

Language Policy and Youth Development: International Background and Russian Multinational Practice

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Abstract

The issues of language policy and rights of younger generation are especially topical in the view of the 20-21th century international legislation concerning linguistic and ethnic diversity of a multinational state. The research aims to outline key stages of language policy development through federal and regional laws in Russia, to reveal contradictions between federal and local national laws on language, to look at positive experience and legal collisions entailing social disturbances in the country that communicates in 277 languages and dialects. The methodology integrates theoretical and analytical processing realized in search, investigation and analysis of the material, historical approach allowing to follow the development of cultural and language strategy, comparative and contrastive analysis contributing to identifying discrepancies between federal and national laws and case study techniques contributing to illustrate the challenges the state faces in this social sphere. The materials include core international legislation and major legal sources of the Russian Federation and its entities, academic review of publications on language policy in Russia, including linguistic, political, socio-cultural and legal, and attracts various factual, mass media and internet sources. The findings reveal pitfalls in designing and enforcing the state strategy on culture, language and education in the Russian Federation. The study shows that language and culture issues envisaged in laws of different levels and contradictions between them entail social and political collisions and are subject to further development and regulation. The critical situation with a number of national languages needs attention and regulation by the state, however the balance and harmony of language variety in a multinational country can only be reached through legal consolidation of the status of official languages with the Russian language as the bond of multicultural diversity.

Key words: *state/official/national language, minority languages, language policy in education, laws on education, language of instruction.*

Introduction

Since the end of the twentieth century, the urgency to develop ideology of an integral nature (multiculturalism) for current and future generations' development has been determining the world philosophy. Language issues have long-standing traditions and have always played a crucial role

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in the international education development (UNESCO, 2003). Consistent international and regional legislations protect human rights and equality with regard to language and education. One can refer to the Universal declaration of Human Rights (1948), European Convention on Human Rights (1950), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and some others.

The language policy considerations within a national landscape vary from education to mass media and administrative-legal settings (Spolsky, 2007). As far as international context is concerned, there are strong and consistent deliberations over the balance between English as a lingua franca and national languages with the view to foster quality education (Atabekova, 2016; Guangwei & Jun, 2014, Chigisheva et al., 2017). Meanwhile, others underline that vernacular languages should have their say in national landscape (Garret & Gallego Balsà, 2014; Gorter et al., 2018) and consider the respective policies as a tool to preserve national identity through education pathways (Atabekova, et al. 2016; Boutelier, 2018; Bulajeva & Hogan-Brun, 2014).

As for the national landscape, there are many states that are historically multinational. In this case, the balance and coordination of federal and regional languages, the state national language and minority languages is subject for specific concern (Rivers & Brecht, 2018; Gorter et al., 2018). Particular attention is drawn to the issues of language rights with regard to refugees (Atabekova & Shoustikova, 2018).

The data concerning the number of languages and people speaking those languages in their everyday lives is very confusing. According to the 2010 census, residents of the Russian Federation speak 230 languages. In addition to Russian, the most common are Tatar, Ukrainian, Bashkir, Chuvash, Chechen and Armenian. More recent figures refer to 277 languages and dialects. The state education system involves 89 languages, 30 of them as the language of instruction and 59 as the subject of study. Out of 137 million people (97.9%) who speak Russian, about 130 million (92.8%) consider it their native language. About 3 million citizens, living mainly in the national republics of the Russian Federation, do not speak Russian (Bondarenko, 2017). According to UNESCO (2003), 136 languages of Russia are in danger. Of these, 22 are in critical condition (including Aleutian, Terek-Saami), 29 are in grave danger (including Chukchi, Karelian) and 49 are endangered (including Kalmyk, Udmurt and Yiddish). Some scholars assert that political decisions may be very destructive for minority languages in a short period of time (Zhemukhov, 2015; Zamyatin, 2012; Oding et al., 2019).

The above-mentioned linguistic variety across multinational state makes it obvious that the federal legislation on languages might come into contradiction with regional policy on national languages and ethnic minorities, thus affecting youth development.

The research goal aims to outline key stages of language policy development through federal and regional laws in Russia, to reveal contradictions between federal and local national laws on language, to look at positive experience and legal collisions in the course of legislation implementation with regard to young generation prospective.

The mentioned objective requires a number of research tasks, namely the following:

- specifying research conceptual background through the analysis of relevant literature,
- providing overview of Russian laws on languages,
- identifying legislation constrains and language policy challenges in the federal and regional contexts,
- finding solutions to remove the existing problems.

Method

Research Design

The research data incorporates diverse sources, including a number of landmark provisions of international legislation and those of the Russian federation and its entities. Besides, the study integrates academic review of publications investigating various aspects of language policy in Russia, including linguistic, political, socio-cultural and legal, and attracts various factual, mass media and internet sources to better understand the challenges in designing the state language strategy.

The procedures have been implemented in line with research tasks.

Data Analysis

The data analysis has been conducted with methodology that integrates theoretical and analytical approaches in terms of search, investigation and processing the academic and other resources on the topic under study. Historical approach to the material allows looking at designing the national language strategy in a retrospect, thus contributing to better visualising and assessing the evolution of state policy in this field.

Comparative and contrastive analyses contribute to revealing differences, discrepancies and inconsistencies in legal approach to the language policy at federal and regional levels.

Case study techniques help to highlight the critical situations, identified in the research.

The methods of synthesis and logical syllogism have been applied to work out concluding part of the research.

Findings

Research Conceptual Background

Language issues in Russia have been in the focus since the October Revolution of 1917. Some of the young republics had never had either sovereignty or written languages. The state helped develop alphabets, grammar, orthography and organized free schools for young and old to learn the basics of literacy. Later, the national academies of sciences were set up to conserve, develop and nurture the language and culture as well as to map out the other spheres of socio-economic and scientific development.

There are currently 37 state languages in the republics and 15 languages with the official status in addition to Russian as the state language in the Russian Federation. Some of them are: Altai (Republic of Altai), Buryat (Republic of Buryatia), Tatar (Republic of Tatarstan), Veps (Republic of Karelia), Dolgan (Republic of Sakha), Kazakh (Republic of Altai), Karelian (The Republic of Karelia), Komi (Komi Republic) / Komi-Permyak (Komi-Permyak area of the Perm Region), Mansi (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area), Nenets (Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area), Khanty (Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Area), Selkup (Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Area), Chukchi (Republic of Sakha), Finnish (Republic of Karelia), Evenki (Republic of Sakha), Yukaghir (Republic of Sakha).

There are republics that have several languages as state and/or official, but the champion is certainly the Republic of Dagestan that recognizes 14 local written languages equal in status with Russian (Safaraliev, 2015).

Russian policy in education has been discussed by scientific society for many years; it is especially topical in the view of the recent laws concerning the linguistic and ethnic diversity of the multinational state and challenges connected with their further support and development. A number of Russian and foreign scholars has looked at this issue with a historical approach starting with the Russian Empire (Bowring & Borgiakova, 2017). B. Bowring (2018) looks at minority

language rights in connection with political shifts and striving for sovereignty and self-determination of the republics after the USSR disintegration and afterwards, whereas K. Zamyatin (2014) contemplates on relationship of minority and dominant majority languages within titular republics. Legal aspects of the local official languages in Russia are central in the works of V.P. Neroznak and N.Y. Oding (Neroznak et al., 2001; Oding et al., 2019). Numerous studies focus on language situation in republics including in the sphere of education (Turkic and Finno-Ugric languages – Zamyatin (2012); Khakas language – Guseinova (2015); Kalmyk language – Denisova (2015); Tatar language – Wigglesworth-Baker (2015); Tuvan language – Zhuravel (2015); Dagestan languages – Ramazanova (2015) and others). The issues of bilingualism in ethnic republics are investigated at by S.K. Malkhanova (Malkhanova et al., 2019).

The analytical data reveals that very often titular languages suffer from numerous shortcomings in terms of the diversity of functional styles, lack of well-developed teaching methods and educational materials that meet modern requirements. They are not able to perform public functions to the extent of Russian as the main language of communication in the multinational state. At the same time, the Russian language gives more opportunities to continue education, get the desired profession and work in any corner of the vast country. This does not mean that minority languages are neglected. For example, in Tatarstan around 25% of pre-school institutions are Tatar spoken whereas 21% schools practice Tatar as the language of instruction during the whole course of education. The native component in Russian schools and Russian component in Tatar schools contribute to language and cultural education in the republic (Valeev, 2016). All kinds of extra-curricular classes, courses, and activities in a native language are also encouraged and can attract both native speakers and children with other mother tongues.

The legislative status of the Russian language in the regions was heavily discussed in the 90s. The matter is that in constitutions and other laws of some republics, Russian was not defined as the state language of the entire Russian Federation, but as the state language of the republic and often took the secondary position after the national language. It can be found in the texts in the Constitution of the Republic of Bashkortostan (2014), in other regional laws on languages (The Law of the Republic of Altai On Languages, 1993; The Law of the Republic of Buryatia On Languages, 1992; The Law of the Republic of Tatarstan On Languages, 1992; etc.

Such interpretation (the republican state language) ignores the federal status of the Russian language and puts it into the secondary position. Lawyers believe that language status (federal or

republican) must comply with the Art. 68, par. 2 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993), which affirms the right of ethnic republics to establish their national state languages but does not allow those languages to rise above the state language of the country in status. That is why, Academia underlines that today, only one state language of the Russian Federation – the Russian language – successfully performs its function, remaining the only language of inter-ethnic communication in the multinational society, which performs the state-forming and consolidating role (Bitkeeva, 2014).

At the same time, it should be mentioned that the State pays great attention and renders support for indigenous cultures (The Law on State Support for Indigenous Small-Numbered Peoples of the North in Murmansk Region, 2018; The Law on the Languages of Indigenous Minorities of the North Living in the Territory of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Area, 2013). The State finances programmes of fundamental scientific linguistic researches of ethnic minority languages. For example, Karelian, Finnish and Veps languages have been granted substantial financial support for the period of 2013-2020 (The Law of the Republic of Karelia on the State Support of Karelian, Veps and Finnish Languages in the Republic of Karelia, 2017).

The above analysis confirms that the State, the publics, and Academia are aware of the language policy challenges. However, no integrated analysis of existing constrains, their reasons, promising practices and possible ways to balance federal and regional legislations has been implemented. Meanwhile, such an approach might help find solutions to overcome the above-mentioned challenges.

Overview of Russian Laws on Languages

The 1936 Constitution of the new Soviet state was the first in the world to establish compulsory secondary education; it opened up opportunities to vocational, secondary special and higher education free of charge; it created favorable conditions for evening education and learning by correspondence, and provided the students with state scholarships and benefits, free school textbooks, and other advantages.

This sphere is regulated by a number of laws adopted at different times after dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Among them are:

Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993) is the main legal source that enshrines the system of public values. All constitutional rights and freedoms are declared by the state as natural, equal,

inalienable and protected by law. Of particular importance in the system of constitutional values is the right to education set out in Article 43. The state guarantees the general accessibility and free preschool, basic general and secondary vocational education. Basic general education is compulsory until the age of 16 (nine forms). Any person has the right to acquire free higher education on a competitive basis after completing the full secondary school course.

In accordance with Article 68, the Russian language is the state language of the Russian Federation. The state language is recognized as the means of communication in the most spheres of official relationship between the state and citizens: public administration in state and local government bodies, state institutions, legislation, referendums, elections, legal proceedings, education, mass media and others. Across the country, the Russian language is the only one that enjoys the status of compulsory in the most important official spheres of communication. The reason is obvious: Russian is the language of the most numerous nation.

The Republics as part of Russia are entitled to establish their own state languages that are used along with the Russian language. The same also refers to autonomous regions and areas that have the right to establish the official status of national languages through their own statutes and laws. The State guarantees to all the peoples the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development. The national languages in Russia differ in their legal status, social functions they perform and spheres of their application. Languages with the status of the state or official tongues in the republics are communicated in different spheres such as the local or ‘community’ official language at the places of residence of those who speak it, in official communication in the native speakers’ densely populated areas or at places of traditional residence of indigenous minorities, and in local mass media. Current Russian legislation uses both terms - state and official language – however, it does not disclose their content, which prevents direct conclusions about identity and differences in their nature (Dorovskih, 2007).

By granting the similar status to the national languages as the Russian language a number of ethnic republics created the situation allowing to “squeeze out” Russian from the sphere of official communication. Such ethnocentric approach demanded the interference of the state.

A number of laws (*The Federal Law On Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation, 1991; The Federal Law on National and Cultural Autonomy, 1996; The Federal Law on the State Language of the Russian Federation, 2005*) regulate the implementation of the state and official languages policy in the regions of the Russian Federation including in the state bodies, enterprises

and institutions. The emphasis is also laid on conservation of indigenous languages and creating favorable conditions for their study and development.

The State undertakes to provide social, economic and legal protection of ethnic minority languages within its territory. The right to preserve and develop the national language, the freedom to choose and use the language of communication, education and training are established by the Constitution of the Russian Federation, federal laws, constitutions (charters) and laws of the constituents of the Russian Federation and by the Art. 8 of the Federal Law on National and Cultural Autonomy (1996). The need in legal regulation of language issues was really urgent due to the manifested centrifugal tendency of the republics in the late eighties. It was balanced by the legal regime of the national languages granting the so-called “linguistic sovereignty” (Art. 2 of the Law on Languages, 1991), which guaranteed the freedom of choice and use of the language of communication with the absolute right (Dorovskih, 2007).

Supported by the state, “the non-Slavic tongues of Russia have retained their vitality and have grown more prevalent in some regions. This trend is especially visible as autonomy of language becomes an important symbol of the struggle to preserve distinct ethnic identities” (Hays, 2016; Bowring, 2018). Unfortunately, it sometimes led to social conflicts, prejudice, and/or opposition thus undermining the aims of the national language policy.

The Federal Law on Education in the Russian Federation (2012) is one of the key priorities in socio-economic development of the state. Since 1992 when it was first adopted it has undergone numerous amendments. According to experts, an ever-increasing number of amendments made Russia’s educational legislation self-contradictory (Kozyrin & Troshkina, 2017).

The Law of 2012 guarantees education in the state language of the Russian Federation as well as the choice of language of instruction and tuition within the options provided by the education system. Instruction in and study of the state languages in the republics may be introduced in accordance with their laws. Russian nationals have the right to acquire pre-school, primary basic and general basic education in their native language from among the languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, as well as the right to learn their mother tongue, including Russian, within the opportunities provided by educational system in the manner prescribed by the legislation on education. The language(s) of education are determined by the local normative acts of the organization carrying out educational activities under the educational programmes implemented by it, in accordance with the legislation of the Russian Federation (Art. 14).

These general provisions of the Federal Law on Education can have its regional component represented by laws and local regulations within the republics. Sometimes respective legal provisions bear contradictions and inconsistencies specifying language rights in the republics some of which we have highlighted above. A special issue under study are the norms concerning the language of instruction in the system of education. Some republics correctly interpret the federal law and demonstrate the dispositive character, that is, citizens have the right to choose the language of education for their children (Art. 14 of the Law on State Languages of the Udmurtian Republic, 2015). Adversely, in some republics teaching is conducted in the imperative manner, that is, the native language is compulsory for all the schoolchildren irrespective of nationality. According to the Ministry of Education, over 1.5 million schoolchildren studied national languages in 2017 (Vostok Media, 2018). Most of these students live in Dagestan, Chechnya, Bashkiria and Tatarstan. Language of instruction is a burning issue also in the Volga region, Yakutia, Altai and in the North Caucasus. Many Russian families in Yakutia complain that their children cannot receive a quality education because the best local schools with specialized profiles accept only children from indigenous families (ibid). Most heated debates however took place in Tatarstan; they led to the ethnic conflict of interests in the sphere of education.

President`s Order No. 1666 of 19.12.2012 on the Strategy of the State National Policy of the Russian Federation for the period of up to 2025 (2012) contributes to strengthening the role of the Russian language and reflects the trend of recent years. It is a fundamental document for the strategic advancement of the country, whose development is determined by the changed socio-economic and ethno-cultural situation. The main goal of the Strategy is formation of the society that is held together by a holistic self-consciousness, solidarity and awareness of the unity of its past, present and future, i.e. the single civic nation. The Strategy outlines four key directions, among which the language policy is of prime importance up to 2025.

On July 25, 2018, the Russian State Duma adopted the bill that will be introduced into the Law on Education as an amendment. It specifies the rules of teaching state languages in pre-school, primary general and basic general institutions in national republics. According to this law parents as legal representatives of minor students will determine the choice of the native language among the national languages of the country, including Russian as the native language. Thus, those who choose Russian can study it instead of Buryat, Adyghe, Mari or Tatar. Ethnic minorities may now

decide whether they will study their national tongues. The subject called 'native language' is compulsory.

Such provision shall be enshrined in the *Federal State Educational Standard (2018)*. These Standards set out mandatory requirements for implementation of programmes for all levels of education from elementary general, to basic/secondary general, to initial/secondary vocational, to higher education by educational institutions formally recognized by the state through licensing. They specify requirements on educational programmes structure and scope, competences and areas of professional activities, requirements concerning personnel, financial, logistical and other conditions.

The Standards have the force of law and must be followed by all educational institutions. This part of social sphere is within the powers of state authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and their governments and is funded and administered locally. That is why there are many discrepancies, differences and specifics in teaching and learning throughout the country. To introduce consistent regulation and countrywide law enforcement, the *Russian Government by its Order No. 637-r approved the Concept of Teaching the Russian language and literature in the Russian Federation (2016)* (hereinafter the Concept); it defines the approaches to the study of the Russian language according to key provisions of the historical and cultural standard. The Concept recognises different levels of learning outcome across the country and suggests working out and introducing modern teaching technologies in a multilingual setting. The results of the final exams in Russia revealed the need for additional measures to improve education quality. The mechanisms for removing the drawbacks at state and local levels have been thoroughly considered but are currently at the initial stage of their realisation. The Concept recommends developing special-purpose educational programmes to improve the quality of teaching Russian in the regions.

Legislation Constrains and Language Challenges in Federal and Regional Contexts

The section focuses on language policy constrains at federal and regional level and explores conflict situations that have developed in the regions since disintegration of the USSR.

Mari El's case

An example of the intra-ethnic conflict in Russia is the Mari language. The Art. 15 of the Constitution of Mari El (2014), enshrines two state languages: Mari (Mountain and Meadow) and Russian. This provision has aroused a wide debate concerning the status of two literary

norms of the Mari language. According to the Russian census of 2010 ethnic Mari account for more than 290 thousand people, whereas the Mountain Mari comprises about 23 thousand people. Some linguists representing the Meadow Mari majority oppose the state status of the Mountain Mari language, as they believe it is just a dialect but not the literal language. They insist that Mountain Mari should not be mentioned in the Constitution of the Republic. The discussion raised up a wide range of aspects related to understanding the origin and history of Mari as a nation, their language and dialects, literary norms, influence of the Russian language on the minority languages, language and social status of people speaking their mother tongue, and many others.

The above tensions have revealed the social conflict between two groups of Mari elite belonging to different ethnic societies in the strive to conserve their identities. In contrast to the nationalist trends, introduction of the state language of the Russian Federation demonstrates adverse incentives. It does not aim at strengthening the position of the Russian language by granting a special status but highlights the urgency of legal consolidation of the principles of a nation-wide language policy in the context of a multinational federation. Accelerated growth of national identity, sometimes reaching various forms of nationalism and separatism, puts forward the issue of language unity of the state in terms of its federal structure and multinational population (Dorovskih, 2007).

Tatarstan's case

An inter-ethnic language conflict in Tatarstan (the Republic of Tatarstan) is of a protracted character, which reached its acute stage after the introduction of the Tatar language in schools as a compulsory subject for all students irrespective of nationality (The Law of the Republic of Tatarstan On Languages, 1992; Law on Education, 2013). Tatar and Russian are learnt in the same amount. According to parents' complaints, Russian children lose the chances of learning Russian more thoroughly because the language sessions are equally divided between two languages. Russian is not recognized as the native tongue in Tatarstan, so schoolchildren have less class sessions in this discipline than students in other regions of Russia. Such decision caused outrage and led to regular street protests. Some parents are even considering moving from Tatarstan in search for better educational opportunities for their children (Yemelianova, 2000; Sulejmanov, 2014).

Adygea's case

Numerous court cases connected with the language school policy have developed a contradictory interpretation of this issue in judicial practice. The Supreme Court of Adygea (Republic of Adygea) confirmed that the imperative duty to learn Adyghe contradicts parts 1 and 2 of Art. 9 of the Federal Law on Languages (1991), which establishes the right to choose the language of education and training (Decision of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Adygea of December No. 3-32, 2006). It asserted that the requirement for Adyghe students to study the Adyghe language and the introduction of the Adyghe language as a compulsory school subject cannot be an imperative, since it leads to violation of the principles of equality of human rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Russian Constitution. Such requirement is not provided for by the federal legislation and violates its own legislation on education by obliging the Adyghe students to learn the Adyghe language, which impairs and limits the rights of citizens according to their language and nationality.

Dagestan's case

Similar case heard in Dagestan was resolved adversely. The Supreme Court of the Russian Federation later upheld that the norm of Dagestan law establishing the duty of studying the native language as a compulsory subject does not contradict the federal legislation (The Russian Supreme Court Decision, 2009).

Further debates on the issue attracted attention of President Putin who expressed his viewpoint. He said that “it’s unacceptable to force a person [at school] to study the language that is not their mother tongue” (RIA Novosti, 2017). President also noted that the Russian language is the language of the state, the language of inter-ethnic communication. “It is impossible to replace it with anything. It is the natural, spiritual pillar of our entire multinational country. Everyone should speak it. The languages of the peoples of Russia are an integral part of the unique culture of the peoples of Russia; to study these languages is the right guaranteed by the Constitution, a voluntary right” (ibid).

After the prosecutor’s inspections of 2017 two republics (out of eight) changed their legislation on education eliminating compulsory language learning, one of them is Kalmykia (Jankiewicz & Kniaginina, 2018), where studying the national language also bore an imperative character.

Cyrillic or Latin script

The alphabet challenge arose in the 1990s, when some republics attempted an alphabet reform. Currently all the written languages across Russia use Cyrillic. However, initially it was different.

The switch to Russian script took place because most of the new alphabets for spoken languages were formed on Cyrillic and Russian became the language of inter-ethnic communication in the multinational state. There was the opinion that the same graphics within the same country would facilitate mastering ethnic minority languages and Russian. Besides, Roman or Latin is not as rich in vowels as Cyrillic and the task was to bring a written language as closely to the spoken language as possible. For this end, additional letters were created and introduced into Cyrillic depending on the phonetics of a specific language. There are languages that formally employed three scripts (Arabic, Latin and Russian) during their history. They are Turkic (Alai, Bashkir, Chuvash, Tuvan, Yakut and others) and Caucasian (Abazin, Chechen, Adyghe and Avar) languages. They have favoured Russian graphic since 1938-1939. On the other hand, there are languages of Nakh-Dagestan groups that are still only spoken and do not have a written form. According to the Federal Law on Languages (1991), the state language of the country (Russian) and the state languages of the republics are based on the Cyrillic graphic. Other graphics may be established by Federal Laws (Par. 6 of Art.3). However, this rule has been violated on one occasion.

The Constitution of the Republic of Tatarstan (1992) envisages the right of the Republic to identify the alphabet graphic of the Tatar language as the state language of the Republic; this provision was confirmed by the Constitutional Court of Tatarstan in its Resolution of December 24, 2003. By this Resolution the Tatar Constitutional Court arbitrarily interpreted the legal norms of the Russian Federation currently in force and formalized Latin as the graphic alphabet of the national language contrary to the Federal Law on the Languages, according to which the use of any other alphabet has to be approved by a special federal law.

After heavy criticism and heated debates and following the Russian Constitutional Court ruling No. 16-P (of November 16, 2004), on December 28, 2004, the Tatar Supreme Court overturned the ruling. However, Latin script is used in a limited sphere, while Arabic calligraphy is very popular in various national settings.

The issue of Latin script was also raised in the Fourth Opinion on the Russian Federation by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Para. 107 (2018). In their comments, the Russian Government asserts that introduction of Latin script into Turkic and/or Finno-Ugric languages would mean using a significant number of diacritical marks and letter combinations, which slow down rather than facilitate the transliteration

of speech. The decision taken in the Republic of Tatarstan was criticized as an attempt to violate the linguistic unity of the Tatar people, the greater part of whom live outside the republic, as well as to break cultural ties between the peoples living together; it could also create additional difficulties for Russians in mastering the Tatar language (Sokolovkij, 2005). Adversely, Cyrillic allows preserving a single information space in the vast territory of the Russian Federation.

Russian language and ethnic minority languages

Despite its obviously humanistic aims, the Strategy was criticized by the Council of Europe in its Fourth Opinion by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2018) claiming that the programme is dedicated not only to the advancement of national minorities, but also to the patriotic education of the youth and promotion of the Russian language (Para 30, 31, 62) (as cited in the Russian Government Comments on the Fourth Opinion of the Advisory Committee on the FCNM Implementation by the Russian Federation, 2018).

The Russian government argues that the main objectives of any state are to preserve and strengthen itself as a single and indivisible community with formed civil identity. However, a mature civil identity does not mean the elimination of any other self-identifications, rather promoting interethnic stability and harmonious development of ethnic minorities in a single socio-political dimension. Russian scientists believe that relationship-building process among the peoples of Russia is constantly evolving and improving: the implementation of constitutional, ethnic and confessional rights of citizens is a pledge of national peace and harmony. In this regard, the multiple tasks allotted to the Federal Agency for Ethnic Affairs are not excessive, as concluded by the Advisory Committee; they rather strengthen Russia's multi-ethnic unity with the concurrent implementation of the linguistic, cultural, religious and other rights of ethnic minorities.

Same educational standards and different results

On completion of secondary general education (form 11) the students take exams called the Unified State Examinations (USE). Two subjects are obligatory for state assessment, Russian and mathematics; others depend on the student's priorities and are optional. The matter of great concern is the dramatic discrepancy in the results of these exams among regions. Traditionally, students from Moscow demonstrate much greater progress than students from the regions. In Perm, the average marks in the Russian language are steadily higher by 5 points than in the

neighbouring Republic of Komi. Students from Altai get 70 points at best whereas Muscovites – 80-85 (Konyuhova, 2017). Russian scholars (National Research University Higher School of Economics, 2017) investigated the reasons and concluded that final exam results heavily depend on economic environment of the region, namely parents' capacity to invest in their children's additional training, regional educational systems' capacity to invest in teachers' professional competences.

The existing laws provide an option to take the USE in a native language; however, such an exam is not very popular among school leavers. For example, in 2018 only 24 students passed the USE in the Tatar language in Tatarstan (Idel.Realii, 2018). Many regional representatives wish the exams were in native languages instead of Russian, but the Russian Ministry of Education does not currently suggest any comments on the issue. The reasons are obvious: limited budgets, huge additional administrative and organizational workload, and questioned effectiveness of the work done. The problem is that most of the minority languages lack the environment where students could communicate in their mother tongue out of school.

Conclusion

The analysis of academic literature has made it possible to specify the research conceptual background. It accepts legal, societal and academic focus on language policy challenges, but argues that there is lack of integrated analysis with the view to search for tools and promising practices to balance federal and regional legislations on language issues.

The language and cultural policy must be well balanced and demonstrate respect and equal opportunities to all the nations within the state. A varied network of legal norms, regulations and rules concerning languages in Russia, including the Russian Constitution, reflects the importance the state attaches to this sphere of social life.

The research findings reveal contradictions between federal and local national laws on a number of language issues that, in turn, lead to language problems in the federal and regional context. They happen when the state powers of the ethnic republics are focused on ensuring the linguistic rights of the titular nations. However, many national tongues, that acquired the status of the state languages of the republics do not evolve functional styles and are not able to perform certain public and organisational functions. The level of their functional development does not always meet the sociolinguistic needs of society but is not taken into consideration when establishing a state or

official language. More confusion is added by the presence of several standard varieties of the language, insufficient language knowledge, code switching and language mixing.

The task can be reached by preserving the country unity through strengthening the position of the Russian language as the bond of multinational diversity. However, regional ethnocratic policies reveal legal and social collisions hindering the progress in this field. Ousting of the Russian language is accompanied by pushing the native Russian speakers out of political and other spheres, thus relegating them to the position of alien, not indigenous people. The concern of the state powers of the republics is focused on ensuring the linguistic rights of the titular nations, which does not contradict the federal laws but highlights their conceptual incompleteness. In this respect, a special role has to be attributed to legal regulation of critical issues throughout the vast and multicultural state.

The findings make it possible to identify possible solutions to remove challenges and constraints that have been detected in the course of studies.

The language issues in youth development should be in the constant focus of the government and the state. Continuous revision of the existing laws, adopting new norms and regulations are a powerful instrument in establishing social justice in the country with multicultural perspective. The national task is to raise culturally minded members who treasure historical heritage, natural wealth and social values. However, the state educational strategies are facing constraints and challenges revealed at schools that demand solutions in legal, financial, organizational, scientific, educational and other spheres. In our view, such important social domain cannot be managed from the legal entities' local budgets. The leading role of the state seems to be urgent to remove legal and other inconsistencies throughout the vast and culturally diverse country.

The study asserts that the state pays great attention and renders support for indigenous cultures (see the examples in the Conceptual Background section). At the same time, the accomplished legal consolidation of the status of official languages for the titular nations is intended to enhance their social role, to strengthen or create conditions for their further development and improvement. There are vast practices of successful bilingualism where minority language performs social and private functions and majority language complements them in public spheres. The role of the Russian language among state languages of the country is to unite nations in the multicultural environment. It does not have to compete with minority languages, on the contrary, it complements them to meet all social language needs in different areas of communication including education.

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