# MINORITY CHILDREN AND EDUCATION IN THE WORK OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Petra Roter, Ph.D. (Cantab.)

(petra.roter@fdv.uni-lj.si)

Vilnius, 20 September 2016

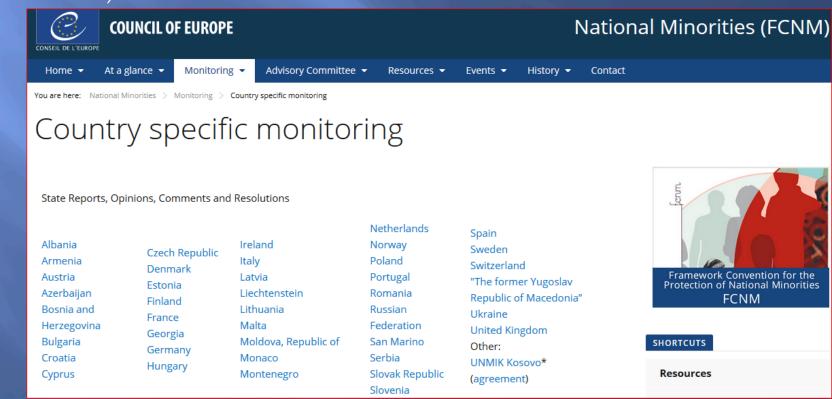
### Contents

Purpose: to demostrate the relevance of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the Advisory Committee (AC) for minority children by: identification of problems they face in the field of education AND recommendations how to address them (practice elsewhere and core principles).

- 1. The legal context: the FCNM and its AC
- 2. Minority children and education
- 3. Contribution of the AC:
  - a) access to education
  - b) performance of children
  - c) substance of education and teacher training
- 4. Conclusions

# 1. The legal context

- Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995/1998; 39 + 1)
- Monitoring of its implementation (AC + CM):
  - Advisory Committee: 18 independent experts (examine state reports, visit states parties, analyse other relevant information, adopt OPINIONS)



# The Framework Convention: access to minority rights

- Minority rights are an integral part of human rights
- GOAL: To achieve effective equality (in law and in practice)
- To this effect, **special measures** are needed to:
  - 1. prevent discrimination,
  - 2. achieve equality,
  - enable the preservation and development of minority identity language, culture, religion.

#### WHO is involved?

Everyone – persons belonging to minorities and those belonging to the majority.

#### FINAL OUTCOME - at two levels:

INDIVIDUALS: equality + identity

SOCIETY: integrated (minorities accepted as its integral part)

# 2. Minority children and education

- Educational policies benefitting minority children only if they combine two elements (Spilipoulou Åkermark 2010):
  - Identity affirmation and development
  - Inclusion-oriented content and form of the entire educational system
- Practice many difficulties:
  - education (secondary socialisation) often a tool for nationbuilding by prioritising the dominant identity group (language, culture, history, practices);
  - focusing on individuals who need to 'integrate' (= assimilate)
- → minority children particularly vulnerable
- → HENCE: crucial to guarantee their equal access to education, which is appropriate also for their needs

# 3. The contribution of the AC

- FCNM: state parties "shall encourage a spirit of tolerance and intercultural dialogue and take effective measures to promote mutual respect and understanding and co-operation among all persons living on their territory ... in particular in the fields of education, culture and the media." (Art. 6(1))
- In education (Art. 12) states must promote the knowledge of national minorities and the majority population in an intercultural perspective; provide for teacher training and textbooks; secure equal opportunities for access to education.
- PRACTICE: the AC has observed many problems!

## 3a. Access to education

#### PROBLEMS faced by minority children:

Unequal opportunities (for children in a double minority situation), discrimination, overrepresentation in 'special schools', underrepresentation in higher levels of education...

#### **OBSTACLES** to be addressed:

- Birth registration (remove obstacles + raise awareness);
- Poor infrastructure and poverty;
- Austerity measures (rationalisation felt in minority language schools);
- Lack of awareness of home-state's (not kin-state's) responsibility;
- Verbal harassment and prejudice towards minorities (diminishes parents' confidence in education);
- Legal status of areas (camps, autochthonous settlement)

# 3b. Performance of children

#### PROBLEMS faced by minority children:

 Absteentism, drop-out rates, particularly girls; disproportional placement into 'special schools', underrepresentation in higher levels of education

#### OBSTACLES to be overcome include:

- Lack of pre-school education
- Lack of language skills (extra help minority assistants; remove linguistic barriers at lower level fluency in minority and official language qualified teachers!)
- Discriminatory attitudes and segregation in classes, schools, educational system (to increase, not reduce, contacts!)

# 3c. Substance of education and teacher training

#### **PROBLEMS**:

Lack of good teaching materials; and of qualified teachers with knowledge and skills to function in a diverse environment; often homogenising (nationbuilding) curricula

#### **OBSTACLES** to be overcome include:

- Develop, in co-operation with minorities, good teaching materials (not simply import them from a kin-state), including in minority languages
- Teaching curricula: to include information on minorities and to recognise diversity as an integral part of a society
- Awareness-raising: teachers, parents, the media...

## 4. Conclusions

- The Framework Convention (the AC work) multi-faceted relevance for minority children in the field of education:
  - Recognition, protection and promotion of minority identity
  - Promotion of societal respect for diversity in general
  - Focus on individuals and the broader society through the perspective of access to rights (different types of minorities!)

# Important for any thinking about educational policies

- Context-specific approaches, but the goals have to be equal opportunities and recognition/protection/promotion of different identities
- Effective participation of minorities
- Diversity inter-group and intra-group (women, youth, rural-urban etc.)
- Equality of everyone and the duty of the entire population (societal integration!)

- Thank you for your attention.
- Further details in: Petra Roter (2015): Minority Children and Education in the Work of the Advisory Committee. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 22, 202–231.