



Analysis of the first session of the Working Group "Education and Culture" of GAMCON – Gagauzian Modernization convention

The present session, which took place at the premises of the Comrat State University, was attended by representatives of the local government as well as of the civic sector. These representatives met to discuss and commit to steps in regards to the modernisation of education and culture in the region of Gagauzia. At the beginning of the session, recommendations were provided by Petr Pashaly, the local expert and chairman of this session. Mr. Pashaly largely emphasised the need to preserve the Gagauzian language, which stirred discussion amongst the participants about whether, to what extent and how to preserve the language. The discussion was largely unmoderated and considered various areas, including a) how the language is developed through local publications and the Gagauzian school curriculum, b) what role extra-curricular – mostly folklore – activities play in the preservation of the local language and culture, and c) whether and how the language could be relevant within the context of the broader Moldovan society.

Regarding education, Mr. Pashaly noted the need for schools to strive to develop skills and understanding rather than focus only on delivering knowledge. This was re-iterated in the following discussion, with one participant sharing the opinion that young people in Gagauzia often lack the soft-skills and professional manners required for higher education as well as employment. However, realistic potential solutions – and the steps these would require – were not raised by anyone.

Building up from these discussion, I delivered a presentation to the group about non-formal education inside and outside of the classroom. In this, I shared my experience as a teacher, tutor and facilitator of non-formal education at D3 Association and the C.S.Lewis High School in Bratislava, Slovakia, which has recently received the Pontis award for the best Slovak educational inspiration.

Some of the specific ideas I presented and discussed with the other participants included:

1. the adaptation of lesson curricula for more interdisciplinarity, personal reflection and group discussion (e.g. in Global and civic studies),
2. the use of a variety of non-formal events, teambuildings and activities, and
3. a youth mentoring program between teachers and students
4. a formalised program requiring students to participate in charity work of their choice

My presentation was followed by questions and discussion; however, these were again soon side-tracked to language and culture and the meeting was already longer than planned (and half of the room has left in the meantime). Therefore, a suggestion was made to end the

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meeting and for the future sub-divide the working group into two groups. The first group would be “education”, with emphasis on non-formal educational solutions to the local challenges and the second group would be “language and culture”.

Overall, I consider the meeting a success in terms of bringing together various stakeholders and enabling them to see the importance of modernising education and culture in Gagauzia. At the same time, however, I consider it necessary to point out that the meeting lacked clarity of understanding what are the local problems and a systematic determination in coming up with, prioritising and committing to solutions to these problems. Therefore, regarding the format of the meeting, I agree with the proposed sub-division of the group to allow for a more focused discussion. I also recommend having a locally-respected moderator of the discussion so that it always stays focused on the agenda. Regarding the content, the variety of non-formal educational solutions, including those I presented at the meeting (e.g. charity work), offer multiple avenues of potential modernisation of Gagauzia. However, these activities need to be chosen and applied with sensitivity to the local context and thus further sessions will be required to think them through and consider how best to do them.

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