



Identities and Modernities in Europe (IME): Briefing of Findings in Bilingual Education in Turkey



INTRODUCTION

IME has investigated European Identities, a wide range of definitions of 'us, the Europeans' proposed and acted upon by various actors in and around the current European Union (EU), in particular in nine cases: Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The project has addressed three major issues regarding European identities: what they are, in what ways they have been formed and what trajectories they may take from now on. This is a briefing of major findings in the Turkish case, focusing on the private individuals' views on bilingual education, particularly education in Kurdish language, at the primary and secondary levels.

KEY OBSERVATIONS

In the scope of the Identities and Modernities in Europe (IME) (SSH-CT-2009-215949) project, in order to provide insight into the case of Turkey, we investigated the internal and external identity promotion programmes carried out by Turkish state between 2000 and 2011. In regards to internal identity promotion programmes carried out by the state, we looked at the regulatory framework concerning the *official* language of education in Turkey. Complementing our investigation of the regulatory framework, we carried out interviews with 20 private individuals, particularly students, parents, academics, where we inquired about their opinions on the possibility of bilingual education in Turkish and Kurdish language.

As we progressed with the interviews, we observed that there are two frameworks where education in one's mother language is addressed: 1) as a right guaranteed by the rules of democracy and hence should be considered as a human rights issue; 2) as a politicized issue' which is being exploited for various reasons. Nonetheless, these two frameworks often merged together despite their differences; concerns over legal and practical complications of bilingual education merged as the widespread and prevailing concern. In terms of practicality, we observed that private individuals do not necessarily disagree with the right to education in mother language, and in most cases they support the *principle* behind the revitalization of minority languages as a means to preserve and promote minority cultures. However, our interviews also revealed that the majority of the private individuals argue for the necessity of having an official language and the need for all those who are citizens of Turkey to learn the Turkish language in order to be able to communicate with the rest of the society. Hence, the practical aspect of communication emerged as the primary issue that needs to be addressed in debates on bilingual education.

Another important aspect of the research on bilingual education was the way in which there was a wide-spread uneasiness with the exclusive association of these concerns with the Kurdish language, which was often criticized for restricting the discussions on other minority languages. We also observed that the concept of separatism arises along these lines of concerns over the restriction of bilingual education to Turkish and Kurdish languages. An analysis of our findings reveals that this issue is considered to be an embodiment of long-lasting societal and political tensions that have been perpetuated by the education system in Turkey. Therefore, it is often the case that our interviews with private individuals reveal a broader tendency to criticize the Turkish education system for its failure to integrate ethnic and cultural variations in Turkey.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

IME Employed qualitative research Methods in its investigation including policy documents analysis, in-depth interviews with state/EU officials, civil society actors and private individuals. The details of the fieldwork can be supplied upon request.

PROJECT IDENTITY

Identities and modernities in Europe: European and national identity construction programmes and politics, culture, history and religion

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Consortium

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