

Multilingualism in Kosovo and Switzerland; a Comparable Viewpoint of Language Policy

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Abstract

The main aim of the paper is to show the differences and similarities of the language use and language policy in The Republic of Kosovo and The Federation of Switzerland. It has a look in to the core documents of language including the constitution of both countries.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Kosovo, Switzerland, language use, language policy

Introduction

Despite the small territorial surface and the population both countries are officially multilingual. Kosovo officially recognizes two languages on the national level; Albanian spoken by 95% of the population and Serbian spoken by 3% of the population, and two other on the municipal level; Bosnian and Turkish together spoken by 2% of the population. Whereas, Switzerland has four national languages. It is German which is a language spoken by a majority of the population 63.6%, French spoken by 19.2% Italian 7.6% and Romansh spoken by 0.6%. Both countries have different historical backgrounds and events that have had an impact on the countries to become multilingual nations. Kosovo has a central position in the Balkans, bordering with Albania in the South, Macedonia in the East, Serbia in the North and Montenegro in the Northwest. This crossroad position in the Balkans has had an impact on language situation as well as intercultural environment and relationship among ethnicities, which have changed from time to time. A history snapshot of six centuries would be: five centuries under Ottoman Empire, a century part of Serbia and Yugoslavia and around 20 years "a country of its own". Without doubt these are the key factors in actual religious, ethnic, cultural and language situation in Kosovo. As broadly known three original so called cantons joined together to create a union in order to defend themselves of surrounding countries known today as: Austria, France, Italy and Germany.

Language Policy and Arrangement

Language rights and the use of language have always been an issue around the globe and have been explored and treated by many researchers and publishers as an important and the most sensitive element of identity, especially when it comes to language rights of minorities. These topics are even more current in the Balkans, a region known for multilingualism and multiculturalism. The region of the Balkans is widely known for its diverse cultural and language lands=cape. Nevertheless, there might be clear territorial separations of languages all of the countries of the Balkans Peninsula are multilingual, as the case is with the Republic of Kosovo. People have learned languages here in order to fulfill daily obligations, to prosper and integrate. Prof Sadik Idrizi describes the language issue in the Balkans as follows:

It is common in the Balkans that people speak many languages and are in contact with communities of different language groups. They often try to use a prestige language, depending on the country they live in, the country that ruled in a certain period in history. (Idrizi, Jezik i stil narodne poezije Gore, 2012)

The Republic of Kosovo as a young democratic country declared its independence on February 17, 2008, and so far has been recognized by the majority of United Nations Member states (114 until this paper was published). Since 1999, immediately after the last armed conflict many things have changed including the language legislation. As a multilingual and multicultural country, it seems to have defined very well the language issue and treated it very neatly in legislation on language. It is clear that the national identities have been taken into consideration when drafting the language policy and language rights as a main mean of identification.

Languages serve as a means of identification, as important ethnic symbols, therefore they are close related to emotions and subjective value judgements, which is why they easily become signs of national anticipation but also objects of nationalist manipulation. (Bugarski, 2007)

Language rights in Kosovo and Switzerland are guaranteed and protected by the highest juridical act which is the Constitution of the country, In the case of Kosovo it is clearly defined, whereas, in Switzerland it is the issue of the local authorities.

Language rights and use of language are defined by many core legislation documents of the Republic of Kosovo. Article 5 of the Constitution defines Albanian and Serbian language as the official languages in the country on national level. Bosnian and Turkish languages are defined as official languages in municipalities as provided by law.

5.1. The official languages in the RK are Albanian and Serbian.

5.2. Turkish, Bosnian and Roma languages have the status of official languages at the Municipal level or will be in official use at all levels as provided by law. (Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008)

Multilingualism in Switzerland is also guaranteed by the highest juridical act, The Constitution of the Swiss Federation.

Art. 4 National languages

The National Languages are German, French, Italian, and Romansh. (Federal Constitution of The Swiss Federation)

Art. 70 Languages

1 The official languages of the Confederation are German, French and Italian. Romansh is also an official language of the Confederation when communicating with persons who speak Romansh.

2 The Cantons shall decide on their official languages. In order to preserve harmony between linguistic communities, the Cantons shall respect the traditional territorial distribution of languages and take account of indigenous linguistic minorities.

3 The Confederation and the Cantons shall encourage understanding and exchange between the linguistic communities. (Federal Constitution of The Swiss Federation)

The language situation in Switzerland seems to have come in more natural and logically explainable way. Compared to Kosovo, in Switzerland languages are divided based on territorial inhabited areas, known as cantons. The overall language legislation has a very careful treatment to all national languages and it has a conservational approach.

The Cantons shall designate their official languages. In order to preserve harmony between linguistic communities, they shall respect the traditional territorial distribution of languages, and take into account indigenous linguistic minorities." (Federal Constitution of The Swiss Federation)

Kosovo and Switzerland seem to have very different state organizations in terms of government and regional.

There are six constitutional entities in Kosovo and two official languages on the state level. In the research paper we focus mainly on central institutions when talking about general situation of official languages in Kosovo. When analyzing language use on the local level, city of Prizren is taken as an example of multilingualism, multiculturalism, as a city of mutual tolerance and harmony.

Different from Kosovo, where language issue is the case of the central government, in Switzerland language issue is the case of the local government.

Switzerland is a federation made up by different localities known as cantons. As a result of federalism, certain powers are assigned to the federal government while others are assigned to the localities.

For the most part, policymaking power is devolved to the cantons. Such is the case with language and education policies. Because these powers have been delegated to local officials, practices can vary from region to region so long as they are in compliance with federal laws. What stems from this devolution is the principle of "territoriality." (Morrison, 2013).

Article 29.2 guarantees everyone to be informed in mother tongue in the case of deprived liberty. According to article 59.3 everyone has the right to obtain primary and secondary education in his mother tongue. Article 59.6 regulates the use of language on municipal level. It guarantees to non-majority communities the right to use their mother tongue where they represent sufficient share of the population in accordance with the law. In case of the use of translator costs are covered by competent authorities.

The Constitution of the RK also guarantees the representation of TV program in community languages in accordance with the law and international standards. It guarantees the community language use in all other types of media like newspapers, radio, or social media.

Law nr. 02/L-37 of the RK regulates the use of language in the country. The Law ensures the use of the Albanian and Serbian language as official languages on the national level as well as Turkish, Bosnian and Roma languages on the level of municipality. Article 2.2 and 2.3 specifies the language use on municipal level. Municipalities that are inhabited with more than 5% of the population of the certain minority population, language of this minority are represented as official. Such municipality is Prizren, which is located in the South of Kosovo, where except the Albanian language, Turkish and Bosnian are official languages as well.

On central level, official languages are represented equally. Central institutions are obliged to ensure translation in all official languages. Moreover, official meetings have simultaneous translations when necessary. All speakers can freely express in their mother tongue. Official documents are issued in all official languages. Moreover, they are issued in English. In cases of misunderstanding in translation, English language is taken as credible. Names of institution in all levels are written in all official languages, in municipalities they are written in community languages too.

On municipal level, all languages are represented equally including languages on national and local level in all fields of administration and institutions, in media, official documents, minutes of debates, all levels of education. The law guarantees attending primary and secondary education on mother tongue for everyone. Municipalities of Prizren, Peja, and Mitrovica offer study programs in all municipal languages for all levels of education,

Similar language policy is inclusive and balanced. In some cases there is a subtle difference of language use on central and local level. However, it has never a discrimination approach in any forms towards any of the ethnicities forming the federation.

Conclusion

Switzerland became a multilingual country as an urgent need for survival and existence while Kosovo as a newborn country in order to satisfy international requirements made positive discrimination towards language use and policy. Switzerland seems to have a right system on place in terms of language use and clearly there are no what so ever serious challenges. In Kosovo, even though there are still ethnic tensions and the armed conflict happened just twenty years ago, there is a very modern and inclusive language policy on power. However, there is still work to do in order that the situation on the field is at a satisfactory level. This situation is mainly due to lack of economic and human capacities.

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