

# **The instrumentalization of ‘Eurasian’ political myth in Kazakhstan**

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## Abstract

Utilizing theoretical literature on political myth and methods of political discourse analysis the thesis explores the development of Eurasian political myth produced through independent elite discourses in Kazakhstan since 1991. President Nursultan Nazarbayev emerged as an active promoter of post-Soviet integration processes and introduced his own interpretation, vision, strategy, and collection of policies that developed and constituted the Eurasian political myth. Discourses of the myth framed regional and domestic policies pursued by the Kazakhstani state and served as a foundation of the Eurasian Economic Union established in 2015. The myth created codes of collective self-identification and stories that conferred significance upon Kazakhstan's new post-Soviet political situation. The narratives and discourses of the myth were constructed in favor of the political authority and were instrumentalized in strengthening the polity's legitimacy. Development of the Eurasian myth enabled a new political imaginary, employing which the leader claimed not only a dignified place for Kazakhstan in the post-Soviet, Eurasian space but celebrated Kazakhstan's prestigious and leading role in the new political context and epoch by placing the country in the center of the project. The myth offered both past and future-oriented political meanings - it enabled the state to change its periphery status and re-imagine it both as a bridge between different cultures and a locus for harmonious co-existence of various ethnocultural groups. The Eurasian myth was a rhetorical instrument for establishing political, inter-ethnic and economic stability, developing a non-confrontational and equal partnership which secured economic ties with Russia in the turbulent 1990s. All these were critical for the regime's legitimacy and longevity.

## Introduction

Fundamentally, any form of social organization requires a collective belief in various stories and myths about it, which exist in the imaginations of its participants. Discourses and stories grant meaning, significance and reason for its existence and perpetuation.<sup>1</sup> Normative and cognitive maps that guide communities register and are conditioned by the stories told and the discourses designed for their consumption. Essentially, discourses and myths define political and social realities in which they operate.

The collapse of the Soviet Union steered a social re-organization and led to re-negotiation of the sense of belonging, producing a constellation of newly built nation-states in the post-Soviet space. Eurasianism is one of the main shared cultural-political rubrics, which emerged and coagulated in the elite discourses of Russia<sup>2</sup>, Tatarstan,<sup>3</sup> aboriginal Siberians<sup>4</sup> and Kazakhstan. In Kazakhstan, Eurasianism was revised, re-interpreted, shaped according to the elite's vision, and evolved into a political myth. After the 'official inauguration' of the idea by Nazarbayev in his Moscow speech in 1994, where he proposed the creation of Eurasian Union, the state started production of various agendas and policy perspectives. Over time, the idea of Eurasianism materialized into a transnational integration project – the Eurasian Economic Union, established in 2015 and currently involving Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan. The existing narratives about the union in

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Blumenberg, *Work on myth* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985); John W. Meyer, and Brian Rowan. "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony." *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (1977): 340-63.

<sup>2</sup> Natalia Morozova, "Geopolitics, Eurasianism and Russian Foreign Policy Under Putin," *Geopolitics* 14, no. 4 (November 16, 2009): 667–86; Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008);

<sup>3</sup> Mark Bassin, "Eurasianism 'Classical' and 'Neo': The Lines of Continuity" In: Tetsuo Mochizuki (ed.) *Beyond the Empire: Images of Russia in the Eurasian Cultural Context*. Sapporo, Japan: Slavic Research Centre (2008)

<sup>4</sup> Miroslava Derenko et al., "Western Eurasian Ancestry in Modern Siberians Based on Mitogenomic Data," *BMC Evolutionary Biology* 14 (October 10, 2014).

the member states are not limited to its pragmatic-economic nature, as various discourses specific to each political context were generated.<sup>5</sup>

Kazakhstani elites adopted the Eurasianism discourse by selecting specific elements from its rich heritage to serve preferred political goals. It is one of the main discursive tools employed for creating a legitimate political order in Kazakhstan and adjusting to the political conditions in which the state found itself. The country was the last to leave the Soviet Union in 1991. Apart from the titular nation, the newly born state inherited another substantial ethnic group –Russians. The state faced a great challenge in building a homogeneous national identity, as the latter outnumbered the former, and the nation-state needed solidification of its sovereignty. At the same time, the government was grappling with post-disintegration economic turmoil, complex political transformations, and the geopolitical maneuvering. Kazakhstan’s nation-building project and its continuous search for identity are dynamic, complex, controversial and volatile processes. The society’s social and political transformations led to the establishment of new socio-cultural vision and values, which are spread through various discourses.

The main objective of the thesis is to reveal and analyze the Eurasianism discourse constructed by the Kazakhstani political elites and to explore how it is instrumentalized as a ‘political myth’. The work relies on the following definition of a political myth offered by Bottici: “political myth is the work on a common narrative that coagulates and thus grants significance to the political conditions and experiences of a social group”.<sup>6</sup> Political myths are narratives and stories which address specifically the political conditions in which a given groups live. Thus, the thesis understands political myth as a process, which changes and adapts depending on various needs and political conditions of a group it targets.

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<sup>5</sup> Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Chiara Bottici, *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary* (Columbia University Press, 2014): p.129.

The Eurasianism rubric in Kazakhstan started as a vague, tentative, institution-less set of ideas. Within twenty-six years since the state received independence in 1991, the political myth of Eurasianism emerged, transformed, matured and was institutionalized domestically as well as transnationally. The thesis explores this process and investigates the following research questions: how has the political myth of Eurasianism developed and changed between 1991 and now? What rhetorical devices and discursive strategies were employed in the creation of the myth? What meanings are attributed to the discourses of Eurasianism and why? How do these meanings inform the formation of identities and vision of the political community exposed to it? Finally, what is the future of the Kazakhstani Eurasianism?

Exploring the construction of the Eurasian political myth, identifying the main storytellers, and examining how the myth is sustained and is made relevant sheds light on cognitive schemes provided for the Kazakhstani population to understand its social world and the socio-political developments it is experiencing. Furthermore, it helps to understand the relationship between the authoritarian elites and the governed. The thesis aims to contribute to the literature on Eurasianism, particularly Kazakhstani Eurasianism. Additionally, it seeks to contribute to understanding the use and nature of political myths in the post-Soviet context.

In order to produce answers to the listed questions, I use discursive data generated within the given timeframe and track how the imaginaries of Eurasianism were formed and polished in Kazakhstan. The data used for the analysis is comprised of President Nazarbayev's speeches, books, foreign policy statements and the Kazakhstani parliamentary discussion transcripts.

To provide the answers to the research questions, the work is organized in five chapters. The first section establishes a theoretical and analytical framework, which is based on the literature on political myths and the methods of political discourse analysis. The literature review section explores the academic works on the application of political myth to

the European Union and mythmaking in the creation of ‘Europeanness’. Although the Eurasian Union is not a full-fledged entity like the EU and it is too early to discuss a Eurasian identity, the parallels between them still can be drawn. Both of them represent a regional integration process and officially positioned as driven by rational-economic motivations of its member states. Exploring the creation of symbolic foundations of the EU sheds light on how worldviews, beliefs, interests, and narratives blend together forming political myths and a related identity. The third chapter provides a historical overview of the idea of Eurasianism, which originally was an invention of Russian intellectual thought in the 1920s. The chapter also briefly discusses the current Russian perspectives on Eurasianism and the political discourses produced by the Russian elites, and offers the review of scholarly discussions about Kazakhstani Eurasianism. The overview highlights the major differences in the outlooks and identifies the gaps in the published literature on Eurasianism in Kazakhstan. Chapter four provides the socio-political contextualization needed for the analysis and follows the course of nation-building in Kazakhstan to identify the political circumstances which opened a discursive space for Eurasianism. Chapter five is the centerpiece of the work and discusses what makes Eurasianism a political myth, explores how it was developed and identifies how the discursive strategies and topoi are employed to create socio-political meanings. It explores the role of the Eurasian political myth and unfolds the complex web of maneuvers, interests, and motivations behind the discursive facade of the project.

## Chapter 1. Theory and Methodology

### 1.1 Political myths

Myth became a fashionable concept and is used almost to the point of abuse in explaining the construction of various group identities, nationalism and political collectives. Disputably, postmodern forms of social organization and collectives tend to aim at the creation of rational and progress-seeking institutions, reducing their need for myths and stories. Yet, myths make knowledge accessible for individuals and make collective events, definitions of belonging and polity intelligible for society. Furthermore, myths can serve as an instrument to explain the fate of a community, outcome of strategies and policies concerning them and to paint a vision of the collective future.

Conceptualization of and theorizations about myths mainly come from the field of anthropology. According to Tanasoiu, anthropologists view it as a type of a “fictitious discourse and a form of speech opposed to the reasoned discourse of the logic”.<sup>7</sup> However, when it comes to political myths, confusion about the terminology might rise. In a common vernacular myth is synonymous with fiction. In this regard, Flood argues that

“Studies of myth almost invariably open with the caveat that the reader should not confuse the popular, pejorative term myth as a synonym for falsehood, distortion, or delusion with the scholarly usage which stresses that myths have unquestioned validity within the belief systems of the social groups which cherish them”.<sup>8</sup>

The statement about the “unquestioned validity” is too strong, as skeptics can be found in every form of social organization, but indeed, myths are imaginary constructions, which truthfulness and validity are relative. They are usually accepted as valid by the majority of the relevant group but certainly are up for contestation. The validity of myth is of secondary relevance. What is more important, is whether it has a symbolic power and possess a robust

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<sup>7</sup> Cosmina Tanasoiu, “Post-Communist Political Symbolism: new myths – same old stories? An analysis of Romanian Political Mythology” *Romanian Journal of Political Science* 5(1): p.114.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction* (Psychology Press, 2001).



capacity to reduce complexity and interpret intricate phenomenon or socio-political realities for its audience.

Scrutinizing political myths and discourses is instrumental for understanding how and why societies identify their origins in the way they do, their vision for the future and their sense of place and belonging. According to Bottici, “myths provide names through which the unknown first becomes masterable, but they also provide narratives, which, by inserting events into a plot, can produce and reproduce significance”.<sup>9</sup>

How do we know when a myth is political? Tudor writes:

“A political myth, as I understand it, is one which tells the story of a political society...in other cases, it concerns a political society destined to be created in the future, and it is told for the purpose of encouraging men to hasten its advent... a political myth may, for instance, establish the claims of a certain group to hegemony, sovereign independence, or an extension of territory; it may strengthen the solidarity of a group...It may sanctify the creation of a society, inspire its members with confidence in their destiny and glorify their achievements”.<sup>10</sup>

There is a correlation between the degree of popular acceptance of a mythology concerning the past of a community and the vision for the future and the legitimacy the polity it is given. Political myths lubricate and induce the establishment of a certain political order and its legitimacy.<sup>11</sup>

So, when does a need for myths and stories rise? According to Bell, the primary functions of myths are to flatten intricacy, smoothen disparities and decrease performative inconsistencies in human history.<sup>12</sup> In a similar manner, Della Salla argues that “precisely at times when social complexity increases that there is a greater need for societies to tell stories that make sense of what seems confusing and unconnected”.<sup>13</sup> Political myths provide ready-

<sup>9</sup> Chiara Bottici, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Tudor, *Political Myth* (London: Pall Mall Press Ltd, 1972): p.138-139.

<sup>11</sup> Andrea Lenschow and Carina Sprungk, “The myth of a Green Europe,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol.48, no.1 (2010):pp.133–154

<sup>12</sup> Duncan S.A. Bell, “Mythscapes: memory, mythology, and national identity,” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 54 (March, 2003 ): pp. 63–81.

<sup>13</sup> Vincent Della Salla, “Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union\*” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48 (2010): p.4.

made answers in the form of various narratives for an audience, in times of socio-political vacuum or rapidly shifting circumstances.

According to functionalists' view, widespread political myths perform practical functions and are widely utilized in a political arena. Tudor argues that myths are stories told for a specific and practical reason not just for the sake of entertainment.<sup>14</sup> Functionalists effectively contextualize myths in a political, daily and social life of a group. Overing suggests that "[i]t serves as a symbolic statement about the social order, and as such it reinforces social cohesion and functional unity by presenting and justifying the traditional order".<sup>15</sup> Functionalists maintain that it is irrelevant whether an audience firmly believes in irrational and symbolic aspects of myths. They suggest that myths' symbolic aspect have a metaphoric value, which serves to provide legitimacy for the given social or political structure.<sup>16</sup> Overing explains that "the narratives of myth have the function of legitimating the social structure, and so myths come into play when the social or moral rule demands justification and sanctity".<sup>17</sup> Bottici and Challand argue that myths perform their function not just thanks to a content of stories they tell but by the very fact of telling and spreading certain discourses.<sup>18</sup> Thus, political myths are instruments, mainly used by those in power in order to legitimate their political authority.

How do political myths develop? Reiterating the definition offered by Bottici: "A political myth is the work on a common narrative that coagulates and thus grants significance to the political conditions and experiences of a social group".<sup>19</sup> Based on the theorizations of

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<sup>14</sup> Henry Tudor, *Political Myth* (London: Pall Mall Press Ltd, 1972).

<sup>15</sup> Joanna Overing, "The Role of Myth: An Anthropological Perspective, or: 'The Reality of the Really Made-Up'" In: Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpfung, *Myths and Nationhood*, (New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1997): pp. 23-24.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Chiara Bottici and Benoît Challand, "Rethinking Political Myth: The Clash of Civilizations as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy" *European Journal of Social Theory*, Volume 9, No. 3 (2006): pp. 315-36.

<sup>19</sup> Chiara Bottici, *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary* (Columbia University Press, 2014): p.129

Della Sala<sup>20</sup>, Bottici<sup>21</sup> and Bouchard<sup>22</sup>, the process of political myths' development can be summarized in the following stages:

1. Creation of a narrative. This involves the initial establishment of a narrative and main stories; the identification of audience. The created narrative should address specific political conditions of its audience and respond to the need for significance.
2. Diffusion of the narrative. Della Sala states that myths "are born in facts, but then take on a life of their own in the hands of storytellers and listeners".<sup>23</sup> At this stage the agents emerge -main storytellers, who spread the discourses and demonstrate legitimacy.
3. Ritualization/Institutionalization. At this stage, the narrative matures, becomes operational and widely accepted. It enters the political practice, is ritualized and contributes to building legitimacy of the political project it works for and provides a basis for collective actions.
4. Sacralization. Della Sala and Bouchard agree on the first three stages, but this last one is conceptualized by Della Sala, and it does not necessarily contribute to understanding the process of political myths' evolution. At this final stage, the myth becomes sacred and an inextricable essential part of the political community.

## 1.2. Methodology

The qualitative data used for the analysis is comprised of texts - mostly the Kazakhstani elites' political speeches and announcements, written in various publications, Nazarbayev's books, official newspapers and to a lesser extent, transcripts of parliamentary

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<sup>20</sup> Vincent Della Sala, "Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union\*" *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48 (2010): pp.1-19.

<sup>21</sup> Chiara Bottici, *Imaginal Politics*.

<sup>22</sup> Gérard Bouchard, *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents* (Routledge, 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Vincent Della Sala, "Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union\*" *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48 (2010):p.4.

discussions. Word choices are cognitive processes, but in this particular genre of political discourse, the selection of words and topical structures is a careful, deliberate and premeditated process. Therefore, they reflect the particular vision, social dynamics, ideology, and identities. The intentionally structured and strategically designed nature make them an yielding data to detect various rhetorical strategies and motivations. To analyze the data, the work employs methods offered by Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). According to van Dijk, PDA is an analysis of discourses enfolded in political texts and talks of politicians in a specific political context. Van Dijk offers a specific conception of political discourse, which he identifies as produced by politicians, who are “the group of people who are being paid for their (political) activities, and who are being elected or appointed (or self-designated) as the central players in the polity”.<sup>24</sup> PDA provides a methodology for understanding what the use of linguistic practices and discourses in political contexts can tell about the perceptions of people about their social world. Moreover, analyzing linguistic framework through PDA can help to understand how political discourses serve legitimizing purposes. According to Chilton:

“Political discourse involves, among other things, the promotion of representations, and a pervase feature of representation is the evident need for political speakers to imbue their utterances with evidence, authority, and truth, a process that we shall refer to in broad terms, in the context of political discourse, as ‘legitimation’”.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the methodology helps to understand the nature and functions of discourses. Furthermore, the method offers tools to highlight how discourses are instrumentalized in production, maintenance and manipulation of power. The analysis focuses on the use metaphors for political argumentation and persuasion, how contextual features are incorporated into the discourse and how various rhetorical topoi are used.

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<sup>24</sup> Teun A. van Dijk, “What is Political Discourse Analysis?” *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 11 (1997): p.13.

<sup>25</sup> Paul Anthony Chilton, *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice* (Psychology Press, 2004): p.23.

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Political myths and the European Union

The European discourses occupy a large niche in the scholarly discussions and cover various research questions related to the construction of myths and narratives about the entity. Commonly, scrutinizing political myths is associated with state- and nation-building. The Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union are neither - but are future-oriented, postmodern, postnational, multinational forms of polity. However, the later has a relatively long history and established foundational and normative political myths, which are based on the objectives and interests of the member states and political actors that participate in their construction. The overview of the existing literature on European myth-making helps to identify and understand the similar processes related to Eurasian myth-making. The study of Europeanness and related discourses is dominated by constructivists, who emphasize its socially constructed nature. The issues of common identity, the establishment of discourses, narratives and symbols attract considerable attention in the academic literature on Europe.

Bo Stråth holds that “Europe is a discourse translated into a political and ideological projects”.<sup>26</sup> He highlights that it is an imaginary construct and a normative center shaped by language, discourses, and political projects.<sup>27</sup> What does “myth” mean and how is the political myth-making is carried out in the European context? Hansen and Williams explore the link between myth and legitimacy in the EU context from a functionalist perspective. They admit that “an original organic ‘people’ must exist in order to be legitimately represented by an elite”. Interestingly, they address the romantic position’s assumption that functionalism holds that the base for legitimacy in the polity is rational institutional

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<sup>26</sup> Bo Stråth, “Towards a European Democracy” In: Sonja Puntischer Riekmann, Monika Mokre, and Michael Latzer, *The State of Europe: Transformations of Statehood from a European Perspective* (Campus Verlag, 2004): p.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

arrangements, not myths and that it lacks appreciation of mythical foundations for the creation of Europeanness. They maintain that

“In fact, the entire argument concerning the mythic necessity of the EU hinges on an opposition between myth and rationalism that simply cannot be sustained, for the opposition between rationality and an historical, mythic culture of identity represents one of the most powerful and defining myths of the modern world – that of modernity as a whole”.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the authors argue that the functionalist vision of community-building in the EU as rationalist, liberal, practical and objective is in itself mythic. They explain that the modernist myth of rationalization itself comes from its ability to contrast itself with traditional understandings of myths.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the authors argue that the myth of modernity which is interwoven into the social structure in Europe is the most powerful myths of all. It is universal, undergirds the vision for the future as rationality of modernity carries a promise of global expansion and timelessness.<sup>30</sup>

Laffan explores how identity, legitimacy and political order are interrelated in Europe.<sup>31</sup> She states that war legacies weakened potency of national myths, opening up space for other myths. She maintains that legitimacy crisis of the EU showed that shared values are important “if the Union is to become a focus for legitimacy in the new Europe”.<sup>32</sup> Obradovic also explores the issue of legitimacy in Europe, particularly, she discusses the crisis of legitimacy. Obradovic argues that the crisis is not a result of policy-making failures and suggests that the problem lies in the realm of myth-making and developing mythic foundations.<sup>33</sup> The author holds that legitimacy and myths are intimately related, as lores provide “symbolic values within which people share an idea of origin, continuity, historical

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<sup>28</sup> Lene Hansen and Michael C. Williams, “The Myths of Europe: Legitimacy, Community and the ‘Crisis’ of the EU,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 1999): p. 240.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.: p.244.

<sup>31</sup> Brigid Laffan, “The Politics of Identity and Political Order in Europe,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 34 (1996) : pp. 81–102.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>33</sup> Daniela Obradovic, “Policy Legitimacy and the European Union,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 34, no. 2 (June 1, 1996): 191–221.

memories, collective remembrance, common heritage and tradition, as well as a common destiny”.<sup>34</sup> Hansen and Williams argue that the EU lacks the solid mythic foundation Obradovic discussed, because the attempts to develop them lead to defensive activation of national myths.<sup>35</sup> Yet, they argue that in European myth-making past and future are interrelated and “the presentation of the EU as a rational, functional institution, as the natural extension of the processes of social and political rationalization already well advanced in the historical evolution of modern states, becomes *a key mythic move*, one that is inextricably related to its more overtly ‘mythic’ foils”.<sup>36</sup>

Della Sala argues that the central idea of European political myth is that it is “a great postwar peace project”.<sup>37</sup> He points out that the myth of Europe has all the hallmarks of a political myth and tells a story of a rational, supranational entity which brings peace, economic prosperity and democracy.<sup>38</sup> He importantly underscores that political myth is “a valuable instrument in determining what is right and what is to be done in governing”. Echoing Hansen and Williams, Della Sala argues that the stories told about the EU and its institutions compose a neofunctional mythology - that it is a form of social and political organization capable of providing political order in a changing, complex world, where nations and states can no longer be the most important locus power and organization.

Ruth Wodak and Gilbert Weiss rely on Critical Discourse analysis methodology in analyzing European discourses. They regard discourse as “texts in context” - in analyzing the EU discourses and narratives they took into consideration the impact of political contexts. For the given purpose they also employed the concept of recontextualization, which implies

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.191.

<sup>35</sup> Lene Hansen and Michael C. Williams, “The Myths of Europe: Legitimacy, Community and the ‘Crisis’ of the EU,” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 37, no. 2 (June 1, 1999): p.238.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p.243.

<sup>37</sup> Vincent Della Sala, “Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union\*” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48 (2010): pp.1-19.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

“the discursive dynamics and modification of arguments, themes, topoi, and speech acts in the transformation from one genre to another or from one public space to another”.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the premise is that contextualization is important in analyzing the construction and changes in the discourses.

## 2.2 Eurasian discourses in Russia

In Russia, the Eurasian ideology received a new momentum in the 1990s and became more politically assertive. In the context of post-Soviet moral confusion, it received a widespread and strong support from Russian intellectuals and politicians. One of the central premises of the Russian neo-Eurasianism is that Russia belongs both to Europe and Asia, which is why it incorporates features of the both sides in terms of culture, identity and mentality. Dugin’s neo-Eurasianism is the most popularized version of the ideology in the current Russian context and it promotes anti-Western, anti-democratic, nationalist agenda, with an objective of creating a new Eurasian empire led by Russia.<sup>40</sup> A more moderate version of Eurasianist discourses is widespread among Russian political elites. Putin’s vision of Eurasianism is related to the Union itself, which he envisions as a great project with Russia in the center and which can compete with the European Union, USA and China by uniting the post-Soviet countries.<sup>41</sup> The Russian elites discuss the union in relation to geopolitics and regional ambitions of Russia. Putin in his article published in 2011 in *Izvestia*, asserts that the Eurasian integration offers “a model of a powerful supranational association that can become one of the poles of the modern world and at the same time play

<sup>39</sup> Ruth Wodak and Gilbert Weiss, “Analyzing European Union discourses,” In: Ruth Wodak and Paul Chilton, *A New Agenda in (Critical) Discourse Analysis: Theory, Methodology and Interdisciplinarity* (John Benjamins Publishing, 2005): p. 127.

<sup>40</sup> Alexandr Dugin, *Osnovi geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoe budushee Rossii. Mislit Prostranstvom*. [Fundamentals of Geopolitics: Geopolitical Future of Russia: To think about Space] (Moscow: Arktogeya-tsent, 1999).

<sup>41</sup> Golam Mostafa, “The Concept of ‘Eurasia’: Kazakhstan’s Eurasian Policy and Its Implications,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 4, no. 2 (July 1, 2013).



the role of an effective "link" between Europe and the dynamic Asia-Pacific region".<sup>42</sup> In 2015, during a direct line with him, Putin said that by integrating the Eurasian space, he is not trying to resurrect the empire or pull other states to the Russian orbit, rather he highlighted, "the point is to make all people's lives in these countries better and open the borders between the states".<sup>43</sup> In general, the Eurasianism discourse in Russia imagines the Eurasian project as a "geopolitical", "mighty", "mutually beneficial" and regional project without much discussion of its cultural or identity-related aspects. The neo-Eurasianists like Dugin, conservatives, and nationalists in Russia admire the idea of Eurasianism and enthusiastic about the integration project as they envision Russia's re-establishment as one of the power poles after the breakup of the Soviet Union, Putin described as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20<sup>th</sup> century". Nevertheless, there are major differences in Putin and Nazarbayev's imaginaries about the project and in the interpretation of the political thought itself, the later rejecting anti-Western and anti-global course advocated by the former. Thus, the dominant Russian discourse of Eurasianism views it as an important geopolitical project which can help Putin to restore Russia's former great power status. Accordingly, there is consensus in the academic literature on Russian Eurasianism that it is a geopolitical project, which is based on the premise that Russia is a geopolitically and culturally unique country, influenced by both European and Asian heritage. It is seen as a product of Russia's post-imperial attempts to understand and create a place for itself in the geopolitical map of the world. Laruelle<sup>44</sup>, Kerr<sup>45</sup>, and Morozova<sup>46</sup> view it as a geopolitical

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<sup>42</sup> Vladimir Putin, Novyi integratsionnyi proekt dlia Evrazii – budushchee, kotoroe rozhdaetsia segodnia. [A new Eurasian integration project for Eurasia: A future born today]. Izvestiia 3 October.

<sup>43</sup> Vladimir, Putin, Pryamaya liniya s Vladimirom Putiny [The direct line with Vladimir Putin], (16 April 2015). Retrieved from [www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49261](http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49261)

<sup>44</sup> Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>45</sup> David Kerr, "The New Eurasianism: The Rise of Geopolitics in Russia's Foreign Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47, no. 6 (September 1, 1995): 977–88, doi:10.1080/09668139508412300.

<sup>46</sup> Natalia Morozova, "Geopolitics, Eurasianism and Russian Foreign Policy Under Putin," *Geopolitics* 14, no. 4 (November 16, 2009): 667–86, doi:10.1080/14650040903141349.

solution employed by the Russian elites in the post-Soviet ideological vacuum. Richardson in his analysis of Putin's Eurasian dialectic argues that Russian elites combine two discourses - Eurasian as a civilizational identity and as a political and economic project of modernization, which will lead Russia and other countries of Eurasia to get integrated into the global economy.<sup>47</sup> Shevtsova also points out that Russia imagines itself as "state-civilization" - an alternative to Western Atlanticism based on different, traditional values.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the Eurasianism in Russia is framed as a civilizational and geopolitical concept. Currently, there are four other post-Soviet states in the Russia-led Eurasian Union, but all them regard the project with caution and pursue their own interpretations and strategies.

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Benjamin Richardson, "Putin's Eurasian Dialectic," In: David Lane and V. Samokhvalov, *The Eurasian Project and Europe: Regional Discontinuities and Geopolitics* (Springer, 2016): pp. 89-101.

<sup>48</sup> Lilia Shevtsova, "The Russian Matrix: The Art of Metamorphosis," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, accessed September 15, 2017, <http://carnegie.ru/2013/11/30/russian-matrix-art-of-metamorphosis-pub-53782>.

### Chapter 3. The origins of Eurasianism

In order to explore the development of Eurasian political myth in Kazakhstan, to understand how and why the idea Eurasianism is instrumentalized, it is essential to explore the origins of the concept, situate it historically and locate the existing scholarly accounts about it.

The emergence of this political idea is attributed to so-called classic Eurasianists and can be traced back to 1920s. The Eurasianists emerged as a counter-reaction to Europeanness. They offered a different set of values and vision which promoted common, all-Eurasian culture and identity for the inhabitants of Russia and peripheries. They established a theoretical foundation of the idea and promoted the development of common Eurasian nationalism and economic independence of the landmass.<sup>49</sup> Shlapentoch argues that Eurasianism was not just an intellectual current developed by Russian thinkers, but an important reflection of new ideological trends in the Union. It signaled the Soviet Union's separation from the West and its increased interest in its Asian roots, featuring the minorities' significance, the majority of which were Asians. Eurasianism has resurfaced in the post-Soviet space, but in the Russian context is popularly associated with imperial nostalgia and anti-Western principles.<sup>50</sup> The concept itself has been popularly regarded as an ideological extension of the Russian imperial expansionism. Bassin calls Eurasianism "one of the most popular keywords available in the volatile ideological arsenal of post-Soviet politics".<sup>51</sup> Its philosophically constructed foundations and rich heritage made it a useful idea and an ideological instrument in a number of the post-Soviet countries,

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<sup>49</sup> Lev Gumilev, *Ritmy Evrazii: Epokhi i tsivilitzatsii [Rhythms of Eurasia: Epochs and Civilization]* (Moscow: OOO Izdatelstvo AST Moscva, 2007).

<sup>50</sup> Dmitry Vladimir Shlapentokh, "Dugin's Early Eurasianism and the Problem of Recycling Ideology" In: A. Sengupta and S. Chatterjee, *Globalizing Geographies: Perspectives from Eurasia: Perspectives from Eurasia* (KW Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2014).

<sup>51</sup> Mark Bassin, "Eurasianism 'Classical' and 'Neo': The Lines of Continuity" In: Tetsuo Mochizuki (ed.) *Beyond the Empire: Images of Russia in the Eurasian Cultural Context*. Sapporo, Japan: Slavic Research Centre (2008): p.271.

articulated in a variety of forms, compromising the Russian monopoly over the concept.

Laruelle underlines the differences between neo-Eurasianisms adopted in different political contexts. She argues that neo-Eurasianism differ depending on various socio-political contexts in which they were developed.<sup>52</sup>

### **Kazakhstani Eurasianism (existing accounts in the literature and gaps)**

Kazakhstan is the only country from the Central Asia which incorporated Eurasianism into the state official ideology. According to Mostafa, the idea of Eurasianism has been first developed in Kazakhstan on the principle of its geographic and geopolitical location as a “bridge between Asia and Europe”. He argues that “Kazakhstan’s Eurasianism is promulgated as an official ideology by the top leadership of the country and the focus was to build peace, solidarity and unity among peoples on the basis of morality, spirituality, cultural and historical interactions of peoples of different ethno-linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds”.<sup>53</sup> He views Eurasianism as an extension of multiculturalism policy. Similarly, Kudaibergenova views Eurasianism as a cultural approach employed by the state which offers an alternative identity for the ethnic Russians and Russophones.<sup>54</sup>

Most of the existing literature focus on explaining the pragmatic reasons for Kazakhstan’s membership in the Eurasian Union. Allison explains that Kazakhstan’s involvement in the Eurasian Union is driven by a security logic. For her, it is a form of “virtual regionalism”, where it uses “protective integration with Russia against processes and

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<sup>52</sup> Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Golam Mostafa, “The Concept of ‘Eurasia’: Kazakhstan’s Eurasian Policy and Its Implications,” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 4, no. 2 (July 1, 2013): p.164.

<sup>54</sup> Diana T. Kudaibergenova, “Eurasian Economic Union Integration in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan,” *European Politics and Society* 17, no.1 (June 15, 2016): 97–112

pressures that are perceived as challenging incumbent leaders and their political entourage”.<sup>55</sup>

The researchers highlight that the most important advantage that membership in the Eurasian Union with Russia can offer to Kazakhstani elites is economic and political support. Political support derives from the post-Soviet elites’ like-mindedness: Russia, as an authoritarian country, is more likely not to intervene into internal politics of Kazakhstan.<sup>56</sup> According to Vieira, “given the fact that elections in both countries have been routinely classified by the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe as unfree and unfair, CIS observation missions, along with Russia’s political support to both regimes, have been important elements of legitimacy for the ruling elites of these countries”.<sup>57</sup> Thus, some scholars argue that participation in the Eurasian Union along with Russia is attractive for post-Soviet Kazakhstani elites because it is ‘easier’ maintain the authoritarian regime security and to preserve power. Vinokurov and Libman also highlight that Kazakhstani Eurasianism is very pragmatic and never attempted to become an intellectual or philosophical movement. According to them, it provides a basis for establishing economic linkages on the continent and foreign policy directions.<sup>58</sup> The Kazakhstani government also refers to dubious advantages that the Eurasian integration brings to Kazakhstan. However, the existing economic studies showed that in fact, Kazakhstan is not benefitting from the “pragmatic-economic” Eurasian integrationist project.<sup>59</sup> The official narratives also point to the presence of an extensive Russian population in the country, importance of inter-ethnic stability,

<sup>55</sup> Roy Allison, “Virtual Regionalism, Regional Structures and Regime Security in Central Asia,” *Central Asian Survey* 27, no. 2 (June 1, 2008): 185–202, doi:10.1080/02634930802355121

<sup>56</sup> Jakob Tolstrup, “Black Knights and Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: Why and How Russia Supports Authoritarian Incumbents in Post-Soviet States,” *European Journal of Political Research* 54, no. 4 (November 1, 2015): 673–90, doi:10.1111/1475-6765.12079. ; Lucan A. Way, “The Limits of Autocracy Promotion: The Case of Russia in the ‘near Abroad,’” *European Journal of Political Research* 54, no. 4 (November 1, 2015): 691–706, doi:10.1111/1475-6765.12092.

<sup>57</sup> Alena Vysotskaya Guedes Vieira, “Eurasian Integration: Elite Perspectives before and after the Ukraine Crisis,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 6 (November 1, 2016): 566–80, doi:10.1080/1060586X.2015.1118200.

<sup>58</sup> Evgeny Vinokurov and Alexander Libman, *Eurasian Integration: Challenges of Transcontinental Regionalism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>59</sup> Bulat Sultanov, “Kazakhstan and Eurasian integration,” in ed. Piotr Dutkiewicz and Richard Sakwa *Eurasian Integration – The View from Within* (Routledge, 2014): 97-110.

economic benefits, new challenges posed by globalization and the need for modernization as the main motivations to be part of the union. Nazarbayev announced that it was the most desired and reasonable strategy to overcome the difficult socio-economic situation in the 1990s. The literature on the Eurasianism in Kazakhstan mostly reverberate the official discourses. Thus, the Kazakhstani Eurasianism research is dominated by the study of how rational political-economic choices of the main decision-makers or political elites feed into creation of the Eurasian Economic Union and formation of the related discourses. They hold that Eurasianism discourse in Kazakhstan is a derivate of its physical location, search for security and other pragmatic goals. There is no detailed discussion offered of the Eurasianism discourses, how they are created and maintained, their functions and the process of construction of its main stories. Hence, this work aims to fill the gap and scrutinize the development and trace the change of the Eurasianism discourse by applying the prism of strategically employed political myth-making.

## Chapter 4. Identity politics in post-Soviet Kazakhstan

To understand how the political myth of Eurasianism emerged and developed in Kazakhstan, it is important to overview and discuss the process of nation-building and political transformations of the country, as the pertinent discourses are interrelated and interwoven. This chapter explores answers to the following questions: what was the socio-political context like and what were the precursors for the introduction of Eurasianism into the Kazakhstani official discourse?

There is voluminous literature on dual nation-building in Kazakhstan, explaining in detail how the project both stressed the multicultural nature of the state and at the same time elevated the titular nation as the first among equals.<sup>60</sup> Nazarbayev and other key elites pursued ambivalent nation-building policies and different discourses, which targeted various audiences in parallel. As a part of visual discourse, the photos of Nazarbayev, taken of him in a steppe or standing in a field of wheat and dressed in a standard uniform of post-Soviet elites – a full business suit and tie used to appear often in the Kazakhstani media, school books and other informational outlets in the first decade after independence. Such a peculiar combination symbolized ethnic-civic dualism of nation-building in Kazakhstan. The steppe and a field of wheat signified “return to ‘nature’ and its ‘poetic spaces’”.<sup>61</sup> This turn to poetic spaces signifies Kazakh soil and the idea of a homeland that belongs to this particular ethnic community. Yet, the president did not opt for traditional Kazakh attire with Kazakh ornaments but chose a classic outfit of the post-Soviet technocrats which neutralized and universalized his image as a leader.

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<sup>60</sup> Cengiz Surucu, “Modernity, Nationalism, Resistance: Identity Politics in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan,” *Central Asian Survey* 21, no. 4 (December 1, 2002): 385–402; Azamat Sarsembayev, “Imagined Communities: Kazak Nationalism and Kazakification in the 1990s,” *Central Asian Survey* 18, no. 3 (September 1, 1999): 319–46; Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Rob Kevlihan, “Threading a Needle: Kazakhstan between Civic and Ethno-Nationalist State-Building,” *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 337–56

<sup>61</sup> Smith Anthony D. *National Identity*. Reno, (Nevada: University of Nevada Press, 1991): p.65.

Being born by default, Kazakhstan inherited a multiethnic society, the majority of which constituted not by the titular ethnic group but by Russians, the legacy of the nineteenth-century imperial colonization and the twentieth-century Sovietization of the country. The large Russian minority posed a challenge for the nation- and state- building projects of the country, serving as a continual reminder of the lasting external political and cultural impact, and vulnerability of the new political elites. Kazakhstan found itself landlocked between powerful regional actors such as China and Russia, having enduring economic, political and cultural bonds with the later. As Cummings emphasizes, “in the first ten years of Kazakhstan’s independence, Russia remained the existential ‘other’ to the political elite – relations with Moscow were still viewed as *primus inter pares*, and developments in Russia were watched closely”.<sup>62</sup> In the early independence years, the state faced a task of legitimizing the regime and its political authority both at home and abroad. Cummings identifies three main constituents, whose support the elites put efforts to win: main power centers in the country, the population (both titular ethnic group and the substantial Russian minority) and the most significant ‘Other’ abroad – Russia.<sup>63</sup>

The main emphasis in legitimacy-building strategy was put on identity politics, as the new elites were deprived of an immediate source of legitimate authority in building a new nation-state. The new status of the state was not achieved by the political elites’ endeavor for independence, and there was no potent mono-ethnic nationalism to build their legitimacy on. In order to address the concerns of all the constituents, to prevent any confrontation along the ethnic faultlines, and to manage tradeoffs between the main ethnic groups, the elites pursued simultaneously state nationalization<sup>64</sup> and internationalization strategies<sup>65</sup>. Schatz calls the

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<sup>62</sup> Sally Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Power and the Elite* (I.B.Tauris, 2005): p.5.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*: p.78.

<sup>64</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1996).



framework of strategies employed by the elites to assuage concerns of the non-titular groups and at the same time accommodate Kazakhs' ethnocultural claims an "internationalism with an ethnic face".<sup>66</sup> The official discourse adopted the language of multiculturalism for legitimization process to calm domestic Russians, reassuring that they will not be pressured in a new nation-state and also targeted the main neighbor, emphasizing that the rights of their co-ethnics are secure. The new state policies of citizenship, foreign policy, and religion increasingly emphasized civic approach to identity<sup>67</sup> It provided a psychological comfort for the non-titular groups. Schatz concludes that international and domestic demands were conflictual, the former imposing a civic conception of citizenship, while the domestic titular audience wanted more ethno-cultural revival. Each of them posed a mutual constraint, resulting in an identity politics which accommodated both demands, but both to a limited extent.

Thus, the leadership pursued strategically ambivalent nation-building strategy, which stressed the discourses of both internationalism and Kazakh nationalism. At the same time, the political elites realized the need to move away from a strong Russian influence and dependency, keeping friendly and respectful relations with the neighbor.

The discourse of Eurasianism emerged and has been present in Kazakhstan since the early 1990s, representing an internationalist imaginary of Kazakhstan. It told the story of the political community's rich heritage of cultural mixing. Nazarbayev in his grand Strategy "Kazakhstan-2030" stressed Kazakhstan's 'strategic' location between Europe and Asia and announced that he is going to "advance and to develop further the idea of Eurasianism, which

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<sup>65</sup> Edward Schatz, 'Framing Strategies and Non-Conflict in Multi-Ethnic Kazakhstan', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer 2000), pp. 70–92.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

has a bright strategic future”.<sup>68</sup> The idea of Eurasianism was used to highlight first and foremost the Kazakhstan’s new status and hopes for the bright future. Nazarbayev often underscored that Kazakhstan is the center of Eurasia, and “a connecting link between the three rapidly growing regions - China, Russia and the Muslim world”.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, in 1990s Nazarbayev’s discourse introduced a new symbol – the *Eurasian Snow Leopard*, which signified Kazakhstan’s Eurasianness and uniqueness. The animal epithet highlighted “inherent egalitarianism, sense of independence, intelligence, courage and nobleness, bravery and cunning” but he also emphasized that the animal is “never first to attack anyone”.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, in imagining Kazakhstan as a snow leopard, the President highlighted that it “possesses *western elegance* and *oriental wisdom*”.<sup>71</sup> The introduction of this symbol marked the birth of the Eurasianist political myth in the political context, characterized by an unresolved tension between imagining Kazakhstan as a multicultural hybrid and efforts to nationalize the state in the presence the powerful and influential neighbor.

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<sup>68</sup> IBP Inc, *Kazakhstan Country Study Guide Volume 1 Strategic Information and Developments* (Lulu.com, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> “Concerning a Role of N. Nazarbayev’s Idea of Eurasianism in the Integration Processes of the CIS Countries · Expert Opinions · ‘Kazakhstan History’ Portal,” accessed September 15, 2017, <http://e-history.kz/en/expert/view/76>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 5. Development of the Eurasian political myth in Kazakhstan

### 5.1 Initial framing of the Eurasian narrative - Escape from peripherality

Bottici underscores that political myth presents “a narrative that must respond to a need for significance that changes over time...and it has to provide significance within changing circumstances”.<sup>72</sup> Kazakhstan, arising from the remnants of the Soviet Union struggled with new socio-economic challenges such as dismantling command economy, diminishing politico-economic dependency on Russia and grappled with creating a new identity for itself. The discourse of Eurasianism provided a universal rhetorical solution in the rapidly changing political circumstances. It enabled the elites to portray Kazakhstani self-image as sovereign, pro-integrationist, straddling East and West and ambitious regional actor. Additionally, Kazakhstan was presented as a bridge between East and West having origins in both - it implied cultural and “blood ties” with both Turkic people and Russians. The narratives of Kazakhstani Eurasianism appeared domestically - to sponsor internationalism and multinationalism among the population and in foreign policy statements - to create Eurasian state image, which helped to pursue a multilateralism in international relations. The home-grown Eurasianism helped to keep the state’s political independence and regulate safely its relations with Russia. Eurasianism is attractive for Kazakhstan because it provides a safe rhetorical basis to move away from the status of peripherality and rise as an equal partner to Russia, without confronting it.

In terms of nation-building, Eurasianism responded to concerns of both Kazakh and Russian population of the country. The multiethnic population of Kazakhstan intuitively recognized and accepted symbolic ambiguity skillfully and carefully promoted by the new elites in the early independence years. The rhetoric that depicted Kazakhstan as an ambitious

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<sup>72</sup> Chiara Bottici, *Imaginal Politics: Images Beyond Imagination and the Imaginary* (Columbia University Press, 2014):p.129.

regional leader and a firm supporter of the post-Soviet integration processes contributed to resolving ethnic tensions and especially, to address Russians' concerns. At the same time, Nazarbayev opened the Eurasianism discourse with an animal epithet, which specifically symbolized the state's independence and sovereignty with an aim to appease the titular nation's preoccupation about possible Russian dominance. Accordingly, Nazarbayev's political priorities were solidification of the state sovereignty and preservation of interethnic stability. In the speech given in 1991 at the meeting of the regional leaders, Nazarbayev emphasized a proactive agency of Kazakhstan in regional integrationist processes – "A step towards each other we did without a hint from 'above' or without any help from 'an authoritative uncle' in the center".<sup>73</sup> Thus, the state simultaneously pursued two incongruent rhetorical objectives – transnational post-Soviet integration policy and consolidation of national sovereignty. Narratives about Eurasianism resolved the incongruence by portraying Kazakhstan as an independent state which takes a legitimate lead in the regional integration due to its Eurasian origins and geographic location. In 1992 Nazarbayev articulated the narrative in the strategy for socio-economic development of the state:

"Occupying a central position between Europe and Asia, the territory of Kazakhstan – whose native residents are the direct descendants of ancient tribes – was the scene of thriving commerce and significant political ties. Today, Kazakhstan can play a strategic role as a link between Europe, post-Soviet Central Asia and [further afield] the wider Asia-Pacific region and the South Asian continent".<sup>74</sup>

Thus, the elites did the initial framing and created a narrative for the potential myth about Eurasianism – the first stage in developing a political myth.

Around the second half of the 1990s, the state authorities experienced disquietude about the interethnic dynamics in Kazakhstan in the context of the yet unfinished state-

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<sup>73</sup> Nazarbayev, 1991, p.30.

<sup>74</sup> Nazarbayev, 1992 quoted in Luca Anceschi, "Regime-Building, Identity-Making and Foreign Policy: Neo-Eurasianist Rhetoric in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan," *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 5 (September 3, 2014): p. 735.

building process. Particularly, the concerns regarding the future of the ethnically Russian population, which constituted 42% of the population escalated. The issue of Russian double citizenship in 1994 exacerbated the concerns of the elites. The government issued a law according to which all ethnic groups who remain in the state automatically become citizens in 1995. By that time half millions of Russian left the country and the those who decided to stay demanded double citizenship to be an option, given that Russia was already eager to grant it. Furthermore, according to Cummings, Russia exerted pressure Kazakh elites to accept dual citizenship.<sup>75</sup> The rhetoric produced by Kazakhstan in response to this issue condemned the Russian agenda and refused to accept it.

The Kazakhstani elites saw dual citizenship as unacceptable, as it would jeopardize the nation-building efforts of the regime and bring more instability by dividing the loyalty of the Russian citizens to the country. This issue has been addressed by hardening the rhetoric of integration. According to the polls conducted during that period, Russians opted for “a larger multicultural informal empire than Kazakh-dominated state”.<sup>76</sup> According to ethnopolitical surveys, Kazakhs and Russians wanted different state-building models – ethnic Kazakhs supported statist and ethnocratic nation-state building, while Russian wanted the similar integration frameworks as the Soviet Union.<sup>77</sup>

Nazarbayev addressed the issue of double citizenship in his “historical” speech given in 1994, where he proposed to create the Eurasian Union. The establishment of close ties with Russia through integration and institutionalizing freedom of mobility was seen as contributing to the Russian population’s peacefulness. The Eurasian project accommodated the state’s will to maintain a friendly and cooperative framework, which would allow

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<sup>75</sup> Sally N. Cummings, “Eurasian Bridge or Murky Waters between East and West? Ideas, Identity and Output in Kazakhstan’s Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 19, no. 3 (September 1, 2003): p. 129.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.150.

<sup>77</sup> Tsentr monitoringa mezhetnicheskikh otnoshenii v Kazakhstane, “Etnopoliticheskii monitoring v Kazakhstane,” Vol.2 (Almaty: Arkor, Winter 1995) cited in Cummings, “Eurasian Bridge”.

Kazakhstan's ethnic Russian constituency to feel less worried about their fate and at the same time to maintain the state's sovereignty vis a vis Russia. Essentially, Nazarbayev proposed to institutionalize the relationships between the states in the region and to keep the rules transparent.

In this speech Nazarbayev defines Kazakhstani state identity as Eurasian, referring both to its geographical location and cultural composition. He calls Kazakhstan a unique country, located in the “*heart* of the Eurasian continent” where “the representatives of different ethnic groups constitute *unity* through diversity” and “the combination of different cultures and traditions allows Kazakhstan to absorb and seize the best achievements of both European and Asian cultures”.<sup>78</sup> In this speech, he emphasized the importance of “ideational consolidation” of Kazakhstan for sustaining its internal stability and making progress.

In the Moscow speech, Nazarbayev addressed the political conditions in which Kazakhstani population was and turned the Eurasian narratives into proto-myth. He drew attention to the preparedness “by history and destiny” of the post-Soviet space to form a united community. By using inclusive and plural personal pronouns, referring to common destiny and shared past the discourse communicated the notions of inclusiveness. Nazarbayev pointed out to “common forms of interaction, similar mechanisms of governance and administration, and shared mentality that belong to the post-Soviet countries”. Furthermore, he emphasized that the institutionalization of the freedom of mobility between the post-Soviet countries would eliminate the issues related to citizenship, “creating all the necessary conditions for the development of languages, cultures and traditions of all the ethnic groups in the shared space”.<sup>79</sup> The Eurasian rhetoric was a safe harbor which helped Nazarbayev to

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<sup>78</sup> Nazarbayev, 1994

<sup>79</sup> “Speech of the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev at the Lomonosov Moscow State University — Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan,” accessed September 15, 2017,

combine a consensual tone towards Russia and rhetoric with direct anti-imperial disposition. He especially stressed that “‘old Union’ will not be recreated and no empire will be back...the Eurasian Union is possible only on the principles of voluntariness, equality, mutual benefit and consideration of the pragmatic interests of each participating country”.<sup>80</sup> In this speech, Nazarbayev provides a solid, well-prepared narrative of Eurasianism which formed the basis of the Eurasian political myth.

Schopflin highlights that one of the most important functions of political myths is to stipulate stories about a group’s origins and its specific or unique values which makes it different from other collectives. He argues that “myth is about perceptions rather than historically validated truths (in so far as these exist at all), about the ways in which communities regard certain propositions as normal and natural and others as perverse and alien”.<sup>81</sup> The narrative of Kazakhstan as a unique, prestigious Eurasian center that unites different cultures and people not only within its borders but also transnationally, playing a role of a regional integrator elevated its status from an obscure periphery to a new, ambitious and peaceful regional leader on par with Russia.

## 5.2 Diffusion of the Eurasian political myth - “Nazarbayev - the Eurasian leader”

In the second stage of political myth development, the narratives are spread and diffused by a range of actors or storytellers. Development of political myths needs storytellers to grant significance to narratives and keep them relevant for the audience. Political myth is a process, the stories and discourses underlying them need to be changing

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[http://www.akorda.kz/en/speeches/external\\_political\\_affairs/ext\\_speeches\\_and\\_addresses/speech-of-the-president-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-at-the-lomonosov-moscow-state-university](http://www.akorda.kz/en/speeches/external_political_affairs/ext_speeches_and_addresses/speech-of-the-president-of-kazakhstan-nursultan-nazarbayev-at-the-lomonosov-moscow-state-university).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> George Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths” In: Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin, *Myths and Nationhood*, (New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1997): p.19.

and adjusting constantly in accordance with their context and inconstant, evolving social structures in which they exist. Therefore, they cannot rely exclusively on institutional actors to endure and develop, but also need particular storytellers “to bring them to life and to ensure that they can continue to tell a story that resonates”.<sup>82</sup> Apart from understanding the origins of myths, identifying the main storytellers, their functions and how they keep discourses relevant sheds light on how the process of myths’ legitimacy generation takes place. The need for solidification of the Eurasianism discourse conformed to the political motives of the matured leadership of Kazakhstan that began to build its political power and legitimacy. The discourse started to put an increased emphasis on Kazakhstan’s, specifically, the President’s original input into a new, “non-imperial ideology” -driven supranational form of integration. This was done to create an image of Nazarbayev as a Eurasian leader, illuminating his growing authority and prestige in the international realm and particularly, in the post-Soviet space. Thus, Nazarbayev and his supporters - academics, public intellectuals and cultural elites emerged as the main storytellers and started to spread the narrative.

At this stage of the Eurasian myth development, the leadership of the country has matured and built a stable domestic power. The literature on the political evolution of the Kazakhstani state and its leadership note that authoritarianism has been hardening during this period. Cummings and Olcott agree that the late 1990s have been an important phase for the solidification of Nazarbayev’s authoritarian governance.<sup>83</sup> Between 1991 and 2000 the leadership consolidated its monopoly over the internal political power and secured inter-ethnic stability, the absence of which was seen as the main potential source of jeopardy to Nazarbayev’s power. In general, Kazakhstan is classified as a soft-authoritarian state.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Della Sala, V., “Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union\*.” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48 (2010): p.8.

<sup>83</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise* (Carnegie Endowment, 2010); Cummings, “Eurasian Bridge or Murky Waters between East and West?”:

<sup>84</sup> Edward Schatz, “Transnational Image Making and Soft Authoritarian Kazakhstan,” *Slavic Review* 67, no. 1 (2008): 50–62



Levitsky and Way argue that the leadership solidified its power by abusing the electoral procedures.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, Nazarbayev solidified his authority and built popular support for his government by increasingly associating himself with the stability and interethnic harmony that the state achieved. Yet, Cummings argues that by 1998 Nazarbayev questioned the basis of his popular support due to contextual factors such as economic downturn and increasing inequalities between regions, which made the constituents divided and apolitical.<sup>86</sup> This urged him to look for new ways to build his legitimacy.

Schatz suggests that soft authoritarian regimes “rely centrally on the means of persuasion, more than on the means of coercion” to build legitimacy.<sup>87</sup> To realize the strategy of persuasion, the Kazakhstani regime centralized the discursive field and promoted leadership-friendly and regime-glorifying narratives to bolster legitimacy.<sup>88</sup> As Schatz asserts, “it requires applying the techniques of ‘public relations’ in a highly constrained ‘marketplace of ideas’ thus fostering a plausible narrative about an elite’s right to rule”.<sup>89</sup> The idea of Eurasianism was also incorporated into the authoritarian “persuasion toolkit”. Nazarbayev became a central figure of the myth and the chief storyteller. The discourse started to put an increased emphasis on Kazakhstan’s, specifically, the President’s original input into a new, “non-imperial ideology” -driven supranational form of integration. The opening line of the introduction written by the Soviet and Russian academic, sociologist and philosopher Genadyi Osipov, to the book *Eurasian Union: Ideas, Practices and Perspectives 1994-1997* written by Nazarbayev introduced Nazarbayev as the originator of the Eurasian Union. During his report at the Almaty conference in 1994, Nazarbayev underlined that the Eurasian project is not purely

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<sup>85</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 51–65,

<sup>86</sup> Sally N. Cummings, *Kazakhstan: Centre-Periphery Relations* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2000).

<sup>87</sup> Schatz, “Transnational Image Making and Soft Authoritarian Kazakhstan.”:p. 50.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.51

pragmatic, but also prioritizes humanistic and universal orientation, “which has been lost lately”. He articulated that the idea of Eurasianism is not his own construct, but a product of “aspirations of the people, who lived for centuries in the Eurasian space”. He positioned himself as a leader, who “took an initiative to express and translate it into actions and policies the idea that came from the people”. After this speech, the Kazakhstani government organized a multitude of conferences, roundtables, and reports to spread the Eurasian discourse. All these events were reported and broadcasted in the Kazakhstani media. Instantaneously, the domestic pro-government and state-run media started channeling and reinforcing the Eurasian myth which served the leadership’s political interests.

In the mass media, the Kazakhstani journalists followed the discourse of the leadership and induced propaganda which systematically praised Nazarbayev’s proposal as an effective operational framework. The general rhetoric distinguished two elements that Nazarbayev commenced in his idea of Eurasianism – pragmatism, and anti-imperialism. He presented his project as a civilized solution for the interstate and interethnic tensions and contradictions in the Eurasian space which offers a collection of integrationist strategies that would preserve “the political independence and identity of the modern state”. Kazakhstani pro-elite journalists and media representatives juxtaposed Russian, geopolitical and “imperial” Eurasianism with the Nazarbayev’s new “impartial” Eurasianism. The discourse during these years pictured the former as obsolete and too Russian-centered. Throughout the 1990s the proposal remained largely a discursive construct. By successfully instrumentalizing the myth, Nazarbayev was able to accomplish his goals – to preserve interethnic balance and alleviate the geopolitical pressure of the early post-Soviet period. Yet, his political opponents – Kazakh nationalists increasingly criticized him for infringing on Kazakhstan’s sovereignty and directing the regional

integration to the “resurrection of the Soviet Union”. To counter the criticism, the state-driven rhetoric started using the modernization and sovereignty tropes, highlighting the pragmatic aspect of the project and its purely operational design, which “does not jeopardize states’ sovereignty”.

The Kazakhstani state rhetoric started to frame Nazarbayev’s initiation year of the project as one of the defining moments of the Eurasian tradition. The discourse started to call it the “Nazarbayev’s Eurasian strategy”. The official discourse and the foreign policy rhetoric intensified an emphasis on the innovative nature of Nazarbayev’s Eurasianism and its response to the new demands of globalization. The project’s promotion of the economic integration “without pressuring the sovereignty” of the newly formed states was presented as its success in adjusting the old idea of Eurasianism to a modern context. The project’s embrace of globalization and its operationalization of integration between the states, which are interrelated not only by economic interests, but by common “history and destiny” was seen and presented as unprecedented. Nazarbayev noted that the core point of his Eurasianism is activation of the Eurasian integration process, building the cooperation on “equality, voluntary participation and pragmatic interests” of the states. In one of his books he highlighted that this will lead to “prosperous future of Eurasia, which only in this case can become a global factor in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world economy and politics”. The project put a considerable emphasis on the preservation of sovereignty of each state as an essential prerequisite for the realization of the strategy. The proposal of the project included the fundamental principles and mechanisms such as “non-interference in each other's internal affairs, respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of state borders”. He also addressed the question of citizenship in the proposal – “if a person changes one’s country of residence within the framework of the union, the individual automatically obtains the citizenship of another country at will”. Thus, the Eurasian

political myth, championed by the Kazakhstani elites triangulated a novel outlook between emphasizing a closer integration, sovereignty of each member and a joint economic advancement that addresses the challenges of globalization. The official discourse praised Nazarbayev's Eurasianism for turning the philosophical ideas proposed in the 1920s by Russian intellectuals into a theoretical foundation of the modern form of economic integration, replacing the term "post-Soviet" with the "Eurasian space". Nazarbayev in his book narrated that "We are an Eurasian country with our own unique history and future. Therefore, our [Eurasian] model does not resemble anyone else's. It absorbs the achievements of different civilizations".<sup>90</sup>

Thus, after consolidating his political power, Nazarbayev became a chief storyteller of the Eurasian myth, constantly producing the discourses and adjusting them to the political context in which it operated. Yet, the myth needed sophistication and institutionalization to appeal to a broader public, to mature and to earn legitimacy. Hence, during this transitional period of the Eurasian strategy, the leadership encountered a task to claim a legitimate place and a status for Nazarbayev's Eurasian myth within the philosophical and theoretical continuum of the idea. Thus, further consolidation of the myth required historicization and ritualization in order to intellectualize the discourses and expand its reach.

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<sup>90</sup> Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Евразийский союз: идеи, практика, перспективы* [Evraziiskii soyuz: idei, praktika, perspektivy] (Moscow, 1997).

### 5.3 Institutionalization of the Eurasian myth - “Astana - a new Eurasian capital”

Schöpflin argues that because mythic and symbolic narratives mobilize emotions and enthusiasm and make political developments broadly intelligible, they can be utilized to build legitimacy and to consolidate political authority. He maintains that “attitudes are...shaped more by symbolic forms than by utilitarian calculation. The potency of symbols in the political process derives from the fact that they are vehicles for conceptualization”.<sup>91</sup> To simplify Schöpflin’s statement, political myths can be considered as emotionally appealing political discourses. According to Marat, in the post-Soviet, Central Asian authoritarian countries “governments’ political symbols might not always be popular among the masses, but ruling regimes promote their own rigid ideas about the nation and the state despite ambivalent public perceptions”.<sup>92</sup> Marat argues that the regimes in this area face an insignificant challenge from the domestic audiences, which allows them to reserve a monopoly over generation and promotion of images of the nation and the state both internally and externally.<sup>93</sup> Hence, elites tend to promote themselves and their interests more than realize and embody the sentiments of the population. The institutionalization and ritualization of the Eurasian myth is an illustration of this logic. In order to ritualize and internalize the Eurasian myth the government undertook the spatialization of discourse. The Eurasian myth has been intertwined into the new capital, Astana’s history and identity, making the myth more emotionally appealing and visible. Institutionalization of the myth through its incorporation into a living city, a new capital of a young nation-state which grew to symbolize national renaissance and its hopes for the future marked the third stage in the

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<sup>91</sup> George Schöpflin, “The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths” In: Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin, *Myths and Nationhood*, (New York, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 1997): p.61.

<sup>92</sup> Erica Marat, “Nation Branding in Central Asia: A New Campaign to Present Ideas about the State and the Nation,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 61, no. 7 (September 1, 2009): p. 1127.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

development of the Eurasian political myth. Furthermore, further ritualization and institutionalization of the myth through establishment of the Eurasian University in Astana, inclusion into the myth and discursive promotion of a specific theoretical framework elaborated by an Eurasianist thinker Gumilev contributed to substantiating the legitimacy of the Eurasian economic and political project in the eyes of the domestic population and prepared the population for the Kazakhstan's official entry into the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015.

In 1998 Nazarbayev made a decision to transfer the capital from Almaty, situated in the south-east to Astana, located in the north-center, close to the country's northern borders shared with Russia. According to Koppen "The new Astana would represent a 'Eurasian Style capital city' characterized by the harmonious coexistence of Eastern and Western culture in its urban form, function, and layout, with 'a skyline as a symphony'".<sup>94</sup> In 2005 Nazarbayev published a book devoted to the history of the formation and development of Astana, tellingly titled "In the Heart of Eurasia". During the presentation of the book, Nazarbayev highlighted that Astana's architecture combines "traditional archetypes with an ultramodern style, because Astana is the heart of Eurasia, a place where cultures and customs intertwine, where representatives of different civilizations live in harmony".<sup>95</sup> Also, the city is designed and presented to become a symbol of economic prosperity and the regime's new geopolitical vision. The brand new city represents the center of the Eurasian idea, cohabitating both European and Asian culture in an urban form. Nazarbayev in his speech given at the signing ceremony of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union in 2014 centralized Astana's position in the project and stressed Kazakhstan's "historic" role in the development of Eurasian integration:

<sup>94</sup> Bernhard Köppen, "The Production of a New Eurasian Capital on the Kazakh Steppe: Architecture, Urban Design, and Identity in Astana," *Nationalities Papers* 41, no. 4 (July 1, 2013): p.597.

<sup>95</sup> "Н.Назарбаев Написал Новую Книгу Об Астане - Сердце Евразии," [N.Nazarbayev napisal novuyu knigu ob Astane - Serdce Evrazii] accessed September 2, 2017, <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1118303820>.

“It is symbolic that the historic act of the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union was signed today in Astana. *Astana is in the heart of Eurasia*. Kazakhstan made a *historic contribution* to the promotion of the ideas of Eurasian integration. The Eurasian Economic Community was created and a number of important decisions which determined the course and dynamics of our integration process were adopted here [in Kazakhstan]. Therefore, it is consequential that *Astana became the cradle of the Eurasian Economic Union*”.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, Astana became a contextual symbol that embodies and internalizes the Eurasian political myth. The Master Plan of the city stated that “the planned city would be Eurasian in character, represent national tradition and history and embody the future that the state envisaged for itself”.<sup>97</sup> The city was created based on Nazarbayev’s idea and impelled by his decision, he was involved in the entire architecture design process and the city planning was his reserved domain. Therefore, Astana is a project of the Eurasian myth’s chief storyteller.

Astana institutionalized the Eurasian myth by creating symbolically and ideationally significant locations. The new institutions bearing the name of Eurasia in Astana include the Eurasian National University named after L.N. Gumilev, whose works are identified as a theoretical foundation of Nazarbayev’s Eurasianism and a national media outlet - the Eurasian Academy of Television and Radio. Additionally, Astana became the central location where various “Eurasian” conferences and events take place annually, such as the Eurasian Higher Education Leaders Forum, Eurasian Media Forum run by Nazarbayev’s daughter Dariga Nazarbaeyeva, Kazenergy Eurasian Forum, The Eurasian Industrial Forum, and the Eurasian Emerging Markets Forum.

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<sup>96</sup> Nursultan Nazarbayev, “Выступление Президента Казахстана Н.Назарбаева На Церемонии Подписания Договора О Евразийском Экономическом Союзе — Официальный Сайт Президента Республики Казахстан,” accessed September 14, 2017, [http://www.akorda.kz/ru/special/speeches/internal\\_political\\_affairs/in\\_speeches\\_and\\_addresses/vystuplenie-prezidenta-kazahstana-nnazarbaeva-na-ceremonii-podpisaniya-dogovora-o-evraziiskom-ekonomicheskoy-soyuze](http://www.akorda.kz/ru/special/speeches/internal_political_affairs/in_speeches_and_addresses/vystuplenie-prezidenta-kazahstana-nnazarbaeva-na-ceremonii-podpisaniya-dogovora-o-evraziiskom-ekonomicheskoy-soyuze).

<sup>97</sup> Alima Bissenova, A, The Master Plan of Astana: Between the "Art of Government" and the "Art of Being Global". In M. Reeves, J. Rasanayagam, & J. Beyer (Eds.), *Ethnographies of the State in Central Asia: Performing Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014): p.128.

In 2000 Nazarbayev opened the Eurasian National University in Astana and named it after a prominent ideologist and a theorist of Eurasianism - Lev Gumilev. It became one of the most funded and the leading national universities in Kazakhstan. The university begins each academic year with lectures on Eurasianism and Gumilev's theories. Furthermore, it is mandatory to take a course titled "Eurasianism: theory and practice" for students of all disciplines in all departments. The syllabus states that the aim of the course is "to study the history of development of the Eurasian ideas, their practical significance in the modern world, to develop tolerance and an open worldview". There are three books required for the course - the Eurasianist Gumilev's main book on Eurasianism where he explains his theories, Nazarbayev's book "On the threshold of the XXI century", where he lies out his ideas about Kazakhstan's future political and economic path and his formulation of Eurasianism, and the third book is the Russian and American Eurasianist historian Vernadsky's "The Mongols and Russia". The first two authors are identified as the intellectual backbone of Kazakhstani Eurasianism. Furthermore, in 2004 the Institute for scholarly research on Eurasianism has been launched at the university. The institutionalization of the Eurasian idea through the establishment of a Eurasian university and a research center shows the regime's attempts to intellectualize and ritualize the myth.

The establishment of the Eurasian university and organization of various annual Eurasian conferences in Astana facilitates the normalization and ritualization of the Eurasian myth - the stories and narratives are becoming part of 'normal life'. Mostafa notes that the Eurasian University serves as an intellectual and research hub, which produces and publishes books and written materials, organizes debates and discussion on Eurasianism.<sup>98</sup> The university and its research center are developed and funded to attract various intellectuals, scholars, and researchers who work on Eurasianism and the related topics.

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<sup>98</sup> Mostafa, "The Concept of 'Eurasia.'": p. 166.



Their works and discussions are expected to facilitate the integration of the Eurasian myth and its discourses into the official educational curriculum.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, with the establishment of the university, the intellectual and cultural elites acquired institutional space to hold regular roundtables, intellectual talks, conferences about the Nazarbayev's Eurasian strategy and its future, drawing both foreign and local media, academics and political representatives. "The president created the Eurasian Center at the university with the mission of formulating a distinctively Kazakh Eurasian ideology different from its Russian counterpart".<sup>100</sup> According to Laruelle, the Eurasian center organizes several conferences annually to discuss the Eurasian strategy and Nazarbayev opens plenary sessions in person.<sup>101</sup> The founding decree of the research institution presents its goal as "to define a conception of Eurasianism that would respond to Kazakhstan's national interests; to develop a geographical methodology for the historical, socioeconomic, and ideological interpretation of the development of contemporary civilization; and to advise state, educational, and academic organizations on Eurasianism".<sup>102</sup> In his lecture at the university in 2006, Nazarbayev called Eurasianism "an idea of the 21st century and of the future" and "a diamond on the crown of integrationist processes, which are demanded by the globalization". Further he elaborated that "Astana is an ideational capital and a heart of Eurasia, whereas the Eurasian University is an inmost center of this heart". Furthermore, in 2009 Nazarbayev wrote an article titled "Eurasian Economic Union: theory or reality" for *Izvestia*, a high-circulation newspaper and news outlet in Russia, where Putin regularly publishes his articles. Nazarbayev stated that "it is necessary to bring the sphere of education to a new qualitative level by joint efforts - in fact, to create a single Eurasian

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<sup>99</sup> Victor Shnirelman, "To Make a Bridge: Eurasian Discourse in the Post-Soviet World," *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 27, no. 2 (2009): 68–85.

<sup>100</sup> Anita Sengupta, *Symbols and the Image of the State in Eurasia* (Springer, 2017): p.56.

<sup>101</sup> Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p.178.

educational space”.<sup>103</sup> He proposed to create an Eurasian program similar to European Erasmus Mundus and name it after Gumilev.

Giving the name of Gumilev to the Eurasian university and making him a fundamental part of the Eurasian myth established a discursive link between Eurasianism and Nazarbayev’s own personality and added an intellectual gloss to it. The narratives that glorified the ethnographer’s theoretical contribution backed up the discourses about Nazarbayev as an Eurasian thinker by establishing proximity and continuity between their ideas. Nazarbayev stated that “the views of the outstanding Russian thinker Lev Gumilev, who went beyond all the followers of the "Eurasian school" that developed among the Russian emigrants in the first half of the twentieth century, has always been appealing to him”. According to Nazarbayev, Gumilev “conceptually substantiated the unity of the geographical and cultural-historical ties of the peoples of the Northern and Central Eurasia”. Gumilev was one of the first thinkers who specifically highlighted the relevance of a nomadic history and culture in the development of Eurasianism, and he was inevitably welcomed and involuntarily made the central symbol of the Kazakhstani Eurasianism. Furthermore, there has already been interest and support for Gumilev’s ideas among the Kazakhstani population prior to the incorporation of his persona and theories into Kazakhstani Eurasian myth. According to Olcott, in the 1990s some of his works had reached best-seller status in Kazakhstan.<sup>104</sup> Shlapentokh argues that “Gumilev, while praising the role of ethnic Russia, still believed that it was the Asiatic people of Eurasia, historically nomadic, who had laid the foundation for the Russian Empire and, later, the USSR”.<sup>105</sup> Nazarbayev sought a theoretic basis for his strategy and a legitimate place for

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<sup>103</sup> Nursultan Nazarbayev, “The Eurasian Economic Union: Theory or Reality,” *Izvestia*, (March 19, 2009).

<sup>104</sup> Martha Brill Olcott, *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise* (Carnegie Endowment, 2010).

<sup>105</sup> Dmitry Shlapentokh, “Lev Gumilev: The Ideologist of the Soviet Empire,” *History of European Ideas* 38, no. 3 (September 1, 2012): p.484.

himself among other Eurasianists and a historical legitimacy to celebrate Kazakhstan's place at the epicenter of Eurasianism. This aspiration produced a rhetoric, which established Nazarbayev's Eurasianist lineage and historicized his ideas.

To establish a link between the past and present, to form a theoretical foundation for the Eurasian myth Nazarbayev picked Gumilev among other Eurasianists. The regime launched a significant propagandistic campaign which taught and spread knowledge about life and intellectual works of the Russian ethnographer. There is a unique museum dedicated to his life and works within the Eurasian university. In the official website of the university, the museum is described as "a research, cultural and educational structural unit of the Eurasian National University". The museum collects, stores, studies and exhibits different materials and written sources that reflect Gumilev's biography, his scientific works, publications and books. The aim of the museum is "to raise awareness about work and life of Gumilev, and to spread the Eurasian idea". M. Tazhin, the Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Russia states that "the Pragmatic Eurasianism, an ideology developed by Gumilev, is the state ideology of the Republic of Kazakhstan". Gumilev's ideas about Eurasianism are based on his theory of ethnogenesis. According to him, when groups happen to be in the same geographical area and, as a consequence receive the same 'energy push' – they develop similar social behavior. This creates a 'complementarity' between the 'ethnoses' – or the similarity in their patterns of behavior, as a result of their physical proximity. In his theory, this complementarity between different 'ethnoses' can lead to the creation of "super ethnos". He defines it as "a group of ethnoses that have emerged as a result of a passionate push in one region and which are united by a common historical destiny and develop similar behavioristic models".<sup>106</sup> Thus, the link is established via quasi-biological, cosmic and energetic links,

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<sup>106</sup> Shlapentokh, "Lev Gumilev.": p.103.

given the geographical proximity of the groups. This is the main premise of his theory that explains the emergence of Eurasianism – the positive complementarity has been established between Russians and other nomadic ethnoses, creating a super-ethnos. Gumilev’s understanding of history departs radically from the classic Eurasianist thinkers, who have a traditional approach to history and consider it as a gradual progress of socio-economic and cultural elements. Whereas according to Titov, “Gumilev created a new paradigm for understanding ethnic history as a natural process in the biosphere, expressed in dynamic changes of human behavior based on the relative complexity of their behavioral ideals and dominant imperatives”.<sup>107</sup> According to Anceschi, Gumilev’s theory has never won much popularity among the prominent Russian neo-Eurasianists: “In some sense, Gumilëv has to be regarded as a *sui generis* Eurasianist, as numerous elements in his conceptual framework depart from – or are in direct opposition to – the terms of reference of Eurasianism properly defined”.<sup>108</sup> Thus, Gumilev stands out among all other Eurasian thinkers, which are present in Russian formulation of Eurasianism. Kazakhstani elites ignore the Russian neo-Eurasianists’ remarks about the Gumilev’s theories. They present his works as the most valid and legitimate and incorporate them into their Eurasian myth, celebrating them as the myth’s fundamental intellectual foundation. Political myths can refer to historical facts but themselves are not necessarily historical. The collectives perceive and accept them as valid in philosophical terms rather than as historically correct.

Thus, Nazarbayev developed his own vision of Eurasianism, making a reference to original, specific, quasi-historical and philosophical conceptions offered by Gumilev, whose persona and works he handpicked among all other Eurasianist thinkers and historians to serve as an intellectual and theoretical foundation of the myth. Furthermore,

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<sup>107</sup> A. S. Titov, “Lev Gumilev, Ethnogenesis and Eurasianism.” (Doctoral, University of London, 2005), <http://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/1446515/>: p.195.

<sup>108</sup> Luca Anceschi, “Regime-Building, Identity-Making and Foreign Policy: Neo-Eurasianist Rhetoric in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan,” *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 5 (September 3, 2014): p.744.

Nazarbayev embedded the Eurasian myth into the urban design and story of the new capital of Kazakhstan, and created an institutional and academic context in the city to internalize the myth and root it in the social reality of the Kazakhstani population and other onlookers. Moreover, Nazarbayev called Astana a *cradle* of the Eurasian Union at its official launch and suggested that the offices of the Eurasian Economic Community - the pre-version of the Eurasian Union, should be located in Astana rather than in Moscow.<sup>109</sup>

The political myth has to adapt through periods of change and shifting political contexts in order to develop and stay relevant. According to Bouchard, political myth's "message must closely connect with the deep sources of anxiety, challenges, and dreams of a population at any given time. Then, it can be seen as a way out of a predicament, as a road to fulfillment and happiness".<sup>110</sup> The Eurasian myth and its components, formulated and developed by the Kazakhstani elites specifically address the challenges faced by the post-Soviet young nation-state and its multiethnic, diverse population. Finding itself in the new political and social realities, the population of the country experienced the growth of ethnic self-awareness, embraced an interest in their ethnic and group origins, reevaluated their identities, values, and sense of belonging within the unprecedented and new political context. Accordingly, the political elites of Kazakhstan reserved a special place for the discourses and narratives designed for strengthening inter-ethnic harmony and achieving inter-group consensus on the issues which emerged due to the volatile and shifting political realities. At the same time the elites needed to build legitimacy for themselves, for the political order they are building and for the political discourses they are promoting. The Eurasian myth was instrumental for all of the listed purposes. According to Barthes, the

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<sup>109</sup> Prajakti Kalra and Siddharth Saxena, "The Asiatic Roots and Rootedness of the Eurasian Project" In: David Lane and V. Samokhvalov, *The Eurasian Project and Europe: Regional Discontinuities and Geopolitics* (Springer, 2016).

<sup>110</sup> Gérard Bouchard, "Europe in Search of Europeans : The Road to Myths and Identity," Notre Europe, the Jacques Delors Institute (2016): p. 13.

significance of political myths lies not in the stories they tell, but in the realm of their functions.<sup>111</sup> They equip the targeted audience with a (quasi-) factual narrative which helps to make a political authority intelligible. As Della Salla sums up, “one of the central purposes of political myth is to generate legitimacy for political rule”.<sup>112</sup> Political myths are stories about political communities which address their conditions and concerns and provide abstract standards according to which a society shapes, legitimates and continually evaluates itself. The Kazakhstani elites utilized the Eurasian myth not only to address the political conditions of its multi-ethnic community but also to substantiate and to grant significance to them. The myth went through a stage of institutionalization and ritualization through creating a spatial discourse in an urban form and creation of the Eurasian university and a research center, named after an Eurasian thinker handpicked by Nazarbayev and placed at the origins of the myth. These steps in developing the myth made the myth part of everyday life, and hence more emotionally appealing and widely accepted as a fact. Back in 1994 in his Moscow speech Nazarbayev laid out his vision summarized in the following excerpt from his speech, and in two decades was able to develop a political myth which serves as an ideational framework for his domestic strategies and the transnational union born in 2015:

“It is impossible not to notice anxiety of people who now remained outside the borders of all the fifteen republics that constituted one country. These are ethnic Russians, Ukrainians, Kazakhs and members of our peoples.

This is explained by the rapid dismantling of the USSR and the period of euphoria over independence, but also by the following period of collective responsibility for survival in new economic and geopolitical conditions which many countries realised. The dismantling of the common rouble zone deepened our concerns, for example. You know that I always supported integration [among post-Soviet states], first of all, because of the personal relations we have [...] We, the republics of the former Soviet Union are prepared for common union preconditioned by our history and destiny. We share the same forms and mechanisms of connections and management, common mentality and many more

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<sup>111</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Vintage, 1993).

<sup>112</sup> Della Sala, V., “Political Myth, Mythology and the European Union\*.” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 48 (2010): p.5.

other similarities”.<sup>113</sup>

The importance and instrumental capacity of a political myth is evaluated not by its factual accuracy, but by its power to make its audience to believe in the vision it is promoting. The main functions of myths and the motivation behind their employment lies in their capacity to build and carry social solidarity, drive support for and legitimize the political order and institutions they are designed for. Integrationist opinion polls demonstrated a high level of interest in the project. According to the Eurasian Development Bank’s Center for Integration Studies report published in 2016, the level of support for the Eurasian integration in Kazakhstan is 74% among the respondents. However, the generalizability of the given data is limited, as only 8,500 people in total from 7 countries, which include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, and Tajikistan participated in the research.<sup>114</sup> It is the only available data on the level of support for Eurasianism in Kazakhstan. Sharipova et al. conducted a research published in 2017, which explored the determinants of ethnic and civic nationalism in Kazakhstan, and their findings demonstrate that the more trust individuals have in political institutions and in the political order of the state, the more are likely to express civic nationalism. Furthermore, they argue that “Strong relationships between trust in the state’s political institutions and civic nationalism indicate that the state’s official discourse and various governmental initiatives to promote civic identity in Kazakhstan have had a certain effect. Overall, the government is more inclined to inculcate civic–nationalist sentiments among citizens rather than endorsing ethnonationalism”.<sup>115</sup> The Eurasian

<sup>113</sup> Nazarbayev, 1994 translated by Diana T. Kudaibergenova, “Eurasian Economic Union Integration in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan,” *European Politics and Society* 17, no.1 (June 15, 2016): p.6.

<sup>114</sup> “EDB Integration Barometer - 2016,” accessed September 10, 2017, <https://eabr./en/analytics/integration-research/cii-reports/integratsionnyy-barometr-eabr-2016/>

<sup>115</sup> Dina Sharipova, Aziz Burkhanov, and Alma Alpeissova, “The Determinants of Civic and Ethnic Nationalisms in Kazakhstan: Evidence from the Grass-Roots Level,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 23, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): p.217.

political myth developed since the 1990s by Nazarbayev contributed to developing civic, inclusive nationalism among the population of Kazakhstan and was instrumental in building legitimacy for the political order.

#### **5.4 Kazakhstan in the Eurasian Economic Union**

As it was demonstrated in previous chapters, the Eurasian myth is instrumentalized in Kazakhstan for the purposes of establishing an ideational and romantic framework aimed at political legitimacy-building and ensuring interethnic stability. The treaty which established the union was signed in 2014 by Kazakhstan, Russia, and Belorussia and on January, 2015 it came into force. The Kazakhstani elite discourses about the Eurasian Union as an actual institution are pragmatic and technocratic, unlike the romantic discourses which were used for the development of the Eurasian myth. The Kazakhstani technocratic rhetoric emphasizes inviolability of the member states' sovereignty and a purely economic and pragmatic nature of the union. The scrutinization of the Kazakhstani discourses about the EEU since its establishment in 2015 reveals interesting observations about the Eurasian myth and its further development.

Nazarbayev notes that he studied various international and regional integration initiatives before he developed his Eurasian ideas and proposed to establish the Eurasian Economic Union. Particularly, in his words, one of the most relevant paradigms to look at in the development of the Eurasian project was the European Union. The president highlighted that "this successful example became the base for the Eurasian economic



project”.<sup>116</sup> Lynggaard argues that one of the most important and fundamental myths of the EU is about economic interdependence between the European states and the inevitability of economic integration among them, while euros and coins are the main symbols of this myth.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, the neoliberal discourses about pragmatic, purely economic integration between the Eurasian states is a backbone of the EEU. The Kazakhstani elites in parliamentary discussions use exclusively technocratic language and channel discourses which highlight the pragmatism of the project. On the eve of signing the Treaty on the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union, the deputies of the Mazhilis, the lower house of the Kazakhstani parliament expressed their opinion about the Union, and all them stressed the pragmatic and economic benefits the membership brings. They specifically underscored that it is a pragmatic and strategic partnership which won’t affect the sovereignty of the state and its internal politics.<sup>118</sup> Chairman of the Mazhilis Nigmatulin, at the Second meeting of the speakers of the parliaments of Eurasian countries in June 2017 stated that “the Eurasian idea expressed by the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev in 1994 obtained its real implementation in the form of macroregional integration projects, which actually proved their efficiency”.<sup>119</sup>

Nazarbayev, the main storyteller and the central figure in the Eurasian political myth also refrains from romantic discursive rhetoric and topoi, rather keeps the discussion of the EEU within a technocratic and economic frame. For instance, in contrast to Russian

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<sup>116</sup> “Эволюция Евразийской Доктрины Н.А.Назарбаева | KazPortal.kz,” [Evolucia Evraziiskoi Doktriny N.A. Nazarbayeva] accessed September 5, 2017, <http://www.kazportal.kz/evolyutsiya-evraziyskoy-doktrinyi-n-a-nazarbaeva/>.

<sup>117</sup> Kennet Lynggaard, “The Pan-European Union Interpretation of Symbols and Myths,” Paper prepared for 2015 Biennial Conference of the European Union Studies Association. Accessed September 5, 2017 <https://eustudies.org/conference/papers/download/68>

<sup>118</sup> “Депутаты Мажилиса Рассказали О Плюсах И Минусах ЕАЭС,” [Deputaty Mazhilisa Rasskazali o Plyusah i Minusah EAES ], *Zakon.kz*, May 29, 2014, [//www.zakon.kz/4627820-deputaty-mazhilisa-rasskazali-o.html](http://www.zakon.kz/4627820-deputaty-mazhilisa-rasskazali-o.html).

<sup>119</sup> Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “N.Nigmatulin: Integration of Eurasian Countries Has Become Practical Implementation of N.Nazarbayev’s Eurasian Project,” accessed September 12, 2017, <http://www.parlam.kz/en/mazhilis/news-details/id34826/1/1>.

discourses which frame the Union in geopolitical terms, discuss the creation of a Eurasian civilizational identity and call it “the Eurasian Union”, the Kazakhstani elites imagine and portray it as a geo-economic project, and the discourse consistently refers to it as the “Eurasian Economic Union”. Nazarbayev consistently stresses the importance of regional integration for the realization of grander integration into the global markets: “When there is a rapid global scientific and technological progress, a fierce struggle for markets, one can survive only by uniting. Have a look at the countries of the Western Europe with centuries-old statehood - they are uniting and integrating their economies. They perfectly understand that the world market is rigidly polarized”.<sup>120</sup>

Nazarbayev developed and gradually increased the presence of Eurasian discourses and upheld relevance of the Eurasian myth in the eyes of the domestic audience, preparing them for the Kazakhstan’s integration with Russia and other post-soviet states.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 created a tension in this process and escalated the worries of the domestic population, especially the titular groups’ concerns about Russia’s imperial ambitions. This critical moment exposed the conflicting imaginaries of the integration project among its members and jeopardized its realization.

In August, 2014 Putin made a comment about the Kazakhstani statehood sparking an angry reaction from the Kazakhstani population and its political class. Putin stated that before 1991 “Kazakhs had never had statehood”.<sup>121</sup> He was explicit that he meant not the current citizens of Kazakhstan per se, but the ethnic group, the titular nation: “until the Soviet Union’s collapse, per Putin, no Kazakh had ever enjoyed the fruits of independent

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<sup>120</sup> Evgenyi Vinokurov, “Pragmatic Eurasianism: Prospects for Eurasian integration,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, 11 (2013).

<sup>121</sup> Casey Michel, “Take Note, Putin: Kazakhstan Celebrates 550 Years of Statehood,” *The Diplomat*, accessed September 12, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/take-note-putin-kazakhstan-celebrates-550-years-of-statehood/>.

statehood”.<sup>122</sup> This comment has been interpreted as a veiled threat and Nazarbayev onset a celebration of the 550th anniversary of the Kazakh Khanate. Most importantly, his direct and sharp response came swiftly, and he threatened to leave the EEU. Three days after the Putin’s comment, Nazarbayev in an interview with "Khabar", a national TV channel in Astana announced that the presence of Kazakhstan in the Eurasian Economic Union is in question. Particularly, he stated that “If the rules previously established in the Treaty are not abided by, Kazakhstan maintain the full right to refuse the membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. Astana will never be part of an organization that poses a threat to Kazakhstan's independence and sovereignty”.<sup>123</sup> Moreover, the Kazakhstani discourse about the EEU rapidly abandoned the topic of a common currency and monetary integration.<sup>124</sup> This incident highlighted that Eurasianism and Kazakhstan’s membership in the Eurasian Economic Union has an uncertain future. Furthermore, in 2014 Nazarbayev presented the idea of “Mängilik El” which means “eternal people” and it is designated exclusively in Kazakh even in Russian-language discourses and documents. This concept “envisions construction of a civic-identity-based society, united by certain shared values, such as common history of people living in Kazakhstan, culture, and language”.<sup>125</sup> This idea primarily promotes unity and peace among Kazakhstani people - unity of various separate ethnic groups, using rhetorics such as “One country - One fate”, “We have one Motherland - Independent Kazakhstan”, “We will be faithful to the great historic mission of

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Andreeva, Marina, “Nazarbaev prigozil vykhodom Kazakhstana iz Evraziiskogo Soiuz,” [Nazarbaev threatened to leave the Eurasian Union]. *Moskovskii Komsomolets* (31 August, 2014)

<sup>124</sup> Marlene Laruelle, “The three discursive paradigms of state identity in Kazakhstan: Kazakhness, Kazakhstanness and Transnationalism,” In: Mariya Omelicheva (ed.), *Nationalism and identity construction in Central Asia: Dimensions, dynamics, and directions*, (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015): 27–44.

<sup>125</sup> Dina Sharipova, Aziz Burkhanov, and Alma Alpeissova, “The Determinants of Civic and Ethnic Nationalisms in Kazakhstan: Evidence from the Grass-Roots Level,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 23, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 203–26.

strengthening Independence” , “We are a Great Country and a Big Family”.<sup>126</sup> The concept of “Mängilik El” was developed to complement the Doctrine of National Unity presented by Nazarbayev in 2010. The Doctrine sparked extensive public disputes and put an unexpected pressure on the government to identify the pre-eminence of either civic or primordial Kazakh identities. The Doctrine identified and spelled the nation in its document as “Kazakhstani”, triggering a wide indignation of the Kazakh population and epistemic community. The Kazakh nationalists-led group of public figures, with the support of 5,000 citizens addressed an open letter to Nazarbayev demanding to replace ‘Kazakhstani’ with ‘Kazakh’.<sup>127</sup> As a result, the Doctrine has been changed, and the adjective “Kazakhstani” has been removed and replaced by “Kazakh”. This debate led to other developments: in 2011 the nationalists designed another open letter to Nazarbayev, the Prime Minister and the Parliament members requesting “to strip the Russian language of its special status granted by the constitution”.<sup>128</sup> The movement has not produced any results, but these series of events highlight that primordialism is still potent among the Kazakhstanis and that they resist sporadic civic identity-building efforts of the political elites. A primordial approach is still strong and continues to reproduce itself in the country and the political elites mostly adapt to the mood of the population, pursuing ambivalent and inconsistent identity-building strategies. This ambivalence and the elites’ vacillation between primordial and constructivist approaches to identity-building comes from the President's goal to avoid political confrontation along the ethnic lines. The elites juggle discourses and various strategic concepts to allow a certain extent Kazakh ethnic hegemony but at the same time

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<sup>126</sup> “Патриотический Акт – ‘Мәңгілік Ел’ Полный текст” [‘Patrioticheskii Akt- ‘Mangilik El’ Polnyi tekst], *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda* (2016), accessed September 12, 2017, <http://www.kazpravda.kz/news/politika/patrioticheskii-akt--mangilik-el-polnii-tekst/>.

<sup>127</sup> Zhasulan Kuzhekov, “Iz doktriny vypali ponyatiya etno-religiozniy ekstremizm i radicalism,” Radio Azattyk, April 30, 2010, [https://rus.azattyq.org/a/doctrine\\_kazakh\\_nation/2028243.html](https://rus.azattyq.org/a/doctrine_kazakh_nation/2028243.html)

<sup>128</sup> Marlene Laruelle, *Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols, and Social Changes* (Lexington Books, 2016): p. 173.

promote constructive civic identity. The emphasis on one or another is usually determined by the political circumstances and the context. The Eurasian political myth is a part of the civic national identity building policies and practices of the government. However, its continuation and further consolidation are questionable.

According to the latest statistics, the number of ethnic Kazakhs constitute nearly 63,1%, and the number of Russians represent 23,7% of Kazakhstan's demographic makeup.<sup>129</sup> Throughout the years the number of Kazakhs has been rising, while the Russian population of the country in opposite, has been shrinking. The changing ethnic balance is expected to affect the Eurasian discourse of pragmatic Nazarbayev. The promotion of the Eurasian myth and Kazakhstan's entry into the EEU has not gone without tension. In 2013, five hundred people organized a protest and hunger strike against the Kazakhstani elites' decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union and asked for a public referendum to decide.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, according to Laruelle, young, non-Soviet, post-independence Kazakh national activists are emerging on the Kazakhstani political landscape, who fiercely criticize the government's Eurasian strategy using social networks and other non-formal ways of mobilization.<sup>131</sup> These developments suggest that the demographic change, a gradual fade away of Soviet values and a new mindset in the long term might lead to greater ethnic self-awareness of the titular group and more inward-looking discourses or nationalization of the Eurasian discourses in Kazakhstan.

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<sup>129</sup> "Kazakhstan Demographics Profile 2016," accessed June 6, 2017, [http://www.indexmundi.com/kazakhstan/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/kazakhstan/demographics_profile.html).

<sup>130</sup> Marlene Laruelle, *Kazakhstan in the Making: Legitimacy, Symbols, and Social Changes* (Lexington Books, 2016): p. 173.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

## Conclusion

The Kazakhstani Eurasianism, formulated and developed by the Kazakhstani elites went through three stages of political myth development – the initial framing, diffusion, and institutionalization. The narratives of the myth were formulated at the beginning of the 1990s and the idea was presented in 1994 in Moscow by Nazarbayev. Between 1991 and the beginning of the 2000s the narratives coagulated and acquired more substance and expanded its reach. Within a decade the myth was institutionalized in the new, symbolic capital of Kazakhstan, becoming a full-fledged political myth. Kazakhstani elites created codes of collective self-identification and various stories that explained the internal social world and conferred significance upon Kazakhstan's new post-Soviet political situation within the discursive arena, established through an elaboration of the Eurasian political myth. Moreover, the discourses shaped the political-cultural character of Kazakhstan's interaction with its regional neighbors. At the same time, the narratives and discourses of the myth were constructed in favor of the political authority and were instrumentalized in strengthening the polity's legitimacy.

The Eurasian myth was placed in the official parlance and framed foreign, regional and domestic policies. Nazarbayev emerged as the main storyteller and an originator of the Eurasian economic project, and through carefully crafted discourses he proposed his own vision and interpretation of Eurasianism. His central role contributed to his legitimacy-building efforts and strengthening of the polity he was building. Development of the Eurasian myth enabled a new political imaginary, employing which the leader claimed not only a dignified place for Kazakhstan in the post-Soviet, Eurasian space, but celebrated Kazakhstan's prestigious and leading role in the new political context and epoch by placing the country in the center – to be more precise, “in the heart of Eurasia”. The myth offered both past and future oriented political meanings - it enabled the state to change its periphery

status and re-imagine it both as a bridge between different cultures and a locus for harmonious co-existence of various ethno-cultural groups. This imaginary helped the elites to go through the critical moments in the post-Soviet turbulent times when the political stability and inter-ethnic peace were fragile. Particularly, the myth provided an effective rhetorical framework which addressed the issue of substantial Slavic population in the country, prevented external political interference and smoothened the process of adaption into the new political reality after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The gradual change of the Kazakhstani Eurasian discourse language from romantic to pragmatic after the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union signals its reactive and ad-hoc nature, dependent on the political context and the political conditions of the community. The myth has always been told from the standpoint of the present, offering a positional interpretation of the past and projections for the future. Taking into consideration the changing demographic situation in the country, endurance and reproduction of primordial vision of identity among the titular nation and introduction of new paradigms functionally alternative to Eurasianism which also promote civic identity aimed at maintaining inter-ethnic peace, the future of the Eurasian myth in Kazakhstan is uncertain. Furthermore, the gradual decrease of romantic discourses regarding the Eurasian project after its institutionalization, increasing contestation of the project by the younger audience in the country and approximation of the post-Nazarbayev era, it is highly unlikely that the project will grow out of the pragmatic framework and that the myth will become a central part of the Kazakhstani polity's mode of being. The scrutinization of the Eurasian political myth's development shed light on the post-Soviet elites' methodology and instruments in adapting to a new political reality.

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