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"To Educate a Xenophobe": Outcomes Review of the Advocacy Campaign for Tolerance in Education (Verbal and Visual Contents in Primary School Textbooks) in Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

In recent years, the problem of methods of education in values of tolerance to difference is subject to increased public attention at the EU level. However, even a sparse reading of the Bulgarian primers and readers shows that the first meeting of children with what is officially "normal" in the social world excludes the "different" people. The main objective of the project "To Educate a Xenophobe" (2015–2016) implemented by the Bulgarian NGO Political Science Center in collaboration with Institute for Creative Civil Strategies was to address the absence of systematic orientation to the initial stage of education as crucial for assimilating a tolerant attitude towards the different people in society. The project aimed to increase public attention and initiate a constructive dialogue with Bulgarian decision makers and stakeholders on the need for conducting reforms in state education requirements and legislation *via* a package of analyses, surveys and in-depth interviews.

Keywords:
tolerance toward diversity in society, intercultural dialogue, screening of textbooks' verbal and visual contents, primary school, EU educational policies

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INTRODUCTION

On 17 March 2015, the education ministers of all EU member states signed the Declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, by which they agreed on fostering measures and actions on national, regional and local level in the following directions:

1) strengthening the key contribution of education to personal development, social inclusion and participation, by imparting the EU societies' fundamental values and principles;
2) ensuring inclusive education for all, which combats racism and discrimination on any ground and teaches children and young people to understand and to accept differences of opinion, of conviction, of belief and of lifestyle, while respecting the rule of law, diversity and gender equality;
3) combating geographical, social and educational inequalities, as well as other factors which can lead to extremism, by providing all children and youngsters with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences for professional and personal realization, and by improving the social and professional integration of all young people;
4) building on children's and young people's sense of initiative and engagement in order to strengthen social ties and generate a sense of belonging;
5) empowering teachers to take an active stand against all forms of discrimination and racism, to educate children and young people in media literacy, to meet the needs of pupils from diverse backgrounds, and to impart common fundamental values.

The National Development Program Bulgaria 2020 places as a top priority the improvement of the quality of education and training and the improvement of access to it, in line with the main objectives of the educational policy adopted in the EU acts and in the UN documents. Bulgaria 2020 introduces new guidelines in the area of public education – the set of measures (increasing the attractiveness of learning, culture and sport among young people; acquiring key or "horizontal" competences) in order to achieve Bulgarian pupils' higher and higher quality educational achievements.

The comparative empirical interdisciplinary studies carried out by the team of the project "To Educate a Xenophobe – Advocacy Campaign for Tolerance in Education" testify to measures already taken in Bulgaria to promote inclusive

education, pupils' personal development and social inclusion. However, along with that, the studies also record a series of acute problems related to: 1) students' alienation from education; 2) manifestations of racism, discrimination, xenophobia and gender inequality in Bulgarian textbooks for the initial course; 3) acute deficits of civil culture, social skills, understanding of the *Other* and respect for the different people.

In the name of bridging the gap between strategic documents and everyday educational practices, we would like to propose the following two recommendations for public education policies in the field of primary education:

1) Introducing a procedure for mandatory preliminary assessment of drafts of primers, readers, textbooks and teaching aids for observing the EU's horizontal policies for equal treatment, equal opportunities and combating racism and discrimination by any sign (physical or mental disabilities, ethnicity, religious or political beliefs, race, class, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, gender expression, vulnerability due to poverty, marginalization, social exclusion, etc.).

2) Introducing a mandatory procedure for: (a) preliminary approbation of projects for primers, readers, textbooks and teaching aids in real learning environment among different types of students (including disabled, those with special educational needs (SEN), minority ethnic and religious backgrounds, from other vulnerable social groups) to be fulfilled by an independent team to help adapting and optimizing learning content, and (b) conducting a qualitative sociological study on how representatives of these different types of students perceive and interpret both the visual and textual content of the draft versions of primers, readers, textbooks and teaching aids, in order to prevent the introduction of learning content that may discriminate, humiliate, distract or otherwise affect students' beliefs, feelings, traditions and culture.

The normative adoption of these two recommendations shall contribute to achieving the goal set out in the Declaration of 17 March 2015: "The primary purpose of education is not only to develop knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes and to embed fundamental values, but also to help young people – in close cooperation with parents and families – to become active, responsible, open-minded members of society" (National Development Program Bulgaria 2020).

ABOUT THE CAUSE

The first meeting of our children with the official "normal" takes place through the teaching aids and the textbooks of primary education. During these first encounters, children acquire a sense of what a social 'norm' is, what 'order', 'right', 'truth', and 'objective' mean as opposed to 'wrong', 'unruly', 'shameful', and 'unduly'.

While learning to greet the elderly, to talk "officially", to listen to the teachers, to line up, to keep silence, to stand still, to wash their hands, and other disciplinary practices (Foucault), through textbooks and teaching aids ("windows to the world") the children adopt a view of the world, which today seems to us (un)intentionally excluding people with disabilities, representatives of different ethnicities, races, religions and cultures. Understandably, such "different" people in Bulgaria still fall into the category of abnormal.

In Bulgaria, the images of people or anthropomorphic beings in primary school textbooks, who are with prostheses or wheelchairs, who are with African, Indian or Asian features, or are with clothing from another (sub-/counter/alternative) culture *are rare exceptions*, and are usually represented in an unvarnished (sometimes even cynically) recessive position.

The project "How to Educate a Xenophobe" is funded by the NGO Support Program in Bulgaria under the Financial Mechanism of the European Economic Area. The project is designed and implemented by an interdisciplinary team from the Political Science Center Association and the Institute for Creative Civil Strategies Foundation.

The following section outlines the results of five deliberative meetings with 8–12 pupils from the first to the fourth grade (including children with disabilities and minorities), 24 in-depth interviews with teachers (from state, municipal and private schools, including resource teachers, school psychologists, teachers from the "Together in Class" initiative), and three focus-group discussions with parents, civil activists and education experts.

SOCIAL COEXISTENCE

The empirical research[6] shows that most parents of children with disabilities tend to enroll their children in mainstream schools, and all the pupils involved in the project declare willingness to go to mainstream school despite some obstacles.

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6   Full text: Стойчев & Борисов, 2015.

Deliberative meetings with people with disabilities (adults, over 18 years) give arguments in support of the mainstream school:

> I've been in a mainstream school, and on individual learning as well – after I got the disability, the teachers came home to teach me. I will tell you one thing – I did not know my classmates, I had never seen them. The other students had a graduation ball. I did not have…

Here is another commonly encountered personal story:

> There is nothing interesting to share… You just sit inside, closed between four walls. You cannot see almost anyone, anything. When the teacher comes, this is a little celebration for you because something different happens. There is someone you can talk to. She used to come, laughed with me, taught me something there, and was in a hurry to go away because she had a job to do. And then you're left alone again…

The study provides numerous proofs that children who do not have or have not had the opportunity to attend a mass school have a great desire for it: "I entreated my parents to bring me to school, I cried, I begged them… they let me go when I was 10…", "you want to be like all other kids because you hear through the window that they play, laugh, go to school, and you're stuck inside…", "you see, you need to talk to someone, communicate, even scream with someone, but to be a human being…". Going out of the family environment is one of the things that leave a bright trail in the minds of the "different" children:

> There were ordinary schools that we called "mass schools", there were specialized schools and there were "sanatoriums" – these are schools near a medical center where you go to rehabilitation procedures. I've been in all three types of schools… What to tell you – it is always hard for a child when you take him or her out of the family… when he or she sees the parents only at the weekends…

But there is another important issue – how do "vulnerable" children feel at (contemporary) Bulgarian school? Do they feel integrated, attracted, compassionate, or equal?

> Oh, I wanted my mother to drop me out of school. I was yelling at her for a month. I applied and entered the English High School. But for some reason, I do not know why, my mother took me alone the next day at school, probably had some paper work to settle. And then the teacher entered and started talking in English at once. And I did not understand anything because I had not studied English before. And the teacher noticed me and came to me: "What's your name?" I looked down. Everyone in the classroom was silent. It became very awkward. I worried that everyone was

dealing with me and that I had interrupted class lessons. And the teacher was also silent and gazed at me. She watched and kept silent for a long time. Some other children whispered to me: "Maria, say Maria". But I was ashamed… All I could do was to look down…"

This story is a testimony to the tendency found in the empirical study that "the different" children often feel strangers at school, and do not fit to the "norm". Many of them recognize and acknowledge that the school environment makes them willing to attribute all their (otherwise natural) problems – with the school subjects, homework, communication, friends, etc. – to the difference: "if in class all are white and one is dark, you immediately notice the dark", "maybe it's just your best to blame your disability for everything", "I do not think they [the class-mates] do it consciously, but somehow they do not quite accept you for equal…". Here is a certain example:

You just know you're different. There was such a case – there was money stolen in the classroom. Later the money was found and only then a friend of mine told me that all the time they all had suspected me. Nobody said it to me, but they all thought it was me who had stolen the money… because I was different. […] No, they did not apologize.

The feeling that you are "not exactly in place" accompanies the everyday life of people with disabilities in our school environment:

Starting from "Class, rise up! Class, silence!", so to the end the school is still not suitable for people with disabilities…

Children without disabilities also say they feel out of place in school, but those with disabilities are likely to experience it more intensely. So, many of them tell about a kind of "splitting of mind":

Somehow at the same time you are there, and you are not… How to explain… the other do not perceive you as a competitor. Do not think that you will overshadow them at the graduation ball… They take advantage of you when they want to show around compassion or something… You are a little bit 'out of focus', slightly smudged, like a little ghost… they can pass through you even without noticing… I mean both teachers and classmates… But that's normal… probably normal… I suppose…

But the "focus" gets sharper when it comes to rules and discipline. Pupils with disabilities recall various specific cases where environmental problems are attributed to them:

Then the system was that we had to go from classroom to another classroom. And I never managed to get on time. I was always late. Moreover, as they washed the corridors, they became slippery. I did not know what they were washing with, but I was afraid of falling, and as soon as I was in a hurry, I was still late and arrived when the lesson had already begun. However, the teachers were always angry with me that I was late. I did not know, but then they pressed my mother to withdraw me from the mass school and move me in a center for disabled. My mother had told me nothing then, but she did not remove me. Now I'm so grateful to her for being resistant…

Another participant in the project also talks about the deficiencies of the environment that roughly separate the worlds of "the normal" and "the different":

The worst I felt when they had physical exercises or played in the school yard. And I was very sad that I couldn't participate… It sounds funny now. And I sat at the end of the corridor, and I remember that there was one of those small windows. Outside, there were cries, laughter… I was looking around for someone not to come along the corridor, and I was trying to look through the grid of the window for what the kids were doing outside. But I was low, sitting in the wheelchair, and I could see nothing… From time to time I was able to see some hair and I was very happy to know who it belongs to…

The difference in age is another demarcation line that causes psychological suffering to the vulnerable children. Another project participant shares her feelings with our interviewer:

I was about 4–5 years older than the other children, and we were in the same class. They called me "aunt". I was standing out among the rest. And everyone thought I was someone stupid and that was why I was with the little ones in the same class. I had to constantly explain… Imagine how I felt… Everyone thought I was repeating the class over and over again…

In a hostile physical environment and teachers' intolerant attitudes, it is no wonder that many of the "different" children are more or less deliberately trying to provoke regret to themselves to compensate for the defects of the surrounding world that make them feel less valuable:

It's easier for you to be regrettable. Consciously or not, many people with disabilities try to take advantage of the others' regret. I've also done it because it's easier to survive this way…

Almost all of the disabled people interviewed during the project implementation admit that they have been abusing the regret of others, including teachers:

> Well, yes, they've given me higher scores because I was on a wheelchair. I knew I had not read the lesson, but teachers let me pass… We all did such things. It's not fair, I know, but we did it.

Most people with disabilities who we met accuse themselves of this "abuse" of others' regret but not the environment. Another participant in the project shares what he is sorry about:

> I felt uncomfortable with the other children who had learned the lessons, but we got the same marks. I felt sorry not because of the teacher – because I knew she wanted me to get away from her and not to deal with me anymore.

The hypothesis of the project is that children learn during their first meetings with the textbooks and readings about what is "official" and "objective", what is "normal" and what is not. If we exclude certain types of activities, social roles, groups of people from the world of "normal" and introduce them as "abnormal" – "foreign", "different' and "others", children will probably perceive them as abnormal for lifetime. But if children with prostheses or on wheelchairs, children of different ethnicity and cultures, etc., the "different" children, find their deserved place in the "objective" world of textbooks at an early stage of learning, we will hardly have to convince someone that "a child with disabilities also have a soul".

ON LETTERS, LITERALLY

Many contemporary textbooks and teaching aids for the primary schools in Bulgaria, as well as for those in Finland, Norway, Sweden, Czech Republic and FYROM, were analyzed within the project. For the purpose of historical comparison, outdated Bulgarian primers were analyzed too. A total of 124 bibliographical sources were used for the analysis. For the purpose of research, the staff working on the project digitalized 95 textbooks and helper books from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, FYROM, Finland, Sweden, and Norway. The digital archive contains a total of 5503 pages. The materials in the digital archive were collected from the National Library fund, the Sofia University library, the Czech Republic center and personal archives.

The comparative historical perspective aims at determining the level of presence of basic moral categories throughout the years in the Bulgarian primers, at

identifying consistent topics and stereotypes and comparing all this to the contemporary Bulgarian primers. The analysis also follows the Bulgarian tradition in the educational content, and in the European social model of tolerance and multiculturalism. In the course of the analysis, several problematic areas were identified, and missing or redundant content was registered. Problematic areas were: the image of the "other" person, the presence of otherness and difference, the imposition of "normality" as a norm, educating emotional intelligence, lack of emotions or feelings, basic Christian values and virtues, lack of civil education, distinction of the categories public and private, the model of the modern Bulgarian family and family relationships. Instead, in the books there is a steady presence of symbols of the notion of nation, the past and the history prevail being presented through several popular historical characters, which are the main source of identity building. Also, based on historical analysis, several themes and values were identified to be missing from the today's visual and textual educational content.

The research and literature review showed that the school literature is not of interest to the researchers. A study on "Civil Society and Civil Competence in the Bulgarian School (2009–2011)" analyses the content of all the Bulgarian textbooks on civil society for 4th and 7th grade, using over 400 indicators (Стойкова & Димитров, 2013, p. 41). The conclusions there are very interesting from the perspective of the current analysis in view of studying values and topics imbalances in those textbooks. A main conclusion is recognizing the inability of the latter to educate civil activity. The values and topics imbalances are: domination of nature over society; domination of history over future; world shrinkage to local national dimensions; multiplicity is unnamed; the acting one is the Self, and not two or a team; the person's emotional and moral life is not studied; there are almost none moral relationships (Стойкова & Димитров, 2013).

Among the main conclusions of the researchers, related to the current analysis, is that the marginalization of communication causes humanitarian deficits. According to them, the images and texts which show feeling as a value, consist of about 4% of the content of 4th grade textbooks. The study identifies the absence of founding elements of human communication, such as interaction, help and support, vanishing suffering from some actions, group game, love and so on, and the texts have moral neutrality (Стойкова & Димитров, 2013, p. 48).

The current visual and textual reading of the textbooks content aims at describing the image of the "other", whom the little readers get to know from the school books. These are different ethnicities, religions and cultures with accompanying physical and anthropological differences, as much as they are present in the school books. We are categorical that there can hardly be found such differences in the

modern elementary textbook. We have extracted the few examples of those from the studied textbooks. Even the rare attempts of recognizing differences rather focus on the physical signs, with categories such as tall, thin, or fat.

THE BULGARIAN PRIMER AND THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL MODEL[7]

One of the important directions for the development of European integration is the gradual overcoming of conflicts based on cultural, ethnic and religious diversity and the achievement of the ideal of "unity in diversity", embodying the principles of intercultural dialogue in the process of building a common European identity (Кальонски, 2009, p. 113). For the success of integration processes, the EU is increasingly focusing on the educational sphere. The latter is also recognized as a factor in achieving economic growth set out in the Europe 2020 strategy, dictating the will to modernize education in the member states as well. The value aspects of today's education system imply personal development in which the child builds the necessary maturity of perceptions in a broad and multifaceted social space where the sense of one's own cultural importance is inextricably linked to the recognition of the significance of the Other (Василева, 2009, pp. 123–152).

The screening research marks the main problematic content areas in the Bulgarian primers and readers for the youngest in order to measure the sensitivity of the school literature to basic democratic categories and values. Several trends have been identified, rather negative, related to deficiencies in the learning content and concerning basic values and democratic categories, as well as the presence of over-information related to the construction of a national identity and to the localization in the local set by the dominant monoculture[8]. Deficiencies in content

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7   Full text: Маринова, 2016.

8   The term *monoculturalism* is used by Kalyonski for denoting "domination and monopoly of a given culture of group over the rest within a specific society. It is stated that the monocultural societies develop as racist or assimilationist" (Кальонски, 2009, p. 104). In those societies, several phenomena develop at some level, such as cultural prejudice, ethnocentrism, discrimination, social distance and inequality, and the monoculturalism is dominant for decades in most of the European national states.

In this context, *multiculturalism* opposes monoculturalism as the state representing the different groups and communities of a given society (Кальонски, 2009, p. 105), and *interculturalism* takes the legal, educational and media activation of the opportunities for constructive dialogue and interaction between the cultures, built on joint recognition of the "otherness" and joint enrichment of cultures through recognizing the merits of the self-identity (Кальонски, 2009). The purpose of intercultural education is meaningful development and fulfillment of the children in a diverse sociocultural environment (Кальонски, 2009). The reasons for developing intercultural education in the 70s are actual problems in Europe on an interpersonal and group relationships level, such as

concern mainly the familiarity with otherness based on ethnic, religious, cultural principle, etc., which is a prerequisite for the lack of understanding of differences by children in a real social environment where they definitely exist.

The Bulgarian primers and readers' content as a rule lacks civil education, an adequate image of the family, the location of the categories of 'public' and 'private', a number of emotional states. For the formation of identity, national symbols, different historical artifacts provoking pride, the Bulgarian folk traditions are used. Many of the elements and themes that form a spirit of tolerance to "the Other" and to the difference are absent from the primary school education although could easily integrate into the curriculum. The overall vision and textual content of the school literature for the youngest does not provoke interest, and does not provide an intellectual challenge. Content that definitely does not reflect the real world rather repels children and imposes the search for other sources, ways and forms of up-to-date information.

SEMIOTICS OF THE OTHER[9]

In the context of the increasing use of legal instruments to narrow the differences and consolidate nationalist discourses based on the concept of identity, 2015 was defined as a year of development „devoted to the external action of the European Union and the role of Europe in the world". Such an initiative at the EU level for the first time drew the attention of European institutions and citizens outside to the poorest countries and the efforts to support their development. The motto of the initiative "Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future" aimed to raise awareness and empowerment of European citizens towards the challenges facing modern societies (Кирова, 2015).

In response to the intensity and complexity of the processes described, modern xenophobic discourse research in Europe is increasingly pressing the thesis that phenomena such as immigration and good political management of diversity require monitoring and analysis of both the discourse of power and the power of production discourse (Zapata-Barrero & Rubio-Carbonero, 2014, p. 23). Thus,

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intolerance, racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, discrimination and so on. Under a decade, interculturalism becomes a leading doctrine in Western Europe. Key terms here are diversity, difference and variety. According to the researchers, multiculturalism implies difference and intercultural education itself suggests recognition of difference, regardless on cultural specifics, religion, ethnos, sexual orientation, nationality, social status, physical abilities and so on (Василева, 2009, p. 115).

9   Full text: Голешевска, 2015.

the problems of visuality and textuality as interdependent parameters of modern literacy directly attack modern societies. The socio-semiotic paradigm thinks of such a transformation as a revolutionary one as it radically alters the relationship between the letter and the printed page; both in semantic terms – transition from letter to image, and in terms of logic of communication – transition from the medium of the book to the medium of the screen. So, in socio-semiotics, two basic communicative modalities are presented –letter and depiction; literacy based on the alphabet is thought to be monomodal, and screen literacy – as multimodal (Kress, 2003).

On the field of political theory, such a transformation is thought to be high-risk, as it has a direct impact on the citizen's formation. Contemporary visual culture (video paideia) produces video-dependent children who become video-dependent citizens – i.e., citizens formed by visual perceptual images, thereby interfering with the ability to abstract thinking and the associated ability to learn, understand and interpretation. Thus, in the fact that abstract concepts formulated within verbal communication, such as freedom, equality, solidarity, nation, state, democracy, legitimacy, legality, etc., are not susceptible to visual representation, Giovanni Sartori sees the actual philosophical and cultural aporia which modern democracies face. So, the political dimension of the visually dominated world exceeds the simple exhaustion of cognitive and interpretative abilities, resulting in weakening the ability to manage community life (Sartori, 1997, p. 114).

In the Bulgarian context, the relation between modern identity discourses, civil literacy and visual aspects of modern culture was studied by Alexander Kiossev in his paper "COME ON! HERE is BULGARIA! Nationalist Images in the Public Spaces of Sofia" (Кьосев, 2013). In his observations, Bulgaria's accession to the EU marks the new situation in the interface of the urban environment, namely, the variegating of the capital with nationalist images and emblems. Thus, latent Bulgarian nationalism does not formulate representations discriminatory toward the forms of otherness, in the extent it forms signs of its own representation.

The subject of the present study are the visual and verbal signs used in the didactic materials for identity, (non-)tolerance, civil identity, understood as agents of social processes in the context of the "Bulgarian ethnic monopoly" (Кьосев, 2013). The study is aimed at reconstructing explicit but also implicit signs of discrimination and the associated stereotypes in various didactic tools for the youngest in the Bulgarian system of primary education that provide "the first institutionalized knowledge of the significant characteristics of the social world" (Стойкова, 2006), as well as the basic forms of social interaction (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 6).

On the basis of predominantly visual codes, readers introduce rules and restrictions on what can be presented and thus construct a vision of a nationally labeled civil identity – the Bulgarian one, embracing the images of the national, traditional and physically healthy.

In the course of the analysis, symbolic representations of reality situations concerning identity issues, gender, sexual orientation, concepts of tradition and citizenship were taken into account, as well as the headlines, the number of main protagonists in stories, their attitudes, behavior and professions, and also the distribution of roles and responsibilities in the representative types in the family. Images that challenge/violate the principles of gender equality, between different ethnicities, religions, cultures, etc., generated particular interest. In turn, the representations of discriminated characters were sought in the context of their role functions. Thus, groups of images combined by typological or thematic similarities (redundancy) have been selected, with the potential to influence the formation of attitudes to fear of and non-recognition of modern forms of otherness.

The description of the contents of the teaching aids formulates the initial hypothesis that, both visually and textually, they impose a model of a singular, homogeneous national(istic) tradition in which the image of the Other – in religious, racial, cultural terms – remains invisible. Analyzed primers and readers raise much more knowledge of "colonizing one's own" than values of tolerance to difference; in them, through both the verbal and visually constructed discourse, the model of a coherent, national tradition is imposed. In the context of absence of alternative narrative strategies, this model risks to create conditions for discriminatory attitudes based on gender, sexuality, religion, or race.

TOLERANCE POLICIES[10]

The Western understanding of tolerance develops and enriches itself along with pluralisation in societies (Knauth, 2010). At the same time, the processes of globalization, unification of European countries, migration (not only in its modern dimensions but also the wave after the Second World War), the problems of local populations, the increase of professional mobility within the continent, the cultural exchange in the real and virtual space and the coexistence of many different cultures, religions and traditions "do not only affect traditional conccepts such as cultural and national identity, state or autonomy, but they also raise the question

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10   Full text: Борисова, 2015.

regarding cultural diversity in the modern society. […] the democratic model of approaching differences is one of the foundations of the right to having differences and equal participation of all entities within the society" (Achkovska-Leshkovska & Davchev, 2013).

In this context, the function of civil and intercultural education – defined by the Council of Europe as "learning how to coexist together" (Batelaan, 2004, pp. 5–13) – more responsibly than ever, should educate today's children and young people in the value of tolerance towards the diversity of cultures and personalities through their in-depth knowledge: a study on the students' attitudes shows that "the more people know each other, the more they are prepared to live together and to respect each other's 'otherness'" (Knauth, 2010)[11].

The EU's efforts to reform member states' education systems and promote intercultural education together with the Council of Europe can be formulated in three general directions:

1) at the level of competences and skills – promoting the development of communication skills, sociability, critical attitudes towards individual identities (religious, national, ethnic) and their specific historical development and relativisation towards the universal world of human rights and dignity;
2) at the level of knowledge transfer – reducing ethnocentric attitudes, critical view of prejudices, recognition of the different civilizations and cultures, processes of socialization and political and ideological consequences based on the curricular content of the subject cycle in Social Sciences and Humanities;
3) at the level of educational and cultural models – cooperation between all sources of education (teachers, parents, local community, media, higher education) in order to achieve a coherent policy in the political, economic and social spheres for equal opportunities for individuals and cultural communities (Achkovska-Leshkovska & Davchev, 2013).

Hence the direct link between the two key EU education measures to prioritize intercultural and civil issues alongside the promotion of students' personal development.

In this direction, Bromley and Mäkinen found in their cross-national analysis of civil education curriculum in 33 countries (including Bulgaria, Finland and

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11   This is one of the main results from the project "Religion in Education. A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries", implemented within the Sixth Framework Program: http://cordis.europa.eu/project/rcn/78641_en.html.

Sweden from the countries considered in this project) that there was a strong correlation between the student-centered education and curriculum, and the highlights on the rights of the different groups; however, along with this the authors found a link between national levels of individualism and the emphasis in textbooks on the diversity and rights of the different groups. According to the study, Bulgaria is characterized by low levels of centeredness of the educational system around the individuality of the student, as well as a low level of national individualism – respectively, with a poorly developed cultural and educational area of civil and intercultural education (Bromley & Mäkinen, 2011, pp. 45–46, Figure 6).

Obviously, civil education on both European and global level undergoes a transformation to a distinct denationalization, a constructive upgrading of its original function (Bromley & Mäkinen, 2011, p. 47) – and increasingly interferes with the subject of intercultural education by postulating the values of "the citizenship of the world" such as tolerance and intercultural understanding, personal development and self-realization. And, if it is true that "education is the mirror of a society, the incentive for its development and the evolution of the potential of human capital" (Николов, 2013, p. 105), then it is a task of school to educate from an earlier age these values among young citizens of the modern European and global society.

CONCLUSION

The political task of building an "institutional educational infrastructure" that develops a virtual reality in order to be recognized *from outside* as an appropriate ground for investment in the "development of a knowledge economy" has emerged in Bulgaria today. But the "reform" in the educational sector does not address the relationships between education and society (local communities and business), but is an expression of the consolidated (under the chitin envelopes of the empowered by the instruments of the central government) private interests to imitate a reform that shambles the flag of European values and faces the fierce – but subversive – resistance of the consolidated *status quo defenders* (competitors and contenders in the process for which it is vital to preserve the "historical principle" of budgeting, quasi-educational cliques that has monopolized the education system through illegitimate influence on decision makers, etc.).

This overplay is being performed against the backdrop of rising expenditures in the educational system, which must be legitimately filled up with European resources, because the lack of reforms does not allow the generation of enough national funds. Of course, the actors are well prepared to play this travesty, since

the communist reflexes from the old regime that has used to abuse the interplay between ideology and reality ("great and little righteousness" of the communist ideology) still prevail among the administration.

However, the games of backstage in the field of education could not be played so successfully if they do not have the supportive will of the hysterical Bulgarian ethno-nationalism, invited to entertain the audience while the actors are behind the scope of the spotlight. There are too many volunteers who want to throw themselves into the ecstasy of the traditional dances, catapulting the question of the meaning in the orbits of the transcendent (rhythm is as meaning itself and does not need any kind of explanation and other meaningful content) because of the lack of sustainable social ties, strong local communities, solidarity, etc. That generates alienation and legitimates the command-repressive political approach to addressing any public policy – from dealing with school bullying to the refugee crisis.

The performance, however, is more and more difficult to contain the mask of tragedy and is revealed as parody, because antagonists and protagonists constantly change their places. On the one hand, due to the permanent crises of the Bulgarian nationalism, which (because of the genetic lack of developed civil society) is constructed on an ethnic, territorial and linguistic basis, instead on values, civil culture, and political objectives.

At the same time, on the other hand, as a result of the above, parents more often see the happiness of their children outside of their homeland, and nationalism turns into a "stone of the neck" that reduces the effectiveness of trampolines such as mathematics and foreign languages.

Moreover, the opening of borders within the EU and the increase of the Roma students' share at schools perish the ethno-nationalist ideology and intensify the process of seeking a new ideology for teachers, administration and parents, because the current one cannot satisfy the hunger for integrity and reducing the practices to raise xenophobes on our own: currently prevailing in Bulgaria mess of medieval, industrial, socialist and postmodern educational practices is the reason for the alienation of many schoolchildren, as it is in sharp contradiction with the culture of creativity, initiative, curiosity, etc., which culture could not be suspended by a decree of the Council of Ministers.

If your child exalts the school, there is something wrong with the child. But if your child disdains the school, there is something wrong with the school.

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