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Education and Language Rights for New Minorities:

Integration through Diversity Governance

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OUTLINE AND MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

1. General consideration and main issues:

Accommodating diversity, including linguistic diversity of new minorities originating from most recent migration flows (migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and their family members), is a powerful tool to reduce tensions and prevent conflicts.

But, which public policies in the field of education for new minorities should be implemented to achieve a diverse and cohesive society?

2. The legal framework and general recommendation

International norms dealing with language rights for new minorities are those foreseen, for instance, in the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child that extends the right to education far beyond equality of access to education and includes provisions concerning the development of the child's cultural identity, language and values of the child's country of origin.

Most international instruments for the protection of migrants, such as the United Nation's 1990 International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrants Workers and Members of Their Families, the Council of Europe's 1977 Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers or the EU Directive on the Status of Third-Country Nationals who are Long Term Residents (LTRD), refer to the teaching of the migrant workers' mother tongue for their children. These instruments however contain also references to possible requirements of 'integration' that include linguistic training in the language of the settlement country.

Moreover, the aim of the provisions concerning mother tongue tuition is mainly the return of these children to the country of origin of their parents rather than the protection and promotion of their identities.

The sole EU legislative measure concerning new minorities' language education is the Directive 486/EEC, entitled *On the Education of the Children of Migrant Workers*, which was adopted by the then European Community in 1977. The Directive's scope is however limited to children of workers who are nationals of other Member States (MSs);

Namely, children who are EU citizens, and thus this text does not address a substantial part of the challenge posed by most recent migration, namely the education of children who are third-country nationals.

The extension of the scope of application of at least some standards/provisions for traditionally applied for historical minorities as to include new minorities too would be then most appropriate.

3. Finding a difficult balance

To what extent new minorities can demand that their identity and culture, including language, be taken into account in the educational process ?

As for old minorities, in education, there is for new minorities too a constant tension between two aspects:

How to preserve, on the one hand, the distinctive identity of a minority and, on the other, how to contribute to unity and social cohesion?

How far does the teaching of and education in new minorities' languages lead to the retreat of minority members into their communities or encourages social integration beyond the family?

Proficiency in the language of origin of new minorities is increasingly considered to be of great importance for pupils for a number of reasons :

- Proficiency can make it easier for these pupils to learn the state language or language of instruction
- It might open up additional opportunities for their educational and professional development
- It secures the self-esteem and identity of children belonging to new minorities helping them to preserve and intensify their social ties with members of their community in the country of origin and in the settlement country.

Nevertheless, it is also acknowledged that children who do not speak, read, or write the language of instruction to the level of their peers perform less well in school.

Helping children of new minorities maintain and develop both languages – the state language or language of instruction and the language of the country of origin of their parents – is a worthwhile, though difficult, goal.

Regardless of the different attitudes that lead to education models and teaching methods, finding a balance between the three aims of education, namely universal values, practical needs of the child and respect for distinct cultural traditions and identities, is often described, especially by teachers, as difficult or problematic.

The problems range from complications of the teaching assignment and decreased educational quality because of restricted linguistic competences of the children, to difficulties to convince parents and administrations that it is profitable to teach languages of countries of origin of new minorities like Turkish or Arabic, which for many seem to be largely irrelevant to European societies.

Schools therefore often see the languages of new minorities as necessary but negative temporary tools while the child is learning the state official language.

And this is what usually is a one-way mechanism to assimilation.

The perceived burden of teachers to deal with bi-multilingualism reflects an ongoing transformation into a multilingual society; and this raises the problem of a state defined monolingualism in a multilingual reality.

4. Models and main recommendations

Educational systems vary widely across Europe but they fall usually within three main models that generally coexist within a given country:

- a. **An assimilationist model**, in which children of new minorities are included in mainstream education classes and taught the same curricula as students from majority groups.
- b. **A separatist model**, which appears in two forms:
 - Transitional arrangements: and
 - Long-term arrangements:
- c. **An inclusive or pluralist model** in which teaching the language of instruction or state language is complemented by an effort to keep children of new minorities in touch with the language and culture of the country of origin of their parents.

(Analogous categorisation of educational systems has been suggested by Athanasia Spiliopoulou Åkermark along the lines of **segregationist, assimilationist and inclusive models** (See, Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of

National Minorities (ACFC), Commentary on Education under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (text prepared by Athanasia Spiliopoulou Åkermark), Strasbourg, ACFC/25DOC(2006)002, 2 March 2006)

In Europe, most countries offer monolingual programs that provide additional support for second-language learning. The most common approach in primary and secondary school is immersion with systematic language support.

Reccomendations :

1.

Studies conducted in this field indicate, however, that countries that tend to have long-standing language support programs with clearly defined goals and standards have a small performance gap between children of new minorities and children of majority groups.

In contrast, in countries where new minorities perform at significantly lower levels than their peers from the majority group, language support tends to be less systematic.

2.

In addition, in line with the inclusive or pluralist model described earlier, among main recommendations emerging from studies conducted in this field, we find among these recommendations that countries should consider offering bilingual programs and heritage-language programs to foster multilingualism as a resource.

To sum up :

Studies conducted in this field indicate that countries that tend to have a small performance gap between children of new minorities and children of majority groups are those that have introduced :

- Heritage-language programs for new minorities based on the inclusive/pluralist model**
- Long-standing systematic language support programs**
- Clearly defined goals and standards**

5. Conclusions

The protection of identity and language rights of new minorities, similarly to the protection of old minorities, would be an appropriate political gesture that underlines the importance of the country's inclusion policy and sends out a powerful message that populations of immigrants or asylum seekers are no longer seen as the "legal Other" but as an integral, though distinct, part of the nation.

This process can function however only on the basis of two conditions :

Cultural attachment to a language other than the official state language should neither compete with nor replace the requirement of skills and fluency in the official language of the country. A common public language is indeed necessary for the state to function and proficiency in the state language is an important tool by which the objective of an integrate society is assured.

In order to spark solidarity and social trust, and thus social cohesion, recognition of diversity is not sufficient: states must also tackle social structures and mechanisms that result in systematic deprivation and exclusion of new minorities from their equal public standing.

To sum up:

Cultural attachment to a language other than the official state language should neither compete with nor replace the requirement of skills and fluency in the official language of the country.

Respecting diversity is not enough : States must also tackle social structures and mechanisms that result in systematic deprivation and exclusion of new minorities.

More synergies and alliances between old and new minorities, their representatives, international organisations and academics are necessary to find common and innovative solutions in the field of education and language rights: often old and new minorities express similar claims and so solutions could also be similar. Obviously, this does not mean that all sets of rights recognised to old minorities should be equally recognised to new minorities. However, a common but differentiated approach for old and new minorities could be very beneficial in the quest for a more cohesive and stable society for all: minorities (old and new) AND majority groups.