



Education of the Greek minority during the transition period in the district of Gjirokastra

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Abstract- Education of the Greek minority living in the district of Gjirokastra has eventually been and still remains one of the main challenges of Albanian state and society, as well.

Their education is not only a matter of educational nature, but primarily this education is related to the application of the Albanian constitutional principles, international judicial normative act, conventions and decisions of the organizations where Albania adheres to.

Nowadays, this community enjoys several rights in the field of education in the Greek language, which are being embodied in the opening up of schools near every village where this community lives, the training of qualified teachers, school textbook compilation, setting up new specific laboratories etc. Despite the fact that a special care has been shown towards this community, some schools have been closed due to the demographic moves, support and integration this population has been offered by the Greek state.

However, new and efficient ways have been applied concerning their education aspect. In the city of Gjirokastra there are classes of Greek language and also a high school that prepares teachers of Greek language. The population of Greek minority has completely been integrated into the Albanian society and accordingly, it serves as a connecting and cooperation bridge with the Greek state.

Key words: minority, Greek, education, integration, education.

INTRODUCTION

Since the early stages of establishment, the Albanian state gave too much importance to the education of its population. This was also a consequence of the fact that for centuries the High Gate had unilaterally denied this legitimate right. Hence, it's not a random case that one of the first important decisions of the Temporary Government of Vlora was precisely connected with this field of activity of the new Albanian State.

In a decision taken in the first days of December 1912 it was defined that "The education in Albania becomes compulsory for the fourth grades of elementary cycle.... The new school year starts on 1 September 1913". Within this framework, the Greek minority was not only to have its own education in their mother language, but efforts were to be made to open up schools in all the territories this cultural and linguistic community lived.

Upon the first stage of Albanian state formation the main issue about the minority education did not remain the opening of schools, because they were already existent in many territories inhabited by these minorities. It is worth mentioning that some of these schools were opened even in territories inhabited by Albanians. For this purpose, certain Greek circles tried to use the permanent greed of these people for education and the impossibility of the Albanian state to open schools in Albanian language. Thus, the main issue to be handled for the new government remained the examination of the school programs content. The Greek schools that operated in Albania by this time still found recourse to Greek programs and curricula and also they entailed a distinguishing anti-Albanian character. Accordingly, in all the territories these schools existed and operated, in the Albanian and Greek population as well, of an orthodox religious creed, but of an Albanian nationality. Albanian language was not taught at all in these schools because the teachers that worked there did not have any command of this language, i.e. no knowledge about it.

Concerning the content of teaching programs the problem seemed to be worse. In the school textbooks especially subjects of Geography and History, it was promoted the mentality of being the so-called "Vorio-Epirius" community, i.e. they were Greek and the territory they were settled belong to the Greek state, not the Albanian territory. Thus, this was a type of political propaganda.

Although Albania by this time was not yet admitted as a full member of the League of Nations, and consequently there was no legally international obligation in the aspect of respecting the minority rights of education. Anyhow, the Albanian authorities of the time strived hard during the first years to respect these rights for all the minorities living in Albania, particularly the Greek-speaking minority.

Since the time when the Prefecture of Gjirokastra in February 1920 joined the national Albanian government, the Ministry of Education got the control of all the Greek schools within this prefecture

merging them with the state schools. Until this stage, all the Greek schools operating in the Albanian territories were privately sponsored with the incomes yielded by the churches and monasteries or even donations stemming from Greek speaking cycles eager or interested in spreading Hellenism in Albania. Despite donations, it should be mentioned that these schools were actually under poor conditions because the financial means were limited and insufficient to maintain them. Consequently, the teachers pay was modest and in some cases they were not paid at all for months running. By this Act, all the expenses would be covered by the Albanian state. Also, the buildings where the teaching process was held were under inappropriate conditions. As classrooms mostly served the temples or rooms of church and monasteries, but they did not in fact meet any required standards as classrooms.

Therefore, the appropriate measures were taken to improve the situation in this field. In line with these measures the Albanian government reached several other decisions concerning the improvement of infrastructure, especially the educational structure in these schools by establishing a much proper proportion between the Greek and Albanian language.

Certainly, these decisions of the Albanian government were not positively welcomed on the part of "Vorio-Epirius" organizations as well as some Greek speaking factors. They claimed that the use of Albanian language in the Greek language schools would have a very negative impact which would gradually lead to their entire assimilation. Furthermore, they were arguing also about the coexistence in the same class of students who have the orthodox creed and those with Muslim creed. In fact, all the decisions of the Albanian government did not intend to denigrate or even refute the minority rights of education; on the contrary, they aimed the strengthening and monitoring of the teaching and educational process at these schools.

Not long after 1920-ies, the number of Greek schools in Albania increased to a large degree, despite the fact that the decision had been taken to close down all the private elementary schools in the prefecture of Gjirokastra. Therefore, according to statistics out of 153 teachers that amounted in the whole region of Gjirokastra prefecture in 1921, 41 were Greek-speaking teachers

During the early years of '20, Albanian government had some information from safe sources that the Greek government was secretly paying the Greek-speaking teachers mainly in the region of Himarë for different purposes and with a certain political background. The amount of money amounted to about 60.000 Italian lira.

By this time, Prefecture of Gjirokastra in the information delivered to the Ministry of Education explained that the Greek government, in addition to others was illegally paying the teachers who served the Ministry of Education, being also paid by the Albanian state. According to the respective data, every teacher profited approximately 80.000 drachma (Greek currency of the time) a year and at the same time the Greek government illegally continued to pay even those Greek teachers who were actually expelled from the Albanian educational system for various reasons. Therefore, the prefecture of Gjirokastra was properly demanding to the Albanian government not only their dismissal but being faced with the respective liability about illegal profits as well as disgraceful manners which degraded the profile of the civil workers of the Albanian state. Anyhow, the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not consider the proposals of the prefecture pretending that if they were punished, they were accordingly freed by the General Amnesty Acts. Anyhow the respective Ministry gave an instruction to the prefecture, expounding that if there appeared to have an occurrence of such cases; these teachers were to be taken to court.

After 1925, along with the political situation stability there was a more favorable situation concerning the education of Greek minority education, a situation that would continue till 1945.

Along with the establishment of communist regime in Albania, it was settled that the education of Greek minority, in the elementary classes (I-IV) the teaching would be performed in Greek language, while Albanian language would be taught as a second language about two classes a week. While in senior classes of the 8-th cycle, the teaching was held in Albanian language and the Greek language now was to be taught as a second language almost two classes a week.

The most important side of the matter was the fact that by this time the Albanian education system in general as well as the Greek minority education underwent a thorough restructuring in the content and form of the teaching programs and the process. Consequently, a network of schools was opened in all villages inhabited by the population of Greek nationality. Whereas, in larger residential centers there also opened high schools for students of the Greek minority. Special care was shown to the building of laboratories in the context of facilitation and normal development of the teaching process. Furthermore, to ensure a full preparation of the future teaching staff for the Greek language, a new branch of this language was opened at the pedagogical high school "Pandeli Sotiri".

With the communist regime overturn after 1990-ies, like in all fields of activity the field of Greek minority education underwent numerous changes concerning structure and content. First of all, Greek language became the first language and the Greek language was a second language for the children of minority.

Meanwhile, in order to improve the quality of teaching in these schools, it was opened the new branch of Language, Literature and Greek Civilization at “Eqrem Çabej” University of Gjirokastra.

Later, the national Greek minorities in Albania gained more rights in all the fields and naturally in the field of education. This is a consequence of the fact that during this period our country not only recognized all the conventions and charters about the minorities’ protection, but above all started to implement them extensively such as “European Social Charter” of 1962, “Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities” of 1995 etc.

Anyhow, in spite of these positive achievements, we have to mention also the fact that during the last decade of the last century, like everywhere in Albania, even the Greek minority encountered substantial emigration moves. The majority of this population massively swapped to Greece with the intention of living a better lifestyle. This situation engendered the decrease of number of students in the respective minority schools, as well as leading naturally to the gradual closing down of several schools in villages where the Greek minority lives. Nowadays, even in schools that operate in those villages, the number of students attending them is very low and they are hardly maintained as educational institutions. But on the other side, we should point out that the decrease in the number of students has also been a consequence of the natality rate, which has been declining in this minority.

Anyhow, in order to herald the difficult situation created about the education of this population, the necessary conditions have been established through the building of schools based on covering the territory, wherein the state cover the transportation and safety expenses. Meanwhile, at A.Z. Çajupi School a class is opened and the teaching process is performed in the Greek language.

A new branch of “Language, Literature and Greek Civilization” opened at “Eqrem Çabej” University in 1994, which has as its main mission to prepare the teaching staff to serve the teaching process in Greek language. During this period 342 students have been enrolled, out of whom 12% are of an Albanian nationality. From 196 students that have actually graduated from the University of Gjirokastra, only 43 of them work in their profession as teachers of Greek language. This comprises 22 % of the graduates. The rest is unemployed or either part of the state administration. The majority of the graduates in general have moved abroad mainly in Greece, in quest of a better living or either due to the impossibility of finding a job within their professional field of teaching.

A direct cause of these positive educational policies followed with the Greek minority is its enhanced integration in the economic, political and social life of the Albanian state. Since the early stages, the Albanian state has pursued a hospitable and cooperation policy with the inhabitants of this cultural community. Thus, facts demonstrate that their representations and participation in the central state bodies is evident since the first parliamentary elections arranged in Albania in 1921. This community was represented by its MPs in the first parliament of Albanians established after the direct popular vote. Their representation was on the way towards reinforcement along with the consolidation of the new Albanian state.

After the country liberation, the participation of the community was extended on the general and local level of the state administration.

During 1945-1990, this community enjoyed the same rights and freedom the Albanian people had. Thus, we think that the communist regime did not utilize any additional instrument in order to prevent their rights. So, their rights were denied to the same degree like the autochthonous majority, i.e. Albanians.

Certainly, after the collapse of communist regime, there was a true revolution in the aspect of the minority rights in Albania, especially concerning the rights of the Greek minority.

Initially, the Greek community was organized in a cultural association and later the circumstances were shaped in order to establish their political parties and power, which was actually being manifested by the first political party of this minority called “Unity for Human Rights Party” (UHRP), the organization called “Omonia” and lately the new political party called “Mega”.

Traditionally speaking, these minorities after 1990-ies have had their legal representatives in the high legislative body in Albania, as well as members in all the governments ensuing, thus having their share in the executive body. Sometimes they have been represented by their own political parties or as members of governing coalitions. As far as the local governing bodies are concerned, communes of this minority have been headed only by local minority representatives.

As a conclusion, we can say that in the aspect of Greek minority education, there has been an appropriate undertaking in full compliance with the human rights respect, international charters and conventions into effect. This lack of persecution about the human rights has positively and substantially influenced in the integration processes of this community in the Albanian state.

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