

Role of civil society institutions in preserving ethnic identity

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Abstract. The paper focuses on the role of ethnocultural public associations, which are civil society institutions preserving ethnic identity. The authors investigate the role of ethnocultural public associations in preserving ethnic culture and language, and report the collaboration of these associations with population and youth. The authors place special emphasis on the specific practices of interaction between public organizations and the authorities in the field of national policy, the maintenance of ethnic identity and language, and the formation of an integrated civic identity and its strengthening in the polyethnic and polyconfessional space.

Keywords: North Caucasus, ethnicity, identity, region, language, culture, public associations, civil identity, civil society

1 Introduction

For a long time, the objective processes in region and public self-consciousness have been developed towards civic solidarity, political consolidation, and dominance identity. Yet, a rapid pace of development can be observed in the process of preserving, supporting and developing the ethnocultural components in the Russian people, and in ethno-national self-consciousness [1].

Science and public self-consciousness promote the idea that ethno-linguistic processes in the Soviet Union were represented by “...two interrelated trends – the development of the native languages of the peoples in the USSR based on brotherhood, friendship and cooperation and the spread the Russian language as a language of interethnic communication that strengthens the socio-political and ideological unity of the Soviet people” [2].

By the end of the 1980s, the issues addressing the state and prospects of national languages indicated the increased ethnic self-awareness. Language relations, language policy, language building became one of the main components of socio-political life in the North Caucasus.

2 Research Questions

This paper investigates the linguistic problems of the North Caucasian peoples on the example of two multi-ethnic republics: Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia. Peoples belonging to different language groups live in the republics: Kabardians live in the KBR, Circassians and Abazins live in the KChR, and their language is referred to the languages of the Abkhaz-Adyghe family. The Balkars and Karachays are different subjects administratively and territorially, but their language belongs to Turkic languages

(Kypchak group). The Nogai language also belongs to this group (Nogais live in Dagestan, the Stavropol Territory, the Chechen Republic, Astrakhan Region, etc.). Turks and Meskhetian Turks live in small groups in the KChR, KBR, the Stavropol Territory, and the Chechen Republic. At present, their language is attributed to one of the Eastern Anatolian dialects of the Turkish language.

3 Findings

3.1 Kabardino-Balkaria

The problems of language functioning could be observed in the late 1980s, and they remain in the focus of politicians, scientists, teachers, which is associated with the socio-economic, socio-political, integration and ethno-linguistic processes occurring in the republic, in Russia, and across the world. They affect the distribution of functional roles between languages.

In the 1980s, the increased public and scientific interest in the problems of the state and development of the languages of the peoples of Kabardino-Balkaria affected the state language policy [3].

In November 1988, the bureau of the Kabardino-Balkarian Regional Party Committee adopted a resolution on the creation of organizational, personnel and methodological conditions for a qualitative increase in the level of teaching native languages and literature in schools and preschool institutions [14].

According to order #179 of May 24, 1989 ‘On transition to education in the native language in the 1st grade’, at the beginning of the school year, a total of 59 classes were educated in the native (Kabardian or Balkar) language. It

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was assumed that the transition would be carried out in elementary school in stages, with regard to the parents' wishes. At the same time, the focus was on further improvement of students' learning of the Russian language in the new conditions.

In the shortest possible time, educational and methodological resources for children in grades 1–4 were translated from Russian into Kabardian and Balkar. These and other measures were taken to achieve a certain level of language readiness of students in their native languages before moving to grade 5 and to develop national-Russian bilingualism. In other words, the KBR tried to involve young people in the historical awareness, including learning the native language from an early age and instilling culture and respect for the historical homeland.

The efforts of the authorities facilitated the growth of national self-consciousness in the early 1990s. Due to this, the attitude towards the native language, including its fluency in Kabardians or Balkars, has become one of the important signs of ethnic identity, 'patriotism' [4]. As a result, the interest in national languages increased, and knowledge of the native language was encouraged. In Kabardian and Balkar rural settlements, children in elementary school (grades 1–4) were educated in the national language. In addition, the study of the Kabardian and Balkar languages was introduced in most schools of the republic. This educational policy improved the knowledge of the Kabardian and Balkar languages. At the same time, some of the school graduates who studied under this program had poor knowledge of the Russian language and could not speak it fluently, which caused some problems in the future [5].

The law of the KBR 'On languages of the peoples of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic' adopted in January 1995 was most important for the linguistic life of Kabardians and Balkars, according to which the Kabardian and Balkar languages gained the status of state languages. Yet, new language relations revealed some problems related to the law implementation. This language planning program, which outlined the measures for solving language problems, was difficult to be realized in practice due to various circumstances, including the lack of funding [6].

It should be noted that by the 1990s the social base of the Kabardian and Balkar languages had changed. A gradual destruction of the economic structure in rural settlements and intensification of migration processes in the republic provided the basis for a new language situation. For instance, teaching the Russian language to rural residents was not compulsory; however, in the conditions of the city, the Russian language has become an obligatory component of the multilingual environment.

Moreover, by the end of the 1990s – the beginning of the 2000s, education in primary school implemented in the Kabardian and Balkar languages was ceased. Despite this, the experience of teaching in native languages had already been accumulated [4].

The transition to the USE system in the 2000s redoubled attention of teachers, parents and students to learning the Russian language and getting a high score in this subject, which increased the chances of entering a university not only in the native city, but also in other regions. In 2017, the average score in the Russian language among graduates of the KBR increased from 62 to 63 compared to 2016. In

general, the results of the Unified State Examination in the Russian language in the KBR are comparable to the all-Russian results.

In 2014, the Parliament of Kabardino-Balkaria adopted the law 'On education', which guarantees "the right to receive preschool, primary general and basic education in the Kabardian and Balkar languages, the right to study these languages, as well as the native language included in the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation" [7]. Despite this, the Russian language gradually began to displace the native language of the Kabardians and Balkars.

3.2 Karachay-Cherkessia

The implementation of the language policy in the Karachay-Cherkess Republic is based on a number of federal and regional doctrines, programs, decrees, and resolutions. The main laws on the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation were adopted in the 1990s. Among them, the most important law at the federal level is the law #1807-1 'On languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation' adopted in October 25, 1991, as amended on July 24, 1998 #126-FZ and on December 11, 2002 #165-FZ [7]. The law is aimed at creating conditions for preservation and equitable and original development of languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation. In the early 1990s, the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR adopted the Declaration 'On languages of the peoples of Russia' [7], which specified the right of every person to choose the language of communication, education, upbringing, and intellectual creativity [8]. The declaration is still in force and retains its relevance.

The law on education in the Russian Federation came into force on September 1, 2013 [9]. In the context of the study, the law specifies the need to develop and implement regional programs for education development, with regard to regional socio-economic, environmental, demographic, ethno-cultural, and other characteristics of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation.

At the beginning of 2018, in the regions of the Russian Federation with multi-ethnic population, the amendments to the law 'On education in the Russian Federation' regarding the study of the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation and the state languages of the republics sparked controversy. The measures taken by the federal government to regulate the teaching of Russian and the state languages of the republics according to V.V. Putin's instruction to ensure the voluntariness of the study of the native languages led to some conflict situations in a number of republics [3]. The decree of the President of the Russian Federation of October 26, 2018 on the establishment of the Fund for preservation and study of the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation is an important legislative act at the federal level. It was developed "to create conditions for preservation and study of the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, which are the national treasure and historical and cultural heritage of the Russian state" [10].

In the Karachay-Cherkess Republic, the main law for implementation of language policy is the law of the KChR of June 14, 1996 'On languages of the peoples of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic' [11], which is aimed at solving the

problems of preserving, equitable and original development of languages of the peoples of the region.

In general, the republics of the North Caucasus have created legislative foundations for preservation and development of national (ethnic) languages and ethnic culture based on federal laws on education, culture and languages. The problem is that laws on languages, both at the federal and regional levels, were adopted in the 1990s and need to be improved. The laws and regulations in the field of language policy must be improved with regard to modern needs of the peoples of the Russian Federation in the development of native languages, the creation of innovative mechanisms for their translation, etc. Yet, the basic principles must be maintained.

To monitor the situation in the region, sociological surveys were conducted to study the ethno-cultural situation, including the linguistic one. Experts, students of secondary educational institutions and universities of the republic, and their parents were interviewed. The studies were carried out for five years as part of program implementation for 2015, 2017, and 2018. A total of 650 students of secondary schools and universities of the republic, 310 experts, specialists in the field of education management, teachers of schools and universities of the republic, scientists, and 100 students' parents were interviewed. Thus, more than a thousand representatives of the peoples from different social strata of society were interviewed [10].

More than half of the experts report that the reduction (or complete absence) of hours allocated for native languages in the schools of the region can cause the public discontent and contribute to the assimilation of ethnic groups. At the same time, a third of the respondents do not see any negative effect. Scientists and representatives of the ethnic (national) intelligentsia show the greatest concern. Employees of educational institutions directly involved in the education of young people are less concerned.

Analysis of political doctrines and legislative acts in the field of language and educational policy at the regional level yielded some conclusions:

- the laws and regulations in the language sphere at the federal and regional levels needs to be improved with regard to the changed realities, the increased interest in this issue on the part of the national (ethnic) intelligentsia, the growth of ethnic self-awareness of young people living in a multi-ethnic environment;
- in the republics of the North Caucasus, compulsory teaching of native (state) languages to native speakers at the primary and basic levels of secondary education is enshrined at the legislative level, but this is not fully implemented;
- the public need to study native (state) languages is retained in the region, but at the same time, there is no need to study school subjects in the languages of the peoples of the republic, since this is lacking in prospects [10].

Thus, the problem of the unstable language situation in the republics of the North Caucasus seems to be urgent. Therefore, it is necessary to “revive” learning of native languages among young people.

The North Caucasus is a multi-ethnic region of the country, which is characterized by the long-term coexistence of representatives of different cultures and languages. The diversity of the population has become a source of constant and mutually enriching communication, which facilitates the region development. A characteristic feature of the region is

actualization of the issues of preservation and spread of native languages, ethnic groups, and ethnic identity.

The ethnocultural and linguistic diversity of the Russian Federation is protected by the state. In the North Caucasian republics, the laws and regulations in the field of language policy is being actively implemented at the federal and regional levels.

Among the priorities, the main document in the field of state national policy ‘Strategies of the state national policy of the Russian Federation for the period until 2025’ specified the preservation of ethnocultural and linguistic diversity. One of the principles of the national policy of the Russian Federation is the state support for the ethnocultural and linguistic diversity of the Russian Federation, and the ethnocultural development of the Russian people and other peoples of the Russian Federation [12].

In all spheres of the state and public activity, it is stated that “the law covers the areas of linguistic communication subject to legal regulation, and it does not establish legal norms for the use of languages of peoples in interpersonal informal relationships, and in the activities of public and religious associations and organizations” [13].

All state languages have equal rights and any language can be used in the work of both the Parliament and the Government with the translation provided. Yet, the public authorities use the language of interethnic communication – the Russian language. In accordance with the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the Constitution of the Chechen Republic, all languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation living in the territory of the Chechen Republic are under the protection of the state and are regulated by the federal laws and the laws of the Chechen Republic. Citizens must carefully treat the languages of the peoples living in the territory of the republic, as the spiritual and cultural heritage of their ancestors, and respect languages and traditions [14].

Article 12 of the law ‘On languages of the peoples of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic’ regulates the right of citizens “to use their native language in state bodies, institutions, organizations and enterprises”, which also implies the translation provision. Meanwhile, the principle of equality of all state languages used in state bodies is not implemented due to a number of limitations, including the lack of an appropriate terminology base in the languages, and due to the multi-ethnic employees in the majority of organizations and institutions of the republic.

According to the law of the KChR ‘On languages of the peoples of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic’, the language to be used in the work of state bodies, organizations, enterprises and institutions is Russian (Article 13), which correlates with the status of the Russian language in the official sphere, and the integrative role of the Russian language across the country.

In 2017–2018, sociological surveys of students, their parents and teachers on the problems of ethnocultural education and language policy were conducted in the republics of the North Caucasus. The survey data from two regions testify to a high level of ethnic identity among the youth.

The activation of national cultural processes contributes to the actualization of the issues related to the revival of ethnic cultural values through the introduction of objects of ethnocultural orientation. A positive trend is that the youth

show the interest in the history of their ancestors and national and cultural roots, which is supported by their parents, who attach sociocultural importance to teaching native languages and ethnocultural subjects. The reduction or complete absence of native languages and the ethnocultural content of education in schools pose a real threat and may lead to the assimilation of ethnic groups and cause discontent among population.

Thus, it should be noted that if “a native speaker is a subject that enters into linguistic social relations” [15], the federal (Russian) language and the republican (regional) Chechen, Kabardino- Circassian or Karachay-Balkarian language, language of interethnic communication (Russian) and native (Chechen, Kabardino-Circassian or Karachay-Balkarian) language overlap in the process of linguistic communication.

The dominant role in the language situation in the republics of the North Caucasus is assigned to the Russian language as the main state language of the Russian Federation and the language of interethnic communication. This is specified by the law of the KChR ‘On languages of the peoples of the Karachay-Cherkess Republic’, and Articles 14, 15, 17, and 18 state that official office work in the state bodies, organizations, enterprises, and institutions, paperwork and official correspondence are conducted in Russian. This means that the legislators considered the status of the Russian language as the state language when developing these norms. The use of state languages in the design of signboards with the names of the state authorities is regulated.

Currently, the interest in learning native languages in many schools of the republics of the North Caucasus and in universities decreased compared to the 1990s and early 2000s.

In the system of education and upbringing, the problem of learning the native language cannot be solved without the desire and participation of parents, because children enter preschool institutions with a low level of native language proficiency [16]. The desire of parents to shift this responsibility to educational institutions cannot be achieved due to some reasons:

1. According to Article 14 of the law of the Russian Federation ‘On education’, “teaching and learning the state languages of the republics of the Russian Federation should not be carried out to the detriment of teaching and learning the state language of the Russian Federation.”

2. The amount of hours allocated for studying the native language by students who do not speak their native language (2–5 hours) is not sufficient. In this regard, if the mother language is not preserved in the family, especially in an urban family, the children will gradually become monolingual. However, it is necessary to consider the fact that the problem is aggravated by the movement of young people from rural to urban areas, urbanization, the tendency towards the culture unification, etc. [17].

Therefore, with regard to the ethnic diversity, the language situation is focused on the interaction of the languages of ethnic groups, which determines the demand for the Russian language in all communicative spheres.

“The main trends in the dynamics of linguistic processes were shown by the increased interest of the population of the republics in their native languages, in the culture of their speakers, and in the desire to preserve and develop national

languages and to expand the functions of the languages of the titular peoples of the republics and areas of their use” [6].

4 Conclusion

Based on the above, it can be assumed that the viability and hence the preservation and further development of the languages of the peoples of the North Caucasus is associated with the actual status of languages. Therefore, the range of their functional areas can be expanded using a well-developed program of the language construction with “...two aspects: formation of the norms of the literary language and definition of the functions of language in society” [17]. Therefore, the optimal use of Russian, Chechen, Kabardino-Circassian, Karachay-Balkarian and other languages as state languages should be limited by law. In addition, it is necessary to distinguish between their state and public functions and to develop the norms for their use in various fields and the requirements for the level of language proficiency in official spheres.

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