

CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN ARMENIA

The Language and Intercultural Education Policy has become one of the major targets of the education policy of Armenia, as the extension of the dialogue with Europe and other parts of the world, as well as the enlargement of mobility opportunities of our learners have made the policy-makers to modify the major policy issues towards the extensive cultivation of languages and the linguistic and the intercultural diversity in the country. The representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Armenia as well as the members of the academic community realize that it is impossible to improve the quality of education and meet the current global challenges and demands without taking into account the linguistic and intercultural problems that exist nowadays in Armenia and hinder the improvement processes in this domain.

Armenia as a member of the Council of Europe and the European Centre of Modern Languages which is a structural unit of the Council, has had certain obligations, mainly:

- To produce reports which sum up the current state of the development in the field of the language policy and language education;
- To work with the European experts to train and instruct the local teachers, trainers and teachers-trainers how to implement the results of the recent projects;
- To be in contact with the representatives of other member states to be in touch with the events that are taking place in their countries in the field of language and intercultural education in order to network different organizations for a better cooperation for mutual benefit.
- To organize different events that foster the language and intercultural education in the country.

The policy makers in Armenia work as catalysts which stimulate the active ongoing processes and help to solve the problems which are obstacles on the way to modernize the language and intercultural education in the country.

The problems of language and intercultural education were discussed in Yerevan at the international conference "Language through Culture" which took place on the 16-17th of June. 82 participants from different countries discussed various problems related to the language teaching, cross-cultural communication, semantics and pragmatics, cultural studies and literature, translation studies, methods of teaching languages from the cultural perspective.

In order to improve the quality of foreign language teaching, secondary, vocational and tertiary education institutions closely cooperate with the embassies of different countries in Armenia. The recent proof of the collaboration was the "German Readings" organized by the Embassy of Germany to Armenia and the Austrian Library of Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences. Within the framework of German Days in Armenia a series of events have been organized in the schools and higher education institutions of Armenia which are aimed to promote the German language and the German Literature and Culture in Armenia.

On the 20th of September the Austrian Library of Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences hosted Matthias Kiessler, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Germany to Armenia who read and lectured on the book "The Death Ship" written by the German writer B. Traven. The book is a adventurous story about the American sailor who has lost his passport, was harassed by police and hounded across Europe until he found an 'illegal' job shoveling coal in the hold of a steamer bound for destruction.

The members of the German Chair and around 100 students majoring and minoring in German were present at this event which was followed by the discussion of some issues related to this politically charged novel.

The meeting was organized with the support of the Austrian Library and Miss Liana Safaryan, its coordinator.

One of the priorities of the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia is the implementation of CEFR at different levels of foreign language education in the country. The schools and higher education institutions extensively use the CEFR (Common European Framework of References for Languages) as well as have developed CEFR indicators for the Armenian as a second foreign language.

Another core objective is to establish a multifunctional working format among the language teachers and trainers so as to promote the European and national values through teaching languages and intercultural communication, to promote the linguistic and the cultural diversity in the country, to establish a dialogue among different stakeholders on how to increase the mutual understanding, foster human rights and democracy and educate an Armenian citizen who respects and appreciates the common European heritage, studies foreign languages, contributes to the process of elimination of regional and global conflicts. Language as a tool for civic success is a fundamental issue of the European society, and the language professionals everywhere and in Armenia, in particular, realize that it is possible to ensure the existence of the variety of conditions and opportunities of the learners without the consolidation of the efforts

and active networking to various European and international organizations that are responsible for the implementation of the policy of the Council of Europe and other international organizations.

The migration of the Armenians from Syria because of the conflict in the region has caused several problems to the school teachers of Armenia and in order to organize the "soft" integration of the children in the process of education, the intensive courses of the Armenian language are being organized at schools for those who do not know it. Most of these children speak the western Armenian dialect and have problems with speaking and writing the eastern Armenian variant of the language. It is a partial language barrier and yet is a serious obstacle for the children to have academic and achieve high records.

The fostering of languages of minorities is another target in the context of language education in Armenia. Armenia joined the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2001, and the state protects the languages of Assyrian, Greek, Russian and Kurdish and Yezidi.

The Armenian Government has adopted the policy of supporting the process of text-book creation and publication of the minorities which do not have their own statehood.

Armenia is a homogeneous monoethnic country, where the bulk of the population are Armenians. National minorities in Armenia constitute 2,4 % of the total population of the country, or around 85000 people¹. Assyrians are the third largest ethnic minority in Armenia after the Yezidis and the Russians.

"According to the 2011 Armenian Census 23,484 people or 0.8% of Armenia's citizens spoke Russian as their first language, 11,859 of the speakers were Armenians, 10,472 speakers were Russians, and the other 1,153 were of other ethnicities. In addition to those who speak Russian as a first language, 1,591,246 people or 52.7% of Armenia's citizens speak Russian as a second language"².

According to the 2011 Armenian Census there were 2,769 Assyrians in Armenia. There are 2,402 people who speak Assyrian Neo-Aramaic as a first language, 2,265 of the speakers are ethnic Assyrians, while the other 137 speakers are of other ethnicities (125 are ethnic Armenians). In 2015 the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia conducted the training

¹ Ethnic Minorities in Armenia have the Same Problems as Armenians, 9 July, 2013, <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/725461/ethnic-minorities-in-armenia-have-the-same-problems-as-armenians.html>

² Languages of Armenia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_Armenia

of 7 teachers of Assyrian language and Literature that work at schools where Assyrian is a language of instruction³.

Among other ethnic minorities we can mention the Georgians, the Jews, the Ukrainians, the Poles, the Russians, the Germans, the Molokans, the Belarusians.

There are still several problems that need to be solved in the future. Not all the languages of minorities are taught at higher education institutions of Armenia, and there are no bachelor or master programmes that allow the students to get a higher education qualification in Assyrian, Kurdish or Yezidi languages. Russian is considered to be the language of instruction at many of higher education institutions, and Greek is also taught at Yerevan State University and Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences. Georgian is taught at some of higher education institutions too. The Ukrainian and Polish languages are taught as a third foreign language at Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences.

³ 2015 Activities Report of the Ministry of Education and Science of Armenia,