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# Language and Education Policies Based on National/Plurilingual Identity in Autonomous Republics: A Case Study of the Gagauzia Autonomous Region

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## Abstract

Autonomous Republics, although situated within the borders of a state, have the right to govern themselves within their own borders. The most concrete indicator of a state's autonomy is its flag, its national language, its national culture and its national education. In this context, the language and education policies come into play in the building of a new political union and a national identity. For example, Gagauzia (or Gagauzia Autonomous Region), which was shaped by many historical periods from the Ottoman Empire (from the 16th century until 1812) to the Russian Empire (1721-1917) and to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1922-1991), is nowadays within the borders of the Republic of Moldova. It is an autonomous republic with the right to self-government. This paper aims to analyze the language and education policies determined and applied for the Gagauz Turks in Moldova. It is possible to argue that there is a relationship between the notions of "autonomous republic" and "language and education policy." In the autonomous republic, this policy will be described as a policy-based not only on the national identity, but also the plurilingualism.

**Keywords:** Language Policy, Education Policy, National Identity, Plurilingualism, Autonomous Republic, Gagauzia

## Introduction

The research on the language and education policies date back to the 1960s, but the theoretical framework of these research remains problematic (Eren, 2018): These policies were initially discussed in the (socio- or applied) linguistics, but the problems point to the need to address this topic in many aspects nowadays. The language and education policies cover especially different areas such as: the law, the political science, the economics, the sociology, the philosophy, the psychology, etc. (Garibova, 2013). If it is difficult to draw the limitations of a research in the social sciences, it is so important to ask how the problematic will be formulated and how the notions will be discussed in the research. For example, there is a relationship between the notions of "language policy," "education policy" and "nation" that will be discussed in this study.

The language and education policies are the basic principles of state administration and thus, these policies are based on the nation-building policies. The aim of the language and education policies is not only the unification of the people (“nation”) within the borders of a state, but also the identification and the acquisition of national, regional, minority or foreign language(s) as official(s) language(s) through the national education institutions (Council of Europe, 2007a). The notion of “education policy” refers to the principles and the decisions applied to educate individuals with social patterns and to shape a nation according to the educational culture accepted in the state (Beacco and al., 2005). It is the transmission of educational cultures through a unique sociopolitical reproduction tool (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970). The nation, as “heir and developer of socio-political values,” is placed at the center of this reproduction (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1964).

The notion of “nation” is qualified as “the most confused notion in the political dictionary” (Tilly, 2001). That is why, it is difficult to define this notion which is not only based on the language, the religion or the community of interest, but also on a large-scale solidarity constituted by the sharing of common past and the cooperation for the future (Renan, 1882, p. 28). This notion refers to a community formed by a common language, a culture and an history (Orhan, 2017). The nation is a sociocultural entity, while the nation-state is a geopolitical entity or a form of government that should be imagined both in sovereignty and in some geopolitical borders. As one of the form of governments, for example, the autonomous republics are situated within the borders of a state, but they have the right to govern themselves within their own borders. The most concrete indicator of a state’s autonomy is its flag, its national language, its national culture and its national education.

In this context, the language and education policies come into play in the building of a new political union and a national identity (“nation-building process”). The birth of these policies is directly linked to the emergence of nation: The language that is described as a “core of national unity” (Welch, 1993), is the first tool used in the nation-building process (Şendeniz, 2014). As for the education, it provides the unity of nation through the language transmission in this process (Adem, 1997). Therefore, the language and education policies are considered as “effective tools of nationalization” (Özdoğan, 2015) and as “sociopolitical reproduction tool” of nation (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1970). These sociocultural and sociopolitical factors are important to ensure the continuity of nation, particularly with the presence of a national language, a national culture and a national education institution.

The present paper aims to analyze the language and education policies that are determined and are applied for the Gagauz Turks (“Gagauz” is derived from “Gökoğuz”) live in the Republic of Moldova. The Gagauzia (officially called “Gagauzia Autonomous Region” in English and “Gagavuz Yeri Özerk Bölgesi” in Turkish), which was shaped by many historical periods from the Ottoman Empire (from 16<sup>th</sup> century until 1812) to the Russian Empire (1721-1917) and to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1922-1991), is nowadays within the borders of the Republic of Moldova. It is an autonomous republic with the right to self-government. It is possible to argue that the autonomous republic depends on the national language and education policies. In the context of “autonomy,” these policies will be described as nation-building policies (namely, the policies based on the national identity).

### **1. Problematic of Language and Education Policies Based on National Identity in Autonomous Republics: Focus on Monolingualism or Plurilingualism Policies?**

The notion of “autonomy” is polysemous due to the complexity, the diversity and the variability of contexts in which the autonomy process occurs differently (Lafargue, 1881). The autonomous republics are the result of a historical and sociopolitical phenomenon that should be considered in terms of national language, national culture and national education (Cavalli and al., 2009). It is important to mention that each specific context is plurilingual (pluricultural) in its own way and that it is why, it is extremely rare to identify totally comparable monolingual or plurilingual contexts (Coste and al., 2009). Since the autonomous republics are confronted inevitably with many languages and many cultures, the language and education policies differ considerably from one state to another, with a focus on the monolingualism or the plurilingualism. The difference between these policies stems from the fact that the states recognize the monolingualism (the opposite of plurilingualism) or the plurilingualism (or the multilingualism) policy officially in the specific context (Beacco and al., 2016).

However, the plurilingualism-based language and education policies are indispensable for the social cohesion within the borders of a state. These policies should promote absolutely the plurilingual (and not monolingual) and intercultural education with the respect to the “education for plurilingualism” and the “education for plurilingual awareness” in the specific context of autonomy (Council of Europe, 2007b). The complexity and the variability of the contexts lead to a “sociolinguistic and sociocultural diversity” (a kind of a “linguistic and sociocultural variety in a society”) which needs to be considered within their specific contexts. The “plurilingualism” as a result of this diversity, is defined in the following way: It is “the ability to use languages for the purposes of communication and intercultural interaction, where a person viewed as a social agent, has proficiency of varying degrees in several languages and has experience of several cultures” (Council of Europe, 2001).

As a matter of fact, the problematic of language and education policies is certainly related to the plurilingualism policies (not to the monolingualism policies) in the autonomous republics. The “sustainable plurilingualism” is the process of ensuring the harmonious coexistence of language (and so culture) for the social cohesion within the borders of a state (Bodean-Vozian and Soltan, 2014). The plurilingual language and education policies are effective in the nation-building process, in the sense that these policies contribute directly to the maintenance of the national language through the national education institutions and consequently, to the construction of national identity and the “national consciousness” within the borders of a state (for example, in the autonomous republics). In the present study, the plurilingualism-based language and education policies are described explicitly as the precondition for the building and the maintenance of autonomous republics:

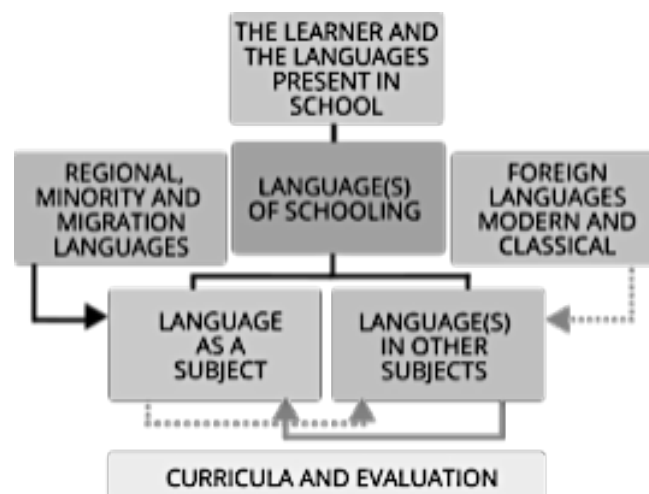


Figure 1. Platform of resources and references for plurilingual and intercultural education

Note. Council of Europe. *Platform of Resources and References for Plurilingual and Intercultural Education*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/language-policy/platform>, (Accessed June 17, 2021).

As seen in the figure above, the plurilingualism and the interculturalism-based education policies include not only the language acquisition within the framework of “the curricula and the evaluation process” (it is about “the learner and the languages present in school: In other words, the language-s- of schooling”) and then, the use of these different languages as “the regional, the minority or the migrations languages” or as the “foreign languages modern and classical” in the autonomous republics, but also the plurilingualism promotion through the national educational programs (like “the language as a subject or the language-s- in other subjects”). These policies are developed for a “minority” which has usually the national identification with the nation-state and the national consciousness (Council of Europe, 2007b). Certainly, this is the impact of the contextual particularities on the language and education policies (with a focus rarely on the monolingualism, but frequently on the plurilingualism) that will be analyzed in the context of Gagauz Turks in Moldova. The aim of the present paper is to ask what particularities this context presented in the determination and the application of language and education policies for the Gagauz Turks.

## 2. Gagauzia as a plurilingual and intercultural context: meeting point of Balkans culture

Moldova or officially the Republic of Moldova, which is situated in the Eastern Europe (in the Balkans), is a state bordered by the Romania to the west and by the Ukraine to the north, the east and the south. Due to the politico-historical conjuncture, Moldova (or called at the time, the Principality of Moldavia) was respectively under the administration of the Ottoman Empire (from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until 1812), the Russian Empire (1721-1917) and finally, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (1922-1991). The unification and the re-unification of Moldova and Romania was/is always a part of the foreign policy priorities (Jelavich, 2013). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1988-1991), the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic declared its independence, henceforth having taken the name of Moldova. As a parliamentary republic with a president as the head of state (its constitution was adopted in 1994), Moldova is now a member state of many international organizations, principally such as the United Nations since 1992, the Council of Europe since 1995, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe since 1992, the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation since 1992, etc.

“Making or breaking the Republic of Moldova?” (Wöber, 2013). The complexity and the particularity of Moldova stem from the fact that the state was/is the meeting point of many Balkans Culture that shaped inevitably the context: The presence of Moldovans, Romanians, Ukrainians, Gagauz, Russians, Bulgarians, Romanis, Poles, and others (King, 1992). As a result, the Republic of Moldova is divided administratively into thirty-two districts, three municipalities and consequently, an autonomous region that is recognized and called the Gagauzia and another that is unrecognized and called the Transnistria (Spinner, 2003). As for the Republic of Turkey, the state is one of the first one which recognizes the independence of the Republic of Moldova (Oran, 2003). Since the declaration of independence (1991), the international relations between the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Moldova have been based not only on the geopolitical cooperation agreements such as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation since 1992, but also on the main presence of Gagauz Turks within the borders of Moldova, undoubtedly in a sociohistorical and sociocultural perspective of the compatriotism (Adanır and Faroqhi, 2011).

The Gagauzia Autonomous Region in English or “Gagavuz Yeri Özerk Bölgesi” in Turkish, is an autonomous republic which declared its independence in 1990 at the end of the Soviet Union and which reached an autonomy agreement with the Republic of Moldova in 1994 (Neukirch, 2002). The Gagauz Turks or the Gökoğuz that constitute nearly six percent of Moldovan population, have the particularity to be culturally; Christians of Turk origin. Although the Gagauzia Autonomous Region is situated within the borders of Republic of Moldova as an integral part of the state, this autonomous region has the right to govern itself within its own borders as a form of self-determination of the Gagauz Turks (Todorova, 2003). There are three provinces that are situated within the borders of the Gagauzia Autonomous Region, such as Comrat, Çadır-Lunga and Vulcanesti. The most concrete indicators of this autonomous region are its flag (the “Coat of arms”; the three provinces are represented by the three stars) and its motto (“Yaşasın Gagauzia!” in Turkish or “Long live Gagauzia!” in English), its capital (Comrat) and its national language, its national culture and its national education (Argunşah and Güngör, 1991) that will be discussed in terms of the language and education policies in the Gagauzian Context.

## 3. Importance of language policies in the Gagauzian context: focus on plurilingualism policies

“The language of politics and the politics of language: (...) Identity” (King, 1992). The “politics of language” or the language policies are linked directly to the sociopolitical reproduction tool of nation. Since the aim of the language policy was particularly to be used as a sociopolitical reproduction tool in the nation-building process, the declaration of an autonomous region (the Gagauzia Autonomous Region in the present study) was certainly supported by the construction and the maintenance of a national identity and a national consciousness through the language policies based on the plurilingualism: In this specific context, the official languages are the Gagauz Turkish (or the Gagauzian), the Russian and the Moldavian (so the Romanian). The Gagauz Turks who live within their own borders in Moldova, differ from the other Turks by the fact that their language is the closest to the “Turkey Turkish” in terms of the grammar, the syntax and the vocabulary (Gaydarci and al., 1991). Besides the Azerbaijani Turkish, the Turkmen Turkish and the Turkey Turkish, the Gagauz Turkish forms the Oghuz Sub-Branch of the Turkic Language Family (Ergin, 2006).

Nevertheless, according to the complexity and the particularity of the Gagauzian Context, the Gagauz Turkish (or the Gagauzian) was/is inevitably confronted with and then, influenced by many languages/cultures such as the Russian, the Bulgarian, the Moldavian and the Romanian (Özkan, 2002). That is the importance of the language policies that should be determined and be applied with a focus on the plurilingualism policies, particularly within the context of an autonomous region which results in the meeting of many cultures (as the Balkans culture in the context of the Gagauzia). Although the language policies are naturally based on the national language as the core of national unity of the context, the autonomous regions have the possibility to grant the right to use different official language within their own borders. In this perspective, the Gagauzia Autonomous Region recognizes officially three different languages: Principally its national language as the Gagauz Turkish and other official languages as the Russian and the Moldavian (the Romanian). The teaching and the learning (or the acquisition) of these official languages will be analyzed within the framework of plurilingual education policies in the next part of the paper.

In the Gagauzian Context, the main problem of language policies lied in the fact that Gagauz Turks did not have officially their own alphabet and their own written language until 1957 (Türk, 2016). They used the Greek Alphabet that was not adopted neither phonetically nor orthographically to the Gagauz Turkish. It seems very important to mention that the first Gagauz Alphabet which was created under the inspiration of the Cyrillic Alphabet (on July 30, 1957), ensured the first literary, the first educational and the first press publications that were entirely written in the Gagauz Turkish as a trace of the national language (Bulgar, 2006). Therefore, the adoption of this new alphabet is considered as a turning point in the determination and in the application of language policies based on the national identity in the Gagauzia Autonomous Region: “Does the language determinate the nation? Or does the nation determinate the language? The impact is certainly mutual: The real creation of a nation is seen in its language policy, because each language policy has its own national form distinct from another” (İnal, 2012). This is also a decision from an autonomous region.

On the other hand, the use of different language as a result undoubtedly of the sociocultural diversity in the Gagauzia Autonomous Region, explains the importance of plurilingualism-based language policies that ensure the harmonious coexistence of language (and so culture) for the social cohesion within the borders of this autonomous region. Considering the importance of politico-historical traces of the Soviet Union, it is obvious that these plurilingual policies are indispensable so that the Russian, for example, is still used at several levels in the social life: The Russian appellation of the Gagauz Turks, the geographical indications, the educational institutions, etc. In the same way, the Gagauzian Media promotes the plurilingualism-based language policies: The “Gagauzia Radio and Television” or called frequently, “GRT”; “Gagauziya Radio Televizionu” in the Gagauz Turkish, which cooperates with the “Turkish Radio and Television Corporation,” “TRT,” broadcasts in three different official languages: The Gagauz Turkish, the Russian and the Moldavian (the Romanian). It can be argued that all these plurilingualism-based language policies applications are promoted through the plurilingual and intercultural education institutions, reflecting the education policies based principally on the national identity in the Gagauzian Context.

#### **4. Importance of education policies in the Gagauzian context: plurilingual and intercultural education**

It should be remembered that the education policy is considered as an effective tool of nationalization in the specific context of autonomy, because this policy comes into play as a core of the national unity in the building of this new political union. Furthermore, the notion of education policy should promote the development of a plurilingual and an intercultural education that takes various sociocultural forms depending on the teaching context (Cavalli and al., 2009). This is indispensable for the social cohesion and for the intercultural dialogue between different languages (and so different cultures) inherited in the specific context. As for the Gagauzia Autonomous Region, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991) and thereby, the declaration of its autonomy (1994), the nation-building process of Gagauz Turks was supported by the priority given to the language and education policies that took place at two different level, respectively the national identity and the plurilingualism and the interculturalism. In this perspective, for example Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, attached a great importance to them in

1930 (Bulut, 2016) and particularly to their own sociolinguistic and to their own socio-educational needs that undoubtedly guaranteed the construction and the maintenance of their national identity in the Gagauzian Context. There are 55 schools that provide the education services at the primary, the secondary and the high school levels: 28 high schools, one private vocational high school, 24 secondary schools and two primary schools (Argunşah and Güngör, 1991). Among of these educational institutions, the Comrat State University which is founded in 1991 as the Gagauz National University, is financially supported by the Republic of Turkey and particularly by the Yunus Emre Institute and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (“TİKA” in Turkish). As “more of a political question than ever before,” for example, the choice of the language of instruction according to the teaching context, is at the center of debates on the education policies (Akkari and Coste, 2015). To question the language of instruction means to describe the language diversity present in the context of teaching (Coste, 2009). Within the framework of education policies in the Gagauzia Autonomous Region, the languages of instruction are the Gagauz Turkish, the Russian and the Moldavian (so the Romanian), certainly contributing all these languages to the development of plurilingual and intercultural education (Bulgar, 2006). In other words, the teaching of the official languages and of the foreign languages as the English, the Bulgarian and the Ukrainian, are a crucial part of the plurilingual and the intercultural educational programs in the Gagauzian Context.

In this specific context, that is the importance of the education policies that should be analyzed also in terms of the national educational system. The Law that is called “About Education” (“Eğitim Üzerine” in Turkish), is accepted in 2016 in the Gagauzia Autonomous Region. According to this law that emphasizes on the national language and the national education of Gagauz Turks, the National Education General Directorate grant the right to determine and to apply the education policies for the planning, the management and the development of their own national educational system: The building and the maintenance of the Gagauzian national identity depend largely on this constitutional basis of the national educational system. Nowadays, the Gagauzian educational system is also adapted to the European educational criteria such as the “Bologna Process,” the International Mobility or Exchange Programs, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the accreditation of educational programs, etc. These criteria ensure the comparability in the standards and in the quality of education qualifications in Europe (Wöber, 2013). As a matter of fact, the curricula and the evaluation process are determinate and are applied in a plurilingual and the intercultural perspective in the Gagauzian Context.

### **Conclusion and Discussion: national but plurilingual language and education policies?**

“The birth of the first language led to the separation of nations. The most important indicator of a nation is its language (policy). As for the nation, the most important indicator is not its physical appearance such as its skull shape, its hair color: But it is its language that serves to distinguish the nations from another and vice versa. That is why, the language is the appearance and the soul of a nation” (İnal, 2012).

The present study emphasizes the need to consider the language and the education policies based on the national identity in the sociocultural diversity of autonomous regions: These contexts accepted as the “natural terrains” (Giné, 2003), inevitably are confronted with and thereby influenced by many languages and many cultures. What particularities the autonomous regions present in the determination and in the application process of language and education policies? Since these policies are the decisions that are taken in the nation-building process, they have been a real reflection of the politico-historical conjuncture of a given state. As the conjuncture changes, the identity changes also as a sociopolitical reproduction tool of the nation in question: The identity is thus a sociopolitical perception that helps an ethnic group to become a nation. For example, the Gagauzia (or the Gagauzia Autonomous Region), which was shaped by many historical periods from the Ottoman Empire (from the 16<sup>th</sup> century until 1812) to the Russian Empire (1721-1917) and to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1922-1991), require to be analyzed according to their particularities or in other words, to their sociopolitical practices.

The complexity and the particularity of the Gagauzian Context leads to a wide range of identity perceptions such as the Gagauzian, the Russian, the Bulgarian, the Moldavian and the Romanian. Although the language and the education policies are directly linked to the national identity, these policies do not oscillate between the

plurilingualism or the monolingualism: The choice of the plurilingualism and the interculturalism-based language and education policies is supported by the nation-building policies (Eren, 2020). Certainly, this sociopolitical reproduction tool is indispensable to ensure the continuity of the Gagauz Turks, particularly with the presence of their national language, their national culture and their national education institutions: The building and the maintenance of their national identity depend largely on the constitutional basis of the national educational system which has the particularity to promote the social cohesion and the intercultural dialogue in the Gagauzia Autonomous Region. That is the importance of the language and the education policies that should be determined and be applied with a focus not only on the nation-building policies, but also on the plurilingualism and the interculturalism policies as a result of the meeting of Balkans culture in this specific context of the Gagauzia.

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