



# THE IMPORTANCE OF ROMANI LANGUAGE IN THE COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF ROMA CHILDREN

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# DECADE OF ROMA INCLUSION AND ROMANI LANGUAGE EDUCATION

- One of the priorities of the Roma Decade is Education
- All countries involved in the Decade initiative have their National Plans for Action, with clear idea what have to happen in the field of education of Roma children.
- Some of the activities introduced to the National Action Plans of the Decade countries are:
  - Desegregation of Roma children;
  - Close down special schools for Roma children;
  - Introduce Romani language as a mother tongue at all educational levels– from kindergarten through University level;



- Prepare Teachers and Assistant Teachers for Romani language education
- Open new University Programs regarding Romani language and culture.



# THE PRESENTATION

- I am going to focus on Romani language education.
- There are two reasons for this:
  - The socio-political reason;
  - The scientific reason.



# THE SOCIO-POLITICAL REASON

- Almost in all Decade countries there is an understanding that Romani language is not important. Such a thinking exists among Roma and non-Roma intellectuals and scientists, national institutions
- My examples come from Bulgaria:
- **Example 1: The Expert of Romani Language** from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education told me that the most important things for the Roma children is desegregation and integration. And if they study Romani it will create obstacle for their integration.



- Example 2: For the 2005-2006 school year the Bulgarian Ministry of education planed 200 EURO (!!!) for the qualification of Romani language teachers in the whole country
- Example 3: The Bulgarian National Agency for Accreditation of University programs closed the only University program existing in the country called “Primary school education and Romani language” who had the task to prepare primary school teachers for mainstream school who can also teach Romani as a mother tongue. The main reason of the Accreditation Agency is that “Romani language does not exist”. After the academic year 2006-2007 the University of Veliko Tarnovo stop accepting students for this paricular program.



- These kind of examples can be given form other countries as well.
- The most problematic thing is that many Roma activist and NGO workers; many non-Roma activists and scientist do not understand the importance of Romani for the COGNITIVE development of Roma children
- The very negative prestige which Roma have in many European countries is also transferred to their languge.



# COUNCIL OF EUROPE INITIATIVES

- In the year 2000 CoE produced Recommendation R(2000)4 focused on Roma and Travelers.
- Later the CoE had 4 years project regarding Roma children education ( 2005-2004)
- Now in 2009 (17 June) CoE Produced new Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the education of Roma and Travellers in Europe, which was Adapted by the Committee of Ministers, including the Ministers of Decade countries.





# RECOMMENDATION

## CM/REC(2009)4

- “Art.18 In accordance with the provision of the Framework Convention for the protection of the National Minorities (1995) (EST No157) and of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (1992) (EST No 148) curriculum and teaching materials should be made available, where appropriate, for Roma and Traveller Children (and other children by choice) to learn their language, history and culture”
- Most of the Decade countries signed the two mentioned documents, but still there are many cases when they are not respected, regarding the Roma population.



# THE SCIENTIFIC REASON

- In early 1930-s L.S. Vigotsky developed his cultural theory, according to which the culture plays an important role in the language and cognitive development of Roma children. This theory was not applied till early 2000-s to the Roma children education and development.
- Most of the research between 1960-1990 showed that for Roma children it is more important to have better knowledge in official language of the country and it is not so important to have knowledge in their mother tongue.



- After 1990-s the situation started slowly to change. In Europe were published first result findings with Roma children in Romani. Most of the research showed that children who have lack of knowledge in their mother tongue also have very low results in the official language of the country where the children live.
- This fact gave us the idea that for Roma children bilingual methodology is best to be developed, which develops both languages.



- However after 15 years of implementation of the bilingual methodology we came to the conclusion that still Roma children lack knowledge in both languages even more: research findings showed that by the age of 10-11 years 30% of Roma children in Bulgaria are on the level of 6-7 years old children in their knowledge of Romani as a mother tongue.
- After 2005 started new research in the field of cognitive and developmental psychology with Roma children, focused on the importance of the language in the understanding of the Theory of Mind.



- The findings show that by the age of 3;6 – 5;0 Roma children are more advanced than children from other cultures, but after the age of 6 when the children start primary school their knowledge in Romani gets less and less. The school system does not tolerate the Romani language development and this influences the children's school success. Most of Roma children drop out at the beginning of the secondary school by the age of 12-13.



# CONCLUSIONS

- It shows that the Romani language education in the educational systems of the Decade countries have to be rethink. Romani has to be introduced in the educational systems if we really which to have successful Romani students in schools.

## **Let's not forget:**

The children get knowledge about the surrounding world from the very first day of the birth through their mother tongue, even the Roma children:

**They are not exception!**

They have the right to have good knowledge in



Thank you!

Phalikerav tumenge šhukares!

