

Comparison of Language Policies in the Post-Soviet Union Countries on the European Continent

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Abstract:

Language was one of the most important identity markers and played a crucial role in all the countries of the former Soviet Union. Governments of the newly independent countries were pressed by their ethnic constituencies to pass language laws and new constitutions in favor of the dominant national or ethnic groups. Governments of post – Soviet republics could accept the status quo of the Russian language or make the majority language the only official language of the state and face the national movements of minority groups. New constitutions and legislation severely affected the status of minority languages. Language became a politicized key component in both nation and state-building processes. As the consequence of language policies, minorities received a dramatically smaller share of government, public service and media positions than their share of the population. Thus, very visible ethno-language cleavages arose in all surveyed countries. The main conclusion of our article is the special classification of language policies in post-Soviet European states. We differ between two clean types: inclusive language policy and exclusive language policy. From these two basic types several other sub-categories are derived.

Keywords:

Quasi-states, language policy, de facto states, failed states, majority language, minority language rights, identity, CIS, USSR, The Baltic States, Moldova, PMR, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, South Ossetia, Abkhazia.

Introduction

Language and national affiliation undoubtedly belong to the dominant themes of the political development of transforming countries in the European part of the former Soviet Union. Language plays the key role in these themes as one of the most important (and most sizable) aspects of communal identity - which is often a reason for various conflicts. New independent states have to enforce legislation and constitutions that influence the positions of minority languages as well as minorities themselves.

When building a nation on an ethnic principle, political authorities make an effort to reach maximum consent between the political and cultural entities. In such situations the ideal state is that all inhabitants belong to the dominant ethnic group. The existence of minorities is seen as a problem requiring some sort of a solution. In other cases the authorities attempt to achieve the cultural, demographical, political and economic marginalization of the minorities. [KOLSTOE 1995: 11] While always feeling endangered by the processes of nation and state-building based on ethnic principle, the governments of the succeeding states on the other hand

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feared the cooperation of Russian-speaking minorities with nationalistic groups in Russia and their attempts to re-build the former union. [KOLSTOE 1995: 11] In reaction to the approach of a majority ethnic group, minorities try to secure their position, best achieved through establishing a federation (or even better confederation, which is viewed by the other side as a step to founding an independent state, merely reinforcing the secessionist efforts). During the creation of the new independent states (which the same time went through the process of democratization) language was no longer seen as only a tool of communication between various ethnic groups and became a strongly politicized attribute of identity. In the newly created states, language became a source of conflicts between majority and minority ethnic groups. Although international organizations introduced several documents relating to the use of language in a political context in the 1950's and 1960's³, the European Council (EC), United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) released further international standards to secure rights relating to language use and education because of the conflicts within the region. The states within the region that attempted to become members of the aforementioned organizations faced the dilemma how to abide these standards and their tendencies to re-establish the status of the titular ethnicity, predominantly with the requirement that all citizens have adequate knowledge of the majority language. Despite these international activities, none of the documents (both universally and regionally accepted) did not include a definition of a state or official language. There is no international standard in the form of an applicable rule that would force the respective state authority to accept minority languages as official in order to fulfill the expectations and requirements of ethnic minorities; neither are there international standards to impose any official language as means of communication nor is there any official definition of a language of a special status. Some states have one official language and other languages are considered "official" in certain regions – for example, Abkhazian in Georgia, Gagauzian and Russian in Moldova, etc. – which secures the minority groups access to administration (for certain ethnic groups the possibility to deal with official authorities in their mother language is crucial), education, media, etc.

The development in the 1990's has shown that a language, aside from its function as a means of communication, can have a political role as well. It can serve in the processes of state-building and nation-building by defining the language (ethnic) group that holds the responsibility for its preservation and, on the contrary, those language (ethnic) groups that are not considered to be reliable enough to participate in these processes (e.g. Georgia). In other states the newly enforced legislation relating to the position of languages in terms of "ethnic containment" serves as a tool to re-define the relationship between majority and minority groups. The aim of such language policy in these states is to deprive the previously dominating ethnic minority of its political influence and instead impose the titular major ethnicity in place. The consequences of such steps may result in not bestowing citizenship to members of ethnic minorities (e.g. Latvia and Estonia) [ecmi.de: 2006]. The aim of this study is to depict differences among various kinds of language policies in these states as well as the changes within these countries from the time of gaining independence until the present.

Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania)

The current language policy in the Baltic states, which is similar to other countries mentioned in this study, was actually a reaction to the official language policy in the former Soviet Union. Its aim was to reach the so-called asymmetric bilingualism. The prevailing part of the native Russian-speaking inhabitants of the SU thus had no significant reason to master the language of the titular population.

On the contrary, the first language-related legislation that took place in the Baltic states at the end of 1980's, i.e. in the autumn of the USSR, presupposed quite the opposite state – to

³ To get more information, see Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms from 1950, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights from 1966, and UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education from 1960. [osce.org/documents: 2007]

make the Russian-speaking population bilingual. In all three states of the region the titular population languages were claimed as official. It was characteristic at this time of reformation tendencies that the language-related rights of the titular populations of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were imposed with emphasis to the policy of nation-building. At the same time it was the beginning of state-governed ethnic deprivation of non-titular groups⁴.

The second language-related legislation period started after the Baltic states gained independence in 1991. This process has still not finished. Throughout the entire period, national governments have attempted to preserve the positions of the titular languages through the enforcement of various laws since these languages are viewed as being permanently exposed to the language hegemony of the Russian - and after entering Euro-Atlantic structures and global economy-related systems – and even the English language. Therefore other legislative norms were imposed that required the knowledge and use of state languages not only in state administration but also in leading trades and non-governmental organizations.

Predominantly in Latvia and Estonia in the 1990's, language-related legislation lead to a number of controversial regulations which were criticized by the international community and various organizations.

These were mostly attempts to imply the use of official/state language policies in private businesses as well as requirements for all parliamentary candidates of non-titular ethnic groups to pass state language tests before being named to their offices. Quite some time after critics from NATO and the EU warned that such legislation was a hurdle for Latvia and Estonia's acceptance to these organizations, the governments of Tallinn and Riga decided at the beginning of the third millennium to limit and even abandon these legislative norms. The biggest disputes over the use of languages between the state administration authorities and representatives of language minorities took place in the area of education. Estonia, reinforcing national integration, put into effect school reforms which ordered all minority state secondary schools to implement the Estonian language as the main means of instruction as of this year. Minority languages would thus play a secondary role only. In Latvia a similar school reform was realized despite a huge protest by the Russian Federation and massive demonstrations in 2004. Lithuanian language policy, compared to the rest of the Balkan region, was much more liberal⁵ and was only limited to regulations inside the state administration sector. The most populous minority, Polish, has so far successfully preserved its language-related rights, as has the Russian-speaking population. The state minority school system has remained untouched in these terms and the decrease of schools with minority languages as the main means of instruction is a result of the fact that many parents send their children to Lithuanian schools to better secure their future careers.

All three Baltic states were forced to join the Soviet Union in 1940. After it fragmented and these countries regained independence, a huge Russian-speaking minority remained, in Latvia it was as high as 45% of the overall population, in Estonia it was 35%. In Lithuania the largest minorities – Russian and Polish – represented together less than 20% of the population, thus the minority language issues were not considered such a hot topic. During the first decade after regaining independence the size of Russian-speaking population decreased significantly.⁶

In case of Estonia and Latvia, Estonian socio-linguist Priit Järve divided the period between 1989 and the present time into three basic eras which differ in types of state language policies. The results can be seen in the following chart [Järve, 2003: 82]⁷:

⁴ Predominantly in Latvia and Estonia, to a lesser extent in Lithuania.

⁵ Which is given mostly by much lower share of national minorities in society.

⁶ The overall number of ethnic Russians in Baltic countries decreased from 1,726,000 in 1989 to 1,273,000 in 2000-2001, or by 26%. In Lithuania the share of Russians decreased by 37%, in Estonia by 26% and Latvia by 22%. [Järve, 2003: 77]

⁷ The author watched the overall situation until 2003. Lithuania and Estonia's entry to the EU and NATO in 2004 liberalized their approach towards national minorities even further, however in my opinion the essential tendencies of their language and naturalization policies remained unchanged.

Time period	Official language agenda	Supporting government agenda (Although not officially declared but realized in practice)
1989 – 1992	Renewal of the status of titular languages and preservation of national culture and identity	Expulsion of mono-lingual Russian-speaking people from leading positions in order to reach political dominance from the side of the titular nation
1992 – 1999	Implementation of naturalization procedures for achievement of citizenship for inhabitants of non-titular language minorities including state language tests	Pressure on re-emigration of “Soviet” inhabitants to their previous home countries
1999 - current	Implementation of national integration programs with an emphasis to education of the state language as the main means of integration	Continuation of previous language policy as well as the policy of granting state citizenship with an aim to control access of non-titular population to political power

The initial language-related norms from the late 1980’s in the Baltic states were moderate because of the existence of the Soviet Union as well as the overall consensus to find a compromising solution between the supporters of national emancipation and members of the Interfront movement which attempted to keep the Baltic states in the Soviet Union and preserve the language rights of the Russian-speaking minority. The language-related legislation situation changed after Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia regained their independence in 1991.

On January 18, 1989, the “Act on the language of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic” was passed by the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic. It was the first language law of its kind on the territory of the disintegrating Soviet Union⁸. The law declared Estonian as the only official language. The Supreme Soviet of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic governed by national communists refused to declare any official status for the Russian language⁹. However, the law secured individuals the right to communicate with state administration offices, businesses and organizations of public affairs in the country in both Estonian and Russian – which resulted in keeping Estonia a bilingual state. The law also secured the right to request official information in answer to official requests in both languages. There was a temporary period set to apply the law in practice, during which employees of state administration offices had to master the basics of the official language. The language law had an impact on education where it granted the right to education in Estonian throughout the entire state, while education in Russian was secured only in places with a sizable Russian minority.

Soon after this law was put into effect, both Latvia and Lithuania followed the Estonian example in the same year. On January 25, 1989, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic issued a decree about the “Use of the official language of the Lithuanian SSR”. The decree declared Lithuanian as the “basic means of official communication” in all spheres of public life, in businesses, state institutions and organizations, regardless whether they were republic or Soviet organizations (with the only exception being the Soviet Army). Based on a mutual agreement between two involved parties, communication in other languages was also allowed. In all organizations and institutions that previously used Russian as the official language of communication, a two-year transition period was set to

⁸ A remark about Estonian as the official language in the country was approved one year earlier in the Constitution of Estonian SSR.

⁹ Unlike Belarus and Ukraine where the Russian language was included in their respective language laws at least as a language of inter-ethnic communication.

apply the law. Members of national minorities had the right to access to intensive courses in the new official language. Latvian language law from 1989 was almost identical with the respective legislation in Estonia and Lithuania. The difference, however, was that in 1992 the law was amended in such a way that all articles regarding the Russian language were deleted and replaced with neutral regulations. Despite this, the amended law did not determine Latvia as monolingual state, according to Priit Järve. On the contrary, just like in other Baltic states, work in state administration was a subject to Lithuanian-Russian bilingualism, depending on the decision of individual clients-citizens – i.e., they could determine individually in which language they would communicate in public affairs. [Järve 2003: 81]

In the second half of the 1980's in Lithuania, the Sajudis movement took the lead in reformation efforts and the fight for independence. In their bulletin *Sajudžio žinios*, the movement representatives published a five-point political program relating to the problematics of national minorities [JUOZAITIS 1992: 6]. The aim of it was to: declare Lithuanian as the official language of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic; strengthen the education of Lithuanian in secondary schools and bring back this language to all colleges and universities around the country; improve the education of Lithuanian in Russian-language schools; establish specialized secondary schools and classes for national minorities and support the establishment of social and public organizations of national minorities as well as cultural centers. In the fall of 1988, the Constitutive Congress of the Sajudis movement adopted several important resolutions relating to the influx of immigrants from other Soviet republics and national minorities in general. Resolution no. 1 “About the unity of Lithuanian society” and Resolution no. 7 “About immigration to the Lithuanian SSR” were crucial proposals regarding the fast application for Lithuanian citizenship. A pro-Soviet movement, *Jedinstvo* (Unity), was founded in the late 1980's as an opposition to the efforts of the Sajudis to achieve the independence of Lithuanian. In the beginning of 1989 when the Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR issued the “Declaration of the state sovereignty of the Lithuanian SSR” together with the law declaring Lithuanian as the only official state language, *Jedinstvo* strongly voiced its protest against such steps. [JUOZAITIS 1992: 10-11] A sociological survey conducted in the 1990's proved that up to 80% of the entire population considered Lithuanian as their mother tongue. The second most-spoken mother language in Lithuania was Russian. On average, up to 96% ethnic Russians, approximately 50% of Ukrainians, Belarussians and Germans, almost a third of Jews and Poles and a small number of other nationalities in Lithuania stated in the survey that Russian was their mother language. [europa.eu.int: 2007] Therefore it is more accurate to speak about a Russian-speaking rather than a Russian national minority in the context of the 1990's.

According to Article 14 of the Constitution of the Lithuanian Republic (1988, ratified in 1992) Lithuanian is defined as the only official language. On top of that the position of Lithuanian is secured also in the special Act about the state language from 1995. The Constitution of the Lithuanian Republic together with Article no. 1 of the Law on National Minorities from 1989 guarantee national minorities the right to develop their own language in education, culture, radio and television¹⁰. The Act regarding the state language from 1995 defines the status of the Lithuanian language in public life (state institutions, judiciary, school system, culture, etc.) and at the same time guarantees the right to use minority languages (Art. 13).

The Law about national minorities from 1989 deals with the rules regarding the use of minority languages even further. In Article 4 it allows for the use of minority languages in local self-governments, non-government organizations, together with the official language in places with a compact habitation of the respective national minority. Article 5 of this law further strengthens the issue by allowing the use of information signs and the names of municipalities in minority languages together with official Lithuanian names in the respective regions.

In fact all these changes in favor of minority languages were not realized which, according to T. Michneva [MICHNEVA 2003: 191], Chairman of the Coordination Council of Russian Community Organizations in Lithuania, is in disregard with the International Convention for

¹⁰ Moreover, Article 45 of Lithuanian Constitution declares that national communities of citizens should freely develop their cultures, educations, charity activities, mutual support and that the Lithuanian state should secure the support of theses national communities. [Constitution of Latvian Republic, downloaded on April 10, 2007]

the Preservation of National Minorities that was ratified in Lithuania in 2000. Moreover, the conservative-ruled adopted an amendment to the minority law in January 1998, which resulted in even further limitation of use of minority languages. According to this amendment, officials in state administration could but did not have to communicate in a non-Lithuanian language. Also, the parliament pushed through an amendment which stipulates that all signs on schools and state offices in non-Lithuanian languages in regions with national minorities should be replaced. Foreign language signs thus could be used only on the buildings of organizations dealing with national minorities' affairs. [DANČÁK 1999: 206]

Control over fulfilling the regulations of the official language's status was handed over to the State Commission for Lithuanian Language and State Language Inspectorate. In 1995 the Council of National Communities was established in order to improve communication among various ethnicities as well as communication with the Lithuanian government. Today there are up to 20 national communities represented in the Council. [europa.eu.int: 2007] The 1991 law on education also integrated the school system of national minorities into the overall system of education in Lithuania. The new law thus helped to preserve education in minority languages. Even before the new language legislation was passed in the Baltic countries (1995 in Lithuania and Estonia, 1999 in Latvia), the concept of a single state language was also incorporated into other laws, mostly in legislation relating to the achievement of citizenship and in laws regarding education and public elections with the aim to strengthen the policy of the expulsion of mainly Russian-speaking minorities. Only Lithuania decided to generously grant citizenship to all applicants at the beginning of its independence in 1991. Estonia and Latvia granted citizenship automatically only to the members of the titular population and those representatives of minorities who provided evidence that either they or their ancestors had gained state citizenship in the period between the world wars. All other applicants thus had (and still have) to expect a complicated naturalization process accompanied with difficult language tests a test of their knowledge of the constitution.

Lithuania and Estonia passed their new language laws in 1995 – in Latvia such a proposed legislation was ready in the same year, however it took more than three years until it was approved in 1999. In the new laws both Lithuania and Estonia explicitly omitted mentioning Russian language. For example, the Estonian language law from 1995 describes all other languages except the official Estonian simply as foreign languages. According to this law, state officials do not have to communicate with citizens in any other language than Estonian. Each person who does not speak Estonian thus has to arrange an interpreter at his/her own expense. The aforementioned Estonian language law also allows for local self-governments – in those regions where the minority comprises less than 50% of population – to use the respective minority language in internal communication. This, however, requires the state government's approval. Until 2003, however, all these proposals (mostly from the Russian-speaking north-eastern regions) were refused by the government. [Järve, 2003: 84]

In 1999 Estonia extended its language regulations to the sphere of private business when the parliament passed an amendment to the language law which ordered all employees of private businesses, non-governmental organizations and foundations to learn and actively use the Estonian language at work. Even foreign experts temporarily working in Estonia were included in this amendment. Representatives of minorities together with the international communities viewed this legislative step as an effort of the state to regulate the previously liberal market in favor of ethnic Estonians. After heavy criticism from the European Commission and OSCE the Estonian parliament eventually cancelled this amendment so that the law was in compliance with international legislative norms. Latvia applied a very similar law with the same consequences for the non-Latvian population. Despite strong pressure from the international community, the law was only amended later – close to the country's entry into the EU and NATO in 2004. The most controversial passages in the law were thus cancelled and amended eventually in Latvia as well.

¹¹ This required percentage of the population can seem exaggerated in comparison to the 20% share in Slovakia and 6 – 8% in Finland. It can be explained by the fact that Estonians feared that many ethnic Russians living in Tallin could have started to use this right, where the Russian-speaking community comprises more than 40% of all residents. [Järve, 2003: 80]

Belarus

The Republic of Belarus, which was established in July 1990, came to its language policy to a certain extent from its predecessor – the Soviet Socialist Republic of Belarus (SSRB)¹². This policy was mostly derived from the law “On languages in the SSRB”, approved in 1990. Belarus was one of the last successors to the SSSR to pass its language-related legislation. Although the Belarussian language¹³ was formally given the status of the only official language, the Russian language still dominated the areas of education, media, economy and state administration – despite the protests from the Belarussian national elite. Based on the political and economic break-up of the country in the summer of 1994, populist Alexander Lukashenko was appointed to lead Belarus as president, bringing with him a turnover in the country’s language policy. Pro-nationalist oriented political parties which supported the development of the Belarussian language were deprived of their political influence and power. Even prior to his appointment, Lukashenko repeatedly claimed that he supported the Soviet language policy adopted back in the 1970’s. [O’Reilly 2001: 94]

The second article of the language law from 1990 describes Russian as the ‘language of international affairs of the USSR nations’. The law’s approval was a consequence of both external international influences as well as the convincing electoral victory of the reformist, national-oriented People’s Front of Belarus (BLF). Shortly after the law was passed, the Council of Ministers approved an accompanying ‘State Program for the Development of the Belarussian Language and Other National Languages of the SSRB’. From the very beginning the local Russian-speaking population reacted negatively to the changes in language policy. These people still considered the Soviet Union as their home country and thus did not understand why all of a sudden they should start learning Belarussian and why they had to send their children to Belarussian kindergartens and schools¹⁴.

¹² The current state is a consequence of a long-term interference and mixture of pro-Belarussian and pro-Russian language policies. The situation with the use of Belarussian in the beginning of the 1980’s was characterized by many observers as catastrophic. Although undubitable successes were recorded in the 1920’s and 1930’s, when the literary Belarussian language was officially codified, since the end of the 1930’s a gradual expulsion of the language from the state administration, educational institutions and culture took place due to the forced use of the Russian language. This partially related to the wave of the Stalinist cleansings during which a large part of Belarussian national elite was eliminated. Other demographic and social changes after World War II lead to the fact that in the 1960’s a significant majority of Belarussian political representatives was Russified and had no interest in developing and nurturing their mother language. Although Belarussian was not stigmatized during the existence of the Soviet Union, it was gradually forced out from everyday communication especially in urban areas, and it was only used in media, folklore, traditional culture and literature. Although in certain areas the language still remained alive, it could not protect itself from many Russian terms that infiltrated the general communication. Thus a mixture of Belarussian-Russian languages, the so-called *trasjanka*, was created. As for the areas of education and science Belarussian was mostly used in humanity studies and in rural areas. Technical sciences were dominated by Russian. The Russian language is still the language of most Belarussian media, and many periodicals are published in both languages.

¹³ Belarussian is an Eastern Slavic language closely related to both Russian and Polish. The codification of Belarussian took place in 1918 when Branislau Tarashkevich published the first ever text book on Belarussian grammar. Before that there was no unified literary language but a number of dialects, some of which were closer to Russian and other to Polish. The last great language reform took place in 1933 with the support from the Soviet government. Belarussian became the official language of the country immediately after the declaration of the Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1919. Between 1924 and 1939 Russian was also declared the official language along with Polish and Yiddish. After 1939 however the latter two lost the status of official languages. In 1992 after the declaration of independence only Belarussian kept this status. Source: [IOFFE, 2003: 1009 – 1047]

¹⁴ It is worth pointing out that Belarussian and Ukrainian as another two Eastern Slavic languages were heavily affected by the Russification tendencies already during the reign of the Russian Tsardom as well as the Soviet Union. It was a process regulated by the central state organs, but due to the close relation of these languages the Russification in this respect can be viewed almost

With the foundation of a multi-party system in the country, various language-related requirements were strongly voiced even in political circles. As a balance against the nationally oriented BLF, two pro-Russian parties were formed – the United Democratic Party of Belarus (SDSB) and the Movement of Democratic Reform (HZDR). Already in 1992 the Movement openly requested changes in the country's language policy. Their requirements were to declare Russian as the second official language and the free choice of language of instruction in schools. Leftist parties in Belarus also supported official bilingualism in the country. At this time also political extremists appeared on both political fronts – Belarussian ultra-nationalists on one side and pro-Russian Slavic Union – White Belarus on the other, which considered Belarussian as a regional language or rather as a dialect derived from Russian.

Approximately the first three years of the country's independence can be characterized as the time of strong 'Belarusification' tendencies, led by the high ranks of the BLF, completely in accordance with the processes of state-building and nation-building. During the years 1990 through 1994 the situation in secondary schools significantly changed in favor of the Belarussian language. During the hectic process of 'Belarusification' the government ordered an increase in the number of schools with Belarussian as the language of instruction even in those urban areas where there was little demand for them. When entering a college or offices of state administration, obligatory state language tests were applied for all students and employees. The official policy of Belarusification, however, faced many obstacles, including technical, due to the lack of school books of Belarussian, technical dictionaries and qualified teachers. Therefore the government decided to motivate the teachers of Belarussian through a 10% salary increase. The Belarussian political and economic elite, however, viewed the process of Belarusification skeptically from the very beginning. Despite all problems, the Belarussian language took a dominating position at least in primary education shortly after the creation of the independent state. Most colleges and universities preserved education in the Russian language due to high pressure from both pedagogues and the administrative workforce.

Significant worsening of the economic situation was the reason for the gradual loss of influence of the BLF in parliament. In this atmosphere the new Constitution of the Republic of Belarus was adopted in March 1994 which preserved the official status of Belarussian, however the influence of Russian increased. Russian re-gained the constitutional guarantee of free use and in addition it was officially named as the language of international (inter-ethnic) communication, this time even within the territory of Belarus itself¹⁵. The most important change was incorporated in Article 50 of the Constitution, which gave parents the right to choose the language of instruction for their children. The existing language law from 1990 thus came into direct conflict with the new constitution because Article 24 clearly defined the obligation of secondary schools to lead education exclusively in Belarussian. [ZAPRUDSKI 2002: 33-40] In 1994 Alexander Lukashenko entered office. The new president based his election campaign on criticism of the economic and language policies of the previous nationally-oriented government. He became the main ambassador of official bilingualism. Society in Belarus divided into two camps. Two new organizations were formed to support different ideas – the Committee for Free Choice of Language of Instruction, supported by the Slavic Union and the president and the Committee for the Preservation of the Belarussian Language supported by nationally-oriented political forces. In the hot atmosphere of 'language demonstrations' the president put forward the idea to hold a referendum on the official status of the Russian language – this took place on May 14, 1995¹⁶.

as natural, when the stronger majority language influences its neighbor languages through various culturally and economically related issues.

¹⁵ The Constitution of Belarus in its Article 14 declares that the state regulates all relations with international communities on the principle of equality before the law and respects its rights and interests. Article 15 stipulates the state's responsibility for protection of cultural-historical as well as spiritual heritage, secures free development of cultures of all national communities inhabiting the territory of Belarus. Article 50 guarantees that "each person is entitled to protection of his/her own nationality as well as no one can be subjected to a forceful change or public declaration of his nationality". The same paragraph formally secures the right to minorities to use their mother language. [MALINOVSKIJ, 2002: 116]

¹⁶ The referendum also included other questions regarding the powers and responsibilities of the President.

Many critics pointed to the fact that a language referendum is in contradiction with both the constitution as well as the referendum law which explicitly banned certain issues (including language-related ones) to be solved through a plebiscite. With 64.8% of the population participating in the vote, 88.3% supported the idea to grant the Russian language official status¹⁷ (in fact these people comprised only 53.9% of all eligible voters). The result of the referendum and the consequent parliamentary election campaign were impeached by the representatives of OSCE. [ZAPRUDSKI 2002: 33 – 40] After the referendum came a swift change in the official state language policy. The Ministry of Education introduced mandatory entry exams to secondary and graduate schools in both Belarussian and Russian. The Russian-speaking urban population used the new situation take their children en masse from Belarussian schools and put them in Russian-language schools. In 1995, up to 62% of all elementary school pupils in large cities were using Russian as the language of instruction. One year earlier, before the referendum, it was only 25% of students. Those who opposed to the changes in the language policy warned the society before the starting Russification and denationalization of the country. In 1995, not a single representative of the BLF had a chance to get to parliament. The language card was turned in favor of the Russian language. [ZAPRUDSKI, 2002: 33-40]

Lukashenko as an authoritarian president has preserved a relatively consistent approach to language policy even to today. Under Lukashenko, the Belarussian language has significantly lost its influence (thanks also to continuing state repression). The ruling establishment automatically and wrongly considers the Belarussian-speaking citizens to be representatives of opposition. Abuse of citizen and constitutional rights is rather frequent among the Belarussian-speaking population. There were cases when people were banned to use Belarussian in judiciary trials. Russian has also increased its influence due to the newly established Russian-Belarussian Union which solely uses Russian as means of communication. The position of the Polish language in Belarus is also viewed as catastrophic and unsatisfying. Together with discrimination in terms of minority languages, Poles point to the state repression of the Catholic Church in recent times. The Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, adopted by referendum in 1996, guarantees Russian as the official state language along with Belarussian. Up to 12% of the 10 million strong population of Belarus consider themselves to be ethnic Russians. Another important minority group is represented by ethnic Poles inhabiting mainly the western regions of Belarus¹⁸. However, according to statistics, more than 80% of the population in practically all areas of public and private life is ethnic Russian. Russian is, together with Belarussian, a mandatory language use in all state comprehensive schools. Up to 75% of all students in Belarus attended Russian-language schools in 2003. [MID.RU: 2007]

The main difference between Belarus and other post-Soviet countries is the fact that the Russian-speaking population here is not perceived by the state as a foreign element, as a minority or a diaspora, but quite the opposite: it's seen as part of the state-forming nation, although officially it is ethnic of Belarussians who are naturally considered to constitute the nation in the country. State policy approaches the members of other ethnicities rather formally – as members of standard national minorities. Minorities together with the titular population enjoy as much of their political and citizens' rights as the rather undemocratic system of Alexander Lukashenko's regime allows them. The fact is that currently there are no functional socio-political organizations that could protect rights – for example of the Russian-speaking community – due to state-imposed obstructions in the process of registration. Representatives of the second strongest minority, the Polish, are actively opposed to the president. Due to this fact their rights are even more suppressed and this suppression is often mentioned in the media abroad. The Belarus' language policy has, in my opinion, a chance for a radical change only in the case of an overall change in the political regime, which predominantly means Lukashenko's departure from the post of president and the consequent coming to power of his opposition.

¹⁷ The exact wording of the question was: “Do you agree with the proposal to grant the Russian language the equal status as the Belarussian language?”

¹⁸ According to the counting of people in 1999 the ethnic composition of the Belarussian population was following in 2006: Belarussians 81.2%, Russians 11.4%, Poles 3.9%, Ukrainians 2.4%, others 1.1%. A large part of the country's population – more than 80% - claims to be of the Orthodox Church.

Ukraine

The Republic of Ukraine is a multinational entity which is characterized by its religious variety¹⁹. According to the Constitution, the only official state language here is Ukrainian. With a slight simplification we could say that in terms of languages, religions and culture the country is divided into the pro-Russian east and pro-Ukrainian west. Ukrainians, together with Russians, comprise almost 90% of the country's population. The question of language policy and its main consequences is thus most naturally solved between the two biggest ethnic communities²⁰. The most frequent language-related demand of the Russian-speaking minority regards the declaration of Russian as the second official state language. The language policy of the Ukraine and its legislative approach towards national minorities has, to a large extent, adopted the requirements of the United Nations, the OSCE and the Council of Europe²¹. Despite that, their application in practice has often been criticized by representatives of various minorities. Article 11 of the Constitution of the Republic of Ukraine stipulates that the state helps with the "consolidation and development of the Ukrainian nation, its historical self-identification, development of national traditions and culture as well as the development of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious peculiarities of all original nations and minorities of the Ukraine". In Article 10, the Constitution defines Ukrainian as the state language and at the same time it guarantees the "liberal development and protection of Russian as well as other minority languages". In Paragraph 4 of the same article the Constitutions orders the state administration to secure the education of "the languages of international communication" in schools. However, these languages are not precisely defined. Organs of local self-government in regions with a dense population of national minorities are responsible for programs of their national-cultural development. [MALINOVSKIJ, 2002: 117] The Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of the Crimea regulates not the status of national minorities but nationalities, which reflects local demographics where Russians and Crimean Tatars comprise the majority population on the peninsula²², while in the rest of the country they represent minorities²³.

¹⁹ According to estimates from 2006 there were 46,710,816 people living on the territory of Ukraine. Ethnic composition was following: Ukrainians 77.8%, Russians 17.3%, Belarusians 0.6%, Moldovans 0.5%, Crimean Tatars 0.5%, Bulgarians 0.4%, Hungarians 0.3%, Romanians 0.3%, Poles 0.3%, Jews 0.2%, others 1.8% (Counting of people in 2001).

²⁰ Other national minorities in Ukraine articulate their language-related requirements much less often. The reason can be seen in their marginalized role in the society, higher level of assimilation or even a certain level of satisfaction with the current situation. Ethnic Russianians, inhabiting the region of Sub-Carpathian Russia, comprise a specific group. Their efforts to be recognized as a peculiar nation, however, were not successful either during the Soviet Union era, nor in the times of independent Ukraine.

²¹ The basic legal documents clarifying the positions of national minorities in Ukraine as well as the use of minority languages are the following: the Constitution of the Republic of Ukraine (1996), the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (1998), Declaration of Minority Rights in Ukraine (1991), the Act on Languages in the Ukrainian SSR (1989), the Act on National Minorities (1992), the Act on State Citizenship (1991), the Act on Local Self-Governments (1997) and others. [STEPANENKO, 2003: 120]

²² Ethnic composition of the Crimean Autonomy: 60% Russians, 24% Ukrainians, 10% Crimean Tatars, 6% others. [ucrainica.info, 2007]

²³ According to the Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, citizens of all nationalities, nation-related cultures as well of other such determining subjects are granted the right to develop their national-cultural traditions, celebrate their national holidays, practice their religions, realize nation-related activities through the means of literature and various forms of art, found their nation-related media, publishing houses, museums, theaters, cinemas and other respective institutions. Moreover, the constitution regulates the use of minority languages as such. As for the Russian language, the wording of the document says that „Russian is the language of majority population as well as the language of international communication is used in all spheres of social life“. Other languages used on the peninsula also have the legally-accepted means of communication. The constitution of the autonomous republic of Crimea stipulates in all spheres of civil life (i.e. state administration, public transportation, health care) as well as business and other respective organizations the Ukrainian, Russian and other languages can be effectively used

By the end of the 1980's in the Ukraine, after many years of ethnic and linguistic domination by their imperial neighbor, the Ukrainian language became the main symbol of national revival and unification. The Public Movement of Ukraine for the Support of Reconstruction (RUCH) was founded relatively late, in 1989, and various opposition groups formed its member base, groups which were hounded and denounced by the Soviet organs earlier. The groups include, for example, the Ukrainian Helsinki Group and the Society of the Ukrainian Language. Half of the country's 52 million strong population either did not speak Ukrainian at all or knew it only a little back in 1989.²⁴

The overall situation regarding languages is rather specific in today's Ukraine. Even here the phenomenon of the entire post-Soviet territory where ethnic self-identification does not always correspond with language self-identification is evident as well. More than 80% of the population consider themselves as ethnic Ukrainians. According to the latest census, there are slightly over 17% ethnic Russians. However, only 85% of ethnic Ukrainians declare the Ukrainian language to be their mother tongue. In the entire society these people comprise a mere 67.5% of the overall population.²⁵ The western part of the Ukraine represents the biggest share of the Ukrainian-speaking population. Nationally-oriented ideas thus get the biggest response in this part of the country. In central Ukraine the positions of the Ukrainian and Russian languages are almost identical, which results in integration and a mixture of both languages. The consequence of this process is a specific dialect, so-called *Surzhik*, which some linguists consider to be a danger to the purity of Ukrainian. In the industrial south-east, due to the dominance of the Russian minority, Russian apparently prevails in every day communication.

A strong influence on the mutual relationship of the titular nation and the Russian minority also resulted in various long-time nation-related stereotypes. Russians are still considered by many Ukrainians as representatives of the imperial nation – a fifth colony of the Russian Federation disloyal to the newly created state. The elderly generation of the Russian-speaking minority, on the other hand, does not find any reason to learn the “primitive language of village people and Bandera's fascists from the UPA”. A number of Ukrainian experts on nation-related issues are convinced that although Ukrainian gained the status of the sole state language, it did not significantly limit the further expansion of the Russian language.²⁶

Until 1991 Moscow was the political and cultural center of the entire Soviet Union. After the fall of the USSR, Kiev took over the role of political center in the Ukraine; however, the cultural influence of Moscow is still very strong. The Russian language dominated even in the 1990's, aided by the fact that most national media were owned by Russian oligarchs who did not apply the legislative quotas for the Ukrainian language. The situation was also similar in film distribution and literature and is more or less the same even today. In general, however,

in case the involved parties agree on using it. Official documents confirming the identity of citizens are written in Ukrainian and Russian, but can also be obtained in Crimean Tatar upon request. The Constitution of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea as well as other legal norms adopted by the Supreme Council of Ukraine are published in the state (Ukrainian) language, as well as the Russian and Crimean Tatar languages. [MALINOVSKIJ, 2002: 118-117]

²⁴ 350 years of Russification obviously resulted in such a state. Throughout many decades it was forbidden to publish books in Ukrainian. In 1876 Tsar Alexander II recommended to use Russian as the means of instruction in Ukrainian schools. Even earlier in 1863 a regulation was issued that except for fiction no other books were allowed to be published in the Ukrainian language. [KAPUŠCIŃSKI 1995: 265]

²⁵ When, however, the sociologists ask the respondents what language they used in every day life – the results will show that every second person in Ukraine speaks Russian. The survey also showed that only an insignificantly small group of people does not speak Ukrainian at all. (Most of them inhabiting the Autonomous Republic of Crimea). [WARSAW.RU/ARTICLES: 2005]

²⁶ The government's policy of “Ukrainization” brought with it significant results mainly in those social spheres that are financed directly from the state budget and are under direct control by the state administration organs (education, edification and state offices). On the contrary, those sectors of society that are regulated by the principles of free market (mass culture, media), stayed almost unaffected by the state's “Ukrainization” policy. Due to that many Ukrainian as well as Russian speaking activists criticize the government's acts. On one hand, Ukrainians criticize the state administration for backwardness and lack of consistency, while on the other ethnic Russians say the government's efforts to favor Ukrainian over Russian are useless and correspond to true *status quo*. [RIABCZUK 2004: 86]

language use is moving in favor of Ukrainian. It is a consequence of the fact that people who use both languages naturally reach their economically productive age – they use Ukrainian in official communication and Russian in every day life. Russian has persevered informally its dominant position mostly in business, but also in the army. Therefore it is no surprise that the permanent political request of the representatives of Russian-speaking minority is to constitutionalize Russian as the second state language. Supporters of this solution frequently point to the increasing ‘Ukrainianization’ of the society, despite the fact that they live in a multinational country which, in their opinion, should rather accept a citizen-based society than narrowly prefer one dominant nationality.

Russian scientific circuits claim that restrictions regarding the use of Russian have caused the process of national revival in the Ukraine in the 1990’s. Attempts to protect the position of the Russian language in society are often viewed as undermining Ukrainian nationhood. The objective of state organs allegedly was the expulsion of the Russian language from both the political and social life of the Ukraine (specifically in education) so that Ukrainian becomes the first language in the entire country. Therefore, representatives of the Russian minority regularly protest against limitations in Russian-language education²⁷.

A group of eastern regions of the Ukraine (Lugan, Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk and the Crimean Autonomy) have repeatedly approached the Ukrainian president and the government with their request to amend the constitution in order to grant the Russian language the status of official language. The city of Kharkov even organized a local referendum for the declaration of Russian as the official language. Similar initiatives continued to take place in other Russian-speaking cities in the eastern Ukraine and the Crimean peninsula. In the past five years there were several local plebiscites about granting Russian at least the status of a local official language. These activities were strongly protested against by the government and the Ukrainian judiciary. Ethnic Ukrainians are rather skeptical toward the language-related amendments of the constitution. They fear that many the so-called ‘Russophiles’ would view constitutional change regarding the languages as though they were granted the right not to speak Ukrainian. Such constitutional change would thus cause a general linguistic and ideological division of the country. [WARSAW.RU/ARTICLES: 2005]

According to some Ukrainian experts it would be reasonable to apply temporary positive discrimination of Russian so that the most radical Russian-speaking pressure groups would lose some of their influence. This would require a careful language policy that has so far absented in the Ukraine. Until now the language pseudo-policy meant that the factual division of the country into Russian-language and Ukrainian-language parts that only minimally communicated with each other was formally respected. Such a situation was and still is welcomed by some Ukrainian as well as foreign politicians who like to play the language card to manipulate public opinion, especially prior to parliamentary elections²⁸. The result of such

²⁷ According to official data, there were up to 75.5% of all secondary school taught in Ukrainian in the school years from 1998 through 1999, 12.1% taught in Russian, 0.5% in Romanian (108 schools), 0.3% in Hungarian (65 schools), and 3 schools in Crimean Tatar and 3 in Polish. On top of that up to 2,466 schools (11.6%) were bilingual. In 2003 there were 327 schools altogether in Kiev, while only 8 of them used Russian. (in 1990 there were 155 Russian-language schools in the city). Also, there are rather big territorial differences in dislocation of the schools with Ukrainian as the means of instruction. They dominate in western Ukraine but are almost non-existent in the Crimean AR, a minority of them is in the east. [STEPANENKO, 2003: 124]

²⁸ Western Ukrainian politologist Mykol Riabczuk came up with a special theory regarding the language policy in the post-Soviet countries. Although the break up of the Soviet Union halted further efforts of the project of “clearly imperial building of the Soviet nation”, but it allowed the Russian elites in the post-Soviet countries to create “creole”, Soviet-Russian nation that would be based on continuing Russification policies within the post-Soviet region and further marginalization of “local natives” (i.e. Ukrainians, Belarussians, Kazakhs, Moldovans, etc.). According to Riabczuk, the policies adopted by the governments in Belarus and Transnistria and partially in the Crimean Autonomous Republic are the closest to this theory. The characters of language policies after 1991 of the governing Russian-speaking elites depended on many factors. Predominantly it was the level of Russification and Sovietization of the elites themselves, on the extent of their proportion in the society as well as the number and influence of national elites and specifics of their policies of national renascence. Riabczuk claims that these national elites in Ukraine had proven very little effectiveness to secure that the process of Ukrainian national renascence was pursued under their supervision. However, not even their competitors –

behavior is, for example, the fact that the Russian-speaking minority is being permanently convinced by its political representatives that there is a threat of forced ‘Ukrainianization’.

Political division in the country from the time of the Orange Revolution to the ‘Orange’ and ‘Blue’ camps was to a large extent influenced by ethnic-territorial aspects. The Orange, pro-Yushchenko camp was supported mainly by inhabitants of western Ukraine with strong nationalist sentiments, while the supporters of the pro-Yanukovich Blue bloc were recruited mostly in the east and south of the country where the Russian-speaking population prevails.

Despite that, the winner of the latest presidential election, Viktor Yushchenko, personally did not heavily play the language card in his pre-election campaign. The language dispute on political grounds today actually does not, according to many politologists, deal with the question of minority rights but rather with the fact of who will become a minority in the Ukraine – whether it will be Ukrainians or Russians (or more accurately, Ukrainian-speaking or Russian-speaking inhabitants).

What changes in the language policy will take place in the present political climate, when the Party of Regions of Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich is gradually strengthening its position and gaining political power, will only become clear in the future. According to the constitutional changes they require at least 300 MPs to support them; however Yanukovich’s bloc does not have such a high number of supporters on his side.

Moldova

Moldova belongs to those states where a number of geographically concentrated minorities of significant size remained on the country’s territory after gaining independence; for example, Russians and Ukrainians in areas along the Dniester River – known as the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR) – and the Gagauz people in Gagauzia. In the case of Russians it was a politically, economically and socially privileged group of people that (Moldovan-speaking) political elites in Kishinev decided to change at the end of the 1980’s. The focal point of political and economic power was supposed to be transferred from the Russified and geographically separated areas along the Dniester River (PMR) with its capital Tiraspol, to Kishinev (Chişinău). In order to pursue this transition, the Moscow-independent language policy²⁹ was to be the key tool that the Moldovan elite in the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic had decided to adopt even before the re-establishment of independent Moldova. Its aim was to terminate the dominance of Russian-governed nomenclature and secure a dominant position for ethnic Moldovans in the new state. The democratization process in combination with language legislation lead to Moldovization, in other words de-Russification, of state administration structures. Already in 1991, Moldovans represented up to 90% of the leading positions in the government as well as the entire state administration. Later a slight moderation of requirements implemented in the language-related legislation took place (originally, according to Article 7 of the Language Act, each person that communicated with people/clients within his/her work-related activities, must have proven the ability to speak Moldovan). For example, language tests originally planned for 1994 were in fact put on hold without the new term being set up. [NEUKIRCH 1999: 48]

In order to understand the developments in Moldova it is necessary to realize that there are two cleavages of significant influence – relations with the Soviet Union and the Russian language. While Moldovan nationalists protested against the preservation of the Soviet Union (unlike the elites in the PMR) and required the limitation of the influence of Russian,

“territorial “ elites – managed to marginalize their “nationalist” enemies as it happened in Belarus. According to Riabczuk, in the end the process of national renaissance in Ukraine was realized through a compromising scenario that formally was “Ukrainian”, but in fact rather “creole”. With regard to the fact that existence of this compromise was never clearly defined and thus not even institutionalized, each side of the conflict attempts to “steal the ball from the rival” in the way that it interpretes all legal discrepancies concerning the language policy and the rights of national minorities in its favor, while, at the same time, both sides claim oppression and forced marginalization of their positions from each other. [RIABCZUK 2004: 91]

²⁹ The language policy of the Soviet Union attempted to Russify Moldovan SSR with the aim to prove that Moldovans and Romanians are different nations.

Moldovan communists were much more tolerant and open to the position of the Russian language. These two approaches in relation to the processes of state-building and nation-building that in Moldova were based on the adoption of language legislation³⁰ and the law on citizenship³¹ played the main role in the political development of the country. During the process of preparation of these laws the Moldovan political elites took inspiration from developments in the Baltic countries. The law-enforcing bodies, including the parliament, defended the adoption of such legislation with the need to create conditions for the Moldovan nation.

Concretely there were three language laws approved by the Supreme Soviet of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic a mere two years prior to the break up of the Soviet Union – the Act on official language, the Act on the function of languages used in the republic and the Act on the re-introduction of Roman characters. Adoption of these laws was followed by the State program for the languages used in the MSSR, proposed with the aim to open a way for Moldovan to become the main means of communication in all spheres of social and public lives. The first of the aforementioned laws granted Romanian (Moldovan) the same status as Russian, while Russian remained a language used in all levels of central and local administration. [culturalpolicies.net/web/moldova: 2007]

The legislation-related activities of the metropolitan institutions in the area of language legislation soon evoked a response from language minorities who understood that the adopted legislation would define the processes of nation-building and state-building on ethnic principles, not on citizenship, as it did in Latvia. The government's activities (rather anti-Soviet and anti-Russian in the first half of the 1990's) invoked the doubts of minorities³² that had very little knowledge of Moldovan (contrary to Russian which, through the consequence of decades of Russification conducted by Moscow, held the function of a language of inter-ethnic communication in Moldova). Implementation of the language policy for minorities (anti-Soviet and anti-Russian) degraded their position in politics, the administration, school system, media, culture, etc. The position of minority languages thus became a critical issue in the country's internal development (Moldovan communists were much more open to the position of Russian than the nationalist government). The most controversial part of the law

³⁰ Already in 1988 the commission established by the Communist Party of Moldova dealt with the necessity of a language reform and developed its draft with the aim to change the language policy pushed through by Moscow. [linguapax.org: 2006]

³¹ The government in Kishinev did not set any language-related requirements for granting the state citizenship to applicants. Individual rules required from all future applicants at least 10 year-long residency, but this paragraph did not apply to people who already lived in the country. The law allowed to grant citizenship to all applicants with permanent residency by the date of the declaration of independence, i.e. June 23, 1990 and could prove having legal income. Despite that the law on citizenship was considered controversial. Post-war immigrants had to apply for citizenship within one year, because Moldova did not accept the possibility of having dual citizenship. Everyone thus had to first refute the Soviet citizenship, which meant that ethnic Russians were forced to clearly proclaim their attitude towards Moldovan statehood. If they failed to apply for the citizenship within one year, they had to prove their knowledge of the language and as other new immigrants also evidence of a 10-year-long residency in the country. [KOLSTOE 1995: 151 - 152]

³² In 1989 the population of Moldova included up to 600,000 of Ukrainians, 562,000 of Russians, 157,500 of Gagauzians, 90,000 Bulgarians, etc. These numbers include also the territory of Transnistria (minorities comprised approx. 35% of the total population). The internal political development was also reflected in the structure of population in Moldova and Transnistria. In 2004 there were 2,564,849 Moldovans living in the country, 282,406 Ukrainians, 201,218 Russians, and 147,500 Gagauzians. In Transnistria in 2004 there were 177,156 Moldovans, 159,940 Ukrainians, 168,270 Russians, and 11,107 Gagauzians. Between 1989 and 2004 a general decrease in population took place, which affected both the right and east banks of the Dniester River. While in Moldova the domestic ethnicity of Moldovans comprise a majority, in PMR we can see a gradual decrease of the position of the strongest ethnicity. Due to the process of Russification the number of ethnic Moldovans decreased from 44% in 1926 to 39.9% in 1989 and 31.9% in 2004. On the contrary, the number of ethnic Russians grew from 13.7% in 1926 to 25.5% in 1989 and 30.4% in 2004. The number of Ukrainians grew from 28.3% in 1989 to 28.8% in 2004. [more on culturalpolicies.net/web/moldova: 2007, pridnestrovie.net/2004census: 2007]

was the requirement for all clerks and officials to master the official Moldovan language even in areas with a Gagauz and/or Russian majority. The growing distrust and doubts of the Russian-speaking population was invoked by the dispute over Moldova's union with Romania and led towards the one-sided declaration of Dniester River's Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republics on August 25, 1991. [GOMBOS 2004: 20]

Minorities' fears of the change in language policy are best understandable when we look at statistics regarding the knowledge of the newly declared state language among representatives of national minorities in the mid-1990's. In 1993 up to 41% of the Russian-speaking population proclaimed they did not speak the Moldovan language at all, another 21% claimed only limited knowledge of the language.

By 1996 the knowledge of Moldovan amongst the Russian-speaking community increased slightly, but more than 71% of respondents said they did not speak the language or knew it very little. An important fact was that in 1993 the knowledge of Moldovan was significantly lower in the Dniester River regions (only up to 10% of Russian-speaking population could speak the language, and not fluently). [SAVOSKUL 2001: 180]

Looking at the given data from the years between 1993 and 1995 it is evident that the practical implementation of the language policy adopted by Kishinev before the break-up of the Soviet Union would certainly fulfill the doubts of minorities about the degradation of their social status and influence (i.e. Gagauz, Russians, Ukrainians, Jews, Bulgarians as well as Moldovans whose first language was Russian) in Moldova. In 1979, only 62% of the entire population claimed Moldovan as their first language. On the contrary, 66% of Jews, 62% of Belarussians, 30% of Ukrainians and even 3% of Moldovans declared Russian as their mother tongue. When it comes to the position of Russian as the second language, it was even more significant – 46% Moldavans, 43% Ukrainians, 68% Gagauz, 30% Jews, 67% Bulgarians, 34% Belarussians, etc. declared Russian to be their second language. [countrystudies.us/moldova: 2007]

Although the language policy of the central government was at the point of its adoption relatively liberal³³ – in comparison with the Baltic states – and faced several changes during the following years in order to become more open and tolerant to language minorities³⁴, it brought with it the degradation of language minorities anyway. The signs of degradation were evident predominantly in the area of education. Between 1990 and 1991 the republican government organized and conducted a campaign for the nationalization of all levels of education and the school system. The Russian language was axed from the curriculum of the Faculty of Philology at the Moldovan State University. In 1990, many faculties of Kishinev University faced a decrease in Russian students of 40-50%. In the following years Russians, Ukrainians, Gagauz and Bulgarian students comprised a mere 11% of the junior year students at the Moldovan State University. [KOLSTOE 1995: 145 – 151] The Russian-language minority especially protested against the repression of state offices even at other levels of the school system. Apparently, there were limitations of the Russian-language schools' capacities which Moldovans doubt, saying that it was a natural consequence of the decrease in the number of Russian-speaking students. Viewed subjectively, the language policy negatively influenced the language minorities, although the following table provides certain data to prove it:

³³ The language law secured the use of Ukrainian, Russian, Bulgarian and other languages. Russian gained the status of the language of inter-ethnic communications. It included a regulation that citizens were allowed to choose their language of use in cases of public gatherings as well as in local self-governments. Moldovan as the state language was supposed to become the language of central administration, and in case of necessity certain official documents would be translated to Russian. However, the actual wording of the laws was rather unclear. [KOLSTOE 1995: 147 - 148]

³⁴ For example, the requirement for a test of knowledge of the state language was not implemented eventually. [dosfan.lib.uic.edu: 2006]

What are the consequences of the Act on the state language on the Russian-speaking population in your opinion? (in %)	Right-bank Moldova				The Dniester Regions	
	Russians		Moldovans		Russians	Moldovans
	1993	1996	1993	1996	1993	1993
Made it more difficult for them to study at colleges/universities	74	62	21	31	79	68
Made it more difficult for them to get jobs	70	64	22	25	69	61
Aggravated their possibilities to work in state administration	57	38	23	30	72	61
Increased the risk for them to lose their jobs	76	52	13	14	73	64
Made it more difficult for them to communicate with Moldovans	38	30	11	8	57	57
Russians realized the necessity to speak Moldovan	33	36	33	48	10	32
There was lack of information in Russian available	33	30	20	10	52	46
Different opinion	2	0	2	1	1	4
I do not know	1	5	31	22	6	18

Table no. 1 – Real impact of the Act on the State Language on lives of the members of Russian-speaking minority in Moldova (Research carried out in urban areas between 1993 and 1996) in % [SAVOSKUL 2001: 180]

For the central Moldovan government, changes in the language policy can be judged as a big failure when viewed from a distance. Despite the fact that on first sight appears as if the problematics of language use in Moldova was solved by the foundation of the quasi-state of the PMR, it is true to only a limited extent (only the pro-USSR vs. anti-USSR division was solved). Although the role of the Russian language in Moldova has gradually been decreasing³⁵, the division between the pro-Russian and anti-Russian is still alive in this society. The importance of the Russian segment of the society is evident also in the steps taken by Prime Minister I. Sturza. He tried to push through a law that would require all advertising be in Moldovan in order to force Russian out of the position of preferred language in marketing. [law.nyu.edu: 2006] The amended law on advertising, after its adoption in the first reading (1999), was criticized by the OSCE Commissioner for National Minorities (Van der Stoel) who said that the amendment is in discrepancy with international standards. His criticism was denied by the Moldovan Minister of Foreign Affairs, N. Tabacaru, who claimed that advertising in Russian comprises some 90 to 95% share of the overall advertising business which he said was in fact a violation of the rights of other language groups to information in their mother tongues. Those media which did not respect the wording of the language law which stipulated that at least 65% of broadcasted programs must be in Moldovan were also an aim of repression from the state which was again harshly criticized by both the OSCE and Moscow. Similar steps were also taken in the area of graduate schooling. On November 18, 1999, the Minister of Education announced that a test in the Romanian language and literature will be a part of the entrance examination to colleges and universities. [law.nyu.edu: 2006]

Another problem was the factual separation of individual social segments based on the division of society on a linguistic principle. Moldovans tend to feel rather negatively towards Russian and the same applies to Russians and their attitude towards the Moldovan language. As a consequence of such attitudes we can expect problems in mutual communication between these two ethnicities in the future, as Russian gradually loses its dominant position as a language of inter-ethnic communication. The same applies to the territory of the developing PMR where a strong process of Russification is taking place and which will complicate the

³⁵ The importance of Russian in Moldova has decreased since the abolition of its mandatory education. Especially young Moldovans who were born in the 1980's speak Russian very rarely, almost never; the number of graduate students who studied in Russian decreased from 55% in 1992 to 16 – 28% in 2004. [countrystudies.us: 2007]

potential future solution of the status of this area that counts on the sovereignty of Kishinev over the PMR. As a result of the language policy adopted in Moldova, knowledge of the state language gradually increases even amongst the language minorities (except for the PMR), but society is still strongly divided. The potential solution cannot be seen in bilingualization of the state – impossible to pursue due to financial demands – and which would in consequence deny the previous and present efforts of the majority ethnicity. The question is whether the role of the language of inter-ethnic communication can be taken over by geographically and culturally neutral English, as happens in Lithuania, for example.

Moldova's potential advantage in the context of the solution of the internal political situation of the government in Kishinev (as opposed to Georgia, for example) is the fact that despite the ethnic conflict no massive exodus/expulsion of members of various minorities from either Moldova or the PMR ever took place.

Transnistria and Gagauzia

It can be said about the internationally unrecognized quasi-state of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic that it was formed as a consequence of language-related and citizenship-related legislation adopted by the Kishinev-based government. The pro-Soviet³⁶ and pro-Russian division was a source of the identity of the society of the PMR (to a certain extent even ethnic Moldovans identify with it who comprise the largest segment of the society). The efforts to expul Russian in order to replace it with the Moldovan language led to the declaration of independence of this geographically and demographically rather different region of Transnistria, or the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic in September 1990.³⁷ The reason behind this declaration of independence were the fears of the Russophilic population (Russian is the first language not only for Russians who comprise one third of this community but also Ukrainians who, together with Russians, comprise two thirds of the autonomy's population, as well as other minorities lesser in size) that potential unity with Romania and the consequential Romanization, despite the fact that already in 1991 the unity of Romania and Moldova had limited support amongst ethnic Moldovans, which was, in addition to other reasons, caused by Romania's unsatisfactory economic situation. Unlike the country's metropolis of Kishinev, the authorities in the PMR took a different path in the process of nation-building and state-building. While the independent state of Moldova was created on the basis of nationality, the PMR was founded on a non-national, citizen-related principle and the policy of trilingualism. This policy was adopted due to the language structure on the left bank of the Dniester River. The Constitution of the PMR set three languages as official – Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan. [The Constitution of PMR: 2007] In practice, however, Russian dominates all spheres of public life, including the economy, administration, media, education, etc. Most media are Russian-language; the largest such multi-business corporation is 'Sheriff' (which includes a TV station, publishing house, mobile phone network, football club, supermarket chain as well as a chain of gas stations) and its website is only in English and Russian. Thus those people who do not speak Russian are automatically deprived of the chance to find a job within this corporation, which is a backbone of the PMR economy.

According to the PMR authorities' statements and official documents, the language policy in Transnistria is rather liberal towards language minorities. In practice, however, the situation is slightly different. The quasi-state of the PMR which was established as a reaction to the unliberal language policy of the metropolis rather paradoxically implemented its own language policy that is even more repressive towards language minorities than the general state language policy, from which the PMR had separated. No one is forced to learn any of the state languages, yet on the other hand, those Moldovans who want to use the Moldovan language in the Latin alphabet (Moldova's official form of the state language) cannot do so since such language is generally considered as Romanian and is thus a foreign language with no official

³⁶ Even today this identity is still present in the "state" symbols of PMR.

³⁷ On January 1, 1991 PMR declared its independence which was followed by a referendum confirming the establishment of PMR by the 97.7% strong majority with participation of 78% of the eligible electorate (without participation of international observers). [KOLSTOE 1995: 161]

status. In practice this persecution is most evident in the media. Many language periodicals were suppressed and Kishinev radio broadcast was de facto blocked in many areas. [KOLSTOE, 1995: 158] Another area with an evidently non-liberal approach towards minorities is the school system. Schools offering education in the Latin alphabet (following the official Moldovan educational curriculum) face repression - including the closure of schools - and function only as private institutions. Obviously, such practices are harshly criticized by the OSCE. By the end of 2006, the OSCE mission chairman in Moldova, L. O'Neill, called on the PMR authorities to return six buildings that had been confiscated by them to their former owner, Lycea Evrica, which pursued education in Moldovan using the Latin alphabet in the town of Ribnica. [osce.org: 2007]. Conflicts between Kishinev and Tiraspol resulted in the closure of four schools educating in Moldovan (with the use of the Latin alphabet) back in 2004. The PMR authorities defended this step claiming several breaches of law (Art. 1, 6, 8, 13, a 35 of the Act on Education, Act on Children's Rights, Art. 52 of Civil Code of PMR, etc. [pridnestrovie.net/moldovanschoolclosings: 2007]) The situation is no better in academic education in the PMR - The Shevchenko University in Tiraspol offers free education, but Russian-speaking students are favored over others.

The reason for the persecution of the Moldovan minority in the PMR is not based on ethnic principles, as it is in Georgia for example, but has its roots rather in the political pragmatism of the local regime. A strong orientation towards Russia and Russification is a reflection of the geopolitical situation in the PMR, the existence of which - after the change of the foreign political orientation of the Ukraine - can only be guaranteed by the Russian Federation and its armed forces present on the PMR's soil. The process of Russification is most evident in the area of education; in the academic as well as scientific circuits there are strong links between the PMR and respective institutions in Russia, which are supported by the authoritarian president I. Smirnov; academic institutions in the PMR use Russian text books and other materials, curricula, and Russian-speaking students are preferred and favored during the entry examinations to academic institutions. Another fact is that many ethnic Moldovans living in the PMR identify themselves more strongly with the PMR than with Moldova as such and prefer Russian to their mother tongue. Recently a book titled *Power Without Legitimacy* was published, in which its author, A. Bojko, from the position of an ethnic Moldovan argues that the regime of the president V. Voronin in Moldova is identical to the regime of the president F. Duvalier on Haiti. [tiraspoltimes.com: 2007] Similar activities are used by president I. Smirnov's regime for its own promotion and propaganda; as an argument reinforcing its efforts to gain international recognition for the PMR, moreover pointing out that many across all ethnicities inhabiting the autonomy support this goal.

The development in another region with a concentrated language minority - Gagauzia³⁸ - was quite different. On November 12, 1989, the Autonomos Republic of Gagauzia was declared, the capital city being Komrat. This act was, however, considered illegal by the then ruling Supreme Soviet of Moldova. Several months later, on August 19, 1990, the Gagauzian Soviet Socialist Republic was declared. It was supposed to be a part of the Soviet Union, but independent from Moldova. [NEUKIRCH 1999: 49] Similarly to the PMR, the divisions here based on relations with the Soviet Union played a significant role. Declaration of the republic followed a referendum confirming independence from Moldova (the referendum had taken place one year earlier). Gagauzians are the Russian-speaking inhabitants of the country - comprising 3.5% of Moldova's population - who felt threatened by the state-imposed language legislation. Between 1990 and 1994 they were in conflict with the government of Kishinev and requested independence. After the changes in leadership of Moldova in 1994, Gagauzians withdrew their request for independence and accepted the sovereignty of Moldova's government. Based on the compromise (an organic law which in 1994 appended the Constitution of Moldova) they gained cultural and language autonomy according to the 1994 constitution. Based on this declaration the Gagauzian parliament has a right to pass its own legislation in the areas of education, culture, taxes, etc. While relations between Kishinev and Gagauzia are not ideal, the achieved solution can serve as an example of the cohesion of the interests of a language minority and the integrity of the common state. This organic law also guarantees to Gagauzians the possibility to declare independence in the case of the uniting

³⁸ A similar internal political problem relating to the separatist region of Podniestrie was likely to appear in Gagauzia as well. The government in Tiraspol, however, managed to reach agreement on the guarantee of autonomy in the areas of language, culture and education.

of Moldova with Romania, the granting of the status of official language to Gagauzian and the region was further granted ethnical-territorial autonomy, which can serve as an example for solutions to similar problems in other areas, such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia and PMR.

Georgia

Language policy at the break of the 1980's and 1990's, under the leadership of nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia, attempted to create a nationally homogenous space in which minorities were excluded from the processes of nation and state-building. The consequence of this did not achieve the desired objectives – the creation of an ethnically and linguistically homogenous state – but rather its break up. The language policy of Georgia faced similar problems to Moldova. At the time of achieving independence, Georgia was a country with a high national heterogeneity³⁹ and a practically bilingual political territory where Russian played the key role.⁴⁰

	1989 in thousands	2002 in thousands	Change from 1989 to 2002 in thousands
Georgians	3,787,4 (70.1%)	3,661,2 (83.8%)	-126.2
Abkhazians	95,9 (1.8%)	3,5 (0.1%)	-92.3
Ossetians	164,1 (3%)	38,0 (0.9%)	-126.0
Russions	341,2 (6.3%)	67,7 (1.5%)	-273.5
Ukrainians	52,4 (1.0%)	7,0 (0.2%)	-45.4
Assyrians	307,6 (5.7%)	284,8 (6.5%)	-22.8
Armenians	437,2 (8.1%)	248,9 (5.7%)	-188.2
Jews	24,8 (0.5%)	3,8 (0.1%)	-20.9
Overall population	5,400,8 (100%)	4,371,5 (100%)	-1029.3

Table 2 – National composition of Georgia between 1989 and 2002 [KORTH; STEPANIAN; MUSKHELISHVILI, 2005: 13 - 14]

As the statistics show in table no. 2 above, Georgia went through an essential demographic change between 1989 and 2002 that we could consider to be the direct reason for the change of language policy as well as the ethnic conflicts that arose later. The language policy was supposed to function within the newly created independent state as a tool for the creation of a unified (Georgian) identity and actively participate in the processes of state-building from which minorities were deliberately excluded. Georgian elites based their activities on the idea that the political realm (the state) was to be ethnically and linguistically homogenous. This nationalistic approach, represented by the president Zviad Gamsakhurdia, towards the overall direction of independent Georgia's development invoked fearful reactions amongst the representatives of various minorities. During Georgia's growing nationalism, the State Program of the Georgian Language was adopted in 1989, based on which the Georgian language was granted the status of state language, later confirmed by the new state's

³⁹ Similarly to minorities in Moldova, even Abkhazians and Ossetians in Georgia were strongly geographically concentrated (in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia). Besides Abkhazians and Ossetians also Armenians and Assyrians belong to strong language minorities in Georgia. These minorities, however, did not play similarly significant role in this internal political development.

⁴⁰ In 1978 the Soviet elites tried to deprive Georgian of the status of the official language since it was the source of Georgian national identity. [parliament.ge: 2007]

Constitution.⁴¹ [more in the State Program of the Georgian Language: 2007, The Constitution of Georgia, Art. no. 8: 2007]

Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the leader of the movement for independence, founded his popularity on a nationalist agenda, based on anti-Russian rhetoric and Georgian nationalism directed against minorities. His aim was to push through Georgian as the language of inter-ethnic communication, expul the representatives of minorities from influential positions in politics, the administration, education and deprive the Russian language of its position of lingua franca. From the Georgian perspective the language policy was supposed to repair the unnatural state that had developed during the reign of the Soviet Union where in every large city and municipality Russian-language schools were opened even in municipalities that had no Russian-speaking inhabitants. In 1989, Georgian was the second language for only 1.6% of Abkhazians, while 81.5% of them spoke fluent Russian and up to 63.3% of Georgians spoke reasonable Russian. [inst.at: 2006]

Implementation of the language program, however, faced problems in autonomies with concentrated populations of minority nations and ethnicities. Abkhazians and Ossetians were, due to the policy of “korenizatsiia”⁴² (i.e. rootage) practiced in the Soviet Union, used to the privileged social status within their own autonomies. As a consequence, a process of territorialization of ethnicity took place within the autonomy on all social levels. The change of language policy, geographic concentration of minorities, their minimal knowledge of the newly declared state language and the process of state-building based on (exclusive) ethnic nationalism invoked a wave of nationalist sentiment in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and a wave of indignation amongst ethnic Armenians and Assyrians.

Among minorities, the Georgian language program evoked fears of losing social status. The interest of minorities and the titular ethnicity collided in the newly created independent state. Georgians viewed the problematic issues of the minorities as artificial, caused by the language policy of the Soviet Union and uninvited guests. The new language policy was supposed to change this “unnatural” state through the change in the education system as well as in the Georgianization of the sphere of public affairs. Although members of minorities were not deprived of citizenship, they became second-class citizens. If we evaluated the language policy adopted by the Tbilisi authorities with respect to the objectives it was supposed to achieve, we can say it was highly unsuccessful. Unified Georgian identity based on a single language remained far from formed, neither the process of ‘Georgization’ of minorities nor the installation of Georgian into the position of the language of inter-ethnic communication took place. On the contrary, the state in fact fell apart – South Ossetia and Abkhazia, with aid from Russia, practically gained independence from Georgia by the end of 1990’s. The language policy did not bring the expected results even in the areas of other strongly populated minorities (predominantly Armenians) that were administered in minority languages.

Although students coming from ethnic minorities still have the chance to study at schools for minorities, this does not indicate a liberal attitude within the central government (incl. text books and other materials that are usually financed from foreign resources) but rather a legacy of the former Soviet Union’s practices. In the regions with Armenian and Assyrian

⁴¹ In August 1989 the Supreme Council of Georgia adopted the state language program which emphasized that Georgian should be used in all spheres of social and public life (in the “Party”, education, science, administration, economy, culture, etc.). The language program included not only education of Georgian and Georgian literature at all levels of schools, but also language tests for colleges and other graduate schools, obligation to dub Russian films, etc. [the State Program of the Georgian Language: 2007]

⁴² In general this policy lead towards over-representation of titular ethnicities at all levels – the union, autonomous republics and autonomous regions. While in 1989 Georgians comprised 70.1% of the population, in state administration and management they represented up to 89.3%. Similar situation did not only exist in the state administration, economy and politics, but also in education. In 1987 94% of all students at the University of Tbilisi were Georgians. It’s important to mention that similar policy was applied even in the regions with autonomous status (in favor of Ossetians in South Ossetia and Abkhazians in Abkhazia). Despite they were controlled by the union republic, titular ethnicities of the second class were present there. [caucasus.dk/chapter5: 2006]

populations there are still minority schools.⁴³ For example, the entire region of Samtskhe – Javakheti is practically administered in Armenian and only a few inhabitants speak Georgian and thanks moreover to the presence of the army base, many people speak Russian. In Georgia, there are 153 schools educating in Armenian and 149 in Assyrian. Many students also attend Russian-language schools, where they prepare for study abroad, or prepare for emigration. The fact is that only 8.6% of Armenians and 17% of Assyrians think that the inability to speak Georgian is a limitation in getting quality education. This fact can be explained logically, although there is only one chance to get substantial education in Armenian and that is at the Faculty of Education at the University of Tbilisi. A significant number of Armenians and Assyrians thus leave to study in Yerevan and Baku. [KORTH; STEPANIAN; MUSKHELISHVILI 2005: 30 - 38]

Despite the increasing number of minorities able to speak Georgian (fearing social marginalization), the prevailing unwillingness of minorities is viewed by Georgians as a tendency not to incorporate themselves into mainstream society and as refuting the state itself. Currently there is no language of inter-ethnic communication in Georgia. The territories under the administration of Tbilisi use Georgian as their language of communication, however, up to 15% of the population of these areas do not speak the language at all (although there are no official statistics regarding the knowledge of languages). [KORTH; STEPANIAN; MUSKHELISHVILI 2005: 29]

The Russian language still plays the role of the language of inter-ethnic communication, which became the tool of communication between the center and the demographically different regions. The government in Tbilisi strictly stands against such an influential role for the Russian language and therefore cancelled the mandatory education of Russian at schools and placed the language among optional subjects within the general curriculum. As a consequence of Georgia's movement from the post-Soviet information space towards a global space and its change in the orientation of the country's foreign policy, the English language has gradually grown in importance. It has become the second language among the urbanized elites, university students and in business sphere. Nevertheless, in distant regions and rural areas its position is rather marginal and does not affect the position of Russian as the second language in any way. Russian has a significant position in business and trade, in advertising, the media, etc. The language program that should have secured that Georgian would replace Russian in every day life and the spheres of the information world (e.g. advertising billboards, outdoor signs, posters, invitations, television, etc.) has failed in this context [More in the State Program for the Support of the Georgian Language].

The language policy was successful in increasing the share of minorities with a substantial knowledge of Georgian. It managed to partially "homogenize" (through the emigration of minorities) the Georgian society. The share of the titular ethnicity in the population between 1898 and 2002 increased from 70.1% to 83.8%. However, the program failed to fulfill the main goal of the nationalists – the creation of a nation state in which a linguistically homogenous society shares a unified language-based identity. On the other hand the fears of the minorities that the language program would lead to the decrease of their socio-political influence were fulfilled. Representatives of minorities comprise a mere 6% of the members of parliament and their representation in the organs of local self-administration, in regions where minorities often comprise up to 50% of the population, is even lower. [KORTH; STEPANIAN; MUSKHELISHVILI 2005: 29] Another significant barrier to pushing through certain political requirements of minorities was the ban on the establishment of new political parties based on ethnicity. This fact effectively halted the articulation and aggregation of the interests of minorities at the highest level and limited their active influence on the process of decision-making at the highest level.

Despite the central government's support for the Georgian language as a priority, within the implementation of the language program⁴⁴ minorities did not receive substantial support to help them integrate into society. One of the main obstacles in the process of implementing the language policy was the unwillingness of Georgians to accept minorities into the general

⁴³ The education law grants to minorities the right to education in their ethnical languages as long as the self-government proposes it.

⁴⁴ The program, in addition to other things, said that self-learning text books and dictionaries would be published in Russian – Georgian, Abkhazian – Georgian, Ossetian – Georgian, Armenian – Georgian, and other versions. (More in the State Program of the Georgian Language: 2007)

society⁴⁵ as well as a lack of financial resources. This is apparent predominantly in the process of education, due to the lack of qualified lecturers teaching the state language to minorities, language courses in Georgian for adults, text books, etc.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia

At the break of the 1980's and 1990's the state language program of the Tbilisi administration and the conflicts regarding the span of the Abkhazian autonomy and South Ossetia generated tension between the center and the regions and later led to a one-sided secession. Presently, both internationally unrecognized de facto states use their own language policies as a tool to strengthen their own identities and, through their orientation to Russia, they attempt to ban repeated integration into the state of Georgia (both entities are fully dependent on Russian financial support – the official currency is the Russian ruble, but support also comes in the form of material, military and other resources).

By the end of the 1980's, Abkhazians lead by Vladislav Ardzinba had an entirely different idea of the position of the Georgian language in Abkhazia than the Georgian nationalists under the leadership of Zviad Gamsakhurdia. The reasons why the language policy of the central government, as well as the disputes over the status of Abkhazia among the local elite led towards the process of secession in the country, were rooted in the total absence of identification of Abkhazians with the territory of Georgia and their negative historical experience with the overrule of Georgians. Changes in language-related legislation adopted prior to the break up of the Soviet Union brought with them historical reminiscences of repression by the Georgians.⁴⁶

The Georgian education program from 1989 – as was introduced – was a threat for Abkhazians in relation to what they had achieved in 1978 when they openly started to talk about separation from Georgia. After demonstrations in Abkhazia, the Pedagogical Institute in Suchumi was promoted to the State University of Abkhazia, new scientific magazines were published in the Abkhazian language and the language in fact experienced an overall process of emancipation. [MIHALKANIN 2004: 146] Moreover, on the basis of the Constitution of the Abkhazian Soviet Socialist Republic from 1978, the language was given equal status with Russian and Georgian. [For more information see the Constitution of the ASSR.] From 1989 onward, Abkhazians started to express their political aspirations, the aims of which were to raise the status of Abkhazia to an equal level with Georgia or even to eventually separate. Another desire was to place Abkhazians in the position of a state-building ethnicity by granting the inhabitants respective rights (for instance, more than 50% strong representation in the local parliament). [More in BAAR, 2003] In October 1989, at the presitium of the Supreme Council of the Abkhazian SSR, the State Program for the Development of the Abkhazian Language was adopted as a reaction to the adoption of a similar program for the support of the Georgian language. [More in the State Program for the Development of the Abkhazian Language] Less than a year later on August 25, 1990, the Supreme Council of Abkhazia declared state sovereignty with the status of a union republic which was the climax

⁴⁵ A good example of this is the Tbilisi's theory about allowing Armenians to study at the Tbilisi University in Akhalkalaki. The proposals worked out by the Shakashvili's cabinet for the support of Georgian and integration of Armenians into the Georgian society failed to fulfill their purpose. In 2004 Shakashvili promised to include 100 students to the university system through various stipends, but they would have to pass entrance exams which included a test of the state language based on the internal educational norms. Even the influx of Georgian students to the branch of the Tbilisi University in Akhalkalaki, where they could study for free and push out Armenian students was problematic (the aim of this could have been an effort to change the demographic structure). [eurasianet.org: 2007]

⁴⁶ During Beria's rule, the Abkhazian government adopted a new alphabet based on the Georgian language. The Georgian-governed cabinet Abkhazia closed all schools where Abkhazian was taught and imposed Georgian as the only language of instruction, moreover even newspapers were not published and radio stations could not broadcast in the language (these were renewed at the end of the 1950's), in higher education Georgian students were favored over Abkhazians. [MIHALKANIN 2004: 145]

to the conflict with Tbilisi. [More in the Declaration of State Sovereignty of the Abkhazian SSR: 2007, BAAR 2003]

Declaration of the Georgian language as the only state language spread fears among Abkhazians that the decision-making posts in the higher ranks of the society will be occupied by Georgians due to the implementation of the Georgian state language program.⁴⁷ Such fears of the implementation of the Georgian state language program were understandable given the demographic composition of Abkhazia⁴⁸ as well as the language literacy of the minorities by the end of the 1980's. Statistics showed that 97.3% of Abkhazians speak their mother language while only 2.2% of them speak Georgian (however, as many as 83.5% speak Russian). That says a lot about the relations between Abkhazians and Georgians. Only around 0.4% of Georgians speak the Abkhazian language, while around 0.6% of ethnic Russians speak Abkhazian; there are, however, three times less Russians in Abkhazia than Georgians. [Baar 2003: 240] The resistance of Abkhazians towards the language legislation of Georgia resulted in an armed conflict with the central government between 1992 and 1994, bringing partial success for Abkhazian nationalists. They practically accomplished what they wanted – with the departure of many Georgians they became the largest nationality in Abkhazia (representing up to 40%). According to the census from 2003, which Tbilisi refused to accept, Abkhazians became the strongest ethnicity in number in the internationally unrecognized Abkhazia, comprising up to 43.8% of its population (compared to 17.8% in 1989); the largest minorities were Armenians, 21% (compared to 14.3% in 1989), Russians, 11% (compared to 14.6% in 1989), Georgians, 21% (compared to 45.8% in 1989). Thus significant changes took place within demographic ratios that had originally developed during the previous century, when between 1897 and 1989 the number of Abkhazians grew by 59%, while the number of Georgians grew by 883% and of Russians by 1,460%! [Baar 2003: 240]

Demographic changes in the 1990's did not take place only within the “hot phase” of the conflict with Tbilisi, they continued even after the conflict faded. Offices in which Abkhazians held key posts did not deviate to open repression but their attitudes towards minorities can hardly be described as open and friendly. [LYNCH 2004: 46] Today there are two state languages in the internationally unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia - which declared its independence on June 22, 1992. These are the Russian and Abkhazian languages which share the same status. According to Article VI of the Constitution, adopted on November 26, 1994, the official language of the Abkhazian Republic is Abkhazian; Russian was granted the status of state language as well as of “other institutional use”. [the Constitution of the Abkhazian Republic] Although Abkhazia declared its independence from Georgia in reaction to Georgian exclusive nationalism and a non-liberal political attitude towards minorities, it's a paradox that it practices similar policies. Unlike South Ossetia, the constitution of this internationally unrecognized republic does not grant any status to the Georgian language. Part of Georgia's efforts to solve its problems with regions that are out of its control are changes in the state language policy. Abkhazian became an official language of the respective region through a constitutional change in the Georgian Constitution in 2002. However Russian was granted no official status at all.

Rather similar was the situation in South Ossetia where the proposed Georgian language program in 1989 also evoked a wave of protests.⁴⁹ Tbilisi's deliberate effort to push the Georgian language into the position of the language of broader communication instead of Russian stirred up Ossetian nationalism that strengthened as a reaction to the proposed language legislation by the authorities in Tbilisi. The changes in language laws had a direct impact on South Ossetia since the Russian language functioned here practically as an official language superior to not only Georgian (only up to 15% of Ossetian population speak it), but also to Ossetian itself. [www.caucasus.dk: 2006] A part of the Ossetian reaction to the Georgian state language program adopted in 1989 by the Supreme Council of Georgia was an active “collaboration” with Abkhazia. In spring of 1989 the leader of the Ossetian movement,

⁴⁷ Mainly in the organs of the Communist Party and state administration offices Abkhazians were overly represented within their autonomy. [More in MIHALKANIN 2004, LYNCH 2004]

⁴⁸ After the break up of the USSR, the dominant nations included Georgians (45.8%), Russians (14.6%), Armenians (14.3%), and Abkhazians (17.8%). [Baar 2003: 240]

⁴⁹ Just like Abkhazians, even Ossetians had negative experience with the pressure of the Georginization process (from 1938 they had to write in Georgian alphabet and in 1954 in Cyrillic. [Baar 2003: 246]

A. Khokhiev, supported the Abkhazian leadership in their fight against the opening of Tbilisi University's branch in Suchumi.⁵⁰ [More in the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Abkhazian SSR about the significant worsening of relations caused by an illegal attempt to open a branch of Tbilisi University in Suchumi: 2007]

In reaction to the Georgian state language program the Supreme Council of South Ossetia adopted the state program for the support of Ossetian in September 1989, including the requirement to grant the Ossetian language the status of an official language in the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia. [The State Program for the Support of the Ossetian Language] The Ossetian language program had, to a certain extent, similar aims as the Georgian state language program (i.e. support of Ossetian in all levels of education, media, culture, etc.), while granting the status of the official language to both Georgian and Ossetian. The requirements formulated in the program were strictly refuted by authorities both in Moscow and Tbilisi. [caucasus.dk: 2006]

After the Ossetians did not succeed with their political aspirations in Tbilisi and Moscow, they decided to act independently from Tbilisi. On September 20, 1990 the autonomy of South Ossetia declared its independence as the South Ossetian Soviet Socialist Republic and later called a general parliamentary election. [caucasus.dk/chapter4: 2006] The Supreme Council of Georgia, led by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, reacted to the activities of the Ossetian separatists in December 1990 by adopting a law that abolished the status of the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia. [Act on abolishment of the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia: 2007] In the spring of 1991 the pressure from Tbilisi increased on Tskhinvali – the new law changed the administrative structure of South Ossetia – the Tskhinvali district was abolished and integrated into the Gori district (where Georgians comprise a significant majority). Ossetians reacted to this step by granting the province the status of a republic (September 1990) and after the declaration of Georgia's independence they declared independence from Georgia.

Developments at the break of 1980's and 1990's were marked with growing nationalism on both sides, later developing into a large conflict leading to a significant decrease in the population and the lowering of the number of ethnic Georgians. Ethnic-related aspects of the conflict were the main obstacle in solving it, despite the Tbilisi government's proposal that proposed a solution through a constitutional guarantee of autonomy, securing the possibility of education in Ossetian as well as passing the responsibility for educational policy to the Ossetian authorities themselves and in addition, granting Ossetian the status of the official language of the autonomy. [www.mfa.gov.ge: 2007] The plan, however, does not mention the status of Russian which fulfilled the role of the official language in politics, the administration, education, etc. The central government is in a rather disadvantaged situation in handling the negotiations regarding the status of South Ossetia because the region is de facto an independent state featuring many attributes of sovereign statehood.

The language policy, education system and legislation are, with the exception of several municipalities with a Georgian majority under the Tbilisi administration, fully in compliance with separatist authorities and organs. They prefer the Ossetian and Russian languages in politics, the economy and administration (although Georgian holds the constitutional status of a regional language in South Ossetia); the education system is closely linked to the Russian one – for example, the University of Tskhinvali is practically a branch of the University of Vladicaucas. Students usually leave to study in North Ossetia, people working in the area of education come here to improve their qualifications, etc. Similarly to Abkhazia, the teaching of Georgian was cancelled in South Ossetia (i.e. in areas under the control of the separatist organs) and the school system is currently based on education in the Ossetian and Russian languages.

⁵⁰ The Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Abkhazian Autonomy protested against its opening in June 1989 which found it as the reason of worsening of ethnic relations and called for annulling of the decree which declared the opening of the branch. [the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Abkhazian SSR about the significant worsening of relations caused by an illegal attempt to open a branch of Tbilisi University in Suchumi: 2007]

Armenia

The state policy of independent Armenia that was created in 1990's was to a large extent influenced by local specifics. In the first place it has to be emphasized that Armenia was one of the most homogenous republics already during the existence of the Soviet Union.⁵¹ The military conflict between Armenian and Azerbaijani republics over the region of Nagorno-Karabakh at the end of the 1980's even strengthened this ethnical homogeneity.⁵² Together with demonstrations in the Baltic countries this was actually the first violent clashes on the territory of the Soviet Union to break out without being controlled by the central authorities in Moscow. [BEISSINGER, 2002: 66]

The strongest national minority to date – Assyrians – were forced under violent threats to emigrate out of the country (up to 170,000 people). On the contrary, up to 300,000 refugees comprising 10% of Armenia's total population were expelled from Azerbaijan after the military conflict broke out, who were heavily Russified despite their Armenian origin. [KARAPETYAN 2003: 151] The military conflict, an unhappy economic situation, still evident consequences of a catastrophic earthquake in Spitak... all these factors had an impact on how easily radical nationalist groups gained political and military power. After gaining independence in 1991, the government representatives from the Armenian National Movement and especially from the influential nationalistic non-governmental organization Mashtots called out an open battle against everything that was non-Armenian, that is to a large extent against the heritage from the Soviet or Russian regime. In this period one exclamation became very popular: "One nation, one language, one culture."

The nationalistic government predominantly focused on its attempt to turn the unfavorable state of the Armenian language in the shortest possible time to better. Unfortunately for Armenian, Russian expelled this titular language from official communication within the state administration, businesses as well as armed forces. With respect to the broadly effective Armenian-Russian bilingualism, the saddest thing in terms of the use of Armenian was the area of education where, according to the 1990 statistics, up to 50% of all Armenian children attended Russian-language schools. On one hand, that allowed them to broaden their career potentials and professional self-realization thanks to the fact that they could have worked on the entire territory of the Soviet Union, on the other hand, though, they failed to learn and cultivate their mother tongue which had a negative impact on the development of the respective language community. The situation in colleges and universities was very similar, up to 20% of graduate students were educated in the Russian language, mostly on then prestigious technical and medical schools. [KARAPETYAN 2003: 153]

The prevalence of the Russian language in the Soviet Armenia was not determined by the physical presence of ethnic Russians to such a large extent, but rather it was influenced by the high level of urbanization and the centralist type of administration of public affairs. Even before the independent state was established in 1991, the first language-related norms and legislation was formed in Armenia. In 1990 the Ministry of Education of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic issued the regulation "On unified national comprehensive education program". One year later the parliament adopted a resolution that declared the Armenian language to be the unified language of instruction for all pupils and students of Armenian nationality in all comprehensive/grammar schools.⁵³ In 1993 the Armenian parliament passed the "Act on Language" which declared Armenian as the only official language of the

⁵¹ According to the counting of inhabitants in 1989 Armenians comprised 96,4% of the population.

⁵² All national minorities (Russians, Kurds, Assyrians) comprise only 3-4% of the country's total population. National minorities enjoy many advantages regulated by law in Armenia. The country signed the European Chart On Regional and Minority Languages (1992), Declaration of the United Nations' General Assembly about the Rights Relating to National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992), the Convention of SNS Countries securing the rights of national minorities (1994) as well as the Framing Treaty of the Council of Europe about protection of national minorities (1995).

⁵³ Education in Armenian was mandatory for the pupils of 1st to 4th class, in further years the education of the language was optional.

country.⁵⁴ The law became a platform for further development of the Armenian language, the nation's history and culture. At the same time it also includes a remark about guaranteeing free use of minority languages living on the territory of the Republic of Armenia. The new language law extended the use of Armenian as means of instruction also to other education-related institutions in the country, including colleges and universities. The only exception in this respect respected the rights of national minorities to accomplish comprehensive education in their mother tongue in accordance with the state educational programs, however, with the mandatory education of the state language as such.

The law also stipulates that the official language be the language of official communication in all levels of state administration, private businesses and other such institutions.⁵⁵ One year later the Armenian parliament passed a law that allowed for the establishment of the State Language Inspectorate as the control and enforcing tool of the newly adopted language legislation. Most of the Inspectorate's employees were recruited among the member of the nationalistic Mashtots organization. They almost instantly launched a campaign for expulsion of all foreign, mostly Russian, words from the Armenian language. Any violation of language-related regulations was a subject to a fine. The state pushed for the fastest possible transition from Russian to the official language in communications in all state as well as private businesses. This had an extremely negative impact on the Russian-speaking population of Armenian origin as well as on Russian specialists who started to leave the country. A turnover came in 1997 when the director of the language inspectorate Valery Mirzozjan was dismissed from his office. [KARAPETYAN 2003: 150-156]

In the second half of the 1990's directors of Armenian schools started to extend the numbers of Russian language lessons. The step was purely pragmatical, based on the increasing interest from the side of parents. A huge portion of Armenians was seeking work abroad, especially in the Russian Federation. The new constitution adopted in 1995 determines the Armenian language in its Article 12 as the official language of the country. In this regard, the constitution does not differ from similar Soviet constitutions with the only difference, which is the fact that the new constitution did not include the remark regarding the role of the Russian language in a multi-ethnic communication within the entire former union. Article 37 of the Constitution grants the right to preserve traditions and develop minority languages and cultures to all members of various national minorities. [armeniaforeignministry.com: 2007] The use of the state language was clarified legislation-wise also in other laws, for example in the law on media and education.

Currently the situation with the language in Armenia has consolidated to a large extent. The state language has achieved a solid position in the society. The rights of national minorities, however, are not being violated. In Tbilisi there is the Russian University, national minorities can publish their periodicals in their respective languages and have space in the state-run media secured by the legislation. The new language legislation from the 1990's did not have a too negative influence on the members of national minorities but rather the ethnic Armenians who had to use other than the state language in everyday communication.

Conclusion

The language policies in the post-Soviet countries of the European part of the Soviet Union became important issues of domestic political developments in the respective countries. The common features of the initial situation in these states was the presence of members of language minorities which in many cases enjoyed privileged statuses due to the language policy of the Soviet Union. The governments of the succeeding states often decided during the respective processes of democratization to re-define their privileged statuses as well as bring new perspectives on the importance of these language minorities and at the same time strengthen the positions of the titular ethnicity languages over the positions of minority

⁵⁴ Regardless of the fact that then there were two codified Armenian languages existed along each other – the Western Armenian Literary Language and the Eastern Armenian Literary Language.

⁵⁵ Various documents and official correspondence of associations of national minorities had to be written in Armenian.

languages. The common feature of the language reforms in individual post-Soviet states was the effort to embed firmly the position of the language of titular ethnicity. In some cases this effort was accompanied by the degradation of minority languages (especially of the Russian language). With regard to the language policies in the individual countries that varied significantly in attitudes towards the positions of minority languages it is relevant to create some sort of classification of these language policies that would reflect various approaches. The following classification is based on the analyses of various legislations determining the positions of state (official) languages and their relations to minority languages within the respective countries after the split of the former Soviet Union and today. In this classification we have taken into consideration even the factual implementation of the respective language legislation that can differ greatly in practice from its legislative form.

Two basic categories of language policies are *inclusive* and *exclusive*⁵⁶. Inclusive language policy, unlike the exclusive one, does not aim to marginalize the languages of ethnic minorities, neither on the legislative nor on the practical level. On the contrary, it attempts to grant the minority languages some sort of legislative status and protection, mostly in the form of their declaration as the second state and/or regional languages. The most important aspect to determine whether the given state pursues a truly inclusive language policy, however, is not the adopted legislation itself, but the fact how the adopted and applied language legislation affects everyday lives of members of various national minorities (for example, protection of minority education, access to media in minority language, use of the minority language in communication with offices of state administration, language requirements in the process of granting citizenship, etc.) Therefore we have included another sub-category of ‘formally inclusive’ language policies in this classification (in cases of Belarus and PMR). Neither the exclusive language policy is always pure in form. The state organs occupied and ruled by the members of titular ethnicity often approach the individual national minorities differently which can have its reason in various levels of the language-related rights of the respective minorities. It is rather frequent in the succeeding post-Soviet countries that one national minority is fully integrated in the process of state-building while other is completely outcast from the process (for example, Abkhazia and Armenia in the beginning of the 1990’s). Therefore we have also included the sub-category of *selectively exclusive* language policy. A special category has been created for the so-called seceded provinces (Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria) where after the split of the Soviet Union and re-gain of independence in the respective countries the titular population used *defensive* language policies to stand against the efforts of the central state governments (Tbilisi and Kishinev) to limit or even abolish the language, cultural and political rights of minorities granted by the previous Soviet organs of power.

	Share of titular ethnicity in population in %	Share of language minorities in population in %	State (official) language	Position of minority languages	Character of language policy during desintegration of the Soviet Union	Change of language policy
ABKHAZIA	in 1989 Abkhazians 17.8%	in 1989 Georgians 45.8% Russians 14.6% Armenians 14.3%	Abkhazian (Russian has a status of the state language)	Russian has a status of the state language	defensive	selectively exclusive

⁵⁶ Both categories of language policies exist in clean form only within our academic concept. The language situation in each real state is specific and it changes rather swiftly. Therefore including each state within a certain category has to be viewed as simplification which is necessary if we aim to compare individual language policies. Moreover we are convinced that this often controversial classification can spark further academic discussion about the actual language policies in the post-Soviet countries.

	in 2003 Abkhazians 43.8%	in 2003 Georgians 21% Russians 14.6% Armenians 14.3%				
ARMENIA	in 1989 Armenians 93% in 2001 Armenians 97.9%	in 1989 Assyrians 2.5% Russians 1.5% in 2001 Russians 0.5%,	Armenian		selectively exclusive	inclusive
BELARUS	in 1989 Belarussians 77.8% in 1999 Belarussians 81.2%	in 1989 Russians 13.2% Poles 4.1% in 1999 Russians 11.4% Poles 3.9%,	Belarus- sian, Russian		exclusive	formally inclusive
ESTONIA	in 1989 Estonians 64% in 2000 Estonians 67.9%	in 1989 Russians 30.3% Ukrainians 3.1% in 2000 Russians 25.6%	Estonian		exclusive	selecti- vely exclusive
GEORGIA	in 1989 Georgians 70.1%	in 1989 Armenians 8.1% Assyrians 5.7% Russians 6.3% Ossetians 3% Abkhazians 1.8%	Georgian	Abkhazia n in Abkhzi a, part of conflict in Georgia is the status of official language granted to Ossetian in South Ossetia	exclusive	inclusive
	in 2002 Georgians 83.8%	in 2002 Armenians 5.7%				
		Assyrians 6.5% Russians 1.5%				
		Ossetians 0.9% Abkhazians 0.1%				
SOUTH OSSETIA	in 1989 Ossetians 69% in 2003 Not available	in 1989 Georgians 29% in 2003 Not available	Ossetian, Russian acc. to constitu- tion with identical status	Georgian	defensive	formally inclusive

LITHUANIA	<p>in 1989 Lithuanians 81%</p> <p>in 2001 Lithuanians 83.4%</p>	<p>in 1989 Russians 9.4% Poles 7.0%</p> <p>in 2001 Poles 6.7% Russians 6.3%</p>	Lithuanian		exclusive	inclusive
LATVIA	<p>in 1989 Latvians 54%</p> <p>in 2002 Latvians 57.7%</p>	<p>in 1989 Russians 34.0% Ukrainians 3.5% Belarussians 4.5%</p> <p>in 2002 Russians 29.6% Belarussians 4.1%</p>	Latvian		exclusive	selectively exclusive
MOLDOVA	<p>in 1989 Moldovans 65%</p> <p>in 2004 Moldovans 75.8%</p>	<p>in 1989 Ukrainians 14% Russians 13% Gagauzians 4%</p> <p>in 2004 Ukrainians 8.3% Gagauzians 4.4% Russians 5.9%</p>	Moldovan	Gagauzian and Russian in Gagauzia, Russian in PMR (part of the Tbilisi proposal to resolve the conflict)	exclusive	inclusive
PMR	<p>in 1989 Moldovans 39.9% Ukrainians 28.3% Russians 25.5%</p> <p>in 2004 Moldovans 31.9% Russians 30.4% Ukrainians 28.8%</p>	<p>in 1989 Others 6.4%</p> <p>in 2004 Others 8.9%</p>	Moldovan in cyrillics, Russian, Ukrainian		defensive	formally inclusive
UKRAINE	<p>in 1989 Ukrainians 73%</p> <p>in 2001 Ukrainians 77.8%</p>	<p>in 1989 Russians 22%</p> <p>in 2001 Russians 17.3%</p>	Ukrainian		exclusive	selectively exclusive

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