Opponent's review on the PhD thesis of Viktor Rodionov
“Population development of Kazakhstan: Geographic, economic and geopolitical aspects”

The PhD dissertation of Viktor Rodionov “Population development of Kazakhstan: Geographic, economic and geopolitical aspects” has 170 numerated pages. The text is organized in nine numerated chapters when Introduction and Conclusion are not numerated. Besides the main body of text, the dissertation incorporates also the lists of tables, figures and maps, plus appendices.

The work has relatively standard structure starting with introduction. There the topic is specified, its significance assessed, basic objectives formulated and structure of the thesis sketched. The second chapter labeled as Chapter 2 contains an interesting and well elaborated discussion of literature used by author in the process of his doctoral research. Clear arrangement of this part of the text is a result of its organization by problem areas: population questions and macroeconomic and geopolitical perspectives. The list of discussed titles is sufficiently representative and provides necessary orientation in attained level of (empirical) cognition regarding both mentioned directions.

Undeniable preconditions of the author for professional work on the required level are signalized also by the content of the second numerated chapter devoted to theoretical and relevant empirical frameworks of the submitted dissertation. The author has selected and introduced as a leading concept the theory of modernization (global change, global revolution ... of modern times) and presents it in quite compact and effective way properly quoting the leading author in the post-Soviet space A.G.Vishnevski but somehow forgetting to discuss the theoretical works and concepts elaborated by his own tutor Z. Pavlik (regardless the fact that some of them were published also in Russian and, of course, in English). The partial theory of demographic revolution is discussed with the sense for proportion and its place here corresponds with entire concept of dissertation which does not focus only on demographic or better saying reproductive transformation. Special attention deserves also author’s linkage of the relevant conceptual elements to empirical data and other facts presented in the second part of the chapter under question.

Unfortunately, the same assessment is not possible to address to the third numerated chapter which deals with research questions and hypotheses formulation. The hypotheses corresponds with the research questions presented, however, these questions does not cover entire theme of dissertation as it was specified in the introduction. For instance, regional aspects of population developments are almost completely missing among research questions and hypotheses as well as there is not mentioned global context of population development. Decreasing quality is also concerning the following chapter on data and methods adopted and used. There is no room for discussion about its quality since the author had neglected the importance of this topic and this partial theme vastly underrated.

The fifth numerated chapter is providing description and basic analysis of population size and structure and elementary reproductive processes, the components of population development. Analysis of fertility, mortality and migration by ethnicity and age, and in some cases also by sex is focused on revealing principal structural and developmental similarities and differences predominantly among the most numerous (8) ethnic groups. This part is intended by the author as an overture to the more important part of the text devoted to population perspectives, and as such it should be also judged.
Population perspectives of Kazakhstan overviewed and discussed in the sixth chapter represents the key topics of the entire dissertation. The author is introducing and comparing here last available forecasts prepared by M. Tatinov or Yu. Shokomanov and the forecasts recently prepared by the professional structures of the United Nations and the U.S. Bureau of Census. Regardless the fact that the insight into more or less different scenarios of Kazakhstani population future is not deeply analytical, in the given context the approach presented in the dissertation seems to be sufficient for the purpose followed.

Presentation and discussion of population perspectives are directed towards an overview and discussion of the country's population and other relevant policies and their particular measures in the second part of the Chapter 6. As in the previous case, the overview is practically complete, well ordered and structured. It provides a reader with good orientation in actual efforts of the government to influence demographic situation of the country and to reach the goals set through valid political documents, mostly sound and ambitious development programs. Discussion led by author is again relatively brief but correct and realistic. This part completes discussion of population development and population relevant policies on national level and the authors is moving on the subnational, regional level in his following text.

Regional population and socio-economic developments is the content of the most extensive seventh chapter. In concordance with the style of most of previous chapters, the author presents here adequate and relatively wide insight into regional differences in population development and relevant socio-economic and ethnic specificities which should help to understand better the observed regional patterns of population reproduction as a whole and also of its particular components. In parallel with the structure of discussion on the national level, the author structures description of situation and its discussion on the presented regional level as well as transition from description and analysis of observed developments to relevant policies discussed in the Chapter 8. The main features of this discussion are again its width, correctness and also author’s good sense for hierarchy of problems.

The Chapter 7 also contains an attempt for classification of regions by demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Formally correct application of advanced statistical methods gave the results which did not bring any ground-breaking and unexpected findings, mainly due to less numerous set of statistical units (16), fourteen regions and two key centers, and by the author stressed and described socio-economic polarization of the entire regional system of Kazakhstan.

The chapter devoted to policies oriented on regional aspects of the country and its society developments closes the core of the submitted dissertation. The following ninth numerated chapter brings discussion of major geopolitical questions and tries to assess recent development of the country’s geopolitical situation. Its thematic relation to the earlier discussed themes, however, remains mostly implicit. It is intermediated by the fact that population size of the country does not correspond with its large territory and therefore the demographic factor is officially treated as a strategic one.

The conclusion successfully summarizes the main findings of the work and provides the author with a platform for further presentation of his ideas and thought, especially those more complex ones. It would be good if this part of the text served also for explicit and well structured inventory of hypotheses and their verification. Unfortunately, not very successful formulation or better saying incompleteness of the set of hypotheses does not provide good base for such presentation.

Relatively good impression produced by the submitted dissertation, with the reservations mentioned above, is time to time violated by formal imperfections which could be found in the text. Probably the most serious is associated with the Abstract which does not represent a real abstract. Moreover misprints, incorrect English incl. missing verbs and other defects can be found
in this small part of the text. In the following text one can also find imperfections in formatting text, missing references, random spacing, usage of wrong typographic symbols for the minus sign, missing definitions of some indicators which are not univocally defined as different types of dependency ratios, missing references to sources in all objects labeled as appendices, not always fully correct bibliographic records, etc.

Regardless all the critical notes above, I found the submitted doctoral dissertation interesting and fitting the major criteria of a successful doctoral thesis. Therefore I recommend to the Commission for state doctoral examinations in Demography at the Faculty of Science, Charles University in Prague to accept the PhD dissertation of Viktor Rodionov “Population development of Kazakhstan: Geographic, economic and geopolitical aspects” for defense.

Prague, September 25, 2011

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