

CULTURAL PLURALISM IN RUSSIAN PRESS: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT

КУЛЬТУРНЫЙ ПЛЮРАЛИЗМ В РОССИЙСКИХ ПЕЧАТНЫХ СМИ: ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ РАЗВИТИЯ

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The article considers the role of cultural pluralism in the Russian society today, and dwells on a set of challenges and prospects it is facing in multiethnic, culturally and linguistically diverse country. Special attention has been given to exploring phenomenon of cultural pluralism in the media, in particular print media, and highlighting governmental initiatives aimed at developing pluralistic media landscape in Russia.

Key words: *cultural pluralism; minorities; inter-ethnic relations; multiculturalism.*

В статье рассматривается роль культурного плюрализма в современном российском обществе, освещаются основные трудности, с которыми сталкивается общество при попытке реализовать идею плюралистического медиаландшафта в условиях мультиэтнической и мультикультурной реальности, а также определяются перспективы развития культурного плюрализма в современной России. Особенное внимание в статье уделяется

изучению особенностей культурного плюрализма в российских медиа, в частности в печатных СМИ. Рассматриваются законопроект и государственные инициативы, направленные на обеспечение культурного многообразия в сфере массовой информации.

Ключевые слова: *культурный плюрализм; меньшинства; межэтнические отношения; мультикультурализм.*

Cultural pluralism in the media is defined as a concept referring to a fair and diverse representation of various cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, gender groups, and expression of their values, standpoints and opinions through the media (Valcke, Picard, Sükösd et al, 2010). Generally, cultural pluralism can be perceived as one of dimensions of a broader notion – media pluralism, which includes also pluralism of media ownership, pluralism of types and genres, political pluralism and geographical pluralism (ibid). Today, when multiculturalism and policies aimed at developing public openness towards diversity in the society are being promoted and implemented in many countries, leaving aside pessimistic views of some European politicians about the future of multiculturalism (Anisimov, 2011), case of Russia is becoming more and more interesting. The way the country, which underwent fundamental political transformations in the XX century, and takes nowadays the 8th place in the world among the countries with the biggest population, cultural and linguistic minorities, is building a multicultural society, undoubtedly deserves a thorough consideration.

To start with, safeguarding pluralistic media landscape is important due to a number of reasons. Firstly, providing all cultural minorities access to media platforms means providing them equal opportunities for development, for reaching their target audience and airing their diverse views and interests in public. Secondly, pluralism in media supports access of all citizens to a wide spectrum of cultural representations, values and opinions of diverse communities, thus broadening one's cultural ho-

rizons and encouraging people to approach things in a different way. Last but not least is that pluralistic media landscape is one of fundamental contributors to building a multicultural society, where interests and cultural identities of all members of the society are equally respected and protected.

As mentioned above, an important factor in forming cultural pluralism in Russia was transformation of the political landscape after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which was followed by a change in national identity, namely a shift from a “multiple” identity – the “Soviet people” – towards a more personalized one. In the Soviet times interests of minority groups were not ignored in a sense that they were not respected or taken on board. However, the commonly accepted point of view was that Russian majority’s interests and expectations are similar to those of non-Russians, so they would rarely come into conflict with the latter (Antonova, 2007). The ethnic Russians were perceived as “first among equal”, meaning by “equals” all nationalities of the USSR, and they were supposed to express the united Soviet people’s interests (ibid).

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, there occurred raise of the self-consciousness of ethnic minority groups living at the territory of the 83 subjects of the Russian Federation. In order to minimize and prevent ethnic tensions between them, the issue of securing pluralism in the society, i.e. providing equal opportunities for all citizens, regardless of their descent and cultural belonging, and making sure there is a proportional representation of all cultural communities in social sphere, including the media, was brought forward.

The Russian census of 2010 revealed that the number of ethnic groups living at the territory of the Russian Federation is 193, and the number of languages spoken in Russia is 171 (Putin, 2012). The biggest ethnic groups, according to the data of 2010, are Tatars (3,87%), Ukrainians (1,41%), Bashkir (1,15%), Chuvash (1,05%) and Chechens (1,04%) (Ob itogakh Vserossiskoi perepisi naselenia 2010 goda, 2012). Out of 142,9 million people living at the territory of Russia, 138 million speak Rus-

sian. Other popular languages are English, Tatar, German, Chechen, Bashkir, Ukrainian and Chuvash (ibid).

Such broad representation of diverse ethnical and cultural minorities in the country makes Russian government face various challenges: difficulties in reducing ethnic conflicts, which may arise, for example, due to the existence of xenophobic sentiment among the natives and lack of sense of belonging among newly coming migrants, protecting languages and cultures of minor ethnic groups and making sure interests and values of such minorities are respected, etc. In this sense developing cultural pluralism in Russian media can be one of the ways to reduce these tensions. One can assume that in a society where freedom of expression is equally protected, and all communities have right and possibility to bring their views, needs, interests, perspectives into the public debate, is less likely to develop ethnic conflicts and ethnocentrism among its members. The role of mass media in forming value systems of citizens, their moral standards and norms, perceptions of reality is becoming very essential (Vartanova, 2008), which also proves that in order to move forward towards multicultural society, Russian media need to become more pluralism-oriented, making content more culturally and linguistically diverse.

Nowadays among all newspapers published in Russia, 9,157 are in the Russian language, and 498 are in other languages; 6,742 magazines and other periodicals are published in Russian, and 307 are in other languages (Vypusk knig i broshur, zhurnalov i gazet, 2012). Some newspapers provide content in the minorities' language only, such as one of the oldest non-Russian newspaper *Khypar* (established in 1906), which is published in the Chuvash language, or *Kyzyl Tan*, a Tatar-language newspaper. Others are issued both in Russian and the minorities' language, for example, *Niiso-Dagestan*, which is available in Russian and Chechen. There are also newspapers in less widespread languages, for example *Tabasarandin Nurar*, published in Tabasaran – a language spoken in the Republic of Dagestan (according to the census of 2010, the number of Russian citizens who can speak this language is 126,136 only).

Although the number of newspapers in the languages of the minorities seems to be quite high, the press in non-Russian languages is indisputably facing a number of challenges today. Among them is the lack of journalists willing to work for the non-Russian media outlets. As Said Suleimanov, journalist of the Dagestan newspaper *Nur* (published in the Tsakhur and Russian languages), puts it: “Young journalists choose those media where they see possibilities for themselves: Internet-media, newspapers in the Russian language. The salary there is higher, and one can make a good career in such media outlets” (V Dagestane zhurnalisty kritikuut gosudarstvennuu politiku v oblasti podderzhki nacionalnykh SMI, 2012). Other problems are a limited number of original materials written in the minorities’ languages (most of publications are translated from Russian) and a lack of initiative from the minorities themselves. The latter challenge, according to the editor-in-chief of Dagestan’s *Novoe Delo* newspaper, Marko Shakhbanov, deals with the state support of non-Russian media: due to the sufficient financing from federal budget, newspapers’ owners do not wish to seek for other funding opportunities (ibid). A possible solution in this case, supposes Shakhbanov, can be reducing state support and stimulating grants allocation. This will make newspapers develop more rapidly in order to remain competitive and attract readership.

Developing cultural pluralism in Russian media can be perceived also in a broader sense: it is a factor contributing to the implementation of the policy of integration in Russia. This policy must focus on stimulating cultural, linguistic, ethnic diversity, on the one hand, and fostering the integration of the Russian population by adopting the national identity, the same set of norms and the values needed for the stable society, on the other one (Tishkov, 2012). Issuing newspapers and launching TV and radio programmes in the minorities’ languages can help harmonize inter-ethnic relations and stabilize social and cultural environment of the country by encouraging all residents having different nationalities to actively participate in the cultural, spiritual, social, economic life of multicultural Russia.

A question, that certainly arises when speaking about the policy of integration is whether the Russian citizens support it or not. Research conducted in 2011 in 9 Moscow schools (Omelchenko, 2012) showed that the majority of newcomers support the policy of integration, if it allows them to retain their own culture as well. Answering the question about the way of living in Russia, 16% of migrants claimed that they existed within their diasporas and had never made attempts to integrate into the Russian culture, 24% said they were trying to absorb Russian traditions and norms as much as they could, 56% marked they didn't mind getting integrated provided that they can retain their culture as well, and 4% found it difficult to answer (ibid).

The survey conducted by Levada-center in October 2012 (*Nacionálnaya politika i otnoshenie k migrantam*, 2012) among indigenous Russians showed similar results: 11,1% said migrants should keep their own culture and traditions and should not integrate into the Russian society, 14,4% support complete integration of newcomers into the Russian society with abandonment of their culture, and 74,4% claimed they did not mind living in a society where ethnic and cultural minorities hold on to their traditions and norms provided that they absorb Russian culture as well. Thus, both surveys demonstrated that the majority of ethnic Russians and the majority of migrants support the policy of integration and harmonious co-existence in the society.

Since the idea of implementing in Russia the policy of integration appears quite promising, there should be more governmental initiatives aimed at developing pluralism in multiethnic Russian society in general, and in the Russian media in particular. Let us have a brief overview of what has been done already in this respect.

Important steps that have been made in this direction since 1991 include ratification of Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1998, and signing European Charter for Regional or Minorities Languages in 2001. Although the latter document has not been ratified yet, a number of initiatives suggested by the Russian government make us believe protection of cultural pluralism in the society is one of key tasks today.

In 2003 the Moscow House of Nationalities was opened. Its main priorities include promoting stable and harmonious inter-ethnic relations, enhancing mutual penetration of cultures and stimulating international cooperation. In order to attain these goals, the Moscow House of Nationalities regularly initiates diverse cultural activities, festivals, competitions aimed at bringing people from different cultural and linguistic communities closer to each other, supports publishing books by national authors and issues an almanac *Vestnik*, which reflects information about the ongoing events. Besides, the Moscow House of Nationalities has its own monthly newspaper *StoLICHNOST* that covers urgent problems of inter-ethnic relations, helps set up dialogues with young people belonging to diverse cultural groups and involves citizens in the ethno-cultural life of the city.

In the years 2009–2011 a Joint Program of The Council of Europe, the Ministry for Regional Development of the Russian Federation and the European Commission “Minorities in Russia: Developing Languages, Culture, Media and Civil Society” was implemented. Significant results of this initiative include fostering a better expression of cultural and ethnic communities through media, creation and support of new print, audio-visual and electronic media outlets of the minorities (e.g., TV portal “Finnougroidenie”³⁸ implemented by the Finno-Urgic Center of the Russian Federation), developing training courses for journalists and establishing communication between minorities and majority of the Russian population. The latter initiative includes, for instance, opening a summer camp for children where they can get acquainted with traditions and everyday reality of the Kumandins ethnic minority living in the Altai Republic. Another interesting example is summer school of Mari language and culture in Yoshkar-Ola, the principal purpose of which is exploring traditional Mari culture incorporated in the study process.

In June 2012 Presidential Council for Interethnic Relations was established in Russia. Its main task is serving as an effective mechanism for cooperation between the state authorities and the public in the area of interethnic relations (Meeting of Council for Interethnic Relations,

³⁸ URL: <http://fusee.tv/>

2012). At the end of 2012 the Council's Working Group suggested a new strategy of national politics in the sphere of interethnic relations. The program includes, besides other initiatives, constant monitoring of mass media and social networks in order to prevent the propaganda of extremist ideas and the rise of ethnic conflicts. The Guild of Inter-ethnic Journalism, which introduced an Internet project *Nacionalniy Akzent*³⁹ (National Accent), is also oriented at developing tolerance towards other cultural groups, stimulating cultural awareness of Russians by publishing news about various cultural events going on in Russia, interviews with politicians, representatives of national minorities. Besides, the Guild is also aimed at increasing the professionalism of journalists specializing on ethnic issues, helping them to get grants and organizing seminars on how to cover the inter-ethnic relations.

One cannot argue that cultural pluralism in Russia, despite all aforementioned initiatives, has not reached the height of its development yet. It seems reasonable to increase the number of newspapers and magazines covering ethnic issues and cross-cultural communication, foster public interest towards exploring other cultural and linguistic communities, organize more joint activities in order to bring people from different cultural groups closer to each other (like, for example, annual festival in Pskov region *Setomaa*, devoted to the culture of Setos – linguistic and cultural minority living in an area covering South-Eastern Estonia and North-Western Russia). Developing periodicals that highlight recent academic researches of cultural and ethnic minorities is also important. The academic journal *Finno-ugrovedenie* published by Mari Research Institute of Language, Literature and History in the Republic of Mari El, for instance, highlights various themes related to the history of Finno-Ugric ethnos, their language, culture and mentality. Increase of number of scholarly publications on diverse cultural communities can also contribute to developing pluralism in the Russian media and expanding cultural awareness of citizens.

Developing cultural pluralism in Russia today is impossible without promoting the general integration policy. Since the main factor of inte-

³⁹ URL: <http://nazaccent.ru/>

gration in any society is the language, there should be more educational institutions aimed at providing those who do not speak Russian fluently, an opportunity to study it. In 2000s a number of schools of Russian language for the children of migrants were opened in Moscow. These school function at regular educational institutions, and provide a one-year study program focused on developing speaking, reading, writing skills and introducing children to Russian realities and culture codes.

Along with that, there should appear more schools for children of the Russian descent, which support the idea of polycultural education. In multi-ethnic, culturally and linguistically diverse country introducing children to a broad sweep of various cultural traditions, ways of thought, modes of expression is exceedingly important, as it will contribute to forming values of tolerance and objectivity. In other words, polycultural education will help younger generation realize that no particular culture is superior, and, therefore, it cannot trump the worldview of others. Other cultures should not be judged or perceived solely by values, standards and beliefs of one's own culture, otherwise there arises so-called cultural centrism (Sadokhin, 2010), which presupposes a foreign culture is indisputably worse than one's own one.

Let us stress again that today cultural pluralism in Russia is still far from being ideal. At the same time, a number of activities and initiatives aimed at promoting tolerance towards persons from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, fostering further development of regional media in the languages of the minorities and safeguarding equal access to media of all cultural and ethnic communities let us believe that the future of pluralism in Russia is promising.

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