

Confessional factor of ethnic community reproduction in the South of Russia

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the study is to investigate the effects produced by confessional belonging on the conditions of the ethnic identities of the diasporas and on the character of the inter-ethnic relations in regional communities. Religious identity can reveal itself both as a factor of inter-ethnic integration and as an additional indicator of ethnic and cultural identity that increases the distance between different groups of the population. The investigation has been developed based on the analysis of statistical and sociological data that illustrate the existence of confessionally heterogeneous ethnic diasporas in regional community. It has been established that in the Rostov region, the hub region of the South of Russia, confessional identity presents an additional factor of maintaining the ethnic identities within the ethnic and cultural communities as follows: Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Poles, Georgians, Assyrians and Koreans. The majority of these groups possess confessional institutions of their own, though the degree of consolidation with them is different. Thus, while for Jewish and Armenian diasporas of the Don the institutions of national religion are the key forms of maintaining their identities, for Poles the importance of the confessional factor is lower, and for Greeks and Georgians this factor is purely symbolic affecting just a negligibly small part of the community. At the same time it has been established that Islamic identity of a number of diasporas that live in the territory of the Rostov region and in many other regions of the South of Russia is practically meaningless in terms of strengthening the identities of the ethnic communities, but, nevertheless it produces an effect of cultural differentiation on the system of social interactions in the environment of the regional community.

KEYWORDS

Diaspora, Identity, Confession, Ethic and Confessional Identity

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Introduction

Over the post-Soviet period of social development in Russia there has been an outburst of national and religious consciousness of the population which has been mostly explained by the political factors. This phenomenon was associated with the collapse of Soviet politics of state atheism, with eliminating the ideological restrictions on religious practices of the population and on the

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activities of confessional groups, with abandoning the idea of creating the Soviet nation as basic ideolgeme of the Soviet nation building process, with propagation of nationalism and ethnocracy. Often these two processes: the growth of ethnic self-consciousness and the higher level of religiosity were mutually preconditioned. Thus, Russian nationalism and Russian national idea has been historically founded on the values of Orthodoxy as the basic belief system of a Russian man (Barkov, 2013).¹ Similarly, Chechen separatism taking its origins in the beginning of the 1990s has developed, towards the 2000s, into the ideology of pan-Islamism and into the necessity to create the Islamic theocratic state in the whole territory of Caucasus (Bazhenova, 2015).² Though the majority of religious systems pretend to be cosmopolitan and supranational, the confessional specifics represent inseparable elements of the ethnic identities of many people, especially in the environment of migration (West, 2011)

The practice shows that the formation of ethnic communities and the development of their institutions have never been free from the influence of confessional factors. This is especially characteristic for the cases when the ethnic minority simultaneously represents confessional minority (Auswertung..., 2011). For example, the Russian diaspora that was extensively developing after the Revolution of 1917 was in most cases mobilized around Orthodox parishes or around an objective to create such.

In modern Russia the processes of diasporization are associated with the actualized ethnic and confessional identities of the members of these ethnic communities (Dyatlov, 2015). The Rostov region, a subject of the Russian Federation, has been actively hosting the waves of ethnic migration in its territory over the post-Soviet period; and the ethnical and cultural mosaics that has been formed in this region along with the system of ethnical and confessional interactions makes it possible to judge upon the conditions of the national relationships in the Russian-speaking territories of the South of Russia.

Method

The investigations were carried out based on the methodological principles of historicism and holism applying the elements of the interdisciplinary approach. Methodological tools at the level of the analysis of empirical data include the methods as follows:

- analysis and interpretation of statistical data, primarily including the results of all-Russia censuses of population (1989, 2002, 2010) and the information from the statistical books on population monitoring by the territorial authorities of the Federal State Statistics Service in the Rostov region;
- secondary analysis of the data of the sociological surveys carried out among the population of the regions of the South of Russia and among the members of the ethnic communities by Russian and regional scientific and research centers and published in the relevant issues;
- profound interviews with the leaders and activists of ethnic and confessional structures in the Rostov region that were held with direct involvement of the authors of this study according to the preliminary developed plan that ensured the achievement of the basic objective of the investigation;
- analysis of the results of the sociological survey in the Rostov region whose program and tools have been developed with the authors' direct involvement.

Within the framework of the investigation of the authors, 851 people have been interviewed; the representativeness of the research procedures have been ensured due to the development and implementation of the multi-level stratified sampling (type of settlement, territory of settlement, sex of the respondent, age sub-group, educational level, social and professional status, social and economic status). The object of the investigation was represented by the population aged 18 and older who permanently reside in the territory of the Rostov region. Territorial sampling included the city of Rostov-on-Don, 9 towns and 8 districts of the Rostov region.

Results

Ethnic pattern of the population in the Rostov region

According to the results of all-Russia census in 2010, in the territory of the Rostov region there live 4,277,976 people (Basic results of all-Russia census of population 2012), that belong to more than 130 ethnic groups. Among these, 36 ethnic groups include over 1 thousand people. Demographic development of the Rostov region can be characterized as de-population inasmuch as, according to the estimations of the Rostov territorial authority of the Federal State Service of Statistics of the Russian Federation, the population of the region as of January, 1, 2015, amounted to 4,242.1 thousand people (Count of population, 2015).

Principal ethnic component of the population of the Rostov region is represented by Russians who, according to the results of the last census, amounted to 3,795.607 people. The share of Russians makes over 88.7 % of the population in the Rostov region and more than 90.3 % of those who lived in the region and who identified their nationality in the course of the census. Within the structure of Russians, according to the results of the two last all-Russia censuses in 2002 and in 2010, there is an ethnic group of Cossacks. Their number in 2002 amounted to 87,492 people (National distribution of the population, 2005), and in 2010 it made 29,682 people. Thereat, within the ethnic structure of the population in the region there are several large components as follows: Slavonic-European, South Caucasian, North Caucasian, Turkic-Central Asian. These components have been distinguished based on combining geographical and cultural-linguistic criteria.

The Slavonic-European component accounts for circa 2.9 % of the population in the region. They are Ukrainians (77,802 persons), Belarusians (16,493 persons), Moldovans (6,664 persons), Germans (4,234 persons), Greeks (2,487 persons), Poles (1,074 persons), Bulgarians (745 persons). Besides, in terms of the majority of social and cultural characteristics, the Slavonic-European component of the population in the Rostov region is joined by the diasporas of Jews (3,231 persons) and Assyrians (1,774 persons), and also by the native people of the Russian Federation of Finno-Ugric linguistic group (Udmurts – 2,411 persons, Mordvins – 2,198 persons, Maris – 1,987 persons, Komi-Permyaks – 1,113 persons). All these groups are characterized by the trend of general de-population expressed by the reduction of their number because of migration losses and because of their low birth rate (Figure 1). At the same time, these groups are characterized by low level of social and cultural separation, by intensive assimilation processes, by widely accepted practices of international marriages, by the dominance of the Russian language in the

families and in day-to-day communications, by the lack of immigration growth, by high level of modernization of their ethnic cultures.

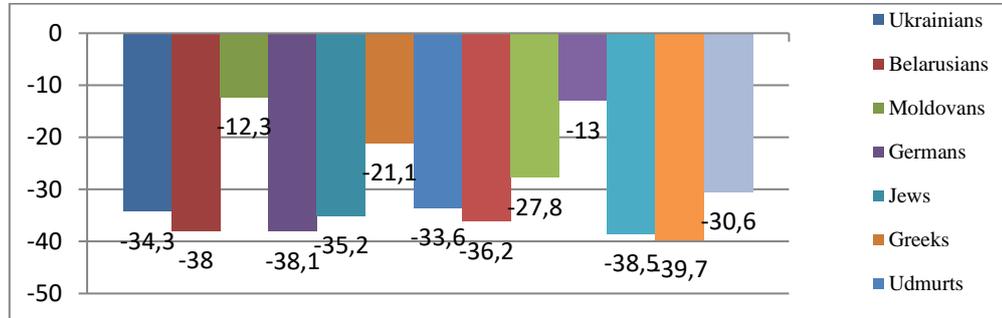


Figure 1. Reduction of population of some ethnic groups in the Rostov region in 2002-2010, %

The South Caucasian component of the ethnic and cultural structure in the Rostov region accounts for circa 3.2 % and is represented by the ethnic groups as follows: Armenians (110,727 persons), Azerbaijani (17,961 persons), Georgians (8,296 persons) and Abkhazians (851 persons). This segment was characterized by the intensive growth in the 1990s due to the mass migration of these ethnic groups in the region. Today there are no general trends of demographic reproduction of the ethnic groups related to the peoples of Southern Caucasus (Transcaucasia) in the Rostov region: Armenians and Azerbaijani are characterized by the stable number of their communities at the background of moderate natural and migration growth; Abkhazians are characterized by considerable immigration growth of the community, while Georgians, on the contrary, seem to decrease their general number considerably (Figure 2).

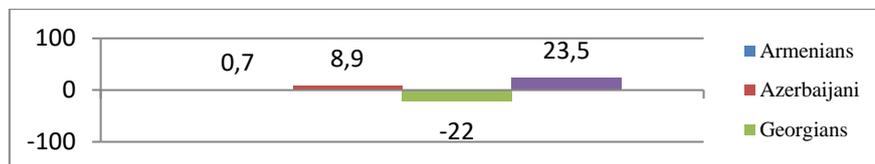


Figure 2. Dynamics of growth of South Caucasian ethnic groups among the population of the Rostov region within the period between the censuses, %.

The least uniform element of the ethnic structure of the population of the Rostov region is represented by the North Caucasian component that accounts for 0.9 %. It covers the peoples as follows: Chechens (11,449 persons); Dargins (8,304 persons.); Avars (4,595 persons); Lezgians (3,902 persons); Ossetians (2,801 persons); Tabasarans (2,481 persons); Udis (1,866 persons); Ingush people (1,520 persons.); Kumiks (1,511 persons); Rutulians (1,067 persons). All of the abovementioned ethnic groups (excluding Chechens) are characterized by natural and migration growth (Figure 3).

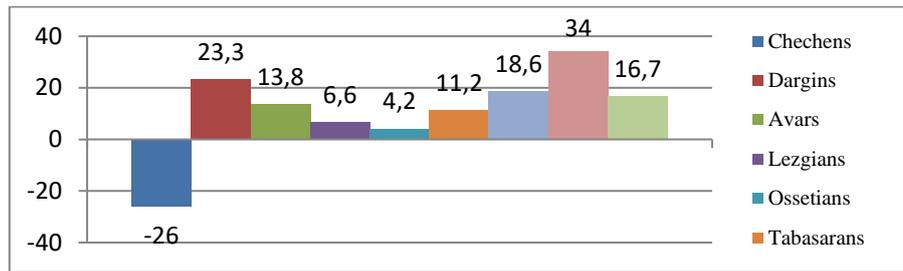


Figure 3. Dynamics of growth of North Caucasian ethnic groups among the population of the Rostov region within the period between the censuses, %.

The Turkic-Central Asian component of the population of the Rostov region accounts for 1.5 % and is represented by the ethnic groups as follows: Turks (35,902 persons), Tatars (13,948 persons), Kazakhs (3,046 persons), Uzbeks (2,753 persons), Chuvashes (2,171 persons), Kirghiz people (1,648 persons), Tadjiks (1,618 persons), Bashkirs (915 persons). The Turkic-speaking population of the Don that belongs to the category of the native peoples of the Russian Federation (Tatars, Chuvashes and Bashkirs) is characterized by negative demographic dynamics (namely: -21.9 %, -28.0 %, -19.9 % respectively). The Turks (Meskhetian Turks) and Central Asian diasporas that live in the Rostov region are, on the contrary, characterized by extensive demographic growth due to the immigration factor and due to the high birth rate (Figure 4). Kazakhs are the exception, as their number over the period between the censuses has not changed and the increase in their number amounted to just 25 men.

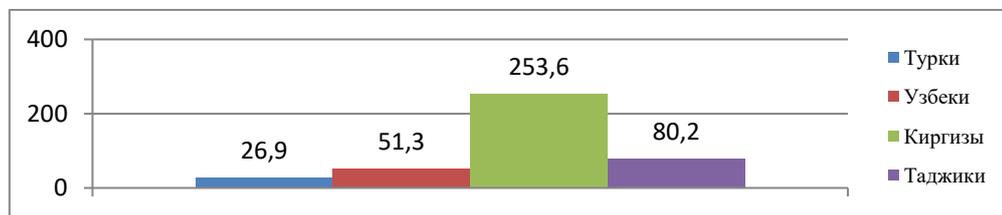


Figure 4. Dynamics of growth of Turkic and Central Asian diasporas among the population of the Rostov region within the period between the censuses, %.

The ethnic pattern of the population in the Rostov region would have been incomplete without taking into account the groups that stand apart in terms of culture, history and language: Roma (16,657 persons), Koreans and Kalmyks (11,597 and 878 persons), Yazidis and Kurds (1,771 and 830 persons). In all, these groups account for 0.75 % of the population of the Rostov region. In terms of demographic reproduction Roma, Yazidis and Kurds are characterized by positive growth, while the growth of the number of Koreans and Kalmyks is negative, though the decrease in the number of these groups over the period between the last censuses was minimal and amounted to 0.6 and 8.2 % accordingly.

3.2. Confessional pattern of the population of the Rostov region

The all-Russia censuses do not register confessional belonging of the respondents which complicates the efficient estimations of the presence of that or another confessional community. Today confessional pattern of the Don is represented by church denominations as follows:

- Orthodox communities subject to Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church (3 eparchies and 357 religious organizations);
- Communities of Old Believers subject to the Russian Orthodox Old Believer Church (5 religious organizations);
- Islamic religious communities subject to Russia's Central Spiritual Governance for Muslims or to the Council of Muftis of Russia (17 religious organizations in total);
- Buddhist religious communities subject to the Buddhist Traditional Sangha of Russia (3 religious organizations);
- Judaical religious communities subject to the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia or to the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations of Russia (4 religious organizations);
- Religious communities subject to the Novo-Nakhichevan and to the Russian Eparchy of the Armenian Apostolic Church (9 religious organizations);
- Religious communities subject to the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia (7 religious organizations);
- Religious communities of Evangelic Christian Baptists (34 religious organizations);
- Religious communities of Christians of Evangelical Faith (25 religious organizations);
- Religious communities of Evangelical Christians in Spirits of Apostles (10 religious organizations);
- Religious communities of Christians of Evangelical Faith – Pentecostalists (26 religious organizations);
- Religious communities of Seventh-Day Adventists (32 religious organizations);
- Religious communities of Jehovah's Witnesses (16 religious organizations);
- Religious communities of the Church of Jesus Christ and the Holy Last Days – Mormons (4 religious organizations);
- Religious communities of Society for Krishna Consciousness (2 religious organizations).

Besides, one religious organization has been registered for each of the denominations as follows: the Evangelic Christians, the New Apostolic Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Salvation Army, the Church of the Most Holy Mother of God "Sovereign", the Church of Christ, Molokan (Interaction between the government of Rostov region and the religious communities, 2016). At the level of the informal groups and organizations there are neo-pagan and Satanist cults, different sects and fundamentalist movements (Bedrik, 2016).

According to the results of the sociological survey of the population in the Rostov region undertaken in 2014 by the branch of the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center VTsIOM-Yug, up to 82 % of the population of the Don identify themselves as Orthodox Christians. At the same time, just 9 % of them regularly attend church practices, and another 12 % noted that they participate

in the activities of their religious community occasionally. Less than 4 % of the population of the region identified themselves as belonging to the category of Muslims and circa 1.5 % of the respondents were distributed among other religious organizations. Besides, almost 10 % of the respondents acknowledged their atheistic views and 2.5 % of the respondents identified themselves as belonging to the category of agnostics (Bedrik, 2015).

Discussion

Confessional identity can become both an instrument of interethnic consolidation and a factor of intra-ethnic integration. As a factor of interethnic consolidation confessional identity reveals itself in cases when ethnoconfessional communities are concerned that are the groups which ethnicity, along with linguistic, cultural, psychological and historical components, includes religious specifics. Such ethnoconfessional communities can either be the bearers of the national type of religion (as are Jews, Hindus, Sikhs or Yazidis), or be the representatives of the world religions within the framework of which separate ethnic denominations become widely spread (for example, in Christianity such ethnic denominations as the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Coptic Orthodox Church and others have been institutionalized). In this case the confession strengthens the ethnic identity and shows itself in the process of its reproduction under the conditions of the diasporas (Bedrik, 2015). Besides, confessional factor is important for forming the structure of the ethnic community if its demographic aggregate is de-congested in the environment where the alien confession prevail. Here the confession also plays the part of the additional marker of the ethnic identity (for instance, historically, Polish ethnic communities in Russia were fundamental for developing Catholicism and vice versa) (Selitskiy, 2008).

The classification of ethnic communities (diasporas) in the Rostov region in which the confessional factor is of actual importance makes it possible to identify several types of ethnoconfessional communities. First, they are the ethnic communities whose identity is equal to their confessional identity and the development of the diaspora proceeds based on the confessional structures. Such communities in the Rostov region are represented by the Jewish diaspora and also by the diaspora of Yazidis. However, up to now Yazidis have no registered religious organizations in the region. Second, there are ethnic communities that have national denominations within the framework of the world religions. In the Rostov region they are represented by Armenians (they are regarded as the traditional congregation of the Armenian Apostolic Church), Assyrians (they historically belong to the congregation of the Assyrian Church of the East), Georgians and Greeks (both are Orthodox believers having the autocephalous church structures of their own: the Georgian and the Greek Orthodox Church respectively). Third, there are ethnic minorities, who mostly practice one of the types of the world religions which in this particular region represents the confessional minority. Such are Polish communities who traditionally practice Catholicism, and Koreans whose major part practices Buddhism. Each of the distinguished types has its own specific features that predetermine the effects produced by the confessional factor on maintaining the ethnic identity.

Jewish Diaspora

The role of the confessional factor in the consolidation of the ethnic identity is most prominently expressed among the Don Jews. This is confirmed by several facts described below. First, the formation of Jewish community organizations (Diasporas) took place in the 1990s on the basis of Judaic religious communities, and their centers were located in the buildings of the synagogues directly or somewhere in the vicinities. Second, connections with the mother ethnoses and with the national state were performed through the institutions of the religious communities (This Immigrant Nation, 2014) that became the centers for studying national language and culture of Jews, where the teachers used to come from Israel and from other regions of the world, where Jewish organizations for youth and children and, later, Jewish gymnasiums were established. Third, the programs for the repatriation of Jews were also implemented and funded through the contacts of the religious structures with the diplomatic services of Israel in Russia. Fourth, at the later stage, the governments of both religious and ethnic communities have been centralized and subjected to the unified all-Russia public communities. However, such close relations between the institutions of religious Judaic community and the Jewish Diaspora create certain barriers for the reproduction of the latter, inasmuch as over the long years of the state atheism there appeared a whole stratum of "Soviet Jews" who never identified their nationality with their religion. Thus, actual ethnic identity of the part of the Jews does not ensure their prospective participation in the life of the community as a whole, because of their separation from the confessional life. Given this fact, in different periods in the Rostov region there were several public national and cultural Jewish communities that were either integrated with or separated from the centers of Judaism. Up to now, notwithstanding the mobilization of Jewish regional national and cultural community at the modern stage, its active members do not always identify themselves as Judaists and, consequently, do participate only in those social and cultural practices of the community that do not touch upon the issues of religion directly.

Armenian diaspora

The Armenian diaspora of the Don possesses complicated cultural, historical and confessional structure. Alongside with several sub-ethnic segments that exist within the structure of the community (Don, Sukhumi, Bakuvian and Central Asian Armenians), the community has been segmented in its confessional composition as well (Armenians in the South of Russia, 2011). This has mostly been stipulated by the consequences of the Soviet politics of secularization and of instilling the state atheism that after the Revolution resulted in closing the major part of the functioning parishes of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Rostov region: among more than twenty Armenian parishes that used to function before the Revolution only Saint Karapet Church remained functioning by the second half of the 20th century at the old Armenian graveyard. As a result, even that part of the Armenians who proved adamant against the ideological influence of Soviet propaganda and who preserved their Christian identity, could not fully participate in religious practices and had no access to communications with Armenian clergy. This part of the Armenian community

had to substitute the traditions of Armenian monophysitism for Orthodoxy that could retain the elements of the church life during the epoch of the state atheism. Baptized within the walls of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Don Armenians have predominantly preserved their loyalty to this religion even after the end of the post-Soviet era which coincided with the renaissance of the Armenian Church in the Don region. Today the Armenian diaspora builds a triune configuration of reproducing their identity (Khastyan, 2002). The elements of this triunity are represented by national and cultural communities of Armenians, parishes of the Armenian Apostolic Church that are mostly guided by clergy from Armenia, and the diplomatic institutions of the Republic of Armenia in the territory of the Rostov region personified by Consulate General. However, the popularity of Armenian Gregorianism is most vividly expressed among the youth of the Armenian community and among the migrants from Armenia and other post-Soviet regions. The older part of the Don diaspora, according to its leaders, does not share the confessional component of the ethnic identity. Besides, due to the migration growth in the post-Soviet period the number of Armenian Catholics has increased considerably in the region (Bedrik, 2016). The donor regions of the Armenian Catholic population were represented by the historical Georgian area Samtskhe-Javakheti. Among the whole aggregate of Armenian population in the Rostov region Armenian Catholics account just for several percent. However, in the structure of the Catholic community of the Don their number makes circa 1/3. It is this part exactly that represents the basis of demographic reproduction of the confessional community which preserves strong ethnical identity, endoethnic domesticity and supports possession of many children. As a percentage, the Armenian segment becomes ever more prevailing over the Polish one, especially in the age cohort under 30 among children and adolescents. At the same time, Armenian Catholics historically belong to the eastern branch of the Catholic Church and in the countries of their habitation (Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Georgia) they adhere to the East-Orthodox practices, while in the parishes of the Don they exercise Latin masses. Given these facts, in 2015 a part of Armenian Catholics who were not satisfied with the sporadic visits of the clergy of the Armenian Catholic Church to Rostov-on-Don from Moscow and Sochi to administer public worship addressed the regional authorities and the local judicial bodies with a petition that they should be registered as an independent religious group and should be allowed to build their own church.

Greek and Georgian diasporas

The expression of the confessional component of the ethnic identity can be observed by the examples of the Don diasporas of Greeks and Georgians. Historically, both peoples are Orthodox believers, but they have the autocephalous religious institutions of their own within the structure of the Universal Orthodox Church: Georgian and Greek Churches. Besides, before the Revolution the Don Greeks had their Greek Orthodox parishes in the territory of the All-Great Don Host (Astvatsaturova, 2002). The religious renaissance in the beginning of the 1990s urged Greeks to re-establish the lost autocephaly. However, the strivings of the diaspora substantiated by its sufficiently high social, economic and cultural status in the regional society have not been met halfway by their Mother Church, the Greek Orthodox Church and were opposed

by the official structures of the Russian Orthodox Church which by that moment regarded the most of the Greeks in the region as its traditional congregation. Multiple pilgrimages of the Greeks to the centers of the Greek-Orthodox world and the invitations addressed to the Greek clergy to come to the Rostov region strengthened the convictions of the considerable part of the active members of the diaspora that the confessional component was an inseparable element of their ethnic and cultural identity. With this regard, a compromise agreement was reached by the leaders of the diaspora headed by the prominent Don entrepreneur and politician I.I. Savvidi and the leaders of the Orthodox eparchy of Don. According to this agreement, in the center of Rostov-on-Don city the Greek Cathedral of Saint Ascension that had been destroyed after the Revolution of 1917 was to be reconstructed, was to be guided by Greek clergy and, partially, the services were to be held in the Greek language. However, structurally this parish is subject to the Rostov and to the Novocherkassk metropolitans of the Russian Orthodox Church. Similar processes over the post-Soviet period were also characteristic for the Georgian Don diaspora that is now headed by B.Ch. Meskhi, prominent scientist and community leader, rector of Don State Technical University. The support from the authoritative leader of the diaspora made it possible for the Don Georgians to obtain the authorization of the government of the Rostov and the Novocherkassk metropolitans to build their own Church of Saint Nino, Enlightener of Georgia, which architecture has been performed in line with the traditions of Georgian cathedrals and the church service combines the elements of Russian and Georgian Orthodox Faith. However, given the fact that both houses of worship (Greek and Georgian) are located in the territory of the Don capital and the diasporas are dissipated over the territory of the whole Rostov region, this renaissance of the ethnoconfessional structure is purely symbolic. For the majority of the members of these ethnic communities their national confessional practices remain inaccessible; and, according to the data of sociological surveys, they do not have any particular needs for them attending the traditional parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church when they want to.

Polish diaspora

Propagation of Catholicism in the Don was especially predetermined by the inflow of the Polish ethnic community and it took place in the end of the 18th century. Catholicism was introduced and developed as a religion of diasporas being most closely interconnected with their history and development. The formation of the Roman Catholic Church in the Don coincided with the emigration of Poles and Lithuanians from Poland in the end of the 18th and in the beginning of the 19th century. (Shadrina, 2011) Before the Revolution in Rostov-on-Don city, in Novocherkassk and in Taganrog, as well as in the settlements Dmitriyevskoye and Grintal there were functioning Catholic Cathedrals attended by Poles and, though not in so great number, by Germans, Armenians, Lithuanians and also by neophytes from the locals. However, as of today the significance of the confessional factor in the reproduction of the Polish diaspora of the Don is practically negligible. The Polish segment accounts for not more than 30 % of the total number of Catholics of the Don. At the same time, it was the Polish ethnic community personified by the public organization called "Polonia of the Don" who established the foundations for the revival of the Don

Catholic parishes over the post-Soviet period and, partially, it was exactly this fact that stipulated its special status in the interactions within the community. Besides, the Don clergy of the Catholic Church mostly consists of the Polish priests and monks (64 %). At the same time, official powers of the Catholic Church in Russia recommend that Polish terminology should not be used in confessional practices (for example, such words as “costyol” or “ksyondz” should be avoided). In the demographical aggregate of the Catholics of the Don Armenian and neophyte segments are ever more dominant which makes the ethnic and church institutions even more distant from each other. Decrease in the demographic aggregate of the Poles, including the Catholics, is explained by the fact that the Polish community is experiencing the aftermath of the processes of assimilation and demographic ageing (Bedrik, 2016). According to these trends, the majority of the people who identify themselves as Poles (3/4) are adults and elderly people whose children were born in international marriages and possess either Orthodox or other confessional identities; and thus, they could not be regarded as social and cultural resources for reproducing the ethnoconfessional community now or in future. The disappearance of the effects produced by the confessional factor on the formation of the ethnic identity is also manifested through the fact that among the active members of two public organizations of Poles in the Don region “Polonia of the Don” and “The union of the Poles of the Don” the adherents of Catholicism now account for less than 1/3.

Conclusion

Thus, the actual importance of the confessional component of the ethnic identities in the diasporas in the Rostov region is differently revealed in each of the groups under investigation. This can be explained by the reasons of historical, social and cultural nature. Thus, for those diasporas that were strongly affected by the assimilation trends the loss of their identity often started with the loss of their confessional uniqueness (Civilizational Identity, 2007). Such process is characteristic for the Don Poles. On the other hand, the groups that experienced over the post-Soviet period the outbursts of their ethnic identities caused by the intensive migration growth (Armenians) and due to the active external policies of the diasporas focused on the contacts with the state of the mother ethnos (Jews) have enjoyed the renaissance of the national original confessional practices and the strengthening of the ethnoconfessional identities of the communities. This trend is quite strong in the diasporas of the world including Jews and Armenians (Kretsedemas, 2012). At the same time, in a number of communities (Greeks, Georgians) the revival of the confessional component of the ethnic identity represented a result of the activities of the elites, was of mostly external (image-creating) nature and did not seem important for the major part of the ethnic and cultural community. It should also be noted that the confessional component of ethnic identity proved to be insignificant among the majority of the Orthodox and Muslim diasporas in the region, i.e. among the confessional groups that possess multinational structures (Ercümet..., 2013). In case of the Muslim community of the Don that is represented by more than a dozen of ethnic groups some importance was attached to the conflict on the rights of that or another ethnic community to nominate their representatives for the government of the regional Ummah (for instance the conflict between the Tatar and the Azerbaijani Muftis).

Consequently, when the confessional minority does not simultaneously represent the ethnic minority, then the significance of the religious factor for the process of establishing the ethnic community becomes low or practically negligible (Weiss, 2013).

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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