THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN FOSTERING INTER-CULTURAL DIALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING IN A MULTIETHNIC SOCIETY- THE CASE OF THE REPUBLIC of MACEDONIA[1]

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Abstract
Macedonian society is multiethnic society trying to design its education system in accordance with contemporary international tendencies. These attempts are in constant collision with the external and internal challenges determining the system of education and shaping its future development directions. In this article we claim that education today should serve to support two main directions: one founded on global values and serving developmental characteristic for the contemporary world (cooperation, compatibility, competitiveness, integration, etc.), and one rooted in the national culture and values, serving the resolving of domestic challenges and developmental directions. This paper will address the challenges and the role of high education institutions in Macedonian society in fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding. It will analyze the process of educational reforms after the conflict in 2001 and the impact of high education reforms and draw conclusions about future actions.
Keywords: high education, interethnic relations and dialogue, intercultural communication

Introduction

Since its independence from former Yugoslavia in 1991, the Republic of Macedonia has been facing numerous challenges, which emanate from the economic, social and political transition processes (Ackermann A, 2000). Nevertheless, after experiencing conflict in April 2001 the country

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has demonstrated political will and commitment to overcome causes of instability trough european integrations process and signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union. In 2005 it was awarded the status of candidate country for EU membership and in November 2013 the European commission issued fifth recommendation to the Council to open negotiations with the country and to move to the second stage of the SAA. Given the fact that Balkan countries (former Yugoslav republics) are post-communist and post-conflict societies now on track of democratization and stabilization it is important to emphasize that ethnic and religious diversity and inequality are still among most sensitive issues. From the beginning of 1991 after country proclaimed independence the multi-ethnic and multi-religious characteristics of Macedonian society are considered sensible and possible underlying factors for instability or conflict escalation (H.P Liotta and Cindy R. Jebb 2004:73).

Thus the perception that multi-ethnicity is characteristic of culturally reach region or society has been marginalized and the perception that multi-ethnicity is a source of intolerance, exclusion, discrimination and violence become prevalent (Olivera Simić, Zala Volčič, Catherine R. Philpot. 2012). As Ackermann (2000) and Sokalski (2003) emphasized, until 2001 Macedonian society went trough unique experience in preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention applied by UN and OSCE with the main goal to avert horizontal conflict spillover effects from the region and to prevent vertical escalation of underlying factors within the society. Many authors captured inter-ethnicity as a source of tensions including Leatherman who described Macedonian society as "tinderbox of underlying tensions" (Leatherman, J. ed. 1999 149-180). She referred to different underlying factors but emphasized that relations between Macedonians and Albanians are characterized by sociopolitical, cultural and religious differences reinforced by the territorial homogeneity of the Albanians.

The question of the role of high education in Macedonian multiethnic society has emerged from the broader context of interethnic relations and specifically as an issue of the access to high education of non-majority ethnic groups. It become the most salient aspect of interethnic tensions as access to high education have become politicized and political parties representatives claimed it is a matter of high priority that requires all necessary means to be achieved. The issue of access to high education in short period of time was politicized and even securitized (Stephen May, Tariq Modood, Judith Squires Ethnicity 2004:157). As a consequence the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities was involved in approaching education issues on different levels since 1993 (CoE, 2008:31). The core problem could be explained from differing ethnic perspectives i.e ethnic Albanians in the country demanded more favorable conditions and access to high education while Macedonians perceived such claims as repetition of once experienced separatist Serbian-Kosovo scenario. Leatherman quoted data from Macedonian Information and Liaison Service (MILS, 1993:17) about graduate students for Universities is Skopje and Bitola in 1990-1991 as 1.5 percent was Albanians and 87.9 Macedonian (Leatherman, J. 1999: 152). The situation in 2010/11 and 2012/3 according to State statistical office shows that situation is different form 1990-1991 and it is improved.[2] The numbers presented by State statistical office shows that the access of ethnic

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[2] Total number of first time enrolled students is 17 694 of which 13 210 (74.65 percentage) are Macedonians, 2422 (13.68 percentage) are Albanians, 336 Turks, 101 Roma, 116 Vlachs, 225 Serbs, 108 Bosniaks and 115 others. From the total number of students in 2011/12 is 57 536 (30 813 female) some 45 748 (25 263 female); 79.51 percentage are Macedonians, 7 804 (3593) 13.56 percentage % Albanians, 1 053, 1.83 percentage are Turks, 216 are Romas, 340 are Vlachs, 618 are Serbs, 271 Bosniaks, 288 are others (1 198 unknown). According to data published by SSO there are 55 810 enrolled students in high education in 2012/3 (43 828 Macedonians; 8649 Albanians; 1160 Turks; 219 Roma; 423 Vlachs; 750 Serbs; 351 Bosniaks; and 331 oters) Enrolled students in the academic year, 2012/2013 State statistical office of the Republic of Macedonia, pp. Statistical review 2.4.14.14 (796) 2014; http://www.stat.gov.mk/Publikacii/2.4.14.14.pdf

communities to high education is improved but the question is whether and how high education contributes for interethnic dialogue and communication.

1. Reforms in education

In line with its commitments, Republic of Macedonia needs to transform into a society in which education and training, culture and science represent a key factor for the well-being of its citizens and strengthening its economy. Hence, reforms in education need to ensure greater compatibility between national and EU and global standards, advancement of democracy and civil society, and development of a contemporary integrated market economy. The primary goal of education policy, enshrined in the National Programme for Development of Education 2005-2015 (Ministry of Education, 2005), is to provide opportunities to all and to all age groups for acquiring a suitable educational level, and to ensure that all possess competences commensurate to the demands of society and the labour market.

In order to achieve this goal, education must be accessible to all, regardless of age, sex, religious and sexual orientation, ethnic affiliation, medical condition and social and financial status. In addition, education and training must fulfill all efficiency and effectiveness requirements in order to be in a position to provide all with sufficient general and vocational education.

The tertiary sector has since 2003 been in a continuous process of change, to the greatest extent caused by the endeavors of the state to implement the Bologna Declaration. After long period of adjustments the new Law on High education was adopted in 2008 reflecting three-cycle based high education system. The period of transition has been filled with a number of initiatives for changing the legislation in education, for decentralising education, for adopting developmental curricula, for strengthening the administrative and professional capacities of the state institutions, for establishing professional bodies, agencies and centres, for changing the structure and organisational set-up of the education system and educational institutions, etc. [3] All this is a result of the efforts of the state to find optimal solutions that would enable the creation of a functional education system.[4] It would be justified to call this period a period of substantial education reform.

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[3] In addition to the state universities (the "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" University in Skopje, the "St. Kliment Ohridski" University in Bitola, the State University in Tetovo, founded in 2004. the "Goce Delcev" University in Shtip, founded in 2007, and the University of Information Sciences and Technologies "St. Apostle Pavle" in Ohrid, founded in 2009), a significant number of private higher education institutions were opened in the country: the FON University (2002),, the European University – Republic of Macedonia, the American College University and are private higher education institutions with representative numbers of students. A new type of public-private non-profitable higher education institution has been introduced. Currently there is only one university of this type, the South-East European University established in Tetovo in 2001 with financial contributions from numerous international donors and foreign higher education   institutions; http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/tempus/participating_countries/reviews/fyromacedonia_review_of_higher_education.pdf

2. The role of high education in intercultural communication and dialogue

Experience so far indicates that the idea of intercultural education draws its strength from the *Education for All Declaration*, based on the right to education and the right to diversity. Within the framework of these efforts, we can differentiate among: multicultural and multilingual education (in the practice it most frequently takes the shape of bi-cultural and bi-lingual education); education of the culturally different; civic education, education for cultural understanding, international education, education for peace and coexistence, etc.

The Republic of Macedonia is populated by a large number of ethnic groups. According to the latest census of 2002, the population consists of: 64.2% Macedonians; 25.2% Albanians; 3.9% Turks; 1.9% Serbs; 2.7% Romanies; 0.8% Boshnaks, Etc. It is evident that in the Republic of Macedonia, just like in the other Balkan countries, a number of cultures coexist, that have among themselves developed appropriate relations. The rights and obligations of the citizens are regulated with the Constitution and the laws. The Constitution respects the rights of the ethnic communities in the Republic of Macedonia, including the right to education. The right to education is guaranteed through Article 7 (lines 2 and 4), Article 8 (lines 2 and 11) and Article 48. The Constitution guarantees a multitude of rights related to education and to the use of language in municipalities populated by a substantial number (over 20 percentage) of the members of ethnic communities. Articles 44 and 48 are of special significance; they relate to the right of the ethnic communities to self-expression and maintenance of the culture and the cultural identity. Thus, conditions and institutional opportunities are constantly created for education, getting to know each other, building and expressing one's own cultural identity, as a basis for interaction with one's own cultural group and with the other cultural groups in the country.

If intercultural education is enshrined in the right to education in the respective mother tongue of the culturally diverse students, then we can conclude that the Republic of Macedonia, as reflected in the situation of its educational system, respects and implements the idea of intercultural education. Still there is general awareness and criticism that there is no common understanding about the concept of intercultural education and its priorities and goals. There is also general concern that pre-school, primary, secondary and even tertiary education produces more ethnic distance than communication and dialogue.

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia, multi-ethnicity is reflected in the education system in different ways, with the aim of providing children and youth with education in the mother tongue. That evidently contributed to the significant progress in the implementation of the language rights of the communities in the last decade. However, the concrete interpretation of the rights of the communities on the part of the country's political factors did not bring about greater integration. On the contrary, the ethnic divide, especially among the smaller children increased, and the knowledge of the other groups became anecdotal. Although on a macro political level interethnic relations are constantly improving as a result of the institutional approach linked to the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, the insufficient integration on a personal level may be a long-term threat to the very cohesion of society. A more integrated approach in education will not only help avoid bad experiences, but will also contribute to a deeper understanding of the elements building the country's multi-ethnic society and what is needed to make it more stable and coherent.

The ethnic and cultural intolerance among the youth, generated in the area of education could be explained as a consequence of several factors:

- Establishing of parallel education systems, which added the issue of physical distance to the issue of cultural distance;

- Factographical presentation of traditional elements of other cultures in the textbooks and in the teaching process; stress is placed only on cognitive acquisition, with absence of the processes of understanding, valuing and respect. Analyses of textbooks for primary and secondary education reveal that the prevailing contents and ways of their delivering in curricular and extra-curricular activities do not enable a satisfactory degree of mutual knowledge of traditional customs and values, way of life, gender relations, family relations, religion, everyday life, etc (Beska at all. 2009)

- Absence of school and out-of-school activities which presuppose participation of young people from different cultures. In this area, there is almost no state intervention with the purpose of elimination of this anomaly. The main carriers of this type of cultural together-bringing predominantly come from the NGO community. In the recent past, numerous projects have been implemented, which have the objective of promoting cultural communication among members of different ethnic groups in the Republic of Macedonia.

- Poor teacher competencies for teaching intercultural education. A large portion of teachers display teaching competencies focused only on realising a teaching programme of an encyclopaedic character. Unfortunately, teaching competencies for an integrated approach in the delivery of a teaching programme focused on realisation of a given educational output and which would presuppose a more liberal and creative teaching approach, are a rarity. This condition is to a large extend preconditioned by the rigidity of the normative acts and standards currently regulating education, and the character of the curricula and programmes that rarely contain objectives aimed at acquiring, promoting and developing intercultural values.

-Strong influence of the non-formal and the in-formal educational influence (family, local community, church / mosque, media, political parties);

-Absence of clearly defined and nationally and locally accepted goals of education. Purposeless conducting of the educational process most frequently results in improvising and experimenting, in negative reflection on the end result of the process / action. All the more, as education is an area which is oversensitive to such incorrectness, and the negative effects, only visible in the future, remain forever incorrigible. Thus, the use of education in the function of strengthening ethnocentric forces brings about extremely negative implications for the future.

-The political structures (as duty-bearers for the development of the country) do not confirm in their practice the declared goals that are inherent to the pedagogical regulations and in the education as a whole.

It is reasonable to expect that elimination of the last reason is crucial for conditions for true enlivening of the idea of intercultural education and a basic precondition for overcoming of all enumerated weaknesses in the education sphere.

3. The role of the Universities

The internal transformation processes and the planetary globalization processes have made a strong impact on the redesigning of the overall structure of society, giving rise to the need for national and international cooperation and compatibility of systems, and thus also to the innovation of the role and structure of higher education, as a significant factor in achieving that compatibility. The need for a strategic approach to the transformation of higher education is a consequence not only of the changes on a national level, but also of the external, i.e. global and general influence factors shaping higher education in other countries. On 19th September 2003, the Republic of Macedonia became a full member of the European family of countries committed to following and implementing the Bologna Process recommendations and common pledge for creation of a single European Area of Higher Education. When the state assumed obligations from the Bologna Process, higher education became faced with new challenges for its further transformation. In addition to efforts for improving

the quality and efficiency of the studies, higher education is also confronted with the obligations for its own structural, organizational and curricular designing, which would make it transparent, competitive, compatible and recognizable on the European market of high education (HE) services. The initiatives for creation of a common European Area of Higher Education forced the higher education institutions to re-examine themselves, and gave them additional impetus for investing efforts on their way towards active membership in the family of European universities and obtaining the status of respectable providers of educational services on the broad European academic market.

It was obvious that higher education faced the need for: structural adaptation of the tertiary education system to the Bologna Process; harmonization of legislation with the principles and recommendations of the Bologna Process; harmonization of requirements and standards of higher education; creation of an efficient system of scholarships that would facilitate enhanced education and mobility of students and teachers; promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance through development of comparable   criteria and methodology; strengthening the system for external evaluation of the quality in higher education; defining of and strict adherence to the standards for founding and accreditation of private higher education facilities; development of an efficient system for financing higher education and allocation of funds; improvement of strategic and managerial capacities; development of scientific and technological strategies; transparent financing of science research; establishment of a data base of national innovations systems in higher education.

To this end, the government of the Republic of Macedonia adopted a Programme for the Development of Higher Education for the period 2006-2010. It was important to ensure that the overall transformation of higher education would be completed in the given period, in order to ensure a dynamics compatible to the changes in the European countries and its active involvement in the European Area of Higher Education.

2003 saw the adoption of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Higher Education, obligating universities to introduce the ECTS and design their study programmes and subject curricula according to the principles of the Bologna Process. However, the conditions under which the changes were made were characterised by pronounced slowness and lack of coordination. The Law on Higher Education and the internal documents adopted by the universities and higher education institutions did not provide for clear instructions for reforming higher education. Thus, the majority of faculties individually approached the transformation of the study and subject curricula. The attempt to implement those Bologna Process principles pertaining to changes in the structure of higher education institutions, primarily the duration of undergraduate and postgraduate studies, initiated huge debates and reactions in the university community.

Higher education institutions made interventions in their structure in line with the provisions of the Law. It turned out that the three-year undergraduate studies model was difficult to accept. The majority of faculties stuck to the previous duration of the studies of 4 and in some cases 5 years, and only a small part introduced study programmes of 3-year duration. The present lack of coordination in the transformation of study programmes brought about cases when a single profile, can be acquired at different faculties through study programmes with different duration namely both in three or in four years.

In 2008 a new *Law on higher education* was adopted. This law made the effort to approximate higher education to the Bologna recommendations. Its goal was to create preconditions for the transformation of the decentralised into integrated universities. The part governing teaching contains provisions regulating transformation of the studies and the study programmes according to the ECTS. It also regulated the management (introduction of a university board, modification of the

role of the university management and strengthening the competence of the Senate and especially of the Chancellor). Significant changes were introduced in the procedures for election and re-election of teaching staff. Unfortunately, this law lacked the courage to introduce changes also in the area of financing and in changing the status of the Accreditation Board and the Agency for Evaluation towards their professionalisation and distancing from the possible influences of the state authorities and institutions. All in all, the law strengthened the influence of the state in higher education. This influence has continued to grow in the following period, through frequent amendments to the law and introduction of provisions highlighting the control and penal role of the state. This trend reached its pinnacle with the adoption of the new Law on State Servants transforming the status of the staff of higher education institutions into state servants.

In the same period, *the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Higher Education* was adopted. The amendments eliminated the title of associates at the university and introduced clinical teaching in higher education. In an environment of shortage of teaching and assisting personnel, the universities faced an additional challenge – loosing associates. This measure sparked a reaction by the universities and mobilisation of the staff with associate status towards completing their master's and doctoral studies.

One of the more significant reforms in higher education was the introduction of Albanian as a language of instruction in higher education. At the beginning of 1997, the Ministry of Education adopted a *Bill on Languages of Instruction at the Pedagogical Faculty St. Clement of Ohrid - Skopje*. This Bill sparked a wave of discontent among some of the academic and political stakeholders. The Bill introduced the possibility for students from the Albanian minority to receive instruction in their mother tongue. This initiative received its full implementation through the *Law on Higher Education from* 2000. Significant features of this Law are the introduction of minority languages in higher education, of the possibility for establishment of private higher education institutions and of the establishment of professional bodies for accreditation and evaluation. This Law enabled the establishment of the South East European University (SEEU) in Tetovo.

Today, five state universities operate in the Republic of Macedonia with 57 faculties, as well as six private universities with 42 faculties and over 50 study programmes dispersed outside of the university centres. In addition to the older universities (the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje and the St. Clement of Ohrid University in Bitola), starting in 2001 the number of state funded universities increased for three new ones. In 2000, the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities initiated the creation of a foundation of international donors which would help the establishment of a new university in the Republic of Macedonia. Following the adoption of the Law on Higher Education by the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia, this allows for the founding of universities without state funding and with Albanian as main language of instruction, the detailed planning commenced towards the end of 2000. The construction started in March 2001 and six months later the South East European University (SEEU) opened its doors to 900 students. By October 2002, the number of students had gone up to 2250, with 3700 students attending the SEEU in October 2003. 2004 saw the opening of the State University in Tetovo, with the Goce Delchev University founded in Shtip in 2007 and the St. Paul the Apostle University for Information Technologies established in Ohrid in 2009.

As regards the strengthening of the state capacities in the area of higher education, we need to mention that in 2000 the Higher Education Accreditation Board and the Agency for Evaluation of Higher Education in the Republic of Macedonia were set up. These two bodies were supposed to "bring order" into higher education, i.e. to instigate external mechanisms for assessment of the degree of fulfillment of the necessary preconditions and quality for founding and operation of higher education institutions, and for ongoing evaluation of the quality of higher education in the

country. Since its establishment, until 2010, the Evaluation Agency failed to fulfill its role as stipulated in the provisions, while the work of the Accreditation Board has frequently received criticism. Until today, it did not manage to establish itself as an independent body and is to a large degree dependent on the Ministry of Education and Science. In 2010, these two bodies were merged, operating as an Accreditation and Evaluation Board, under strong influence of the state.

4. Initiatives for improvement of intercultural education

In the period since gaining independence, many changes and amendments to the legislation and a number of strategic documents, developmental programmes and measures have been adopted, all of which had as their aim not only the improvement of the situation in education, but also the strengthening of the intercultural dialogue in the Republic of Macedonia. At the beginning of 1997 the Draft Law on the Languages of Instruction at the St. Clement of Ohrid Pedagogical Faculty in Skopje was adopted. The Law envisaged the possibility for the students of Albanian nationality to attend instruction in their own mother tongue. Despite the reactions of the general public, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia adopted at the first continuation of its 58th session, held on 30th January 1997 the Draft Law on the Languages of Instruction at the St. Clement of Ohrid Pedagogical Faculty in Skopje.

In 2000, the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities initiated the creation of a foundation of international donors to help the establishment of a new university in the Republic of Macedonia. Thus, 2000 saw the adoption of a new Law on Higher Education This law introduced several new solutions in higher education, namely the introduction of the languages of the minority groups in higher education, the possibility for founding of universities without state funding and with the Albanian language as the main language of instruction, the creation of preconditions for founding of private higher education institutions and the establishment of professional bodies for accreditation and evaluation. Thus, as a direct result of this law, the South-East European University was founded in Tetovo, starting officially its operation in 2001. The Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Macedonia concluded in 2010 that despite the significant progress of the education system in the past decade in the area of mother tongue education, developments are taking a course that needs attention and correction, in order to avoid a greater ethnic divide, brought about by insufficient knowledge of the others, by decreasing interaction, all as a consequence of the serious lack of familiarity with the language.

With joint efforts, and as follow-up measures to the recommendations by the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities (OSCE HCNM) from January 2008, the Ministry of Education and Science and OSCE developed the strategic document *Steps towards Integrated Education in the Education System of the Republic of Macedonia*, as an overarching government strategy towards an integrated education system. The goal was to introduce a clear and significant change to the general approach in the education system in accordance with the multiethnic reality in the country, as a step towards achievement of the strategic goals of the country, for which stability and internal cohesion are as crucial as are good interethnic relations. This policy reflects the Constitution and the legislation respectively resulting from the Ohrid Framework Agreement. The measures provided in this document are divided into five thematic groups:

The **first** thematic group included integration through joint activities of students attending instruction in different languages, provides measures for introduction or strengthening joint curricular and extracurricular activities on different levels: in the schools themselves and between different schools in the same municipality or from the entire country;

The **second** group of measures focuses on integration through increasing the mutual familiarity with each other's languages among students and adults, increasing the communication between members

of the different communities. One subgroup of measures is aimed at training teachers in the methodology of teaching the students' second language, with emphasis on the language of the smaller ethnic communities;

The **third** group of measures proposes adaptation of the syllabus and curricula and the textbooks, with emphasis on history, geography and language textbooks, as well as improvement of the mechanisms for approval of and control over textbooks. The adaptation of the curricula from primary and secondary education aims at giving schools space to identify the needs of their respective environments, as well as to include the concept of education for tolerance and intercultural communication and understanding in all aspects of teaching. The introduction of the subject History of Religions is also planned, accompanied by measures ensuring that teachers are adequately trained to teach it;

The **fourth** group of measures is aimed at strengthening the qualification of teachers with competencies for integration. This requires pre-service training in interethnic issues, introduction of regular in-service training for teachers and school directors, and introduction of a system for external evaluation and monitoring of teachers' abilities. It is also proposed that preschool education is involved in the implementation of these measures.

The **fifth** group of measures included the management of schools in a decentralised context. It proposes measures for strengthening the job security of teachers, for defining conditions for employment of deputy directors, of municipal inspectors and municipal education advisers, followed by defining of education responsibilities of the state institutions vis-à-vis those of the municipal authorities, thus strengthening the cooperation both at a national as well as on a local level.

Besides aforementioned, additional measures are proposed for further depolitisation of the education system and for enhancement of the involvement of all stakeholders in the management of schools. This document also highlights the need for introduction of a process of regular consultations between all stakeholders, which will function as a participative democratic corrective measure. The review of the document shows that the emphasis is on the primary and secondary education role and its contribution on integrated education in Macedonia. Jet the document do not refer on the role of high education as an actor in integrated education. The role of high education institutions is mainly recognized trough teacher's competences.

5. Conclusions

The future of intercultural education in the Republic of Macedonia depends on shared understanding of its mission and its goals if not on common vision about what intercultural education means. As it was the case in the past, the high education in Macedonia is affected and will suffer from the challenges arising from the social, economic, interethnic and political issues.

The specific objectives and tasks of education must be geared towards promotion and development of the individual characteristics of the personality through the processes of getting to know, understand and respect of other cultures, at national and international level, with the purpose of development of the individuality, his/her interests, attitudes and motives. This process needs to be raised to a level of self-educational activities, so that the individual is in a position to situate him/herself in the world of a narrow and wider social and working environment.

The role of high education should be directed to foster intercultural dialogue and development trough supporting instruments (policies, strategies) that:

- on one hand, provide multiply opportunities for interaction between ethnic communities and,
- at the same time, create some "pressure" on the national level (for example, through the sets of standards to HE, economic instruments, incorporating a new value system into the functioning

of the society, etc.) that stimulate HE institutions, as well as other stakeholders, to implement the educational reform more actively.

It is very important that the high education institutions, while acknowledging the positive practices within (mixed campuses, availability of courses in several languages, extra-curricular activities, etc.) realise the limitations of these approaches within the concept of Integrated Education and raise the issues of redefining the concept of HE, which is *more broad, inclusive,* and *humanistic*, and addresses the needs of the whole society, rather than over-concentrating on accommodating the needs of separate ethnic groups.

The content of education has to be changed as it is critical that curriculum reform promotes the development of skills, values and behaviours that allow students to participate more actively in the society and that are coherent with the notions of democratic and cohesive society;

Teaching practices have to be changed; In order to address the diverse needs of students, also from different ethnic communities, teaching has to become more student-centred; at the moment, the most staff do not feel comfortable with the mixed student campuses and classrooms and also teaching about inter-cultural relations, since it requires rethinking the whole approach to learning, which allows seeing the perspective of " others" from their own point of view, but not through the textbook or lecture;

Achieving the goal of bringing the students from different ethnic communities to study together still creates a problem for the HE institutions; although some courses are attended by Albanian and Macedonian students, it is done through the means of the third language (i.e. English), while other courses are provided only in Macedonian or Albanian;

Defining a new concept of HE (or vision) creates a challenge that has to be addressed on the national level; the lack of clear definition *what the quality of education is within the integrated education framework* prevents from the development of the appropriate standards and requirements in higher education; moreover, it may jeopardise the process of implementation of the national strategy, since the quality criteria for the HE are not defined;

The University could contribute for the cultural dialogue enforcement; still the University is not capable of removing all omissions happened during primary or secondary education or non-school life. Enhancing of intercultural dialogue is not exclusively University issue but of the broader community and family. It requires holistic approach and measures in order to bring some positive results.

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