



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe
Mission to Moldova

CONFERENCE

20 YEARS OF GAGAUZ YERI

Speech by Jan Plešinger

Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova

[Check against delivery]

Comrat, 12 December 2014

Mr President(s),
Your Excellences,
Mr Bashkan and Speaker of Peoples' Assembly,
Esteemed guests,

Let me extend to you the OSCE Mission's warmest congratulations on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Gagauzian autonomy in Moldova.

One of the underlying documents of the OSCE is the "Paris Charter for a New Europe" of 1990. In this Charter the participating states pledge to "foster the rich contribution of national minorities to the life of our societies" and to improve their situation. They state that "friendly relations among our peoples, as well as peace, justice, stability and democracy, require that the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities be protected and conditions for the promotion of that identity be created." Therefore, the issue of the rights of national minorities is always one of the priorities in the activities of OSCE, and no less for this Mission.

The adoption in 1994 of the Law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia was a commitment on the part of the Chisinau authorities to provide the Gagauzians with specific protection of their national identity. Provision to Gagauzia of the rights and obligations of Autonomous Territorial Unit was a decision of utmost importance not only for Gagauzians but for Moldova as a whole. Nevertheless, the comprehensive implementation of the Autonomy Law has proved to be a challenge. It appears that autonomy of Gagauzia within the administrative-territorial division of Moldova and the devolution of competencies between Chisinau and Comrat were not sufficiently well defined in order for the autonomy to function effectively.

The OSCE Mission to Moldova has over the years encouraged constructive dialogue between the authorities of the Autonomy and central authorities in order to clarify the competencies of the Autonomy within Moldovan legislation. Therefore in April we welcomed the creation of the joint Commission of deputies of Moldovan Parliament and Gagauzian Peoples' Assembly to tackle this issue.

The Commission met four times, but instead of establishing consensus the respective deputies put forth two separate sets of proposals on how to amend Moldova's legislation in order to harmonize it with the Special Status Law. Nevertheless, agreement was reached on three important points. First, the deputies of both legislative assemblies agreed that it is necessary to make amendments to Moldovan legislation in order to eliminate discrepancies between the national and the autonomous

units' legislation. Second, they agreed that Gagauzia's legal status in the territorial-administrative structure of Moldova has to be elevated to a "special level", distinct from other regions or raions. And third, the members of the Commission agreed that other issues of concern to the representatives of Gagauzia, in addition to the ones strictly related to the implementation of the Special Status Law, can and may be discussed within joint commissions or other fora.

Our Mission hopes that a new Moldovan Government will publicly underscore its strong commitment to an inclusive society, critical to fostering a strong sense of national unity out of Moldova's rich multicultural fabric. One way to do this is by making the Gagauzian autonomy function successfully. The Mission in coordination with the High Commissioner on National Minorities has identified three steps a new Government and Parliament could embrace within its first 100 days to set that process in motion.

- 1) Establish a permanent body to maintain and facilitate an active and constructive dialogue, be it a new Commission or a permanent Working Group, either within the executive or legislative branches, composed of representatives of both Chisinau and Comrat. Their aim would be to work out a comprehensive plan to implement the Autonomy Law and amend the Moldovan legislation accordingly, while taking into account proposals from both regional and central authorities.

- 2) Ensure that Gagauzia within Moldovan legislation has a special level administrative structure within the ongoing decentralization process in Moldova.

- 3) Complete the development of the National Minorities Integration Strategy in close cooperation with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities office. In that context, undertake measures to improve in Gagauzia the quality and availability of the study of the state language for both children and adults.

The OSCE remains ready to help Moldova and Gagauzia where assistance is needed and welcomed.

Thank you for your attention.