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**MINORITY RIGHTS IN RUSSIA (BURYATIA) AND POLAND: STATE POLICIES
AND INVOLVEMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

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1. Introduction

Interethnic concord is a precondition for the development of every multiethnic state. The protection of minorities in the liberal democratic model is viewed as a culture-enriching factor, leading to social peace and serving as a test of the democratic nature of a country's government, as *progress in democratization is measured in terms of the degree to which minority rights are respected and the consequences of former discrimination have been overcome*.

Guaranteeing good management of ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural diversity should be viewed as an urgent priority, so as to prevent interethnic conflicts from spreading all over the Russian Federation. The situation with regard to interethnic relations in multiethnic Russia for the last decade has been characterized by a gradual escalation of ethnic and racial violence by Russian nationalist extremist groups and retaliatory anti-Russian actions in national republics. The sense of urgency regarding the deteriorating situation concerning autochthonous languages and the lack of legal means to secure their interests within the current political system have at times pushed the "titular nationalities" of republics to take radical action in order to protect their language and their identity. An example was a rally in defense of the Tatar language held on May 1, 2011 in Kazan, Tatarstan, where protesters raised a banner bearing the slogan "Suitcase – railway station – Russia". Such rallies in defense of autochthonous languages organized in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Sakha-Yakutia show that there is an acute need for a new vision of national policy in Russia, based on a dialogue between federal and regional authorities and minority NGOs.

This paper analyses the contemporary state of affairs with regard to the observance of linguistic and cultural rights of minorities in Russia (focusing on Buryatia) and summarizes the European experience in this area (focusing on the Poland). It presents an overview of the linguistic legislation in both countries, as well as the institutional setup in the field of national policy. A substantial part of the paper is devoted to a description of the Polish system of institutionalization of minority rights and the best practices in the area of minority protection, which can be adapted to solve similar problems in Russia. **The main goal** of the paper is to propose recommendations to policy makers at the federal and regional levels regarding possible ways of implementation of policies on minority protection and the establishment of cooperation between the state and minority communities.

2. Description of the Issue

2.1. Linguistic legislation in the Russian Federation and the Republic of Buryatia

The Russian Federation is made up of more than 160 ethnic groups and an almost equal number of languages spoken. Ethnic minorities represent approximately 28 million people, 20% of the total

population. This ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity is reflected in the Federal Statutes, with 21 National Republics and several Autonomous Regions and Districts. Minority regions are characterized by a strong interweaving of peoples. The UNESCO Red Book of Endangered Languages only reports on three minority languages in Russia that are not endangered, all the others being either “on the verge of extinction” or “threatened.”

According to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the Republics have the right to establish their own state languages.¹ Russia promulgated the first linguistic law in its history on October 25, 1991, in which the languages of the country were mentioned as an integral part of the national patrimony and of its historical and cultural heritage.² The Federal Law on National and Cultural Autonomy, passed on June 17, 1996, proclaims the right to maintain and develop the autochthonous languages of the Republics and autonomous territorial bodies,³ and recognizes the right of pupils to be educated in Primary School in the mother tongue of the pupil, as well as to choose the language of education.⁴ The official status of the Buryat language is proclaimed in the Constitution of the Republic of Buryatia⁵ and in the Law on the Languages of the Republic of Buryatia.⁶

On December 1, 2007, amendments to Federal Law #309 on Education were made according to which national/regional and school components of the federal educational standard were abolished. The new amendments provoked vehement discussions among educators and the public in general. Minority communities were concerned that realization of the law would lead to limitation of the rights of the peoples of the Russian Federation to national and cultural development, to the abolition of education in the mother tongue and of the learning of national culture and history in national schools and schools with a national-cultural component. Nevertheless, the new federal educational standard was adopted.

Changes made to the Federal Law on December 1, 2007 were meant, on the one hand, to provide “unity of the federal, cultural and educational space” but, on the other hand, excluded a mechanism for “protection and development by the educational system of national cultures, regional cultural traditions and peculiarities in the conditions of the multi-ethnic state.” The Law of the Russian Federation of February 10, 2009 #18 “On changes in separate legislative acts of the Russian Federation concerning the activities of federal universities” clarified the situation somewhat. The following wording was added to Article 29 “Competence of the subjects of the Russian Federation”: “participation in the

¹ The Constitution of the Russian Federation (adopted at National Voting on December 12, 1993). Chapter 3, Article 68.2.

² The Law on the Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation (adopted by the State Duma on October 25, 1991, #1807-1, amended by the Federal law, July 24 1998, # 126-FZ). Introduction.

³ The Russian Federation Federal Law on National and Cultural Autonomy (passed on June 17, 1996, # 74-FZ). Article 9.

⁴ Ibid., Articles 10, 11,12.

⁵ The Constitution of the Republic of Buryatia (adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Buryatia on February 22, 1994). Chapter 3, Article 67.

⁶ The Law on the Languages of the Republic of Buryatia (adopted by the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Buryatia on June 10, 1992, #221-XII).

development - on the basis of federal state educational standards or federal state requirements - of approximate major educational programs with due account taken of their level and direction (taking into consideration regional, national and ethno-cultural peculiarities).” Implementation of this provision at the current stage gives subjects of the Russian Federation some opportunity to have a say in the educational content in the area of fostering ethno-cultural identity in ethnic minority pupils.

Regretfully, the languages of many peoples in Russia do not function as languages of school education (the latter being the major condition for the preservation and development of a literary language in a multilingual environment), being only taught as a separate subject. Such an approach does not facilitate the development of balanced bilingualism and narrows the functioning of a language. For instance, in the Republic of Buryatia there is not a single school with an immersion method of learning the Buryat language; only one school in the capital city of Buryatia – Ulan-Ude – uses Buryat as a language of instruction for some curricula subjects. However, in other schools in Ulan-Ude, Buryat is taught as a subject, but the number of primary schools in villages that use Buryat as a language of education is gradually decreasing.

As regards the observance of the part of the existing linguistic legislation concerning the functioning of autochthonous languages in the official and public sphere, one has to admit that in many respects, the laws exist only on paper. Buryat is hardly used in the public sphere. For instance, there have been occasions when Buryat repatriates from China who did not speak Russian were unable to interact with officials in public offices and thus could not exercise their right to use the second state language of the Republic of Buryatia. In the Constitution of the Republic of Buryatia (Article 70), it is stated that the President must know the state languages of the Republic of Buryatia. On June 15, 2007 the People’s Khural (Parliament) of the Republic of Buryatia approved the candidacy of Vyacheslav Nagovitsyn, the Deputy Governor of Tomsk region, for the Presidency of Buryatia. After his inauguration he made a promise to learn Buryat, but has not kept it yet. These examples show that without due mechanisms of public control, the linguistic legislation in the eyes of both the authorities and citizens becomes optional, rather than compulsory and equally binding for all. Thus, **it is fundamental for the construction of a civil society to find and introduce such mechanisms of public auditing that would reinforce the legislation.** According to a number of Buryat NGO activists and academics, the President of Buryatia should be obliged to pass an examination to prove his/her proficiency in Buryat, at least after a year in office.

Though certain steps have been taken by the Government of the Republic of Buryatia to start solving the problem of the (impending) extinction of the Buryat language,⁷ there is still a lack of adequate policy with regard to the rights of minorities from the side of the Federal State. **One of the**

⁷ The State Program of the Republic of Buryatia “Preservation and development of the Buryat Language” for the years 2011-2014 was approved by the Government of the Republic on August 2, 2010.

major reasons for the invisibility of the problem of minority rights to policy makers on the federal level is **a substantial underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in power** and thus, **their inability to influence the political process.**

Lack of adequate national policy on the federal level remains an unsolved problem, resulting in a worsening of the situation concerning the observance of linguistic rights of minorities in the regions. Under current circumstances, minorities have no means of persuading national decision-makers to enforce the existing laws in the field of protection of minority languages, let alone adopt new laws in compliance with European standards. For instance, the State Program of the Republic of Buryatia entitled “Preservation and development of the Buryat Language” for the years 2011-2014 states that projects aimed at the development of the Buryat language will be financed from the regional budget, and only *“after ratification by the Russian Federation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages will prerequisites be created for co-financing from the federal budget.”*

2.2. Ethnic representation in the Russian Federation

Formally in contemporary Russia, ethnic representation does not serve as a principle of organization of representative power. By law, ethnic representation is recognized as “contradictory to the principle of equal representation and, therefore to the fundamental principle of the equality of citizens.” However, in fact, this means that in the Russian Federation there are no constitutional means of protection of the interests of minority peoples that make up one-fifth of the country’s citizens. The issue of ethnic representation is institutionalized according to the level of power: in federal, regional and local bodies. The *Soviet of Nationalities* established by the Bolshevik State, which used to perform the functions of the representative power, does not exist any more in modern Russian legislation. Formally, its current successor is the *Soviet of Federation*, the upper chamber of the Russian Parliament, which, however, represents the regions of Russia, but not its peoples. The Soviet of Federation consists of 178 representatives of the subjects of the Russian Federation, including 27 national-territorial autonomies (of whom only 13 are representatives of the so-called “titular nationalities”). Not all the peoples of Russia are represented on party lists in the State Duma of the fifth convocation. According to many observers, a proportional electoral system based on the principles of equal representation leaves not only minorities, but whole regions no chance to elect their own MP. Thus, **the institutional problems in the organization of the system of representation of peoples in the Parliament make it practically impossible for minorities to protect their interests.** According to a number of scholars, it is *“the scanty representation of minorities in the supreme executive bodies and their too weak voice in the legislative body that is the reason for the prevalence of unitary-chauvinistic views in the process of making decisions on ethno-political issues in the country.”*

However, representation of different ethnic groups is more balanced on the regional level as the example of the Republic of Buryatia shows. The People's Khural of the Republic of Buryatia is a one chamber parliament consisting of 65 members. There is an approximately equal representation of the main peoples in the parliament of the Republic. Members of the fourth convocation in December 2007 included 31 Buryats, 30 Russians, 1 Evenk, 1 Dagestanian, 1 Georgian and 1 German.

2.3. State institutions in charge of national policy

The State Duma includes a *Committee for the Affairs of Nationalities*. Two of its members – the Vice Chairperson and a member - represent ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, the committee is considered to be one of the least popular among MPs. It consists of only 8 members, whereas, for instance, the Committee on the Budget is comprised of 43 MPs. There is no Committee on Nationalities in the Soviet of Federation. Minorities are scarcely represented in the supreme bodies of executive power. Among the heads of federal ministries and agencies, there are 17 representatives of ethnic minorities. Four of them are ministers of the Government of the Russian Federation (out of 16 ministries), five are deputy ministers, two are the heads of federal agencies, and one is a head of federal services (out of 34). There are no representatives of minorities among the heads of State Committees and their deputies. Obviously, the ethnic diversity of the country requires that the amendments to the electoral system should be adopted in order to guarantee representation of minorities in Parliament irrespective of their share in the population. A broadened Committee for the Affairs of Nationalities comprised of representatives of Russia's minorities would become one of the actors of positive change in the national policy of the country.

The Ministry for the Affairs of Federation, National and Migration Policy was disbanded by the Decree of President Putin of October 16, 2001. Its functions were divided between the Ministry of Interior, the newly established Federal Migration Service and the Ministry of Regional Development. In the wake of the nationalist riots at Moscow's Manezhnaya Square on December 11 last year, the issue of working out an updated concept of interethnic policy was raised. Soon after the events, the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan came up with a suggestion to form a new Ministry of Nationalities. According to a recent statement of the head of the Council, Farid Mukhametshin, "*Every ethnic group has its own problems, including the protection of its language, culture and traditions. It would be easier for the Ministry of nationalities to solve these issues.*" Although that idea has not been realized, it still has a lot of supporters in the regions.

In March this year, the decision was made to create, under the auspices of the Government, a *Council on Interethnic Policy*. It was supported by minority communities hopeful that the new body would deal with the issues of interethnic relations "*on an everyday basis, not from Manezhnaya to*

another problem.” A document that stipulates creation of an ***Interethnic Relations Department under the Russian Federal Ministry of Culture***, was adopted recently by the Government. It is envisaged that the new Department will coordinate the government’s efforts in the field of interethnic relations and carry out governmental strategies concerning the subject. It is fundamental for the successful work of the newly formed structure to involve minorities in the policy-making process not only by establishing efficient cooperation with its regional departments, but also by providing substantial ethnic representation in the federal office. As for the Council on Interethnic Policy, as a joint consultative body comprised of representatives of the federal government and of ethnic minorities’ organizations, it would fulfill the aspirations of minority communities desperate to be heard on the federal level.

The issues of education in minority languages and culture are within the competence of the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. On the regional level, regional ministries of education are responsible for implementation of educational policies laid down by the Federal Government and for working out strategies of education in the indigenous languages. Other issues concerning ensuring cultural rights and interethnic relations are within the competence of the Ministry of Culture – on federal and regional levels, and of special committees. In the case of the Republic of Buryatia, this function is performed by the Committee on Inter-Ethnic Relations and the Development of Civil Initiatives.

A number of NGOs are active in the field of minority rights, implementing activities aimed at revitalization of the Buryat language. Sometimes the regional government allocates grants to these groups for different projects, like printing bilingual books or production of Buryat language cartoons, but there is still a potential for further, wider cooperation.

One of the main barriers to the effective functioning of these institutions in the area of fostering cultural and linguistic rights of minorities is the absence of direct financial responsibility of the federal state (stipulated in the federal budget) for support for the indigenous languages and cultures of ethnic minorities in Russia. Under the current system of budget committees and responsibilities adopted in Russia, many of the budget responsibilities of the state are being transferred from the federal budget to regional and local ones without adequate support from authorities with due financial, fiscal and other resources. As a result, many of the minority rights are not being observed because regional budgets usually suffer from a deficit. Thus, the regional authorities are unable to satisfy the numerous and various needs of minorities, ranging from the publishing of books (especially language manuals, dictionaries and children’s books) and organization of education in the native language to the provision of a substantial presence of indigenous languages in the media. For instance, in the Republic of Buryatia, there are no Buryat TV or radio channels, no Buryat publishing trusts, and only one Buryat

newspaper. National television broadcasts in Russian, with only short news releases in Buryat. In the past it was possible to produce other shows in Buryat, including children's shows, with the support of the federal budget, but several years ago by the decision of the director of the All-Russian State Television and Radio Company, all other shows in autochthonous languages except news were to be financed via regional budgets.

The major reason for the dissolution of the Ministry of National Policy in 2001 was its inefficiency as a bureaucratic structure and inability to solve interethnic problems. Thus, **the main challenges** facing the new institution, as well as other institutions in charge of the national policy would be **(1) establishing of efficient interaction with regional governments and parliaments and (2) providing for the involvement of ethnic minorities' organizations and other NGOs, especially Human Rights organizations in the formulation, adoption, application and evaluation of protection policies, as well as policies fostering their rights at international, national and local levels.**

3. The Relevance of Polish Experience

Contemporary Poland provides a relevant example of effective legislation in the area of minority rights and the adequate state management of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. The European Commission highly acknowledged the efforts of the Polish state to secure minority rights when endorsing its acceptance into the European Union, expressing no concerns regarding minority protection and its execution in Poland, just as it saw no reason for concern in other candidate countries such as Cyprus or Malta.

The Polish experience in the protection of minority languages is of significant interest to countries with a similar experience of transition from communism to liberal democracy, as in such situations there is a dramatic shift in policy from complete non-recognition of minorities to the institutionalization of minority rights. Although it is impossible to simply introduce the same solutions and policies in another country, methods and ideas that have proved effective in the challenging and delicate area of minority protection and interethnic relations are surely worth studying. In this context, the Polish dialogue-oriented approach to the interaction of state institutions and minority NGOs can be recommended to be adopted in Russia. It can help fill the gap now separating policy makers in the field of national policy and minority communities, transforming their relations from confrontation to cooperation.

The presence of national minorities always constitutes a challenge in terms of relating to their members' place and rights in the majority society. A range of approaches to this issue can be found in the history of Europe – from such extremes as extermination of minorities through the ignoring of their

ethnic identity to regulation and programs fostering their recognition or special protection. The post-1945 international (and European) system of protection of minorities was based on the prohibition of discrimination (including ethnic and racial discrimination) and the principle of equal legal rights for every citizen. This has been reflected in the main human rights documents, none of which made any reference to national minorities. A major shift in the philosophy of minority rights took place in Europe in the 1990s. New documents concerning the protection of minority rights issued by the United Nations Organization, Council of Europe, OSCE, European Union (European Communities) as well as other international organizations served as a positive response to the revival of ethnic consciousness in Europe.

3.1. Legal framework

Poland's commitment to the protection of national minorities is expressed in the following legal acts:

1) the *Constitution* of 2 April 1997, which sanctions the principles of ethnic and national minority protection and the state's obligations in this area.⁸ Minority protection as guaranteed by Article 35 contains positive state obligations to guarantee that *members of minority groups can exercise their right to cultural development (language, traditions, customs) and grants them the right to establish organizations, and also to participate in decision making in issues concerning maintaining their cultural and religious identity;*

2) the *Act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language*.⁹ The Act regulates issues of relating to the maintenance and development of national and ethnic minorities' cultural identity and regional language. It lays down the framework for realization of the principle of equal treatment of individuals irrespective of their ethnic background. One of the many important issues that the Act defines is the concept of a national and ethnic minority and lists the groups which the state has officially recognized as such. It also provides detailed regulations concerning bilingualism in the minority and regional languages and the methods of realization of educational and cultural rights. It lays out the responsibilities of the administration and prescribes the conditions of conducting political consultations with minority communities. The Act changed the organizational foundations of minority policy, established new institutions and created the basis for the

⁸ The Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2nd April, 1997 as published in *Dziennik Ustaw* No. 78, item 483.

⁹ The Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language (adopted by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland on 6 January 2005).

realization of new minority rights. Its adoption represented a purposeful institutional reform of state policy regarding minorities;

3) the *bilateral treaties* on the protection of national minorities, which the country signed with all its neighbors and other Central-Eastern European countries after 1989;

3) a number of *legal acts concerning the rights of individuals belonging to national and ethnic minorities* adopted in the 1990s. The acts comply with European standards, particularly with the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the protection of National Minorities (1995). Minority communities and their organizations are accepted as distinct subjects of public life and their members have been granted the right to unrestricted and public expression of their ethnic affiliation.

3.2. Polish state institutions in charge of national policy

The *National and Ethnic Minorities Committee of the Sejm* (the lower chamber of Parliament) of the Republic of Poland “*deals with matters concerning maintenance of cultural heritage of national, ethnic and linguistic minorities, protection of their rights as well as implementation of the principle of equal treatment of persons regardless of their ethnic and racial origin or nationality.*”

Minorities have their representation in the Sejm, including the Committee and its Presidium. It is possible for the minorities to create electoral blocks and nominate candidates during elections from their minority cultural organizations. In the present term, the German minority comprises a separate parliamentary bloc, and, furthermore, 10 MPs from the Kashubian minority were nominated for the elections by minority cultural organizations. Representatives of other minorities are being elected on the lists of political parties. In connection with this, minority rights activists have appealed to Parliament with a suggestion to adopt the practices of the Romanian and Croatian Parliaments, where special quotas (of seats) are allotted for representatives of minorities.

Minorities, such as Belarusians, Germans, Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Kashubians are well represented in elected councils (*sejmiki*) in Polish regions (*województwa*), holding the majority of ballots in some regions.

On the executive level, there is the *Department for Denominations and National and Ethnic Minorities* at the Ministry of Interior and Administration responsible for coordination of government activities aimed at creating adequate conditions for national and ethnic minorities.

The Department's main responsibilities are:

- to coordinate activities pursued by government administration bodies dealing with ethnic and national minority issues;
- to assess and propose solutions aimed at ensuring the rights and satisfying the needs of national and ethnic minorities;
- to prevent any infringement of minority rights;
- to prepare studies on the situation of national and ethnic minorities in Poland;
- to publish on the subject of national and ethnic minority issues and problems and to inform the Polish public about them.

An important role in the system of minority rights regulation is played by the *Joint Government and National and Ethnic Minorities Commission*, which was created on the basis of the Act of 6 January 2005 as an opinion-making and consultative body. The Commission consists of representatives of the Government and of national and ethnic minorities and a regional language speaking minority (Kashubian).

3.3. Other forms of institutional guarantees. The role of audit institutions and NGOs

Audit institutions play a significant role in the observance of Human Rights and the Rights of Minorities. In the Polish administrative system, auditing functions in the field of minority protection are executed by:

1) The *Human Rights Defender (Ombudsman)*, who is the constitutional authority for legal control and protection. The Human Rights Defender safeguards human and civic freedoms and rights specified in the Constitution and other legal acts;

2) The *Supreme Control Chamber*, which is the top independent state audit body whose mission is to safeguard public spending. In 2009 the Office initiated auditing of the *Realization of the tasks of the Act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language* for the period of 2007-2010, with the aim of assessing the realization of tasks by the state authorities and local self governments in the field of preservation and development of the cultural identity of national and ethnic minorities.

Polish NGOs play an important role in activities aimed at minority protection. The *Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights* is especially notable in this respect. Since 1991 it has been organizing meetings for the leaders of minority organizations, aimed at informing minority representatives about

their rights, maintaining contacts and inter-community cooperation, and interethnic conflict resolution. The Foundation has enabled the National and Ethnic Minorities Commission to make contacts with all minority communities in Poland. It is worth mentioning that the current state policy regarding minorities in Poland, institutionalized in the historic Act of 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language, has been developed through the joint efforts of state authorities, minority NGOs and the Helsinki Foundation of Human Rights since the start of democratization reforms in 1989.

3.4. Overview of the system of minority protection in Poland

Citizens of Poland belonging to minorities have the right to learn or be instructed in the minority language. According to the law, if there are 7 or more pupils belonging to a minority in a class, a separate class can be formed in a pre-school and secondary school with instruction in the minority language. If there are less than 7 pupils at the same level – an intra-class group should be formed. If there is one pupil in school belonging to a minority, the school principal applies to a local self-government body to form an intra-school group.

Poland has a special policy to protect the cultural and linguistic rights of minorities with support from special funds. The state budget allocates additional funds to local self-government bodies to support national schools. In order to encourage local communities and schools to provide education in minority languages, schools with instruction in the minority languages receive 150 % of funding for each pupil belonging to a minority group. The Ministry of Education also provides additional funds for publication of school books in the minority languages.

Polish solutions concerning minorities' linguistic rights merit special attention. According to the Act, a minority language can be used as an auxiliary language in local self-government bodies in districts where at least 20% of the population belongs to the minority. The Act grants minorities the right to have bilingual names of localities, physiographic objects and streets. It also prescribes that there are bilingual employees in local administrative bodies, who are paid larger salaries for their expertise in the minority language.

According to many observers, since the adoption of the Act of 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language more and more parents have expressed their desire to educate their children in the minority language and culture. Thanks to the joint efforts of representatives of the state, minority organizations and experts in the field of Human Rights to apply this law, a lot of people are being encouraged to enjoy their linguistic rights. Minority organizations receive grants from the Government for their activities: publication of newspapers, magazines,

almanacs, books, organization of festivals. According to the law, minority organizations are exempt from the restriction under which NGOs in Poland cannot receive grants for administrative purposes, such as for staff salaries – e.g., for book-keepers and coordinators of projects. The framework for TV and Radio shows in the minority languages is regulated by the National Broadcasting Council. Under the law, public TV and radio channels must broadcast shows in the languages of minorities. The Government also supports private channels, such as Radio Kaszebe, Radio Racja (Belarusian).

The Polish experience in institutionalization of minority rights can be of significant interest to Russia, because it presents an example of effective cooperation between the state and citizens belonging to minorities and of methods of enhancing ethnic representation at different levels of power. The Act of 6 January 2005 on National and Ethnic Minorities and on the Regional Language has become an effective legislative solution to the problem of minority protection, for it provides detailed regulations concerning bilingualism in the minority and regional languages and methods of realization of educational and cultural rights, lays out the authorities' responsibilities and prescribes interaction of authorities with minority communities in the form of political consultations. Based on the Act, a successful institutional reform of state policy regarding minorities was carried out, according to which new institutions were established, such as the Joint Government and National and Ethnic Minorities Commission, and the foundations for the realization of new minority rights were created. From the perspective of the observance of the rights of minorities, the active role of audit institutions, Human Rights NGOs and minority cultural organizations is especially valuable.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Summarizing the results of the research, it is important to point out the *key problems concerning linguistic and cultural rights of the Buryat minority in Russia*:

- lack of adequate legislation and policy with regard to the rights of minorities;
- non-observance of the existing linguistic legislation in the public sphere;
- underrepresentation of minorities in federal state institutions;
- insufficient involvement of civil society (Human Rights organizations, minority NGOs) in policy making in the field of minority protection; lack of cooperation with the state.

It is evident that to stop the process of extinction of the Buryat language and to jump-start its development, combined efforts of the state and civil society are needed. Thus, some recommendations may be proposed to different actors involved in the policy making process in order to set in motion credible and effective policies in the field of promotion of cultural and linguistic rights of minorities.

1. Recommendations to the Russian federal and regional state institutions

The institution of ethnic representation is an effective instrument of national policy and a mechanism of interethnic harmony. That is why it is very important to guarantee adequate ethnic representation, so that minorities have the chance to participate in the adoption of laws concerning their cultural identity and in the implementation of policies making sure that their linguistic and cultural rights are guaranteed.

Audit institutions should play a more significant role in the observance of the Rights of Minorities. It is also fundamental to involve NGOs dealing with cultural and linguistic minorities' issues, as well as Human Rights organizations in the formulation, adoption and implementation of protection policies, as well as policies fostering their rights at international, national and local levels. The effective participation of these communities in such activities can result in better management of the area's human, social, and economic resources, as well as better control of national and local government actions in order to guarantee the observance of linguistic and cultural legislation.

A recent initiative by MPs of the Parliament of Tatarstan, who suggested creating a government body responsible for national policy in Russia, deserves special attention. Since the dissolution of the Ministry for the Affairs of the Federation, National and Migration policy on 16 October by the decree of President Putin, no special government body has yet been named responsible for dealing with minority issues. The experiences of the Department for Denominations and National and Ethnic Minorities at the Ministry of Interior and Administration of the Republic of Poland and the Joint Government and National and Ethnic Minorities Commission, can be learnt from and effective policies can be adopted.

2. Recommendations to Russian NGOs in the field of Human Rights

Human Rights organizations can play an important role not only in educating representatives of minorities about their rights but also as mediators bringing together state institutions and minority communities to create a dialogue aimed at drawing up and applying effective policies. The experience of the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights can be studied in this respect.

3. Recommendations to minority organizations

There is a famous expression from Soviet literature, "*Salvation of the drowning is in the hands of the drowning themselves.*" In respect of the minority organizations, this means that they should become active participants in the policy making process. It also means that they should use legal forms

of promoting their rights more actively by filing appeals to judicial bodies, the office of Ombudsman and Human Rights organizations. It is of utmost importance for interethnic harmony in the country that minority NGOs and state institutions become social partners in the cause of the protection of minority rights.