

LANGUAGE RICH EUROPE: MULTILINGUALISM POLICIES IMPLEMENTATION IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Anca COLIBABA¹ Monica VLAD²,

e-mail: monica.vlad@euroed.ro

Abstract

This article presents a research carried out in the framework of the Language Rich Europe project. Language Rich Europe (LRE) is co-funded by the European Union and its main aim is to perform a comparative analysis of countries' performance against the European multilingualism policy for an overview of the situation of national and minorities' languages in European countries and to illustrate policies and good practices initiated for the promotion of multilingualism. The research has been carried out in 14 countries members of the European Union and 2 regions in Europe based on a methodology that will be presented below together with the results at the level of Romania. The research results mainly show that at European level a lot of measures have been taken for ensuring social inclusion and integration through support offered by policies in the field of multilingualism and minorities languages. There are still areas where improvement is needed, with the primary and secondary education being the fields where reactions have been most prompt and adaptation swift in adopting the key European recommendations for multi/plurilingualism. In Romania, the areas needing improvement are support for minority languages while at the level of legislation results show that recommendations for multi/plurilingualism have been implemented in key areas such as foreign language education at primary level (the current law of education enabling competition between schools by allowing them to have a differentiated offer of foreign languages).

Key words: multilingualism, minorities' languages, multilingualism policies

The motivation of the consortium for setting up this project is that although states in the European Union have responded to increasing mobility and migration through social inclusion measures, these 2 phenomena are not addressed by language policies and practices to promote linguistic diversity. Moreover, according to Eurobarometer, 83% of Europeans value knowing other languages but 44% cannot speak a second language.

The LRE project has created a network of 960 decision makers from 14 Member States and 2 regions that will share good practice and will

cooperate on improving language policies and practices. The organizations within the network will learn from each other and create practical guidance on how to develop more language learning friendly environments, increase linguistic diversity and enhance intercultural dialogue and social cohesion through language teaching and learning.

Referințele pentru bibliografie se vor scrie între paranteze rotunde, iar referințele pentru figuri și tabele între paranteze rotunde, italic. Ex: (Ionescu A., Popescu D., 2002).

MATERIALS AND METHOD

The main goal of the research on multilingualism policies at European level was to find a series of common parameters against which the various national practices and policies could be evaluated, compared and examples of good practices could be transferred. The main point was reference was made of European documents on multilingualism and benchmarks were identified from highlights of European recommendations. A series of 260 indicators for the research were

identified and the research was carried out in each partner country against this set. The indicators mainly referred to language questions regarding the home language, main language, mother tongue, language thought in and known best, legislation on regional and minorities' languages, on foreign languages and immigrant languages (in this case the legislation mainly analyzed was that specifying provisions for immigrant languages), official language policy documents on national and foreign languages. Other indicators referred to the teaching of foreign languages and school and support for learning the national language in the

¹ EuroEd Foundation, Iasi, "Gr. T. Popa" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iasi

² EuroEd Foundation, Iasi

case of the minorities' and migrants' languages. The degree of qualification required from the teachers in every field of education was also an indicator (qualified language teachers, generally qualified classroom teachers, teachers with no specific qualification). Foreign language learning is believed to be influenced also by the fact that foreign media content is delivered as dubbed or subtitled and thus one of the research indicators was whether media content in the research countries was delivered as dubbed or subtitles. The sign language provision at European level was researched against the following indicators: whether it is recognized and promoted, whether it can be used with authorities and if it can be used in key media events. The situation on these indicators was analysed in the following fields of education: pre-primary, primary and secondary. The language of the media was also analysed based on a series of indicators focusing on the top 20 languages used in 64 European cities. At the policy level, strategies and priorities were researched based on the following indicators: strategies for multilingualism, multilingual services, multilingual websites of authorities, annual municipal reports in other languages. In the European cities, language strategies and policies were researched on the following coordinates: use of interpreters and translators, languages in job descriptions of staff, language training of staff. The strategies for languages and multilingualism were also analysed at the level of companies throughout Europe (mainly hotels, banks, building constructors and supermarkets). Their activity was surveyed for the existence of language strategies, relevance of language skills in recruitment, use of translators and interpreters, and whether any records of staff language skills were kept. The company practices in external communications were also analysed, mainly based on whether they publish their annual report in another language, as well as whether they have marketing materials, company website and corporate branding in more than one language. Within companies, the number of foreign languages spoken was also researched, mainly with the goal of finding out which are the main languages spoken in companies throughout Europe.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results of the research carried out in Romania based on the research methodology, instruments and indicators presented in the previous section. Romanian is the official language and there are ten minority languages that have general protection: Albanian, Armenian, Greek, Italian, Macedonian, Polish, Romani, Ruthenian, Tatar and Yiddish and there are ten languages with enhanced protection: Bulgarian, Czech, Croatian, German, Hungarian, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Turkish and Ukrainian.

The data on this topic was difficult to collect as it is rather scarce even if topics related to these languages appear sometimes in mass media. With regard to the situation of minority languages in pre-primary education, foreign languages at the pre-primary level are optional. However, most of nurseries include a foreign language in their curriculum. In Romania, a year of nursery is compulsory for being accepted into primary education and this ensures that most of the children are acquainted with a foreign language before beginning primary education. Moreover, legally, all the children of the recognised minority have the right to education in their own language. While this is an important positive aspect, there are still differences in the implementation of this law within different minority groups. Immigrants do not have a significant educational offer. In primary education, one foreign language is mandatory. Usually the school decides what is the language to be studied but some schools give parents the opportunity to choose which language to learn. As far as the minority languages are concerned, some schools provide instruction fully or partially in minority languages, mostly in Hungarian. At present, the law of education gives more autonomy to the schools and enhances the increase of competitiveness between them. It can be expected that this process will enhance the quality of the foreign language tuition as this is an important factor in the choice of the school. The recent provisions based on the new law of education will also encourage schools to offer Romani language and Roma culture classes at the parents' request. At this level – as well as at the level of pre-primary education, the results of the research indicated the lack of an important educational offer for immigrants. In secondary education, in most cases, pupils continue the study of the foreign language started in primary school although this is not always the case. They also start to study a second foreign language in the first year of secondary level (when they are approximately 12 years old). At the national level, there are schools with intensive study programmes in foreign languages and also specialised high schools where the medium of instruction is in a specific foreign language, such as English, German, French, Italian or Spanish. Education in minority languages at secondary school level exists in specific regions of the country. The main minority language for whose tuition necessary staff and teaching institutions are available is Hungarian, followed by German, Ukrainian, Serbian and Slovak. At the end of the secondary education cycle, pupils have the opportunity to take their final national exams in the minority language with an adapted Romanian

language test. As in the case of the two previous educational levels, there is still an absence of an important educational offer for immigrants. At the vocational training level, there is a strong national and foreign languages representation and just a few Hungarian and Romani courses offered in Cluj. Hungarian and German, as the main minority languages, are well represented at the tertiary level in regions where the minority population is significant. As far as foreign languages are concerned, English and French come first with specialised sections in foreign languages or even postgraduate levels such as Master or PhD programmes taught partially or entirely in these languages. There is also no important provision for immigrant languages.

The research has also included the situation of foreign and minority languages in the mass-media. Traditionally, mass media in Romania are in national and minority languages.

Most of the films and foreign television programmes are subtitled while the rest of the broadcasts are in the national language. Relatively recently (in the last 5-7 years), cartoons from foreign channels have begun to be dubbed from English while the language of some programmes can be changed by the viewer's choice. There is some space for Hungarian and German programmes on the public national TV channels and some specialised public local TV programmes that are entirely in these minority languages. TV channels in Hungarian, German, Serbian and other minority languages are widely available through private cable operators. As far as the written media is concerned, newspapers are mainly in Romanian. There are some international English, French or German newspapers available in some bookstores and shops. In the central and western part of the country there are also Hungarian and German newspapers and magazines.

Online media is also available in national and minority languages, as well as in some immigrant languages such as Arabic and Chinese and in widely used foreign languages such as English. Some newspapers with an online version have an entire separate page dedicated to articles written in English. With regard to languages in public services and spaces, some public institutions supply information in several languages, for example websites are available in English or French as well as the national language. Hungarian is also available in the central and western part of the country, be it through online material or for some of the services that are available to the public. All over the country, minority language use is associated with the population structure. In areas where a certain minority population represents at

least 20 per cent of the local population, public administration and public services institutions will ensure there is communication in the minority language as stipulated in the Constitution, and in accordance with international treaties that Romania has adhered to. As far as the linguistic skills of the administrative staff are concerned, investment in trainings for language skills inside public institutions is not consistent. However, some institutions seem to have adapted to the local situation. In areas with large minority groups the services are provided by personnel who can usually speak the correspondent minority language. In the case of the Roma minority, mediators are hired to help in the communication between the ethnic groups. A survey at the level of businesses showed a medium to low level of linguistic skills in a foreign language which mainly means that a language strategy is implemented at the level of business and that usage of a foreign language at work is high but the investment in language skills for their employees is generally very low. In most of the companies evidence shows that staff acquired their language skills prior to employment and this shows that the language strategy of the businesses involve employing people that are already trained. In companies in Romania, the national language and English seem to emerge as the main languages used, followed by French and German.

This is an area where it is clear that policies highlighting the importance of languages and the necessity of private investment in these skills are needed at the level of the companies for an increase of the multilingual practices in businesses.

CONCLUSIONS

At a European level, the research concluded that while some countries/regions have highly desired multi/plurilingual policies and practices in specific domains, other countries/regions need to improve their policies and practices in alignment with European recommendations.

Primary and secondary education seem to be most prompt to adopt the key European recommendations for multi/plurilingualism.

The findings of the LRE partnership suggest that the officially declared commitment of EU bodies to support multilingualism still needs to be turned into action plans and practices at the local and institutional level.

Overall key findings at the level of Romania present a situation where national, minority and foreign languages seem to be well promoted especially in the education system. The businesses researched here appear to use foreign languages

adequately, but do not invest significantly in language skills for employees. There is high motivation to learn foreign languages. Minority languages are supported legally both through the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and through the new education law. But this reality does not lead necessarily to equal results for all minorities. While some minority languages, for example Hungarian, are represented in educational and cultural activities, others such as Romani are not. While investments have been made to help the access of speakers of minority languages to administration, schools and other public services through mediators, there is still much more to be done in order to ensure real opportunities for using regional and minority languages in the public space.

At the level of tertiary education, the offer of the universities regarding the Romanian language as a foreign language could be improved. This would be useful for foreign students that want to study in Romania. The development of language skills among workers in public institutions and the improvement of communication strategies, especially disseminating information in more languages, would be of great social and economic importance for both immigrant population and foreign entrepreneurs.

Another aspect that needs urgent attention is the immigrant population, and language issues that

are related to them, for example access to education. Long term immigration is most likely to increase and policies to meet their needs should be discussed and implemented.

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