

Diversity and Tolerance in a Multi-Ethnic Region of Mari El Republic, Russia

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Abstract

The article is dedicated to the problem of tolerance preservation under the conditions of national and cultural diversity of civil society on the example of the Republic of Mari El—a multi-ethnic region of the Russian Federation. On the basis of the analysis of earlier pedagogical and sociological research the ethnic, linguistic and confessional diversity of the Republic population has been described. The study of tolerance motivation of different population groups including teachers, students, experts, representatives of public authorities, civil society organizations and the mass media has been presented. A detailed description has been given to the most important conditions of the formation and tolerance manifestation in a multi-ethnic region: state policy and inter-cultural approach to education. The research has indicated that the present state of civil society in the Republic is characterized by the real inter-cultural tolerance being formed under the conditions of multinational diversity of the region due to the sensible politics of the regional government in social sphere, culture and education.

Keywords: diversity, tolerance, state regional policy, education, intercultural approach

1. Introduction

The terrorist attack against the contributors of Charlie Hebdo magazine in January 2015 which caused a wave of anti-Islamic and pro-Muslim protest actions all over the world revealed an old latent problem. The ideology of multiculturalism has led a modern European society to the severe crisis of principles of their own set-up—secularity, tolerance and freedom of all kinds (Headley, 2012). According to Western analysts, all this makes the problem of possible collision of civilizations prevention quite acute (Cassidy, 2015). Therefore, the analysis of the Russian experience when many ethnic groups and religions have been coexisting peacefully for many centuries is of great value.

The objective of the article is to study the conditions under which tolerance is formed and manifested in a multi-ethnic region. The subject of the research is diversity and tolerance of civil society of the Republic of Mari El as one of the multi-ethnic regions in Russia.

The Mari El Republic is the national Republic within the Russian Federation. It is one of subjects the Russian Federation belonging to the Volga Federal District. It is situated in the East European Plain in its eastern part in the Middle Volga Region where the biggest rivers come together—these are the Volga, the Vetluga and the Sura. The length of the Republic from north to south measures 150km, from west to east—275km. The length of the borders exceeds 1200 km. In the north, northeast and east Mari El borders the Kirov Oblast, in the south and southeast—the Republic of Tatarstan and the Chuvash Republic, in the west and northwest—the Nizhny Novgorod Oblast. Such geographical position of the republic has determined its ethnic and cultural diversity. Representatives of more than 100 ethnic groups inhabit the Republic.

The assumption that the present state of civil society in the Republic of Mari El is characterized by a true inter-ethnic tolerance being formed under the conditions of the region's multinational diversity, which has been reached due to the sensible politics of the regional government in social sphere, culture and education, is the hypothesis of the research.

2. Methods

An interdisciplinary (sociology, education, psychology) approach and research design was used, combining

qualitative and quantitative research, including the following methods:

- 1) Analysis of official statistics and results of published sociological research;
- 2) Survey of policy and local authorities;
- 3) Questionnaire survey of 200 university students and interviews of 20 experts representing government agencies, public organizations, mass media and education;
- 4) Theoretical synthesis.

Such design of this research allows exploration of the heterogeneity and the complexity of the national, cultural and religion diversity and tolerance in Mari El Republic as a multi-ethnic region.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Diversity

Ethnic diversity. The total population of the Republic is 687.6 thousand people by 01/01/2015 (65.2% of urban population, 34.8% of rural population) (Official website..., 2014). Its ethnic structure is represented by the Russians 45.1%, the Mari 41.8%, the Tatar 5.5%, other nationalities (the Chuvash, the Udmurt, the Mordva, the Ukrainian and etc)—2.7%, without nationality identification—4.7%; nationality not given—0.2%. (Ethnic composition ..., 2012).

The title population of the Republic—the Mari—is divided into three main subethnic groups: the Mountain, the Meadow and the Eastern. The most numerous Meadow Mari (¾ of ethnic group) populate a vast low left bank of the Volga (After Volga region), the Mountain Mari inhabit the right bank of the Volga River—the northern hills of the Volga height. The Eastern Mari live East from the Vyatka River, mainly in the territory of Bashkiria.

The Mari land was populated gradually by the Russians from the middle of the 16th century. Russian peasants moved here from different places but mostly from northern districts of the Vyatka province. Mainly the Russian occupied the lands of the Yurino volost of former Vasilsursky district of the Nizhny Novgorod province whose landowners were the Sheremetevs since 1812. Now the majority of population of the republic are Russians.

A great part of the Tatar who live in the Republic (60%) are located in the Paranginsky, Mari-Tureksky and Morkinsky regions where a significant number of Tatar settlements are situated and in Volzhsk i.e. in neighbour regions with Tatarstan. More than quarter of the Tatar of the Republic lives in Yoshkar-Ola. In the Republic the Tatars dominate in 36 settlements.

In Zvenigovo area there are several Chuvash villages, which are home to 35% of the Chuvash, taken into account in the Republic. A third of the Chuvash people live in the cities of Yoshkar-Ola, and Volzhsk. The settlements with the Udmurt population are found in the Mari-Turek, on which territory there are 72% of the Udmurt population.

Among other peoples who inhabit the Mari El Republic the more presentable in quantity are the Ukrainian (5.3 thousand people), the Mordva (1.7 thousand people) and the Belorussian (1.4 thousand people). The main flow of them towards the Republic began in the 1930-1940-s during the industrialization. The Ukrainian and Belorussian migrated in the period of the Great Patriotic War in connection with the evacuation of industrial enterprises and population from temporary occupied territories by Germany. A great part of the Mordva, Ukrainian, Belorussian and representatives of other peoples migrated to the Republic in the 1960-1980-s that was caused by massive migration and mobility of the population (Results..., 2012).

International migration (immigration) to the Republic was massive till 1992 and was directly connected with interethnic tension in new countries—former Soviet Republics. The most part of immigrants came from the Baltics, Ukraine and Kazakhstan. In 2000-2004 immigration turned to be structurally different and could be characterized as a labour migration from the Republics of the Caucasus and the Middle Asia. The existing scale of migration can be estimated as significant, besides the population moving is growing. The tension on the international grounds is still nearly absent between immigrants and the native people but it can appear while the number growth of the first.

International migration is calculated only by hundreds or dozens of incomers. In particular from Kazakhstan (in 2002—251 persons, in 2007—43 persons), from Ukraine (in 2002—86 persons, in 2007—70 persons), from Uzbekistan (in 2002—81 persons, in 2007—93 persons) and also a number of migrants from Azerbaijan and Armenia. In January-November 2014: 17731 people have arrived in the Republic; 19483 people have dropped out; migration loss amounted 1752 person (On the harmonization..., 2013).

Now the Republic of Mari El has a relatively low economic attractiveness for migrants. So, in Mari El, despite

the high demand for specialists in 2012, the quota for the issuance of work permits to migrant workers was used only for 26.4%.

Language diversity. The state languages of the Mari El Republic are Mari (mountain and meadow) and Russian. Their official status is supported by the Constitution of the Mari El Republic. The law of the Mari El Republic “On languages in the Mari El Republic” declares the (nominal) equality of languages and linguistic rights of citizens, except as permitted under federal law.

The legal basis of ethnolanguage policy is provided primarily in the Constitution of the Mari El Republic, according to which the official languages are the Mari (mountain, meadow) and Russian languages.

The Mari people are divided into two main ethnic groups: the Mountain (“Kyryk (Mountain) Mari”) and Meadow Mari (“Olyk Mari”). Each group uses its literary norm, i.e. the Mountain Mari language is spread in the Gornomariysky region of the Mari El Republic, and actually the Mari language, which native speakers are representatives of the Meadow Mari and the associated by genetic affinity Eastern Mari geographic group living in Bashkiria, Tatarstan, Udmurtia, Perm, Sverdlovsk and other Oblasts. The existence of two independent literary norms is connected with significant differences in vocabulary, partly grammar and even phonetics and affirms some difficulties in the oral speech understanding between the Mountain and Meadow Mari.

In accordance with the Article 24 of the Law “On languages in the Mari El Republic” (Law..., 2011), “the official paperwork in the Mari El Republic is conducted in the state languages of the Republic”. The Article 38 states that “citizens have the right to choose freely the language of training and education in child welfare institutions and secondary schools. Directors and employees of the educational institutions are selected basing on the language knowledge of education and training adopted in the institution”.

Using a representative sampling the Sociology Department of the Mari Scientific and Research Institute of Language, Literature and History analyzed the interethnic relations in the Republic, surveyed 1170 people so far. The respondents were townsmen and a number of settlements residents in various regions of the Republic. The study showed that 88.9% of the Meadow and 95.2% of the Mountain Mari called Mari as a mother language. While 10.9% of the Meadow and 1.0% of the Mountain Mari named Russian as native (Orlova, 2013).

Following the statistics gathered by researchers, the purpose to study and know the Mari language is quite high: about 72% of the Mari schoolchildren and 12.5% of Russian pupils feel the importance of the Mari language knowledge. 15% consider that they have a fairly high level of linguistic competence: 10%—fluent, 5% have fluent speech, but read and write with difficulty. However, Mari did not become the language of real communication among pupils.

Dominant spoken language is Russian, according to the results of the last census all residents of the Republic know it sufficiently to communicate. The Russian language dominates almost everywhere, has a higher social status, but a number of newspapers, magazines and transmissions on television and radio are in the Mari language. In rural areas, Mari, as the languages of other ethnic minorities, is spread much wider than in the towns, both in the mass media and in the sphere of culture and education. On the Internet all the variety of national culture of the Mari El Republic is presented, for example, several magazines and newspapers are published in Mari: the magazine “Onchyko” (“Forward”), the magazine “U Sem”, “Pachemysh” (“Wasp”), “Keche-Solnyshko”, the Republican newspaper “Kugarnya” (“Friday”), municipal and regional newspapers.

Law “On Languages in the Republic of Mari El”, expressing respect to all nationalities living in the Republic, defines the basic principles for the regulation of social relations in the field of development and functioning of languages used by the population of the republic in the state, socio-economic and cultural life, provides for the protection of constitutional rights of citizens in this area, promote respect for national dignity of man, his culture and language, contributes to the further strengthening of friendship and cooperation among peoples. This law aims to create conditions for the preservation and equitable, the original development of languages.

Religion diversity. The Mari El Republic refers to multi-religious territories of Russia, where different confessions exist and interact for many centuries on the basis of different nationalities co-residence: Orthodoxy, Paganism, Islam, etc. The Orthodoxy has been and remains the main religion in the Mari El Republic. The majority of the Russian population living in the Republic and a large part of the Mari ethnic group confess it. The Tatar ethnic group and other small ethnic communities, compactly living in some regions of the Republic, are Muslim. The small number of the Mari confesses the Mari pagan religion. However, the Paganism is widely spread in the dual faith confessional group, which amounts up to a quarter of the Mari population. The history of the Mari Traditional Religion began in the ancient times. Nature worship (sun, water and wind) and the veneration to plants, animals, birds, celestial bodies, objects and phenomena of the nature take a central place in

Mari religion. Prayers are held in the sacred groves (*Mari: oto, kusoto*). The national Mari holidays are accompanied with ancient traditional rituals. In the Republic six local religious communities of the Mari Traditional Religion united under the Central religious organization are registered officially in accordance with federal legislation on freedom of conscience and religion. Other religious groups and organizations in Mari El as a rule are either small or do not have strong traditions in the Republic.

Belonging to a particular confession is defined by the ethnicity of a person: Russian believers are mostly Orthodox, the Tatars are Muslims. Some Mari confess dual faith, i.e. compliance with the Mari traditional faith along with the Orthodoxy. According to the 2011 survey results, 55.6% of respondents indicated the Orthodox confession; 7.6% mainly confess the Orthodox faith, and sometimes follow the Mari traditional faith; 5.2% are equally attached to the Orthodox and Mari traditional faith, 3.5% mainly follow the Mari traditional faith; 1.1% confess only the Mari traditional faith; 4.8%—Islam; 0.4%—adherents of other religions; 3.9%—believe in God, but do not understand the religions; 2.4%—believe in “their God”; 15.5%—did not answer (Orlova, 2013).

Now there are 66 acting temples and 10 churches; 76 parishes, 2 monasteries (Mironositsky Convent and a friary—Bogoroditsky-Sergiev Hermitage) in the Republic, 83 priests and 13 deacons serve in the temples.

3.2 Tolerance

Opinion polls that have followed the study of ethnic and religious aspects of the Mari El social life note a tolerable level of intergroup relations. The studies of two last decades indicate rather peaceful interethnic relations in the region. So, from the point of view of the majority of respondents, nationality in everyday life is not an obstacle for interaction. For example, nationality does not matter: while communication—for 83.1%; while choosing close friends—for 65.7%; while working together—for 55.2%; while choosing a marriage partner—for 56.1% (Orlova, 2013).

The most important indicator of interethnic peace in the Republic is the situation connected with intermarriages. Percentage of intermarriages within the total number of marriages throughout the whole study period remained practically unchanged and amounted to about 30%. In the Republic the following intermarriages dominate: Russian husband-Mari wife and vice versa. The second place is filled with Russian-Tatar and Tatar-Russian marriages, the third—Russian-Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Russian, the fourth place—Mari-Tatar and Tatar-Mari marriages. This indicates a high level of tolerance and fairly close cultural level of the various ethnic groups living in the Republic.

57.7% of respondents indicated that the national (ethnic) identity is important for them. Ethnic identity support is largely influenced by the factors such as family and parents (83.5%), social network (49.3%). Mass media as a source of ethnic identity support was mentioned only by 11.3%. The main joining factors that the respondents called were the mother tongue (70.2%), folk customs (38.6%), and historical past (28.4%), religion (20.2%).

Two-thirds of respondents answered that they have the greatest sympathy towards the Russian and Mari people, and a large majority of respondents (49.4%) indicated that the conflict initiation on the ethnic grounds is unlikely in the Republic. Moreover, 86.7% of the respondents rated the current relationship between the representatives of different nationalities in the Republic as good and satisfactory.

High language integration is present, as 99.5% of respondents speak Russian, 55.3%—Mari, 17.5%—Tatar. 51.5% name Russian their mother tongue, Mari—33.6%, the Mari and Russian languages at the same time are native for 7.8%, Tatar—17.5%. Most (86.9%) of respondents want their children certainly knew their native language. Besides, the majority is interested in the cultures of the peoples living in the territory of the Republic: 89.9% are interested in the Russian culture, 81.5%—the Mari culture, 49.4%—the Tatar culture.

66.4% of respondents said that they did not have any difficulties in communicating with people of other nationalities. Those who experience difficulties, consider the main cause is their ignorance of the languages (22.4%). The affront to national dignity is rarely encountered by respondents.

A pattern of intergroup relations among the youth is special. Results of the 2011 survey were stratified into three age groups: 1st group—15-19 years old, 2nd group—20-24, 3rd group—aged 25-29. Young respondents evaluated the relationship between different nationalities in Mari El as good and satisfactory (the first group—83.1%, the second group—78.3%, the third group—90.1%). The vast majority of young people do not lay emphasis to the national affiliation of a person while communicating with him (the first group—73.4%, the second group—80.8%, the third group—90.0%), and the most have no difficulties in communicating with people of different nationality (the first group—61.1%, the second group—66.1%, the third group—70.1%). Those who experience similar difficulties said that the obstacle is usually the lack of language skills (the first group—22.4%, the second group—20.7%, the third group—19.9%), as well as ignorance of the traditions and customs (the first

group—20.5%, the second group—10.7%, the third group—7.5%).

Nearly half of the young respondents believe that nationality does not harm collaborative work or study: the first group—44.4%, the second group—52.7%, the third group—63.9%. The fact that the nationality also does not matter in friendship was proved in the first group by 59.9%, the second—66.5%, the third—65.8%.

Moreover, the majority of young people believe that when choosing a marriage partner the nationality is not important (the first group—60%, the second group—61.1%, the third group—61.6%). A small part of the respondents considered such a marriage undesirable (the first group—10.9%, the second group—5.5%, the third group—7.8%), and another part believes that their relationship will depend on the nationality of the person to whom they marry (the first group—4.3%, the second group—13.8%, the third group—11.9%).

However, the youth is concerned about the future state of interethnic relations in the Republic. A significant proportion of young respondents found it difficult to answer on the ethnic conflicts occurrence (the first group—41.3%, the second group—35.5%, the third group—35.6%). But there is a considerable proportion of those who deny this probability (the first group—39.1%, the second group—36.5%, the third group—44.5%). Only a minority admits the potential for conflict (the first group—18.4%, the second group—26.4%, the third group—18.0%).

Young respondents less often than mature population express their negative attitude toward immigrants from other regions of Russia (the first group—21.7%, the second group—16.4%, the third group—19.1%). Regarding prospects of interconfessional relations in the Republic, 46% (2004) and 53.4% (2011) of respondents said that changes would not follow, and the relationship would remain peaceful; 8.4% and 6.1% of respondents talked about the possibilities of complications; others found it difficult to forecast. On the possibility of serious conflicts in the Republic on the religious grounds in 2011 52.6% gave a negative answer, 32.9% of respondents could not say exactly. Thus, a half of respondents believes that interconfessional situation in the Republic is peaceful (Orlova, 2013).

In 2014 the authors of this article conducted two studies: a questionnaire survey of 200 students of Mari State University and interviews of 20 experts. According to the results of a questionnaire survey of students conducted, revealed the following:

- 1) Every second student replied that he has friends—representatives of other nationalities (49%) of the respondents gave an affirmative answer.
- 2) Most of the students are satisfied with the fact that they live in a multicultural environment (38%—are satisfied, 34%—rather satisfied than not satisfied, 18% said—“I do not care.”
- 3) Intermarried with people of other ethnicity agree more than half of the respondents (59%).
- 4) The majority of students (71%) have never encountered a manifestation of stigma on a national basis, (22%) experienced the phenomenon only occasionally.
- 5) 52% of respondents believe inter-ethnic situation is stable, 40%—estimate it generally stable, but do not exclude the possibility of conflicts arising from domestic violence. With the approval “of the possibility of inter-ethnic conflict” agreed to only 8% of the subjects.

Thus, comparing the results of the study in 2011 and 2014, we can see that in the Republic of Mari El has been stable in terms of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations.

Expert survey revealed the following results:

- 1) Absence of significant differences in the situation assessment of the experts representing the four sectors (government, society, mass media, science);
- 2) Majority of respondents (80%) evaluated an overall social and economic situation in the Republic as stable, normal;
- 3) 50% of the experts of the political and administrative elite distinguished power and political structures (government, parties);
- 4) Among the most active in defending their ethnic interests were called the Tatars (30% of the experts), representatives of the Central Asia and the Caucuses (15%), the titular nation Mari and the Russian (5%);
- 5) 30% of the experts rated intensity of migration flows in the Republic as low/below average, 25%—as average, 10%—as intensive/high, the other 35% could not give such evaluation;
- 6) Majority (85%) of the respondents deny the existence of xenophobic attitudes towards migrants and ethnic

groups of the Republic;

7) Majority (90%) of the experts called the traditional national holidays (Peledysh Pairem, Sabantuy, Russian birch) and the Days of national cultures as successful initiatives and activities aimed at interethnic and interconfessional consent;

8) Majority (90%) of the respondents rated the linguistic situation as normal/stable;

9) Majority (95%) of the respondents considered the religious situation in the Republic as peaceful/stable;

10) Majority (85%) of the respondents deny the connection of ethnic/religious factors with criminality and the influence of ethnic/religious affiliation on interpersonal relations, stressing that “criminality has no face”, “there are no such nations, and there are individuals”;

11) Majority (90%) of the respondents noted the absence of ethnic/religious groups whose rights and interests are infringed in the Republic;

12) All the experts agreed the influence of the federal governmental policies on interethnic and interconfessional situation in the Republic, mostly noting its positive features;

13) 100% of the respondents rated the interethnic and interconfessional situation in the Republic as stable/normal, while 90% do not predict its drastic change and deterioration;

14) Among possible destabilization factors most experts pointed cases of extremism, chauvinism, nationalism.

Thus, the survey indicates a stable situation in the Republic in the field of interethnic and interconfessional relations and the absence of obvious signs of potential conflicts on this ground.

3.3 Factors of Preservation and Development of Tolerance in Diverse Society

State regional policy. The Mari El Republic is one of the first regions of the Russian Federation which adopted the target-oriented approach in the state national policy implementation. Work coordination in the field of interethnic and interconfessional relations carried out in the framework of the Governmental Commission implementation of the State National Policy Conception in the Mari El Republic, the work of the Commission on the State Languages of the Mari El Republic, the Council under the Head of the Mari El Republic in the interaction with religious organizations, the Advisory Council on Religious Associations, the Council on Ethnic Affairs.

In 2012, the Mari El government approved a new state program “State national policy of the Mari El Republic for 2013-2020” and its subprogram called “Ethnic and cultural development, interethnic and interconfessional relations in the Mari El Republic” are in force (On the state program..., 2013). The program is aimed at creation in the Republic highly favourable conditions to meet national interests of all the peoples living in its territory, to ensure their full participation in the political, social, economic and cultural development, to preserve interethnic peace and harmony in the region. Functions of programs implement, monitoring, regulation and coordination in the field of the state national policy and interconfessional relations are imposed on the Ministry of Culture, Press and on Ethnic Affairs.

The basic objectives and performance targets of the Program “Ethnic and cultural development of the Mari El Republic” are:

1) Building conditions to meet individual rights to religious freedom, creativity and participation in cultural life, implementation, and development of their ethnic and cultural identity;

2) The preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity. Fostering the formation of conditions for learning and developing the native culture by citizens themselves and the using of the mother tongue and the official language of the Republic of Mari El;

3) Distribution and strengthening tolerant social attitudes and in the society. Promoting the integration processes based on historical and cultural traditions, heritage of the peoples of Russia, the national civil identity and self-awareness, state patriotism;

4) Monitoring of interethnic relations in the Republic of Mari El. Scientific, analytical and methodological support of the implementation of the Program.

Implementation of this Program is important for prevention of interethnic and inter-religious conflicts because it provides following activities:

- Creation of conditions for the realization of creative initiatives, projects and activities in the field of ethno-cultural development by national-cultural associations, communities, creative teams and organizations.

- Supporting ethno-cultural communities in the implementation of the right to ethno-cultural (national and cultural) development and self-government Implementation of projects in the Mari language, aimed at its development, the expansion of the use, quality improvement of learning it.
- Implementation of specialized projects and activities for the conservation and promotion of folk calendar ceremonial customs, traditions and holidays
- Realization of projects and activities in the field of ethnic youth culture Implementation of specialized outreach projects to promote cultural diversity, tolerant socio-cultural attitudes Implementation of commemorative and celebratory events of joint activities of national-cultural associations of Mary El Republic
- Creating terms of strengthening interregional cooperation in the field of ethno-cultural and inter-ethnic relations ethno-sociological research and monitoring of the situation in the field of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations

Implementation of the Program will streamline and focus the activities in the field of ethno-cultural and inter-ethnic relations, will bring clarity and accuracy in the organization of work of the following national policy priorities set out in the basic normative legal documents and other state documents.

Within the State program “State National Policy of the Republic of Mari El for 2013-2020” sociological research on issues of national and confessional relations in the territory of Mari El is scheduled every two years. The program encouraged activities dedicated to the prevention and development of national languages, culture and history of the peoples of the Republic, harmonization of interethnic and interconfessional relations: “Ignatiev Readings”, the Day of National Hero, the Day of Slavic Writing and Culture, the Day of the Russian Language, round table “Islam against Terrorism”, scientific and practical conferences “The Mari Language in IT” and “Sociological Research of Interethnic and Interconfessional Relations”; the Day of Mari Writing, etc.

More than 740 cultural establishments obey the Ministry; they employ more than 5000 persons. Mari El was the forth in the all-Russian regional rate of cultural development. The work on preservation, reconstruction and restoration of cultural and artistic monuments, education and introduction of the youth to the culture, folk culture in particular is conducted.

The Ministry of Culture, its subordinate organizations and agencies, local authorities and public associations regularly host cultural events, meetings, celebrate commemorative dates: the Mari Youth Forum, Interregional Meeting of Young Correspondents who write in Mari “Mari young correspondents”.

In order to prevent ethnic and religious conflicts, combating xenophobia, Ministry of Culture has developed instructions for receiving information and has recommended the creation of a contact center (the “hot” telephone line) to receive information about the conflict. Currently, the department interethnic and interfaith relations of Ministry of Culture performs the function of the call center to receive information about the conflicts.

In 2013, the Ministry developed the Recommendations for local authorities on the procedure for emerging conflicts identifying in the sphere of interethnic and interconfessional relations and actions aimed at their consequences eliminating. In 15 municipal regions and urban districts the Councils on Ethnic Affairs under the heads are formed, in all 17 of them the Councils on Cooperation with Religious Associations operate.

The work on the preservation and development of national cultures is executed by the Republican Centres of the Mari, Russian and Tatar Culture, the Municipal Centres of the Udmurt and Chuvash Culture in densely populated areas by these groups. At the initiative of the citizens in the Republic national and cultural autonomies of the Tatars, Ukrainians, Jews, the Ethnic and Cultural organizations of the Mari, Russian, Udmurt, Azerbaijanis, Armenians, Uzbeks, Bashkirs, Dagestan and other ethnic groups successfully function. Totally in the Republic in 2014 there are 32 national and cultural associations, 27 non-commercial organizations, 133 religious organizations (On the harmonization..., 2013).

The system of state mass media of the Republic is represented by 7 Republican newspapers, 4 of them in the Mari language; 8 Republican journals, 5 of them in the Mari language; 27 regional and municipal newspapers, 7 of them in Mari, 2 newspapers with a loose leaf in Mari and Tatar. The Mari language is increasingly being used on television, radio and on the Internet. The national electronic and print mass media carry out information campaigns to promote tolerance, interethnic and interconfessional consent and preserve ethnic and cultural heritage of the ethnic groups living in the Republic. Every year seminars and other training activities in the field of interethnic and interconfessional relations are held for the mass media representatives.

The Ministry of Culture, Press and on Ethnic Affairs of the Mari El Republic together with national and cultural associations hold the Mari, Russian, Tatar, Udmurt, Chuvash calendar-ritual and traditional festivals, events

dedicated to significant dates in the ethno-cultural life (such as “Peledysh Pairem”, “Sabantuy” and other). Not only creative teams of all nationalities of the Mari El Republic take part in them, but also the diaspora representatives from the Kirov, Sverdlovsk Oblasts, Bashkortostan, Tatarstan and other regions.

Thus, the Mari El Republic can be now characterized as the territory where three main ethnoses and three main religions coexist and interethnic and interconfessional contradictions are expressed rather weakly due to competent state policy of regional authorities.

Intercultural Approach in the Education System. State educational policy of the Mari El Republic is conducted in accordance with the basic provisions of the Russian legal documents. The basic approach to numerous ethnic groups representatives teaching in Mari El is intercultural (multicultural) education. It is based on a set of ideas, values and practices that contribute to peaceful, equitable and mutually beneficial co-existence of different cultural, ethnic and social groups in one country or its region. The leading idea of such education lies in tolerance and equivalence formation among different cultures, providing equal educational opportunities for everyone. Everyone who wishes in the Republic, as well as in whole Russia, can get any kind of education in accordance with his individual needs and capabilities, and regardless of ethnic/religious affiliation.

The main form of intercultural education implementation is the education of people of different nationalities in the same group (school, class, etc.) that provides direct communication and interpenetration between cultures and communities with different identity.

Intercultural education is provided by its content, namely:

- Studying of Russian, foreign (English, French, German, etc.) and native language (kindergarten, school, high school);
- Studying of the history of civilizations, history of Russia, its peoples and foreign countries (school, high school);
- Studying of philosophical theories and history of science at selected field of knowledge (high school, post-graduate school);
- Studying of ethnology, ethno-psychology and ethnopedagogics by the professionals of Humanities (college, high school).

Students of all nationalities are included in the Mari El Republic in intercultural education system. However, titular nation representatives (Mari) and other ethnic groups in the places of their compact residence (e.g., the Tatars in the Paranginsky region of the Republic) have the opportunity to study in their native language.

According to the Ministry of Education, primary education (4 years) is given in the following languages: Russian (22635 pupils), Meadow Mari (5194), Mountain Mari (1122), Tatar (362). Primary as well as preschool education in the mother, not Russian, language is in practice only in rural areas. In the towns and major built-up areas primary education is carried out in Russian. The mother tongue teaching as a subject for the non-Russian children is generally held in rural schools which are usually national schools. After the state language study program the Mari language is totally taught in 181 schools. Thus, Mari is taught by the non-Mari children, as well as the Mari not having an opportunity to learn it as a mother tongue, or the Russian-speaking Mari (who do not speak the Mari language). The number of hours for studying the mother, not Russian, language depends on the study program and a year of study and varies from 3 to 6 hours a week (from 8 to 24% of the study time).

Coverage of students who are taught in their native language and studying the native language, in recent years remains stable and is determined only on demand, i.e. the desire of consumers themselves to receive educational services in their native language. Thus, in 2011-2012 academic year, in Mari El 17.6% of students studied the Mari language as native, 44.4%—the Mari language as the state one, the subject “History and Culture of Mari El peoples”—78% of students (The Ministry..., 2014). In addition, pupils of secondary schools study the subject “History and Culture of Mari El peoples” is taught.

Under modern conditions new mechanisms that confirm their effectiveness in educational institutions have appeared. These mechanisms are ethno-cultural educational technologies which help to optimize and activate the process of development, maintenance and translation of the ethnic culture.

The best examples of the education organized for ethnic groups members are national kindergartens and primary schools, national classes and classes with in-depth study of particular languages in the towns and regions of the Republic, as well as the National Gymnasium No.14 and the National Presidential Art School in Yoshkar-Ola. During the work ethnic pedagogization of the entire educational process and education of children in the spirit of national culture are conducted. Ethnic and cultural development of students is carried out under the following

directions: development of the Russian civil identity; formation of a conscious, respectful and friendly attitude towards another person, his opinion, worldview, culture, faith, traditions, languages; formation of communicative competence in cooperation with representatives of different nationalities and etc.

The capacity to implement intercultural approach in school and university curricula in Russia is laid with current Federal State Educational Standards (FSES). The FSES structure includes in each of the cycles of studied disciplines basic (compulsory) and variable (regional) parts, in the framework of which the intercultural educational disciplines are introduced. So, after the curriculum of Mari State University program “Psycho-pedagogical education” future bachelors study “Russian language and speech culture”, “Culture and intercultural communication in the modern world” within the basic part of the course; “History and Culture of the Mari people”, “Mari language”—within the variable part, and “Cultural Studies”, “Ethnology”, “World Art”—as optional subjects.

A compulsory subject for all Russian fourth-year students, including in Mari El, starting from September 1, 2012 became the course “Basics of religious cultures and secular ethics”, offering students to get acquainted with the Orthodox, Islamic, Buddhist, Jewish or secular module. Since 2014 Mari State University in conjunction with the Mari Diocese started the teacher training “Basics of Orthodox Culture”, more than 100 people completed the training.

The basic ideas of intercultural approach in education were implemented not only for teaching schoolchildren and students. They form the basis for continuing lifelong education of youth, adults and seniors in the Republic (Biryukova, 2008; Domracheva, 2012; Lezhnina, 2014; Morova, 2010).

The following examples of educational activities of the first University in the Mari El Republic—Mari State University—prove it:

- 1) Preparation and taking of certification exams within the Russian state system testing of Russian as a foreign language (TORFL) at all levels of proficiency in the Russian language and the language of business communication and also obtaining the Russian citizenship for working migrants;
- 2) Annual additional education courses “Summer School of the Mari language and Culture for Russian and Foreign Citizens”, its participants are citizens of the Russian Federation, Germany, Switzerland, the USA, Austria and Finland, who for three weeks are learning the language and culture of the Mari people;
- 3) Refresher courses for state and municipal employees under the program “Topical problems of interethnic and interreligious harmony strengthening in the Russian Federation. Counteraction to extremism in state bodies and local authorities of the Mari El Republic”;
- 4) Educational program “University of the Third Age” designed for the seniors with active life position, aimed to continuing personal development and communication, and based on the principle of learning throughout the life (in 2013-2015 about 1000 people were trained).

The educational institutions from kindergartens to universities are the main institutions of socialization of all ethnic groups representatives living in the Republic. In the context of the intercultural education, students learn the culture of their own and other peoples (language, traditions, customs, way of life, etc.) and through direct communication in joint educational activities they form tolerant attitudes and relationships with different cultures and ethnoses.

4. Conclusions

The results of the research indicate a problem-free interethnic and inter-confessional situation in the Republic of Mari El. The last decades are characterized by interethnic consent and tolerant relations among the representatives of different nationalities and faiths.

The Mari El Republic is one of the most favorable regions of the regulation of interethnic relations, which are not burdened by any historical conflict factors. In the present it can be characterized as a territory on which the existence of many ethnic groups and religions, but ethnic and religious contradictions expressed rather poorly. According to the first ranking of international threats, conducted in the Russian Federation, the Mari El Republic is one of the prosperous regions, where interethnic peace and consent are preserved and the tendency of joint development and tolerant attitudes conserve.

Calm interethnic situation persists here for centuries in spite of such a multi-ethnic composition of the population. It became possible including thanks to the competent public policy in the social sphere and education. The Government of the Republic of Mari El, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture consider carrying out the necessary and obligatory actions supporting various nationalities, introduction to education acquaintance

with various cultures and education of respect to each other. Educational institutions when developing the educational programs include a regional component.

The Department of Interethnic and Interconfessional Relations under the Ministry together with concerned executive authorities and local government, public and municipal institutions of culture and education, national and cultural associations of the Mari El Republic does a significant work to preserve and promote ethnic and cultural diversity of Mari El peoples. The main result is the maintenance of interethnic peace and consent in the Republic, consistent work on national and religious extremism prevention. New radical religious groups are absent. Religious discrimination does not exist in the republic, the representatives of each religion have the opportunity to realize their needs in the form of religion and to visit relevant institutions (churches for Orthodox Christians, mosques for Muslims).

In the Republic of Mari El intolerable propaganda of hatred and contempt to any language, ethnic groups or religions, creating contrary to constitutionally established principles of national policy obstacles, restrictions and privileges in the use of languages is banned. In the Republic great attention is paid to intercultural education. According to the survey results the most part of the Republic population does not consider a possibility of religious and ethnic conflicts. However, this does not negate the need for active prevention of interethnic conflicts.

Despite the fact that social and economic characteristics of the Republic determine low percentage of migrants' families (mostly they are representatives of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and other CIS countries), the main problem is clearly evident. Such families often either do not understand Russian at all, or know it very badly. Today, there are neither governmental programs nor adaptive courses for migrants to their new social and cultural environment, no special educational centres for training migrants and no specialized textbooks and methods of teaching non-native children. As a rule, Centers of social, psychological and educational assistance to families and children solve the problems of migrants; experts of these centers have not received special training in working with migrants.

In order to solve this problem Mari State University launched the project "Actions of Lifelong Learning Addressing Multicultural Education and Tolerance in Russia" TEMPUS IV (2013-2016).

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