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Multilingualism in Lithuania

Santrauka

Straipsnyje pristatomos Lietuvos tautinės mažumos ir jų kalbos. Aptariama demografinė situacija, istorinis tautinių mažumų Lietuvoje kontekstas. Pristatoma teisinė bazė, reguliuojanti tautinių mažumų viešojo gyvenimo, švietimo, informavimo ir kt. sritis. Pateikiama statistinė informacija apie tautinių mažumų švietimo ir žiniasklaidos būklę. Atkreipiamas dėmesys į tautinių mažumų kalbų ir kultūrų paveldo tyrimus Lietuvoje. Konstatuojama, kad tautinių mažumų kalbos ir kultūros yra didžiulis Lietuvos turtas, tačiau jų kalbų statuso problemos šalyje dar nėra iki galo išdiskutuotos.

1. Ethnic minorities in Lithuania

Modern Lithuania remains the multinational central European country. There are 115 nationalities living in Lithuania (for further details see Potachenko 2008; Kaubrys 2002).

The population of Lithuania consists of: Lithuanians (84%), Poles (6.1%), Russians (4.9%), Belorussians (1.1%), Ukrainians (0.6%), Jewish (0.1%), German (0.1%), Latvians (0.1%), Tatars (0.1%), Karaites amongst others (2001 census). There is also an approximately 3 000 people strong Roma community, which is mainly settled in the Vilnius region. Other non-titular people are primarily concentrated in some of the biggest cities: Vilnius (42% of various ethnic minorities), Klaipėda (29% mostly Russian-speakers minority; Klaipėda is the ice-free seaport, where numerous migrants from the Soviet occupation period are working) and Visaginas (concentrated Russian-speakers minority; the Ignalina Power Plant in Visaginas operates in Russian since the Soviet occupation period). The Roma community mainly settled in the Vilnius region. Concentrated Polish communities are settled in Eastern and South-Eastern Lithuania (*Vilnijos kraštas, Wileńszczyzna*).

Since the restitution of independence in the Baltic States, there has been a notable decrease in the percentage of resident Russians and Russian-speakers (most of the present-day Russians in Lithuania are migrants from the Soviet occupation era including their descendants) related to political developments, repatriation, and lower birth rate.

Religion had a significant impact on the Lithuanian minorities' history. Population by religious confession consists of: Roman Catholics (79%); Orthodox Believers (4.05%); Old Believers (0.77%); Evangelical Lutherans (0.56%); Evangelical Reformists (0.2%); Jehovah's Witnesses (0.1%); Sunni Muslims (0.08%); All Gospel Churches (0.06%); Pentecostal Church (0.04%); Judaists (0.04%); Balts Believers (0.04%); Baptists (and other independent churches) (0.04%); other believers (0.135%); no religion (9.5%); not indicated (5.35%) (2001 census).

Old Believers, who are Russian speakers, appeared as an organized Fedoseevian community in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the eighteenth century. It was the first wave of an extensive emigration from Russia into the Baltic countries, and in par-

ticular, into Lithuania. In the late eighteenth century, they ranged from 100 000 to 180 000 Old Believers. Nowadays Old Believers remain at about 45 000 (for further details, see Potachenko 2006).

In 1392, Grand Duke Vytautas of the medieval Grand Duchy of Lithuania relocated one branch of the Crimean Karaites to Lithuania, where they continued to speak their own language. The Lithuanian Karaites settled primarily in Vilnius and Trakai as well as in Biržai, Pasvalys, Naujamiestis, and Upytė – smaller settlements throughout Lithuania proper – and lands of modern Belarus and Ukraine that were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Nowadays there are only about 300 Karaites (for further details, see Zajączkowski 1961; Szyszman 1980; Harviainen 1996-1997). There is a website intended for the spoken Karaite language: <http://www3.aa.tufs.ac.jp/~djn/karaim/karaimCD.htm>. Collection of Karaite language data was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft at the University of Cologne.

In Lithuania, unlike many other northern and western European countries, Islam came long ago. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania, stretching from Baltic to Black seas, included some Muslim lands in the south, inhabited by Crimean Tatars. Some people from those lands were moved into ethnically Lithuanian lands, mainly under rule of Grand Duke Vytautas. The Tatars, now referred to as Lithuanian Tatars (*Lipka Tatars*), lost their language over time; however, they have not lost Islam as their religion. Due to long isolation from all the other Islamic world, the practices of the Lithuanian Tatars differs somewhat from the rest of Sunni Muslims; however, they are not considered a separate sect. Nowadays about 4 000 Lithuanian Tatars reside in Lithuania (for further details, see Suter 2004; Bairašauskaitė 1998).

Lithuanian Jews are Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews with roots in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Lithuania was historically home to a large and influential Jewish community that was almost entirely eliminated during the Holocaust. Before World War II, there were over 110 synagogues and 10 yeshivas in Vilnius. Before World War II, the Lithuanian Jewish (*Litvaks*) population was 160 000, approximately 7% of the total population. Nowadays about 4 000 Jews live in Lithuania (for further details, see Katz 2004; Katz 2008; Levin, Teller 2001; Nikžentaitis/Schreiner/Staliūnas/Donskis 2004). Litvaks have an identifiable mode of pronouncing Hebrew and Yiddish that is often used to determine the boundaries of *Lita*. The Vilnius Yiddish Institute is the first Yiddish center of higher learning to be established in post-Holocaust Eastern Europe. It is an integral part of the four-centuries-old Vilnius University (1579). The Institute is dedicated to the preservation of the centuries-old heritage of Yiddish language and culture through teaching and scholarly research of the highest quality.

The Polish minority in Lithuania forms the largest ethnic minority in modern Lithuania and one of the largest Polish diaspora groups in a former Soviet republic. Poles are concentrated in the Vilnius Region (*Wileńszczyzna, Vilnija*). Of the Poles in Lithuania, 80.0% consider the Polish language to be their mother tongue, 9.5% speak Russian as their first language, while 7.3% speak Lithuanian. 2.7% Poles did not indicate their first language. The remaining 0.5% speak various other languages (2001 census) (for the sociolinguistical situation in other regions [not Vilnius] see Karas 2001).

Ruthenians (current Belorussian) were native to the central and south-eastern part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Ruthenian chancellery language was used to write laws in the middle ages. Ruthenian is a term used for the varieties of Eastern Slavonic spoken and written in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Ruthenian can be seen as a predecessor of modern Belorussian and Ukrainian. There are approximately 55 000 Belorussians in Lithuania today (2001 census).

2. The legal framework

In accordance with the **Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania**, the State is required to offer support to minorities by ensuring the protection and promotion of their language, culture, and customs (Article 37). The Lithuanian Constitution guarantees the availability of an interpreter in judicial proceedings for those who do not speak Lithuanian (Article 117).

The Law on Ethnic Minorities guarantees the right to free development and respect of every nationality and every language (Article 1) as well as the support of the State in education and the teaching of their culture and language (Article 2). It guarantees their right to a state education in their language from nursery school to the completion of secondary education as well as higher levels of initial training for teaching personnel involved with minority languages. It recognizes their right to express themselves publicly in their language in the press and cultural or religious demonstrations. In regions with a high concentration of ethnic minorities, those minorities execute the right to use their language alongside the state language in communication (Article 4) and on signs (Article 5).

The rights of the citizens belonging to the national minorities are protected by state language; education; associations; provision of information to the public; religious communities and associations; political parties and political organization; fundamentals of protection of the rights of children as well as other legal acts.

Lithuania signed (1995) and ratified (2000) the **Convention for the Protection of National Minorities**. In 2007, the Government of Lithuania validated the development of **Politics of National Minorities until 2015**.

3. Education

The provisions for the education of persons belonging to national minorities detail the program for teaching minority languages within the education system and reinforce the correlation between minority and national languages. Exams in schools for minorities are in the minority language and, if the pupils so wish, also in the national language.

At the beginning of the 2008-2009 academic year in the territory of the Republic of Lithuania, there were about 166 schools of general education in which the teaching process was conducted in one or several languages of instruction: 64 general educational establishments with the Polish language of instruction; 38 Russian; 8 Belorussian; 1 English; 1 French.

There are 61 general schools where more than one language of instruction is used: 23 general schools with the Lithuanian – Russian language of instruction, and 17 Lithuanian – Polish, 11 Russian – Polish, 8 Lithuanian – Russian – Polish, and 2 Lithuanian – English schools.

Some minorities (Ukrainians, Armenians, Latvians, Estonians, Karaites, Poles, Russians, Belorussians, Greeks, Chechens, Jews, and Tatars) have established their own Saturday/Sunday schools (approximately 39). This idea was the brainchild of a working group led by the Department of National Minorities and Lithuanians Living Abroad under the Government of the Republic of Lithuania in 2004.

Nonetheless, it is important to note the difference between the two biggest ethnic communities – the Russian community and the Polish community. Currently, the parents, who belong to the Russian community, more often let their children study in the schools with the Lithuanian language of instruction. Meanwhile, until 2005, the Lithuanian Poles choose the Polish schools for their children (from 10 613 in 1989 to 19 507 in 2004/2005). In recent times, this tendency has been relatively changing (amounting to 15 064 students in 2008/2009 academic year, whose language of instruction was Polish).

4. Mass media

National minorities are able to engage in creative work and publish information in their native languages. Currently periodicals in Russian, Polish, and Yiddish are being published in the country. Tatars and Greeks of Lithuania are issuing their newspapers in Lithuanian or Russian with inserts in their native languages; the Tatar newspaper *Lietuvos totoriai (Tatars of Lithuania)* – in the Lithuanian and Russian; *Lietuvos Jeruzalė (Jerusalem of Lithuania)* – in the Lithuanian, Yiddish, Russian, and English.

The first programme of the Radio Lithuania gives a daily half-hour broadcast of information on public issues and politics in Russian. The programme *Klasika (Classics)* of the Radio Lithuania broadcasts a daily half-hour cultural-educative programme *Santara* for the national minorities living in Lithuania. All other broadcasts of *Santara* are in Russian and are targeted at the Russian and other national minorities of Lithuania. There is also a daily half-hour broadcast in the Polish language for the Poles living in Lithuania.

Lithuania also has non-governmental radio stations operating: Polish radio *Znad Wilii*, Russian radio *Ruskoje Radio*, and *Baltijos Bangos* broadcasting in the Belorussian language. In Visaginas and Klaipėda, there are local radio stations broadcasting programmes in the Russian language.

The national television of Lithuania broadcasts various information programmes aimed at national minorities: Russians, Poles, Ukrainians, Jews, Belorussians, and other small national minorities – Latvians, Estonians, Tatars, Karaites, etc.

The distribution of public information in the languages of minorities may be more successful: in 2003, there were 17 periodicals (7 – in Russian), in 2000 – 49.

5. Research of multilingual history of Lithuania

At the Institute of the Lithuanian Language, the new department for the research in old writings of ethnic minorities and language contacts was established. Major areas of activity of the new department are: Cyrillic manuscripts kept in Lithuania; the spoken language and writings of Russian Old Believers in Lithuania; Muslim (Tatar) writings in Arabic in The Great Duchy of Lithuania; contemporary and historical Lithuanian and other language contacts; Lithuanian and minorities' language dictionaries etc.

The fifth international conference focusing on the research of the cultural heritage of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania was organized by the Institute in co-operation with Polish colleagues and was held in 2008. Previous conferences were held in Budapest (1996, 1998, 2000) and Brest, Belorussia (2004).

The Institute of Lithuanian Language publishes multilingual sources of old writings, for example, *Turkish-Polish dictionary of the Lithuanian Tatars manuscript (1840)* (Miškinienė/Güllüdağ 2008; in Tatars and Polish languages), *Christian science laid out in Samogitian: Priest Jonas Krizostomas Gintilas' Samogitian Catechism in Hebrew alphabet* (Verbickienė 2009; in Lithuanian, Hebrew and English), etc.

Dictionaries of minorities languages are being compiled; for example, lexicographers are working on the *Lithuanian – Polish* and *Polish – Lithuanian* as well as *Belorussian – Lithuanian* and *Lithuanian – Belorussian* dictionaries.

The research into language contacts, language and culture dialog, is an important factor to promote European multilingualism and inter-cultural ideas.

Languages and the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities are of great cultural and social wealth for the Lithuanian.

6. Problems

There is some support for the idea that one or several languages of minorities should be given the legal status of second official language in the regions settled by minority people; however, the issue is not discussed much in public.

In the future, the discussion on the legitimisation of the status of minority languages in public life may be in the centre of public attention.

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