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Turar Ryskulov: the Career of a Kazakh Revolutionary Leader during the Construction of the New Soviet State, 1917-1926

Dedicated to Saule Turarovna Ryskulova (1933-2013)

Abstract

This article is about the biography of a young Kazakh born in the last decade of the 19th century, Turar Ryskulov (1894-1938), who was an essential actor of the revolutionary period in Russian Turkestan. The approach of this brief biography will follow the line of a definition of the national and the nation. The postulate is that the identity is tackled through a political understanding and that it is chosen among multiple pre-existing or invented designations. National identity is a moving construction, favoring one of the possible designations depending on the needs of a group in the struggle for power. Ryskulov began his political activity with the idea of a common *Kirghiz* interest, then went through the Muslim and Turkic designations. Finally, he had to submit to a soviet Kazakh one. Against the Russian colonial heritage, Ryskulov's political project was to offer a real place for his Turkestani compatriot in the new soviet regime. He thought it through a unified Turkestan beyond Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen or Tajik designations.

Key words: Kazakhstan; Turkestan; Russian revolution; Soviet society; biography; Central Asia; Turar Ryskulov

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Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences

Editor in chief: Jolanta Sujecka

Conception and academic editing of this issue: Maciej Falski

National identity is a moving construction, favoring one of the possible designations depending on the needs of a group in the struggle for power. It is based on a sense of community and on real attachments and existing relations. It embraced two main contemporary ideas: modernism and the awakening of consciousness. National consciousness was considered one of the attributes of modernism, which was associated with the possibility of being reckoned with on the world arena. Identity cannot be considered as the choice of individuals. The issue is the belonging to a specific group and whether groups reconfigured themselves into larger units.

Turkestan was conquered by the Russians in the second half of the 19th century. The Kazakh tribes became subjects of the Tsarist Empire, but they were a matter for a peculiar Statute maintaining them in an inferior position. The establishing of the *inorodec* (Russian term for allogeneous or alien) Statute in 1822 produced a clear separation between the European population and people classified as *inorodcy* (plural form of *inorodec*), mainly natives of Siberia and Central Asia. This Statute was an attempt to assimilate administratively and politically the non-Russian populations. However, despite the policies of Russification and Christianization, the Tsarist State always refused to grant *inorodcy* the same rights as those of the Russians. Therefore, *inorodcy* searched for their own road relying partly on the national idea. The question was to determine the place of these populations in a modern state. Both segments of society, Russian and allogeneous, were concerned with the problem but by the time of the 1917 revolution no answer had been found.

Ryskulov's biography is made up of three phases: from his birth in the Russian Empire to the Revolution of February 1917; his political activity in Turkestan from 1917 to 1924; and his Muscovite period which ended tragically in 1938. Being still a Kazakh, he experienced the *inorodec* Statute before becoming a Soviet citizen.

The central part of the Kazakh genealogy is tribal kinship, which structured Kazakh society along the whole studied period. One of the most influential representatives of Kazakh intelligentsia, Alihan Bukejhanov, explained in his work *Kirgizy (Kirghiz)* [Russian appellation of both Kazakhs and Kirghiz, which could include both or either ones; the term in italics will have the Russian meaning] published in 1911: "To the question, who are you? A *Kirghiz* will answer: *Uš žuzdın balasymin*, i.e. I am a child of the three hordes. If the question is posed by a *Kirghiz*, the interviewee will name one of the hordes or a tribe" (Bökejhan 2005: 73). Self-designation depends on who is asking and is made up of different levels.

Kazakh tribes split into three *žuz* (hordes), the Elder, the Middle and the Junior, which occupy distinct geographical areas, respectively the south, the center and east, and the west of modern Kazakhstan. Under Russian rule, Kazakh tribes were divided in two administrative entities: the Steppes Governorate and Turkestan. Turkestani Kazakhs inhabited mainly the Semireč'e and Syr-Darya *oblast'* (region). The district of Turkestan, where Ryskulov grew up, had a population composed of tribes of the Elder Horde and of Kirghiz. Ryskulov was a member of the Dulat tribe of the Elder *žuz*. Tribes were themselves divided into clans. Four clans are known for the Dulat: Syqym, Žanyys, Botpaj and Šymyr. Ryskulov belonged to the latter one. The two other pillars of Kazakh self-representation were the pastoral nomadic way of life and Islam.

Apart from the tribal factor, one event had a strong impact on Turar's destiny. His father Ryskul was recruited for his talents by the chief of another Dulat clan and, around 1890, moved with his family from Merke *volost'* (district) in Syr-Darya *oblast'* to a location east of Vernyj (Almaty) in Semireč'e *oblast'*. The association lasted 15 years, but in December 1904 Ryskul murdered this chief. The event had more than local implications and the news spread all over Turkestan. It was perceived as the rebellion of an oppressed Kazakh against a native tsarist state employee. The clan's chief was indeed *volost'* governor. Several legends have this event as their subject and even a novel was dedicated to it in the 1920's. The most widespread story says that the clan's chief used his power and wealth to marry a girl promised to Ryskul. In return, Ryskul waited for him at a pass and shot him dead. Actually, the reason was more prosaic. The argument was about some cattle rustling ordered by the chief, who did not respect an agreement that he had with Ryskul. Anyway, Ryskul was arrested and went to prison with his son. When Ryskul was sent to Siberia in 1905, Turar's uncle took him to his *aoul* (village) in Merke *volost'*. Threatened by the chief's clan, Turar found shelter among his own clan. His father died on the road to the penal colony.

At the age of 10, Ryskulov entered the Russian-native school of Merke, where he studied for four years with young Kazakhs and Kirghiz. In this area, Kazakhs and Kirghiz lived side by side and were treated the same way by Russians. After his first diploma in 1910, he briefly worked for the Merke local judge. This position did not satisfy him and he applied for admission to the Agricultural College of Pishpek (nowadays Bishkek in Kirghizia), created in 1890 and accessible for boys of all origins. He studied there with young Kirghiz, Kazakhs and Russians.

His school career opened to him another world and he was looking forward to going further. He wrote to his school director to ask for help: "My

genuine wish that you give to your *Kirghiz* protégé the chance to continue his education, because you now decide of my future" (Central State Archives of Kirghizstan: 69/1/2/189). A new class, the intelligentsia, had been developing since the 19th century. The Russian definition given at the beginning of the 20th century was: "an intellectually developed class of the society, interested in political and cultural stakes" (*Malyj enciklopedičeskij slovar' Brokgauza i Efrona* (Small Encyclopedic Dictionary of Borkgauz and Efron), Saint-Petersburg: 1907-1909). The term appeared in Russia during the second half of the 19th century to denote the socially heterogeneous people who were involved in the discussion about the evolution of society and its future. This class grew thanks to the development of the school system and public service. *Intelligenty* (members of the intelligentsia) were school teachers, state employees, lawyers, journalists, as well as renowned intellectuals.

All over the Tsarist Empire, non-Russian societies were touched by a similar phenomenon which followed a rhythm and a development peculiar to each of them. Non-Russian intelligentsia distinguished itself from the Russian by its duality. Its cultural, social and political referents were firstly those of its origin and the Russian imprint was superimposed. The criterion for being part of the intelligentsia was a secondary or higher Russian education. Even though dual education was common, this element singled out *intelligenty* (members of the intelligentsia) among their compatriots. It has to be noticed that all religious, political and intellectual elites were not educated in Russian schools. Ryskulov became an *intelligent* according to the definition, but he never presented himself as a member of this class. He was linked to neither Kazakh-related nor Turkestan intelligentsia.

Turar Ryskulov did not belong to any influential Kazakh network. His family was not particularly rich and did not include any *intelligenty* before Turar. Nevertheless, the renown of his father offered him a prestige which contributed to his being offered the opportunity of studying. During the summer 1915, Muhamedžan Tynyšpaev, an important figure of the Kazakh intelligentsia from Turkestan, who worked at railway construction, visited Turar's *aoul*. He wrote later on: "Someone said that a young Kazakh living in the village of Tul'kubas was the son of Ryskul and that he was willing to go to study. But he didn't have the money to do it. I asked somebody to bring him to me and I saw him for the first time. He really needed help, so I gave him 150 roubles. I took him in my arms and said he could ask for more money if needed" (*Alaš miras*, Almaty: 1993, 233). Thanks to Tynyšpaev, he could go to Samara for the admission test at the Agricultural Institute, but he failed in autumn 1915.

He gave up his initial project, although he did not renounce a form of acculturation. He could not imagine coming back to the life of a cattle

breeder or a local state employee in his district. Therefore, he decided to move to Tashkent and began to work as a gardener at the experimental agronomic station. At the same time, he prepared for the admission test to the teachers' training college, but he again failed at his first attempt. Teaching careers were popular among non-Russian *intelligenty*. The motivation was the desire to elevate the educational standards of the population in order to modernize society and to break with some habits thought as archaic and obscurantist. Above all, Ryskulov's aim was to raise his social standing and become integrated in the tsarist society, although he did not agree with the inequality implied by the *inorodec* Statute.

Except for the brief meeting with Tynyşpaev, he had no contact with Kazakh *intelligenty*. At this point, he did not build up a network among the Kazakhs living or studying in Tashkent. Not belonging to a powerful clan or coming from an influential family and not having a higher education, he was not recognized by Kazakh intelligentsia circles as one of them. Nevertheless, he heard their discourse on national consciousness, the situation of allogeneous people in the Russian Empire, modernization of society and economic crisis.

In Turkestan, the situation was more complicated than in the Steppes Governorate because of the ethnic intertwining. Native populations never thought of themselves as nations, but the idea of common ancestry was strong among nomadic populations and federated Turkmens or Kazakhs. Moreover, the latter benefited from the institution of khans elected by tribes. Throughout the 19th century, the domination of the Khanate of Kokand and then of the Russian Empire implemented another level in political affiliation for the Kazakhs of the Elder *žuz*. Even if the Khanate of Kokand did not exist anymore at the time of Ryskulov, it still had an influence on political alliances. In this peculiar context two ideas gained precedence in Turkestan: the principle of a Muslim designation and the definition of a Turkestani unity based on the supposed Turkness of all the Turkestani population. What national consciousness (Muslim, Turkic, Turkestani, Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen,...) had to be awakened? The national principle did not have any stable definition. It varied according to its ability to give cohesion to the identity array, juxtaposing territorial, ethnic and religious levels. The choice was also motivated by political projects (e.g. the question of the role of Islam in political matters) and by territorial and geopolitical issues.

While Ryskulov was looking for his life path, an event shook up Central Asia. On the 25th of June 1916, the tsar decreed the mobilization of allogeneous people as auxiliaries, whereas they had previously been exempted from any military duty. Opposing this mobilization, several Kazakh tribes rebelled. The tsarist authorities responded harshly and the rebellion was

suppressed by September in most parts of the region. This moment was crucial for Ryskulov's political future. He came back to his *aoul* during that summer and was close to the young Kazakhs and Kirghiz involved in the rebellion, even if he did not really take part himself. Apart from the usual tribal network, the rebellion created a new one more politically related, on which Ryskulov would later rely. This process concerned young people, but not only. All the clans and tribes did not adopt the same attitude toward the tsarist decree. Briefly, clans which were in charge of the allogeneous administration supported the Russian authorities. Influential members of the intelligentsia admonished the Kazakhs not to rebel, fearing the brutal repression which became a reality. They were also trying to gain civil rights for Kazakhs and thought that this meant accepting military duty. Rebels included the clans excluded from positions of power and those under the influence of political or spiritual figures who assumed a confrontational attitude towards colonial authorities and Russian society. The political range of these personages was broad, from anti-Russian Muslim-based positions to revolutionary ideas. The land question was particularly sensitive in Semireč'e and Syr-Darya *oblast'*, where many European peasants had settled in earlier years. The rebellion expressed social tensions between the poorest Kazakhs, often named *Buqara* (people, mass), and the *Bai* (wealthy Kazakhs). The split, which took place in Kazakh society owing to the events of 1916, would not disappear after the revolution of February 1917.

Ryskulov went back to Tashkent in September 1916 and passed the admission test for the teacher's training school, but he did not study for long. The February Revolution of 1917 put an end to his studies. Even if the Revolution was essentially a Russian one and moreover a Petrograd one, its ideas were soon adopted by the non-Russian populations, which entered the political arena. The first declaration of the Provisional Government on the 6th of March opened new perspectives. It proclaimed the recognition of the equality of all citizens, the election of national autonomous organs and the convocation of a constituent assembly. Tashkent did not stand aloof from the revolutionary process. Numerous meetings were held and were attended both by the Muslim population and the European. Soon, Soviet and Muslim organizations were organized. There are no documents referring to Ryskulov's activity and political ideas at that time. He surely attended some meetings, but he did not join any party or organization. In March or April 1917, he returned to his *aoul*, leaving Turkestan's political centre in order to act in familiar surroundings. In his homeland, he could activate familial, clan and peer networks. Conversely, he could not imagine playing any political role in Tashkent. He was also concerned with the situation in his lands.

From the revolution came a new administration. The Provisional Government appointed committees at all administrative levels to take over from the tsarist officials. In Merke, to where Ryskulov moved, a committee of the Provisional Government was created and included members of the local middle class (civil servants, shopkeepers and teachers). At the same time, Kazakh committees were organized by the Kazakhs themselves in *oblast'* and *uezd* (department) to take care of Kazakh affairs. Local Kazakh elites, in charge under the tsarist regime, were their instigators and the balance of power did not change with the new administration. The only difference was a broader presence of *intelligenty* in these committees. Afterwards, Kazakh congresses were held everywhere. The newly elected organs were dominated by the most powerful tribes and by a group of *intelligenty* who later organized the Alash party. They stood at the head of the Kazakh national movement, with other political forces being progressively marginalized.

Young Kazakh *intelligenty* expected to enter the political space opened up by the revolution. They mainly followed the older intelligentsia, but a small part, both wanting social change and denied any important posts, opposed the new Kazakh committees and the national movement. This was particularly true for Ryskulov and his closest friend Kabulbek Sarymuldaev, a postman in Merke. They tried to unify Kazakh and Kirghiz youth against local Kazakh and Provisional Government committees. At that time, they did not have any clear political ideas. There were a lot of possible options which opened up. Beside tribal solidarity, the experience of the 1916 rebellion and some vague ideas on socialism were the main political base for Ryskulov and these young people. But each day they heard new slogans and were mindful of the national discourse.

In the former Steppes Governorate, all Kazakh political forces claimed to be representative of the Kazakh nation, except for the Adaj tribe which stayed apart in the western region. Conversely, Kazakh national consciousness was not the only principle for political unity in Turkestan. There were at least *Kirghiz* or *Kazakh-Kirghiz*, *Muslim* and *Turkestani* identities. The Congress of the Kazakhs from Turkestan, held in January 1918, decided not to join the Kazakh autonomy proclaimed by the Kazakhs of the former Steppes Governorate, but to stay affiliated to Turkestan. Because of the interconnections within the region, they preferred to be part of a broader political identity than just Kazakh. In the years 1917-1918, Ryskulov chose the *Kirghiz* designation which allowed him to include both young Kazakhs and Kirghiz. This designation, both in Kazakh and Russian, was used in the Semireč'e *oblast'* and part of the Syr-Darya *oblast'* in 1917. Then the *Kazakh-Kirghiz* designation was adopted in Kazakh, whereas the term *Kirghiz* persisted in Russian. This attempt to create a

political identity with a double designation was not an isolated act (e.g. Tatar-Bashkir or Buryat-Mongol). Ryskulov built up his political activity by denouncing the oppression of weak tribes by the stronger ones and on the basis of a Kazakh-Kirghiz community, in other words on both class and national principles.

In Spring 1917, Ryskulov and his comrades were a minority and had not much influence in Merke, even if he attended the first Kazakh congress of the Syr-Darya region. The majority was behind the Kazakh national movement and the different national congresses. There is not much information on his activity at that period. We know of the existence of a group of young Kazakhs and Kirghiz under his direction and that he was associated with the *Buqara* party. Essentially active in the Semireč'e region, this party gathered Kazakhs, Kirghiz and Tatars on a socialist platform. It represented an opposition to the Alash party and its affiliates, which reflected the split of the 1916 rebellion. Anyway, the majority of the Kazakh population was on the side of the Alash party.

The progressive organization of the Soviets in the region proved to be the political springboard for young Russian-speaking Kazakhs, who had been set aside by the national movement. After the October Revolution of 1917, Soviets, ruling alone, had to find go-betweens to win over the Kazakh population that was not under their influence. The refusal of Kazakh elites to collaborate with the Soviets made it possible for Ryskulov and some other politically marginalized *intelligenty* to infiltrate new power positions. They began to be influenced by the Bolshevik discourse, but the old distinction between Europeans and allogeneous people did not disappear.

In the beginning of 1918, Ryskulov was admitted to the Aulie-Ata (Taraz) Soviet, the administrative centre of his *uezd*, and joined the Bolshevik party. The Soviet was still a Russian dominated organ and the allogeneous were not considered real partners. In order to change this situation, Ryskulov endeavoured to create *Kirghiz* Soviets. He kept the *Kirghiz* designation, although the Muslim one was widely spread in Turkestan. He aimed to defend the interests of the nomads, which he associated with the term *Kirghiz*. This association became stronger along with the 1918 famine which affected primarily the nomadic population. Ryskulov led the struggle against the famine and found in it a political base for the recognition of his people by the revolutionary power. It helped him to gain authority among the Kazakhs and the Aulie-Ata Soviet. In the summer of 1918, he became the vice-president of the Soviet of his *uezd* and was included in the delegation for the 6th Congress of the Soviets of Turkestan in September. His work to fight the famine was appreciated and he was appointed the Turkestan Commissar for Public Health.

Ryskulov remained in Tashkent after his nomination. His situation had changed since his last stay. He was now a member of the government and was introduced to native Soviet circles. During the first months he was worried, first of all, about the situation in his homeland. He acted as spokesman of the Aulie-Ata *uezd* before Turkestan's central authorities. He was not really interested in public health, but in problems of famine which were also a responsibility of his administration. The famine was still a hot topic, especially for nomads in the Syr-Darya and Semireč'e *oblast'*. His *uezd* was directly concerned. However, the question had not been a matter of real interest for the Soviet administration. Ryskulov concentrated his attention on the matter and proposed forming a central commission for the struggle against famine. The commission was created in November 1918 and Ryskulov was appointed its president. He wanted to help the hungry, but his other aim was also to undertake "a study of the economic situation of the starving population in order to work out some measures for stabilization which could lead to a future strengthening" (Central State Archives of the republic of Uzbekistan: 17/1/1100/158). The second point showed the political character assigned by Ryskulov to the struggle against famine. Progressively, he extended the mission of his central commission, yet still fighting against the local Russian communists. Most of them denied *Kirghiz* equal political rights. One of the main Bolshevik figures from Turkestan declared: "The *Kirghiz*, economically weak according to Marxist principles, will anyway disappear. This is why it is more important to assign available funds not to the struggle against famine but to the fronts" (Mihajlov 1993: 237). The presupposition of this declaration was the widely shared assumption that the nomadic way of life had to be replaced by a sedentary one.

To legitimate his action and get necessary funds, Ryskulov justified the proletarian nature of "the starving nomad mass". They were presented by him as the weakest and the most exploited population of Turkestan, suffering from the colonial administration and the rich native class: "the starving mass, being today a backwards and darkened population, is the real proletariat of Turkestan" (Ryskulov 1997: 147). Ryskulov adopted the Bolshevik discourse to obtain a place for the *Kirghiz* in the revolution. His objective was that they could take part in political decisions and not be put aside as they were. Between the years 1918 and 1919, the political identity chosen by Ryskulov was a mix of class (starving mass), national (*Kirghiz*) and lifestyle (nomad) principles.

The contempt of the local European communists toward the whole native population encouraged Ryskulov to move closer to the few other natives in charge in the Soviet government or administration. They mainly belonged

to Jadid circles (Muslim reformism) from Tashkent and were not Kazakh or Kirghiz, but Uzbek. These Jadids took part in the construction of the 1917 Muslim movement in Turkestan and participated in the Turkestani autonomy, proclaimed in November 1917 by the IVth All-muslim Congress held in Kokand. It was an attempt to create a Turkestani autonomous entity under the control of the Muslim representatives, but still attached to a democratic Russia. The political range was large, but the majority opposed the power seizure by the Soviets. In February 1918, the Turkestani autonomy was abolished by the Bolsheviks. Some of the participants chose to continue the fight against the Soviet regime and started what is called the Basmachis' revolt. Others decided to join the regime and were appointed to posts in the Soviet administration. They later opened before Ryskulov new horizons which he made his own. His political conceptions began to evolve amongst them. The main idea was Turkestani unity, which could be understood through Muslim, native or Turkic identity. Ryskulov realized that the previous designations he had used (*Kirghiz*, nomad or starving mass) had not proved fruitful for two reasons. First, despite his efforts, he was unable to turn the central commission for struggle against famine into a political force. Secondly, he had not managed to rally to his project leading Kazakh or Kirghiz figures in order to create an active political group.

In parallel, the Central Bureau of the Muslim communist organizations, dominated by Tatar communists, was created in Moscow in November 1918. Its mission was to assume the direction of the affairs of all Muslims of the former Russian Empire. It sent a delegate to Turkestan in January 1919 to organize a local office. All the native populations of Turkestan were Muslims, except for the Jewish minority. Soon, Ryskulov, already involved in Jadid-related circles, adopted the Muslim discourse, which appeared to be the most effective and was widely spread in Turkestan. The revolutionary legitimacy of this designation, which was not understood as a religious, but as a national one, was provided by Moscow through the Central Bureau and many official declarations. The Muslim designation did not obliterate others (Kazakh, Uzbek, Turkmen, Turkic...), which were still used and were claimed by some political circles in Turkestan. But "Muslim" dominated the political space throughout 1919.

Facing the multiethnic landscape of the former Russian Empire, the Soviet power decided to use the category of nationalities, which presumed common language, culture and interests. Their list, which changed during the period, was the result of self-designation, inheritance of tsarist categorization, ethnographic studies and political considerations. Even if the VIIIth congress of the Russian communist party in March 1919 recognized the right to self-determination of all nationalities, the local Russian communists

did not accept this decision and were still opposed to the presence of natives in Turkestan Soviet authorities, arguing that the European population was the only true proletarian one. Political life during 1919 turned out to be a continuous struggle for power between local Europeans and Muslim communists, i.e. between those in charge since 1917 and the growing number of Muslim communists. The latter relied on the overwhelming majority of Muslims, i.e. natives, in Turkestan, representing over 90% of the population, and on the Muslim revolutionary discourse. According to this discourse, the Muslim world, of which Turkestan was part, was oppressed and exploited by western colonial powers. This legitimated the place of Muslims in the revolutionary movement.

Until the beginning of 1919, native communists were isolated both in Turkestan's party and in the government. The situation changed with the VIIth Congress of the Soviets and the IInd Conference of the Turkestani Communist Party (KPT), held in March. The number of native delegates significantly increased and they could then count on the support of Petr Kobozev, sent by Moscow to implement central national policy. Through the Congress of the Soviets, a Muslim platform was elaborated, which unified native delegates. The next step was taken at the party conference. Inspired by the Moscow Central Bureau, it was decided to create the regional Bureau of Muslim Communist Organizations (Musburo), which became the voice of the non-Russian populations of Turkestan. The Muslim designation was therefore recognized as their main political identity, assimilated into a national one. Ryskulov was elected president of the Musburo and became spokesman for the Muslims. Throughout 1919, he always presented himself as a Muslim and was against the existence of a Commissariat of nationalities, whose purpose was to defend the interests of each nationality separately. Conversely, Ryskulov and his comrades favored the unity of the Turkestani populations, in order to win political primacy in the region, and their weapon was the Musburo.

At the next congresses in September 1919, the Muslim group seemed to have won over the local Russian communists. But Moscow started to get more involved in the political life of Turkestan. The central power decided to send a special commission (Turkkomissia) to solve the conflict between Muslims and Europeans and to assert its authority. First, the Muslim designation began to be criticized for its religious background. Secondly, the Musburo acted as an autonomous organization, which doubled the Central Committee of the KPT. During the winter of 1919, the Turkkomissia forced the Musburo to merge with the Central Committee. Facing this new context, Ryskulov and the other members of the Musburo moved from the Muslim designation to the presumed Turkic origin of the majority of the

native populations. This ideology had spread through Jadid circles in 1917. Its main advantage was to be more compatible with the Soviet definition of the nation. It also guaranteed the political unity of Turkestan and the legitimacy of the native people. Ryskulov convened a party conference in January 1920 to carry out the merger of the Musburo with the Central Committee. He took advantage of the fusion to propose renaming the KPT as the Communist party of the Turks and Turkestan as the Republic of the Turks. He claimed for the Turks, who had been previously called the Muslims of Turkestan, the same rights as other nationalities under the Soviet regime. Supported by the native delegates, this project was adopted at the conference, but the validation by Moscow never came.

On the other side, the Turkkomissia launched a program to destroy the basis of Ryskulov and the Musburo. The purpose was to tear apart the unified political identity of Turkestan, whether Muslim or Turkic. The Turkkomissia favored the emergence of new leaders coming from the fifth *oblast'* of Turkestan and began to establish the basis for the delimitation of Turkestan into three separate national republics: Kazakh, Uzbek and Turkmen. In Central Asia, as well as in other parts of Russia, the Soviet power pragmatically fostered a political identity based on limited nations, which could be more easily integrated in a global Soviet state than larger entities based on Turkic or Muslim designations. It attempted to standardize the administration of all its territories and to keep control over them. Moscow did not create nations, but either allowed them or not to become Soviet entities.

Ryskulov tried to defend his point of view before the central authorities in May-June 1920. He did not deny the existence of nationalities in Turkestan, but he refused to accept the political division involved when the emphasis was put on the recognition of their rights. He named a longer list of nationalities than the three mentioned, based on the 1896 census. He wanted to prove the absurdity of dividing Turkestan into national republics. His arguments were not accepted and he was called away from Turkestan in August 1920.

For the next two years, he concentrated all his efforts on obtaining from Moscow his return to Turkestan. In the beginning of 1922, he went to the republic of Kazakhstan, created in October 1920 from the former Steppes Governorate and officially called *Kirghizia*, but he was never accepted by the Kazakh communists in charge and spent there less than two months. He was finally allowed to return to Turkestan in autumn 1922, because the Basmachi revolt was still threatening Soviet control over Central Asia. Moscow feared the presence in Turkestan of the pan-Turkist Enver Pasha and the Bashkir leader Zeki Validov who aimed at unifying all the forces fighting against the Bolsheviks and establishing a Turkestani or Turkic

political entity. They were also in contact with Turkestani leaders engaged on the side of the Soviets. Enver Pasha was killed in September, just before the arrival of Ryskulov in Turkestan, though Validov was left alone. Ryskulov began to negotiate with him, but Validov refused to rally to the Soviet regime and left Turkestan.

The political landscape had been totally transformed since 1920. Ryskulov's previous network had been dissolved and new people, whose solidarity was more regionally or nationally related, had taken positions in the government, the party and the administration. Native communists were divided into national groups, mainly Uzbek, Kazakh and Turkmen, but there were also several groups for each so-called nationality.

Ryskulov, soon after arriving in Tashkent, was appointed president of the government. He had to build up his own group to implement his policies. Taking into account the new context, he decided to co-opt Kazakhs he had met in Moscow. They were *intelligently* drawn back from Kazakhstan because of their anti-Soviet past. Ryskulov had never been close to them and they did not consider him as one of their own, but he had no other choice. Even as he tried to promote the political unity of Turkestan, he progressively appeared as a leader of a Kazakh group. The other groups and Moscow were looking forward to dividing Turkestan into national republics. This had not yet been achieved because of the difficulty of drawing borders, the conflict between national groups and the Basmachi revolt. There was another consideration: the necessity to include the two other political entities of Central Asia: the people's republics of Bukhara and Khwarezm. Ryskulov presented the project of a union of these two republics with Turkestan, in order to establish a Middle Asian Federation. He succeeded in creating an economic union in March 1923, but failed to transform it into a political one.

Through 1923 he became more and more isolated. The main Kazakh group was particularly opposed to Ryskulov and to the Turkestani idea. Ryskulov could count essentially on his old friend Sarymuldaev and Kazakhs from his homeland. During the XIIth Congress of the Soviets of Turkestan in January 1924, he was dismissed from all his positions, facing an alliance of the most powerful groups, two Uzbek and one Kazakh. By the end of 1924, Turkestan and the republics of Bukhara and Khwarezm were divided into two republics (Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan) and the autonomous *oblast'* of the Kara-Kirghiz (the term used by Russians to specify the Kirghiz). The two *oblast'* of Syr-Darya and Semireč'e were attached to *Kirghizia*, which was renamed Qazaqstan (in Kazakh) or Kazakstan (in Russian) in 1925 (a new change occurred in 1936 and Kazakstan became Kazakhstan, which was then upgraded to the status of a Soviet socialist republic of the USSR).

At the same time, the Kara-Kirghiz were renamed Kirghiz. The political dream of Ryskulov came to an end and he had to leave the region.

After his policy for Turkestan was thus rejected, he was sent to Mongolia as representative of the Komintern. He acted as a Soviet and a communist, though he was partially chosen because of his nomadic background. In order to defend the interests of the USSR, he fought for ideas close to his own, but adapted to the Mongol context. He aimed to appear as a good implementer of the Soviet policy. He partially succeeded in his mission and came back to Moscow in August 1925 after about 10 months.

At the beginning of 1926, as a Kazakh, he was again appointed to Kazakhstan, but this did not last long. His presence was rejected by almost all political actors. The central power decided to call him back to Moscow, where he became one of the vice-presidents of the Russian Federative Republic. From 1920 to 1936, Kazakhstan was an autonomous republic of the Russian Republic.

Through 1926 and 1927, a commission was working on the relationship between the central organs of the Russian Republic and the national autonomous republics and *oblast'*. Ryskulov was a member of this commission and endeavored to defend the interests of the national entities. He took advantage of a congress of the Soviets in Moscow to convene the delegates of the national autonomous entities for a special conference. He organized this conference in November 1926 with another Kazakh, Sandžar Asfendiarov, member of the national bureau of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR. The invitation was made in the name of "nationals". The term had been already used in 1922 by some non-Russian communists with the aim of unifying their claims against the centralization trend in the debate around the creation of the USSR. The attendance was not big and the proposals put forward at the conference were not taken into account. It was Ryskulov's last attempt to implement his own national policy.

Until his arrest in 1937, he remained in his position in Moscow and acted as a Soviet official. He was specifically assigned to issues related to Kazakhstan and Central Asia and felt concerned by the situation in Kazakhstan. Ryskulov became involved in the collectivization and sedentarization campaigns of nomads in the beginning of the 1930's. A terrible famine struck Kazakhstan and some Kazakh officials appealed to him as a Kazakh. He used his influence to diminish the collectivization policy. In the last years of his life, he identified himself as a Soviet Kazakh, following the double identity in use in the USSR: Soviet citizenship and the proper nationality.

The biography of Turar Ryskulov shows that national identity does not lie first in the belonging to a peculiar ethnic group and is not exclusive.

Identity is built according to context, network and political project and changes depending on these criteria. The creation of nations uses pre-existing or imagined designations and mixes them up. Ryskulov began his political activity with the idea of a common *Kirghiz* interest, then went through the Muslim and Turkic designations. Finally, he had to submit to a Soviet Kazakh one. He was one of those young non-Russian *intelligenty* who had no revolutionary experience before 1917 and who chose to rally to the Soviet regime with the intention of seizing the opportunity to play a leading role in the transformation of their society.

The Soviet central power implemented a framework for the new nations that responded to pragmatic motives in the first years of the Revolution, i.e. primarily the rallying of non-Russian populations to the Soviet regime. Bolshevik leaders wanted also to elaborate a policy toward these populations that would be compatible with Marxist principles. Nations were viewed as a temporary step towards the rise of communism. Effective power was supposedly given to the proletariat of each nation. The future establishment of a classless society would merge the nations into a single proletarian identity. The reality was quite the opposite; the gap between Russians and former *inorodcy* did not diminish, either towards the abolition of national differences or in the direction of well-balanced relationships.

Paradoxically, the Soviet national policy was consistent with some autonomous projects supported by the national movement in 1917 and particularly by the Kazakhs behind the Alash party. The frontiers of the Kazakh Soviet republic almost overlapped their claims. The nations created during these years are still standing today, although internal identity-related conflicts occur in almost all post-Soviet Central Asian republics. In the case of Kazakhstan, tribal kinships (*žuz* and tribes), obliterated in the Soviet period, have been reemerging since 1991. The differences in matters of identity have often been expressed in terms of regionalism (south, west, north and centre), but the Kazakh identity remains first. The fluidity of political identity we described in this article is based upon the multiplicity of co-existing designations. Some political designations are more prevalent at long-term history. In our case, nowadays Kazakhstan is in some way a continuation of the Kazakh khanate. But if Kazakh designation remained throughout centuries, it wasn't always the one to prevail for political identity.

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Tutar Ryskulov: kariera kazachskiego przywódcy rewolucyjnego w epoce tworzenia nowego państwa radzieckiego, 1917-1926

Artykuł dotyczy biografii młodego Kazacha urodzonego w ostatniej dekadzie XIX wieku, Turara Ryskulova (1894-1938); Ryskulov był kluczowym aktorem okresu rewolucyjnego w radzieckim Turkiestanie. Jego krótka biografia będzie się koncentrować wokół definicji narodu oraz tożsamości narodowej. W myśl przesłanki wyjściowej tożsamość kształtuje się zgodnie z interpretacją polityczną i jest wynikiem wyboru spośród wielu uprzednich lub wymyślonych kategorii. Tożsamość narodowa to konstrukcja płynna, skłaniająca się do jednej pośród możliwych kategorii w zależności od potrzeb grupy walczącej o władzę. Ryskulov w początkach kariery politycznej głosił ideę wspólnych interesów Kirgizów, następnie przychylił się do identyfikacji muzułmańskiej i turkmeńskiej. W końcu musiał się podporządkować radzieckiej tożsamości kazachskiej. W opozycji do spadku po rosyjskim kolonializmie projekt polityczny Ryskulova dążył do znalezienia rzeczywistej roli dla jego turkiestańskich rodaków w nowym, radzieckim reżimie. Dostrzegał ją w zjednoczonym Turkiestanie, ponad określeniami takimi jak Kazach, Uzbek, Turkmen czy Tadżyk.