

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

Warsaw, 24 September - 5 October 2007

Statement by the Greek Delegation,

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Intercultural Education Measures in the Greek Educational System

One of the major challenges that have been posed in recent years to the Greek educational system is the rapid increase in the number of foreign and repatriated students in schools, which has significantly changed the demographic composition in them. In particular, according to data from the Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies during the school year 2004-2005 138,193 foreign and repatriated students attended Primary and Secondary education schools, which comes up to almost 9,5% of the total number of students for that school year.

With the aim of a) ensuring high-quality educational services that are accessible to all, b) of catering for every child's specific educational needs, while respecting their diversity and c) of combating educational exclusion, a line of measures has been taken by the Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs and its related bodies. Due to limited time available, I will hereafter make reference to only some of them.

To begin with, by law, all foreign and repatriated students in Greece enjoy the right to free education exactly as natives do. Every child is entitled to education regardless of their parents' / guardians' legal status in the country. Because of the frequently special conditions of migration, administrative adaptations have been made to facilitate registering of foreign students, who at the time of registration do not possess the official documents that are otherwise required. If upon completion of the school year those documents have not been submitted, the student is given a certificate of attendance, which provides for the promotion of the child to the next grade level.

In view of the growing number of students with multicultural characteristics, the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs drafted Law 2413, which entered into force in 1996. The said law sets the basis for intercultural education and for material action with regard to the educational needs of groups with different social, cultural or religious characteristics.

Furthermore, valuable aid for foreign and repatriated pupils has been offered since 1998 through the project "Education of Immigrants and Repatriated Pupils". Among others, special innovative teaching material has been drafted in the frame of this project with the aim of fostering children's integration as well as enabling them to develop their skills in the new school environment.

On the whole, the key-concepts and principles of intercultural education are included in the new cross-thematic school curricula. School books in both primary and secondary education have been and continue to be revised to reinforce understanding and respect for the "different", to

enhance interest in other people's beliefs, religion, way of living and thinking.

The education of the children of the Muslim minority in Thrace constitutes a matter of high priority as well, in the frame of the general national policy for the social and economic integration of Greeks of the Muslim minority in Thrace into the contemporary Greek reality.

Therefore, a project has been running for the education of the children of the Muslim minority and has so far yielded positive results. It is the project "Education of Muslim Children", which started with the initiative of the Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs and has been running in collaboration with the University of Athens. In the framework of the project, new policies have been introduced to combat the phenomenon of drop-outs from schools and to foster the integration of Muslim minority children into the Greek schools.

Furthermore, some additional measures have been taken in favour of Muslim minority pupils such as a special scholarship which has been drafted for students from schools of the Muslim minority, as well as the introduction of the Turkish language in a pilot base into 5 school units as an optional language course since the school year 2006-7.

In the direction of responding to the challenges of a rapidly changing society in order to ensure concrete results, Education for Democratic Citizenship has been central to the implementation of the notions of intercultural learning, solidarity and forms of participatory citizenship, since of course Civic Education has always been entrenched within the Greek legislative framework.

Thus, civic education modules are linked with cross-curricular activities and subject-specific themes at Primary and Secondary educational levels. Students are encouraged to acknowledge and accept diversity, resolve conflicts without violence, assume responsibility, establish positive and creative relations, and take part in decision-making and collective action.

Moreover, taking account of the increased interest among Member States of the Council of Europe in issues related to religious diversity the CoE Secretariat proposed the organisation of a series of regional debates on the theme “The religious dimension of intercultural education”. The Greek Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs being particularly concerned with the issue of religious diversity in school units is going to organise the first of these debates in cooperation with CoE in two weeks time (8-9 October 2007).

The debate will allow participants, who are going to be education professionals in the field, to examine the implications of religious diversity in schools, to identify implementation strategies and further needs, and to become familiar with the results of the CoE’s project on religious diversity and intercultural education as well as with other European (or international) research-based projects in this field.

For anyone interested in further details on what I have discussed so far but also on other policies or practices on the part of Greece in the direction of intercultural education I am always at your disposal.

