individuals replied that it is going to be extremely difficult.

As concerns the key question number nine: “Is it likely that, with the transition to the Latin alphabet, you will more read news and literature in Russian?”, which most closely relates to the position of the Russian language amidst the reform on Latinization, almost half of the respondents (45 persons) asserted that there is a strong likelihood that they will read more intensively in the Russian language amidst the transition to the Latin alphabet. Among the arguments mostly put forward were: “the habit of reading in Cyrillic” and “the need to oppose the decision to change the alphabet”. One female respondent, aged 69, with Kazakh as a mother tongue, for instance, added a note on the questionnaire that “even before the reform she has been watching the Kazakh news only in Russian”. Another female respondent, aged 55, with Kazakh as a mother tongue added that “Russian is always trending everywhere, therefore it is a positive side **in a situation where I will have** to resort to reading in Russian”. Six out of these 45 persons claimed that they will only read more in Russian at the beginning of the learning process while getting used to the Latinized Kazakh script. Out of the said 45 persons, twelve manifested a somewhat weaker probability of reading more Russian sources by answering “possibly”/“50/50”/“time will show” to the question regarding the likelihood of using Russian more intensively as a result of the transition to the Latin alphabet. These twelve persons included five respondents who will read more Russian only at the beginning stage.

At the same time, 36 respondents expressed strong certainty that they will not turn to more extensive use of Russian, even if they fail to learn a new alphabet. Those who denied the possibility of turning to more extensive use of Russian did not substantiate their reasoning, with the exception of one respondent claiming that the Latin script will better fit the Kazakh pronunciation and one respondent claiming that “this is a bad decision yet I am not going to give up before the government imposing a new policy”. Thus, a slight advantage towards turning more extensively to reading more in Russian in the Russian-speaking areas is observed.

It is interesting to note that three persons out of 99 claimed that they will read the old books with the Cyrillic script as “nothing will change in them”. On the one hand, such opinions demonstrate that the respondents are forward-looking and expect to continue reading despite difficulties with the new script and to look for new knowledge. On the other hand, this nonetheless proves that the writings in the “old” Kazakh language might (again) sink into oblivion causing a [step backwards in the development of –devastating effect on the development of](#) at least mass reading culture, [even if we assume that the specialists will decode scientific knowledge from the sources in cyrillized Kazakh language.](#)

All in all, the majority of respondents in the first group reported that they are going to learn the new alphabet using all available means such as courses, books, and Internet applications. A female aged 66 with Kazakh as a mother tongue, for instance, reported that she “learns the alphabet as a daily practice, and writes separate words and also sentences in a new script”. Eighteen persons out of these 99 respondents were not going to learn the Latin alphabet; among them can be found Russian and Kazakh native speakers who have attained both basic and higher education. Yet the vast majority of those who do not intend to read more in Russian, irrespective of the outcomes of learning the new alphabet, were mostly those whose mother tongue and language of daily communication is Kazakh. Twelve persons who replied that they do not intend to learn the new alphabet were aged more than 65.

B. Study in predominantly Kazakh-speaking areas: second group

Most of the 49 respondents from the Kazakh-speaking areas indicated Kazakh as their mother tongue. In this group, the practice of bilingualism is, nevertheless, less evident than in the first group: only eleven respondents use Russian and Kazakh daily. Only one person practices trilingualism, using English in addition to Russian and Kazakh in daily communication. Only eight persons use Russian for daily communication. The remaining 30 persons speak only Kazakh as a language on a daily basis.

Significantly, nearly a half of respondents in this group (22 persons) do not regularly read content in the Kazakh language compared with another 23 individuals who regularly read in Kazakh. The proportional difference between reading and not reading in Kazakh is higher than in the first group which might suggest that the Kazakh language is still predominantly employed as a spoken language.

Fewer respondents, in comparison with the first group, consider learning a new alphabet an easy task (13 persons): nevertheless, only seven respondents see this task as clearly difficult. This is

again a different picture to the one obtained in the first group where the respondents largely see learning a new alphabet a difficult task.

Comparison with the first study can also be seen in replies regarding a more intensive use of the Russian language if mastering the Latinized Kazakh language is not successful. Out of a total of 49 respondents, 23 persons made strong claims that ~~it is not possible that the situation when~~ they would turn to reading more Russian sources ~~is not possible~~. Seventeen respondents allowed such a possibility of which seven had indicated Russian as their mother tongue. The rest had difficulties to reply this question.

C. Discussing the findings in both groups

After summarizing the results obtained after studying the opinions in both groups, it is clear that nobody was taken by surprise by the subject of Latinization, indicating the strong outreach among the population of this reform. Almost a third of respondents anticipate the possibility of reading in Russian more intensively in case of failure in mastering Latinized Kazakh (52 persons out of 148). In any event, a significant number of persons show a strong commitment to learn reading in Latinized Kazakh (59 persons out of 148). Since the majority of respondents regularly read in Kazakh, we can see that Latinization not only impacts the professional sphere where people will have to be able to read, but also the private sphere. A disturbing trend, however, is that in Kazakh-speaking areas, the number of those who regularly read in Kazakh is significantly less than in the Russian-speaking areas. At the same time, some individuals with Kazakh as a mother tongue strongly denied the possibility of reading more extensively in Russian even if they do not succeed in learning the new script. This is alarming since, most probably, these persons do not master Russian well enough to read, and if they fail to learn Latinized Kazakh, they risk finding themselves deprived of the opportunity of being updated about current affairs available in written form. This might be attributed to the fact that Russian-speaking individuals, up to now, have tended to be better educated due to the overwhelming representation of the Russian language in education. Language reforms, in particular targeted at the spread of Russian language and cyrilizing the Kazakh ~~This is again the situation where the regular language reforms played script played~~ not the last role in rising the position of Russian-speakers among the most educated citizens. The finding that those who are not going to learn the new alphabet are more than 65 years of age is also of concern. Among the arguments given for such reluctance, is absence of effective language training in English or German which could facilitate the process of learning the Latinized Kazakh. This suggests that the older generation of Kazakhstanis will be most affected by the reform. It is positive

that a considerable number of respondents in both groups are willing to keep to Kazakh, although the process of learning the new alphabet will take its toll on them.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The state of Kazakhstan is pursuing the reform where the Cyrillic alphabet is being changed for the written Kazakh language into the Latin alphabet. Ongoing globalization is most probably the main driving force behind the alphabet change, requiring citizens to have a good command of English. Kazakhstan strives to solve the problem of proficiency in English by making English a third official language of communication alongside Kazakh and Russian. There is currently, however, no intention of giving English constitutional status, nor making it a language of legislation. Trilingualism, however, is being pursued despite the absence of a historical English-speaking group in the country. The Russian language is used on a par with Kazakh and is the language of interethnic communication

The study attempts to show that this reform impacts not only the various linguistic groups in Kazakhstan in different ways, but also various age categories. The possible effects of Latinization on the position of the Russian language in Kazakhstan were highlighted. In order to study the effects of Latinization on possible fortification of the position of the Russian language, the study obtained 148 opinions of Kazakhstanis who were divided into two groups: those who live in predominantly Russian-speaking areas and those who come from Kazakh-speaking areas of Kazakhstan. In particular, the authors wished to see if difficulties in mastering the new script is potent to increase bipolarity in Kazakhstan when the youth will read (and absorb views and ideas) more in English and the older generation will keep to material in the Cyrillic Kazakh language. The survey shows that the majority of individuals regularly read not only news but also fiction in Kazakh which suggests that Latinization goes beyond the official and professional sphere of language use but also penetrates the private sphere. The study also proves that Russian still takes a significant position as a language of daily communication also in the private sphere, since the majority of our respondents use both Russian and Kazakh on a daily basis. The findings confirm that while less than the threshold of 50% of responses indicate the possibility of reading more in Russian, should they fail to master the new script, the number of those who anticipate reading more in Russian remains significant.

Given such circumstances, it is clear that Latinization is probably not going to end in more extensive use of Russian, thus being an asset for ~~does not run counter to~~ the Kazakhization vector when individuals would resort to more extensive use of Russian of language policy development.

Commented [JN12]: 25) Author: Kazakh is the state language. This sentence is contrary to what is written at the beginning of the paper. Please check the rephrasing and advise if this corresponds to the intended meaning. tks

Commented [H13]: This is what we say: Kazakh and Russian language have constitutional entrenchment, yet only Kazakh is named a state language, the status of Russian remains unsolved

Many respondents thought that the reform of the script would devalue the existing written production in Cyrillic Kazakh language and thus reverse the progress made by Kazakh language literature and culture. The study also showed the positive sides of the ‘trinity of languages’ policy as the first steps have already been made in Kazakhstan, since four persons out of 148 reported that they use English in daily communication. The results of our survey confirm that those who master the Latin alphabet consider it an easy task to go through Latinization. It is, nevertheless, evident that the scale of the study is statistically non-representative to draw any nationwide conclusions.

With the enhancement of the role of the Kazakh language in official communication and the increasing emphasis on mastering (and using) English in professional and daily communication, changes in [use operation](#) of the Russian language in Kazakhstan are unavoidable. There might, however, be a lack of coherence in the discourse on Kazakhstan’s language identity, which is stretching between Kazakhization, the multiethnic vector, and internationalization of language use. Nevertheless, concerns over the possible marginalization of the Russian language amidst the said processes are probably poorly justified. This is due to the fact that building a national identity on post-Soviet space cannot avoid juxtaposing this identity with that of Russia. Again, Kazakh authorities attempt to promote a new form of identity since the acquisition of independence with the adoption of laws and subordinate legislation aimed at strengthening the role of the Kazakh language and gradual widening use of the state language in all spheres of life. What becomes evident in the cause of the Latinization reform is that, even if the Kazakh language script successfully switches to Latin, the written production in the Russian language will remain in Cyrillic script. The ongoing reforms will thus not only result in trilingualism but also in bi-alphabetism.

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