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Language policy and linguistic reality of the Mari in the Republics of Mari El, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan (Russian Federation)

According to the 2002 census, only about half of the 604.298 Mari of the Russian Federation live in their titular republic Mari El. Beside other areas, bigger groups of Mari settle in the republics of Tatarstan (18.787) and Bashkortostan (105.829). Although these three republics are subjects of the Russian Federation with equal official status, they all show specific traits in their language policy resulting in different conditions for the non-Russian population and their languages.

The Mari minorities living in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan are affected by the laws that are passed by the governmental bodies of these republics, but also by the language planning measures taken in Mari El, as those often include the Mari living outside the territory as well. Mari El is providing communities in other republics with Mari-language textbooks, and Mari language teachers are trained in Mari El.

It should not be forgotten, however, that all republics, as non-independent subjects of the Russian Federation, can take decisions only within the framework of the federal legislation. This leads to certain limitations in legislative processes because national ("republican") laws have to correspond to federal laws. One example for this is the recent change of law № 309 concerning the status of the non-Russian languages in education.

In our talk, we will discuss the above-mentioned questions and present relevant sociolinguistic data, with an emphasis on the situation of the Mari in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. It will be considered whether the legislative regulations of the past years have had an effect on the linguistic reality of the Mari in the respective republics. This will be complemented by an analysis of the discussion of language-related issues in different kinds of media (Russian- as well as non-Russian sources): How do journalists evaluate recent developments, and what kind of impressions arise from users' comments on articles in online publications and on language-related topics in forums?