

Integration as a tool of education in a broader context

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Let's have a quick look at the Municipality Educational Integration Program of the children from Ethnic Minorities 2005-2015 /Bulgaria, municipality of Pomorie/.

The main objective is to realize a full fledged integration of the children of Roma origin to the educational settings in the Municipality.

What are the main problems in this field according the Program:

1. Lack of normative structure and financial and material background
2. Lack of standards and programs referring to the needs of the minority students
3. In the small schools with mixed classes there are no conditions for having an access to quality education.
4. In the curriculum there are no topics referring to the history and culture of the minorities.
5. Social attitudes in the society are not favorable in order to guarantee equal integration and the development of the cultural identity of the ethnic groups.
6. The parents and the students are not enough motivated to study their mother language.
7. In the small sites there are not enough children which could join a group for studying mother language
8. In the curriculum for 7 and 8 grades there are only 4 elective hours – but the students prefer instead of mother language to study computers or English.
9. The children from the poor families do not have enough means to buy books and school materials and they do not go to school.

Objectives of the Municipality Educational Integration of the minority children:

1. Guarantees for the equal access to the quality education for the children from the ethnic minorities
2. Preserving and development of the cultural identity of the children and students from the ethnic minorities
3. Creating preconditions for the successful socialization of the children and of the young people from ethnic minorities.
4. Turning of the cultural diversity into a source and a factor of mutual acquaintance and spiritual development.
5. Establishment of a favorable social-psychological atmosphere, which will facilitate the realization of that strategy.

The main directions of the Action Plan are:

1. Ensuring legal guarantees for the realization of the Strategy/ changes in the legal system/
2. Rising the efficiency of the governing educational structures.
3. Ensuring the necessary for the realization of the process of integration educational conditions and resources
4. Support for the establishment of a set of municipality schools which will host the students from the neighboring settlements which will guarantee quality education
5. Training of the necessary educational staff for the realization of the programs in the field of Civic Education, Human Rights, Intercultural Education.
6. Inclusion of the school boards and NGO's in the elaboration, realization and monitoring of the integration programs and measures.
7. Inclusion of the minority students in outschool activities.

8. Material support for the students from the ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged families.

I do refer to this Program because it reflects the philosophy and the ideas of the National Plan for the Integration of the Minorities Students and such plans are elaborated and voted in every Bulgarian municipality. We could assume that there is general awareness at least at official level about the problem and about the possible measures and developments in the field and this is very positive fact.

But we could ask ourselves whether these plans and actions are something more than simply re-written ideas and whether they do reflect really serious changes in the thinking, attitudes and behavior of the educational authorities and of all educational actors?

The objective of this speech is to look at the Integration in the light or in the context of modern education and to try to distinguish the trends and the necessary actions to be undertaken.

The Education in the Transitional period – between Integration and Exclusion

Education during transition is a contradictory process. On one side the influence of traditional institutions for socialization like family and school (not to mention church, army and political system) is decreasing and there is more influence from the means of mass communication, entertainment industry, business – i.e. uncontrollable and non-pedagogical institutes for socialization. In fact in our societies in the field of education with the disintegration of the traditional and of the official communist institutions we can talk about a dangerous and threatening the social tissue increasing process of **independent and consequently random socialization, regardless of the control and desires of society.**

On the other side the contemporary education of the transition period is **the democratization of educational system**, the consolidation of the idea for education.

The most important about this idea is the fact that **young people's personalities and the opportunities for personal development are in the centre of educational efforts.** The building of a **personal project for development** and realization of certain social skills and attitudes, necessary for this development are the Educational System's objective and consequently the educational process is directed towards the future, towards knowing and envisaging the world around us, as well as towards preparation for life in a period of change and towards development of the necessary collective skills for co-operation and dialogue.

Democratization in Education is an inclusive, integrative process which meaning is respecting the interests of all main educational actors, the development of their subjectivity, and the creation of conditions for their self-governance. The other side of this process is the development of integrative, co-operative and interactive processes whose final objective is **the working out and ratification of a Social Contract in Education.**

This process actually means building new relationships between educational actors, rejecting the model of one-sided imposition of development schemes by the political power, strengthening the processes of integration based on negotiation, co-operation and looking for mutual interests and benefits. In other words every actor in education should be looking for its place in a **consensus model**, which accepts the existing differences. Something more – due to close interests, education is the sphere where this consensus model is very easy to be performed.

Education is the area which sets an example of co-operation and dialogue to the other areas in social life.

Knowledge has always been the foundation of education but for the first time it is turning into a main resource of society. It is also an unlimited resource unlike land, wealth, capital. In other words, **knowledge is also an objective basis for integration, interaction, co-operation, common benefits.**

It does not possess dividing power and cannot oppose people and communities like it happens in a society based on wealth, land, capital and on the ideologies accompanying these factors.

Something more, the acquired contemporary knowledge in Education is not only individual set of rules for socialization and survival but is experienced, shared, practically directed, expressed in skills, attitudes and collectively general attitude towards the world and the society and toward the other learners.

The other side of the learning process, i.e. of socialization and personal development from a value perspective is its connection with social democratic conditions – peace, co-existence, co-operation. The aim of the Education is **the peaceful citizen, an integrated member of its own community but of the world as well**, building its relationships with the others on the basis of understanding, good will and non-violence.

In this respect **Education is also an opening, getting to know things, dialogue, interaction and therefore bringing people together** (where religion and ethnicity are secondary, non-defying marks), overcoming borders, directing attention at the learning person, but also at the community and universal dimensions of existence in an interdependent world.

Basically, Education is the only opportunity for a structured consolidation of the democratic idea and order, for dialogue, for understanding between different ethnic groups and religions.

Education based on the written and spoken word in reality and build on the influence leads to dominance of the present in the learning process. In this respect a key contradiction in contemporary Education is the fact that it has to transfer social knowledge and examples and it can no longer use its past authority. Young people live in the present. The world shown in images and accepted by them is a world which is developing, one with more common points unlike the world of the past; it is a world of joined experience and awareness. Through the images young people immerse into society and its problems and this is a new condition for integration, togetherness and possible cooperation.

The other big change in contemporary Education is the introduction of the idea of **Lifelong Learning**. Education today does not try to imprint within the range of several years simple and final truths about the world, people, neighbors or modern technologies. The school prepares for the learning process which will continue a whole life. In this case, the number of binding and necessary dogmas decreases. Messages are much more open, applicable, and their universal rather than concrete character is getting more important. The school, even in its most extended form is not the final place for obtaining knowledge but a starting point where we begin the journey of permanent learning. The other side of the lifelong learning is that there is a possibility **to delete the division between traditionally knowledgeable and non-knowledgeable (illiterate) people, of educated and undeveloped nations. Lifelong Learning gives equal chances to everybody who takes this as a key idea and builds a more homogeneous society of knowledge and co-operation.**

New Paradigm of socialization in Education has an open message – democratic, personally directed, giving power and energy to deal with challenges, inclusive, suggesting a program for co-operation and union among young people on the basis of accepting differences, of complementing one another but also of respect and accepting differing views. This program based on co-operation and Educational actors' potential not only releases social energy but also triggers the development of the exhausted Educational systems.

The co-operative learning model is another significant difference of contemporary Education. Learning open for the person next to you and done with the same person is **learning in a group based on common experience and reflection**. Group learning removes borders between young people, they get to know each other, become closer, trust and rely on each other, achieve results together and their personal projects overcome the borders of community, of ethnic and religious divisions, of national state. **Computers** create connections which a traditional Education cannot realize – **they help to overcome barriers and distances.**

Playing games in a net at computer clubs suggests growing connections of nets and networking which are popular around the world – as possibilities for communication, exchange of opinions, understanding and joined actions.

The **world of young people is global, intercultural, tolerant, therefore integrative**. This is **life shared through music, pleasures, overcoming distances through information, life in a net**. It is also a world of global mentality, energy, mobility, a place where authorities, traditions and barriers are not taken into consideration.

Finally in contemporary Education **the role of the Teacher and the world of the Educator** are changing. They are knocked off the pedestal of knowledge and ability and stop being ideologists setting limits and discovering new horizons of knowledge and are no longer absolute role models re-creating their own social and subject illiteracy, narrow-mindedness, devotion to “still knowledge”, order, the division of the world, their distrust of the unknown, sensuality, spontaneity, of the people’s inner world, global processes, of religion as a mystery and of personal freedom as a mean of self-expression and obeying ideology, official politics and its postulates.

The new Teacher of today is above all a symbolic image of a liberating elderly member of society, of a liberating citizen, as this freedom, humanity and tolerance are the conditions which the educator really needs in the contemporary school reality. In this sense and in the way of life as a Teacher, a Teacher of adults, she/he can serve as a model in societies which are still far from accomplishing the democratic ideas.

These are the Educational conditions needed in order to **consolidate the idea of intercultural, inter-ethnic dialogue**. Above all it is possible as a dialogue between generations, young people from different communities, groups, societies and countries.

If Educational systems do not manage to create conditions for this dialogue, the roads to global communication and for following universal examples will be defined by the media, entertainment business but also of permanent resistance and institutional violence.

The development of the region today and consequently of the key democratic values and attitudes cannot be understood without **the integrating European idea**.

According to official ideology Europe is a model, ideal type, but also democratic, economic, social practice and for the people from the Balkan Region Europe is usually perceived as a successful rich society and less as a democratic one. This way or another Europe is a role model, direction for development, community evoking approval and envy. The attractive power of the European idea is also in its proved practicality, although its accomplishment will mean not only economic but also social revolution and radical transformation of values for east European communities. To some extent, like America in the past, Europe is a practical goal. Something more – for the countries in the Region it is a development model without alternative which deprives the democratic ideal from its necessary dose of romanticism and turns it into something prosaic.

Therefore Europe and European idea does possess a double integrative role – integrating the isolated societies from our Region into the all-European social space and in the same time serving as a consolidating and integrative factor inside national societies and their systems.

In the field of Education it is important for us that the European idea in its different aspects legitimizes the new co-operative and integrative Educational paradigm and as such becomes part of the Educational normative documents and thus joint integrative democratic values and postulates are formulated as objectives of Education.

Once postulated, these values develop normatively and little by little start changing the Educational practice, start creating a resource base – in the face of Teachers, parents and students who practice them.

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The role of Civil society as a factor of integration.

Above all, dialogue lies in the heart of Civil society – it is a union of people in the name of common satisfaction of higher human needs – belonging, giving support, personal development, etc.

In order to function well the Civil society requires co-operation, trust, understanding, abandoning of narrow personal interests of life in the community, overcoming borders- it should be inclusive and integrative.

In civil organizations and activities usually are involved the most dynamic, informed and educated people who are examples of social thinking, tolerance and giving support.

As a big number of the Civil society projects are assisted and set from abroad – Western Europe and the USA – they intentionally consolidate values like integration, co-operation, dialogue and tolerance which become real in these small pieces of reality within communities connected with the projects' accomplishment.

In individual aspect part of the members of civil organizations belong to the younger generation – in fields like Ecology, Education, interaction among ethnic groups. Thus they play twice more useful role for the intercultural dialogue – of public and civil figures, and at the same time the role of parents or future parents who form directly new attitudes among their children.

The development of Civil society creates the critical mass of people needed for accomplishing the dialogue and for supporting the political efforts for developing the dialogue.

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Consolidation of dialogue as a basis of integration is a very important characteristic of contemporary Education - without dialogue at school among actors - educators and students, parents and Teachers, there will not be an effective integration in the society.

It is extremely important **to introduce interactive learning methods** – based on the new concept of communication, group activities, interaction and new attitude towards learning and knowledge. **Interactive methods are integrative** - communicating daily at school, solving Educational problems together, developing of the Educational projects (group or personal) with the others, respecting them.

Secondly, the integration, or rather the quality of integration depends on the **implementation of Civic Education / the Education for Democratic Citizenship/** . This is a new, not connected with the past, Educational space representing different integrative and interactive model for socialization of young people, in accordance with their needs and attitudes. Civic Education (and the other interactive social areas) offers young people a model which can attract their attention. This is a model of practical actions for building reality and constructing their own world, a model of joined internalization of democratic values.

Civic Education presents a model for opening the Education towards community, society, global world, a model of joined openness towards democratic values.

Another key area is **Intercultural Education**, the effortless introduction of dialogue with the other person from the childhood and the gradual extension of dialogue and cooperation with growing up. Intercultural Education is based on the ideas for the dialogue in everyday life, exclusion of aggression, violence and domination as determining relations between people. Tolerance and understanding the other person give a possible solution in the new conditions of the problem of competitiveness in a socially and resourcefully poor environment, they are helpful in interrupting the vicious circle of poverty, prejudice, mutual demands, desire for revenge, violence.

There are important areas which are not only a common concern but also give the chance for joined action: **Peace Education; Environmental Education; Health Education; Education for Sustainable Development.**

We should look at traditional humanitarian subjects in a new way - at Geography and its potential to present the world as a whole with the richness of interconnections between its parts; at Literature which

leads to understanding of spiritual and sensual wholeness of the world; at History in its modern sound – as a history of joined acts, of common fate and suffering, history of everyday life, of European life, of expressing Human Rights, of the development of personality and dignity; a history of common ideas and common people.

Independent School existing in and through local community and opened towards the world and society will also mean destroying the old, closed, based on ethnicity uniqueness and prejudice School of inequality.

Intercultural Dialogue has to become a priority of state policy in the field of integration in Education and national strategies for its accomplishment should be developed.

In structural aspect this strategy can be united around the **integration of the members of minorities within national societies and in more narrow educational sense around the integration of the children with special educational needs**. Integration within national societies will raise the question about regional borders for solving the problems of some minorities – Roma people in the first place, but also of all minorities from neighboring countries.

National standards for intercultural cooperation for different school degrees should be developed. We should not stay at a general level where the fight against exclusion, discrimination and racism is marked.

Introducing the Education for Democratic Citizenship (Intercultural Education, Peace Education, Education for Human Rights at school) as a main part of National Educational Standards – should be a basis and a starting point without which the other Educational developments will be incomplete and seemingly unaccomplished.

Every school should formulate its own policy for overcoming differences, for integration, for tolerance, for Educational actors' rights, order and safety.

These steps at a school level will provide the basis on which different project in this field will develop.

Integration and Intercultural Dialogue should be built in all outschool and community oriented activities – where different projects will help the forming and development of attitudes and models of intercultural behavior and tolerance. The opportunities for young people to step outside the borders of their own community will develop on this base - **intercultural dialogue should transform from interpersonal relations to exploration of institutions, of different areas of the life where it happens**.

Another necessary Educational dimension is the European one, connected with the joining of the countries to the European Union which give a good opportunity for learning the democratic principles, for getting to know and accepting of intercultural differences in the community, for exploration of inner differences from a common European perspective point of view.

Informational basis for cooperation among young people should be provided so that it can become a reality and also Educational TV programs and computer games should be created.

The other big potential is in the **provision of enough resources for the project activity of young people** – for transborder projects, projects based on topics, for creation of different Educational nets, for training of young leaders.

We should give up the **outlining new liberal approach** for diminishing the role of the state and over-relying on the economics in Education. The processes of learning, integration, overcoming isolation, of dialogue and understanding in Education need clear support, and principal attitude of society, the authorities and Teachers themselves – nothing happens without preparation and only with a lot of money.

Not business but widely recognized contemporary Education will overcome borders, bring people and societies, creates a natural basis for understanding and dialogue.

Integration and Dialogue are a responsibility of politicians, businessmen, media figures, but in every day life its foundation is laid by thousands of pedagogues, by parents' support and by the enlightened participation of self-governed young people.