Chapter TK

THE GAGAUZ

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The Gagauz are a Turkic-speaking group adhering to the Christian Orthodox faith. Today, the majority of them live in the autonomous region of the Republic of Moldova called *Gagauz Yeri* (or *Gagauziya* in the Moldovan language) and its neighboring districts in the Ukraine. Smaller groups of Gagauz live in Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and pockets in the Caucasus.

In the 1989 census, the Gagauz numbered roughly 153,000 (3.5 percent of the country's population); at the same time, there were about 31,000 Gagauz in the neighboring regions of Ukraine. About 13,000 Gagauz live in other parts of the former Soviet Union. A significant group lives in Bulgaria, but there is no reliable head count; various authors have estimated their numbers between 30,000 and 300,000.[1] According to a 1992 census in Bulgaria, however, they numbered only 1,478, of whom a mere 402 claimed Gagauz as their mother tongue.[2] This low number is somewhat doubtful, but it nevertheless reflects the way the Gagauz in Bulgaria regard their ethnic identity. (I shall return to this point below.) In Greece and Romania, the number of Gagauz is unknown, but it probably does not even reach 1,000 in either country.

Their population in Turkey—where individuals and groups of Gagauz migrated during the 1930s—is also uncertain; in all probability, most of them assimilated quickly. Nowadays, a number of Gagauz are working temporarily in Turkey.

At the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, some Gagauz migrated to South America, but little is known of them.

Origins

Because the Gagauz are not mentioned in historical sources—at least not under their modern ethnonym—their history tends to be murky. Only since the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth has this ethnonym appeared in the sources.[3] The Gagauz entered the historical sources with their migration from what is today Bulgaria to Bessarabia—then part of the Russian Empire—at the end of the eighteenth century and especially in the aftermath of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1806-12. After the war, the Russian emperor invited Christian settlers from the Ottoman territories to cultivate the southern Bessarabian region of Budjak. Having migrated to the Russian Empire together with Bulgarians, the Gagauz tended to be treated officially as Turkish-speaking Bulgarians until the end of the nineteenth century (Radova 1995, p. 268). At the beginning of the twentieth century, spurred by agrarian reforms promulgated by Pyotr Stolypin (1906-14), some groups went farther afield and settled in Kazakhstan and the Caucasus region.

There is no documentation to explain when (and from where) the Gagauz settled in Balkan territory—i.e., the region that today falls mostly within Bulgaria. In Ottoman times, authorities only mentioned religious groups in tax registers and similar sources. The Ottoman tradition of recognizing the empire's subjects according to their religion obviously also shaped the self-awareness of their non-Muslim subjects in the pre-nation period. The Gagauz referred to

themselves simply as *millet*, Christian, or—again pointing to their confession—as Greeks. Furthermore, as noted by Pees (1894, p. 82) in his anthropological article on the Gagauz: ". . . the Gagauz have almost no tradition on their origin. Some families claim that they stem from the interior of Bulgaria, others that they came from the Greek coasts. But for the bulk of the people, no tradition is preserved." Therefore, much latitude exists for speculation and "history making."

Basically, there are two main hypotheses on the origin and ethnogenesis of the Gagauz: one claiming a Turkic origin and the other a non-Turkic origin.

The non-Turkic thesis has two main subgroups. One claims that the Gagauz were descendants of Pechenegs and Kumans, who, coming from the north in the eleventh century, several times raided the region that nowadays falls mainly within Bulgaria. During this period, groups of Pechenegs and Kumans were settled in various regions of Bulgaria (Jireček 1876, pp. 201-10). These groups—or, according to various researchers, only the one or the other—subsequently mingled with Oghuz Turks and thus formed the Gagauz. This thesis mainly serves to explain their Christian faith, because Christianity was not uncommon among the Pechenegs and the Kumans. It should be noted, however, that there are no traces of a Kipchak origin in the Gagauz language, which is a purely Western Oghuz language. Interestingly, Pees (1894, p. 82) also mentions that among Bulgarians, the idea that the Gagauz could be ancestors of the old Bolgars and thus be related to the modern Bulgarians gained greater popularity at the time he made his observations (see also the quotation from Mladenov 1931 in Manov 1940, p. 32). Pees stresses

the political implications of this thesis "because it makes a sister people instead of a conquered one out of the Gagauz, trying to remove them from Greek influence and reconcile them with the Bulgarian supreme power" (Pees, p. 82).

The second thesis, pointing to the linguistic facts, claims a pure Oghuz origin for the Gagauz. According to this thesis, a group of Anatolian Seljuk Turks fell under the sway of the Byzantine Empire in the thirteenth century. They adopted Christianity and were settled by the Byzantine emperor in Dobruja, which is today part of Bulgaria and Romania.

The non-Turkic thesis, on the other hand, claims that the Gagauz were simply either Bulgarians or Greeks who changed their language in order to avoid pressure from Ottoman authorities. The arguments for this are based mostly on anthropological similarities and the fact that the Gagauz language shows some syntactical resemblance to Slavic languages.

Because of the scanty historiographic evidence, it is difficult if not impossible to decide definitively among the various theses.

The Matter of Their Ethnonym

Older ethnographic works such as Pees (1894) and Jireček (1891)—both covering the Gagauz in Bulgaria—mention that only their neighbors used the ethnonym *Gagauz,* partly as an insult. The Gagauz themselves did not use this self-designation; indeed, they considered it offensive. Both Pees and Jireček mention that the Gagauz in Bulgaria tended to register either as Greek because of their religion (clearly an outcome of the Ottoman *millet*-system) or as Bulgarian because of the newly emerging concept of nationalism. According to

Pees informants from Moldova, the Gagauz there called themselves *Hıristiyan-Bulgar* (Christian Bulgars), and *Gagauz* was used only as a nickname (Pees 1894, p. 90).

The etymology of the ethnonym Gagauz is as unclear as their history. As noted above, they are not mentioned—at least not under that name—in any historical sources before their immigration into Bessarabia. Therefore, we have no older versions of this ethnonym. This, combined with the report that the Gagauz felt offended when called by this name, makes the etymology somewhat dubious. Nevertheless, a number of researchers and Gagauz intellectuals have proposed various explanations. Some of these explanations are obvious folk etymologies, and there is no consensus on any of them.

Most proposals assume that the name contains the element *uz* or *guz,* which they connect to the tribal name *Oghuz.* That leaves the element *gaga,* which is supposed to be a tribal name of unknown origin. We also are faced with the problem that both *uz* and *ghuz* are designations for the Oghuz in Byzantine and Arabic sources, respectively—i.e., they are not self-designations. Some propose an element *auz,* which is supposed to have developed from Oghuz, thus leaving the element *gag,* which is explained as having developed from *gök, hak,* or *ak.* All these explanations have serious problems with the historical development of Oghuzic phonetics and phonology.

An alternative etymology was proposed by Wittek (1952), who believed that the Gagauz were the offspring of a group of Rum-Seljuks who surrendered to the Byzantine emperor; thus, he attributed the name to a leader of this group, the Seljuk prince Kaykaus.[4]

There are additional explanations of the name *Gagauz,* but most of them cannot be taken seriously and are clearly only superficial combinations—such as that of Jireček (cited after Pees 1984, p. 81), who suggests that the words *gaga* (beak) and *us* (straight) are supposed to mean "those who speak out as they think," because the Gagauz like a good talk!

Most of these explanations obviously are linked to the speculations about the ethnogenesis of the Gagauz. In connection with the etymological problem of the ethnonym *Gagauz,* one should always keep in mind that this very name was first mentioned in written sources in the eighteenth century (Radova 1995, p. 268). Before that, they were recognized in Moldova as Turkish-speaking Bulgarians. The term *Gagauz* probably was initially not a self-designation but rather a label given by neighboring ethnic groups. Both these facts tend to support the possibility of a non-Turkic etymological root. Today, *Gagauz* is a neutral ethnonym. Interestingly enough, however, since the 1980s—corresponding to the major political changes in Eastern Europe—some authors have started to change the ethnonym *Gagauz* into *Gagavuz* or *Gagouz* or even *Gagoğuz*[5] (the latter despite the fact that the official alphabet does not contain the letter ğ, the "soft g" of Turkish), thus making a statement about both the etymology of the word and the ethnogenesis of this people.

In his extensive article about the Gagauz in Bulgaria, Pees (1894) observed that they called themselves either Greek or Bulgarian, even though they knew those respective languages only purely. He also mentions that the Gagauz saw themselves traditionally as Greeks because of their religion, and only after the

establishment of Bulgaria did they start to claim to be Bulgarians. Carrying out fieldwork among the Gagauz in Bulgaria in 1993 and in Moldova in 1995, it struck me—when speaking with members of the respective groups about their history and self-perception, as a group differing from the majority in their countries—that the Gagauz in Bulgaria claimed to be "pure Bulgarians" *(temiz Bulgar*, in their words), whereas the Gagauz in Moldova claimed Turkic ancestry.

In Bulgaria, every Gagauz with whom I spoke emphasized the fact that he or she was of Bulgarian descent. They uniformly explained that the Gagauz had shifted to the Turkish language in order to be able to keep their faith under the pressure of Ottoman rule. They referred to the Pomaks, who took the opposite tack and converted to Islam. I heard many stories about young girls who threw themselves into the Black Sea to avoid a forced marriage to an Ottoman nobleman or rape by Ottoman soldiers. This theme is also reflected in the folk literature (to which I will return below).

One explanation for this rejection of "Turkishness" is, of course, the very rigid policy against minorities carried out by the Bulgarian government from the 1960s onward. This policy, aiming to build a single nation-state by assimilating all (and especially Muslim) minorities, even led to a complete denial of the existence of a Turkish minority in Bulgaria. Accordingly, all Muslims in Bulgaria were regarded as Bulgarians who were forcibly converted to Islam during the Ottoman period (Eminov 1997). This policy—including discrimination in hiring, use of their language, and so forth—of course made it much more attractive for a Christian minority to attribute their diversity to external forces. It should not be forgotten, however, that already a century earlier the Gagauz had tended to

register as Greek or Bulgarian in the national censuses. That seems to indicate that, as an extension of the traditional Ottoman concept of *millet,* religion is the main factor for the Gagauz of Bulgaria in choosing their national identity.

In Moldova, the situation was different. In the Russian Empire, the Gagauz were relatively privileged, enjoying exemption from taxes and military service (Troebst 1999, pp. 42-43). Under Romanian rule, however—between 1866 and 1878, and especially after 1918—they were pressed to assimilate, and some were forced to settle into Romania proper. They were required to serve in the military, where they had to speak Romanian. Efforts also were made to teach Romanian in the villages.[6]

In 1944, Moldova finally came under Soviet control as the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, remaining so until its independence as the Republic of Moldova in 1991. In 1957, Gagauz was recognized as one of the Soviet Union's official languages, with a Cyrillic-based alphabet. Soviet researchers stressed an alleged Kipchak layer in the Gagauz language, possibly to emphasize a supposed distance between Gagauz and Turkish. Between 1959 and 1962, there was language instruction in schools that had Gagauz pupils, but this was abolished in 1962, allegedly because parents preferred a monolingual Russian education. During the *perestroika/glasnost* era, Gagauz language instruction was reinstigated. Nevertheless, the Soviet-wide censuses of 1974 and 1989 indicate that the Gagauz tended to stick to their native tongue more closely than did other minorities living in the Soviet Union.

During my research, I found that the typical Gagauz villager was conscious of a certain relationship to the Turkic world but not

especially interested in the matter of the exact affiliation and the history of the people in pre-Bessarabian times.[7] (Christianity was an important factor for distinguishing themselves mainly from the Turks of Turkey.) The intellectuals, as can be expected, were far more interested in their history and their affiliation with the Turkic world. Even so, they felt a need to distinguish themselves from the Turks of Turkey because of their distinct religions. This led to the compilation of a history of the Gagauz along the lines of the theory linking the Gagauz with the Pechenegs and Kumans. The Seljuk historical theory is completely disregarded or simply not mentioned.[8] Even the Scythians sometimes are cited as ancestors of the Gagauz, an ancestry that for some reason is quite popular among the Turkic people of the former Soviet Union. There is also a claim for the existence of an independent Gagauz state in Dobruja that allegedly flourished until it fell under "the control of the Ottoman conquerors in the fifteenth century." The "many oppressive years under Ottoman rule" serve for the Moldovan Gagauz as an explanation for their migration into Bessarabia, but—in contrast to the sentiments of the Gagauz in Bulgaria—not as a claim of being non-Turkic. The emphasis on their "Turkic" identity is, according to my observations, also supported by an increased use of "Turkic" motifs in fine arts—especially themes from the great heroic past.[9]

The Language

The Gagauz language is Oghuzic (West Turkic) and linguistically can be regarded as a dialect of Turkish (Doerfer 1959). After 1957—when Gagauz was named one of the USSR's official languages and a Cyrillic alphabet was created—a Gagauz grammar, a Gagauz-

Russian-Moldavian dictionary, and some textbooks were published. As noted above, Gagauz language instruction was introduced in schools in 1959 and suspended in 1962. During the *glasnost* era, much was done to support the language, and Gagauz became a compulsory subject in all schools for all children in the autonomous region.

In the post-Soviet period—as was the case for many minority languages of the former USSR—a Latin alphabet was created for Gagauz. Since January 1996, Gagauz has been officially written with a Latin-based script—albeit a slightly different script from that used in Turkey. Because of its relatively low number of speakers, and its having been a purely oral language for so long, Gagauz was and is influenced by neighboring languages, which have greater prestige and/or a larger number of speakers (Menz 2003).

As a result of centuries of contact with Slavic languages, Gagauz shows significant differences from Turkish on various levels. Phonology and morphology are basically the same as in Turkish, but other levels changed due to the influence of Bulgarian and Russian. For example, intonation patterns are heavily influenced by Russian. On the syntactic level, moreover, we find a lot of copies from Russian and Bulgarian clause models. In simple finite clauses, the neutral word order became subject/verb/object—as, for example, in *bän gideim babuma* (I want to go to my grandmother). Also because of the long-lasting contact with Slavic languages, a lot of embedded non-finite clause types vanished from Gagauz and were replaced by finite ones. Relative clauses, for example, are almost exclusively built as finite clauses, such that the counterpart for the Turkish *para verdiğim adam* (the man to whom I gave money) occurs in Gagauz as *adam angısına para verdim.*

The lexicon is also a level of the language that shows various layers of different language-contact situations. In modern times, of course, a significant number of Russian loan-words entered the language, mainly from political, technical, and economic terminology. For example: *avtonomiy* (autonomy), *akuşerka* (midwife), and *jeleznodorjnik* (railwayman). A lot of family terms have come from Bulgarian: *babu* (grandmother, old woman), *çiçu* (uncle on the father's side), *svatu* (father of the bride or bridegroom), *dädu* (grandfather, old man). Numerous agricultural terms from the household sphere are Romanian loan-words, such as *furkulitsa* (fork).

Interestingly, Gagauz religious terminology has a great many Arabo-Persian words, including such basic terms as *Allah* (God), *dua* (prayer), *oruç* (fasting), *kurban* (sacrifice), etc. Special Christian terms are mostly of Greek origin, such as *ayos* (saint) and *aydimu* (altar), but sometimes there are also loan-words from Russian, such as *kolada,* a custom connected with Christmas.

Nowadays, because of increased contact with Turkish—through the media or personal contacts with Turks—more and more Turkish vocabulary has entered the Gagauz language. During my visit to Moldova in 1995, a heated debate was raging over Turkish loan-words. It was stated that the Gagauz could not understand them, and therefore they should not be used in the media. On the other hand, journalists were making an effort to introduce to the public the new words they had learned during language courses in Turkey. Because the Gagauz language was mostly restricted to the family sphere, and typically in rural areas, vocabulary did not so much develop as be copied from Russian.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, when discussions were underway about changing the school language instruction from Russian to Gagauz, some Gagauz intellectuals argued in favor of replacing Russian loan-words with Turkish words or artificially created Gagauz terms. Such a change, however, did not occur.

In the end, a language with no more than 350,000 speakers remains in a precarious if not dangerous situation.

Gagauz Culture

Folklore

The culture of the Gagauz contains elements that resemble those of their neighbors as well as elements connecting them with the Turks of the Balkans and Turkey.

Manov (1938) contains a good description of Gagauz religious beliefs and folklore, which is, not surprisingly, shaped in large part by Christianity.[10] Several Christian holidays—*paskalya* (Easter) and *kolada* (a Christmas festivity), as well as fasting and feasts for the saints according to Orthodox tradition, and rituals related to birth, baptism, marriage, and death—of course have much in common with the rituals observed by their fellow-believers. In his book on the history of the Gagauz, Ciachir (1934, p. 3) states: *"Gagauzlar her yerde tutarlar hristian dinini, zere onlar ortodox hristian olup, eydinli, religialıklı, diyanetli insanlardır."* [The Gagauz stick to the Christian faith everywhere, because they are Orthodox Christians, and faithful, devout, and religious people.] Even if we have to be judicious in evaluating the writings of Ciachir, who was a priest, today most of the Gagauz still regard themselves as good Christians. Even during the Soviet period, children were baptized. One informant told me

that even if the father was a Communist Party member who would not opt for baptism, the child's mother would take the child to a priest and the father would pretend not to have noticed. Nevertheless, not surprisingly for a rural area where religion is clearly to be understood as mainly folk religion, this probably holds true for all theologically untrained Christians in rural regions all over Europe. In some of the turn-of-the-twentieth-century fairy tales and stories documented by Moškov, we find several saints (St. Peter, St. Nicholas, etc.) and even God as a personage walking on earth and acting in various—not always pious—ways.

Several beliefs regarding natural phenomena or animals are obviously common beliefs in the Balkans, and sometimes they are even more widespread. For example, the belief that the voice of an owl is a bad omen or even a sign of imminent death can be found in Turkey as well as in Russia and northwestern Europe.

Besides customs rooted in their Christian faith, we can also find similarities with, for example, wedding traditions in Turkey—as described in Pees (1894) and Zajączkowski (1966). These customs might well have a regional distribution regardless of religion.

One custom among the Gagauz that would seem to be a candidate for a Turkic element in Gagauz folklore is the *Canavar yortusu* (Wolf celebration). From November 10 to 17, women are not supposed to sew anything. If they fail to observe this regulation, a wolf supposedly will come and bite the person who wears what was sewn during that week. This tradition—together with the fact that the wolf is called by the general word for *beast*—might well point to a tradition connected to a sheep-breeding society, and not so much to the wolf of Turkic mythology. Further research is needed to

determine whether this tradition is found elsewhere in the Turkic world or among the inhabitants of the Balkans.

Literature

Not surprisingly, we find a lot of elements in the Gagauz oral literature that connect it with the Turkish oral literature and the folk literature of their Slavic neighbors. This holds for motifs as well as for formal styles.

Moškov's substantial collection of texts from Moldova contains fairy tales, legends, riddles, proverbs, and poems—thus giving a good overview of the Gagauz oral literature of the nineteenth century. In Zajączkowski (1966), and to a lesser extent in Manov (1938), we find examples for the folk literature of the Gagauz of Bulgaria—namely, fairy tales, riddles, proverbs, and examples of poetry. Today we also find a lot of examples of folk literature—in written and sometimes literary adapted forms—in schoolbooks and journals for children that aim to foster their knowledge of their mother tongue.

In the fairy tales, one encounters personages well known from Turkish literature, such as Nasradin/Nastradin (Nasreddin Hoca), Tepegöz, and Kelcä (Keloğlan), as well as Slavic names such as Yuvan or Yuvancu. Moškov's collections also contains fairy tales with quasi-religious content, including God and the saints. These tales are not legends of the sufferings of the saints but rather stories of how God, while strolling with a saint (typically, St. Peter), teaches a lesson to idlers, thieves, or thugs. Legends about historical persons, such as King Marko, the famous Serbian hero (see Zajączkowski 1966, pp. 102-5), and Alexander the Great (see Moškov 1904, pp. 48-53), were

known and told among the Gagauz. A comparative study of Gagauz, Turkish, and Slavic or Balkan fairy tales would shed more light on the inter-ethnic relationships. Gagauz riddles and proverbs are very similar to Turkish ones—in style as well as content. Some of the Gagauz (and Turkish) proverbs also have counterparts among the various ethnic groups in the Balkans (Schubert 1991).

The *türkü* and the *mani* or *mane*—a four-line poetic form very common among the Turkic people—are also widespread in the oral literature of the Gagauz. A subspecies of the *türkü* is a collection of Christian songs in Gagauz for specific religious occasions, such as the *kolada* songs for Christmas. Turkish songs are sung, as are Bulgarian songs or translations of them (Moškov 1904, pp. 319-20). One even finds the *Yemen türküsü*—so popular as a folk song in Turkey—in the material gathered among the Gagauz in Bulgaria (Zajączkowski 1966, p. 87). As mentioned above, one theme in folk literature is the story of a young girl who drowns herself to escape Ottoman soldiers. There is now a publication of this legend in four different languages—Russian, Romanian, Bulgarian, and Gagauz.

Written literature is a more recent development, dating from the beginning of the twentieth century with the works of Mihail Ciachir, a Gagauz priest. After translating the gospels and other religious texts into Gagauz, he compiled a Gagauz-Romanian dictionary and wrote *The History of the Gagauz of Bessarabia.*[11] He used the Latin alphabet, following the rules for writing Romanian. He was, however, the only one to write in Gagauz until the end of the 1950s, when a Cyrillic-based Gagauz alphabet was created.

After Gagauz was made one of the Soviet Union's official languages, some writers emerged. The most popular among them is

Dimitri Karaçoban, who wrote short stories and poetry. He became the example and the teacher for a whole generation of Gagauz writers. One of his "pupils" is the historian and journalist Stepan Bulgar, who writes short stories and essays. Poetry, however, is the most popular genre among Gagauz writers; the best-known poets are Mine Köse, Fedor Zanet, and Petr Cebotar. Thus far, only one Gagauz novel has been published—a historical novel called *Uzun Kervan (The Long Caravan),* by Dionis Tanasoglu.

The Autonomous Region

With the *perestroika/glasnost* era came great changes in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1988, the Gagauz—following the example of the Moldavian Popular Front—established *Gagauz Halkı* (the Gagauz People's Movement). The main issues of the organization were the promotion of the Gagauz language and culture and a negative attitude toward the Soviet system—or, to be precise, its policy toward minorities.

Regarding the minority policy, the Moldavian Popular Front and the Gagauz People's Movement initially saw eye-to-eye. But then the radicalization of the Romanian majority led to a radicalization of the Gagauz. On August 31, 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the Moldavian SSR adopted a new law declaring that Moldavian (i.e., Romanian) would be the official language of the republic; the Cyrillic script was to be replaced by a Latin one. The main goal of this law, of course, was "de-Russification" in all spheres of public life. The declaration, though, affected not only the Russian minority but also the Gagauz, who were traditionally bilingual, using Russian as their second or sometimes even first language.[12]

A direct outcome of the adoption of the language law was the declaration of the "Gagauz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (GASSR) within the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR)" by the *Gagauz Halkı* on November 12, 1989. This, of course, was never recognized by the Moldavian Supreme Soviet. The next incident that disrupted the relationship between the Gagauz and the authorities was a report on the history of the Moldavian Republic issued by the parliament in August 1990. The report stated that the Gagauz were not indigenous residents of the republic, that their homeland was Bulgaria, and that they came to the territory of the Moldavian SSR at the invitation of the Russian czar. Thus, they were labeled an "ethnic group," as opposed to a "nation." According to this report, the status of the Gagauz as an ethnic group denied them the right to claim territory.[13]

Outrage over the report led to a Gagauz declaration of secession from the Moldavian SSR. The Gagauz territories were meant to stay a part of the Soviet Union but no longer of the MSSR. At the same time, elections for a Gagauz parliament were announced for October 1990. Only one day after the secession declaration was issued, the Supreme Soviet of the Moldavian SSR deemed it unconstitutional. At this point, the MSSR started to put pressure on the *Gagauz Halkı:* some of its members were arrested, and the organization was dissolved. The rising mutual animosities led to tensions in Gagauz cities, the chief instigators being Moldavian "volunteers" who tried to enter the region to disturb and/or prevent the planned elections. When the situation started getting out of control, with violent outbreaks, the government asked the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs to send troops and regain control over the

region. When government troops arrived, the Moldavian "volunteers" departed, thus averting civil war.

Gagauz elections occurred on October 28, 1990. On December 12, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the "Gagauz Soviet Socialist Republic" —as it was called then—assembled for the first time. The Gagauz, unnerved by the possibility that independence from Moscow could lead to a "reunification" with Romania, sided with Moldavia's Russian minority in its conflict over the Transdniestria region.

With Moldavia's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union on August 27, 1991, and its establishment as the Republic of Moldova, relations between the Gagauz and the Moldovan government reached their lowest point. In 1992, however, a process got underway that led to a peaceful solution to the conflict. After almost two years of negotiations, the Moldovan parliament agreed to a "law on the special legal status of Gagauzia" in December 1994. This law guaranteed an autonomous territory for the Gagauz as part of the Republic of Moldova. It also established the right of independence for *Gagauz Yeri* in the event of unification of the Republic of Moldova with Romania. Gagauz, Russian, and Romanian were designated the official languages of the autonomous region.

On March 5, 1995, a referendum was held in all of the towns and villages of southern Moldova. Residents could vote on whether or not their town or village should join *Gagauz Yeri (Gagauzia).* As a result of the referendum, thirty communities—a total of 171,500 people—joined *Gagauz Yeri,* choosing Comrat as their capital. Because not all of the villages and towns decided to join, the territory of *Gagauz Yeri* consists of four disparate sections. Despite the lack of a single contiguous region, the process that led to the establishment of

Gagauz Yeri has often been cited as a good example of how inter-ethnic tensions and independence claims can be resolved peaceably.

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[1] Compare Zajączkowski (1966b), p. 6, with Özkan (1996), p. 28.

[2] Census cited from Troebst (1999), p. 43.

[3] For a discussion about the etymology of the name *Gagauz,* see below.

[4] Detailed compilations of the various etymologies can be found in Manov (1938) and Özkan (1996). Pokrovskaya (1996) made a recent alternative proposal.

[5] See, for example, the journal *Gagoğuz Kültür Sanat Dergisi,* published in Chişinău, capital of the Republic of Moldova.

[6] These efforts achieved almost nothing in the long run. In the 1989 census, only 4.4 percent of the Gagauz in the Soviet Union had a command of Moldavian (i.e., Romanian): see Fane 1993, p. 143.

[7] This apparent lack of interest is reminiscent of the observations made by Pees (1894, p. 82) among the Gagauz in Bulgaria, but it might well be explained by a preoccupation with more urgent daily tasks, such as earning a living and making ends meet.

[8] Compare, for example, the web page created by a student of the Department of Modern Languages at Moldova State University (www.iatp/md/multimedia/Gagauzia/history_of_gagauzia.htm).

[9] See, for example, the report on the Gagauz in *Atlas* 109 (2002), pp. 84-85. A picture shows Tanas Karaçoban, a sculptor who is working on a statue of Oghuz Khan to be erected in the city of Comrat (or Komrat), capital of the *Gagauz Yeri.*

[10] Manov also points to similarities in rituals and beliefs among the Slavic people.

[11] Ciachir's book was reprinted in the Turkish alphabet in 1998.

[12] See also footnote 6. Note, however, that the language law contained a section stating that in areas where the majority of the inhabitants are of Gagauz nationality, the official languages are Gagauz and Russian (see Fane 1993, p. 143).

[13] An excerpt of passages in this report concerning the Gagauz appears in Fane 1993, pp. 143-44.