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# Diaspora and its role in the European cultural diplomacy with Kazakhstan

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## Introduction

The bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and the nine European Union countries examined in this policy brief – Bulgaria, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland and Romania – are characterised by the existence of large ethnic communities or "beached diasporas". Many of these peoples came to be living in Kazakhstan as a result of Stalin's expatriation policy in the 1930s-40s. Others came later as 'waves of settlers and migrant workers, mainly from the European parts of the former USSR, had transformed Kazakhstan into the most "international" of all the Soviet republics in the post-World War II period'. Yet, no matter how long they live in the host land, they self-identify with their own country of origin. They are, by Shain's definition, diasporas: 'geographically outside the state, but identity-wise perceived (by themselves, the homeland, or others) as "inside the people" – [they] attach great importance to kinship identity'.<sup>3</sup>

Before the independence of Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian countries, direct contact between European countries and their ethnic communities was relatively minimal and, for the most part, discouraged. Independence and the change in the facility with which populations in different countries can communicate with each other have greatly transformed the nature of contact between member states and their diasporas in Kazakhstan and Central Asia generally.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Laitin, David D. 1995. "Identity in Formation: The Russian-speaking Nationality in the Post-Soviet Diaspora." *Archives Européenes de Sociologie*, 36 (2): 281–316. Cohen's typology suggests the term "victim diasporas" to cover much of the same experience (Cohen, Robin. 1997. *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*. London: UCL Press)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Bhavna, Dave. 2004. "Entitlement through numbers: nationality and language categories in the first post-Soviet census of Kazakhstan." *Nations and Nationalism*, 10 (4): 440.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Shain, Yossi. 2007. *Kinship and Diasporas in International Affairs*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 128.

As EU members, the nine states focused on are all equally open to trade with Kazakhstan and exercise similar financial, labour and tax regulation. Their diaspora communities – those that are citizens of Kazakhstan because of above mentioned historical circumstances – all enjoy equal rights under the Kazakhstan constitution though not all European diasporas have exercised them. All diasporas have equal rights to preserve and promote their language, culture and traditions (see Table 1: the European diasporas' dynamic in Kazakhstan and Table 2: European diasporas in Kazakhstan and their cultural capital).

## **Research Parameters**

In this policy brief, we discuss the European diasporas living in Kazakhstan in the context of European cultural diplomacy. The brief analyses their role and that of various specialised ethnic-cultural agencies in EU cultural diplomacy. It asks how the promotion of culture via diasporas can assist the EU in its cultural diplomacy. Finally, the brief evaluates the approaches of the EU member-states to their diasporas in creating interstate understanding and exchanging values.

Table 1: European diasporas' dynamic in Kazakhstan. Source: National census of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The number of Romanian\* and Finn\*\* populations is given without taking into account closely-related ethnicities.

	1970	1979	1989	1999	2009
Germans	857777	900343	946967	353462	178409
Polish	61385	61106	59321	47302	34057
Greeks	51330	50125	46448	12705	8846
Lithuanians	14194	10964	10650	7070	4925
Bulgarians	10420	10064	10222	6916	4523
Estonians	4083	3505	3328	1819	986
Romanians*	872	846	940	594	421
Finns**	1259	1074	987	547	373
Hungarians	832	595	674	440	357

While the number of countries covered

is relatively small, the analysis here draws on evidence of actual policy implementation rather than just official data. It also includes the activities of various national agencies.

The research draws on responses to a questionnaire to the relevant embassies, semi-structured interviews with representatives of the diaspora communities as well as with current and former diplomats. The interviews were conducted between August and October 2016. Both members of the diasporas and diplomats were asked about the importance of engaging diasporas for the homeland's cultural diplomacy and projecting their country abroad. Respondents were invited to assess the interest of homeland governments and cultural institutions in working with diasporas, the level of homeland engagement in cultural activities locally and the impact local activities on the image of their country in Kazakhstan. Visits were made to thirteen ethnic-cultural centres in Karaganda, Pavlodar and Almaty – cities with compact diaspora populations, established by the government of Kazakhstan to support ethnic identities. In addition, an analysis of relevant social media (Facebook pages, websites, YouTube channels of cultural centres) and newspaper output (country-wide *The Astana Times, Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, Dostyk*) between April 2015 and July 2016 was undertaken.

Following the usage in diaspora literature, the term "host land" is applied to the country of residence and "homeland" to the place of origin.

To aid comparisons of state-diaspora relations, a typology from the perspective of a diaspora as a network of communication and facilitator of cultural diplomacy is advanced drawing on the level of formalisation of the state (homeland) relations with diasporas, and on the range of the "experience"

of the diasporic community. The relations between diaspora and homeland are explored from a broad range of immediate interactions, including the promotion of culture (music, language acquisition, film, festivals etc.), the facilitation of business opportunities, the encouragement of touristic exchange and the implementation of special cultural-educational programmes. The level of engagement ranged from highly formalised, in which quasi-state entities play an active role, to entirely informal, based on non-programmatic exchanges between civil society in the homeland and host country.

The four categories of the diasporic networks are:

- Symbolic: covers diaspora that may have a high level of institutional recognition in terms
  of legal status or formal entitlement but whose advantages are not backed up by actual
  interaction. The potential for cultural diplomatic advantage with groups in this category
  is not realised in part because the homeland agencies do not act.
- 2) Nominal: refers to members of ethnic groups for whom no official provision is made and whose existence is effectively "formal" or even forgotten by the institutions. As part of a network of communication and facilitator of cultural diplomacy, this group is completely underutilised.
- 3) *Expressive*: if diaspora is with broad lived experience and active in promoting of its culture within host state, but homeland's governmental and non-governmental institutions responsible for their diaspora abroad fail in providing various forms of possible cooperation, the level of diaspora interaction is merely "expressive"
- 4) **Valued**: it finds expression not only in formal arrangements but in a range of cultural events and enterprises that have regular meaning and value for all involved. In the valued cases, there is a 'recognition that diasporas have an important place in the economic and political collaboration between countries of settlement and origin' (Sinatti and Horst 2015, 138) and this is reflected in proactivity.

Table 2: European diasporas in Kazakhstan and their cultural capital

Diaspora	Concentration (in Kazakhstan)	Cultural capital
Greek	Cities of Kyzylorda and Pavlodar, South Kazakhstan and Dzhambyl oblast	<ul> <li>17 centres united by "Filiya" Greek Association in Kazakhstan</li> <li>Before the crisis in Greece, the Association was supported with books &amp; finances from Greece, was a period when the community published their own newspaper.</li> <li>Dance group, music ensemble</li> </ul>
German	Karaganda, Akmola, Pavlodar & Kostanai; until recently many German villages.	<ul> <li>DAAD; GIZ; Goethe-Institut.</li> <li>More than 20 cultural centres united by "Wiedergeburt" (Revival), the public association of Germans in Kazakhstan</li> <li>German-language newspaper Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung</li> <li>German Drama theatre</li> <li>Various annual festivals</li> <li>"German House" opened with the support of Govt. of Germany &amp; Kz in 1994. Meeting place for intellectuals, businessmen, members of the Brussels club, politicians, trade unions etc.</li> <li>http://www.wiedergeburt.kz/</li> </ul>

		<ul><li>YouTube: daz.asia</li><li>https://www.facebook.com/daz.asia/</li></ul>
Bulgarian	Razumovka & Andriyanovka in today's Pavlodar region & Bolgarka in today's Aktobe region.	<ul> <li>Zlata Bulgarian Ethno-Cultural Association of Astana, 5 cultural centres</li> <li>Tsvetanka children's vocal band; Zlata adult band, Izvor dance group</li> </ul>
Polish	North Kazakhstan, Karaganda & Pavlodar regions & cities of Astana & Almaty.	<ul> <li>80% of priests are from Poland</li> <li>"Głos Polski" journal, Polish Union (1992)</li> <li>Annual poetry competition "Kresy" in Pavlodar</li> <li>Annual music festival "Singing Polonia."</li> </ul>
Finnish (inkerinsuomalaiset)	Pavlodar, Almaty	<ul> <li>"Suomi" ethnocultural centre (2002, Almaty)</li> <li>2016, new Finnish centre in Pavlodar with the focus on promoting language and culture</li> </ul>
Hungarian	Almaty	<ul><li>Hungarian Cultural Centre, Almaty (1995)</li><li>Spassk Memorial in Karaganda oblast to Hungarians</li></ul>
Lithuanian	Karaganda	<ul> <li>"Lituanica" public association</li> <li>Meetings with Lithuania's political leaders</li> <li>Monument to Lithuanians, Steplag Gulag</li> </ul>
Romanian	2 villages in Aktobe: Bessarabka and Moldovanka	<ul> <li>Dacia cultural society</li> <li>Memorial of Spassk, Karaganda oblast</li> <li>Meetings with Romanian</li> <li>Karaganda State University: classes on culture and language</li> <li>YouTube channel: dacia.kz</li> </ul>
Estonian	North Kazakhstan, Marievka village	There were several attempts to set up a cultural centre, however, lack of institutional support determined only ad hoc meetings of community members.

# **Evidence and Analysis**

'German, Lithuanian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Hungarian diasporas are the examples
of "valued" communities with broad lived experience and being highly institutionalised
(see Figure 1).

Probably, *the German diaspora* is the model or ideal type of diaspora functioning successfully as a network of communication for cultural diplomacy. Partially, it is explained by the fact that Germans are the biggest European diaspora in Kazakhstan, constituting 1.1% of the whole population. After Kazakhstan gained its independence, Germany applauded the Kazakh government's "Complex Programme of Ethnic Revival of Germans Living in the Republic of Kazakhstan". Also, as an initial step to implement the programme, the Association of Germans and the Kazakh-German intergovernmental commission were established.

In order 'to forestall any repeat of the migration of ethnic Germans and others from Kazakhstan', Germany creates many opportunities for Germans in Kazakhstan to feel support from their homeland. More than 20 branches of the ethnocultural association *Wiedergeburt* (Revival) have been established throughout Kazakhstan; also the functioning of *the Goethe Institut, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD*), *the Kazakhstan-Germany Institute, a German drama theatre and radio station*, as well as a German language newspaper, *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, are supported and facilitated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany, the Federal Ministry of the Interior, the Federal Office of Administration and by the German Technical Cooperation Agency in Almaty. The latter coordinates the implementation of the various German programmes in Kazakhstan.<sup>5</sup>

The German diaspora in Kazakhstan displays a vibrant and organised lived experience, and the institutional supports available are wide-ranging and highly impactful. *The German community is very active in discussions on developing legislation protecting national minorities' rights (1998); national policy; Kazakh-German cultural and economic relations and humanitarian cooperation; the adoption of a European model of social support; and cultural heritage in Kazakhstan.* Taking into account the well-organised structure of the community, its close relations with the homeland, active position of the diaspora in the social life of the host land and the economic and political weight of Germany, the German diasporic community could be a significant player not only in Kazakhstan, but in Central Asia as well.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, no less valued, in spite of the lack of specialised agreements between the countries, are the *diasporas from Lithuania, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary*. Each makes a significant contribution to bilateral relations alongside preserving and promoting ethnic culture. For example, during her official visit, the President Dalia Grybauskaitė made it clear that Lithuanians in Kazakhstan are also part of Lithuania: 'Let's remain Lithuanians wherever we are. Show respect for the country you live in but don't forget your Motherland'.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Brown, Andrew J. 2005. "The Germans of Germany and the Germans of Kazakhstan: A Eurasian Volk in the Twilight of Diaspora." *Europe-Asia Studies*, 57 (4): 631.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Sheryazdanova, K. and D. Smagulova. 2012. "Migration and Diaspora Aspects of the Kazakh-German Relations." *Eurasian Economic Integration*, 1 (14).

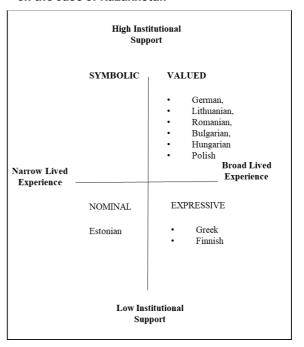
<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Brown. 2005, p. 625.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Grybauskaitė, Dalia. 2011. Speech quoted in "Perpetuation of the memory of Lithuanian exiles in Kazakhstan." Accessed 7 October 2016. <a href="https://www.lrp.lt/en/press-centre/press-releases/12277">https://www.lrp.lt/en/press-centre/press-releases/12277</a>

The ethnocultural centres act as "cultural ambassadors", promoting national and European values through music, dance, theatre performances, exhibitions and public lectures. They regularly involve the wider community beyond the diasporas. The German, Lithuanian, Bulgarian and Romanian diasporas cooperate with schools and universities on the promotion of language, literature and culture. Their centres also facilitate engagement between embassies and diaspora communities to

promote cultural, educational and business projects and partnerships. Further, the centres are the focus of events that unite the whole diaspora, including international events that link communities across the globe. For instance, the Congress of Romanians Everywhere, the World Congress of Pontian Greeks, the Congress of the Lithuanian World Community and similar organisations work through the ethnic community centres. The attention the diasporas and corresponding ethnic centres receives from their Governments is explained by national cultural diplomacy shift toward 'second generation known as active creation, which encompasses non-state actors in order to strengthen it [cultural diplomacy] not only with their closer or wider neighbours, but also to promote it in overseas countries', where 'national diaspora (associations) serve as the pull factor for the materialisation of Slavic EU Member States' cultural diplomacy'.8

Figure 1: Networks of communication - based on the case of Kazakhstan



In the case study drawn on here, the size of the diaspora was not a good predictor of their place in the typology. Currently, there are around *400 Hungarians scattered all over Kazakhstan*, among them 50 live in Almaty, where the ethnocultural centre was set up in 1996 'to further the revival and development of Hungarian national culture, to preserve customs and practices of Hungarian people'. Notwithstanding their small number, the centre has close contacts with senior officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the embassy. It also hosted several meetings with the President of Hungary. The centre is active in disseminating knowledge about Hungarian culture and achievements on the various media platforms of Kazakhstan. As with others, the Hungarian centre provides cultural and educational opportunities for Kazakhstani people visiting Hungary. The centre also participated actively in establishing a memorial to Hungarian prisoners in SpasskLAG (Karaganda oblast) and facilitates business relations between the two countries. Moreover, cultural relations are supported via the Hungarian Turan Foundation, an organisation that unites nomadic peoples.

### Polish and Greek Diasporas: from being 'expressive' to 'valued' and back

The Polish and Greek diasporas are examples that demonstrate the possibility of changing the status of a network. The attitude of these homelands toward their diasporas has shifted – **the Greek from being "valued" toward "expressive"**, **and the Polish vice versa**. In the case of Greece, in the post-2008 economic crisis, institutional supports have been downgraded and poorly funded. Currently, in spite of low institutional framework, the lived experience of the Greek community is not shrinking: the cultural activities are holding mostly with the support of local **akimats** (a municipal, district, or

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Udovič & Podgornik. 2016. "Cultural Diplomacy of Slavic European Union Member States: A Cross-country Analysis". *Baltic Journal of European Studies* 6 (2): 130-133

 $<sup>^9</sup>$  "Не количеством, но качеством" Dostyq, 6 May 2013. Accessed 25 October 2016. Available at http://dostykmag.kz/?p=205

provincial government) via various grants and the enthusiasm of members, who still cherish theatrical, dancing, musical and other cultural initiatives. They are clearly eager to foster their Greek identity and are supported in this endeavour by the World Council of Greeks Abroad, an organisation that is active only in the former USSR region.

Poland, in turn, has started giving more consideration to its diaspora abroad. In 1999, Kazakhstan and Poland put on the agenda of bilateral cooperation the possibility of sending to Kazakhstan Polish language and culture teachers, of opening a Kazakh-Polish university and of broadcasting Polish TV channel Polonia, all listed on the Kazakh Government website.

However, the initiatives were implemented only in 2013 and ultimately confirmed in 2016. The agreement to improve cultural and educational ties between countries made it possible for Poland to send to Kazakhstan Polish language teachers and to accept in return children from the diaspora during their summer and winter vacations to study language and culture. Special programmes also exist for older people. From 2008, Poland started granting *Karta Polyaka* (Pole's Card), which gives cultural-educational benefits to its holders, such as free visas, free admission to museums, transport discounts and other benefits. Recently, at the University of International Business in Almaty, with the support of the Polish embassy and the Polish Association, the first Kazakhstan-Poland educational centre has been opened. Although the institutional framework was weak initially, Polish people are notable for the robust protection of their identity, even in cases of mixed marriage. This characteristic and personal enthusiasm of the Polish facilitated the establishment of ethnocultural centres, the organisation of festivals of Polish songs and close contacts with Polish musicians and artists. But, the assistance from the Polish government in recent years for both 'repatriation'<sup>11</sup> and cultural revival<sup>12</sup> has encouraged a broad lived experience for the Polish diaspora.

## • Finnish diaspora: example of an 'expressive' community

The Finnish diaspora in Kazakhstan is categorised here as "expressive" because of its renewed vitality, but the homeland institutions scarcely acknowledge it. Indeed, the existence of a diaspora in Kazakhstan and other parts of Central Asia is officially denied. This status is much to the frustration of Kazakhstan's ethnic community. Finns, including Karelians and Ingrians, were deported to Kazakhstan from Leningrad oblast between 1935 and the 1940s. From the 17th century onward, this ethnic group was the victim of religious and political conflicts and territorial annexation involving Finland, Sweden and Russia. For simplicity and following Kazakhstan usage, the term "Finn" is used to cover the community in this analysis. Today, contact between the Finns and their "homeland" is almost entirely non-governmental though Almaty and Helsinki are "twinned" and there is a Finnish Business Centre in Astana. The Finnish diaspora participated in the VII World Congress of the Finno-Ugrian Peoples after pressure from the aspiring delegate from Kazakhstan. Currently, there are two ethnocultural centres: one in Almaty with a focus on expanding business relations, and the second one in Pavlodar, where culture, history and language are at the core of the activities.

### • Estonian diaspora as a 'nominal' community

**The Estonian diaspora** as a network of communication is considered to be "nominal". This is perhaps not surprising given the narrow focus of Estonian foreign policy. <sup>14</sup> According to the official statistics, the number of Estonians is close to 1,000, with a big concentration in the Northern Kazakhstan village

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Iglicka, Krystyna. 2002. "Poland: Between Geopolitical Shifts and Emerging Migratory Patterns." Working Paper for Prage Migracyine Seria, 42. Institute for Social Studies, University of Warsaw, p. 15

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> **Astana Times**, 14 January 2015.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Mähönen, Tuuli Anna, Sirkku Varjonen, Nicholas Prindiville, Linda Arnold, and Inga Jasinskaja-Lahti. 2015 "Boundaries of National Belonging in Ingrian Finish Return Migration: A Multi-Level Perspective." *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 5 (3):

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Raik, Kristi. 2014. "Renaissance of realism, a new stage of Europeanization, or both? Estonia, Finland and EU foreign policy." *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50 (4): 440-456.

of Marievka. The evidence gathered for this case study suggests, however, that the Estonian ethnocultural centre is non-functioning. According to Oinas, there were two attempts to set up an Estonian cultural centre, however, the efforts were unsuccessful due to a lack of institutional support and resources. At the moment, the activities of Estonians are reduced to a joint celebration of significant Estonian dates. As Kulu suggests, the official Estonian approach may reflect ambiguities in the wider nation-building project: "Estonia supports the members of the diaspora both in their country of residence and returning to their "historical homeland". However, support is comparatively modest; the policy is less clear.

The case of Estonia is a reminder that the relationship with the diaspora is for all homelands subject to domestic political pressure.

## **Policy Implications and Recommendations**

Engagement with diaspora communities is a growing feature of cultural diplomacy globally. Successful policies can engender levels of trust that help to consolidate positive bilateral relations and ameliorate the impact of policy differences. For EU member states, the decision to enhance their links with residents abroad whose cultural roots are shared will help consolidate European influence. In many cases, it will assist social and economic development in countries that seek to emulate European cultural values. While all member states appear to see the value of engaging their diaspora, some have chosen to tailor their cultural diplomacy to their domestic economic pressures or their wider global strategy.

The examination of the cultural diplomacy of European Union member states in Kazakhstan has stressed the benefits of developing vibrant "valued" networks of communication embracing both local diasporas and homeland embassies and agencies. In such cases, diplomatic benefits accrue to the homeland and local communities are empowered. Similarly, failing to capitalise on positive sentiment with some infrastructural support may leave an "expressive" network as one of neglected potential.

## Recommendations: Improving the Use of Diaspora in Kazakhstan

Based on the interviews with the directors of the ethnocultural centres, the recommendations are the following :

- To recognise the wide variety of people who make up the diaspora and the important contribution that they have been making in preserving and promoting culture and identuty;
- In order to avoid the 'folklorisation' phenomena, to send an update studying literature on the frequent basis
- To establish closer links with non-state organisations in the countries of origin
- To set up a particular policy or establish an intergovernmental commission that provides an agenda for bilateral cooperation
- To participate in the events organised by the ethnocultural centres
- To consult with diaspora on potential areas of collaboration with hostland
- To facilitate a wide range of activities organised by and for the diaspora in both directions homeland and hostland – in order to build on and develop two-way diaspora engagement
- To provide scholarship opportunities in both the host land and homeland
- · To encourage family reunions

<sup>15</sup> Oinas, Maria. 2005. Эстонская **диаспора Казахстана: историко-социальный аспект**, (Estonian diaspora in Kazakhstan: historical and social aspect)." Master's thesis, Almaty: Kaynar University.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Kulu, Hill. 2000. "Policy towards the Diaspora and Ethnic (Return) Migration: An Estonian case." *GeoJournal*, 51 (3): 135-143.

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