

**KYRGYZ LEADERSHIP AND ETHNOPOLITICS BEFORE AND  
AFTER THE TULIP REVOLUTION: THE CHANGED  
POSITION OF ETHNIC RUSSIANS AND UZBEKS**

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## **Abstract**

The Soviet Union's multi-ethnic legacy in the Central Asian region, particularly in Kyrgyzstan was a crucial factor that largely impacted its post-independence state consolidation and transition. Especially the nation-building became difficult due to the ethnic heterogeneity of its population. More recently in 2005 there was the "Tulip Revolution", basically an overthrow of the northern president by the southern clan leader. Despite the fact that the system and character of the government and of any other governmental structures did not change following the so-called Kyrgyz "Tulip Revolution", there have been observations of the dramatic changes for the worse in the position of ethnic minorities, more specifically Russians and Uzbeks, and their relation with the titular nation. This work uses interviews and media material in order to demonstrate how the elite change has caused the changes analyzed in the thesis. The findings of the research demonstrate that the elite change, which was a result of 2005 events, is the main factor that has caused negative shifts in the political representation, ethnic organizations becoming more active and politicized, official policies taking more nationalistic tones, and in deteriorated inter-ethnic relations.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter I. Theoretical Framework</b> .....	9
1.1 “Stateness” .....	9
1.2 “Nationalizing states” .....	11
<b>Chapter II. Historical Background: before the “Tulip Revolution”</b> .....	19
2.1 Nation-building under the Soviet regime .....	19
2.2 Post-soviet state-building in Kyrgyzstan .....	24
2.3 The “Tulip Revolution” .....	27
<b>Chapter III. The Position of Ethnic Russians and Uzbeks before and after the “Tulip Revolution”</b> .....	33
3.1 Ethnic Russians and Uzbeks before the “Tulip Revolution” .....	33
3.1.1 The Uzbeks .....	33
3.1.2 The Russians .....	36
3.2 Ethnic Russians and Uzbeks after the “Tulip Revolution” .....	39
3.2.1 Political Representation .....	40
3.2.2 Ethnic organizations .....	44
3.2.3 Governmental policies .....	47
3.2.4 Interethnic relations .....	49
3.2.5 What is ahead? .....	52
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	53
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	58
<b>Appendix</b> .....	63

## Introduction

“A revolution constitutes a challenge to the established political order and the eventual establishment of a new order radically different from the preceding one.”<sup>1</sup> In other words a revolution is “in social and political science, a major, sudden, and hence typically violent alteration in government and in related associations and structures.”<sup>2</sup> This implies that a revolution should result in dramatic changes in the government system and in other appropriate areas. Therefore, as Knyazev, Omarov and Radnitz argue the “Tulip revolution” of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan was no more than a change of the governing elites, because first and foremost, the character, form and the system of governance did not change as a consequence; second, the new elite is continuing the old pattern of ruling the country; third, it was a struggle for power between the various clan leaders after the long rule of one of the northern clan leaders.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, in this piece it will be referred to as a revolution, since it has been accepted and referred to by the international audience, mass media, people and the government as one of the “colored revolutions” of the post-communist space that had earlier take place in Serbia, Ukraine and Georgia.

In the context of Kyrgyzstan a “clan is informal identity organizations with a kinship basis”<sup>4</sup>, while “kinship is the core foundation of clan relations and identity, and a network is the

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<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2008, „**revolution**,” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9063362>>.

<sup>2</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2008, „**revolution**,” *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*.  
<<http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9063362>>. See also, John Foran, „Theories of Revolution Revisited: Toward a Fourth generation?”, *Sociological Theory*, 11:1, (1993), 1-20.

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Scott Radnitz, „What really happened in Kyrgyzstan?”, *Journal of Democracy*, 17:2, National Endowment for Democracy and The John Hopkins University Press (2006); Alexandr Knyazev, „*Gosudarstvennyi perevorot 24 marta 2005 g. V Kirgizii*”, [Governmental overthrow on March 24 of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan], (2007), [www.knyazev.kg](http://www.knyazev.kg); Nur Omarov, „*God peremen v Kyrgyzstane*”, [The Year of changes in Kyrgyzstan], December 14, 2005, [www.apn.kz](http://www.apn.kz).

<sup>4</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 24.

organizing principle of this unit.”<sup>5</sup> According to Collins “clan politics, while not sufficient to explain the whole of the transitional process, is critical to explaining post-transition convergence – why and how elites and their reform programs are constrained, and why and how new regime institutions, of whatever type, are penetrated and transformed so that they fail to serve the ideological or bureaucratic purposes of the state.”<sup>6</sup>

Ethnic minorities did not take part in these events; they chose to stay neutral in the political life of the country as usual; they try to not participate in political demonstrations. From the works of the aforementioned scholars it can be derived that Kyrgyzstan is living the same life with the same way of distribution of resources based on the patronage system as under the first president Akayev. This means that the situation of ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan would stay the same as under the president Akayev’s nationalizing policies, because the new president Bakiev did not introduce any new or different policies regarding the ethnic groups. However, it was noticed that the position of ethnic minorities has changed following those events despite the fact that they were unexpected. They have deteriorated. Then, my question is: why has the position of ethnic minorities worsened if the type of the government, policy-making, or the Constitution did not change regarding the issue of ethnic minorities?

Many people were arguing and predicting that these changes would improve the representation and overall position of Uzbeks in the government, because the southern part of Kyrgyzstan is culturally close to Uzbeks and big cities, such as Osh, Uzgen, Karasuu are dominated by Uzbek. “Uzbeks number 46%, Kyrgyz 24% and Russians comprise about 20% in the administrative center of Osh (211,000 people). Uzbeks are also a majority in the regional

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<sup>5</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Kathleen Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 60.

center, the city of Uzgen.”<sup>7</sup> Of about 34 thousand citizens as the statistics shows 27 thousand are Uzbek, 4 thousand are Kyrgyz, about 1 thousand are Russians and Ukrainians. “The town of Kara-Suu used to be one single town during the Soviet period, but is now divided into two parts – one belonging to Kyrgyzstan and the other to Uzbekistan, separated by a river. The majority of the residents in the Kyrgyz part of Kara-Suu are Uzbeks (90% of the residents).”<sup>8</sup> Consequently, it seemed that predictions that southern clans will take over all the spheres were true, Bakiev appointing his clan members, family members, relatives, and friends to key positions, which logically would lead to the under-representation of the Russian minority, since they are concentrated in the northern part, causing a shift in the positions of largest Uzbek and Russian minorities. As a consequence of the redistribution of power and resources, there are more cases that involve the appointments of members of the southern clans. One such example is that Bakiev’s five brothers and two sons occupy key positions.

There are about 100 ethnicities residing in Kyrgyzstan, the largest two being ethnic Russians and Uzbeks that have interchanged places in early 1990’s. The replacement of Russians by Uzbeks as the first largest minority community was due to the nation-building policies of the post-soviet leadership, as well as socio-economic downfall becoming one of the main reasons for the European ethnic group’s outflow from Kyrgyzstan. Even though only three years have passed, it is already possible to argue, as is done later in this work, that despite the fact that there are no important changes in the governmental policies towards ethnic minorities due to known facts (that will be discussed in the last chapter), small alterations are being made, which are sometimes contradictory. What is more important is that even if there are no significant changes

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<sup>7</sup> Valery Tishkov, “Don’t kill me: I am a Kyrgyz! : An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 32: 2, (1995), 134

<sup>8</sup> International Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and Memorial, “Ethnic Minorities in Kyrgyzstan: Recent Developments”, *Mission Report*, (2006), 3

in the policies, one can observe changes in the interrelation between ethnic minorities and the titular nation (Kyrgyz), as well as with the state, because these small modifications together with political instability (struggle between the opposition and Bakiev for central power) create an illusion that their position is worsening or that the state is more aggressive towards minorities. This is understandable, since ethnic minorities have been paid very little attention by the central government, which was usually able to make informal agreements with ethnic and regional leaders who were able to control the situation following the Osh ethnic conflict. One thing can be said confidently, following the 2005 events: different elites, those who were in the opposition together with Bakiev and helped to overthrow Akayev, were fighting over the central power, appointing and dismissing officials, eventually causing ignorance of the regional and ethnic leaders, as opposed to the previous leadership. These facts make the case even worse, resulting in uprisings of ethnic communities with demands, particularly Uzbeks. There are reactions from the Kyrgyz side as well, so the relationship is becoming tense raising conflicts even though they are small and local, but driven on ethnic-lines. As people of Kyrgyzstan were able to witness, for the first time after the Osh ethnic conflict in 1991 between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, there were ethnically driven demonstrations on the streets in the southern part of the republic, in the city of Jalalabad.

Therefore, this work's main purpose is to assess the evolving ethno-political situation in Kyrgyzstan, more precisely to analyze the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks in the country before and after the „Tulip Revolution” of 2005 and find out why their position worsened if the political system stayed the same. This is important because, Russians and Uzbeks are the largest minorities residing in this country and the study of these two ethnic groups can reflect the situation of all the other minorities in the state. In addition, they are territorially concentrated, which has a potential for ethnic mobilization in case a conflict arises. The strongest example is



the Osh conflict that was based on ethnic lines and considered to be one of the violent disputes on the post-soviet territory. Moreover, I will demonstrate how the 2005 events have impacted on the political and social conditions of the ethnic minorities and look at the implications this may have for inter-ethnic relations. In the end, I will provide future prognosis concerning the issue of ethnopolitics in Kyrgyzstan. The time frame of this work is from the moment of the USSR breakdown to the present, since it is intended to make a comparative analysis of two phases of an independent Kyrgyzstan.

This topic is important because it will be a contribution to the existing small literature on ethnic issues in post-soviet Kyrgyzstan, as it is considered to be a sensitive issue to talk about for both the titular nation and minorities due to the past ethnic conflict, and there is a gap in the literature on this topic. In fact, there is no research in this field following the “Tulip revolution”. In the existing literature on ethnopolitics in Kyrgyzstan there is a general view that the USSR had a huge impact on the post-independence state consolidation and that nation-building was heavily nationalized, which could have caused conflicts. The majority of authors<sup>9</sup> explain that there is no repetition of the Osh conflict due to informal politics in terms of informal agreements between the ethnic minorities and the state. This work will be a valuable piece of information especially for those intending to conduct research on the ethnopolitics or regionalism studies in Kyrgyzstan after the so-called “Tulip Revolution”, since it touches upon regionalism as well.

The fact that only ethnic Russians and Uzbeks were chosen to be studied can be explained. Besides their size, the Russian Federation and Uzbekistan have an influence on Kyrgyzstan’s ethnic policies, especially since the Russian Federation is one of the strategic

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<sup>9</sup> See for example, Kathleen Collins, „The Role of Clans in Central Asia”, *Comparative Politics*, 35:2, (2003); Alisher Khamidov, “Kak vostanovit usy doveriya: uzbekskaya obshina i vlast v Kyrgyzstane” [How to reestablish trust: Uzbek community and leadership in Kyrgyzstan]. *Turonzamin journal*, (October 2, 2006), <http://turonzamin.com/2006/10/02/alisher/>

actors in the Central Asian region. Finally, the cultural influence of these ethnic groups on ethnic Kyrgyz is great and this further strengthens the north-south regional division. The northern part is culturally russified, whereas the southern part is under the cultural influence of Uzbeks, since “the Uzbek minority is concentrated around the southwestern city of Osh, and the Russian population is concentrated in Bishkek and adjacent Chu province.”<sup>10</sup> “Tension between north and south surfaced at the end of 1990 following the removal of Masaliev as republican leader, in response to the ethnic rioting in the south, and his replacement with Askar Akayev.”<sup>11</sup> “A variety of proposals were made, including the idea of dividing the republic in two and formation of a Kyrgyz Federation based on distinct northern and southern republics.”<sup>12</sup>

The main methodology in finding answers to the research questions is interviews. Interviews conducted via e-mail with NGO workers, political scientists and journalists who are experts on the contemporary politics of Kyrgyzstan, and are aware of the political discourse, recent developments and ethnopolitics. Seven people whom I interviewed were university graduates, work close to politics and were closely observing the political discourse prior, during and after the 2005 events. In addition to interviews, I will use secondary research, analysis of existing material, media sources, articles, electronic sources of various agencies, and the Constitution. There will be also a contribution of reports and statistical data of international organizations. Regarding the findings, one thing should be said here concerning the methodology. Due to the time constraints and shortage of academic resources, as well as absence

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<sup>10</sup> Country Profile: Kyrgyzstan, *Library of Congress – Federal Research Division*, (January, 2007), 5

<sup>11</sup> Neil J. Melvin, „Patterns of Center-Regional Relations in Central Asia: The cases of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan”, In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions and Conflict*, ed. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 180

<sup>12</sup> Neil J. Melvin, „Patterns of Center-Regional Relations in Central Asia: The cases of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan”, In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions and Conflict*, ed. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 180

of access to governmental materials following the revolution, it was unavoidable to rely only on media sources and interview results when writing the final chapter of this work.

As stated above, this work aims to explain what has caused the change in the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks by comparing the position of Uzbek and Russian minorities in Kyrgyzstan before and after the so-called “Tulip Revolution”. This in-depth study of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks can provide us with a clear picture of why the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks changed following the 2005 events, and the general political situation in the country; it will be possible to see the major developments, especially concerning the regional division following the 2005 events, and what consequences these may have in the near future.

The first chapter will introduce the theoretical framework and concepts that are most applicable to the case of Kyrgyzstan. If precisely, a theory of ‘nationalizing’ state and the concept of ‘stateness’, which are explanatory factors of the dynamics of the ‘nationalizing’ state-building and the complexity of ethnopolitics in Kyrgyzstan.

Then, there will be a second chapter on the soviet and post-soviet history of Kyrgyzstan, which will give a full picture of Kyrgyz ethnopolitics. As many scholars<sup>13</sup> agreed, Soviet history has served as the defining factor in shaping the post-soviet politics of ethnicity, since the new states were created based on the national identities promoted by the Soviet government. The literature on the ethnicity and ethno-politics of Kyrgyzstan is divided into two major segments. As will be discussed later, the majority of the literature says that USSR leaders’ policies were based on the Marxism-Leninism ideas, the goal of which was to achieve after some stages a

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<sup>13</sup> See for example, John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia* (USA: St. Martin’s Press, INC, 1999); Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict* (USA: Greenwood Press, 1994); Askat Dukenbaev and William Hansen, “Understanding politics in Kyrgyzstan” in *DEMSTAR research report no. 16*, (2003), [www.demstar.dk](http://www.demstar.dk)

“soviet state” with a single soviet identity. Some scholars<sup>14</sup> focus more on the post-independence period. They describe how this state consolidation process is realized, where they refer to various factors that could influence their self-consolidation, such as foreign pressure, domestic legitimacy, socio-economic indicators etc. In the same chapter I will talk about the important event, so-called “Tulip Revolution” of 2005 and its results, where there will be an analysis of the participation or non-participation of these ethnic groups, the roots of the event itself. How was it realized? What kind of implications did this event have on the overall political situation in the country? The reasons why scholars consider that it was not a real revolution, but only the elite change?

Finally, the last chapter will outline research findings, primarily based on the interviews with individuals engaged in this specific field of research. There we will see the implications these events had on the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks and their interrelation with the titular nation. Afterwards, the work introduces some important conclusions based on the recent developments in this sphere, such as change in the political representation and governmental policies, growing activity and politicization of the ethnic organizations, changed interaction of ethnic minorities and the titular nation, through the analysis of which it is possible to measure the ‘nationalizing’ nature of the state.

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<sup>14</sup> See for example, Paul Kolstoe, *Russian in the Former Soviet Republics* (Hurst and Company, London, 1995); Airat Aklaev, *Democratization and Ethnic Peace: Patterns of Ethnopolitical Crisis Management in post-Soviet Settings* (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1999); Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, and Edward Allworth, *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands. The Politics of National Identities*. (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

## Chapter I. Theoretical Framework

Kyrgyzstan did not have the experience of independent statehood prior to the collapse of USSR; therefore it faced challenges and opportunities at the same time to become a state starting with building institutions and undergoing a transition. Due to its heterogeneity – a legacy of soviet policies, it has become difficult, so one of the first goals was to identify itself nationally, which resulted in the implementation of nationalistic policies. Brubaker's theory of 'nationalizing states' is applicable to understanding the ethnopolitics of an independent Kyrgyzstan during different phases of its statehood and transition, because it clearly reflects the nationalizing nature of its nation-building. Within the framework of this theory, there is an important concept - 'stateness' that explains the difficulties regarding the transition process, primarily because of its nationalizing policies in order to have a consolidated state without the prior statehood experience, even if the transition in this state cannot be identified as democratization. In this respect, this chapter will analyze both the theory and the concept in detail. The contribution of Kyrgyzstan's case study to the theoretical literature is based on the empirical findings and will be presented at the end of this chapter.

### 1.1 "Stateness"

Linz, Stepan, Hughes, and Sasse<sup>15</sup> argue that post-soviet governments were occupied by the titular nations, which started implementing policies that were largely exclusivist. They state that such homogenizing policies most likely result in inter-ethnic conflicts, which in its turn impedes democratic transition. "Linz and Stepan single out two institutional means as having a stabilizing

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<sup>15</sup> James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, „Comparing Regional and Ethnic Conflicts in Post-Soviet Transition States.”, In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions and Conflict*, ed. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 9

effect: consociationalism and electoral sequencing.”<sup>16</sup> They call them a concept of “Stateness [which] refers to the relationship between nation-building, state-building and democratization.”<sup>17</sup> “As elucidated by Linz and Stepan, the stateness problem relates how a polity’s structure and identity affects its transition to democracy.”<sup>18</sup> They say that if there is a threat for a national minority’s culture, language or religion not to survive, they might accept a claim for independence as the only way to keep their identity. However, as they also state, instead of accommodation of variety of local identities, unitary states have been constitutionally established in Central Asia. “At the same time, the diversity within the unitary state forms that developed in Central Asia reflected the variety of informal, notably elite, ethno-linguistic, and social networks, which served as the basis for contesting the territorial division of power in each of the new states.”<sup>19</sup> “At its base the crisis of stateness has to do with the problem of boundaries and identities incorporated within the territorial state.”<sup>20</sup> As Aklaev suggests in order to solve this crisis there should be a construction of a polity with accommodating nation-building or a polity with divided sub-units.

Scholars<sup>21</sup> using an elitist approach argue that right after the collapse of USSR, all states started a democratic transition process, and that the democratization in post-communist states

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<sup>16</sup> Arunas Juska, “Ethno-political transformation in the states of former USSR.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22:3 (1999), 9

<sup>17</sup> Monica Duffy Toft, „Multinationality, Regional Institutions, State-building and the Failed Transition in Georgia, In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions and Conflict*, ed. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 124

<sup>18</sup> Monica Duffy Toft, „Multinationality, Regional Institutions, State-building and the Failed Transition in Georgia, In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions and Conflict*, ed. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 124

<sup>19</sup> Neil J. Melvin, „Patterns of Center-Regional Relations in Central Asia: The cases of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Uzbekistan”, In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions and Conflict*, ed. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 166

<sup>20</sup> Airat Aklaev, *Democratization and ethnic peace: Patterns of ethno-political crisis management in post-soviet settings*, (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1999), 114

<sup>21</sup> See for example: Ghia Nodia, „Nationalism and Democracy”, in *Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict and Democracy*, ed. Larry Diamond and Mark F. Plattner, (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1994); Jack Snyder, *From Voting to Violence: Democratization and Nationalist Conflict*, (London: W.W.Norton and Company LTD, 2000)

can lead to the politicization of ethnicity. They argue that in most of the states undergoing this process the political elite use nationalism in order to gain popular support. Moreover, they propose the idea that heterogeneity hinders democracy in these states, which is criticized by institutionalists<sup>22</sup> as a deficient approach. It has been argued by institutionalists that in the majority of post-soviet states the process of change cannot be called democratization, especially in the Central Asian region, where various types of authoritarianism are taking root. “Particularly given the legacy of formal and informal institutionalized and territorialized multi-ethnicity...the adoption of nationalizing and homogenizing policies in divided societies is likely to intensify minority discontent and sow conflict.”<sup>23</sup> In addition, “ethnically relevant power differences and attempts at redistribution of power arrangements are among the major causes of ethnopolitical conflict.”<sup>24</sup>

## 1.2 “Nationalizing states”

In the literature on nationalism and nation-building there is an important debate on Brubaker’s theory of ‘nationalizing states’ that I found applicable to the given case, because both sides of the debate practically reflect all the theories and concepts in the fields of nationalism and nation-building. The theory of ‘nationalizing states’ widely used by many scholars, though largely criticized by Kuzio about its validity, is the main theory that I apply to my case study, because it explains the ethno-political situation of Kyrgyzstan, despite some weaknesses pointed out by Kuzio.

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<sup>22</sup> See for example, Hughes and Sasse, „Conflict and Accomodation in the FSU: The Role of Insitutions and Regimes.”, In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions and Conflict*, ad. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Hughes and Sasse, „Conflict and Accomodation in the FSU: The Role of Institutions and Regimes.”, In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions and Conflict*, ed. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 222

<sup>24</sup> Airat Aklaev, *Democratization and ethnic peace: Patterns of ethno-political crisis management in post-soviet settings*, (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1999), 33

Brubaker categorizes three types of states in the world, namely ‘civic states’, ‘bi-national states’ and ‘nationalizing states’. He argues that in his description in post-communist Eurasia all the states belong to the third category. “These are the states that are conceived by their dominant elites as nation-states, as the states of and for particular nations, yet as ‘incomplete’ or ‘unrealized’ nation-states, as insufficiently ‘national’ in variety of senses.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, he proposes that these states can be ‘nationalizing’ to a different degree and in various ways with different nationalizing politics. Therefore, Brubaker suggests some elements that he believes are common in all: first, “the existence of a ‘core nation’ or nationality, defined in ethnocultural terms, and sharply distinguished from the citizenry”<sup>26</sup>; second, “the idea that the core nation legitimately ‘owns’ the polity, that the polity exists as the polity of and for the core nation”<sup>27</sup>; third, the idea that the interests of the core nation are not sufficiently manifested and accomplished; fourth, the idea that special policies are necessary for the promotion of the ‘core nation’s’ language, and its predominance in all spheres of the state; fifth, justifying such actions as compensation for the pre-existing disadvantaged position; sixth, practical implementation based on these ideas of the laws, media, education etc.; and finally, “the adoption – by the state, by particular state agencies and officials, and by non-state organizations – of policies and practices, formal and informal, that were informed by the ideas outlined above.”<sup>28</sup>

Among all, the second element, namely the idea of legitimate ownership of the state by the titular nation and the fifth element, namely justifying nationalizing policies as compensatory, he considers as key, and claims their presence in all the post-soviet states. Moreover, he claims that

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<sup>25</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Nationalizing states in the old ‘New Europe’ – and the new”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19:2 (1996), 411

<sup>26</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Nationalizing states in the old ‘New Europe’ – and the new”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19:2 (1996), 415

<sup>27</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Nationalizing states in the old ‘New Europe’ – and the new”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19:2 (1996), 416

<sup>28</sup> Rogers Brubaker, “Nationalizing states in the old ‘New Europe’ – and the new”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19:2 (1996), 416



it is impossible for ‘civic’ and ‘bi-national’ models to be established in these states; however, for legitimizing for the outside world, such states are able to embody civil elements into their constitutions, declarations and speeches. While presenting empirical evidence on Poland, he states that nationalizing policies can be both ‘assimilationist’ (Germans and Jews) and ‘disassimilationist’ (Ukrainians). So the main statement he makes is that it is a question of to what extent and in what form these new states are nationalizing, as opposed to the question they will be nationalizing. He also describes the inter-relation between the three components: ‘nationalizing state’, ‘national minorities’ and ‘external homelands’, according to which nationalizing policies are not undertaken without consideration of the other two factors. At the same time “even within national minorities there is a dynamic division between those who advocate protection from abroad, secession (‘exit’) and local autonomy.”<sup>29</sup> Presumably, these preferences depend on the nature of the state politics and position of the minorities, for instance, the Russian minority in Kazakhstan that he refers to, demanded secession. Brubaker also touches upon the issue of the ability and simultaneously complexity of application of the concept within one state, not just internationally; he refers to the difficulty of applying one ‘nationalizing’ policy to all the spheres of public life due to the differences in their importance, interests etc.

“In firmly linking nationality to the notion of ethnic homeland, the practitioners of Soviet ideology generated a belief system which held that each titular nation is indivisibly connected through its putative history to a particular territory that is the natural patrimony of that nation.”<sup>30</sup> This was implemented and has further developed during post-independence not only in Kyrgyzstan, but in all the Central Asian states, and “as Rogers Brubaker has suggested, they

<sup>29</sup> Taras Kuzio, „Nationalizing states’ or nation-building? A critical Review of the theoretical literature and empirical evidence”, *Nations and Nationalism*, 7:2, (2001), 137

<sup>30</sup> Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr and Edward Alworth, “*Nation-building in the Post-Soviet borderlands: The Politics of National Identities*”, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 139

might perhaps more appropriately be called ‘nationalizing states’. They are ethnically heterogeneous, ‘yet conceived as nation-states, whose dominant elites promote (to varying degrees) the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the nominally state-bearing nation.’<sup>31</sup> “Despite formulations in the constitutions and other legislative acts guaranteeing the equality of all citizens, nationalizing policies and practices are manifest in, *inter alia*, the iconography of the new regimes, the privileged status accorded to the local languages, newly revised histories and the exclusion of members of non-eponymous groups from the echelons of power.”<sup>32</sup>

“The more open nature of Kyrgyzstani society, in particular, coupled with its heterogeneous demographic composition, has allowed ethnic divisions to come to the fore in that country. As a consequence, there has been an ethnic component to virtually every major sphere of state activity, ranging from the adoption of the constitution and national currency.”<sup>33</sup> As the authors suggest this is not the only factor influencing nation-building, there are other factors that constrain this process, other than ethnic diversity, which are the type of the regime and the Russian Federation’s foreign policy. “Certain nationalizing measures intended to secure the cultural and political resurgence of the titular nation have been openly promoted (e.g. the upgrading of the local language, the re-invention of putative national holidays), while others have been ‘tacit’, informal practices carried out in accordance with the unwritten rules of the game.”<sup>34</sup> As this concept of ‘nationalizing states’ presents, despite the fact that legally, all the ethnic minorities are included, in reality the titular nation is given a distinct (higher) status, and

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<sup>31</sup> Pal Kolsto, “*Political Construction Sites. Nation-building in Russia and the Soviet States*”, (USA: Westview Press, 2000), 27

<sup>32</sup> Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr and Edward Alworth, “*Nation-building in the Post-Soviet borderlands: The Politics of National Identities*”, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 139

<sup>33</sup> Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr and Edward Alworth, “*Nation-building in the Post-Soviet borderlands: The Politics of National Identities*”, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 141

<sup>34</sup> Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr and Edward Alworth, “*Nation-building in the Post-Soviet borderlands: The Politics of National Identities*”, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 142

state policies are often contradictory causing the exclusion of non-titular groups. And here it is important to pay attention to the Russian minority, since it was a privileged group prior to the collapse, whereas now their position is overtaken.

Pal Kolsto examined the Russian population's new status in post-soviet states. According to him, Russians in Central Asian countries have become "new Russians" due to the fact that geographically and culturally they are far from mainland Russia. Kolsto says that this is why migration kept on the same level, and some Russians are returning to the region, since they do not feel welcome by heartland Russians. As he states, 'the Russian Diaspora', while identifying themselves as Russians, indeed, see themselves as Russians of a different type, due to the fact that they have been influenced by the culture of the region that they live in, and eventually, they may be loyal both to the Russian Federation and to the state that they live in, as well as have a longing for their own state.

Kuzio has written an article that criticizes Brubaker's theory discussed above, by providing his own analysis based on which he comes up with a different classification. One important thing to be noted here, he talks about the US, all the European states, but not about post-soviet states of Central Asia and Caucasus. He divides states into 'civic' and 'ethnic' (nationalizing), where 'civic' states are further classified as 'mono-ethnic', 'plural liberal', 'plural non-liberal' and 'ethnic democracies'. And only Belarus and Yugoslavia are defined as nationalizing in his categorization. His main argument in criticizing Brubaker's work is on the fact that he disagrees with Brubaker's division of states into 'civic West' and 'ethnic East', he demonstrates that all the states in the West and East have ethnic elements and that the West also went through this process earlier in their history. All the civic states have promoted homogenization policies based on the common history, language etc. but to a lesser degree, which means that Brubaker's theory is not

quite useful or valid. Therefore, he says that it is not right to attach Ukraine to this category, because “non-Russian minorities do not regard their host states as ‘nationalizers’. Indeed, the non-Russian national minorities in Ukraine voted for Kravchuk in the 1994 presidential elections, the candidate traditionally defined as ‘nationalist’.”<sup>35</sup> This he brings as a counter argument to Brubaker’s argument that policies of such states can be perceived by minorities and ‘external homelands’ as “an ‘oppressive’ state that is attempting to homogenize the country and eradicate regional identities. National minorities mobilize against the ‘oppressive’ host state with the help of the external homeland.”<sup>36</sup>

From the analysis above of both sides of the debate on the type of polities in the post-communist world and taking into consideration peculiarities of Kyrgyzstan’s case discussed below, I come to the conclusion that despite the criticisms of Kuzio, Brubaker’s conceptualization remains valid and applicable. However, of the weaknesses Kuzio claimed, there is one that contradicts Brubaker’s assumptions, the fact that non-Russians minorities of Ukraine have voted for a ‘nationalist’ leader, even though, according to Brubaker, these minorities are supposed to stand against such leaders.

From the wide variety of existing theories and concepts concerning ethno-political issues in newly independent countries and in general, the ‘nationalizing states’ theory and the ‘stateness’ concept were able to explain, each to different degree, the complexity of Kyrgyz ethno-politics. The major theory of the ‘nationalizing state’ describes the main course of the state after gaining its independence: how the inclusive legal policies are in fact exclusive; factors that impacted this way of consolidation. Whereas, the other concept, though mainly derived from liberal views can

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<sup>35</sup> Taras Kuzio, „‘Nationalizing states’ or nation-building? A critical Review of the theoretical literature and empirical evidence”, *Nations and Nationalism*, 7:2, (2001), 142

<sup>36</sup> Taras Kuzio, „‘Nationalizing states’ or nation-building? A critical Review of the theoretical literature and empirical evidence”, *Nations and Nationalism*, 7:2, (2001), 138

be also applied to Kyrgyzstan, since it is undergoing a transition process. As we were able to see, 'stateness' explains why in Kyrgyzstan transition to democracy is impossible and that its diverse ethnic composition is one of the constraints impeding this transition. The contribution of this research to the theoretical literature is based on the findings presented in the last chapter. Brubaker and his opponent Kuzio did not introduce factors explaining the change in the degree of 'nationalizing' in one state. They do not answer the question, why then, in one state after fifteen years of independence the 'nationalizing' degree has increased? From the findings of this research it is possible to observe the reasons and factors that can have an impact on the deepening of the nationalizing degree or the perceptions by national minorities that the state is becoming more nationalizing, eventually leading to the counter-reaction of minorities each in a different way, depending on their status, positions, conditions etc.

Presenting factors that cause deepening of 'nationalizing' degree seems important, since identifying state as 'nationalizing' is not enough. It is necessary to see whether the degree has increased or decreased over time, since, as Kuzio notices, time passes and states can become less 'nationalizing' due to the modernization. However, as historical evidence demonstrates, modernization can have the opposite effect, as states can become more 'nationalizing' due to the large immigration, for example Netherlands, UK etc. In some cases, such as Kyrgyzstan, as the empirical evidence clearly demonstrates, an increasing degree of 'nationalization' can occur due to the elite change. The new elite can be more aggressively promoting national identity due to the danger for a development of a unit by one of the ethnic minorities or break down of the existing stabilizing informal ties between the state and the minorities. From these it is possible to see that the threat and the leadership personality factors are important in explaining why countries move on the scale of 'nationalizing' degree, which was not closely examined by the

two scholars. Thus, in order to measure the ‘nationalizing’ nature of a state, as the empirical findings demonstrate, it is necessary to examine closely the shifts occurring in the political representation, activity and politicization of ethnic organizations, official policies and interethnic relations following the leadership change.

## Chapter II. Historical Background: before the “Tulip Revolution”

It is necessary to refer to the soviet and post-soviet historical background of Kyrgyzstan in order to understand Kyrgyz ethno-politics. As I have presented earlier, through the discussion of the historical background, the theory of ‘nationalizing state’ is being justified as well as the ‘stateness’ concept. The way that nations and ethnicities were treated under the soviet rule, or I would rather say ‘arranged’, have their impact on the post-independence consolidation, which defines the position of ethnic minorities, particularly Russians and Uzbeks in the state. For this reason, the objective of this chapter is to provide the historical background of Kyrgyzstan, where we will be able to see the process of Kyrgyzstan’s consolidation as a state and the soviet history’s impact on it.

### **2.1 Nation-building under the Soviet regime**

Soviet nation-building policies dramatically influenced the post-independence national consolidation process, during which ethnicity became highly politicized, as was the case with the Soviet nation-building as well. According to Tchoroev<sup>37</sup>, there were some main approaches such as the Marxist and Leninist dogmas that explained soviet ethnopolitics, both having the same basis, moving from class-based society to classless society in terms of identity. By this they meant that establishing socialism would lead to equality among all, thus absence of ethnic identification. The idea of both Lenin and then Stalin (meaning that Lenin’s idea was continued by Stalin but in a different way) was to reach a strong unified socialist state, which Stalin defined as one nation comprising of a federation and “as an historically evolved, stable community arising on the foundation of a common language, territory, economic life and psychological

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<sup>37</sup> Tynchtykbek Tchoroev, “Historiography of post-soviet,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34:2, (2002)

make-up, manifested in a community of culture.”<sup>38</sup> Both Lenin and Stalin considered the fact that “a nation can organize its life as it sees fit. It has a right to organize its life on the basis of autonomy. It has a right to enter ethno-federal relations with other nations. It has a right to complete secession. Nations are sovereign and all nations are equal.”<sup>39</sup> As Martin points out, the power of nationalism was seen during the mobilization in the revolution. Therefore, and in order to prevent this from happening again the nationality policy was designed, given the name by Martin “the Affirmative Action Empire: a strategy aimed at disarming nationalism by granting what were called the “forms” of nationhood”.<sup>40</sup> According to Martin the creation of such a state involved several elements, such as recognizing and promoting national territories, languages, elites, cultures.

This is described by many authors, later, as the “territoriality of ethnicity”<sup>41</sup> principle. Some Soviet scholars are “characterizing national-territorial delimitation as a progressive policy that has eliminated clan and tribal feuds by giving the major ethnographic groups of former Turkestan (Uzbeks, Tajiks, Turkmen and so on) separate national territories and enabling each to attain national self-realization.”<sup>42</sup> Generally, as historians point out, new nation-building in USSR was developed into a program and “put into practice in the Union Treaty of December 1922, otherwise known as the “federal compromise””.<sup>43</sup> This was a compromise to a diverse national and cultural composition of the Soviet Union, which involved territorial division not

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<sup>38</sup> John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, (USA: St. Martin’s Press, INC, 1999), 5

<sup>39</sup> Yuri Slezkine, „The USSR is a Communal Apartment, or how a Socialist State promoted ethnic particularism“, *Slavic Review*, 53:2, (1994), 416

<sup>40</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, (USA: Cornell University Press, 2001), 3

<sup>41</sup> John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, (USA: St. Martin’s Press, INC, 1999), 5

<sup>42</sup> Francine Hirsch, „Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities“, *Russian Review*, 59:2, (2000), 202

<sup>43</sup> John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, (USA: St. Martin’s Press, INC, 1999), 74



only on the national level, but even further into smaller districts, villages etc. in order to comfort different ethnic minorities that found themselves mostly due to the drawn borders.

Lenin promoted this idea of a federation, which was later realized. More than 100 ethnicities were residing all over the union that had been subject to various treatment, sometimes violent, under the Tsarist Russia. In order for the soviet federation to be founded, borders were supposed to be drawn; the long process was called ‘national-territorial delimitation’ and completed only in 1936<sup>44</sup>. According to Patnaik, redrawing borders was not an easy process, and was not done only by Stalin as many say; many experts and specialists from the Central Asian region took part in this historical process. However, I would rather agree with the statement that this process “should be understood as a manifestation of the Soviet regime’s attempt to define a new (and presumably nonimperialistic) model of colonization.”<sup>45</sup> The ethnic heterogeneity of Central Asian states complicated the process even more, for instance in the Fergana valley, where three major ethnic communities were residing: Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik besides other small ethnicities. “In most cases the major ethnic groups of Central Asia lived in compact communities with other groups being few in such compact settlements. These major groups served as the basis for forming national republics.”<sup>46</sup>

Of course, there were some imperfections, as Patnaik points out; boundary imperfections were created on purpose, in order to assist the new states to become self-sufficient. This is hard to agree with; in various sources it is treated differently, by contrast Hirsch points out “the Soviet regime, like the West European Empires, used violence and other technologies of conquest and

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<sup>44</sup> Ajay Patnaik, *Nations, Minorities and States in Central Asia*, (Kolkata: Anamika Publishers and Distributors Ltd 2003), 25

<sup>45</sup> Francine Hirsch, „Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities“, *Russian Review*, 59:2, (2000), 203

<sup>46</sup> Ajay Patnaik, *Nations, Minorities and States in Central Asia*, (Kolkata: Anamika Publishers and Distributors Ltd 2003), 28

rule to integrate a vast expanse of territories and great variety of peoples into a highly centralized economic, political, and ideational whole.”<sup>47</sup> As a part of this soviet modernization, “beginning in the early 1920s all Soviet subjects, including Communist party elites, were assimilated into official nationality categories through the census, map, and other classificatory devices.”<sup>48</sup> At the same time, people were assimilated into the Soviet state through various state institutions as Hirsch states. This process is called by her ‘double-assimilation’, which was designed for USSR’s modernization.

One such example of deliberate border demarcation is Kyrgyzstan. According to Patnaik and Anderson the reason for the large Uzbek population’s inclusion in Kyrgyz Republic was a consequence of including portion of Fergana valley to the republic as a part of ‘ethnicity principle’ combined with economic goals (“national-territorial unit be integrated into the all-union command economy either as a separate economic region or as a part of a larger economic region; each region would have an economic specialization, and all economic activity would be coordinated through Moscow.”<sup>49</sup>), which was not a problem at that time, but later right after the collapse of the Soviet Union it became a problem resulting in a violent ethnic conflict on the post-soviet territory. However, according to Patnaik, prior to the breakdown of the USSR, when there was the question of the union’s survival, Central Asian republics did not want secession from Russia. This is explained by some scholars, such as Patnaik, by the fact that nationalism was not strong in the Central Asian region. Or as one would argue by the fact that not being able to function economically as one state organism meant for them a crisis.

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<sup>47</sup> Francine Hirsch, „Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities“, *Russian Review*, 59:2, (2000), 203

<sup>48</sup> Francine Hirsch, „Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities“, *Russian Review*, 59:2, (2000), 204

<sup>49</sup> Francine Hirsch, „Toward an Empire of Nations: Border-Making and the Formation of Soviet National Identities“, *Russian Review*, 59:2, (2000), 208

The Marxist and Leninist approach includes that both nation-building and assimilation policies go hand in hand and were undertaken at the same time. As many historians agree, nation-building in the USSR was implemented through a strong “russification” policy in terms of language, modernization, urbanization and rapid industrialization. However, national languages (the official language in each soviet republic was the language of the titular nation) and elites (they were appointed to key positions) were strongly promoted by the Soviet state<sup>50</sup>, because “native languages would make Soviet power comprehensible. Native cadres, who understood ‘the way of life, customs, and habits of the local population’, would make Soviet power seem indigenous rather than an external Russian imperial imposition.”<sup>51</sup> In addition, national culture was actively promoted, such as symbols, clothes, music, food, literature. With this they aimed to reach a soviet state, where each nation would tolerate the other nations and soviet culture or Russian culture would be superior over national cultures.<sup>52</sup>

Nation-building during the soviet era can be characterized by the following concepts: “flourishing (*ratsvet*), coming together (*sblizhenie*), and final fusion (*sliyanie*) of the nations into a new historical community of Soviet people (*Sovetskii narod*).”<sup>53</sup> Soviet government, the center encouraged Russians from the mainland to go to the Central Asian region and obtain positions there as a part of their russification mission. As Commercio says, Russians were encouraged to move to all parts of the USSR, where they were privileged, obtaining the best jobs and were seen as “big brothers”. Then, there was an effort to implement a policy of nation-building, the idea of which was to bring together the local nations, such as Kyrgyz, Kazakh or Uzbek from their

<sup>50</sup> John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, (USA: St. Martin’s Press, INC, 1999)

<sup>51</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, (USA: Cornell University Press, 2001), 12

<sup>52</sup> Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939*, (USA: Cornell University Press, 2001)

<sup>53</sup> John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, (USA: St. Martin’s Press, INC, 1999), 5

existing tribal ties, only after the idea of a single soviet socialist state was attempted to be formed.<sup>54</sup> However, the attempt failed, because during these policies only the urban and civilized population was captured, whereas the rural population kept its tribal ties as a protection from outside interference. This failure was evident during the nativization (*korenizatsiya*) period, which aimed at appointing representatives of the titular nation to administrative positions at their places. Once people got top positions they started hiring employees on the kinship-basis. *Korenizatsiya*, translated as nativization, was a part of the Russification policy in the early 1990's.<sup>55</sup> Assimilation intended by the central government was not achieved, as demonstrated above, due to the concentration of the titular nation, Kyrgyz in particular in rural areas and European or Russian groups living in the urban areas, therefore, less inter-ethnic marriages and division of labor between Russians and the titular nation.

It is very important to take into consideration the language factor. Promoting the Russian language as a lingua franca means bringing together all the nations, meanwhile giving cultural autonomy often described as linguistic autonomy, to every nation. Nevertheless, overall, soviet policies designed to serve the unification of all republics into one socialist state with its different methods were effective for the consolidation of nationalities in Central Asia. Post-soviet state-building, therefore, was heavily influenced by its previous history and was copied to some extent by the successor states, leading to problems.

## **2.2 Post-soviet state-building in Kyrgyzstan**

From the background given on Soviet history it is seen that nationality policies of those times promoted national consolidation of union republics and at the same time strengthened

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<sup>54</sup> Michele Commercio, "Exit in the Near Abroad: The Russian Minorities in Latvia and Kyrgyzstan." *Problems of Post-Communism*, 51:6 (2004)

<sup>55</sup> John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, (USA: St. Martin's Press, INC, 1999)

various regional and tribal identities (consequence of ‘russification’ and ‘*korenizatsiya*’ policies), where the former will serve as the basis for a state consolidation, and the latter will complicate and to some extent impede this process following the USSR break-up. Kolsto gives a definition of “the nation as a cultural entity, held together by common language, traditions, folklore, mores and religion – in short, the ethnic nation.”<sup>56</sup> His definition is used here, because it very well describes the understanding of a nation on the basis of which the post-independence nation-building of Kyrgyzstan was carried out. Kolsto argues that “in ethnically based nation-building, the symbols and traditions of the titular nation become equated with the symbols and traditions of the state...The state authorities will seek to create maximum correspondence between the ethnic and the political “nation” – by means of assimilation, emigration of minorities, or other ways.”<sup>57</sup>

According to Kolsto the multiethnic composition of most of the newly independent states not only in Central Asia, but across the post-soviet region was complicated further by the redrawn borders: titular nations made up only fifty-sixty percent on average. “The remainder of the populace in each case was made up of ethnic groups that either belonged to the titular nation of the neighboring republic or had ended up on the “wrong” side of the border when the boundaries were drawn up or had immigrated from other parts of the Soviet Union.”<sup>58</sup> Once again, the consequences came out later, since back then, there were not many problems, because as some scholars say (e.g. Patnaik, Kolsto) titular nations in Central Asia identified themselves with their tribes, clans or regions.

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<sup>56</sup> Pal Kolsto, *The New Russian Diaspora – an Identity of Its Own? Possible identity trajectories for Russians in the former Soviet republic*. (1996), 2 <http://folk.uio.no/palk/identity.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> Pal Kolsto, *The New Russian Diaspora – an Identity of Its Own? Possible identity trajectories for Russians in the former Soviet republic* (1996), 4 <http://folk.uio.no/palk/identity.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> Pal Kolsto, *The New Russian Diaspora – an Identity of Its Own? Possible identity trajectories for Russians in the former Soviet republic* (1996), 5 <http://folk.uio.no/palk/identity.htm>.

After the fall of the Soviet Union, old clan antagonisms began to resurface. In Kyrgyzstan the main conflict is north-south: The Kyrgyz in the southern parts of the country are heavily influenced by the Uzbek oasis culture, and Islam is fairly strong, whereas the Kyrgyz of the north are marked more by the Russian cultural influence. Southern Kyrgyz were in control during the Communist period, but [then] the northerly clans dominated the political life of the country, at the expense of the southerly Kyrgyz and various national minorities.<sup>59</sup>

This cultural variation among Kyrgyz people was a determining factor in the conflict between north and south.

If we refer to the post-independence ethnic situation in the Fergana valley, in comparison to Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, as Kolsto points out, the case with ethnic Kyrgyz in Uzbekistan's part of the valley is much harder due to the strictly authoritarian Uzbek government. In Kyrgyzstan the adoption of the market economy gives more freedom and opportunities to minorities for a better life, since there are much less restrictions and control by the government than in Uzbekistan, where the economy and pretty much everything is controlled and regulated by the state. That is why when asked; most Uzbeks do not express a desire to leave the country for their homeland, mainly due to the more open free market oriented economy of Kyrgyzstan. That is the reason why "one often hears hundreds of thousand of Uzbeks live in Kyrgyzstan. They are especially numerous in the districts bordering on Uzbekistan. However, one finds almost no Uzbek among the leadership of provinces, districts and farms. It is quite possible that this led to discontent, tension and eventual confrontation between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents in Osh."<sup>60</sup>

Granting automatic citizenship to Russians residing in Kyrgyzstan following the independence was accepted as a positive nation-building attempt, unlike in some states such as Latvia for example, where there were harsh policies towards the new Russian minority.

<sup>59</sup> Pal Kolsto, *The New Russian Diaspora – an Identity of Its Own? Possible identity trajectories for Russians in the former Soviet republic* (1996), 7 <http://folk.uio.no/palk/identity.htm>.

<sup>60</sup> Pal Kolsto, *The New Russian Diaspora – an Identity of Its Own? Possible identity trajectories for Russians in the former Soviet republic* (1996), 126 <http://folk.uio.no/palk/identity.htm>.

Nevertheless, Kyrgyzstan's decision is characterized by the strategic importance of Russian partnership. However, there is a debate: as Kolstoe argues, automatic citizenship was a part of the politicization of ethnicity process, meaning, Akayev played the role of a 'democratic leader', due to many factors, namely to legitimize his power at home and abroad, and because of Kyrgyzstan's financial dependency on the Russian Federation and other countries. According to the elitist approach of the nation-building theory, in an ethnically diverse society at the time of the regime change, political elites use ethnicity as a tool for consolidation and legitimization of current power. Thus, ethnicity was used in accordance with this approach in Kyrgyzstan as well as in other Central Asia states following the USSR breakup.

### **2.3 The "Tulip Revolution"**

"The events of March 2005 and their pointed lesson that no given autocratic regime need be taken as permanent did offer Central Asians a reasonable measure of renewed hope that democracy might have a chance to develop in their countries."<sup>61</sup> As Martha Brill Olcott says the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan might have an impact on Central Asian states, because

"throughout Central Asia, members of the elite from disfavored clans and families have been sitting by, waiting for the opportunity to grasp more economic and political power. As institutions to ensure a peaceful transfer of power do not exist, there is no foundation on which for them to rest their hopes. The Rose, Orange and Tulip revolutions have changed their perspective, and have given them new incentive to try and plot the downfall of the current regime."<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Kyrgyz revolution is being compared to the other colored revolutions in Ukraine, Serbia and Georgia, "Kyrgyzstan did not have a true revolution (meaning the transformation or overthrow of a whole sociopolitical order) or even a regime change. What

<sup>61</sup> Scott Radnitz, "What really happened in Kyrgyzstan", *Journal of Democracy*, 17: 2, National Endowment for Democracy and The John Hopkins University Press, (2006), 132

<sup>62</sup> Marta Brill Olcott, Lessons of the Tulip Revolution, April 7, 2005, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16758>

the country had, by all appearances, was something decidedly more limited, namely, a transfer of power.”<sup>63</sup>

How did the revolution take place? What were the reasons? Disputed parliamentary elections on 27 February of 2005, and later run-off in March in some districts became the birth of various protests in favor of losing candidates. As Omarov<sup>64</sup> well describes, the first protest took place in one of the small villages of the Jalalabad region on March 3, which then moved to the city of Jalalabad; this ended in taking over an administrative building. This was the beginning for nation-wide demonstrations under the leadership of the People’s Movement of Kyrgyzstan (NKD) created in the fall of 2004 prior to the parliamentary elections of 2005 by several political parties. The goals of this Movement, according to an International Crisis Group report were to ensure free elections and Akayev’s end of presidential term. However, protestors’ calls for Akayev’s resignation during demonstrations together with NKD’s program later turned out to be a crucial point for the outcomes. “Only after the Akayev government’s fate was sealed in the south did the NKD and other oppositionists mount protests in Bishkek. There, a temporary alliance had formed between a motley crew of NDK leaders and unaffiliated politicians, mobilization leaders from other regions, local businessmen, and NGO activists.”<sup>65</sup> So, on March 24 the crowd mobilized by groups of leaders came to the main square marching from two sides of the city. By the evening of that day without much police involvement, the white house was taken over. The crowd entered the government building, maybe thinking to find Akayev, who was already gone and his last order was not to use any weapons. Several days later, people were able

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<sup>63</sup> Scott Radnitz, “What really happened in Kyrgyzstan”, *Journal of Democracy*, 17: 2, National Endowment for Democracy and The John Hopkins University Press, (2006), 133

<sup>64</sup> Nur Omarov, „*God peremen v Kyrgyzstane*”, [The Year of Changes in Kyrgyzstan], December 14, 2005, [www.apn.kz](http://www.apn.kz)

<sup>65</sup> Scott Radnitz, “What really happened in Kyrgyzstan”, *Journal of Democracy*, 17: 2, National Endowment for Democracy and The John Hopkins University Press, (2006), 136



to see him on the main television channel signing official documents for his resignation from his post. Generally, the seizure of administrative units all over the country and numerous protests, demonstrations followed by the arrival of citizens mostly southerners to the capital on 24<sup>th</sup> of March and seizure of the White House with lootings during that night made up that revolution.

“While Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan all saw mass mobilizations that led to peaceful transfers of power, the engines of change in the former two – a large urban population, a strong civil society, and a national-level student movement – were weak in Kyrgyzstan, as they are in other Central Asian republics. Kyrgyzstan is far more rural than Georgia and Ukraine – most of the protestors in Bishkek were not city dwellers but countryfolk. The Kyrgyz ‘opposition’, moreover, consisted not of established parties or civil society groups, but of elites lacking broad-based support that had banded together for tactical reasons.”<sup>66</sup>

As Knyazev argues, patronage networks, informal ties, and private businesses, that made the Tulip Revolution were strong during Akayev’s long presidency and remain even stronger currently under Bakiev. The candidates that were losing in the elections were able to mobilize people easily due to the effectiveness of kinship ties, since ordinary people’s actions are influenced by these relations. Regional division of Kyrgyzstan into north-south, then into separate oblasts (districts) and clan, tribal identities and most importantly ethnic identities once again proved their significance during those events and even afterwards. New president – Bakiev is from the southern part, which is culturally dominated and influenced by Uzbeks. People in the northern part, especially in the capital Bishkek saw this as if Uzbeks were coming to power.

As it was presented by the international media, the Tulip Revolution of Kyrgyzstan was one of the “colored revolutions” that took place in post-communist space, after the Bulldozer Revolution in Serbia, Orange Revolution in Ukraine and Rose revolution in Georgia. Observing the media broadcasts during the revolutions and comparing them, it could be said that the main similarity is that all of them took place because of the disputed elections, be that presidential as

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<sup>66</sup> Scott Radnitz, “What really happened in Kyrgyzstan”, *Journal of Democracy*, 17: 2, National Endowment for Democracy and The John Hopkins University Press, (2006), 133

in Ukraine or parliamentary as in Georgia and Kyrgyzstan. The main difference is that in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine, according to the media, there was one unifying leader, whereas in Kyrgyzstan the leadership was fragmented. In addition “The ‘Tulip Revolution’ has been messier than its Georgian and Ukrainian predecessors. The result is that the interim government in Kyrgyzstan will have an uphill battle to demonstrate its democratic credentials.”<sup>67</sup>

The fragmentation of the oppositional forces during the revolution, as abovementioned scholars agree, was due to the following factors. Friends, family members and colleagues supported a conquered candidate, which shows the salience of informal ties. The other factor is the salience of patronage system. People of the same town or village also support candidates, since during their work, candidates somehow had assisted them

According to many sources and particularly to Knyazev<sup>68</sup>, the so-called revolution took place due to the following reasons: weakness of law-enforcement bodies and reluctance of the government to act in such situations; oppositional rivalry clans of the south (along with support of such leaders by various means based on the kinship ties, patronage networks and regional identity); external support, precisely Western financial and political assistance to the opposition as a result of the establishment of a Russian airbase next to the US air base. As the Crisis Group report demonstrates, everything in the state stayed the same, except for growing security issues, and the new government being less competent than the previous one.

The opposition, as mentioned earlier and according to the official report of the International Crisis Group, was divided itself, there was no strong unity. However, they

<sup>67</sup> Marta Brill Olcott, Lessons of the Tulip Revolution, April 7, 2005, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=16758>

<sup>68</sup> Alexandr Knyazev, *Gosudarstvennyi Perevorot 24 marta 2005 g. V Kirgizii*, [Governmental overthrow on March 24 of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan], (2007), [www.knyazev.kg](http://www.knyazev.kg)

“accepted former Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiev as de facto leader”<sup>69</sup> but “the best known leader, Feliks Kulov remained in prison.”<sup>70</sup> Some deputies joined the opposition later, in addition “the former education minister Ishengul Bolgurova”<sup>71</sup> also became the part of the opposition. Roza Otumbaeva, the former minister of foreign affairs and former ambassador, was also one of the prominent leaders, who had formed an oppositional party called ‘Ata-Jurt’. These leaders, each representing his/her own interests meanwhile representing their clan’s interests, and none of them representing Uzbeks or Russians, I believe, gave a picture of ignorance of ethnic minorities. In addition “socio-political change is an important variable influencing the conflict-peace continuum of ethnicity.”<sup>72</sup> By this it is meant that any such change if it involves ethnic element can affect the ethnic situation of a state.

The reasons of the revolution of 2005 in Kyrgyzstan were becoming more year by year; the dissatisfaction of mostly southern elites, such as Bakiev, by Akayev’s preferential treatment (favoring northerners). So, the parliamentary elections of that year were a final drop for a cup to spill over. Businesses in Kyrgyzstan are owned by the political elites, this is the way of preserving their wealth, even though it is obviously prohibited by law. Being a citizen of this country allows me to be confident about this statement. The best example to this would be Akayev himself, concentration of the power in his hands; his family and relatives owning most profitable enterprises during his rule. It is not a secret anymore, and this was one of the main reasons of this revolution. The publicly announced goals of this revolution were: first, to end the corruption that was deeply rooted in the government, second, somehow to put and end to authoritarianism, and third, the hidden and obvious goal, the new government, namely the

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<sup>69</sup> Crisis Group Asia Report no. 97, May 5, 2005, 5

<sup>70</sup> Crisis Group Asia Report no. 97, May 5, 2005, 5

<sup>71</sup> Crisis Group Asia Report no. 97, May 5, 2005, 5

<sup>72</sup> Airat Aklaev, *Democratization and Ethnic Peace: Patterns of Ethnopolitical Crisis Management in post-Soviet Settings* (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 1999),36

president and his allies wanted to gain power and wealth, thus repeating the pattern of governance of the previous leadership. This new leadership or opposition used the situation created by the masses as a tool for achieving its ambitious aims. Failure to build any dialogue or negotiations with the opposition to solve the problem ended in exile of the president and his family, although his daughter and son had been elected to parliament.

As the International Crisis Group reports, opposition did not succeed in including ethnic minorities, or as other sources say minorities chose to stay neutral in this “conflict”. This factor along with other factors such as land seizure, activeness of ethnic Uzbeks in the south in promoting their interests, political under-representation of ethnic groups, political ignorance or rather weakness of the new government to control the situation influence the position and interrelation of ethnic minorities with the titular nation today. “Sadly, instead of breathing a new and more democratic spirit into the polity, the March events appear, at least in the short term, mostly to have worsened Kyrgyzstan’s political instability, with rising numbers of assassinations and unruly crowd actions.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Scott Radnitz, “What really happened in Kyrgyzstan”, *Journal of Democracy*, 17: 2, National Endowment for Democracy and The John Hopkins University Press, (2006), 133

## Chapter III. The Position of Ethnic Russians and Uzbeks before and after the “Tulip Revolution”

### 3.1 *Ethnic Russians and Uzbeks before the “Tulip Revolution”*

#### 3.1.1 The Uzbeks

The positive attempt of „the Kyrgyzstani leadership and particularly former President Akayev [...] to implement his vision of Kyrgyzstan as a „common home” for all ethnic groups”<sup>74</sup>, which was designed to prevent ethnic division, instead unite them all under one state ideology, unfortunately, was not achieved, since the state policies did not collaborate, with language policy being one of them. The Kyrgyz language was given the „status of the Republic’s sole official language in 1989, a transnational period was initially set in place until 31 December 1998, when the actual replacement of Russian with Kyrgyz would become effective.”<sup>75</sup> As a matter of fact, this policy did not decrease the wide use of Russian in communication, because, as many scholars argue, the political elite was culturally Russified. In addition to the Kyrgyz language’s official status, „in 2000, Russian was finally given official language status.”<sup>76</sup> This was a compromise for all the ethnic groups to use Russian as a language of inter-group communication, even though after some years of the post-soviet era ethnic composition in Kyrgyzstan dramatically changed, Russians becoming less and Uzbeks becoming the largest minority. The reason for the Uzbek language not gaining official status is underlined by the fact „that an initial concession to the large Uzbek community may usher in series of further demands, possibly leading to calls for Uzbek cultural autonomy or the establishment of an Uzbek

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<sup>74</sup> James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, „Conflict and Accomodation in the FSU: The Role of Institutions and Regimes.”, In *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions and Conflict*, ed. James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse (New York, NY: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001), 222

<sup>75</sup> Matteo Fumagalli, “Informal Ehtnopolitics and Local Authority Figures in Osh, Kyrgyzstan.”, *Ethnopolitics*, 6:2, (2007), 219

<sup>76</sup> Matteo Fumagalli, “Informal Ehtnopolitics and Local Authority Figures in Osh, Kyrgyzstan.”, *Ethnopolitics*, 6:2, (2007), 219

region.”<sup>77</sup> According to the latest version of Kyrgyzstan’s Constitution there are two languages with official status: Kyrgyz and Russian. However, there is a clause in it that says that no minority should be discriminated of not speaking the official languages.

Analysis of formal political institutions of Kyrgyzstan shows the real position of ethnic Uzbeks through their representation. As many scholars<sup>78</sup> state, political parties in Kyrgyzstan are not institutionalized yet, „political parties and organizations are now de facto overwhelmingly Kyrgyz. Ordinary members are predominantly ethnic Kyrgyz and so are party officials occupying senior positions, sidelining minority groups from political and party life, which contributes to fuel Uzbek frustration.”<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, this should not mean that ethnic minorities are not represented. „Eight Uzbek deputies, six Slavs and six belonging to other minority groups were elected to the national parliament – alongside 85 Kyrgyz – in the first 1995 elections.”<sup>80</sup> The next parliament of 2000 also had ethnic minorities represented in it. Fumagalli points out that in the local administrative bodies Uzbeks represent only about 5% from the top positions. In the parliamentary elections of 2005 the Uzbek representation grew from five to seven among seventy five deputies. To address existing ethnic problems there was an „establishment of the Assembly of the People of Kyrgyzstan (APK) in 1994 [...] by then president Akayev. The institution was set up as an advisory body to the president on ethnic issues and included a series of public organizations (national-cultural centers), each representing an ethnic group.”<sup>81</sup> But as it

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<sup>77</sup> Matteo Fumagalli, “Informal Ehtnopolitics and Local Authority Figures in Osh, Kyrgyzstan.”, *Ethnopolitics*, 6:2, (2007), 219

<sup>78</sup> See for example, John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia’s island of Democracy?* (Overseas Publishers Association, 1999); Kathleen Collins, “Conceptualizing clans: informal organizations, identities, and networks”, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, (USA: Cambridge University Press, 2006);

<sup>79</sup> Matteo Fumagalli, “Informal Ehtnopolitics and Local Authority Figures in Osh, Kyrgyzstan.”, *Ethnopolitics*, 6:2, (2007), 220

<sup>80</sup> Matteo Fumagalli, “Informal Ehtnopolitics and Local Authority Figures in Osh, Kyrgyzstan.”, *Ethnopolitics*, 6:2, (2007), 220

<sup>81</sup> Matteo Fumagalli, “Informal Ehtnopolitics and Local Authority Figures in Osh, Kyrgyzstan.”, *Ethnopolitics*, 6:2, (2007), 221

was proved by Fumagalli and as people themselves say, this body as well as other formal institutions appeared to be „ineffective”, however, the weakness of formal institutions is substituted by the informal institutions, which are able to manage ethnic diversity, and that is why ethnic tensions do not take place as often as predicted.

The position of ethnic Uzbeks is further undermined with the tribal division or clan politics that is still a dominant part of Kyrgyz political life. From Tishkov's research the following conclusion can be drawn; that the position of Kyrgyz in the southern part of the republic was to some extent disadvantageous. „The concentration of Uzbeks and Russians in the cities is higher than that of Kyrgyz; Uzbeks number 46%, Kyrgyz 24% and Russians comprise about 20% in the administrative center of Osh.”<sup>82</sup> As it is a known fact in the country, Uzbeks „have traditionally been engaged in land cultivation and commerce.”<sup>83</sup> Therefore, they have better life than the titular nation. It could be said that if Uzbek's position was politically weak and underrepresented as various authors put it, economically, they have been more active and wealthier than Kyrgyz in the south. This or in other words, consociational features (i.e. informal agreement between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz on the division of labor) and the absence of the Uzbek government's involvement in Kyrgyz state affairs, probably, has been preventing serious ethnic conflicts.

According to the mission report conducted by the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and Memorial, and as it was described earlier there are many problems that Uzbeks are facing: under-representation in the political life, in the army, „Uzbeks are not eager to serve in the army since they easily end up falling victim to hazing (*dedovshina*). Many of them pay bribes to be

<sup>82</sup> Valery Tishkov, “Don't kill me: I am a Kyrgyz! : An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 32: 2, (1995), 134

<sup>83</sup> Valery Tishkov, “Don't kill me: I am a Kyrgyz! : An Anthropological Analysis of Violence in the Osh Ethnic Conflict”, *Journal of Peace Research*, 32: 2, (1995), 137

exempted from military service.”<sup>84</sup> There are problems with the education and schools, lack of qualified instructors (due to the low payment), educational materials in Uzbek. In addition, as the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and Memorial reports, Uzbeks are continually under the suspicion of administrative bodies for the possibility of being Islamic ‘fundamentalists’, because they are more religious than the titular nation. Nevertheless, „in contrast to public administration and law enforcement, ethnic Uzbeks are well represented in the mass media in Osh and in the south in general. In the Osh region, 60% of broadcast media professionals are Uzbeks.”<sup>85</sup> As it is reported, national media does not have programs in Uzbek language except for few minutes per day, however, in the southern region there are several Uzbek language channels, such as MezonTV and OshTV. I think that the reason for this, as it was earlier mentioned, is that the Russian is widely used by all the inhabitants as a language of inter-group communication.

### 3.1.2 The Russians

Chinn & Kaiser talk about the conditions and issues concerning mostly the Russian minority in post-soviet states. They provide a comparative analysis of the ethnic situation in all successor states, focusing on the historical events as previously mentioned scholars did. According to Chinn and Kaiser “Russians living in the newly independent republics outside Russia likewise perceive themselves to be deprived of their former cultural, political and economic status.”<sup>86</sup> “Lack of accommodation by the dominant nation leaves subordinate nations with few choices: acceptance of the new status quo (i.e. hegemony of the dominant nation in the state), emigration (perceived as forced emigration or refugee migration), or political

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<sup>84</sup> International Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and Memorial, “Ethnic Minorities in Kyrgyzstan: Recent Developments”, *Mission Report*, (2006), 4

<sup>85</sup> International Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights and Memorial, “Ethnic Minorities in Kyrgyzstan: Recent Developments”, *Mission Report*, (2006), 7

<sup>86</sup> Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States: Russians as the New Minority*, (UK: Westview Press, 1996), 27



resistance/secession/irredentism.”<sup>87</sup> The authors discuss the importance of state policies on language and citizenship. There is a common point that nation-building process of newly independent states and remembering past negative memories causes tensions on ethnic ground to rise. Naumkin<sup>88</sup> and Glenn<sup>89</sup> similar to the previously mentioned scholars concentrate on the ethnic issues of post-soviet world, how soviet era policies and nation-building processes created today’s Central Asia. Again, here I will be emphasizing only Kyrgyzstan, the historical background of which was described similarly by all the authors.

As group of scholars<sup>90</sup> agree on the fact that the history - pre-soviet and soviet came to be responsible for an existing ethnic situation in modern Kyrgyzstan. One should not ignore the fact that governmental policies within these countries also have a great impact on the issue, which in its turn defines intergovernmental relations. Kolstoe says that the case of Russians in Kyrgyzstan is totally different than in other Central Asian countries, because they constitute a large part of the population; nevertheless, the number of Russians leaving Kyrgyzstan is the same as in Uzbekistan. This means that “ethnic relations in Kyrgyzstan are deteriorating, which is certainly one reason for the accelerated European exodus”.<sup>91</sup> However, according to Kolstoe, this is happening not only because of the nationalism towards ethnic minorities, but due to the clan politics that is very strong and present even today. Moreover, as Naumkin argues this outflow’s main reason is economic conditions of Kyrgyzstan. “A major complaint among the Russians is discrimination in the workplace”<sup>92</sup> Since the Kyrgyz struggling with each other leads to the ignorance of ethnic minorities. Kolstoe mentions the Osh ethnic conflict, where only few

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<sup>87</sup> Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States: Russians as the New Minority*, (UK: Westview Press, 1996), 33

<sup>88</sup> Vitaly V Naumkin, *Central Asia and Transcaucasia: Ethnicity and Conflict*, (USA: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>89</sup> John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, (USA: St. Martin’s Press, INC, 1999)

<sup>90</sup> See for example, John Glenn, *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia*, (USA: St. Martin’s Press, INC, 1999); Jeff Chinn, and Robert Kaiser, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor States*, (UK: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>91</sup> Paul Kolstoe, *Russian in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Hurst and Company, London, 1995), 233.

<sup>92</sup> Paul Kolstoe, *Russian in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Hurst and Company, London, 1995), 234

Russians reside. “Interethnic intolerance is widespread in daily life: for example, unlike in the past, mixed marriages are now becoming rare. However, more Russians are returning back to the region”<sup>93</sup>. As Kolstoe describes, the returning of Russians from their ethnic homeland is mainly due to the huge cultural variation of Russians residing in the mainland and in Kyrgyzstan. He says that it is problematic for them to change life style, besides these people are not welcomed by their ‘brothers’.

Kolstoe discusses the country’s democratic transition, its Constitution that was full of, as the author says, not very clear expressions regarding the definition of the term „nation”, whether the word Kyrgyz means ethnic Kyrgyz or Kyrgyz Republic, that were harshening ethnic tensions. Under Akayev’s government, Dukenbaev and Hansen<sup>94</sup> say that the provision in the Constitution requiring a presidential candidate to be fluent in Kyrgyz was facilitating the exodus of the Russian population from the country. In addition, as it is stated earlier, there were amendments introduced, which made it clear that soon there will be a transition to the full use of Kyrgyz language in all aspects of Kyrgyzstan’s life. All of these, as the majority of authors argue, were incentives for the Russian Diaspora to emigrate to their ethnic homeland, which created more problems not only to Kyrgyzstan, because educated intellectuals were leaving leading the state to a less favorable economic situation, but to Russia as well that has more people to take care of, a need for more jobs and homes etc. That is why, scholars say, there were established organizations such as the ‘Slavonic Foundation’ created to assist the Russian population in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>95</sup> “The leaders of “Slavonic Diaspora” describe the inter-ethnic

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<sup>93</sup> Paul Kolstoe, *Russian in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Hurst and Company, London, 1995), 2

<sup>94</sup> Askat Dukenbaev, and William Hansen, Understanding politics in Kyrgyzstan in *DEMSTAR research report no. 16*, (2003), [www.demstar.kg](http://www.demstar.kg)

<sup>95</sup> Paul Kolstoe, *Russian in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Hurst and Company, London, 1995), 242

situation in the republic as “basically stable”<sup>96</sup>. As scholars conclude, Russia today sets its foreign policy towards post-soviet states in accordance with the Russian Diaspora.

The position of ethnic minorities in general and specifically of Russians and Uzbeks is defined by the nationalizing policies of the government, which resulted in the Russian exodus. Russians can leave the country for Russia, since economic conditions there are better, whereas Uzbeks seem to prefer staying in Kyrgyzstan, due to the stricter regime in Uzbekistan and previously the informal agreement with Akayev and his government, despite the existing problems and everyday discrimination.

### **3.2 Ethnic Russians and Uzbeks after the “Tulip Revolution”**

The initial question of this research was what has changed in Kyrgyz ethno-politics following the 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, which resulted in the change of leadership or as I would argue, after 15 years’ rule of the northern elite, the southern elite became the new power. Once again the southern part is culturally close to the Uzbeks and the northern part is culturally Russified, which I believe was supposed to be the main argument for the ethno-political change in favor of Uzbeks and which would occur at the expense of the Russian minority. However, southern leaders turned out to be less tolerant towards Uzbeks than the northern elite, which will be explored in this chapter.

I argue that despite the fact that there are no major policy changes with regards to ethno-politics in Kyrgyzstan, there are some minor modifications that will be discussed below. So, these small changes, such as the new leadership causing the north-south regional division to sharpen and resulting in the political instability in the country caused by the Tulip Revolution have changed inter-ethnic relations. That is why I believe there are perceptions that the state is

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<sup>96</sup> Paul Kolstoe, *Russian in the Former Soviet Republics*, (Hurst and Company, London, 1995), 243

taking ethnic tones and local conflicts are taking place between ethnic minorities and the titular nation. Consequently, ethnic organizations are becoming more active, especially ethnic Russians and Uzbeks, which are the most significant in numbers and in case of serious threats have the ability to mobilize.

However, there are some other important factors to take into consideration in defining their new position, from which I will start this chapter. In order to see how and why the positions of both Russians and Uzbeks have changed after the Tulip Revolution, I will proceed in the following order: first by looking at the political representation of both groups, the activities of ethnic organizations, reactions and any legal steps made by the government, interactions between these groups and the titular nation during the last three years, and finally by making some predictions concerning the evolving ethno-political situation. This section provides empirical findings based on interviews conducted and media material. Throughout this section I will be referring to the answers of the respondents, therefore, due to the requested confidentiality it is appropriate to use numbers rather than names. For detailed information the reader should see the appendix.

### **3.2.1 Political Representation**

Political representation of ethnic minorities is a good determinant of the overall ethnopolitical situation in the state as has been believed by western scholars. Comparing data on the previous parliament (see the first section) and current legislature, which will be presented in this section, ethnic minorities are under-represented today, especially the Uzbeks, while Russian representation is more stable. This shows the shift in the Kyrgyz ethnopolitics after the Tulip Revolution.

Kyrgyzstan has a population of approximately 5.2 million people and there are about 100 ethnic groups, among which the Uzbeks are the largest ethnic community. Official data states that there 600, 000 Uzbeks, however, according to unofficial data and by the claim of these ethnic leaders, their number constitutes more than 1 million. “Ethnic Russians account for over 10% of the population. Following them, the largest ethnic groups include the Uigurs, Dungans, Ukrainians, and some others that constitute between 1% and 3% of the population. All in all, non-titular ethnic groups account for more than 30% of the population.”<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, as Sharipov<sup>98</sup> rightly notes, there are differences between the Russian and Uzbek minorities’ position in general. First of all, if there is an extremely unstable situation or serious conflicts in the country, Russians can always exit the state, whereas the Uzbeks cannot. This is because the Uzbeks feel more attached to the Kyrgyz land, since they did not come from abroad as Russians did, they prefer to stay in Kyrgyzstan if something happens, and unlike Russia there is no actual political support from the Uzbek government. Besides Uzbekistan does not provide economic opportunities to the people as Kyrgyzstan does due to its strictly authoritarian leadership. On the other hand, the Russian Federation is developing, economically attractive and the Russian government does care about the well-being of its people. These factors make the position of Russians and Uzbeks relatively different.

Based on the interview results (see the appendix) and the articles on political representation in the new parliament, it is necessary to say that the situation here has not improved in comparison to the previous legislatures, indeed it has deteriorated. All the respondents have pointed out that representation has always been a problematic issue, ethnic

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<sup>97</sup> Abdumomun Mamaraïmov, “*Look who is here! A brief review of the new parliament of Kyrgyzstan*”, January 11, 2008, [Ferghana.ru](http://Ferghana.ru)

<sup>98</sup> Abdumalik Sharipov, “*Kirgiziya: Rol I mesto natsionalnyh menshinstv v konfliktah megdu vlastuy I oppozitsiei*” [Kyrgyzstan: The role and position of the ethnic minorities in the conflict between the government and the opposition]. May 2, 2007, [Ferghana.ru](http://Ferghana.ru)

groups were under-represented, even though in legal documents, namely in the Constitution and Electoral Code, it is said clearly that ethnic minorities should be properly represented in political life. One of the most recent proofs of this is the new Constitution that brought changes to the electoral system: the last parliamentary elections were based on the proportional representation system. In addition, “political parties need to poll at least 5% votes and no less than 0.5% in every one of the seven regions and in the cities of Bishkek and Osh.”<sup>99</sup> As Mamraimov<sup>100</sup> points out this as a positive step towards political development, since this would improve parties in general. However, at the end, only one party, “Ak-Jol”, was able to make it to parliament, which was a very young party only three months old, founded by the president, especially for these elections. After some struggles in the Supreme Court, the 5% threshold at the regional level was abolished, which helped three more parties join the legislature, but gaining insignificant number of seats.

So, from fifty parties (according to [www.24.kg](http://www.24.kg) news agency) intending to run, only twelve were registered by the Central Electoral Committee to compete. I assume that some of them were not able to pay the fee of 30,000 soms (700 USD) for registration, some of them did not meet formal requirements of the Central Electoral Committee and some of them were just denied registration for political reasons. As an article by Mamaraïmov explains, in comparison to the 2005 parliament under Akayev, where 15% of ethnic minorities were represented, this parliament has only 11%. The decrease seems insignificant; however, it is an alarm, particularly for ethnic Uzbeks, since from about 100 ethnic groups residing in Kyrgyzstan, “twelve political parties running for the Jogorku Kenesh nominated representatives of 26 ethnic groups.

<sup>99</sup> Abdumomun Mamaraïmov, “Kyrgyzstan: Fifty political parties aspired for participation in the parliamentary race, twelve admitted”, November 26, 2007, [Ferghana.ru](http://Ferghana.ru)

<sup>100</sup> Abdumomun Mamaraïmov, “Kyrgyzstan: Uzbekskaya obshchestvennost poddergivaet initsiativy presidenta strany” [Kyrgyzstan: Uzbek community supports initiatives of the president]. October 18, 2007, [Ferghana.ru](http://Ferghana.ru)

Representatives of only seven actually made it to the parliament – 73% Kyrgyzes (81%), seven Russians (7.7%), two Koreans, Uigur, Dungan, and Karachaev (one each).<sup>101</sup> In these elections “leaders of the Uzbek Diaspora aspired for every fifth seat on the Jogorku Kenesh last December, but luck was not with them. Candidates of the Motherland party (composed of ethnic Uzbeks by over 75%) were denied official registration. Forty Uzbeks finagled places on lists of candidates compiled by other political parties. Only one of them actually made it.”<sup>102</sup> Considering the 10% of Russians and 20% of Uzbeks in the country, and seven Russians against one Uzbek in the current legislature, it is easy to make conclusions. On the one hand, Russians are better off than Uzbeks, on the other hand, this a case of luck, or the government favors Russians due to its dependence on the Russian Federation.

As a consequence of partially soviet times that only strengthened clan-based and patronage relations, as Pauline Jones argues through encouraging “interregional political competition and intraregional patronage networks”<sup>103</sup>, top positions at the local and regional level administrative and legal bodies are occupied by ethnic Kyrgyz.<sup>104</sup> This was true under Akayev and is strong even today under Bakiev’s government. Kyrgyz people promote their extended family members and friends at the workplace leading to the under-representation of ethnic minorities. The perfect example is the president himself, brothers, Marat Bakiev is an ambassador to Germany, Adyl Bakiev works at the Kyrgyz embassy in China. “Along with these two diplomats, the president has three brothers more. One of them is the head of a village

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<sup>101</sup> Abdumomun Mamaraimov, “*Look who is here! A brief review of the new parliament of Kyrgyzstan*”, January 11, 2008, [Ferghana.ru](http://Ferghana.ru)

<sup>102</sup> Abdumomun Mamaraimov, “*Look who is here! A brief review of the new parliament of Kyrgyzstan*”, January 11, 2008, [Ferghana.ru](http://Ferghana.ru)

<sup>103</sup> Pauline Jones, “Politics in the periphery: competing views of central asian states and societies” in *The Transformation of Central Asia*, (USA: Cornell University Press, 2004), 13

<sup>104</sup> See for example Kathleen Collins, “The Role of Clans in Central Asia” in *Comparative Politics*, 35:2, (2003); Jeff Chinn and Robert Kaiser, “*Ethnicity and Nationalism in the Soviet Successor State*”, (UK: Westview Press, 1996)

administration. Another, Akmat Bakiyev who sits on the Jalalabad City Council, runs "a small business" as the president recently put it in his address to the parliament."<sup>105</sup> Another brother Janysh and one of his sons Marat work in the National Security Service, whereas his second son Maxim runs a huge business. As has been demonstrated in this section, there is a change in the political representation of the ethnic minorities following the March events. Uzbeks are under-represented nowadays, whereas, the Russians are more stable due to the known factor, namely the strategic importance of the Russian Federation for Kyrgyzstan.

### 3.2.2 Ethnic organizations

There were ethnic cultural organizations from the beginning of independence, which, according to the respondents, were not as politically active as they are today. Certainly, these organizations became more active and politicized under the new government. "There are several reasons that explain the growing Uzbek interest in their civil rights. Some observers see a connection between Uzbek dissatisfaction and struggle for economic resources, aggravated following the March revolution".<sup>106</sup> One of the examples is Kadyrgan Batyrov, one of the Uzbek leaders in the south, mobilizing Uzbeks on May 27<sup>th</sup> of 2007 in the city of Jalalabad, where they were demanding their rights to be recognized, as well as more ethnic representation in the political, legal and administrative institutions. Among their requests, a demand for the Uzbek language to be official was really a surprise for the government, because during Akayev's time there was no such idea or any other demonstrations of this sort. As the respondents commented, the role of economic factors is obvious here, but they say that the ignorance of the current government is more serious and dangerous.

<sup>105</sup> Adilet Alpamyshev, „Five brothers and two sons of Bakiev nettle the opposition,” October 23, 2006, [Ferghana.ru](http://ferghana.ru)

<sup>106</sup> Alisher Khamidov, “Kak vstanovit usy doveriya: uzbekskaya obshina i vlast v Kyrgyzstane” [How to reestablish trust: Uzbek community and leadership in Kyrgyzstan]. <http://turonzamin.com/2006/10/02/alisher/>



Most of the representatives of the Uzbek community think that the March revolution did not bring any positive changes to their people. People remember that the president Askar Akayev during his rule was undertaking policies under the “Kyrgyzstan-our common home” slogan. Then, in order to express their interests, Uzbeks used People’s Assembly of Kyrgyzstan – the official body, uniting ethnic minorities. Today the Assembly has lost its power. For instance, on August 5<sup>th</sup>, Uzbek leaders gathering to present their problems were denied the right to participate in the Assembly meeting in Bishkek.<sup>107</sup>

In addition, as respondents point out, informal channels of communication between the ethnic leaders and the central government are no longer functioning, which raises the fear and awareness of ethnic Uzbeks that their position is worsening and that they are excluded.

However, there is a problem within the Uzbek community itself; due to the regional division among them and demonstrations, the leadership became fragmented, as Sharipov<sup>108</sup> argues, and therefore there is no unity around one idea, which is preventing effective outcomes. According to Khamidov<sup>109</sup> Uzbeks in Osh are more careful in terms of demonstrations because they experienced the ethnic conflict in 1990 and they do not want its repetition, whereas Uzbeks in Jalalabad, on the contrary, are being active. As respondents state, sometimes, these leaders are playing the “ethnic card” game in order to attract Bakiev’s attention, who at this moment seems to be not interested in building relations with them.

As for Russians, from the sources and answers that I have examined, it can be concluded that there was one step made towards unification; before the Tulip Revolution Russian organizations had their own leaders and were not collaborative. Sharipov<sup>110</sup> points out the creation of the Institute of Russian Diaspora in Kyrgyzstan, which he believes could help

<sup>107</sup> Alisher Khamidov, “*Kak vostanovit usy doveriya: uzbekskaya obshina I vlast v Kyrgyzstane*” [How to reestablish trust: Uzbek community and leadership in Kyrgyzstan]. <http://turonzamin.com/2006/10/02/alisher/>

<sup>108</sup> Abdumalik Sharipov, “*Kirgiziya: Rol I mesto natsionalnyh menshinstv v konfliktah megdu vlastuy I oppozitsiei*” [Kyrgyzstan: The role and position of the ethnic minorities in the conflict between the government and the opposition]. May 2, 2007, [Ferghana.ru](http://ferghana.ru)

<sup>109</sup> Alisher Khamidov, “*Kak vostanovit usy doveriya: uzbekskaya obshina I vlast v Kyrgyzstane*” [How to reestablish trust: Uzbek community and leadership in Kyrgyzstan]. <http://turonzamin.com/2006/10/02/alisher/>

<sup>110</sup> Abdumalik Sharipov, “*Kirgiziya: Rol I mesto natsionalnyh menshinstv v konfliktah megdu vlastuy I oppozitsiei*” [Kyrgyzstan: The role and position of the ethnic minorities in the conflict between the government and the opposition]. May 2, 2007, [Ferghana.ru](http://ferghana.ru)

Russians in achieving political goals. For instance, in my opinion, such goals as achieving more ethnic representation, abolition of the exam for presidential candidate's fluency in Kyrgyz language etc. though negotiations with the state. Now, as they have established a central body for all the Russian organizations, it is working closely with the Russian embassy within the frameworks of Putin's 'mass immigration' program to leave Kyrgyzstan for Russia. As Abdurasulov<sup>111</sup> states, this is because ethnic Russians lately have the 'mood to leave' (*chemodannoe nastroyenie*), unending protests after the 2005 events, and political instability in terms of the struggle between Bakiev and the opposition make them feel uncomfortable. Even though Russian organizations are less active and politicized than Uzbek organizations, now they are working more closely with the Russian government. As has been observed right after the March events and as respondent<sup>112</sup> number seven points out, applications to leave for Russia have rapidly increased. No other demands similar to the Uzbek's are observed, this is, as was stated in the beginning, due to the fact that Russians can return to their homeland as opposed to Uzbeks. Noting the fact that Russians did not take part in the revolution, but have opted to leave, it can be said that their position has changed or at least they have noticed it changed.

As we have observed, the aforementioned ethnic organizations suddenly became more concerned and action – taking, which demonstrates the fact that ethnic communities are relying on them as a tool to protect them. Regarding the Russian case, it is understandable; it will not interfere with politics for now due to better representation and the option to leave, the Uzbeks are already taking actions, which is quite noticeable. Previously symbolic existence of such organizations is turning into a challenging phase for the government. However, these organizations are not able to gain enough attention and it seems to me that if all the Uzbek

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<sup>111</sup> Abdujalil Abdurasulov, "Krizis v Bishkeke: raskol ili obiedinenie strany?" [Crisis in Bishkek: split or unification of the country?]. April 18, 2007, [BBCRussian.com](http://BBCRussian.com)

<sup>112</sup> Respondent number seven, see the appendix

organizations unite, it will become the point from when the government will start negotiations. So, what was demonstrated above shows the change in the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks in the country, because these organizations have become very active and politicized, although each to a different degree.

### 3.2.3 Governmental policies

This section examines small developments under the current government that make it different from the previous leadership and that cause changes in the position of ethnic minorities. Three major factors or common points on the ethno-political level on which some respondents agree will be presented here. First, both presidents have generally formally accommodating policies, not ethnic cleansing for instance. There are no major changes; nevertheless, Bakiev introduced the ethnic quota in the new electoral code, which was considered as a positive step as respondent number four mentions. More recently, there was a decree issued by the Ministry of Education<sup>113</sup> (# 347/1 from June 12, 2007) stating that Uzbek and Tajik schools will have increased hours of Kyrgyz language classes at the expense of their native languages. Moreover, as Ravshanbek Tursunov, a director of the Uzbek humanitarian institute says in his interview with Amir Suleiman<sup>114</sup>, the Ministry of Education did not provide any tuition free places to the institute in the 2007-08 academic year. Another point, on which almost all respondents agree is that Bakiev is not trying to rebuild informal relations with the leaders of ethnic minorities, particularly with Uzbeks, as opposed to Akayev, who as Khamidov<sup>115</sup> argues always kept these kinds of relations and both sides were satisfied. Indeed, it is necessary to reconsider the decree

<sup>113</sup> Amir Suleiman, “*Prikaz ministerstva obrazovaniya Kyrgyzstana moget vyzvat zabastovku uchitelei*” [Decree of the Ministry of Education can cause teacher’s demonstration]. August 23, 2007, [Fergana.ru](http://fergana.ru)

<sup>114</sup> Amir Suleiman, “*Prikaz ministerstva obrazovaniya Kyrgyzstana moget vyzvat zabastovku uchitelei*” [Decree of the Ministry of Education can cause teacher’s demonstration]. August 23, 2007, [Fergana.ru](http://fergana.ru)

<sup>115</sup> Alisher Khamidov, „*Kak vostanovit usy doveriya: uzbekskaya obshina i vlast v Kyrgyzstane*” [How to reestablish trust: Uzbek community and leadership in Kyrgyzstan]. <http://turonzamin.com/2006/10/02/alisher/>

since as one of the respondents outlined, this kind of promotion of the Kyrgyz language will not bear fruit, it will raise negative feelings towards not only the government, but the Kyrgyz people as well.

The second important factor to take into consideration is that allies of the president are nationalistic and in order not to lose their support, Bakiev keeps neutrality towards ethnic groups. Only Russians are the exception in this case, because the Russian Federation is an important partner in economic terms, besides, Russian is widely spoken by the political elite (the president's wife is Russian, which is an important detail). The current prime-minister – Chudinov, is an ethnic Russian, given this position only because he is Russian, as respondent number two argues. However, as we are able to observe, appointing clan members and friends to administrative positions is leading to the increased use of the Kyrgyz language at the work place. It can be explained by the fact that southern part of the country, where his clan members and friends are mostly from, is less Russified, where the Russian is not the main language of communication as opposed to the northern part. This change in the use of language, as some respondents argue, is perceived by Russians as an increased discrimination and Putin's policy of mass immigration due to the demographic crisis in Russia pushes for their more numerous emigration.

The third important factor, as respondent number four notes, is that the sharpening north-south divide following the revolution has contributed to the rise of ethnic tensions in the following way. "The Uzbeks accused the Kyrgyz of destabilizing the situation in Kyrgyzstan, while the protesters blamed the Uzbeks for supporting the regime of president Akayev."<sup>116</sup> Accusations by Kyrgyz of the Uzbeks for non-participation in the Tulip Revolution and for their loyalty to Akayev's regime indeed as was earlier in this chapter discussed, the previous president

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<sup>116</sup> Igor Rotar, "Ethnic conflict simmers in southern Kyrgyzstan.", June 20, 2005, [www.eurasianet.org](http://www.eurasianet.org)

had good relations with them. Moreover all the ethnic groups, especially Russians and Uzbeks, did not participate in the 2005 events, as they say, because instability would only harm them as is happening now.

From what has been examined in this section, we can make the conclusion that, even though the overall official policy of the state under both presidents was and is accommodating, as respondent number seven argues “the Bakiev administration started with quite a nationalistic rhetoric that mainly focused on positive messages of self-reliance, getting rid of dependence on foreign aid and instilling can-do mentality and Kyrgyz pride. There was promise of more active promotion of the Kyrgyz language as the state language.”<sup>117</sup> From the analysis of several developments it is clearly seen that they have an impact on the general ethnopolitical change in the country.

### **3.2.4 Interethnic relations**

The changes in political representation, ethnic organizations and governmental policies eventually result in the change of inter-ethnic relations. To the question about the implications of what is happening now in the country in terms of inter-ethnic relations, respondent number two gave an answer that basically reflects the answers of all the respondents.

Mutual distrust between ethnicities, resulting in mutual blaming, the sense of being ignored, humiliated within minorities, which inevitably leads to stronger ethnic semi-official groupings (to protect oneself), which then easily turn into semi-political armed groupings (SUAR, Kurdistan, Rwanda, Karabakh-too many examples), easy transformation of any domestic, business etc. conflict into ethnic one, loss of political influence and contact with certain groups of people, which discontinue to identify itself with the country, ready opportunities for destructive forces (terrorist organizations, foreign countries etc).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Respondent number seven, see the appendix

<sup>118</sup> Respondent number two, see the appendix

After the March events, politicians talk about the strengthening of “national self-identification”, as Abdurasulov<sup>119</sup> notes. According to Abdurasulov<sup>120</sup>, since at the public demonstrations, participants speak only in Kyrgyz, mostly coming from rural areas, other ethnic groups see it as a growing nationalism towards them. The slogan used under Akayev, ‘Kyrgyzstan-our common home’, despite some weaknesses and Akayev’s diplomatic abilities to keep ethnic stability through informal agreements, created a place for all to live peacefully. At least, there were no ethnic conflicts even at local levels. On the contrary, under Bakiev’s government, due to many factors and his failure to find ways of stabilizing the political situation (i.e. struggle for central power), there have been some conflicts on ethnic lines, except for daily discriminations and accusations for being loyal to Akayev’s regime. “A January 31 brawl between Kyrgyz and Dungan teenagers in the village of Iskra, about 45 miles (70 kilometers) from the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, precipitated a broader interethnic clash. Two Kyrgyz boys were allegedly beaten by Dungan youths in a dispute over a seat in a local computer center. Dungans, Muslims of Chinese origin, are one of Kyrgyzstan’s smallest minority groups, numbering roughly 50,000. But Dungans comprise roughly 90 percent of Iskra’s 3,000 residents.”<sup>121</sup> Another disturbing case took place, according to Khamidov<sup>122</sup>, in 2006, close to Soh village on the border with Uzbekistan between two Kyrgyz boys and a group of Tajik boys, when Tajik boys beat up Kyrgyz boys. On the next

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<sup>119</sup> Abdujalil Abdurasulov, “We’re with the people! The eventfulness of Identity in Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution”, (Paper presented at the LSE Workshop: The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan One Year On. London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK, February 28, 2006).

<sup>120</sup> Abdujalil Abdurasulov, “Titular Group and Ethnic Minorities after the Kyrgyz Revolution: The changed interaction”, (Paper presented at the LSE Workshop: The Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan One Year On. London School of Economics and Political Science, London, UK, February 28, 2006)

<sup>121</sup> “Interethnic clash causes Kyrgyzstan’s “Common House” to tremble”, February 16, 2006,

<http://www.eurasianet.org>

<sup>122</sup> Alisher Khmaidov, „*Kak vostanovit usy doveriya: uzbekskaya obshina I vlast v Kyrgyzstane*” [How to reestablish trust: Uzbek community and leadership in Kyrgyzstan]. <http://turonzamin.com/2006/10/02/alisher/>

day, around 150 Kyrgyz people gathered in order to take revenge and the conflict was prevented, as Khamidov says, only thanks to local NGO's.

Meanwhile, Kadyrjan Batyrov is the leader of one of the Uzbek organizations, who mobilized people for the demonstrations in Jalalabad, where they demanded the Uzbek language to become official. According to some analysts, he played this ethnic card game himself to get the government's attention, whereas most of the respondents state that he was just afraid to lose his land, earned during Akayev's rule, which he really lost, but gained later again. His fears were justifiable, because following the Tulip Revolution illegal land seizure or illegal redistribution of land started. "In early April 2005 people began seizing land around Bishkek, defying residents and local authorities. There were reports of seizures in seventeen places, involving at least 30,000 people. Often residents said the land belonged to their farms, and they would drive the newcomers out. In some places there was an ethnic undercurrent: Kyrgyz in dispute with Turks, Dungans and Koreans, who had often rented the land for crops."<sup>123</sup> As the Crisis Group reports this has definitely intensified nationalistic attitudes. However, "some of the new officials were much more nationalist than the old regime, although they were careful in public statements not to inflame opinion. In particular, they tried to calm Russian-speakers but some ethnic Russians began to leave, fearing more political upheaval and interethnic tensions."<sup>124</sup>

As we were able to see, there is much evidence for the hypothesis that the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks changed following the 2005 events. To be true, there is definitely a change towards ethnic groups, in their attitude towards government, interethnic communication following the revolution, which is leading to a change in the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks. These two largest ethnic groups were heavily affected by those

<sup>123</sup> Kyrgyzstan after the revolution, Crisis Group #97, May 4, 2005, 12

<sup>124</sup> Kyrgyzstan after the revolution, Crisis Group #97, May 4, 2005, 16

events, as well as the titular nation, which is a hard situation that needs to be solved very soon, before things get worse.

### **3.2. 5 What is ahead?**

Taking into consideration all the answers by respondents and the material on the post-revolutionary situation in the country, there are two options for the evolving ethno-political situation. Starting from the positive development, Bakiev's government may recover old ways of negotiation with ethnic leaders, keeping accommodating policies or, according to Khamidov,<sup>125</sup> ethnic leaders will join the opposition forces. The negative development, as the examples of local ethnic conflicts show, and as Khamidov says, is that there might be a destabilization in the southern part of the country. "The small conflict between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz on the local level may spread all over the region and Uzbek leaders might not be able to control the masses any more."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Alisher Khmaidov, „*Kak vostanovit usy doveriya: uzbekskaya obshina I vlast v Kyrgyzstane*” [How to reestablish trust: Uzbek community and leadership in Kyrgyzstan]. <http://turonzamin.com/2006/10/02/alisher/>

<sup>126</sup> Alisher Khmaidov, „*Kak vostanovit usy doveriya: uzbekskaya obshina I vlast v Kyrgyzstane*” [How to reestablish trust: Uzbek community and leadership in Kyrgyzstan]. <http://turonzamin.com/2006/10/02/alisher/>



## Conclusion

This research has examined the evolving ethnopolitics in Kyrgyzstan following the Tulip Revolution in 2005, which caused southern leaders, namely Bakiev and his allies to overthrow the northern president, Akayev, and come to power. The ethnopolitical situation before the revolution consisted of Akayev's accommodating policies, which were unfortunately contradictory to their realization. As Brubaker<sup>127</sup> conceptualizes, the constitution in such "nationalizing" states recognizes minorities and provides rights for preserving their cultures, language etc. because they have some motivation such as international arena, foreign investment etc. However, in social terms, as he argues, these states are ethnocratic with most of the time exclusive policies, given the soviet legacy, where multi-ethnicity was institutionalized. This was more complicated by the strong presence of clan-based politics and the north-south division. The position of ethnic minorities under Akayev was not discussed or questioned, and ethnic communities did not complain, at least not openly, because there were informal agreements between the government and ethnic leaders, namely political noninterference in exchange for economic opportunities for them, besides friendly relations, which prevented any conflicts.

As I have argued it is important to examine Russian and Uzbek communities residing in Kyrgyzstan, because they are the largest groups that are territorially concentrated, the former in the northern part and the latter in the south and are capable of mobilizing. So, following the leadership change in the state, there have been minor modifications in the main legal document of the republic. For example, the introduction of proportional representation rule in the electoral code, as well as the proportional ethnic representation requirement for parties. It seemed an improvement to the position of all the ethnic groups; nevertheless, it was just an illusion. As the

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<sup>127</sup> Rogers Brubaker, "Nationalizing states in the old 'New Europe' – and the new", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 19:2 (1996)

results demonstrate, it can be easily manipulated through administrative resources as Mamaraimov<sup>128</sup> argues. Besides, the decree issued by the Ministry of Education on the increase of Kyrgyz language classes resulting in fewer lessons of their own languages in the Uzbek and Tajik schools is very contradictory to the official policy in the Constitution stating that all the ethnic communities have the right and freedom to practice and keep their languages, traditions.

My initial hypothesis that the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks after the so-called ‘Tulip Revolution’ have changed for the worse, despite the fact that everything stayed the same, have been confirmed by the empirical findings. Namely, the new elite causing small changes in the official policies, along with the political instability in the country as reflected by continuous demonstrations and the Tulip Revolution itself, changed the interaction of ethnic minorities and the titular nation. Consequently, all these factors are changing the attitudes of minorities towards the government, eventually leading to the rise of fears among the ethnic groups, especially the largest ones. Evidence of various demonstrations by Uzbek demanding recognition of their language to become official, more political representation, the Russians becoming more united and working closely with the embassy to leave etc. demonstrate the evolving situation. Small ethnic conflicts on the local level, such as in the village of Iskra between Dungans and Kyrgyz last year, resulted in several Dungan families leaving; Tajik and Kyrgyz conflict in the village of Soh was prevented by local NGOs.

As presented throughout this work, the conclusion is that findings demonstrate that the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks has changed so far due to the factors listed above, even though the new government did not make any significant changes in their ethnic policies. Moreover, this government is continuing the official policies of the old government, because the

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<sup>128</sup> Abdumomun Mamaraimov, “*Vybory v Kirgizii: Administrativnyi resurs I lichnosti kandidatov kak glavnye factory pobedy*” [Elections in Kyrgyzstan: Administrative resource and personalities of candidates as major factors of the victory]. December 14, 2007, [Fergana.ru](http://Fergana.ru)

language law has stayed the same since Akayev's time, according to which there are two official languages: Kyrgyz and Russian. However, the decree issued by the Ministry of Education (see chapter 3 for more information) clearly shows that Bakiev is putting more emphasis on the Kyrgyz language. Thus, we may say that this is an indicator of his more nationalistic approach, despite the fact that his wife is Russian, since intelligent Akayev, coming from the northern part and having lived in Russia for many years during his academic career, was more Russified, as the respondent number seven points out.

The elite change and the perceived threat that the Uzbeks are growing in number as a consequence of the Andijan uprising in 2005 according to Omarov<sup>129</sup>, as a result of which numerous Uzbek citizens were accepted by Kyrgyzstan as refugees, are significant factors that cause the state to become more 'nationalizing'. Especially if the new leader is more nationalistic, as Bakiev is, who according to the Crisis Group report comes from the more nationalist part of the country and whose allies are also nationalists. We were able to measure the degree of nationalization through the analysis of the change in political representation, activity of ethnic organizations, official policies and interethnic relations after the so-called 'Tulip Revolution'. Empirical findings demonstrate that the state has become more 'nationalizing' under the new elite. However, only three years have passed since those days, therefore, this opens more space for further research in this area, which could make a valuable contribution to the overall literature of ethnopolitical issues and nationalism studies. Specifically, this case study of Kyrgyzstan at its new stage can be a proof or disproof for some conceptual ideas in the field of nationalism when researched more in-depth.

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<sup>129</sup> Nur Omarov, „*God peremen v Kyrgyzstane*”, [The Year of Changes in Kyrgyzstan], December 14, 2005, [www.apn.kz](http://www.apn.kz)

This work has provided the general background of soviet ethno-political history and its legacy on the territory of not only Kyrgyzstan, but the whole region of Central Asia. It attempted to give an analysis of ethno-politics and evolving ethno-politics under two very different leaderships of contemporary Kyrgyzstan from a comparative perspective. More importantly, it was able to demonstrate and argue that there is a difference between them, meaning that the situation and position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks today is more complicated and raises greater awareness than before. Additionally, as most of the respondents and media sources claim, if the government continues in this mood and will not undertake any comprehensive actions, there is a possibility for a conflict between Uzbeks and the titular nation in case of the worse scenario, or for them to join the opposition, which was never the case under Akayev, as the best scenario. Meanwhile, Russians will keep emigrating for a better future in their homeland that is now very attractive economically. All of these has and will continue to have an impact on the political, economic and social development of the country.

The changed attitude towards the government can also be noticed in the increased activity and politicization of Uzbek and Russian ethnic organizations caused by the troubles of the March events. The loyalty of these organizations, especially Uzbeks', to the government and symbolic existence under Akayev and their salience in expressing their demands or working with the embassy as in the Russian case today tells us about the difference in their position and evolving ethnopolitical situation in the country.

The predictions of Juska<sup>130</sup> that if Kyrgyzstan continues to achieve its ethnocratic goals, it will turn into a fully ethnocratic state similar to Uzbekistan without consociational elements, seem to be beginning now, since Bakiev so far does not use informal agreements according to

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<sup>130</sup> Arunas Juska, "Ethno-political transformation in the states of former USSR." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22:3 (1999)

Khamidov<sup>131</sup>. Brubaker's<sup>132</sup> concept of nationalizing nation-building is applicable to the given case, and as Brubaker puts it, it can cause ethnic conflicts, since as the concept of "stateness" says during the transition process heterogeneity of the society is a main constraint for democracy to be achieved.

In this complex ethno-political situation in Kyrgyzstan, it is important for the government, as Khamidov argues, not to ignore ethnic minorities, but to take some actions to include them in the political life of the country. This is what they are demanding now and have been always complaining about, though not openly. As Khamidov proposes, there are solutions for this problem: increasing their representation by putting them, particularly Uzbeks, under-represented in comparison to Russians into some ministerial, legal and administrative positions. In addition, ethnic organizations could also be a link between the government and people by listening to and discussing issues in the state through the meetings of such organizations. Concluding, it is important to suggest that in order for ethnic conflicts not to occur, the government should start functioning as a point for unification of all the people by stressing its efforts at the joint economic, social and political development, and by guaranteeing and actually implementing the rights of ethnic communities to preserve their culture, language etc., at the same time, overseeing and checking whether laws and regulations are in accordance with the constitution. Conflicts are the last thing that people would want.

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<sup>131</sup> Alisher Khmaidov, „*Kak vostanovit usy doveriya: uzbekskaya obshina I vlast v Kyrgyzstane*” [How to reestablish trust: Uzbek community and leadership in Kyrgyzstan]. <http://turonzamin.com/2006/10/02/alisher/>

<sup>132</sup> Rogers Brubaker, „Nationhood and National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutional Account”, in *Theory and Society*, 23:1, (1994)

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## Appendix

### Interview questions:

- Does the current leadership differ from the previous in terms of their policies towards ethnic minorities? How and why?
- What kind of implications may this have for inter-ethnic relations?
- Have the cultural organizations of ethnic minorities become more active? More politicized? Please, provide examples.
- How would you describe the position of ethnic Russians and Uzbeks following the 2005 events, in terms of political representation, culture, economic conditions, and role in the society?
- What are the future prognoses for minorities?

### Interviewees:

1. Senior Analyst of the Foundation for Tolerance International. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
2. Former instructor at American University-Central Asia (AUCA), Director of the translation company of his own at the moment. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
3. BBC news producer, Central Asian Bureau, author of the articles about the ethnic minorities in KG. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
4. A PhD student at Maryland University, previously head of the International and Comparative Politics Department at AUCA, former deputy director of OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
5. Regional Director of the Institute for War in Peace Report, former instructor at AUCA. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
6. Media assistant at UNDP in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.
7. The president of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, prominent activist of the Tulip Revolution itself, a member of the Social-Democratic Party Ata-Meken. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.