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Education of Moslem-Minority Children in the Balkans Overcoming the Cultural Gap

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THE PROBLEM

The educational policy of Bulgarian central and local authorities towards the ethnic and religious minorities has followed an assimilationist line from the early sixties to the late eighties (1989) of the XX-th century. Since 1990 significant changes were introduced in favor of the cultural rights of the minorities. At present the normative documents which have greatest relevance to minority education are as follows.

Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria:

Art. 36 (2) The citizens, for whom Bulgarian is not the mother tongue, have the right beside the obligatory study of Bulgarian to study and use their mother tongue.

Art. 53 (2) School education to the age of 16 is obligatory.

The Law of National Education:

Art. 4 (2) No restrictions or privileges are admitted, that are based on race, nationality, gender, ethnic and social origin, religion and social status.

Art. 8 (2) The students, for whom Bulgarian is not the mother tongue, have the right, beside the obligatory study of Bulgarian, to study their mother tongue at the municipality? schools in the Republic of Bulgaria, under the protection and control by the state.

Art. 9 Every citizen has the right to consume his right to education in schools that has been chosen freely by him, according to his personal preferences and potential/

The Law of the Grade of Education, the General-Educational Minimum and the National Curriculum

Art. 8 (2) The General-Educational instruction is built upon the principles of: universal human rights; children's rights; the traditions of Bulgarian culture and education, the achievements of world culture, the values of civil society, the freedom of conscience and freedom of thought

Instructions of the Ministry of Education and Science:

Instruction No2 about the National Curriculum

Section "Civic Education – basic themes: "I am a citizen of my country"; "Diversity and Identity of the Personality", "Rights and Responsibilities of the Person", "The Citizen and the World", "Global Issues of our Time", National Identity and Differences in Society", "Citizens, Rights, Responsibilities".

Instruction No4 about the Distribution of Teaching Time:

Art. 5 ...among the obligatory elective subjects is the study of the mother tongue...

Art. 21 ...among the freely elective subjects is the study of Religion....

The status of study of the mother tongue has been transformed in 1999 from a "freely elective" to an "obligatory elective" subject. This means that the lessons in mother tongue will have place within the regular studying time (and will not be taken after the regular classes as was until 1999). The language that is studied at the largest scale as mother tongue is Turkish (more than 37 000 students and about 680 teachers). In several towns there are classes in Hebrew, Armenian and Greek. The second largest minority, the Roma, do not study their mother tongue, because of lack of professionally qualified Roma language teachers, and to some extent, because of difficulties with the standardization of the Roma language, which has quite a few dialects in Bulgaria.

The study of Islam as freely elective subject is still under discussion, although there are no normative obstacles for it. Another matter is the study of Islam at the religious secondary schools, which prepare imams for the needs of the religious practices of the Moslem population, and which have a special status.

Until 2001 the only civil servants, whose professional duties involved dealing with the issues of minority education, were the experts in mother tongue. There are such positions in several towns in the regions with greater number of minority (especially Turkish) students – Shumen, Burgas, Russe and Kurdzhali. At the Ministry of Education and Science there are experts in Turkish, Hebrew and Armenian.

In 2001 an expert was appointed at the Ministry to deal with the issues of minority integration, and several months later (after the change of the Government and administrative transformations in the Ministry) a Directorate for “Spiritual Development and Integration” was established. One of its prerogatives are the issues of minority education.

On the whole, a paradox is becoming more and more evident. On the one hand, we have the need and the normative basis for developing minority education. The growing number of minority children, who drop out from school, and the poor quality of the education of most of those, who stay at school, are a menace for the future development of the country – no society can integrate large masses of illiterate or semi-literate people into constructive economic and cultural processes. Besides, the decline of the birth rate (with the exception of the Roma and to some extent the Turkish population) brings about a sharp decrease of the numbers of school children. Each year more and more schools are closed because there are no children to study there. Many teachers, consequently, lose their jobs. If a preparatory year (before the first grade) for the children, whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian, becomes a mass practice (now there are such classes, but more as an exception, than as a rule), this would restore many positions for elementary school teachers. The same is valid also for full day training. And last, but not least, there is considerable international pressure to harmonize Bulgarian legislation and policy practices with the European standards. This is valid also for minority rights.

On the other hand, the Educational administration and the Government as a whole keep being rather passive with regard of the issues of minority education.

Some progress was made recently, after the adoption by the Government (under NGO pressure) of a Framework Program for the Integration of the Roma in Bulgarian Society (April 1999), as a result of which an experimental Project was started for the replacement of the de facto segregated Roma schools by a system of distributing the Roma children among the mainstream schools. However, this initiative is being realized exclusively by NGOs, and is financed from international funds.

Initial assumption of this paper: this paradox – the reluctance of the Bulgarian educational administration, inspite the obvious necessity and the recent improvement in the normative documentation, to commit itself to a more active minority education policy is due greatly to concerns related to the danger of making large scale mistakes. There is actually no experience in the country in specialized minority education. Besides, the political sensitivity of minority issues in general makes the educational authorities very cautious and unwilling to make radical steps in this direction. As a whole, there is no clear perspective for a consistent minority education policy, and this justifies to a great extent a passive position of the educational administration in this respect.

The main objective of this policy project is to consider the different options for developing minority education in Bulgaria, and sort out by means of policy analysis their shortcomings and advantages, outlining as a result the most acceptable solution and formulating the respective policy recommendations.

OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. To preserve the status quo, doing nothing special about the problems of minority education. This option has the advantage that no one will be personally responsible, if the situation deteriorates substantially in some respect. The basic shortcoming is that in this way the educational system reproduces and increases the alienation between the minority ethnic and religious groups, on the one hand, and mainstream society, on the other. If we take into account the shifting of the demographical balance in favor of the minorities, this postponing of the state's tackling of the problem increases the latter's scope progressively, so that a future catastrophe is becoming more and more probable.

2. To introduce into the curricula only elements of intercultural education on culture-general basis, i.e. working against ethnocentrism and prejudice; raising of culture-awareness; developing general skills of intercultural communication. The advantage is that there is virtually no risk of achieving results, which jeopardize the peaceful relations between the ethnic and religious groups. The shortcoming is that in this way the most dramatic problems of the minority children at school (such as the unattractiveness, the "intransparency", the irrelevance to their basic life-problems of school reality) will remain unresolved. The intercultural education, which is built solely on culture-general basis, would serve as an alibi for the educational authorities (that they are doing their best in this respect) and would mislead the general public that the problems of minority children have roots outside the educational system and a different agenda of resolving these problems is needed. Basically, the introduction of culture-general methods of intercultural education is quite necessary, but it must not remain the only element of such education to be practiced at Bulgarian schools.

3. To supplement the culture-general methods by radical changes in the educational system in the direction of developing culture-specific methods to work with the different ethnic and religious categories of students in general (i.e. – to use different educational instruments in the education of Roma-Christian, Roma-Moslem, Bulgarian-Moslem and Turkish students). The advantage of such an approach is that the specific educational needs of these categories of students will be addressed. The danger is that this would lead to a segregationist system of working with minority children. The more distant history of minority education in Bulgaria can present negative precedents of special schools for Roma children, which had the task to prepare them for low skilled work places, giving them an education that was of second quality per definition. A segregationist approach would be also quite unacceptable in a political perspective. From a philosophically methodological point of view, such an educational policy could be characterized as "essentialist" – i.e. as treating the concrete situations in a preconceived way. This means to regard the cultural needs of the various "populations" of minority students as directly determined by the mere fact of their belonging to one or another ethnic category. As a result, in most cases the culture-specific methods would be applied inadequately. A clear example for the consequences of an essentialist minority (and more specifically – educational) policy is the case with the Albanian minority in Macedonia.

4. To supplement the culture-general methods by an individualizing approach to the concrete groups of minority students, which takes into account their specific needs, without using large-scale categorization, i.e. without creating prerequisites for educational segregation. This option is being considered in more detail below as subject of the policy recommendations.

5. Regardless of the options of resolving the basic problems of minority education in Bulgaria, there is an unquestionable necessity of taking urgent measures for improving the education of Roma ghetto children. This is a matter of a separate category of recommendations further.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It would be helpful in this situation to work out an individualizing approach towards the different ethnic/religious categories of students within the concrete schools with minority representation (as an alternative for a generalizing approach, developing specialized methodologies for working with the different ethnic and religious categories of students in general). Such an individualizing approach should be applied both in identifying the educational needs and in using educational materials and training techniques, adequate to these needs.

This approach should by no means be oriented towards “dissolving” the cultural (ethnic, religious) identities of the minority students by treating their culturally specific educational needs as only a part of the complex needs of a culturally heterogeneous school or class. The individualizing methodology includes as its important component specialized working with children from one or another ethnic or religious category – e.g. on lessons in mother tongue; or within the obligatory lessons (about individualizing didactic instruments see Research Paper); or out of the obligatory lessons, which is possible within a full-day training (the latter, unlike the predominant in Bulgaria half-day training, gives more opportunities to work out of the strictly programmed compulsory lessons); or as extracurricular activities. My specific methodological claim here is that this specialized training is “tuned” a posteriori to the actual needs of the children from the respective cultural community - needs that are determined in interaction with their concrete social environment.

The sociological survey, which is a part of this policy Project, has demonstrated that the response of the children from ethnically and religiously heterogeneous schools to questions, concerning their cultural attitudes, was determined more by the concrete configuration of their social environment, than by their belonging to the respective ethnic or religious community in general. (For more detail see the Research Paper.) This is an argument in favor of the following recommendations

Level A (general):

- working out a questionnaire for identifying the specific educational needs of the ethnic/religious categories of students within concrete schools with ethnic/religious minority representation
- working out a resource package of educational materials for all the identified educational needs – the application of the appropriate part of the materials will depend on the concrete diagnostics of the educational needs within the concrete class.
- working out a strategy for building a social environment at school, which is culturally friendly for the minority students

Level B (immediate/urgent measures)

- combating the striking communicative deficiencies among the ghetto Roma children:
 - wider introduction of the preparatory (before the first grade) year for minority children, with emphasis on communication training.
 - wider introduction of full-day training for minority children (additional work after the compulsory lessons)
 - special measures for the motivation and qualification of the teachers, who work with minority children
 - appointing of psychologists at the schools with problematic minority children

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IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

The possible sources of resistance against the proposed policy changes are as follows:

- the deficiency of material resources. In the recent years an automatic response by the educational authorities to all initiatives for change has been, that the budget money available is barely enough to support the system such as it is. A possible counter-argumentation can be developed in the direction that saving money in the field of education now can bring about wasting much more money later, to repair damages, if a social catastrophe, conditioned by the inadequacy of the education of minority children, breaks out. Besides, a possible strategy to bypass the resistance of the educational authorities in this respect might be to provide non-government (private, international) funds for experimental small scale introduction of the proposed educational methods. If they demonstrate their effectiveness in a convincing way, this could be a decisive argument for the changes.

- The inertness of the teachers and the administration. Such as the human resources in the educational system are now, it is quite difficult to expect from them a positive reaction to the introduction of qualitatively new methods of work with minority children. A possible tool to overcome this obstacle might be to develop a system of stimuli – in the respect of increased pay, of attractive forms of post-graduate education, of improving the career opportunities – for teachers and administrators, who take active part in the changes.

- A negative attitude of the general public. This is possible as a result of political concerns (e.g. that a too great attention to the education of minority children might trigger a “chain reaction” of escalating demands by the minorities for more rights and privileges not only in education, but in all fields of social life). A possible preemptive strategy against such a reaction might be a campaign to promote public awareness in this field, including also minority NGOs and political representations. More general methodological and world-view elements, such as the values of multiculturalism and intercultural dialogue might be helpful in this respect.

EDUCATION OF MOSLEM-MINORITY CHILDREN IN THE BALKANS. OVERCOMING THE CULTURAL GAP

Research Paper

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The intellectual interest, which has motivated this research, was directed towards the specific educational problems of Moslem minority children in Bulgaria and other countries in the Balkans. The broader issue was the problematic situation of the Moslem minorities in the region (i.e. Turkish, Albanian, Roma-Moslem and Pomak, i.e. Slavonic-Moslem populations). They have specific difficulties in the cohabitation with the majority populations in the Balkan countries - in comparison with the Roma-Christian minority, and also with the smaller minorities. My intention was to study the specific educational problems of the children from Moslem minorities, i.e. to outline the “profile” of their educational needs. However, my first steps in the research revealed to me the importance of the narrow cohabitation of the Moslem minorities with other ethnic and religious communities in the target countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece). This made me shift the focus of study towards the effects of cultural interaction on the educational needs. The problems of Moslem children at school are treated in the context of broader issues of intercultural education, with special emphasis on the complexity of the effects of cultural interactions.

The initial title of the Project contained the adjective “Islamic” instead of “Moslem”. My work with the matter of this study convinced me that “Moslem” fits better the research design. I wish to express my gratitude to my mentors, Prof. Will Kymlicka and Prof Maya Grekova, whose advice and assistance were of great value to my work. Of course, the responsibility for all problematic elements in this study is entirely mine.

I. INITIAL ASSUMPTIONS

1. General goal of intercultural education:

harmonization of the relationships between/among cultural identities.

2. Means:

A. Via culture-general methods, legitimizing cultural diversity as such:

Working against ethnocentrism and prejudice; raising of culture-awareness; promoting tolerance, demonstrating the value of cultural identities in general, linking the issues of cultural integration with civic culture and activity.

Examples: familiarization of the students with the historically conditioned mechanisms of construction of cultural identity, introduction to the psychological theories of intergroup and intercultural dynamics; training of general skills in intercultural communication; sensibilization to value pluralism, developing of self-reflective attitude towards the own culture, etc. All this can be done within the lessons in obligatory subjects, such as history, literature, art, psychology, ethics, philosophy? etc. as well as within optional subjects and extracurricular activities.

B. Via culture-specific methods:

They might include: language training – both in the mother tongue and in the “national” (i.e. mainstream culture’s) language; providing information about the minority’s culture – literature, history, customs, traditions, etc.; specific interreligious activities (in the cases where the cultural difference concerns also religion); developing specific intercultural competence.

While all but the last one of these methods of intercultural education are quite popular at ethnically or religiously heterogeneous schools, there are very few attempts to involve in the educational process elements, which contribute to building specific intercultural competence. As my research is focused on the problems of developing such competence, I shall outline here briefly the issues of intercultural education, which can be resolved neither by the culture-general, nor by the just listed culture-specific methods, which concern language, cultural information or religion.

Most generally, the educational system requires inter alia the adopting of definite cultural forms of behavior. If there is a considerable difference between the standards of behavior of the mainstream culture, which are usually dominant at school, and the ones of the minority culture, the minority students are in a contradictory situation. In most cases this contradiction is resolved in a competitive way. If school culture wins, the child gets involved into a process of assimilation. If the child’s original culture remains superior, s/he becomes a poor student. In the best case s/he reproduces mechanically the knowledge that is taught and pretends to have achieved the results that are required. The integration into school culture, and further into the mainstream high culture, what education aims at?, is ineffective under such conditions. Usually the cultural difference is not recognized by the educational authorities as reason for these failures. Other factors are blamed – poverty, discrimination, the general neglect of minority education, etc. These relatively obvious circumstances are important too, but I shall try to substantiate the thesis that cultural difference matters a lot in minority education.

- **Issues of the orientation and motivation of the student’s activity at school.** Generally, the

school promotes one or another personality model, that ought to be followed as an ideal by the students. Desirable forms of behavior are all the time encouraged and undesirable ones – punished; the correct reproduction of knowledge and skills is affirmed and mistakes are negated, etc. In this way certain beliefs, attitudes, values, norms of behavior are cultivated in the student's mind. However, if they contradict more or less the standards of her/his original culture, this results in disorientation. Suppose that, e.g., tolerance is proclaimed at school as a basic value, and a boy's father keeps telling him that he must become a tough guy, and impose his will onto the others by every means. Besides, what would happen, if the role-models that are offered by the curriculum, look ridiculous, or simply meaningless from the point of view of the child's original culture? Would that child adopt them as her/his personal heroes, would s/he get inspiration from them?

- **Issues, ensuing from the general contrast between minority and school/mainstream culture.** Generally, (at least in the Balkans) minority cultures function mostly on popular, everyday level. The cultural experience that a child can get in her/his family environment often is rather limited, the cultural horizon is rather narrow. This quantitative factor, combined with the difference in content with the mainstream culture, makes it more difficult for the child to understand correctly the messages of the teaching material – to be able to relate the information that s/he gets at school to her/his own life-world and in this way grasp the information's true meaning, going beyond the mechanical reproduction of texts. Besides, there appear to be in many cases communicational incommensurabilities. The conceptual patterns that the child is accustomed to at home, are very different from the high culture ones at school. Furthermore, the contrast between the high mainstream culture and the merely popular original culture of the child often results in an inferiority complex, which is an additional factor for the child's alienation from school environment.

And in the fourth place (but not in importance) – in many cases the child's original culture imposes on her/him an agenda that is very different from, and even incompatible with the school one. The rhythm of life e.g. of the Roma youngster has little to do with the one that is presupposed by school curricula and programs. It is the norm in Roma society that boys and, especially, girls get socially mature much earlier than is taken for granted by the educational system. To establish a family and to start making a living on one's own is a task that these young people have to face at an age when they are supposed to be interested exclusively in their lessons. And the meaning of education and career to one's life is very different in their cultural context.

- **Issues of the teacher – student interaction.** Cultural differences are generally an important, often negative, factor in interpersonal relationships. If we regard, for instance, such differences as individualism – collectivism; low power distance – high power distance; feminine – masculine culture; low uncertainty avoidance – high uncertainty avoidance (all these as defined by G. Hofstede – see Hofstede 1994), low context – high context culture (in the meaning of E. Hall – see Hall 1977), “guilt” culture – “shame” culture, or, more generally, modern – traditional culture, we'll see that a great variety of misunderstandings and conflicts is possible, when persons, belonging to different cultures interact. This is also the case at school. Let us imagine how children, who belong to a collectivist culture, would behave under competitive “rules of the game” in the class room, formulated by a teacher in the spirit of a modern mainstream culture. Most probably they would be very passive, preferring to get low marks, rather than violate the code of behavior of their culture and get into a situation that is embarrassing for them. However, from the point of view of the teacher this perfectly rational conduct would look as an evidence of

low motivation, lack of interest towards the teaching material, etc.

We can find evidence for such an intercultural misunderstanding in the results of a survey on the evaluation of children from mixed classes by Bulgarian teachers, carried out by Dr Ivan Ivanov in the region of Shumen (North East Bulgaria). The teachers clearly evaluate the Turkish students as much more collectivist than the Bulgarian ones (Ivanov 97 : 29), but ascribe to the former much lower ambition (Ivanov 97 : 39) and need of achievement (Ivanov 97 : 56).

Indisputably these observations of the teachers contradict the general impression of the people from that region that the Turks there are especially hard working and positively motivated people. Isn't it strange, then, that the Turkish children behave as low motivated and unambitious at school. This paradox can be easily explained by referring to the inadequacy of the standard teaching methods that are applied by the teachers with regard of the collectivist culture of their students.

Many more examples can be given in this respect. A low power distance behavior of the teacher can be interpreted by children with high power distance mentality as an evidence of feebleness – it would be very difficult for the teacher to get respect from these children in such a situation.

The value of personal responsibility can be cultivated in children from a “guilt”-culture by methods that would not bring much with children from a “shame”-culture. A correct, dignified, rational behavior of the teacher towards the students, which might be well in place with children from a modern culture, would be perceived as impersonal and arrogant by children from a traditional culture, who would welcome rather an emotional and family-like approach.

- **Issues of the school – student interaction.** In some cases (especially with Roma children and their parents) the attitude towards the modern institutions of mainstream society is one of distance and suspicion. The institutions present a “non-transparent” reality with incomprehensible logic. It is very difficult to achieve a correct understanding of the mission of education from such a starting point, without specialized assistance by the educators. As a result, the motivation to study remains low.

Many more challenges to intercultural education, that ensue from cultural differences, can be pointed out, which can be met neither by culture-general methods, nor by language training and providing information about minority cultures. It would not be enough to help a student and a teacher accept cultural difference as something positive, if in their case this difference brings confusion into their interaction. Recognizing someone's right to be different is only the first step. It is a very important step, indeed, as it prevents the orientation of educational activity towards assimilation. However, what remains to be done is to establish a link of mutual understanding between the cultural identities. It is not necessary to “convert” the child from collectivism to individualism, or from a high context to a low context culture. In my opinion, it would be enough to facilitate her/his activity in a different cultural environment, without claiming that this is the only “right” way of life.

To develop intercultural competence in this case would mean to provide the student with orientation how to act in a cultural environment, that is “secondary” for her/him, without demanding from her/him to take this environment's standards of behavior as self-evident (as it has been done so far within the standard educational systems in our countries). A necessary condition to achieve this would be competence to work with alternative standards of cognition, thinking, evaluation and action. The starting point to develop such a cultural “bilingualism” should be the child's original culture, its specific styles of intellectual activity, its value priorities, etc. If the process does not start from within the child's original culture, it has little chances of success.

The relation between the minority culture and the mainstream one will remain a relation of competition and not of cooperation.

3. The problem that is addressed by this research.

It is interesting that the need to work with the concrete differences (in terms of standards of behavior), between the mainstream and the minority cultures at school, is generally recognized in the literature on intercultural education, but very rarely concrete educational methods are discussed, which can realize the intercultural competence of students and teachers, that is needed. I shall take for granted that such culture-specific methods can be and are being developed (a strategy in this respect is outlined, e.g. in G. Hofstede's article "Cultural Differences in Teaching and Learning", where he calls this approach towards intercultural education "an anthropological one" – Hofstede 93 : 29)?, and shall try to resolve by this research the following dilemma in applying them:

Whether they should address the needs of the students, as determined by:

- a) their belonging to one or another ethnic or religious category in general;
- b) the environment in one or another concrete school, where ethnocultural diversity is present.

The b) option has two possible variants:

- the needs of the students to be regarded as undifferentiated within the concrete "population" (e.g. the students from a given school) – i.e. without making any difference according to ethnicity or religion
- to differentiate between the needs of the ethnic and/or religious categories of students in every school, taking into account their contingency upon the concrete conditions of their environment (e.g. whether the school is in a town or a village, in an ethnically and/or religiously mixed area, or in a homogeneous one, etc.).?

The a) option bears the risks of essentialization of cultural differences. This term has become popular as denoting the treatment of some social phenomena as manifestations of "hard" essences – not subject to historical changes, not intermingling with other social realities. From this point of view cultural identities are "discrete, frozen in time, impervious to external influences, homogeneous and without internal dissent". (Modood 1998 : 378) In our case, if the various cultural traits, exhibited by minority children at school, are considered in an essentialist way, we should direct our educational policy so as to transcend these "manifestations" of the one and only "true" Turkishness, or "true" Gypsiness and try to establish harmonious relations with the latter, i. e. with the minority cultures as "essences", and not with the "phenomena" that "mask" them. This would mean to ignore the unique configurations of cultural characteristics, that are present in the concrete schools, to put the rich variety of cultural life under common denominators, to approach in the same way very different populations of students (e. g. Turkish children, who live for two generations in an industrialized town and Turkish children from an isolated small village), to apply different specialized, rigid methodologies when working with children with different ethnicities and/or religious affiliation, fragmenting in this way the cultural space at school.

An interesting example of an essentialist approach towards cultural difference, predetermined by political circumstances, is the case with the education of Albanian minority students in Macedonia. According to the Constitution of the country, which has inherited in this respect much from the (former) Yugoslav model of minority rights, the members of "the nationalities" (this is the term in the text of the Constitution to denote the ethnic Albanians, ethnic Turks, the Roma, etc. in Macedonia) have the right to instruction in their mother tongue at primary and secondary school (Article 48, also, Article 11 of the Education Law – s. Galev 98 : 55). It is

stated in the same article of the Constitution, that at the schools, where the instruction is carried out in the language of a nationality, Macedonian is also taught. Besides, although nothing is mentioned about higher education, it is indisputably implied, that the right of instruction in the mother tongue is not recognized at University level.

A de facto segregated? school system follows from these provisions: separate schools?, separate teachers in all subjects, separate textbooks (not translations of the mainstream ones?). And, interestingly, very few graduates continue their studies in the only mixed, not (auto)segregated educational institution – the University. The Albanians, for instance, were about 22% of the population of Macedonia in 1992. In the same year Albanian were about 26.5% of the students at primary school, and about 1.5% of the students at the University (Tasheva 97 : 111). Now the situation is not much different. The reaction of the Albanian minority to this fact is quite symptomatic – they do not demand greater flexibility and integration in school education, but a separate University as well?.

As if to “balance” these too far reaching (in a way) educational rights, no special care has been taken of minority education, so that to make possible positive interactions between the ethnic/religious minority students and the other children, via which bonds of mutual understanding and trust could be established. Cultural pluralism in this case has been exercised as absolutely contrary to national unity.

Paradoxically, neither side in this relationship is satisfied by the present state of affairs. The ethnic Macedonian public maintains that the Albanians have too much rights. The latter complain that nothing is being done in order to give them opportunities for equal participation in the social and cultural life of the country. As far as education is concerned, for example, they point out that the separate Albanian classes and schools work in inferior material conditions, the qualification of the Albanian teachers is lower than the average, and the access to the 2 Macedonian Universities is especially difficult for Albanians. In other words, the exercising of their educational rights is being done under such conditions (provided by the state), that it turns to their detriment.

It is not my task here to comment on the advantages and shortcomings of the different minority rights’ systems. The education of the ethnic minorities in Macedonia entirely in their mother tongue is realization of a group-differentiated right and as such it corresponds to some important criteria of justice - e.g. the “recognition” of cultural identity in the terms of Ch. Taylor (s. Taylor 94), or the membership in the minority’s own “societal culture”, in the meaning of W. Kymlicka (s. Kymlicka 95). However, although supporting in principle such rights, I can not deny that there seems to be something wrong in their implementation in this case. The constitutional principle is applied without using other instruments in parallel with it, so as to guarantee the beneficial effect of its realization in the various concrete situations. I am using the category “essentialist” to conceptualize this implementation of group-differentiated rights in the sense that it leaves no room for the definition of the cultural needs of the young people with their (and also of their parents and their communities) participation, and with regard of the concrete conditions. The cultural needs of the various “populations” of Albanian and other minority students are regarded here as directly determined by the mere fact of their belonging to an ethnic category. Let us consider now the b) option. Its first variant - to identify the group specific cultural needs of the students as integral part of the cultural needs of the student “population” in each concrete school - devalues the ethnic and religious differences. If such an approach is adopted, that would mean to choose what culture-specific methods of intercultural education to apply in a given school? on the basis of studying the needs of the students in that school as a whole, without

differentiating between ethnic or religious subgroups. This approach is free, indeed, from the shortcomings of the essentialized targeting of ethnic and/or religious categories of students in general, because it takes into account the specific features of each concrete situation. However, it bears the risks of an assimilationist educational policy.

As a result, we are left with the second variant of the b) option. It will be formulated in detail in the next section (“Thesis of this research”). It is its underlying assumption that is tested by the empirical survey, represented below: namely, that the cultural differences within the concrete “populations” (schools) of students with minority representation are more meaningful with regard of educational methodology, than the differences among the ethnic and/or religious categories of students in general.

4. Thesis of this research:

- Due to the complex ethnocultural relations in the Balkans, a generalizing application of culture-specific methods of intercultural education according to the needs of the students, as belonging to one or another ethnic or religious category in general, would be an unacceptable essentialization of the situation. Each concrete ethnic or religious group in the region is located in the “force field” between the poles of more than one pair of opposites: traditional – modern; rural – urban; religious - secular; living in mixed – living in homogeneous (or even ghetto) ethnocultural environment; etc. It is unrealistic to try to outline the “profile” of the needs of an ethnic or religious community as a whole, because the community exists as a cluster of subgroups, which are influenced to a different extent by the above mentioned factors.?

- An individualizing approach, adequate to the specific needs of each ethnic and/or religious subgroup within each concrete “population” (school) seems to be more appropriate to the situation.? The key difficulty for introducing such an approach is: how to apply a definite – self-consistent and reproducible – educational methodology to the immense variety of configurations of needs and capacities, specific for each concrete subgroup of students.

- This difficulty can be overcome by:

- an analytical “diagnostics” of the educational needs of each concrete subgroup of students (e.g. the Turkish students in a given school), proceeding from the assumption that each such group is characterized by the same system of cultural parameters?, but by a specific combination of values of these parameters?. The diagnostics would consist in finding out by empirical means (e.g. by a questionnaire) what the concrete values for the given group are of the cultural parameters, which as a system are common for all groups of students in the region?.

- an application of an appropriate combination of educational materials, corresponding to the concrete needs of the group, identified by the diagnostic procedure. These educational materials will be selected (according to the needs of the group) from a larger collection (a resource package), compiled with regard of the system of cultural parameters, characteristic to one or another extent for every group.

The individualizing approach in the application of culture-specific methods of intercultural education in Bulgarian schools, which is recommended here as most adequate to the situation in the country, is not an unique invention. It is formulated, rather, in a well established trend in contemporary innovative pedagogy. To this trend belong “Child-Centered” and “Student-Centered Education”, as well as in a larger sense, “Child-Directed Education” and “Developmentally Appropriate Practice” (DAP). In another respect there are substantial commonalities with the “Differentiated Classroom” model (s. Tomlinson 1999). Without going into detail, some common methodological assumptions of these theories, which are valid also for the “individualizing approach” in question, are: the necessity of adaptation of training activities

to the needs of the learners?; the necessity to integrate the learning process into the self-development of the child (an important authority for some of these theories is J. Piaget); the necessity of narrow collaboration between teacher and student, the necessity of ongoing assessment of the training process as a source of feedback for modifications of instruction; balance of group and individual goals and norms, etc.

There is considerable skepticism and criticism with regard of this pedagogical trend. Some authors express serious concerns about the prospect that the children's needs determine the agenda of the educational process. Isn't the task of education precisely to transcend the immediate needs of the children, to open new horizons before them. An interesting critical analysis in this respect can be found in G.S. Cannella's *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education: Social Justice & Revolution* "(Cannella, 1997).

However, it can be argued that a priority for the student-centered approach is precisely to assist the self-development of the needs and interests of the children. Besides, a clear definition of the strategic goals of the educational process in the respective case can be a guarantee against a complacent staying at a primitive level of instruction under the pretext that "this is what the children want (or like, or are interested in...)". And such a definition obviously cannot be dictated by the children's momentary needs. It should be a matter of public consensus of all the affected parties, including parents, ethnic/religious communities, educational authorities, etc. In this respect a more general methodology, e.g. the one of discourse ethics could be helpful (s. e. g. Habermas 1983).

When discussing an individualizing approach in applying culture-specific methods of intercultural education, we have to take into account also the difficulties in the practical implementation. Let us imagine the following situation. We have a class of 20 ethnic Bulgarian and 7 Roma students. Even if the specific cultural needs of the minority children are successfully identified, how can the process of instruction be adapted to them, without making it inadequate to the needs of the rest of the children in class?

The literature on Child-Centered Education, Student-Centered Education, etc. offers a lot of individualizing methods of instruction, which can fit a unified (e.g. national) curriculum. Only as an illustration I'll cite "project-based learning", "case-based learning", "learning contracts", "group investigation", "interest centers" (for more s. Tomlinson 1999 : 15). Besides, also for many other reasons, full day training is preferable for minority children, who have difficulties at school (in our case – especially the Roma children). The instruction after the regular lessons gives plenty of opportunities for more flexible, individualizing activities. And still another option is the extracurricular work with the children.

5. Task of this research:

To test the assumption that the cultural differences within the concrete "populations" of students (i.e. schools) with minority representation are more meaningful with regard of educational methodology, than the differences among the ethnic and/or religious categories of students in general.

The parameters, along which the cultural differences are established within the research, are among the ones that according to our opinion should be used for diagnosing the specific educational needs of each concrete group of students with minority representation. However, it is not a task of this research to find out these needs themselves. I think that this should be achieved by a more comprehensive and representative survey. Actually, my main policy recommendation, if my assumption is confirmed by my empirical data, will be that such a survey is prepared and used on national level in Bulgaria for diagnosing the specific needs in the respect of cultural

integration of the students from each culturally heterogeneous school in the country. Consequently, the parameters, along which the cultural differences are established within this research, are only a part of the whole set, which, according to my view, should be used to find out the specific educational needs of the concrete groups of students – see the table in the theoretical model of the sociological survey.

This is the reason why only a small part of the parameters of cultural difference, that are outlined in the theoretical model of the survey?, are actually included in the questionnaire. The task of the latter is merely to check whether the data about the cultural differences within the concrete schools vary significantly with regard of the aggregate data about the cultural differences among the ethnic categories of students, resp. among the religious categories of students in general. If it is so, this would mean that the specific approaches of intercultural education to address the specific needs of minority students should be “tailored” according to the cultural configurations within the concrete schools, and not according to the cultural identities of the ethnic and religious categories of students as such.

II. QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Parameters, along which cultural differences within and among the schools, on the one hand, and the ethnic and religious categories of students, on the other, are to be identified by the survey:

- Qualitative differences:

- Attitude to school (questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10 – some of the questions are relevant to more than one type of differences)

- Worldview /especially position in the tradition – modernity frame of reference/ (4, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21)

- Claims for specific cultural presence in the school curricula (12, 13, 24)

- Quantitative differences:

- Level of coping with the school tasks (6, 7, 8, 9)

- Level of communication capacities (14, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22)

- Identification questions: (23, 25, 26)

As relevant for the comparison of the levels of cultural difference seem to be only the questions which refer to the attitude to school and to the worldview. The other questions were included either because of “technological” necessity (the identification ones), or because they could be instrumental for the eventual further comprehensive identification of the group’s specific educational needs and it seemed worthwhile testing them at this stage of research (these are the questions, concerning the claims for cultural presence in the curricula, the level of coping with the school tasks and the level of communication capacities).

2. Technical parameters of the survey:

Typological sample:

Sliven region (South-East of Bulgaria) – one urban mixed school (Bulgarian and Roma children), one urban minority school? (ghetto type – Roma Christian and Roma-Moslem children), one rural minority school (Turkish village near the town of Sliven)

Shumen region (North-East of Bulgaria) - one urban mixed school (Bulgarian and Turkish children), one urban minority school (Roma and Turkish children, with some Bulgarians too),

one rural minority school (Pomak, i.e. Bulgarian-Moslem village near the town of Shumen). Altogether 304 respondents.

Interviews with the teachers of all the classes that were included in the sample. The interviews preceded the field survey and the results of the interviews were used in the preparation of the questionnaire.

3. Limitations:

- Age problem: the diagnostics can be either too early (difficult communication because of low level of self-reflectivity of the respondents), or too late (after a certain age it is too late for intervention, because of the fixation of ethnocentric attitudes and of the alienation from school and from the mainstream culture of the minority children, besides - after IV grade the role of the teacher in Bulgarian schools changes. Instead of working almost entirely with one teacher, the class begins to work with several ones, none of them having special responsibility for the class). The most acceptable compromise for our survey – IV grade (age - about 11 years).
- Material resources: a) not all existing population configurations have been studied; b) not all relevant parameters of cultural difference. A representative survey would be the comprehensive one, which will be recommended, if the present hypothesis is confirmed.
- Ethnic and religious homogeneity of the rural schools that were included in the survey – this feature of theirs makes the data about them irrelevant for the study of ethnic and religious differences within schools. However, we kept them, because we needed to see how cultural differences are influenced by the rural environment.
- Socially desirable answers (especially in connection with school).
- The unclear ethnic identification of the Roma: some of them identify themselves as Bulgarians or Turks, although their educational needs are quite distinct from the ones of Bulgarian and Turkish children. That is why we didn't consider the ethnic differences within schools.

V. INTERVIEWS' RESULTS

The interviews with the teachers of the classes where the survey had to be realized, were useful for adapting the questionnaire to the age characteristics of the students. However, generally these interviews revealed several problematic elements in the activity of these teachers.

- a) low qualification of most of the teachers – if as an evidence for this can be accepted their style of expression, that was manifest in the interviews, and also their ability to articulate and substantiate their statements.
- b) low self-esteem and motivation of most of the teachers – the circumstance that they work with minority children was perceived by most of them as result of their failure to get a better job, and not as a professional challenge.
- c) low criteria for the achievement of their students – even the teachers of the classes, where the most shocking inability of the students to communicate was manifest throughout the survey, were not concerned about the quality of their students' work.
- d) low level of material support of the schools – in general, but with special difficulties in the Roma neighborhood school

VI. SURVEY RESULTS

The distribution of the answers of the children belonging to Moslem families and the one of the answers of the Christian children vary a lot from school to school in comparison with the aggregate data about all Moslem and all Christian children?. E.g. of all Christian students 28.6% replied that for them it is most important to get from their teacher “understanding and advice”

(question No 3), and 66.9% wanted to get “knowledge”. For the Moslem children the distribution is respectively 24.1% and 74.1%. However, the distribution of the answers to this question of the Christian children at the minority (“ghetto”) school in Sliven is reversed – most of them (76.66%) would like to get understanding and advice, and only 23.33% - knowledge. The Moslem children, on the contrary, repeat the configuration from the aggregate data, even in a more contrasted way – 16.66% to 83.33% in favor of knowledge. And we have a very different picture at the school in the Pomak village in the region of Shumen. All children there are Moslem and almost half of them preferred “understanding and advice” to knowledge”. Even more deviating from the aggregate results is the situation at the Turkish village school (all children there are Moslem too) near Sliven – 75% to 25% in favor of “understanding and advice”.

So, even if we take into consideration that at the other three schools the data were nearer to the aggregate ones, the overall picture represents a lot of variety within the concrete schools. It is about this variety that the aggregate data do not speak at all. And that is why an application of culture specific methods of intercultural education, which is guided by such aggregate data would be very inadequate for most of the schools. If we expect that at school level the distribution of cultural attitudes of minority children would be a microcosmic “copy” of the distribution that is registered at national level, we would make a big mistake.

Of course, it might be argued that the “deviant” schools in our case are not typical. Both the Christian and the Moslem children at the “ghetto” school in Sliven are ethnically Roma (although many of the Christians there identify themselves as Bulgarian and almost all of the Moslems identify themselves as Turks). The villages with the Pomak and the Turkish schools are a very traditional social environment for the children, unlike the industrialized one in Sliven and Shumen. However, most of the schools with minority representation in Bulgaria are not typical in one way or another. That is why it is unrealistic to expect some invariants in the attitudes of the children of the same ethnic or religious category, which would neatly divide them into “typical” Christian, “typical” Moslem, resp. “typical” Bulgarian, Roma and Turks. And such was the result of this pilot survey too.

- Most important other problems identified by the survey:

- the extreme lack of communicative capacities at the level of high culture among the ghetto Roma children (evidence – the difficulty with which they understood the survey questions; the primitive answers that they gave to most of the questions, e.g. to the question “What is friendship for you” most of them answered by pointing one or more names of friends of theirs).
- the inadequacy of the teachers in the minority schools – evidence – the fact that in the interviews they did not draw the attention to the almost total lack of communicative capacities of the ghetto Roma children – as if this is a normal state of affairs
- Unexpected result – absolutely no claims for changes in the curricula (questions 12, 13, 24). It seems that at this age the minority children do not see as a problem the lack of specific cultural presence of the minorities in the curricula and the insufficiency of mother tongue training.

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