



LANGUAGE POLICY AND MINORITY LANGUAGE ISSUES AN INTERACTIVE RELATION

Mazedonische Zustände - On Macedonian Matters: Language Policy Or Politics Of Language

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"Macedonia defies definition"
(Wilkinson H.R.)

Language policy is without doubt closely connected to minority rights and language rights. The attitude towards minority issues can play an important role in defining a language policy. Setting off from this basis we would like to draw attention to the following question: can minority rights i.e. language rights be misused as a weapon?

Presenting the facts and aspects of the minorities' situation in the Republic of Macedonia with emphasis of the role of language policy implementation is going to be an attempt to clear out some of the perplexities.

The basic principles of recognizing human rights and civil society should unconditionally be included in a state's constitution, the laws and of course, the laws that regulate language and language policy. Therefore language policy has and should have an important role in practically every aspect of everyday existence in civil societies.

Republic of Macedonia as a state which declared its independence and sovereignty in 1991 due to a referendum of its citizens, has set off from its own past when the very existence of the Macedonian nation, language and culture has been denied and therefore has declared itself as a multiethnic society, obligating itself to giving equal rights to every particular citizen no matter what nationality or confession he belongs to, which of course includes every minority living in Macedonia.

1 The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia guarantees the rights of minorities to primary and secondary education in their mother tongue, whereas in the area of high education both state universities in Skopje and Bitola have special quotas for the students of the minority groups: the Faculty of Philology "Blazhe Koneski" at the University "Sv. Kiril i Metodij" in Skopje has a group for Serbian language, (founded in 1946), a Department of Albanian language and literature, (founded in 1959) and a Department of Turkish language and literature, (founded 1976) all which provide professor training, as well as MA and PhD programmes. The Pedagogic Faculty in Skopje provides also professor training for primary and secondary education in Albanian and Turkish. The providence of language rights also includes radio and TV broadcasting in the mother tongue on the state Radio and TV stations as well as founding of numerous private stations: for example the state radio and TV broadcasts programmes in Albanian, Turkish, Roma, Aromanian and Serbian on daily basis, whereas there are 58 private radio

stations out of which 22 broadcast in one of the minority languages and 36 private TV stations out of which 21 broadcast in one of the minority languages. Publishing daily papers, weekly magazines and books also provides a favorable environment for language and cultural practice, as well as providence of a professional theatre for the ethnic minorities, which incorporates the Albanian and the Turkish drama.

2. The research in the field of Macedonian sociolinguistic topics and the care for the use of Macedonian language and the ways of using it as the official language of the Republic of Macedonia has led to a completion and declaration of a Law for the use of Macedonian Language in 1998. Regulating the status of Macedonian as an official language, declaring its use as a right and obligation for the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia and emphasizing its cultural and historical meaning for the state, the law clearly states in article 3 that it "does not limit the right to free creation and development of the cultural, language and religious identity of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia" and in article 4: "this law does not limit the right of the citizens which belong to ethnic minorities to an official use of the language and script of the minority in the local government units, in concordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia." The law enforces an improvement of the use of Macedonian in the administration and the public communications domain. By a proposal from the government and the Ministry of culture a Council for Macedonian Language has been founded whose activity is also regulated by the law. The Council has as its task to give recommendations and proposals for programmes of improvement, protection and enrichment of the Macedonian language, including terminology in various fields. The Council also edits publications about Macedonian and acts in the field with appropriate education and culture. As a result of law implementation a group of high-educated professionals-linguists is formed which acts as an important and conscious factor in the process of language planning, language policy and language use. Macedonian language today has the same problems as almost all world languages except English. For known and almost obvious reasons English language has entered and has found its place in various areas of life and its influence is evident in almost all language levels and language functional use. It seems Macedonian language specialists should be considering the handling of this development as a priority in the language planning process. We should add here that the European Charter for regional and minority languages has been signed and given to further procedure for ratifying by the Parliament.

3. On the other hand, the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia have witnessed and experienced a unique change in defining minority issues along with some aspects of language policy. It is known to the world public that in the first half of 2001 terrorist attacks and war conflicts have been undertaken by members of the Albanian minority declaring themselves as a terrorist group called NLA (ONA). The indecisiveness on part of the Macedonian government as well as the undefined political attitude of the international community (EU, NATO, USA) have led to constructing an agreement under supervision of international envoys that actually took in consideration members of one minority- the Albanian and thus introduced the politics of double standards. This document which was -we must not forget- signed under weapon threat encloses several aspects of political life not having in consideration the unitary character of the state. What is more, it favors one minority counter the other five and the majority of Macedonians. The 15 amendments of the Constitution which resulted from the agreement, along with the change of the Constitutions' preamble, includes article 7 which regulates the language status. Thus, with amendment 5 a language which is spoken by at least 20% of the citizens is also to be considered an official language and its script on a states' level, along with the official status on a local-regional level which was already provided with the Constitution of 1991. And even more: it is stated that "about the use of the languages and scripts of other citizens which are less than 20% of the local units' citizens is to be decided by the local unit government." Having in mind the numbers it is only too obvious which minority is to be privileged with this action. One principle thing which remains under discussion is the incompatibility of this kind of regulations with a unitary state as a political form. Considering the various kinds of experience of states with more than one official language, regulations like these tend to develop either towards one language domination or to a states' disintegration or some form of consensual democracy.

Defining and changing a language policy can be affected enormously as a result of minority issues. Actually, the politics of language becomes a weapon itself, a weapon which can and is misused. This unfortunately had been the case with the denial of the Macedonian language and nation from the 19th century even until today; and now is also the case due to a combination of terrorist forces acting under



human rights' safeguard and a dubious international intervention.

4. Contributing to the discussion of how important are really minority and language rights as basic human rights and how much can shaping language policy be important for improvement of democracy, this 'case' of providing an official language status on a states level for a minority's language merely on the basis of numbers is truly a challenge for the whole democratic world -- a challenge which would hopefully be accepted and implemented as one unique factor for the strengthening of modern democracies!

However, a lesson can indeed be learned from all of this: solving political problems by using language issues is a dangerous form of political manipulation!

At this point, finishing this presentation I would like to quote Prof. Patrick Seriot. In his study titled "Should languages have names? The case of Macedonian Language" writing about the 'tradition' of Macedonian language denial in Bulgarian, Serbian and Greek linguistics he points out the necessity of an objective perspective in dealing with language issues. Thus, he emphasizes: "Is a language without a name imaginable? Yes, with no doubt and that is not going to stop the speakers of that language to use it." In this context he quotes Ernest Renan who speaks up against the naturalistic approach in solving relations between language and nation: "A man does not belong to his language nor he belongs to his race: he belongs to himself because he is a free being, because he is a moral being". Along with that an even more profound notion by Jacques Ansel: "...Not even the color of one's hair, nor the absence of an article is enough for dividing (destructing) of a country. We should decide that these unsatisfactory criteria should be eliminated".

We can only express our hope that language will be given back its basic mission of conveying even the most subtle information from every aspect of human interest -- because: There are no great languages, there are only great creations!- (Macedonian poet Petre M. Andreevski), and that ethics will prevail over geo-political and strategic interests.