

ERASMUS MUNDUS  
International Master in Russian, Central and East European Studies (IMRCEES)

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW  
School of Social and Political Sciences  
Master of Arts: Central and East European Studies  
Matriculation number: 2250226

UNIVERSITY OF TARTU  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies  
Master of Arts: Baltic Sea Region Studies

Christiana Holsapple

**THE POLITICS OF BELONGING IN GAGAUZIA: NEGOTIATING  
LANGUAGE USAGE, ETHNIC LABELS, AND CITIZENSHIP**

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**Author's Declaration**

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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# **THE POLITICS OF BELONGING IN GAGAUZIA: NEGOTIATING LANGUAGE USAGE, ETHNIC LABELS, AND CITIZENSHIP**

Christiana Holsapple

## **Abstract**

This case study of Gagauzia reveals the complex nature of belonging and its interplay with a wide variety of factors by bringing to light personal attitudes in Gagauzia towards ethnic labels and languages. Analysis of empirical data collected during three months of fieldwork explores in what situations ethnic categorizations are activated, identifies patterns of ethnic labeling, and draws conclusions on how ethnicity interlinks with negotiation of the politics of belonging. In doing so, this work reflects on how Soviet legacies, namely language policies and assigned ethnicity, continue to have a huge impact on the everyday realities of belonging in Gagauzia. Moreover, it illustrates the role that economic instability can play in negotiation of belonging by examining the effect that enormous out-migration has had not only on demographics, but on the standing of Gagauzian language and feelings of personal identification among Gagauzians. In multiethnic Gagauzia, ethnic identification, language usage, and citizenship very often do not align, and this thesis addresses how Gagauzians attach meaning to these elements, frame them in forming identity, and utilize them in the construction of boundaries. This work employs in-depth qualitative analysis that draws out relationships among various phenomena related to ever-changing conceptualizations of belonging in Gagauzia. It not only fills a void in ethnographic research on an understudied region, but it also contributes to the existing broader body of literature on topics of identity and belonging in the post-Soviet space.

## CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

Gagauzia is a small autonomous region in southern Moldova with an official population of 134,535 (2014 Moldovan Census). As a Turkic-speaking Orthodox ethnic group, with a territorial homeland in Moldova, but with Russian as their lingua franca and a large percentage of migrant workers abroad mainly in Russia and Turkey, Gagauzians are caught in a web of influences. Indeed, they are a minority in several various ways. Within the larger Turkic-speaking world, they are a religious minority as Orthodox Christians.<sup>1</sup> Within their current homeland of autonomous Gagauzia, they are an ethnic and linguistic minority among Romanian and Slavic-speakers of Moldova. Notably, this is the first time in history that Gagauzians are the titular nation, albeit if only in an autonomy within the larger Republic of Moldova<sup>2</sup>. They began migrating to southern Moldova in waves in the late eighteenth century and more heavily in the early nineteenth century after the area came under control of the Russian Empire in 1812. Since settling in southern Moldova, they have been subjects of the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Romania, and the Soviet Union. Their cultural practices and way of life today reflect their complex history in a border region between various empires' and nations' opposing geographical spheres of influence. Gagauzia occupies a rift between competing powers in the area. They have ethnolinguistic connections with Turkey, yet are predominantly Orthodox Christians with strong historic and present-day affiliation with Russia. As a demographically tiny and geographically peripheral group, their incongruous position presents a fascinating case for examining topics of belonging.

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<sup>1</sup> There exist a few other such Turkic-speaking Russian Orthodox groups, such as Chuvash, but it is still appropriate to postulate that they are few and far between, and that this linguistic-faith combination is unusual and even “dissonant” in the greater human landscape, as Turkic idioms are generally associated with Islam, rather than Orthodoxy.

<sup>2</sup> The Moldovan 2014 census gave the country's population as 2,998,235 (statistica.md), not counting breakaway Transnistria. However, the country's political and economic instability, corruption, and high levels of migration must be considered when contemplating the reliability of census data (VofH 2018, WB 2018, IOM 2018). Keeping this in mind, according to census data, Gagauzia represents about 4.49% of the entire population of Moldova.

Historically, and still today to some extent, Gagauzians have been farmers and shepherds, with 63.8% of the population being listed as living in rural areas (2014 Moldovan Census).<sup>3</sup> As is the case with the rest of Moldova, Gagauzia is characterized by extremely high levels of out-migration (IOM 2018, World Bank 2018, Keough 2006). Nearly every family the researcher met during her time in Gagauzia has at least one family member living abroad as a migrant worker, usually in Russia or Turkey, though also in some cases in the European Union. Although there exist no statistics on migration or remittances specifically for Gagauzia, it is reasonable to assume that the situation there reflects the overall situation in the Republic of Moldova, in which remittances account for a quarter of the country's GDP (World Bank 2018). Minority Rights Group International even lists Gagauzia as the poorest area of Moldova, with few sources of income apart from agriculture (MRGI 2018), and Vision of Humanity's Global Peace Index lists Moldova as 62 out of 163, pointing to the severity of problems such as political instability, criminality, and violent demonstrations (Vision of Humanity 2018). Going abroad to earn money has been the norm, an expected responsibility, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia is usually the first destination choice due to lack of problem with language knowledge and obvious ties as a former Soviet republic, with many even holding Russian citizenship, along with Moldovan. Most often men work abroad in Russia, usually in construction. Women, on the other hand, commonly work abroad in Turkey, as there is demand for cheap labor in domestic work, care for elderly, and sex work. Again, language plays a role in choosing this destination, as the similarities between Gagauzian and Turkish make finding employment and navigating the country easier (Keough 2006, 440). On the basis of Bulgaria's historic homeland policies, it is possible for Gagauzians to obtain Bulgarian citizenship by merely proving ancestry and without taking language proficiency exams. Many utilize this opportunity to obtain a European Union passport, which allows them to then work in higher-paying European countries

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<sup>3</sup> Gagauzia is composed of three cities (Comrat, pop. 23,709; Chadyr-Lunga, pop. 10,797; Vulcanesti, pop. 15,528) and twenty-four villages (ATU Gagauzia Official Webpage).



where cheap labor is in demand, often in retail or fast food service (IOM Moldova 2018).

Although there does not exist current, reliable data on language usage, Gagauzian is classified as “definitely endangered” by UNESCO, which reports that there are 180,000 speakers (UNESCO Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger 2018). The researcher, however, corresponded with the individuals responsible for determining these numbers, and they relayed that this number was based on the assumption that all 150,00 (2004 Moldovan Census) residents of Gagauzia and 30,000 self-reported ethnic Gagauzians in neighboring Ukraine speak Gagauzian<sup>4</sup>. This is certainly not the case. As a highly multiethnic region, the linguistic landscape in Gagauzia is much more diverse. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, when there was talk of Moldova joining Romania, some non-Gagauzian villages joined Gagauzia in order to have their right to speak Russian protected<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, UNESCO’s estimate is quite generous, and it can be put forth that fewer than 180,000 Gagauzian-speakers exist, making the possibility of the language’s extinction even more real.

The Gagauzian language was entirely oral until 1957, when an alphabet was created using Cyrillic letters, though it was never used for official purposes or in the public sphere (Menz 2000, 103). There exist no kindergartens or schools where the language of instruction is Gagauzian, and the language is not even a required subject in Gagauzia, as is the case with Moldovan and English languages. Rather, students are given the choice between Gagauzian and Bulgarian, a policy that reflects the Soviet legacy of “native language” policies, that is that native language

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<sup>4</sup> The individual mentioned stated that his knowledge of Turkic languages is limited, and as he had to compile several hundred entries for UNESCO besides the one on Gagauzian, the atlas info, therefore, is necessarily superficial. This speaks to the possibility of data and classifications for endangered languages often not being entirely representative of reality, overestimating the actual number of speakers in some cases.

<sup>5</sup> Examples include Ferepontevka, a predominantly Ukrainian village and Russkaya Kiseliya, a predominantly Moldovan and Ukrainian village. In neither do Gagauzians make up the majority of the population, yet they are part of Gagauzia (ATU Gagauzia Official Webpage 2018).

and ethnicity were expected to correspond<sup>6</sup>. It is reasonable to assume that there today exist no monolingual native Gagauzian speakers: no native speakers of Gagauzian who do not also have some degree of fluency in Russian. It is worth also mentioning the lack of standardization of the language, or more precisely, the lack of implementation and usage of a standardized version of Gagauzian. Vocabulary and pronunciation vary from village to village, and none seem to correlate entirely with the constantly-changing “standard” taught in schools. Essentially, despite existence of written language, it continues to be an oral language. In contrast with many minority groups, Gagauzians never experienced a real national awakening or nation-building era. Some Gagauzian-language poets, writers, and singers appeared after an alphabet was created in 1957, but they did not have great impact on national psyche, especially considering the controlled nature of publishing in Soviet times. As a result of devout Orthodoxy, for the past two centuries and continuing today, Gagauzians have had Russian first names, another example of the many commonalities between the two groups.

As is often the case with small nations or sub-ethnic groups<sup>7</sup>, Gagauzia is the recipient of a great deal of foreign aid, and inevitably, the target of many soft power initiatives. Namely, in post-Soviet times, Turkey and Russia are major donors, both claiming ties with this small autonomy. Turkey draws on the commonalities in language and the possibility of ancestral ties, often being called a “brother nation.” Their contributions are impressive, with many joking there’s nowhere left in Comrat free from the ubiquitous TiKA (Turkish Development Agency) plaques. Projects include: Ataturk Library, nursing homes, radio station, kindergartens, etc. Their role is not without controversy. Many consider that they have manipulated the Gagauzian language (historically, an oral one), with radio broadcasts in Gagauzian

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<sup>6</sup> See Karklins’s 1980 “A Note on ‘Nationality’ and ‘Native Tongue’ as Census Categories in 1979” for more insight on the “native tongue” policies in the Soviet Union, to be discussed in the literature review of chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> In accordance with the 1994 Law on the Special Status of Gagauzia (part of the Moldovan Constitution), Gagauzians are considered a *народ*, which can be translated differently depending on semantic understanding: people, nation, ethnic group.

now using more “Turkish” pronunciation and vocabulary, for example. Although Turkey’s help is accepted, there is generally little affinity with them, not least of all because they are Muslims. Gagauzians, as largely Orthodox Christians, often view Turks with suspicion. They express and display (evident most obviously by Russian flags in many buses, cars, homes, etc.) more affinity with Russia, which recently financed the replacement of the silver cupolas on the Comrat church with gold ones. Moldova, though not in the financial position to carry out the sorts of projects Turkey and Russia are capable of, is, nevertheless, the country within which Gagauzia’s autonomy operates. As such, their influence is also visible. Striking are the ubiquitous social participation billboards throughout the country, including Gagauzia, which read both in Romanian and Russian (though in smaller letters) catchy slogans like: “Identity? Together we’re Moldova!” (Figure 1), “Belonging? Moldova is my home!”, “Name, last name? I’m a citizen of the Republic of Moldova!”. Moldovan/Romanian<sup>8</sup> continues to be a required subject in schools in Gagauzia, and there is frequent controversy surrounding differing interpretations on both the Gagauzian and the Moldovan sides of various laws related to autonomy.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 1**<sup>10</sup> (eualegmoldova.md)



<sup>8</sup> For a thorough exploration of the Moldovan vs. Romanian controversy, see Wim van Meur’s 1998 “Carving a Moldavian Identity out of History.”

<sup>9</sup> The wording of the 1994 Law on the Special Status of Gagauzia (part of the Moldovan Constitution) is extremely open-ended. One example is: Article 1(2): “Gagauzia, within the bounds of its jurisdiction, independently addresses issues of political, economic, and cultural development...” (Ст.1(2): “Гагаузия в пределах своей компетенции самостоятельно решает вопросы политического, экономического и культурного развития...”): ATU Gagauzia Official Website 2018. Clearly, such issues are interlinked with those of the greater Republic of Moldova, meaning that jurisdiction clashes are commonplace.

<sup>10</sup> Translation of text: -Identity? Together we’re Moldova!

These three bigger powers, among others<sup>11</sup>, are in the process of constantly exerting their sway of influence on tiny Gagauzia. As a result of hundreds of years of Russification and Sovietization, the impact of Orthodoxy, and the failure to implement any level of education in Gagauzian language, Gagauzian language users are dwindling. Plus, having lived in the melting pot of multicultural Bessarabia for the past two centuries has made it difficult to pinpoint specifically “Gagauzian” aspects of culture. Gagauzian was used as an ethnic label in passports in Soviet times<sup>12</sup>, but in the post-Soviet era, the prospects for the continuance of the label Gagauzian without nation-building tools (standardized language taught, national symbols, heroes, agreed-upon history, etc.) can be considered tenuous. What’s more, Gagauzia is a highly multiethnic region. Although no reliable statistics exist on ethnic breakdown<sup>13</sup>, legal documents refer to the autonomy as multinational. The 1998 legal code of the Law on the Special Status of Gagauzia (which can be considered to be the equivalent to a constitution), begins with: “We, the legitimate representatives of the multiethnic people (*многонационального народа*) of Gagauzia, founded on the historical traditions of the Gagauzian people (*гагаузского народа*), declaring respect for the rights and freedom of all peoples/ethnicities (*народов*)<sup>14</sup>...” Although a vague mention is made to unspecified Gagauzian

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<sup>11</sup> On the alley of glory (*аллея славы*) in Comrat, for example, there are busts of Nursultan Nazarbaev and Ilkham Aliyev, a nod to the financing Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have given to Gagauzia, also often referred to as “brother” Turkish peoples. It goes without saying that the US and EU also have multifarious projects operating in the area.

<sup>12</sup> For an in-depth look at the nuances of “creating” ethnicity in the Soviet Union, see Francine Hirsch’s 1997 “The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress: Ethnographers and the Category Nationality in the 1926, 1937, and 1939 Censuses.” This will be discussed more in the literature review (chapter 2).

<sup>13</sup> The Republic of Moldova produces new census data every ten years for the country as a whole that includes language usage and ethnic identification, but no such data is composed separately for Gagauzia. Both Moldova’s and Gagauzia’s larger problems of poverty, corruption, and criminality are not conducive for generation of accurate or specific census data, and pushing for creation of such data is not an issue that receives attention considering the multifarious difficulties of more severe nature.

<sup>14</sup> “Мы, полномочные представители многонационального народа Гагаузии, опираясь на исторические традиции гагаузского народа; свидетельствуя уважение к правам и свободам всех народов...” (*Уложение Гагаузии / Legal Code of Gagauzia, ratified 1998: ATU Official Gagauzia Website 2018*). The word *народ* is used three times in this opening: first to refer to a multiethnic group of people united within a political/territorial union, next to refer to a certain

“traditions,” the code of law makes it clear that Gagauzia is a diverse union, composed of different ethnic groups. Indeed, it can be argued<sup>15</sup> that Gagauzian autonomy came about as political tool to avoid unification with Romania and Romanianization, not necessarily as a purely nationalist/ethnic movement.<sup>16</sup> It is worth exploring to what extent this is reflected in Gagauzian narratives about belonging. Being a small minority group always under the rule of bigger groups complicates matters of identity and belonging. Indeed, considering the intensive soft power initiatives, the enormous out-migration, and the fact that a national awakening movement never fully occurred, contemplating topics of identity, identification, and belonging in Gagauzia are far from straightforward. The above-mentioned historical realities have all contributed to the current challenges of identity in Gagauzia, and this work is an attempt to shed light on how belonging is negotiated in this small, understudied<sup>17</sup> area of the world.

### **1.1 Statement of the Research Puzzle**

Investigating the circumstances and forms of belonging in multiethnic contemporary Gagauzia, this thesis examines an under-researched minority group caught in the spheres of influence of larger, more cohesive and powerful groups. Worth citing is a telling quote from a Gagauzian student recorded by James Kapaló during his ethnographic studies in Gagauzia: “The Turks want to turn us into Turks, the Bulgarians into Bulgarians, the Russians into Russians, the Moldovans into Romanians... Why don’t they just let us be Gagauz!” (Kapaló 2011, 82). This is a poignant question and one that begs another question: what does it mean to be

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ethnic/national group with unnamed historical traditions. This points to the evolving usage of this terminology; the contrast is striking when used side-by-side both in the Western understanding (“we, the people”) and in the more traditional (and Soviet) way meaning “a people” as an ethnic or national group.

<sup>15</sup> As many of my interviewees do. Scholar James Kapaló also makes such arguments (e.g. Kapaló 2011, 49).

<sup>16</sup> The young Republic of Moldova adopted Romanian-language policies, the Romanian anthem, and the Romanian flag upon declaring independence in 1990, causing widespread fear of union with Romania (OSCE 1994).

<sup>17</sup> See section 2.4 for an overview of existing literature on Gagauzia, which serves to demonstrate the contention that this is an understudied area of the world.

Gagauzian? As Thomas Hylland Eriksen asserts in his *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, “Group identities must always be defined in relation to what they are not... in relation to non-members of the group” (Eriksen 2010, 14). From this theory, it follows that it is worth investigating how Gagauzians are perceived to be different from other groups and in what circumstances are they differentiated. Barth’s theories on the constant creation and maintaining of ethnic boundaries is used to frame how boundary-drawing with other groups is interlinked with conceptualizations of being Gagauzian. Complementing these theories on identity and boundaries, this work also makes use of the idea of the politics of belonging, referred to as “the dirty work of boundary maintenance” (Crowley 1999, 155). Belonging is an exceptionally complicated topic in Gagauzia, where ethnic identification, language usage, and citizenship very often do not align. This research addresses how Gagauzians attach meaning to these elements, frame them in forming identity, and make use of them in the construction of boundaries.

Three months of ethnographic fieldwork (January – April 2018) in Gagauzia, which built on observations and experiences from a nine-month stay as a Fulbright grant recipient in 2015-16, provided the researcher with opportunities to interact with individuals representing various generations, educational backgrounds, urban versus rural living situations, and with diverse ethnic, linguistic, and political affiliations. This all speaks to the internal heterogeneity of the populace of Gagauzia and the differing narratives on what it means to be Gagauzian. Within the greater picture of being a denizen of Gagauzia, this research focuses on three main themes that recurred during interviews and came to light as salient in the field: ethnic labeling, language usage, and double citizenship practices. Specifically, the interrelation among these three topics is investigated, and the paradoxes of them not correlating, and at times even coming into conflict, is highlighted. The data reveals negotiation of belonging in the Gagauzian case to be a complicated, dynamic process, one that often is interlinked with the economic instability in the region. Indeed, according to International Organization for Migration estimates, roughly 25% of Moldova’s population was working abroad in 2015, indicative of an

economy fueled by remittances as a result of widespread domestic poverty (IOM Moldova 2018). Arguing that economic circumstances and feelings of belonging are critically intertwined, this work addresses the relationship between conceptions of belonging and the realities of making a living in a country plagued by extreme poverty. Moreover, as a heavily Russified area of the former Soviet Union with an endangered language, prospects for the survival of Gagauzian culture and language are a contested topic also explored within the scope of this work.

## **1.2 Aims and Objectives**

This thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the reasons that lead a person to identify as Gagauzian, and what are the traits commonly associated with this ethnicity? What role does the legacy of the Soviet system of assigned ethnicity categories (solidified in passports and other documents) play today in relation to ethnic identification?
2. In what contexts in Gagauzia are ethnic labels used to self-identify and to identify others, and what is their role in the “us” and “them” of identity politics?
3. How are perceptions of belonging in Gagauzia influenced by language knowledge and usage?
4. What complications can surround the reality of ethnicity, language knowledge, and citizenship not always correlating, and what are the attitudes towards this in contemporary Gagauzia?
5. How can the interplay between belonging and phenomena related to economic instability, such as heavy out-migration, be characterized in the Gagauzian case?
6. How do Gagauzians view prospects for Gagauzian cultural and language survival considering the widespread influence of larger, titular groups?

This work involves in-depth qualitative analysis that attempts to draw out relationships among various phenomena related to ever-changing conceptualizations of belonging in Gagauzia. The presentation and analysis of this data aim to contribute to the existing broader body of literature on topics of identity and belonging in the post-Soviet space. Its findings may be used to draw conclusions about “common denominators” that can be applied to other groups throughout the world.



## CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review

### 2.1 Construction of Ethnicity and Boundary Maintenance

Benedict Anderson defines nations as “imagined communities,” for “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 2006, 6; originally published in 1983). Ernest Gellner goes so far to say that nations are “invented, where they do not exist,” in opposition to the idea that some sort of national consciousness can be awakened (Gellner 1964, 169). The arguments in this work are founded on these theories: it is put forth that all communities, Gagauzia included, are “imagined” units with finite (yet elastic) boundaries. Further, there is an element of “invention” in the creation of these units and boundaries, ever-changing to reflect various narratives by different individuals and groups.

As Eriksen asserts in his *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, “Group identities must always be defined in relation to what they are not... in relation to non-members of the group” (Eriksen 2010, 14). From this theory, it follows that it is worth investigating what differentiates Gagauzians from other groups and in what circumstances are they differentiated. Further, it is worth questioning if these differences are not essential and given, but rather made, and what aspects are used to differentiate Gagauzians from other groups, and by whom: by Gagauzians themselves and by others. Fredrik Barth contends that ethnic groups are a form of social organization, for “...actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction...” (Barth 1998, 13-14; originally published in 1969). Therefore, it is necessary to examine which cultural differences are perceived as salient and are, thereby, made socially-relevant in the construction of boundaries. The important element in ethnic group delineation is not the cultural difference (or similarity) itself, but rather the meaning attached to it by members of the group (Blom 1998, 74). It should also be highlighted that ethnicity is both internal and external, individual and collective; it is used for individual self-identification, as well as creating categories for regarding others (Jenkins 2008,

169). This means that ethnicity is a two-way process that occurs in a constant exchange across the boundaries of “us” and “them,” producing, reproducing, and remaking socially-differentiated collectivities. This production and reproduction process occurs in multifarious contexts, or in “construction sites” of ethnicity (Cornell and Hartmann 1998, 153). Jenkins identifies several such construction sites, including: primary socialization, routine public interaction, and organized politics (Jenkins 2008, 65). While carrying out her fieldwork, in particular participant observation, the researcher made an effort to identify and pay attention to such “construction sites” of ethnicity in Gagauzia. The research carried out was founded on the theoretical assumption that ethnicity is constructed and reconstructed and that detecting the contexts in which this occurs can provide useful insight to understanding the overall picture of how ethnicity functions. Furthermore, the claims made in this work are based on the theory that ethnic identity is always relative and also situational, to an extent, meaning that the “us” categorization can expand and contract based on the situation (Eriksen 2010, 37). This is a consideration when examining interview data (discussed in chapter 5), all of which was collected in diverse situations that no doubt influenced identifications made. One of the objectives of this research was to track in what situations which ethnic categorizations were activated, to identify patterns of ethnic categorization, and to draw conclusions accordingly.

The arguments made in this work are set within the framework of these theories on ethnicity and boundary maintenance. Ultimately, ethnic identifications can be seen as classificatory processes that create and recreate shared meaning (Jenkins 2008, 57). Shared meaning is drawn upon to navigate how to interact with others based on their own ethnic identification. The researcher maintains that the interviewees and the individuals observed during fieldwork in Gagauzia are in the constant process of formulating and reformulating boundaries. These boundaries form the basis on which various forms of identification are claimed, which then make up the different social locality axes that are a fundamental part of the concept of belonging, as is discussed in section 2.3. One of the most widespread forms of

social identification in our world is ethnicity. Considering ethnicity in Gagauzia, however, is not a straightforward matter, as it is a less-than-stable post-Soviet region in transition. Although Gagauzia has some degree of titular status for the first time in history, it is entangled in various spheres of influence. Therefore, it is important to consider theories on assimilation and boundary shifting, discussed in section 2.2.

## **2.2 Boundary Shifting, Assimilation, and Soviet Legacies**

Intertwined with notions of group boundaries, their maintenance and their elasticity is the concept of assimilation. One early definition explains this term as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life” (Burgess and Park 1969, 735). To conceptualize further, assimilation can also be defined as “boundary spanning and altering” (Alba and Nee 2003, 59), which is “a process that occurs... often unintendedly in the course of interaction between majority and minority groups... a key concept for the study of intergroup relations” (Alba and Nee 1997, 827). In one study, Alba concludes that a gradual unlinking of ethnic identity occurs over generations of immigrants due to factors such as the decline of ethnic institutions, social interactions not based on ethnic lines, and intermarriage (Alba 1990, 344). It can be argued that such an “unlinking” of ethnic identity occurred in Gagauzia as well with the new world order brought by the Soviet Union, which heralded the same factors named by Alba. Further, Alba maintains that a new social group was formed, “one based on ancestry from anywhere on the European continent” (Alba 1990, 3). This can be compared to the Gagauzian case, where, in theory, everyone became a Soviet Russian-speaker, which inevitably led to shifting of ethnic boundaries, in some cases, assimilation.

Considering topics of ethnicity in the former Soviet space is complex due in large part to the Soviet methods of classification on the basis of ethnicity/nationality and native language (Hirsch 1997, Karklins 1980). On one hand, ethnicity in the

Soviet Union was primordial, meaning that it was something a person was born into and secured on the fifth line of one's passport (Stalin 1942). At the same time, a constructivist project of identity-building was implemented: the creation of the Soviet nation, all one people regardless of ethnicity. Being a working member of one of the fifteen Soviet republics and speaking Russian were the key components of this newly-created Soviet identity; however, it didn't ignore ethnicity, but rather used it as a building block. Slezkine's well-known 1994 article calls the Soviet Union's efforts at nation-building on the basis of ethnic groups "a spectacularly successful attempt at a state-sponsored conflation of language, "culture," territory and quota-fed bureaucracy" (Slezkine 1994, 414). The legacies of these methods of identity construction, both the primordial ethnic one, along with the constructivist "Soviet person" one, continue to play a role in formation of identity in the former Soviet Union (Brubaker 1996), with Gagauzia as a prime example. Still today many identify as a certain ethnicity for the simple reason that this label was written in their parents' Soviet passports, as will be explored in analysis of fieldwork data in chapter 5. Ethnic identification is not necessarily (and very often is not) correlated with language or cultural knowledge and practice, as demonstrated by Rasma Karklins's studies showing that very often Soviet individuals and families claimed their "native tongue" to be the one corresponding to their ethnicity, even if they had only rudimentary knowledge of this language (Karklins 1980, 418-19). This can be problematic when considering statistics on language knowledge and usage in the former Soviet Union, as the term "native language" (*родной язык*) very often is not understood to mean a person's first language or the language they have used since childhood, as in the Western understanding. In Gagauzia, the Soviet idea of native language corresponding with ethnicity is still widespread, evident in the interview data. This has been cited in other studies on minorities in the former Soviet Union, with respondents sometimes commenting that they learned their "native language" late in life (Ventsel 2016, 113). As such, discussing topics of native language in Gagauzia is not straightforward, as there still persists the idea that if one is

ethnically Gagauzian, his native language must be Gagauzian, regardless of whether it was the first language he/she learned.

Silver maintains that demographic or cultural conditions, such as urban/rural dispersion, traditional occupation of national group members, religion, and the degree of affinity (historical, linguistic, cultural) among groups all impact maintenance of ethnic identities (Silver 1974, 46). As a few-in-number ethnic group, historically farmers and shepherds, that had never experienced a real national awakening, the situation in Gagauzia has historically been conducive for the prospect for assimilation to occur. The creation of a Soviet identity, the implementation of Russian language and Soviet culture in nearly all spheres of life, along with the population transfers sending large numbers of native Russian speakers to Gagauzia (Bulgar 2006, Kapaló 2011) all served to fluidify the boundaries separating ethnic groups. Many scholars maintain that although, officially, non-Russian identities were promoted during Soviet times, essentially, Russians were still the titular nation, and traditional ways of life were not protected in the regime's attempts to create a new Soviet identity (Northrop 2004, 21). In addition, intermarriage is another key factor in softening ethnic boundaries (Karklins 1980, 417; Hirsch 1997, 271). In Gagauzia in Soviet times it was common for individuals of different ethnic identifications (let's say, a Bulgarian and a Gagauzian) to speak with one another in Russian, their common language. Their children, then, will, more likely than not, grow up speaking Russian not just because this is their parents' common language, but because it is the language of education throughout Gagauzia. The data in this thesis certainly point to many indicators of assimilation processes, with one interviewee even explaining that he's Gagauzian according to traditional ethnicity classifications, but that he considers himself to be Russian because of his language knowledge and usage, as will be discussed in chapter 5. Fanon refers to language as a "cultural tool" and maintains that "A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language" (Fanon 1967, 18; 38). Further, Karklins maintains that in the Soviet Union, it was those "small peoples without republic status" (such as Gagauzians)

that were the most likely to lose group members through processes of intermarriage and assimilation (Karklins 1980, 418).

Another aspect found in much of the literature on assimilation is the implications of racial differences, a theme that also recurs in both the interview and participant observation data. In fact, as is discussed in chapter 5, some interview respondents stated that they see no difference between Russians and Gagauzians apart from physical features, attributed to race. “In other words, boundary blurring might be more readily possible for one group, but not the other; a decline in the salience of ethnic differences in one instance and their perpetuation in another” (Alba 2009, 210). Silver argues that in the Soviet Union ethnicity (*национальность*) was “fixed for life,” as it was listed on one’s passport and official documents and was not something that could be changed (Silver 1974, 49). Likewise, Hirsch contends that by the late 1930s, *национальность* in the Soviet Union was as taken-for-granted as one’s last name or address (Hirsch 1997, 269). This points to the impermeability of certain boundaries: ascriptive traits based on “unchangeable” things like physical appearance and ethnicity.

There is much literature pointing to the interplay of economic considerations and language knowledge or usage. Brian Silver, for example, suggests that acquisition of Russian during Soviet times was a practical and economic matter, calling it an aid to upward social mobility (Silver 1976, 414), evident in the Gagauzian case as well, where Gagauzians themselves have historically called for Russian-language education (Bulgar 2006, 372-4). Further, Silver’s maintains that in Central Asia, there was conflicting pressures to use Russian, yet to also preserve national language as a marker of ethnic identity (Silver 1976, 406). Fanon’s classic work, *Black Skin, White Masks* discusses black individuals’ aspirations (both the voluntary and forced aspects) to speak French in order to gain access to societal opportunities (Fanon 1967, 38). What’s more, some studies indicate that the prosperity of national language is interlinked with access to jobs and resources. For example, Aimar Ventsel’s studies on language in the post-Soviet Republic of Sakha find that promotion of Sakha language occurred only after the creation of jobs in the

public sector that required this language (Ventsel 2016, 111). It can be argued that in Gagauzia, the lack of efforts in protecting Gagauzian language is a result of the region's poverty; without the economic means to promote teaching of the language or create jobs requiring the language, it is not prospering. David Laitin argues that learning a new language in the post-Soviet space is always a cost-benefit calculation of sorts, which he calls the "tipping game" (Laitin 1998, 248). Indeed, it can be said for the Gagauzian case that non-Gagauzians (and in some cases, even Gagauzians) living in Gagauzia have little incentive to learn Gagauzian, as the language cannot be used in the general public sphere. Data from multiple interviews point to this, to be revealed in chapter 5. As a key topic that emerged during fieldwork, the researcher considers it important to address issues of language usage and Russification in Gagauzia. However, this is not to say that this is the only aspect determining one's ethnic identity. The literature maintains that even without speaking the language corresponding to ethnic identification, a separate ethnic consciousness can exist, with Jews and Germans often listed as examples (Silver 1974, 65). Indeed, Abel Polese contends that "rejecting some identity markers does not necessarily entail a rejection of that very identity" (Polese 2011, 37).

Vernon Aspaturian defines Russianization as "the process of internationalizing Russian language and culture within the Soviet Union" (Aspaturian 1968, 159-60). Gagauzia can be considered to be a region that has undergone some degree of Russianization. Throughout the autonomy, Russian is the language of instruction in all kindergartens, schools, and other educational institutions<sup>18</sup>. Churches in Gagauzia operate as filiates of the Orthodox Patriarch in Moscow with all aspects connected to religious life conducted in Russian. Considering these realities, it is important to keep in mind theories on assimilation and shifting identity, particularly in the former Soviet space. The researcher acknowledges the impact that two hundred years of Russian and Soviet rule has had

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<sup>18</sup> In contrast, throughout the larger Republic of Moldova, there are both Russian schools, with all subjects taught in Russian, and Moldovan/Romanian schools, where the language of instruction is Moldovan/Romanian.

on collective identity and memory in Gagauzia. Within the given theoretical conceptualizations, Gagauzians can be considered to have undergone some degree of assimilation or boundary shifting, and this work seeks to better understand what bearing this has on feelings of belonging today.

In contemplating the dynamics between language usage, ethnic identification, and fluidifying boundaries in Gagauzia, the researcher could not help recalling the descriptions of the Ruritarians and the Megalomanians in Ernest Gellner's classic work, *Nations and Nationalism*. In this theoretical piece, Gellner posits the hypothetical question of what would happen if the semiliterate, rural representatives of Ruritania migrate to the modern, more-dominant land of Megalomania (Gellner 1983, 58-70). With time, will they assimilate and become virtually indistinguishable from the Megalomanians? Or after some time in Megalomania, will they become more "progressive-minded," literate, and nationally-mobilized, eventually reconstructing their own Ruritanian language and culture into more standardized, modern versions? Of course, this is a highly-simplified theoretical conception, and one that is not an exact correlation to the Gagauzian case. In the Gagauzian case, Russians were the "migrants" sent to predominantly Gagauzian cities and villages in Soviet times. However, as the titular nation in the Soviet Union, Russians' position can be compared to that of the Megalomanians. Therefore, Gellner's questions can be applied to topics of assimilation and its interplay with belonging in the Gagauzian case. Does a Gagauzian who was educated in Russian and lives in a highly-Russified world become assimilated? Or does he make an effort to contribute to developing his "native" culture and language? Or is there some sort of in-between compromise situation? Although presented in an admittedly overly-simplified manner, this line of thought on assimilation is highly relevant to the multilayered realities of belonging. Further, this theory maintains that assimilation occurs because existence of a nation is not enough for the emergence of nationalism. Yet, other theorists maintain that assimilation in such cases is not inevitable but as possible, an outcome that "may occur through changes taking place in groups on both sides of the



boundary” (Alba and Nee 2003, 11). Therefore, the factors that determine degrees of boundary shifting are complex highly unpredictable, and it isn’t possible to make secure prognostications for the future of boundary shifting and assimilation in Gagauzia. Rather, this work sets out to show how the boundary shifting that occurred as a result of Soviet policies<sup>19</sup> plays a role in the politics of belonging in contemporary Gagauzia, as discussed in section 2.3.

### **2.3 Belonging and the Politics of Belonging**

Any discussion involving topics of identity, identification, or belonging can easily become muddled due to the multifarious semantic usages of these terms and the issue that they are often used interchangeably. Indeed, considering the massive various bodies of literature that make use of these words in different ways, it is inevitable that the terms spark a variety of diverse associations and interpretations. These words should not be confused with belonging, a much more multifaceted term, which this section aims to define for the uses of this thesis. This section argues that belonging is the most appropriate term to apply to the given research study, for reasons connected to the complexity and inclusivity of the term, as discussed in depth below.

Manuel Castells defines identity as “people’s source of meaning and experience,” going on to explain that an individual has multiple identities dependent upon negotiation of social situation (Castells 2010, 6). Brubaker and Cooper assert that identity is “both a category of practice and a category of analysis,” meaning that it describes both what people do to make sense of their world, and also to the actions of political actors in manipulating individuals and groups to view others in a certain way (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 4). This definition touches upon the “politics of identity,” the concept that identity (and, as argued below, belonging) is always intertwined with greater power relations and their accompanying politics

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<sup>19</sup> Boundary shifting has also occurred as a result of soft power initiatives of other countries (most notably, Turkey), but a discussion of the impact of such activity is outside the scope of this work. Rather, the legacy of Soviet actions is zoomed in upon, as this emerged as most salient in the field.

within a given society. There are a plethora of ways to conceptualize these terms. Belonging is a broad concept, used to describe attachment in its many different forms and in relation to multiple different objects. Nira Yuval-Davis maintains that, “belonging can be an act of self-identification or identification by others, in a stable, contested or transient way... belonging is always a dynamic process, not a reified fixity” (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). The fluidity of the term is also highlighted, particularly as contrasted with the (arguably overused) word identity, which some consider to have lost its analytical power (Lähdesmäki et al. 2016, 233). Brubaker and Cooper refer to identity as a “blunt, flat, undifferentiated” term (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 2), and, indeed, belonging “captures more accurately the desire for some sort of attachment, be it to other people, places, or modes of being, and the ways in which individuals and groups are caught within wanting to belong, wanting to become, a process that is fueled by yearning rather than the positing of identity as a stable state” (Probyn 1996, 19). Although the researcher began this project wanting to examine identity, she soon realized that the term doesn’t fully correspond to the sort of insight she hoped to gain, as it is somewhat limited as a conceptual tool. Belonging, therefore, has been chosen as the most suitable analytical device to help make sense of the Gagauzian case because of its emphasis on spatiality, dynamics, and its multilayered approach. Its adaptability enables exploration of constantly-shifting borders, and its complexity facilitates consideration of a wide range of relevant factors. In addition, the approach is considered “person-centered,” as it allows for inclusion of subjective emotions, and it addresses the restrictions, norms, and external relations that hinder or validate feelings of belonging (May 2011, 364). The aptness of belonging as an analytical tool has been demonstrated in studies on migrants, as people often “in between” worlds (Geddes and Favell 1999). Indeed, belonging can be understood as being made up of attachments, memberships, and a range of sometimes contradictory identities (Jones and Krzyzanowski 2011, 42). Belonging is relevant in investigating Gagauzia, caught in various spheres of influence and where there are commonly

dissonant relations among a wide variety of perceptions, most notably of ethnicity, language usage, and citizenship.

Drawing on Yuval-Davis's analytical framework, belonging can be examined on three analytical levels: social locations, identifications and emotional attachments, and ethical and political values (Yuval-Davis 2006, 199). The first analytical level, social locations, refers to categories of identification: male, Bulgarian, elderly, disabled, etc. and their ramifications or associations in a given societal or historical context. The strength in this analytical framework lies in its complexity. In considering identities and group memberships, it is necessary to also consider the implications of these categories of belonging in relation to the power relations networks in any given society. Moreover, the categories of belonging must be considered together. Just as in calculus, where axes are traditionally used, social positions that correspond to various categories are located along different axes. An intersectionality approach is useful in considering the bigger picture of belonging, as these various axes intersect in different places, and they can't be considered separately. More specifically, intersectionality can be defined as "analysis of multiple and even conflicting social dynamics that enable certain kinds of social understanding that are otherwise invisible when scholars focus on a single set of social dynamics" (Clarke and McCall 2013, 349). For example, to be female in Gagauzia is different depending on other social locations: whether one is young or old, from the city or the village, a native Gagauzian speaker or a native Russian speaker, etc. Therefore, interplay of these social locations is key; they cannot be considered independently and give an accurate picture. In this thesis, the researcher attempts to examine the data within a framework of different intersecting social power axes, rather than social identities. This is a more complex, yet a more operative way of understanding the workings and interplay of social categories, certainly applicable to the Gagauzian case. It considers identification categories not merely as independent units, but rather as intersecting parts of a larger, ever-changing grid of social relations, in which all members of society are located.

Identifications and emotional attachments, the second analytical level, deals with the “narratives we tell ourselves and others about who we are and who we aren’t” (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202). It describes both directly and indirectly what it means to be part of a certain group and carry a certain label. Noteworthy is that construction and consciousness of identity become more central, the more threatened one feels (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202). This is discussed in more detail in chapter 5 within the presentation and analysis of the data, showing, for example, that for many, identity as a Russian-speaker becomes more important in light of the current movements for Moldovan unification with Romania. This leads into the third analytical level or facet, political and ethical values. Elements of identification are always intertwined with certain values, certain ideologies connected to maintaining categorical boundaries. For example, identifying as a native Gagauzian speaker conjures different associations and passing of different judgements for different people, as is discussed in chapter 5. Being a native Gagauzian speaker is not a reality occurring in a vacuum, so to speak, but rather it is linked with political and ethical values. It is connected to how identity-related boundaries are drawn among people and groups. This interplay, the delineation of “us” and “them” is what Crowley refers to as “the dirty work of boundary maintenance” (Crowley 1999, 155) and what Yuval-Davis succinctly terms “the politics of belonging” (Yuval-Davis 2011).

It is important to note that the politics of belonging have meaningful implications for participatory practices of citizenship, status, entitlement, and access to resources. For example, in the Gagauzian case, the linguistic situation was never reversed to give the titular language status, as happened in many former Soviet regions; Russian continues to be the language used in the public sphere. Therefore, one’s identity as a Russian-speaker opens up access to educational opportunities, job prospects, and general ability to communicate with wider society. In interview and participant observation data, three topics recurred: language usage, ethnic labels, and citizenship practice. In the scope of this project, these three elements are used as the analytical lens to critically examine belonging and the politics of

belonging in Gagauzia. This work does not seek to fit Gagauzians into one category, but rather to understand the dynamics of belonging among Gagauzians and its possible implications for future usage of the term “Gagauzian”, whether as an ethnic label or in some other form.

#### **2.4 Existing Literature on Gagauzia**

The significance and novelty of this thesis are hinged on the claim that Gagauzia is a relatively understudied area of the world, especially ethnographically, and therefore, the given case study is a worthwhile contribution, addressing topics that have not been previously explored in academic scholarship. This section provides a brief overview of the current state of research on Gagauzia, introducing the works that serve as major background text sources, explaining which research aspects related to Gagauzia have already been explored, and highlighting the research gaps that remain to be filled.

Key Gagauzian historians include Stepan Bulgar (2006), Fyodor Angeli (2007), and Mikhail Guboglo (2006). Their books were published in small quantities and are not easily available, and the researcher accessed this literature in the Comrat Public Library. Russian ethnographer Maria Marunovich (1983, 1993) published works on Gagauzian culture and traditions, as well as a political booklet advocating their status as a *народ*. James Kapaló (2010, 2011) is one of the few Western ethnographers to have carried out extensive fieldwork in Gagauzia, and his works focus mainly on religious traditions in Gagauzia, in particular on the activities of priest Mikhail Chakir and on Gagauzian folk ritual. Astrid Menz (2000, 2006, 2015) has explored linguistic particularities of Gagauzian, and Hülya Demirdirek (1996, 2000) has published several ethnographic works on historical memory in Gagauzia. Anthropologist Leyla Keough (2006), carried out a study on Gagauzia women working abroad, and political scientists such as Charles King (1997, 2000), Jeff Chinn and Steven Roper (1998) have published on general topics of Gagauzian history and its political situation. The above authors can be considered the most salient of those who have published research on Gagauzia, and among

them, there are few who have utilized ethnographic approaches. None have specifically examined the ways of experiencing belonging in Gagauzia, meaning that this work does provide novel input.

Of the literature that does exist on Gagauzia, one relatively popular angle has been pondering of the secessionist potential of Gagauzia and prognosticating the likelihood of separatism from the Republic of Moldova. Such topics have been discussed thoroughly in news articles and political analysis forums (Al Jazeera, Radio Free Europe, Jamestown Foundation) and in scholarly articles (Donaj and Grishin 2015, Cantir 2015, Zabarah 2012, Tislenko 2015). Theodor Tudoroiu claims that his 2015 article comparing Gagauzia with Crimea is the “first English-language scholarly text analysing this crisis and, more generally, addressing recent Gagauz politics... increasingly neglected internationally after the end of the conflict of the early 1990s” (Tudoroiu 2015, 376). Tudoroiu’s contention is rather ambitious, as there is a fair amount of literature on the enclave aspect of the region. Gagauzia even receives mention in geographer Alastair Bonnett’s 2014 chapter on “Enclaves and Breakaway Nations” as the land of a people loyal to “Mother Russia” (Bonnett 2014, 200). Indeed, Gagauzia’s pro-Russian political leanings and the possibility of its break from Moldova are topics that have been thoroughly explored. However, the researcher agrees with Tudoroiu’s assertion that Gagauzia as a whole is relatively neglected in scholarship, with the research that does exist focusing largely on its potential as the “next Crimea” and a region where the stage is set for conflict. This thesis seeks to fill this research void by providing novel ethnographic data on topics of belonging and ethnicity in Gagauzia and by analyzing these data using multidisciplinary theoretical approaches.

## **CHAPTER 3 – Research Design and Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Strategy**

Selecting a research strategy is a vital first step, as the research strategy usually indicates the general directions of how the research is carried out (Bryman 2008, 698). Qualitative research is considered to be an interpretative approach dealing with the significance people attach to the phenomena within their social environment (Snape and Spencer 2003, 19). As such, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most appropriate strategy for this project, which aims to understand the meaning Gagauzians attach to various elements of social life, such as language usage and ethnic labels. Snape and Spencer name multiple key aspects of the qualitative method, including: interactive data collection methods (such as interviewing and participant observation) and open-mindedness that enables the exploration of new concepts and issues with the goal of providing better understanding of the social world (Snape and Spencer 2003, 15). In line with these points, this project employs a purely qualitative approach. It focuses on analyzing how individuals understand various elements of their social lives, to which elements particular meaning is attached, and how diverse social phenomena are perceived. By utilizing a qualitative approach, the researcher was able to form a vibrant picture of the multilayered realities of social life and attitudes in Gagauzia. Moreover, qualitative research is both interpretative and inductive, meaning that theory is formed by analyzing the data and identifying recurring categories and patterns. This project relies on an emic approach, meaning that the focus of the research is what is meaningful to members of the group (Headland and McElhanon 2004, 305).

### **3.2 Research Design**

This research employs a case study design, which aims to give in-depth consideration to specific features of individual cases. It can be argued that one strength of the case study design is that the data collected captures cases in their uniqueness, and not necessarily with the objective of using them for wide theoretical conclusions (Hammersley 2004, 92). This reasoning aligns with the

design of this project; a limited number of cases are examined, not with the goal of forming broad generalizing conclusions, but rather to highlight their distinctiveness and to attempt to draw out causal relationships. Indeed, the case study method is often chosen for the reason that it allows for investigative study of causal processes “in the real world,” not in artificially-constructed settings (Hammersley 2004, 93). Within case studies, emphasis is on narrative accounts, with the goal of representing a situation “in its own terms” and giving voice to those whose perspectives and experiences perhaps go unheard (Hammersley 2004, 93-4). This study can be considered to be an ethnographic work, as it deals with providing a detailed account of what is happening in a certain location, from the point of view of natives of this location; furthermore, it recognizes the existence of multiple realities created by different perceptions, outlooks, and roles in society (Fetterman 2004, 328). Indeed, central to this project are different people’s diverse narratives on their perceptions of reality. By studying a limited quantity of cases, insight can be gleaned on cause-and-effect relationships: within this study, specifically on the interplay between perceptions of ethnicity, language usage, and feelings of belonging.

### **3.3 Data Collection Process**

The data used in this thesis were obtained through participant observation and interviewing, tools commonly used in ethnographic studies and conducive to the qualitative research approach, as discussed above.

The bulk of data for this project was collected using interviews. Semi-structured interviews were carried out between January and April of 2018. The interviewees come from a wide range of backgrounds, professions, educational levels, and political views. They were distributed evenly into three age groups: 18-24, 25-40, and 40+ in an attempt to collect information from representatives of different generations. The first group, ages 18-24, is composed of students, young people who were all born in autonomous Gagauzia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The second age grouping, 25-40 correlates to the young workforce, a segment of the population in between the post-Soviet and Soviet ones. The third



group, ages 40+, represents the older workforce, people who grew up in the Soviet Union. The gender distribution is 75% female and 25% male. This disbalance speaks to the fact that the researcher, as a young (in Western terms) female, had more access to recruiting other females for interviews. Interview participants included both individuals who identify ethnically as Gagauzian, as well as representatives of other ethnic identifications, including Russians, Bulgarians, and those who do not identify with any one ethnic group. Representatives of both Comrat, the capital of Gagauzia, as well as interviewees from four different Gagauzian villages (Chok-Maidan, Beshgioz, Budjak, Copchak), and one non-Gagauzian village (Troitsa) were included<sup>20</sup>. Interviewees were asked to share their views on language usage, ethnic identification, and attitudes toward other groups. They were recruited through host family and neighborhood networks, along with community ties the researcher had made while previously living in Gagauzia in 2015-16.

Semi-structured, as opposed to structured, interviews were opted for on the basis of their flexibility. Semi-structured interviews typically make use of an interview guide, often including potential questions, but the guide is not necessarily strictly followed or “hidden behind”; rather, the direction of topics discussed changes to follow the flow of conversation (Brinkmann 2013, 21). Another key aspect of qualitative interviewing is allowing interviewees to conjure to mind concrete examples and explain their points of view in-depth, which gives the interviewer the chance to “hear” data (Rubin and Rubin 2004). A variety of open-ended questions were asked, as well as some close-ended questions (see Appendix 1 for the basic list of questions). Follow-up questions were used in any situations when the information provided was unclear or could be elaborated upon. Semi-structured interviews are often found useful because they allow for responsiveness to the participants, while still remaining relevant to the topics examined (McIntosh

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<sup>20</sup> With the wording “Gagauzian” villages, I am referring to those villages that are currently in the Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gagauzia and, therefore, under Gagauzian laws and regulations. This doesn’t necessarily mean that they are ethnically-Gagauzian or Gagauzian-speaking.

and Morse 2015, 1). The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated from Russian to English. The English versions can be found in the appendixes of this work.

Carried out during the same time period as the interviews, participant observation had the purpose of gaining insight into day-to-day elements that manifest belonging in Gagauzians' real-world setting, and it often served to complement information gathered through interviews. Indeed, participant observation shed light on some realities not addressed in interviews. As other ethnographers have noted, people are not necessarily actively aware of some aspects of their lives and/or do not necessarily want to openly discuss some behaviors (Siragusa 2017, 90). Therefore, participant observation is a highly useful tool to accompany interviewing as a way to "fill in the gaps." By living with a multi-generational host family and taking part in their various activities, the researcher was able to make observations about how people congregate and associate, what languages they use, and identify areas of life where national traits are visible. Immersion in the lives of the people being studied is considered to enable ethnographers to more accurately interpret behavior, as they gain understanding of patterns over time (Fetterman 2004, 328). Conglomeration of interview and participant observation data presents a portrait of Gagauzian notions of belonging and insight on different conceptions of being Gagauzian. Although a separate examination of the participant observation data is not included in this work due to lack of space, it should be mentioned that this ethnographic method shaped the researcher's interpretation and analysis of interview data.

Secondary literature on topics of Gagauzian history and culture were also used to provide background information and give context to themes that arose during interviews and participant observation. As is important when considering any documents, it was key to be critical when reviewing these sources, as there are always considerations connected to reliability.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Methods

Data was analyzed using analytic induction, a model commonly used in qualitative research, which involves the generation of hypotheses out of the data collection and analysis (Hammersley 2004, 17). This approach is suitable for the in-depth study of a small number of cases and enables the search for relations of causality and functional interdependence. Becker argues that analytic induction is most appropriate for capturing the logic of social science research (Becker 1998). The analysis is carried out within a general social constructionist framework, based on the understanding that each individual is constantly in the process of constructing his/her world. Gergen asserts that emphasis within this frame of thought is often on the following: value reflection, collaborative participation, and multiple standpoints (Gergen 2004, 184). Considering the qualitative nature of this study, it is reasonable that the analysis of data within this project draws on a constructionist account of knowledge generation.

**Interview transcribing, organization and familiarization of data:** The interviews were transcribed, and notes from participant observation were organized into one document. The data were read through repeatedly for the researcher to gain familiarity with it and prepare herself for coding and formulation of hypotheses.

**Coding:** This involved the identification of patterns and recurring themes. Through consistent data analysis, patterns were recognized, and recurring themes were pinned down. Coding necessitates the researcher to contemplate and interact with the data, an essential component of social research (Lockyer 2004, 137). Links were made between different parts of the data considered to possess commonalities, and this facilitated reordering and interpretation of the data.

**Formulation and testing of hypotheses:** Hypotheses were formulated based on the links among different bodies of data. As data are used to formulate hypotheses, involving generation of categories from the data, this approach is called “coding up” (Lockyer 2004, 137). The viability of these hypotheses was contemplated by continued appraisal of the data and by placing the hypotheses within the wider

theoretical framework. The method of constant comparison, whereby each new interpretation is compared with existing findings, was utilized, as it is considered to contribute to research validity (Parry 2004, 180). The hypotheses were progressively reformulated, and the phenomena continuously redefined throughout this process until a distinct and coherent relationship between them was determined. **Critical analysis and conclusions:** The hypotheses were critically analyzed within the theoretical literature in order to give shape to final conclusions of the study.

### **3.5 Limitations and Ethical Considerations**

In much of the literature an emphasis is placed on active interviewing as a particular orientation toward the interview process. This entails acknowledging the interactional character of the interview and also viewing the interview process as an active construction of data, meaning that the content and form of what is being said is determined by the circumstances of the interaction (Gubrium and Holstein 2004, 6). Ultimately, both the interviewer and the interviewee are “active,” meaning that the information is inevitably shaped by this process of interaction. Some consider this to be a potential limitation to interviewing as a data collection method, for “interviewers are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating the meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents” (Gubrium and Holstein 2004, 6). Therefore, the researcher acknowledges that interviewing, as a process of social interaction, is always influenced by the dynamics between two individuals and constitutes a construction of meaning within a specific situation. Regardless of efforts made on the interviewer’s part to avoid influencing the interviewee’s responses, the meaning-making process unfolds in a certain way as a direct result of the very fact that an interview is being carried out. This can be considered a possible limitation, and when considering the data presented in this thesis, it is important to keep in mind the constructed circumstances, the interview setting, that was the medium for data collection. The same can be said for participant observation. The researcher’s mere presence in various situations likely had an influence on what was or was not done or said. Moreover, as human beings, we inevitably have our own ways of

viewing reality that will then have an impact on how situations are perceived and interpreted. As Seljamaa eloquently argues, “ethnographers often cannot avoid contributing to the construction of ethnicity in the field, not least because they cannot shed their personal (ethnic) histories. These, in turn, are inseparable from continuous interplays between larger cultural, political, economic and other factors” (Seljamaa 2016, 29). It is arguable that it is impossible to avoid in one way or another playing a role in the construction of social reality, of ethnicity for example, even if simply by being present.

Also, as Eriksen maintains, “...fieldwork can give a profound understanding of the contemporary functioning of ethnicity or other categorical distinctions, but not of their emergence” (Eriksen 2010, 110). This line of thought is an acknowledgement of the realities of what can’t be accomplished by fieldwork. Although fieldwork is generally considered to be an effective method for building a reliable basis of knowledge about a group or culture (Fetterman 2004, 328), its limitations must also be recognized. It cannot, for example, provide a complete picture of the historical events that shaped a group’s realities in the present day, as Eriksen points out. Therefore, it is important to recognize the importance of contextualizing fieldwork within some historical background, as chapter 4 sets out to accomplish. What’s more, the researcher abandons claims of being able to generalize based on this research, as the limited scope and size of the data cannot provide a fully representative overview of Gagauzian belonging. Rather, this work focuses on in-depth qualitative analysis that attempts to draw out relationships among various phenomena on the basis of a small number of cases. Another limitation involves the diversity of the participants selected. Significantly more females than males and more city residents than village residents were interviewed. This was related to the researcher’s own identity, along with those of the host family members (mainly female), which inevitably impacted communication networks and dialogue with potential interviewees.

Ethics are considered to permeate every step of ethnographic work (Fetterman 2004, 331). Indeed, as work focused on better understanding people, it is

vital that no harm is caused to the people involved in generating data. In the early stages of this project, the researcher underwent a rigorous ethics approval process at the University of Glasgow. Included in this was a detailed plan of the researchers' actions, intents, and the list of questions to be used for the semi-structured interviews. An approved plain language statement was given to each participant before the interview, and they were given the chance to ask questions about the project. It was made clear that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason, and informed consent forms were signed by each interviewee prior to the start of the interview. The researcher takes seriously the confidentiality of participants, to whom were given pseudonyms and whose information is stored in password-protected systems. Furthermore, in much of the literature, a nonjudgmental orientation is emphasized, meaning that the researcher should make every effort to suspend any personal evaluation of individuals' opinions or actions (Fetterman 2004, 329). As a cross-cultural research project, a position of cultural relativism is necessary, as it is important to recognize the variability of culture and attempt to understand people from within the context of their own culture (Mertens 2004, 226). As Fetterman articulately advises, it is important for an ethnographer to go into the field "with an open mind but not an empty head" (Fetterman 2004, 329). Therefore, in carrying out fieldwork, the researcher made an effort to keep in mind concepts of contextualization, nonjudgmental orientation, a holistic outlook, and the importance of carrying out research in an unobtrusive way.

## **CHAPTER 4 – A Brief History of Gagauzians in Southern Moldova**

### **4.1 Theories on Origins**

The term “Gagauz” has historically been used to describe a group of people with a Turkic language and Orthodox faith who migrated to Bessarabia (where present-day Gagauzia is located) in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Chinn and Roper 1998, 88). There exist a multitude of various versions of where the group originally came from, how and why they settled in Bessarabia, and to which modern-day group they are closest to “ethnically.” In fact, some sources report that there are as many as twenty-one different versions of the origins of Gagauzians, all of which are considered sufficiently legitimate to have been published in some form or another (Boicov 2015, 178). Based on linguistic and folkloric evidence, many scholars consider Gagauzians to be descended from Turkic tribes that migrated to the Balkans from Asia starting in the tenth century, who then eventually converted to Orthodoxy as a result of living among Bulgarians (Chinn and Roper 1998, 88). Other common theories claim that Gagauzians were originally Bulgarians who began speaking Turkish as a result of Ottoman domination or that Gagauzians descend from shamanistic tribes in Central Asia, then migrated to Bulgaria and there converted to Orthodoxy (Keough 2006, 437). Indeed, they were even recorded by the Russian Empire as Bulgarians until the mid-nineteenth century (Radova 1998, 54). This plays a role in Gagauzians’ citizenship practices, which is returned to in chapter 5. As a group with a Turkic language, yet a strong Orthodox faith, Gagauzians are a rather unique people. Some theories claim that Gagauzians are the descendants of the Oghuz, a Turkic group that came under the Byzantium Empire in the thirteenth century, converted to Christianity, and settled in Dobrudja (King 2000, 210). Interestingly, one ethnographer notes that Gagauzians in Bulgaria today claim pure Bulgarian roots, while Gagauzians in Gagauzia highlight their Turkish ancestry (Menz 2006, 378). Indeed, the etymology of the ethnonym “Gagauz” is just as unknown as their history, with many diverse and vibrant theories on its origin and meaning. It can be found in written sources only as far

back as the eighteenth century, with some theorizing that it was initially not a self-designation, but rather a label applied by other groups (Radova 1995, 268).

These origins narratives are relevant to perceptions and attitudes in Gagauzia today. They are often instrumentalized, especially by Turkey, in political discourse that aims to advance national causes of the various players in regional geo-politics (Kapaló 2011, 7). Furthermore, the fact that there is no one agreed-upon version of Gagauzian history complicates in some ways nation-building prospects, as there is no “historic past” to draw upon in the creation of national symbols or heroes. To this day, the main street in the capital and in most villages of Gagauzia is Lenin street, and statues of Lenin still stand ubiquitous throughout the cities and villages. When the researcher brought this up with locals, there was often the response, “Well, who could we replace him with?” Indeed, without ancient heroes or historical leaders to make use of, replacing Soviet statues and street names is a less straightforward task than in other areas of the Soviet Union with a more documented pre-Soviet past. One ethnographer succinctly describes Gagauzians as: “...in a way, a nation in the making after the dissolution of the Soviet Union” (Demirdirek 1996). Further, another ethnographer argues that the complicated national and political conflict in the area has not merely defined, but perhaps even created Gagauzian nationhood (Kapaló 2011, 49).

#### **4.2 Russian Empire (1812-1918)**

Despite great controversy surrounding their ancient origins, nineteenth century history is much less foggy, and historians generally agree that Gagauzians migrated to southern Bessarabia during and after the Russo-Turkish Wars when Russia granted them land (King 2000, 740). They enjoyed various privileges, including exemption from taxes and military service, and their right to practice Orthodoxy was protected (Menz 2006, 373). Political scientist Ivan Katchanovski points to this migration and preferential treatment from the Russian Empire as a key point in the formation of Gagauzian pro-Russian political culture that persists today (Katchanovski 2005, 889). The mass movements of different populations from



Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia during the late eighteenth century was caused by economic instability and social hardships under Ottoman rule, including the series of wars between the Ottoman Empire and Russia throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Kapaló 2011, 49-50). The migrations of this era served to create the melting pot of cultures and ethnicities found still in present-day southern Moldova. With the end of the Russo-Turkish War of 1806-12, the territory of Bessarabia came under Russian control, which heralded several decades of relative prosperity, with the first schools in the region opening in the 1840s (Kapaló 2011, 50-1). The instability caused by World War I and the 1917 Russian Revolution triggered world changes. In 1917 the local Moldovan National Council declared Bessarabia an autonomous territory within the Russian Empire, which was followed by occupation by Romanian troops in 1918, leading to annexation of Bessarabia into Romania soon after (van Meurs 1998, 45-8).

#### **4.3 Kingdom of Romania: 1918-1944 (1940-1 USSR)**

While Gagauzians enjoyed some privileges under the Russian Empire and a comparative degree of freedom in managing their own affairs, the new Romanian rule beginning in 1918 heralded in harsh policies of assimilation, as well as obligatory military service and some resettlement to Romania (Woeber 2013, 8). Strict policies of Romanianization were put into practice, including prohibition of speaking languages apart from Romanian and the removal of non-Romanians from posts such as doctors (Angeli 2007, 403). Further, as Romania became a key member of Hitler's coalition, their actions escalated as the war progressed, with Gagauzians being sent to concentration camps in 1941-2 (Bulgar 2006, 331-342). Intensive Romanianization policies were carried out, which live on in collective memory still today. Because of such harsh policies, many refused to send their children to school, and there are records of open protests: in 1929 schoolchildren in Comrat refused to attend classes, citing as a reason their non-acceptance of being educated in Romanian (Angeli 2007, 405).

After having lived in the Russian Empire for over a century, with general loyalty and positive feeling towards the tsar, the sudden switch to Romanian language and norms in daily life was a shock for Bessarabia, which was considered one of the most “backwards” provinces within the newly-expanded Kingdom of Romania (Angeli 2007, 406). Those Gagauzians who did make their way through the ranks of the new Romanian system were forced to change their names and hide their nationalities (Angeli 2007, 406). It is unsurprising that after having been Russianized, then Romanianized, then Sovietized, Gagauzians today struggle with forming a collective understanding of what it means to be Gagauzian. Despite widespread oppression, the work of one devoted priest, Mikhail Chakir, stands out as a positive example of Gagauzian cultural development during the Romanian era. Chakir was responsible for the first efforts to create a written version of the entirely-oral Gagauzian language, compiling a Gagauzian dictionary and translating religious texts into his self-created written form of Gagauzian based on the Romanian alphabet (Menz 2006, 375). Although Chakir was the only one to write in this language, and its usage was limited to religious writings, his efforts to develop a Gagauzian ethnic consciousness are noteworthy. Kapaló maintains that Chakir’s articulations on Gagauzians as a people or ethnic group (*народ*) served as the principal foundation for ethnic identity among the very small body of Gagauzian intellectual elites through the 1980s (Kapaló 2011, 76).

On June 26, 1940 the Soviet Union announced to Romania that it never recognized the occupation of Bessarabia and demanded the return of this territory (Veratek 1991, 17). Upon approaching Hitler for advice, the Romanian king, Carol II, was told to relinquish, for now, this territory, and the following day, the Soviet Union gave the ultimatum that all Romanian forces should abandon the territory of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina, followed by the arrival of Soviet forces to this territory on June 28, 1940 (Angeli 2007, 409). Nikita Khrushchev writes in his memoirs, “I took an active part in the liberation of Bessarabia” and describes how Soviet forces were greeted warmly by locals (Khrushchev 1999, 175-6). Nonetheless, Gagauzian historian, Fyodor Angeli, opines that still today, the

“peaceful” solution to the Bessarabian question continues to divide Moldova: some (Gagauzians in particular) see the Soviet forces as liberators, some as occupiers (Angeli 2007, 410). In August of 1940, the Soviet Supreme Court passed a law on the borders of the Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic, which divided Bessarabia between Moldova and Ukraine; as was the case with many borders within the Soviet Union, Stalin ignored those who argued that Bessarabia should be kept intact, not divided between Ukraine and Moldova, for reasons of cultural and linguistic unity (Angeli 2007, 412-13).

However, Bessarabia quickly came back under Romanian rule, with Romania joining Hitler’s Axis in 1940 and the Soviet Union being invaded by joint Axis powers in 1941; this was followed by three years of repressive and discriminatory policies for Gagauzians (Kapaló 2011, 73). Most horrific were eugenic and racial anthropological studies focused on non-Romanians, along with plans for massive population transfers of Gagauzians to Turkey by the Antonescu regime (Solonari 2007, 268). This lived on in historical memory, as in the early 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Gagauzian leaders referred to such policies when explaining their opposition to independence of Moldova and/or unification with Romania (Katchanovski 2005, 890).

#### **4.4 Soviet Union post-WWII (1944-1989)**

In 1944 with the end of the war, Romania relinquished Bessarabia, which came back under Soviet control. These decades saw a wide variety of changes in all spheres of life, all of which are still in living memory. Katchanovski maintains that Gagauzians generally benefitted from the mass education and economic growth that the Soviet Union implemented, which served to foster pro-Russian sentiment (Katchanovski 2005, 890). As was the case with much of the Soviet Union, collectivization, mechanization of agricultural production, and widely-available education were all key policies implemented in Gagauzia (Woeber 2013, 8). Economic development was a key characteristic of the Soviet period for this relatively poor region. Historian Bulgar maintains that the decades between the 50s

and 80s saw monumental advances in industry and agricultural development, particularly in winemaking, as a result of the stable economic and social conditions created by the Soviet Union (Bulgar 2006, 364-5). While some highlight that the Soviet period resulted in widespread Russification of the population of southern Moldova, it is also noted that it saw a relatively high level of cultural development – certainly more than Gagauzians had ever experienced previously (Woeber 2013, 9).

However, the period immediately after the war was fraught with hardships. Under Stalin's rule in the 1940s, thousands were deported to Siberian and Central Asian labor camps, and Bessarabia experienced a manmade famine from 1945-7; however, it is arguable that neither of these tragedies are remembered in collective memory as vibrantly as oppression under the Romanian Empire due in large part to the controlled nature of information dispersal and ideology under the Soviet Union (Katchanovski 2005, 890). Nonetheless, Kapaló points to these catastrophes as contributing to the loss of many Gagauzian customs and traditional knowledge (Kapaló 2011, 75).

A particularly notable development during Soviet times was the 1957 creation of an alphabet using Cyrillic letters and the creation of Gagauzian language textbooks. What's more, there were efforts to open schools in which the language of instruction would be Gagauzian. However, in 1960 parents of schoolchildren voiced their opposition to this change, explaining that education in Russian would better facilitate career growth and access to higher education (Bulgar 2006, 372-4).

#### **4.5 Autonomy**

In contrast to the situation in Transnistria, which involved armed contact and is still today considered an unrecognized state<sup>21</sup>, Gagauzia acquired autonomy through a largely peaceful process. The Gorbachev era saw a great deal of ethnic

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<sup>21</sup> In 1990, after declaring independence, Moldova adopted the Romanian flag and the Romanian national anthem. In the wake of widespread fear that Moldova would unite with Romania, Transnistria (an area between the Dnistr River and Ukraine) declared its own independence soon after, then engaging in armed conflict with greater Moldova in 1992. (OSCE 1994). Since then, it has been considered a frozen conflict zone.

mobilization, as his policies, such as *glasnost*, resulted (perhaps unintentionally) in giving minority groups a voice, with Gagauzians not an exception (Woeber 2013, 9). *Gagauz Halki* (Gagauzian people) was initially a cultural group that transformed into a political organization in the last years of the Soviet Union. With the central Moldovan government passing a new language law in 1989 regarding the status and usage of languages on the territory of the Moldovan SSR, Gagauzian and Russian-speakers became worried about the future of non-titular language usage in Moldova (Woeber 2013, 10). According to 1989 statistical data for the Republic of Moldova, Gagauzians ranked highest among minority groups in terms of Russian fluency and lowest with Moldovan fluency (King 2000, 213). Moreover, calls by some political groups for unification of Moldova and Romania served to heighten concern among non-Moldovans, especially considering that Romania's previous harsh rule was (is) still in living memory. In November 1989, community leaders in Comrat announced their establishment of the Gagauzian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the greater Moldovan SSR, which was declared illegal by the central Chisinau government (Woeber 2013, 10). Russian ethnologist Maria Marunovich writes that the Chisinau government refused to recognize Gagauzians as a separate people (*народ*), referring to them as an "ethnic minority" or simply as "another sector of the population of Budjak" (*прочая часть населения Буджака*) to discredit their establishment of autonomy (Marunovich 1993, 1). By referring to them as an "ethnic minority," it was implied that Gagauzians did not have a right to the territory of southern Moldova; Marunovich asserts that Moldovans and Gagauzians should have had equal right to the territory of the former MSSR, as they are both peoples (*народы*) whose historical homeland is on this territory (Marunovich 1993, 5).

Despite its contested legitimacy, the new Gagauzian republic held elections the following year, with Stepan Topal becoming the first chairman of the Gagauzian Supreme Soviet. Chisinau refused to recognize Gagauzian actions, even issuing a report in 1990 stating that Bulgaria was the homeland of Gagauzians (Demirdirek 2000, 67-71). It wasn't until December 1994, after the Agrarian Democrats came to

power in Chisinau, that the Moldovan parliament passed the Autonomy Statute or Law on the Special Status of Gagauzia. Political elites in Gagauzia at the time pointed to the influence of external players in Moldova granting them autonomy; the Soviet military intervened in 1990 to prevent escalation of hostilities, and the president of Turkey, Suleyman Demirel, voiced his support for Gagauzian autonomy (Woeber 2013, 11). In spring of 1995, a referendum was held in southern Moldova, resulting in three cities and 29 villages voting to join the new Gagauzian autonomy (ATU Gagauzia Official Webpage 2018). Notably, one of the key points of the autonomy statute is the right to self-determination should the Republic of Moldova ever cease to be an independent state, which alludes to negative collective memory of Romanian rule. Another key point is that the Gagauzian model of territorial autonomy included provisions for a multiethnic entity, including Bulgarians, Russians, and Ukrainians (Tislenko 2015, 71). Although generally applauded as a peaceful compromise, especially in comparison with the Transnistrian case, the greatest flaw of the establishment of Gagauzian autonomy is often considered the overly-basic wording in the autonomy statute; its lack of details and specificities has led to various differing interpretations of the actual rights of the autonomy in practice (Gagauz Info 2018c; Woeber 2013, 13). Also worth noting is what can be considered the unlikely or even “accidental” way that the Gagauzian political entity emerged. Indeed, Kapaló maintains that this came out of a “combination of chance events and political maneuvers that arose from the national ambitions of competing states” (Kapaló 2011, 77). Further, Bonnett contends that Gagauzia was created by chance, for “the desire to reinvent a place as a nation... can arise suddenly, especially among vulnerable populations... once absorbed by vast, multinational entities like the Soviet Union” (Bonnett 2014, 200).

Since establishment of autonomy, Gagauzia has had seven different *bashkans*, or heads of autonomy, several of whom served multiple terms. Irina Vlakh, the current *bashkan* of Gagauzia was elected in 2015 on an openly avid pro-Russia campaign, with slogans like “Russia – our strategic partner” and “The Russian regions will help every region of Gagauzia!” (Irina Vlakh Official

Webpage 2018). Key developments since gaining autonomy include a switch from Cyrillic to Latin letters for the Gagauzian alphabet, along with creation of the Gagauzian national anthem. As discussed in the introduction and as will be further referred to in the next chapter, post-Soviet Gagauzia can be characterized by extreme poverty and heavy reliance on remittances. What's more, the current overall not only economic, but also political instability of the greater Republic of Moldova, including political in-fighting, frequent government changes, and severe corruption (Freedom House Moldova 2017) create an uncertain environment that extends to Gagauzia as well. The political unpredictability is exemplified by the country's conflicted position between the West (in the Eastern Partnership framework) and Russia, leading to widespread uncertainty of Moldova's trajectory, chiefly whether it will remain independent. These realities in present-day Moldova play a huge role in shaping individuals' negotiations of belonging in Gagauzia.

## **CHAPTER 5 – Presentation of Data and Findings**

### **5.1. Interviewee Diversity**

Eleven semi-structured interviews were carried out from January through April of 2018, mainly in Comrat, the capital of Gagauzia, and also in several villages. Table 1 gives the breakdown of age, gender, origin, profession, and second citizenship for the interview participants, who were given pseudonyms to protect anonymity. An attempt was made to recruit participants from three age brackets: 18-25, 25-40, 40+. Within the first age bracket, all interviewees are students, and within the others, there is a diversity of various professions represented. Originally, the researcher intended to have more male participants but found it more difficult to recruit male interviewees due to the researcher's own identity as a female.



**Table 1. Interview respondents**

<b>Appendix</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Origin</b>	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Second Citizenship</b>
1	Alla	20	F	Comrat	Student	-
2	Arina	19	F	Comrat	Student (Chisinau)	Bulgarian (applied)
3	Nelya	20	F	Copchak (village)	Student	Bulgarian (applied)
4	Aleksandr	19	M	Comrat	Student	-
5	Viktorija	26	F	Beshgioz (village)	Journalist	Romanian (applied)
6	Ekaterina	32	F	Comrat	Accountant	Bulgarian (applied, rejected)
7	Sergei	25	M	Chok- Maidan (village)	Technical engineer	-
8	Roman	32	M	Budjak (village)	History teacher	Russian (applied)
9	Marina	46	F	Comrat	Office manager	Russian
10	Elena	48	F	Comrat	Small business owner	Turkish
11	Alisa	41	F	Troitsa (village)	Accountant	Russian

## 5.2 Presentation and Analysis of Interview Data

### Question 1: How do you identify in terms of ethnicity<sup>22</sup>?

The first question explores how people in Gagauzia, a highly multiethnic region, view themselves in terms of ethnic identification and for what reasons. This question allowed the researcher to gain insight on what factors go into a person's decision on how to identify, particularly what markers of ethnic identification are considered important and, accordingly, which boundaries between collectivities are more or less flexible. Considered also are the legacies of the Soviet system of assigned ethnicity, as discussed in chapter 2. The interviewees in the third age bracket (40+) without exception identified according to the ethnicity written in their Soviet passports. Many responded with confusion or surprise upon being asked both how they themselves identify in terms of ethnicity and what ethnicity was written in their passports. For most representatives of Soviet generations, these questions are one and the same and being asked both was perceived as redundant. This reflects the affixed nature of ethnicity in the Soviet Union, assigned to an individual from birth and made official in his/her documents. In cases of mixed heritage, for Soviet-generation interviewees, ethnicity correlated with the father's ethnicity. Also worth drawing attention to is how some interviewees stated their ethnicity at the beginning of the interview without being asked (see appendixes 4, 9). This demonstrates how one's affixed ethnicity, for some, is considered automatic, expected information that accompanies one's name and age.

For the given question, a generational trend can be recognized. As mentioned, all representatives of the 40+ age bracket unhesitatingly identified with the ethnicity in their Soviet passports, regardless of mixed heritage. For younger interviewees, however, some variation in responses can be seen, with individuals identifying in different ways according to various criteria important to them. This perhaps points to the lessened effect of certain Soviet legacies among younger

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<sup>22</sup> Ethnicity in this context is intended to correlate with the Soviet/Russian understanding of *национальность*. See Yuri Slezkine's 1994 "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism" for more on how ethnicity was assigned and documented in the Soviet Union.

generations, who were not exposed to the rigid assignment of ethnicity as were older generations. Notably, one interviewee said that although he's Gagauzian in terms of heritage and according to his documents<sup>23</sup>, he considers himself Russian, as this is the language he was educated in, thinks in, and uses for communication in most situations.

*“What’s written on my documents? Or how I feel, who I regard myself to be? Well, although my heritage is Gagauzian, my ancestors were all Gagauzian, and I know this language, I consider myself to be Russian because I think in Russian. I don’t think in my native language, in Gagauzian. I consider myself to be Russian.”<sup>24</sup>”*

Although this respondent (age 33) rejects the Soviet idea of assigned ethnicity, his response, nonetheless, demonstrates the Soviet legacies that continue to impact ideas of native language, as discussed in chapter 2. The given interviewee uses “native language” to refer to the language corresponding to his documented ethnicity, rather than to the language he learned first or knows best, as is usually the Western understanding. Moreover, it is worth noting that the respondent considers it important to draw attention to the dissonance between documented ethnicity and national language. This suggests that in the interviewee’s worldview, the two are typically expected to correspond. Several younger respondents brought up their mixed heritage, explaining that it’s difficult to identify with one. One opts to not identify with any one ethnicity in these cases.

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<sup>23</sup> In this case, his birth certificate, as he didn’t have a Soviet passport. Ethnicity in the Republic of Moldova is listed on one’s birth certificate and is chosen by the parents. This can be regarded as a continuation of the Soviet era practice of institutionalization, though no longer supported by the same infrastructure as Soviet passport ethnicity system was (e.g. ethnic quotas for universities). Ethnicity is also entered into the governmental population database, though the researcher was not able to ascertain what this information is used for.

<sup>24</sup> Roman, Appendix 8.

*“Altogether, there are a lot of ethnicities in me, to put it this way. Well, Gagauzian, Ukrainian, Moldovan. Lots of relatives. But I don’t feel like any one of these. I’m all of them at the same time, and therefore, I can’t say, I can’t choose one.”<sup>25</sup>”*

Another respondent of multiethnic heritage asserted that she identifies as Russian for several various reasons.

*“It’s a tough question. Usually I say that I’m Russian. But in reality, I have a very multiethnic family. My mother is Gagauzian. Her family has lived for two-hundred years in Comrat. My father, he’s Russian. His family moved here from Russia, from Moscow. And my grandmother is Moldovan, and she has also lived for many years in Moldova. Well, in general, for us it’s customary to take our father’s ethnicity. But at the same time, the thing is that I don’t speak Gagauzian. And very often there are questions: how do you live in Gagauzia, you’re Gagauzian, and you don’t know Gagauzian language? I say that I’m Russian! And this helps to avoid questions.”<sup>26</sup>”*

This response demonstrates the difficulties that can arise from ethnicity and language use not corresponding: not problematic in itself, but it becomes a problem when one is expected to position oneself. By simply identifying as Russian, the ethnicity that corresponds with the interviewee’s native language, she avoids judgement and questions. One respondent explained that he doesn’t identify with any one ethnicity, citing a dissonance between ethnicity as listed on official documents, language usage, and physical traits.

*“Yes, according to my documents, I am Gagauzian. But I am of the frame of mind that... I speak Russian, but I don’t like to count myself as Russian in terms of ethnic*

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<sup>25</sup> Arina, Appendix 2.

<sup>26</sup> Alla, Appendix 1.

*identification. Probably, I still haven't figured this out, but based on traits, appearance traits, I suppose I am more Gagauzian.<sup>27</sup>*"

These instances all point to the politics of belonging at work: individuals claim belonging in very different ways depending on their circumstances, and all are connected to larger political affairs that project narratives of what is necessary to belong to a certain collectivity. Yuval-Davis maintains that the politics of belonging “comprise specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging to particular collectivity/ies which are themselves being constructed... in very specific ways and in very specific boundaries,” and she uses the questions of whether Jews can be considered German or abortion-advocates can be considered Catholics to illustrate the politically-charged usage of boundaries in construction of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011, 10). This line of thought is highly applicable to the responses above. The last respondent, in particular, demonstrates the trickiness of negotiating the boundaries of the various collectivities in his world. On one hand, his native language is Russian, but his physical traits do not align with typical preconceptions of a “Russian” appearance. Physical appearance in this context can be considered an inflexible boundary, as it is less easily changed. On the other hand, the given respondent feels uncomfortable identifying as Gagauzian, as he doesn’t command the language. He considers this marker of ethnicity, language, to be important, and is in a somewhat dissonant situation of not being able to claim full belonging to either of the collectivities in question because of projected political narratives on what criteria must be met in order to belong. The impermeability of the physical appearance boundary prevents him from identifying as Russian, in contrast with the respondent before him, who possesses a more stereotypical “Russian” appearance, and who identifies as Russian to avoid judgement for not knowing Gagauzian. These cases point to the relative inflexibility of the language boundary in Gagauzian society. Language knowledge is referred to as an important marker of ethnic

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<sup>27</sup> Aleksandr, Appendix 4.

identity, and in the Gagauzian context, when one's native language and documented ethnicity do not align, uncomfortable questions or judgements can be put forth.<sup>28</sup>

**Question 2: Do you have second citizenship, or are you planning to obtain second citizenship? For what reasons did you acquire it / are you acquiring it?**

This question addresses citizenship practices in Gagauzia, where many hold second citizenship.<sup>29</sup> In explaining why they have or are in the process of obtaining second citizenship, many respondents made reference to the economic situation in Gagauzia and the difficulties in finding stable, well-paying employment. Going abroad as a migrant worker has become an accepted responsibility in Gagauzia in the post-Soviet era. Many choose to apply for Bulgarian citizenship, as this opens the door to entering the European Union and working there, often illegally.

*“I’m in the process of getting Bulgarian citizenship. Well, for example, because Bulgarian citizenship is European. Well, so that I can leave and earn money because here in Gagauzia you can’t, especially young professionals... therefore, we have to go abroad, to earn money. But I don’t want to live in Europe.”<sup>30</sup>*

Citizens of Moldova, including Gagauzia, also have the opportunity to acquire Romanian citizenship on a historic territorial basis, as Bessarabia was part of Romania during the interwar period. Romanian citizenship is granted regardless of an individual's ethnicity.

*“...we have a program for reinstatement of citizenship. It’s not that we are granted this citizenship, it’s reinstated to us. At one point in history, this was Romanian*

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<sup>28</sup> Questions or judgement can occur in a variety of situations. One example from observational data: At a public lecture, Gagauzian writer and national activist, Fyodor Zanet, scolded students in the audience for not understanding when he would switch to Gagauzian. Many responded that they are Bulgarian and, therefore, don't know Gagauzian.

<sup>29</sup> Of the 11 interviewees, three hold second citizenship, four are in the process of applying for second citizenship, and one had her application rejected (see table 1).

<sup>30</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.

*territory. And if a person has ancestors who during that time lived on the territory of what was then Romania, your Romanian citizenship is automatically returned. So it does, in some way, make sense.”*

*-“And it works out that even though you are Gagauzian—”*

*-“Yes, it doesn’t matter, that’s not important to them. You submit documents. I don’t know, to do with language knowledge. But it doesn’t matter at all, whether you’re Gagauzian or Bulgarian, it’s not important.”<sup>31</sup>”*

Worth taking note of is how modern-day citizenship practices are transcending the traditional “one nation, one state, one language” framework. Romanian citizenship is offered to individuals regardless of their ethnicity, yet with a separate political goal: to stake an historic claim to Bessarabia, once Romanian territory. This is especially relevant in the current context, with constant talks of Moldovan unification with Romania. Offering Moldovan citizens Romanian citizenship on the basis of an historic territorial claim is an example of a specific political project targeted at influencing individuals’ senses of belonging. In addition to pursuing Bulgarian and Romanian citizenship, many in Gagauzia take advantage of the Russian Federation’s compatriot resettlement program.

*“Well, essentially, it works in all countries, all republics of the former Soviet Union. If you’re from, let’s say, the Baltics, Ukraine, Moldova, Central Asia – former Soviet republics – there are consulates, where you submit your documents. It works out that you’re considered a compatriot. You submit documents: passport, birth certificate, educational diploma, military card. You apply, and they consider your application. If you’re suitable, then you pick some certain region. You’re suitable, there are vacancies in your field, they invite you, and you go there.”<sup>32</sup>”*

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<sup>31</sup> Viktoria, Appendix 5.

<sup>32</sup> Roman, Appendix 8.

*“I participated in the Russian Federation’s compatriot resettlement program. I gave it a try, and it worked out. The main thing is that it is based on our having lived in the Soviet Union. We had MSSR – Moldovan SSR passports. Such people are able to participate in this program.”<sup>33</sup>”*

The Russian Federation’s compatriot resettlement program is also an example of a political project targeted at perceptions of belonging. By granting citizenship on the basis of not only historical territorial claims, but also on the basis of ideas of common language and culture that were shared across the Soviet Union, Russia operates an explicit political undertaking intent on impacting feelings of belonging and thereby exerting political sway.

The widespread practice of obtaining second citizenship points to the unstable economic situation in Moldova, circumstances that inevitably impact how people make choices in their lives, intertwined with the politics of belonging. As Yuval-Davis maintains, “Politics involves the exercise of power, and different hegemonic political projects of belonging represent different symbolic power orders” (Yuval-Davis 2011, 19). Demonstrated by the political narratives surrounding these countries’ (Bulgaria, Romania, Russia) citizenship policies, all exert their political power to influence sentiments and practices of belonging in Gagauzia. Their various criteria for being granted citizenship are illustrative of the range of what is required from a person in order for him/her to be deemed as belonging to a collectivity. Bulgaria, for example, evokes narratives on common descent (whether mythical or not). Romania puts forth the narrative of a common territorial homeland historically. Russia makes use of conceptions of common culture and language, as well as historic territory, in their political projects on belonging. These cases are demonstrative of how various facets of belonging (social locations, identities, and ethical/political values) can serve as the essential components of boundary delineation in different political projects. They vary in

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<sup>33</sup> Alisa, Appendix 11.



permeability, with stipulations for belonging, such as place of birth, ethnicity, or origin representing ascriptive social locations, highly impermeable. Requisites of belonging like language and culture are somewhat more permeable, as they can sometimes be reached by assimilatory or voluntary means in identifying with certain collectivities. When claims are made for belonging to another state's collectivity, this can impact one's sense of belonging to a different collectivity. For instance, in claiming common cultural and linguistic traits to obtain Russian citizenship or in common origins to gain Bulgarian citizenship, this changes the boundaries of what is considered the Gagauzian collectivity. That an individual can be Gagauzian and also share lingual and cultural commonalities with Russians, Bulgarians, or Romanians is demonstrative of the boundary shifting that occurs when states exercise their political power in implementing political projects of belonging.

An important point in this discussion is the economic stability of the groups in question. As citizens of the poorest region of the poorest country in Europe, Gagauzians' ability to make a living is dependent upon the fluidity of group boundaries and vice versa. In order to more easily go abroad to Europe as migrant workers, for example, Bulgarian citizenship is needed. To obtain Bulgarian citizenship, Gagauzians go along with the political narrative of common origins or ethnic descent, softening the boundary between Gagauzians and Bulgarians. As the Bulgarian News Agency puts it "There are no Gagauz people who are not of Bulgarian origin and this must be taken into account when their naturalization applications are reviewed" (Bulgarian News Agency 2015). This is a bold claim regarding Gagauzian origins, a way of tying Gagauzians to the Bulgarian state and thereby exercising political influence. Citizenship can be considered a political project of belonging, for it remains in most of the world the main source of various types of entitlements, even despite effects of globalization (Yuval-Davis 2011, 49).

### **Question 3: How did you obtain second citizenship?**

In explaining how they obtained or applied for their second citizenship, all respondents with Bulgarian citizenship pointed to the current policy of Bulgaria, which allows ethnic Gagauzians to apply for citizenship by proving Gagauzian ancestry.

*“You have to prove, in the first place, that you’re Gagauzian because we Gagauzians, well, in part, probably... we came from that direction, from the direction of Bulgaria. And we are, I guess, descendants, therefore, we have the right to Bulgarian citizenship. All Gagauzians.”<sup>34</sup>*

Many apply for Bulgarian citizenship without fully understanding why they are allowed it and without any desire to actually live in or have connections with Bulgaria. One younger respondent, in particular, had trouble explaining on what basis she was granted Bulgarian citizenship.

*“-And did you have to take a Bulgarian language exam, for example?”*

*“-No. It’s, sort of, I don’t exactly know, but Gagauzians... with Bulgarians...”*

*“-It works out that your ancestors are from Bulgaria?”*

*“-Yes, sort of, and there in Bulgaria there’s a Gagauzian village, there they’re real Gagauzians. So there’s some sort of related connections there, and therefore they give us the opportunity to get Bulgarian citizenship.”<sup>35</sup>*

Castells argues that the definition of citizenship has become muddled as a result of the “blurring of boundaries of the nation-state,” and he holds that the state is becoming less relevant for average citizens, with people fighting for their own interests on an individual basis (Castells 2010, 367-8). Indeed, interview data show that citizenship for many in Gagauzia is a tool used in cultivating economic

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<sup>34</sup> Arina, Appendix 2.

<sup>35</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.

interests, rather than representative of any greater citizenry-state relationship. Further, these responses are illustrative of the different claims made by different actors regarding the origins of Gagauzians, possible as Gagauzia lacks a coherent national narrative. Although in Gagauzia ethnic origins is a question of controversy and considered unproven, Bulgaria's official stance is that it is the historic homeland of Gagauzians. This points to the various sways of influence exerted on Gagauzians in determining their historic past and how they belong in today's world. Bulgaria, for example, purports the narrative that Gagauzians belong (at least on a historical basis) in Bulgaria. This fits into theories on the politics of belonging, the idea that any narrative on belonging is linked with political projects, in this case, Bulgaria's citizenship policies. Indeed, these responses point to how different political projects are anchored in various facets of belonging, which lead to construction of boundaries in different ways. They demonstrate how different political projects of belonging can be targeted at the same collectivity, yet construct their projects in various ways in order to purport their control of the collectivity. In so doing, these political projects of belonging are illustrative of different power organizations and position in different ways the same people along intersectional political and social axes of society. Worth keeping in mind is that the ways different individuals in the collectivity interpret and experience these political projects of belonging vary widely depending on an individual's intersected social location, identification, and values (Yuval-Davis 2011, 25).

**Question 4: What is your native language(s)?**

This question aims to shed light on the linguistic landscape of Gagauzia and improve understanding of individual attitudes toward native language usage. Many of those who identify ethnically as Gagauzian mention that they grew up speaking Russian.

*“Well, I have always spoken Russian. My grandmother and grandfather spoke with me in Gagauzian. I know Gagauzian. In school we studied Gagauzian, but at home with our family we speak Russian.”<sup>36</sup>”*

*“-Well, after all, I’m Gagauzian, and my native language is Gagauzian, isn’t that how it works? But I already said that I don’t think in this language. I consider my native language to be Russian. All my mental processes are in Russian. Therefore... well, okay, let’s say two languages: Russian and Gagauzian.”*

*“-And what language do you speak with your parents?”*

*“-We speak in Russian. Although my father and mother speak Gagauzian with one another. It’s just that we were attending school in Russian, and in our class, there were lots of kids who didn’t know Gagauzian, and in school all the subjects were in Russian. And somehow, it worked out naturally that our parents came to speak with us in Russian. But in Gagauzian also. But, for example, with them, I can throw out a few phrases in Gagauzian, then say everything else in Russian. And they practically only speak in Gagauzian with one another.”<sup>37</sup>”*

As already argued, identity is relative and situational, which can be useful in explaining how individuals might claim powerful identification with a language, yet do not pass it on to their children (Austin and Sallabank 2011, 8-9). Although this seems paradoxical, it can be made sense of when considering how individuals position themselves in different, sometimes conflicting social realities within their daily lives, hence creating various identities. Several respondents explained that their parents spoke with them in Russian at home to make it easier for them to study in school, where education is entirely in Russian.

*“I can say for sure that I have two native languages and that they are Gagauzian and Russian because since childhood... you know, why were we taught Russian*

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<sup>36</sup> Elena, Appendix 10.

<sup>37</sup> Roman, Appendix 8.

*from childhood, because it works out that in daily life you learn Gagauzian regardless, that is within the family. And in school everything is in Russian. And therefore, my parents... my mother even told me that they spoke Russian with me at home so that... regardless, you'll learn Gagauzian... with neighbors, with friends, outside. And Russian... because school will be difficult if you don't know Russian.<sup>38</sup>”*

Indeed, the survival of a language depends on its continuous reteaching and relearning, with national governments playing a key role in language shift through their educational and infrastructural policies (Spolsky 2011, 142). The Soviet Union's policies certainly caused major language shift in Gagauzia, when Russian became the dominant language in society, opening educational, professional, and general socioeconomic opportunities.

*“...well... really, my native language, of course, is Gagauzian. But I speak Russian. Well, essentially, perhaps because we are a national minority, our language isn't as popular as, let's say, Russian. Therefore, most likely, our parents spoke with us in Russian so that it would be easier for us to socialize and study in school.<sup>39</sup>”*

As discussed in chapter 2, other studies on different nationalities in the Soviet Union point to the choice to learn and use Russian as a tool for social mobility (Silver 1976, 414). The literature shows that language acquisition can be a practical matter tied to economic opportunities, and the interview data of this study support such a theory. Although perhaps knowledge of national language is considered important, it, understandably, often can pale in the broader picture of making a living and functioning in a society in which Russian opens educational and career doors. What's more, Lenore Grenoble holds that knowledge of a world language is often seen as more useful or practical than knowledge of a national or

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<sup>38</sup> Viktoria, Appendix 5.

<sup>39</sup> Ekaterina, Appendix 6.

regional language (Grenoble 2011, 34). Indeed, in Gagauzia, three other languages are seen as equipping an individual with opportunities, as reflected in school curriculum, in which Russian (the language of instruction for all subjects), Moldovan/Romanian, and English are all required subjects.

Indeed, one respondent explained that she grew up in a Gagauzian-speaking family, yet attended school in Russian, and as a result, faces challenges when speaking either one.

*“I consider it to be this way, I even tell a lot of people. That Gagauzian is my “rodnoi,” and Russian is my “dvoyorodnyi!”<sup>40</sup> So it works out that I know Gagauzian, but not fluently! Russian, also not fluently! Russian, I understand everything perfectly! And I speak... not perfectly! I should, well, I think I should read a lot of books, for example, literature. And... think in Russian. It works out for me... I’m thinking in Gagauzian, then I switch to Russian... everything is mixed up for me! And it works out that I can’t think or speak purely in Gagauzian. It’s interspersed with Russian. Well, because there’s the language that you think in – that’s your native language. And so one time I thought, I wonder what language I think in. I caught myself thinking, that I think one sentence in Gagauzian, but then an entire phrase in Russian. Everything for me is mixed up... Yes, in our family Gagauzian. But it’s intertwined with Russian. Sometimes there aren’t certain words in Gagauzian, and so we speak Russian. Especially some phrases. My brother and I made a bet to speak clean Gagauzian, but it doesn’t work! You know, because it’s mixed with Russian.<sup>41</sup>”*

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<sup>40</sup> This is a play on words. *Rodnoi* refers to something “native” or related closely. One’s *rodnoi* brother, for example, is one’s own brother from the same parents. *Dvoyorodnyi* also implies a relation, but a more distant one. One’s *dvoyorodnyi* brother, for example, is one’s cousin. The root of both words is the same, though, pointing to the fact that both refer to something “native,” so to speak, but with *dvoyorodnyi* implying a more distant relation. The prefix of *dvoyorodnyi* is a form of “two,” so the word literally means native, but secondary.

<sup>41</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.

Another respondent comments on how many words are borrowed from Russian, or by older generations from Moldovan/Romanian, in Gagauzian speech.

*“Well, if we single out native language, it’s Gagauzian in the first place. But here there’s also an interesting point: a real native speaker of Gagauzian, who speaks pure Gagauzian, can’t be found in Gagauzia. Because there’s this symbiosis of Russian and Gagauzian. We’ve taken a lot of words from Russian, and when we speak Gagauzian, we very often switch to this mixed, strange language. I mean, pure Gagauzian, well relatively pure Gagauzian, was spoken by our grandparents. That is, during their lives, essentially. But about that, it’s noticeable, I myself noticed that people who didn’t know Russian used Moldovan words, Romanian words. Because there was a time when Romanians were here on our territory, and in school Romanian was taught, and in daily life, people spoke Gagauzian, and lots of their words were borrowed from Romanian, from Moldovan.”<sup>42</sup>”*

This response draws attention to another aspect of language politics: claims surrounding “purity” of a language and rejection of borrowed words or mixing with another language. The literature describes such cases in other areas of the former Soviet Union. *Surzhik*, or mixing of Ukrainian and Russian, for example, is considered by some a “form of linguistic pathology” (Stepanenko 2003, 132). Indeed, parallels can be drawn with the Gagauzian case, in which negative attitudes towards borrowing words from Russian or Moldovan/Romanian and towards “impure” Gagauzian speech persist. In turn, this impacts individuals’ nominative views on the statuses of languages. Gagauzian is seen as less developed and lagging, dependent on loan words from titular languages of more dominant groups.

**Question 5: What was the language of instruction in your kindergarten? In your school? In your university?**

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<sup>42</sup> Sergei, Appendix 7.

This question explores the linguistic landscape of the educational system in Gagauzia. Apart from some feeble efforts to open several Gagauzian schools after the creation of the Gagauzian alphabet in 1957, there has never been any level of education taught in Gagauzian. As expected, all respondents reported that the language of instruction was Russian for all educational institutions in Gagauzia. One respondent from a village, though, explained that her teachers in school would switch between Russian and Gagauzian.

*“But our teachers were, how to say, many were elderly, and we would switch to Gagauzian. But now I notice that in schools they try to teach more in Russian. But before they spoke in Gagauzian and in Russian, everything together.”<sup>43</sup>”*

The given respondent, further, voices the view that Russian is used in more formal settings, while Gagauzian is limited to use in the villages.

*“With teachers [in university] only in Russian. Even if they understand Gagauzian, [we speak] Russian. Well, this is a more official institution after all. In school we could ask in Gagauzian, the teachers understood. But here even if you know that the teacher understands Gagauzian, it’s not comfortable to ask in Gagauzian.”<sup>44</sup>”*

This speaks to the status attached to different languages. This respondent views Russian as a more “official” language and considers it to be more appropriate for communication in a higher-education institution. Gagauzian, on the other hand, she considers to be out of place in more formal spheres. There is much in the literature that demonstrates how different languages carry different status associations. For example, Laitin maintains that Russians’ attitudes towards learning the national languages in Estonia and Kazakhstan vary vastly. His ethnographic studies find that Russians in Estonia are more willing to learn

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<sup>43</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.

<sup>44</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.



Estonian, viewed as a “European” or “advanced” language, while Russians in Kazakhstan are reported as less amenable to learning Kazakh, which they consider “Asian” and “backward” (Laitin 1998). Linked to this is the economic aspects of learning a language, discussed in section 2.2. Parallels can be drawn with the Gagauzian case. As an unstandardized language historically used for communication among farmers and rural populations, attitudes persist that it is not appropriate for usage in official or formal spheres. This is indicative of normative claims surrounding languages and illustrate the power of mental images about “appropriate” usage of different languages. The literature maintains that standard languages are usually used in educational spheres, with non-standardized languages often being stigmatized (Spolsky 2011, 142). William Stewart defines a standard language as one “with published grammars and dictionaries and a popular belief that there is a correct version” (Stewart 1968, 535). Gagauzian can be considered to fall short of meeting this definition, as there exist many dialectical variations with no one implemented standard of what is “correct.” Another respondent, currently an undergraduate law student in Chisinau, explains why she chose a Moldovan-language group, rather than a Russian one.

*“But with this group, there is priority, that is some advantages. That’s the first thing. And the second – studying in Russian wouldn’t allow me to later work in Moldova, even in Gagauzia. Here you must know the state language. And as the legal language, it’s quite specific. You have to know it, and preferably from the start in the state language.”*

Again, this demonstrates the status and political power attached to different languages and how this impacts an individual’s choice of what language to study or speak. As discussed in the literature review, it is often the case that people opt to speak or learn to speak a particular language for the opportunities that are associated with it; in multilingual societies, it is frequently not a neutral or random choice. Harbert hypothesizes that people alter their linguistic behavior very often to bring

about desired change in their material situation, and such alteration is related to the “cultural capital” that a language possesses, meaning how it can be employed in the “linguistic marketplace” (Harbert 2011, 404). Learning Moldovan/Romanian will provide the given interviewee access to job opportunities in the greater Republic of Moldova, not just in Gagauzia, the most economically disadvantaged area of the country. Moreover, as official communication from Chisinau is in Moldovan/Romanian, learning this language will open doors to government-level jobs, such as state-appointed lawyers, in Gagauzia as well.

**Question 6: In your opinion, is there a connection between native language and ethnicity?**

This question aimed to investigate individuals’ attitudes towards degree of correlation between language use and ethnicity. As a highly multiethnic area in which Russian has been the lingua franca for several centuries, many in Gagauzia don’t know the language of their “ethnicity.” The following responses shed light on the situations in which such markers of ethnicity become important and for what reasons. One younger respondent, a representative of the post-Soviet generation, voices the opinion that ethnicity is becoming an obsolete conception.

*“I would not say so, because, as one Romanian philosopher said: one’s homeland is language and nothing else. I also think so because everything depends on factors outside an individual’s control. One doesn’t choose the language that he/she speaks. And ethnicity and all that, I think, is a remnant of the past.”<sup>45</sup>*

This response reflects a way of thinking vastly different from the Soviet primordial ideas about correlation of national language and ethnicity and more representative of the Western ideas of self-chosen, flexible ways of identifying. Another respondent asserts that correlation of native language with ethnicity is

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<sup>45</sup> Aleksandr, Appendix 4.

important for development of national self-awareness. However, she comments on the problematic aspects of this in the Gagauzian case.

*“As practice shows, here there isn’t a connection. I believe that, generally, for the strengthening of any sort of national self-awareness, that there should be [such a link]. That is, we need to speak our own language more, I think... but in terms of documented and written language, everything is more difficult because our language is essentially young. Our alphabet is young, and we need to develop it so that we can use it to write, and we need to develop our terminology because there are many words for which there exist no translations. This makes, namely, writing difficult. That is, writing of documents. But, in general, this language is capable of surviving, of functioning. Therefore, I think that from a young age, probably—because this young generation growing up now, essentially doesn’t know the language at all, and this scares me a bit. And I think that they have started to draft laws related to this. I think that a few hours in kindergarten will be absolutely fine. So not to completely switch languages, but so that there’s a balance--- support, so that... after all, we live in Moldova... a couple of languages – I don’t think this will be problematic for a child.<sup>46</sup>”*

In this response, the interviewee draws attention to the lack of standardization of Gagauzian, which translates into problems when considering its use in the public sphere or at an official level. In spite of this, though, some respondents voice the opinion that knowing Gagauzian language is an essential part of being Gagauzian.

*“-Of course. Definitely. For example, there are some people in villages who say that they’re Gagauzian, but they speak Russian. So, for example, I don’t respect*

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<sup>46</sup> Viktoria, Appendix 5.

*those who say that they're Gagauzian, but can't speak Gagauzian. Because language and ethnicity – they're inseparable.”*

*“-So if a person doesn't know Gagauzian language, he's not Gagauzian?”*

*“-Right. He can't consider himself to be Gagauzian. Maybe according to his passport, he's Gagauzian, but he can't be proud of being Gagauzian.”<sup>47</sup>*

This response speaks to the primordial idea that one must know the language of his/her ethnicity. In this interviewee's opinion, language is a salient ethnic marker and forms a strong boundary among groups. Knowledge of Gagauzian language is a key criterion for being part of the Gagauzian collectivity or “imagined community.”

*“Well, that's a pretty deep question. It depends on how you look at it. Yes, I think that there is, of course. There is. If you, let's say, think in Gagauzian, you speak it fluently, your thought process occurs in it, then you can say with pride that yes, I am Gagauzian. On the other hand, many, our present-day, for example, politicians, assembly members, they speak Gagauzian poorly, but they also say, yeah, I'm Gagauzian. Here it cuts both ways. But, in general, I think that there is a connection. Language is one of the factors that determines ethnicity. One of the most important factors.”<sup>48</sup>*

This illustrates a dissonant situation. Although language knowledge is considered by some an essential part of ethnic identification, Gagauzian language is highly endangered with no education carried out in the language and no major efforts being made to preserve it or advance its status. With language being cited by interviewees as one of the major components of ability to identify as Gagauzian, and considering that the language is dying, negotiation of boundaries of who is part of the Gagauzian collectivity or not is becoming more complicated.

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<sup>47</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.

<sup>48</sup> Roman, Appendix 8.

**Question 7: In your opinion, what is the most important part of Gagauzian culture?**

Ethnicity is understood to have subjective and personal aspects. One's ethnic identification is determined by his/her position on the different axes of social locations as discussed in the literature review. Asking what individuals consider to be the most important part of Gagauzian culture sheds light on what ethnic markers are considered important and for what reasons. Several respondents maintain that, in their opinion, language is a major component of culture, an idea that is supported in the literature. Michael asserts that as is the case with culture, language is a learned behavior passed along intergenerationally, and refers to the two as "inextricably intermeshed" (Michael 2011, 120-4).

*"If we approach it from, let's say, a patriotic angle, Gagauzians want to preserve their language, that is, we try to preserve our language because language is a marker of your ethnicity and a part, well, it's like a unit of culture. I mean your ethnicity and your language are very much connected. And if we lose our language, it will be difficult to prove that we are... well, our national belonging. I mean, a country, an entire people... without a language can't exist... It's a bit embarrassing, but there's nothing that our culture can take pride in, that is we don't have any sites or any sort of big achievements on the world scale or... therefore, in this case, it's language. If we lose our language, then..."<sup>49</sup>*

Literature on endangered languages highlights that language loss occurs as a result of language shift and language attrition, when speakers of a language choose to stop speaking it, often specifically with their children (Grenoble 2011, 32). It is replaced by a more dominant or more "useful" language that holds political or socioeconomic benefits. Further, Grenoble points out that language shift often

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<sup>49</sup> Sergei, Appendix 7.

occurs unnoticed in multilingual settings, where older generations aren't concerned by younger generations speaking a more dominant language (Grenoble 2011, 33). This theory fits with the situation in Gagauzia, historically a highly multiethnic and multilingual region, where Russian has been the lingua franca for several centuries. Gagauzian language loss can be attributed to the imbalance in political power, social prestige, and economic advancement between Gagauzian and Russian. Language shift and extinction is not a recent phenomenon, and, arguably, an inevitable part of historical processes; however, worth pointing out in the Gagauzian case is that several interview respondents cite the language as being intertwined with culture and as the key to being a "real" Gagauzian.

*"I think that one of the factors that defines a Gagauz as a Gagauz is, of course, language. It's our religion – Orthodoxy. Gagauzians are an Orthodox people, and what's more, a very devout people. Another defining feature of Gagauzian-ness is our lifestyle. In the cities we've lost this, but in Gagauzian villages, there's something especially inherently Gagauzian: our Gagauzian mentality. The fact that we were peasants, and we depended upon the land on which we lived, upon whether there was a harvest or not, upon whether you're hardworking or not, therefore, I think that this way of life influences whether you're Gagauzian or not."<sup>50</sup>*

The prominence of traditional, rural way of life recurs in interview responses regarding Gagauzian culture. This is supported in other ethnographic studies on Gagauzia. Hülya Demirdirek maintains that agricultural labor is central to social identity among Gagauzians (Demirdirek 2000, 70). Narratives regarding rural way of life as a key component of Gagauzian-ness serve to reinforce the attitudes towards Gagauzian as a less-official, village language, as discussed in the analysis of previous responses. Another respondent asserts that she perceives traits like diligence and work ethic, regardless of hardship, to set Gagauzians apart.

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<sup>50</sup> Roman, Appendix 8.

*“Well, they say Gagauzians are hardworking. They say that even in a desert, a Gagauz can build a house. And Gagauzians can live anywhere. If you take Germany, in Frankfurt, in Berlin, everywhere they live and make money. Willingness to work hard – this is a defining trait.”<sup>51</sup>”*

This response reflects the economic instability in post-Soviet Gagauzia, which has prompted an enormous sector of their population to go abroad as migrant workers. That it is brought up in connection to Gagauzian culture is noteworthy; it illustrates the interplay of economic hardship and claims of identity. The necessity to seek employment abroad has become such a ubiquitous part of life in Gagauzia to the point that it is referenced in narratives regarding who Gagauzians are and what sets them apart as a collectivity. Other ethnographic accounts also draw attention to the concept of work ethic among Gagauzians as a defining self-perceived cultural trait. Demirdirek describes how during her fieldwork, Gagauzians who had experienced Romanian rule, along with the hardships of World War II, would claim that they survived by working hard and by depending on their land (Demirdirek 2000, 69).

**Question 8: In your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians?**

This question explores the repercussions of Gagauzians having been under the rule of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union for several centuries. It evokes questions surrounding assimilation: how boundaries between groups become more permeable and eventually disappear. In asking this question, the researcher had the goal of engaging respondents in dialogue about how they view the boundaries between the two groups: to what extent is there a boundary, and what factors play a role in boundary delineation.

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<sup>51</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.

*“... actually, we have a lot in common because it’s a fact that we all lived together in the Soviet Union, but also we lived in Tsarist Russia, and many intelligentsia were sent to our southern area when the tsar allowed Gagauzians – who were a nomadic people – and when they migrated from Dobruja, the tsar allowed them to live on this territory, where we are now located.<sup>52</sup>”*

Tislenko argues that the centrality of Russian cannot be overemphasized when considering the Gagauzian case, as it has been the language of education and religion for the past two centuries, following migration to Bessarabia; moreover, commemoration of the Great Patriotic War and the Soviet Union’s victory continues to be of extreme importance in Gagauzian culture, serving as another key link with Russia (Tislenko 2015, 72).

*“Gagauzians migrated here to Moldova, to this territory, when Russia fought off Turkey, and these empty lands needed to be settled. They invited our ancestors, who came here from the Balkans and settled here, and there, it works out that the entire nineteenth century, the entire twentieth century, we lived side by side with Russians. And after this, we have a lot in common. We basically are slowly merging into one people. And I, I guess I’m Gagauzian, but I consider myself Russian. Here in Comrat, in the city, the vast majority of Gagauzian youth are already like me, they speak and think in Russian. Only youth in the villages for now still thinks in Gagauzian. Young people come here from the villages, I hear that they speak in Gagauzian among themselves. Among Gagauzians who live in Comrat, you won’t find this. They all speak Russian. Therefore, as with Moldovans, with Russians there’s a lot more that connects us, than separates us.<sup>53</sup>”*

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<sup>52</sup> Ekaterina, Appendix 6.

<sup>53</sup> Roman, Appendix 8.



*“Well, in my opinion, Gagauzians are more farmers. They raise animals, livestock. They are in their element on the land. They worked on the land, their ancestors worked on the land, they raised livestock, grew vegetables, fruits, so it works out that farming probably sets Gagauzians apart as a people/ethnic group (народ). And, of course, now they also differ in that they are hardworking, they are willing to work hard and take care of their families, yes.<sup>54</sup>”*

As was the case with responses to the previous question, the importance of working hard and connection to the land are highlighted by both respondents from urban and rural areas as elements that set Gagauzians apart. This respondent brought these traits up in explaining how Gagauzians are different from Russians. As evident in the responses regarding language usage, this response also demonstrates nominative assignment of values. Gagauzians are seen as being less progressive and more as “village” people than Russians.

*“I don’t know. They’re like our relatives! We have a lot in common. But a difference... I don’t know. I never thought about it. This has given me something to ponder!<sup>55</sup>”*

*“There’s no difference! Maybe just physiology, their faces. Gagauzians are just darker, and Russians lighter. I think there aren’t any differences. If you ask around here, walk around, ask who everyone likes, 100%, 99% respect Russians.<sup>56</sup>”*

This response speaks to the relative impermeability of boundaries based on ascriptive traits, such as physical features. Additionally, the respondent maintains that general attitude towards Russians in Gagauzia is overwhelmingly positive. Affinity with Russians is a noteworthy aspect, corresponding to the third facet of

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<sup>54</sup> Marina, Appendix 9.

<sup>55</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.

<sup>56</sup> Elena, Appendix 10.

belonging, political values, discussed in the theoretical literature. Indeed, Irina Vlach, the current *bashkan* of Gagauzia elected in 2015, based her campaign on close ties with Russia, referred to as Gagauzia’s prime strategic partner (Irina Vlach Official Website). Figure 2 shows the front page of Vlach’s pre-election campaign booklet. It lists five main strategies, with the first one reading “Russia – our key strategic partner.”

**Figure 2**<sup>57</sup> (Irina Vlach Official Website)



The interview responses and Vlach’s campaign speak to the complexity of negotiating belonging as a very small minority group grappling with poverty. Heavily reliant on remittances from migrant workers abroad in Russia, as well as on

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<sup>57</sup> Translation of text: Irina Vlach, independent candidate for *bashkan* of Gagauzia. Pre-election platform: Russia – our key strategic partner; jobs – our priority; developed, modern infrastructure; people-centered social policy; preservation of traditions, strengthening of autonomy.

donor aid from Russia, for many Gagauzians, affinity with Russia can be considered a salient facet of belonging. In another study on Gagauzian autonomy, Woeber recorded a Gagauzian NGO activist as maintaining that “A good Gagauzian is considered to be pro-Russian and Orthodox” (Woeber 2013, 23).<sup>58</sup>

**Question 9: Do you consider Gagauzian territorial autonomy to be important?**

This question brings to light various opinions on creation and maintaining of Gagauzian autonomy within the Republic of Moldova. Gagauzia is a relatively young political creation, which came to be as a result of coinciding events: the Soviet Union’s collapse and efforts in Moldova to unite with Romania, as discussed in the previous chapter. The following responses elucidate diverse individuals’ understandings of the reasons that Gagauzian autonomy operates. Several respondents voice their belief that without autonomy, they would lose Gagauzian language and ethnic distinctiveness and be assimilated into the Republic of Moldova.

*“Yes. Because if there won’t be autonomy, there won’t be Gagauzians – we will simply be assimilated.”<sup>59</sup>”*

*“It’s possible, yes. So that we won’t be like Bulgarians [in Moldova], for example. They’ve already merged with other nationalities. Been absorbed. And us Gagauzians, if we have autonomy, that means there’s more responsibility, that something be done specifically for Gagauzia. And if we didn’t have autonomy, we would have already submitted to Chisinau in everything<sup>60</sup>, and it’s possible we would have even stopped learning Gagauzian. In this regard, I think that autonomy is important. To some degree we should be independent.”<sup>61</sup>”*

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<sup>58</sup> Although Woeber’s study did not specify “considered” by whom, based on field observation, I would assume by the populace of Gagauzia itself.

<sup>59</sup> Ekaterina, Appendix 6.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. language of instruction in schools and in government positions.

<sup>61</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.

Although language is just one of a multiplicity of markers of identity, some research suggests that language becomes a salient aspect of identity when people feel that group identity is being lost as a result of political or social reasons (Lanza and Svendsen 2007, 293). Some respondents connect autonomy with language usage, both Gagauzian and Russian.

*“I think it’s important. Because for us... it’s not that we have to, but... it’s how it turned out for us, that it’s comfortable for us to speak Russian, to speak Gagauzian here. And I think that if we don’t have autonomy, then they’ll [the central Moldovan government] simply do to us what they did in other Russian-speaking communities, simply make it impossible for us to speak the language that we’re used to speaking. I don’t have anything against the state language. As I already said, I study in this language. But regardless, if a person is already used to [speaking his language], and he loves his language, why should he be restricted, why should he be told that he needs a different language? Yes, we should know this language. Moreover, we live in Moldova. But still, we need our own language, our own languages.”<sup>62</sup>*

Individuals’ understandings of entitlement surrounding language are molded by bigger grids of values and political ideologies. Grin and Kymlicka argue that in much of the former Soviet Union, nationalism is one of these ideologies, which implies a “one state, one nation, one language” model (Grin and Kymlicka 2003, 21). This is certainly the case in Moldova, where Moldovan/Romanian was made the country’s only official language after the collapse of the Soviet Union, without considering the country’s many minority groups. Russian, however, has officially remained the language of interethnic communication since 1989 (MRGI 2018). In part, though, it not being removed as of yet can be attributed to political and economic instability. The rampant political in-fighting in the central government, corruption, and the economic crisis generally aren’t conducive for any big policy

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<sup>62</sup> Arina, Appendix 2.

changes to be implemented (Freedom House Moldova 2017). However, a recent example of nationalistic policy can be considered the May 2018 talks in Chisinau to remove Russian as the language of interethnic communication in Moldova. Many Gagauzian politicians reacted by stating that Gagauzia will challenge such a change. Prominent Gagauzian politician and businessman, Pyotr Vlakh, was reported as asserting that “Gagauzians speak Gagauzian, but they think in Russian” as part of his larger statement asserting that Gagauzians will not tolerate Russian’s status being taken away (Gagauz Info 2018a). Similar linguistic situations can be seen in other multiethnic parts of the former Soviet Union. In Tatarstan, for example, a highly diverse republic in terms of ethnic composition, some scholars argue that having Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication is unavoidable and not easily challenged, even not considering the higher authority of the Russian Federation in these matters (Faller and Garipov 2003). Parallels can be drawn with the Gagauzian case. Considering Gagauzia’s and greater Moldova’s multiethnic composition, it is difficult to imagine that Russian’s status could be easily disputed. Several interviewees highlight that political affinities in Gagauzia differ greatly from those in the rest of Moldova. Specifically, ongoing talks regarding Moldovan unification with Romania serve to heighten some people’s appreciation of autonomy.

*“I think that for us, as citizens of this autonomy, it is very important because considering now the unstable political situation, it’s important for us to protect namely our autonomy, the ability to make our own decisions because, after all, political views here in Gagauzia are quite different from those in Chisinau or in northern Moldova, and we don’t want, if, God forbid, in my opinion, if Chisinau decides in the end on unification with Romania, but I don’t believe this, I don’t believe this will happen, but nevertheless, in Gagauzia people openly stand against these sorts of scenarios and hope that they won’t come to be, and we, as citizens of*

*Gagauzia, are glad that we have autonomy. Because this allows us, gives us some freedoms in deciding our path in the future.<sup>63</sup>”*

Another interviewee points specifically to negative historical memory of Romanian rule in her explanation of why Gagauzian autonomy is important.

*“It’s important. Very important. At the moment, in Moldova 40% want unification with Romania. Autonomy is absolutely necessary... Even if they leave [to join Romania], Gagauzia will remain here, separate. I’m sure of this. Gagauzians won’t join Romania, no way. Because our ancestors here, my grandmother, she’s still alive, she remembers how they lived here under the Romanians, how Romanians abused them, and nobody wants the Romanians to come again.<sup>64</sup>”*

In another response, historical affinity with the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and Russia is emphasized, positioning them as an opposing sphere of influence to Romania. This idea is supported in the literature as well, with one ethnographer maintaining that for Gagauzians, “the larger unit, or “imagined community,” to which they relate is still the Soviet Union” (Demirdirek 2000, 78).

*“Gagauzians want to continue to exist as an ethnicity. They don’t want to get blended in with others. And they try, as they are able. They established autonomy. Many in the Assembly sincerely love this land. It’s their homeland. Although they themselves understand that their national language is being forgotten. They don’t want it to disappear. And creation of autonomy is an attempt to make it so that Gagauzian culture, Gagauzian language don’t disappear because if there won’t be autonomy, they’ll immediately demand that we switch to Romanian, and that’s it, you can say goodbye within ten years. On the other hand, creation of autonomy – this was motivated in the nineties when the Soviet Union was collapsing, then*

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<sup>63</sup> Alla, Appendix 1.

<sup>64</sup> Elena, Appendix 10.

*Moldavia announced this sudden course to closer ties with Romania, almost to the point of unification with Romania. Gagauzians, as a nation that doesn't see itself as part of Romania, a nation that always associated itself with the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and now with Russia more, Gagauzians stood up for their right to self-determination. They said, if you, Moldovans, want to unify with Romania, go ahead, but without us. We'll create an independent state for ourselves, and we won't [join Romania] with you. Autonomy is like an instrument for self-preservation, an instrument to exercise our right to self-determination.<sup>65</sup>*

**Question 10: And how, in your opinion, will Gagauzia change within the next fifteen years?**

This question seeks to understand how different people see the future of Gagauzia and in which spheres of life changes are foreseen or hoped for. Several point to the importance of developing Gagauzian language and including it in the public and educational spheres. However, the difficulty in accomplishing this is also highlighted.

*“One can dream! ... I think that Gagauzia... well, if it will collaborate with other countries in the academic sphere, for example. Send our students abroad. So that others will come here, learn about us. And it works out that... I had this moment, I was so upset, I thought, I don't know either Gagauzian or Russian. I want to know one. And after all, Gagauzian, where can you go with Gagauzian? It's really upsetting in terms of my native language. But if there will be, for example, some sort of school in Gagauzian. Art, for example. And so that a scientific/academic language would be created. Some music schools, for example, art schools, that are specifically in Gagauzian. This would help Gagauzia to develop... Of course, you have to start with yourself. This takes a lot of time. Others will be living their lives,*

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<sup>65</sup> Roman, Appendix 8.

*making money for a family, starting families, and you will be advocating Gagauzia, you know! You have to sacrifice something to help your country.<sup>66</sup>”*

*“Well, fifteen years is a rather short time period for changes, to be honest. But I think that if soon a law is passed to have our language better preserved, then I think that this will have a positive impact on our future generations, in terms of language knowledge, patriotism, and cultural self-awareness. So there, in this case, there will be changes.<sup>67</sup>”*

One interviewee highlights the possibility of Moldovan unification with Romania and voices her opinions on what should happen to Gagauzia in that case.

*“This is the most interesting question. Well, of course, I can’t predict the future. But anyway, there’s one theory that by 2050 Moldova, in the form of a state, won’t exist. But if we’re talking about the coming fifteen years, there’s the possibility, of course, that Moldova will find a way to unify with Romania. If this happens, then the Gagauzian people have the right to self-determination. This is written in our constitution. And in that case, I, of course, would like for Gagauzia to become an independent country. Or, if that doesn’t work out, to become some sort of autonomous district of Russia, if it ends up going that way, though I, of course, would want independence. But. But the question remains whether Moldova will unite with Romania or not because Transnistria is preventing this, and I’m even glad about this. Because I believe that Moldova, really, should be independent, even considering that we have Transnistria and Gagauzia and Taraclia and so on. We don’t need to unify with anyone, we need to develop ourselves. So I sincerely hope that in fifteen years, this country will have made progress. At long last.<sup>68</sup>”*

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<sup>66</sup> Nelya, Appendix 3.

<sup>67</sup> Viktoria, Appendix 5.

<sup>68</sup> Arina, Appendix 2.



Several respondents draw attention to Gagauzia's migration crisis and voice opinions on how this will impact demographics and language usage in the future.

*“First of all, a lot of people are migrating away. This process will continue. Gagauzian youth is migrating away from here, from the autonomy. Migrating, mostly, to the Russian Federation. Some by the resettlement program. Some just to earn money, but then never return. And here, there's empty housing. At the same time, people from neighboring Moldovan villages buy apartments here in Comrat. There's, I don't know, Sadyk<sup>69</sup>, nearby there's lots of Moldovans. Already in Comrat you hear Moldovan as often, if not more often than you hear Gagauzian. I think that this process will continue, and gradually our Russian-speaking population, Gagauzians who speak Russian, will migrate away from here, and there will be more and more Moldovans, Romanian-speakers, in the autonomy.<sup>70</sup>”*

Roman is referring to a depopulation of Gagauzian-speakers in Gagauzia as a result of mass out-migration, and indeed, the literature points to population movement as a key factor in language shift (Harbert 2011, 410).

*“Considering that at the moment there is a large flow of citizens from all over Moldova and from Gagauzia... from Gagauzia, in particular, a large part of the population leaves for Russia, some to Europe, so I don't even know... to predict, to say that in the future something somehow will change for the better... I'm, of course, not a pessimist, but I look at the current situation in Gagauzia as a realist. I can say that, I don't know, it's unlikely to expect anything good. Because many villages are left empty. People, young people, aspire to settle closer to megapolises, where there's some sort of development, where you can, for example, give your children some sort of future: a career, a profession, something in the future.<sup>71</sup>”*

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<sup>69</sup> Predominantly Moldovan village near Gagauzia.

<sup>70</sup> Roman, Appendix 8.

<sup>71</sup> Sergei, Appendix 7.

This last response, in particular, points to the aspiration to migrate in search of better opportunities, supporting the narratives regarding second citizenship practices earlier in this chapter. Worth considering is how the phenomena of massive out-migration impacts individuals' feelings of belonging. Acquiring citizenship of another country or living outside Gagauzia long-term are practices that play a role in Gagauzians' changing identities and claims of belonging. The concept of work ethic as a distinguishing group trait includes historical memory of always being under the rule of larger powers, as well as present-day narratives of post-Soviet dependence on remittances.

### **5.3 Summary**

Among the reasons that lead a person to identify as Gagauzian, the legacy of the Soviet system of assigned ethnic categories (solidified in passports and other documents) continues to play a role today in relation to ethnic identification. Even younger generations can reference their "documents" when asked about ethnicity (appendix 4), and discrepancy between documented ethnicity and feelings of ethnic belonging were topics that arose as salient (appendices 1, 7, 8). Further, the data show that perceptions of belonging in Gagauzia are influenced by language knowledge and usage, especially among younger, post-Soviet generations. While Soviet generations identify according to the ethnicity in their passports, regardless of language knowledge (appendices 9-11), younger generations give more thought to the dissonance of ethnicity and language usage in-practice not corresponding (appendices 1-8). Indeed, interviewee responses demonstrate that ethnicity and language knowledge not correlating, though not unusual, can create uncertain situations, even judgement. Many have negative ideas about a Gagauzian not knowing Gagauzian language, for example, yet they acknowledge that Gagauzian, as a non-standardized minority language, does not provide educational or career prospects (appendices 3, 5, 6, 7). Indeed, considering the widespread influence of

larger, titular groups, several Gagauzians expressed less-than-optimistic views on the prospects for the future of Gagauzia and Gagauzian language (appendices 7, 8).

According to the data, the interplay between belonging and phenomena related to economic instability, such as heavy out-migration, can be characterized in the Gagauzian case as close-knit. The practice of obtaining second citizenship as an economic choice, regardless of affinity to the country itself, is widespread (appendices 2, 3, 5, 6, 8-11). The data provide multifarious instances of the politics of belonging at work: individuals in Gagauzia claim belonging in very different ways depending on their circumstances, and all are connected to larger political affairs that project narratives of what is necessary to belong to a certain collectivity. The intersectionality approach is useful in considering the social locations of different Gagauzians, as it allows examination of the larger picture of the dynamic grid of social relations, on which individuals occupy places according to the intersecting axes of their social identifications.

## **CHAPTER 6 – Conclusions: Overview and Contribution of the Study**

This study seeks to analyze the meaning of the concept of ethnicity in Gagauzian narratives on identity and belonging. It puts forth an outlook on processes of political projects of belonging and their manifestations at the citizenry level. Through analysis of interview data, three key practices emerged as salient aspects indicative of forces shaping Gagauzians' negotiations of belonging and the intertwined politics of belonging set in motion and manipulated by various political entities. These are: language usage, ethnic labeling/identification, and citizenship practices. Ultimately, these practices are all intertwined with access to resources that have the power to improve an individual's economic circumstances. The data demonstrates how ethnic labeling is used to portray and legitimate behaviors and feelings of belonging in the Gagauzian case through means of maintenance of group boundaries. These are put in the spotlight particularly in contexts when there is a mismatch in expectations regarding correlation of documented ethnicity and language knowledge. Due to the meanings attached to language usage and its expected correlation with ethnicity, forming claims of belonging to a certain collectivity can be complicated for some in Gagauzia. The ability to claim belonging can depend on aspects such as physical appearance, which can be considered a relatively impermeable boundary among groups. Ethnic labeling serves as a vehicle by which claims of belonging are often made discursively acceptable in Gagauzian society. Indeed, ethnic identification and its expected correspondence with language usage serve as a framework for legitimizing discourses of Gagauzian identity. The ways that Gagauzians utilize ethnic identity discourses to formulate articulations of belonging are multifaceted and intermeshed with greater exertions of political power by various actors. A key finding of this work involves how ethnic labels in Gagauzia are used as a discursive tool to apprehend the world. Claims of ethnic belonging reflect the various political projects at work, and language knowledge is conceptualized as a discursively constructed facet of collective identity.

Moreover, the data demonstrate how some facets of identity become salient in times of political uncertainty. In particular, conclusions regarding language usage in Gagauzia deserve special attention. This work demonstrates how many Gagauzians are faced with a conflicted situation. On one hand, language is seen as the key to being Gagauzian and a vital part of culture. However, on the other hand, the economic situation, foremost among other considerations, acts as an impediment to Gagauzian language usage, acquisition, as well as development and/or standardization efforts. There are a multiplicity of arguments surrounding why the world should care about loss of language diversity. Most common among these involves scientific reasoning that languages encode groups' world knowledge that could be lost along with the language and thereby diminish not only linguistic diversity, but broader diversity of entire human groups' systems (Grenoble 2011, 37). Another popular point is that a people should have "the right to revitalize, use, develop, and transmit to future generations" their languages, as put forth in the UN's 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN 2007). Although specifically named as a right for indigenous peoples, a particularly vulnerable group, these linguistic rights are generally considered a basic human right. Understanding why Gagauzian language is endangered and why a language shift has occurred and continues in Gagauzia can assist in contemplating solutions to the dying-out of this minority language.

Based on the data and analysis of this thesis, the conclusion can be drawn that the future of Gagauzian language is highly dependent upon the economic situation in the region. Without incentive to learn or use the language, the number of speakers will likely continue to dwindle. However, in a poverty-stricken region so heavily dependent on remittances, it seems improbable that government (either Gagauzian or Moldovan) funding will be invested in language policy and infrastructure changes that would encourage usage of Gagauzian in the public sphere. As several interview respondents pointed out, and as the literature highlights often is the case with minority languages (Grenoble 2011), Gagauzia continues to grapple with issues related to standardization of the language, which impede the

potential of implementing the language in educational or public spheres. This case study is an effort to contribute conceptual tools that will enable understanding of language shift, specifically its relationship with political and economic conditions. By gaining insight on why individuals choose to speak what languages they do, and indeed, how much real choice they have in the matter given economic hardship, the conclusions of this work could be used to help in designing strategies to address dwindling linguistic diversity in our world.

This study generated original ethnographic data on a little-known region and ethnic group. However, the data collected in the framework of this case study and its analysis and interpretation are just one small stone in the larger mosaic of Gagauzian belonging. Further research is needed to more deeply understand the interplay among the aspects that the researcher analyzes in this work. While this work focuses predominantly on outlooks of Gagauzians towards their own ethnic category and language, as well as towards Russians and Russian language, additional research on attitudes towards other ethnic groups and labels, such as Turks and Moldovans, would foreseeably yield insightful results to complement the findings of this study.

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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Biographical information:

#### Биографические данные:

1. Name:  
И.Ф.:
2. Age:  
Возраст:
3. Resident of which town/village:  
Житель какого города/села:
4. Profession:  
Профессия:

### Open-ended questions:

#### Открытые вопросы:

1. How do you identify yourself in terms of national identification / ethnicity?<sup>72</sup>  
Представителем какой национальности Вы себя считаете?
2. What ethnicity was written in your Soviet passport? (if interviewee represents Soviet generation)  
Какая национальность была написана в Вашем советском паспорте?
3. What is your citizenship? Do you have second citizenship, or are you planning to obtain second citizenship?  
Есть ли у Вас второе гражданство? Планируете ли Вы получить второе гражданство?
4. What is your native language(s)?  
Какой у Вас родной язык или родные языки?
5. What other languages do you speak? When and how did you acquire them? In what situations do you use them?  
Какими ещё языками Вы владеете? Когда и как Вы их выучили (изучали)? В каких ситуациях Вы их используете?
6. What was the language of instruction in your kindergarten? In your school? In your university?  
На каком языке велось преподавание в Вашем детском саду? В Вашей школе? В Вашем университете?
7. In your view, what is the relationship between your native language and national identification?

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<sup>72</sup> Interviews were conducted in Russian, and here, “national identification” is meant in terms of ethnicity (the equivalent of *национальность*), rather than citizenship.

Как Вы считаете, есть ли связь между родным языком и национальностью? И если есть, то какая?

8. In your opinion, what is the most important part of your culture?  
Что, на Ваш взгляд, является самым важным аспектом Вашей культуры?
9. Where does the word “Gagauz” come from? What does it mean?  
Откуда происходит слово «гагауз»? Что оно означает?
10. How do Gagauzians differ from Russians/Moldovans/Turks? (three separate questions)  
В чём наибольшее отличие гагаузов от молдаван? От русских? От турок?
11. Do you consider Gagauzian autonomy to be important? Why or why not?  
На Ваш взгляд, важна ли территориальная автономия Гагаузии? Почему?
12. Where do you see Gagauzia in fifteen years?  
Как на Ваш взгляд, изменится Гагаузия в следующие пятнадцать лет?

## Appendix B: Interview Transcripts

### Appendix 1: Alla

**-First, your name, please.**

-My name is Alla.

**-And your age?**

-I'm 20.

**-And which city or village do you live in?**

-In Comrat.

**-And where are you from originally?**

-From Comrat. I was born here.

**-And your profession?**

-I'm studying. At the moment, I'm a student, but I also do translations.

**-Which languages?**

-From English to Russian mostly.

**-And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-It's a tough question. Usually I say that I'm Russian. But in reality, I have a very multiethnic family. My mother is Gagauzian. Her family has lived for two-hundred years in Comrat. My father, he's Russian. His family moved here from Russia, from Moscow. And my grandmother is Moldovan, and she has also lived for many years in Moldova.

**-You said that you usually say you're Russian. Why is that?**

-Well, in general, for us it's customary to take our father's ethnicity. But at the same time, the thing is that I don't speak Gagauzian. And very often there are questions: how do you live in Gagauzia, you're Gagauzian, and you don't know Gagauzian language? I say that I'm Russian! And this helps to avoid questions.

**-And what is your native language or languages?**

-My native language is Russian. But since childhood I've been exposed to Moldovan, as my grandmother speaks Moldovan.

**-And do you know Gagauzian?**

-I can read and write. I understand some basic words. But I think that I'm not bad at Gagauzian grammar because I don't understand what I'm writing or doing!

**-So you studied Gagauzian in school?**

-Yes, for many years. I figured out how to do all the exercises, figured out what they want from us on the tests, but I don't understand [Gagauzian], unfortunately.

**-And what other languages do you know?**

-Moldovan. I understand fairly well, but I don't speak so well, as I haven't had practice for a long time. English. I understand quite well, and I speak pretty well. Well, Russian. That's all.

**-And in what situations do you use them?**

-Well, English, mostly, in relation to my studies or work, as I do translations. Russian, really, constantly, because at home we often, that is, we constantly speak Russian. Gagauzian... my other grandmother speaks Gagauzian, but not often, mostly in Russian. Moldovan... in school, that is in university. And with my other grandmother, who's Moldovan.

**-And what was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**

-As I remember, Russian.

**-And in your school?**

-In school also Russian.

**-And this was all in Comrat?**

-Yes, in Comrat.

**-And now, in university?**

-Well, mostly... hmm, it's complicated. A large portion of our subjects are taught in English, but with switching into Russian. Some subjects are taught entirely in Romanian. And one subject is taught in German, as we are studying [German language].

**-What subjects are in Romanian?**

-Well, in Romanian, in Moldovan, we have the subject: business correspondence. And it's taught entirely in Romanian because, in theory, we should fill out all documents in the state language.

**-And do you consider there to be a connection between native language and ethnicity?**

-Not always, I think, because a person can consider himself to belong to a certain ethnicity, but not speak the corresponding language.

**-And in Comrat, in Gagauzia, does this happen?**

-Yes. There's quite a lot of people who consider themselves Gagauzian, yet speak the language poorly or don't speak it. Or a situation when a Moldovan... according to his passport, to his documents, is considered Moldovan, yet speaks Moldovan poorly. In my opinion, this happens frequently.

**-And what is the most important aspect of Gagauzian culture, in your opinion?**

-Probably, family and family traditions that enable preservation of some sort of traditional lifestyle. How people lived in the old days, for Gagauzians this is important. As I've observed, they don't accept innovation or change easily, they aren't so tolerant, in reality. I've observed this, unfortunately.

**-And do you know where the word "Gagauz" comes from?**

-I know that Gagauzians, like Turks, come from a people called "Oghuz." And from this word subsequently came "Gagauz." So at some point long ago this was one people, who were nomadic. And, in general, even now we fully understand Turks, and they understand us... and some languages, Turkish languages, Azerbaijani – they're a bit similar.

**-And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans?**

-The biggest difference... actually, I think that they're very similar, they just position themselves differently. That is, Gagauzians are used to thinking, here we are in the south, specifically from a political point of view, we have more contact with Russia. Meanwhile, Moldovans, who live in the center, in the north, they have more... some pro-European, some pro-Romanian views. And Gagauzians, even though they're part of Moldova, they're pro-autonomy. They hold a definite position that autonomy is unassailable. In contrast, Moldovans are definitely more in favor of Moldova or in favor of unification with Romania, this also happens.

This, in my opinion, is more a political polarization than some actual significant difference. Maybe some sort of cultural aspects, traditions, differ a bit, but not much. Because we've lived for so many years on the same territory.

**-And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians?**

-Gagauzians and Russians... Their attitudes towards other culture are a bit different. What do I mean... Russians fairly often are very... arrogant, if I can say this, towards other nationalities. That is, if you aren't Russian, this is already a mark against you, and you might be treated negatively. But it depends on the person, of course. Moldovans, in this regard, are a bit more open because there has always been a large number of nationalities living on the territory of Moldova. And we're used to this. Although... there can always be unpleasant moments. In any case.

**-Yes, unfortunately. And you said that you're Russian, but you also said that Russians can be arrogant—**

-I say that I'm Russian, but nevertheless, I regard myself to be a native of Moldova, to be a native of Gagauzia. I'm used to this. Yes, I speak Russian. Yes, many generations of my relatives lived in Russia. But despite this, above all, I consider myself to be a native of Moldova, a citizen of this country. Therefore... I don't know. And, of course, I am greatly generalizing. There are good people who are Russians. There are bad people who are Russians. There are bad people who are Gagauzians and Moldovans. That's how it always goes.

**-Of course. Thank you. It's just hard sometimes for foreigners to understand these nuances.**

-Yes, there's a lot of nuances. But I think that it's necessary to know history because for a long time Moldova was an independent country, really big and powerful. Then we survived many wars. And then there was a time when we were a part of Romania, when we were a part of Russia. And all of this has left its mark on people. Different people have different attitudes towards all this. Everyone has different experience.



**-And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks?**

-We have freer traditions, in my opinion. It's not that they're [Gagauzian traditions] more modern, but... Turks have preserved their traditional lifestyle. They have some traditions that they observe even today. For them, even now it's shameful if a woman gets married a second time or gets divorced. Typically, for us, this is also judged, but not to such an extent. Because many people travel outside the country. We're used to modern ways. In this regard, regarding some family traditions, Gagauzians are more open. On the other hand, Turkey is a bit more of a developed country if compared to our autonomy, and on one hand, in Turkey, there's a different standard of life, but on the other hand, these old traditions are observed. We don't have this anymore.

**-And there are a lot of students from Turkey here, yes?**

-Yes.

**-Do you have any classmates from Turkey?**

-Yes, there's a guy from Turkey and one classmate from Azerbaijan. Generally, they come here simply because studying is cheaper. A lot cheaper. If there they pay, I don't know, some twenty-thousand dollars a year, here they pay twenty-thousand lei. A considerable difference. But at the same time, a lot of them don't study in the end, they just... they don't even always show up.

**-Yes, I myself remember this. And are they very different from local Gagauzians?**

-I wouldn't say so. But this also depends on the person. Some arrive here, and, well, because they have a different financial situation, that is they come with money. They can behave pretty arrogantly, and they can display exploitative behavior towards girls. They know that this isn't home, that here girls are more open-minded. But it depends on the person. There are some who behave the same as locals here, there are some who are more open... I even know one guy, in his fourth year, who is engaged to a girl from here, from Gagauzia. They've been together a long time. So, yeah.

**-And in your opinion, is territorial autonomy of Gagauzia important?**

-I think that for us, as citizens of this autonomy, it is very important because considering now the unstable political situation, it's important for us to protect namely our autonomy, the ability to make our own decisions because, after all, political views here in Gagauzia are quite different from those in Chisinau or in northern Moldova, and we don't want, if, God forbid, in my opinion, if Chisinau decides in the end on unification with Romania, but I don't believe this, I don't believe this will happen, but nevertheless, in Gagauzia people openly stand against these sorts of scenarios and hope that they won't come to be, and we, as citizens of Gagauzia, are glad that we have autonomy. Because this allows us, gives us some freedoms in deciding our path in the future.

**-And in your opinion, how will Gagauzia change within the next fifteen years?**

-Well, at the moment, as I work with different NGOs, I see that there exists a very big flow of financial aid from the European Union, and not just from them, as a matter of fact. There's a great number of grants and projects aimed at development of community life, development of civil society, at specifically jolting people because at the moment, it's truly like a swamp. Everyone's grumpy, nobody wants to do anything, nobody believes in anything, and I believe that what people are doing now, specifically in the area of development, that they're doing the right thing. This will bring something new. It will provide some sort of development at least for youth. If some older people don't want to change, at least there should be this opportunity for youth, the opportunity to grow, to go somewhere. Because, in general, nobody knows about many opportunities, there's simply no information. Therefore, let's hope that this will all bring some sort of benefit.

**-First, your name, please.**

-Arina.

**-And your age?**

-I'm 19 years old.

**-And you live in which city or village?**

-I live in the city of Comrat. I was born here.

**-You were born in Comrat, and right now you live here?**

-Well, not entirely, as I study in Chisinau.

**-And your profession?**

-I don't yet have a profession. I'm just now studying. In the law department.

**-How do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-Altogether, there are a lot of ethnicities in me, to put it this way. Well, Gagauzian, Ukrainian, Moldovan. Lots of relatives. But I don't feel like any one of these. I'm all of them at the same time, and therefore, I can't say, I can't choose one.

**-And do you have second citizenship?**

-No.

**-And do you plan to obtain second citizenship?**

-Yes, Bulgarian.

**-And why?**

-Well, because Moldova has more priority with [obtaining] this citizenship. Our citizens, that is. And namely Bulgarian because I know the language a bit, and their culture is closer for me.

**-Is it difficult to obtain?**

-Well, yes, because I already went and submitted my documents, and the thing is that you apply, and then only after half a year, or after a year, do you receive any news. Then you have to go through a lot of procedures, give money. It takes a long time.

**-And what documents do you need to submit?**

-For example, for Bulgarian citizenship, you must have the passport of a parent, that is the passport copy of a parent, who already has Bulgarian citizenship. And if you don't have this, as far as I know, then they can turn you down. So you need a relative. Preferably a close one, who has this document [Bulgarian passport]. If not, then it's a problem.

**-So it works out that you have to prove your ancestors are from Bulgaria?**

-You have to prove, in the first place, that you're Gagauzian because we Gagauzians, well, in part, probably... we came from that direction, from the direction of Bulgaria. And we are, I guess, descendants, therefore, we have the right to Bulgarian citizenship. All Gagauzians.

**-All Gagauzians ethnically, or all citizens of Gagauzia?**

-I think ethnically.

**-What is your native language or languages?**

-My native language is Russian. That's it.

**-And what other languages do you speak?**

-Well, I speak English, Moldovan, or the state language, and Bulgarian a little bit, as I already mentioned.

**-And in what situations do you use them?**

-Well, Russian, of course, I use every day in conversation. In my studies I use either the state language or English because I study in these languages. Bulgarian I use when I speak with my friends from Bulgaria or when I need to go to Bulgaria, there I'll speak that language.

**-What was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**

-Russian.

**-In Comrat?**

-Yes. Well, and we had Gagauzian, English, Moldovan, I think. We had all this.

**-And in your school?**

-In school also in Russian.

**-And which languages did you study?**

-Four languages. English, Moldovan, Russian, and Bulgarian.

**-And now in your university?**

-Now I study in Moldovan and English.

**-And why did you choose a Moldovan group?**

-Well, it's more of an English group than a Moldovan group. But with this group, there is priority, that is some advantages. That's the first thing. And the second – studying in Russian wouldn't allow me to later work in Moldova, even in Gagauzia. Here you must know the state language. And as the legal language, it's quite specific. You have to know it, and preferably from the start in the state language. And accordingly, my group combines all these things.

**-Do you consider there to be a connection between native language and ethnicity?**

-Well, of course there is. Because ethnicity, as a rule, implies that a people, a nation maybe, has their own language, which people, the people, speak. So I think there is.

**-And in Gagauzia, in practice, is there? In your opinion.**

-In my opinion, yes. But it's a question of to what extent. Because if we're speaking about Gagauzians, then we, well, those who live here, whoever considers himself Gagauzian – we all, we, well, it seems we speak Russian, the majority, especially in the cities. But in the villages the language has been preserved, and people still speak it as their first language. Therefore, I think there is a connection anyway. But it's true, why do I say to what extent, because many move to the city, and Russian becomes their native language. Gagauzian takes a secondary place. Therefore... but the connection is still there.

**-And in your opinion, what is the most important aspect of Gagauzian culture?**

-The most important aspect... for some reason, my first thought is wine. I thought of wine because for us... this is a really thriving area. And it's continuing to thrive. New wineries, new brands are appearing. And all of Moldova, essentially, is known for this, but in Gagauzia it also holds a certain place. Therefore, probably, the truth is in the wine.

**-And do you know where the word “Gagauz” comes from?**

-Oghuz, no? I don't know for sure. I think I know, but I'm not sure. For some reason, "Oghuz" came to mind first. That's this other *narod*, and considered a brother one. Well, to be precise, a past one [*narod*]. But it's all very complicated, let's say that. So I think from this word, but I'm not sure.

**-And what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans, in your opinion?**

-Probably, not even temperament, but their outlook on life. I think that Gagauzians, that is my community, is more, I don't even know, more... We have a different view on life. We're more, perhaps, strong, serious. Something like that. Moldovans are a bit different from us in terms of their worldview. Probably, we're also different in that we're all used to living not just in a community of Gagauzians, but we're all mixed together. There's not this differentiation: you're a pure Gagauzian, you're not, you're Moldovan or whoever else. We're so used to living together that there's not this differentiation. We're used to the fact that there's a lot of us, that we're all different. Therefore, we're all community, allied.

**-In Moldova, or just in Gagauzia?**

-In Moldova also, essentially, but I think more in Gagauzia because there are fewer Gagauzians, and even in our city there's this confluence, this conglomerate of different peoples and bloods.

**-And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians?**

-Well, probably, language. Gagauzian. Russians, of course, have just one native language. And we have... well, two. But... it's implied that our first language is Gagauzian. So... that's the biggest difference, I think.

**-And what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks, in your opinion?**

-To be honest, I've never been to Turkey, and Turks... well, this people remains a mystery for now because I don't know many Turks. I think the main difference is their religion. We're Christians. They're more for Islam, if I'm not mistaken. Although, we are, essentially, related peoples. Some even call us brothers by blood.

And for a long time, by the way, this was a problem, because nobody understood that Gagauzians are Christians. Apparently from the Muslim world, but Christians, nonetheless. So I think that religion is the main difference.

**-And in your opinion, is territorial autonomy of Gagauzia important?**

-I think it's important. Because for us... it's not that we have to, but... it's how it turned out for us, that it's comfortable for us to speak Russian, to speak Gagauzian here. And I think that if we don't have autonomy, then they'll simply do to us what they did in other Russian-speaking communities, simply make it impossible for us to speak the language that we're used to speaking. I don't have anything against the state language. As I already said, I study in this language. But regardless, if a person is already used to [speaking his language], and he loves his language, why should he be restricted, why should he be told that he needs a different language? Yes, we should know this language. Moreover, we live in Moldova. But still, we need our own language, our own languages.

**-You said in other communities. Which ones?**

-Well, for example, all of the south of Moldova – the majority of the communities in the south, they are or were Russian-speaking. In its time, Cahul also. What else. Well, I remember Cahul best because there were a lot of Russian-speakers there, and with time, this was displaced, Russian language... though many know it. It's just the thing is that I know one teacher from Cahul, and she says, you Gagauzians have it good, they still let you speak Russian, and all that. In Taraclia they also have it good. They're Bulgarians. They have it great. And in the south, without you, all that's left is us, Cahul – that's neither here, nor there, and as a result, we remain part of Moldova, and, I mean, we don't have anything against this, but they don't let us continue to speak Russian.

**-And how do they prohibit this?**

-Well, first of all, when Moldova got on the European Union course in 2009, the attitude towards Russian language, and to the Russian people changed a bit. And many educational institutions, community institutions, all began to switch to the state language. There became more of them, and Russian divisions, in contrast,

became fewer, and this tendency took off, not just in Cahul, but also in Chisinau, and in all areas.

**-And Taraclia – is this Gagauzia? I forgot.**

-Taraclia is not part of Gagauzia. It's a city that doesn't have autonomy. And back when Gagauzia was just trying to get autonomy, there was talk of Taraclia also joining because there live Bulgarians, who also like us came from Bulgaria, they've preserved their traditions, their culture. And there it's probably, 80% Bulgarian. And they, as I said, don't have autonomy, but nonetheless, they have some sort of status. It's true, I don't know what kind. But I think they have something that... it works out that their native languages are not Gagauzian and Russian, but Bulgarian and Russian. So a situation similar to ours.

**-And how do you see Gagauzia changing within the next fifteen years?**

-This is the most interesting question. Well, of course, I can't predict the future. But anyway, there's one theory that by 2050 Moldova, in the form of a state, won't exist. But if we're talking about the coming fifteen years, there's the possibility, of course, that Moldova will find a way to unify with Romania. If this happens, then the Gagauzian people have the right to self-determination. This is written in our constitution. And in that case, I, of course, would like for Gagauzia to become an independent country. Or, if that doesn't work out, to become some sort of autonomous district of Russia, if it ends up going that way, though I, of course, would want independence. But. But the question remains whether Moldova will unite with Romania or not because Transnistria is preventing this, and I'm even glad about this. Because I believe that Moldova, really, should be independent, even considering that we have Transnistria and Gagauzia and Taraclia and so on. We don't need to unify with anyone, we need to develop ourselves. So I sincerely hope that in fifteen years, this country will have made progress. At long last.



### Appendix 3: Nelya

**-Your name, please.**

-Nelya.

**-And your age?**

-I'm 20.

**-And what city or village are you from?**

-I'm from the village Copchak.

**-And where do you live now?**

-At the moment I live in the student dormitory in Comrat.

**-And your profession?**

-My future profession is a teacher of foreign languages. English, German.

**-And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-I'm Gagauzian, for sure!

**-And why?**

-Because... my grandmothers and grandfathers were Gagauzian. Although I do have one grandmother – she's mixed Ukrainian. I have one sister, and when we go to visit friends, Moldovans, everyone says, she's really light-skinned, everyone says that she looks Ukrainian, German, but never Gagauzian! And I basically know Russian the same as her, but she doesn't have an accent! She even tells me, you have such a Gagauzian accent! And at first I was embarrassed that I have a Gagauzian accent. But then I thought, the most important thing is that I understand, speak, try to convey my thoughts.

**-Good job, that's what I tell myself too! And at home you speak Gagauzian?**

-Yes. What's interesting is that even the children speak Gagauzian. Although now is a tricky time because young families try to speak with their children from childhood in Russian, so that it will be easier for them in school, and after all, with Gagauzian... well, there's not many of us... and so that they will speak with a Russian accent, not with this Gagauzian accent. And in our family, there's ten children, and it's hard, of course, when you go to school... before there weren't such difficulties because everyone spoke Gagauzian, all teachers taught in this mix

with Russian. But now children go [to school] already with Russian. And we understand, but sometimes it's hard to talk, but we study nonetheless. Yes, in our family Gagauzian. But it's intertwined with Russian. Sometimes there aren't certain words in Gagauzian, and so we speak Russian. Especially some phrases. My brother and I made a bet to speak clean Gagauzian, but it doesn't work! You know, because it's mixed with Russian.

**-And you said one of your sisters speaks without an accent—**

-Well, it's possible she has one, but she speaks smoothly, not like me.

**-And do you have second citizenship?**

-Right now, no. But I'm in the process of getting Bulgarian citizenship.

**-And why do you want to acquire it?**

-Well, for example, because Bulgarian citizenship is European. Well, so that I can leave and earn money because here in Gagauzia you can't, especially young professionals... therefore, we have to go abroad, to earn money. But I don't want to live in Europe.

**-So you'll just go there to earn money?**

-Yes, but it can be seen in our village, for example, that a young couple leaves for Germany for a few months to make money, but then in the end, they stay there, buy an apartment, and ten years go by, and it's already not convenient to return.

**-And when will you receive Bulgarian citizenship?**

-I already have the decision. If I were to go to Bulgaria, I would have Bulgarian citizenship, a Bulgarian passport within two months. But for now I don't need it, as I'm studying, so I'll just get it in a year, through Chisinau.

**-And did you have to take a Bulgarian language exam, for example?**

-No. It's, sort of, I don't exactly know, but Gagauzians... with Bulgarians...

**-It works out that your ancestors are from Bulgaria?**

-Yes, sort of, and there in Bulgaria there's a Gagauzian village, there they're real Gagauzians. So there's some sort of related connections there, and therefore they give us the opportunity to get Bulgarian citizenship.

**-And what is your native language or languages?**

-I consider it to be this way, I even tell a lot of people. That Gagauzian is my *rodnoi*, and Russian is my *dvoyorodnyi*! And others, well, I studied German in school. And I always dreamed of studying English because I liked the pronunciation, and English is already such a world language that you have to know it. And we studied Romanian in school. So it works out that I know Gagauzian, but not fluently! Russian, also not fluently!

**-Oh come on, why?**

-Russian, I understand everything perfectly! And I speak... not perfectly! I should, well, I think I should read a lot of books, for example, literature. And... think in Russian. It works out for me... I'm thinking in Gagauzian, then I switch to Russian... everything is mixed up for me! And it works out that I can't think or speak purely in Gagauzian. It's interspersed with Russian.

**-And why do you think the situation is this way?**

-Well, because there's the language that you think in – that's your native language. And so one time I thought, I wonder what language I think in. I caught myself thinking, that I think one sentence in Gagauzian, but then an entire phrase in Russian. Everything for me is mixed up.

**-And in what situations do you use Gagauzian?**

-That's interesting! For example, we go to camps. Well, I'm Baptist. And we have these youth groups. We get together in Moldova. And there are Moldovans, and from Transnistria, and Russians, and Gagauzians. And it's so great to speak Gagauzian and have nobody understand you! You can laugh about something. You can talk about somebody, and nobody understands, and they get mad! It's so nice. You feel free.

**-And in what other situations?**

-Well, I know Gagauzian. And I'll understand Turkish. It's easier for me to understand Turks. And I think that this is a very good thing. I started studying Turkish. And if I didn't know Gagauzian, I probably wouldn't be able to fully master Turkish. I also really want to master Turkish. Because, you know, all things considered. It's upsetting that our Gagauzian, well, isn't prospering, isn't

developing. Because, how to say... It works out that if you master Turkish, you can do translations, speak, use it. But Gagauzian you can't use abroad anywhere. There aren't any opportunities with it.

**-And what was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**

-I didn't go to kindergarten.

**-Why, if I can ask?**

-I don't know, in our family that's how it is. Only one of our boys went to kindergarten. It used to be that there was a "zero" grade, then first grade. How many, four or five years ago, they started going straight to first grade. That's why he had to go to kindergarten. But I don't know, there wasn't really any change. He said, they send us to kindergarten so that we open up. And our mother said, my children are already so open, I want them to be a bit closed! Well, that's how it is in our family.

**-And what was the language of instruction in your school?**

-For us Russian. In Copchak. But our teachers were, how to say, many were elderly, and we would switch to Gagauzian. But now I notice that in schools they try to teach more in Russian. But before they spoke in Gagauzian and in Russian, everything together.

**-And your textbooks are in Russian?**

-Yes. All our schools are Russian schools.

**-And in your university in what language?**

-Here I speak Gagauzian and Russian the same amount. Because I live in the dormitory with one Gagauzian and one Russian. Here in university, in Russian, Gagauzian.

**-Among yourselves?**

-Yes. With teachers only in Russian. Even if they understand Gagauzian, [we speak] Russian. Well, this is a more official institution after all. In school we could ask in Gagauzian, the teachers understood. But here even if you know that the teacher understands Gagauzian, it's not comfortable to ask in Gagauzian.

**-Do you consider there to be a relationship between native language and ethnicity?**

-Of course. Definitely. For example, there are some people in villages who say that they're Gagauzian, but they speak Russian. So, for example, I don't respect those who say that they're Gagauzian, but can't speak Gagauzian. Because language and ethnicity – they're inseparable.

**-So if a person doesn't know Gagauzian language, he's not Gagauzian?**

-Right. He can't consider himself to be Gagauzian. Maybe according to his passport, he's Gagauzian, but he can't be proud of being Gagauzian.

**-And in your opinion, what is the most important part of your culture?**

-How we're different, you mean?

**-Sure.**

-Well, they say Gagauzians are hardworking. They say that even in a desert, a Gagauz can build a house. And Gagauzians can live anywhere. If you take Germany, in Frankfurt, in Berlin, everywhere they live and make money. Willingness to work hard – this is a defining trait.

**-And do you know where the word "Gagauz" comes from?**

-I've read different sources, but I remember... gaga... uz... the nose should be [pointed] straight. A straight nose. I read history, it's mixed up a bit. But I understood that one should be purposeful. Gagauz... gaga, if translating word-for-word – is beak.

**-And what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans, in your opinion?**

-Gagauzians, if they're in a different environment, they're friendly, like brothers. And Moldovans, it's like they're more fickle. Well, it's just that I heard that they go abroad to make money, Moldovans and Gagauzians too. And I heard that making friends with Moldovans doesn't happen because they're... well, not so loyal, to put it one way. We also have, of course... I'm talking about in general. There are also such Gagauzians. But our people are different, our men are more coarse. It's just that we were always different, at camp, they always said that we're a hot-blooded

people. Well, we are friendly, but sometimes it works out that they would say something about us, make fun of how we talk, and this would offend us, and we're very short-tempered. But at least we're friendly.

**-And what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians, in your opinion?**

-I don't know. They're like our relatives! We have a lot in common. But a difference... I don't know. I never thought about it. This has given me something to ponder!

**-And what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks, in your opinion?**

-Well, you know that our men are very coarse, right? But, how to say, they're direct in their relations with women. But Turks, for example, at first they might be flattering, but then it turns out that they're really rude, they can be offensive. And what else. Essentially, they're an even more hot-blooded people!

**-More hot-blooded than Gagauzians?**

-Yes, they're genuinely... fiery!

**-And are your languages very different?**

-Our sentence structure is like in Slavic languages. We adopted this from Russian. But in Turkish there's a different word order and sentence structure. But generally, we can understand them. But if they talk in scientific/academic terms, explain something, it will be difficult to understand because our Gagauzian is more conversational. We don't have scientific/academic language.

**-And in your opinion, is territorial autonomy of Gagauzia important?**

-It's possible, yes. So that we won't be like Bulgarians, for example. They've already merged with other nationalities. Been absorbed. And us Gagauzians, if we have autonomy, that means there's more responsibility, that something be done specifically for Gagauzia. And if we didn't have autonomy, we would have already submitted to Chisinau in everything, and it's possible we would have even stopped learning Gagauzian. In this regard, I think that autonomy is important. To some degree we should be independent.

**-And how, in your opinion, will Gagauzia change within the next fifteen years?**

-One can dream! Well, when I moved to Comrat to study, I learned that Comrat University works with Americans. The American ambassador visits us. I don't know how it is in other universities, maybe it's the same. But Turks come here. This is interesting. They become interested in Gagauzians. I was talking with one Turk. He also says that Gagauzian – it's not from Turkish. And I really liked that because they find us to be equals. Not that we came from them, that we're some kind of appendages. We're like they're equals, and... what was the question? I think that Gagauzia... well, if it will collaborate with other countries in the academic sphere, for example. Send our students abroad. So that others will come here, learn about us. And it works out that... I had this moment, I was so upset, I thought, I don't know either Gagauzian or Russian. I want to know one. And after all, Gagauzian, where can you go with Gagauzian? It's really upsetting in terms of my native language. But if there will be, for example, some sort of school in Gagauzian. Art, for example. And so that a scientific/academic language would be created. Some music schools, for example, art schools, that are specifically in Gagauzian. This would help Gagauzia to develop.

**-And what do you think, is there a chance that this will all happen?**

-Well, if there will be people like Fyodor Zanet!<sup>73</sup> It amazed me what he said, that many criticized him, but he went on ahead.

**-Yes, well done. And who, specifically, criticized him?**

-Even some of his colleagues, other writers, I think. Well, you know, there are those kind of people, who want to brake everything. But he proved that it was not for nothing. His work. If there will be more such people. Of course, you have to start with yourself. This takes a lot of time. Others will be living their lives, making money for a family, starting families, and you will be advocating Gagauzia, you know! You have to sacrifice something to help your country.

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<sup>73</sup> Fyodor Ivanovich Zanet is a Gagauzian poet, writer, journalist, and cultural activist. He wrote the Gagauzian national anthem in 1990, and since 1988 has been the editor and publisher of the only Gagauzian-language newspaper. Prior to our interview, the interviewee and I had just attended a lecture of his at the university to celebrate the publication of his collections of Gagauzian folklore.

#### Appendix 4: Aleksandr

**-Tell us, please, your first name and last name.**

-Hello. My name is Aleksandr (pseudonym). I was born and live in Comrat. My ethnicity is Gagauzian. I study in our Comrat State University with a journalism major.

**-Great. And your age?**

-19.

**-And you already said that you are a student, but apart from this, do you work anywhere?**

-At the moment, I work unofficially in a wine store.

**-Okay. And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity? You already mentioned, but could you—**

-Yes, according to my documents, I am Gagauzian. But I am of the frame of mind that... I speak Russian, but I don't like to count myself as Russian in terms of ethnicity. Probably, I still haven't figured this out, but based on traits, appearance traits, I suppose I am more Gagauzian.

**-And you said that according to your documents, you are Gagauzian. And that's according to which documents?**

-In our passports, ethnicity is written.

**-Yeah?**

-Yeah.

**-In your Moldovan passports?**

-Yes.

**-Okay. Do you have second citizenship?**

-No, only Moldovan citizenship.

**-And do you plan to obtain second citizenship?**

-At the moment, everything here suits me, and for the next five years, I don't have any such plan.

**-Okay. What is your native language or languages?**



-Well, I understand a bit of Gagauzian, but really, my native language, probably, can be considered Russian, as my friends, parents, and relatives speak Russian.

**-What other languages do you know?**

-I understand and speak English. I can write in Moldovan. I understand Gagauzian, that is I know grammar and I can write.

**-And how did you learn them?**

-Gagauzian and Moldovan I learned in school. English was also taught in school, but I consider this to be my own effort, as I was interested and attended courses.

**-And in what situations do you use them?**

-It's nice to meet someone of a different ethnicity and find a topic of common interest to discuss in his/her language.

**-And can you give an example? For example, the last time this occurred?**

-The last time... when I was at an exhibition in Chisinau, some Moldovans approached me and asked questions in Moldovan, and it was nice to answer them in Moldovan and understand what they were talking about... to not force my own language on anyone.

**-Great. What was the language of instruction in your school?**

-In Russian, but there were classes in Gagauzian, that is, in all the other languages also.

**-The other languages—**

-Yes, better to list them, Gagauzian, Moldovan, a little English – that was near the end.

**-Okay. And what was the language of instruction in your school?**

-In my school, Russian. But in Comrat we also have a school with Moldovan as the language of instruction. But, mostly, all in Russian.

**-And where you study now, in your university, what is the language of instruction?**

-Russian, yes, Russian.

**-Okay. And do you study Gagauzian or Moldovan languages?**

-Yes, a fair amount. We have culture of the Gagauz, Gagauzian language itself, that is literature and writing, and also, we use Gagauzian a bit for our major field of study, for our newspapers, as some are published in Gagauzian language.

**-And when you write articles, or in your studies, essays, do you write in Russian, or in which language?**

-In the language comfortable for the student, as some understand Gagauzian very well, and for them, it would be difficult to write in Russian. I would say, it depends, probably, as one wants.

**-I see. And in your opinion, is there a connection between native language and ethnicity?**

-I would not say so, because, as one Romanian philosopher said: one's homeland is language and nothing else. I also think so because everything depends on factors outside an individual's control. One doesn't choose the language that he/she speaks. And ethnicity and all that, I think, is a remnant of the past.

**-Thank you. And in your opinion, what is the most important aspect of your culture?**

-Probably, our traditions, because language can be lost, but traditions, probably, are entrenched more deeply in a people's memory. That's what I think.

**-And specifically what traditions?**

-Our carols, for example. That is, Russians and Slavic peoples have carols, but nevertheless, ours have a special vibrancy. Our celebrations of the coming of spring and the departure of summer also are specifically ours.

**-And can you describe these traditions in greater detail?**

-In the fall, there is "Kasym," which is the departure of summer, and we meet the arrival of winter, so people get ready, they have markets in the city, this occurs now, but in the past it also occurred, gifts are given to friends. And then in the summer, oi, that is in the spring, now, there will be "Khederlez." This is when people put their animals to pasture, it coincides with this, that is historically it did. Now there will also be different markets, celebrations... this celebration will be quite large.

**-And this is only in Gagauzia? Or in all of Moldova?**

-In Gagauzia. We have, for example, such celebrations when we don't go to work, but throughout the rest of Moldova, people go to work, it is a typical working day for them.

**-Okay, thank you. Do you know where the word, "Gagauz," comes from?**

-As far as I remember, eastern tribes... there were a lot of them... their root word was "Oghuz," and the rest were just added to "Oghuz," their tribe names, that is. And as far as I know, one of the versions of the origins of the Gagauz – is traitor in Turkish. We changed our faith from Islam to Christianity, and therefore, Turkish peoples and others called us "Gagauz," like traitors.

**-Interesting.**

-There were the Khakoghuz, the Oghuz... I can't remember them all and list them, but there were a lot of them.

**-I see. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans?**

-I think, language, as Moldovan is a Latin language, and Gagauzian is a Turkic language, from the East. It seems to me that this is the biggest difference. Well, apart from appearance and different customs.

**-And what customs, for example?**

-Customs? They have... let's see... when they greet the arrival of spring, they wear *Martishors*<sup>74</sup>. I don't know the official name of this. Of course, we do this now too, but before it was only among Moldovans.

**-Thank you. And what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians, in your opinion?**

-There is a bit difference in appearance and also in language, because they have Slavic language roots, and again, we have Turkish. There is nothing in common at all. They are blonde, light-skinned, and we are darker. There are also physical differences. We have large noses, for example. And eyebrows... no, our foreheads are very wide. And height. Yes, as far as I know, height is also a big difference.

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<sup>74</sup> Red and white tasseled ornaments pinned to lapels during the month of March to greet the arrival of Spring.

**-Height?**

-Yes, well, we are taller (*laughs*).

**-Gagauzians are taller?**

-Yes!

**-Great, okay. But nevertheless, you all speak one language—**

-Yes, yes. This is because of historical circumstances, because there was very active Russification in the '40s, and therefore... we even have a common culture in some ways.

**-I see. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks?**

-Well, that is harder. It is said that we saved the original form of the language from which they departed. They now have some dialects, plus words from other languages. Our language is cleaner, more historical.

**-I see. And in your opinion, is territorial autonomy of Gagauzia important?**

-Well, probably, only for some legal reasons. A Gagauzian will feel Gagauzian in Brazil, there are some there, as you probably know, and on the North Pole he will be Gagauzian. Probably, for people, it isn't so important, but from the governmental side, yes, it is nice to have your own piece of land where Gagauzian is spoken.

**-And Gagauzian is spoken here?**

-Yes, you can walk down the street and hear Gagauzian speech. How people are bickering or making up.

**-I see. In Comrat?**

-Yes. And in villages even more so. There grandmothers and parents speak with children only in Gagauzian.

**-In your opinion, how will Gagauzia change within the next fifteen years?**

-Well, if everything goes according to plan, well, even now we are strengthening Gagauzian language fairly well. We want to put in place new laws that help the development of this language in the sphere of mass media, for example, it will be required that Gagauzian is used. I think this is a rather forceful method, but if it useful for the future... time will tell.

**-Yes, time will tell.**

-I think that there are reasons for development... that is, this language isn't dead, as many say.

**-Yes, many say so. And, for example, you think that in fifteen years, more people will speak Gagauzian?**

-I will be glad if the amount stays the same. But I don't want to make any predictions.

**-Good evening. Tell us first, please, your name.**

-Viktoria.

**-And your age?**

-26 years old.

**-And you live in which city?**

-Comrat.

**-And where are you from?**

-From the village, Beshgioz, Chadyr-Lunga region.

**-And your profession?**

-I'm a journalist.

**-And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-I consider myself Gagauzian. Although in my passport it's written that I have Moldovan citizenship, as is the case, generally, for everyone in Moldova.

**-And why do you consider yourself to be Gagauzian?**

-Because both my parents are Gagauzian. Because I speak Gagauzian. And, no matter how banal it sounds, but when I see all the Gagauzian dances, Gagauzian music, something lights up in my soul, and therefore, I think that it's my roots. Genetics, roots. I associate myself with this ethnicity, and I believe that in terms of mentality, in the good sense of the word, I am Gagauzian.

**-Okay, great. And with whom do you speak in Gagauzian?**

-With my parents, with my sister, with relatives. In the village mostly. Here I don't have any relatives. With friends and classmates who I grew up with from childhood... yeah, that's all.

**-Great. And do you have second citizenship?**

-For now, no.

**-And the follow-up question, do you plan to obtain secondary citizenship?**

-Yes, I plan to.

**-Of which country?**

-Romania. I know Romanian, and we have a program for reinstatement of citizenship. It's not that we are granted this citizenship, it's reinstated to us. At one point in history, this was Romanian territory. And if a person has ancestors who during that time lived on the territory of what was then Romania, your Romanian citizenship is automatically returned. So it does, in some way, make sense.

**-And it works out that even though you are Gagauzian—**

-Yes, it doesn't matter, that's not important to them. You submit documents. I don't know, to do with language knowledge. But it doesn't matter at all, whether you're Gagauzian or Bulgarian, it's not important.

**-I see. And for what reason do you want to obtain Romanian citizenship?**

-Mostly for traveling. Of course, a biometric passport enables traveling, but not, for example, to England. And at the moment, with a European Union passport, one can travel to England without a visa.

**-Interesting. I didn't know that. But this is until Brexit goes through, right?**

-Yes. Yes, until 2019. I believe that if there is such an opportunity... it's just that my boyfriend lives there... and it's just that there's the opportunity that if before 2019 you enter the country, obtain a social security number, pay taxes, then you can stay there after Brexit goes through. You don't need a visa. So there's this opportunity, and I think, it will be useful, second citizenship. And also, I have work now, but you never know what might happen in life, and it's good to insure oneself. So there, those sorts of goals.

**-I see. So it's possible that you will move to England?**

-It's possible. I wouldn't say move. In general, everything here suits me, as I found myself not-bad work. I provide for myself. And a portion of my salary is left over. In other countries, it's absolutely the same, in that you'll never be making millions. The only thing is if, I don't know, if there will be the situation in which my boyfriend decides to marry me... but that's not for sure.

**-I see. And we already talked about this a bit, but what is your native language or languages?**

-I can say for sure that I have two native languages and that they are Gagauzian and Russian because since childhood... you know, why were we taught Russian from childhood, because it works out that in daily life you learn Gagauzian regardless, that is within the family. And in school everything is in Russian. And therefore, my parents... my mother even told me that they spoke Russian with me at home so that... regardless, you'll learn Gagauzian... with neighbors, with friends, outside. And Russian... because school will be difficult if you don't know Russian.

**-Okay, great. And what other languages do you know?**

-Well, it depends on the level, of course. Well, my Turkish is A1 – beginning level. And Gagauzian, I can say that I have a good level, both written and spoken. And the same with English and Romanian.

**-I see. And how did you learn them?**

-I studied Romanian in school. I had a wonderful teacher... I moved to Chisinau, and, of course, I felt that it was difficult to talk, but I understood everything. It was difficult because I hadn't had practice. But writing and understanding – absolutely everything, even it came in handy at work and at university. Of course, after three years of studies, my Romanian was much better. English also in school. And in university we had one year of English. And independently – movies, music. I think this is the best method. And Turkish – courses at the Turkish Library.

**-Free courses?**

-Yes, completely free.

**-I see. And in what situations do you use these languages?**

-Mostly at work, of course. We live in Moldova, and often I should translate the news from Moldovan, translate governmental or parliament rulings. Those sorts of things. Or if people from Chisinau don't know Russian, for example, and they need to speak with the management or with other people, well, we help, we collaborate. That kind of stuff.

**-I see. At work, I suppose—**

-Yes, mostly at work.

**-And what was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**



-Russian, but we also learned Moldovan. English... no, we learned Moldovan. That's what it was called then. But, essentially, it's Romanian. Some basic words, how to say what is your name. And then in school more in-depth. But in general, Russian is the language of instruction. Kids among themselves, of course, talked in Gagauzian, but teaching itself was in Russian.

**-That was in the village, right?**

-Yes.

**-And what was the language of instruction in your school?**

-Also Russian.

**-And was that in the village or in Comrat?**

-In the village. We have Gagauzian like a foreign language. We have literature and grammar, separate subjects, a couple of times a week. We study Gagauzian like other languages. One can definitely learn it. No problems there. If you speak it at home, then you have a place to use it.

**-And you said you studied in university in Chisinau, and there, what was the language of instruction?**

-The language of instruction was Russian, but there was the choice between a Russian group or a Romanian group. At one time, there were problems, well, not problems, but everyone thought that there wouldn't continue to be Russian groups... everyone worried, those from Russian-speaking areas, from the North, from Beltsy, for example. But with every year... if a person wants to study in Russian, he will find himself, for sure, a Russian group. And yes, the language of instruction for me was Russian.

**-And why did you choose a university in Chisinau and not, for example, in Comrat or Tiraspol or—**

-It seems I didn't even know about the university in Comrat! It's so active that I didn't even know about it. [Representatives] from Svetlyi visited us, there's a college there. They visited us and invited us to study with them. But about the Comrat university I honestly never even heard anything. But in any case, it's unlikely I would have gone there... because my sister studied in Chisinau and all

my relatives, everyone studied in Chisinau because it's considered that there is good, well not bad, quality of education for Moldova. It's the capital.

**-I see. And you never wanted to go to Tiraspol or Moscow, for example?**

-No, no. Although I have many... well, after our generation, many left for Tiraspol, for Russia.

**-Yes, that's why I asked...**

-But namely my generation, for whatever reason, not so. There are some programs, but we weren't told about them, or they didn't exist, I don't know. And anyway, no, I didn't want to go anywhere. I wanted to stay closer to home. I wanted to be here.

**-I see. And in your opinion, is there a link between native language and ethnicity?**

-As practice shows, here there isn't a link. I believe that, generally, for the strengthening of any sort of national self-awareness, that there should be [such a link]. That is, we need to speak our own language more, I think... but in terms of documented and written language, everything is more difficult because our language is essentially young. Our alphabet is young, and we need to develop it so that we can use it to write, and we need to develop our terminology because there are many words for which there exist no translations. This makes, namely, writing difficult. That is, writing of documents. But, in general, this language is capable of surviving, of functioning. Therefore, I think that from a young age, probably— because this young generation growing up now, essentially doesn't know the language at all, and this scares me a bit. And I think that they have started to draft laws related to this. I think that a few hours in kindergarten will be absolutely fine. So not to completely switch languages, but so that there's a balance--- support, so that... after all, we live in Moldova... a couple of language – I don't think this will be problematic for a child. What's more, children learn very quickly.

**-Yes, they're like sponges.**

-Yes, I also think that they're like sponges. They soak up everything.

**-Great, thank you, and in your opinion, what is the most important part of your culture?**

-Specifically Gagauzian culture?

**-Well, that's the thing, which culture do you see as yours?**

-Specifically for me... I definitely think that my culture is a bit mixed. Let's start with what sorts of things are aspects of Gagauzian culture... as strange as it sounds, our folklore culture, dances, culture of hospitality, cooking--- I consider to be the most important. But I can't say that I eat only Gagauzian food or listen only to Gagauzian music because nobody does so. Whatever the culture might be, however well-preserved it might be, there is always some sort of mixing of cultures. But I think that we shouldn't forget about such things. Even though there might be mixing, it should be balanced, kind of... for example, on our table can be found, I don't know, some new fashionable salad and our *kaurma*<sup>75</sup>, as an example. Or at weddings, again, we have music starting from Western, ending with Bulgarian, Turkish, Gagauzian, and the entire set, so to say. I believe that, in fact, this is really good – diversity – it's great, I think.

**-Great. And do you know where the word "Gagauzian" comes from?**

-I heard something about the *Gyok-Oghuz*, who came somewhere from the Balkans. In general, there are different theories. There is no one certain theory. Some say that we came from the Altai Krai, that we are nomads with some sort of Bulgarian roots, with Turkish roots. This, I consider... not that it's bad, but it's not clear, this ambiguity concerning our history, but, in general, Gagauzians are considered to be people who are nomads, you know, under the sky. This is our, how to say, national trait, that we, essentially, migrated here. That we weren't born here. Considering that we already have lived here for generations, our nomadism has disappeared a bit, though I heard that our Gagauzians are in Australia, and...

**-In Brazil, I heard—**

-Yes, this nomadism persists a bit, but, in general, the Oghuz are people who migrated from somewhere else.

**-I see. And do you know what this word means?**

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<sup>75</sup> Traditional Gagauzian meat dish.

-Gagauz comes from the word “Oghuz”... I read about this, but, to be honest, I forgot. Now I’m embarrassed, to be honest...

**-No, don’t be, it’s just that there are different theories, which is why I ask—**

-Yes, there are different theories, and there is no documented proof of any one.

There is one guy, a community figure, who connects us with some runes, you know, some old language. There also might be some sort of link there, but nobody knows for sure.

**-Yes, that’s why it’s interesting. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans?**

-In the first place, language, of course. Our mentalities are similar in some ways. We are hospitable, and so are they, in general. Dancing, wine – these are common aspects of our cultures. But after all, we are a southern people. And southern peoples always are different... more hot-blooded, more... we have different dispositions. That’s it, probably – disposition, language, history – all differ. We have an autonomy, and we migrated here. They, Moldovans, essentially always lived here. Our music is different. There are common elements in our culinary traditions, but there are some that are only theirs and some that are only ours. So, you know, over the centuries, there was mixing, and some things stuck with us, some things stuck with them, and there, we have this symbiosis.

**-Interesting. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians?**

-Well, if we’re talking specifically about Russians who live in Moscow, this is night and day. We are really different people. But if we’re talking about Russian-speakers in Moldova? Well, there you go, we are Russian-speakers in Moldova, but again, if we’re talking about Russian-Russians, they don’t consider us brothers, they don’t consider us to be anyone. We speak the same language because it worked out that way historically. We were in in Bessarabia, and at that time, this was part of the Russian Empire. This is history that you can’t just erase, and actually, we have a common religion, that is we are Orthodox. This is an important point because our

people are very devout Orthodox believers. Therefore, on one hand, there are similarities in terms of mentality, but we are absolutely different people. Absolutely.

**-And how do you differ?**

-Firstly, for the most part, the majority of our population lives in villages. Their life, you understand – the garden and the house. They [Russian-Russians] are more city people. They don't understand this agriculture, for them this is all... we have more of a village life. We only have a total of three cities. And all of them are very small. Big villages. In Russia... of course, there are also villages, but... therefore, Russian city people differ from us a great deal.

**-I see. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks?**

-In the first place, religion. They are Muslims. And our people can't understand this because for centuries, we have been Christians, and the Muslim religion differs greatly, they have different rules. There are many Turks in Gagauzia, as you know yourself. We are called brothers. They also say, you are our brothers, but even, for example, if we start speaking, if you don't know Turkish, there is a lot you may not understand. Therefore, there is even a difference in our languages. Gagauzian, apparently, is a separate branch. Now we have Turkish words because we don't have our own terminology, essentially. This we adopt from them. So, generally, language... there is a small difference. Religion. And, probably, mentality because Turks are big patriots, bigger, I think, than we are. That is, they are always behind their homeland. We don't have this. We, of course, say that we are Gagauzian.... But we wouldn't go out of our way to prove this, to tell about ourselves. They have this patriotism. I was in close contact with some, and this, frankly, amazed me. And in fact, it would be good if we had the same level of patriotism as they do, you know. There's that, I suppose. But in general, they also like to dance. Cuisine, eating. The only thing is that they don't drink, though there are exceptions. At home they don't drink, but here they do.

**-And what do you think, why don't you have such patriotism?**

-Again, this is history, that we were under one rule, then another. Turks didn't have this. The reverse, they were everywhere. They had their own, how are they called... colonies, that kind of stuff. And essentially, we were always under someone else. To put it plainly. And therefore, considering that we are an autonomy, not an independent state, we have fewer rights, not like an independent country. I think this plays a role. But otherwise, I don't think that we could be a self-sufficient state. Therefore, autonomy is the best option. It's just that we need to take more pride in our nation. That's what I think.

**-Interesting. And why do you think that autonomy is the best option?**

-We have 150,00 people. 130,000 people took part in the last elections. If we were to gather people from all over the world, we might have 200,000. I know that there are smaller countries, but taking into account that Moldova is not the richest country. To become a separate country, we need support. We can't just suddenly become a separate state. We need financing. That's clear. Without this, we can't do anything. And again, all the same, if we were to develop with the financing of other countries, how could this be considered independence, right? So therefore, I think that autonomy is the best option.

**-And why do you consider Gagauzian autonomy to be important?**

-We have different... we have our own educational laws. There are some laws that are applied only to Gagauzia. Included in them are particular features, even studying Gagauzian in school. Only we study Gagauzian, nobody else. Of course, it happens that we pass laws, but there is an inconsistency with the Moldovan Constitution, and then these laws are annulled, you know. I think that for autonomy to function fully, for it to be effective territorially, the discord in lawmaking needs to be fixed. So that they recognize our laws, and we recognize their laws. Because there is the problem that we don't recognize some laws because we think that we are autonomous, so we pass our own laws and don't recognize theirs. This isn't right. And it also happens that they pass laws without taking into account ours. This also isn't right. So there's this mutual lack of understanding. But this is completely fixable, I believe, if we can reach a compromise from both sides. And in general, we coexist fine, as we don't

have any sort of hatred towards Moldovans, and they.... Well, at least, at the personal level, I really have never seen this. We, basically, don't like authority, like everyone, we aren't happy with politicians. But at the human level, this isn't evident. When we come together for our *hora*<sup>76</sup>, this is our collective *hora*. You can't tell the difference – whether you're Gagauzian or Moldovan. So therefore, essentially, autonomy is important so that we don't lose our identity, our culture, our language passed down to us from our ancestors. And after all, we aren't entirely Moldovans. We've adopted something from them, perhaps they've adopted something from us. But still, we need to preserve our national identity.

**-And in your opinion, how will Gagauzia change within the next fifteen years?**

-Well, fifteen years is a rather short time period for changes, to be honest. But I think that if soon a law is passed to have our language better preserved, then I think that this will have a positive impact on our future generations, in terms of language knowledge, patriotism, and cultural self-awareness. So there, in this case, there will be changes. And I think that our people, you know, need to travel in order to see how things are in different countries, different places, in order to improve things at home, you know. We need to learn from the experience of others. And I believe that there will be change if people will learn from others' experiences and good practices, if this will be implemented here. And we need to probably step away from the Soviet mentality a bit, I think. Then we will see change. I'm not saying that it's bad, this mentality, but current realities are changing. Technology is changing, everything is changing, moving forward with time, everything is developing. And we also need to develop. And if there will be understanding of this, that we don't want to reject [Soviet mentality], we just want to develop and understand the modern world and be a part of it while preserving our culture. Then, I think, we will experience development within the next fifteen years.

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<sup>76</sup> Traditional dance of both Moldovans and Gagauzians (and many other groups).

**Tell us, please, your first name.**

-Ekaterina.

**-And your age?**

-32.

**-And you reside in which city?**

-Comrat, Gagauzia.

**-And what is your profession?**

-An accountant.

**- How do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-Gagauzian.

**-And why?**

-Well, because my parents are Gagauzian, both my mother and father. And, essentially, as far as I know, my relatives are all Gagauzian, and as far as my parents know, their ancestors are all Gagauzian.

**-And you were alive during the Soviet Union and had a Soviet passport?**

-Yes. I had a passport, a Soviet-form one. There it was written that my ethnicity is Gagauzian. Well, that is, I didn't have a passport, as I was little, but my parents did.

**-And in their passports, it was written-**

-Gagauzian.

**-Do you have second citizenship?**

-No.

**-Are you planning to obtain second citizenship?**

-I applied for Bulgarian citizenship, as my great-grandfather was Bulgarian, on my mother's side, that is, my mother's grandfather was Bulgarian. But as I wasn't able to prove his identity as Bulgarian, as church records were not saved, my application was denied.

**-I see, okay. What is your native language or languages?**



-Well, I have always spoken Russian. My grandmother and grandfather spoke with me in Gagauzian. I know Gagauzian. In school we studied Gagauzian, but at home with our family we speak Russian.

**-I see. Apart from Gagauzian and Russian, what other languages do you know?**

-Well, also English. Italian, at a conversational, basic level. And Romanian, of course, not fluently, but better than Italian, and not as well as English.

**-I see. And in what situations do you use them?**

-For example, English I use when I speak with my friends that live abroad, in different countries. Also at work. Apart from being an accountant, I also take part in different projects, for which, of course, English knowledge is essential. Also, sometimes, I use Romanian at work. Also, when speaking, if someone doesn't understand Russian, I try to speak Romanian. Well, and Gagauzian, pretty much with older people in the family. That's all.

**-Okay, thank you. What was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**

-Russian.

**-In your school?**

-Also Russian.

**-In your university?**

-Russian.

**-In your view, is there a relationship between native language and national identification?**

-Yes.

**-And in your opinion, what sort of relationship?**

-In my opinion... well... really, my native language, of course, is Gagauzian. But I speak Russian. Well, essentially, perhaps because we are a national minority, our language isn't as popular as, let's say, Russian. Therefore, most likely, our parents spoke with us in Russian so that it would be easier for us to socialize and study in school. But, well, language determines the identity of a people, I suppose, so therefore, between them there is a relationship.

**-Okay, thank you. In your opinion, what is the most important aspect of your culture?**

-Our culture? The most important aspect? The fact that we remember our traditions. We try to honor, that is, remember our ancestors. Of course, with time, some things are forgotten, it's true, but we try to hold on to and remember at least the basic, key things. Lately, there has been a sort of "revival" tendency. Of, perhaps, old customs. There are attempts to create "ethnic museums" so that future generations don't forget how our ancestors lived and what sorts of traditions there were in those times.

**-Do you know where the word "Gagauz" comes from?**

-From... there was a Turkish people, as far as I know, the Oghuz (laughs)... and... (laughs) honestly, I am having trouble answering this!

**-No worries!**

-I think there were the Oghuz and then came the Gagauz.

**-Okay. And do you know what the word means?**

-No.

**-Okay, and in your view, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans?**

-In our view, in my view... there aren't any big differences, but we are different in that we speak completely different languages. Our languages belong to different language groups, namely Gagauzian belongs to the Turkish group, and Moldovan, Romanian to the Romance group. What do we have in common – we share a religious faith. Generally, we are all Orthodox. In general, we have a lot... we have a mixed culture. We have something, let's say, Eastern in our culture, something Slavic, this is because we always lived in this mix – Gagauzians and Moldovans – but, in general, we always lived and still live amicably.

**-Great. And in your view, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians?**

-Well, again, language. These are absolutely different language groups. In terms of traditions, well, there are also differences, of course, but there are also... It's just that we have more Eastern, Turkish influence, and traditions in our culture prevail

to a greater extent... even in our cooking, we also have many Eastern dishes, but in terms of differences from Russians... actually, we have a lot in common because it's a fact that we all lived together in the Soviet Union, but also we lived in Tsarist Russia, and many intelligentsia were sent to our southern area when the tsar allowed Gagauzians – who were a nomadic people – and when they migrated from Dobruja, the tsar allowed them to live on this territory, where we are now located.

**-Great. And in your view, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks?**

-Turks. Well, first of all is religious faith. We are Orthodox. Turks are Muslims. In Turkish culture there is a lot from Arab culture, which we, of course, don't have.

**-Do you consider Gagauzian autonomy to be important?**

-Yes. Because if there won't be autonomy, there won't be Gagauzians – we will simply be assimilated.

**-I see. And where do you see Gagauzia in fifteen years?**

-One wants to think positively. We hope that Gagauzia and the south of Moldova will prosper, as in Soviet times, the south was always neglected, for some reason. Well, in general, this is probably in all countries, that the north lives better than the south. And one wants, of course, to change this situation, so that everyone will live equally. And also, I see the future of Gagauzia together with the Republic of Moldova. Because we are a very small autonomy, and independently, of course, we perhaps could survive, but nobody needs conflict. And we, generally, always lived in friendship with Moldovans, with the Moldovan people, therefore, we don't see a future without Moldova.

**-First, please tell us your name.**

-Sergei.

**-And your age?**

-My age – 25. Birthdate – January 9, 1993.

**-And you are a resident of which city or village?**

-I'm a resident of the village Chok-Maidan in Gagauzia.

**-And were you born there?**

-Well, no, I was born here.

**-In Comrat?**

-No, not in Comrat. I was born in a hospital in Chisinau.

**-And where did you grow up?**

-Well, until I was six years old... so when I was born, my parents moved to Russia. We lived there about... well, until I was six I think, I don't remember. Then my parents got divorced, and my mother and I moved back to Gagauzia, to Chok-Maidan.

**-And your profession?**

-I studied in the polytechnic university, UTM - *Universitatea Tehnică a Moldovei*<sup>77</sup>.

**-In Chisinau?**

-Yes. My specialization is electronics. That is, I'm an engineer. Faculty of design of electronic equipment. Can you imagine, we even have this.

**-Great. So you studied in Chisinau, and why did you choose Chisinau and not Comrat or Tiraspol, for example?**

-Well, in this case, it's an individual choice. However it works out. However one thinks is best... for example, if you want some sort of profession in the humanities, you can study here in *Komrat Devlet Universiteti*<sup>78</sup>. But if you want, let's say, an education in a technical sphere, to become an engineer, the only educational

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<sup>77</sup> Technical University of Moldova.

<sup>78</sup> Comrat State University.

institution where you can receive technical training is the polytechnic in Chisinau. Therefore, I didn't have to think about it, I enrolled there.

**-Great. And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-That's an interesting question. Well, of course, as Gagauzian. Because my mother and father are Gagauzian. I mean there was no ethnic mixing, or how is the right way to say it, for example, that my mother was Moldovan, or that my father was Moldovan or Ukrainian. Although I don't know, if we were to look at our roots further back, my great-grandfather, maybe there was some sort of mixing. But I consider myself to be Gagauzian, that is I identify ethnically as Gagauzian. But we are citizens of Moldova. And speak Russian. And Gagauzian, that is.

**-Interesting. So it works out that you consider yourself Gagauzian because your parents are Gagauzian, is that right?**

-Well, yes. I'm speaking from that point of view... blood, belonging, ethnicity.

**-I see. Do you have second citizenship?**

-I don't have second citizenship. Well, how to say. I am Gagauzian, but we are considered citizens of Moldova. I mean... you probably know that Gagauzia is an autonomy. We are part of the Republic of Moldova... well, we won't get into politics... but we have the right to regulate our inner affairs... Probably it's not quite right to say that we are a small country in another country. On the outside, we are very dependent upon Moldova, upon Moldovans, but some of our problems we deal with ourselves. That is, we try to preserve our ethnicity.

**-Okay, I see. So it works out that you just have a Moldovan passport. And are you planning to obtain second citizenship?**

-Well, I have such an interest. I would like to, for example, obtain European citizenship. I mean, at the moment, I think it's more promising to have European citizenship and live in some European country. But we'll see.

**-I see. So for now, you don't have definite plans, just an interest?**

-Yes, an interest.

**-And it would probably be through Bulgaria or Romania or—**

-Well, yes, yeah.

**-And what is your native language or languages?**

-My native language... is considered to be Gagauzian. But apart from Gagauzian, I know Russian. Because... there's the paradox in Gagauzia... that is, we have our own language, but we also know Russian, as Moldova is part of the former Soviet Union. And all countries that were in the USSR, that is all people of these countries, they know Russian along with their native language. For example, in Kazakhstan, they know their own language and Russian as well. And I mean, in the time before I was born, this unified many people. My parents were brought up in the Soviet Union... communism, ideology, all that stuff. Therefore, we also know Russian. Russian, Gagauzian, Moldovan – of course we have to know – another paradox – not all Gagauzians know Moldovan, though we are required to, as this is the state language. And to not know the state language... isn't a very good thing. Moldovan, Russian, Gagauzian. And I'm trying to learn English and at least German. English, German. English, of course, without this language at the moment it's difficult. If you want to develop in the future, find good work – everywhere it's required to know English. Or, for example, even if you want to be based in Europe or do something there, you should know at least English. That's why I consider mastering English to be good for my future. Though we had English classes.

**-I see. And it works out that your native language or languages is/are which of these?**

-Well, if we single out native language, it's Gagauzian in the first place. But here there's also an interesting point: a real native speaker of Gagauzian, who speaks pure Gagauzian, can't be found in Gagauzia. Because there's this symbiosis of Russian and Gagauzian. We've taken a lot of words from Russian, and when we speak Gagauzian, we very often switch to this mixed, unintelligible language. I mean, pure Gagauzian, well relatively pure Gagauzian, was spoken by our grandparents. That is, during their lives, essentially. But about that, it's noticeable, I myself noticed that people who didn't know Russian used Moldovan words, Romanian words. Because there was a time when Romanians were here on our

territory, and in school Romanian was taught, and in daily life, people spoke Gagauzian, and lots of their words were borrowed from Romanian, from Moldovan.

**-Yes, I see. And I think there's the interesting situation now that Turkish probably also has an influence on Gagauzian...**

-Yes, but Turkish was there from the start. I mean Gagauzian comes from... well, it's a Turkish language... it's roots, I don't know, somebody studied this, but they say that Gagauzians are Turkified Bulgarians... I mean nobody has studied this in-depth. There's only some ideas about who we are, where our language comes from.

**-Thank you. And in what situations do you use these different languages, that is: Gagauzian, Russian, Moldovan, English?**

-Well, Gagauzian, mostly, let's say, when you're here in Gagauzia speaking with people, but the majority of people speak this mixed language, as I said... a couple words in Russian, something in Gagauzian – that kind of language. And now there's also this unusual situation that young people, I mean those younger than me, those generations, they don't learn Gagauzian, that is, they learn Russian. In Comrat you can find people who don't speak Gagauzian. They know a few words, but they prefer to speak Russian. This points to the fact that in the near future, it's possible that Gagauzian will disappear, or it will morph into something else. It's possible that we will lose our language.

**-It's possible, yes...**

-I mean, in Gagauzia we speak Gagauzian. Let's say, in the capital, in Chisinau, in Moldovan villages, if you know Moldovan well, you speak with people in Moldovan. But again, Russian is the common language because the majority of Moldovans, but not all of course, know Russian and Moldovan. We know Gagauzian and Russian. So there, Russian is our common language. I mean, even at the present moment, you and I are speaking Russian because you know Russian and I also know Russian, and so...

**-And that's why we're speaking Russian, yes. Thank you, and what was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**

-Oh, in kindergarten...

**-That was in Russia?**

-Yes. I learned Russian. See, what's most interesting is that the first language I mastered was not Gagauzian. I first learned Russian. And when we returned [to Gagauzia], that's when I started to learn Gagauzian. But teaching in our schools here is in Russian. That is, all the teaching, all the subjects, are taught in Russian. I don't know, now in *Komrat Devlet Universiteti*, all subjects are taught in Turkish, in English. There was, and there still is, I think, a Turkish lyceum. I had acquaintances who studied there, and there teaching is in English, I mean math, hard sciences, everything is taught in English. But if we're talking about all over Gagauzia, then teaching in in Russian.

**-And what was the language of instruction in your university?**

-In university... in Chisinau there are Russian groups and Moldovan groups. But when I enrolled... at that time there were enough people, I mean, they organized a Russian group. So at the start we had a Russian group, but then in the second year, for whatever reasons, many people dropped out, and we were left with few people. Therefore, some of our subjects were taught in Moldovan, I mean in the state language. I mean there were some subjects taught in Russian because some teachers were Russian-speaking. And some of our subjects were taught in Moldovan, in Romanian. This means that... I mean, if you don't know the language very well, there will be difficulties in mastering the material because it's pretty difficult to switch over, I mean to understand some complicated scientific terms in Romanian, then to translate them to Russian, then, well, just for myself, to Gagauzian. Although people who know several languages very well get asked, what language do you think in? And I can say that if you know, let's say, three languages very well...

**-Like you?**

-No, I know two languages, well, I think, relatively well.

**-But you studied in Romanian—**

-Yes, but I can think in Gagauzian and Russian. It depends on what language I'm speaking.



**-I see, great. So was it difficult when they switched to Moldovan, to Romanian in university? How did you manage?**

-Yes, there were some hard times... but if you have the inclination... and it is experience... I mean, in its own way, it's new knowledge, it's a plus. That is, I don't think that everything should be in just one language, I don't want to limit myself. The more languages you know, the better.

**-Yes, I agree. And in your opinion, is there a link between native language and ethnicity?**

-A link between native language and ethnicity... well, in order to preserve... if we consider it from a patriotic angle... if you are Gagauzian, American, whatever ethnicity, you should know the language... well, I don't know if it's a stereotype or... you should know the language if you are... I mean, there is a link! I think! But maybe I'm wrong...

**-No, it's whatever you think—**

-Well, everything is relative.

**-Of course.**

-Well, what's interesting... what I'll mention is that children, young generations, they're Gagauzian, but they don't know a word of Gagauzian. I mean, you learn the language that will be useful to you in the future, and... in your surroundings, in your society, whatever language you will use more in daily life.

**-Okay, thank you. And in your opinion, what is the most important aspect of your culture?**

-The most important aspect of our culture... That's kind of an... interesting question. Yes, I have to think. If we approach it from, let's say, a patriotic angle, Gagauzians want to preserve their language, that is, we try to preserve our language because language is a marker of your ethnicity and a part, well, it's like a unit of culture. I mean your ethnicity and your language are very much connected. And if we lose our language, it will be difficult to prove that we are... well, our national belonging. I mean, a country, an entire people... without a language can't exist. I got off track a bit, and I forgot what the question was.

**-No, that's good, it's interesting. But the question was, what do you consider to be the most important part of your culture?**

-It's a bit embarrassing, but there's nothing that our culture can take pride in, that is we don't have any sites or any sort of big achievements on the world scale or... therefore, in this case, it's language. If we lose our language, then... language, written language... our written language is also relatively quite young. I mean our alphabet was created using Latin letters. Before this, we wrote, well, when our parents studied in school, they wrote in Cyrillic. They studied Gagauzian and wrote with Russian letters. And the same with Moldovan.

**-Yes, I think the switch was in 1957—**

-Well, I learned all that in school, but unfortunately, to my shame, I don't remember—

**-No, I just mean that the language really is relatively young—**

-Yes, but as an example, maybe I just have this stereotypical way of thinking, but you Americans, you have the American dream, you have some established cultural values, not just language. You consider yourselves... well, a world nation, you have accomplishments in science and everything like that. You carry weight in the world. You have something to be proud of.

**-Well, yes, it's an interesting topic...**

-Do you agree with me?

**-Well, America, after all, is a country of migrants, a country of different nationalities, so it's tricky to talk about...**

-Yes...

**-And do you know where the word "Gagauz" comes from?**

-Gagauz... I might be mistaken, but what we learned in school, history of the Gagauzian people – we had such a subject, by the way – I mean, they try to instill this in us, so that we will know. The word "Gagauz" comes from the word "Oghuz," which was some Turkish-speaking people. And the name somehow came from them. In the beginning, we were Oghuz, then... well, to be honest, I'm not knowledgeable, well, really, I just don't remember, and I don't want to tell you the

wrong thing. I mean, we are a Turkish-speaking people and somehow, from that... first there were the Oghuz, then from that...

**-And do you know what the word means?**

-To be honest, I never thought about it. What does it mean...

**-Probably only foreigners think about these things.**

-Well, I don't know, historians try to explain all this somehow, but... For example, do you know what "American" means?

**-I'll tell you later. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans?**

-Well, apart from the different languages...

**-Yes, apart from this, I suppose.**

-Ethnic identification, that they, for example... they are part of the Romance group... I wouldn't say that there are any differences apart from language and ethnic origins. If we take, for example, from the provinces, yeah? A Moldovan from the provinces, from Gagauzia, and a Gagauz... and not considering language and identification, that one is a Moldovan, one is a Gagauz... essentially, in terms of worldview, there is no difference. I mean, how to say it the right way... mentality is the same, you can say. And I think that if we compare with the other countries of the CIS, regardless of who, a Kazakh or whoever... essentially, it will be the same. Though maybe there's a difference in religious worldview... Muslims are a bit different... but here, Gagauzians and Moldovans are Orthodox... I don't think that there are any major differences in this case, apart from language and ethnic identification.

**-I see. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians?**

-Gagauzians and Russians... Russians, meaning native speakers of Russian, or actual Russians? In terms of actual Russians, there are real differences... Russia is also part of the former USSR and all that, but Russians have a rather different mentality... it differs... they are a much bigger nation. Their cultural values are somehow more established. We, Gagauzians, are a small nation. There are few of us

here. Although we Gagauzians are in Greece, even in Brazil, and where else, in Ukraine. And because there are few of us, wherever we end up, let's say in Brazil or in Ukraine, we somehow blend in... how is it called... assimilation. We blend in with the local culture and can't really influence it in any way. But Russians – there are more of them – they have their own, also these stereotypes: balalaikas, bears, vodka. They have all this... there are differences.

**-I see. And even though you all speak the same language—**

-Yes, Russian – it's just like... well, like English now – a world language. In this case, Russian, in our local area, in Eurasia, in the CIS countries... I mean... that's language... Well, if we look at it from a cultural angle... among Russians there are also Orthodox and Muslims, if we are talking about religion, for example... but, yeah, in terms of mentality, probably, there are differences.

**-Thank you. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks?**

-Gagauzians and Turks. I don't even know because I don't have many Turkish acquaintances. I mean... I don't really know any Turks, so I can't really talk about the differences. But basically, Turks, they have Islam, if we're talking about religion, right? And religion also has an impact on daily life, differences in terms of mentality, upbringing. There are some differences, probably. But exactly what sort, I can't say because I don't have any Turkish acquaintances with whom I could interact and notice some kinds of contrasts, characteristics. But my acquaintances who have come into contact with Turkish culture... there are differences, in any case. I think pretty major differences. Apart from the fact that our language is similar, eighty percent or seventy percent, I don't know... Turkish speech – you understand a few words, a few words you don't understand. But we consider ourselves *arkadash*<sup>79</sup>, brothers, but...

**-Yes, here, for example, the Gagauzian radio receives funding from Turkey—**

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<sup>79</sup> Turkic word for "friend."

-Turkey really helps us out, and I mean, this is a big plus for us, and we try to maintain good relations.

**-I see. And in your opinion, is territorial autonomy of Gagauzia important?**

-That's a pretty interesting question, also controversial. You can look at it in different ways... for example, if we weren't to have autonomy, this would cut down on our rights, I mean, in that we wouldn't have the right to choose what language we speak, for example. So that there aren't these national conflicts, in order to avoid them... I don't even know, honestly I can't say whether this is good or bad, I mean everything is relative. If this somehow would have a positive impact on the development of Moldova as a whole and on our nation, on Gagauzians, yes, I guess we could do without autonomy, but as we try to preserve our integrity, in quotation marks, for us, autonomy is important. We want to preserve... that is, we aren't challenging, we don't want to start conflict with Moldovans, we just want to be recognized as a nation, as a separate nation with our own rights... in a way, democracy.

**-And in your opinion, how will Gagauzia change within the next fifteen years?**

-Also an interesting question. Considering that at the moment there is a large flow of citizens from all over Moldova and from Gagauzia... from Gagauzia, in particular, a large part of the population leaves for Russia, some to Europe, so I don't even know... to predict, to say that in the future something somehow will change for the better... I'm, of course, not a pessimist, but I look at the current situation in Gagauzia as a realist. I can say that, I don't know, it's unlikely to expect anything good. Because many villages are left empty. People, young people, aspire to settle closer to megapolises, where there's some sort of development, where you can, for example, give your children some sort of future: a career, a profession, something in the future. But this is happening not just here with us in Moldova, I think, but it's all over the world, that is, a flow of people from the provinces settling around big cities. So the concentration of populations is distributed unevenly, that is, in one place there are a lot of people, in another place nobody.

**-Yes, globalization, probably plays a role—**

-Yes, maybe in the future these borders, nationalities will fade away. I think this would even be for the best. But in the future, what will be happening in Gagauzia in fifteen years, I honestly can't predict! Maybe things will be okay, god willing, of course.

## Appendix 8: Roman

**-First, please, your name.**

-Yes, my name is Roman. I'm Gagauzian. I live in Comrat. I'm thirty-three years old. Well, almost.

**-And where are you from?**

-Well, I'm actually from a village. The village Budjak. But it's almost within the city limits. It's about... from the center of Comrat to my village, it's about eight kilometers. So it's considered Comrat.

**-And did you grow up there?**

-Yes, I grew up in the countryside, in the village.

**-And your profession?**

-I'm a history teacher in a school in Comrat.

**-And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-What's written on my documents? Or how I feel, who I regard myself to be?

**-How you regard yourself.**

-Well, although my heritage is Gagauzian, my ancestors were all Gagauzian, and I know this language, I consider myself to be Russian because I think in Russian. I don't think in my native language, in Gagauzian. I consider myself to be Russian.

**-And according to your documents—**

-I'm Gagauzian.

**-And here in Moldova do you pick yourselves what ethnicity is written in your passport?**

-No. No, I didn't choose. Well, it's written, I think, on your birth certificate. Ethnicity isn't indicated in passports anymore. Everywhere I traveled, I would tell people I'm Gagauzian. They told me, you have a Moldovan passport. That means you're Moldovan.

**-And do you have second citizenship?**

-For now, no. But I won't rule out that I'll obtain it.

**-Do you have any definite plans?**

-Yes. I want to acquire citizenship of the Russian Federation.

**-Did you already apply? Are you waiting on results?**

-Yes, actually, an answer was already given. And it turns out that we passed the first round. We just need to go and start to formalize things there. Until now for different reasons related to my family, to work, I haven't gone yet. But I plan to in the near future.

**-And how does this process work?**

-Well, essentially, it works in all countries, all republics of the former Soviet Union. If you're from, let's say, the Baltics, Ukraine, Moldova, Central Asia – former Soviet republics – there are consulates, where you submit your documents. It works out that you're considered a compatriot. You submit documents: passport, birth certificate, educational diploma, military card. You apply, and they consider your application. If you're suitable, then you pick some certain region. You're suitable, there are vacancies in your field, they invite you, and you go there.

**-And what is your native language or languages?**

-Well, after all, I'm Gagauzian, and my native language is Gagauzian, isn't that how it works? But I already said that I don't think in this language. I consider my native language to be Russian. All my mental processes are in Russian. Therefore... well, okay, let's say two languages: Russian and Gagauzian.

**-And what language do you speak with your parents?**

-We speak in Russian. Although my father and mother speak Gagauzian with one another. It's just that we were attending school in Russian, and in our class, there were lots of kids who didn't know Gagauzian, and in school all the subjects were in Russian. And somehow, it worked out naturally that our parents came to speak with us in Russian. But in Gagauzian also. But, for example, with them, I can throw out a few phrases in Gagauzian, then say everything else in Russian. And they practically only speak in Gagauzian with one another.

**-And with your own family, what language do you speak?**

-Only in Russian. My wife doesn't know Gagauzian.

**-And what other languages do you know, apart from Russian and Gagauzian?**



-Well, I know Ukrainian fairly well. I worked there for a few years. I understand it well, almost entirely. But it's very close to Russian. English, at a very low level. I can't speak it fluently, only brokenly. I don't know, as I know Gagauzian, I would probably understand Turkish. So, Russian, Gagauzian, English a little. It's embarrassing to admit, but I know English better than I know Romanian. I live here in Moldavia, but I don't know, for different reasons, in school I basically didn't study it, although I was supposed to. I don't know, I'd understand more quickly what an Englishman is saying, than what a Moldovan is saying.

**-And in what situations do you use these languages?**

-Well, I don't know. For example, when I was doing my master's, they taught us English also. I got a good grade.

**-And do you ever, for example, need to use Romanian?**

-No, I've never needed to. Although when you go, for example, to Chisinau, there they speak mostly Romanian, but to the credit of those who live there, I want to say that... many complain that oh, I got to Chisinau, and there they didn't want to speak with me in Russian, only in Romanian. The number of times I've been there, I've addressed people in Russian, they've always answered in Russian, I've never had any problems.

**-Yes, me too. And you mentioned you worked in Ukraine. What was your job?**

-I'm actually a person of many professions. I traveled, worked there as, well, we call such people *gasterbeiter*<sup>80</sup>. I traveled there to earn money, I worked in construction there. In Ukraine it's very popular, people make these little paths in their gardens, fences out of natural stone. They turn out pretty. And I was a builder. It works out that I put in natural stone and made money.

**-And what was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**

-Everywhere always I was taught only in Russian. In kindergarten, in school, in university, and during my master's – everywhere. Only Russian.

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<sup>80</sup> Migrant worker, often used with a negative connotation.

**-And do you consider there to be a connection between native language and ethnicity?**

-Well, that's a pretty deep question. It depends on how you look at it. Yes, I think that there is, of course. There is. If you, let's say, think in Gagauzian, you speak it fluently, your thought process occurs in it, then you can say with pride that yes, I am Gagauzian. On the other hand, many, our present-day, for example, politicians, assembly members, they speak Gagauzian poorly, but they also say, yeah, I'm Gagauzian. Here it cuts both ways. But, in general, I think that there is a connection. Language is one of the factors that determines ethnicity. One of the most important factors.

**-And, in your opinion, what is the most important aspect of Gagauzian culture?**

-I have to think. I think that one of the factors that defines a Gagauz as a Gagauz is, of course, language. It's our religion – Orthodoxy. Gagauzians are an Orthodox people, and what's more, a very devout people. Another defining feature of Gagauzian-ness is our lifestyle. In the cities we've lost this, but in Gagauzian villages, there's something especially inherently Gagauzian: our Gagauzian mentality. The fact that we were peasants, and we depended upon the land on which we lived, upon whether there was a harvest or not, upon whether you're hardworking or not, therefore, I think that this way of life influences whether you're Gagauzian or not. Our Gagauzian cuisine is also unique. Traditions, our winemaking. All of this together. Well, I call this way of life. This, likely, defines Gagauzian-ness.

**-And do you know where the word "Gagauz" comes from?**

-No. Nobody knows this. There are some hypotheses. That it comes from the word "Oghuz", there was such a tribe. There are some theories, but I can't say definitely.

**-And what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans, in your opinion?**

-In my opinion. Well. If we don't look at language, it's clear that they're different. Well, in fact, there's a lot that connects us. We have the same church. We have the

same way of life. We live in villages. A Gagauzian shepherd, the same as a Moldovan shepherd, puts sheep to pasture, makes the same bryndza<sup>81</sup>. A Gagauzian woman also ties on a headscarf, takes a hoe, and works the land. A Gagauzian tractor driver, he also fixes his tractor, he has dirty hands, calluses, and a Moldovan tractor driver has the same dirty hands. We have the same food. There's a lot that connects us. In neighboring villages, Gagauzian and Moldovan, there everyone is intermarried, Gagauzian men and Moldovan women. But then again, there is some difference. For example, as far as I know, Moldovans are of the opinion that we Gagauzians here in the south are very emotional, that we have wild temperaments, that we're prone to conflict, to start a fight over one word we don't like. Basically, these southerners, hot-tempered. I don't know. I'm not going to not confirm this. But I will say that the Moldovans who I know, they're actually a lot softer, they're friendlier, their souls are bigger, more open than ours. Us Gagauzians have a bit of this inherent toughness.

**-And why is that do you think?**

-Maybe, after all, it's somehow related to our origins. We, probably, have different ancestors. Who knows.

**-And what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians, in your opinion?**

-Well, if we look at it purely geographically, we, after all, are a southern people. Russians – this is a people that lives more north. We live in the steppe, and they live in a forest zone. Even their villages are built differently. They have a different schedule for working in the fields and all that. They have a different mentality. In addition, the Russian mentality and character formed, for a long time there was indentured servitude, and because of all this, they have a unique character. For us, for Gagauzians, I don't know, we have an inherently different way of behaving, probably. What else. Well, I think there's not a lot of differences. After all, we travel there to Moscow to work, we understand Russians entirely, they understand

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<sup>81</sup> Cheese made from sheep's milk, common throughout Moldova and Gagauzia.

us. Plus, take Orthodoxy. We have the same faith. And also. Gagauzians migrated here to Moldova, to this territory, when Russia fought off Turkey, and these empty lands needed to be settled. They invited our ancestors, who came here from the Balkans and settled here, and there, it works out that the entire nineteenth century, the entire twentieth century, we lived side by side with Russians. And after this, we have a lot in common. We basically are slowly merging into one people. And I, I guess I'm Gagauzian, but I consider myself Russian. Here in Comrat, in the city, the vast majority of Gagauzian youth are already like me, they speak and think in Russian. Only youth in the villages for now still thinks in Gagauzian. Young people come here from the villages, I hear that they speak in Gagauzian among themselves. Among Gagauzians who live in Comrat, you won't find this. They all speak Russian. Therefore, as with Moldovans, with Russians there's a lot more that connects us, than separates us.

**-And what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks, in your opinion?**

-Well, first of all, it's religion: Islam. In fact, I have an acquaintance, a friend, we studied together, Yuri is his name. He's a Muslim. Although he himself is Latvian, from the Baltics. He converted to Islam. And he told me that it turns out that for a Muslim, it's not important what your ethnicity is. You're Turkish, Arab, Syrian – the main thing is that if you're Muslim, you're a brother. If you're Christian, then you won't ever be a brother. Therefore, the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks is that they're Muslims, and we're Christians. Everything is different. Apart from language, there's little that connects us. Our languages are similar. Turks who come here to Gagauzia, when they hear our colorful Gagauzian speech, they say that their language was like this a hundred years ago. They say, you Gagauzians preserved our language as it was. But apart from language, I can't name anything else. Essentially, we're different.

**-Yes. But many come here from Turkey.**

-Yes, because, as far as I know, education here is a lot cheaper. Plus, along with this, they come here with the goal of learning Russian. Here you can accomplish

this. And then find work at home, there's lot of Russian tourists, and you can make good money, knowing Russian. Many come purely for the sake of learning Russian. They enroll in whatever, in agronomy, teaching, law, it doesn't matter. They'll learn Russian here.

**-And in your opinion, is territorial autonomy of Gagauzia important?**

-I don't know. This might seem very unpatriotic, but... There's some meaning in it if, probably, Gagauzian language, Gagauzian culture should be preserved, of course, even though I'm a bad patriot of Gagauzia. But in any case, I don't see a future. I think that Gagauzians will gradually migrate to Russia and they'll speak Russian. Those who remain here, they'll gradually learn Romanian because it's necessary. Moldova has gone down the path of its own national statehood, and Romanian is already everywhere. With Russian you can't do anything. Those Gagauzians who are here in Moldova, who want to continue living here, who want to have a career, if they want to stay here, they'll learn Romanian. Many of our Gagauzians today, residents of Comrat, high-profile people, they send their children to the Romanian lyceum<sup>82</sup>. They want them to learn Romanian. Is autonomy needed or not. Well, there's nothing bad in it, let it be, of course. It's just that we pick the wrong people for our leadership judging by what's going on in the Assembly. We don't choose well, we choose the wrong people. So... Well, I believe that, of course, it's good that we have autonomy. Let it be.

**-Yes. It's just that foreigners have trouble understanding how it works. How is it that there's this Gagauzia, where education is only in Russian, for example.**

-Gagauzians want to continue to exist as an ethnicity. They don't want to get blended in with others. And they try, as they are able. They established autonomy. Many in the Assemble sincerely love this land. It's their homeland. Although they themselves understand that their national language is being forgotten. They don't want it to disappear. And creation of autonomy is an attempt to make it so that Gagauzian culture, Gagauzian language don't disappear because if there won't be

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<sup>82</sup> There is one lyceum in Comrat, where the language of instruction is Romanian/Moldovan/state language (these terms are used interchangeably).

autonomy, they'll immediately demand that we switch to Romanian, and that's it, you can say goodbye within ten years. On the other hand, creation of autonomy – this was motivated in the nineties when the Soviet Union was collapsing, then Moldavia announced this sudden course to closer ties with Romania, almost to the point of unification with Romania. Gagauzians, as a nation that doesn't see itself as part of Romania, a nation that always associated itself with the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and now with Russia more, Gagauzians stood up for their right to self-determination. They said, if you, Moldovans, want to unify with Romania, go ahead, but without us. We'll create an independent state for ourselves, and we won't [join Romania] with you. Autonomy is like an instrument for self-preservation, an instrument to exercise our right to self-determination.

**-And you work in a school, where everything is in Russian. Is there ever talk of changing education over to Gagauzian?**

-Only the members of the People's Assembly have those sorts of talks. This speaks to their naivety, to their lack of any elementary understanding of what an educational system entails. Any sound-minded person, he understands that today in modern Gagauzian, in the language that ordinary people know, not the one that teachers know, in this language it's not possible to teach physics, chemistry, math, et cetera, et cetera. If we were to change education over to Gagauzian, we would have to borrow a lot of words from Turkish, from other languages. And this would result in ordinary Gagauzians not understanding. Therefore, like that. Teachers themselves don't talk about this, as they understand that it's not realistic.

**-Yes, I have also heard many times how people complain that when they talk on the radio in Gagauzian, many think that this isn't Gagauzian, it's Turkish.**

-Yes. And maybe you have noticed that when Gagauzians speak among themselves in Gagauzian, then half the words have Russian endings. I don't see any potential with it. I'll explain why I see it this way. Because the basis from the start, well, there's no foundation of Gagauzian language, Gagauzian culture. Let's take Moldovans, well, Romanian language, they have this strong foundation. They have, in the first place, they go way back in history. They have a historic past that's more-

or-less known. Take us, Gagauzians. Until the nineteenth century, until we migrated here to Moldova, there's nothing known about us. We don't know where we come from, what we are. We don't have this strong historical foundation on which something could be built, you understand? We were simple peasants. We had almost no intelligentsia. In the Soviet times, Russians came here. They gave us an alphabet. They gave us a written language. Our own writers, poets, our own small intelligentsia appeared. We're just barely at the start of this process, therefore to talk about conducting education in Gagauzian – it's too soon. Maybe with time. If we don't fully convert to Russian or Romanian. It's the tragedy of small nations. I don't see, by the way, anything bad about it. The Russian nation, it soaked up many different nations that lived in the steppe or in forests. The French also, after all. The Gascon at one point were a separate nation. Today they're French. The French swallowed them, assimilated them. This is a normal historical process. Small nations always become parts of bigger nations. Gagauzians, well, it's unlikely that we can create some big Gagauzia. It's more likely that Gagauzians will become part of some big, great nation and repeat a normal historical process. But we have a wish, us Gagauzians, our leaders, the wish to continue to exist. So we, as we are able, we fight this assimilation. You see, we have festivals, our national television, radio, writers. For now, if there's a crisis, it's not a big one. If there is, then it manifests itself in the fact that there's people like me, who forget their native language.

**-And in your opinion, how will Gagauzia change in the next fifteen years?**

-First of all, a lot of people are migrating away. This process will continue. Gagauzian youth is migrating away from here, from the autonomy. Migrating, mostly, to the Russian Federation. Some by the resettlement program. Some just to earn money, but then never return. And here, there's empty housing. At the same time, people from neighboring Moldovan villages buy apartments here in Comrat. There's, I don't know, Sadyk, nearby there's lots of Moldovans. Already in Comrat you hear Moldovan as often, if not more often than you hear Gagauzian. I think that this process will continue, and gradually our Russian-speaking population,

Gagauzians who speak Russian, will migrate away from here, and there will be more and more Moldovans, Romanian-speakers, in the autonomy. I think it will be like this.

**-And do you think in the end there will be unification with Romania?**

-Ideologically it's already happened. It's just us here in the south, in Gagauzia, we speak Russian. I don't know, there in the north, there's Beltsy, also a Russian-speaking city. But in general, the vast majority of Moldova has already for a long time been thinking and speaking in Romanian. They're ideologically already there. When the Union collapsed, and Moldovans switched their educational system over to Romanian, they changed the situation, Russification stopped happening, they returned to their roots. And already a generation has grown up that speaks and thinks in Romanian. They study Romanian history in school. They believe that those are their ancestors, their past, and they're already entirely ideologically prepared for unification with Romania. And... do I think that this is possible. Yes, it's possible. The people won't even be asked about this, by the way. When people start debating with me and saying that, oh, the people don't want this, we won't go along, I give this example. In 1812 the Russian Empire defeated the Ottoman Empire, and a part of Moldova, Bessarabia, was immediately taken from the Turks. And the other part of Moldovan went to Romania. Were the people asked about this? No. In 1918 Romania took this territory back, from the Russian Empire. And my grandfather and grandmother lived under Romanian rule. Were the people asked? No. In 1940 comrade Stalin pounded his fist on the table. He told Romania to return [Bessarabia]. They returned Moldova to the Soviet Union. Were the people asked? No. In 1991 when the Union was collapsing, the people were asked, do you want independence, or do you want to stay in the Soviet Union? 87% of people voted to stay in the Union. But the opposite was done. The question of Moldova's independence or its unification with Romania will not be decided here, not in Moldova. It will be decided in Bucharest, Washington, Moscow, but not here. Therefore...

**-And I forgot to ask earlier. You teach history in school. What type of history?**



-Well, the subject is called “History of the Romanians and General History.” All the topics are mixed. I teach the kids about the nineteenth century, the revolutions in central and eastern Europe. We learn about the revolution in France, in Austro-Hungary, in Italy, in Romania. We learn about the Ottoman Empire. How it came to be and all that. And then – hop! The Ottomans are fighting in Moldova. We have a couple of topics about how Moldova fought against the Ottomans. So topics from history of the Romanians are connects with general history. But it’s all very mixed up, let’s say.

**-And how do you feel about all this?**

-I think that it’s not bad – this teaching model. But I don’t like how ideology itself is taught. How in modern history that’s taught to children, the role of Russia, the role of the Soviet Union is taught. There’s this extreme excessiveness in modern Moldovan historiography, it has erased everything good that was in our Russian and Soviet past. After all, this region, during the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, it developed so prosperously, so intensively. Moldova would have never been so developed, there would have never been such a high standard of life. But all of this is erased. There’s nothing about this, and they left only the repressions of the Soviet times, the famine. And they push this into kids’ heads, and the overall picture is that everything was dark, there was nothing good. I don’t like this at all. I think that, if being objective, that in Moldavia, where there’s not one place to extract metals, not one drop of oil, that at one time it had industry. Here there were factories. They gave education, medicine, the academy of sciences. There was huge agricultural success. The list goes on forever. There’s none of that, you understand. There’s only the scary Soviet past, angry Stalin. This I regard negatively. Everything needs to be talked about. The bad and the good.

**-And in school is there a Gagauzian history subject?**

-Gagauzian language teachers teach a subject that’s called “History, culture, and traditions of the Gagauzian people,” and what do they talk about there, about our past, whatever is known, different legends on the origins of the Gagauz. They

discuss our traditional dress, cuisine, some traditions, rituals, wedding ones and whatever else. They talk about that.

**-Tell us, please, your name.**

-Marina.

**-And your age?**

-46.

**-And you reside in what city?**

-In Comrat, in the Republic of Moldova.

**-And your profession?**

-My profession – manager of client relations in a translation bureau.

**-And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-I identify as Russian because my father is Russian. My mother is Gagauzian, but I am more Russian.

**-And what ethnicity was written in your Soviet passport? If you had a Soviet passport.**

-Yes, I had a Soviet passport, and when we received them, we were allowed to choose our ethnicity ourselves. And, of course, I chose Russian.

**-I see. And do you have second citizenship?**

-No. My only citizenship is of the Republic of Moldova.

**-And are you planning on obtaining second citizenship?**

-Yes, I plan to.

**-And which one?**

-Russian Federation. I plan to obtain citizenship of the Russian Federation.

**-And for what reason?**

-For what reason... because it is my historical homeland. I was born in Russia. My roots and my loved ones are there. Therefore, I want to obtain citizenship.

**-And what is your native language or languages?**

-Naturally, my native language is Russian... and that's all.

**-And what other languages do you know?**

-What languages do I know? It's hard to say that I know... I understand Moldovan, Gagauzian, English, German I understand... but knowing a language implies that

you think in that language and use it constantly. At the moment, I use only Russian, but the other languages are in my reserve.

**-Great. And in what situations would you use these other languages?**

-In a situation in which a person speaks with me, for example, in Romanian, I can listen to him and answer him in his language so that he better understands me. If a person speaks other languages, I always try to understand and answer in his language.

**-I see. What was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**

-My kindergarten was a Soviet kindergarten, and in the Soviet Union, everyone spoke Russian, of course, the teachers and children and parents, everyone spoke with one another in Russian.

**-Okay. And in your school?**

-In school also Russian.

**-And in your university?**

-In my university where I study at the moment – Comrat State University – the language of instruction is Russian, but my department is in the national cultures division, English-German.

**-In your opinion, is there a connection between native language and ethnicity?**

-Yes, of course, there is a connection because you think in your native language, yeah, and ethnicity, in a way, determines your language, certainly.

**-Okay. And in your opinion, what is the most important element of your culture? Or aspect of your culture?**

-The most important part of one's culture is, certainly, the language in which people speak. Such elements like songs, stories, poems, writers, paintings, everything really, painters – these are all elements of culture.

**-Okay. But it works out that you think the most important element is language?**

-Well, yes, the most important is the language in which people speak with one another and communicate.

**-Okay. Do you know where the word “Gagauz” comes from?**

-They told us about this at some point, but I don't remember. Where it comes from... let me try to remember...

**-If not, no worries.**

-It's hard to remember, but there were Turkish tribes, Bulgarian tribes, the Balkans, and this all was mixed together and from somewhere, from there, came the...

Oghuz – yeah! From the word “Oghuz”. In the beginning, they were Oghuz, and then, it seems, there was migration, there was shifting of the letters (*laughs*), and out of this came “Gagauz.”

**-Interesting, thank you. In your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians?**

-The difference... Well, in my opinion, Gagauzians are more farmers. They raise animals, livestock. They are in their element on the land. They worked on the land, their ancestors worked on the land, they raised livestock, grew vegetables, fruits, so it works out that farming probably sets Gagauzians apart as a ethnicity. And, of course, now they also differ in that they are hardworking, they are willing to work hard and take care of their families, yes.

**-Thank you. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans, for example?**

-Well, probably the main difference is language. Next, their dispositions probably differ. Gagauzians are closer, probably, to the Turkish tribes, after all, and the Turkish tribes were aggressive, they were always warriors. Here, of course, in Gagauzians this isn't really the case anymore, but still there is some sort of aggression in their dispositions.

**-Okay. And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks?**

-Gagauzians and Turks. Well, probably a difference is that the Soviet Union had an influence on life and development and culture. Because Gagauzians lived for seventy years in the Soviet Union. And nobody knew that there was such a group, the Gagauz. Sure, there was Moldavia, the Moldovan USSR, and everyone was Russian, and everyone was equal, brothers, friends, grew grapes, raised sheep,

drank wine, ate shashlik, built, studied, and everything was wonderful, yes. Such an influence – it can't be said that the Soviet Union had such an influence on Turkey, they developed in their own way. They have totally different – even though they have a common language, a similar language, yes – but the difference is development I think.

**-Interesting, thank you. And in your opinion, is territorial autonomy of Gagauzia important?**

-Territorial autonomy of Gagauzia is important for people, for a separate identity, so that people feel a sense of security, that they haven't just been sitting around for hundreds of years, that they have held on to their language and some cultural traditions. This is a defining point. Yes, every nation wants their own identity.

**-And in your opinion, how will Gagauzia change within the next fifteen years?**

-It's hard to say because there's informational technology, a huge stream of migration, and in fifteen years, will there even be such a place and will it be called Gagauzia, nobody at the moment can say.

## Appendix 10: Elena

**-First, please, your name.**

-Elena.

**-And your age.**

-I just turned 48.

**-And where do you live?**

-Comrat, Moldavia.

**-And where are you from?**

-From Comrat.

**-And your profession?**

-At the moment I'm a business owner.

**-And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-I identify as Russian. I'm Russian. Although I'm from Moldova, from Gagauzia, I'm Russian, though I live among Gagauzians.

**-And why do you consider yourself Russian?**

-My father is Russian. My mother, well, she had some Russian blood. Well, I consider myself Russian.

**-And do you have second citizenship?**

-Yes, Turkish.

**-How did you acquire it?**

-How did I acquire it. Well, I worked there five years and at the end of this time period, citizenship is given.

**-Was it hard to acquire?**

-Then it was hard. Now it's even harder!

**-There's language knowledge, probably—**

-Language knowledge.

**-So you know Turkish?**

-I know Turkish.

**-And you probably had to pass a Turkish test, or—**

-No, not in 2000. At that time you needed to have worked in the same place for five years and lived there for five years.

**-And for what reason did you acquire it?**

-Well, for what reason. I was working there.

**-And what was your job?**

-I was a domestic worker. I looked after children.

**-And what is your native language or languages?**

-Russian.

**-And what other languages do you know?**

-Russian and Turkish. I don't know any others.

**-Moldovan, for example—**

-I don't know Moldovan, I don't even understand it. I understand Gagauzian, but I don't speak it. Although I can, well, I can just answer in Turkish. The languages are similar.

**-And in what situations do you use these languages?**

-I speak Russian everywhere. Here in Comrat everyone speaks Russian.

**-And what was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**

-In kindergarten, in school, in university – all in Russian.

**-In Comrat?**

-In Comrat. Also, by the way, in Cahul. I studied in a college in Cahul. In those times, it was the Soviet Union, then they taught in Russian. Although we had a couple of Moldovan language lessons, but to avoid us making a fuss, they gave us fairy tales, told us to sit, read, be quiet. Therefore, we didn't know Moldovan at all.

**-And was it difficult to learn Turkish?**

-Well, when you're in the situation, you're obliged to. Well, and the fact that I already understood some Gagauzian made it a little bit easier.

**-And in your opinion, what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans?**

-In my opinion, there's no difference. They're Russian-speaking. We're Russian-speaking. Only that they speak Moldovan. Not Romanian, but Moldovan. And we



speak Gagauzian. But they speak Russian, we speak Russian. So there's practically no difference.

**-And you said that they speak Moldovan, not Romanian.**

-Yes. But there are these die-hard Romanians, though they're Moldovans, who say, we're Romanians. They are, excuse my saying, traitors of their homeland.

**-And in your opinion, what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians?**

-There's no difference! Maybe just physiology, their faces. Gagauzians are just darker, and Russians lighter. I think there aren't any differences. If you ask around here, walk around, ask who everyone likes, 100%, 99% respect Russians.

**-And in your opinion, what's the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Turks?**

-There's also no difference. They're also dark-skinned. The language is similar. Only that their culture is a bit different. They're Muslims, and we're Christians, Orthodox.

**-And in your opinion, is territorial autonomy of Gagauzia important?**

-It's important. Very important. At the moment, in Moldova 40% want unification with Romania. Autonomy is absolutely necessary.

**-And how do you think this will all end?**

-Even if they leave [to join Romania], Gagauzia will remain here, separate. I'm sure of this. Gagauzians won't join Romania, no way. Because our ancestors here, my grandmother, she's still alive, she remembers how they lived here under the Romanians, how Romanians abused them, and nobody wants the Romanians to come again.

**-And how will Gagauzia change within the next fifteen years?**

-It will change. It will change for the better. Look, take our primar.<sup>83</sup> The bashkan<sup>84</sup>, she tries to do everything for Gagauzia. But take the primar, Anastasov Sergei

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<sup>83</sup> Throughout Moldova, including Gagauzia, the mayor is called the primar. This word comes from Romanian.

<sup>84</sup> The bashkan is the head of the Gagauzian autonomy. Currently Irina Vlakh.

Sergeevich, he's so great. We've never had such a primar in Comrat. Look, in just these two years, our roads have improved, we have street lights. After the collapse of the Union, we walked around like blind moles, we couldn't see the roads. Our city has been transformed. Our streets were so beautiful for New Year. This person, god give him health, is like the host of this city. You can feel this.

**-Yes. I frequently see him at the stadium.**

-He's an athlete as well!

**-And in the span of fifteen years, what concrete changes will there be?**

-Well, there's been more houses built. The city will change! If, of course, we will have the kind of primar we have now, I hope he'll be here another fifteen years. I think that people will come even from big cities because here, first of all, we have clean air. There aren't any big traffic jams. And if there will be more development in terms of more businesses. God willing. So that people won't migrate away from here because here there's nowhere to earn money. And if someone is working, then he has a low salary. If all of this will happen, then people will come here.

**-Yes, I like it here, for example.**

-See, it's true, you don't feel any sort of pressure, right? Nobody approaches you with negative energy. It's calm. It's nice here.

**-First, could I please have your name.**

-My name is Alisa.

**-And your age?**

-41.

**-And in which city or village do you live?**

-In Comrat.

**-And where are you from?**

-I was born in the city, Leovo. It's in the Republic of Moldova. Actually, not in the city Leovo, but in the Leovo region In the village Troitsa.

**-Interesting, I've never been there. So Leovo isn't part of Gagauzia?**

-It's not part of Gagauzia, no.

**-And what is your profession?**

-I'm a legal expert in a finance department.

**-And how do you identify in terms of ethnicity?**

-Well, I consider myself to be, and according to my documents, I am Bulgarian.

**-And why do you consider yourself Bulgarian?**

-Because my father is Bulgarian. And ethnicity was given according to father's ethnicity.

**-And your mother, if I can ask?**

-My mother. Well, as a matter of fact, her father was Moldovan, but as her father died quite early, when she was getting her passport, she didn't know Moldovan, she had grown up in a Ukrainian village in Transnistria, and so she identified according to her mother's ethnicity – Ukrainian.

**-And what language did you speak at home as a child?**

-Russian.

**-And your parents?**

-Well, my parents... my mother learned Bulgarian, as they lived in the village that my father was from. She learned Bulgarian, and sometimes they also spoke Bulgarian, as we lived for a little bit with my father's parents. But with us they

spoke Russian. But my brothers and I understood what they were saying when they spoke Bulgarian.

**-And do you have second citizenship?**

-Yes, I have second citizenship – Russian.

**-And for what reason did you acquire it?**

-I participated in the Russian Federation's compatriot resettlement program. I gave it a try, and it worked out.

**-And how does this program work?**

-The main thing is that it is based on our having lived in the Soviet Union. We had MSSR – Moldovan SSR passports. Such people are able to participate in this program.

**-I see. And what is your native language or languages?**

-Well, I, of course, consider Russian to be my native language because I converse in it, use it at work, speak it with my family. Although I am Bulgarian ethnically, I don't speak Bulgarian, I just understand it. And Moldovan I understand and can speak a bit.

**-In what situations do you use Moldovan?**

-Occasionally, I'm in Chisinau and converse with people. I know more just conversational speech. And at work it happens that I have to translate documents. So at work I also use Moldovan.

**-And you probably studied Moldovan in school?**

-Yes. At one time my mother worked in a Moldovan school in Leovo. She taught home economics, but the language of instruction was Moldovan. So my mother helped me learn Moldovan, and, of course, in school I studied it. At university here in Gagauzia, I knew Moldovan better than everyone, though I don't think I know this language even halfway.

**-Well, the main thing is that you knew it best in university—**

-Yes, among Gagauzians!

**-By the way, do you know Gagauzian?**

-Unfortunately, I don't, but my children studied it in school, and when they use some interesting phrases or joke around, then I remember some things. So I only know a few sentences. I'd say that I really don't know [Gagauzian]. At home we also speak Russian. So that's why [I don't know Gagauzian].

**-And what was the language of instruction in your kindergarten?**

-Russian.

**-And in your school?**

-Also Russian.

**-And in your university?**

-Also Russian.

**-What do you think, is there a connection between native language and ethnicity?**

-I think so. I think that a person should know the language of his/her ethnicity. At least understand it! I don't know, even when there was a choice in school, my children are in school, and as one of their parents is Bulgarian and the other Gagauz, there was the choice to study either Bulgarian or Gagauzian. I submitted a request that they study Gagauzian, as that's the language of their ethnicity<sup>85</sup>. So I believe that everyone should know the language of his/her ethnicity.

**-And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Moldovans?**

-In my opinion, there are good and bad people among every ethnicity. Gagauzians, I think, are more emotional. As they always say, they are a very proud people. There's not many of us [Gagauzians]! But, in general, if I judge by my husband, he's hot-tempered, but he cools down quickly. Moldovans, Moldovans. I think

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<sup>85</sup> The interview used "родной язык," but this does not imply an individual's first language, as is usually the Western understanding of "native language". Rather, as the term was typically used in Soviet times, it refers to the language that correlates with a person's national/ethnicity. In this case, as national/ethnic identification is passed on paternally, the children in question are considered Gagauzian and Gagauzian to be their "родной язык" despite it not being their first language. I translated this as "language of ethnicity" in an attempt to make clear that the interviewee is speaking about an ascribed national label and the language that correlates with this label, not about her children's first language.

they're also kind. There are different people. I've never had any problems with Moldovans. I think that they're the same people.

**-And in your opinion, what is the biggest difference between Gagauzians and Russians?**

-I think Gagauzians are simpler. I don't know how to put it into words. Well, Gagauzians are friends with Russia. They're similar to one another, but Russians, I think are a bit more self-absorbed. So if Gagauzians are a proud people, [Russians] are a more self-absorbed people. They think that there's no one smarter than them. Well, I have this... but this doesn't apply to how they have treated me. I was there, I lived there for a while, but not long. And there, well, I didn't experience anything. Everyone always treated me well. But I think that how you treat people is how you will be treated. So I didn't have any complaints or problems.

**-And in your opinion, is territorial autonomy of Gagauzia important?**

-Important? I think so. You know, ever since autonomy was established, I think that people have been living better, there have been job opportunities created. Money, a large portion of the budget remains here in the autonomy. Well, and thanks to the fact that in the first place, state-financed places have been created, people have places to work and make money and live, to stay in Gagauzia and not leave. Well, salaries, of course, aren't very high, so a great many do leave. But I think, anyways, that people live better now because... it's just I don't remember, I don't know how it was before the formation of autonomy, I didn't live here. So how they lived before... well, I think they were worse off. Because the university has been opened, as well as lots of educational institutions. Things are definitely better, I think. A portion of young people at least remain here, study here.

**-And this is all related to autonomy?**

-Yes, before there wasn't a university here.

**-And why did you choose university in Comrat and not Chisinau, for example?**

-To be honest, I wanted to go to a university in Chisinau, but my father, at that time worked in the police force, and right at that time when there was fighting going on here, he came here, learned that there was a university in Comrat, that there were

state-funded spots. And also, Comrat is closer than Chisinau to Leovo. I'm the only daughter, so therefore, he decided that I should be closer. But my brothers, they studied in Chisinau, they didn't listen, didn't want to move to Comrat.

**-And how do you see Gagauzia changing within the next fifteen years?**

-I think it will prosper. I hope so. Because they really do try... and our government tries. But we'll see how things will go.

**-And what sort of changes will there be, what do you think?**

-Well, even in terms of language. The members of the People's Assembly have developed this legislative initiative: "on the expansion of the spheres of usage of Gagauzian language." So they, Gagauzians, you know, they worry about their culture, about their language. They try to develop all this... I think they will be successful if they keep trying. The main thing is not to fight with anyone, not to fight with neighboring counties, so that there's peace, and then everything will be okay, all issues will be resolved.

**-You were reading the name of the project here, yes? (Interviewee has information on the legislative initiative on her desk.)**

-Yes. As I understand, they want Gagauzian to be spoken in kindergartens. And in schools too. For there to be, for example, a music class in Gagauzian. Although I don't know how they'll teach in Gagauzian. Well, maybe they'll learn some songs. Also, they want art class to be taught in Gagauzian... I don't know if it will be passed. But they want children to speak and hear this language more so that it doesn't disappear.

**-For this, Gagauzian-speaking kindergarten teachers, art and music teachers are needed—**

-Yes, you're right. And for that we have a teachers' college.

**-And they're taught in Gagauzian there?**

-Well, they'll train specialists who can teach children in schools, in kindergartens.

**-And do you think the initiative will go through?**

-I think... it's just the only thing that I don't like is that this law obligates everyone. I believe that it should be on a voluntary basis. I don't believe that they should... how to say... well, it works out that, for example, if somebody doesn't want this...

**-And this would be in all schools and kindergartens?**

-Well, according to this proposal, that's what they want.

**-Maybe I'm mistaken, but I don't think there are enough qualified teachers at this point.**

-Of course, there aren't enough. So that's why I also think that this isn't realistic at the moment.

**-And what happens next with this initiative? How does the process work?**

-Well, you see, for example in this case, the members of the People's Assembly developed this legislative initiative. They pass it on to the executive committee for the proposal to be reviewed and for some sort of decision to be made. If there are more votes in support of it, then the People's Assembly can take it up and approve it. If there are many votes against it, then there won't be backing for the proposal, it won't be supported or approved.

**-And this all occurs over the span of several months?**

-To be honest, I also don't know. But over the span, perhaps, of six months. I can't say for sure.

**-Well, time will tell.**

-Yes, we'll see.



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