

MULTICULTURALISM AND THE BILINGUALISM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Ass.Prof. PhD Vlado Petrovski, Ass.Prof. PhD Snezana Mirascieva, Young Ass. Daniela Jakimova

Pedagogical faculty, University "Goce Delcev" – Stip

Republic of Macedonia

snezana.mirascieva@ugd.edu.mk

vlado.petrovski@ugd.edu.mk

Abstract: *the Republic of Macedonia is a multiethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional state. This fact itself opens the question of language (languages) and its use in public life, and which is more important, in institutions of education; in this context it makes the topic quite complex in the time when the change of laws conditioned by the Framework Agreement presumes real bilingualism in multiethnic regions. This paper contains the analysis of the Framework Agreement and the Constitution with the changes from 2001 concerning the use of language, i.e. languages of ethnic communities in public life and educational institutions, bearing in mind the fact that the official language in the Republic of Macedonia is Macedonian and the language of the community which in respective units of self-government is represented in a percentage greater than 20. Such a condition of the use of languages of ethnic communities, or, more precisely the use of Albanian language in public life, as well as bringing into effect the Law for founding a state university in Albanian language, puts forward the issue which is very important and to which we have paid much attention in this paper, and that is if this means making the foundation of the policy of bilingualism in The Republic of Macedonia.*

Key words: *multiethnicity, language, education, bilingualism, diglottism*

Considering the fact that the Republic of Macedonia is a multi-ethnic society and a country where 33,4% of the total population belong to other ethnic communities and pursuant to article 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, the official language is the Macedonian language and the language of the community which is represented in a percentage higher than twenty in some units of the local self-management, and in group communication languages, other than the official one are used. Thus the question about the official language and its use in educational institutions is imposed in this context which makes this subject very complex and difficult in times when the changes in laws caused by Framework Agreement predict real bilingualism in multi-ethnic regions.

The attempt to find an answer to this question would make us simplify this situation the essence of which is quite complex. In addition, one of the answer will be the one suggested by the sociologists who faced this phenomenon in different situations, which is, asking for higher status of the language of the ethnic minority in one environment, the background of which is social promotion.

Taking into consideration the fact that minorities concentrated at one location where they represent a considerable part or perhaps the majority of the total population, the official language of the country necessary for performing administrative activities is known only by those people who have achieved higher education. Thus the importance of

the language at a level of a language of the local administration practically means a possibility for a larger number of individuals, representatives of that language group, to participate in the administrative activities. One of the further consequences of this is the reinforcement of the inter-ethnic conflicts because of the majority groups had better positions.

Another important reason for pointing out the language request in the list of requests of the special groups in the multi-ethnic societies is the search for symbols can firmly connect the group and distinguish it from other groups, and aims to present other requests in accordance with this difference. In this context, many groups that have not used their own mother tongue because of the advantages imposed by the language of majority, in their effort to draw the borders which became vague in time, take their language out of the oblivion as a flag used in military attacks.

Another important reason which we should bear in mind in our situation is the tendency to approach one group to another through the language. Namely, for some existing groups such as Moslems in Macedonia, who are not able to provide their own reproduction and as such are exposed to assimilation, their language choice represents an indicator of preference of one group to the others. This choice usually bears more messages: bitterness toward the barriers made by the group that shares the same language, fear and resistance to the assimilating pressure of one minority group and the choice of another as the closest and more desirable to merge into.

The Framework Agreement and its points are aiming to give an agreed frame of legal changes that can provide a legal foundation for overcoming the disagreeable events that happened in the Republic of Macedonia in 2001. This agreement resulted from the essential need to overcome the difficulties from the events that we are not going to comment here. The Framework Agreement aims to balance the violated relations and confidence among the communities and thus provide future democracy in the Republic of Macedonia, Europe and the International community. The representatives of our country and the international community who signed this Agreement think that its implementation in practice will promote the peaceful and harmonic development of the civic society, respecting the ethnic identity and the interests of all Macedonian citizens at the same time.

In this context we will analyze those articles which relate to the use of languages of ethnic communities, whose changes were made in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia in 2001 under the influence of the Framework Agreement, as well as the articles that resulted in changes in the education law and are in direct correlation with the use of languages of the communities in our country.

Framework Agreement parts referring to education and usage of languages

As for primary and secondary education, teaching will be performed in mother tongues of the pupils, and at the same time in Macedonia unified standards of academic curricula will be applied.

State financing will be provided for higher education in languages that are spoken by at least 20% of the population in Macedonia, based on respective agreements.

When enrolling new students at state universities, who belong to communities that are not majority population in Macedonia, the principle of positive discrimination will be applied until the enrollment is not a justified reflection of the population in Macedonia.

Throughout Macedonia and in its international relations the official language is Macedonian.

Any other language that is spoken by at least 20% of the population is also the official language, as it was explained above. In the organs of the Republic of Macedonia any official languages different from Macedonian can be used in accordance with the law, as it is further elaborated in Annex B. Any person living in a unit of local self-government in which at least 20% of population speaks an official language different from Macedonian, can use any official language to communicate with the regional office of the central government, authorized for the municipality; such an office will respond in that language, additionally in Macedonian. Any person can use any official language to communicate with the main office of the central government which will respond in the language, additionally in Macedonian.

In relation to the local self-government in municipalities where a respective community constitutes at least 20% of population of the municipality in question, the language of the community will be used as the official language, additionally in Macedonia. As for the languages spoken by less than 20% of population of a municipality, the local authorities will democratically decide about their use in public organs.

In criminal civic proceedings at any level, the accused person or any part will have the right to translation at state expense for all proceedings, as well as documents in accordance with the appropriate documents of the Council of Europe.

Any personal documents of citizens speaking an official language other than Macedonian will also be issued in that language, additionally in Macedonia, according to the law.

The Framework Agreement resulted in changes in the laws among which in the laws regulating education. The changes entering the field of education in languages of ethnic communities in Macedonia on all levels have not essentially changed the contents of the laws regulating these issues because those changes resulted from the changes of the Constitution; in the following part we will list the articles of the Constitution regulating these issues that were not considerably changed, and which very clearly explain the status of languages of communities related to their use on all educational levels.

Articles of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia that treat educational issues

Article 44

Every person has the right to be educated. Education is available under the same conditions. Primary education is obligatory and free.

Article 45

Citizens have the right, under conditions established by the law, to found private educational institution at all levels of education, except primary education.

Article 46

The University is guaranteed autonomy. The conditions of founding, performing and stopping the activities of the University are regulated by law.

Article 48

Members of communities have the right to freely express, cherish and develop their identity and characteristics of their communities, and to use the symbols of their community. The Republic guarantees the protection of ethnic, cultural, language, and religious identity to all communities.

Members of communities have the right to found cultural, artistic, educational, as well as scientific and other associations for the purpose of expressing, cherishing and developing of their identity. Members of communities have the right to be taught in their language in primary and secondary education in the manner established by law. In the schools where education is being performed in another language, Macedonian is also studied.

The Framework Agreement gives a fairly vague formulation of the languages of education in the regions in which the representation of ethnic communities is greater than 20%, without at the same time asking for the change in the Constitution article which defines that the languages of the communities will be used only in primary and secondary education. Namely, the Framework Agreement does not condition changes relating to the language of higher education. This vague formulation could be here interpreted as a possibility to organize private higher education in the languages of the communities, but not state higher education.

To adopt the law for founding a state university in Albanian language means to establish the foundations of the policy of bilingualism, i.e. to prepare staff that will perform communication in the domain of high administration in Albanian.

But, what does bilingualism mean? The concept of bilingualism itself is explained quite vaguely and incorrectly in Macedonia, which results in thinking the bilingualism in Macedonia and its introduction into practice would mean that everyone in the Republic of Macedonia should speak Macedonian as the official language in the state, but that the majority Macedonian community should not know the languages of the other minority communities living in the state, i.e. Albanian, the language of the most numerous minority community. In fact, bilingualism in the Republic of Macedonia will refer to the usage of Macedonian language as the official language, and the usage of Albanian in the Albanian community which is the most numerous minority community, and which in respective regions, is at the position of majority at global level; according to the last census in the total population of Macedonia it is represented in a percentage a little greater than 25% which, according to the Framework Agreement and the Constitution of 2001, means that on state level also, as well as in those communities of local self-government in which members of an ethnic community constitute a percentage of 20% or more, in mutual communication the official language beside Macedonian will be the language of the other community, more precisely Albanian community.

Bilingualism means that two ethnic communities in an ethnically heterogeneous regions, no matter which is the majority, speak both languages, if they satisfy the criteria

given in the Framework Agreement and in the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia which is brought into accord with it. Bilingualism in education means that all the children are taught in both languages: in practice each ethnic community is taught the basic subjects in its own language and the other subjects in one or the other language. If the language of the majority community is more represented, special lessons are organized for studying the second language.

In our country there is no bilingualism in educational practice, but diglottism. Which means that one group knows both languages and other only its own; concretely, in our country this refers to the relations between the Macedonian majority community and the other ethnic communities, or even more correctly, between the Macedonian and the Albanian community. In our country, members of all ethnic communities know both their mother tongue and Macedonian, including the members of the Albanian community, while at the same time few exceptions, the members of the Macedonian community know only their own language; this in principle means that one group knows both languages, and other one only own. Thus communication is performed in only one language instead two, which would be possible if both groups knew both languages and this would mean bilingualism in the true sense or word.

The condition of diglottism, in this situation of introducing the policy of bilingualism, means the exclusion from administration of everyone who does not speak second language well. The hasty introduction of bilingualism into the institutions of the Republic of Macedonia, without adapting the educational system to this direction, and knowing that the members of Macedonian and the other communities do not speak Albanian, will lead to a lot of unwanted consequences on the labor market, and a lot of people losing their jobs in administration mostly in the municipalities in which Albanians are the majority – one half or one forth – because of not speaking Albanian. This is followed by the requirement of a proportional representation of members of communities in all institutions of the system which is the second reason for sacking the members of the majority group.

The introduction of bilingualism into the state should be very careful, with a lot of fact, with previous preparation of the educational system of Republic of Macedonia so that it could respond to the need of the whole population to become bilingual. Any sudden implementation of the Framework Agreement referring to the use of languages and the introduction of bilingualism will lead to interethnic tensions that are unnecessary at this moment if we want to build a European civic state.

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Ass.Prof. PhD Vlado Petrovski,
Pedagogical faculty, University "Goce Delcev" Stip , Macedonia
++38970257493,e-mail :vlado.petrovski@ugd.edu.mk

Ass.Prof. PhD Snezana Mirascieva,.
Pedagogical faculty, University "Goce Delcev" Stip , Macedonia
++38971215818, e-mail: snezana.mirascieva@ugd.edu.mk

Young Ass Daniela Jakimova,
Pedagogical faculty, University "Goce Delcev" Stip , Macedonia
e-mail:daniela.jakimova@ugd.edu.mk