The Place and the Role of Civic Education in the Republic of Macedonia

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Introduction

Some six years ago, writing about the social functions and the state of affairs of the civic education in the country at that moment and comparing it with the situation in other post-communist countries, I found it illustrative to describe the situation by paraphrasing the opening sentence from the famous Marx and Engel's Communist Manifesto. The result was the statement that: A hundred and fifty years after the publication of the Communist Manifesto, some eighty years after the beginning of the communist revolution and ten years after the transition, today, "a aureole is surrounding" the East and Central Europe, the aureole of citizenship. All forces of the new Europe unite together in a holy battle for that aureole. Everyone is trying to direct the civic aureole vitalis towards his yard (Trajkovski 1998a).

Against that general trend, the author critically concluded that the Macedonian educational authorities, at that time did not have clear ideas and orientation towards civic education. They were moving back and forth. Today, the situation is different. Although not yet well institutionalized, the idea of civic education is already accepted and introduced as new paradigm in social education (1).

The present situation of the civic education in Macedonia is a result of no more than a seven-year long process of implementation of the concept into the educational system. This process went through two specific phases and is nowadays entering into its third phase of institutionalization and mainstreaming. The first phase, started in 1995-96. It was initial and the activities here were focused on the promotion of the idea of civic education, and its mission and place in the educational system. The second phase started in 1998, and was characterized by introducing the first experimental civic education programs in school classes. The third phase started in 2000-01 and its primary challenge is mainstreaming. In what follows, the specific objectives and issues of the first two phases are described. The third phase is just starting, and due to that, the third part of the paper stipulates about the prospects of civic education in view of the European integration of the country.

Before that, it is important to emphasize that the Macedonian achievements in the field of civic education need to be understood and evaluated within the specific social milieu. The specificity of the Macedonian context originates, of course, from the transition itself. In these terms, the Macedonian society shares the transitional phenomenology with the rest of the post-communist countries.

Besides the typical transitional phenomena such as the privatization of public ownership, liberalization of the economy, democratization of the political system, the transition in Macedonia was headed primarily towards independence and state-building; nation-building and societal integration of ethnic minorities; and international recognition and integration of the Republic of Macedonia as independent State.

In addition to these problems, the Macedonian society in 1999, over a period of 3-4 month, experienced the enormous influx of (over 360.000) refugees from Kosovo. But the real effects of the Kosovo conflict on Macedonia followed two years later. Last year the country went through a war conflict on its own territory. The war spoiled the very ideas of citizenship, diversity and human rights (2). The basic ideas behind these concepts were abused by the ethnic Albanian guerillas -

presenting their war against the Republic of Macedonia as "struggle for more human rights". Yet, most of the citizens understood that civic values, attitudes and skills acquired and learned during the previous years of peace and stability provided capacities that enabled them to overcome the situation. It is important to emphasize that the principle of citizenship was incorporated as one of the fundamental principles of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (3).

1. Civic education as conflicting educational innovation

Civic education for the first time entered the public discourse of the country in 1995 and 1996. It was introduced from above, since in this time there were only few alternative educational agents active in the field. The initiatives for educational reform were coming mainly from the independent university circles. Yet, soon after the country was accepted as member of the Council of Europe it undertook its first steps to introduce civic education.

In order to cope with the new educational challenges of the integration, the institutions and agencies of the educational system have been involved in a number of basically self-reforming efforts, without any significant public (political or academic) debate about the National Curriculum (NC). The best result of such efforts was presented in the newly reformed curriculums for primary and secondary schools (4). Both of them were modeled according to the principles of the long-standing and self-perpetuating tradition of uniform, centralized, detailed and discipline-oriented education. Nevertheless, both curriculums (for primary and for secondary education) provided a specific place for civic education.

At the level of primary education, civic education was planned to be taught in grades seven and eight (pupils between 14 to 15 years of age), as a content element of the History and Civic Society school subject. Such placing of civic education in the curriculum was based on the definition of the fundamental mission of primary education (Osnovno obrazovanie 1997). In the meantime, this position of civic education has been changed. Civic education is introduced as separate course.

At the level of secondary education, (students between 16 and 19 years of age) the civic education was differently positioned in the curriculum for vocational training (VET) than in the curriculum for general schools. The VET curriculum introduces civic education as a separate course. Here, too, civic education is introduced as a means for reaching the primary goals of the secondary school.

In the new curriculum for general education, civic education was due to be delivered through specific curriculum inserts (Political System as optional course) and through a range of subjects (in particular through Sociology and Philosophy courses). The curriculum also introduced civic education through a program for school activities called Civic Culture.

In general the above described curriculum provisions demonstrate that educational authorities have had a very strong positive normative commitment to educate the citizens for life in a society that respects human rights and freedoms and its internal diversity. The official documents for primary and secondary education have incorporated the norms and values of democracy, citizenship, diversity, European integration and so forth. Peace, stability and democracy are defined as principle goals of the school.

There was hardly anything to add to these provisions. One could say that civic education in a Macedonia had a good, and comparatively better, starting position - it had an official status within the national curriculums. Yet, there was still long way to go. One open and very controversial issue, which affected the very place of civic education in the curriculum, was the particular content which the specific curriculum inserts or other courses were expected to provide for the pupils - what kind of information, knowledge and ideas, what skills and capabilities, and what values and personal dispositions?

These were the issues that, unlike the introduction of civic education into the curriculum, could not be locked and solved within the bureaucratic offices. The implementation of such innovations in the education process was out of the reach of the educational authorities. As a result, they left - although unwillingly - the door half open, for initiatives and activities from outside. In one way or another, they allowed certain peace-meal changes and innovations. The first pilot civic education

projects and programs were introduced into the schools.

The scope, the objectives and the content of the various activities were very diverse: from programs covering only one or two single concepts, ideas, skills and values, to programs covering a whole range of eclectically chosen topics. The content usually was coming with the money that supported the implementation of a particular civic education program.

The first initiatives were financially supported by foreign organizations. Among the first ones active in this field were the Open Society Institute; the PHARE, the US Center for Civic Education (CCE) from California; and the Austrian KulturKontakt. As a result first promotional activities were organized. Among the most influential, one was initiated and organized by the newly established *Education for Civic Society Action Project* (ECSAP), at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy. With the financial support from the CCE, the ECSAP organized round table on the topics of the place, the goals, and the teaching methods of civic education in Macedonia. On the basis of the discussion and conclusions of the round table, ECSAP developed and proposed a comprehensive strategy for introducing civic education at all levels of public education (Trajkovski 1998b). The strategy was partially accepted by the educational authorities. Yet, on the base of the Strategy, the ECSAP team developed the projects and partnerships that continue shaping the civic education activities in Macedonia in the next years, although after the political changes in the government in 1998 all ECSAP activities were overtaken and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES).

The last remark illustrates part of the power game over the introduction of the civic education in the country. From the very beginning civic education was understood not simply as pure educational innovation, but also as something that brings new resources, finances as well as jobs, equipment, etc. For these reasons, the introduction of civic education from the very beginning turned to be very conflicting process.

Except for the existential sources of conflict, the promotion of civic education became conflicting because of ideological reasons as well. The civic education, as well as the human rights education, was from the very beginning exploited for the purposes of the ideological and political conflicts between the ethno-nationalistic and liberal, or so called "civic" forces. The civic parties were, at least declaratively, stronger supporters of civic education than the nationalistic parties. Yet, after the changes in the government in 1998, when the latter parties came to power their partisans, for one reason or another, very passionately took over the control of the implementation of already existing civic education projects, developed by the University based ECSAP (5).

When introducing civic education in Macedonian schools another source of conflicts were the issues dealing with professional ownership. Since it was to be introduced as separate subject in the curricula, the question appeared as to who is professionally authorized to teach it. The main competitors were the sociologists and their main rivals the historians, political scientists, philosophers and pedagogues - so many interested sides for a small, but desperately wanted cake.

All these controversies somehow disappeared from the public discourse during the last four years that overlap with the second phase of the implementation of civic education in the educational system. The new educational authorities understood the implementation of civic education projects simply as a matter of practicing state authority. They were not interested in the perceptions of the qualified public opinion about the civic education as educational innovation.

2. Introducing civic education projects from the top

During the period between 1998 and 2001/02 the civic education theme was reduced to implementation of previously initiated projects. The educational authorities, in order to translate the previously established normative provisions into effective civic education school courses and classroom practices, based on adequate teacher training and teaching materials, were involved in a number of implementation activities. For that purpose, at the very beginning of this phase, the Ministry of Education established a Commission, charged with the responsibility to coordinate all civic education and related projects. These projects were at the previous stage introduced as initiatives of various NGOs and academic institutions from the country or from international

organizations. Latter on, it appeared that the establishment of the Commission was only a tactical move of the new Ministry of Education. Soon after it was established as coordination body, the Commission itself took over the implementation and administration of most of the ongoing civic education projects in primary and secondary education.

This centralization was a strong sign of distrust. The new educational authorities did not accept the domestic and international experts or other persons that were previously active in the field and, in fact, brought in the first civic education projects and initiatives in the country. In this process, the international organizations that were financing the projects were not too upset about the personal and institutional changes. After their first and more routine reaction, they understood such changes as part of the folklore and of the calculated risk when working in unstable environment, and very quickly got over their former partners. This was the formula how organizations such as the American Catholic Relief Services, active in primary, and the Austrian KulturKontakt, active in secondary education, could survive and continue their work in the country.

Yet, on the other side, the extreme centralization and monopolization of the implementation activities by the Ministry of Education and its subordinated bodies showed to be much more effective in comparison to the previous phase. The top down implementation approach that was introduced, with its directive style of work - that was definitely not very much in line with the mission of civic education, but - turned out to be more accustomed to the inherited authoritarian educational climate and long established school practices. The most visible results of this approach are described below (6).

At pre-school level the main civic education project was Foundations of Democracy. Institutionally, it was conducted by the MES and its Bureau for Development of Education, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and social policy (MLSP). According to the information from the MES, up until 2001 the program was implemented in some 20% of pre-school groups. Financially the project was supported by the MES and by the MLSP.

At the level of primary education there were two civic education projects implemented. In terms of content, teaching materials and teaching methods were based on American projects Foundations of democracy and Project citizen, originally developed by the Center for Civic Education from California. The first project was initially introduced at the class teaching sub-level (grades 1 to 4) and the second one in subject teaching sub-level (grades 5 to 8). The projects were financed by USAID through the Catholic Relief Services as grant holder (CRS). Both projects were implemented with respect to the linguistic diversity of the Macedonian schools. Until today, the majority of the teachers have received short training. Teaching materials for students as well as for teachers were developed in Macedonian, Albanian and Turkish language.

At the level of secondary education the most relevant civic education projects are introduced in vocational schools. During these years two separate projects were implemented: Citizens for Democracy, developed within the PHARE VET reform program and the Civic education, developed in cooperation with the Austrian NGO KulturKontakt and financially supported by the Austrian Ministry of Education. The second project resulted with originally developed teaching materials (for students and for teachers). The program was implemented by teachers of sociology, all of whom received teacher training. On the basis of the achievements of the two projects starting from September 2001 Civic education has been introduced as a regular subject in vocational schools. The Ministry of Education is starting its activities for introducing civic education (civic culture) in the general high school (secondary grammar school).

In terms of civic education teacher training, the best achievement is that high a percentage of teachers, at all educational levels, has received some kind of training - bringing new didactics, new educational materials and definitely new perspective on teaching. Yet, in terms of the quality of the training the dominant opinion of teachers is critical. This is true, in particular, for In-service Teacher Training (IST). On the one hand the teachers themselves, who are not very motivated, are the reason but on the other hand, it is due to the educational system which does not provide stimulation for the permanent professional development of teaching staff. The civic education teacher training is mainly carried out at seminars and workshops and is almost exclusively designed and provided for the needs of individual projects.

Teaching materials are the most visible results of the implementation of the civic education

programs. Thanks to the implemented and ongoing projects, the present situation with the civic education teaching materials is much better than before. There are student textbooks and teachers manuals for different themes such as: human rights, conflict resolution and conflict management, peace education, democracy, rule of law, non-violence, multiculturalism, inter-cultural understanding etc. Yet, because all the present teaching materials have been developed for the needs of the particular programs and projects, there is lack of good and comprehensive resource materials and more general readers. This weakness could not be overcome without developing citizenship studies and citizenship education at higher (university graduate and postgraduate) level. In this regard, the place of the citizenship studies at the university level is not much better compared to the situation before civic education was introduced at the lower levels of the educational system.

Institutionally, the university departments have not been very much responsive to the needs and processes at the lower levels of the education. Individuals from the university have played a leading role in introducing the civic education programs at primary and secondary education. Yet, the individual efforts and achievements have not been institutionalized - something that could be understood and explained within the more general problems of consolidation and stabilization of the new democratic values and institutions. Citizenship and civic education are not regular part of the pre-service teacher training curriculum. The only exception is the Pedagogical Faculty of the University of Bitola. In 1999/2000 the Pedagogical Faculty introduced the course Foundations of democracy didactics as obligatory for teachers trained for class teaching sub-level and for subject teaching sub-level.

3. Future challenges of civic education

Based on the above sketched past achievements in terms of good legislative and curriculum framework, strong normative commitment of educational agents and already undertaken implementation policies, there is good reason for an optimistic perspective on the future of civic education in Macedonia. In addition to this, it seems also reasonable to presuppose the continuation of the positive trends from the perspective of the European integration of the country. This strategic direction of the society as a whole positively affects the place of the civic education within the education system. From this perspective, civic education has been understood as an educational program that meets the needs for respect of diversity, and supports the acceptance of European political and economic values in the era of globalization. As such, civic education is to be treated as vehicle of the European integration.

In order to effectively serve its goals, civic education in the future needs to be more grounded and contextualized than in the past (Petrovski 2002). In terms of their content, didactics, organization and definitely in terms of finances the majority of the implemented projects and programs are only minor adaptations of originally foreign ideas and practices. There is no 'in-country' developed civic education project. All of the implemented programs and projects are 'imported' from outside. On the other side, the new and contextualized programs need to integrate the dimension of European citizenship that is very much missing from the present ones.

These gaps will be achieved in parallel with the success of the process of institution building. There is strong need for building and promoting domestic centers of expertise in policy development, resource and teaching materials development, teacher training, evaluation and research in the field of civic education and citizenship studies in general. For this purpose the developmental international cooperation and partnership is a necessary precondition.

Another very important developmental factor that will directly affect the future of civic education is the so much needed reform in the area of social and humanistic studies in general, and in social and humanistic sciences in particular. In the past, many serious controversies, problems and sometimes obstacles resulted from the "competition" between social and humanistic disciplines over their right to monopolize civic education.

Notes

(1) See Stocktaking Research on Policies for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Managing of Diversity in Southeast Europe. 2001. Country Report the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedoni. Council of Europe DGIV/EDU/CIT, 45.

(2) This was reflected in the last report of the International Crisis group, according to whose (to a certain extent) oversimplified conclusions: "neither side in Macedonia" (ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians "believes in a 'civic' solution. Democracy is frail, "multiethnicity" is regarded as dubious Western jargon, and civic politics have" lost the support.
http://www.crisisweb.org/projects/balkans/macedonia/reports/A400369_27072001.pdf

(3) Peace agreement signed by all the major political parties in Macedonia, under strong international guaranties.

(4) Developed by the Pedagogical Institute of Macedonia (PIM) and, on the proposal of the State Pedagogical Council, enacted by the Ministry of Education (MES).

(5) Four years later, affront of the new parliamentarian elections in September 2002, the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE, published its White book. A good part of the Education chapter of this document is devoted to the achievements in the field of civic education.

(6) The data presented here is taken from the above quoted Macedonian National report: Trajkovski, Ilo (2001) Stocktaking Research on Policies for Education for Democratic Citizenship and Managing of Diversity in Southeast Europe: Country Report "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Council of Europe DGIV/EDU/CIT (2001) 45.

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