What does the case of Vojvodina (Serbia) tell us about multilingualism, mobility, inclusion and power relations?

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Language regime of Serbia

Serbia is an asymmetrically decentralized unitary state with one autonomous province: Vojvodina.

The multilingual and multilingual make-up of Vojvodina as a border region is not reflected adequately in legislation nor in practice.

Limits territories where minority language rights can be claimed: 15% threshold at state-level (LSGU), 25% in Vojvodina (settlements)

Restrictive approach: limits Vojvodina’s capacity to improve conditions of multilingualism in the repetition of state laws

Multilingualism in Vojvodina

2011 census: more than 13% non-Serbs (cf. less than 17% non-Serbs within Serbia).

Hungarians 11.7%, Slovaks 2.6%, Croats 2.4%, Roma 2.1%, Romanians 1.12, Montenegrins 1.55, Russians 0.85, Bulgarians 0.72 per cent etc.

In official use 9 national minority languages: Hungarian in the entire or partial territory of 11 LSGUs, Slovaks in 11, Romanians in 15, Russians in 4, Croats in 4, Montenegrins in 2, Czechs, Romany and Bulgarians in 1 each.

Variation in cases from forced multilingualism (e.g. Bolo Rins, Hsz. Ngyereibükk, Slg. Bolo Bins) to conflict (e.g. Sinars)

Conflicts inducing processes among ethnic and linguistic „fault lines” in Europe

1. Unwarranted securitization of ethnic and language issues

2. Violation of, restriction of the use of, or reduction of the scope of vested minority (language) rights, unduly downplaying of the status of the language of the minority in administration, education etc.

3. Ethic gerrymandering

4. Contested markers of identity between majority and minority peoples consisting of shared territory, possibly with an overemphasis on language as a marker of national identity over language as a means of communication

5. Unilateral kin-state activism and extra-territorial (transborder) nation-building practices, efforts to reinforce the links with the kin-state in a way that downplays minorities’ sense of belonging in their country of residence

6. Competing nation-building efforts exposing claimed co-ethnics (co-nationals) or „in-between” minorities to irreconcilable loyalty pressures

Macro environment

International minority rights norms are often contested and subordinated to geopolitical interests

Without a robust and common European minority rights regime, EU member states remain unaccountable for the non-implementation of minority protection commitments

The primary of domestic party politics often overpowers the influence of EU conditionality

Kin-state policies

Triadic nexus (kin-state, national minority, nationalising home state) revisited

Claimed co-ethnics and loyalty competition - breaching or dual affiliation, stigmatization by both host and kin-state minorities - influence on language use, e.g., Bunjevići - textbook affair

Extra-territorial citizenship policies - multilingual language skills, family histories and personal connections in order to acquire EU via Bulgarian, Croatian & Hungarian citizenship - citizenship is a tool for labour migration within the EU (access to diverse resources) and identity insecurity (present linguistic assimilation)

Consequences: growing prestige of national minority languages, segregation potential („emptification” of settlements)

Implementation gap

Pseudo multilingual practice: national legal framework is good, the application of laws is insufficient and faces many obstacles:

- lack of skill and/or resource;
- nationalizing state’s logic;
- lack of legal enforcement;
- local and regional branches of state-level institutions are not sensitive to local context;
- interference in language rights enforcement (non-application or circumvention of the laws) help undermine social inclusion

Proportional representation of national minorities in labour market, barriers:

- technicizing in and excluding the language of a national minority do not overlap;
- no obligations to declare national affiliation;
- no proof of command of a national minority language required

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