Trans-Ethnic Organizational Settings: Roads to Explanation

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The article analyses trans-ethnic organizational settings (TOS) – multi-ethnic non-governmental organizations, autonomous parts of the public sector or recurrent organized practices designed for the promotion of inter-ethnic accord and communication between ethnicities and public authorities. Most of these low-profile power-sharing arrangements have been established in the post-Soviet countries, and they range from a statehood resting on the very idea of multi-ethnic coalition (breakaway Transnistria) to official or semi-official 'assemblies of peoples' (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia) and coordinative bodies for minority NGOs (Belarus and some provinces of Ukraine). The constant features of all these settings are the patronizing involvement of the state and the principle of inter-ethnic cooperation which justifies and guides all the related activities. The author investigates why TOS as a rule exhibit durability and a high level of popular support combined with a lack of explicit state compulsion and resistance from minority rank-and-file despite the fact that TOS provide virtually no assets and opportunities to ethnic groups involved. Several mutually compatible explanations rest on discarding the view of ethnic groups as internally cohesive social entities and independent actors, and can be looped into two categories, namely discursive accommodation and institutional cooptation of ethnic activism.

Keywords: multi-ethnicity, activism, hegemony, securitization, banalization, neo-patrimonialism, patronage

Viability and internal cohesion of multi-ethnic societies are issues of global importance from both a theoretic and a practical standpoint. Most scholars prefer to place the primary focus on the relations between collective or corporate entities (often labeled as 'communities') acting

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and speaking on behalf of certain ethnicities.[1] 'Participation in public life' is, as a rule, confined to the 'voice' that ethnicities may be endowed with in public domain, and constitutes the core of minority studies and minority politics.

Most of the ideas fitting in the dominant paradigm of 'inter-group' or 'majority-minority' relations and seeking practical solutions are tagged as 'power-sharing' which generally means that '…in multiethnic societies divided into different linguistic, religious, or national communities, power-sharing institutions and procedures turn political opponents into cooperative partners, by providing communal leaders with a guaranteed stake in the democratic process' (Norris, 2008: 3).

Over the time, there is an incremental reconsideration of the boundaries and the content of this thematic area. 'Power-sharing is often promoted by the international community and involves a broad assortment of practices' (Traniello, 2008: 31). First, it is being gradually acknowledged that cooperation across ethnic dividing lines is important beyond the scope of narrowly understood government and politics (Norris, 2008: 5). Second, a growing number of scholars in fact follow the appeal of Carmen Kettley and acknowledge that existing practices are even more important and deserve more attention than comprehensive but rarely fully functional normative models (2002). From this perspective, it makes little sense to draw a clear dividing line between 'self-rule' and 'shared rule' or in assessing advantages of 'segmental autonomy' over 'coalition-based' institutions (Van Parijs, 2000) since real practices can combine features of the both.

Third, checks and balances on ethnic grounds are important in non-democratic environments, along with polities based on democratic participation. The variety of organizational frameworks or practices based on the interaction of ethnicity-based collective agents are variously termed in academia and politics as 'participation', 'integration', 'intercultural dialogue',[2] 'reconciliation' and so forth, and the concrete approaches reflect the context and emphasize different aspects of the issue.

Despite contextual and terminological peculiarities, the sustainability and effectiveness of such inter-ethnic settings pose a significant research and practical interest. From the former standpoint, it is important to understand the motives of ethnic activists seeking alliances beyond their own constituencies and the conditions for such interactions; from the latter, it is worthwhile to know what kinds of institutional designs and what circumstances can bring

about the desired outcomes, such as a clear choice in favour of political stability and social cohesion.

There are other, more specific circumstances that may also stimulate scholarly and practical interest towards the cooperation of individuals and organizations positioning themselves as agents of ethnic groups. On the one hand, there is the widely spread suspicion towards segregated institutions which sustain, reinforce and institutionalize ethnic cleavages (Barry, 2001; Sniderman and Hagendoorn, 2007); from this point, inter-ethnic coalitions may represent a promising solution even in an already internally divided society. On the other, durable coalitions and their organizational underpinnings may provide some clear content for the still nebulous concepts of 'intercultural dialogue' or 'interculturalism' (Meer and Modood, 2012).

In this respect, analytical attention shall be primarily focused on the organizations and recurrent practices of inter-ethnic cooperation that demonstrate long-lasting stability and legitimacy. Such phenomena exist, and interestingly, there is an array of formal organizations and/or recurrent organized activities that have manifested themselves over the last two decades. Most of them, which I will hereafter call 'trans-ethnic organizational settings' (TOS; hereafter taken in plural), are concentrated in post-Soviet countries. They demonstrate three invariable features:

(1) patronizing involvement of the state;

(2) the principle of inter-ethnic cooperation which justifies and guides all the related activities;

(3) involvement of ethnic spokespersons or ethnicity-based organizations as the major actors.

It should be stressed that they not be confused with effectively multi-ethnic organizations, which disregard or transcend ethnic divisions in their activities and promote non-ethnic solidarity.

1. TOS – a variety of manifestations

TOS range from a statehood resting on the very idea of multi-ethnic coalition to recurrent collaborative activities of NGOs. In detail, the spectrum includes:
- statehood based on the idea of inter-ethnic coalition (unrecognized Transnistria);

- consultative and representative multi-ethnic assemblies with mandatory institutional membership as a part of state apparatus (Kazakhstan, Belarus);
- semi-official consultative and representative multi-ethnic assemblies - NGOs orchestrated and controlled by governments (Russia, Kyrgyzstan);
- multi-ethnic consultative bodies (Russia, Moldova, Ukraine as well as Croatia, Serbia, Romania);
- voluntary organizational coalitions of ethnic NGOs encouraged by official authorities (Ukraine, Georgia);
- recurrent joint activities of multiple ethnic NGOs or individuals acting on behalf of groups (festivals, exhibitions, conferences, mass-media).

1.1 Transnistria

Transnistria is a strip of land basically on the left (eastern) bank of the river Dniester/Nistru. From 1940 it was a part of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, a constituent unit of the Soviet Union. Nowadays in terms of international law it is a part of Republic of Moldova; in fact it is an unrecognized state called Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (TMR) and a territory beyond control of the central government. TMR was established as a result of a domestic conflict which emerged in 1989 due to the 'nationalizing policies' of the Moldovan government (Roper, 2001: 106-107; Kolstø and Malgin, 1998; Troebst, 2003: 438–440). The predominantly Russian-speaking elites and the population of that part of Moldova protested against the government's plan to make Moldovan/Romanian the only state language of the republic. In September 1990, the protests escalated, resulting in the establishment of the Transnistrian Republic as independent from Moldova but still a part of the USSR; after the Soviet Union's breakdown and armed clashes with Moldovan police and armed forces, TMR proved its viability as a *de facto* independent albeit internationally unrecognized state. International mediation and lengthy negotiations with Moldovan central government on Transnistrian reintegration have brought about no significant outcome (Burian, 2012: 29–39; Lisenco, 2012: 43–47; Popescu, 2013).

The approximately 500,000-strong population of TMR[3] is multi-ethnic, and no ethnicity prevails numerically. Each of the three major ethnic groups, namely Moldovans, Ukrainians and Russians, constitutes around 30 per cent of the population; the rest belongs to smaller groups such as Bulgarians, Tatars, the Gagauz, Roma, Jews and so forth. Despite the ethnic

eponym in the name of the republic,[4] TMR from its very outset represented itself as an entity established on the basis of multi-ethnic citizenry and 'internationalism' contrary to the ethno-national fundamentals of Moldova (Blakkisrud and Kolstø; Cojocaru, 2006; Troebst, 2003). Accordingly, the Transnistrian problem cannot be adequately described in terms of ethnic conflict because the dividing lines in Moldova do not go along ethnic or linguistic boundaries (Troebst, 2004; King, 1999: 147, 179; Kolstø, 2006: 730).

The 1996 Constitution of TMR (Article 8) refers to 'relations between national [ethnic] communities' that are to be regulated by the state on the basis of their 'equality' and 'respect towards their rights and interests'.[5] The Constitution and the Law on Languages establish Russian, Moldovan and Ukrainian as three equal official languages. Multi-ethnicity of Transnistria is emphasized in the state symbols as well as official and other public ceremonies such as holiday celebrations, in school and university curricula and textbooks, and in museum expositions and publicly sponsored cultural performances (Biaspamiatnykh et al., 2014: 178-80). Indirectly the multi-ethnicity is reinforced through official multilingualism, particularly broadcasting in Moldovan and Ukrainian along with Russian, compulsory teaching of the official languages in schools, and the right to communicate with the official authorities in each of the official languages (Biaspamiatnykh et al., 2014: 179). However, no one either in or outside TMR denies that Russian dominates the entire public sphere and the other two official languages as well as minority languages are gradually being extinguished (Hammarberg, 2013: 35).

Although the state symbolically recognized the constitutive role of the three major 'communities', power-sharing manifests itself symbolically. Persons belonging to the three major groups are represented in the legislature and the executive; they may speak out as members of their respective 'communities' only on random occasions, particularly when they act as members of the major ethnic NGOs (Biaspamiatnykh et al., 2014: 180). Ethnicity-based parties are not allowed; the three communities are represented by country-wide associations of Moldovans, Ukrainians and Russians (Protsyk, 2012: 179). The three associations are not vested with any official functions, but they are in part funded from the state budget and receive other assets from the government. This means they are totally loyal to the authorities and as a rule perform as legitimate spokespersons of their 'nationalities'; their members are among the parliamentarians, top officials and leading businesspeople of TMR (Biaspamiatnykh et al., 2014: 180; Protsyk, 2009).

1.2. Government-led coordinative bodies

The largest and most significant cluster of TOS is the so-called 'assemblies of peoples'. Organizations bearing the same name of 'assembly' sometimes function in different ways. The Assembly of People of Kazakhstan (hereinafter - APK; before 2007 - the Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan) is a special body created by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, who is *ex officio* the APK chair (Baybasheva, 2008: 33; Dave, 2004: 83-100; Shaimerdenova, 1997: 16). The status of the Assembly is protected by the Kazakh Constitution (Article 44) and it operates under a special law.[6] The Assembly is composed of 350 members who are representatives of ethnic and civil society associations, various state officials and public figures acting in their personal capacity.[7] Each province of Kazakhstan also has its Small Assembly of People which also operates under the heads of regional administrations. Candidates to the main APK are nominated by those provincial Small Assemblies upon recommendations of ethnicity-based NGOs and other civil society organizations, and are then appointed by the President of Kazakhstan. Officially, the major objectives of APK are to elaborate proposals for public policies that take into account the interests of all ethnic groups, and also to facilitate and promote social dialogue to preserve the unity of the people of Kazakhstan. The agenda and working plans for APK are officially defined by its chair.

The Belarusian Consultative Inter-Ethnic Council (CIEC) functions under the Plenipotentiary on Religious and Nationalities Affairs, who is a member of the Belarusian government appointed by the President.[8] Being an official body composed of appointees, CIEC resembles the APK, but unlike the Kazakhstani Assembly, CIEC includes only heads of national minority associations. It is stipulated that one ethnic group has only one representative council and the Plenipotentiary's office makes the appointment only when all NGOs speaking on behalf of a certain group have agreed on their common nominee. In addition, organizations represented in CIEC commit themselves to regard all decisions of the Council as binding. In addition to making recommendations to the government of Belarus on ethnic issues, CIEC plans and coordinates joint activities of the national-cultural societies and makes decisions on the distribution of public grants and subsidies for ethno-cultural projects of the non-governmental sector.

1.3. Pro-official interethnic coalitions

The Assembly of Peoples of Russia (hereinafter – APR) is a nation-wide non-governmental organization established in 1998.[9] The very idea of the Assembly as a kind of inter-ethnic parliament and even an annex to the supreme legislative body was discussed since the early 1990s (Drobizheva, 2003: 29; Guboglo, 1999: 117-118), and was even mentioned in the 1996 Concept of State Nationalities Policy of the Russian Federation. Despite its pretentious name, APR is simply a voluntary association with no public powers or functions, although it works in close cooperation with the government. APR also receives public support, including funding, and is often referred to by high-ranked public officials as an important tool in the management of ethnic relations in Russia.

There are also dozens of 'peoples' assemblies' in a number of Russian regions. Many of them appeared before the federal APR (for instance, in Yakutia in 1994, and in the Saratov province - in 1997)[10], and for the most part the creation of those organizations was initiated by the regional governments.[11] At present, all regional 'assemblies' are considered regional branches of APR, but not all regional offices of APR are named 'assemblies'. According to the APR website, the organization includes over 70 regional offices; all regional assemblies are also non-governmental organizations, which includes representatives of ethnic ('national-cultural' in Russian terminology) societies.[12] Nominally all the 'assemblies' claim to represent ethnic groups, but until recently the lengthy debates about the ways to achieve 'genuine' and 'legitimate' representation have generated no satisfactory output. As a rule, governing bodies of the assemblies are formed at their congresses, and delegates of the latter are selected under mixed and complicated principles.

The Assembly of People of Kyrgyzstan has been established in 1994 under the country's President's auspices as a non-governmental organization; to date it is composed of 28 nation-wide minority associations under the principle 'one minority – one member', and four multi-ethnic social organizations. The organization defines its major goals as consolidation of Kyrgyzstan's people through inter-ethnic dialogue, facilitation of cultural activities, and co-ordination of minority communities' public initiatives. Although the Assembly is a non-governmental association, several ministers (ministers of culture, education, youth affairs; Director of the Public Management Academy under the President; Director of the State Cadre Service and Chair of the Language Board) are considered members of its Council *ex officio*.[13]

1.4. Consultative bodies

Another group is constituted by consultative bodies on ethnic issues. Moldova has a national Coordinative Council of National Minorities – a consultative body on minority issues composed of around 100 ethnic NGOs under the governmental Bureau for Inter-ethnic Relations.[14] The Council of National Minorities of Georgia functions under the auspices of the Public Defender (Ombudsman).[15] Several territories of Ukraine (such as the Odessa or Chernivtsy provinces) and constituent regions of the Russian Federation have established minority consultative councils under their governments or executive bodies in charge of ethno-cultural affairs. They all are composed of appointed representatives of ethnic NGOs plus governmental officials dealing with ethnic issues. As a rule, these bodies are expected to provide consultancy for the executive, but as a rule they are also expected to arrange for joint events of NGOs (such as conferences, festivals and exhibitions mostly held under the banner of 'inter-ethnic dialogue') and to coordinate NGO activities.

To sum up, due to the ways TOS are functioning and are publicly justified as organizations, there is neither a clear dividing line between TOS composed of minority organizations and TOS comprising individuals serving as minority spokespersons, nor a clear difference between, on the one hand, consultative bodies providing for the communication between the governments and minority activists, and, on the other hand, councils authorized to coordinates minorities' activities.

1.5. Recurrent activities

Recurrent joint activities carried out on behalf of different ethnicities independent of certain consultative or coordinative bodies also take place; the most prominent is the Republican Festival of Nationalities' Cultures arranged by the government of Belarus since 1996.[16] The festivals are held in early summer in Hrodna every two years. A festival in a strict sense – that is, as a large standalone event involving thousands of participants and guests – is the tip of the iceberg; it is preceded by an almost two-year long process of competitions among folklore groups and selecting procedures. The competitions are carried out in four rounds (at local, district, provincial and national levels) and four nominations are held throughout the entire country, arranged by the Ministry of Culture and regional departments of culture. The main rationales of the whole process are the promotion of nationalities' cultures in Belarus and the harmonization of ethnic relations through positive representation of cultural pluralism. It is noteworthy that the organizers do not distinguish between 'minorities' and 'immigrants', or

even between the 'majority' and all the rest – all ethnicities and cultures are treated on equal footing. Minority cultural festivals are also organized by the government of Moldova on an annual basis, and also by some regional administrations in Ukraine and Russia.

1.6. Voluntary umbrella organizations

One could also add to the list voluntary umbrella organizations of different minority NGOs, which also exist – or used to exist – at national and provincial levels. Usually they are short-lived; among the few exceptions is the Georgian NGO coalition - the Association 'Multinational Georgia'.[17] One of the first coalitions of this type, the Association of National Cultural Societies of Latvia was established in 1988 and is still functional to date. Although these umbrella organizations are independent, their actual affiliation with or the patronizing involvement of mainstream parties or official bodies can be also traced. 'Multinational Georgia', although often critical of the government, generally seeks to work in close association with the consultative body under the Ombudsman's office. The Association of National Cultural Societies of Latvia was established before the Soviet Union's breakdown, under the auspices of the major oppositional movement at that time – the Latvian Popular Front – which was seeking a counterbalance to the anti-nationalist, pro-Moscow movement of the Russian-speaking population of the constituent republic of the USSR.[18] Currently the Association is officially under the patronage of the Latvian Cultural Ministry. Umbrella organizations of this type claim to be a vehicle for interethnic dialogue and representation of ethnic minorities before the authorities and the mainstream societies at large.

2. What is puzzling about TOS?

If one assumes that activities on behalf of an ethnic group embody group agency and are driven by rational choice of group members who seek to maximize the gains their own group can achieve, then the listed settings and practices look contradictory.

Multi-ethnic settings provide somewhat dubious access to material resources. While the APK, the Assembly of Kyrgyzstan and CIEC are publicly funded, Russian assemblies depend on private donors, and to a lesser degree on governmental subsidies, while public subsidies are selective and not guaranteed. In Russia, direct contributions of public authorities are mainly confined to the provision of free of charge or low rent premises for minority organizations (usually at the regional level there are special public institutions called 'House

of Peoples Friendship' or 'House of Nationalities'), or involve TOS as junior partners in the preparation of cultural events (such as festivals, exhibitions and conferences). Private financial sponsorship is irregular and often takes place at the initiative of or under pressure from public authorities.

In other words, the governments do not distribute any significant funding[19] through TOS on a regular basis. In cases when it does occur, the people and organizations posing as ethnic community representatives either don't make decisions on the money distribution (the APK, which is a governmental unit, spends the budgetary funds for itself) or receive insignificant and insufficient funding for the maintenance of their functioning (as with the Belarusian CIEC). One of the few success stories is the Assembly of Peoples of Tatarstan in Russia, which functions on the basis of the state institution 'House of Peoples of Tatarstan' and gets public funding through this channel. The Assembly of Peoples of Tatarstan runs language courses (Nabiullina, 2012: 287; Sagitova, 2011: 504). The establishment and maintenance of cultural and educational subsidiaries is a rare exception. The Assembly of Peoples of Russia contributed to the making of a non-governmental House of Peoples' Friendship in Moscow in the early 2000s, which comprised of a museum, a theater and a library (Dom, 2006). This endeavor was funded by private donors, and by 2009 funding had faded away.

The next issue is representation and participation in public decision making. The largest amount of power has been formally granted to the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan. APK selects nine MPs, members of the Parliament's lower chamber (out of 107), and takes part in drafting laws and executive regulations which concern minorities or ethnic relations (Musabaeva, 2011; Zhakaeva, 2009). The role of the Belarusian CIEC is particularly noteworthy. Among other things, it makes decisions about the distribution of public subsidies for the projects of national-cultural societies, and also makes recommendations on granting tax exempt status to ethnic NGOs. Although formally the final decisions on both issues are to be made by the Plenipotentiary on Religions and Nationalities Affairs, CIEC recommendations are always fulfilled. Beyond these cases, there are no examples of important legislative or political initiatives coming out of 'assemblies' or similar TOS; nor have there been any advocacy or protest campaigns. There have been no examples of TOS involvement contributing to a change in the government's stances. There is also no evidence of bargaining between the governments and TOS; rather, TOS activities as a rule on the surface look like

rituals of consent with the governmental policies (keeping in mind that Transnistria is a *de facto* statehood itself).

One can say that people and organizations participating in TOS can really gain some symbolic representation of their ethnicities in public space; other benefits are not visible while formal and informal restrictions imposed by the patronizing state authorities must limit or deny the opportunities which the constituencies may otherwise possess. Surprisingly enough, although the post-Soviet TOS impose limitations on ethnic activities, there has been virtually no dissent and public criticism of the assemblies, consultative bodies and similar settings on the side of ethnic activists, or any attempts to quit and create alternative organizational settings. Moreover, all the TOS enjoy a high degree of legitimacy within their societies and receive almost exclusively positive comments in mass-media and academic publications (Abdulatipov, 2007; Turetskii, 2009).

To sum up, the post-Soviet TOS, despite their presumably impracticability for ethnic activists in terms of maximizing gains for their respective groups, exhibit durability, a high level of popular support and the lack of resistance and criticism from minority rank-and-file. The easiest explanation would be the authoritarian environment in Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, and minority-unfriendly regimes of 'ethnic control' in other post-Soviet countries. This explanation seems legitimate but insufficient, because in the early 1990s, in a more liberal environment, minority activists in Russia and Kazakhstan demonstrated the same modes of behavior in the meaning that they swore allegiance to the official nation-building agendas and were seeking subordination to governmental patronage in the same way. In other cases, one may expect that there might be criticism on a part of minority activists toward unconditional collaboration with the governments.

Transnistria also represents a striking example. TMR is ruled by an authoritarian regime (Caspersen, 2011: 79–80; Lisenco, 2012: 43; Protsyk, 2009; Troebst, 2003); however, some scholars argue that it would be more correct to refer to it as a 'hybrid' or as a combination of authoritarian and democratic techniques of governance, with some degree of political competition and a high turnover of elite members (Protsyk, 2009; 2012). The case of so-called Latin-script Moldovan schools demonstrates that resistance, at least in a non-political sphere, is possible. The Transnistrian legislation acknowledges the Moldovan language only with Cyrillic script as an official language, while public usage of Moldovan with another script (i.e. the language as it is used in Moldova) is prohibited and punishable in terms of law

(Biaspamiatnykh, 2014: 178). In the early 1990s, some of the Moldovan-language schools and a large group of the pupils' parents opted for teaching with Latin script. Eight Latin script schools with approximately 1,200 pupils have survived to date as private and sometimes officially non-recognized educational institutions. These schools, their principals and the pupils' parents experienced various forms of intimidation and administrative pressure, but they have withstood (The Moldovan-Administered, 2012). Nevertheless, these schools remain the only example of resistance in the ethno-cultural sphere, as evidenced by the gradual extinction of all languages other than Russian – although the existing 'rules of the game' allow the Transnistrian elite members to raise linguistic issues without encroaching on the fundamentals of the TMR politics. This does not happen except for individual public grievances of non-Russian elite members.[20]

3. Ways of explanation

The phenomena can be explained under the condition of discarding a mute assumption currently dominating all currents and branches of ethnic studies. The said assumption can be briefly described as the existence of collective ethnic agency ultimately underpinning all activities represented as ethnicity-motivated. This means that there must be 'genuine' community interests predetermined by the need to preserve the group 'identity' (taken as given) and to maximize resources (including political participation) available for the group. To phrase it in a simplistic way, ethnic activism may either develop in the pursuit of 'correct' group needs or be 'false', imposed by an exogenous force or egoist individual strategies. 'Genuine' activism has advantages over the 'false' activism, and must ultimately overcome due to the change of political circumstances or competition of leaders and their stances within the group. When this prediction does not come true (as in this case, given that post-Soviet TOS are at odds with collective needs of ethnic groups in terms of resource maximization), this raises questions.

If one assumes that ethnicity means a way of social categorization and representation, the phenomena of TOS can be interpreted from two mutually compatible perspectives which can be conditionally called discursive accommodation and institutional cooptation. There are two major approaches, but the discursive one comprises three elements, and thus one may talk about four roads to explanation.

3.1. Explanation: discursive frames

Discursive accommodation means the generation of publicly acceptable narratives that provide for non-conflictual communication between the rulers and the ruled, and that marginalize alternative visions of the situation. In other words, the issue is about a regime of hegemony in terms of Gramsci (Gramsci, 1971). Representation and justification of TOS may be viewed as part and parcel of the official multi-ethnicity in the post-Soviet space. The mainstream discourses portray the given societies as combinations of ethnic culturally distinct groups placed within some certain 'fair' social order, and this assumption does not preclude 'nationalizing' policies and regimes of 'ethnic control'.

To date, public authorities in all post-Soviet countries as a rule explicitly recognize the multi-ethnicity of their populaces. This recognition remains the core of the mainstream and thus legitimate discourses on ethno-national issues in the post-Soviet countries, although the nuances and contexts of this recognition vary. Sometimes the official wording goes far beyond merely general formulations on equal rights and minority protection, and includes acknowledgement of different communities as social entities possessing distinct identities as well as the right to 'development' and to participation in public life. A few cases, such symbolic recognition, are stipulated in constitutional provisions. The 1993 Russian Constitution refers to the country's people as 'multinational' (the Preamble) and also includes such tropes as 'national development' (in the meaning of ethno-cultural development, Article 72 (f)) and 'peoples' rights' with regard to the preservation of languages (Article 68, part 3) and to small indigenous peoples (Article 69). The Belarusian constitution of 1994 (Article 14) refers to 'relations between national [ethnic] communities', which are to be regulated by the state on the basis of their 'equality' and 'respect towards their rights and interests'. The 1992 Constitution of Turkmenistan mentions 'equality between social and national [ethnic] communities' (Article 11). More often references to communal 'right' or group development are scattered over pieces of sectoral legislation, in by-laws or official conceptual outlines of ethnic policies. For example, the Concept of Nationalities Policy of Moldova adopted by the national law No. 546-XV from 19 December 2003 contains such notions as 'interests' and 'development' of 'ethnic and linguistic communities'. The Ukrainian Declaration of Nationalities' Rights of 1 November 1991 stipulates that the 'state guarantees' of 'equal political, economic, social and cultural rights' are granted to all 'peoples, ethnic groups and citizens resident on its territory' (Article 1).

Public consumption of mainstream narratives requires 'officialization' in terms of Bourdieu, i.e.:

> …the process whereby the group (or those who dominate it) teaches itself or masks from itself its own truth, binds itself by a public profession which sanctions and imposes what it utters, tacitly defining the limits of the thinkable and the unthinkable and so contributing to the maintenance of the social order from which it derives its power. (1990: 108)

Officialization brings about a certain degree of simplification and distortion of the social knowledge; some portion of ignorance turns out to be a precondition for non-conflictual existence in a complex social environment. TOS appear to be a suitable and visible model, which simultaneously secures and demonstrates the desirable inter-ethnic accord and cooperation of ethnic groups without encroaching on the existing social and political order. In this regard, assemblies, consultative bodies and joint events cannot but be widely perceived as legitimate elements of the social landscape. This officialization is the first method of legitimization.

The second method of legitimization is the securitization of nationalities' affairs or focusing on interethnic dialogue as a remedy for ethnic conflicts. Mass fears and security issues can be instrumentalized as a tool of governance, particularly by discrediting options presumably not securing a sufficient protection from the announced threat (Buck-Morss, 2000; Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998; Huysmans, 2006). As in many parts of the world, ethnic issues are routinely viewed and portrayed in terms of threats, primarily as a source of conflicts (Horowitz, 1985; Roe, 2005). Placing emphasis on this perspective is relatively easy due to the numerous ethnic clashes that occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s or lasting to date. Accordingly, oppression of allegedly destabilizing forces and, on the contrary, facilitation of inter-ethnic dialogue are advertised as the only right strategy. Any organizational framework providing for the said 'dialogue' would be regarded as legitimate, while all criticisms would be marginalized. This models model manifests itself in the most sharp manner in Transnistria which is always portrayed by its government firstly as a besieged fortress whose garrison cannot afford any internal clashes or discords, and secondly, that multiethnic TMR poses a positive contrast to unstable Moldova which managed to unleash a civil war on its territory a quarter of century ago (Caspersen, 2011: 85-87; Kolstø, 2006, 730-731).

The third method of legitimization could be referred to as taming or domestication of potential or actual ethnic claims. TOS are established on the presumption that they are preoccupied with cultural affairs and intercultural dialogue, and that is interpreted as non-interference of minorities in 'real' politics. Respectively, they, on the one hand, allow bracketing out all the agendas that are uncomfortable for the stakeholders or generating tensions; on the other hand, they provide for the 'banalization' of ethnic relations or confine them to ritual and low-cost forms of cultural representation, participation in public life and ethnic reconciliation. '... The term banalization refers to the representation of ethno-cultural differences within a nation as relatively superficial variations on a common, trans-ethnic theme rather than as sources of deep internal cleavages.' (Roshwald , 2007: 367)

'I do not mean to be dismissive of the salutary aspects of what I have termed cultural banalization. The atmosphere of inclusiveness and tolerance it generates and sustains is palpable. It allows individuals and communities to take open pride in their various heritages without being made to feel that this detracts from their patriotism.' (Roshwald , 2007: 370)

3.2. Explanation: institutional cooptation

The other basic explanation rests on the structural opportunities which TOS open up. One can assume that TOS being socially acceptable (or being a mechanism of hegemony in other words) also serve as a mechanism for the incorporation and cooptation of ethnic spokespersons into the system of government (Lustick, 1979; Pettai and Hallik, 2002).

One may argue that the organizational forms described earlier are not authentic models of representation and self-organization of ethnic groups, since they are guided and controlled by authoritarian governments (as in Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) and/or governments pursuing 'ethnic control' (Lustick, 1979) (as in the cases of Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Moldova). This objection becomes irrelevant if one questions the very notion of 'authentic' self-organization or representation. It is worth remembering here that the role of state coercion shall be also questioned in the light of the fact that in most countries of the former USSR within the last two decades, most ethnic activists strive to be loyal to their governments and to accept all their offers, no matter how authoritarian the political regime may be. Given the lack of opposition and alternatives to such modes of behavior, one may assume that this model of interaction with authorities is legitimate and is as a rule endorsed by those who wish to take part in social activities on behalf of minorities.

If one discards the very idea of 'real' group interests and 'genuine' group representation, then one can talk about ethnicity as a mode of framing ethnic activism or certain organizational arrangements. From this angle, a TOS may be regarded as an informal asymmetrical agreement between the state authorities and ethnic spokespersons which envisages mutually suitable channels and scenarios of communication, and which brackets out potential controversies. People wishing to pose as ethnic spokespersons may do so under certain conditions within a multi-ethnic statehood (Transnistria), or appointed coordinative body (the APK), or a 'governmental NGO' (such as Russian 'assemblies of peoples'), or a consultative body of minority issues totally loyal to governmental agendas. The government achieves a totally predictable and controllable organizational framework legitimate in the eyes of the broader society (see above). On their side, ethnic spokespersons acquire a officially recognized high status and direct communication with public authorities, plus some other organizational and material assets. Besides, ethnic spokespersons refrain from potentially troublesome issues – either under a legitimate pretext of preserving 'stability' and ethnic accord or because such issues are beyond the given discursive horizons. Thus the key condition for the deal is that both sides should stick to narrow agendas of cultural activities and interethnic dialogue. The agenda and the very organizational settings appear to be the only opportunity offered by the government; other options are in fact excluded or marginalized.

Such arrangements as TOS – asymmetric and vertical exchanges of resources to loyalties – fully fit in the theoretic framework of 'neopatrimonialism' which serves as a promising explanatory tool for the analysis of post-colonial and post-communist societies. This term (Bach, 2011; Bratton and van de Walle, 1994; Eisenstadt, 1973; Theobald, 1982) generally denotes

(1) a type of social systems and political regimes based on a combination of patronage and clienteles, established and utilized by office holders, with legal-rational bureaucratic rule and

(2) a theoretic framework designed for the analysis of these phenomena and the societies where there are nested.

Within this neopatrimonial framework, ethnic activists are subject to governmental patronage as a social group and can engage in clientele relations as individuals in exchange for their performance as loyal agents of the state bureaucracy or mainstream politicians

(Erdmann and Engel, 2007: 107). Along with this, they can also establish their own clienteles, helping other individuals as public figures to benefit from their privileged relations with public authorities. One can also say that in this framework one kind of capital (ethnic spokespersonship as cultural capital) is converted into social capital stemming from alliance with the government (On the types of capital see Bourdieu, 1986).

Conclusion: TOS in multiple social contexts?

One may also ask whether the experience of the former Soviet republics or in other former socialist states could be reproduced in other, more liberal and less authoritarian contexts with similar effects.

If 'interethnic dialogue' and broader ethnic policies are regarded as modes of framing and as relations between certain organizations and individuals rather than groups *per se*, one can legitimately assume that similar institutional settings, systems of resource exchanges and modes of legitimation may take place in a broad range of environments where minds are colonized with the ideas of ethnic collective agency. It would be a mistake to assess the issue of legitimacy of TOS from the point of whether they were imposed 'from above' or initiated 'from below'. This perception reflects in some way a 'republican' vision of ethnicities as aggregates of individuals thinking in a similar way because of their 'identity' and respective 'genuine' interests, and thus as able to adopt and implement collective decisions through democratic procedures. If these premises are discarded then one can talk about a broader range of perspectives in settings and legitimizing a variety of institutional settings.

The three ways of legitimation, namely officialization, securitization and culturalization, coupled with banalization of ethnic relations, can be instrumentalized in almost all modern societies. Respectively, there are certain incentives and opportunities for ethnic spokespersons to engage in alliances and patronage exchanges with the governments and mainstream political parties. Finally, there are no reasons to expect that similar hegemonic mechanisms do not apply in liberal-democratic environments. TOS are viable and legitimate in 'hybrid' regimes; who can object their presence in other circumstances, and why?

One can also expect that the organizational forms in question apply not only in the field of symbolic politics. In reality, TOS can implement ethno-cultural and educational projects,

and their affiliation with state institutions can in theory raise their capacities. These types of organizations offer flexible and thus potentially efficient schemes of public participation.

Multi-ethnic coalition-type organizations like 'assemblies' look to be a promising organizational form. In theory, they can help to overcome ethnic barriers and to encourage leaders and activists of different ethnicities to co-ordinate and reconcile their interests and stances. In addition, multi-ethnic organizations can provide minority organizations with additional recourses such as legal aid, support staff and premises, and such co-operation in certain instances may be more efficient than separate investments of each individual organization.

Notes

[1] For a number of reasons, which are beyond the scope of this article, other perspectives such as individual strategies of accommodation, social adaptation across dividing lines on the basis of informal networking and bargaining, and non-articulation and muting of ethnicity-based claims or their transformation are too often sidelined or neglected.

[2] See White Paper, 2008.

[3] Estimates done in accordance with the 2004 population census carried out by the Transnistrian *de facto* authorities; see Naseleniye 2005.

[4] TMR portrays itself as the only guardian of the 'true' Moldovan identity, which is allegedly being gradually eliminated in Moldova in the course of its rapprochement with Romania (see Munteanu and Munteanu, 2007).

[5] The Transnistrian legislation is taken from the official TMR legal database <http://president.gospmr.ru/ru/zakon>.

[6] The texts are available at the official website of the Assembly: http://www.assembly.kz/pravovaya-baza-ank.html.

[7] For the description of the APK and of the regional assemblies see the APK's official website: http://www.assembly.kz/pravovaya-baza-ank.html.

[8] See the official website of the Belarusian Plenipotentiary on Religious and Nationalities Affairs: http://www.belarus21.by/ru/main_menu/nat/consultation_centre.

[9] See the Charter, Programme and a description of the Assemblies history at its official website: http://anrussia.ru/; also Assambleya, 1999.

[10] Information about the regional assemblies was until June 2014 available at the APR's old website: Deyatelnost regionalnukh otdelenii ANR, at http://www.anrorg.ru/Regions/Reg_Index.htm (accessed on 12 May 2014).

[11] For example see Decree of the President of the Republic Sakha (Yakutia) No.39 of 3 February 1997 'On Holding the Second Assembly of Peoples of Sakha (Yakutia)'; Resolution of the Administration Head of Cheliabunsk Oblast No. 711 of 3 December 1996 'On the Assembly of Peoples of Cheliabinsk Oblast'; Decree of the President of the Republic of Bashkortostan No.UP-493 of 18 August 2000 'On Holding the Assembly of Peoples of Bashkortostan'; the texts are stored in the legal database 'Consultant+'.

[12] Deyatelnost regionalnukh otdelenii ANR [Activities of APR regional branches]. http://www.anrorg.ru/Regions/Reg_Index.htm. Retrieved May 12, 201.

[13] The information about the Assembly's structure and activities is available at its official website at http://www.assembly.kg/.

[14] The information about the Council is on BRI's official website http://www.bri.gov.md/index.php?pag=sec&id=91&l=ru.

[15] See http://www.ecmicaucasus.org/menu/fora_cnm.html.

[16] Respublikanskii Festival Natsionalnyh Kultur. The webpage at the regional Department's of Culture website http://kult.grodno-region.by/ru/fest/nac_kult

[17] Public Movement 'Multinational Georgia'. Official website: http://pmmg.org.ge/index.php?m=7&lang=Eng.

[18] Latvian Association of National Cultural Societies. Official website: https://ankolen.wordpress.com/

[19] Since the funding schemes of the largest TOS are not transparent, one can only make estimates on the grounds of the activities actually carried out.

[20] One of the few cases is public mentioning of the Moldovan language's destiny in Transnistria by Grigory Marakutsa, the former chair of the TMR de facto parliament at the inauguration of Evgeniy Shevchuk, the new president of TMR, on December 30, 2011; see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJvULErMc8I (from 39 to 43 min).

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