

Novy Uzen Riots in 1989: Ethnic Conflict or Economic Nationalism?

*Les violences de 1989 à Novy Uzen. Conflit ethnique ou nationalisme
économique ?*

*НОВЫЙ УЗЕНЬ В 1989 Г.: МЕЖЭТНИЧЕСКИЕ КОНФЛИКТЫ ИЛИ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЙ
НАЦИОНАЛИЗМ?*

Gulnara Dadabayeva et Dina Sharipova



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Gulnara DADABAYEVA & Dina SHARIPOVA*

Introduction

Twenty-six years ago, on 16 June 1989, a conflict between Kazakhs and Caucasian ethnic minorities arose in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). It is estimated that 25,000 to 30,000 people participated in clashes in Novy Uzen, a small town located in the Western part of Kazakhstan. Officials immediately described it as an ethnic conflict unleashed by Kazakh hooligans and nationalists. But what really happened in 1989 and how can we evaluate these past events from today's perspective? Despite growing interest in the history and ethnic conflicts of the late Soviet period, little research has been done on the riots of 1989. The goal of this article is to re-evaluate the past events and provide a different perspective on the conflict in Novy Uzen. Although we do not deny the fact that clashes occurred along ethnic lines, focusing solely on the ethnic side of the conflict

* Gulnara Dadabayeva is Assistant Professor at the department of International relations and regional studies at KIMEP University (Almaty, Kazakhstan). She is a Doctor of Science in history. Her research interests include nation-building processes in the independent states of Central Asia. Her recent publications cover geopolitics and cultural puzzles of the region. Contact: dgulnara@kimep.kz.

Dina Sharipova is Assistant Professor of political science in the department of International relations and regional studies at KIMEP University (Almaty, Kazakhstan). Her research interests include nation- and state-building in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, formal and informal institutions, identity politics in Central Asia. She has published articles on national identity, informal institutions and security issues. Contact: dina.sharipova@kimep.kz.

would be to overlook the reality of the situation. We argue that the causes of the 1989 events do not lie in ethnic hatred between Kazakhs and other ethnic minorities, as it was portrayed by mass media and officials. The economic policies conducted by Moscow authorities towards the oil-rich region in the West of Kazakhstan produced poor socio-economic conditions and a sense of injustice that pushed ethnic Kazakhs to start the riots. Moscow was not interested in the development of local industries, the creation of new jobs and construction of schools, clinics and hospitals. As a result, the local population was deprived of many social benefits which were available to shift workers sent by Moscow from the Caucasus and other Russian cities to Western Kazakhstan. The lack of developed local industries and withdrawal of oil resources for the benefit of other Soviet republics, along with the desire to protect the labour market, urged the local population and authorities to reconsider national economic policies and defend their own economic interests. Thus, we suggest considering the riots of 1989 as a manifestation of economic nationalism rather than a primordialist expression of ethnic hatred towards other nationalities.

Theoretical Frames

Before discussing the theoretical perspectives of nationalism, it is important to define the term “riots,” which has been discussed and contested over a long period of time by scholars. In general, a riot is defined as “at least one group publicly, and with little or no attempt at concealment, illegally assaulting at least one other group or illegally attacking or invading property” (Halle & Rafter, 2003, p. 347). In addition, scholars differentiate riots in terms of intensity and duration. Halle and Rafter, for instance, argue that a major riot should have at least one of the following features: a duration of more than two days, ten or more people killed, more than 1,000 people involved, more than 500 injuries, more than 1,000 people arrested, more than 500 buildings damaged, at least two neighbourhoods participating in the riot (*idem*). In terms of the size of the group involved in the event, a minimum number would range from 12 to 50 participants (Wilkinson, 2009). Ethnic riots are episodes of “sustained collective violence with an ethnic, racial, religious or xenophobic character” (Haller & Rafter, 2003, p. 347). In this work, we are going to use the definition provided by Bleich *et al.*, according to which an ethnic riot occurs when “at least one group publicly, and with little or no attempt at concealment, illegally assaulting

at least one other group or illegally attacking or invading property over a period of hours or days, in a manner motivated or patterned by elements of ethnicity, race, religion or xenophobia” (Bleich *et al*, 2010, p. 272). Ethnic riots might be perpetrated by groups due to frustration of real or perceived disadvantages, to an extent related to their ethnic status. The 1989 conflict in Novy Uzen can be defined as a major riot since it has at least three features listed by Halle & Rafter: duration, number of participants and number of injured.

So, what are the theoretical approaches to the phenomenon of nationalism? Two classics of modern studies of “nationalism” and “ethnic nationalism,” Eric Hobsbawm and Ernest Gellner, have fundamentally changed twentieth century perceptions of the vitality of nations and nation-states in a globalised world. For Hobsbawm, transnational companies and other influential international institutions replaced the “major building-blocks of the world system” (Hobsbaum, 1992, p. 181). He questioned the possibility for nations to further guide the world economic order. Gellner insisted on the nation-state right to act as a dominant political actor due to its role in promoting and keeping a common language and culture within given political borders. But Gellner noted that “late industrial society can be expected to be one in which nationalism persists, but in a muted, less virulent form” (Gellner, 1983, p. 122). He was convinced that violent clashes between different ethnicities would be less frequent due to the reduction of social inequalities in societies. However, Gellner foresaw insurgent nationalism as a result of unfulfilled economic expectations (Szakonyi, 2007). Gellner continued that “if states feel inferior to, exploited by, or dominated by ‘advanced’ powers, new forms of nationalism may appear to combat this perceived threat and will foster a politically divisive and tense environment” (Gellner, 1983, p. 122). This statement can be applied not only to the world order but also to the system inside existing states. We can thus use this approach when analysing the situation in the Soviet Union. One of the new forms of nationalism, as mentioned by Gellner, was thus economic nationalism.

Modern international economy is composed of three schools – economic liberalism, economic socialism and economic nationalism. Contrary to economic liberalism and socialism, which were quite popular subjects to study during the Cold War period, economic nationalism was mainly iden-

tified as an outdated economic area. Despite this, a number of interesting works were published on the problems of communism and nationalism including Roman Szporluk (1988), Henryk Szlajfer (1990), and Anthony James Gregor *et al.* (1981). The collapse of the Soviet Union put a stop to communist ideology and interest in the phenomenon of a planned economy diminished. Whereas a successful development of Asian tigers, dragons, etc., along with the troubles of African states, seemed to re-focus our perceptions of economic nationalism. The term “economic nationalism” was introduced in the nineteenth century by the German economist Friedrich List in his fundamental work *The National System of Political Economy* published in German in 1841 (List, 1991). In contrast to the economic liberal theory of Adam Smith and David Ricardo, List was interested in trade relations between developed and economically weak states. He argued that the liberal theory does not truly reflect the real world due to the unequal level of economic development of different states. List opposed the processes of international integration and, particularly, the British doctrine of free exchange and economic liberalism supported by Adam Smith since “free competition between the advanced factories of England and relatively backward factories of other manufacturing countries would... simply lead to the destruction of the industries of the weaker states” (cited by Levi-Faur, 1997, p. 366). Similarly, Francois Perroux also argued that “in practice, the concept of liberalism encounters with economic reality where the ‘inequality of structures’ exist. Under this inequality the most powerful and strong nations seek to get most economic profits at the expense of other nations” (Perroux, 1950, pp. 89-90). In 1993, Luc Michel,¹ published a provocative article “Economic Nationalism against the World Economy,” where he raised the problem of “autarky of large spaces,” when states with similar levels of development unite from an economical and customs viewpoint in order to prevent a stronger economic competitor from entering their markets (Michel, 1993).

The concept of “autarky of large spaces” thus embodies economic nationalism. Starting with the Stalinist idea of modernisation, the USSR followed the model of economic nationalism. Stalin’s work *Economic Problems in the USSR* (1972) reflected the principles of economic

¹ Luc Michel is a Belgian political activist who founded the Belgian far right political party, the Parti Communautaire National Européen (PCN).

nationalism, or “autarky of large spaces,” on which Soviet economic policies were based. The velvet neo-Stalinism of Leonid Brejnev pursued the same economic approach with some adjustments. The latter refer to the liberalisation of relations towards national republics. Moscow gave more power to Soviet republics to promote their national languages, culture and, most importantly, appointments of their cadre.

We can say that the “inequality of structure” can also be applied to the internal development of the Soviet Union. Here we can see the coincidence of different nationalisms in the late Soviet Union. Nationalism defined political and cultural borders (Gellner, 1983) and consequently we see its practical realisation within the politics of the USSR leadership. Moscow’s economic strategy was founded on the following premises: the country represented a single economic space where the development of certain regions was defined by the interdependence of national economies. The complexity of the Soviet economy made it impossible to separate economies by national republic interests. However, since the 1970s, and due to Moscow’s liberalisation policy, a steady growth of ethnic nationalism can be observed in the national republics. Unfulfilled economic expectations led to insurgent nationalism which later transformed into either ethnic or economic nationalism. The conflict in Novy Uzen can be situated within this insurgent nationalism which arose due to unfulfilled economic expectations.

Our assumption is therefore that ethnic nationalism, although playing a role in the situation, cannot be seen as the main driving factor. In 1989, Kazakhstan was unable to raise the issue of separation from Moscow due to its interdependence with the Soviet market. Successful ethnic mobilisation of the Kazakh people under the entrepreneurship of the local republican elite was far from reality. Political leadership did not want to break with the Soviet system. Thus, public feeling could be better identified as economic nationalism. Several factors can be seen behind the emergence of this type of nationalism in Kazakhstan. “The rise and institutionalisation of economic nationalism was a product of economic crisis, nationalistic movement and enlarged state” (Pryke, 2012). In the case of Kazakhstan, we see the coincidence of the two first phenomena, while the third one kept some space to start partial ethnic mobilisation against economic hardships. Ethnic nationalism became an umbrella for Kazakhs to demonstrate their

feelings and grievances over the existing situation. They were not planning to fight against the state, on the contrary, they used state power to fulfil their goals – to oust other ethnic groups from those economic sectors which they believed should be the labour market for local Kazakhs.

During the 1970s, the inequality in economic development of the Soviet republics became more apparent. The three Slavic republics – Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus – were the most economically advanced ones, producing manufactured goods, while other republics, particularly Central Asia's, were mostly agrarian and lacking modernisation. For instance, Ukraine produced 41% of colour TV sets and 96% of trains and locomotives. It provided 46 of the 64 Soviet products meant for exportation. On the territory of Ukraine, there were 1,000 industrial factories (Anonymous, s.d.). Similarly, Belarus had the highest level of economic development of all the Soviet republics. For the period of 1970s to 1980s, industrial production increased three fold with over 1,000 factories and industrial enterprises. From 1971 to 1975, economic growth reached 10.4%. Belorussia significantly increased its production of radio, telecommunication and electronic equipment (Anonymous, 2010). In contrast, the economic development of Central Asian republics was much lower. Kazakhstan tried to overcome its economic backwardness by promoting domestic production in order to prevent the influx of imported goods (Karamanov, 1989). Dinmukhamed Kunaev, the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR from 1964 to 1986, recognised the importance of domestic national production for the development of the republic (Kunaev, 1992). From 1959 to 1965, a lot of new enterprises emerged including Alma-Ata cotton factory, aluminium factories, and others. Despite the construction of new industrial plants, the economy was mainly oriented towards the extraction of raw materials. For instance, Kazakhstan produced 90% of Soviet chrome, coal, ferrous and non-ferrous ore, and 70% of copper, zinc and lead (Goskomstat, 1990). The republic exported 8 billion rubles worth of agricultural products and raw materials and imported 16 billion rubles worth. The economic structure of the republic was thus flawed with the export of cheap raw materials and import of expensive manufactured goods. This created negative tendencies in the economy of the country which, in turn, paved the way for economic nationalism which appeared at the end of 1970s and 1980s in declarations and speeches of both the Kazakh leaders and ordinary people.

Economic nationalism is an indicator of state maturity, proof that the state is ready to defend its economic interests. In the late Soviet period, republics were transforming from a quasi-state level to nation-states with elites having and demonstrating their own national interests, including economic ones. At the same time, Soviet society was fragmented into different groups along ethnic and socio-economic lines. Groups depending on their social status had economic interests that did not correspond with the state economic policy. This created fertile soil for the emergence of conflicts.

The 1989 Conflict in Novy Uzen

The conflict between young Kazakhs and Caucasian ethnic minorities started on June 16, 1989. The conflict was triggered by a fight in a dancing club in Novy Uzen, which was the centre of the riots. From there, the conflict spread to other areas of the region of Guriev, including Ševčenko (today Aktau), the Mangyšlak station, Uzen, Kulsary, Žetibaj, Munajšy, Šetpe, Aqšukyr, Eralievo, Kyzyltobe. It is estimated that between 25,000 and 30,000 people participated in the clashes. According to official data, five people were killed and dozens were injured. However, other sources claim that about a hundred people were killed and a thousand injured (Ryskoža, 2009). To end the conflict, a curfew was introduced on June 19 and lasted for 36 days. Moscow sent the special military unit “Vitâz” (1,000 to 2,000 soldiers), military tanks, helicopters, cars, and other equipment to suppress the riots. In addition, 1,000 to 2,000 local militia from the regional centre Guriev (today Atyrau) and Novy Uzen joined forces to stop the clashes. During the conflict, 3,516 people left Novy Uzen for the Caucasus, where they ended in Dagestan and the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic. Later, some of them returned to Novy Uzen. The material damage was significant. It was estimated that fifty shops and cafes were destroyed and six cars were burnt. Some enterprises and organisations stopped working for a period of time.

In the light of the conflict in Novy Uzen, it is important to look at the nationalities policy and ethnic relations in Central Asia during the late Soviet period. Although perestroika and glasnost brought some social and political changes, the nationalities policy remained untouched. As before, the Soviet leadership continued promoting the flourishing of nations and ethnic groups and the great friendship of peoples. In 1985, Egor Ligačev,

a member of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU and chief ideologist, said: “We have created a society in which the truly harmonious combination of state-wide interests and the interests of each of the republics and the flowering of all nations and ethnic groups are ensured” (Nahaylo & Swoboda, 1990, p. 234). Similarly, the draft of the new party program published in 1985 contained standard statements about the “mutual enrichment of cultures, the equality and free development of [national] language” (*ibid.*, p. 236). In reality, this kind of rhetoric was largely declarative. The centre insisted on the dominance of the Russian language and continued controlling the national cultural life of Soviet republics despite efforts to introduce some degree of decentralisation. In addition, Moscow did not change its cadre policy, which led to the 1986 mass riots in Alma-Ata when Gennady Kolbin, an ethnic Russian, was appointed as head of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR. These issues were coupled with deep economic and social turmoil accumulated during the Brejnev era. All this raised discontent and frustration among the population that often took the form of nationalist or ethnic unrests.

The first secretary of the Communist Party, Michael Gorbachev, acknowledged that the national processes were not without their problems and issues such as “national exclusiveness,” “localism,” and “parasitism” were still on the agenda of the Soviet leadership that faced a difficult task of balancing ethnic relations and distribution of resources (*idem*). One of the challenges for the Soviet leadership was to control ethnic environments that conditioned ethnic relations within the Soviet Union. The character of ethnic relations thus varied depending on place and nationality (Karklins, 1986). Ethnic relations in Central Asia were not even and differed from one republic to another due to historical, political, and demographic factors. In 1989, Ethnic Uzbeks represented the majority of the population in Uzbekistan (71%), whereas ethnic Kazakhs were a minority in Kazakhstan (40%) (Goskomstat, 1991-1993). The resettlement policies during the Tsarist period, cultivation of virgin lands and deportation of people, made Kazakhstan one of the most ethnically diverse republics.

The Chechens, Ingush, and Meskhetian Turks were deported from the Caucasus to Kazakhstan in 1944, during the Second World War. It is considered that approximately 500,000 people were sent to Central Asia. The Chechens and Ingush were the first to arrive in February, the Balkars in

March, and then the Meskhetian Turks. In 1957, the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic was rehabilitated and many deported families returned to their native lands. Those who decided to stay chose to live in the West, South and South-East of Kazakhstan. Over time, they began to occupy lucrative places in the economy. They worked as traders, distributors of shortage goods, managers of newly emerged cooperatives. The Caucasians had a higher economic status with better access to housing and other social benefits. A significant part Caucasian specialists were sent by Moscow from Grozny, Makhachkala, Baku, and other cities to work in Novy Uzen oil and gas industry.

The authorities and mass media were quick to label the conflict as “inter-ethnic” instigated by “hooligans” and “outrageous elements” (Samoilenko, 1989, p. 2). The conflict was between young Kazakhs and Caucasian ethnic groups, namely Lezgins, Chechens, Ingush and Azerbaijanis. However, the causes of the conflict were rooted in poor social and economic conditions that existed in Western Kazakhstan. Ethnic hatred was an effect, rather than the cause, of the conflict.

Socio-Economic Conditions in Novy Uzen in 1989

What was the situation in Novy Uzen in 1989? Novy Uzen was a small town founded in 1964, located in the heart of the desert peninsula of Mangyşlak, in the Guriev region. The population of the town had reached 56,000 by 1989.

The Guriev region was mostly populated by ethnic Kazakhs (76%), while ethnic Russians and other nationalities represented approximately 24% of the region’s population. In Novy Uzen, ethnic Kazakhs composed 50% of the population, Russians 18% and Lezgins 11%. Despite rapid urbanisation, the majority of Kazakhs lived in rural areas and their migration to urban centres was problematic due to social and economic conditions. It was very hard, if not impossible, to get a job in a city without residential registration (*propiska*). In addition, Russian was the main working language in all sectors of the economy except agriculture. As a result, lack of Russian language skills became a barrier for people wishing to apply for a job in towns and cities of the republic. In addition, during the late Soviet period, it was not easy for rural Kazakhs to become educated since most disciplines, particularly technical, were taught in Russian. As a

result, most ethnic Kazakhs experienced significant difficulties moving to the oblast centre for employment.

According to statistics, 55% of the Guriev region residents were economically active in different sectors of the economy, while 45% percent of the population did not make up the work force and was composed mostly of pensioners, unemployed, children and students. 97% of ethnic Kazakhs worked in agriculture.² According to Nursultan Nazarbaev, from 1985 to 1990, industrial production dropped from 31.6% to 20.9%, while agricultural production increased from 28.4% in 1985 to 41.6% in 1990 (Nazarbaev, 1992, p. 53). These numbers show that the rate of latent unemployment was supposed to increase in urban areas. Central government in Moscow did not support the idea of organisation of new state farms in the region to cover food demands of the local people. Hiring of the new staff in oil industry had to be accompanied by the increase of food products shipped from the other republics of USSR. However, this plan was never realised.

The Role of Moscow and the Level of Unemployment in Novy Uzen

Moscow policy aimed to defend the interests of state companies that were controlled by the centre. Consequently, local industry did not receive enough financial support from the centre and faced a deep economic crisis. Moscow sought to suppress industrial production in Kazakhstan, while supplying manufactured goods to the region. This explains the rise in unemployment and increased competition in the labour market in Western Kazakhstan. This competition went along ethnic lines, specifically between ethnic Kazakhs and other ethnic minorities such as Lezgins, Chechens, Azerbaijanis, people from Dagestan and other Russian regions. These populations were largely employed as shift workers at oil enterprises in Guriev and other lucrative places. Since the oil industry was under the control of the Soviet Ministry of Oil and Gas, shift workers became the main target blamed for economic troubles.

The paradox of Novy Uzen was a high rate of unemployment among the local population, particularly among ethnic Kazakhs. Although newspapers linked hard socio-economic conditions to the conflict that took place in

² Authors' calculations based on demographic statistics of the region.

1989, we found no statistical data on the rate of unemployment in the Guriev region. In this article, we propose our own statistical calculation based on the national census conducted in 1989. According to the 1989 census the urban population of the Guriev region was about 256,000, while in the rural area the population reached 169,000 (Republican Information Center, 1991). Thus the workforce in urban areas grew up to 148,000, while in the rural area it was about 84,000 (*idem*). The most interesting fact is that the number of young people living in the rural area reached 69,000, while in the urban areas the young generation reached 90,000 (*idem*). Based on this data, we can estimate that in absolute numbers the difference between rural and urban young populations is significant. Thus, out of 100% of the rural population, 82% were young people under age 18.³ This demographic composition could easily provoke social tensions and conflicts.

The potential of the agricultural sector was limited, which inevitably led to the migration of young people to urban areas. However, the situation in Guriev's industrial centres was also difficult because of the specific structure of the economic sector. The region specialised mostly in the extraction of oil and gas. Moscow authorities were not interested in the development of oil processing industries there. "It was an illogical position of the Ministry of Oil and Gas of the USSR that preferred to process oil from Tengiz in different enterprises [out of the republic], which was economically ineffective" (Karamanov, 1989). According to an inhabitant of the village Tenge, people lived without gas despite the fact that it was extracted nearby the settlement for 25 years (Ryskoža, 2009). After the events of Novy Uzen, Moscow authorities recognised the negative impact on the structural development of the economy. Only 13% of oil and 16% of gas were processed in Western Kazakhstan. The ruling elites faced the problem of creating a domestic oil processing industry to fill the domestic market with goods produced in the republic. This idea was suggested in the report of the Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Uzakbaj Karamanov, who said: "The region should get significant autonomy to manage its own resources" (Karamanov, 1989, p. 2).

Moscow considered the construction of an oil processing industry in Kazakhstan to be economically ineffective. The share of crude oil extraction represented only 1.5% of the total USSR oil extraction. In the beginning

³ Authors' own calculation based on actual numbers from Goskomstat, 1991-1993.

of the 1980s, the oil industry was in a crisis due to the lack of significant investments. The Soviet Union had insufficient financial resources to be allocated for further economic development. The government faced a dilemma: allocate money towards social development, which at that time was in need of modernisation, or finance the development of the oil and gas industry. The decision was made in favour of industrial development. Oil and gas workers received significant financial assistance and administrative support. The exploration of new deposits was also accelerated. From 1985 to 1988, 25 new deposits were discovered and explored annually. The increase in oil production, however, did not lead to the improvement of social infrastructures. Faced with inflation and the fall of oil prices worldwide, the government preferred to spend money on the development of prioritised projects. The Soviet economy of that period cannot be characterised as human capital oriented (Nursultanova, 2011, p. 62).

Another reason for the lack of interest by the central authorities in the development of the region was the large number of shift workers sent to Novy Uzen from other republics of the USSR, mostly from the Caucasus. Sending shift workers was very convenient for central ministries and agencies because they did not have to spend money on the development of social infrastructures or training of the local personnel. It was estimated that in Western Kazakhstan, the number of shift workers reached 27,000 with 70% coming from outside the republic (Karamanov, 1989, p. 2). Western Kazakhstan, including Novy Uzen, was thus literally flooded with shift workers from the Caucasus and other regions of the USSR. This created discontent and a sense of relative deprivation amongst the local population for whom the rate of unemployment was very high.

According to a decree of the Central Committee of the CPSU adopted on March 31, 1989 “On the attraction of unemployed part of the labour force to the socio-useful work in the Union and autonomous republics of the Middle Asia, Caucasus, and North Caucasus,” Moscow was aware of the high rate of unemployment, particularly in Central Asia and the Caucasus. It was estimated that 40% of 18 to 29 year olds in Central Asia and South Caucasus were unemployed (Anonymous, 1989d). The Central Committee recognised that the growth of social tensions was due to the high rate of unemployment. Clashes in the Ferghana Valley (Uzbek SSR), Novy Uzen

(Kazakh SSR), and Nebit Dag (Turkmen SSR) demonstrated that young people were active participants in the protests.

The high rate of unemployment among the local population was aggravated by the lack of housing, foodstuff, and other social benefits enjoyed by shift workers. This eventually led to the rise of tensions between ethnic Kazakhs and other nationalities (Anonymous, 1989b; 1989c). According to the official authorities' data, each citizen of Novy Uzen had 16 square meters of living space. However, this figure did not correspond to the real situation which was considerably lower. *Pripiski* [padding] was normal practice in the Soviet Union when official authorities sought to improve indicators in order to provide a more positive image of their work. In fact, each citizen of the Guriev region had 9.6 square meters of housing, while the number at the national level was 13.5 square meters (Karamanov, 1989, p. 2). A further example, 460 out of the 600 bus drivers in Novy Uzen did not have housing (Ryskoža, 2009). The situation in the rural area was even worse.

The paradox of the situation that eventually led to the conflict in Novy Uzen was that the oil and gas rich region was in reality very poor in comparison to other regions of Kazakhstan. This regional disparity has continued during the post-Soviet period. Even today, Western Kazakhstan remains the poorest region, despite its oil deposits and the influx of petrodollars and foreign oil companies into the economy (Kurganbaeva 2009; Najman *et al.*, 2008). The high rate of poverty thus partly explains why the conflict happened in this part of the country rather than elsewhere (Anonymous, 1989a). For instance, in 1988, the revenue of the Uzenneft was 110 million rubles, whereas Moscow provided only 3.5 million rubles for the socio-economic development of Novy Uzen. At the same time, the centre benefited tremendously from oil revenues, while the local population lacked basic public goods and services. As Samoleinko noted, "citizens drink water contaminated with herbicides, defoliants and mineral supplements. Some products are allocated through rationing cards. Sugar is given half of a kilogram per person. And rationing cards are given only to the employed people!" (Samoilenko, 1989). Even in 1990, it was claimed that with the growth of oil extraction, the deficit of food products would increase. They noted that from 1989 to 1990, product demand was met as follows: 65% for dairy, 75% for eggs, 90% for fish, 60% for vegetables including potatoes, and 17% for fruit and berries. The local food production

could not provide an adequate amount of food for the population due to the fast growth of personnel employed by a constantly expanding oil industry (*Koncepciâ ...*, 1990).

The economic effectiveness of the state is determined by the ability to produce enough food products to feed its own population. The strategy for agricultural development was not based on this vision. For instance, in the early 1980s, local farmers produced only 40% of the milk required with the remaining 60% being imported from other regions of the country and Soviet republics (*idem*). The regional administration planned to increase the production of milk twice for the period from 1986 to 2000. The expected growth of milk production would not cover the needs of the market and the region would remain dependent on food imports. This deficit of food products, along with poverty and unemployment among the local population, created frustration and discontent that eventually led to a violent conflict on the one hand, but on the other hand made local elites think about the economic perspectives of the region.

Economic Nationalism in Need

Economic nationalism implies the defence of domestic markets. The strategy employed by the local authorities at the time would not lead to independence from the other republics. By the end of the 1980s, the events in Novy Uzen and other areas demonstrated the necessity to turn to economic nationalism. When did local authorities become aware of a necessity to defend the interests of the local population and market? Before the events in Novy Uzen, the leaders of the Guriev region did not give sufficient consideration to the social situation of the region and relied on Moscow based decisions. After the conflict in 1989, they sought to find a solution of their own. The conference “The Concept of food products provision of the Guriev region’s population” that took place in Guriev in 1990 is the best illustration of this shift (*idem*). The majority of the reporters recognised that the Guriev region had the potential to provide enough food for its own population. However, the problem was to find investments for the food industry, renovate equipment and machinery, and apply modern technologies to agriculture (*idem*).

We argue that these measures represented the transition to an economic nationalism approach. Firstly, the expectations to produce enough

foodstuff and be secure and independent from other regions and Soviet republics in terms of food provision were high. It meant protectionism of the local industry and local market. Secondly, the development of a local food industry could lead to the decrease of unemployment rates among the local population, primarily ethnic Kazakhs who lived mostly in rural areas. Thirdly, it could also lead to changes in the structure of the workforce. Personnel for the oil industry was trained in Moscow and Baku, while the cadres for textile and food industries studied in a number of cities of Kazakhstan such as Alma-Ata, Dzhambul, Karaganda, Chimkent, amongst others. The introduction of new technologies and training of local personnel was a realistic task and represented the transition from the Moscow vision of the region's economic development to economic nationalism. Following the local authorities lead, the republican leadership began to raise issues related to economic nationalism.

The local population, and especially those who could not find jobs, were in a disadvantaged position. In sharp contrast to the reality, an article published in *Pravda* on 10 November 1989 depicted a completely different picture. It reported on the excellent living and working conditions of employees of the Caspian Metallurgical Plant in Ševčenko. The article stated that there was full provision of public goods and services including resorts, sanatoriums, child and medical facilities. "You can find everything there: swimming pools, sauna, sports and medical facilities" (Mosin, 1989). The average salary of personnel at the children's hospital was 270 rubles and for every two children, there was one kindergarten supervisor (Karamanov, 1989). However, the local people, could not even dream of such benefits. This sharp contrast between those who could not find a job and those who benefitted from the provision of goods by the Ministry of Oil and Gas created a sense of injustice and discontent with the policies. In addition, the ineffectiveness of management was also evident through the growth of foodstuff imports. For instance, from 1969 to 1989, the import of grain, fish, meat, and butter increased tenfold, highlighting that Kazakhstan was dependent on other Soviet republics for food security.

These social, economic and ecological problems, as well as various disproportions, combined and led to protests against social and economic injustice. The fact that the events in Novy Uzen were driven by economic hardships rather than by ethnic hatred was recognised in 1989:

They were not driven by nationalism and were not directed against the Russian or Caucasian population. In fact, it was a protest against the dictate of the administrative command system (*idem*).

One of the website sources provides the memoirs of the veterans of the special military unit Vityaz:

The order was to arrive to Novy Uzen in the Mangyşlak region of the Kazakh SSR. There were mass riots. The curfew was introduced. The existing situation showed that corruption penetrated all levels and brought the region rich with resources to poverty. This provided an impetus for mass riots based on social and international grounds (Public Organisation ..., 1989).

Indeed, the Soviet Union as an empire extracted resources without considering the local population and environment. The population of Novy Uzen, along with other towns and villages of Western Kazakhstan, was against this economic injustice imposed by the centre.

Conclusion

The article suggests that the events in Novy Uzen in 1989 can be characterised as the first attempt to attract attention to the socio-economic problems and economic development of the region. This is in stark contrast to the interethnic nature of the conflict as it was described by analysts and the mass media. In fact, the Kazakh people tried to find and occupy their own niches in the economy of the republic. Until the 1970s, the majority of the Kazakh population worked in the agricultural sector. There was an increase in migration of Kazakhs to urban centres due to a high birth rate among ethnic Kazakhs and the fall of agricultural production coinciding with the growth of industry. However, most jobs in industrial enterprises and the service sector were occupied by other ethnic groups such as Russians, Ukrainians, Chechens and Lezgins.

All negative tendencies that existed in the USSR in the 1980s affected socio-economic conditions. The combination of factors such as the worsening of social situations and the growth of competition in the job market became the basis for potential conflicts in many areas including in Guriev. Moscow did not take any measures to improve the situation in the region. It was not interested in creating new jobs or investing money in the development of infrastructures in the region. Instead, the centre preferred to bring in shift workers to Novy Uzen from other republics, mainly the

Caucasus. This policy aggravated the situation for local Kazakhs who were the main job seekers in urban centres.

The internal processes that took place in the USSR were not completely isolated from the processes of world development. Some scholars claim that globalisation of the twentieth century is based on precluding the economic development of the South by the developed North. In the world economic community, the “invisible hand” was not working properly. The advanced countries created barriers for the less developed states of the South thus preventing a free flow of their goods. They introduced high tariffs, subsidised the production of certain goods, including agricultural products. This created dissatisfaction among the less developed countries that began to realise the importance of economic nationalism.

This division of the world into the developed North and underdeveloped South is reflected by the economic model of the USSR. The economic model can be understood as the confrontation between the developed Slavic centre (North) and Central Asian republics and the Caucasus (South). The “inequality of structure” as described by Perroux was observed inside the USSR. Although Moscow had the potential to invest capital in high-level industry, it mostly allocated money for the development of raw material extraction industries such as oil, gas, ores, and others. The “inequality of structure” of the Soviet economy was created to serve the export needs of the country, while the needs of the domestic market in the region were not addressed.

Today, economic nationalism is an important issue for Kazakhstan. It has become important to express the interests of the people and the elites. The riots and protests against injustice and hard economic conditions were repeated in 2009 in Žanaozen, as was renamed Novy Uzen in 1993. The people of Žanaozen complained that the salaries of the local population working for foreign oil companies were much lower than those received by the managers. Again, as was the case twenty years ago, there are no jobs for young people, and very expensive housing and foodstuff. The events in Žanaozen confirmed that economic nationalism is still an important issue on the political and economic agenda of post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

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Abstract

This article focuses on the events in Novy Uzen – ethnic clashes between Kazakhs and ethnic minorities from the Caucasus – that took place in 1989 in the West of Kazakhstan. At that time, officials interpreted the riots as an ethnic conflict unleashed by 'hooligans' on the basis of ethnic hatred. In contrast, we argue that it was a result of policies conducted by Moscow towards the local population of this oil-rich region. The 1989 events were mainly driven by a strong desire to protect the local labour market and thus to force migrants to leave the Novy Uzen region. These events can be seen as part of an economic nationalism that began to emerge in Kazakhstan in the 1980s.

Keywords: Novy Uzen, economic nationalism, ethnic conflict, Kazakhs, minorities.

Résumé

Les violences de 1989 à Novy Uzen. Conflit ethnique ou nationalisme économique ?

Cet article traite des violences ethniques qui ont eu lieu en 1989 à Novy Uzen, dans l'Ouest du Kazakhstan, entre des Kazakhs et des minorités ethniques originaires du Caucase. À l'époque, les autorités avaient perçu les émeutes comme un conflit communautaire déclenché par des « hooligans » sur la base d'une haine ethnique. Nous estimons au contraire que ce conflit est le résultat des politiques menées par Moscou à l'égard de la population locale de cette région riche en pétrole. Il était avant tout motivé par la volonté de protéger le marché du travail local et donc de forcer les migrants à quitter la région de Novy Uzen. Ces événements peuvent être considérés comme relevant d'un nationalisme économique qui a commencé à émerger au Kazakhstan dans les années quatre-vingt.

Mots clés : Novy Uzen, nationalisme économique, conflit ethnique, Kazakhs, minorités ethniques.

Аннотация

Новый Узень в 1989 г.: межэтнические конфликты или экономический национализм?

Данная статья анализирует конфликт между казахами и этническими меньшинствами с Кавказа, который произошел на западе Казахстана в Новом Узене в 1989 году. В тот период власти охарактеризовали конфликт как этнический, спровоцированный «хулиганами» на основе этнической ненависти. Авторы статьи утверждают, что конфликт был результатом проводимой Москвой политики в отношении богатого нефтью региона. Одной из ведущих сил конфликта была защита местного рынка труда и желание, чтобы приезжие мигранты покинули Новой Узень. События 1989 года могут рассматриваться как часть экономического национализма, который стал появляться в Казахстане в 80-е годы прошлого столетия.

Ключевые слова: Новый Узень, экономический национализм, этнический конфликт, казахи, этнические меньшинства.