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FUNCTIONING OF LANGUAGES IN MULTIETHNICAL REGIONS UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF GOVERNMENT CONTROLLED LANGUAGE POLICY

1. A monoethnic region can turn into a polyethnic one, both as a result of natural demographic processes, and the policy planned by the Government in advance. **In the first case** when the ethnic situation of the region undergoes changes without the interference of the owner of the region or the neighbouring country the situation connected with the language also undergoes a change quite naturally, and the language of the nation whose representatives exceed the number of the other one is given priority, though having or lacking a literary tradition may turn out to be an important factor. The situation is quite different **in the second case**. In the region of the conquered country where the demographic and language situation is purposefully governed from the metropolis according to the plan worked out beforehand. At such a time the monoethnic region becomes a polyethnic and multilingual one in a very short time. The functioning of languages is limited artificially and the language of the conqueror gains a dominating position and turns into a tool of assimilation. The ethnic variety of the population in the region gradually shows the tendency to becoming monoethnic "in favour" of the conquering nation.

2. The correctness of the latter statement is clearly seen on the example of Abkhazia, historically an indivisible part of Georgia, where the assimilatory policy begun in 1864 and continued till the nineties of the 20th century, carried out first by the Tsarist Empire of Russia, and then by the Russian-chauvinistic empire of the Soviet Union turning this biethnic region into a polyethnic-multilingual one. Owing to this, the functioning of the Georgian, Colchi (Megrelian-laz) and Abkhazian languages was limited as much as possible, and the Russian language obtained the domineering position. Both the representatives of the indigenous population, and a considerable part of other non-Russian nations who had settled down in Abkhazia in later periods, lost their native languages and were assimilated with Russians. The empires artificially set off the Georgian and Abkhazian populations against one another, and formed aggressive Abkhazian separatism.

By the time Russia conquered Abkhazia (1864), only Abkhazians and Georgians lived on the territory of the present day Abkhazia. They used three languages: Abkhazian, Colchi and Georgian. The Abkhazian and Colchi languages were used only in a monoethnic situation as the languages of every day communication (For this function the Abkhazians used only Abkhazian, and the Georgians of that region used the Colchi language). One part of men (mainly the shepherds who grazed their cattle side by side in mountain pastures) knew both languages (Abkhazian and Colchi). As for the Georgian language, it performed the function of the state language for the population of both nationalities. This is corroborated by the following fact: the Abkhazian rulers conducted official-diplomatic correspondence with the Russian State authorities only in the Georgian language.

It must be noted separately what the attitude of the Georgians (Megrels) living in Abkhazia, was towards the Colchi language, on the one hand, and the Georgian language, on the other. The Colchi language for them, as we have already mentioned, was the language of everyday communication, and presented a tribal language (patois), as to the Georgian language, it was the national language of the Georgians living there. From the point of view of sociolinguistics, the Colchi language was the same kind of a dialect of the Georgian language as the Kartlian, Kakhetian, Imeretian, Khevsurian and other dialects.

Before conquering Abkhazia the Russian Empire had begun to get ready for the active realization of the russificatory policy. The main objective of the language policy planned by it was to segregate the Abkhazians from the Georgian cultural and