

EDUCATION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES IN LITHUANIA

Nearly all over the world humanism, democracy and civil society are recognized ideals. Powerful and independent state rests on them. Trying to assure that these ideals are met the determinant role falls on a school. Education and the level of people's intelligence are the factors nation's culture, its independence and abilities to manage its issues are measured upon.

The Republic of Lithuania has given clear priority to education. This sphere of development is supported by the state. According to the Law on Education adopted in 1998 education is based on humanistic cultural values of a nation and the world, democratic principles and recognized fundamental human rights and freedoms. Education is a prerequisite for cultural, social and economic progress of the country, it strengthens solidarity among the people and among the nations, it advances tolerance and cooperation.

The undergoing reform in Lithuania refers to educational experiences of both Lithuania and Europe. In their respective documents they point to the following educational principles:

1. Nationality: commitment to Lithuanian culture, care for the preservation of identity and historical continuity. Lithuania's education preserves and further promotes multinational culture of the country. It acknowledges that experiences national minorities bestow enrich Lithuania's culture.
2. Resumption: openness in maintaining universal moral virtues and the nucleus of nationality.

Thus, Lithuania's educational system is based upon the heritage and fortune of European culture: individual values, humanism, equality of the people, freedom of conscience, tolerance, and endowment of norms and principles pertaining to every democratic society. Educational standards laws and legal acts of the Republic of Lithuania regulate correspond to democratic standards established in international legal documents. They emphasize the due that education has to cherish interdependent understanding and tolerance of every nation and every racial or religious group without exception. Education must do everything so that persons who belong to national minorities understand culture and language of their country, and take constructive participation in the activities and daily life of the society.

While implementing the policy of education Lithuania recognizes the needs of national minorities – to preserve the essential elements of ethnocultural identity: language, cultural heritage, customs and religion.

The Republic of Lithuania recognizes and abides by the principles and standards set on the international level. Lithuania is a member of the United Nations, the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council of Europe and other international organizations.

During a 10-year-period of independence Lithuania has adhered to a number of international treaties, which aim to protect human rights. Besides, it has signed and ratified treaties with the neighboring states.

Lately aspirations of Lithuania to integrate into the European political structures have had a significant influence upon Lithuania's education. One can remember that according to the terms EC adopted in Copenhagen in 1993, Central and East European states would become members of the European Union only if democratic stability, superiority to laws, respect for individuals and national minorities is ensured. History proves that Lithuania has rich and harmonious traditions of multinational coexistence.

In the history one could barely find a nation or a state with one nation, and no other nation, living in it. To forget the cultural heritage of mutual coexistence of different nations means to impoverish and deny the true cultural image to our country.

It is hard to imagine Vilnius apart from the cultural contribution of such distinguished people as Pranciškus Skorina, Antokolskis, Adomas Mickevičius, Pushkinas, and others. Developing the respect to citizens of other states and active maintenance of ones own cultural identity – is one of the most important tasks united Europe faces. What we know as the culture of mankind is the result of joint creative efforts of various nations.

Latest census of population, 1989 provides data about 109 nationalities that lived in Lithuania at the time. According to it, national minorities made up 20,4 percent, or 751.000, of the entire population of Lithuania. In 1997 the percent fell to 18,4 (682,9 thousand). Therefore, it is evident that during 1989 – 1995 the number of non-Lithuanian residents decreased by 114796 thousand. This has happened due to the

demographic and migration processes (repatriation, withdrawal of foreign army, decreased immigration).

At present Russians constitute the most numerous ethnic group in Lithuania (as for January 1st, 1997 their total number amounted to 304.800 or 8,2 percent of mean-time Lithuanian population). They are followed by the Polish (256.600 or 6,9 percent respectively), Belarusian (54.500 or 1,5 percent respectively), Ukrainian (36.900 or 1,0 percent respectively), Jewish (5.200 or 0,1 percent respectively) and other nationalities – 24900 or 0,7 percent. Speaking about the national minorities in Lithuania there is a variance not only in numbers or percentage; there is a variance with respect to the duration of habitation in the country, territorial distribution, and level of national consciousness.

Non-Lithuanians are dispersed throughout the entire territory of the country. However, they concentrate for the most part in the eastern and southeastern Lithuania, as well as in the cities of Vilnius, Klaipėda, Visaginas. There is unequal distribution according to their nationality as well. For example, the majority of Polish-speaking population (approximately 90 percent) lives in Vilnius and in the neighboring regions. Russians, Ukrainians, and the Jewish population reside for the most part in large cities in the southeastern Lithuania. Due to historical reasons, southeastern Lithuania (Vilnius region) and eastern Lithuania (city of Visaginas) have become multinational and multicultural regions. Persons of Lithuanian origin are in the position of a national minority there.

Development of education in these particular regions of Lithuania formed in the course of history depends upon the dynamic interaction amongst diverse cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious customs. For this reason the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the Laws on National Minorities and Education guarantee the right of national minorities that reside abundantly and compactly in some given area of Lithuania to establish state or state-financed pre-school institutions, secondary education schools. National minorities are granted the right to hold lessons in their mother tongue. Groups, faculties and branches at the universities and colleges can train educators, teachers and other specialists necessary for fulfillment of the needs of national minorities. For ethnic groups residing non-abundantly and non-compactly classes and optional groups are established at secondary education schools. The same applies to Sunday schools.

Resolution, “The regulations of integration of the schools of national minorities into the educational system of the Republic of Lithuania” No. 76, issued on December 22, 1922 by the Ministry of Culture and Education sets fundamental regulations that define the position of national minorities’ school in the Lithuanian educational system. They define the educational principles that apply to national minorities in a democratic state. These principles are established in the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, Concept of Education of Lithuania, Laws on National Minorities and Education and international legal documents, - all of these documents regulate issues related to the education of national minorities.

In Lithuania pre-school training institutions and secondary education schools of all levels organize the teaching process. In this process they adhere to the general principles of education. Children and youngsters are given the right to acquire secondary education on the basis of their national culture and in their native language. By doing this, schools help children and youngsters integrate into the Lithuanian culture and become full participants of the activities and daily life of Lithuania and its society.

Education of national minorities of Lithuania is based on following principles:

- 1) Civic harmony, integration and solidarity;
- 2) Open society and sociocultural integration;
- 3) Priority to a person and family in their educational needs;
- 4) Maintenance of ethnocultural identity of the peoples of Lithuania; cultural cooperation for the sake of the cultural progress of Lithuania;
- 5) Adaptation to international legal principles and standards of the Council of Europe and other organizations;
- 6) Universal application of education;
- 7) Further expansion of policy on national minorities.

Following regulations illustrate efforts to provide equal opportunities for representatives of national minorities to obtain secondary education:

1. Given that a student (schoolboy/schoolgirl) moves from one school to another and the language of proceedings is different from the previous one, s/he is given the right to attend extra classes and eliminate insufficiency, which occurred due to the change of language.

2. There are well-organized classes for non-Lithuanian students aimed to teach Lithuanian as a foreign language. In this situation schools that instruct students in Lithuanian language apply the foreign language teaching methods.

3. There are plans to organize common written exam of the Lithuanian language for everyone at school. These plans aim to provide equal opportunities for everybody, be that Lithuanian, Russian, Polish or other national, to study in universities and colleges in Lithuania.

4. The state bears the responsibility to cover all the expenses and mismatch of costs between Lithuanian and non-Lithuanian schools save these differences occur because of the fulfillment of the needs of education of national minorities.

Article 45 of the Constitution of Republic of Lithuania defines that persons, who are the citizens of Lithuania and belong to some national minority group, have the right of independent organization and execution of various activities, ethnic-cultural affairs, education, charity and mutual support activities including. The state provides financial and any other necessary support for national minorities.

Article 2 of the Law on National Minorities defines that the Republic of Lithuania guarantees the right to advance national culture and education, the right to study in mother tongue, including the use of mother tongue in the pre-school institutions and schools. Besides, they have the right to organize themselves in groups, establish departments in the universities and colleges on that account that they can prepare specialists, teachers and other professionals to supplement the needs of national minorities.

Article 12 of the Law on Education defines that “if national minorities necessitate and request, they may have pre-schools, schools and classes in mother tongue in their densely populated districts.” State, municipalities or private foundations may grant support to these educational institutions. It is not without due cause, parents (or child’s guardians) choose the pre-school or school for their children to are to attend according to the language of instruction. According to the same article these are small national minority groups and groups residing in less densely populated that may learn and improve their mother tongue by choosing classes in the state or

municipal schools. National minorities do this voluntarily. Another alternative is that they might favor Sunday schools, which they can pick too.

Article 30 of Law on Education includes the option to introduce ethno-cultural elements into the general plan of education. Article 10 of the same law defines the right of natural and legal persons, who might be either citizens of the Republic of Lithuania or foreign countries, to establish private institutions for educational purposes. In this case they would have to abide by the rules of the Ministry of Education and Science.

The education needs of national minorities are implemented by the state, private and supplementary educational institutions, such as:

1. Schools of national minorities; they preserve the traditional language of instruction;
2. Schools where Lithuanian is the language of instruction; mother tongue is a separate subject students can study;
3. Educational institutions where several different languages are the languages of instruction;
4. Schools that use extra time for teaching and learning;
5. Vocational schools; here, students obtain the degree of school education and study mother tongue as a subject;
6. Sunday (Saturday) schools.

Draft Laws on Education and National minorities and also Regulations of Education of national minorities institute, adjust and legally establish modifications the system of education underwent during the decade of the independent statehood of the Republic of Lithuania.

Main regulations of education of national minorities reproduce the general framework of teaching content and teaching process for national minorities:

1. Curriculum may combine ethno-culture, history and geography of national minorities in Lithuania, on the one hand, and their historical Homeland, on

the other. This is done in order to fulfill educational needs of national minorities and highlight the multicultural environment of Lithuanian society.

2. Non-Lithuanian students have the opportunity to learn Lithuanian as a foreign language in the pre-school groups;
3. Polish and Russian students, who study in Polish and Russian elementary, main and high schools, use either original textbooks written in their native language (Russian, for instance) or textbooks translated from Lithuanian to their native language. Once these students enter high school, they are encouraged to study in Lithuanian language;
4. Rules and regulations set by the Ministry of Education and Science, and international treaties and agreements allow schools to use the textbooks published abroad;
5. Upon graduation from the main school, where instructions were given in the national minorities' language, students must pass the exam in that language of instruction;
6. Upon graduation from national minority high school, students face the right of choice: they can pass the exam in the language of instruction of the national minority schools. The community of national minority school may decide to make the exam of the language of instruction in their school mandatory, or not, introducing at the time certain exceptions for the students, whose native language is different than the language instructed at school.
7. Upon graduation from national minority high school, students must pass the exam of Lithuanian as a state language.

There are two main tasks the educational system of national minorities in Lithuania aims to conclude. On the one hand, the system is set to preserve ethnic identity of national minorities, their culture and mother tongue. On the other hand, it makes the state and society of Lithuania richer. It does not mean, however, that every single concern that might appear because of the emphasis on ethnic distinctness is watered down. We know that emphasis on ethnic distinctness can lead to isolation. Therefore, strong efforts are undertaken in order to integrate national minorities into

the political, social and cultural activities of the state, and develop processes of integration for that sake. Persons who belong to national minorities should always be aware they are citizens of the state, and that the state will always safeguard them from any kind of assimilation.

All these aspects are the composite part of the policy Lithuania implements. The state seeks total understanding in its efforts to integrate the schools of national minorities into the general framework of state educational system. All the laws mentioned above as well as official documents of the Government and the Ministry of Education and Science firmly establish fundamental provision to maintain balance between the preservation of national identity and integration into the political, social and cultural life of the state.

Enhancing the quality of teaching Lithuanian as a state language in the schools of national minorities was pointed to as one of the main tasks for integration of national minorities into the society to become successful. Upon graduation from school, a student must know Lithuanian language very well. This is a prerequisite for him or her to continue studies at the universities and colleges because in these institutions Lithuanian is the language of instruction. Given that students' parents request, school staff may respond to this request by making such disciplines as history and geography of Lithuania, as well as other subjects, be instructed in Lithuanian language. In this process, however, difficulties appear, first of all, due to the lack of teaching personnel – teachers – particularly teachers of Lithuanian language.

Textbooks and study programs for national minorities' schools reproduce the main tasks of integration processes into the society. Such classes as native language and literature, history, geography and other subjects are organized in a way to present the cultural and historical ties of the national group to Lithuania, its common past, political and cultural background. In the same way students at Lithuanian language schools should be educated: they would obtain broader and deeper knowledge on the culture and history of national minorities in Lithuania. Introduction of such classes for students in Lithuanian language schools would, beyond doubt, yield better

understanding of multicultural pluralism of Lithuanian society and promote tolerance and ethnic cooperation.

In Lithuania, universities and colleges organize courses for undergraduate and graduate students – an unparalleled opportunity to study native languages of national minorities. Once they graduate from the course, they become specialists of the native language at the national minority schools. The teachers of the national minority schools all the time seek to improve their qualifications and develop their professional skills in order to operate in multilingual environment. Universities and colleges advance cooperation with international educational institutions. Vilnius Pedagogical University, for example, has signed treaties of cooperation with State University of Linguistics in Moscow (Federation of Russia), M.Tanko University in Minsk (Republic of Belarus), Academy of Pedagogics and Education in Riga (Republic of Latvia) and Wroclaw University (Republic of Poland).

Teachers who work in the schools of national minorities are trained and tested according to the general rules of testing. These rules are based on the instructions of educational system in Lithuania.

Schools of national minorities are financed in accordance to the same principles and criteria as Lithuanian schools. For instance, each year the state covers the expenses such as the purchase of textbooks. Equal terms apply for both Lithuanian schools and schools of national minorities. Furthermore, the latter usually receive more financial support than the former, which are Lithuanian schools. In 2000/2001, each student in the Lithuanian schools received the transfer of 15 litas (appr. 3.75 USD) to cover the costs of the textbooks; at the same time and for the same purpose each student in the schools of national minorities received 18 litas (4.5 USD).

Recently, new financing rules have been introduced to form the school budget and general teaching process. The so-called student's package is going to broaden opportunities that improve training process of students and fulfill their needs of education such as: acquisition of textbooks and other means for education, obtaining

of highly qualified training, cooperation with teachers who constantly improve their qualifications, etc.

Council of the Ministry of Education and Science endorsed general regulations on the publication and distribution of textbooks for schools (December 18, 1997, No. 52). In Lithuania this process of publication and distribution of textbooks for schools of national minorities is organized in accordance to these regulations. In the meantime, the draft of new regulations is being prepared.

In 2000, there was an additional supply of new textbooks for schools: 18 textbooks saw the daylight in Polish, 24 - in Russian, and 10 - in Lithuanian language. The latter were set for Russian and Polish schools. 4 textbooks were republished. In 2001, school libraries received 18 new textbooks in Polish, 26 – in Russian and 12 – in Lithuanian language for Russian and Polish schools.

The state is interested in publishing original and translated textbooks for national minorities in their mother tongue. For that sake it grants financial support. Once predominant, centralized system of publication and distribution of the textbooks changed, first of all because of the high costs of translation. New rules of publication and order of textbooks, which have been introduced, as well as means of education aim to establish a new structure of publication and order of textbooks. It should be based on democratic principles that respond to the mechanisms of market economy and general needs of schools.

In 2000, total number of schools in the Republic of Lithuania reached 2246, the number of Polish schools - 74, Russian – 68, Belarusian – 7, and 72 combined schools:

Schools according to the language of instruction, as of 2000

Language of instruction	Number of schools
Lithuanian	2031
Polish	74
Russian	68
Russian-Polish	26

Lithuanian-Russian	23
Lithuanian-Polish	11
Lithuanian-Russian-Polish	10
Belarusian	1
Russian-Belarusian	1
Lithuanian-English	1
Total	2246

Two schools, Sholom Aleichem Jewish school in Vilnius and Herman Zuderman German school in Klaipėda, are the exceptions in the education system of national minorities in Lithuania. They differ from the common model of schools of national minorities. In these schools education is based on ethnic identity and culture, though almost all classes are instructed in Lithuanian language.

There are private schools for national minorities as well. Certain ethnic minorities such as Poles, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Germans, Armenians, Karaites, Tatars and Greeks have established their Sunday schools. The program of education in such schools or classes contains lectures of mother tongue of national minorities.

There are 586294 students in Lithuania: 41162 students – in Russian schools and classes, 22303 – in Polish, 214 – in Belarusian, 202 students - in Jewish and 364 – in German schools.

Number of students according to the language of instruction

Academic year	Number of students according to the language of instruction			Total number of students
	Lithuanian	Polish	Russian	
1990/1991	409 295	11 407	76 038	501 740
1991/1992	414 119	12 611	72 762	499 692
1992/1993	415 971	13 881	67 506	497 359
1993/1994	422 216	15 312	58 743	496 387
1994/1995	434 469	16 613	57 655	508 887
1995/1996	46 336	17 898	55 237	519 659
1996/1997	459 799	19 212	52 315	531 480
1997/1998	475 253	20 263	49 347	545 042
1998/1999	490 589	21 038	46 325	558 160
1999/2000	508 373	21 826	44 058	574 486
2000/2001	522 569	22 303	41 162	586 294

The rules of integration of schools of national minorities into the system of education in Lithuania are set in laws and legal acts. They comply with the democratic rules set in international documents. Stimulation of mutual understanding and tolerance between all national, racial and religious groups is the main purpose of education in Lithuania. Program of education encourages studies and understanding of the culture and language of national minority. It puts together their confidence so they participate actively in the life of the state. Lithuania's system of education preserves the heritage of national minorities because it is this heritage that enriches the culture of the state.

Generation of multicultural, humanistic and democratic environment and integration of different ethnic groups into the society require time and efforts. Critical approach and constructive actions are necessary if we want to ensure that cooperation and consolidation between diverse cultures perseveres.

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