

Ambassador Herrero interview in Utrinski vesnik
Learning of the language should not bring divisions
Utrinski vesnik
Interviewer: Tamara Grncarovska

The state language must be known well by everybody, but how this is done is up to the local authorities

In the joint statement with the Ambassadors of EU, NATO and USA addressing the issue of introducing the Macedonian language for the first-graders from the minority communities, it was said that this should be done early, but it was not specified what is meant by early.

The point we wanted to make is that it is very important that the state language is learned early enough so that there are not comparative disadvantages among the ethnic groups. All need to know the state language well. As to the specific moment, it is not really up to us collectively to dictate the details. It is up to the local authorities to do the specific adjustments on this concrete question.

Is the question at what age to start with the learning of the language the main problem?

I am not an educational expert, and we believe that the local authorities must have the freedom to decide this. The main principle is that the state language should be known well by everybody and therefore it has to be taught early in life. I think this principle is very important and we agreed that how to do it remains on the local authorities. It is also important for us not only when to introduce it but also how this will be done. It is important how to generate acceptance. This has to be done through dialogue. It is not easy, but this is the case with societies with a complex ethnic composition and situations. Therefore these issues that touch the sensitivities of the ethnic communities deeply have to be addressed very carefully. This was our second message.

This question gets very big political dimension...

The politics does not help at all. I think it is legitimate what the political leaders are doing, because this is politics by definition, but I don't think that in this point this helps too much, because it brings people in positions after which is difficult to be brought together. All should be more flexible, not to try to capitalize politically, because at the end of the day we all know that they will have to create a common future, so it has no point of creating positions for which we all know will not hold in the future.

What is your comment about the exchange of letters between Prime Minister Gruevski and HCNM Knut Vollebaek?

I think that there is a lot of room for understanding and the High Commissioner's intentions are very clear. He is trying to help this country with his expertise and he is

doing that in the spirit of moderation. I think that the dialogue should continue and to be intensified in all levels, between the coalition on power and among the parties of the opposition.

Are the relations between Government and OSCE institutions becoming more tensed?

There is no tension. On the contrary, it shows that we are tackling important issues and important issues are not easy, therefore there is a need to concentrate on this matter, but I don't think that there is a special tension. Our cooperation with the Government is strong as it always been, as well as it with the opposition. However, this does not mean that the problems we are tackling together are not difficult, they are difficult

Do you think that Prime Minister Gruevski's statement that from now on recommendations coming from OSCE will be analyzed more cautiously, will influence on the ODIHR recommendations for the implementation of the elections or those of your Mission regarding the reforms in the judiciary, police?

No, the positions of ODIHR and the Mission are neutral, objective, whenever there has been an assessment of the elections, judiciary... they are objective, professional assessments. We expect our cooperation with the Government to be very strong as it has been and here I don't see any particular problem.

On your Mission's web page there is a story about the language barriers among the children in Kicevo with a conclusion that many of them finish their education with poor knowledge of the official language. What is your comment on this situation?

This was a story prepared by the HCNM Office, and I think that they know what the situation is. The whole point is in the equality of chances of all students so they finish and they speak the state language at the very proficient level, so none of them feels disadvantageous later in life.

There should be a policy of encouragement of learning the Albanian language by the others. It should be more than just offered, it should be encouraged, particular in those municipalities where the presence of the Albanian community is big, in the west part of the country. This should be encouraged, and this would help for the integration of the both communities and we strongly advice to have policy of promotion of learning the Albanian language.

How the current tensions will reflect on the Macedonians and learning the Albanian language by their children?

I think it would be accepted positively. Tensions are not good but it is important that these issues are being discussed. There has to be a dialogue over these questions because they are important for the country. Our main concern is that a dialogue over these issues takes place, but it takes place with a moderate tone. This is what we are trying to do and I am confident that this is the case, despite some few, small radicalized voices here. Overall I think that the dialogue is good, is moderate and I hope it would continue on this way. What we need is that all parties talk about these issues calmly and respecting each others positions.

Was there any opinion from the OSCE Mission to Skopje regarding the learning of the language given before this question was actualized, having in mind that this is part of the Framework Agreement which implementation you monitor?

We have expressed our opinion several times. The Law on languages is good enough and it was passed last year, but the implementation of that law is still far from the expectations. People forget that to adopt a law is not the end of the story. To implement the law you need resources.

On what questions you are currently working with the Macedonian Government?

On lot of things. On issues related with the strengthening of the rule of law, capacity building of the judiciary, lot of cooperation with the Academy of judges and prosecutors. We put a lot of effort to prepare this country for the elections. We work on the technical capacity of the Electoral Commission, voters list, electoral code. We cooperate with the police, that includes increasing the capacity of the police and assisting in the implementation of the new Law on Internal Affairs, which is a very important law. We work closely with the Prime Minister and our partners from EU, USA and NATO on the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which key activities are mainly in the five areas: equitable representation, decentralization, education, use of languages and non-discrimination.

What are the other obstacles that the implementation of the reforms is facing?

In every country there are many things that have to be better. Not only here but in every other country. To me, to OSCE in general, the main thing that is still on the table is the interethnic issue. We have to achieve much smoother interaction among the communities. Let's not forget that ten years ago there was a conflict situation. Though the situation is improved considerably, we still make sure that there will be further progress in this respect. So this is important and this kind of aspect should be implemented everywhere, in education, in politics, in elections.

Second is the deepening of the completion of the process of the democratic transition, the quality of the democratic institutions. I think there is massive progress and no one can deny that. Yet, this is not the end of the story. Some aspects of the democracy still need fixing: the quality of the elections is one of them. Though the last elections were pretty good, we still need to make sure that the system is here, because the previous elections were not so good. The rule of law in general and also the working of the judiciary. All together is connected with the stability and interethnic relations as well as with the quality of the democratic institutions, two main areas of our concern and on which we work.