

## THE PRACTICE OF MINORITY EDUCATION POLICY IN THE BALKANS

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Recibido: 15 Junio 2011 / Revisado: 20 Junio 2011 / Aceptado: 3 Julio 2011

By the end of the 20th Century, the changing concept of the Balkans and their territorial issues came into focus again. In the course of defining a community or territory, unique, differentiating, common features and accepted geographical borders are ascertained. Regarding the hereby examined Balkans, there are neither an academic consensus, nor an accordance among the neighbouring countries in terms of bordering, definition, and integrated regional community. Today's scientists and politicians regard the Balkans as an originally problematic space which endangers the safety and stability of the entire European community. The term 'the Balkans' refers to a fragmented, multi-ethnic, multicultural region but used as a pejorative remark. It is also referred to as an example to be avoided in other parts of Europe. The term 'Balkan' is a grievous historical heritage burdened with ethnic conflicts and political failure. This negative image is also affirmed by the intricate conversion processes (political-economic) of the post-communist era.<sup>1</sup>

The concept of the Balkans is mostly identified as South-Eastern Europe or it is even narrowed down. According to a wider representation, the former Yugoslavian states are considered as parts of the Balkans such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and in some cases Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, and the European territories of Turkey. The product of modern times is a new territorial category namely

'the West-Balkans'. Formerly it used to represent the Balkans as state poverty, violence, and backwardness, and this concept has inherited the above mentioned features.<sup>2</sup>

In the Balkans, statehood and ethnicity are deeply connected and derive from the era of national rebirth in the 19th Century. In the region, ethnic situations seem to be unbalanced and burdened due to the recently perpetuated Balkan wars, conflicts, ethnic and religious problems. As a result the question of minorities has attracted an intense attention.

According to the data of the national census in 2000, the total population of the region's 54 million is divided into  $\frac{3}{4}$  part of Romanians (19,5 million), Serbians (8,1 million), Bulgarians (6,7 million), and Albanians (5,3 million). As the first chart demonstrates (Appendix 1), in certain countries of the region, the ratio of the possibly dominant nations increased up to 87% within the total population (which was 73,1% in 1921). However the ratio of the minorities decreased to 13%. This process is related to wartime ethnic cleansing, a large number of migration, spatial ethnic concentration, and assimilation which is pointing towards ethnic homogenization. Obviously this does not mean that there are no solid ethnic spaces where minorities dominate the population in numbers (Hungarians in Vojvodina, Albanians in Macedonia, Turkish around Sumen and Kardjali in Bulgaria).<sup>3</sup> The ethnic compound of the Balkan countries is various as it

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<sup>1</sup> Anastasakis, O., p. 46.

<sup>2</sup> Pap, N., p. 79.

<sup>3</sup> Kocsis, K., p. 8.

clearly appears on the charts. There are some ethnic groups which can be found in several Balkan states as a national minority, but also at the same time they embody the state-forming national majority in another country. For example Albanians represent the minority in Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Greece but on the other hand the national majority in Kosovo and Albania. In the course of long historical dramas, the 'stage' of the Balkans has been rearranged which led to a special situation in numerous cases. While one part of an ethnic group forms the majority of a country, the other part of the same community suffers from the disadvantages of minority existence in another state (Serbians, Croats, Bosnians are all related). It also has been considered that there have been different minorities excluded from the state-forming procedures. This includes the remaining groups of the Osman regime that determined the flow of the development of the Balkans for centuries. Similarly to Hungarians, the Turkish also have their native home far from the region. Other minorities such as Pomaks and Torbeks have converted to Islam and kept their religion and their local language. Among the forgotten minor nations one attracts more attention again. The Vlachs, or Aromani as many of them call themselves, do not possess an own state but significantly contribute to the ethnic variety of the Balkans.

To get a complete understanding of the situation, the Hungarian minority also has to be mentioned that got excluded from the new borders of Hungary after World War I and remained living in the Balkan region along with those immigrant ethnic groups like Slovaks who settled down in the Southern part of the Carpathian Basin or in the Northern brim of the Balkans mostly in the decades after the Turkish retreat from the area. (The major part lives in the Province of Vojvodina and a minor part can be found in Bosnia and Herzegovina.) The ethnic diversity is slightly shaded by the German and Jewish minorities who formerly used to play a determining role in the development of the region. In terms of minorities, Romanians also have to be considered as a significant group. According to official data, there are 1.1 million Romanians in the Balkans, but most of them have assimilated to the surrounding nations in language, ethnicity, and religion, thus their population might be as high as 3,7

million<sup>4</sup>. However some estimations suggest that their number might be over 4.7 million<sup>5</sup>.

The above analysed unique connection between statehood and ethnicity is an innermost issue in the inhabitants' everyday lives who live in an ethnically diverse area. This also determines the political life and pervades the education policy. The decadal hostility between ethnic groups and the wounds caused along the centuries keep on returning. This manifests in the denial of minority rights or in an exaggerated demand of minority rights as compared with the population/ratio. In Macedonia, latter can be observed in the Albanian demands supported by the United States of America and Western Europe, as the Albanian minority gained the sufficient rights to be able to provide the total detachment.

## 1. THE PROTECTION OF MINORITIES, MINORITY EDUCATION RIGHTS

Among the minority rights, education related rights are the most significant. Education appears to be the assurance of the ethnic perseverance and the avoidance of assimilation. The use of language, the native culture and the maintenance of traditions are insured by the education. Therefore the assurance of minority education system seems to be the most important in terms of minority protection. The legal frames are provided on the European level, and majority nations control their acceptance and adaption. Obviously the introduction and ensurance of minority rights are not properly escorted by the will, intention, and execution of the governing powers. The laws and documents are in correspondence with the international legal norms. Therefore the international legal expectations about minority education rights need deeper analysis.

The European Council appointed those Eastern countries that wanted to join the European Union to meet the Copenhagen Criteria in terms of ethnic rights. In 1993 the Copenhagen Criteria defined the EU membership requirements considering the following international standards:

According to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages which was adopted by the European Council it has 'to make avail-

<sup>4</sup> Kocsis, K., p. 18.

<sup>5</sup> CIA World factbook 2009.

lable education in the relevant regional or minority languages; to provide, within education, for the teaching of the relevant regional or minority languages as an integral part of the curriculum'. Another article offers the following alternatives:

"[...] to make arrangements to ensure the teaching of the history and the culture which is reflected by the regional or minority language; to provide the basic and further training of the teachers required to implement those of paragraphs a to g accepted by the Party; to set up a supervisory body or bodies responsible for monitoring the measures taken and progress achieved in establishing or developing the teaching of regional or minority languages and for drawing up periodic reports of their findings, which will be made public; with regard to education and in respect of territories other than those in which the regional or minority languages are traditionally used, the Parties undertake, if the number of users of a regional or minority language justifies it, to allow, encourage or provide teaching in or of the regional or minority language at all the appropriate stages of education".

European Charter for Regional or  
Minority Languages - Article 8

All countries adopting the Charter must agree to undertake the insurance of minority education. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities adopted by the European Council on 1st February 1995 enlarged the frames defined by the document. According to this 'the Parties shall inter alia provide adequate opportunities for teacher training and access to textbooks, and facilitate contacts among students and teachers of different communities' and in another article 'the Parties undertake to recognise that every person belonging to a national minority has the right to learn his or her minority language. In areas inhabited by persons belonging to national minorities traditionally or in substantial numbers, if there is sufficient demand, the Parties shall endeavour to ensure, as far as possible and within the framework of their education systems, that persons belonging to

those minorities have adequate opportunities for being taught the minority language or for receiving instruction in this language. Paragraph 2 of this article shall be implemented without prejudice to the learning of the official language or the teaching in this language'<sup>6</sup>

The Hague Recommendations of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) make a significant effort to protect the ethnic minorities' education rights. They approach the issue of education independently from the general minority protection thus they represent the highest quality among any other legal documents referring to minority education.<sup>7</sup> It is remarkable that the Recommendations requires the education of the state language in minority education. They also mention the issue of tertiary education which has to be accessible when the minority demonstrated their need for it and have the eligible number of applicants. These established institutions can be available within the existing educational systems or they can exist independently. The Hague Recommendations prefer the first alternative but also claim that the majority state should recognise them without any discrimination. The state should not reduce tertiary education on teacher training either. In terms of curriculum development the Recommendations point out four basic obligations. First, the curriculum has to include the history, culture, and traditions of the respective minority. Second, the State should encourage the majority to learn the languages of the minorities. Third, the curriculum related to minorities should be developed with the active participation of the representatives of the minorities. Fourth, the State should facilitate the establishment of centres for minority language education and development (*The Hague Recommendations*).<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the 1990s, OSCE decision-making body surveyed the minority education content European legal documents and drew attention to the lack of a comprehensive and obligatory requirement system which could initiate a united European cooperation seeking the resolution of practical problems. It is also declared that The Language Charter is auspicious but definitely not a satisfactory initiative. The educational references of

<sup>6</sup> The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities - Article 12-15

<sup>7</sup> Hollósi G. <[www.jogiforum.hu](http://www.jogiforum.hu)>.

<sup>8</sup> <[www.osce.org/hu/hcnm/32186](http://www.osce.org/hu/hcnm/32186)>.

the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities are considerably superficial and the Hague Recommendations do not include obligations. Thus there are no dependable requirements developed for the states burdened by ethnic problems. As a result, in some of the new member states of the European Union, majority and minority parties have not found general agreement.

In most of the Balkan states the fundamental rights of the minorities are declared in the constitution or in minority laws. However only the everyday experience can demonstrate to what extent these rules are kept and applied, and whether they are completely supported by the ethnic majority. (Although it should be remarked that as the structure of the Balkan states are based on ethnicity, a comparison based on Western European norms would be extremely difficult.)

Minority education is an especially sensitive field. Hence the post-Yugoslavian states endeavour to treat ethnic content problems via education policy. It is not obvious though, to what extent do legal facilities contribute to the resolution of ethnic tensions and conflicts.

## 2. MINORITY EDUCATION IN REALITY

The educational situation of minorities in the Balkans may be considered radical. For example Albanians in Macedonia possess equal rights in every field of life with the ethnic majority. They enjoy the rights to learn in their language on every stage of education. It should be remarked, that there may be significant differences within one country in terms of minority education. Those ethnic groups that 'do not endanger' the majority vindicate their rights in minority education and proper conditions are provided for them (for example Serbia). Autochthon minorities and immigrant groups undergo different treatment regarding judgment and legal protection. In the region, the situation of the Romanies is definitely the most misfortunate. Romani children are more often segregated and excluded from education.

By this time, every Balkan state has undertaken to ensure the legal background for minority education. They have begun to apply the ordinances related to minority protection based on European norms and created legal conditions to facilitate minority education. Even so, the difference between legal actions and everyday practice is

remarkable. In several cases, the lack of political will leads to the avoidance of laws or obligations are interpreted in a specific way. In some countries (for example Bosnia-Herzegovina) minority protection is guaranteed only theoretically.

One notable difficulty is the lack of bilingual teachers. Therefore the establishment and development of tertiary education is an essential requirement in every state (however as a matter of fact, the degree of a state may not be accredited in another state within the region). According to international expectations, tertiary education should not be narrowed down to teacher training. Curriculum and school material form another crucial point as they do not considerate the history and culture of minorities, however they avoid hostility. In some regions, there were wars at the end of the 20th Century due to ethnic tensions, thus the selection of appropriate curriculum is necessarily complicated. The translation of school material may represent the perspective of the major society, hence it may be the source of severe conflicts between the majority and minorities. The materials imported from the native country do not meet the special requirements of the minorities and fail to mention them or the adopting country. Indeed, some books strengthen the hostility and prejudice between majorities and minorities due to the specific historical perspective they contain. Both material alternatives lack the important mutual dependency of ethnic groups.

The region also undergoes the difficulties of what resolution method the state seeks for minority integration. According to practice, parents themselves initiate segregation through insisting on single ethnic classes, linguistically and culturally homogeneous environment and teachers from minority background. This way of separation is more common in those areas where ethnic minorities do not endanger the political position of the major society. Bilingual education may provide resolution for integration which may provide an active participation in the life of the majority, in labour and official matters (where both languages can be used in one class). The realisation of bilingual education is often hindered by the lack of bilingual teachers as explained above. Some researches claim though that bilingual education may not necessarily facilitate the interests of minorities because students might confuse the two languages which may hamper language learning. Education in native language plays a prestigious role as it

enhances the position of a minority language. Furthermore it also contributes to the maintenance of a language and culture strengthening the ethnic identity from a long term perspective.<sup>9</sup> However this resolution does not facilitate integration despite all the advantages. Ethnic integration and cooperation, succeeding in the labour market, accessing higher education all require the confident knowledge of the state language. According to experts, the most eligible resolution may contain an education where students learn the state language as a subject on a regular basis from the earliest stage of schooling. Nevertheless in some cases, the quality of language teaching does not reach the adequate level. For example, in the areas of Macedonia inhabited mostly by Albanians, segregation and detachment appear as a result. Multicultural education applied in Western countries help students get acquainted with each other's history and culture. These norms do not characterize the education of the Balkans.

In terms of minority education, one of the most significant challenges is the segregation and absence of the Romani children. In every Southern-European country, dropout students include a higher number of Romani children than any other ethnic majorities or minorities. It is also considered as a common practice to segregate Romani children and educate them in 'special needs' classes.

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Several minority groups of the Balkans live in economically underdeveloped regions along the borders lacking career opportunities and skills. Without knowing the state language, they could not access the secondary and tertiary education which resulted their unqualification as they could not participate in higher education in their native languages. Religious fundamentalism (wahabbism) fascinates more followers among the unskilled people, especially young people (Sandjak). The development of education and regions can provide one solution for this difficulty. It may reduce unemployment and skilled labour force may attract capital.

As a conclusion the following consequence has been drawn: minority education in the Balkans is dependent on minority policy. In the Southern European region, education plays an essential role in identity preservation and the persuasion of autonomy, therefore it receives increased attention both from minority leaders and from state leaders. The present form of minority education in most of the Balkan countries does not facilitate the resolution of ethnic tensions. Although legislation and ordinances declare minority rights, they do not reduce discrimination and prejudice, and the applied practice does not contribute to the integration of minorities.

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<sup>9</sup> Lastyán, I. p. 113.

Appendix 1: The Ethnic Distribution of the Population in the South-Eastern European States (1921 and 2001)

State	Albania		Bulgaria		Romania		Bosnia-Hercegovina	
Year	1923	1998	1920	2001	1920	2002	1921	1995
Albanian	736000	3251000					626	
Bulgarian			4164172	6655210	71103	8092		
Bosnian, muslim							584800	1275000
Romani	10000	1000	105477	370908	104896	535250		
Greek	40000	62000	42074	3408		6513		
Croatian						6786	407700	468000
Hungarian					1420290	1434377	2577	
Macedonian	7489	5000		5071				
German					702717	60088	16471	
Italian								
Russian, Ukranian			10600	18084	97648	97750	10782	
Romianian, Vlach, Aromun	10000	10000	64220	11654	10399265	19409400	1334	
Serbian, Montenegrin					52696	22518	822000	987000
Slovakian, Chech					31966	21137	6377	
Slovenian								
Turkish, tatar, gagauz			663466	746664	41625	56733	231	
Jewish	100		43509	1363	267379	5870		
Other	10796	10000	3012	116539	80520	16667	37542	168000
Total population	814385	3339000	5096530	7928901	13270105	21681181	1890440	2898000
State	Croatia		Macedonia		Montenegro		Serbia	
Year	1921	2001	1921	2002	1921	2003	1921	2002
Albanian	751	15082	110651	509083	17231	31163	309516	1455847
Bulgarian		331					51009	20497
Bosnian, muslim	1700	20755	41500	17018	38300	72809	101129	160171
Romani		9463		53879		2601		108193
Greek								
Croatian	2374752	3977171	700		18200	6811	126788	90614
Hungarian	81835	16595	74		49	362	373120	293299
Macedonian		4270	498000	1297981		819		25847
German	99808	2902	106		172	118	332761	3901
Italian	210336	19636				127		
Russian, Ukranian	9521	5220	177		209	240	23824	7942
Romianian, Vlach, Aromun	896	487	8209	9695	19		219701	74630
Serbian, Montenegrin	584058	206557	18300	35939	236000	466083	3100893	6378987
Slovakian, Chech	42444	15222	132		136		63491	61232
Slovenian		13173				415		5104
Turkish, tatar, gagauz	260	300	101460	77959	172		31160	
Jewish		576					196	
Other	41233	129720	18982	20993	853	38597	74489	375937
Total population	3447594	4437460	798291	2022547	311341	620145	4808077	9062201
State	Middle Serbia		Kosovo		Vojvodina		Slovenia	
Year	1921	2002	1921	1999	1921	2002	1921	2002
Albanian	20609	59952	288907	1394200		1695		6186
Bulgarian	48609	18839			2400	1658		138
Bosnian, muslim	72709	155514	27680		740	4657		32009
Romani		79136				29057		3246
Greek								54
Croatian	8924	14302	525		117339	76312	7251	35642
Hungarian	3136	3092	12		369972	290207	14429	6243
Macedonian		14062				11785		3972
German	14976	747	30		317755	3154	41832	680
Italian							37302	2258
Russian, Ukranian	4527	2646	31		19266	21201	1630	961
Romianian, Vlach, Aromun	151632	44110	402		67667	30520		135
Serbian, Montenegrin	2483560	4924567	90000	97100	527333	1357320	4981	41631
Slovakian, Chech	4345	2947	18		59128	58285	2941	489
Slovenian		3099				2005	1201726	1631363
Turkish, tatar, gagauz	2484		27915		761			259
Jewish					196			28
Other	39548	143275	3490	72900	31451	159762	2432	198742
Total population	2855059	5466288	439010	1564200	1514008	2047618	1314524	1964036

Source: Kocsis, K., 2005