

SOCIO-CULTURAL INTEGRATION OF THE GAGAUZ PEOPLE INTO THE MOLDOVAN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY: NATIONAL AND REGIONAL APPROACHES

INTEGRAREA SOCIO-CULTURALĂ A GAGAUZILOR ÎN SOCIETATEA CONTEMPORANĂ MOLDOVENEASCĂ: ABORDĂRI NAȚIONALE ȘI REGIONALE

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REZUMAT

După obținerea independenței în 1991, Republica Moldova s-a confruntat cu două mișcări secesioniste. Conflictul cu poporul găgăuz s-a rezolvat pe cale pașnică, și a apărut prima autonomie din zona post-sovietică, UTA Gagauz Yeri, creată pe criterii etnice. Astăzi, regiunea continuă să fie izolată de restul republicii din punct de vedere lingvistic și informațional, ceea ce reprezintă o provocare pentru viabilitatea proiectului de statalitate al Republicii Moldova. În acest articol sunt analizate în paralel abordările naționale și regionale ale unor aspecte ale integrării socio-culturale a autonomiei la etapa actuală.

Cuvinte-cheie: *politică de integrare, integrare socioculturală, traducători de valori, minorități etnice, politică lingvistică, politică educațională, politică audiovizuală.*

SUMMARY

Après avoir obtenu son indépendance en 1991, la Moldavie a dû faire face à deux mouvements sécessionnistes. Le conflit avec le peuple gagaouze a été résolu pacifiquement et la première autonomie de la zone post-soviétique, ATU Gagauz Yeri, est apparue, créée sur la base de critères ethniques. Aujourd'hui, la région continue d'être isolée du reste de la république en termes linguistiques et informationnels, ce qui pose un défi à la viabilité du projet d'État moldave. Cet article établit des parallèles entre les approches nationales et régionales de certains aspects de l'intégration socioculturelle de l'autonomie au stade actuel.

Keywords: *integration policy, sociocultural integration, value translators, ethnic minorities, language policy, educational policy, audiovisual policy.*

The settlement of nascent interethnic tensions in Gagauzia in the early 1990s has been recognized as one of the most successful examples of dispute resolution in South East Europe. The autonomous unit was created in the south of Moldova to protect the cultural, linguistic and local rights of self-government of the Gagauz people, an ethnic community with a pronounced ethnic identity and a certain area of habitation. Its creation was of great importance at that time. The Gagauz case is the unique example of the ethnic minority in Moldova with their own territorial autonomous region.

Paradoxically, but having received cultural and linguistic autonomy, Gagauzia has continued to function as a Russian-speaking autonomy for almost 30 years. Gagauz and Moldavan, which are, along with Russian, official languages of ATU Gagauzia, are actually not used. The majority of the population perceives Russian as their native language. In fact, linguistically and informationally the region has been cut off from the rest of Moldova and remained under extensive Russian influence [14, p. 7]. Aloofness in sociocultural terms means a difference in the system of views, ideas and value attitudes that are being formed, which deeply detaches the community and, in fact, is difficult-to-overcome. External influences only exacerbate the existing situation. The sustainable development of Moldova and the preservation of security in the region make many researchers turn to the problem of Gagauz integration in the Moldovan society.

This article analyzes national and Gagauz approaches to the social and

cultural integration as a concept covering the implementation of the language policy in the republic and the functioning of two value translators that are defined as key for identity formation - the education system and the media [11,12,13,16]. The choice of the above-mentioned socio-cultural aspects of the integration policy of ethnic minorities is due to their special significance in the formation of value senses and beliefs.

The scholars repeatedly emphasize the extraordinary significance of the language as „...the most important mechanism for the formation of cultural distinctiveness, an essential element of individual and collective identity” [18, p. 223], as one of the factors shaping identity that is inevitably targeted by nation-building policies [11, p. 26]. „... by means of the language with which you get to know the baby in the arms of the mother, you part only in the grave, the past is recreated, communities are imagined and the future is dreamed” [2, p. 254].

Within the concept of social and cultural integration, the education system has long-term influence. Functionally, this system perfectly manifests itself as a means of transferring the totality of social experience, the formation of competencies in the field of ethnological and ethnocultural knowledge. It covers practically all segments of the population. It is quite successful in building a collective consciousness and is regulated by the government. In addition, it begins to work with people at an early age and allows you to lay the right patterns of behavior at the

subconscious level, which are difficult to change over the course of life. The media represent another significant translator of values. Present daily and hourly in the life of every person, they actually control opinions, assessments, integrating or disintegrating individual human minds.

In order to examine the national and Gagauz approaches to the social and cultural integration there were used the following methods: analysis of legislative documents, government programs, research reports, comparison method.

First of all, it should be pointed out that the Republic of Moldova has adopted and ratified the main international acts guaranteeing the rights of national minorities - the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention against Discrimination in Education, European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Framework Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. As we can see, the national legislation offers a solid basis for democratic approaches towards ethnic minorities and the protection of their rights.

Regarding the language policy, it should be noted that at the moment Moldova does not have any current law on the functioning of languages. The last one of December, 16 2020 has expired this year. On the territory of ATU Gagauzia, the functioning of lan-

guages is regulated on the basis of the wide legislative framework: Law on the Special Status of Gagauzia, Ulojenie of Gagauzia, Law on the Functioning of Languages on the Territory of the ATU Gagauzia, Law of the ATU Gagauzia on Expanding the Sphere of Application of the Gagauz Language.

According to the Law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia and the Law of ATU Gagauzia on Languages the official languages of Gagauzia are Moldovan, Gagauz and Russian [6]. The possibility to choose between three languages led to the situation when especially in the sphere of public life is mostly used Russian. As a result, in 2018 there was adopted Law of ATU Gagauzia on Expanding the Sphere of Application of the Gagauz Language. This Law is intended to eliminate a number of contradictions and gaps in the Law of ATU Gagauzia on Languages - the lack of the necessary protection of the Gagauz language and guarantees its functioning as the language of office work and records management, lawmaking and legal proceedings [5].

Meanwhile it must be emphasized that the Law on the Functioning of Languages on the Territory of Moldova of 2020 mandated a slight enlargement of the state language usage in public sphere of the autonomy. It was requiring to conduct records management in state and public institutions in the state language, and upon request - in Gagauz or Russian [8].

Since the times of the Soviet Union, Russian has remained the native language for most of the Gagauz people. There are practically no people who

could speak only the Gagauz language. Russian has been the main language of instruction. When asked what language of instruction you would choose for your children and grandchildren, 84.1% of the inhabitants of Gagauzia answer - Russian [9].

The authors of the study „Implementation of the Linguistic Rights of the Gagauzians of Moldova. Integration of the Gagauz community into the society of Moldova” [1, pp. 5-6] point to an unfavorable trend among young people that remains pertinent today - there are fewer and fewer of those speaking both Moldovan and Russian. Children born and raised in Moldovan families no longer speak Russian well enough. The growth of Moldovan monolingualism in Moldovan society, and Russian monolingualism in Gagauz society will lead to the fact that the authorities of the region will have to communicate with the authorities of the country through translators. Obviously, if this tendency is not tried to be stopped, then this will mean a barrier in communication, which will inevitably alienate the Gagauz people from the Moldovans and complicate their integration.

The law of ATU Gagauzia on Expanding the sphere of Application of the Gagauz language is means to get away from Russian monolingualism. However, a number of problems is recorded in the implementation of this piece of law. Among them one should name insufficient funding and citizens' understanding that the Gagauz language is used in a limited area.

In general, if we take the issue of

mastering the state language by the minorities of Moldova, we detect that the process has been accompanied by numerous difficulties and does not have the desired effect. For a long time, the national legislation lacked the requirement for the compulsory knowledge of the state official language by minorities representatives [14, p. 97]. The situation changed with the adoption of the new Education Code of 2014. According to the new Education Code the state guarantees the training and development of effective communication skills in the Romanian language, if necessary, in the languages of national minorities and at least two languages of international circulation; the study of the Romanian language is compulsory in all educational institutions of all levels and is regulated by state educational standards; the state provides the necessary conditions for the study of the Romanian language in all educational institutions, including the increase of the number of disciplines studied in the Romanian language in establishments with a different language of instruction [10].

It is noteworthy that after 5 years of functioning of the code, experts continued to point out to the problems with mastering Romanian. The quality of teaching the state language in ethnic minority schools was generally inadequate. Teachers' salaries were low and their number was not sufficient. Young people preferred to continue their careers in the capital and not return to their home towns and villages. Native speakers of the state language not from Gagauzia were facing the pro-

blem of rejection, as they are alien to the local culture and language. The level of training of teachers of the state language was also poor. Teaching textbooks were characterized as outdated and not adapted to the needs of proper teaching. The level of understanding of the importance of learning the state language continued to be low [15, p. 2].

According to the study of the degree of integration of the population of ATU Gagauzia and the Taraclia region into the society of the Republic of Moldova only about 30% of the residents of Gagauzia feel the need to know the state language in their daily life and activities. Today's schoolchildren do not see prospects for building a career in Moldova, do not see the point in properly mastering the state language [9]. However, 56% of the population have a positive attitude to the idea of creating joint schools, in which some of the classes will be taught in the state language, and some in Russian [9]. This demonstrates the awareness by today's Gagauz parents of the importance of learning Romanian for the successful future of their children.

Essentially the implementation of national policies on the territory of Gagauzia is labored and obstructed. Misinterpretations and contradictions between national and regional legislation largely contribute to it. Having a certain degree of independence autonomy is trying to keep its vision over multiple issues. One of such discords was born as a result of Gagauzia attempt to adopt its own law „On Education”.

The main purpose of the adoption

of this law was expanding the usage of the Gagauz language in preschool and secondary educational institutions of the autonomy. The law was annulled by a court in Ceadir-Lunga, since it contradicts the law „On regulatory acts of the government and other central and local public administration bodies” and Art. 111 of the Constitution of Moldova [17].

At the same time, another way of expanding the usage of the Gagauz language in educational institutions of the autonomy is advanced by the central authorities. This one seems to be more correct and promising from the point of view of uniting the Moldovan society. In the period from 2015 to 2020, a program of parallel teaching of Romanian and Gagauz languages was developed for the middle senior and preparatory groups and implemented in twenty kindergartens in Gagauzia. 471 children and 450 parents were able to take advantage of the program. In 2020, it was planned to expand the program and implement it in all the kindergartens. The aim of the program is to promote the ethnic and cultural identity of the Gagauz people and to strengthen their integration into the Moldovan society by overcoming language barriers [3].

Bilingual education at the stage of preschool education is a fairly effective tool to overcome the growing linguistic divide between the inhabitants of the autonomy and the rest of the republic. It presupposes a certain level of values convergence at the early stages of the formation of ideas about life, when social instincts, which are very difficult to

eradicate through life, are laid. Also it implies decrease in the language barrier, expansion of socio-economic ties, reduction of the feeling of otherness among the Gagauz people. Certainly, it must be followed by correct civic education of unifying cultural ideas, values, social norms, ideals behavior patterns, fostering a sense of citizenship and self-identification. It will also not be superfluous to develop the obvious advantages of using the Romanian language for the Gagauz people, encouraging its use to achieve certain benefits in the field of socio-economic relations.

The mass media are one of the most powerful tools for the formation and transformation of fundamental beliefs. The information space of the Gagauzia is exclusively Russian in content. The Russian media influence the formation of public opinion not only on international events, but also on domestic and local politics. Due to the variety of formats offered by these media products, they are very popular among the population. The Moldovan media cannot offer a worthy alternative to the Russian ones, either in terms of variety, quality, or volume while the local mass media of the autonomy are in fact the conductors of the opinions of foreign media, namely Russian ones [14, p. 31].

This situation is greatly the result of contradictions between local and national legislation in the field of audiovisual services. In March 2016 there was adopted a new Law of ATU Gagauzia on TV and radio broadcasting. Its main goal has been to resolve the crisis in the Regional Public TV and Radio Company

Gagauz Ragio Televizionu. Following the previous Law on Television and Radio Broadcasting this piece of legislation does not limit the content broadcast by cable operators in any way and continues to be actively used as a basis for non-compliance with the national legislation [4].

On June 22 of this year, the Law on Amendments to the Code on Audiovisual Media Services came into force, prohibiting the broadcasting of Russian news, information and analytical programs and films of military content on the territory of the republic [7]. The exceptions are movies, and entertainment programs that do not contain militaristic content. The law provides for the introduction of strict sanctions for the spread of disinformation. Nevertheless, cable operators operate in Gagauzia, retransmitting Russian programs without restrictions, including the „Россия 24” channel, which was banned in Moldova in 2015. The products of the Russian media market continue to be traditional and popular for residents of the autonomy.

Conclusion. To date, the policies pursued at the national level affect all the aspects of socio-cultural integration chosen for analysis in the article - approaches to the use of languages in general, language policy in the field of education, as well as, the policy in the provision of media services. They are not always definitely accepted at the local level, causing some misunderstanding and confrontation, which shows us the context where previous problems in the integration of the region still persist. The existing

problems do not indicate the non-viability of the autonomous territorial entity. They reaffirm the need for constant cooperation between the center and the regional authorities as a path that has retained its viability for more than

25 years, involving the promotion of European of maintaining diversity and tolerance in the formation of the national identity of the Republic of Moldova through overcoming current and future socio-political crises.

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