

COMRAT DECLARATION ON INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS AND PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Within the framework of the BRIDGE project – Fostering mutual understanding and cooperation of the EU with Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine (2008-2012) a Workshop on “discrimination, human rights, freedoms and minorities’ protection” was held on 15-16 April 2011 in Comrat, the capital of the Autonomous Territorial Establishment of Gagauzia / Gagauz Yeri, Republic of Moldova.

The Workshop was attended by experts for ethnic issues from Moldova and several EU countries, representatives of national minorities, distinguished members of the Gagauzian community, members of the Parliament and representatives of some political parties of Moldova, and the representative of the European Commission’s Delegation to Moldova. The Workshop was organised by the BRIDGE Coordinator – ISCOMET Institute for Ethnic and Regional Studies from Maribor, Slovenia in cooperation with ASER - the Association for Ethnic and Regional Studies from Chisinau and the Bulgarian Community of Autonomous Territorial Establishment of Gagauzia, Moldova.

After two days of intensive and productive discussion of the Workshop topics the participants adopted the following opinions and recommendations:

1. The further development of good inter-ethnic relations in the Republic of Moldova, including the improvement of the protection of national minorities, is of paramount importance for its political stability, for widening its possibilities for European integration, and finally for creating favourable conditions for the peaceful unification of the country, which should be a safe home of all ethnic communities living in the Republic of Moldova.

2. In this context, it should be of particular importance to care for a positive political attitude of the Moldovan political structure towards the ethnic territorial autonomy of Gagauzia, which has been a unique achievement of the Moldovan democracy after the independence in 1991. It is thus of paramount importance to develop further this autonomy. Participants propose the following:

- It would be commendable to organise a dialogue between the autonomous authorities and the central government in order to clarify the division of competences in general, and the well-defined competences of the Autonomous Territorial Establishment of Gagauzia in relation to the central government in particular.
- The Autonomous Territorial Establishment of Gagauzia should have the legal possibilities for developing territorial cross – border cooperation with regions and local communities in foreign countries, in order to increase its opportunities for cultural, economic and social development.
- The Moldovan authorities should provide a legal basis for establishing regional political parties on the territory of Gagauzia and thus broadening the democratic political structure in that part of Moldova.

- The Moldovan authorities should provide the reception of the signal of the Gagauzian public TV by Gagauzians who live outside of the autonomous territory of Gagauzia. Likewise, the Gagauzian authorities should ensure that the private local broadcasting companies apply the law requirements concerning the transmission of programs produced by the Gagauzian public TV.
- The Moldovan government and the Gagauzian authorities as well should stimulate and finance the research and study of the Gagauzian history and culture, and the spreading of the results both, on national and international level.

3. With the intention of strengthening the “unity in diversity” of the Republic of Moldova it would be advisable to elaborate and carry out special programs of learning minority languages by the majority population, and the state language by national minorities.

4. The Moldovan authorities should ensure the effective implementation and application of the present legislation regulating the status and rights of national minorities and improve and up-date these norms, also in accordance with the obligations of Moldova emanating from the relevant international instruments, first of all from the Framework convention on the rights of national minorities adopted in the frame of the Council of Europe.

5. The Moldovan Parliament should finally ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Protocol No. 12 to the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

6. The Moldovan regional and national authorities should pay special attention to the problems of Roma population, among other by adopting adequate measures for reducing the negative stereotypes of the majority population towards Roma and for improving their educational opportunities and socio-economic conditions (health, housing, employment, etc.), having in mind, of course, the general socio-economic situation in Moldova.

7. The Moldovan authorities are commended to remove obstacles for the inclusion of the members of national minorities in the civil services and in the decision-making processes on local, regional and national level thus enhancing the equal participation of national minorities in the public life of Moldova.

8. Participants recommend the competent Moldovan authorities to get familiar with experiences abroad concerning the ethnic data collection and to elaborate on this basis their own procedure; these data would be of help for the consideration of ethnic issues in Moldova.

9. Participants encourage further development of cooperation of Moldova with Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and other countries on cultural, linguistic, economic and other fields what will be to the benefit of ethnic communities living in Moldova and the Moldovan minority living in Ukraine as well.

10. The European Commission should consider the establishing of new programs and financial lines, aimed at increasing the opportunities for developing projects, which will contribute to the further development of inter-ethnic relations and national minority protection, and thus to the political stability and unity of the Republic of Moldova.

The participants requested the BRIDGE Coordinator, Prof. Dr. Silvo Devetak and the BRIDGE Vice Coordinator, Ass.Prof.Dr. Olesia Sirbu, who was the organiser of the Workshop in Comrat, to distribute this declaration to the Moldovan governmental structures, to the competent EU agencies, and to the governments of the EU member states as well.

Done on 16. April 2011 in Comrat, the capital of Autonomous Territorial Establishment of Gagauzia / Gagauz Yeri, Republic of Moldova.