

The Politics of Memory in Kyrgyzstan: The Formation of National Identity in the Context of the Formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region

Baktybek S. Batyrbayev✉

Kyrgyz National University named after Zhusup Balasaga, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan

baktybatyrbayev@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1534-1337>

Abstract. The article examines the role of legal norms and institutions in the formation of national identity, the influence of memory policy on legislation, cultural heritage and historical memory. Important in the formation of identity in our time is the new perception of historical facts from the point of view of their legal assessment and interpretation. The states of the post-Soviet space use legal instruments to influence the formation of self-identification, setting a specific vector of development. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the impact of the new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic and the approved development concepts on the formation of civil identity, as well as the historical and legal analysis associated with the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region. The study presents a new look at the role of law in the preservation and transmission of historical memory, the formation of national identity in Kyrgyzstan.

Keywords: Kyrgyzstan, politics of memory, national identity, Constitution, cultural heritage, historical memory, Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region, legal aspects

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Introduction

In 2024, the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region is celebrated, which makes it especially important to study the legal aspects of the politics of memory in Kyrgyzstan and their impact on the formation of national identity. This is an analysis of the legislation regulating memorial events, the protection of cultural heritage and historical monuments, as well as the mechanisms of legal support for the preservation and transmission of historical memory to future generations. The study of these aspects allows us to understand the role of legal norms and institutions in the formation of national identity through the preservation of the historical heritage of the autonomous region.

In the 21st century, humanity is faced with problems of self-identification at the international and personal levels caused by changes in climate, demography, economics, politics, culture and the information sphere. Legal assessment and interpretation of historical facts is important. The states of the post-Soviet space use legal instruments to give the processes of self-identification a certain direction of development. The constitutional enshrinement of the attitude towards the historical past is an important aspect by which one can judge the general and specific approaches of the states that were formerly part of the USSR to the Soviet period of history. The models of studying the historical past in the post-Soviet states vary: some countries restore pre-Soviet constitutions or refer to them, such as Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania; others recognize the importance of the Soviet period without negative assessments, including obligations to preserve national heritage, such as Turkmenistan, Moldova and Kazakhstan. There is also an appeal to the distant past, epics and heroes, emphasizing the centuries-old history, as in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Tajikistan and Armenia.

The Constitution of Turkmenistan (1992) enshrines loyalty to ancestors and responsibility for heritage, the Constitution of Kazakhstan (1995) emphasizes the unity of the people and the duty to preserve heritage. The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2021) enshrines loyalty to the traditions of ancestors and the duty to develop culture and preserve heritage. The Constitutions of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus enshrine continuity with the USSR and obligations to preserve heritage and historical truth¹. These constitutional provisions reflect the basic principles that exist at the present stage and demonstrate the importance of official memory policy and memorial laws for the formation of national identity in post-Soviet states.

¹ Dorskaya A.A. Preservation of a common historical past and processes of self-identification of states and peoples of the post-Soviet space. *Education and Law*. 2023; 10:17-19.

Materials and Methods

The study of legal aspects of memory policy and their impact on the formation of national identity in Kyrgyzstan is relevant. Understanding how legal norms and institutions contribute to the preservation and transmission of historical memory allows us to understand the mechanisms of national identity formation. In the context of ongoing global changes, such studies help not only to preserve cultural and historical heritage, but also to ensure stable and cohesive development of society.

The theoretical significance of the work is determined by the multi-level nature of the phenomena of memory policy and national identity, as well as the multidimensionality of their functioning, which required the use of interdisciplinary approaches that synthesize the achievements of law, political science, history and sociology. The study as a whole is based on such epistemological principles as the logical-reflexive approach in combination with the problem-contextual one, the principles of historicism, the dialectical relationship of the general, the particular and the individual, integrity and complementarity.

Among the most significant foreign authors engaged in the study of the formation of national and state identity of the post-Soviet republics, one can single out R.Herman, T.Hopf, D.Chekel [19-21].

The problems of development of Central Asian countries in Russia are studied by scientists from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of International Relations and World Economy of the Russian Academy of Sciences [9, 11, 13-15, 18] and other educational and research institutions [8, 10, 16-17].

Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the self-awareness of Kyrgyzstanis and the ways of perceiving the past by different generations born and raised in a changing society [1, 3-5]. Identity is considered as a historical phenomenon subject, changing in its character and nature, in the processes of formation and manifestation associated with the life destiny of the people, the individual and the country.

Results

In 1991, Kyrgyzstan, along with other post-Soviet countries, embarked on a project to create a national state. The new state faced the task of legitimizing new institutions, statuses and power relations, introducing new beliefs and values. The first president of the Kyrgyz Republic, A.A.Akayev, proposed two key ideas at the state level: "Kyrgyzstan is our common home" and "Kyrgyzstan is a country of human rights."² Однако из-за размытости программ политической элиты и недостаточной готовности страны эти попытки внедрения идеологических установок потерпели неудачу.

² Koichuev T. On the national idea. *Reforma*. 2002; 3(15):59–60.

During the period of K.Bakiyev's term as president, the program "Heritage of the Kyrgyz and the Future" was developed within the framework of the national project "Culture". The main goal was to form a civil political nation and establish new perspectives for studying cultural heritage and defining national identity³. However, due to the change of power, the program was not implemented.

After the April 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan, the new political elite attempted to revive the propaganda of the moral values of the Manas epic, making it the basis of historical memory. The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, by its resolution of December 9, 2014, approved the draft law on civic-patriotic education and sent it to the Zhogorku Kenesh for consideration. In this draft, civic-patriotic education is defined as a purposeful process of personality formation, the purpose of which is love for the Motherland, respect for state power and cultural heritage, as well as responsibility for one's choice and development of abilities (Article 3). The purpose of civic-patriotic education is to unite society and achieve state goals; the objectives are the formation of national self-awareness, patriotism, respect for the rule of law, legal culture, consolidation of society and the education of a healthy lifestyle (Article 4)⁴.

However, this draft law was not adopted, and the President of the Kyrgyz Republic signed the Decree "On the Days of History and Memory of Ancestors"⁵. This Decree emphasized the importance of the history of the Kyrgyz people, including the establishment of the Great Kyrgyz Khaganate and the struggle for statehood, and noted the influence of the Great October Socialist Revolution on the development of the region. Attempts to focus on cultural and historical heritage indicated the importance of this aspect for the formation of national identity, but without specific and consistent actions, these efforts remained declarative.

The analysis showed that the problems that Kyrgyzstan faced after gaining independence were largely due to insufficient preparation for the new status and the absence of consistent programs. Effective formation of national identity required not only the development of conceptual programs, but also their implementation through coordinated actions of all branches of government and the active participation of civil society. Without such efforts, the country continued to face problems in the areas of stability and national unity, which, in turn, hindered its sustainable development and progress.

Today, political and legal processes aimed at creating and strengthening national identity in Kyrgyzstan require clear conceptualization and practical implementation.

The need for a unifying civic identity in Kyrgyzstan was realized after the protest movement in October 2020, which followed the disputed elections, which ended in

³ The Heritage of the Kyrgyz and the Present. The Heritage of the Kyrgyz and the Future: National Project "Culture". Bishkek: Ilim, 2009:3–4.

⁴ On the draft Law of the Kyrgyz Republic «On civic-patriotic education in the Kyrgyz Republic»: Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic of December 9, 2014, No. 698. Available from: <https://novopokrovka3.mektebim.kg/wp-content/uploads/sites/240/2023/03/polozhenie-o-grazhdansko-patrioticheskom-vospitanii.pdf>.

⁵ On the establishment of Days of History and Memory of Ancestors: Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic of October 26, 2017, UP, No. 231. Available from: <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/69431/edition/858547/ru>.

a political crisis and a change of power. The preamble to the new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic of May 5, 2021, enshrines as a basic provision fidelity to the traditions of ancestors, as well as the precepts of Manas the Magnanimous - a hero who united the Kyrgyz people in the fight against external and internal enemies, performed military feats, called for living in unity, peace, harmony and in harmony with nature. In accordance with the provisions of Article 21 of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, the state undertakes to develop the culture of the people of Kyrgyzstan, preserving customs and traditions that do not infringe on human rights and freedoms. The sacred tradition of the people is the respect for elders and the respect for the younger. The Constitution guarantees the protection of the historical, material and spiritual heritage of the people of Kyrgyzstan⁶.

In order to implement the principles enshrined in the Constitution, the development of civil identity in the Kyrgyz Republic is ensured by creating equal opportunities for the participation of all citizens in the socio-economic and socio-political life of the country. The state undertakes to guarantee equal conditions for all citizens, regardless of their ethnic or social background, so that they can actively contribute to the development of society. Particular attention is paid to preserving the diversity of cultures and traditions, strengthening tolerance in society. This is necessary so that every person, regardless of their origin or cultural characteristics, can feel respected and accepted. Tolerance and respect for diversity require a willingness to actively interact, cooperate and work together between different social groups and ethnic communities. This approach contributes to the formation of a unified society, where each citizen contributes to the general well-being and prosperity, feeling an integral part of the state community.

In 2020, the Decree of the President of Kyrgyzstan approved the Concept for the Development of Civil Identity "Kyrgyz Jarany" for the period from 2021 to 2026⁷. The concept is aimed at forming a common civil identity in the country, uniting all citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious or social background. It is based on the principles of equality, respect for diversity, voluntariness and interaction in order to create a favorable environment for strengthening national unity and increasing tolerance in society. The Concept provides for various strategic directions, including the formation of a conscious perception of identity, strengthening the state language, creating equal opportunities in governance and increasing trust in political institutions.

The Concept on the spiritual and moral development and physical education of the individual of the Kyrgyz Republic, adopted on July 24, 2021, highlights civic identity as a key aspect of personal development, defined as an individual awareness of belonging to the civil community of the state. The goal is to form a comprehensively developed personality, deeply imbued with the spiritual and cultural values of his people, knowing his native language as a key component of the cultural heritage. The main tasks include:

⁶ Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic of May 5, 2021 (adopted by referendum (popular vote) on April 11, 2021). Available from: <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/112213/edition/1202952/ru>.

⁷ The concept of development of civil identity - Kyrgyz language in the Kyrgyz Republic for the period 2021-2026 (as amended by the Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic of May 15, 2023, UP, No. 124). Available from: <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/430346/edition/1253187/ru>.

maintaining state integrity, ensuring information security, preserving national wealth and spiritual and moral values, as well as stimulating a healthy lifestyle and developing patriotism. The concept is also aimed at strengthening respect for the state and native languages, observing the norms of public behavior, including patriotism and honest work⁸.

Historical and legal analysis in connection with the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region is of particular importance for the formation of national identity in the course of implementing the basic norms of the Constitution of 2021, the concept of "Kyrgyz Jarany" and the "Concept of spiritual and moral development and physical education of the individual". In light of the Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic S. Japarov dated October 24, 2023, dedicated to the celebration of the 100th anniversary of this event, recognition of the wisdom and heroism of the ancestors who carefully protected and preserved the territory of Kyrgyzstan for centuries comes to the fore⁹. The formation of the national state of the Kyrgyz people was a long and complex process, accompanied by intense political struggle. The formation of the autonomy of the Kyrgyz within the Turkestan ASSR began in 1921, and in 1924, delegates to the 12th Congress of Soviets of the Turkestan ASSR expressed a demand for recognition of the Kara-Kyrgyz people as an independent nation. The Resolution of the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR on national-territorial demarcation in 1924 granted the Kyrgyz the right to create the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region within the RSFSR. This formation united the Kyrgyz land and people into a single whole, creating the prerequisites for preserving national identity¹⁰. This event created favorable conditions for the development of the national economy and culture, for the organization of state institutions, education and courts operating in the native language.

During the Soviet period, Kyrgyz statehood went through several stages of development. With the creation of the autonomous region and the autonomous republic, the territory and borders were defined, institutions and attributes of statehood were established. The formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region in 1924, the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region in 1925, and then the Kyrgyz SSR as a union republic within the USSR became the determining factor that opened the way to the independence of the Kyrgyz Republic in 1991. A plan of celebrations was approved, which includes annual events at the national and local levels dedicated to historical events, the memory of ancestors and historical figures.

⁸ On approval of the Concept on spiritual and moral development and physical education of the individual: Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic dated July 24, 2021. UP № 313. Available from: <https://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/430539/edition/1084953/ru>.

⁹ On the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region: Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic dated October 24, 2023. Available from: <http://kkao.archive.kg/ru>.

¹⁰ Extract from the Resolution of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of October 14, 1924 on the formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region within the RSFSR. Available from: <http://kkao.archive.kg/ru>.

Conclusions

The need to form a common civic identity in Kyrgyzstan, noted in the new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic of May 5, 2021, reflects the state's desire to affirm its commitment to preserving cultural heritage and traditions. Adopted development concepts, such as "Kyrgyz Jarany" and "The Concept of Spiritual and Moral Development and Physical Education of the Individual", emphasize the importance of ensuring equal opportunities and supporting tolerance to achieve unity of national identity. Of particular importance are events aimed at celebrating the 100th anniversary of the formation of the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Region, which is important for the formation of national identity. The formation of the autonomous region in 1924 and its subsequent transformation into the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union was an important milestone on the path to the independence of the Kyrgyz Republic in 1991. The plan of events dedicated to historical events, which includes holding events annually on November 7 and 8, 2024 at the national and regional levels, is part of the strategy to preserve and strengthen national identity.

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About the author

Baktybek S. BATYRBAYEV. CandSc. (Law). Associate Professor of the Department of Criminal Procedure and Forensic Science of the Law Institute of the Kyrgyz National University named after Zhusup Balasagyn. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1534-1337>. Address: 547, Frunze str., Bishkek, 720033, Kyrgyzstan. baktybatyrbaev@gmail.com

Contribution of the author

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