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BORDERLAND GROUPS BETWEEN POLITICAL CENTRES: NATIONAL INFLUENCE AND LOCAL PRACTICES IN BESSARABIA

The article considers the conditions, under which ethnic groups form the necessity in lobbying of group socio-economic and political interests. The attention is focused on the leading role of ethnic groups in the processes of integration and disintegration of the region, regional policy of national development.

The process of acquisition of subjects` of socio-economic and political relations function by local ethnic groups both within the State and in the international arena is demonstrated on the example of ethnic groups of Bessarabia in Ukraine and Moldova.

The paper illustrates the acquisition of active capacity by ethnic groups while protecting cultural and social rights, as well as participation in global international processes. This problem acquires the special relevance in regard with the developed institutional and integrational crisis in Ukraine at the end of 2013 – beginning 2014. The “Ethnic map” at this conjuncture acquired additional functions as by the side of ethnic groups and in the managerial political projects of leading geopolitical players in the region (Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Turkey, etc.).

Keywords: region, regional identity, ethnic group, national priorities.

Problem statement. The local groups of borderland, in sequence of the special structuring of the social space, within which they function, form the specific composition of adaptative everyday practices. Among the significant practices and strategies that determine a socio-political capacity of the local groups: preservation of capable regional identity in addition to national and ethnic; transcultural practices, including polyglottism and biculturality, as the space for fast socio-cultural transformation; readiness for transboundary cooperation under the condition of network structure of the ethnocultural groups.

The purpose of the paper is to analyse the conditions under which local groups of the borderland acquire the ability to act as parties of socio-political process on the level of regional processes as well as on the level of transboundary systems. **The object of the analysis** of the present research is ethnocultural groups of Bessarabia in Ukraine and Moldova and their practices of participation in regional and transboundary socio-political processes.

Analysis of the recent researches. The majority of the researchers consider the “borderland” as space of interaction of multilevel players: central and regional powers, local groups, transnational systems, etc. Social infrastructure of such spaces became an object of studies of R. Brubaker¹, O. Brednikov, E. Chekidze², A. Crosby³, Je. Lozanskij,⁴ etc. In the works of Beck, U., the borderland space is considered as a place with “biography” that allows local groups to contrast themselves with humanity⁵. The space as a “place”, in which the everyday practice of person is realized had been considered in the works of E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, A. Schutz, etc.

¹ Брубейкер, Р. (2000). «Диаспоры катаклизма» в Центральной и Восточной Европе и из отношения с родинами. *Диаспоры*, 3, 6-32.

² Бредников, О., Чекидзе, Е. (1998). Армяне Санкт-Петербурга: карьеры этничности. *Конструирование этничности*. Санкт-Петербург, 227-259.

³ Crosby, A. (2002). Introduction. *The Local Historian*. Vol.32, 2. May. <[http://www.balh.co.uk/publications/tlh_volume32_copy\(2\).html](http://www.balh.co.uk/publications/tlh_volume32_copy(2).html)>. (2018, October, 09).

⁴ Лозанский, Э. (2004). *Этносы и лоббизм в США. О перспективах российского лобби в Америке*. Москва. 272.

⁵ Бек, У. (2001). *Что такое глобализация? Ошибки глобализма – ответы на глобализацию*. Москва: Прогресс-Традиция, 304.

The idea to consider the “borderland” as “symbolic”, a self-forming structure that is able to dictate conditions of development for the participants of this system, is presented as a concept of “experience of the area” by Pierre Bourdieu¹. Therein the reality is predetermined by formed conformism, “perception of the social world” that acts as symbolic power in the form of social resource fixed to the group.

The analysis of the socio-cultural practices of local ethno-social groups in Bessarabia have been conducted by a lot of historians and ethnographers (O. Ganchev, I. Grek, M. Guboglo, O. Kvilinkova, O. Prigarin, O. Uvarova, P. Khristov), however, the practices itself have not been an object of specific political analysis.

Paper main body. The regional system in the South – North Ukraine is a unique social structure that demonstrates the ability to generate the rules and social statements throughout history, due to which the process of transmission of traditions, as inherited actual social experience, is provided.

The region has been formed as a stable systematic borderland: between civilizations, economy and cultural centers, informational and geopolitical areas. Bessarabia is an area of vital interests of many geopolitical players, classic limitrophe, multipolarity and marginality of which are predetermined by geography². Regional area of Bessarabia throughout history has maintained an unstable political influence, an absence of sustained cultural basis, enclave settlement of peoples in the region. Here “the experience of the area” (Pierre Bourdieu’s concept) appears as a composition of social practices and models of behavior, provided not only the ability to maintain a tolerant multi-ethnic environment but also a traditional pragmatic relation to national idea.

Bessarabia is the borderland region, located in the area of Ukraine and Moldova and within the zone of permanent geopolitical attention by the side of Romania, Turkey and Russia. Throughout the long history, Bessarabia has been considered by all participants of regional relations as a potential source of different resources: geographical, agricultural, demographical, transit, etc.

Bessarabia received the status of “disputed territory” due to the history: during the period of antiquity this lands had been the borderland between Daco-Thracian and Iranian tribes of Scythians and Sarmatians; during the period of the great migrations it was the corridor, that successively had been inhabited by peoples that had moved from the steppes of the South – East Europe to Middle Europe and to the Balkans. Here have been located the borders of the Eurasian Empires: the Ancient Hellas, the Roman Empire, Byzantium, the Bulgarian Kingdom, the Kievan Rus, Lithuania, the Golden Horde, Genoa, Moldavian and Wallachian principalities, Ottoman and Russian empires, the Soviet Union and Romania, modern Ukraine.

This territory was marked on the West Europe maps as “*Loca Deserta*”, “*Loca desolata*”. Gradually it had been transformed in stable “disputed territory” for the border-states; “undeveloped”, that means free for settlement; “marginal” – far from centres of culture and political influence. On the maps of XVII century, created by the Polish engineer Guillaume Levasseur de Beauplan, the interfluvium between Dniester and Prut had been marked as a borderland within which had been needed to build boundary and defensive structures. The visible signs of this frontier land have been preserved by remains of “Serpent’s Wall” and “Trajan’s Wall”. In the collection of 1903, it is stated that the Walls of South Bessarabia created vast redoubt, included the “whole region”³. A lot of modern towns in the region were founded as defensive fortifications – fortresses: Bilhorod-Dnistrovskiy (Akkerman), Izmail, Bender (Tighin), Kiliya, Savran, etc. Virtually all Bessarabian fortresses had performed the function of transit centres in ancient times, provided the trade with the barbaric world of the Black Sea region. In II-III centuries AC Rome, on the periphery of which were the lands of Bessarabia, actively provided the patronage to the local merchants by granting the right on free trade. Later in X – XIII centuries the part of trade route lied through the Danube Delta and the Snake Island – “The trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks”. The role of contact zones had been performed by the Greek and Genoese colonies, later by Turkish fortresses. They had connected the Mediterranean region and countries of Central and West Europe. Trade route through Crete – Constantinople – Kiliya – Suceava – Kamenetz – Lviv had been formed in XVII century. In the same time

¹ Бурдые, П. (2007). *Социология социального пространства*. Санкт-Петербург: Алетейя, 87-96.

² Коч, С., Узун, Ю. (2012). Диаспоры юга Украины в системе региональных геополитических отношений.

Науковий вісник міжнародного гуманітарного університету. Серія: Історія, Філософія. Політологія. Збірник наукових праць, вип. 4, 140.

³ *Бессарабия. Графический, исторический, статистический, экономический, этнографический, литературный и справочный сборник (1903)*. Москва: Бессарабед.

Kiliya, Izmail, Akkerman transformed into the transit trade points with a corresponding ethno-social structure of the population.

The modern development of the region by all subjects of regional policy appeared as potentially promising. The interfluvies of Dniester, Prut and Danube are still the area of vital interests of Turkey, Romania, Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Bulgaria. There is a significant number of projects, the aim of which is to use the transit resource and to integrate the region to one of the global regional systems: European or Eurasian.

Four International transport corridors pass through Bessarabia. Two of them: the corridor No.9 – “The trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks” and revived “Silk Road” – TRACECA are officially recognized by international organizations as natural transit bridges. The significant transit potential of the region is concentrated in the triangle Reni (Ukraine) – Galati (Romania) – Giurgiulesti (Moldova). Herewith, every state owns its “key” to the region: Ukraine controls port, Romania – Danube channel – the Black Sea, Moldova – railroad sidings. The cooperation within the Euroregion “Lower Danube” is directed to the regulation of transboundary cooperation between Ukraine, Romania and Moldova. The autonomy part of Moldova – Gagauzia also sees itself as an independent participant of transport corridor¹ Association of the European Border Regions Euroregion “Lower Danube” as a legal entity has an ability to attract financing from the European Union Funds for strategic infrastructural projects.

However, these and other perspectives did not rid Bessarabia of the economic depression conditions, in which it has come at the turn of XX – XXI centuries. This fact in combination with geopolitical seismicity traditionally underlines the political instability and peripherality of the region, concerning all possible economic investments. The crisis of XXI century transforms the area of Bessarabia into the “island”, depriving it of its merits as a transit system and possibilities to be a geopolitical “corridor”. Thus, the “island” status of Ukrainian part of Bessarabia becomes a reality. Bessarabia is dependent on all vital resources: gas, water, electricity, roads. Region is connected to the “mainland” by two roads, one of them passes through the territory of Bessarabia, that makes passage through it “conditionally free”; the other road passes through the bridge above the mouth of the Dniester that makes it “strategically vulnerable”.

Nevertheless, the modern politicians traditionally consider Bessarabia as a “connecting element” between two geopolitical areas. In 2007 Mayor of the City of Athens on the meeting with the President of Moldova noticed, that “Moldova and Greece are the states, where religions and civilizations meet, where West and East converge”². Ukrainian politician I. Plachkov claimed: “The Danubian Bessarabia, due to its geopolitical position, is “the solar plexus” of a geopolitical and geoeconomic axis of the EU – Ukraine – Russia”³. Such approach is traditional and relevant.

The activity and capability of regional system are largely determined by its political capacity during the long historical period. From XVII century, the names “Bessarabia”, “Budjak” appeared in international treaties and documents, maps of Moldavia, Wallachia, Poland, the Ottoman Empire, Crimean Khanate, Venice, Russia, etc.⁴; these names have been used in administrative divisions of the Ottoman and Russian empires; mentioned in historical descriptions, demonstrating the significant level of actual autonomy and regional capacity⁵. Remoteness from the centres of political power determined the attractiveness of the region for fugitives from social pressure and absolutism from the Danubian principalities, Russia and

¹ Румыния не пускает Гагаузию к участию в Еврорегионе «Нижний Дунай». *Basarabia. MD*, 27.01.2014 <<http://www.basarabia.md/rumyniya-ne-puskaet-gagauziyu-k-uchastiyu-v-evroregione-nizhnij-dunaj>>. (2018, September, 16).

² Старыш, К. (2007). Молдова-Греция: политический роман. *Независимая Молдова*. 15.06.2007 <<http://www.nm.md/article/moldova-greciya-politicheskiy-roman>>. (2018, September, 18).

³ Плачков, И. (2012). *Бессарабское экономическое чудо*. <<http://bessarabiainform.com/2012/07/ivan-plachkov-bessarabskoe-ekonomicheskoe-chudo/#ixzz2sq2jzduC>>. (2018, September, 05).

⁴ Мустафа, А. (1986). *Турецкие документы об истории Румынии 1791-1821*. Бухарест, 293.; Jorga, N. (1899). *Studii istorice asupra Chiliei și Cetații Albe*. București, 220; Сосса, Р. (2007). *Картографування території України*. Київ. Либідь. 76-77.

⁵ Шевальс, П. (1993). *История войны козаків проти Польщі з розвідкою про їхнє походження, кранну, звичай, спосіб правління та релігію; другою розвідкою про перекопських татар*. Пер. с франц. Ю. Назаренко. Київ: Томіріс. 224; Челеби, Э. (1961) *Книга путешествия: (Извлечение из сочинения турецкого путешественника XVII в.)*. Вып. 1: Земли Молдавии и Украины Москва: Восточная литература. 338.

Poland in XV – XVII centuries¹. However, in XVIII century Bessarabia, in fact, was divided into Moldovan, Turkish, and Nogai zones of administration.

The ethno-social structure has been forming exactly during this period and in the later historical periods it became typical for this region. During the period of Russian-Turkish wars from 1711 to 1812 in Bessarabia, the ethno-confession structure of the population and all socio-cultural environment had been gradually restructured. After Bessarabia had joined the Russian Empire the process of settling the territory by Christians – farmers began, they were: Moldovans, the descendants of the Cossacks, Bulgarians, Serbs, Albanians, Greeks, Armenians, Germans, etc. The frame of mental image has been formed due to the “special” status of the region during the so-called “period of illusions” and subsequently caused the formation of a sustainable socio-cultural and political image of the region².

Social regional system has been formed in result of the cooperation of self-contained ethnic communities (autochthonous and emigrant ethnic groups), that created the mechanism of retention of the part of social space, which is necessary for their development.

The principle of ethno-social segmentation has been formed, due to which the borders of social group coincide with the borders of ethnic or confessional groups. This mechanism has been forming for decades. Social structure with expressed “horizontal” ethnic systems has already been inherent in the region during the period of the Ottoman influence. During the period of the economic development of the territory by the Russian Empire this mechanism had been supported by protectionist policy of the state in regard to the agricultural colonies as well as by the system of socio-economic and legal benefits in regard to the new settlers – *coreligionists* (Greeks, Bulgarians, Gagauzians, Albanians) and *foreigners* (Germans and Swiss; Jews from Poland and Belarus)³. During this period, the cultural differences had been supported by socio-economic mechanisms and by the time became their hostages⁴. Furthermore, the ethnic culture of migrants became the basis for legal regulation of their statuses⁵.

Therein, if geopolitical conditions generate and organize regional practices, the schemes of perception of centre-periphery relations convert the external conditions into the models of action that are realized on the level of group and individual practices.

The acts of “symbolic appropriation” of the space, its marking as “own” (orthodox / agricultural / Russian / Turk / Greek / Balkan / Soviet / Ukrainian etc.) perform as an “argument” for presence during the competition between groups and political actors for the right to be the “owners” and to make socially significant decisions. The “Iconography of the region”, as a system of symbols, images, public actions, is able to demonstrate the group solidarity and to create “the border of locality”⁶. The glocal “biography” of Bessarabia allows local groups, that set their, to form the functionally-active, hierarchical system of identifications, which is able to quickly and significantly modify⁷.

Thus, the geopolitical structure, features of demographic and communicational resource, socio-cultural segmentation set by the conditions of “settlement” and needs of “central government” became conditions for the regional development.

¹ Гончарова, Н.О. (упоряд.) (2013). *Джерела історії Південної Бессарабії з давніх часів до кінця XIX ст.* Ізмаїл: РВВ ІДГУ, 191.; Паламарчук, С. (2005). *Територіальні структури Дунай-Дністровського межиріччя (кінець XIV – середина XVII ст.)*: Дисертація на здобуття наукового ступеню кандидата історичних наук. Одеса: Одеський національний університет імені І.І.Мечникова.

² Коч, С. (2014). Этническое лоббирование как социальная практика в пограничье (на материалах исследования Бессарабии). *Перекрестки. Журнал исследований восточноевропейского Пограничья*, 1-2, 46-65.

³ Уварова, О. (2007). *Російська «політика покровительства» щодо греків-іммігрантів в кінці XVIII першій третині XIX ст. (на матеріалах Херсонської губернії)*: Дисертація на здобуття наукового ступеню кандидата історичних наук. Одеса: Одеський національний університет імені І.І.Мечникова.

⁴ Коч, С. (2011). Социально-экономические модели адаптации этнических групп (на примере «старых» и «новых» диаспор юго-западного региона Украины). *Предупреждение насильственных конфликтов в мультикультурных сообществах и формирование культуры мира*. Киев: ЧП «Золотые Ворота», 61-71.

⁵ Красняков, Н. (2009). Закрепление политико-правового статуса Бессарабской области в составе Российской империи: опыт применения конституционализма. *Вопросы управления*, 6. <<http://vestnik.uapa.ru/ru-ru/issue/2009/01/19/>>.

⁶ Gottmann, J. (1952). The Political Partitioning of Our World: an Attempt at Analysis. *World Politics*, 4, 512-519.

⁷ Бек, У. (2001). *Что такое глобализация? Ошибки глобализма – ответы на глобализацию*. Пер. с нем. А. Григорьева. Москва: Прогресс-Традиция, 304.

The ethno-cultural structure of Bessarabian population is characterized by such features as: 1) poly-culturalism and poly-confessionalism – there are more than 130 nationalities that profess *different denominations of Christianity, Judaism and Islam in the region*; 2) *enclave settlement: historically formed compact settlements of ethno-cultural groups that have the defined structure “of cluster resettlement” with own “centres”*; 3) *absence of status of “indigenous people” upon conditions that every regional group have an ability to act as a “settler” that colonized and rendered habitable this territory*; 4) *unstable status of the titular nation that in different time belonged to Tatars, Greeks, Russian, Romanians, Ukrainians*¹.

The concept of group adaptation and strengthening of collective rights on the vital space became the condition of the social structure segmentation on the ethno-cultural principle that caused the transformation of ethno-cultural groups into the parties of socio-political process.

The formation of the modern ethnic map of the region occurred simultaneously with “economic development” of the new lands while maintaining the traditional characteristics of the transitional area of the region. That predetermined the consolidation of special economic niches of the groups and long-term preservation of traditional agricultural sector.

The process of economic and cultural adaptation for all inhabitants of the region became the basis for the formation of:

1) ethno-economic presentation realized in the form of usage of ethno-cultural resources for “gaining a foothold” in the social space;

2) practices of “gaining a foothold” on the socio-economic space by the group as the realization of the right on inhabitation that reflected in the toponymy and iconography of the region. Such socio-cultural “recognized” spaces have been set by German, Greek, Jewish, Russian, Bulgarian, Gagauzian, Moldovan communities, etc. That is the system of ethnographical and sacral objects that nowadays allows not only to preserve social practices of these groups, develop ethnographical tourism, but also to act as groups of socio-political influence (for example, demands for the implementation of the Law on languages 2013). The institutionalized ethnic communities are orientated on the “gaining a foothold” in the landscape of cities and countries “places of memory”, memorial complexes, that in historical perspective will enable groups to strengthen their presence in the region;

3) the practices of allocation of local vital space within the region, that became the part of the ethnic identity of ethnic groups (“Bessarabian”, “Bessarabian Bulgarian”, “Bessarabian German”, “Bessarabian Greek”, “Moldovan schismatic”);

4) the practices of conscious demonstration of being involved in the local ethnic groups, that is a condition for formation on their basis the groups of influence (lobbying), the activity of which is directed on the assistance to the development of economic and social projects, initiated by the members of these groups. Such practice has been convenient and promising as for the historical ethnic groups, and for the “new” ethno-social groups, forming in the region (Chinese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Chechen, Armenian, etc.)

The usage of self-identification signs in the landscape of the region always has the aim: “gain a foothold” in the social space, presentation of a desired semantic image that demonstrates the capability of the subject. The establishment of the “symbolic system” allows to set up a concept, that is fundamental for conformally stable relationship of social integer².

The majority of ethnic groups within the region (Greeks, Germans, Jews, Armenians, Russian, Ukrainians, etc.) have their “Nominative spaces”. There are the marks of presence: toponymical objects, historical memorial complexes, informational resources, sightseeing tours, systems of cultural and educational complexes, sacral objects, etc.

The demonstration of success and influence of ethnic groups in historical retrospective is an argument for its social capability nowadays. That is why the representatives of ethnic communities actively promote and represent their social statuses. The symbolic history, iconographical images are the resource that enables a person to realize their own place in the system, due to being included in the network of senses that are accumulated in the memory, forming a fundament for social cooperation. This resource assumed the interconnection of three moments “place”, “network” and “memory”³.

¹ Коч, С. (2011). Социально-экономические модели адаптации этнических групп (на примере «старых» и «новых» диаспор юго-западного региона Украины). *Предупреждение насильственных конфликтов в мультикультурных сообществах и формирование культуры мира*. Киев: ЧП «Золотые Ворота», 61-71.

² Бурдьё, П. (1993). Социальное пространство и символическая власть. *THESIS. Альманах, Вып. 2*, 140.

³ Preston, P. (1997). Political / Cultural Identity. Citizens and Nations in a Global Era. *London/Thousand Oaks/New Delhi: SAGE Publications*.

The preservation of “places of memory”, building/destruction of memorial and architectural complexes, cemeteries, protection of sacral centres, creation of museum collections, books, names of the cities and streets, names – all of that in complex is a historical reality for the residents of Bessarabia. The main task is to choose the strategy of memory, the aim of which is to put the focus on significant moments of history. In the same time, such form of culture presentation is “artificial”, because any analysis and description of tradition is a way of its interpretation and “rewriting” into modern language¹. However, while the world, which consists of a number of realities, gives a preference to one of them – the daily life, the “historical memory” is only a projection of the present into the past that gives the opportunity to modernity to find a background for legitimacy in the “past”.

The ambiguity of socio-cultural identity in Bessarabia is explained by its peripheral position in the system of communicational spaces of researched groups, by the presence of national and local cultures, the borders of which have never been fully contacted.

Multidimensionality of communicational spaces demonstrates an ability of a social system to be functionally transformed under the conditions of political and national instability. Communication socio-cultural systems in the region can be classified by ethnic, language or confessional belonging, economic specialization, geopolitical orientation.

Turk layer of culture in the region is represented in historical geography, marked by toponymical objects, history of Nogai presence, Ottoman influence and by the part of this ethnic space – Gagauzia, ethnos, whose ethno-genesis is connected with this territory.

The significant communication system in the region is *Balkan culture* or culture of *Transdanubia colonists* that is represented by the group of peoples, moved from the Balkans. These peoples are Albanians, Greeks, Bulgarians, Gagauzians. Especially it should be highlighted the area of *Greek culture*, that includes several historical and socio-cultural layers of history (Greek city-colonies of antiquity, Byzantine civilization, Phanariotes rule and Greek colonists). The history has determined the expanded interpretation of ethnonym “Greek” as a person of “Greek religion”. That explains the frequent replacement of the terms “Greek”, “Christian”, and “Balkan migrant”. This fact explains the availability of transition from “Greek” self-identification to the identity of any other Christian ethnos during the process of forced reidentification and deportation in the XX century.

The legacy of the Roman Empire in architecture, toponymy, and language is represented by *the Roman culture*. Its successors are two peoples: Moldovans and Romanians. They are perceived as “indigenous” people, of one faith with Christians – migrants, but unlike the last one, they have never had the status of colonists.

The Slavic culture is represented by groups of Ukrainians, Bulgarians, Russian Nikonians and Old Believers. This group was not socially homogeneous, because Bulgarians and Old Believers had the statuses of colonists, and Ukrainians and Russian Nikonians referred to the category of state peasants. Their resettlement in the region mostly had been spontaneous.

The migrants from the West and Central Europe, Germans, Swiss, French, should be allocated in a separate communication system. The appearance of technological forms of agriculture, mechanical engineering, intensive forms of land use is connected with their appearance in the region.

The criterion that has predetermined the formation of the ethnic map of the region, was a religion. The migrants considered Bessarabia as a territory, where lived “co-religionists” – Christians, that predetermined their choice under the conditions of Islam influence. The Albanians, Bulgarians, Gagauzians moved from the territory of the Ottoman Empire were perceived as “friends” and that is why they quickly adapted to the local population. The religious tradition was laid on the basis of the use of exonym “Khokhol”. Following the Old Believers, all Orthodox Nikonian population is called “Khokhols” here, that is why this exonym is widely used in the daily life.

Institutional environment and vector of social development have formed such social category as *colonists*. This status united Albanians, Gagauzians, Greek, Russians, Old Believers, Bulgarians, Germans and Swiss into one social space. The development of this group has a rigorous algorithm in the dynamic of the political and legal status and socio-economic opportunities during two decades.

¹ Бергер, П., Лукман, Т. (1995). *Социальное конструирование реальности. Трактат по социологии знания*. Москва: Медуим, 323.

Ethno-economic niches should be allocated as a communicational space, based on the multi-structurality of regional development of Bessarabia. Such niches form the system and mechanism of vital resource allocation (material, social, symbolic, informational).

Thus, Moldovans, Gagauzians, Tatars, Bulgarians, Albanians, Russians, Ukrainians are usually referred to as to the rural population, the economy of which is based on agriculture, animal husbandry and horticulture. The urban environment usually has cosmopolitan, ethnically and confessionally diverse structure. However, the urban citizens, who provided trade infrastructure of the cities, mostly were Jews, Armenians, Greeks, Italians and peoples, whose political centres pretended on this land: Russians, Ukrainians, Turks, Romanians.

Interconnection of communicational spaces has been strengthened by language practices. The situation of functional polyglossia is a distinguishing feature of this region, that allows to easily manipulate socio-communicational spaces by language. The mass bilingualism is determined by the features of political socio-cultural history. Diglossal situations are different by their origin: 1) by birth (knowledge of languages of both parents); 2) territorial bilingualism (as a result of interference of languages because of mixed settlement of the native speakers); 3) social determinism (forced knowledge of two languages or pragmatically conditioned knowledge, acquired as a result of studying) and etc.¹. It is worth to consider also the state programs of official language determination that had been applied by different political centres. As regional languages with a public status have been recognized: Greek, Turkish, Russian, Romanian, Ukrainian. Last three of them are available for the regional intercultural communication nowadays. Furthermore, each of them is represented as a language of intercultural communication in different generation groups.

Manipulation of language spaces is used not only in the communicational practice of individuals but also as a method of demarcation of political borders, implementing different national strategies in the region. If previously the assimilation policy had been realized by language and education, nowadays, writing systems are involved in this process. Thus, the Moldovan and Gagauzian writing had been converted to Latin system, wherein by manifestation act was preserved the Cyrillic alphabet for Moldavian language in Trans-Dniester.

Important is that every communicational space presumed the existence of the “own centre” and “periphery”, that caused the creation of the network structures (*from relations between countrymen to transnational systems*), which are based on the specific contacts (*the channels of information and semiotic systems*), that united the participants. The most important task of such iconographical signs (J. Gottman) and Simulacra (J.n Baudrillard) is to demonstrate group solidarity and presence in the social space of the region.

The represented communication systems are not single-dimensional, they have a plurality of intersections. However, the important element of communication is polyglossia creation of images of “friends” and “foes”. The aim of any communication system is to regulate the behavior of subjects and programming the development of social structure. The capability and necessity of involving an individual or a group in one of the systems demonstrate their socio-cultural choice and allows in the situation of political and national uncertainty to preserve the identificational and social stability.

Social strategies of borderland groups always have been directed on the maintenance of positive identity that is an argument for maintenance of socio-cultural border. The mythologizing of “bygones”, the creation of local-group, and regional chronotope allow to fix the group in the regional space and to create the argumentation for its social capability. Thus, the constructing of “myths” on the topic of migrations, contribution to the process of development of the region, cultural and social patronage give an opportunity to interpret the regional history in favour of group or centre of political influence.

Turning back to the characteristic of the conditions of current social system in Bessarabia, it should be noticed, that ethno-groups traditionally cooperate with each other within several dimensions of the system: cultural – communicational, value-semiotic, rational and pragmatic.

Thus, the geopolitical attractiveness of the region provided the “special treatment” by the side of the main competitors. The citizens of Bessarabia have had the special statuses in different times, that provided: the right on free trade, tax exemptions (Roman and Byzantium Empire); protectionism policy by the side

¹ Коч, С. (2008). Динаміка етномовної ситуації на території Півдня Бессарабії у XVIII – XX ст. *Європейська Хартія регіональних мов або мов менишин: перспективи реалізації в Україні*. Одеса: Друкарський дім, 145-157.

of Empire centres during the period of the Ottoman Empire, tax exemptions for the farmers – migrants – colonists; special regime of administrative-territorial governance and legal regulation (Russian Empire); etc.

Poly-cultural environment is considered by all participants of the regional relations as a resource, as a potential source of influence and power, as an opportunity to act. And if the presentation of ethnic culture is considered by the local ethno-cultural groups as a way to “gain a footnote” on vital space and to provide social capability, for the centres of geopolitical influence ethnicity acts as a resource for establishment of social and political institutes for implementation their manipulation practices in the space of their states.

Considering the region as a geopolitical resource, governments of the borderland-states besides being loyal to the process of spontaneous colonization of the region, participated in the constructing of this space. The historically known projects of development of the territory evidenced about that. The special place shall be given to the project of XVIII century of creation “the New Byzantium” of the era of Phanariotes on the lands of Wallachia, Moldavia and Bessarabia that had been supported by the “Greek project” of Catherine II. The main aim of this project was to establish the Greek Empire under the rule of the Russian crown¹. Also, there was the project of agricultural colonization of Siberia and Bessarabia, suggested by the A. O. Kornilovich², the project of the “Greater Romania”, formed on the basis of anti-Turkish and anti-Phanariotes sentiments, the original purpose of which was to achieve national independence. At the beginning of XX century the uniting of all “Romanian historical provinces” within the unitary Romanian state became the task of the World War I³. Its modern version presumed the reconstruction of the “Greater Romania” within the borders before 1940⁴. The project “Greater Moldavia”, being anti-Romanian, has been orientated on the reconstruction of the borders of the Medieval Principality of Moldavia⁵.

The “Bessarabian issue” always has appeared as an element of solving the “Balkan problem”⁶. Generally, the Bessarabia has been often considered as a part of Balkan world, the distinctive feature of which is deep peripherality and problematic identity⁷.

Among the modern geopolitical constructs, it should be noted the projects of “Budjak Republic”, “Republic of Gagauzia”, “Transnistria republic”, “Federal Moldavia”. The actualization of this geopolitical constructions mostly occurs through the public organizations and political Parties: “Our Bessarabia”, “Our Country” (Ukraine), “Civil platform “Ațiunea-2012” (Romania), “Patriots of Moldova” (Moldova), each party realizes the political potential of the space of Bessarabia.

The ethno-cultural history of Bessarabia has a great number of examples that poly-ethnicity, as an inner resource has a significant potential for political activity. Nowadays, there are synchronous, but opposite by their sense, social processes, that accompanying the destruction of the old and establishment of the new state borders in the region. The uncertain-provocative status of Bessarabia has been preserved, that is evidenced by the statements of officials and media. Romania, represented by President T. Basescu, strongly advocated the return of the “occupied Romanian districts” – Bessarabia and Bukovina. These claims have been strengthened by the events in Ukraine of 2013 – 2014. Thus, on the website of the weekly *Adevarul* on the 27th of January had been made the statement that “the activity of Euromaidan and the fact, that it still has not being destroyed by the armed forces of Ukraine are the sufficient reason for the armed invasion”⁸. The geopolitical uncertainty has strengthened due to the active policy of Gagauzia that sees

¹ Маркова, О. (1958). О происхождении так называемого греческого проекта (80-е гг. XVIII в.). *История СССР*, 4, 52-78.

² Оганян, Л. (1985). Декабрист А. О. Корнилович и его проекты развития Сибири и Бессарабии. *Сибирь и декабристы*, вып. 4, 67.

³ Узун, Ю. (2013). Румынский унионизм как фактор «внутренней» и «внешней» геополитики: к проблеме государственного управления региональным развитием. *Постфактум: историко-антропологічні студії*, 3, 51.

⁴ В Румынии раздаются призывы воспользоваться ситуацией в Украине для возврата «своих» территорий (2014). *Мультимедийное информационное агентство OMEGA* 25.01.2014. <<http://omg.md/ru/114390/>>. (2016, September, 25).

⁵ *Фундамент Великой Молдовы. Как рождается новая национальная идеология* (2008). Сборник статей. Кишинев, 164. <<http://common.regnum.ru/documents/moldova-foundation.pdf>>.

⁶ Бессарабия на перекрестке европейской дипломатии. *Документы и материалы* (1996). Москва: Индрик. 380.

⁷ Карастоянов, С. (2002). *Особенности на съвременното политикогеографско положение на балканските страни*. Балканите. Политикогеографски анализи. София, 144.

⁸ *Adevarul* (2014). 27 января 2014: *Сайт еженедельника*. <<http://adevarul.ro/news/>>. (2015, June, 15).

in Romania a threat to its autonomy and national identity. According to the legislation of Moldova, in case of disappearance of Moldova as an independent state, Gagauzia shall become independent that is evidenced by the referendum in Gagauzia on February 2, 2014¹. Russia and Turkey are ready to act as guarantors of Gagauzia independence. During the visit to Moldova on October 18, 2018 the President of Turkey Recep Erdogan suggested to Gagauzians “love that extends borders” meaning the extension of the “Turkic world”². Russia, in its turn, involves Gagauzia into the “Orthodox Christianity”. However, in this case, the vector of integration of Gagauzia coincides with the intention of unrecognized Transnistrian Moldovan Republic³. Such conditions of development of the region explain the maintenance of the system of local identities that due to their “ability to transform” can ensure social order and retain capability upon the conditions of political uncertainty.

Local identity is convenient to use in socio-political practice, because it enables groups to adapt to different geopolitical transformations without significant changes in their identity, maintaining the main elements of socio-cultural system. In the same time, the formation of multiple identities within ethnic communities is caused by the following necessities: to combine several cultural and national reference points, to maintain the opportunity to activate the specific vectors of culture according to the need, to maintain the positive identity and internal complementarity in the region due to the minor exterior modelling. For example, the respondents, who have been identified as members of only “Greek” or only “Bulgarian” group, in other version – only “Bulgarian” or only “Gagauzian” group, in third version – only “Moldovan” or only “Romanian” group, cannot clearly explain the differences between these groups.

Conclusions. Social capability of the local groups in Bessarabia became a result of the settlement of the region when socio-cultural borders of the group act as a basis for settling social statuses.

Geopolitical conditions of region’s development and political instability during two and half centuries have preserved and fixed the practices of social lobbying and social reservation by groups that became conditions of preservation and sustainability of the local regional system. Dynamic of the transformation of centre-peripheral systems predetermined the formation of specific models of transcultural behavior on the level of group and individual practices.

The ethnic groups of Bessarabia have formed ability to act as a “lobbyists”, “guides” of interests of their groups in metropolis⁴ or vice versa to act as a “foreign lobbyists” and to become an instrument of influence on political and economic institutes of the state of residence. Such activity has a number of preconditions: involvement of the ethnic groups into the international network, created by the representatives of their people; presence of a systematic connection with the metropolis. The culture of the ethnic groups and their connection with their metropolis are significant diplomatic resources. In accordance with that, it should be mentioned about the relations between Moldova and Greece, which positions on the periphery of the European Union have many similar problems. However, the government of Greece supported the European intentions of Moldova⁵. The similar situation is in the Gagauz-Turkish union. Ankara tried to take under control political and social processes in Gagauzia autonomy. Although Gagauzia has made a statement of its intention to integrate into the Customs Union, Turkey still has been an active “Maecenas” in cultural and educational spheres; Turkey forms the instrument of influence on the political processes in Transnistria, Moldova and South Ukraine. While the Turkish presence in the region is realized through the systematic support of the ethnically related people – Gagauzians and Gagauzia autonomy and interests of Bulgaria are represented by the institutes of Bulgarian ethnic groups, Russia and Romania consider as an object of their interest the whole region.

¹ Референдум в Гагаузии: итоги 04.02.2014 г *Международная организация по наблюдению за выборами CIS-ЕМО* <<http://www.cis-emo.net/ru/news/referendum-v-gagauzii-itogi>>. (2015, September, 15).

² Выступление Реджепа Тайипа Эрдогана в Комрате 21.10.2018 (2018). <http://gagauzinfo.md/index.php?newsid=43274&fbclid=iwar1occcvripwcsxb-jl3z92j_a0vjemkrpxb0wedg_v_oenrcgnpusqnn50> (2018, November, 08).

³ Указ об утверждении Государственной стратегии экономической безопасности Приднестровской Молдавской Республики 2013 (Президент Приднестровской Молдавской Республики). *Официальный сайт Президента Приднестровской Молдавской Республики*. <<http://president.gospmr.ru/ru/news/ukaz-prezidenta-pmr-no558-ob-utverzhdenii-gosudarstvennoy-strategii-ekonomicheskoy-bezopasnosti>>. (2015, August, 18).

⁴ Коч, С. (2014). Этническое лоббирование как социальная практика в пограничье (на материалах исследования Бессарабии). *Перекрёстки. Журнал исследований восточноевропейского Пограничья*, 1–2, 46–65.

⁵ Старыш, К. (2007). Молдова-Греция: политический роман. *Независимая Молдова*. 15.06.2007 <<http://www.nm.md/article/moldova-greciya-politicheskiy-roman>>. (2018, September, 18).

Usually the borderland regions have an ability to maintain their features, regardless of changes of the political centre, moreover, they have an ability to situationally “choose” the centre that acts as a guarantee of social tasks realization. The current multidimensionality of cultural base and “the practice of presence” in Bessarabia determine the formation of structural model and behavior scheme in the region that enable it, in spite of systematic decentralization, “to save face”.

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