

MANAGING DIFFERENCES IN THE MULTIETHNIC COMMUNITIES OF SOUTH KAZAKHSTAN¹

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Introduction

Kazakhstan is frequently looked upon as a country that has succeeded in harmonizing an extremely ethnically and confessionally diverse social environment. There are indeed reasons for such inferences, one in particular being the absence of open mass opposition among different groups of the population in the Republic of Kazakhstan. However, this in no way means that the country's social development is entirely free of collisions or inter-group tension. Such conflict is apt to erupt whenever the government and society fail to react on time to the challenges arising in our ever complicated social world.

In turn, the shortcomings of the local self-government system tend to sap faith in the fairness of government institutions and the invincibility of constitutional principles. As a result, ethnic mobilization is becoming an effective way to form and uphold particular group interests. So it stands to reason that the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan is increasingly faced with the task of shifting the focus of its attention from ceremonial issues to everyday relations among the people.

The aim of this article is to analyze the integration and disintegration of rural communities in which different ethnic groups reside and live side-

¹ The field studies used in this article were conducted within the framework of the Norwegian Institute of International Studies (NUPI) in 2009-2011.

by-side in the same territorial and social environment of South Kazakhstan, as well as ways for the government and society to optimize their relations.

In order to achieve this aim, the following research tasks must be solved:

1. Revealing how public requests form with respect to realizing specific ethnocultural rights of the residents of multiethnic rural settlements.
2. Defining the factors that have the greatest influence on types of identity (general civil, local, and others) that predomi-

nate in the minds of the region's residents.

3. Identifying the role of the local power bodies in managing differences by analyzing several conflict situations.
4. Drawing up recommendations for optimizing existing mechanisms and raising the effectiveness of their impact on the situation.

We focused on the relations between three South Kazakhstan communities—Uzbek, Turkish (Ahiska Turks), and Kurdish—and the local power bodies.

Target and Methods of Study

The Uzbek community. The size of the Uzbek population of the South Kazakhstan Region (SKR) reaches 420,000 people (as of the beginning of 2010, it amounted to around 470,000 for the country as a whole). Furthermore, it should be noted that rural residents predominate among the Uzbek population of the SKR.

Outside the SKR, a large number of Uzbeks live in the suburban settlements and towns of the Zhambyl Region. Most Uzbeks live in the Sayram District (65%), the cities of Turkestan (45%), Kentau (25%), and Chimkent (15%), as well as in the Tole Bi (14%), Tulkubass (4%), Kazygurt (5%), Saryagash (4%), Maktaaral (4%), and Sozak (4%) districts.

A large number of Uzbeks live compactly in four population settlements of the Sayram District—the villages of Sayram, Karabulak, Mankent, and Karamurt. The size of the population in each of these villages comprises several tens of thousand people, and in the first two, more than 40,000, whereby the overwhelming majority of residents are Uzbeks (95% and 99%, respectively). This has given rise to a specific sociocultural environment based on traditional ways of Uzbek everyday life.

At the same time, it cannot be said that the population of these villages is entirely isolated from the other residents of the region. For example, 70% of the residents of Sayram, which is situated 10 km to the east of Chimkent, work in the city. The village of Karabulak, which is surrounded by several auls with a predominantly Kazakh population, is the infrastructural center, if you will, of the northern part of the Sayram District; it boasts the largest bazaar, numerous tea-houses, and so on.

So there are areas of interception and interaction among the residents of different ethnic groups in these villages, which proved to be the reason for the minor confrontations that occurred in 2007-2009; in some cases, the authorities had to interfere.

In light of the above, these two villages were chosen as the main target of this study; three focus groups and seven expert interviews were held with representatives of the rural district administration, deputies of the municipal and regional maslikhats (local representative power bodies), teachers, journalists, and public activists.

The Turkish community (Meskhetian Turks or Ahiska Turks). According to expert assessments, approximately 170,000 Meskhetian Turks currently live in Kazakhstan; it is difficult to present more precise data, since these people are registered under different categories (Turks, Meskhetian Turks, and Azeris). There are around 55,000 Turks in the South Kazakhstan Region, who live predominantly in rural areas. Turks account for 5% of the population of Chimkent; the same figure applies to the Tole Bi, Tulkubass, and Sayram districts. Turks also comprise 1.5% of the residents of the Ordabasy District.

The largest number of Turks can be found in the village of Karasu (around 50% of the entire population) and the rural district of Zhuldyz (around 30%) of the Sayram District; focus groups were also held in these population settlements. Since Zhuldyz adjoins Chimkent, the social context of the life of its population is very different from life in the village of Karasu. Focus groups were held among population categories of different genders, age, level of education, and prosperity. Moreover, six expert interviews were held with employees of the district akimiat, white-collar workers, businessmen, and activists of ethnocultural associations.

The Kurdish community. There are approximately 35,000 Kurds in the South Kazakhstan Region; they themselves believe their numbers to be higher. They justify this deduction by the fact that some Kurds are registered as Azeris or Turks.

Most of the Kurds live in the Tole Bi, Sayram, and Baydibek districts of the South Kazakhstan Region, as well as in the suburbs of Chimkent.

The largest number of Kurds (in terms of percent) live in the rural part of Kazygurt in the Tole Bi District, where their numbers amount to around 3,000. In the fall of 2007, Kurd pogroms took place in Maiatas, one of the villages in this rural neighborhood. This was the reason for holding one of the focus groups there; another study was carried out in the KolKent neighborhood of the Sayram District where several authoritative Kurds of the older generation live, one of whom heads the council of aksakals at the regional Kurd ethnocultural center.

A total of two focus groups and five expert interviews were held in different villages with public activists, businessmen, and pensioners.

Several expert interviews were also held with the head of the department of internal policy of the district branch of the Nur Otan party, an employee of the department of internal policy of the city administration, the secretary of the district Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan, and an employee of the district sociopolitical newspaper *Yuzhny Kazakhstan*. During the interviews, questions were raised relating to the sociopolitical situation in the region.

In addition to this, an analysis of the way the akimiats function in the rural neighborhoods of Sayram, Karatube and Zhuldyz of the Sayram District and several case-studies of some actual and prevented conflicts were carried out.

Problems of Meeting Specific Ethnocultural Needs

The Uzbek population of Kazakhstan often brings up problems relating to the administrative measures employed by the local authorities aimed at ubiquitous introduction of the Kazakh language. Art 21 of the Law on Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan of 11 July, 1997 says: "Whenever necessary, the texts of visual information may also be given in other languages;" however, such information is given only in the Kazakh language. Moreover, in villages where most of the population is Uzbek, the names of streets are written only in Kazakh and Russian.

This “injustice” is substantiated by the fact that the text of this law does not give any clear instructions on how to use languages when writing the names of streets. At one time, there were fervent disputes about this, but a solution that suited everyone was never found. Today, a situation has developed in the country where any attempt to revive the discussion on the use of language is interpreted as disloyalty to the authorities.

It is the same in the sphere where the Kazakh language is exclusively used, i.e. the paperwork of all budget-supported organizations, including schools and hospitals. The Uzbek participants in all the focus groups noted that this creates significant difficulties in everyday life.

Many of these statements came from the residents of Sayram included in the study. This, evidently, is related to the fact that compared with other Uzbek villages, more people with higher education who are employees of city and district organizations (located beyond their villages) live there. However, here too topics related to language are only discussed at private meetings among closely acquainted people.

As for Karabulak, its population is more oriented toward everyday rural concerns. As one of the participants of the focus group said, the life of most people in this village goes no further than the fields, the bazaar, the school, and the hospital.

The only way to raise questions concerning the use of a particular language is for a representative of the population, prepared in advance, to present a speech at a rural gathering (held once a year in the presence of the district and village akim) or at some assembly in which the authorities participate. This representative is usually a respected person or pensioner who used to hold a high position in the village or district. This choice is explained by the fact that someone who has retired is no longer involved in current labor-management or power relations. Even if the powers that be do not like his speech, he will not suffer any negative consequences.

In the last year, there have been two cases of such speeches by aksakals (one each in Karabulak and in Sayram) who asked their district akims to expand the sphere of use of the Uzbek language in paperwork within the villages. In both cases, the aksakals were told that their requests were invalid; whereby the akims referred to the instructions set forth in the Law on Languages.

Moreover, the akim of Karabulak added that it was a very dangerous precedent; if these requests from Uzbeks were granted, the representatives of the other 56 nationalities living in the district could request the same.

The arguments of the regional authorities are entirely unsound since only Uzbeks form settlements with a concentrated monoethnic population (more than 90%) in the district. Nevertheless, the officials are constantly driving it home to the Uzbeks that they, just like the other peoples living in the district (who amount to a mere handful), are a national minority.

Activists of the Uzbek community are very well aware of the existing situation; this is apparently why they do not raise the topic of the use of languages during regular meetings between the village akim and representatives of smaller territorial divisions (makhallas or precincts). Each such community comprises approximately 5,000 people (1,200 farmsteads); it has its own *bey* (usually an honored senior) who passes all the requests of the local residents concerning their daily needs on to the village akim.

In recent years, questions relating to the constricted sphere for using the Uzbek language and the inconveniences this entails for the population have never been a topic of discussion at the meetings of akimiat councils; nor are these problems mentioned in any of the outgoing documents sent to a particular government body. This may be because the residents understand that it is impossible to resolve such questions at the level of the akimiat.

On the other hand, there is an extensive network of organizations in the region, as throughout the country, that is especially oriented toward resolving problems precisely in this sphere. Each vil-

lage has an Uzbek ethnocultural center, all the village centers are joined under the district Uzbek ethnocultural center, and all the district centers under the regional center, the chairman of which is a member of the small Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan of the South Kazakhstan Region created in 1989.

There is also a republican organization called the Dostlik (Friendship) Association. Its chairman (at the time this study was conducted) is R. Khalmuradov, a member of the Majilis (Parliament) of the Republic of Kazakhstan according to the quota from the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan.

It is these organizations that bring the specific interests of Uzbeks to the attention of the authorities.

Ever since Kazakhstan gained its independence, the regional ethnocultural center and the Dostlik Association, with the mediation of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan and in some cases the representatives of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, have been collaborating with the regional and republic authorities to improve the mechanism for granting the specific ethnocultural requests of the Uzbek population.

Certain achievements have been made in this collaboration; for example, in particular, almost 90,000 schoolchildren in South Kazakhstan study in Uzbek, textbooks are published in Uzbek, regional and district newspapers come out in Uzbek, and some radio and television channels broadcast in Uzbek. Moreover, in 2003, the only regional Uzbek drama theater in Kazakhstan opened. It should be noted that all of these undertakings are funded by the state.

In 2009, graduates from Uzbek schools were allowed to take the common national test when applying for university on the same basis as everyone else, which students can take in either Kazakh or Russian (in the past, they had to first take a comprehensive test in Uzbek, which made getting into higher educational institutions throughout the republic more difficult).

In January 2012, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan issued a new order, according to which all graduates from schools where lessons are taught in Uzbek, Uyghur, or Tajik must mandatorily (and not voluntarily, as before) pass the common national test in Kazakh and in Russian in order to be admitted to a higher educational institution.

This innovation took the Uzbek community by surprise, since most of the graduates were studying to take the comprehensive test, which calls for one mandatory subject less. It is expected that a much lower number of students will be admitted to higher educational institutions in 2012 on the basis of the common national test. This is because, without special preparation, it is very difficult to successfully pass tests in a language you have not studied in.

Against this background, problems relating to the fact that the Uzbek language is not used in street names, visual information, and paperwork (in villages with a predominant Uzbek population) seem trivial, although villagers face them every day. It is precisely these problems that create difficulties in the relations between the Uzbek population and the authorities; officials berate the complainers for showing a lack of gratitude toward the state, which has already done so much for them. Government representatives justify their position by saying that it is the indulgence and leniency of the state and not its obligations to a specific group of citizens that have created all the conditions for meeting ethnocultural needs in Kazakhstan. As a result, the Uzbeks feel as though they are living in a "foreign" country, where their status depends on how the country's leaders relate to them.

The representatives of Turkish and Kurdish communities say that they do not experience any particular difficulties in getting their ethnocultural needs met. Due to their small numbers and dispersion, they do not try to open special schools where lessons are taught only in Turkish or Kurdish. Furthermore, in some schools extracurricular lessons are given in Turkish (the village of Karasu) and

Kurdish (the village of Kazygurt). These lessons fall within the overall curriculum funded by the state and school directors have the right to schedule them as they see fit.

Moreover, the republican ethnocultural centers fund the publication of Turkish and Kurdish newspapers at the republican level; the resources needed come from sponsors from the diaspora.

Turks and Kurds do not feel alienated from the informational-cultural environment, since they can watch television programs broadcast by satellite in their native language.

It can be said that today questions relating to the specific ethnocultural rights of individual minorities are raised only by the population of large Uzbek villages, whereby special institutions (ethnocultural centers, branches of the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan) capable of formulating particular demands at the local level (district, village) are essentially not used.

This situation can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, the local population does not believe in the effectiveness of the above-mentioned organizations and prefers to address the district leaders directly. While on the other hand, people believe that these special institutions have already accomplished a lot (as already mentioned above, schoolchildren study free in Uzbek, some programs are broadcast, separate newspapers are published, and a theater functions in Uzbek) and perceive them as organizations responsible for the cultural sphere (holding folklore celebrations, festivals, and so on). As for everyday matters, they are mostly discussed directly with the executive power bodies at the district level.

For what it is worth, speeches given at the annual village gatherings held in the presence of the district akim are not an effective way to make demands. At best, the akim, after listening to them, might promise to deal with them, but he usually regards such statements as misunderstanding by the Uzbek population of the special features of the country's policy. Moreover, he is not competent to resolve many of the issues brought up.

So, it can be concluded that there is no collaboration between the population and local authorities today in South Kazakhstan. The matter primarily concerns questions relating to granting specific cultural requests of certain groups of the population.

Identity: General Civil or Ethnic?

Creating equal opportunities for all residents when meeting their everyday needs and realizing their civil rights is an equally important factor influencing the social situation in multiethnic villages.

- First, all residents should feel confident that their ethnic origin will not influence the government's attitude toward them and make it difficult to realize the universal social rights envisaged by the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan.
- Second, all citizens should feel they have equal opportunities for realizing their capabilities in any sphere of activity, including as members of the state power bodies, especially at the local level.

Only in this case will ideas related to nationwide and other forms of supra-ethnic identity (neighborhood, regional) dominate over narrower solidarities (ethnic, clan, group, and so on).

It can be noted that on the whole the residents of the villages and neighborhoods studied are satisfied with their own social and legal status and nature of their relations with the lower power bodies, which makes it possible for them to largely realize their main requests without conflict.

Nevertheless, in some cases the basic principle of equality of rights and opportunities is consistently ignored.

In particular, the participants of the focus group in Sayram noted cases when government representatives made it understood that they were primarily Uzbeks and so should seek protection of their rights in Uzbekistan. This argument was given in reply to an address by a resident of the village of Sayram to the law-enforcement bodies of Chimkent. Another example: at an army recruitment office in the village of Sayram, a draftee was told to go and serve as a street-sweeper in Uzbekistan.

What is more, the participants in different focus groups emphasized that compared to Soviet times, their status had declined.

Although the above-mentioned incidents are isolated, they show how the predominantly Kazakh power bodies perceive the non-Kazakh population. For example, a prosecutor declared in public that he could not understand why there were so many Uzbeks living in Kazakhstan; higher education professors, representatives of the power bodies, and young rural people also make similar statements. No matter how widespread these sentiments may be, they nevertheless affect all strata of the population.

In particular, in 2007-2009, mass fights took place between Kazakh and Uzbek young people in the villages of Sayram and Karabulak. They were instigated by some of the Kazakhs resenting that Uzbeks live too well in Kazakhstan, particularly against the background of the recent repatriates (oralmans) who have found it difficult to integrate back into the country's life. Such moods are having a strong impact on how Uzbeks living in South Kazakhstan feel about themselves.

Another important aspect lies in the special features of regional personnel policy at the local level and its perception by different categories of the population. Many of the Turks and Kurds who participated in the focus groups talked about how their communities were insufficiently represented in the power bodies.

The situation is slightly better among the Uzbeks. For example, one Uzbek is a member of parliament, two work in the regional maslikhat (the legislative power body), and a few are members of the district power bodies; one representative of this nationality is deputy akim of the Sayram District. However, Uzbeks think that this is not enough.

The situation is different for the Turks and Kurds. For example, one Turk is employed at the district education department of the Sayram District, and one is the deputy akim of the rural neighborhood (in the same district); two Kurds work as deputy directors in schools (in the Tole Bi and Baydibek districts). This state of affairs does not suit the Kurds, particularly since in Soviet times many of them worked as chairmen of Soviet state farms, heads of economic organizations, or served in the law-enforcement agencies, and so on.

The Turks, in turn, express their discontent, saying, "We are not allowed higher than a certain level. So here we sit... Not everything depends on nationality. Some people are respected regardless of their nationality, but still the titular groups have many more opportunities. Turks can be normal executives and partners behind the scenes, but not directors. Turks must work twice as hard as Kazakhs to get anywhere."

Similar moods can also be found among the Uzbeks, since Kazakhs prevail in all positions in the sphere of state control (even in villages where Uzbeks form the absolute majority). For example, Kazakhs predominate in the police precincts of the villages of Sayram, Karabulak, and Karatube; frequently they are not even local residents, but come to work on a rotational basis from other settlements. There are no Uzbeks at all among the employees of the tax police, only Kazakhs.

On the one hand, there are no visible obstacles for non-Kazakh people to occupy certain posts. However, the appointment procedure is not transparent, which leads to favoritism when appointing

people to specific positions. If, however, appointments require general elections or must be underpinned by citizen support (the election of maslikhat deputies and village akims), the level of ethnic diversity is much higher.

On the other hand, people often perceive this appointment procedure as evidence that the authorities do not trust them; it raises the significance of general civil categories of identity and increases the role of local forms of solidarity and loyalty. For example, the Turks who participated in the focus groups declared frankly that they regard government representatives from the Turkish community as “their own” and expected special treatment from them. And this was frequently the case, whereby the Turkish community used this to compensate for the otherwise insufficient attention they were shown by the authorities. If a Turk acted in keeping with civil servant ethics and did not give special treatment to his own people, he was criticized; this kind of reaction has undermined the principle of fairness of the power bodies, which was fragile anyway.

The Kurds also mentioned similar things; the matter particularly concerns the residents of the village of Maiatas who, without their own government representatives, achieved protection from the local leadership by means of bribes. They simply did not see another way to protect their interests in conditions of a biased government and non-transparent administrative decisions; however, in many cases (allotting land plots and in controversial and conflict situations) it was impossible to manage without the support of the law-enforcement agencies. It should be noted that the village residents hid the fact they were giving bribes, but this came to the surface during conversations and interviews with their neighbors and government representatives.

It can be said that in the rural areas of South Kazakhstan, many residents do not believe the authorities are capable of fairly taking account of and meeting their interests and requests. This has given rise to the use of illegal and illegitimate social resources in everyday practice: ethnic, group, alliance (clandestine agreements with government representatives), corruptive, and others.

All of this has destroyed the unified social environment in the rural settlements based on the principles of equal opportunities and fairness of the government. Moreover, mutual mistrust and alienation among people belonging to different ethnic groups has increased; this was shown most graphically during the open conflicts and clashes that arose as a consequence.

Government Action in Difficult Situations

In order to confirm the influence of the above-mentioned factors and assess how effective the actions of the local power bodies are in particular situations, we decided to take a brief look at several instances of escalation of social tension in the villages of the South Kazakhstan Region that have occurred over the past few years.

We will not go into depth about each of them, but will concentrate only on describing the active forces and presumed motives, relying on information obtained during conversations with experts who know about what happened.

1. The anti-Kurd pogroms in Maiatas in November 2007. They were caused by the unfair distribution of the best pasture land in favor of certain families of Kurds. It should be noted that a few more families cooperated with the local police in criminal business, to be more precise, in drug trafficking. The local population repeatedly complained to the authorities

about the privileged position of these families, but no active measures were taken, whereby moods of “we are not in charge in our own country” built up. So when a conflict arose between a new settler from the Kazygurt District and the local administration, these moods were skillfully used by those in favor of redistributing property and business infrastructure.

Neither the rural administration, nor the local law-enforcement agencies were able to change the situation since they themselves were involved in creating it and were not perceived by the population as impartial fair authorities. In addition, the people saw some of the local Kurds not as “fellow villagers,” but as a “special group with special rights,” which complicated settlement of the conflict; nor did appealing to the traditional authority of the elders of both sides help. Police cordons were set up to prevent violence; the conflict was settled only by bringing in authoritative people with no relation either to the local authorities or to the local Kurds (a special representative from the city administration and an influential businessman from another village).

2. A series of Kazakh-Uzbek clashes and arsons in Karabulak and the adjacent villages that occurred in 2008. On one side of the conflict were young Kazakh people from auls near the village who came on the weekends to go to the bazaar and tea-house in Karabulak. The young people expressed their disdain for the local Uzbeks and, saying that they were “the country’s bosses,” refused to pay, beat up the employees of several shops, and so on.

On the other side were local, mainly young, Uzbeks who tolerated the situation for a while and did not turn to the local police or akimiat for help; later they decided to retaliate en masse. The local policemen, who were mainly Kazakhs, at first arrested the Kazakh instigators, but then let them go. Furthermore, the released Kazakhs accused them of violating ethnic solidarity.

The local Uzbek akim, known for his authoritative style of leadership, would not accept the appeals from citizens and, trying to present what happened as “isolated cases,” gave absolutely no attention to preventing small conflicts and took no active measures. It is possible he was worried the higher authorities might accuse him of showing favoritism. In other words, good relations with the district bosses were more important for the akim than the village residents.

In the end, after mass fighting broke out, there were no authoritative people in the village to stand up for either side; police contingents had to be brought in and mediators invited from the outside (deputies of the regional maslikhat).

3. The events of the winter of 2008-2009 in the village of Sayram. They were caused by the founder of the Sayram folk museum, who was its director for many years, being suddenly dismissed and a specialist from the city (a Kazakh woman) being appointed in his place. The village residents were up in arms and appealed to the maslikhat deputies and local power bodies.

The thing was that this museum was founded on the initiative of the previous director with the active participation of the villagers themselves. Later it was transferred to the jurisdiction of the regional museum. When the museum director was dismissed, the village residents saw this as the authorities’ disregard for them. People were indignant that no one had asked them before replacing the museum director, for whom they had collected exhibits themselves. Moreover, soon after the appearance of the new director, significant changes were made to the museum of the Uzbek village of Sayram. Instead of Uzbek exhibits, the central place was occupied by exhibits on the general Kazakh theme.

As soon as it became clear how indignant the people were, an initiative group of deputies from the district maslikhat, with the approval of the village akim, visited the regional cultural department responsible for administration of the museum. At the meeting, recommendations were given for changing the actions of the museum administration in order to normalize the situation in the village. Soon thereafter, a delegation from the regional department of culture visited Sayram and presented the former director with a fancy chapan (an Uzbek quilted dressing gown) and certificate of appreciation in ceremonious circumstances in the presence of hundreds of residents. He was also appointed as advisor to the new director.

This act diffused the atmosphere in Sayram and calmed the people down.

A little later, the authorities, taking advantage of the good lesson they learned from the situation with the museum, acted much more solicitously when replacing the elderly director of the sports school of Sayram. He was warned in advance, chose the person to replace him, and became the advisor to the new school director.

This effective settlement of the situation was possible only thanks to the active interference of the local authorities, who spearheaded the public initiative and made it non-conflict. This is explained by the fact that the akim and public activists of Sayram are open to each other and able to collaborate effectively and productively even in the most sensitive matters.

4. A domestic fight that occurred several years ago between Kurds living in the rural neighborhood of Zhuldyz and Turks. Mass violence was stopped thanks to the village akim who prevented several dozen Kurds from taking revenge on someone who had insulted their fellow countryman. In this case, an immense role was played not by the fact that the *akim* (who no one knew personally at the time) took part in settling the conflict, but by the fact that he was a relative of some Uzbeks who lived next to authoritative Kurds. By taking advantage of his acquaintance with them, the head of the village authorities managed to stop the crowd and win over its leaders.

So the success of the akim's actions are explained by the fact that he was not afraid to rely on the support of people who were an authority for one of the sides. Merely as a government representative, it is unlikely that he would have been able to do anything.

There are also other examples of the rapid settlement of domestic ethnic conflicts; most often authoritative elders, who are members of special councils of elders that exist in each of the twenty ethnocultural centers, act as mediators. The chairman of one of these councils related a similar experience.

But it should be kept in mind that success can only be achieved if the elders enjoy authority on both sides, which is not always the case as the experience of Maiatas shows.

Conclusion

The ability of the local authorities to prevent and efficiently react to conflict situations that mobilize ethnic feelings depends on several conditions, including the following:

- trust on the part of the local residents;
- openness of the power bodies to all appeals from local residents;

- ability of the authorities to formulate the requests of local residents and present them to higher organizations;
- ability of the authorities to keep a track of the moods prevailing among the local residents and predict how the situation will develop.

It is easy to see that all the above-mentioned recommendations are acceptable for any conflict situation between residents and the local authorities. This is confirmed by fact that all the conflict situations that occurred in the region we have been examining were caused not by ethnic differences as such, but by the local residents' certainty that the authorities cannot be fair and impartial when dealing with their problems.

There were no conflicts in those cases when the authorities were able to be objective. However, when the authorities tried to ignore the social roots of ethnic tension and did not take any measures, conflicts grew and escalated into violence.

All government representatives need to do to manage ethnic differences is to clearly distinguish between situations when the residents of the territory under their control are entities of the action of general civil rights and when they are the bearers of specific ethnocultural requests. This in turn will make it possible to correctly understand the sources of conflict among the population and prevent ethnic identity from becoming a resource for protecting one's social rights (as is still happening).

This requires that employees of the rural administrations, policemen, and employees of educational and cultural institutions have at least minimum knowledge about the interaction between general civil and specific ethnocultural rights on the basis of existing OSCE recommendations (The Hague, Oslo, Lund, and so on). It is administration employees who could be able to act as an impartial source of information capable of helping residents to choose the right tools to uphold their rights and prevent charging of the conflict situation.

In order to correct the situation, employees of the local administrations should,

- first, know about how the ethnic composition of the population of their district and village formed, which will allow them to explain to residents why different communities reside in their territory,
- second, be familiar with international and national legislation relating to satisfying requests from a multiethnic population in the education, language, and culture (including the special recommendations of international organizations), and,
- third, be able to gather source information and carry out situation analysis and forecasting using specially developed indicators.

These indicators could also be used for predicting the results of their own decisions in difficult situations.

Employees of the local power bodies can acquire these skills by attending special seminars and training sessions which should combine the existing experience of the postsocialist Eastern European countries in organizing the vital activity of multiethnic communities and knowledge of the local specifics.