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The Eastern Slavic Population of Central Asia After the Collapse of the USSR: Ethno-Demographic Processes

At the end of the Soviet period, Eastern Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians) made up over one fifth of the population of Central Asia. In the USSR, Eastern Slavs were the leading ethnic group, playing the key role in the multinational state. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Eastern Slavs, in essence, became an ethnic minority. The new ethno-political situation had a negative effect on their natural increase, which dropped below population replacement level; whereas emigration from Central Asia showed an abrupt rise. As a result, the absolute numbers of Eastern Slavs decreased by half, and their proportion in the population decreased by nearly two thirds. Before the collapse of the USSR, their share in this region was 1/4 to 1/5; by the mid-2010s it dropped to 1/12 to 1/13. In Kazakhstan, the decrease was much slower than in other Central Asian republics, so Kazakhstan has become the place where three quarters of Central Asian Eastern Slavs concentrate. This republic therefore has a good chance to remain the most “Slavic” in the region, whereas in other republics of Central Asia the future preservation of the Slavic population is problematic.

Keywords: Central Asia, Eastern Slavs, population dynamics, ethnic policy, depopulation, emigration.

Introduction

Eastern Slavs, the family of three ethnogenetically, linguistically, and culturally related peoples, were the second largest ethnic community of Central Asia* at the time of the collapse of the USSR, being numerically inferior only to the Turkic-speaking peoples of the region (Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Turkmen, Kyrgyzs, Karakalpaks, Tatars, Uyghurs) and considerably superior to all other ethnolinguistic groups, including the Iranian-speaking one (Tajiks, Baluch, Jamshidi). As they in essence

performed the functions of an “imperial” ethnic group, which consolidated the multinational state, Eastern Slavs learned the consequences of the collapse of the USSR at their own cost.

The Eastern Slavic population of Central Asia included several groups, differing both ethnically (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians) and with respect to the time of resettlement to this territory (old settlers, resettlers of the Soviet period). Almost all Ukrainians and Belarusians had a good command of the Russian language (Natsionalniy sostav..., 1991: 92–137), while the old inhabitants gradually developed a “unified type of culture”, which resulted in a certain convergence of national identities and the formation of a mixed Russian-Ukrainian dialect (Brusina, 2001: 16). The political, social, and economic conditions of the three Eastern-

*The historical and geographic notions “Central Asia” are used in this article as synonyms for designation of the region that includes present Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

Slavic peoples were similar. As a result of “localization” policy, they ceded most of the leading positions to representatives of the titular ethnic groups. At the same time, Slavs, and primarily Russians, made up the majority of people engaged in the industry and other technologically-difficult branches and fields; thus, they actually ensured functioning of the industrial sector of the economy (Brusina, 1996: 6–7). This contradiction led to rapid deterioration of the status of the Slavic population after the collapse of the USSR.

Size and composition of the Eastern Slavic population of Central Asia before the collapse of the USSR

According to the 1989 All-Union Census, the Central Asian region (which since the 1990s has been officially named Central Asia by its states) accommodated more than 10,992 thousand Eastern Slavs (Table 1). This was comparable with the population of Belarus (10.2 million), and was twice as great as the population of Tajikistan (5.1 million), two and a half times that of Kyrgyzstan (4.3 million), and three times that of Turkmenistan (3.5 million). The proportion of Russians among the Eastern Slavs was 86.6 %, that of Ukrainians 11.2 %, and that of Belarusians only 2.2 %.

The distribution of Slavs throughout the Central Asian region was uneven: 66.5 % in the Kazakh SSR, whose northern areas adjoined the zone of continuous settlement of Russians in the RSFSR, 16.7 % in the Uzbek SSR, 9.4 % in the Kirghiz SSR, 4 % in the Tajik SSR, and 3.4 % in the Turkmen SSR.

Differences between the Central Asian republics in terms of the absolute numbers of Slavic population were even more significant. In the Kazakh SSR, there were more than 7 million Eastern Slavs, which was comparable to the entire population of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan taken together; however, their numbers were 1/4 of this

in Uzbekistan, 1/7 in Kyrgyzstan, 1/17 in Tajikistan, and 1/19 in Turkmenistan (Table 1). Such a situation was typical not only for Russians, since the majority of Ukrainians and Belarusians also lived in Kazakhstan. After the collapse of the USSR, these differences became one of the factors in the demographic “stability” of the Slavic population; its rates of decline were lower in the countries where it was larger.

By the end of the Soviet period, Eastern Slavs made up almost a quarter of the population of Central Asia. Meanwhile, their proportion strongly fluctuated across the republics. In the Kazakh SSR, they made up almost half of the population, in Kyrgyzstan about a quarter, and in the Turkmen, Uzbek, and Tajik SSR only about a tenth (Table 1). As compared to their average number in the region, the share of Slavs among the Kazakhstan inhabitants was 2 times as great, corresponded to this level in Kyrgyzstan, and was more than 2 times lower in other republics. Uneven distribution is largely related to the specifics of climatic and natural conditions. In Kazakhstan and Northern Kyrgyzstan, there were a lot of lands suitable for farming, so the mainstream of peasant colonization was directed to these areas. In contrast, unoccupied lands were almost absent in Uzbekistan, Southern Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan, and the possibilities for establishing rural Slavic settlements there appeared only after construction of irrigation canals (Brusina, 2001: 25–26). Therefore, the Slavic colonization of Turkestan was predominantly urban. The inflow of Slavs to Kazakhstan was also related to mass evacuation during the Great Patriotic War (World War 2), to the Virgin Lands Campaign, and to construction of production facilities.

The role and place of Slavs in the ethnic structure of the Central Asian republics before the collapse of the USSR were substantially different. In Kazakhstan, where (according to 1989 census) Kazakhs amounted to 39.7 % of population and Eastern Slavs to 44.3 %, they

*Table 1. Size of the Eastern Slavic population of Central Asia
(according to the All-Union population census of 1989)**

SSR	Russians		Ukrainians		Belarusians		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Kazakh	6,227,549	37.8	896,240	5.4	182,601	1.1	7,306,390	44.3
Uzbek	1,653,478	8.3	153,197	0.8	29,427	0.2	1,836,102	9.3
Kirghiz	916,558	21.5	108,027	2.5	9,187	0.2	1,033,772	24.2
Tajik	388,481	7.6	41,375	0.8	7,247	0.1	437,103	8.5
Turkmen	333,892	9.5	35,578	1.0	9,220	0.3	378,690	10.8
<i>Total</i>	9,519,959	19.4	1,234,417	2.5	237,682	0.5	10,992,057	22.4

*Compiled after (Natsionalniy sostav..., 1991: 13–19; Vsesoyuznaya perepis naseleniya 1989 goda, (s.a.)).

actually were the ethnic majority, while in Kyrgyzstan they were the second largest ethnic community (24.2 %) after Kyrgyzs (52.4 %). In other Central Asian republics, the relation between the titular ethnic group and Eastern Slavs at the end of the 1980s was as follows: 71.4 and 9.3 % in Uzbekistan, 62.3 and 8.5 % in Tajikistan, and 72.0 and 10.8 % in Turkmenistan (*Natsionalnyi sostav...*, 1991: 13–19).

In general, before the collapse of the USSR, Eastern Slavs (11 million) living in all five Central Asian republics were outnumbered only by Uzbeks (16.7 million) and considerably exceeded all other titular ethnic groups, including Kazakhs (8.1 million), Tajiks (4.2 million), Turkmens (2.7 million), and Kyrgyzs (2.5 million)* (*Naseleniye SSSR*, 1990: 37). The majority of Slavs in the Central Asia lived in cities, though in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan the share of rural Slavic population was substantial as well (Fridman, Karazhas, 1994: 8). High urban saturation determined weaker “affection for the land” and adaptation to the economic crisis conditions of the 1990s as compared to the indigenous ethnic groups.

The collapse of the USSR and ethnic policy of the Central Asian states

The collapse of the Soviet Union was a shock for the Slavic population of Central Asia. “The loss of their dominant status upon formation of the CIS was absolutely unexpected for Russians in Uzbekistan; on December 8, 1991, they awoke in a foreign country”, says the Russian sociologist L. Drobzhieva. “It was a painful blow, since the Uzbekistan Declaration of Independence adopted quite recently, in the autumn of 1991, was not considered as withdrawing from the Union or as an event that affected anybody personally” (cited after (Kaiser, 1998: 66)). The unexpected transformation into a national minority took a heavy toll on the social and economic position of Slavs, and also on the attitude towards them of the titular population. The situation was aggravated by the fast and widespread growth of nationalist sentiments at the turn of the 1980s–1990s.

The privileged positions of titular ethnic groups were institutionalized in regulatory legal acts of many CIS countries adopted in the first years after the collapse of the USSR. For instance, the first Kazakhstan constitution adopted on January 28, 1993 stated that the Republic of Kazakhstan was a “form of statehood of the self-identified Kazakh nation” (*Konstitutsiya...*, (s.a.)). This definition was deleted from the 1995 Constitution; however, language about the “creation” of statehood on the “indigenously Kazakh land” appeared in its preamble

(*Konstitutsiya...*, 2001: 3). In Kyrgyzstan, the Land Act adopted in April 1991 established that “the land in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan is a property of Kyrgyzs”; while a “non-ethnic” variant of this wording stating that “the land belongs to the people of Kyrgyzstan” was forced through by president A. Akaev only after numerous attempts (Kaiser, 1998: 62).

The legal status of the Russian language became the key “indicator” of ethnic policy. Playing the *de facto* role of the state language, Russian did not, in practice, have any legal status up to the collapse of the USSR. The law “On Languages of the USSR peoples” adopted in April 1990, which assigned the status of official and bridge language to the Russian language, could not yet have a noticeable influence on the ethno-political situation. In 1989–1990, all the Central Asian republics passed official languages acts, according to which the languages of the titular ethnic groups became official. In the first half of the 1990s, this situation was institutionalized in the new constitutions. In most of them, the status of the Russian language was not stipulated. The sole exception was Tajikistan. Being in need of support from Moscow in its struggle against opposition, it included into a 1994 Constitution a clause according to which the Russian language was the bridge language (Shustov, 2016: 154–155).

“The language issue” became one of the key reasons for mass emigration of non-indigenous ethnic groups, which was especially painful for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where the percentage of Eastern Slavic population was highest in the region. From the middle of the 1990s to the beginning of the 2000s, both republics had to assign the Russian language an official status. According to the new constitution of Kazakhstan adopted in August 1995, Russian could be used along with the Kazakh language in the work of government authorities and local government bodies. In July 1997, the Law “On Languages” was adopted, which confirmed the equitable use of the Russian and Kazakh languages in all areas of social life (*Ibid.*: 155).

In May 2001, the Law “On the official language of the Kyrgyz Republic” was adopted, which stated that the Russian language could be used along with the Kyrgyz language in activities of the government authorities, in documents of all types, in the educational system, and other areas. In February 2003, the regulation on the official status of the Russian language was included in the new edition of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (*Ibid.*: 156–157). Such “legalization” of the Russian language enabled both republics to reduce the emigration of Slavs, which reached its maximum level in the first half of the 2000s. However, as early as the second half of this decade, an increase could be observed in their outflow, which was caused by instability of domestic policy in the Kyrgyz Republic and by gradual deterioration of situation in Kazakhstan.

*The sizes of the titular ethnic groups throughout the entire territory of the USSR are given.

Sovereignization of the former Soviet republics was accompanied by a dramatic drop in the representation of Slavs in the government authorities, which was largely related to dominance of clannish family and territorial neighborhood ties in the local policy. For instance, according to data from O. Ryabchenko, the Deputy Minister of Information of Kazakhstan, presented in his Report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination of August 14, 2007, among public employees, Kazakhs amounted to 79 %, Russians to 14.5 %, and Ukrainians to 0.9 % (Plotnikova, 2014). Meanwhile, according to the 2009 Census, 63.1 % of the population fell to the share of Kazakhs, 23.7 % to the share of Russians, and 2.1 % to the share of Ukrainians (Natsionalny sostav..., 2010: 4–5); i.e. the proportion of Slavs in civilian service was 1.7 times smaller, and the proportion of Kazakhs 1.3 times greater than that in the make-up of the population. In the estimation of the Kazakhstan political analyst N. Mustafaev, representatives of the titular ethnic group occupied 95 % of all official positions (2004).

In Kyrgyzstan, based on the results of parliamentary elections in 1995, Russians and Ukrainians won only six of 105 seats in the Supreme Soviet, which amounted to 5.7 %, i.e. only a quarter of their share among the inhabitants of the republic (24 %). Over time, the situation became even worse. In 2005, only one Russian was among the 75 deputies elected to the parliament, i.e. 1.3 %, which was only a sixth of the proportion of the Russian population (7.8 %). The situation slightly improved in 2007 when, in December elections, Russians won seven of 85 seats (8.2 %) in the Supreme Soviet. However, this was due to changes in the electoral legislation, and the introduction of elections by party lists, in which the political parties were obliged to include at least 15 % candidates of non-titular nations (Shustov, 2016: 67).

The new ethno-political situation that was formed in the Central Asian states after the collapse of the USSR had an extremely negative effect on the natural and mechanical movement of the Eastern Slavic population, having caused its mass outflow out of the region, abrupt fall in the birth rate, and consequent progressive depopulation. According to the well-known US researcher M.B. Alcott, “Russians in Central Asia did not consider themselves to be a minority... because they made up the majority in the USSR as a whole. However, after the collapse of the USSR, they had to put up with an unfamiliar status of minority. Many of them could not reconcile themselves to it, and preferred migration to Russia” (2001: 19).

“Crisis” depopulation: the Eastern Slavic population in the 1990s

The demographic dynamics of the Slavic population in the region after the collapse of the USSR were determined by two factors: a fast, and in the first half of the 1990s, drastic growth of emigration, and also reduction in the level of natural increase. In the 1989–1999, three fourths of the net emigration (the difference between the number of emigrants and immigrants) from Central Asia to Russia was composed of Slavs, of which more than two thirds were Russians. In 1991–1999, 3 million Russians, 243 thousand Ukrainians, and 30.4 thousand Belarusians emigrated from this region to the Russian Federation (Demograficheskiy ezhegodnik..., 1994: 400–401; 2000: 354–357). Subsequently, emigration of Slavs continued, though at lower rates.

In the beginning of the 1990s, the fertility among Slavs decreased below population replacement level. While the indigenous population maintained high rates of natural increase, the non-indigenous people experienced depopulation caused by a sharp decrease in birthrate and a rise in mortality. In Tajikistan, for instance, in 1995, the birth rate amounted to 29.8 ‰ among Tajiks, 30.3 ‰ among Uzbeks, and 6.2 ‰ among Russians, while mortality was 5.3, 5.4, and 16 ‰, respectively. Thus, the fertility of Russians was 4.8 times lower, and the mortality 3 times higher than of the “indigenous” peoples of the republic. In Kyrgyzstan, the natural increase during the same year amounted to 24.2 ‰ among Kyrgyzs (fertility 30.6 ‰, mortality 6.4 ‰), to 26.1 ‰ (32.1 ‰ and 6.0 ‰) among Uzbeks, and to 5.4 ‰ (9.2 ‰ and 14.6 ‰) among Russians (Shustov, 2016: 89). The high mortality in the Russian population, younger generations of which have emigrated, is largely a consequence of its “older” age structure.

Affected by mass emigration and by a decline in natural increase, the population size of Slavic ethnic groups started to reduce rapidly, while the size of indigenous population continued growing. Meanwhile, the rates of demographic decline in Eastern Slavs were different over the quarter-century that has passed since the collapse of the USSR. During the first post-Soviet decade, when the shock caused by the collapse had not yet disappeared, the numbers reduced much faster. In the 2000s to the middle of the 2010s, when the social, political, and economic situation in most countries of the region had stabilized to a greater or lesser extent, the rate of decline diminished considerably. This tendency was especially noticeable in Kazakhstan, where, owing to the greater number of Slavs, a high level of russification of the local population, and the proximity to Russia, the Slavic population felt more confident.

Over the period of 1989 to the end of the 1990s, the number of Eastern Slavs who lived in five Central Asian republics was reduced almost by one third (31.6 %). While in 1989 they numbered nearly 11 million, at the turn of the 1990s–2000s the figure was only 7.5 million (Table 2). Moreover, these data do not take into account the decline in the Slavic population of Turkmenistan in the second half of the 1990s, which is not disclosed in the official statistics. The number of Slavs (3.3 million) who left the region during a decade was comparable to the population of Turkmenistan (3.5 million) recorded by the 1989 census. Most of them migrated to Russia and the Ukraine, and only some of them left for Belarus.

Tajikistan, whence most Slavs fled because of the civil war that started right after the collapse of the USSR, had a lead in the rates of demographic decline in the Slavic population. In the 1989–2000, their numbers in the republic decreased by a factor of 6, and their proportion by a factor of 7 (Table 2). Kyrgyzstan, which unlike Tajikistan did not experience military political crises during this period, took second place in the decline of Eastern Slavs. Therefore, the Slavic population in its territory during the period from 1989 to 1999 sank less drastically, by 36.5 %. However, its proportion decreased by nearly half (Table 2) owing to a continuing increase in population of the indigenous ethnic groups.

In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (two leading countries of the region in terms of economy and population size), the rates of demographic decline in Slavs were comparable. In Kazakhstan, as indicated by the returns of the first national census of 1999, the size of the three Eastern Slavic ethnic groups dropped by 29.7 % (Table 2). In Uzbekistan, where general censuses of population were not taken after achieving independence, the number of Eastern Slavs according to the current statistics (*Etnicheskiy atlas...*, 2002: 15–254) had decreased by the end of 1990s by 0.5 million people, or by 27.9 % (Table 2). The less precipitous decline of Slavs in these republics was explained mainly by a more stable political and economic situation.

Turkmenistan, after the collapse of the USSR, decided to adopt the methodology of Turkey, where censuses were carried out quinquennially. However, only one census was taken (1995), whose results showed that the numbers of the Slavic population decreased by only 14.1 % (Table 2). If such rates of decline were maintained during the following four years, the number of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians would be 290 thousand people by the end of the 1990s. Turkmenistan would be the last on this indicator (–23.4 %) in the region, being exceeded not only by Tajikistan (–83.4 %) and Kyrgyzstan (–36.5 %), but also by Kazakhstan (–29.7 %) and Uzbekistan (–27.9 %). However, because of the absence of official statistics on ethnicity, the data needed to draw the final conclusion are insufficient so far.

The general tendency in all states of the region was for higher rates of decline in Ukrainians and Belarusians as compared to Russians. While the overall number of the three Eastern Slavic peoples in the Central Asia reduced by 31.6 % in the 1990s, the number of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians fell by 30.1 %, 40.9 %, and 41.3 %, respectively. During the same period, the number of Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians in Uzbekistan decreased by 27.5 %, 31.6 %, and 30.7 %; in Kazakhstan their decline amounted to 28.1 %, 39.0 %, and 38.7 %; in Kyrgyzstan to 34.2 %, 53.3 %, and 65.1 %; and in Turkmenistan (1989–1995) to 10.5 %, 35.2 %, and 60.5 %. The differences in the rates of depopulation in the three Slavic peoples were noticeable even in Tajikistan (82.5 %, 90.8 %, and 93.6 %), where the “natural” migration processes were deformed by the civil war.

Demographic dynamics of the Slavic population in the 2000s to the middle of the 2010s

In the 2000s, a demographic decline in the Slavic population in the region decreased noticeably. The first wave of emigration caused by the collapse of the USSR and by sovereignization of the former union republics has already passed. The concerns about the possible accession of Islamists or nationalist fringes to power, which were widespread in the beginning of the 1990s, were not borne out either. The majority of countries in the region also managed to avoid large military and political crises, such as the civil war in Tajikistan. An exception was Kyrgyzstan, which went through two *coups d'état* (2005 and 2010) and a large-scale ethnic conflict in the southern areas of the Republic (June 2010) during that period.

As compared to the previous decade, the absolute decline in the Eastern Slavic population of Central Asia in the 2000s decreased nearly twofold (1.8 against 3.5 million people). At the same time, owing to a dramatic reduction in the demographic “base” in the prior period, the relative decline proved to be less significant. During the first post-Soviet decade, this amounted to 31.6 %; but during the second it reached only 23.8 %. Over this time, the proportion of Slavs among the inhabitants of the region decreased from 13.7 % to 9.3 %. At the turn of the 2000s and 2010s, their share in Central Asia was 1/7, while in ten years it dropped to 1/11.

In the 2000s, the rates of reduction in the Slavic population of Kazakhstan were the lowest. The population's size dropped by 18.4 %, and its proportion by 8 % (Table 2). Emigration of Slavs reduced with the successful development of the economy, a higher quality of living as compared to other republics, a stable political situation, and a relatively “soft” national and language policy. After its dramatic increase in the early 1990s, when the number of those leaving the country was comparable

Table 2. Dynamics of the size and proportion of Eastern Slavs in 1989–2015*¹⁾

Republic	Year	Total		Including							
				Russians		Ukrainians		Belarusians		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Kazakhstan	1989	16,464,464	100	6,227,549	37.8	896,240	5.4	182,601	1.1	7,306,390	44.3
	1999	14,981,281	100	4,480,675	29.9	547,065	3.7	111,924	0.7	5,139,664	34.3
	2009	16,009,597	100	3,793,764	23.7	333,031	2.1	66,476	0.4	4,193,271	26.2
	2015	17,415,715	100	3,666,401	21.1	295,420	1.7	59,069	0.3	4,020,890	23.1
Kyrgyzstan	1989	4,257,755	100	916,558	21.5	108,027	2.5	9187	0.2	1,033,772	24.2
	1999	4,822,938	100	603,201	12.5	50,442	1.0	3208	0.1	656,851	13.6
	2009	5,362,793	100	419,583	7.8	21,924	0.4	1394	0	442,901	8.3
	2015	5,895,062	100	364,571	6.2	13,501	0.2	978	0	379,050	6.4
Tajikistan	1989	5,092,603	100	388,481	7.6	41,375	0.8	7247	0.1	437,103	8.5
	2000	6,127,493	100	68,171	1.1	3787	0.1	464	0	72,422	1.2
	2010	7,564,502	100	34,838	0.5	1090	0	104	0	36,032	0.5
	2015	8,449,500	100	14,838* ²⁾	0.2	...	...	...	...	...	...
Uzbekistan	1989	19,810,077	100	1,653,478	8.3	153,197	0.8	29,427	0.2	1,836,102	9.3
	2000	24,487,700	100	1,199,015	4.9	104,720	0.4	20,397	0.1	1,324,132	5.4
	2006	2,612,700	100	952,000	3.4	...	...	...	...	...	...
	2013	31,022,500	100	809,530	2.6	...	...	...	...	...	...
Turkmenistan	1989	3,522,717	100	333,892	9.5	35,578	1.0	9220	0.3	378,690	10.8
	1995	4,437,570	100	298,751	6.7	23,064	0.5	3640	0.1	325,455	7.3
	2012	4,751,120	100	104,525* ³⁾	2.2* ²⁾
	2015* ⁴⁾	5,374,000	100	100,000	1.9* ²⁾
Total	1989	49,147,616	100	9,519,958	19.4	1,234,417	2.5	237,682	0.5	10,992,057	22.4
	1999/2000	54,856,982	100	6,649,813	12.2	729,078	1.3	139,633	0.3	7,518,524	13.7
	2009/2010	61,328,500* ⁵⁾	100	5,442,492	8.9	...	...	...	...	5,728,729	9.3
	2015	68,156,777	100	4,955,340	7.3	...	...	...	...	5,324,308* ⁶⁾	7.8

*¹⁾Compiled after (Natsionalniy sostav..., 2010: 4–9; Natsionalniy sostav..., 2012: 7–11; Natsionalniy sostav..., (s.a.); Perepis naseleniya..., 1996: 67; Tsiryapkina, 2013: 92; 2015: 18; Chislennost naseleniya Respubliki Kazakhstan..., (s.a.); Chislennost postoyannogo naseleniya Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki..., (s.a.); Rezultaty..., 2015; World Population Prospects..., 2015: 17).

*²⁾Estimation is based on the demographic dynamics of Russians over the previous decade.

*³⁾The data have been obtained on the basis of information about the ethnic structure of population, presented by the Turkmenian delegation at the meeting of the UN Human Rights Committee in January 2015, and about the population size in 2012, according to the Internet-resource *Chronicles of Turkmenistan*.

*⁴⁾The population size is given after: (World Population Prospects..., 2015: 17), the data on the number of Russians are according to expert estimations.

*⁵⁾According to the data provided by the CIS Statistics Committee regarding the annual average population size of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan for 2009, and on the population size of Turkmenistan for 2012.

*⁶⁾Without regard to the number of Ukrainians and Belarusians in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and using expert estimations on the overall size of “Russian-speaking” population in Turkmenistan.

with the population of some provinces, the authorities had to moderate their course towards the creation of the Kazakh national state, by withdrawing, in particular, from accelerated introduction of the titular language into all spheres of life.

The rates of decline in Eastern Slavs in the Kyrgyz Republic were nearly twice as high (–32.6 %). While

Kazakhstan avoided large-scale disturbances, Kyrgyzstan could not boast of stability. In 1999–2000, it experienced the “Batken war”, i.e. a series of armed clashes between detachments of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Kyrgyz security forces in the Batken Region. In March 2005 and April 2010, *coups d'état*, accompanied by outrages and civil unrest, occurred

in the Republic. In the estimation of R.I. Otunbayeva, the former President of the Kyrgyz Republic, violent clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyzs in the south of the country in June 2010 caused fatalities of up to 2 thousand people (*Kommersant*, June 18, 2010). All these conflicts negatively affected the general state of the Slavs. As a result, their number decreased by 214 thousand people, and their proportion by 5.3 % (Table 2).

Tajikistan led in the rates of depopulation of Slavs, whose number in this republic after the civil war proved to be the lowest in the region; though before the collapse of the USSR this place belonged to Turkmenistan. In the 2000s, the number of Eastern Slavs was reduced by half (Table 2). According to the 2009 Census, they amounted only to 0.5 % of the republic's population. Not counting the 201st military base and other Russian military facilities, the personnel of which do not belong in the country's population figures as given by the statistical data, it can be inferred that the Slavic community of Tajikistan is close to total disappearance. Most remaining Slavs are elderly and cannot leave for Russia, while their number is decreasing rapidly through natural attrition.

In Uzbekistan, the number of Russians in 2000 to 2006 was reduced by 20.6 %, and by the beginning of 2013 by 15 % more (Table 2). In total, during 2000–2013, their number reduced by one third (32.5 %), and their percentage by 2.3 % (Table 2). Since by 2000 Russians made up more than 90 % of Eastern Slavs who lived in Uzbekistan, it can be inferred that the rates of their depopulation were higher than those in Kazakhstan, somewhat lower than in Kyrgyzstan, and considerably lower than in Tajikistan. Meanwhile, Uzbekistan still took the second place in the absolute number of Slavs in the region, being inferior only to Kazakhstan and superior to all other republics of Central Asia taken together.

Estimation of the ethnodemographic situation in Turkmenistan is the most problematic. According to the opposition Web-resource *Chronicles of Turkmenistan*, the 2012 Census recorded 5.1 % of Russians in the country (*Rezultaty...*, 2015), i.e. there must be ca 242.3 thousand Russians, with a total population size of 4751.1 thousand. Meanwhile, in February 2001, President S. Niyazov stated that Russians made up only 2 % of the people of Turkmenistan (*Saparmurat Niyazov...*, 2001). However, owing to distortions of demographic statistics (*Zhukov, Reznikova*, 2001: 32–40), it is impossible to determine the actual number of Slavs during this period.

In January 2015, at the meeting of the UN Human Rights Committee, the Turkmenian delegation reported that Russians made up about 2.2 % of the country's population (*Rezultaty...*, 2015). Judging by the data of the *Chronicles of Turkmenistan* on the total population size, the number of Russians must be about 104.5 thousand. In

general, this figure corresponds to other expert estimates (*Fomin*, 2003; *Rossiyskiye sootchestvenniki...*, 2009), according to which approximately 100–120 thousand “Russian-speaking” people remained in the republic by the beginning of the 21st century. Thus, Turkmenistan will be second to last in the number of Slavs in the region, giving place only to Tajikistan.

Conclusions

The collapse of the USSR has led to accelerated depopulation of the Eastern Slavic population of Central Asia. In 1989, Slavs made up 22.4 % of the region's population; but by the end of the 1990s, owing to drastic emigration, their proportion had decreased by more than 1.5 times (to 13.7 %), and by the end of the 2000s more than twice (to 9.3 %, without regard to Ukrainians and Belarusians in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan). By 2015, the share of Russians in the Central Asian population had dropped by 2.5 times (from 19.4 % to 7.3 %), and that of Ukrainians and Belarusians, whose rates of decline were considerably higher, by more than three times (from 3 % to less than 1 %). In general, by 2015, Eastern Slavs amounted to about 7.8 % of the Central Asian region inhabitants, while their number dropped from 11 to 5.3–5.4 million people.

In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the numbers of Slavic population decreased more slowly than in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which were economically weaker and more unstable in their social and military-political situation. By the turn of the 2000s and 2010s, the number of Slavs was reduced by 42.6 % in Kazakhstan, and by 48.2 % in Uzbekistan (1989–2006, without data on the number of Ukrainians and Belarusians for 2006), while the decreases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan came to 57.2 % and 91.8 %, respectively. A special place is occupied by Turkmenistan, where reliable ethnodemographic statistics data are (so far) absent. According to experts, the number of Eastern Slavs in the republic decreased by more than two thirds over this time.

As a result of the uneven depopulation of Slavs in the countries of the region, in the quarter of a century after the collapse of the USSR, almost all of these proved to be concentrated in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. In Kazakhstan alone, by 2015, there lived three quarters of the total Russian population of the region.

Despite the similarity in their political, economic, and cultural conditions, the numbers of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian populations decreased at different rates. The share of Russians in the Central Asian region in 1989–1999 became smaller by 30.1 %, whereas that of Ukrainians and Belarusians decreased by 40.9 % and 41.3 %. In Kazakhstan, these figures over the 1989–2015 period amounted to 41.1 %, 67.0 %, and 67.6 %, respectively.

while in Kyrgyzstan to 60.2 %, 87.5 %, and 89.4 %, respectively. In general, the processes of depopulation among Ukrainians and Belarusians proceeded by 1.5 times faster as compared to Russians, which was caused by their active ethnic assimilation by the Russians.

The prospects of the Slavic population in Central Asia will depend largely on development of the domestic political situation in the countries of the region. The “Slavic issue” in Tajikistan, where the non-indigenous ethnic groups almost disappeared, was solved by their nearly complete emigration. Turkmenistan, being second in the rate of reduction in the number of Slavs, may soon find itself in a similar situation. A considerable outflow of the non-indigenous peoples from Kyrgyzstan continues, owing to the unstable political and economic situation. Depopulation of the Slavic people in Uzbekistan proceeded much more slowly than in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan, but somewhat faster than in Kazakhstan. However, taking into account its weak “rootedness” in the republic territory, the chances for preservation of a rather large Slavic community in Uzbekistan are small.

At the moment, the prospects for the Eastern Slavic population in Kazakhstan seem most favorable. In recent years, a certain stabilization of its size at the level of about 4 million people has been observed. During 2011–2015, “net” annual average emigration from Kazakhstan to Russia was 36.5 thousand people (Mezhdunarodnaya migratsiya, (s.a.)), which seems a relatively small figure as compared to tremendous migratory outflow of the 1990s. If a stable social, political, and economic situation is preserved, Kazakhstan will remain the most “Slavic” state of the Central Asian region. However, this does not rule out an increase in emigration of Slavs in the event of negative changes in internal policy, mass unrests, or military conflicts.

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