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The languages of disputes in Eastern Europe

The Cold War left on Eastern European countries a considerable inheritance of ethnolinguistic issues which constitute a never-ending debate in the region. However, the debate is different among the states.

On October 31st, the Constitutional Court in Moldova has endorsed a draft amendment to the Constitution in order to change the country's language from Moldovan to Romanian. The case originated in an application lodged with the Constitutional Court of Moldova on 13 October 2017, by a group of MPs. The draft proposed a change to Article 13, by replacing “the Moldovan language based on Latin alphabet” with “Romanian language.” The proposal to amend Article 13 of the Constitution was first submitted by the pro-European Liberal Democratic Party and signed by 35 lawmakers. Yet in 2013 the Court made this examination, underlying that the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Moldova, adopted in 1989 after collapse of USSR, operates with the term “Romanian language”. On the contrary, the provisions of the Constitution, which was adopted in 1994 operates with the term “Moldovan language”. Thus, the Court underlined that the provision of the Declaration of Independence on Romanian language as the official language of Moldova takes precedence over the provision on Moldovan language of Article 13 of the Constitution [The Court Delivered a Positive Opinion on the Amendment of Article 13 of the Constitution, Constitutional Court, 31 October 2017].

Of course, “Romanian” is favoured by those who want closer relations or even unification with Romania, while pro-Russians, such as President Igor Dodon, want to keep the name “Moldovan”. President Igor Dodon said that the matter should be handled through a referendum. "The absolute majority of the native population of the Republic of Moldova thinks it speaks in Moldovan," Dodon wrote on his Facebook page. The issue, that could trigger a separatist movement escalation, for example in the Transnistria region, it is expected to be debated in parliament from April next year. [Moldova's Top Court Endorses Proposal To Switch Official Language To 'Romanian' In Constitution, RadioFreeEurope RadioLiberty, 31 October 2017].

Instead, bucking to the difficult relations between Georgia and Abkhazia, the Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili, on October 27th, has announced a new state program aimed at developing and protecting the Abkhaz language in an effort to normalize the relations with Abkhazian citizens. Congratulating his “Abkhazian brothers and sisters,” Kvirikashvili promised his government’s backing, nothing hopes that the project would help “restore burned bridges, which are necessary for our unity” [State Program for Protection and Development of Abkhazian Language to be Launched, Government of Georgia, 27 October 2017]. The memorandum was signed by Vice-Premier, Minister of Education and Science of Georgia Aleksandre Jejelava and State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili. The signing ceremony was attended by Vakhtang Kolbaia, the Acting Chairman

of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia Elguja Gvazava, and Chairman of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, Members of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, NGOs, and Representatives of various governmental structures. Within the framework of the project, the aim of the parties is to support the maintenance, development and promotion of the Abkhazian language, cooperate with the Georgian and Abkhazian specialists and professional groups working on the relevant issues and implement bilateral trust projects [State program launched for protection and development of the Abkhazian language, Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, 27 October 2017].

Probably, the Georgian government is consciousness of the difficulties that persist with the separatist region, and the attempt is to embark on a more peaceful course to avoid further escalations that may compromise the European path.

Moldova and Georgia, although differently, demonstrate the fundamental weight of the linguistic issue in the regional relations of the former Soviet states. Indeed, even in the Ukrainian case, the ethnolinguistic matter was one of the reasons for the conflict's outbreak in Donbass. Accurate and decisive management of the linguistic problem would be an excellent proof of maturity for the states of Eastern Europe which, with other structural reforms, could demonstrate a complete national process.

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