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Телефон: +7 (727) 272-46-54

E-mail: Otanhistory@gmail.com

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**ТӘУЕЛСІЗ ҚАЗАҚСТАН ТАРИХЫ
ИСТОРИЯ НЕЗАВИСИМОГО КАЗАХСТАНА
INDEPENDENT KAZAKHSTAN HISTORY**

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**UKRAINIAN ETHNO-CULTURAL CENTERS IN ALMATY CITY AND
ALMATINSKAYA OBLAST: CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES**

Didar Kassymova^{1*}, Daniil Litvin²

¹Ch. Valikhanov Institute of history and ethnology, Almaty, Kazakhstan

²KIMEP University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

*Corresponding author

E-mail: didarkassymova87@gmail.com (Kassymova), daniilo.litvin@gmail.com (Litvin)

Abstract. Ethnic Ukrainian population has been part of the multiethnic society of the Republic of Kazakhstan for a long time. Since late 1980s numerous ethno-cultural centers were created in Kazakhstan, becoming sources of ethno-cultural identity maintenance and means of self-realization for various ethnic groups. This article elucidates the role of the Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers in Almaty city and Almatinskaya oblast that pursue threefold mission: support and maintaining of ethno-cultural identity of Ukrainians, realization of the Doctrine of National Unity of Republic of Kazakhstan and maintaining friendly relations between Republic of Kazakhstan and Ukraine. It also illustrates the challenges that representatives of Ukrainian ethno-cultural community are facing (aging, few contacts with Ukraine, mix of identities). The current state of ethno-cultural centers, as well as potential reasons for their low effectiveness, is examined. Article is based on first-hand information about the day-to-day activity of ethno-cultural centers, including participatory observations and interviews with official representatives of those centers.

Key words: Republic of Kazakhstan, Markers of Ethno-cultural Identity, Ukrainians, Ethno-Cultural centers, Almaty and Almatinskaya Oblast.

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**АЛМАТЫ ҚАЛАСЫ МЕН АЛМАТЫ ОБЛЫСЫНДАҒЫ
УКРАИНА ЭТНОМӘДЕНИЕТ ОРТАЛЫҚТАРЫ:
АҒЫМДАҒЫ ЖАҒДАЙ МЕН МӘСЕЛЕЛЕРІ**

Дидар Қасымова^{1*}, Даниил Литвин²

¹Ш.Уәлиханов атындағы тарих және этнология институты, Алматы қ., Қазақстан

²ҚМЭБИ Университеті, Алматы қ., Қазақстан

*Corresponding author

E-mail: didarkassymova87@gmail.com (Қасымова), daniilo.litvin@gmail.com (Литвин)

Түйіндемe. Қазақстан Республикасында этникалық украин халқы ауқымды кезеңнен көпэтностық оғамының бір бөлігіне айналған. Қазақстанда 80-жылдардың аяғынан бастап этномәдени бірегейлікті сақтау және әр түрлі этностардың бір-біріне икемделудің қажетті құралына айналған көптеген этномәдени орталықтар құрылды. Бұл мақалада Алматы қаласы мен Алматы облысындағы украин этномәдени орталықтарының рөлі мен жүзеге асыратын үш мәселесі көрсетілген: украиндардың этномәдени бірегейлігін сақтау және қолдау, Қазақстан Республикасының ұлттық бірлігі доктринасын жүзеге асыру, Қазақстан Республикасы мен Украина арасындағы достық қатынастарды қолдау. Сонымен қатар, украин этномәдени бірлестігінің өкілдері тап болған проблемаларды (мысалы, қартаю, Украинамен әлсіз байланыстар, бірегейліктің араласуы) көрсетеді. Этномәдени орталықтардың қазіргі жағдайы,

сондай-ақ олардың жұмыстарының төмен тиімділігінің себептері қарастырылған. Мақала этномәдени орталықтардың күнделікті қызметі, оның ішінде қатысушылардың бақылауы мен осы орталықтардың лауазымды адамдарымен сұхбаттасу туралы ақпаратқа негізделген.

Кілт сөздер: Қазақстан Республикасы, этномәдени бірегейліктің маркерлері, украиндар, этномәдени орталықтар, Алматы және Алматы облысы.

МРНТИ 03.20

УКРАИНСКИЕ ЭТНО-КУЛЬТУРНЫЕ ЦЕНТРЫ В ГОРОДЕ АЛМАТЫ И АЛМАТИНСКОЙ ОБЛАСТИ: ТЕКУЩЕЕ ПОЛОЖЕНИЕ И ПРОБЛЕМЫ

Дидар Касымова^{1*}, Даниил Литвин²

¹Институт истории и этнологии им. Ш. Валиханова, Алматы, Казахстан

²Университет КИМЭП, Алматы, Казахстан

*Corresponding author

E-mail: didarkassymova87@gmail.com (Касымова), danilo.litvin@gmail.com (Литвин)

Аннотация. Этническое украинское население уже долгое время является частью полиэтнического общества Республики Казахстан. С конца 80-х годов в Казахстане были созданы многочисленные этнокультурные центры, ставшие источниками сохранения этнокультурной идентичности и средством самореализации различных этносов. В данной статье освещается роль украинских этнокультурных центров в городе Алматы и Алматинской области, которые преследуют тройную миссию: поддержку и поддержание этнокультурной идентичности украинцев, реализацию Доктрины национального единства Республики Казахстан и поддержание дружеских отношений между Республикой Казахстан и Украиной. Она также иллюстрирует проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются представители украинского этнокультурного сообщества (такие как старение, слабость контактов с Украиной, смешение идентичностей). Рассматривается современное состояние этнокультурных центров, а также возможные причины их низкой эффективности. Статья основана на информации из первых рук о повседневной деятельности этнокультурных центров, включая включённое наблюдение и интервью с официальными представителями этих центров.

Ключевые слова: Республика Казахстан, маркеры этнокультурной идентичности, украинцы, этнокультурные центры, Алматы и Алматинская область.

Introduction. Ethnic Ukrainian population has been part of the multiethnic society of the Republic of Kazakhstan for a long time. Since late 1980s numerous ethno-cultural centers were created in Kazakhstan, becoming sources of ethno-cultural identity maintenance and means of self-realization for various ethnic groups. This article elucidates the role of the Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers in Almaty city and Almatinskaya oblast that pursue threefold mission: support and maintaining of ethno-cultural identity of Ukrainians, realization of the Doctrine of National Unity of Republic of Kazakhstan and maintaining friendly relations between Republic of Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Their current state, as well as potential reasons for their low effectiveness, is examined. Article is based on first-hand information about the day-to-day activity of ethno-cultural centers, including participatory observations and interviews. Maintenance and effectiveness of the ethno-cultural centers in the Republic of Kazakhstan is of academic interest. They have been active since the Gorbachev perestroika times of late 1980s and after the establishment of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan grew into institutional significance. But preliminary research has found that very little to no attention is being paid to activities and current situation of the Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers in Almaty city and Almatinskaya oblast. The Ukrainian community in Kazakhstan in general received slightly more attention: for instance, Makasheva and Bernov (2018) reviewed the overall state and history of Ukrainian community, but little attention was given to the perspective of ethno-cultural centers' functionality and effectiveness; atop of that, reasons behind demographic decline of Ukrainian population are not clear. Ethno-cultural

centers and the role they play in socio-political life of the Republic are unique and important due to the multiethnic composition of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Their effectiveness shouldn't be neglected in the light of realization of the Doctrine of National Unity aimed at construction of harmonious, sustainable and stable multi-cultural society with common language and civic identity (Fierman, 2005). The overall number of ethnic Ukrainians in the Republic has been steadily decreasing over the past 20 years from 547 054 (3,66% of the population) in 1999 (Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National statistics, 2013) to 263 962 (1,42%) in 2020 (Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020). This decline is behind the present challenges ethno-cultural centers face on their path of maintaining ethno-cultural identity of Ukrainians. Those challenges greatly diminish the effectiveness of those centers, potential reasons for which will be examined further. More than that – this decrease signals that average representatives of Ukrainian ethno-cultural community are also facing individual challenges with their identity maintenance, which must be discussed as well.

Materials and research methods. Both secondary and primary-data analysis was conducted during this research. The official documents on the activity of ethno-cultural centers, Doctrine of the National unity of the Republic of Kazakhstan and various historical sources on the waves of Ukrainian migration into Kazakhstan and statistical data were used to provide the background information, and to illuminate the context of Ukrainians in the Republic. Theoretical-methodological frameworks are based on theories of John Berry (1992) and Rogers Brubaker. Berry's Acculturation Model states that ethno-cultural communities on the territory outside of their native country eventually apply one of four adaptive strategies: they assimilate, integrate, separate or marginalize from the mainstream ethnic group. Theory of "identity without groups" by Rogers Brubaker theorized on ethnic identity of group members living in alien ethnical environment. Ethnic identity in that case is a cognitive phenomenon which can be held by individuals separately without necessarily sharing group identity. Participatory observations and interviews with official representatives of the ethno-cultural centers were conducted to get insight information of the centers, understand the degree of the involvement of ethnic Ukrainians in their activity. Additional institutions involved in the activity of those centers or cooperate with them in any way are the local Greek Catholic Church, the Ukrainian Embassy to the Republic of Kazakhstan were visited and some officials were interviewed. The methodology was selected to figure out the willingness of the ethnic Ukrainians and activists to uphold and upgrade the centers' works and understand the challenges centers might face. Participatory observation was chosen as the method to provide the most in-depth information of the ongoing processes, participant statistic and level of activities involvement within the centers under research. Interviews with the centers' leaders were conducted to gather the more professionalized opinion on the matter, as well as perspectives of future development of the centers and challenges they face. All participatory observations were conducted upon the agreement with leaders of the communities; all interviewees have been properly informed about the nature and purpose of the research and expressed their oral agreement to willingly contribute to it.

Discussion. One of many ways ethnic groups in Kazakhstan can realize their ethno-cultural potential outside their families is through the ethno-cultural centers. The Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers serve not only as meeting points of the Ukrainians in Kazakhstan. They operate under the umbrella of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan and in accordance with the Kazakhstani model of ethnic tolerance expressed in the official Doctrine of National Unity (Assembly of People of Kazakhstan). The founding principles are inter-ethnic accord and solidarity with civic identity-building strategy of the doctrine. It must be also noted that since 1995 the Assembly's name has changed from Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan to the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan – to underline once more the fundamental idea of national unity in ethnic diversity, reflected in the Doctrine (Rustembekova, 2015).

Ukrainians also have their own unions and centers in the Republic of Kazakhstan – mainly, there is an association of legal entities "Rada Ukrainsev Kazahstana" (*Council of Ukrainians of Kazakhstan*), with headquarters located in Nur-Sultan. Among its stated goals are reinforcement of national unity, formation of Kazakhstani identity and encouragement of ethno-cultural association representatives' participation in the civil society development (Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, n.d.).

Almatinskaya oblast is presenting an interesting case due to its generally multicultural nature – and, therefore, can serve as a model of Kazakhstani society in which ethno-cultural centers should be thriving; therefore, it was chosen as the main territorial area of this research. There are currently two ethno-cultural centers, operating on a city and oblast level respectively: the Ukrainian Cultural Center, headed by Agapova Tamara Alexeevna and Taras Shevchenko Regional Ukrainian Cultural Centre “Prosvita Zhetisu”, led by Duras Mykola Fedorovich. They are all recognized as ethno-cultural centers by the Republic of Kazakhstan and as “Ukrainian associations” by Ukraine (Ukrainian Embassy in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2017), serving also as a bridge of international dialogue between two states.

Results of the research. Research of historical background of the matter of Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers proved extremely diverse nature of Ukrainian ethno-cultural community in Kazakhstan. History of their appearance on this land differs from family to family – some Ukrainians are the descendants of Haidamaks exiled by the Tsarist Russia after suppression of peasants revolts in the Right-bank Ukraine in the mid XVIII century; others are tracing their bloodline to the Tsarist migrating settlers from the Ukrainian parts of the Empire, coming as part of the Stolypin reform. In the early Soviet period, the Ukrainians in Kazakhstan grew due to the exiled kulaks and the Western Ukrainians as part of the resettlement demopolitics of the soviet regime and after annexation of Eastern Poland in 1939. After liberation of West Ukraine during the war, large amount of Ukrainians were exiled to the soviet GULAG camps located on the territory of Kazakhstan. The Ukrainians constituted a large amount of volunteers arrived to Kazakhstan during the famous “Virgin Land” campaign (Bilan, 2017). Finally, some small percentage of modern-day Kazakhstani Ukrainians came here in the late Soviet period, when, out of economic or personal reasons, some families have been moving into Kazakh SSR seeking for better job opportunities. Both different reasons for migration, cultural and religious background and region of origin make Ukrainian community extremely diverse, although in official documents and during cultural events they are usually regarded as homogeneous ethno-cultural community.

Before 1991 the ethnic Ukrainians made up about 5% of overall Kazakhstani population; their fates were deeply intertwined with the soviet realities. However, even after collapse of the USSR, the ethno-demographical situation changed. Broader perspective shows us that percentage of Ukrainian population in Kazakhstan is currently decreasing rapidly, while the overall population of the Republic steadily grows (Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National statistics, 2013). However, decrease of Ukrainian population in Kazakhstan can be explained through different causes: natural aging and gradual extinction of the ethnic group, willing emigration or repatriation to Ukraine. One is certain – current conditions in the Republic are not preventing Ukrainian population from declining.

During personal interviews few challenges became clear – first of all, most of the financial matters of those ethno-cultural centers are covered by voluntary donations from the regular members of those same centers (Lebid L., interview of March 13, 2021). Ethnic clothes for chorus “Ukraine”, operating in the regional ethno-cultural center’s custody, as well as organizational matters of the planned events are covered by those donations. Secondly, the challenge of insignificant independent activity came to the attention. While regional ethno-cultural center has official plan of events, revised and officially approved by the government officials, the city center is less numerous, and usually participates in the programs organized by other better-organized and financially more stable cultural centers – one of the examples of such case is the event dedicated to the Day of Gratitude conducted by the Cossack Ethno-Cultural center on March 1, 2020, where the Ukrainian cultural community was represented by five people and didn’t have its own cultural program, jumping on the bandwagon of organizers. The very few events that were and still are organized regularly by the Ukrainian Ethno-cultural center of Almaty city are Shevchenko readings and Sunday Schools – and while the first one received certain amount of attendance in 2020, the latter ones are not that popular among the people (Agapova, interview of March 1, 2020).

One of other challenges revealed by the participatory observation was the substantial lack of younger generation; most of those actively participating in the activities of those ethno-cultural centers are elderly and senior citizens, while children and students are not represented. This can signal about the overall aging of those centers and inability to ensure cultural continuity due to the lack of effective means of communication with the younger

generation – which is drastically diminishing the effectiveness of the cultural centers. One of the potential answers to the problem of decline of the Ukrainian ethno-cultural community was also discovered during participatory observation – in personal communication, many of those centers' members who are currently married outside of their ethnic group stated that it was practically impossible for them to transfer the Ukrainian ethno-cultural identity to their children in such families. Other matter is the identity that is currently held and maintained by regular representatives of Ukrainian ethno-cultural community. Participatory observation and personal communication have suggested a conclusion of a new, mixed "Russian-Ukrainian", or better Soviet, identity: for instance, majority of representatives of the Ukrainian ethno-cultural community have very little knowledge of the Ukrainian language, and generally recognize the Russian language as their native tongue. Very few of them actually speak Ukrainian – and those few are all seniors; while those in the age group of mature adults (41-65 y.o.) are speaking Russian and show a general admiration of the Soviet period. One of the reasons for this identity mix-up is the fact that those ethnic Ukrainians are having no contact with the Ukraine itself and are not affected by socio-political changes that have occurred there since the independence. This has resulted in them being more favorable towards the "Ukrainian" identity they have been familiar with – the Soviet Ukrainian one. However, few positive sides of center's activity must also be mentioned – those centers formally follow the Doctrine of National Unity provisions thoroughly, their compliance with the general ideas of inter-ethnic peace, inclusiveness and tolerance is clear in both official documents and programs of public events held by those centers. They try to cooperate with other ethno-cultural centers to ensure the correct reflection of multicultural face of Kazakhstani society (Agapova, interview of March 1, 2020), and use every opportunity to promote those tolerant values during their events (Lebid., interview of March 13, 2021).

Taking into consideration that participatory observation was one of the supportive methodologies utilized in this research, it would be fitting to provide at least a brief overview of involvement in those centers' activity. It must be admitted that the coronavirus pandemic that started in the March of 2020 caused most of the regular events organized by those institutions, as well as all previously planned anniversaries and public celebrations to be either postponed or closed. However, because this research and preparation process for effective participatory observation started earlier, beginning from January 2020, the authors attended the events happened to occur before the lockdown and tracked of all further zoom conference dates, meetings (with maintenance of social distancing) and other events that were organized upon agreement with the government officials of Almaty city since. It has also become clear that theoretically, leaders of Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers in Almaty city and Almatinskaya oblast are promoting what was qualified by Berry (1992) as an integration model of adaptation – while formally supporting and maintaining the Ukrainian group' ethnic identity, they also heavily promote positive relations and attitude to other ethnic groups living in the Kazakhstan. Participatory observations and personal communication revealed the validity of Brubaker's (2002) theory for Ukrainian case in Kazakhstan as well – many representatives of ethno-cultural community maintain their identity more at home and individually, while rarely being involved in common practices of their ethnic group. It was discovered that members of Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers differ also in terms of religion – while the majority of them identify as Orthodox, there is a minority of Greek Catholics present here. Following the recommendations from the leader of city ethno-cultural center (Agapova T., personal communication, March 1, 2020), the religious aspect of this community was studied as well.

The nature of the Greek (or Byzantium) Catholicism remains to be a Terra Incognita for non-theological researchers, and for a good reason – out of all 1.3 billion Catholics in the world, those who follow the Byzantine Rite, traditional for the spiritual legacy of Constantinople and Byzantium Empire, comprise only 8.2 million – less than 1% (Holy See Press Office, 2020). However, members of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church constitute the overwhelming majority of that percent – 5.5 million people (Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church, n.d.). Members of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, the vast majority of whom are settled on the territory of the Western Ukraine, trace their historical tradition back to the days of Brest Synod of 1595, when Orthodox bishops of present-day Ukraine addressed Pope Clement VIII on the matter of their reunion with the Catholic Church. This decision was in no least part dictated by the fact that by that time, Ukrainian territory and its people

were under the heavy influence of Catholic Poland, and it was vital for the sake of preservation of people's traditions and escaping persecution and violent conversion (Orthodox were viewed as second-class citizens by Poles at that historical point) to seek protection from the Pope. As the result of this union, a Ruthenian Uniate Church was born, which would later become what it is today – the largest Byzantium Rite Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (Mirtshuk, 1931). The price for that union was the acceptance of theological teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the supremacy of the Pope – but at the same time, the Greek (or “Byzantium”) Catholics were allowed to preserve their own administrative structure as well as Byzantium rite of Divine Liturgy. Many outsiders mistaken them for the ordinary Eastern Orthodox as there are very few visible differences between the two – the architecture of the churches, the way the sign of the cross is made (from right to left shoulder) and even the Order of the Liturgy are mostly the same as in the Orthodox Church.

One final fact to add before the explanation of how this part of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church history is important for this research is that the Church was officially liquidated by the Soviet power in 1946, most of its bishops were arrested and politically persecuted (Dirscherl, 1970). Along with other political prisoners, the clergy was sent in the GULAG camps in Kazakhstan.

Majority of those deported Ukrainians were living in Karaganda, which eventually became a so-called “spiritual capital” of Greek Catholics in Kazakhstan (Catholic Church in Kazakhstan, n.d.). Until today, this history of religious persecution is deeply intertwined with the local Byzantium Catholic community – for instance, ethnic Ukrainians of Karlag prison camp were Byzantium Catholics deported from Western Ukraine (Department of Information of UGCC, 2020). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the official representatives of the reborn Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church started arriving in Kazakhstan with missionary purposes, renewing contacts with their brothers in faith here. It must also be noted that, historically, the followers of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church were treated by the Russian Orthodox Church as a “schismatic traitors” who broke their historical ties with Orthodoxy (Fedyk, 2015). The ROC is extremely influential on the post-Soviet territory, not to the least part by the fact that their position is politically secured by the Russian cultural influence on the territory of Kazakhstan (Shevchenko, 2015). Those two factors combined resulted in the present-day state of the Byzantium Catholics in Kazakhstan – while they do not belong to any of the existing territorial dioceses or episcopates (territorial-administrative units) of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (GCatholic, n.d.) for the sake of avoiding confrontation with much more influential Metropolitan District of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan, they operate under the direct jurisdiction of Apostolic Administration of the Holy See. This fairly recent decision (Sakun, 2020) was welcomed by local Byzantium Catholics, including those that live in Almaty.

Therefore, the local Ukrainian Greek Catholic community in Almaty oblast is represented by one parish, which is currently residing in the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Holy Trinity, located at Tlendiyevast. 9. Their liturgy is conducted regularly every Sunday, from 13:00 till 14:00, and Ukrainian community usually gathers together afterwards for the purpose of socializing. This religious community is headed by Father Oleh Halushka, who is mainly in charge with religious matters, while matters of organizing events, maintaining contacts with different members of this community and other social duties are held by his wife, yimost (religious term, defining wife of a priest and can be vaguely translated as “mother”) MiroslavaHalushka. Although not included in the official structure of the Assembly due to the religious nature of its activity, this community also cooperates with ethno-cultural centers, although mostly sporadically – this cooperation usually takes form of either ethno-cultural center's members visiting this parish for the purpose of satisfying religious needs, or representatives of this religious structures being present on the events organized by said centers.

Now, while examining the final dimension of ethno-cultural centers' activity, - serving as a bridge of intercultural dialogue and cooperation between Ukraine and Kazakhstan, - it is needed to mention their cooperation with the Ukrainian Embassy. It seemingly has a very little impact on the social and cultural life of the Ukrainian ethno-cultural community in Kazakhstan due to its strict diplomatic nature, and it is usually ethnic Ukrainians themselves and people related to the activity of their ethno-cultural centers that become interested and involved in their public projects. Although it is more common for the Embassy to make

official stands on the international matters between states (Ukrainian Embassy in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020), organizing business forums (Ukrainian Embassy in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019) or acknowledging the point of common historical events (Ukrainian Embassy in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019), there are also ways in which it communicates with ethno-cultural communities – traditionally, in form of an annual event called “the dictation of the national unity” (Ukrainian Embassy in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020). One of the most significant public statements that was made by the Embassy so far in regards to the local ethno-cultural community is the letter of the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Ukraine to the Republic of Kazakhstan Ivan Kuleba (who stayed in that position until January 2020), from 20 of June, 2018, in which he addressed the leaders of ethno-cultural communities and “compatriots” (*співвітчизники*), stating that he is open to dialog and propositions about further cooperation (Ukrainian Embassy in the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2018). Practically, however, most of the ties and connections that existed between Ukrainian ethno-cultural communities in Almaty oblast were established via the Consulate – and were either weakened substantially or broken entirely since the abovementioned Consulate was moved to the capital city of Nur-Sultan in 2014, as it was stated during my participatory observations of various members of said community. Since then, only two conferences were held, in which Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers’ representatives participated directly. Most of the contacts between the Embassy and local Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers are coordinated and organized via the First Secretary of the Embassy, Taras Bunisevich, and the Consul Ivan Almashi, and have strictly cultural or educational nature.

Overall, it can be said that the parish of Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was less affected by recent COVID outbreak in terms of meeting organizations due to the fact that they operate under the regulation of religious objects’ activity, which was less strict for some parts – for instance, Catholics were allowed to gather for Christmas celebration (Krishtop, 2020), and Sunday masses in general were conducted in a regular manner. However, this part of the Ukrainian community is probably the least numerous one in terms of involvement of Kazakhstani Ukrainians – as both participatory observation and interview taken from most suggests, local Greek Catholic parish attracts predominantly Ukrainian citizens from Western Ukraine who are currently employed on the territory of Almaty city (Halushka, M., personal communication, March 28, 2020). Perspectives of its growth are few, predominantly due to the reason that the Russian Orthodox Church is very numerous and very influential on the territory of Almaty city and Almaty oblast, and so is any potential involvement of local, Kazakhstani Ukrainians – while the Catholics are less popular among Slavic population, the fact that the Russian Orthodox Church has been present in this oblast for longer period of time secured its position among the local Slavic population, including Ukrainians.

Second in this scale goes the regional Ukrainian Cultural Centre “Prosvita Zhetysu”, due to the fact that the secretary of this center is a member of the UGCC parish and, therefore, was able to organize some events with support and approval of the Catholic clergy. Again, the participatory observation has provided me with the opportunity to view this community from within – and out of 30 claimed regular members (Lebid L., personal communication, March 13, 2021), younger generation was not represented by any of them, with the exception of Lebid’s own grandchildren, once more underlining the main challenge Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers face. From the organizational point of view, this center is the most bureaucratically organized one – for instance, acting secretary provided me with plans on its activity, official center’s passport information and registration.

The Almaty city ethno-cultural center and Ukrainian Embassy were the least active in terms of organizing events, even in online format – since January 2020, they organized only three events overall, two of which were conducted online. The city center lacked any official documentation to provide for this research, and very few things were said about any plans or perspectives of its activity (Agapova T., personal communication, March 1, 2020). Its members were almost all senior citizens, with once again spotted absence of young generation. Speaking of events – all major, public ones were organized by other ethno-cultural centers (Day of Gratitude, etc.), with Ukrainian representatives being on secondary position. What is the main reason for such low involvement, – lack of substantial funding or lack of initiative due to old age of its members, – will remain to be question for further research.

Conclusion. It can be said with certainty that Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers in the Almaty city and Almatinskaya oblast are facing certain challenges. Although officially being present in the cultural and social life, their practical impact seems to be very low. What once began as a promising initiative to ensure the preservation of the multicultural community now became formal, ineffective and generally invalidated by the very Ukrainian ethno-cultural community it was supposed to represent initially. One of the reasons for that might be the old age of all prominent leaders of said centers, their increased focus on the formalities and the limited amount of resources available to them. While all their activities, both happened and planned, correspond with the ideas of the Kazakhstani supra-ethnic identity and promote the inter-ethnic peace and co-existence, the actual target audience of those activities is limited to aging members of those ethno-cultural centers themselves. Further research might be suggested to explore the financial matters of local ethno-cultural centers, but the current amount of voluntary donations they receive to cover the expenses on national clothing creation, events organization and other day-to-day matters can obviously hardly support any substantial impact on the life of the Ukrainian ethno-cultural community. The age gap between the official members of ethno-cultural centers and younger representatives of Ukrainian ethno-cultural community challenges their ability to reach the target audience, which results in a complete absence of younger generation in said centers and their slow, but inevitable self-preoccupation. Those challenges result in a paradoxical situation, when Ukrainian ethno-cultural centers in Almaty city and Almatinskaya oblast exist for their own sake, and their practically useful activity is having little to no effect on both wider ethno-cultural community of Almatinskaya oblast and its general population. Publicly, they promote the adaptive strategy of integration, formally maintaining the Ukrainian identity and keeping a close contact with other ethnicities represented in the region – while individually, representatives of the Ukrainian community adapted “cognitive identity”, affirming their ethnic identity individually but becoming very reluctant at participating in group activities of their ethno-cultural community; they view the latter more as a right, than an obligation. It has also become clear that the identity of their choice was representing a unique mix of different features, with heavy emphasis on the Russian language as the main way of communication and even the mother tongue for majority. This allows us to come to the conclusion that this identity shares commonalities with the Russian and, largely, Soviet identity, which results from the very few ties left with the historical Ukrainian land, and Soviet memory. However, the individual level of analysis was not a main matter of this research, which focused more on the condition of ethno-cultural centers per se. Due to the low activity and overall senior age category of their leaders and active members, those centers no longer reflect the constantly changing and internally diverse Ukrainian ethno-cultural community in the region, which results in lowered involvement of that community’s actual representatives in the events conducted by those centers – and failure to complete their claimed functions in Kazakhstani society. Although currently those centers fulfill all three of their goalson paper – they formally maintain Ukrainian ethno-cultural identity, promote the ideals of the tolerance and try to stay relevant as a bridge between the two countries, abovementioned challenges pose a threat to all of those missions’ practical effectiveness in a long-terms perspective, and solutions to them must be found.

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**МАЗМҰНЫ
СОДЕРЖАНИЕ
CONTENTS**

**ДЕРЕКТАНУ ЖӘНЕ ТАРИХНАМА
ИСТОЧНИКОВЕДЕНИЕ И ИСТОРИОГРАФИЯ
SOURCE STUDING AND HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Имангалиев А., Дүкенбаева З. ИБН ХАЛЛИКАН ЖӘНЕ АҚЖАН ӘЛ-МАШАНИДІҢ ЕҢБЕКТЕРІНДЕГІ ӘЛ-ФАРАБИ.....	5
Қамбарбекова Ғ.Ә. «ТАРИХ-И АББАСИ» («РУЗНАМА-ЙЕ МОЛЛА ЖӘЛАЛ») ШЫҒАРМАСЫНДАҒЫ ҚАЗАҚ ХАНДЫҒЫНА ҚАТЫСТЫ ДЕРЕКТЕР.....	16
Байдильдина Феллан С.Х., Раджапов А.У. «БІРЛІК ТУЫ» – ТҮРКІСТАН ӨЛКЕСІ БОЙЫНША ҚҰНДЫ ТАРИХИ ДЕРЕККӨЗ РЕТІНДЕ.....	29
Карамендина М.Ө. ҚЫРҒЫЗ-ҚАЗАҚ ҚАРЫМ-ҚАТЫНАСЫНЫҢ ТАРИХНАМАСЫ.....	40

**ОРТА ҒАСЫРЛАР ТАРИХЫ
СРЕДНЕВЕКОВАЯ ИСТОРИЯ
MEDIEVAL HISTORY**

Атыгаев Н.А. КАЗАХСКОЕ ХАНСТВО И МОГУЛИСТАН В XV – НАЧАЛЕ XVI В.....	57
--	----

**ЖАҢА ЗАМАН ТАРИХЫ
НОВАЯ ИСТОРИЯ
NEW HISTORY**

Абдулина А.Т. К ПРАКТИКЕ МИССИОНЕРСКОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ РУССКОЙ ПРАВОСЛАВНОЙ ЦЕРКВИ В СЕМИРЕЧЬЕ.....	66
---	----

**КЕҢЕС ДӘУІРІ ТАРИХЫ
ИСТОРИЯ СОВЕТСКОГО ПЕРИОДА
SOVIET PERIOD HISTORY**

Бәкір Ә.Қ., Тайман С. МҰСТАФА ШОҚАЙ ТӘУЕЛСІЗ ҰЛТТЫҚ МЕМЛЕКЕТ ТУРАЛЫ.....	80
Санъязов Е. АЛАШ ҚАЙРАТКЕРЛЕРІНІҢ ЖЕР МӘСЕЛЕСІН РЕТТЕУДЕГІ ҚЫЗМЕТІ (СЕМЕЙ ӨҢІРІ МЫСАЛЫНДА).....	92
Көкебаева Г.К. КЕҢЕС-GERMAN МАЙДАНЫНДАҒЫ СОҒЫС ТҮТҚЫНДАРЫНЫҢ ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ-ҚҰҚЫҚТЫҚ СТАТУСЫН АНЫҚТАУ МӘСЕЛЕСІ.....	101

Касымова Д.Б., Қудайбергеноулы Б.
 НЕКОТОРЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ ВОПРОСОВ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ
 ПОЛИТИКИ В ПОСЛЕВОЕННОЕ ВРЕМЯ И ПОЗИЦИЯ
 РУКОВОДСТВА КАЗАХСКОЙ ССР.....114

Аминов Т., Талгатбеков А.
 ЖУМАБАЙ ШАЯХМЕТОВ – ВЫДАЮЩИЙСЯ
 КАЗАХСКИЙ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ И ОБЩЕСТВЕННЫЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬ.....127

Бекмагамбетов Р.К., Бекмагамбетова М.Ж.
 СОВЕТСКОЕ ДЕТСТВО КАЗАХСТАНА В 60-Е ГОДЫ XX ВЕКА
 (ПО МАТЕРИАЛАМ ГАЗЕТЫ «КАЗАХСТАНСКАЯ ПРАВДА»).....142

**Шашаев Ә.Қ., Зикирбаева В.С.,
 Мурзаходжаев Қ.М., Мрзабаева Р.Ж.**
 ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ АЛҒАШҚЫ ҚОҒАМДЫҚ
 ҰЙЫМДАРДЫҢ АҒАРТУШЫЛЫҚ ҚЫЗМЕТІ.....157

**ТӘУЕЛСІЗ ҚАЗАҚСТАН ТАРИХЫ
 ИСТОРИЯ НЕЗАВИСИМОГО КАЗАХСТАНА
 INDEPENDENT KAZAKHSTAN HISTORY**

Kassymova D., Litvin D.
 UKRAINIAN ETHNO-CULTURAL CENTERS IN ALMATY CITY AND
 ALMATINSKAYA OBLAST: CURRENT SITUATION AND CHALLENGES.....170

**ДҮНИЕЖҮЗІ ТАРИХЫ
 ВСЕМИРНАЯ ИСТОРИЯ
 HISTORY OF THE WORLD**

Каримова З.К., Меделбай А.А.
 ТҮРКІЯНЫҢ ҚАЗАҚСТАНДАҒЫ «ЖҰМСАҚ КҮШ»
 САЯСАТЫН ЖҮЗЕГЕ АСЫРУДЫҢ МЕХАНИЗМДЕРІ МЕН ӘДІСТЕРІ.....179

Ahmet Burçin Yereli, G. Мовкебаева, А.К. Toguzbayeva
 SOME PROBLEMATIC ASPECTS OF THE CUSTOMS
 AND LOGISTICS SPHERE OF THE EURASIAN ECONOMIC UNION.....188

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