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ALBANIAN PUPILS IN GREECE:

LANGUAGE POLICIES

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0. ABSTRACT

From the beginning of the 1990s and onwards, a large number of Albanian immigrants came into Greece, mainly because of the collapse of the communist regime in Albania. Today Albanian immigrants represent 57,5% of the total population of immigrants in Greece (438.036 Albanian immigrants), referring to those who are officially registrated. It is also interesting to note that the percentage of Albanian pupils amounts up to the 71% of the total foreign population of pupils (69.880 Albanian pupils).

The issue that occurs is how the Greek state handles the cultural and linguistic heritage that these pupils carry with them into their new country. In the decade of the 1970s, the situation in Europe dictated in Greece the promulgation of laws concerning the education of foreign pupils. There are three main landmarks in the history of the policy for the education of the foreign and the repatriated pupils in Greece: first, the creation of special classes for foreign pupils which aim to their integration (1983), as well as the establishment of schools of Intercultural Education (1996) and, finally, the creation of an interventional program for the education of the repatriated and of the foreign pupils, which is financed up to 75% from the European Union and 25% from the Ministry of Education in Greece (1997). The present paper deals with the needs that motivated these educational policies, as well as with their aims, their functions and with the results which so far have been achieved by the official policy.

The paper deals also with the interesting fact that the Albanian communities in Central Macedonia are trying during the last years to mobilize and to create mechanisms for the maintenance of the Albanian language as well as of the elements of their ethnocultural identity, mainly through the establishment of community schools, which aim to maintain or to propagate the Albanian language to the younger generations. This fact leads to the conclusion that the Albanian immigrants in Greece have already begun to implement their own “policies” as far as the teaching of their mother tongue to the new generations is concerned, thus proving that they are able to resist to the “assimilating” official policy. The paper presents two Albanian community schools (structure, function, aims) which are established in Central Macedonia and aim to the transmission of the Albanian language and the Albanian cultural elements to the younger generations.

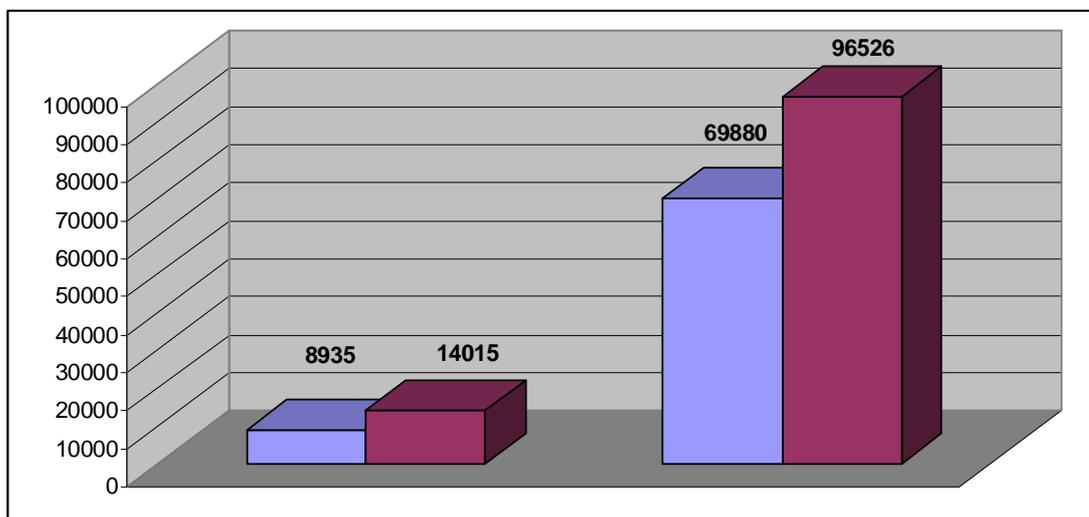
1. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of the 1990s and onwards, a large number of Albanian immigrants came into Greece, mainly because of the collapse of the communist regime in Albania. The number of Albanian pupils attending primary and secondary education is impressive. Albanian pupils constitute the highest percentage of foreign pupils in the Greek educational system. The following table illustrates the large increase of the number of Albanian pupils in primary and secondary education from 1995 until 2003. The blue color indicates the Albanian pupils, whereas the red color the amount of the foreign pupils. Thus, in 1995 the number of Albanian pupils was 8.935 (the total amount of the foreign pupils being 14.015)¹, whereas in 2003 the number of the Albanian pupils was 69.880 pupils² (the total amount of the foreign pupils being 96.526). As far as the distribution of the Albanian pupils in the state area is concerned, according to the same sources, the majority of them live in the region of Athens (50,3%) and in the region of Thessaloniki (10,7%) (Central Macedonia).

¹ Damanakis 1997:53

² IPODE, part b:112

Number of Albanian and Immigrant Pupils in the Primary and Secondary Education in the school years 1995/1996 and 2002/2003



This situation raises many questions, the main of which is *how* the Greek state handles the education of these children and, more specifically, *how* it confronts the bicultural and bilingual identity of these children. It is clear that a specific legislation for the education of Albanian pupils in Greece does not exist. However, there exists a legislation for the repatriated and foreign pupils in general, where the group of Albanian pupils is also counted. The aim of the present paper is on one hand to explore whether the legislation for the education of immigrant pupils makes good use of the foreign students' bicultural and bilingual identity and, on the other hand, to explore which is the collective attitude of the Albanian immigrants in Greece for the transmission of their mother-tongue to the next generation (community-schools).

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) distinguishes four types of bilingual children: a) children that come from families of “elit” bilinguals, b) children that belong to the majority group and acquire a foreign language either through immersion programs or through the class of foreign languages, c) children that come from bilingual families (mixed-language couples) and, finally, d) children that belong to a linguistic minority. Albanian pupils in Greece clearly belong to the fourth group, thus they come from families with an immigrant background and are required to acquire a new language, the majority one, which is totally different from their mother-tongue.

Language policy and, more precisely, the scope behind a language policy clearly determines the aims and the measures that are going to be taken towards a linguistic variety, a dialect and, in our case, towards the language of a numerous immigrant group. Thus, a language policy can either aim towards linguistic assimilation, or towards linguistic pluralism or towards linguistic enrichment (Fishman 1991). The traditional policy, either implicitly assumed or explicitly stated, which most nations have pursued/implemented with regard to various minority groups, who speak a different language, has been the enforcement of transition from the minority to the majority language and culture (Romaine 1995:242). On the other hand, a policy of transmission of a language leads either to a certain type of bilingual education or to the provision of lessons on the mother-tongue (Wardaugh 1992). Baker (1996) distinguishes between “strong” types of bilingual education (if the aim of the educational system is the cultivation of the oral and written skills of the student in both languages) and “weak” types of bilingual education (if the aim of the educational system is the cultivation of the majority language). In this point we shall refer to the Greek language policy regarding the Albanian pupils that study in Greece.

3. THE ANALYSIS OF THE LEGISLATIONS

The official policy as far as the education of the foreign pupils in Greece is concerned, is divided into three main periods. During the *first* period, in the decade of the 1970s, a great wave of repatriation of Greeks is observed, mainly from European countries (Germany), the United States of America, Canada and Australia to Greece. The Greek state, in order to face these new challenges promulgates several legislative measures (decree 664/69 and decree 264/79), aiming to facilitate these pupils. These measures, though, facilitated the pupils as far as grades were concerned, in an effort to be more tolerant. It was not provided in the curriculum or in the teaching material the teaching neither of the mother tongue nor of the culture of the repatriated and foreign pupils. Moreover, during the same period the “Schools for the Immigrant Children” were founded. Their aim was, according to the particular law, the common education of the pupils on the basis of Greek history, Greek civilization and of the orthodox Christian religion. In addition, the lack of qualified teaching staff originated from their countries, the lack of appropriate teaching material for these pupils, the inadequate training of the teaching staff and the lack of psychological support to the pupils and to their parents deteriorated the situation. It thus emerged a situation, where children came to school with a “deficit” intellectual heritage, which had to be balanced through compensatory educational measures and had to be equated with that of the native pupils (Damanakis 1997).

During the *second* period (1980-1996) reception classes and tutorial courses (a preparatory phase in the language of instruction) were offered for newly immigrated students, that is, immigrant students were separated from their classmates and were offered special tuition on the acquisition of Greek (decree 1404/83). The concrete aim of these classes was the “normal” integration of the foreign pupil to the school system.

These programs mainly included the teaching of the Greek language and elements of the Greek culture as well as the preparation of the pupils in some other school lessons. Additionally, in the same law it was provided that foreign pupils can learn their language and elements of the culture of their native countries. This possibility however rested only in the domain of theory and it was never concretely realized (Nikolaou 2000:62). Moreover, the “Schools for the Repatriated Children” were founded, which aimed to the education of this special group of pupils. However, they did not contribute to the education of this group of pupils much more than the “Schools for the Immigrant Children”.

The *third* period (1996-today) is characterized by the legislation of a basic law (2413/96), which organizes issues that are related with the Greek education in the diaspora and the intercultural education in Greece. With this law basically the Schools of Intercultural Education³ were founded with a curriculum adjusted to the educational needs of the foreign pupils. However, there was in this specific law no mention pertaining the staff that would teach in these schools nor whether this staff would be qualified to teach to foreign pupils. In general terms, there was no mention about the aims these schools would follow. A rather positive aspect is the initiative of the Greek state to invest a certain sum of the European allocation for the educational support of some “sensitive” groups of students, among which is the group of repatriated and foreign pupils. The program of the education of the repatriated and foreign children was financed by the Greek Ministry of Education as well as by the European Union. Its targets are the natural integration of the repatriated and foreign pupils to the educational system through the implication of more effective educational measures. An interesting point is that in the context of the specific programme was provided the pilot teaching of the Albanian language for Albanian pupils and the pilot teaching of the Russian language

³ Actually the “Schools for the Repatriated Children” were diverted in to “Schools of Intercultural Education”.

for pupils with Russian origin and that a considerable amount of handbooks were launched which focused on this specific kind of pupils. Generally speaking, despite the fact that in certain cases this program may be hindered by bureaucratic practices as well as by administrative obstacles (Damanakis 2005), is basically an implication of the official educational policy of the Greek state. If the mother tongue of the pupils is taught in several schools, if appropriate handbooks for this group of pupils are produced, if teachers are introduced into bilingualism and intercultural education, then one may talk about a fourth period of educational policy for the group of repatriated and foreign pupils in Greece, which is much more substantial, because it is more close to the theory of intercultural and bilingual education.

This is the policy of the Greek state, in general terms, pertaining the education of the foreign pupils in Greece in the last 35 years. Let's now come to the point which is the *collective attitude of Albanian immigrants in Greece*.

4. COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

One can distinguish in the region of Central Macedonia since the year 2000 and onwards, three associations of Albanian immigrants, within the context of which classes for the teaching of mother-tongue were organized. The issue of community schooling is though poorly researched and especially in the Greek context.

The community schools can serve several aims: a) provision of supplementary teaching and learning on mainstream subject curriculum, b) cultivation and acquisition of the “minority” language for children of linguistic or ethnic minorities (mother-tongue schools), c) provision of opportunities for the exploration of cultural and heritage knowledge to children of linguistic or ethnic minorities, d) religious maintenance (religious schools) e.tc. (Hall et al. 2002).

The majority of specialists (Stone 1981, Zulfiqar 1997) agrees that most of the community schools have emerged because of the “failure” of the mainstream schooling to include in their curriculum or even in the educational practice the particular linguistic, and cultural needs of the foreign pupils. And in the case of the Albanian community schools in the region of Central Macedonia the initiators’ basic aim of establishing these community schools, according to their statements, was to teach the Albanian language to children who were born in Greece but have Albanian origin, as they felt that in the mainstream school their language and culture not only were neglected, but often was also undergraded.

5. THE ALBANIAN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IN CENTRAL MACEDONIA

In recent years Albanian communities in the region of Central Macedonia try to mobilize mechanisms for the maintenance of the Albanian language as well as of the elements of their ethnocultural identities mainly through the creation of community schools. I studied these community schools during November 2006-January 2007 within the frame of my research for my thesis. Interviews with the initiators of these schools were conducted as well as with two parents from each school.

There are three community schools in the region of Central Macedonia (two in Thessaloniki and one in the province of Giannitsa) which rely on volunteers, whose aim is to transmit their mother tongue to Albanian children (mother tongue schools) , as they assert *«nor in Greek schools nor in the family circle can these children learn their language and culture»*, *«our children are born here, the parents work and can not be all the time with their children, and they go to schools where they only hear Greek »*. Mainstream schools, according to them, do not reflect their linguistic and cultural identity. The main characteristics of these community schools are the following: The schools rely on the initiative of Albanian

parents and their collective representations, have voluntary status with poor financial support from local authorities, teachers have high bilingual competence, pupils are grouped according to their ability, these children are taught according to the standard educational means which are used in the mainstream schools in Albania and, at the same time, teachers try to initiate the Albanian pupils into the tradition and culture of their country through excursions to Albania, national holidays and similar cultural activities.

The Albanian parents presented the following five reasons as to why they decided to send their children to these community schools: a) their wish that their child could cultivate literacy practices in the Albanian language (*"We are never at home. We leave home early in the morning, I have to clean two houses everyday and therefore I am not able to see my child. But it is necessary that he will learn to write and to read"*), b) their desire to put an order in the perception of their native language (*"in school things are more serious for everyone"*), c) the desire to maintain their ethnocultural identity (*"she should preserve her origin, because it is a shame for us...that an Albanian child does not speak her language"*), d) improvement of the quality and quantity of contact with relatives in Albania, e) perspective of repatriation (*"We don't know what it will come tomorrow for us, maybe after twenty years she will want to stay in Albania"*) and, finally, f) the acquisition of a language, according to the parents, can contribute to the enrichment of the child's cognitive heritage (*"the more languages she knows, the better for her"*).

The activity and more particularly the aims of the community Albanian schools in the region of Central Macedonia leads to the assumption that Albanian immigrants in Greece have begun to implicate their own "policies" concerning the teaching of their native language, showing in this way a tendency of resistance to the loss of their native language.

6. CONCLUSION

The repatriated and foreign pupils immigrate to Greece carrying all the characteristics which are reflected in their own mother-tongue. For the newcomers, Greek educational policy seemed, until recently, to ignore these particular aspects. It treated pupils as “tabulae rasae” and aimed to equip them with cognitive, ethical and social principals, in order to homogenize them with Greek pupils. However, the identity of a person can be proved to be so strong that can resist to assimilation. In many cases school drop-outs, low grades, insufficient proficiency in Greek language etc. were observed. Thus, Greek official policy was switched over to the foundation of special classes and special schools for foreign and repatriated children. The new educational programs, with the help of the European Union stressed specifically to the education of this group of pupils.

At the same time, Albanian communities in the region of Central Macedonia try to create mechanisms of maintenance of their language and culture, showing in this way that individual and collective initiatives can function as counterweight to a stiff educational policy that cannot recognize the duality of the linguistic and cognitive heritage which these children carry with them.

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