

Innovative Transformations of Russian Higher Education

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New social roles of modern university: case of Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University

One of the promising characteristic features of the XXI century is that it is going to be **an era of Universities**. The Universities tend to become the major leading socio-economic and cultural structures in the present-day and future society. In this process roles and functions of Universities are becoming more and more various and diverse. They transform the status of Universities and press them to become active **social actors** changing the human society around them, assisting to resolve social conflicts and reach mutual understanding in multinational and polycultural world.

New roles and functions of modern university are becoming no less important than its traditional roles of educational institution and of academic and research centre and even than its more recent role as a centre of innovations. These new roles are predominantly concentrated in the sphere of **social interaction** between the **Government** and the **Society** where university takes the place of a **Site and at the same time a Mediator for such interaction**.

The unique development of Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University (which is one of the national universities of Russia situated in its very South – in the North Caucasus) has already shown not only big advance in the said direction but also new potential in enhancing these social roles of university as an institution at large and of Pyatigorsk University as an example in action.

Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University (PSLU) works out and fulfils in social practice **several important concepts**, among which are the following:

- the concept of the University as a Peacemaking Site and a Centre and Mediator of the Government – Civil Society Interaction;
- the concept of the University as a Centre of Language and Cultural Diversity;
- the concept of the University as a Site of Government – Confessional Interaction;
- the concept of the University as an acting Model of polycultural Civil Society and Professional Community.

In this article we will analyze and comment the first three concepts; the fourth will be the subject of further publications.



The Concept of Peacemaking Site and a Centre and Mediator of the Government – Civil Society Interaction

University of the XXI century is a multi-profile complex. It combines in itself an educational institution, an academic and research centre, a centre of innovations, a centre of internationalization. But it is also a **Peacemaking Site** and a **Centre** (and at the same time – **Mediator**) **of the Government and Civil Society Interaction**, as has been confirmed by the experience of Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University. Among the new social roles and functions of modern University these two are fall into category of extremely important.

Let us illustrate this with the following facts.

Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University since 1996 has been carrying out the wide-scale academic, research, educational and cultural unifying project “Peace through Languages, Education and Culture” aimed at the establishment of peace and stability in the North Caucasus and all Big Caucasus by humanitarian means. Thus the University has become a well-known (in Russia and abroad) Peacemaking Site in the North Caucasus.



In the framework of this project six International Congresses were held at PSLU. The VIth Congress was

held not so long ago, on the 12th – 14th October, 2010. These Congresses (each of them being held in three-year period) gather hundreds and hundreds of statesmen, policymakers, scholars, social leaders, educational and cultural representatives of federal, regional and local level, clergymen of different confessions etc. who all have the opportunity to take part in plenary meetings, symposiums, panel discussions and round tables disputes.



All speeches and reports are published. For example, the documents of the V International Congress which collected in 2007 participants from 35 regions of the Russian Federation and 9 foreign countries were published in 19 books of Congress proceedings totaled up to 2,640 pages. [Peace in the North Caucasus through Languages, Education and Culture, 2007]. The documents of the VIth Congress which collected over 800 participants from 50 regions of Russia and 16 foreign states were published in 9 books totaled up to 1917 pages. Now the 10th book with speeches and reports from the Plenary Session of the VIth Congress is ready for publication [Peace through Languages, Education and Culture: Russia – Caucasus – World Community, 2010].



In our assumption the said Congresses are the most impressive events of the project but not the only ones. In the periods between them a wide variety of intercongressional activities are held: conferences, symposia, field researches which promote the general line of the project and bring together more and more people interested in the problems and topics under analysis.



In 2010 the format of the Congresses and of the whole project was changed: not just the North Caucasus, but Russia – Big Caucasus – World Community. It allows to enlarge the focus of research and discussions.

And to reflect on the new realities. Among them: the establishment by President D. Medvedev of the new North Caucasus Federal District with the City of Pyatigorsk as its centre (it is the eighth federal district in the Russian Federation and it includes seven regions: Stavropol'sky krai, Kabardino-Balkarian Republic, Karachai-Cherkess Republic, the Republic of Dagestan, the Republic of North Ossetia - Alania, the Republic of Chechnya, the Republic of Ingushetia); the new status of Pyatigorsk as the capital city of the new District; adoption of the "Strategy of the Socio-Economic Development of the North Caucasus Federal District up to 2025".

Respectively, all these mean radical changes in the social environment of Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University which make significant influence on conditions and opportunities of its future social activity.

That is why now PSLU is working out a new variant of its complex project "Peace through Languages, Education and Culture: Russia – Big Caucasus – World Community" prolonging it for the next five years and incorporating in its essence new socially significant humanitarian research and development projects proposed by scholars, educational and cultural leaders.

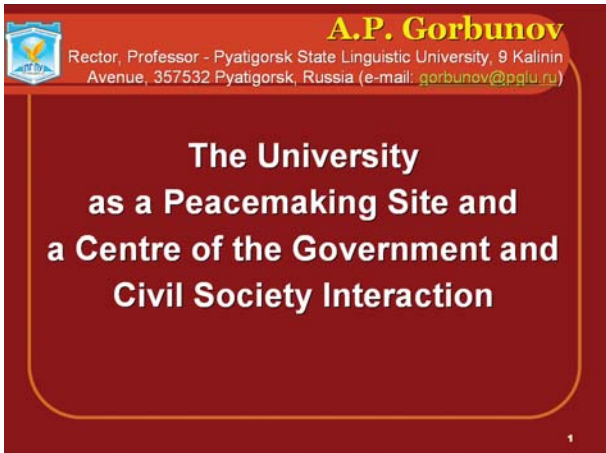
One of the main goals is to put humanitarian values of various peoples and ethnic groups inhabiting North Caucasus (here, in this unique territory, there are over 100 of them) for the purpose of efficient application of spiritual and socio-economic potential concentrated in this very powerful by its human energy, most southern and most diverse territory of Russia.

Besides, the world community is to be informed not only of terrorist attacks and shortcomings in this territory, but also of the big positive resource of common living, mutual understanding and cooperation, of inter-ethnic and inter-confessional partnership which is the most characteristic feature of North Caucasus.

PSLU stands in the core of all these activities. Its role of coordinator and mediator is also defined by such an important factor as the polycultural type of Pyatigorsk

University community. Students, undergraduates, post-graduates of PSLU represent 41 regions of the Russian Federation and 26 foreign states. Here one can find all ethnic groups of the Big Caucasus.

Thus the University fulfills the role of a coordinator of the peacemaking and conflict-resolving forces' efforts and aspirations coming from different territories and levels, and acts as the Centre and mediator of Government and Civil Society Interaction.



Recently, on October 20-24, 2010 the delegation of PSLU took part in the **World Universities Congress** (Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkey) organized by the International Association of Universities (IAU) where PSLU got membership in 2009. The main topic of the World Universities Congress was **the social role of universities** in the modern world: “*What should be the new aims and responsibilities of universities within the framework of global issues?*” Problems for discussion suggested by our University got the support of academic community and our delegation held a panel session under the title “**The University as a Peacemaking Site and a Centre of the Government and Civil Society Cooperation**” where the PSLU experience and approaches were presented.



It is also worth mentioning that as the Rector of Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University, I have been elected the Chairman of the Public Council of the City of Pyatigorsk and that provides a unique opportunity for the University to closely cooperate with the city administration and deputies, on one hand, and the local commu-

nity with its ethno-cultural groups, 16 of which have officially registered public associations, on the other hand. On this foundation the University has accepted and now enlarges its role as an effective Mediator in establishing productive dialogue and collaboration between Government and Public Administration structures on one side and regional and local communities on the other side in creation of strong conflict-free Civil Society.



Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University is also very active in involvement into social and public life on international, federal, and regional levels of cooperation.



The Concept of a Centre of Language and Cultural Diversity

Enhancing the role of Pyatigorsk Linguistic University as a Peacemaking Centre and Mediator of Government – Civil Society Interaction correlates with its strategy of development as a Centre of Language and Cultural Diversity. This brand of Pyatigorsk University has its roots in the wide diversity of languages and cultures studied in the University and in the wide diversity

of peoples and ethnic cultures represented among those people who comprise the University undergraduates, postgraduates, faculty, staff and its surrounding community. That's why festivals of languages and cultures which are held in PSLU attract so many participants.



All educational programs and most research and innovation projects provided by the University are concentrated on or connected with the studies of languages and cultures. Today PSLU offers programs in 23 lan-

guages as either majors or extracurricular courses. Besides, to enhance the social side of the language and culture diversity PSLU has created an extensive network of twelve Language and Culture Centers performing wide educational, cultural and enlightenment functions.



These are the Anglistic and American Studies and Language Centre, the Francophone Centre, the Hispanic Language and Culture Centre, the Italian Language and Culture Centre, the Chinese Language and Culture Centre, the Russian Language and Culture Centre etc.

Among these Centers there are those which are connected with the languages and cultures of ethnic groups and peoples residing in the North Caucasus (South Russia): The Armenian Language and Culture Centre, The Greek Language and Culture Centre, The North Caucasus Languages and Cultures Centre, The German Language and Culture Centre, The Arabic Language, Islamic Studies and Culture Centre, the Hebrew and Israeli Culture Centre. All of them are oriented to languages and cultures which are related both to the countries abroad and to ethnic Diasporas at local communities in the South of Russia.





Now the conditions have ripened for opening two new Centres: The Polish Language and Culture Centre and The Turkish Languages and Cultures Centre. [The University That Opens the World, 2010].

The Concept of a Site of Government-Confessional Interaction

In recent years Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University also has strengthened its role as a site for Government-Confessional and Interconfessional Interaction. This interaction is an interaction of everybody with everybody and in fact is not just a dialogue but **a polylogue**.

This role of PSLU is based on the specific features of the North Caucasus region as a unique multi-confessional territory where Christianity (predominantly Russian Orthodoxy but not only this), Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and other confessions have existed and cooperated for centuries. Today the University provides a solid foundation for active Interconfessional Polylogue and also for an effective Dialogue between State and Religion.

The idea of a social partnership between the Government and traditional confessions possessing a great spiritual potential is becoming more and more up-to-date nowadays. The state Universities involved in preparation of specialists of a new generation able to deal expertly with intercultural and religious issues seem to be at the frontline in the sphere of Government-Confessional interaction. The high significance of universitarian spiritual education has been determined by the demand in secularly educated people dealing in the sphere of religion and theology. In this regard much depends (including the issues of spiritual security of the society) upon their mindset and world views. At the same time **the Civil Consent**

in the society depends upon those graduates who will deal as mediators between the Government and Religious Organizations. Thus **the Spiritual Security and Civil Consent are to a great extent ensured through universitarian education**, and the role of the University as a Centre of the Culture of Interethnic and Interconfessional interaction becomes more extended.

Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University has participated in the development of Theological Education since 2007. Today it is the first State University in the Russian Federation that has invented and licensed academic program “Theology” (for Bachelor and Master Degrees) with both equitable packages of both Russian Orthodoxy and Islamic confessional disciplines included in the curriculum. Students of the Islamic part of the Program and of its Russian Orthodoxy part are trained together during the general (basic) part as experts with a profound knowledge of the religious history and culture. They master the specialization “Government-Confessional Relations” and thus are able to professionally conduct and monitor Government-Confessional dialogue.



Besides, in the framework of the development of Theological Islamic education in Russia PSLU has signed bilateral agreements on academic cooperation with the North Caucasus Islamic University named after Imam Abu Khanifa (Kabardino-Balkarian Republic) and the Russian Islamic University named after Kunta-Khadji (Chechen Republic). Currently 40 teachers and lecturers of the above-mentioned Islamic Universities take training in PSLU under these agreements **to get secular higher education qualification in Theology** (with curriculum of the Islamic set of confessional disciplines). Also lecturers and instructors of the Islamic Universities have taken part in special seminars in the life-long learning net of PSLU.





Very the leaders of religious organizations take an active part often in the discussions held in PSLU on the issues of intercultural, interconfessional and government-confessional cooperation (among them **Pheophan**, Archbishop of Stavropol and Vladikavkaz Eparchy and Imam **Ismail-Khadzhi Berdiev**, Head of the North Caucasus Coordinative Centre of Moslems).



Conclusions and Recommendations

Thus the study of the case based on Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University provides a valid opportunity to determine universities as Centers of alliance of of the Civil Society peacemaking actions as well as the “points”

of constant interaction and consolidation of efforts of the Government and Civil Society including its religious component.

All facts described and analyzed above demonstrate a really new situation formed by the XXI century trends in changing and widening the role of modern University. They show that University, being a centre of education, research, innovation and culture, has proved to be a very productive site where State and Religion, State and Civil Society may come into effective interaction.

The final analysis brings forward a set of conclusions and recommendations showing how to disclose the potential of University in this sphere. The following recommendations have been made by considering the major trends in higher education contemporary development.

Firstly, a University is to work out and adopt a mission, goals and strategy that reflect and embrace its role as a social actor in the surrounding community. The main thing is to adopt this role as objectively necessary and not to be afraid of it. As for Pyatigorsk State Linguistic University, it has adopted such a mission, goals and strategy.

Secondary, a University should also work out and fulfil a long-standing project of big social importance. PSLU’s project “Peace through Languages, Education and Culture” is a successful example of this kind and it has become one of the brand features of our University.

Thirdly, a University ought not to concentrate only on the sphere of research and providing academic-type recommendations. On the contrary, it ought to involve itself in practical activities playing the role of a developer, coordinator and interconfessional integrator. This puts it in the core of a live polylogue and makes it the magnetic centre of it.

Fourthly, the specific features of the University as a cluster of education, research, innovation and culture give it an opportunity to become a mediator in interaction of State (Government) and Religion.

Fifthly, all mentioned above, including interaction between State and Religion, in reality strengthens the role of University as a Peacemaking and Conflict-Resolving Site and a unique Centre of the State (Government) and Civil Society Interaction.

In the cases when a University is established by the Government or municipal bodies, this role can also be explained by the unique social position of such University: on one side, it is a part of the State structure, and, on the other side, it is a part of the Civil Society.

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