



INTERNATIONAL LEGAL GUARANTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES AND PROBLEMS IN THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

WITH SPECIAL FOCUS ON MINORITY EDUCATION

Organizing Education in Polyethnic Russia by Mikhail Kouzmine and Olga Artemenko Centre for Ethnic Matters in Education, Moscow

The Russian system of education deals with a complex heterogeneous contingent of learners diverse in ethnic, linguistic, cultural and mental respects. This is an objective feature of the ethnic composition of the country's population, which had been built up during formation of Moscow State and Russian Empire.

One of the most prominent state officials of Russia, Prime Minister of the Russian Government Sergey Witte wrote in 1905 as follows,

“The basic mistake of our multi-decade policy is that we still have not recognized that since the times of Peter the Great and Catherine the Great there is no Russia any longer but there is Russian Empire instead. About 35% of the population is of non-Russian origin, and the Russians themselves are split into Great Russians (Russians *per se*), Little Russians (Ukrainians) and White Russians (Belo Russians). So it is impossible in the 19th and 20th centuries to conduct a policy ignoring the ethnic traits of other nationalities that make up the Russian Empire – their religion, their language etc. The slogan of such an empire cannot be “turning all people into true Russians”. This cannot make a common ideal for all subjects of the Russian emperor, cannot unite the whole population, create a single political soul”.

This opinion is a proof that the Russian state has recognized the political importance of taking into consideration ethnic interests of its population. This had brought to building up a net of the so-called Russian-native schools, subsequently ethnic (or national) schools. It was the specific type of an educational institution, which had its own curriculum (18 variants by the eve of 1980/90-ies), programmes and educational aids.

Basically tuition in one's mother tongue (non-Russian language) was conducted in primary grades with a consequent transition to teaching in Russian whereas one's mother tongue remained only as an educational subject. In intermediate grades, native literature with elements of native culture was also taught. In senior grades, all tuition was conducted in Russian, and the content of education totally lacked information on the history and culture of an ethnos whose children attended school.

Such a school solved not only educational tasks but also tasks of spiritual and linguistic integration of Russian society through the content of the humanities subjects. However, one has to bear in mind that until the middle of the 20th century ethnic (national) school served as a whole not industrialized, ethnically heterogeneous, low mobile population 80% of which resided in rural areas.

Mainly Russian urban population carried out «opening up» and modernization of ethnoses. As a result by the end of the 80-ies native tongues remained as languages of instruction only by 18 ethnoses of the RSFSR, with only 4 ethnoses teaching in their mother tongues above the elementary level: Tuvins and Yakuts (common school), Tartars and Bashkirs (full middle school).

The situation of the end of the 20th century has changed drastically. This school began to serve a completely different, relatively strong industrialized and urbanized socium though some ethnoses were involved into this process to a different degree what makes up their peculiarity (especially it concerns the indigenous, small in number peoples of the North).

Since 1992 a new in quality stage has begun in developing education aimed at satisfying ethnic and cultural educational needs. These changes are connected with democratization of Russian social system built upon the principles of real federalism.

According to the new Constitution of the Russian Federation (1993) the Russian Federation is made up of 89 equal in rights subjects. 32 subjects bear in their names ethnic names of the people that historically reside in their territory (they are the so-called “national subjects”). 21 subjects out of them have a status of the Republic/State with their own Constitution, legislation and their own state language. 11 subjects have their own Regulation and regional legislation.

The Constitution of the Russian Federation guarantees “the equality of rights and freedoms of man and citizen, regardless of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, property and official status, place of residence, religion, convictions, membership of public associations, and also of other circumstances. All forms of limitations of human rights on social, racial, national, linguistic or religious grounds shall be banned” (Art.19).

“The propaganda or agitation instigating social, racial, national or religious hatred and strife shall not be allowed. The propaganda of social, racial, national, religious or linguistic supremacy shall be banned” (Art.29).

“Everyone shall have the right to use his or her native language, to a free choice of the language of communication, upbringing, education and creative work” (Art.26).

“The Russian Federation shall guarantee to all of its peoples the right to preserve their native language and to create conditions for its study and development” (Art.68)

The Constitution also establishes jurisdiction of different levels in the field of ethnic development (Art. 69, 71, 72, 76).

At present time the ethnic composition of Russia is made up of ca. 160 peoples (according to the census of 2002) that differ in language, culture, historical affiliation with different civilization zones and traditions. Statistically this diversity makes 25.3% pf the Russian population of the country.

The federal law “On Education” (1992) guarantees to all citizens of the Russian Federation the right to obtain basic common education in one’s mother tongue, and also the choice of a language of instruction within the scope of possibilities granted by the system of education (Art.6.2).

Further on the law proclaims protection and development by school of national (ethnic) cultures and regional cultural traditions (Art.1.2), on the one hand, and providing the unity of cultural and educational space of the country, on the other hand. The law sets a task of integrating a personality both into national and world culture (Art.14.2). However, the law neglects that real circumstance that in Russia the role of the main “re-translator” of world culture, as well as the role of the cultural integrator as whole is performed by the Russian culture.

To realize the above-mentioned diverse cultural and educational tasks the law has introduced a component principle of structuring the content of education: federal component – universal for all educational institutions, and regional (ethnic/regional) component which is determined in content by the subjects of the Russian Federation and is variable. The law made these components zones of independent authority and responsibility of the center and the regions.

On the one hand, realizing regional (ethnic/regional) component has provided ethnoses new possibilities to satisfy their linguistic and cultural needs.

Today in the system of education of the Russian Federation more than 75 languages of the peoples of Russia are included into the educational process, among them 30 languages are used (in a different volume) as languages of instruction.

This data objectively confirms that only developed languages of big ethnoses could really use new possibilities in a full volume. In other cases, mother tongues have been restored only as educational subjects. Now more 45 native languages are used in this capacity in schools of the RF. They are learnt as a rule from grade 1 to grade 11.

During the past decade, textbooks in native literature, history, culture, national traditions, and decorative and applied art have been compiled in subjects of the Russian Federation.

Restoration of mother tongues as languages of instruction has occurred on a considerable scale in a number of subjects of the Federation. Today schools with one's native language as a means of instruction make up to 40% in Sakha-Yakutia, up to 60% in Bashkortostan and Tartarstan, up to 80% of the whole school net in Tyva.

On the other hand, the component principle of organizing the content of education turned unable to fully provide the unity of educational space of the country. On the contrary, in a number of subjects of the Federation (Sakha-Yakutia, Bashkortostan, Tartarstan) this principle was used by national elite to achieve their own political goals: it gave the possibility to make the ethnic/regional component autonomous and prior to the federal one, to lower the level of its connection with the Russian language and culture, and finally to make the school a tool of ethnic mobilization – a factor of policy of turning federal relations into confederative ones.

There was a discrepancy between adopted decisions on the federal and regional levels. Federal bodies worked out normative acts, such as “National doctrine of education in the Russian Federation”, “The concept of structure and content of education of 12-grade school”, “The experiment of the common state examination”, “Priority directions of development of the system of education”. These documents do not take into consideration the specific features of polyethnic and polycultural Russian society, do not provide cross-component mechanisms of integration of the content of education of the humanities. On the regional level concepts of regionalization of the system of education are adopted. Tuition is carried out according to the regional programmes which considerably lowers the opportunities for school-graduates to enter the leading universities of the country.

The whole above-mentioned set of factors is an evidence that in the structure of the Russian educational system school with tuition in a native (non-Russian) language and in Russian (non-native) language with the content of the humanities education (with this or that volume) on the basis of native culture must make a special and independent educational institution with such basic distinctive features as bi-lingual and bi-cultural content of education and using predominantly a comparative analysis.