How could the Gagauz Achieve Autonomy and what has it Achieved for them? A Comparison Among Neighbours on the Moldova-Ukrainian Border

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Abstract

In southern Bessarabia, a multi-ethnic region on the Moldovan-Ukrainian border, one ethnic group, the Turkic speaking Gagauz, have managed to negotiate a unique autonomy status with the Moldovan government in 1994. Neither their Bulgarian neighbours nor the Gagauz on the Ukrainian side of the border have achieved a similar degree of political autonomy. The analysis presented here looks into the historical factors that enabled autonomy for the Gagauz in Moldova. It wraps up the literature on the emergence of the autonomy status and draws on interviews with activists and educators. It appears that a unique geopolitical constellation was more decisive for the achievement of autonomy than local or national ethno-politics. The comparison with neighbouring groups suggests that under the precarious economic circumstances in the region, the effect of autonomy on the preservation of language was rather small. The main effect of the autonomy was that the Gagauz elite had the means to adopt their own geopolitical position, sometimes contradicting the central government. With the beginning of the Ukrainian Russian conflict in 2014 this characteristic of Gagauz autonomy came to be seen as a potentially dangerous precedent in Ukraine.

Keywords: Ukraine; Moldova; Gagauz autonomy; language policy

On the border between Ukraine's Odessa Oblast and the southern outreaches of the Republic of Moldova live several ethnic minorities, Gagauz, Bulgarians and a small group of Albanians, in close neighbourhood and perpetual cultural interaction with Russians and the titular groups of the two countries, Ukrainians and Moldovans. Their peripheral status vis-à-vis the respective central government is aggravated by the border between Moldova and Ukraine that runs through their area of settlement. The history of this region, the southernmost stretches of a former Russian province called Bessarabia, was shaped by its location at the crossroads of the Russian and the Ottoman Empires, of the Balkans and the Eurasian steppes. Although the province's historical name no longer refers to an administrative unit, "Bessarabia" has not lost its identificatory potential (Anastassova, 2006). The present ethnic mosaic of southern Bessarabia dates back to the first decades of the nineteenth century. In 1812 tsarist Russia established firm control over this peripheral province and began to settle it with Orthodox Christians from the Ottoman Balkan provinces, the ancestors of today's Gagauz, Bulgarians and Albanians. As a part of Romania between the First and the Second World War and as part of the Soviet Union in the post-war decades, the ethnic composition of the populace in Southern Bessarabia underwent several attempts of forced migration and ethnic cleansing.

The present situation emerged after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This event turned the formerly purely administrative border between two Soviet republics into a paralyzing state border between Moldova and Ukraine. Of the roughly 174,600 Gagauz who now live in southern Bessarabia, a sixth (27,600) found themselves on the Ukrainian side of the border. The bigger share (147,000) live in southern Moldova, a country in which they constitute about 4.4% of the population. For the Bulgarians of southern Bessarabia, who number roughly 216,000 people, it is the other way round: the bigger share, 150,000 people, live on the Ukrainian side of the border whereas approximately 66,000 live in southern Moldova (where they constitute 1.9% of the country's population).[1] The Gagauz are a largely Orthodox group whose ancestral Gagauz language, closely related to Turkish, was categorized as "definitely endangered" by UNESCO.[2] In 1994 the bigger group of Gagauz, the one living in southern Moldova, managed to gain a unique form of territorial autonomy in a discontinuous territory.

The first section of this paper looks at what historical circumstances enabled the Gagauz of Moldova to settle an autonomous status, while other groups failed to do so. A

comparison between the two states and between ethnic groups living on both sides of the border is then undertaken to show the possibilities and limits of territorial autonomy for the revival of minority languages. This comparison looks into a number of criteria as they existed when the Soviet Union collapsed, opening a host of opportunities for those who challenged the authority of the newly established successor republics. Many of these newly arising opportunities had their roots in local ethnic identities. The criteria of comparison between the different groups are: 1) the relations between an ethnic vanguard and the respective republic's leadership; 2) the relations between the representatives of a specific ethnic minority to other ethnic minorities in the region; 3) the transnational ties the champions of ethnic minorities had to third parties outside the republic (mainly Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, and the European Union); 4) the level of grievances the representatives of ethnic minorities could build their mobilization strategy on; and 5) the prospects of what could realistically be achieved by mobilizing people along ethnic lines. Finally, the paper looks into how the relations between ethnic minorities and the two states in concern were affected by the recent confrontation between Western Europe and Russia. The Maidan upheaval, the annexation of Crimea, and the war in the Donbas forced people everywhere in the former Soviet Union to take sides. The champions of ethnic groups do so too and thereby change the relation between ethnic minorities and the states they live in. The prospect of European integration for the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, however hazy it may be, has put the local ethnic minorities at the heart of a geopolitical conflict.

1. A short-lived window of opportunity

The case of Gagauz autonomy in southern Moldova has been hailed as a model for solving ethnic tensions and as proof that functional solutions beyond separatism and ethnic discrimination can be found (King, 1997: 738; Troebst, 2001: 76). The autonomy regulations in Gagauzia have been credited with sparing the Gagauz the violence and isolation near-by Transnistria has experienced. It has also been argued that the present situation of the Gagauz in their Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) within Moldova, although far from ideal, is certainly better than it has ever been before, and better than the situation of the Gagauz across the border in Ukraine (Hatłas, 2011: 197). For all this praise, it is worth taking a closer look at what Gagauz autonomy was able to achieve since it was granted in 1994 and what the absence of a similar status meant for neighbouring ethnic minorities. This requires a look at the political circumstances that made the Gagauz autonomy agreement possible. For this I

adopt the hypothesis that the Gagauz of Moldova in comparison to the Ukrainian Gagauz, as well as to the Bulgarians on both sides of the border, were able to make better use of their transnational ties to Turkey and Russia, had the highest degree of grievances to mobilize with, and the best prospects for success of their autonomy project.

The appropriate starting point to test this assumption is to take a closer look at what ethnicity meant at the time the Soviet Union disintegrated. For this I rely on historical literature as well as on a series of biographical interviews, mainly taken in the Ukrainian part of Bessarabia in late 2012 and throughout 2013. The respondents of these interviews were educators, local researchers and political activists for minority causes. The questions in the interviews were meant to clarify the roots of autonomy aspirations, the prospects and limits of reviving minority languages, as well as an assessment of the prospects of ethnic minority movements from the Perestroika period until the eve of Ukraine's Maidan upheaval.

At least since Bessarabia became permanently integrated into the Soviet Union, in 1944, ethnicity was widely used as an administrative category. In every citizen's identity documents one (and only one) ethnic identity was registered. In the 1980s this category no longer had a big impact on the personal fate for members of most ethnic groups. By way of a constant routine of ethnic labelling, however, most Soviet citizens had come to perceive ethnicity as an inherent, fundamental and crucially important characteristic of all individuals (Martin, 2000: 168). The Soviets used separate ethnic categories for the Gagauz and the Bulgarians of southern Bessarabia. However, neither of the groups had any kind of political body granting a degree of autonomy, such as an autonomous Oblast or Republic.

When the country slithered into bankruptcy by the mid-1980s, the rhetoric of a communist future, in which all differences would melt away and a single, united, Soviet people would emerge, became empty talk. Elites in the Soviet system justified their power by their position within party hierarchy, by education, and by military rank. Now, as these features linked them to the sinking ship of the one-party state, they became a burden rather than an asset. Ethnicity suddenly became the only officially recorded category that could justify holding power over others (Slezkine, 1994: 451; Verdery, 1993: 175). In the region concerned here, divided then between Soviet republics of Moldova and Ukraine, nationalist movements began to gather pace during the Perestroika years. They posed a serious threat to the ruling party elites in both countries. Local rulers became aware of nationalism's power through the experience of other Soviet elites that had been swept away by ethnic mobilization in Baltic republics as well as in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Communist party elites in both

Moldova and in Ukraine dealt with the threat by taking the wind out of the sails of nationalist movements and adopting their own rhetoric of national revival (for Moldova see Fane, 1993: 124; for Ukraine see Kappeler, 2000: 249). In Ukraine, the mildly nationalist *Rukh* (movement) gained hardly a fourth of parliamentary seats in the first multiparty elections of March 1990. Nevertheless, the parliament started to pass bills, privileging Ukrainian language and stressing nationalist perspectives on Ukrainian history. The members of parliament had remained roughly the same before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Only now that nationalism was the latest craze, had they taken it up as their legitimizing ideology (Reid, 1997: 218).

But even newly nationalist party elites initially tried a policy of appeasement towards their minorities. One of the means with which the Moldovan government hoped to calm demands for Gagauz independence was government funded programmes to enhance the standing of the Gagauz language. In 1988 a Gagauz language weekly was initiated. In 1991 a Gagauz University was founded in Komrat, the largest Gagauz town, partly financed by the Moldovan government (King, 1997: 745). Concern for the Gagauz minority came from a parliamentary report commissioned by the Moldovan government in 1990. It concluded that the Gagauz and other non-Moldovans were not native to Moldova. It identified Bulgaria as the historical homeland of the Gagauz and stated therefore that the Gagauz had at present no national territory of their own and no bases for autonomy in Moldova (Demirdirek, 2008a: 125; Shornikov, 2012: 789). The huge impact of this report illustrates that besides language regulations, the official perspective on history was a second concern for the representatives of ethnic minorities. Particularly the representatives of the Russian minority feared that reassessing the region's history from a nationalist point of view could stigmatize them as intruders and blame them for all the country's faults.

When restrictions to form civil society organizations were loosened in the Perestroika period, ethnic associations were among the first civil society organizations to appear. A nationalist Moldovan movement, the People's Front, and a Gagauz cultural-revival movement, Gagauz Halkı, initially worked hand in hand for more cultural self-determination (King, 2000: 129). But soon pressure on the Gagauz minority grew. The People's Front began demanding language regulations that would clearly privilege the Moldovan language.[3] In 1989, an article in the journal of the Moldovan Writer's Union *Literatura şi Arta* proposed new language regulations, according to which only the titular nation's language should have official status. State servants should be obliged to speak Moldovan while on duty or

otherwise face sanctions. This would have side-lined non-Romanian speakers in the state administration (Shornikov, 2012: 783). Members of ethnic minorities began fearing they could soon become second-rate citizens. Therefore, Russian speakers and the Gagauz in the south of the country began voicing their demands for autonomy (Demirdirek, 2008a: 125; Fane, 1993: 134). Initially, these were meant primarily to defend the linguistic and citizenship rights for non-Moldovans. Several varieties were proposed, a Gagauz-Moldovan autonomous Oblast in Moldova or a Gagauz-Bulgarian autonomous Soviet republic including parts of Ukraine. What was common to all early projects was the goal to keep Russian as an official language. As one observer commented, it was not that a suitable language needed to be found for a republic, but a republic suitable for the language (Guboglo cited in Shornikov, 2012: 782).

In September 1989, when the Moldovan Popular Front increasingly showed signs of radicalization, Gagauz leaders for the first time announced the creation of an autonomous Gagauz republic in southern Moldova, thereby permanently severing their ties with Chișinău. Parliamentary elections, held in February 1990, further aggravated the situation. The ballot brought many frontist candidates into powerful positions, and the newly elected nationalist and pan-Romanian Prime Minister Mircea Druc repeatedly condemned the Gagauz leadership. In August 1990 another proclamation of a separate Gagauz republic followed. Gagauz parliamentary elections were scheduled for October that year. The government in Chișinău declared Gagauz Halkı an illegal organization and urged Moldovan citizens to take up arms against Gagauz separatists. So-called volunteer combatants were bused in from different regions of Moldova to crush the Gagauz separatist movement. In the Gagauz region, road blocks were set up and trenches dug out. Only the intervention of Soviet troops prevented major bloodshed (Fane, 1993: 144; King, 1997: 744).

In late August 1991 however, a failed putsch in Moscow became the final straw for the disintegration of the USSR. The fate of Russian speakers and other ethnic minorities in the newly independent republics remained unclear. The future of ethnic minorities in Moldova was uncertain, because there was widespread rhetoric of uniting the small republic with the culturally similar and historically related Romania. While Moldovan nationalists embraced the opportunity to declare their independence, Gagauz leaders would have greeted the restoration of a heavy-handed Soviet leadership that could have prevented the break-up of the Union. To the tiny group of the Gagauz, being one of many tiny minorities in a big, internationalist state was clearly preferable to being one of a few ethnic minorities on the

periphery of a nationalist, pan-Romanian state (King, 1997: 745). The newly independent Moldovan government and the renegade Gagauz in the south of the country entered an uneasy stalemate between 1990 and 1994, while violence escalated in near-by Transnistria.

In 1994, the year when the compromise leading to the ATU was reached, two factors crucially contributed to the two side's readiness for compromise: the war in Transnistria and the geopolitical interests of Russia at the time. After the establishment of the ATU, two additional factors helped to cement it: the influence of Turkey and Moldova's aspirations of European integration. With the help of these two factors, the achievements of the short-lived window of opportunity were conserved.

Perhaps the most important regional catalyst for the settlement of the Gagauz conflict was the war in Transnistria. In spring 1992, during the stalemate years between Gagauzia and Moldova, the Transnistrian conflict, the other separatist conflict in the country, escalated. The war in Transnistria brought death and destruction, but it also culminated in a continuous deadlock with devastating consequences for the local population. The nightmarish Transnistrian experience of 1992 served both sides of the Gagauzian conflict as a warning. The Gagauz shied away from going down the road of separatism, while the Moldovan government was more cautious of another attempt to disband an autonomy movement by force (Demirdirek, 2008a: 126). The Russian Federation had played an important role in the Transnistrian conflict of 1992. Russian "Peace-keepers" had prevented the destruction of the separatist movement and secured the still holding break-away of Transnistria (King, 2000: 194). Transnistria is heavily dependent on Russia. As long as Moscow chooses to keep up the present limbo-status of Transnistria, Moldova's borders remain disputed and the country most likely will be barred from joining the EU or NATO. Transnistria is an asset for the Kremlin, but by no means a cheap one (King, 2000: 204). Moscow was certainly not satisfied with the outcomes of the Transnistrian conflict, but the current situation for the Kremlin is still clearly preferable over all conceivable alternatives. Russia has employed similar strategies in other countries by supporting separatist movements in Georgian break-away republics Abkhazia and South-Ossetia, and most recently in eastern Ukraine.

The outcomes of Russia's unrecognized-republic strategy ironically became one more factor why Gagauziya was able to get a better deal: for Russia one such foothold per renegade country was enough. Since Russia already had Transnistria to keep Moldova in check, there was no need for another adventure in Gagauzia. Also, there were only few Russians in the area the protection of which could have served as a pretext for intervention. In this way,

Russia's already satisfied interests became one more factor for Gagauzia's exceptional autonomy settlement. The Gagauz by 1994 understood that they could not count on Russia should they slither into armed conflict with Chişinău. The transnational link of the Gagauz elites to the Russian Federation turned out to be crucial. It kept the prospects of achieving some form of autonomy realistic but it also cautioned them not to count on military support.

There was hardly another candidate that would come to Gagauzia's assistance with arms. But after the autonomy agreement was settled, it was important for the Gagauz leadership to find economic and political support as well. Unlike other ethnic minorities in Bessarabia—the Russians, the Bulgarians, the Ukrainians, and the Albanians—the Gagauz have no country anywhere that bears their name. Most Gagauz trace their historical roots to modern day Bulgaria. Bulgaria has often acted as an advocate for the Bessarabian Bulgarians but was more reluctant to do so for the Gagauz. Turkey, on the other hand, has already at an early stage built on the linguistic similarity with the Gagauz to take on the role of a protector state (Demirdirek, 2008a: 97). Turkey has been an important influence in Moldovan politics since independence. Not only could Ankara provide much needed investment, it also offered an alternative to Moscow as a point of orientation for the Gagauz (King, 1997: 747). A three day visit by a high ranking Turkish delegation in 1994, including President Süleyman Demirel, proved that Turkey's commitment to Moldova was earnest. An official visit to the Gagauz region also made clear that part of the commitment to Moldova was bound to Turkey's role as a peace broker between the Gagauz and the Moldovan government (King, 1997: 748-749). In a later visit to the Gagauz Autonomy Territory, Demirel announced major funding for a Gagauz University in Komrat (Guboglo, 2011: 120).

Finally, there was also pressure from Europe. Although the final agreement went not without criticism from the European council, the settlement of the Gagauz question secured Moldova's place in the council (Demirdirek, 2008b: 97).

All these factors combined favoured lasting success of a negotiated agreement between the representatives of the Gagauz and the Moldovan government. Over the course of four years after the narrowly prevented escalation of the Gagauz conflict, a settlement was reached in December 1994. The relation between the ethnic minority's champions and the Moldovan government could therefore be peacefully regulated because the project of armed separatism in Transnistria had backfired. The local elites had transnational ties to Russia and Turkey that promised to support them politically but had no interest in going to war. The prospect of ending up as a relatively large group of second-rate citizens with little political influence

created an incentive strong enough to mobilize people that could support a four-year standoff with the Moldovan government.

The settlement came with a new law on the status of the Gagauz.[4] This meant autonomy for those municipalities that would vote in favour of a referendum held in March 1995. Thirty municipalities did so, while others voted no. The newly formed autonomous territories comprised a discontinuous area of 1832.5 square kilometres with 171,500 inhabitants, 78.7% of which were Gagauz (Troebst, 2001: 76). From 1995 onward this area enjoyed considerable autonomy rights. Only foreign policy, matters of national security, currency policies, and the right to naturalize new citizens remained in the hands of the central government in Chişinău. All other matters are in the responsibility of the autonomous Gagauz administration in Komrat. The new autonomy law significantly considered the historically founded fear of many Gagauz that Moldova might merge with Romania. The autonomy treaty therefore contains the regulation that if the status of Moldova should change one day, the ATU would have the right to reassess its own status.[5] This regulation became important again in 2014, as I will discuss later on.

The autonomy law's preamble states that its objective was to 'preserve the centuries old good relations between the ethnic groups' in the region. Many observers indeed saw the unique generosity of the Gagauz autonomy agreement as a guarantee that Gagauzia will remain peaceful. Its formulation was highly inclusive by adopting Gagauz, Russian and Moldovan as official languages, by keeping access to political posts open to representatives of all of Moldova's ethnic groups and at the same time reserving the post of vice speaker of the autonomy parliament for a person with an ethnic identity other than Gagauz.[6] However, at the time of its settlement, the Gagauz Autonomy Agreement went too far for the European Council. It could have become a precedent for other ethnic minorities in the region. Romania in particular criticized the agreement fearing an "atomization" of Moldova and that similar demands might be voiced by Romania's own ethnic minorities (Putină, 2010: 135). Another criticism that has been voiced is that the Gagauz leadership, once comprised of the heads of local administrations, had made use of the turmoil after the collapse of the Soviet Union and presumed to speak for all the Gagauz, while actually demanding more power for themselves (King, 1997: 752).

The Gagauz success did not attract equally successful imitators. All the other minorities of the region may have had similar aspirations; however, during the short-lived window of opportunity that the geopolitical situation of the early 1990s provided, they had less

influential transnational ties, less to lose and less to gain. Unlike in Moldova, on the Ukrainian side there are no Gagauz settlements big enough to host urban structures such as universities. The institutional basis on which nationalist mobilization could be founded was certainly thin on both sides of the border. However, the Gagauz in Moldova had, beside many villages, also three small towns, Komrat, Vulcaneşti, and Ceadir-Lunga, while the Gagauz in Ukraine lived exclusively in scattered villages. The Gagauz Autonomy movement had its roots in cultural circles of these towns (Demirdirek, 2008a: 124), a social stratum that the Ukrainian Gagauz simply lacked.

In the Perestroika years, aspirations to carve out an autonomous Bulgarian-Gagauz territory of both countries soon were thwarted by the realization that shifting republic borders would trigger an unpredictable dynamic, and would hardly be permitted by any of the powerful players involved.[7] When the Gagauz in Moldova saw themselves confronted with armed volunteer combatants in October 1990, they called for their ethnic brethren in Gagauz villages across the Ukrainian border to join their struggle. From the Moldovan Gagauz town of Vulcaneşti a truckload of weapons was sent to one Gagauz village in Ukraine. However, as two respondents in interviews said, people there turned out to be reluctant to join a dangerous and unpromising adventure.[8]

So perhaps grievances of Gagauz and Bulgarians in Ukraine were less pressing than the ones in Moldova? After all, in Ukraine too, nationalist language regulations were passed even before the Soviet Union dissolved. Also, habitual Russia-centred ways of narrating history came under pressure quickly. But the greatest fear of Moldovan Gagauz was to become subjects of Romania again, like between 1918-40, and 1941-44. Romania had a past as an oppressive occupant in southern Bessarabia. Ukraine, in contrast, had no association with being an enemy in the past. What is more, in Ukraine the Gagauz were one of the smallest among many much bigger ethnic minorities, the biggest of which, the Russians, comprised about 12 million people. Since most Gagauz speak Russian rather than Ukrainian they could count on the political weight of other Russian-speakers. It was likely that these minorities would be able to organize and defend their rights much better than the relatively few and small minorities in Moldova.

Indeed, still under Soviet rule in 1990 Ukraine guaranteed the right to free development of minority cultures to all her numerous ethnic minorities (Rozhik, 2004: 465). The Gagauz and the Bulgarians in Ukrainian Bessarabia were clearly to be included in a newly independent Ukrainian society. But they became tiny, peripheral minorities, expected to

eventually accept the Ukrainian language as their second language, rather than Russian. This demand was institutionalized in 2017 with a new education law that specifies that the language of instruction in secondary education can be only Ukrainian and that all schools are obliged to ensure their student's learning of Ukrainian.[9] This new law prompted harsh reactions from Hungary and Romania. The foreign ministries of both countries expressed concern that the education on these minorities' languages would be marginalized.[10] For the ethnic minorities of southern Bessarabia, this new law changes precious little. They never had schools in which their language was used as language of instruction (let alone secondary schools, which are affected by the new law). Therefore, representatives of the Bulgarian minority as well as the Bulgarian authorities said they would not object the new law. It had always been clear to them that learning Ukrainian was a prerequisite of being successful in Ukrainian society.[11] Another expectation certainly was to sooner or later buy into the historical narratives sanctioned by the Ukrainian state. Such vague demands were not nearly as threatening as the prospect of Moldovan Gagauz to end up in a new version of Greater Romania. Therefore, minority activists of the Bulgarian and Gagauz in Ukraine soon dropped territorial autonomy aspirations and instead followed the path of cultural autonomy, exemplified by the large, well-funded, and well-organized Russian minority. Therefore, indeed, the grievances for Gagauz and Bulgarian on the Ukrainian side of the border were felt less harshly. They could also hope to profit from the efforts of the various organizations championing the cause of Russians and Russian-speakers, a group that had been weakened in Moldova by the failed Transnistria project. The transnational contacts of Bulgarian and Gagauz in Ukraine would not meddle in Ukrainian politics and aspirations of independence or autonomy were seen as unrealistic by the overwhelming majority.

2. Cultural revival and political autonomy

Cultural autonomy rights could best be advocated if based on a broad cultural revival. Such revival movements were initiated by almost all ethnic minorities in southern Bessarabia, even if their representatives were very few in numbers, such as the Jews or the Germans. A first step in voicing cultural autonomy demands was the formation of ethnic associations. This became possible in the late 1980s when Perestroika reforms began to permit civil society organizations. In some cases, such as with the Bulgarian Society of Saint Cyril and Methodius, this allowed organizations that had for several years operated clandestinely, to come out publicly and become legalized.[12] A core demand of such associations was the right

to teach minority languages in public schools. Until this aim was secured, some ethnic associations, like the Association of the Bulgarian Families, held Sunday school courses for children who voluntarily learned the language of the ethnic minority their parents identified with. In the much discussed 2017 Ukrainian law on education, this decade long semi-official work by ethnic associations was acknowledged in that they are specifically named as possible providers of minority language courses.[13] Other aims of ethnic associations were to create links with the country considered a historic homeland. Bulgarian associations were very effective in building a network of cultural, political, and commercial ties with Bulgaria. Gagauz associations in Ukraine have built links to Bulgaria as well as to Turkey and increasingly to the newly founded ATU Gagauzia just across the Moldovan border. Ethnic associations have also taken a crucial role in organizing folklore gatherings that created ties between folklore groups and culture houses of villages sometimes far-apart. In some instances, ethnic associations have also mobilized voters of a particular ethnic group in elections. But their main political goal remained the adoption of school lessons in minority languages in the areas where these ethnic groups formed local majorities.

Even though political resistance to native language lessons was minimal, their introduction did not pass without obstacles. There was very little experience in teaching these languages, especially Gagauz. The Gagauz language had been standardized only in the late 1950s on the basis of the Cyrillic alphabet (Guboglo, 2011: 115). The Soviet Union practiced a rather rigid policy on school language. Only languages that had a respective administrative body within the Soviet Union could serve as languages of school instruction. In southern Bessarabia these were the Russian, the Ukrainian, and the Moldovan languages, all of which had their titular republic inside the USSR. Gagauz and Bulgarian had no such administrative body. Worse even, the Bulgarian language had a country outside the Soviet Union as a historic homeland. Bulgaria's relations to the Soviet Union during World War II were very hostile. It was therefore treated with great suspicion when in the late 1940s the foundations of Soviet language policy in southern Bessarabia were laid. For the villages with Bulgarian, Gagauz, or Albanian inhabitants, Russian was chosen as language of school instruction.

The Gagauz villages in the Moldovan SSR additionally saw a brief experiment of Gagauz lessons between 1958 and 1961. The Academy of Science of the Moldovan SSR carried out research and published methodological material on how to teach the Gagauz language in schools.[14] But the initiative was dropped amidst protests that Gagauz school children had a tougher workload than their peers of other ethnic groups and that they

therefore could not compete on a par with others in higher education (Guboglo, 2011: 117). In this protest, the Gagauz were no exception. All over the Soviet Union the right of parents to choose the language of instruction for their children led most parents to choose the prestigious Russian language over native languages (Gorenburg, 2006: 279). The question of Gagauz lessons in school did not resurface until after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Now, considering the political rapprochement with Turkey and the Moldovan switch of alphabets, it seemed more practical to use the Latin script. In the Gagauz autonomy constitution of 1998 three official languages were adopted, Gagauz, Russian, and Moldovan. The fostering of the Gagauz language was declared a priority task for Gagauz administration (Guboglo, 2011: 125). It was out of question, even for the most ardent Gagauz patriots, to abandon Russian as the language of instruction in Gagauz schools. More than 80% of the population prefer Russian as the language of instruction in Gagauz schools (Cantarji, 2012: 127).

In Moldova, first achievements materialized quickly. By 1997 most Gagauz school children went to Gagauz languages classes. Gagauz language curricula became available by that time (Guboglo, 2011: 114). In the neighbouring Taraklia Rayon, schools also provide lessons in Bulgarian. In contrast to schools of the Gagauz autonomy area, these schools were, and still are, dependent on a budget determined in the capital Chişinău. Therefore, Bulgarian lessons in Taraklia Rayon are at the mercy of the Moldovan education budget, whereas in the Gagauz autonomy region the Gagauz themselves can decide how much they want to spend on the fostering of their language. In Taraklia, recurrent conflicts over funding of Bulgarian lessons between local school boards and the ministry of education have prompted Bulgaria to intervene and to spend considerable sums on Bulgarian lessons in Taraklia Rayon.[15] However different these arrangements may be, the measurable results, published in a 2009 OSCE report, are remarkably similar. Fourteen years after the establishment of the ATU, 83% of Gagauz students said they could have a conversation in Gagauz "easily" or "relatively easily". In the neighbouring Taraklia Rayon, which is predominantly inhabited by Bulgarians, 80% of students said the same about their fluency in Bulgarian. In both regions knowledge of Russian was significantly higher. When the teachers of these students were asked whether their students could continue their education in the respective language, in the ATU Gagauzia, teachers said 81% of their students could 'easily continue' or 'continue with additional language training'. In Taraklia rayon this number was even 88%, although teachers there acknowledged a higher share of their students would need some additional training. In

both regions close to 100% of the students would be able to continue their education in Russian.[16] These are rather encouraging results, but the autonomy status of the Gagauz in Moldova does not seem to have a significant effect.

Moldova signed the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages in 2002 but has so far not ratified it.[17] Therefore the country has made no formal commitment to native language education vis-à-vis the international community. In the Moldovan areas of Gagauz and the Bulgarian settlement, ethnic minority school children are required to learn Russian, Romanian, Gagauz or Bulgarian, plus a foreign language (Guboglo, 2011: 115). Studying four or sometimes five languages puts a high strain on teachers and pupils equally. This leads to poor results, especially in the command of Romanian among the ethnic minorities of southern Moldova. It also makes it hard to find qualified teachers (Gremalschi, 2016: 90). Poor knowledge of Romanian will provide a barrier for higher education as well as for careers in state structures. Yet many of those who do not speak Romanian report little requirement for it and little grievances caused by not speaking it (Cantarji, 2016: 24). In the Autonomous Gagauz area, Russian too is clearly still the most dominant language in most realms. But Gagauz has gained a symbolic value to be used in public and Gagauz media or books are more readily available there than in Gagauz areas of Ukraine. But in the ATU too it is an increasing challenge to recruit language teachers of Gagauz. (Cantarji, 2016: 27-28).

In Ukraine, all students are required to learn Ukrainian. Russian serves as the language of instruction in most schools in southern Bessarabia. Additionally, one foreign language is also compulsory. One Bulgarian language teacher from a village school explained that the ancestral language for most students is often one too many.[18]

Although the Ukrainian constitution has since independence held the linguistic rights of ethnic minorities high, formal introduction of native language lessons came only in the mid-2000s. Before that some schools offered non-compulsory language classes in Bulgarian and Gagauz, but one of the teachers holding such courses said the time that could be dedicated to them was minimal.[19] The Ukrainian parliament ratified the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages in May 2003 and it entered into force in 2006. To offer compulsory native language lessons is one of the ways the Charter can be implemented.[20] As for language of instruction, the Soviet system was largely kept. Ukrainians are usually schooled in Ukrainian, Russians in Russian, and Moldovans in Romanian. For Gagauz und Bulgarians, Russian was further used as language of instruction. Following the ratification of the European Charter on regional and minority languages, most villages must provide

compulsory lessons of the local ancestral languages. Many village schools already offered voluntary lessons much earlier, but started to teach Gagauz in the Latin script only after the ratification of the Charter.[21]

But often the workload for students is unbearably high, especially for the increasing number of those who had no knowledge of their ancestral language before they learned it in school. On top of that, in Ukraine there are big differences between village schools in the amount of native language lessons, the regularity, the quality, and the nature of content. If education expenses need to be cut, these lessons are usually the first to be repealed.[22] Even more than on the Moldovan side of border, on the Ukrainian side certified teachers for native language lessons are hard to come by with. Those teachers who are qualified to teach Bulgarian or Gagauz often have a hard time finding suitable teaching materials. For Gagauz, there is a selection of course materials published in the Gagauz autonomy region in Moldova. These are not authorized to be used in Ukrainian schools, but some teachers do so anyway.[23] Gagauz ethnic associations have recently produced their own basic teaching materials some of which became authorized by the ministry of education. The fact that teaching materials need to be created or at least approved by central authorities in Kyiv, who have too little insight in what the needs are on the ground, is an obstacle to creating high standard curricula.[24]

All minorities have, in principle, the right to use their languages in most spheres. However, for the sphere of jurisdiction and administration, the European Charter is so vague that local policy makers are essentially free to decide as they please.[25] The Gagauz and Bulgarian languages in Ukraine and the Bulgarian language in Moldova therefore remain largely languages for person-to-person interaction, while Russian remains dominant in the public and the official sphere.

A full assessment of how well representatives of a certain ethnic group master their titular language has been notoriously difficult in the former Soviet Union. The reason for this is a high social desirability to indicate the titular language of one's ethnic group as one's native language even if another language, usually Russian, was learned first and to a fuller extent (Arel, 2006: 9). Therefore, data on native language mastery must be treated with caution. In 1988, that is before lessons in Gagauz or Bulgarian were part of the school curriculum, 93.5% of the Gagauz in the Moldovan SSR and 94.9% of the Bulgarians said they could freely speak and think in their respective languages. At the same time, over 90% of respondents from both groups also said they were fluent in Russian (Guboglo, 2011: 111).

If asked about which language they use during work, already then 56.5% of the Gagauz and 74.6% of the Bulgarians spoke Russian rather than the language of the ethnic group they identified with (Guboglo, 2011: 113). In a study by Vasile Cantarji (2012: 125), the Russian language was still the one spoken and understood by the biggest share of the population.

This indicates that Russian has not lost its role as the language of social mobility. The Ukrainian and Romanian languages have begun to claim this role for themselves in recent years. But Gagauz and Bulgarian languages have little perspective to ever provide more than local prestige and a good basis for successful labour-migration to Turkey or Bulgaria. Here, perhaps, lays the core of the problem: one important determinant on how well people preserve or regain mastery in their language are incentives that come along with fluency. The Bulgarian government has done much to create incentives for Bulgarians in Ukraine and Moldova to thoroughly study the Bulgarian language. Places at Bulgarian institutions of higher education are a welcome way for many ethnic Bulgarians to escape the economically precarious situation in Bessarabia. Bulgarians from Ukraine and Moldova also have relatively easy access to Bulgarian passports and with them, in recent years, to the European labour market. For the Gagauz, on the other hand, if they are fluent in the Gagauz language, they usually learn to speak Turkish without difficulty (Demirdirek, 2008a: 127). Labour-migration to Turkey, and Istanbul in particular, has become very common (Demirdirek, 2008b: 99). Seeking employment abroad has become a predominant economic strategy in rural Bessarabia on both sides of the border. The practical use of the close relation between Gagauz and Turkish has become a powerful incentive to learn the language. In a speech on the occasion of the World Congress of the Gagauz[26] in 2012, the then head of ATU, Bashkan Mikhail Formuzal, was criticized by a Ukrainian Gagauz delegate for not sufficiently defending the linguistic rights of Gagauz in Ukraine. The Bashkan answered that one just needed to tell people that Turkey had a vibrant economy and that the Gagauz language gave access to it. These new destinations might replace the traditional sphere of the Gagauz and the Bulgarian language in Bessarabia—the family and the village community. The flipside of incentives to use native languages outside their traditional spheres could turn out to be that most people who migrate to far-away labour markets never return to their native Bessarabian villages. So both languages have fallen prey to economic decline and devastating out-migration from the traditional spheres of native language use. If asked about what threatens their lifestyle most, Gagauz informants living in villages overwhelmingly answered it was out-migration by their youth. The problem is so strongly felt that it is a normal feature of

annual village celebrations that the event's host announces the number of vacant houses in the village. In a 2012 survey, less than a quarter of the inhabitants of the ATU Gagauzia stated they would stay in the country if the opportunity of moving away arose (Cantarji, 2012: 119). The strongest incentive to learn Bulgarian or Gagauz, the prospect of finding work abroad, is at the same time the most corrosive factor for the speaker communities in Bessarabia. For the fate of the Gagauz and Bulgarian language in southern Bessarabia, the possibility for young people to find work in the region and to be able to use these languages in their work environments are far more significant than neglect by central states or fostering by institutions of an autonomous political body. As long as the sphere of language for Gagauz and Bulgarian keep withering away due to shrinking village populations, compulsory language lessons in village schools will likely only delay their disappearance, rather than prevent it.

3. The events of 2014 and the geopolitical dimensions of Gagauz autonomy

Most Gagauz, independent of age or political views, tend to speak Russian. Russia as a state often appears in the role of a protector. This widely held image partly stems from the intervention of Soviet troops in 1990 when Gagauzia was on the brink of a civil war. Some even trace the image of the Russian protector back to the Russo-Ottoman wars in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Anikin, 2009: 24). Since systematic school education became widely accessible in the area of Gagauz settlement after World War II, the language of instruction was Russian. The "language of interethnic communication" as it was called in Soviet times, provided access to the city, to education, and to white-collar jobs. Russian was first adopted to communicate outside the ethnic community, but increasingly also served as a tool of communication inside it. Thanks to the adoption of Russian as the language of education, it was possible to create a university educated Gagauz elite within just one generation. These men and women had achieved high social status thanks to their fluency in Russian. Representatives of this group spearheaded the Gagauz autonomy movement in the early 1990s (Guboglo, 2011: 119). The Russian language also dominates the media. Although in Moldova there is a Gagauz language TV station, the media consumption of Gagauz in both Ukraine and Moldova is chiefly in Russian rather than in Gagauz, Ukrainian, or Romanian (Guboglo, 2011: 123). Russian media content also enjoys a far higher degree of trust among the population (Cantarji, 2016: 27-28). The Gagauz radio channel in Odessa does not reach

the areas in the Oblast that are settled by Gagauz. Its target audience are mainly Gagauz living in Odessa.[27]

The situation for Bulgarians in both countries is quite similar. They too were schooled in Russian, and Russian provides the broadest access to information. Among the Bulgarians too, the dominant way of narrating history portrays Russia and the Russians as protectors and civilizers. Romania appears as a fierce oppressor in this narrative, while Ukraine has a more neutral standing, but has in recent years increasingly been identified as an opponent of Russia. Many Bulgarians from Ukraine and Moldova have profited from Bulgaria's recent European integration while they personally often remain deeply sceptical of the economic and social implications the EU membership had for Bulgarian society.

From 2004 until 2010 Ukraine had a mildly nationalist, pro-European government. In Moldova in 2009, amidst riots in Chişinău, the long-ruling pro-Russian Communist Party was voted out to make space for various pro-European coalitions. In both countries these governments took an active stand in the eastern partnership of the EU, initiated in 2009. The course towards association agreements was kept up in Ukraine even after the more pro-Russian Party of the Regions won the elections in 2010. However, talks with the EU came to a brisk end when, in November 2013, Party of the Regions leader Viktor Yanukovich made a last-minute decision not to sign the Association Agreement and instead seek closer ties with Russia. This political U-turn led to the Maidan upheaval of winter 2013-14 and in its wake the cascade of violence that has afflicted Ukraine since 2014.

On the Moldovan side of the border where European integration seemed more realistic, these developments brought back old concerns that rapprochement with the EU was only a prelude to Moldova's merger with Romania. Russian authorities have consciously fuelled such fears.[28] Moldovan authorities, on the other hand, have done a poor job explaining the difference between eventually joining the EU and merging with Romania. In 2016 Moldovans voted for an EU sceptic government again.

Along with failing to properly explain the perspectives of an association agreement, local elites have retreated to shadow boxing over mutually exclusive values portrayed as belonging either to "the West" or "to us". Homosexuality figured prominently in the discourse whether Ukraine and Moldova could profit from a rapprochement with the EU. The then Bashkan of Gagauzia, Mikhail Formuzal, countered fears that homosexuals could gain more rights by drafting his own anti-gay bill that was debated in the Gagauz parliament in

spring 2013.[29] The debate about values became so dominant throughout 2012 and 2013 that it permitted local elites to turn away from the region's pressing economic problems. It also overshadowed many truly problematic aspects of EU integration plans. Brussels' demands to restructure administration, cut expenses, and privatize state enterprises could have much more tangible consequences for the citizens of Moldova and Ukraine than a shift in cultural values might have had.

In contrast to Ukraine, Moldova *did* sign the Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013. But Gagauz authorities demonstrated their preference for closer ties with Moscow by initiating a referendum on February 2, 2014, asking its citizens whether they favour closer ties with the EU or the Russia-led alternative, the Customs Union. A second item in the same referendum was whether or not Gagauzia should declare its independence, should Moldova lose or surrender her independence. The referendum, which took place against the backdrop of escalating violence in neighbouring Ukraine, was declared illegal by the Moldovan government but was supported by opposition parties. 98.4% of Gagauz voters decided in favour of the Customs Union and against a closer EU integration. A similar number, 98.9%, insisted on Gagauzia's right to declare independence if the political status of the Republic of Moldova should change.[30] One of the driving forces behind the referendum, then member of parliament and the traditionally pro-Russian Communist Party, Irina Vlakh, became the ATU's Bashkan a year later in March 2015.[31] Even though the legality of the referendum and its outcome are debated, the Gagauz autonomy government's symbolic message to Chişinău, to Brussels, and to Moscow was very clear: political autonomy will henceforth be used not only to decide how many native language school lessons should be held, but to take matters of geopolitical orientation into the hands of local administrators.

The referendum attracted an unusual amount of attention in Ukraine. At the time the Yanukovich government, although under pressure on the streets of Kyiv, still controlled the entire territory of Ukraine. An autonomous region in a neighbouring country that decided to turn another geopolitical direction than the central government was seen as a potentially dangerous precedent.[32] One of the leaders of a Gagauz association in Ukraine, Yuriy Dimchoglo, praised the referendum as a reminder for all of Europe that the identity of small people's needs to be respected and that autonomy governments need to be consulted before far-reaching decisions were made.[33] After the emergence of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics in eastern Ukraine, just a few weeks after the referendum, the Kremlin demanded a scenario much harsher than the Gagauz one: the "federalization" of

Ukraine, whereby every region would have a veto on international agreements (Plokhy, 2016: 341). This is a scenario no Ukrainian government will likely agree to. But as a military solution for the conflict in eastern Ukraine becomes ever less realistic and as the comparison to the frozen conflict in Transnistria becomes more and more frequent, the Gagauz autonomy might at last inspire imitators. Some of the criteria that enabled its emergence are in the mix; in the long run, Russia might find its Donbas clients too costly. The "people's republics" leaders have a lot to lose and have already mobilized against the central state. They could formalize their status and continue to look to Russia as a point of orientation. Ukraine has no realistic perspective of European integration without settling its territorial disputes. If they look to Moldova and find the Transnistrian scenario unappealing, the Gagauz one would probably be the next best thing.

Conclusion

The Gagauz case, with its far-reaching autonomy rights, became possible thanks to the misfortunes of neighbouring Transnistria, because of Turkey's support, because Russia's appetite in Moldova had already been satisfied, and because the Moldovan government strived to be a model-pupil among the candidates for European integration. In this period the Bulgarians, as well as the Gagauz in Ukraine, could not mobilize a similarly dedicated group that perceived political autonomy as realistic and worthwhile. On the other hand, they also did not fear the same degree of oppression or even violence that Gagauz in Moldova felt threatened with. This brings us back to the paper's initial assumption that the Gagauz in Moldova had both more to lose and more to gain and were better able to make use of their transnational ties. They encountered a favourable constellation of factors that existed for a short period of time in the early 1990s after the outbreak of violence in Transnistria and the autonomy compromise.

As a tool for cultural revival, political autonomy has permitted the Gagauz to take language education in their own hands, whereas Bulgarians and the Ukrainian Gagauz still need to ask their central governments for funding. However, combined with their transnational ties to Bulgaria and Turkey, they proved to be able to secure a similar degree of language knowledge without political autonomy. The positive effects the autonomy could have had for the revival of local culture has been watered down by the region's precarious

economic situation. The best argument to invest time and energy in learning one of the local minority languages is often that they provide a ticket to more promising labour markets.

The comparison between the region's ethnic minorities without autonomy and the ATU shows that autonomy status has mainly given the local elites the leverage to confront the central government over its geopolitical course. Unlike ATU Gagauzia, the champions of neighbouring groups have not had the means of confronting the central government and have, perhaps as a direct consequence, carefully conserved good relations.

Notes

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[1] Moldovan census of 2004, http://www.statistica.md/pageview.php?l=ru&idc=295&id=2234, and Ukrainian census of 2001, http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/nationality_population/nationality_popul1/select_51/?botton=cens_db&box=5.1W&k_t=51&p=25&rz=1_1&rz_b=2_1%20&n_page=2. Both retrieved: March 11, 2017.

[2] See UNESCO's Atlas of Endangered Languages, http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php. Retrieved: November 29, 2017.

[3] Article 13 of the Moldovan Constitution, specifies "Moldovan" as the name of the language of state, http://www.parlament.md/CadrulLegal/Constitution/tabid/151/language/ro-RO/Default.aspx#Articolul_13. In late 2017 the constitutional court gave green light to change this designation to "Romanian". 'Curtea Constituțională a aprobat "sentința" pentru limba moldovenească'. *RTR Moldova,* November 6, 2017, https://rtr.md/ro/stiri/societate/curtea-constitutionala-a-aprobat-sentinta-pentru-limba-moldoveneasca.

[4] Law Nr. 344 of December 23, 1994, about the special legal status of Gagauzia (Gagauz Eri).

[5] Ibid. Article 1 §4.

[6] Ibid. For official language see Article 3 §1, for eligibility to political office see Article 8 §3, and for eligibility to the office of vice speaker see Article 10 §2.

[7] Interview with Vladimir Petrov (Izmail, April 21, 2013), head of the Bulgarian Society of Saint Cyril and Methodius, the leading Bulgarian association during the turmoil of the early 1990s.

[8] Interview with history teacher, Kotlovina, Reni Rayon, July 31, 2013. A Gagauz artist, also from Kotlovina (Interview in Izmail, May 15, 2013), said that one of the few 'enthusiasts' for a Gagauz republic, a surgeon, was dissuaded from the idea by his own social circle. He was told he was a 'utopian'. Like many other villagers, he eventually left the region to find employment abroad.

[9] Article 7 of the Ukrainian law 'on Education', September 5, 2017, Website of Verkhovna Rada, http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19/.

[10] 'Hungary and Romania unhappy with new Ukrainian law on education'. *Kyiv Post*, September 8, 2017, https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/hungary-romania-unhappy-new-ukrainian-law-education.html.

[11] 'Natsmen'shinstva Bolgarii v Ukraine podderzhali zakon "Ob obrazovanii"'. *Segodnya,* October 12, 2017, https://www.segodnya.ua/ukraine/nacmenshinstva-bolgarii-v-ukraine-podderzhali-zakon-ob-obrazovanii-1063363.html.

[12] Interview with Vladimir Petrov (Izmail, April 21, 2013), head of the Bulgarian Society of Saint Cyril and Methodius, the leading Bulgarian association during the turmoil of the early 1990s.

[13] Article 7 of the Ukrainian law "on Education", September 5, 2017, Website of Verkhovna Rada, http://zakon3.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2145-19/.

[14] Some of the teaching materials used during this experiment are at disposal in the town Museum of Ceadir Lunga in the ATU Gagauzia.

[15] 'Bolgariya profinansiruet izuchenie bolgarskogo yazyka v shesti shkolakh tarakliyskogo rayona'. *Gagauzinfo.md,* August 30, 2013, http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=9061, as well as 'Vlasti tarakliyskogo rayona prizvali Bolgariyu zashchitit' kultury i bolgarskiy yasyk v Moldove'. *Gagauzinfo.md,* March 22, 2012, http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=3282.

[16] Report by OSCE and Pro Didactica 'Problemy prepodavaniya yazykov v shkolakh s kontingentom uchashchikhsya natsional'nikh men'shinstv: Analiz potrebnostey', 49-71, Chișinău 2009.

[17] Council of Europe, http://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/148/signatures. Retrieved: March 11, 2017.

[18] Interview with Bulgarian language lecturer of Izmail State University, Izmail, October 17, 2012.

[19] Ibid.

[20] European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages, § 8b iii, http://www.conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/148.htm. Retrieved: March 11, 2017.

[21] Interview with Gagauz language teacher in Chervonoarmeyskoe, Bolgrad Rayon, August 26, 2013.

[22] Interview with Bulgarian language teachers of the Saint Cyril and Methodius Society, Izmail, March 3, 2013.

[23] Interview with Gagauz language teacher, Kotlovina, Reni Rayon, June 10, 2013.

[24] Interview with Gagauz radio host, Odessa, December 13, 2013. The same observation was made by a Gagauz member of the Moldovan Academy of Science, interviewed in Chişinău, December 6, 2012.

[25] See § 9 and §10 of the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages, http://www.conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/148.htm. Retrieved: March 11, 2017.

[26] in Komrat, November 3, 2012.

[27] Interview with Gagauz radio host, Odessa, December 13, 2013.

[28] 'Rogozin Accuses Romania Of "Traian Horse" On Moldova'. *Radio Free Europe,* October 2, 2013, http://www.rferl.org/a/russia-rogozin-romania-moldova/25124600.html.

[29] 'Bashkan Gagauzii poobeshchal promul'guvat' "antigeyskiy zakon"'. *Gagauzinfo.md,* May 2, 2013, http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=7696.

[30] 'Concerned About EU Integration, Moldova's Gagauz Region Holds Disputed Referendum'. *Radio Free Europe,* February 2, 2014, http://www.rferl.org/content/moldova-gagauzia-eu-referendum/25249087.html.

[31] Official biography of the Bashkan of Gagauziya, Irina Vlakh, on the website of the Autonomous Territorial Unit, http://gagauzia.md/pageview.php?l=ru&idc=429&id=308. Retrieved: November 19, 2017.

[32] 'Gagauzkiy Pretsedent'. *Taimer*, February 17, 2014, http://timer-odessa.net/statji/gagauzskiy_pretsedent_897.html.

[33] 'Dimchoglo o gagauzkom referendume: eto pretsedent i primer dlya vsey Evropy'. *Gagauzinfo.md*, February 14, 2014, http://gagauzinfo.md/ya/11100-dimchoglo-o-gagauzskom-referendume-eto-precedent-i-primer-dlya-vsey-evropy.html.

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