

Issues of Ethno-Political Mobilization of National and Cultural Unions of Russia: Example of the Nizhny Novgorod Region

Movilización etno-política de los sindicatos nacionales y culturales de Rusia: ejemplo de la región de Nizhni Novgorod

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RESUMO:

In a multicultural state, national and cultural unions play a key role in the dialog with the government regarding national issues and help reduce cultural intolerance. The article presents an analysis of concepts of leaders and ordinary members of national and cultural unions residing in the Nizhny Novgorod region of Russia with regard to approaches and means that should be used for identity preservation and ethno-political mobilization.

Keywords Ethno-political mobilization; Identity; Migrants; National and cultural unions.

ABSTRACT:

En un Estado multicultural, los sindicatos nacionales y culturales juegan un papel clave en el diálogo con el Gobierno respecto a las cuestiones nacionales y ayudan a reducir la intolerancia cultural. El artículo presenta un análisis de los conceptos de los dirigentes y de los miembros ordinarios de los sindicatos nacionales y culturales que residen en la región de Nizhni Novgorod en Rusia con respecto a los enfoques y medios que deben utilizarse para la preservación de la identidad y la política étnica movilización.

Palabras clave: movilización etno-política; Identidad; Migrantes; Sindicatos nacionales y culturales.

1. Introdução

During the period of globalization and regionalization trends evolvement, non-state ethnic groups activity is getting more and more important and they produce an ever increasing impact on orientation of regional political processes (Gornev et al., 2017). Diasporas, national and cultural unions and other types of ethnic groups possess and actively use resources of ethno-

political mobilization, namely: cultural and educational projects, teaching of national language, history and culture, institutionalization of communities, promotion of compatriots to higher educational institutions, scientific and research structures, authorities, mass media. Ethnic business capital and lobby pressure groups exert a significant influence on these processes.

Scholars working at crossroads of ethnology, political science and sociology often distinguish classical and modern diasporas, and attempt to classify diasporas and ethnic groups.

A British sociologist, the university professor Warwick R. Cohen considers necessary to classify diasporas into four types: Victim Diasporas (Jewish, African, Armenian, Palestinian), Labour Diasporas (Indian), Trading Diasporas (Chinese) and Imperial Diasporas (British, French, Spanish, Portuguese) (Cohen and Van Hear, 2008).

At diasporas classification, an authoritative ethnologist, Professor of the University of Wisconsin (USA) J. Armstrong takes into account their interaction with a multi-ethnic state in which the diasporas assert themselves. In this regard Professor Armstrong specifies two types of diasporas: "mobilized" and "proletarian". "Mobilized" diasporas have a long and complicated history, they have been developing for centuries. Such diasporas are capable of social adaptation and therefore they are reliably integrated in the receiving society. At the same time, "proletarian" diasporas can be referred to a category of new, recently structured ethnic groups. J. Armstrong calls them "failed products of modern policy" (Armstrong, 1976).

Pay attention to diasporas understanding by a Russian academician V.A. Tishkov (2001). This scholar takes notice of the concepts "historical homeland" and "homeland". He regards diasporas as groups of people who (or their ancestors) "were dispersed from their particular "initial center" to another or other peripheral or overseas regions". According to Academician Tishkov, a characteristic feature of a diaspora is "presence and maintenance of the collective memory, idea or myth about the "primary homeland" ("motherland" etc.) which include geographical location, historical version, cultural achievements and cultural figures". Please note another sign of diaspora consciousness and behavior distinguished by V.A. Tishkov: "romantic (nostalgic) belief in the land of forefathers as an intrinsic, real (ideal) home and place where the diaspora's representatives or their descendants will eventually return" (Tishkov, 2001).

2. Methodology

There is a significant layer of works dedicated to issues of ethnic mobilization (Olzak, 2006). Special attention of researchers is paid to matters of relationships of ethnic diasporas and dynamics of conflicts (Baser, 2015; McLoughlin et al., 2014). Some researchers associate understanding of diasporas with processes of globalization and changing nature of a sovereignty (Baluev, 2015). Issues of correlations of diasporas and problems of migration are also reflected in modern Russian studies (Krivoy and Rikhtik, 2015). Interesting studies of social media use for ethnic mobilization have recently appeared (Baluev and Kaminchenko, 2015). The way the ethnicity influences non-political aspects of social activity and, as the result, the political socialization, is another important aspect of ethno-political mobilization (Efimova et al., 2016).

All the ideas listed above are nothing else but subjects (issues) of ethno-political mobilization of national and cultural unions of Russia, and the Nizhny Novgorod region is a typical example of ethno-political mobilization ways and means development.

In the political aspect, national and cultural unions act as an element of the civil society and play a key role in the interaction between the government and the general public on national issues and in the interethnic dialog under the auspices of governmental and administrative agencies, which requires participants with a certain status and internal structure (Smith and Cordell, 2013; Liber, 2014; Smith, 2016). This is especially relevant on the local level, where it is necessary to relieve tensions between members of different ethnic groups and take measures to prevent interethnic conflicts (Smith, 2014; Molnar, 2015; Prina 2016).

This article is aimed to study issues and ways of ethno-political mobilization which are actively

considered the Nizhny Novgorod region diasporas structured into national and cultural unions registered by the regional authorities. But first let us make preliminary and necessary remarks to the issue analysis.

First, all the considered organizations listed below are loyal to the Russian government and interested in being represented in consultative and advisory authorities. NCA are represented at various governor and mayor public councils, at the Administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, at the Administration of the Federal Migration Service (since 2016 makes part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia) and others.

Second, NCA and national and cultural unions refrain from public discussions of conflicts where people of their countries of origin are involved. For example, the Armenians and the Azerbaijanians avoid public debates about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Tajiks, the Kyrgyzs and the Uzbeks – evade territorial discussions between their countries. It does not imply that in everyday life such discussions are not allowed or absent.

Third, all the organizations are interested in overcoming xenophobia and aggressive nationalism. Any manifestations of ethnic or religious intolerance complicate residence of labour migrants and compatriots «settled» in the region. Of course, the regional authorities welcome and encourage feelings of tolerance.

Fourth, from our point of view, regional and municipal authorities express unreasonably high expectations in relation to control of behavior of representatives of specific peoples. An offence committed by a labour migrant should be tracked by the respective community. But, according to NCA and national and cultural unions leaders, such control of actions is absolutely impossible. Migrants arrive in Nizhny Novgorod and the region without notification of "their" community thereof.

Fifth, as an example we took the unions directly related to the considerable mass of labour migrants from the country of origin to the Nizhny Novgorod region, closely connected with the country of origin and influence the dynamics of ethnic and religious landscape of the region. We did not consider national-cultural autonomies of indigenous peoples (Tatars, Mordovians, Mari, Ukrainians) which do not show any "external" diversity in their cultural and public activity. Neither we analyzed the unions which are connected with the country of origin and labour migration, but are still weakly expressed in cultural and public reflection. Those include unions of the Kyrgyzs and Uzbeks. It is worth noticing that at the organizational level Georgians, Turkomans, Kazakh, Belarusians are still rather poorly represented in the region.

3. Results

Organization 1: Regional National and Cultural Autonomy of Azerbaijanians of the Nizhny Novgorod Region (RNCAANO)

1.1. Expectations of leaders. The president of the autonomy Zaur Shikarovich Idrisov, local businessman. The vice-president of the autonomy is Fatima Magomedovna Akhmedova. The leaders are striving to preserve the Azerbaijanian identity, the Azerbaijanian language, to promote reinforcement of national self-awareness. For them it is extremely important to combine two things: to be loyal citizens of the Russian Federation and to maintain their own ethnic origin. The leaders do not insist on protection of active nationalism, but try to protect possibilities of preservation of the Azerbaijanian culture elements. In our view, they are doing that successfully. Unlike other NCA of Muslim peoples, RNKAANO went beyond the traditional celebration of national holidays, for example, Novruz. They showed interest to cooperation with the leading higher education institution - the Lobachevsky Nizhny Novgorod State University.

In 2012 Z.Sh. Idrisov and F.M. Akhmedova supported the initiative of the University to start an optional course for studying the Azerbaijanian language at the University's Department of International Relations. Now this initiative "discontinued" because of absence of a good teacher

possessing methodology, experience and educational materials. In the recent years the autonomy leaders have been interested and have promoted joining the University of Nizhny Novgorod by the Azerbaijanian entrants and have contributed to implementation of the state goal of socialization of young migrants and harmonious development of inter-ethnic relations. RNKAANO leaders show genuine interest to organization of scientific and research events jointly with the Nizhny Novgorod University. In 2013 and 2014 the autonomy provided the real assistance in arrangement of the international scientific conference "Foreign studies: theory and practice issues", as well as in the receipt of an Azerbaijanian scholar, Professor, deputy of the AR Parliament Musa Gasymlı (Foreign studies: theory and practice issues, 2013). In 2013 RNKAANO provided help in arrangement of a series of lectures of a Turkish expert in international relations and safety Orkhan Dede (Istanbul) for the University students (News and events, 2013). Thanks to these and other events organized by Z. Idrisov, the University starts having background for development of such a promising scientific direction as Azerbaijan studies. Let's add here joint efforts of RNKAANO and IMOMI (Institute of International Relations and World history) of the Nizhny Novgorod University in the area of increasing of the Azerbaijan books fund for the Department of Foreign Studies and Local History. The AR embassy in Moscow is aware about this activity and renders support in the form of books on the country study.

1.2. Expectations of ordinary members of the autonomy. Experience of working as the Chairman of the Public Advisory Council of the Administration of the Federal Migration Service for the Nizhny Novgorod region shows that ordinary members in general demonstrate poor interest to "high matters" of cooperation with the higher school. The most important thing for them is to get established in the Nizhny Novgorod region: to get a job, and rather prestigious or well-paid one. A significant part of Azerbaijanians "settled" in the region are people who fled from economic hardships in the period of the Karabakh war in 1991-1994. Their children are now studying in Nizhny Novgorod higher education institutions and schools. The children undergo serious processes of assimilation. Suffice to say that the first experience of teaching of the Azerbaijanian language in the Nizhny Novgorod university showed the following: as a general rule, the majority of students of Azerbaijanian origin know their native language at the spoken, but not literary level accepted in the Azerbaijanian Republic.

Thus, we can assume that there is a certain gap in expectations and priorities between the adult generation, that was born and grown up in Azerbaijan, and their children, a great part of which were born already in Russia (in Nizhny Novgorod and in the Nizhny Novgorod region) (table 1).

Table 1

The main subjects of ethno-political mobilization of the regional Azerbaijanian autonomy

Subject	Older generation	Younger generation (students, schoolchildren)
Attitude to Russia and Azerbaijan	AR is the beloved Homeland that needs help, but Russia is a common land for many nationalities	Azerbaijan is the distant Motherland which they should help where possible.
Getting a permanent job, high salary and education	Extremely important, it is vital for existence.	Important, but only after getting higher education in prestigious professions
Attitude to the native language	It is desirable to know the Azerbaijanian language but to the	Culture and language are very important, but knowledge of the

extent necessary for communication with relatives in Azerbaijan. It is important to remember and know own national culture

Russian language, history and culture provides means of social mobility.

Hence, the top-priority efforts of RNKAANO leaders are aimed to increase of status of the community members in various areas of development of Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod region: economy, commerce, but also, which is vital, in education, science, culture and language preservation. Some time ago they attempted to publish a newspaper "Khayat" for the Azerbaijani community of the region. Now the newspaper is not being released. But the ordinary members of the autonomy, including its well-to-do representatives, are principally interested in achievement of social and economic well-being, provision of the younger generation with the appropriate and qualitative education.

It is also worth mentioning a category of Azerbaijanians which includes migrants. As a rule, they are seasonal workers and they probably have the only interest in the autonomy – the autonomy, where possible, should guarantee their rights and opportunities of working in the region.

Additionally, the regional autonomy, like, however, the municipal one, is not characterized by excessive religiosity. As a general rule, they are quite secular people with secular concepts, although RNKAANO representatives participate in main Muslim holidays, Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr held by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Nizhny Novgorod region. Such reasonable attitude towards religion contributes to very favourable attitude of the municipal and regional authorities towards the Azerbaijani autonomy.

Organization 2. The Nizhny Novgorod Regional Public Organization of Ethnic Tadjiks "Umed" ("Hope").

2.1. Expectations of leaders. Leader - Mutribsho Yusufshoyevich Mirzoev. This organization strives to give all-round support to labour migrants from Tadjikistan. The leader seems to be "everything for everyone": his mobile phone is known to all the members of the community. The organization structure is such that the city and the regions have representatives in areas of compact residence of migrants from Tadjikistan to provide the compatriots with legal, financial and any other support.

At the same time, M.Y. Mirzoev is open for a dialogue with higher schools, in particular, with the Nizhny Novgorod University. Umed organizes and holds in various institutions various kinds of "round tables" dedicated to national holidays of the Republic of Tadjikistan, like, for instance, the Day of Independence of Tadjikistan, or Days of Tadjik Culture in Russia (Russia and Tadjikistan. Dialogue of cultures, 2011). M. Mirzoev is promoting a campaign to encourage the talented Tadjiks who graduate schools to enter the Nizhny Novgorod University. The leader expects to provide material and legal support to labour migrants and to those who arrived for permanent living in the Nizhny Novgorod region. M. Mirzoev is open for cooperation with the higher school, interested in increasing of the University library, in supply of the library with literature about Tadjikistan and the Pamir subregion. However, the community itself, having, unlike RNKAANO, limited financial resources, is not ready for large projects like, for example: studying of the Tadjik language, culture and internal and foreign policy of the Republic of Tadjikistan. Besides, the regional factor has a certain influence. The influence lies in the fact that the Tadjiks in Nizhny Novgorod and in the region strive to keep in touch and give help firstly to descendants from "their" districts of Tadjikistan: from Kulyab, Pamir (the community leader M. Mirzoev is originally from Pamir), Leninabad etc.

2.2. Expectations of ordinary members of Umed. They are extremely interested in enforcement of their status of permanent residents of the region, and for that purpose they

show sustainable interest to permanent job and earnings. Some members of the organization who succeeded in faster, as compared to the others, integration, tend to get their children educated in Nizhny Novgorod higher schools. At the same, in our opinion, psychological impact is produced to the Tadjik diaspora by the court processes and actions of law enforcement agencies in the Nizhny Novgorod region aimed to suppression of activity of the terrorist organization "Khizbut-Takhrir" prohibited in the Russian Federation. Naturally, law-enforcement activity itself should only be supported by the Russian citizen. But the fact that representatives of Tadjik ethnos happen to get to the dock brings spirit of disturbance to the population of the community.

In the past 2-3 years centrifugal tendencies have acted across Umed. The former Head of the Department of Public Relations, Culture and Science of the Umed organization Eradzh Boev announced establishment of the Nizhny Novgorod regional public organization "Congress of Iranian-Speaking Nationalities" and practically left Umed. This Congress, however, is rather an intellectual union because its leader is a young talented scholar preparing for defense of his PhD thesis. At the same time E. Boev is actively expanding contacts with other public organizations outside Nizhny Novgorod.

About a year ago in Nizhny Novgorod emerged the National and Cultural Tadjik Autonomy of Nizhny Novgorod which at the moment exhibits traditional activity in issues of preservation of ethnic identity at the level of arrangement of ceremonial meetings of compatriots on great national holidays. In addition, in the Nizhny Novgorod Region acts the public organization "Tadjik Cultural Centre "Dusti-Druzhba" (the chairman is Ayubzhon Nuridinov). This organization also provides support to labour migrants, has positive attitude to the regional authorities and expresses convinced orientation towards integration of compatriots in the Russian society.

Previously successful web-site "Umed" is now blocked as there are no specialists ready to support it. These facts testify to sustainable centrifugal processes, they prove that the Tadjik community is divided due to diverse interests of its ordinary members. Either the leader or the ordinary members of Umed do not demonstrate intensive religious activity, although they participate in festive namazs during Eid al-Adha and Eid al-Fitr. Attitude towards identity preservation at the public level is weakly expressed (table 2).

Table 2. Main subjects of ethno-political mobilization Umed

Subject	Leaders of organizations of RT descendants	Ordinary members
Attitude to Russia and Tadjikistan	Loyalty to Russian laws, protection of compatriots' rights. Tadjikistan remains a far magnet for future relocation. Identity preservation is an important but challenging task.	Russia is a territory perceived as a source of earnings and economic survival. Tadjikistan is the real motherland where all the Tadjiks must return. There is no need to learn Russian, keeping together with compatriots is enough.
Getting a permanent job, high salary and education	Vital as a guarantee of survival and existence. Education is necessary but ordinary members are not willing to integrate in the Russian society	Vital as a guarantee of survival and existence. Getting a qualitative education is an inaccessible and at the moment unnecessary goal.
Attitude to the native language	Very important task, but for	Knowledge sufficient for

gradual integration in the Russian society people also have to learn Russian and send children to Russian schools.

communication with compatriots. Willingness to know literary Tadjik language, and preserve native language in dialects is weakly expressed. For labour activity in the Russian Federation the Russian language is needed to minimum extent.

Organization 3. The Regional Public Organization the "Nizhny Novgorod Armenian Community"

3.1. Expectations of leaders.

The leaders put forward the following tasks:

- joining efforts of Armenians living in Russia for comprehensive strengthening and development of friendship between Russia and Armenia;
- propaganda of best achievements of both nations;
- preservation of national traditions, culture, language, religion, family principles in conditions of living within the diaspora;
- education of Armenian youth in the spirit of moral values of the Armenian people;
- development of spiritual, cultural and business potential of the Armenian community;
- holding of celebrations and other events related to historic dates of the Armenian people;
- creation of national education centres: Sunday school, lectures on history and culture, a library;
- establishment of printed media (newspaper, magazine);
- improvement of interaction with other ethnic groups, native population by means of cultural events and a dialogue for promotion of friendship and understanding;
- counteraction to ethnic and religious conflicts by way of close cooperation with all public organizations for the purposes of maintenance of peace and friendship;
- interaction with power structures for coordination of actions and solution of both national and state problems, cooperation in development of proposals for improvement of interethnic environment in the Nizhny Novgorod region;
- keeping in touch with Armenian communities around Russia and with the historical homeland;
- provision of charity support;
- construction of an Armenian temple.

The community's activity is governed by the Board consisting of 11 persons. The Chairman of the Council is a Nizhny Novgorod businessman Agasi Alekryan.

The Armenian community turned out to be probably the most successful of all the NCAs of the region. Notwithstanding that it is not defined as "national and cultural autonomy" in the charter title, the community contributed significantly to preservation of the Armenian identity. The list of tasks presented above is being performed.

The Nizhny Novgorod Armenians have collaborated with the University since 2000. The Armenian language has been offered for learning since 2003, since 2004 the almanac "NAIRI" on Armenia and Armenian diaspora has been published. The temple of the Armenian Apostolic Church of "Surb Amenaprkich" (Savior) is built and regular services are conducted there.

The Lobachevsky Nizhny Novgorod State University has the centre of the Armenia studies. The

centre holds regular science-education and learning events, including international academic conferences involving leading experts in Armenia studies from Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Armenia. 4 doctoral theses have been defended in Armenia studies, not to mention graduation bachelor and master papers.

Art groups recognized around Russia are developing, the Sunday school is working. The public magazine "Kamurdzh" is being published. Youth organizations exist both in the community and in the Armenian temple. The community is noticeable in the Internet environment: it has own web-page "Nizhny Novgorod Armenians" and "Armenians today" and the web-site of a known Nizhny Novgorod blogger, member of the Union of Writers of Armenia Victor Konoplyov "Our Environment". Probably all the elements mentioned above form the phenomenon known as the "organized Armenian community".

3.2. Expectations of ordinary members of the organization.

The Armenians have traditionally lived in the territory of the Nizhny Novgorod region, but today the great part of the community constitute emigrants from Armenia and/or former Soviet Azerbaijan, as well as from other former Soviet republics. The Nizhny Novgorod Armenian community is apparently the organization where expectations of the management and ordinary members almost coincide. The community has become strong enough to address serious issues of the Armenian identity preservation. The assimilation problem exists, but efforts of the community and the church produce results. Young people willingly participate in the events, learn the Armenian language (table 3).

Table 3
Main subjects of ethno-political mobilization of the Armenian community

Subject	Leaders of organizations of RT descendants	Ordinary members
Attitude to Russia and Armenia	Russia is the second Motherland. Armenia is sacred. Helping Russia means helping Armenia because Russia and the Russian people are historic allies of the Armenians.	The same. But among the labour migrants (seasonal workers) from Armenia there is an opinion that Russia is a source of earnings which must be brought to Armenia to support the family.
Getting a permanent job, high salary and education	This is an important task which allows to integrate deeply in the Russian society and get a prominent social status	The same
Attitude towards native language and identity preservation	Studying and knowing the language are among the necessary components of Armenian identity preservation Other components are: strong family, unity around the Armenian church, observance of national holidays, collective memory of Genocide of 1915 . Armenia studies at the University (NNGU) is a strong element of identity preservation.	The older generation in general supports these expectations. Youth, however, is prone to assimilation processes. So, the community makes efforts to make schoolchildren and students study Armenian at the Sunday school and at the optional University course.

To sum up, we should notice an interesting diversity of national cultural unions work as well as of ethno-political mobilization expectations which are expressed by the leaders and ordinary members of communities and diasporas. In cooperation with the regional authorities and scholars the national and cultural organizations add to the Nizhny Novgorod society a unique tint and create backgrounds for development of a constructive dialogue for the benefit of stability of the Russian society and strengthening of mutual respect of peoples. Thus, culture of dialogue in Nizhny Novgorod and the Nizhny Novgorod Region has its own features and particular dimensions.

4. Conclusions

At the current trends of migration policy of the federal centre NCOs will have to maintain cooperation with the authority and society in Russia in the following spheres important for ethno-political mobilization:

- Learning of the Russian language and history. In this process the following will be inevitable: assimilation events, at the same time the number of representatives of non-title ethnoses of the 2nd and 3rd generations in spheres of management and education, which as of today are traditionally Russian, will increase.
- Promotion of trade and economic relations and cultural and educational relations of countries of origin with the Russian Federation. Role of lobbying efforts of national and cultural unions can increase.
- Rearrangement of forces within the Islamic communities which strive to represent interests of migrants from the Central Asia and Azerbaijan. At keeping clear and understandable national policy of the state authorities an ever *larger* part of the Islamic leadership will be occupying position of statist and will refuse (probably, for a certain period) to support priority of religious identity over civil identity.

Thus, national and cultural unions are a key link in the preservation of native culture for peoples that live in a foreign cultural environment. In general, all programs of national and cultural unions have similar features: preservation of culture, language, and traditions. However, in order to develop, national and cultural unions should establish connections:

- with other unions by developing joint cultural programs;
- with the national homeland by participating in various conferences, with a view to discussing the main problems and ways of solving them in the field of assimilated population and labor migration.

The main difficulty is the lack of funding, which makes it so most cultural programs remain or turn out to be unimplemented. A solution to this issue may be to organize membership fees or to look for investors.

The results of this study can be used as a theoretical source for the development of national and cultural unions in multicultural states.

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