

The International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (IMIR) has been a partner in several academic consortia funded by the European Commission in the period 2005-2012. The methodology of the projects, regardless of the various discourses of scientific search, required IMIR teams to carry out active fieldwork on the territory of Bulgaria, frequently with a focus on respondents belonging to ethnic and religious minorities. The systematization and analysis of the empirical data, collected from tens of interviews and focus groups from different parts of Bulgaria, made it evident that, regardless of the concrete issue of the respective European study, respondents have concerns about various educational issues.¹ In addition to being a fundamental human right, education is of crucial importance for the successful integration of minorities into the society. Without good education, citizens of minority origin cannot participate on equal footing in the social, economic and political life in the country. Obtaining quality education depends on numerous and very diverse factors, however the most fundamental one is a sensible and just legislative framework.

Influenced by the forthcoming adoption of the new Preschool and School Education Act, IMIR decided to conduct a study on educational problems of Turkish children in Bulgarian schools. IMIR team made a surprising finding that the level of command of the Bulgarian language was low not only among children but also among those parents who had recently completed their primary or secondary education. Another unexpected fact was that part of the respondents had limited knowledge of their mother tongue (Turkish): they spoke in dialect forms and with extremely limited vocabulary. This is surprising due to the fact that the Constitution and the legislation of Bulgaria guarantee the right to study mother tongue since 1991. In addition, the macro society accepts this right as a norm.

The right to study mother tongue has been one of the most important post-1989 achievements of the democratic and liberal minded citizens. Despite that, the interest in studying Turkish language had visibly decreased over the last ten years. The goal of the current study was to answer the question why was this happening and why this fundamental right was not actively used by minorities at times when society had adopted the European standards and was fully at ease with the studying of the mother tongue.

In addition, the team tried to identify the reasons why the Turkish children knew Bulgarian on a level significantly lower than required by the national educational and cultural standards.

The third objective of the study was to explore if (and why) the tradition of passing the family and kin history through generations has been preserved or lost in the Turkish community. If such family histories continued to exist, then their relation with the history textbooks and methodology of teaching had to be analyzed.