

ETHNOCULTURAL SITUATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF KARELIA (1980–1990s)

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Abstracts: The Republic of Karelia is an independent state of the Russian Federation. The Karels, the Veps and the Russians are native people of the Republic of Karelia. According to the adopted ethnological criteria the Karels and Veps are considered to be national minorities of the Republic. Due to a longstanding tradition the Finns, including 5/6 of the Inkeri Finns, are believed to be a national minority as well. In accordance with the last census (1989) the national minorities made up only 13.1% of the total number of the inhabitants of Karelia (the Karels – 10%; the Finns – 2.7%; the Veps – 0.4%). Modern ethno-demographic situation in Karelia is considered to be a critical one. The average age of the Karels, the Veps and the Finns living there is higher than in the other ethnic groups. The process of democratization in the Soviet society aroused the national factor in the former Autonomous Republics. Ethnic minorities began to announce infringement of their rights, started organizing national movements. National and cultural rebirth of their peoples and first of all their languages appears to be the principle goal of these national societies. But the Karelian language has no official status. In 1991–1993 the writing of the Vepsians was restored. As for the Finnish language it does not have a definite status yet. The “Programme of the language-cultural rebirth and development of the Karels, Veps and Finns of the Republic of Karelia” was adopted in 1995 by the Karelian Government. By the end of the 1990s two approaches to the national problems were determined. The first is cultural (the development of languages and culture within national autonomy) and the second is political (the advancement of political demands from national-radical movements and organizations). But the stable political and national situation in Karelia guarantees a favorable solution to the problems of the ethno-cultural development of the Veps, Karels, Finns.

Keywords: Republic of Karelia, Karels, Veps (Vepsians), Finns, Karelian language, ethno-cultural rebirth and development, ethno-demographic situation, national problems, national political movements and organizations, Vepsian Volost

The Republic of Karelia is an independent state of the Russian Federation. It has full legislative, executive and juridical power on its territory. Its population is about 794,200 people. 74% of them are living in an urban area and 26% in a rural one. The Karels, the Veps and the Russians are native people of the Republic of Karelia.

According to the adopted ethnological criteria the Karels and Veps are considered to be national minorities of the Republic. Due to a longstanding tradition the Finns, including 5/6 of the Inkeri Finns, are believed to be a national minority as well.

The tendency of national merging and unreasoned policy of “non-perspective villages” lead to the decreasing number of the Karels, the Veps and the Finns. From the 1920s to the late 1980s the number of the Karels was reduced from 108,000 to

80,000, the Veps from 9,400 to 6,000 accordingly. From the late 1970s to the late 1980s the number of the Finns decreased from 29,000 to 18,400 people.

In accordance with the last census (1989) the national minorities made up only 13.1% of the total number of the inhabitants of Karelia (the Karels – 10%; the Finns – 2.7%; the Veps – 0.4%). They were losing their main national features such as language, national culture, customs and traditions rather fast.

Modern demographic situation in Karelia is considered to be a critical one. The main reason of the low birth and high death rate is the fall of living standards under conditions of social unprotectedness. At the beginning of 1998 as many as 18,000 people were classified as unemployed.

The deformation of the age structure of the population and negative tendencies in family life are the main reasons of the low birth rate. Such a situation is typical for all parts of Karelia. But it is much unfavorable in densely populated regions. The average age of the Karels, the Veps and the Finns living there is higher than in the other ethnic groups.

For example, in 1989 the average age of the Veps was 45.5 years, that of the Finns 43.9. The average age of the inhabitants in Karelia was 33.2 years. The index of death rate in these regions was higher than in the Republic. The death rate was 2–3 times higher than the birth rate. Exactly the same tendency is kept at present.

By the late 1980s the national minorities seemed to be under the threat of ethnic degeneration. Only on the verge of the 1980–1990s the tendencies of national and cultural rebirth of the Karels, the Veps and the Finns were outlined.

The process of democratization in the Soviet society aroused the national factor in the former Autonomous Republics. Ethnic minorities began to announce infringement of their rights, started organizing national movements.

In 1989 the Karelian and Vepsian Culture Society and Ingrian Union were organized in the Republic. National intelligentsia and people not indifferent to the destiny of their nationality joined these organizations. National and cultural rebirth of their peoples and first of all their languages appears to be the principle goal of these national societies.

On March 28, 1991 in Olonetz the first republican national political organization the “Karelian Movement” was formed. Its aim is a free self-determination of the Karelians on their own territory. The most radical activists of the “Karelian Movement” stand for the re-union of the Russian Karelians with the Finnish ones.

The Russian national political movements in Karelia have only been forming. In contrast to the Finno-Ugrian one, it does not practically influence the political life of the Republic. It is not supported by the Republican government structures. It consists of two organizations – the “Russian Consent” and the “Russian Culture Society”.

In spring 1998 the elections to the Legislative Assembly showed nationalistic ideas to be unpopular even in the merely Karelian regions. The Russian great-power ideas did not attract Karelian votes either. As a result, a lot of well-experienced people, the managers of large enterprises and farms were elected to the Parliament, their nationalities were left out of account.

By the end of 1990s two approaches to the national problems were determined. The former one is cultural (the development of language and culture within national autonomy) and the later one is political (the advancement of political demands from national and radical movements and organizations).

As to the second tendency, the National Congress seems to reveal a lot of political activities. On October 18, 1995 the delegation of the National Congress entered into negotiations with Ole Esperson, Commissar Plenipotentiary on democratic institutions and human rights of the Baltic Sea States Council. But Esperson considers the solution of the problems of national minorities to be hampered by the present day economical situation, both in Karelia and in Russia, expressing positive opinion about the Karelian law of the local self-government. He also pointed out that Karelia has gone farther in solving the ethnocultural rebirth of the minorities compared with the other regions of Russia and even the members of the Baltic Sea States Council.

Now we can talk about an ethno-cultural development of the Karels, Veps and Finns in the Republic of Karelia. In 1989 the written language of the Karelians (the livikovsky and northern Karelian accent) was created. That helped to develop the literary language of these people. Two ABC-books and five language textbooks for primary schools were published during 1992–1994. The newspaper *Oma mya* has been publishing since 1990. It is circulated in 1,000 copies (1998).

The Karelian language has no official status. According to the 1994 microcensus data 47.5% of the Karels considered the Karelian language to be their native one, the others named it to be the Russian.

In 1991–1993 the writing of the Vepsians was restored. In conformity with the 1994 microcensus 24% of the Veps declared the Vepsian language and 76% called the Russian as their native language.

As for the Finnish language it does not have a definite status yet. It was the second national language of the Republic from early 1920s to 1956 (with a short interval in 1937–1940), then it became an official one between 1956–1990.

To preserve culture and history the people are supposed to know the language. Ethno-culture cannot be rich and varied without ethnical language.

The “Programme of the language-cultural rebirth and development of the Karels, Veps and Finns of the Republic of Karelia” was adopted in 1995 by the Karelian Government. The programme covers the period between 1995–2000. It is aimed at the creation of real conditions to meet ethno-cultural requirements of the Karels, Veps and Finns of Karelia, maintaining the formed social and economical as well as cultural and historical integration of peoples living in it. In the programme special attention is paid to people’s education.

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Nowadays there are very sharp discussions around the “Bill on the State Languages in the Republic of Karelia”. The representatives of the Karelian Union, some

persons from the Karelian intelligentsia propose the improvement of the Karelian language as the second language after Russian. But many Russians are against this proposal. They are afraid that the approval of this bill can lead to a sharp situation in the Republic. This bill will be discussed by the Karelian Parliament.

A great amount of problems emerge with the newly-created districts within the Republic. Examination of a newly-created self-government of Vepskaya Volost is a good way to detect these problems. The creation of this Volost fell into several steps. At first, three national rural soviets were formed. After they accumulated some sophistication they had been united into a volost.

Vepskaya Volost was created in accordance with the following two legislations: "On National District" and "On Local Self-government".

According to the first legislation, an expressed will of the population through a referendum must be present. According to the second one, a local self-government can be created within a territory only if 1/3 of the minimum budget is obtained from the sources of the territory itself. Both of the requirements were present: a referendum was held and 1/3 of the revenues could be received from local sources.

Finally, in 1994 Vepskaya National Volost was instituted in Karelia occupying the territory populated by Veps and including 4,000 of the population overall.

After a representative body (The Council of Volost) and a leader of the self-government were elected, determination of the boundaries of the volost emerged as the key problem. The whole process took 8 months. The Prionezhski District, which originated the volost, came to no agreement on the boundaries issue. The main reasoning behind it was that with the creation of this volost it loses a significant part of local resources.

Only in November 1994 were the boundaries determined. After that the volost could create its own budget. 1/3 of the budget must consist of local sources and the rest of it must be provided by the state.

Anyway, the volost budget must be separate from the budget of the Prionezhski District. The administration of the district was slow to come to this decision. The Council of the Volost along with the leader of the local self-government N. Rembot repeatedly addressed the Ministry of Finances to set a separate balance between the two budgets but to no effect. The Tax Inspection did not establish a list of tax-payers for the budget of the Volost. Ultimately, the leader of the Karelian government had to interfere.

According to enacted decrees of the Chairman, ministries and departments were ordered to deliberate solutions in terms of state powers in the Volost. However, the Ministry of Finances announced that the budget must not be separate until a law "On the budget" was passed. The law "On the budget" in its turn, was not passed because the Federal budget was not formed. Only in June 1995 did the Volost have its own budget.

Along with its own budget the Volost had to deal with financial difficulties for it inherited the debts of the Prionezhski District. The debts were growing fast because the only way to pay them back was through the use of natural resources (especially forests). The Volost had no access to them because forests were at cor-

porations' disposal located beyond its boundaries. The Forestry Committee of Karelia owned the corporations. These corporations' key motivating factor was to perform their duties under contracts they entered into prior to the creation of the Volost.

There are two major quarry factories located in the Volost: the joint-stock company *Shohtinski Karjer* and the joint-stock company *Onezhski Karjer*. But since they belong to federal ministries, neither of them are interested in budget allocations. Plus they have more than enough of their own financial difficulties.

Those against the new Volost took advantage of this situation and claimed that the creation of a new unit within the Republic of Karelia was fruitless. Hard discussions on this continue to be held.

The national politics of the Republic of Karelia pursues the major goal of creating actual conditions for satisfying the cultural needs of the peoples and national groups living in the republic. The major part of the politics was the activity on the national-cultural revival of small indigenous peoples and carrying out the republican program of reviving and developing the languages and culture of the Karelians, Veps and Finns of Karelia, which was adopted on January 30, 1995.

On September 1, 1994 a Finno-Ugrian school was opened in Petrozavodsk for the children of Karelians, Veps and Finns. Different educational institutions continue training specialists (instructors, teachers and cultural workers) with the knowledge of Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages, namely the faculty of Baltic-Finnish philology and culture at the Petrozavodsk State University, the department of Karelian and Veps languages at the Karelian State Pedagogical University, the Finno-Ugrian music academy at the Petrozavodsk conservatoire and pedagogical colleges. A department of national (Karelian and Veps) languages was opened in the Karelian State Pedagogical University on December 1, 1994 and enrolls 20 students annually. Currently there are over 300 students at the faculty of Baltic-Finnish philology and culture. They specialize in such fields as "Finnish and Russian languages and literature", "Finnish language and literature", "Veps and Finnish language". There are 23 instructors and assistants at two departments of this faculty. 70 students attend courses offered by the inter-faculty chair of Karelian-Veps languages at the Karelian State Pedagogical University. They specialize in "pedagogy and methodology of primary education" with additional specialization in Karelian and Veps languages, "pre-school pedagogy and psychology", "Karelian and Veps languages". There are 6 people working at the faculty.

The chairs of Karelian and Veps languages in KSPU and PetrSU have started almost from a scratch and still experience a lack of educational and education-methodical literature, appropriate equipment and necessary accommodation for the instructors and assistants. Taking into account these factors and also the very hard work they are doing, the Committee on National Politics of the Karelian Government proposed to increase by 50% the salary of instructors of Karelian and Veps languages. This should be important for ensuring that highly qualified staff remains in the institutions of higher education and provide the continuing realization of national and in particular language politics in Karelia. Currently, the Ministry of Edu-

cation of Karelia has provided money for the stipend of country-side school graduates studying at the aforementioned faculties.

1994 was the year of publication of several educational-methodical manuals on teaching Karelian and Veps languages (by A. Triphoeva, Z. Dubinina), Karelian fairy-tales in northern Karelian dialect (compiled by P. Zaikov and A. Stepanova), the first two poetry and song collections in Veps language: *Thirty Three* (N. Abramov) and *Pipe* (L. Melentieva) and also such serious academic works as *Karelian-Finnish folk group* (compiled by V. Evseev) and *Dictionary of Karelian language (Tver dialects)* (by A. Punjina).

In 1995 the following books were issued: a collection of stories for 3–4th grades in northern Karelian dialect (P. Zaikov), Veps–Russian and Russian–Veps dictionary (N. Zaitseva and M. Mullenon), a collection of songs of Iyvviik Karelians (N. Dubalov), *ingermanland song* – a collection of poems in Finnish and Russian languages (A. Mishin), *Veps fairy-tales* – academic edition in Veps and Russian languages (N. Onegina and M. Zaitseva). However, this is only less than one third of what was supposed to be published within the framework of the program.

The volumes of radio and TV broadcasts in Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages have remained the same as well as their relative disproportion due to the significant dominance of the Finnish language.

Despite the difficult economical situation all the periodical editions of the republic in Karelian, Veps and Finnish languages that are financed from its budget are still published (newspapers *Oma mua*, *Kodima*, *Karjalan sanomat*, magazines *Karelia* and *Kipina*). On the one hand they satisfy the people's need of the "printed word" in their native language and on the other hand they pursue the important goal of developing the literature of these languages. In 1994 all national editions have been centralized within the framework of one printing house, Periodika. This decision enabled to better solve the issues of their continuing functioning. The situation with the weekly edition of the Kalevala national district *Vienan Viesti* proves this decision to be correct. This edition was terminated in the second half of 1995 due to the lack of financing in the local budget and started again only in early 1996 after the regional administration received the financial support from their colleagues in the neighboring Finnish county. Financial problems of issuing these editions have become regular for the Government of the republic. However, they have become less severe after the M. A. Kastren Society (Finland) transferred 27,000 FIM for the Periodika printing house. This allowed 270 cultural and educational institutions and social organizations of Karelia (including 130 schools and 117 libraries) to receive these editions during the entire year of 1996. This is a concrete example of humanitarian help for the indigenous peoples of Karelia.

Traditional national holidays (Tree of Life, Karelian humor in Kindasovo village, Inkeri day, etc.) have been carried out fully and regularly. The following events have been important for the national-cultural life of the republic:

- scientific conference on “Veps people: history, culture and inter-ethnic contacts”;
- the 100th anniversary of the birthday of S. A. Makariev, a famous Veps researcher;
- music conference devoted to the 75th anniversary of composer G. Sinisalo;
- Ryabinov, Vinogradov and Kononov readings;
- 11th International Children Festival of Finno-Ugrian Peoples;
- 1st republican contest on toponymy among the school children;
- a holiday of Veps culture in Sheltozero, within the framework of which there was an inter-regional contest on the knowledge of the Veps language, etc.

The stable political and national situation in Karelia guarantees a favorable solution of the problems of the ethno-cultural development of the minorities.