MULTICULTURAL POLICY: A SOLUTION FOR INTERETHNIC TENSIONS IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

POLITICA MULTICULTURALĂ: O SOLUȚIE PENTRU TENSIUNI INTERETNICE DIN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA

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Summary. *This article examines the potential of multicultural policies as a solution to interethnic tensions in the Republic of Moldova. The study identifies the main causes of these conflicts and assesses the effectiveness of multicultural policies in promoting social cohesion. Using qualitative methods, data was gathered from policy documents, academic articles and interviews with experts. The findings indicate that historical legacies, socio-political changes, and geopolitical division influence ethnic tensions in Moldova. The results suggest that implementing multicultural policies could enhance the integration of ethnic minorities and improve societal stability. This study offers insights for policymakers on tension resolution in multiethnic societies.*

Keywords: *multiethnic societies, interethnic tensions, ethnic minorities, multiculturalism, multicultural policy.*

INTRODUCTION

Multicultural policy as the solution to addressing inter-ethnic tensions in societies around the world, which in an era marked by globalization, migration and enduring historical ties, managing cultural diversity has become indispensable for promoting social cohesion and unity. These policies, comprising principles, laws and practices, aim to promote equal opportunities and rights for all cultural and ethnic groups, providing a structured approach to achieving these goals.

Multicultural policy also recognizes and respects diverse cultural identities in a society. By ensuring minority groups have equal access to resources, opportunities and representation, these policies reduce disparities and encourage a sense of belonging among all citizens. They promote mutual understanding, respect and cooperation between different ethnic groups, thereby reducing tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence.

Countries such as Canada, Australia and several European states have successfully implemented multicultural policies that view diversity as a source of strength, not division. These policies facilitate the integration of diverse populations into mainstream society while preserving and celebrating their cultural heritage. By promoting inclusive processes of nation-building, multicultural policy contributes to the creation of cohesive and resilient societies, capable of constructively navigating cultural differences.

In the case of the Republic of Moldova, which hosts diverse ethnic groups such as Moldovans, Romanians, Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauz, Bulgarians and others, multicultural policy plays a crucial role, because by recognizing and respecting the cultural rights and identities of these groups, such policies can contribute to the formation of a more cohesive society, and from a functional point of view, this political strategy ensures the protection of minority rights and the promotion of inclusive processes of nation-building, essential for overcoming historical divisions and for cultivating a common national identity.

The importance of the multicultural policy in the Republic of Moldova can`t be underestimated, because the effective implementation of these policies is crucial for the promotion of peaceful coexistence, the provision of equal opportunities for all ethnic groups and the advancement of sustainable social cohesion. This study aims to analyze how multicultural policy can effectively alleviate inter-ethnic tensions and contribute to a united and harmonious Moldovan society.

By examining case studies and academic perspective, this article aims to provide insights into the reasoning behind multiculturalist policy as a solution to inter-ethnic tensions. It explores its impact on social cohesion, integration and sustainable development, aiming to contribute to the discourse on promoting social harmony and inclusive growth in contemporary societies.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyze the effectiveness of multicultural policies in addressing interethnic tensions in the Republic of Moldova. The primary materials include governmental policy documents, academic articles, and reports from international organizations. Data collection methods involve semi-structured interviews with policymakers, community leaders, and experts in ethnic studies. Additionally, content analysis of relevant literature provides a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of interethnic relations and the implementation of multicultural policies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Varieties and Typologies of conflicts

Any tensions that take place within a social structure is qualified in different ways. Both the former Soviet Union and the post-Soviet countries were extremely ethnically diverse. According to some rough estimates, about 150 ethnic groups lived on the former Soviet territory. Non-Russian ethnic groups made up slightly more than half of the population of the USSR. All these peoples were incorporated into one state with all the geographical, cultural, economic and religious implications of such an incorporation – unprecedented diversity. Therefore, researchers agree that post-Soviet countries experienced several different types of ethnic conflicts, many of which have deep historical roots [3]. From this point of view, it seems to be incorrect to consider all post-Soviet ethnic problems as having the same consequences and remedies.

This variety of ethnic disputes and their causes reflected in different typologies of ethnic conflicts.

One of the typologies, almost self-evident, is based on the highlighting of "matryoshka" nationalisms that reflect the hierarchy of ethno-territorial units within the former Soviet Union.

The main factors generating conflicts are related to the frustrations arising from the disintegration of old state structures at all levels, the confrontation between regional and central elites, the struggle between ethnic elites for important positions in terms of power, the conflict between nationalist and communist or neo-communist forces, the disguise and preservation of communist regimes in the form of state sovereignty (the case of Central Asia), the consolidation of pro-imperial political forces and the absence of a political strategy in all the camps involved in the conflict [3,p. 119].

According to Western researchers such as Ekiert G. and Hanson S.E., the main types of interethnic conflicts that occurred in the territories of the former Soviet republics can be categorized as follows:

- The new political elites, both those of the titular nation and those of the minorities, pursuing their goals, channeled the public's dissatisfaction towards other ethnic groups, making them guilty for the existing problems;
- Conflicts between the titular nationality and Russian-speaking ethnic minorities who could not, or rather did not want to, comply with the new linguistic realities imposed by the majority;
- The consequences of the deportations of the peoples from the communist period, or conflicts during the return of the property or the return to the ancestral places;
- Armed hostilities between new political elites and old elites who did not want to lose economic and political influence within the republics;
- Political conflicts regarding the claims to expand the territorial-administrative status of untitled ethnic groups;
- Conflicts arising from historically disputed territories [9, p.144].

2. The causes of Ethnic Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Space

The disintegration of the Soviet Union unleashed a wave of ethno-political activism and intercommunal struggles, driven by historical grievances and the sudden shift in political power dynamics. In the Republic of Moldova, these conflicts were exacerbated by the lack of societal cohesion and the challenges of nation- building.

A researcher from the Republic of Moldova Toma C., explains that a series of ethnic conflicts took place throughout the territory of the former USSR speaks of certain objective causes of them, of a legacy that the newly independent states received from the communist regime. This also refers to the conflicts that have arisen in other post-communist multinational states. The former Soviet Union and the post-Soviet countries had to go through a dramatic wave of ethnopolitical activism and intercommunal struggles, especially from the end of the 80s of the last century [9, p. 132].

Thus, ethnic conflicts are one of the characteristics of modernity, but the last decade has brought seismic changes in the relations between different communities around the world. Understanding the causes, manifestations and consequences of ethnic conflicts preoccupied political decision-makers and public opinion in the post-Soviet period, constituting a real challenge for contemporary researchers [3, p. 34-37]. Also, understanding these causes is important for avoiding political speculation as much as possible. After the collapse of communism and the dissolution of the multinational states (USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia), fundamental issues were raised regarding the nature of the state, sovereignty, autonomy, the right to self-determination, etc. Obviously, these issues were seen differently. For the new states that appeared immediately after the disintegration of those mentioned above, the principle of territorial integrity held superiority over the right to self-determination of minorities.

3. Identifying the sets of causes

The collapse of the authoritarian regime made conflicts possible after the "lid of the internationalist cauldron" was lifted from the old ethnic resentments. Toma C., identified three broad sets of causes of interethnic conflict in the former USSR [9, p.144]:

1) general, structural and systemic policy;
2) causes related to the Soviet and pre-Soviet heritage and ideology;
3) causes resulting from the process of rapid socio-political change, from the economic reform to the post-communist democratization and privatization process.

Ethnic conflicts in ex-soviet countries, the Republic of Moldova can be categorized into several types, including political conflicts, linguistic disputes, and territorial claims. Each type has unique causes and manifestations.

The root causes of interethnic conflicts in the Republic of Moldova include the legacy of Soviet policies, rapid socio-political changes, and ongoing economic reforms. These factors have created a volatile environment where ethnic tensions can easily escalate.

4. The Republic of Moldova: Aspects of Societal Security Issues

Moldova's societal security compromised by its lack of integration among ethnic minorities and the geopolitical division between pro-western and pro-eastern factions. Located on the border of the European Union, the Republic of Moldova represents a unique case in terms of societal security. Since its proclamation of independence on August 27, 1991, Moldovan authorities, regardless of the political spectrum, have not succeeded in consolidating a Moldovan civic nation that includes all citizens, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or social affiliations. The integration of ethnic minorities remains low, and many do not identify as Moldovans, preferring their ethnic identities instead.

According to researcher Lavric A., Moldovan society is divided along several lines:

1. Geopolitics: the population is split between pro-Western and pro-Eastern factions, which often aligns with political divisions;

2. Inter–ethnic: ethnic minorities, heavily Russified during the Soviet period are poorly integrated into contemporary Moldovan society.
3. Intra-ethnic: within the majority population, there are divisions between those identifying as Romanians, while others identifying as Moldovans. [5, p. 218].

Other researchers such as Negru E., and Serebrian O., have noted the inconsistency in projecting a Romanian identity beyond the medieval period [6, p. 3], because Serebrian O., explains that post-annexation Bessarabians identified as Moldovans, not Romanians, and the Moldavian identity was later shaped within the USSR [8, p. 220].

The societal division weakens Moldova s state cohesion. An American analyst Buzan, B., explains that states with low sociopolitical cohesion are often termed or categorized as “weak states”, because of several causes [2, p. 5]:

1. Lack of a Unified State Idea: The authorities from the Republic of Moldova have not formulated a national vision or project embraced by all societal components.
2. Failure to build a Civic Nation: Authorities have not focused on building a Moldovan civic nation based on shared values.
3. Unattractiveness to Ethnic Minorities: The Moldovan states has failed to appeal to its ethnic minorities, lacking soft power initiatives and necessary reforms to improve living conditions [7 p. 114].

5. The role of Multicultural Policies.

Multicultural policies aim to promote integration and mutual respect among different ethnic groups. From a theoretical point of view, the concept of culture has several meanings: in a broad sense, culture signifies a way of life of a people (“Ensemble of activities and behavior patterns specific to a given social group, transmissible through education”), and in the narrow sense, the notion in question refers to the achievements of creative personalities in the various branches of art: painting, plastic art, literature, music, theater, cinema, etc. (“The fact of possessing varied knowledge in various fields; the totality of this knowledge; the (high) level of intellectual development one reaches. Man of culture means a person with a high intellectual level, who possesses fundamental universal knowledge [5, p.223]. So according to the first meaning evoked, it is an impersonal culture (for example, folklore manifested in dances, folk music, folk wear, traditional dishes, etc.), and the second meaning refers to personalized culture, to the creations specific historical personalities.

Multicultural ideologies or policies are broad, ranging from equal respect for diverse cultures in a society to maintaining cultural diversity. Multiculturalism, which promotes the maintenance of the distinctness of different cultures, is often contrasted with the establishment of policies regarding social integration, cultural assimilation, and racial segregation. Multiculturalism has been described as a “melting pot” or “cultural mosaic.” Two different and apparently incompatible strategies have been developed through different government policies and strategies.

The first focuses on interaction and communication between different cultures; this approach is also often known as interculturality. The second focuses on cultural diversity and uniqueness that can sometimes lead to intercultural competition.

Cultural isolation can protect the uniqueness of a nation's or area's local culture and also contribute to global cultural diversity. A common aspect of many policies following the second approach is that they avoid presenting any specific ethnic, religious or cultural community values as central.

The Republic of Moldova is a multi-ethnic state; therefore, in order to ensure societal security, its cultural policy must meet the needs of all ethnic groups, so it must be multicultural. To ensure societal security, the Republic of Moldova must adopt a multicultural policy that addresses the needs of all ethnic groups. The Bureau of Inter-Ethnic Relations (BRI) should be legally mandated to develop and implement this policy, with adequate funding. This policy should be integrated with educational initiatives to help ethnic minorities master the state language which is the Romanian language [1, p.42].

CONCLUSIONS

Multicultural policy represents a crucial strategy for identifying, comprehensively analyzing, understanding, and resolving inter-ethnic tensions. This approach promotes social cohesion not only at the national level, as seen in the case of the Republic of Moldova, but also regionally and globally. In the current era dominated by globalization, migration, and the enduring legacy of historical divisions, managing cultural diversity has become indispensable for fostering social harmony and unity. Multicultural policies encompass a range of principles, laws, and practices designed to ensure equal opportunities and rights for all cultural and ethnic groups, providing a structured framework for achieving these goals.

Multicultural policy also signifies recognition and respect for diverse cultural identities within societies. By guaranteeing minority groups equal access to resources, opportunities, and representation, these policies reduce disparities and foster a sense of belonging among all citizens. They promote mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation between different ethnic groups, thereby mitigating tensions and promoting peaceful coexistence.

Western countries such as Canada, Australia, and various European states have successfully implemented multicultural policies that celebrate diversity as a source of strength. These policies facilitate the integration of diverse populations into mainstream society while preserving and celebrating their cultural heritage. Through inclusive nation-building processes, multicultural policy contributes to creating cohesive and resilient societies capable of effectively managing cultural differences.

In the context of the Republic of Moldova, a country characterized by its diverse ethnic composition including Moldovans, Romanians, Ukrainians, Russians, Gagauzians, Bulgarians, and others, multicultural policy plays a pivotal role in state development and implementation. By recognizing and respecting the cultural rights and identities of these groups, such policies contribute to societal cohesion. The principles of

multicultural policy focus on respecting and protecting the rights of ethnic minorities and promoting inclusive nation-building processes essential for overcoming historical divisions and cultivating a common national identity.

The necessity for the active development and promotion of multicultural policy in the Republic of Moldova cannot be overstated. Effective implementation of these policies is essential for promoting peaceful coexistence, providing equal opportunities for all ethnic groups, and advancing sustainable social cohesion. This research explores how multicultural policy can effectively identify and address inter-ethnic tensions, emphasizing unity, diversity, and solidarity among citizens, society, and the state.

Through analysis of case studies, policy documents, academic perspectives, and expert interviews, this study provides valuable insights into the rationale behind multiculturalism as a solution to inter-ethnic tensions. By examining its causes and impact on social cohesion, integration, and sustainable development, it contributes to long-term strategic policy discourse on promoting social harmony and inclusive growth in contemporary societies.

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