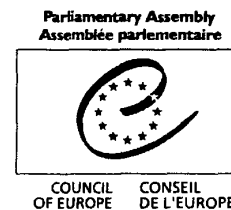


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ADDENDUM 2

The place of Mother Tongue in School Education

The following text was submitted for inclusion in the official report by a member who was present in the Chamber but was prevented by lack of time from delivering it.

Mrs DAMANAKI (Greece) – The report and the draft recommendation presented by our colleague Mr. Legendre face the difficult reality of multinationalism and multiculturalism in our societies. There is no doubt that the principles expressed in the text are reasonable as far as education and the protection of European and world linguistic heritage are concerned.

The necessary dialogue between the European citizens needs plurilingualism in order to create relations based on trust. However, strong bilingual and multilingual education, whose goal is to equip the students with proficiency in both languages that is the mother tongue and the official language of the country in which they live is extremely expensive. It has a lot of pedagogical advantages against the weak bilingual models, but they are very expensive.

Many countries are confronted by serious problems because of the cost of this procedure. Consequently, they really focus, no matter what they declare, their interest on the education of the official language.

Who is responsible for the financial aspect of this issue? Should the countries of origin contribute to the education of their mother tongue? Greece, for example, is financing the education of Greek language in other countries with an annual amount of 60 million euros.

Moreover, the European educational systems vary as far as the degree of freedom or integration of groups of population is concerned. It should be made clear that the implementation of this recommendation is going to be related to the national features and differences of all countries in the context of respect of the right of every citizen to have access to appropriate education.

Mrs OSKINA (Russian Federation) – Dear Mr President, Dear Colleagues, despite the fact that the Parliamentary Assembly has many times considered language and mother tongue issues, this is still a very urgent issue. The place of mother tongue in school education is very important. This is a question of rights, of the right to education, as well as of the right to national identity.

I support paragraph 7 of the draft recommendation, which says:

“A large amount of research is agreed on one point: immediate schooling of such children in a language they do not know well, or not at all, seriously jeopardises their chances of academic success. Conversely, bilingual education based on the mother tongue is the basis for long-term success”.

That is why we are very concerned about the situation with the Russian language in the Baltic states, especially in Latvia. Now, as before, we are very concerned about the ongoing reform of secondary schools for national minorities, which has become the key element in the building of a monoethnic state in Latvia and virtual assimilation of the non-Latvian population. In a consistent pursuit of this course, in 1999 state institutes of higher education with teaching in the Russian language were closed. Today, they are working on the introduction of language proportions for private institutes.

The introduction of such proportions in Russian schools from September 2004 – 60 % of academic hours are taught in the Latvian language and 40 % in Russian, including studies of a foreign language – has led to a sharp decrease of education quality and poorer academic success. It affects the competitiveness of young Russian-speaking specialists in the labour market. The question arises, are there so many unqualified workers in Latvia?

On September 1st 2005, the reforms second stage was launched, which has affected the primary school 1-4 grades, where the number of mother tongue classes decreased from seven to eight hours per week to four to five hours. The policy of removing the Russian language from secondary schools and a speedy transition into Latvian contradicts the objective of integration of the society through creating equal opportunities for graduates from Latvian schools and national minorities' schools, which was stated by Latvia. The inevitability of negative implications of the badly prepared education reform is confirmed by the information from Latvia's Ministry of Education and Science: in 2004-2005 up to 15 000 children, mainly Russian-speaking, do not attend school; in 2004, about 3 000 graduates after finishing school got a school-leaving form instead of a certificate. We hope that Estonia, where so many Russian-speaking people live - according to the latest census, there are about 400 000 people – would choose another course, or at least, take into account the experience of Latvian reforms, particularly its disadvantages.

The Estonian authorities should immediately draw up legislative acts which allow non-Estonian schools to delay the transition of teaching mainly into Estonian in 2007-2008, to envisage the inclusion in school programs studies of minorities' culture and their contribution to Estonia's development and to teach the Russian language to more Estonian pupils.

Not long ago I visited Georgia. Russian is an optional subject in Georgian schools. I was astonished when a young Georgian girl could not speak Russian almost at all. I felt sorry for her, for the fact that her country's authorities deprived her and many other people of the opportunity to read Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Pushkin in the original.

Dear colleagues, in order to understand Russia, the soul of a Russian man one should read books by Leo Tolstoy, Fedor Dostoevsky and many other authors.

