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‘TO SPEAK TO THE HEGEMON’

THE VISIONS OF SOVIET PAST IN THE HISTORY COURSEBOOKS OF CENTRAL ASIA COUNTRIES

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the content of history coursebooks in selected republics of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The author focuses on the matter that is less frequently interpreted but nevertheless has a significant influence on the societies – the most recent editions of coursebooks on the national history of the 20th century. The republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were chosen because in each of these states the Soviet heritage is debated for different reasons, and its evaluation is redefined to a different degree. The analysis focuses on the newest editions of coursebooks, written from the perspective of more than two decades of independence; they were also revised and expanded during the periods of increased political dynamics in all three countries: in Kyrgyzstan, after two sudden changes of the government; in Uzbekistan, after the death of Islam Karimov; and in Kazakhstan, after Nursultan Nazarbayev’s voluntary stepping down from the office of the president of the republic. The author pays special attention to the differences in various national historical narratives relating to the key historical events of the Soviet period (from the point of view of Central Asian countries): the creation of national republics within the Soviet Union, the participation of republics of this region in the events of World War II, the process of the collapse of the USSR. The author juxtaposes the contemporary historical narrative with the parallel historical policy in these republics. The author also points to the degree of closeness of today’s historical narrative in Central Asia to the narrative developed during the Soviet period. Such a comparison shows significant differences between the analyzed countries in the degree of change of the language base developed in the Soviet period. The study also shows a different tendency to reject the Soviet

historical concept. This indirectly gives an answer to the question of the possibility of liberating today's Central Asian historical narrative from the 'complex of hegemon', which is characteristic of postcolonial countries.

Keywords: Central Asia, USSR, politics of memory, historical education, coursebooks

For researchers from Central Europe who study the dynamics of contemporary discourse on the memory of the 20th century, and on the history of the Soviet Union in particular, the case of Central Asian states poses a significant challenge. The Central and Eastern European perspective suggests such nouns as 'occupation', 'aggression' and 'partition' to describe the international policy of the USSR, while the Soviet political system is almost solely described by the adjective 'totalitarian'. This basically excludes any notion that the former proletarian paradise could be a source of any modernising stimuli.

Thus what makes it difficult for researchers from Poland to look objectively at their eastern neighbour is not only the awareness of repeated schemes of Russia's expansion at the cost of its neighbours but also the specificity of local social conditions, which facilitate politicisation of history.¹ The conviction regarding the superiority of Polish culture and Poland's role as Europe's first line of defence (which must be at least partially revised in the face of the ideological context of Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022) is well rooted in public consciousness and often exploited for political purposes; this is conducive to creating one's own modernising mission in the East rather than to accepting any model of development that has originated there. This leads to frequent classification of the Russian world as a territory alien to European culture, as the world of the Turanian civilisation.² It is also the source of the recurring willingness to carry the 'torch of freedom' to nations enslaved by Russia – the tendency embodied in the concept of Prometheism,³ and only in a small part balanced by the post-colonial approach to Polish history itself.⁴ A one-dimensional approach to 20th-century history with a clear division into heroes and villains makes it difficult to understand any differing opinions about the former hegemon and to accept that the process of rejecting Soviet heritage may be slower than in the case of Polish historiography. Meanwhile, such voices – diverse, less emotional, but not necessarily uncritical towards the Soviet Union – can be heard from the republics of Central Asia.

¹ A. Miller, "Rossiia. Vlast' i istoriia," *Pro et Contra*, vol. 46, no. 3-4 (2009), p. 6.

² F. Koneczny, *O wielości cywilizacji*, Warszawa 2015.

³ P. Kowal, *Testament Prometeusza. Źródła polityki wschodniej III Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa–Wojnowice 2018.

⁴ J. Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, Kraków 2011; E. Thompson, "Said a sprawa polska. Przeciwno kulturowej bezsilności peryferii," *Europa. Tygodnik idei*, vol 26, no. 65 (2005), pp. 11-13.

The subject of the analysis in this article is not the politics of history in its broad, most visible dimension. The actions of state governments in that region do not pass unnoticed by the media and have been widely discussed in the existing research. My analysis focuses on the matter that is less frequently interpreted but nevertheless has a significant influence on the societies – the most recent editions of coursebooks on the national history of the 20th century, published in the countries of central Asia. Thus if I refer to the stimuli generated by the politics of memory pursued by the governments of these republics, I do it indirectly, by assessing the degree to which such stimuli are processed to serve the needs of the narrative targeted at school pupils. The selection of research material is deliberate: the republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan were chosen because in each of these states the Soviet heritage is debated for different reasons, and its evaluation is redefined to a different degree. The rationale behind my choice is thus an attempt to present the diversity of the local attitudes towards the not so distant past, and the differing scale on which the narrative dominant under the Soviet rule has been reinterpreted. The analysis focuses on the newest editions of coursebooks, written from the perspective of more than two decades of independence; they were also revised and expanded during the periods of increased political dynamics in all three countries: in Kyrgyzstan, after two sudden changes of the government; in Uzbekistan, after the death of Islam Karimov; and in Kazakhstan, after Nursultan Nazarbayev's voluntary stepping down from the office of the president of the republic.⁵

The analysed research material comprises Russian-language versions of history coursebooks, which in most cases are translations of original language versions (Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Uzbek). This is an important qualification: in the context of post-Soviet Central Asia it means that the books are destined for pupils from local Russian (or Russian-speaking) communities. As such, these books are an attempt to familiarise these groups (decreasing in number) with a new interpretation of recent history. In a wider perspective, coursebooks written in Russian complement the policies of history pursued in each state, intended to enter into dialogue with the Russian historical narrative. In this dimension they can be considered as a form of 'speaking to the hegemon'.

What clearly impacted the content of the coursebooks is the fact of regaining independence and the resulting demand for a new vision of history that would support the independent statehood, still shaky and requiring constant justification. Unsurprisingly, the coursebook narrative was strongly influenced by the local 'fathers of independence', in particular such distinctive political figures as Nursultan Nazarbayev and Islam Karimov. The traces they left in the narrative remain as multidimensional as the former

⁵ K. Uskembayev, Z.G. Saktaganova, L.I. Zueva, *Istoriia Kazakhstana (1900-1945). Uchebnik dlia 8-9 klassov obshcheobrazovatel'nykh shkol*, ch. 1, Almaty 2019 (further: *Istoriia Kazakhstana 1*); K. Uskembayev, Z.G. Saktaganova, L.I. Zueva, *Istoriia Kazakhstana (1945-2019). Uchebnik dlia 8-9 klassov obshcheobrazovatel'nykh shkol*, ch. 2, Almaty 2019 (further: *Istoriia Kazakhstana 2*); M.K. Imankulov, *Istoriia Kyrgyzstana (XX-XXI vv.): 9 kl.: Uchebnik dlia obshcheobrazovatel'nykh shkol*, Bishkek 2014; K. Radzhabov, A. Zamonov, *Istoriia Uzbekistana (1917-1991). Uchebnik dlia uchashchikhsia 10-klassov srednikh obrazovatel'nykh uchrezhdenii srednego spetsial'nogo, professional'nogo obrazovaniia*, Tashkent 2017.

presidents themselves were – for those leaders acted as a link between the old and the new world. They came from the Soviet era and were well versed in its mechanisms of power, yet at the same time they fully embraced the politics of the decolonisation era, which required distance and criticism towards the recently dissolved empire. Therefore the new historical narratives began to mirror to a large extent the leaders' own paths in life and the changing attitudes towards the past.

The pages of Central Asian history coursebooks thus reveal a multidimensional, unobvious portrayal of the Soviet Union, much divergent from the canonical Central European versions, particularly the Polish one. The USSR takes the role of an initiator of national republics only to become very soon a totalitarian machine destroying any signs of local independence; it is at the same time the motherland that has to be defended against the Nazi onslaught and the coloniser, ruthlessly exploiting its periphery. The individual historical narratives – and therefore the coursebooks as well – deal with this discontinuity or even internal contradictions with varying degrees of success.

A crucial problem for each of these narratives is how to coherently combine the elements of the past that are perceived as positive and as negative because a convincing presentation of the pros and cons of remaining under the Soviet power should logically lead to the birth of the statehood in the form of a Soviet republic and then to achieving independence in 1991. It seems that the Kazakh authors were most successful in coping with this difficult task.

What characterises the narrative dominant in the Kazakh coursebook is the skilful universalisation of the fate of the nation by combining its history with the difficult 20th-century history of the other nations living within the Soviet Union so that it makes a single, cohesive tale. The authors avoid putting excessive emphasis on the role of individual leaders of the Kazakh nation, creating instead a group hero – the community that participates in history, quite often becoming the victim of the actions of its own state. Such a shift of the narrative centre of gravity allows highlighting the heroism and sacrifices of the Kazakhs fighting during the war in the name of the motherland shared with many nations.⁶ This device also enables unification of the martyrdom of the Kazakh nation, decimated during the Stalinist campaign of dekulakisation and collectivisation, with the suffering of the nations transported to the heart of the Kazakh SSR during the deportations of the 1940s.⁷

The Kazakh manoeuvre of depersonalisation and at the same time of nationalisation of history resembles to a significant degree the actions undertaken by Nikita Khrushchev in the de-Stalinisation era. The Russian leader justified the fight with the cult of Stalin by stating that the latter had claimed the merits and achievements of the Communist Party and of the entire Soviet society as his own.⁸ Of course, today's historical education in Kazakhstan does not highlight the role of the party, replacing the nation-individual dichotomy with the one juxtaposing the nation and the totalitarian

⁶ *Istoriia Kazakhstana 1*, p. 209.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 226-231.

⁸ N. Koposov, *Pamiat' strogogo rezhima. Istoriia i politika Rossii*, Moskva 2011, pp. 94-102.

regime. With regard to post-war times, the latter is gradually replaced by the notion of the centre, pursuing its imperial ambitions at the cost of the periphery.⁹

Although the critique of the USSR suggests that the Soviet state was flawed at the systemic level, not merely at a personal one (connected to the figure of Josef Stalin),¹⁰ it does not turn into a full negation of the experience of those years. The reason for this is the need to avoid any conflict in framing into the historical narrative the fact that the Kazakh republic was created under the USSR's aegis. The abovementioned communalisation of history turns out to be useful as it allows to interpret the cooperation of part of the national groups with the Soviet authorities in the broader context of pursuing the Kazakh national interest even in the most difficult political situation.¹¹ The contestation of the pre-war period is decisive but not all-encompassing, which makes it possible to note also the positive aspects of social modernisation of that period, particularly the educational, academic and cultural achievements of Soviet Kazakhstan.¹²

The critique of the USSR, recurring in the entire narrative, is rather well argued. The coursebook authors note the negative evolution of the communist state, which as a result of WWII transformed into a global empire. This led to the disappearance of the modernising aspect of the Soviet Union, replaced by realisation of its international ambitions, to which the Soviet peripheries, including Kazakhstan, fell victim.¹³ Highlighting this change serves as a justification of the republic's desire to free itself from the Russian dominance – a desire expressed both by the society and the last generation of local communist leaders, including Nursultan Nazarbayev.

However, the political interest of the elites governing the republic after the dissolution of the Soviet Union seems not to be the sole reason why the Kazakh coursebooks represent the pre-1991 reality in more categories than just social regression or foreign rule. This approach preserves the continuity of national history, and it consolidates the society not only around a specific leader and a particular vision of history but around the real progress achieved during that time. Also significantly, it allows different social groups and ethnic communities in Kazakhstan to identify without a sense of dissonance with the history told in this way, although their opinions about the past may vary.

The narrative of Uzbek coursebooks, which basically reflects the political thought and the version of the past formulated by Islam Karimov, is considerably more uncompromising towards the Soviet Union. The application of the late president's assertive standpoint to the interpretation of the past makes the Uzbek voice distinctive among the narratives of other republics, yet it does not make this voice more cohesive.

The Uzbek narrative seems closer to the Kazakh version, presenting the republic as economically exploited, politically depreciated, and playing an ancillary role to a great power's interests. However, there is a significant difference between these two versions

⁹ *Istoriia Kazakhstana* 2, pp. 44-49, 54-63.

¹⁰ *Istoriia Kazakhstana* 1, pp. 99-144.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-99.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 144-178.

¹³ *Istoriia Kazakhstana* 2, pp. 5-15.

of history: the Kazakhs put more emphasis on the history of various groups living in their republic, while the Uzbeks focus on the strictly political phenomena, constructing a clear opposition between local and central elites. The discrepancy between the achievements of the local communist activists and their contribution to the development of the republic on the one hand and the ruthless, almost totalitarian policy of the Soviet Union's authorities on the other makes this narrative unconvincing. Ascribing negative character to all the stimuli originating in Moscow (from the party policy to economic changes to suppression of the local culture¹⁴) and assuming that the decision-makers had only malevolent intentions (involving Uzbekistan in the war,¹⁵ economic exploitation,¹⁶ intentional destruction of the environment¹⁷) may puzzle the reader. If the conditions were so inauspicious, and the central government ignored Uzbekistan's needs, how did the local politicians achieve all the things emphasised in the coursebook? How did they manage to establish the Uzbek SSR, as well as ensure its economic leap, social progress and dynamic development of culture, which has produced many works of respected artists?¹⁸

Extremely critical towards USSR authorities, the Uzbek narrative makes it difficult to understand how the figures it glorifies – such as Sharof Rashidov, who from 1959 until his death in 1983) enjoyed the support of the Moscow rulers – were able to act at all. This dichotomy clashes also with the fact that it was during the Rashidov's era (which the coursebook describes as a 'period of stable development'¹⁹) that the Uzbek economy became most tightly bound to the needs of the empire and was dominated by the overgrown cotton industry, while the ecosystem of the republic deteriorated (for which the coursebook authors blame Moscow).

The Uzbek narrative on World War II can hardly be considered consistent either. While the Kazakh version makes it possible to include both rationally and emotionally the events of the years 1941-1945 in the pantheon of glorious patriotic acts, the Uzbek tale again creates dissonance. Expansion of the previously described narrative to the years 1939-1945, replacing the term 'the Great Patriotic War' with 'the Second World War' and making the Soviet Union complicit in the outbreak of this conflict²⁰ – all these devices are a nod to the Western and specifically Central-European version of history. However, from the perspective of Soviet Uzbekistan, integrally involved in operations on the Eastern Front, such expanding narrative seems contrived. Such a critical introduction is particularly jarring when contrasted with the next section, describing how the Uzbek society and local party elites rose to defend the motherland.²¹

¹⁴ Cf. e.g. K. Radzhabov, A. Zamonov, *Istoriia Uzbekistana...*, pp. 105-116.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 112-116.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 123-127.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 116-128.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 87-88.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 91-105.

A separate case are history coursebooks from Kyrgyzstan. The narrative here is unique, firstly because it is difficult to pinpoint any coherent policy of history that these books might reflect. This has been caused by frequent and sudden changes of government in this republic, resulting in the lack of any distinctive figures among the political leaders who would be able to impose in a long term their own narratives, including the historical one. Unlike in the neighbouring republics, where the political thought of the leaders has clearly imprinted itself on the attitude towards the country's past, what emerged in Kyrgyzstan was a kind of void, offering the authors greater freedom in creating opinions about history.

However, this freedom of creation seems to be only apparent. As the government does not order a specific narrative, the authors tend to adopt a minimalist attitude: the changes in the coursebook are cosmetic and unoriginal, and seem to be copied from the narratives of Kyrgyzstan's neighbours. As a result, there is no distinct Kyrgyz tale about their 20th-century fate. The events that should be problematized (such as the effects of the revolution in Kyrgyz lands or the political and economic transformation of the 1920s) are presented in an ambivalent way,²² which may lead to a suspicion that this is actually an old Soviet narrative stripped of ideological accents, Marxist-Leninist jargon and the achievements of the Communist party. The fragments criticising the actions of the USSR (mainly the Stalinist policy of collectivization of the agricultural sector and political persecutions of that period²³), seem to be out of context – they are included after a dispassionate report on the establishment of the Kyrgyz SSR and just before a grandiloquent description of the defence of the motherland against the Nazi invaders. It leads to the assumption that this chapter is not an element of an independent, well thought-out evaluation of the past but rather a critique of the personality cult era that is merely a ritualised gesture, modelled on the neighbours.

The narrative proposed by Kyrgyz authors is extremely detailed; it meticulously quotes decisions, figures and names instead of inviting the readers (i.e. pupils) to discuss more broadly the significance of the last century's events for Kyrgyzstan and its people. The descriptive character of the coursebook is the first element which suggests that the authors have taken the minimalist approach. It is easier to describe the Soviet Union than to assess individual stages of its development from one's own point of view. Such insipidity of the narrative, which hardly ever debates the reality (a significant exception here is the evaluation of the period of the decline of the Soviet rule), can be understood from the perspective of Kyrgyzstan's geopolitical location as this republic is unwilling to enter into disputes with Russia, which tries to maintain rather positive perception of the Soviet heritage. However, this withdrawal from discussion expresses the acceptance of one's own status as a periphery, which is a term the coursebook uses with surprising frequency when referring to Kyrgyzstan.²⁴

One of the crucial challenges that each of the analysed narratives had to face was the justification of the sense and rightness of political transformations that took place

²² M.K. Imankulov, *Istoriia Kyrgyzstana...*, pp. 50-68.

²³ Ibid., pp. 78-97.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 43, 64, 163, 175.

towards the end of the Soviet Union, i.e. the emancipation of the local Communist elites and their adoption of nationalist slogans, which ensured that the *nomenklatura* maintained their power after the dissolution of the USSR. This issue was basically unknown in Central Europe, where the systemic transformation involved the requirement to remove the communist elites from power. It was also a factor that complicated the question of legitimization of local ruling elites, formerly involved in cooperation with Moscow. Analytically speaking, the approach chosen to present this period is extremely interesting as it demonstrates the ability (or lack thereof) to unify two different historical eras in one narrative and thus to give credibility to all the previous argumentation.

Again, the Kazakh coursebooks seem to be most convincing in their description of the last years of the Soviet rule in the republic. While they do not stop emphasising the significance of the national rebirth during perestroika, they perceive those events in a broader perspective, as part of a country-wide renewal of social and political life in the face of the increasingly fossilised and anachronistic political system of the USSR.²⁵ Thus the mobilisation of the society in the Kazakh SSR, reflected in the renaissance of religion, the struggle for equal status of the Kazakh language and in the mass protests of December 1986,²⁶ is not presented in this narrative as 'shaking off the foreign yoke'. It can be read rather as a sign of the maturity of the Kazakh nation, fighting for their fundamental rights and responding to the challenges of the modern day, to which the colonial-style rule of the USSR was less and less suited. This narrative also allows including part of the Kazakh Communist elites led by Nursultan Nazarbayev in the transformation process, putting them in the role of a young, reformist wing of the party, noticing in time the new challenges and seizing the opportunity to gain independence.²⁷

In the Uzbek coursebooks the last years of the Soviet rule are reported differently. As in all the previous narrative, the dominant goal here is to maximise the antagonism between the republic and the authorities in Moscow, an example of which is the description of the consequences of the scandal involving mass-scale falsification of cotton production figures in the republic.²⁸ On this foundation, the authors construct the image of the Uzbek nation as lacking influence on the situation in their own republic and a victim of power plays at the highest government levels. This nationalist perspective is both the strength and a weakness of this narrative: presenting Islam Karimov as the father of the Uzbek nation and the author of its independence requires not only portraying him as an opponent of Moscow's actions but also contrasting him with that part of the *nomenklatura* which towards the end of the 1980s remained loyal to the central government. As a result, the coursebooks divide the communists into the good ones, who supported the national goals, and the evil ones, who stayed loyal to Moscow.²⁹ This logic of description necessitates a specific presentation of the internal conflict of the

²⁵ *Istoriia Kazakhstana 2*, pp. 87-92.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 92-103.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-128.

²⁸ K. Radzhabov, A. Zamonov, *Istoriia Uzbekistana...*, pp. 128-131.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

events taking place in the Uzbek SSR (the juxtaposition of the Samarkand and the Fergana elites) as well as highlighting the actions of the 'nomenklatura' group led by Islam Karimov, while the grassroots renewal movement in the society is underestimated.³⁰ As a result, the narrative becomes exclusivist and difficult to identify with – not only for the representatives of Uzbekistan's national minorities but also for many other residents of this country torn by regional affiliations.

In the Kyrgyz coursebook, the narrative on the genesis of independence seems unusually decisive when compared to the presentation of the entire Soviet period. The author puts the events occurring in Kyrgyzstan in the 1980s against the background of the events taking place in the entire country, clearly including the republic in the group of Soviet regions that suffered due to the USSR's colonial policy and outdated governance system.³¹ The narrative does not lack nationalist elements, particularly in the description of the 1989 Kyrgyz-Uzbek conflict in Osh, where the author criticises both the Uzbeks' demands and the passivity of the central government in the face of the tragedy.³² The book proudly describes Askar Akayev's path to power, particularly emphasizing the fact that the first president of Kyrgyzstan did not come from the communist elites but from the academic circles.³³ This is clearly aimed at underscoring the uniqueness of Kyrgyzstan, contrasted with the neighbouring states with their 'nomenklatura' transformations.

Although this part of the Kyrgyz narrative is a contrast to the moderate tone of the previous chapters, its particular version of opposition to the system should not be surprising. Similar elements are more or less evident in all three narratives – to justify independence, a *rescaling* was necessary, which involved capturing and highlighting the ethnic and cultural differences as well as the phenomenon of colonial subordination, and turning these elements into nationalism.³⁴ This logic also included renouncing the attempts made by Moscow at that time to reform the system by increasing the transparency of political life and introducing economic reforms. Thus each of the described narratives includes a negative assessment of Mikhail Gorbachev's policy as any nod towards perestroika would weaken the justification of the road to independence. Interestingly, as regards this last question, a certain consensus has emerged among very diverse, often mutually hostile political forces in the entire post-Soviet area, including Russia.

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While the assessment of the Soviet era in history coursebooks published in Central Asian states is clearly marked by current political needs, it is by no means a simple transmission of thoughts and biases of any particular politician. This educational

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 135-136.

³¹ M.K. Imankulov, *Istoriia Kyrgyzstana...*, pp. 166-175.

³² Ibid., pp. 175-178.

³³ Ibid., pp. 178-180.

³⁴ J. Staniszkis, *Postkomunizm. Próba opisu*, Gdańsk 2001, p. 138.

struggle with the past contains a broader trend of gradual post-colonial emancipation of one's own history. The process of separating and freeing the local/national narratives from the influence of the universalist Soviet version of history did not begin in 1991. It was initiated several decades earlier, when Khrushchev's group negated the Stalinist approach to teaching history. Towards the end of the 1950s a decision was made to remove the multitude of dates and historical figures overloading the books on the history of the USSR so that the new, thinner coursebooks would be *best suited to the needs of daily life*.³⁵ In practice, the implementation of this project led to limiting the content almost solely to Russian history, sacrificing the information on smaller nations. To counterbalance this 'Russification' of the history of the Soviet Union, individual republics prepared their own separate coursebooks, complementing the knowledge on the USSR's history with a local component.³⁶ This step actually reflected the crawling federalisation of the state, increasingly *socialist in form and nationalist in content*.³⁷ Like many other similar decisions in the USSR, this change was imposed by Moscow, and the new coursebooks had to be complementary to the central historical narrative; however, they were a novelty in education and demonstrated that the central authorities permitted to speak about the 'nations of the USSR' rather than about 'one Soviet nation'.

In this perspective, the contemporary coursebooks are more of a continuation of the mentioned emancipatory trend than a full break with the past. It is noticeable even at the level of the language they use. Although the content was revised after 1991, the books still include numerous fragments that correspond to the Soviet historical narrative and form a particular bridge between the description of reality to which USSR citizens were accustomed and the today's interpretation of the past: *the Provisional Government protected the interests of the bourgeoisie and landowners*³⁸ or *due to their support for the Kyrgyz people, long suffering the colonial oppression [...], the Bolsheviks involved wide masses of the local population in the fight for the Soviet rule*.³⁹

The coursebooks are not free from the grandiloquence so characteristic of the Soviet 'pedagogy of pride': *the Nazi Germany treacherously invaded the Soviet Union*;⁴⁰ *the*

³⁵ L.P. Bushchik, *Ocherk razvitiia shkol'nogo istoricheskogo obrazovaniia v SSSR*, Moskva 1961, pp. 405-416.

³⁶ A resolution on this issue was adopted by the Central Committee of the CPSU and The Council of Ministers of the USSR on October 8, 1959. See "O nekotorykh izmeneniiakh v prepodovanii istorii v shkolakh. Postanovlenie TsK KPSS i Soveta Ministrov SSSR, 8 oktiabria 1959 g.," in A.A. Abakumov, N.P. Kuzin, F.I. Puzyrev, L.F. Litvinov (eds.), *Narodnoe obrazovanie v SSSR, obshcheobrazovatel'naia shkola. Sbornik dokumentov 1917-1973 gg.*, Moskva 1974, pp. 196-197.

³⁷ The problem of relations between nationalism and the idea of socialism in the history of the Soviet Union was discussed by the periodical *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, which used the quoted phrase as a leit-motif of an entire issue. See *Neprikosnovennyi zapas. Debaty o politike i kul'ture. CCCR: sotsialisticheskii po forme – natsional'nyi po soderzhaniiu*, no. 4(78) (2011).

³⁸ *Istoriia Kazakhstana 1*, p. 42.

³⁹ M.K. Imankulov, *Istoriia Kyrgyzstana...*, p. 24.

⁴⁰ K. Radzhabov, A. Zamonov, *Istoriia Uzbekistana...*, p. 88.

Kyrgyz [...] *joined the heroic ranks of motherland defenders*;⁴¹ or *fearless General Panfilov [...] fell like a true hero*.⁴² The fact that such narrative and language conventions have been preserved to a varying degree confirms (the authors' intentions notwithstanding) that this is only a partial break with the past, not a radical one. There are noticeable differences between the analysed narratives in this regard – the Kazakh authors most extensively purged the language used to describe the past from elements of ideology and bombastic narrative, which confirms that in this country the way of presenting the national history was best thought-out. In the case of Kyrgyz and Uzbek books, while their assessment of the Soviet era differs, they draw to the same degree upon the Soviet description of the USSR's reality.

Like the language used, also the organisation of the coursebook content closely corresponds to the internal organisation and chronology adopted by the Russian methodology of history teaching.⁴³ It is most evident in the Kyrgyz coursebook: although it describes the history from the local perspective, its chapter division follows rather the dynamics of the changes occurring in the USSR: the Revolution and the Civil War, the New Economic Policy, industrialisation and collectivisation, the Great Patriotic War, the post-war period and Khrushchev's era, Leonid Brezhnev's rule, perestroika and the dissolution of the USSR.⁴⁴ The absence of internal divisions more closely related to the local political dynamics suggests that the authors basically accept the primacy of the political stimuli coming from the centre over the events connected with their republic.

Although they make the stages of the USSR's development a reference point for describing their own state's history, the Uzbek and Kazakh coursebooks introduce some changes in this area. The Uzbek authors change the dating of the war period, adopting in their description the period of the entire WWII (1939-1945) and not just the German-Russian conflict (1941-1945).⁴⁵ However, this device is superficial, as after several paragraphs the authors focus on the events related to the Eastern Front, which corresponds to the narratives of the neighbouring states.⁴⁶ The Uzbek coursebook redefines also the dates of the post-war period: Chapter V distinguishes the period of 1959-1983 (the tenure of Sharof Rashidov as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan),⁴⁷ which is supposed to emphasize the focus on the dynamics of the local political changes. It also highlights the role of this politician in the history of Uzbekistan and contrasts his times with later negative changes that took place during perestroika.

The Kazakh authors also make only partial corrections to the traditional Soviet division into historical periods. They set the year 1900 as the starting point for the

⁴¹ M.K. Imankulov, *Istoriia Kyrgyzstana...*, p. 107.

⁴² *Istoriia Kazakhstana 1*, p. 188.

⁴³ S. Ezhova et al., *Metodika prepodavaniia istorii v srednei shkole*, Moskva 1986, pp. 65-69.

⁴⁴ M.K. Imankulov, *Istoriia Kyrgyzstana...*, pp. 238-239.

⁴⁵ K. Radzhabov, A. Zamonov, *Istoriia Uzbekistana...*, p. 142.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-116.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-128.

analysis of the 20th century, while the neighbours symbolically start counting the past century from the revolutions of 1917. In this way, the Central Asian Revolt of 1916 can be a reference point for further description,⁴⁸ and makes this local event (and not an external factor, i.e. the October Revolution) the moment in which the history of modern Kazakhstan begins.

A characteristic element is the approach of individual authors to the issue of combining Soviet and post-Soviet history as a continuous narrative. In the Uzbek coursebook, these stages are clearly separated: the book for grade 10 covers only the period of 1917-1991, which suggests a break before the most recent history, intended to be presented as something new. The Kyrgyz coursebook uses a reverse logic: the history of Soviet and post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan are presented together, which suggests that these two eras are naturally close and seen as related. The Kazakh authors also introduce a distinctive division. The coursebook is split into two parts; the first covers the years 1900-1945, while the second deals with the post-war period and the most recent history, symbolically capped by the moment when Nursultan Nazarbayev stepped down as the president of the republic.⁴⁹ This logic is a reflection of the dominant thought in contemporary Kazakh politics of history, which sees the roots of today's problems of Kazakhstan in its post-war history; this refers not only to the political and economic transformations but also to the ethnic makeup of the population shaped in those times, and even to ecology-related issues.

Despite many significant differences, the analysed coursebooks have numerous narrative elements and content fragments that link them to the Soviet version of history. They all preserve (unchanged or with minor revisions) the internal chapter division characteristic of the pre-1991 coursebooks, putting a heavy emphasis on socioeconomic transformations, of which the political, cultural and scientific development that occurred during each period was only a derivative. Although the leaning of the Soviet historical narrative towards economy lost its ideological tint and Marxist elements after 1991, it continues to be present in all the coursebooks, which results in the inclusion of multiple descriptions of economic indices achieved in particular eras and frequent mentions of specific investment projects implemented in the territories of the respective Soviet republics.⁵⁰

The didactic component in Soviet historical education was particularly extensive: schools were expected not only to educate but also to bring the pupils up and awaken their pride in the socialist motherland. Thus the coursebooks introducing young people to past events were to include specific episodes from history, particularly those that illustrated the achievements of the said socialist motherland: the heroism of soldiers during the Great Patriotic War, the successes of *udarniki* (shock workers) and the achievements of scientists and artists.⁵¹ The analysed coursebooks have not omitted

⁴⁸ *Istoriia Kazakhstana 1*, pp. 22-39.

⁴⁹ Cf. footnote 5.

⁵⁰ This element is most prominent in Kyrgyz narrative. See M.K. Imankulov, *Istoriia Kyrgyzstana...*, pp. 43-50, 69-90, 113-123, 146-155.

⁵¹ S. Ezhova et al., *Metodika...*, pp. 42-73.

the didactic element; it was adopted from the Soviet narrative, and the only change was the emphasis the authors put on the national affiliation of individual persons, nationalising in this way their achievements.⁵² The authors’ intentions notwithstanding, this device – combined with the mentioned leaning towards economic issues in the narrative – suggests that the Soviet past is perceived positively, as a period of progress, full of specific achievements. This perception is independent of the anti-colonial notions introduced today so that even the Uzbek narrative, most antagonistic towards the USSR, can hardly be considered as unequivocally anti-Soviet.

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⁵² This is most clearly visible in the chapters on the involvement of the representatives of a given nation in the fight against Nazism. See M.K. Imankulov, *Istoriia Kyrgyzstana...*, pp. 107–113, *Istoriia Kazakhstana I*, pp. 183–188, K. Radzhabov, A. Zamonov, *Istoriia Uzbekistana...*, pp. 96–101.

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