

National Minorities in Moldova: Institutional Arrangements, Rights and Policies

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ABSTRACT

Moldova's ethnic composition has become what it is today following a series of key historical events. At the moment, according to the 2014 general census, the population of the Republic of Moldova is about 2.9 million. Moldovans represent 75.1% of the total population; 7.0% self-identified as Romanians; Ukrainians represent 6.6%, Gagauz - 4.6%, Russians - 4.1%, Bulgarians - 1.9%, Jews - 0.11%, Roma - 0.3% and other nationalities - 0.5%, including Belarusians, Poles, Armenians, Germans, Tartars.

The Republic of Moldova remains a multi-ethnic state, which since independence has faced gaps in the management of this diversity. Despite the existence of a legal mechanism and institutional arrangements in the field of ethnic policy, the real concerns regarding the integration policies of persons belonging to the minorities started very late.

The article will analyse the evolution of policies in the field of harmonization of ethnic relations, focusing in particular on the evaluation of the implementation of governmental political principles in the field of integration of minorities, as the “Strategy for the integration of national minorities of the Republic of Moldova 2015-2020” and “Strategy for consolidating interethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2017-2027”.

KEYWORDS: national minorities, multi-ethnic states, ethnic policies.

1. Introduction

After proclaiming its independence and sovereignty in 1991, the Republic of Moldova has taken a number of important measures to recognize the rights of national minorities and to secure the State's commitments towards their respect. The normative and institutional framework for the promotion and protection of national minority rights within a human rights-based context is in constant development in the light of the international standards, national priorities and aspirations to the European integration. Particular attention is paid to the issue of improving the system of relevant legal norms implementation and ensuring their effectiveness. The principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment in relation to the national minorities and their integration into various spheres of public life have been strengthened through legal initiatives adopted in recent years (Council of Europe, 2019: 8)

After collapse of URSS most of republic within post-Soviet area was larger multiethnic. The cote of minorities in Moldova in 1989 was about 36%. The ethnic migration in the earlier 1990 increase a bit titular nation ponders. At the time of the 2004 census, Moldova's total population was 3.383 332. The largest ethnic group in the republic is the Romanians/Moldavians



accounting for 76.1% of the population. Other major ethnic groups are the Ukrainians (8.4 %), Russians (5.8%), Gagauz (4.4%), Bulgarians (1.9%), and Jews (2%) etc. When Republic of Moldova became independent, enshrining the titular language as the official language was closely bound up with the idea of establishing and maintaining full independence. By this time, however, Russian and Russophone minorities had become identified with opposition to democracy and independence. Finding themselves treated as second-class (and probably disloyal) citizens, they turned to Moscow for help. This only served to confirm the suspicion and mistrust of the newly independent states. Issues of language and national identity fuelled the series of conflicts which led to the breakup of the USSR (Putină, 2013; Putină, 2019).

Today, according to the 2014 general census, Moldova's population is approximately 2.9 million. Moldovans make up 75.1% of the total population. 7.0% self-identified as Romanians. Ukrainians account for 6.6%, Gagauz for 4.6 %, Russians for 4.1%, Bulgarians for 1.9%, Jews 0.11%, Roma 0.3% and other nationalities 0.5%, among them Belarusians, Poles, Armenians, Germans, and Tatars (NBS, Census of 2014). Ethnic communities are not territorially divided and are interspersed across Moldova, except for the Gagauz people, who live in the South of Moldova. The data on Moldova does not include the Transnistrian region, over which fighting occurred in the early 1990s and which remains outside of the control of the central government (Federal Foreign Office, 2018: 12).¹

The presence of large and regionally concentrated ethnic minorities in border areas that are often territorially contiguous to an external national homeland continues to this day to bear testimony to this legacy (Brubaker, 1996). In Moldova the national minorities are concentrated in specific region of the country. Turkic-speaking Gagauzians populates largely the southern region of country in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia. The Bulgarians are concentrated in Taraclia District, also in the south. These are the only territorial units where Moldovans form a minority. The Ukrainians populate predominant the northern regions of country, while Russians live in urban areas, especially in Chișinău, despite this country's capital remains a strong attribute of titular population representatives (Kosienkowski, 2014). Issues of language and national identity fuelled the series of conflicts which led to the breakup of the USSR. While the Chisinau authorities spent as much of their political energy on defending this conceptual duality as their opponents from both sides on attacking it, political and economic reforms were on the backburner (Meurs, 2004).

Interethnic division is often used by politicians for election purposes. During election campaigns political parties often use different nostalgias and phobias, especially those inherited from the Soviet past. Some political parties insist on the idea that the Republic of Moldova is the "second Romanian state", that "we are all Romanians!" Others, on the contrary, pedal the topic of the Russian language, promising to give it the status of the second state language. In particular, it was one of the issues of the electoral campaign of PCRM (Communist Party) in 2001, which

¹According to the population census in Transnistria, conducted in 2015, the region had 475,665 inhabitants – 31.9% Moldovans, 30.4% - Russians and 28% Ukrainians. The data are comparable with the numbers of 1995, when Moldovans accounted for 34.1%, Russians – 30.1% and Ukrainians – 28%. As in the case of right-bank Moldova, there are serious questions about the validity of the data, as the real rates of immigration have been much higher. Ref - Ria.ru, Transnistria's population declined by over 14% in 11 years, <https://ria.ru/world/20160513/1432571354.html>

helped them to win the election, and of the PSRM (Socialist Party), which helped them to gain the largest number of votes in a fragmented Parliament in 2014. This exploitation of linguistic identity and geopolitical themes for narrow party interests deepens the split and misunderstanding in society (Federal Foreign Office, 2018: 17).

In the Republic of Moldova, national minorities, whose share varied from 36%, 22% to 19.4% of the country's population over time, (the main Russian, Ukrainian, Gagauz, Bulgarian minority groups, etc.)² had a considerable impact in support of political parties that exploited the geopolitical cleavage, they represent an electorate with relations in Moscow, Kiev, Ankara, Sofia. Being a less fragmented electoral segment than Moldovans, without identity crises, national minorities have become the prerogative of multiethnic political parties, with pro-Eastern, pro-statalist messages, they were easier to enlist in a state political spectrum, not both ideologically and geopolitically. The price of such a peculiarity of political and electoral behaviour further favoured the consolidation of dependence on Moscow.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the authorities of the newly independent state resumed the Soviet vision of the nation, called "Moldovanism," and implemented a national policy that insisted on a distinct Moldovan nation and people. The Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM) and Vladimir Voronin, the party leader and president of the republic between 2001 and 2009, revived this Moldovanism and showed, in Luke March's opinion, a "consistent strategy" with which the party aimed to become a Moldovan nation builder, emphasizing overcoming ethnic divisions and defending statehood and territorial integrity (Iglesias, 2013).

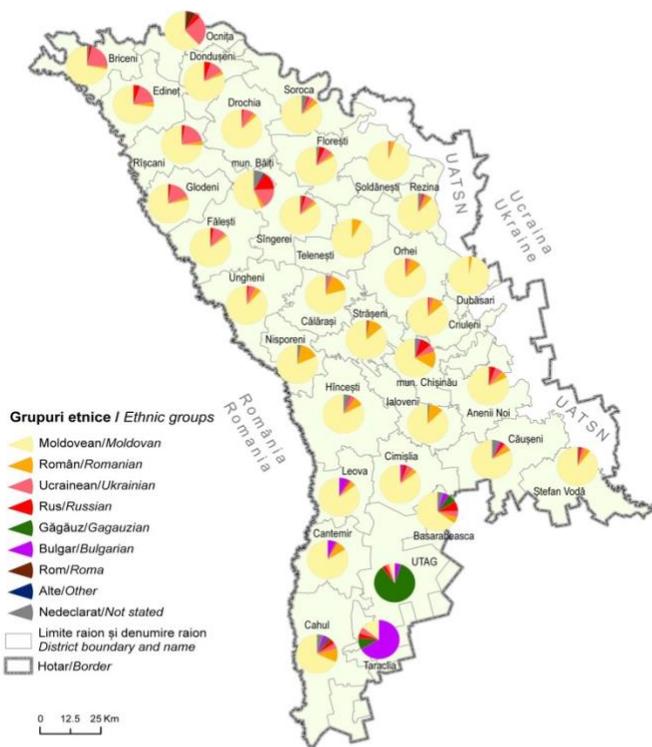
Tabel 1. Ethnic structure of the Republic of Moldova

1989	The main ethnic groups	2004	2014
64.5%	Moldavians/Romanians	78%	75,1/7%
8.6%	Ukrainians	8.4%	6,6%
13.0%	Russians	5.9%	4,1%
3.5%	Gagauz	4.4%	4,6%
2.0%	Bulgarians	1.9%	1,9%
1.5%	Jews	0.1%	
1.6%	Other ethnic groups: Poles, Byelorussians, Azerbaijanis, Armenians, etc.	0.1%	0,8%

Moldova's national minorities today live in a state that can be considered "nationalizing", according to the concept of Rogers Brubaker, a state in which the authorities try to build a nation-state according to the classical model of the nineteenth century.

²Proportion of national minorities in relation to the majority ethnic group according to census data from 1989, 2004, 2014, conducted in the Republic of Moldova

Structura etnică pe raioane
Ethnicity by district



Sursa datelor statistice / Source of statistical data:
Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor 2014, Republica Moldova
2014 Population and Housing Census, Republic of Moldova

Sursa datelor geografice / Source of geographic data: ARFCAL/RIC

Transnistria și comunitățile Chitcani, Cremeniug, Gâsca, Coțova și mun. Tighina nu au fost recenzate

Transnistria and the communes of Chitcani, Cremeniug, Gâsca, Coțova and Tighina Mun. were not enumerated

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This map was produced with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund in Moldova, and does not necessarily represent the views of SDC, UNFPA, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations

Source: *Ethnic structure by districts in Republic of Moldova, according to the 2014 census,*
https://statistica.gov.md/public/files/Recensamint/Recensamint_pop_2014/Rezultate/Harti/Limba_materna_A4.jpg

Referring to Linz's theory of nation-building strategies (Linz, 1993) used by different states in relation to national minorities living in their territories, the author summarizes four types of strategies that existed in political practice: purification strategy, isolation strategy, assimilation strategy and balance strategy. The Republic of Moldova has tried to focus its ethnic policy on the strategy of balance between all ethnic groups, harmonizing interethnic relations being a rather difficult task. The management of ethnic pluralism was in a “laissez-faire” manner, the tactic of non-intervention on the integration of minorities was combined with permissive ethnic policy, often criticized by external partners.



*Normative framework and policy documents in the field of ethnic
policy management*

Moldova has a rather developed legislative basis for interethnic relations and minority protection, but laws are not implemented to a sufficient degree. The national legal framework includes more than 30 legislative and governmental acts, the most important are the *Law on the Functioning of Languages*, the *Law on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities and the Legal Status of Their Organizations*, the *National Concept for Cultural and Ethnic Relations*, as well as the *Law on Equality* (Federal Foreign Office, 2018: 18).

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The current legislation is imperfect and stimulates unreal expectations, violates the balance between the rights and obligations both of the majority and of the minorities, prescribes to the language of a minority representatives the status of interethnic language of communication to the detriment of the official state language and encourages leaders, representatives of some national minorities to use their cultural identity to gain benefits for their own, as is the case of Gagauz minority (Corețchi, Pascaru, Stevens, 2002).

The basic legislation regarding national minorities has not changed in the last years, so it is safe to switch back to the 1994 Constitution at this stage. *Article 10 II of the Constitution* recognizes the right of all citizens to preserve, develop and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity and *Article 13*, although reaffirming Moldovan as the state language, acknowledges and protects the right to preserve, develop and use the Russian language and other languages spoken within the Republic of Moldova. The language tests, which had been originally envisaged for 1994, had been postponed in the meantime and will probably, now never, be introduced. Russian was not officially granted the status of a second state language, as most Russian speakers wished; nevertheless, it does have *de facto* such status (Neukirch, 1999: 53). The division of the Moldovan society according to the ethnic criteria is just a visible part of the iceberg. This is a way to hide the incompetence of the governing body that is challenged to solve the problems confronting the society, negatively impacting the majority as well as minority populations. Among the key issues that persist is the attempt to manipulate and politicizes the linguistic context within the society.

A sensitive topic is the linguistic dimension and the subject of the place of the Russian language in interethnic communication. (Law no 3465, 1989), considered in relation to international legal standards, was tolerable to those unfamiliar with the language of the majority, and encouraged the representatives of the national minorities to learn the official language during a transition period up to 3-7 years (Corețchi, Pascaru, Stevens, 2002).

In 2018 by decision of Constitutional Court of Republic of Moldova the Law no 3465 of September 1, 1989 was declared unconstitutional (CC, Decision on Law no 3465). The Court noted that Article 2 of the *Law* gives the Russian language a privileged status over other languages of ethnic minorities in the Republic of Moldova, a status that does not derive from the Constitution. There are districts (e.g. Briceni, Drochia, Edineț, Fălești, Glodeni, Hâncești, Ocnița, Râșcani, Șoldănești) in which the Ukrainian language, for example, has a higher share than the Russian language. It can be noticed that in some districts the Russian language has a small share, of less than 3% (e.g. Cantemir, Călărași, Criuleni, Dubăsari, Hâncești, Ialoveni, Nisporeni, Orhei,



Straseni, Soldanesti, Telenesti). However, being elevated to the level of language of interethnic communication, Russian, the language of an ethnic minority, acquires along with Romanian a quasi-official status (CC, Decision on Law no 3465).

In the autumn of 2020, a group of deputies representing the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova drafted Law no. 459 on the status of the Russian language on the territory of the Republic of Moldova (Draft on Law no. 459, 2020), after called The Law on the Functioning of Languages no 234/2020. This bill was adopted in two readings in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, but did not enter into force, arousing critical reactions among society, experts and state institutions. According to the law expertise realized by the National Anticorruption Center the implementation of the draft law on the status of the Russian language on the territory of the Republic of Moldova, will not stimulate national minorities to know the Romanian language, there is a possible risk of conflicts between ethnic groups in the country. The experts of the National Anticorruption Center said that the implementation of that project constitutes “an imminent danger to the social order and to the bases of the statehood of the Republic of Moldova” and involves considerable additional expenditures from the state budget (National Centre of Anticorruption, 2020). In opinion of The People's Advocate mentions that the contested law does not correspond to the provisions of articles 10, 13 par. (1) and 16 of the Constitution and can generate dissension in society (CC, Decision on Law no 3465).

The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Moldova declared unconstitutional *Law no. 234 of December 16, 2020 on the functioning of languages spoken on the territory of the Republic of Moldova*. Among the arguments the Constitutional Court mentions the preferential treatment of the Russian language in comparison with the other languages of ethnic minorities, by positioning it at the level of the official language, that is contrary to Article 13 of the Constitution. This treatment does not comply with the principles enunciated by the Preamble of the Constitution and makes the prescription of article 10 par. (2) of the Constitution to be emptied of substance with respect to other ethnic minorities who speak a language other than Russian. The contested law does not contain a stable, sustainable and clearly defined language policy from the perspective of constitutional requirements. The lack of such a policy harms the interests of society and makes the Parliament not respect its positive obligation stemming from Article 13 para. (4) of the Constitution, the legislature failing to solve one of the great challenges in the political and social life of the Republic of Moldova, in terms of constitutional principles. Therefore, Law no. 234 of December 16, 2020 on the functioning of languages spoken on the territory of the Republic of Moldova is contrary to Article 13 of the Constitution (CC, Decision no 4 on Law no 234, 2020).

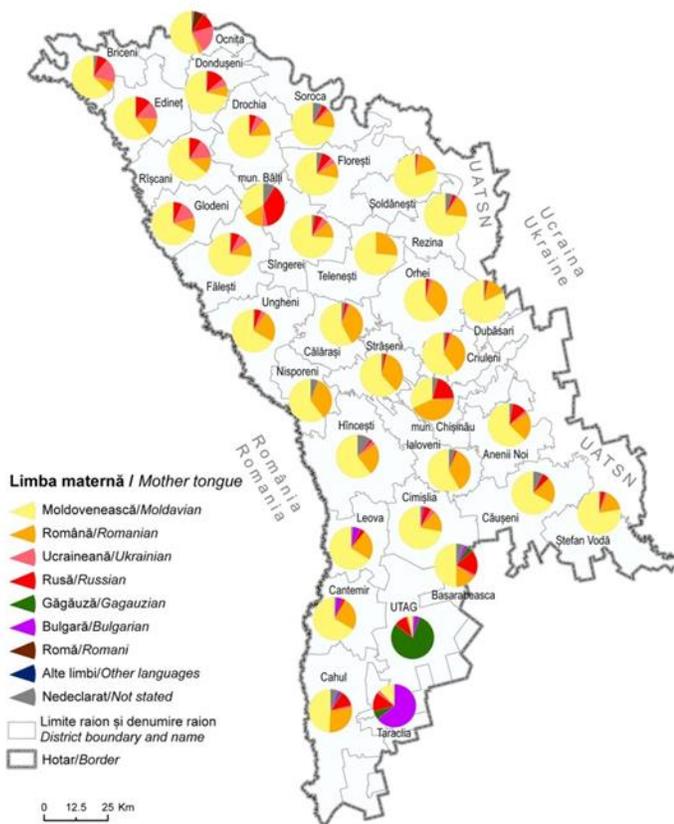
Therefore, according to the data on the structure of the population by language obtained at the 2014 Census, from a total population of 2,804,801 citizens, of whom 2,723,315 said it is their mother tongue, 1,544,726 have as their mother tongue Moldovan, 639 339 - Romanian, 107 252 - Ukrainian, 263 523 - Russian, 114 532 - Gagauz, 41 756 - Bulgarian, 7 574 - Romans and 4613 - other languages. Starting from the premise that the gluttony "Romanian" includes the term "Moldovan", in The Republic of Moldova Romanian is the mother tongue of 2,184,065 citizens. In percentage data, the mother tongue of at least 77.86% of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova is Romanian. The Russian language is mother tongue of at least 9.39% of the citizens of the Republic of Moldova, Gagauz is the mother tongue of at least 4.08% of the population, Ukrainian



is the mother tongue of at least 3.82% of citizens, and Bulgarian is the mother tongue of at least 1.48% of the population (NBS, Population Census, 2014)

Another bone of contention in language and minority politics is usually the *education sector*. Article 35 II of the Moldovan Constitution envisages that the state will enforce the right of each person to choose his or her language in which teaching will be conducted. This provision, which is reinforced in the language and in the education laws, is followed in practice as far as possible under the current socio-economic crises. In practice, Moldovan and Russian dominate in schools and higher education institutions. Schools with education in Ukrainian (77), Gagauz (49), Bulgarian (32), Ivrit (2) and German (1) also exist, but none teaches the whole curriculum in one of these languages (Neurkirch, 1999, 54).

Limba maternă pe raioane
Mother tongue by district



Sursa datelor statistice / Source of statistical data:
Recensământul Populației și Locuințelor 2014, Republica Moldova
2014 Population and Housing Census, Republic of Moldova

Sursa datelor geografice / Source of geographic data: ARFC/ALRC

Transnistria și comunele Chițcani, Crețmenciu, Gâsca, Corjova și mun. Tigheina nu au fost recensate
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Thus, it may seem that some lessons have been learned regarding the language legislation and its application in practice, but others probably have to be taken. First of all, it is now for the Russian-speaking community in Moldova to accept that learning the state language of the state of which they are citizens is a necessary step for integration. This does not mean that they should be assimilated. But symmetric bilingualism has to replace the asymmetric bilingualism which has prevailed in Moldova until today if the idea of a multi-ethnic Republican Moldovan identity is to have a chance in reality. Secondly, the Moldovan government has to undertake further efforts to offer real possibilities for Russian speakers to learn Moldovan and for other nationalities also to learn the native language. Thirdly, Moldovans should refrain from any aggressive propaganda against the use of Russian in public or in parliament, as has happened recently, in order not to alienate Russian speakers again (or not to do so further). Fourthly, young Moldovans should continue to learn and to speak Russian in order to ensure that Moldova remains a bilingual society. Trends are already visible that more and more Moldovans are not learning a full command of Russian. If Moldovans start to abandon Russian, and Russians, Ukrainians and others continue to refuse to learn and speak Moldovan, the chances for the development of a republican Moldovan identity are bleak (Neurkirch, 1999).

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The Law on the right of persons belonging to national minorities (2001) was adopted only after ten years of Moldova's independence and represents nothing but a copy of languages law from 1989. Delayed nature of this law and respectively of *Law on national concept of Republic of Moldova (2005)* reveals an action and decision-making paradox of Moldovan Government. In these circumstances, a *strategy on integration of national minorities* in Republic of Moldova is just in preliminary stage of draft.

In 2003, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova adopted the *Law on approving the Concept of the national policy of the Republic of Moldova*. We consider that this document was the first consolidated policy in the field of integration of ethnic minorities, which aimed to ensure the unity of the people of the Republic of Moldova. The document even mentioned inter alia the goal of "consolidating the people of the Republic of Moldova, taking into account the multiethnic, multicultural, multilingual and regional specifics, by strengthening citizens' trust in their common homeland - the Republic of Moldova" (Law no 546, 2003).

The *Law on the approving the Concept of the national policy of the Republic of Moldova* is still in force, but we find that de facto it no longer works. The action plan that was elaborated by the Government was not transposed in practice and we do not notice any measures that would obviously emerge from the Concept in the national normative context. Moreover, this document continued to arouse dissatisfaction in both civil and political society. Thus, on 05.07.2013, a group of deputies in the Parliament addressed to the Constitutional Court the notification for the control of the constitutionality of the provisions of the present Concept. In the opinion of the authors of the notification, Law no. 546-XV of December 19, 2003 on the approval of the National Concept of the Republic of Moldova through its entire content represents an ideology, elevated to the rank of



national policy, which contradicts the constitutional rigors expressly provided in art. 5 para. (2) (CC, Decision no 10, 2013).

An important policy document is considered "*Strategy for consolidating interethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova for the years 2017-2027*". This document was approved by the Government of the Republic of Moldova on 30.12.2016. The document highlighted as a main goal the facilitation of interethnic concord, encouraging inclusive diversity of society in the Republic of Moldova by integrating national minorities in various spheres of state life; ensuring equality of citizens regardless of ethnic, cultural, linguistic affiliation; observance of national legislation and international standards". That significant step is consistent to the relevant recommendations contained in the fourth Opinion (in particular in paragraphs 40, 41, 42, 43) and affirms the government's determination to take tangible measures to ensure the protection of minority rights, in law and in fact as well as and to promote the integration of society in order to strengthen social cohesion and stability in the country.

The Strategy sets out the long-term objectives (11 years) and determines arrangements and national mechanisms for ensuring effective participation of national minorities in public life; providing the allophone citizens, including the adult ones, with necessary conditions to study and apply the state language; promoting national minority languages; consolidating interethnic concord; facilitating the intercultural dialogue; consolidating the sense of civic identity to the State of the Republic of Moldova; providing national minorities with access to information and mass media in their languages; promoting diversity in society.

The document provides clarity, consistency and convergence of state policy and practices, contributing to national minority integration in four priority areas: 1. Participation in public life. 2. Language as a means of integration: policies in relation to the state language and minority languages. 3. Intercultural dialogue and civic belonging to the State of the Republic of Moldova 4. Mass media (Advisory Committee, Fourth Opinion).

Despite the fact that this Strategy establishes goals and objectives for a long-term period (11 years), the mechanisms for its implementation and clear targets are lacking, which raises questions about its impact and the results it will produce. For the actions that are envisaged, the Strategy does not establish clear benchmarks, timeframes and monitoring mechanisms for regular evaluation and consistent implementation. The measures proposed in the strategy focus more on cultural, ethnographic actions, such as protection and preservation of culture, and programs which are designed to avoid interethnic tensions. The strategy fails to tackle problems, concerns and issues, such as integration of ethno-cultural communities, language learning, political and government representation, meaningful participation in decision-making. Effective programs and actions to construct a civic identity and to strengthen allegiance to the Moldovan state are not included either (Federal Foreign Office, 2018: 19).

In June, 2015, The Bureau of Interethnic Relations presented the draft Decision of the Government of the Republic Moldova, on the approval of the *Strategy for the Integration of National Minorities of the Republic of Moldova (2015-2020)*. That strategy contains the policies on the basis of which will be elaborated ways of harmonizing interethnic relations and facilitating linguistic communication. The document comprises five compartments, in which they are described detailed the purpose and key notions of the strategy, the current situation and the



priorities areas of the integration process, the implementation stages, the way of financing, monitoring, evaluation and reporting procedure.

One of the strategic directions of the *Strategy for the Consolidation of Interethnic Relations for 2017-2027* in the field of ensuring efficient approach to policies on the state language promotion is to improve linguistic competences and the process of the State language study. Despite efforts made over the years to facilitate the study of the State language by minority adult population, pure command of the official language continues to pose a barrier to the integration in society. In this respect, complex educational measures needed to be taken with, focusing on young people all over the country, as well as specific measures for adult population, especially in settlements densely inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities. Some progress has been made in the field of socio-linguistic and professional integration, promotion of interethnic tolerance and creation of linguistic environment favourable to the national minorities. The Agency of Interethnic Relations has remained involved with the project “*Language training programme for national minorities in the Republic of Moldova*” supported by the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities. The programme encompasses various activities, linguistic training modalities, linguistic situation monitoring, addressing the needs of the Romanian language study on the territory of the republic, especially in the regions densely populated by national minorities, including in ATU Gagauzia (Comrat and Ceadir-Lunga), in the municipalities of Edineț and Bălți, in the regions of Taraclia, Briceni, Ocnița, Dondușeni, etc (Council of Europe, 2019: 20).

Tabel The share of national minorities proficient in the State language

	Total	Urban	Rural
Total ethnic minorities	31,3	36,7	25,8
Ukrainians	38,3	45,5	32,8
Russians	41,2	42,5	37,4
Gagauz	8,7	13,1	6,5
Bulgarians	31,3	26,3	36,5
Other ethnic groups	50,4	43,5	67,5

Source: 2014 Population and Housing Census, www.statistica.md

In order to integrate the Roma, the most marginalized ethnic minority, separate policy documents have been developed. The recent *Roma Action Plan for 2016-2020 was approved by the Government Decision No. 734 of 9 June 2016* (Government of RM, Decision no. 734, 2016). It comes as a continuity of Government’s commitment to enhance Roma social inclusion enshrined in the previous Roma Action Plan 2011-2015. It is intended to supplement existing national regulatory framework for Roma. The Action Plan represented a policy document setting out the way to address problems of Roma communities, and is meant to ensure that national policy is based on Roma-specific approach. The Plan stipulated specific measures and responsibilities in such fields like education, health, labour and social protection, housing and community development, participation in decision-making process and combating discrimination.

An important task set out in the Plan was to ensure continuity of introducing and promoting a service of community mediators at national level aimed at facilitating Roma access to public services, enhancing communication between public authorities and Roma community, and

overcoming discriminatory attitudes towards Roma. The realization of the right of Roma communities to participate in public life, decision-making and solving problems that affect them at different levels is a key element of the new Action Plan. At the same time, document includes some new measures to ensure Roma social security at labour market. Funding of the Plan will be made from state budget allocations with the support from European funds, technical assistance projects/programmes, public-private partnerships and other sources acceptable under the national legislation etc. (Advisory Committee, the Fourth Opinion).

Institutions with responsibilities in the field of minority rights

Regarding the institutional framework, in the Republic of Moldova there is a system of authorities whose competence is aimed at protecting human rights, including the rights of ethnic minorities, non-discrimination, protection and promotion of their cultural and linguistic heritage: *Standing Committee on Human Rights and Interethnic Relations of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova, The Bureau (Agency) of Interethnic Relations, People's Advocate (Ombudsman), Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination and Ensuring Equality* etc. Therefore, we will analyze the activity and competencies of some of those institutions in order to determine the degree of involvement in carrying out activities aimed at the integration of ethnic minorities in order to ensure the unity of the people of the Republic of Moldova.

Standing Committee on Human Rights and Interethnic Relations of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. During the legislatures, the positive precedent of creating a permanent commission for human rights and interethnic relations was established in the structure of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. The objective of this commission is human rights, minority issues, cult issues, citizenship of the Republic of Moldova, ensuring legal regulations in the field of migration, ensuring equal opportunities for women and men, protection of communities of citizens of the Republic of Moldova abroad, victims of political repression and refugees (Law no 797, 1996).

The Committee included on the agenda only those draft legislative acts to be discussed in the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova. This was achieved as a mandatory element of the legislative procedure in accordance with art. 45 of the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament. At the level of activity and organization, based on the information presented in the statistical reports on the legislative process during the years 2013 - 2017, this commission had the lowest number of meetings compared to the other standing commissions. The Commission does not publish activity reports on the documents discussed and approved. On the website of the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova are presented only the draft documents and the agenda of the sitting. This fact complicates the process of appreciating the good activity of the commission in carrying out its tasks and in the process of integrating ethnic minorities (Iovu, 2018: 87).

The Bureau (Agency) of Interethnic Relations is the specialized body of the central public administration, which develops the state policy in the field of interethnic relations, monitors the observance of the rights of ethnic minorities and the functioning of languages on the territory of the Republic of Moldova. The Agency shall perform the functions set out in the following areas of activity:

- 1) strengthening interethnic relations;

- 2) developing intercultural dialogue and strengthening civic identity;
- 3) the functioning of the languages spoken on the territory of the Republic of Moldova and the promotion of linguistic diversity (Government of RM, Decision no. 593, 2018).

The Bureau (Agency) is also in charge of supporting ethno-cultural organizations and promoting cooperation with and between government institutions to implement national policies and international commitments in the field of minorities' rights. The Bureau (Agency) is also responsible for the protection of cultural and linguistic heritage of minorities, the teaching of the state language to ethno-cultural communities, promotion of tolerance, respect for cultural and linguistic diversity, preventing and combating discrimination, support for inter-ethnic integration into political, cultural, social and economic life, as well as social cohesion programs (Federal Foreign Office, 2018: 22).

Conclusions

At the current stage, interethnic relations in the country can be characterized as stable, harmonious and peaceful. The situation of national minorities in Republic of Moldova reflects positive changes as regards raising awareness at the State level of the need to develop interethnic relations based on equal rights of all cohabiting ethnic groups, principle of non-discrimination, recognition of diversity, facilitation of intercultural dialogue, enhancement of civic identity. The Government of the Republic of Moldova has managed to achieve significant progress in the process of interethnic relations development based on the principles that ensure application of good international practices while embedding in the existing context of the country. These principles represent the point of reference for the integration process, which involves development of complex policies that should take into account interests of all ethnic groups in society (Council of Europe, 2019: 7).

The biggest unresolved issues are the linguistic integration of national minorities, a process that requires time, human and financial resources, but also efforts at the level of central and local authorities, as well as representatives of national minority communities. Awareness for the communities of national minorities of the need to know the official language of the state as an indispensable element in social, economic and political integration, remains an important task to be solved for the future.

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