From Language Barriers to Social Capital: Serbian as the Language of Education for Romani Children[1]

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1. Introduction: Roma, their ethnicity and their language

The Roma[2] represent one of the major ethnic minorities in a large number of European countries. It is Europe's largest transnational minority, a "non-territorial nation" of Europe. According to Guy (2003, p. 48), there are approximately between seven and eight and a half million Gypsies or Roma living in Europe, which makes them the largest European ethnic minority without a nation-state or anything that even resembles a homeland. Almost two thirds of all Roma live in the former Communist and Socialist countries of Eastern and Central Europe, including Serbia, and everywhere they live, they make up the most stigmatized and marginalized segment of the population. Due to this fact, the Roma have had very limited success in gaining national or international affirmation in Europe. As Guy (2003) puts it, one small success was in 1993, when the Council of Europe declared the Roma "the true European minority."[3] It is believed that the first references to the Roma as "Gypsies" or "Egyptians"[4] go back to the 10th or 11th centuries as various medieval chronicles from the Byzantium, and later on from the Ottoman Empire mention their presence in the Balkan peninsula: "…allowing scholars to reconstruct an outwards migration from the Balkans beginning in the fourteenth century, and reaching northern and western Europe in the fifteenth century" (Matras, 2002, p. 2).[5]

As Romani communities constitute some of the most seriously marginalized minorities in all the countries they live in, the history of linguistic research geared toward their language, Romani, was for the longest time purely theoretical and descriptive: "The agenda of Romani linguistics is…similar to that of other fields of investigation in descriptive linguistics: it pursues questions relating to historical

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[1] This project was sponsored by the *Roma Education Fund*, Budapest, Hungary, coordinated by the *Romani Forum for Internally Displaced Persons* (a Romani NGO), Belgrade, Serbia, and supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia and the Department for Support to Roma within the Office for Human and Minority Rights (now Ministry for Human and Minority Rights) of the Government of Serbia.

[2] Throughout the paper, the term *Roma* is used as a noun and the term *Romani* as an adjective.

[3] In linguistic and anthropological writings of a number of authors from the Balkan countries, the term "hidden minority" is used to designate the Roma and "other small ethnic, that is, ethnographic groups which are not formally recognized as minorities in the countries they live in. These hidden minorities, by default, do not have institutional support for education in their L1, or for any other type of cultural activity" (Sikimić, 2004, p. 7).

[4] The term *Gypsy* is derived from the adjective *Egyptian*, as this ethnic group was for centuries erroneously believed to be of Egyptian origin.

[5] For more information about Romani language and culture, see Matras (2002), or visit http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/for-Rlanguage/for-Rlang-001start.htm. To the best of our knowledge, the most extensive academic projects on Romani linguistics in recent years have been conducted by research teams of the University of Graz, Austria and the University of Manchester, Great Britain.

reconstruction and structural change, dialect diversification, discourse structure, language maintenance and loss, and more" (Matras, 2002, p. 2). In other words, for the longest time, no serious political, social, cultural or other interest existed among the more socially, economically, and politically powerful majority or minority groups in those political entities to include and/or improve Roma living conditions, their integration into the overall population, or to make any serious efforts toward a more systematic maintenance of their cultural or linguistic heritage. It was only in the second half of the 20th century that Romani communities began a very slow and erratic process of self-organization and emancipation, identifying as on of their priorities the preservation of their ethnic and linguistic identity: "Post-war Romani linguistics saw an extension of the research agenda to include issues of language contact and language use, as well as language status and language planning, much of it, during the 1970s and 1980s, embedded into the context of emerging Romani political and cultural activism." (Matras, 2002, p. 3). Large international initiatives have been instigated by a number of Romani communities in an attempt to create a basis for a common Romani standard language that would be understood and actively used by the majority of the Romani population in Europe (e.g., the *World Romani Congress*). Due to the fact that Romani varieties have for centuries been used in informal communication and in the spoken medium, their standardization should basically be understood as a process of revitalization, a proactive measure aimed at finding ways in which the speakers of minority languages are assured a transgenerational transmission of a linguistic variety which has been endangered or made inaccessible to them for different social, economic, cultural and political reasons (Filipović, 2009; Hinton, 2003). It is precisely due to this fact that corpus and status planning of Romani are very important, but also very much debated issues among Romani scholars. So far, in many European countries it has been practically impossible to come up with a consensus regarding the linguistic basis of this new Romani standard variety. For instance, in Serbia there exists a Committee for the standardization of Romani, appointed by the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences which for the last two or three decades has failed to determine which Romani variety spoken in the territory of Serbia to choose as the basis for the future standard.[6] This of, course, has serious implications for various aspects of Romani life: in particular, the access to education in the mother tongue and the right to use the native language in professional and public domains. As we shall discuss in the continuation of this paper, the use of Romani is directly related to a sense of ethnic pride and positive valuation of ethnic identity,

The critical, postmodern nature of social, cultural and political processes in Europe in the late 1980s, during the 1990s and at the beginning of the 21st century, has had a serious impact on the attitudes toward Romani ethnicity and ethnic identity both among the members of the Romani communities and among the policy makers in a number of European countries with a high percentage of Roma. However, despite the fact that some more or less successful grass-root attempts have been made by Romani communities in different European countries, their social, economic and educational status remains extremely critical. "Throughout their long residence over more than five centuries in the European countries they inhabit, Roma have invariably been regarded as outsiders and pariahs. At the same time, a parallel and contrasting identity is also attributed to them for, although often loathed, they are sometimes grudgingly admired as a version of Rousseau's 'primitive savage' – as improbable survivors in a modernizing world" (Guy, 2003, p. 49). Furthermore, the results of actions by non-Romani policy makers aiming at improving the overall social status, living conditions, right to education, employment, health care, etc. of the Romani people demonstrate only limited success. Therefore, marginalization, lack of economic and political power, social and cultural stereotypes and segregation, lack of access to formal education, etc., which have been part of the Romani life for centuries are still very much present in practically all Romani communities in Europe. In response to this fact, various supra-national institutions prompted a large international initiative bringing together

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[6]The Council of Europe has done extensive work on improving all aspects of life for the Roma communities of Europe. One of the results of this comprehensive endeavor was the publication of the *Common European Curriculum Framework for Romani language* (2007). For a more detailed information about the activities by the CoE, see, for example http://www.osce.org/documents/odihr/2008/10/33823_en.pdf.

eleven countries from Central and Eastern Europe which signed an agreement on the *Decade of Roma Inclusion* 2005-2015[7] in February of 2005.

Serbia[8] is one of the countries to take part in the *Decade of Roma Inclusion*, together with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, and Slovakia. As explicitly stated at the official web presentation of the *Decade*, all of these countries have significant Romani minorities, and in all of them the Roma have been rather disadvantaged, both economically and socially. Each of these countries has developed a national *Decade Action Plan* that specifies the goals and indicators in the priority areas (education, employment, health, and housing) and commits the participating governments to take into account the other core issues of poverty, discrimination, and gender mainstreaming. It is also important to point out that the Romani communities themselves have also taken active participation in this project and their voice is clearly heard primarily due to the activities of the *Roma Education Fund*, an international donor organization seated in Budapest, Hungary, which has a number of Roma in the decision-making positions within the organization.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights of Serbia have taken part in the *Decade* initiative and several programs have been initiated or already implemented with a specific goal to improve the educational, social, economic, and overall life conditions of the Romani minority in Serbia. However, we agree with May's (2008, p. 168) claim that when it comes to state policies, "despite their stated intentions to the contrary, previous educational policies have demonstrably failed to address and mitigate the comparative social and educational disadvantages faced by such (minority) groups…. In short, minorities tend to be overrepresented in unfavorable social and educational indices in comparison with majority group members." The project outlined in the continuation of this paper is aimed at rectifying this state of affairs.

It is postulated herein that the access to formal education at different levels is the core right which should be provided to all Romani children as it provides a solid basis for their further successful integration into the world of employment (see Skutnabb-Kangas 2000, 2004 for further discussion). Employment gives way to economic progress that then enhances individual and collective self-esteem as well as heightens levels of ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness (Fishman, 1989, p. 33). Ethnic identity is one of the keystones for grass-roots minority mobilization and recognition of its own cultural contributions to the majority community. Moreover, an enhanced presence of the members of an ethnic minority in public and professional spheres of the larger community opens a window of opportunity for the elimination of negative stereotypes existing among the members of the majority community towards a particular ethnic minority.

In the continuation of this paper, an educational project aimed specifically toward internally displaced Romani children and Romani children returnees from the countries of the European Union is presented. As will be shown in the following sections, one of the major objective problems that the Roma face when entering the formal educational system in any European country is a low level of competence in the majority language, normally used as the language of formal education. The model of language support for Serbian as the language of education is designed with an objective to minimize

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[7]For further information, visit the official website of the *Decade of Roma Inclusion* 2005-2015 (http://www.romadecade.org).

[8] Over the last two decades, the position of Roma in Serbia has been made even more difficult for two reasons: 1) military and nationalist conflicts in former Yugoslavia resulted in a mass migration (illegal more often than not) of Roma into the countries of the European Union during the 1990s, and 2) the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 motivated an almost systemic expulsion of all non-Albanian population from Kosovo into other parts of Serbia. The Roma made a very large percentage of these internally displaced refugees from Kosovo whose situation has been by far the most difficult among all the Serbian refugees due to their poverty and lack of professional skills which would ensure their social and economic integration into a larger community. After the democratic changes in Serbia in 2000, an agreement on repatriation of all Serbian illegal emigrants from the European Union was signed between the government of Serbia and the countries of the European Union. Again, a large number of Roma have been affected by this turn of political events and a mass repatriation of Roma from the European Union (involuntary for the most part) has been taking place ever since.

the consequences of initial complete or partial lack of competence in Serbian, which makes it difficult for Romani children to do well in school. This model was designed by an expert task force during the 2007/08 school year and was approved by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia in the summer of 2008. The implementation of the pilot phase of the project is expected in the fall of 2010.

2. The overall objectives of the project

The principal objective of this project was twofold. First, the model of language support for Serbian as the language of education for Romani children is aimed at finding a way to develop these children's competences in Serbian as the language of education, and to integrate the already existing linguistic and cultural competences of Romani returnee children and internally displaced Romani children into the Serbian formal educational system. Second, its authors hoped to begin the process of intercultural awareness rising among the members of both minority and majority populations in Serbia in order to begin a social change which would eventually put an end to centuries of segregation, exclusion and depreciation of the Roma in this country. This also implies that a significant amount of classroom time and effort need to be dedicated to strengthening and enhancing social identification and ethnolinguistic identity of these children (see Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009, for a more detailed discussion on motivation and identity in language learning and teaching). In other words, a two-way integrative process should be initiated. On the one hand, the minority children should be given competent guidance in the process of acquiring a new linguistic code (Serbian, or more precisely, Serbian as the language of education) in order to integrate successfully into the mainstream educational system (successfully herein also means that they overcome the cultural barriers and negative stereotypes historically attributed to Roma in Serbia). On the other hand, they should be provided with resources that would help them to find ways of not only maintaining but also reviving and promoting their own linguistic and ethnic identity through a series of meaningful and productive activities that would include both Romani and non-Romani children in Serbian schools.

This particular educational model is based on a holistic approach to education of minorities and majorities, in which both sides are trained in the area of intercultural competence, with an overt rejection and sanctioning of any form of racism, discrimination and segregation. The model recognizes the specific circumstances of the Romani children in Serbia, but it also takes the advantage of the vast European and global experience in the area of education of minorities.

Furthermore, the model attempts to determine specific conditions and respond adequately to the educational needs of the Romani population; to specify actions which would help build a system of continuous support in all local communities where Romani children are to be found; to suggest procedures which would ensure the sustainability of the model implementation; as well as to suggest procedures for a "two-way" integration of both minority (Roma) and majority children into an educational community based on pluricultural and plurilingual awareness, tolerance and competence.

3. The education of minorities in Europe, with special emphasis on Roma

Despite the explicit statements regarding the importance of building and strengthening ethnic identity of minority groups in Europe, by ensuring their right to education in their mother tongue (i.e., minority language), consistently made by the relevant political and cultural institutions, such as the Council of Europe or OSCE,[9] the reality of the majority of educational systems is often very far from the maximalistic goals prescribed in the official documents of different national and international bodies, such as those mentioned above. Furthermore, the European nation-state ideology which favors a single national language is very much implicitly present in most European language education policies and it often stands in a way of plurilingual, pluricultural education argued for in explicit language education policy statements made by relevant governmental institutions.

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[9] See, for instance, OSCE's *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities*, or Council of Europe's *The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages*.

Minority children's low levels of competence in the majority language (a minority's L2), as well as limited proficiency in their own L1 (which further inhibits their progress in L2 acquisition) is often believed to be the main reason for their academic failure.[10] High poverty rates, high unemployment rate, low levels of parental formal education, traditional cultural models, etc., within minority communities are all to be blamed for unsuccessful integration of minority children into a larger community (stereotypes and negative attitudes of the members within the majority communities are often related to the above factors).

All the above contribute to the perpetuation of the *deficiency theory* still predominantly argued for in many European countries (albeit implicitly, using demagogical cover-ups and euphemisms which cannot completely hide the bottom-line attitudes of some education policy makers). The deficiency theory cites the overall low cognitive capacity of the minority children as the main reason for their academic failure (which, consequently, leads to their failure to become productive members of a given society).[11] Of course, additional problems are created by the socio-financial reality in the majority of countries in Europe and worldwide which, at least according to their leaders' statements, cannot support the strong programs of bilingual/plurilingual education which would lead to additive bilingualism/plurilingualism (e.g., see Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006, for a serious criticism of this particular political argumentation).[12]

As a consequence, a majority of European countries, as well as some countries from other continents, choose various programs of "language support" for children from minority groups living in their states. Christiansen and Stanat (2007) provide an overview of language education policies in 14 immigrant-receiving countries around the world: Austria, Australia, Belgium (the French community), Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, Germany, Luxemburg, Holland, Norway, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. In all of these countries, attempts have been made to create conditions to help immigrant students gain sufficient levels of linguistic competence in a given language of education (namely, the majority's L1 and the minority's L2):

> The PISA[13] results confirm the importance of learning the language of instruction for academic success. If we consider the average across the OECD countries, immigrant students who speak the language of instruction at home are roughly a half-year of learning behind their nonimmigrant peers in mathematics, while immigrant students who do not speak the language of instruction at

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[10] For instance, see Baker (2006, pp. 217-219). He cites results from a number of empirical studies conducted over the last couple of decades which indicate that any type of linguistic "mainstreaming" without the support for the minority ethnolinguistic culture and its maintenance/revitalization normally leads to an increased percentage of minority students who fail academically and leave the educational system prematurely. According to the same author (Baker, 2006, pp. 55-56), these high percentages often directly correlate with social, economic and political status and the amount of social power that the speakers of a minority language possess within the "mainstream" society. Furthermore, significant sociolinguistic research conducted from the early 1970s onwards (e.g., see Bernstein 1964, 1970/1987; Labov 1969/1987) indicates that low linguistic competence in a standard variety (even when we talk about *bidialectal* children, i.e., children who acquire as their L1 a non-standard variety of a particular language of education) directly correlates with poor academic achievement of socially underprivileged children. As in the case of Roma, social segregation and ghetoization often characterizes underprivileged minorities speaking a different L1 from the majority community.

[11] This, of course, is not limited to the European continent; it has been documented in older and more recent sociolinguistics and applied linguistics literature researching the relationship between majority language competences and scholastic aptitudes and achievement of different minorities (e.g., see Cummins, 1981a, 1981b, 1984; Labov, 1967/1987; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1991, 2000, 2004, 2006, etc.)

[12] Additive bilingualism has positive linguistic, socio-cultural and cognitive effects: it diminishes ethnocentrism, and it increases linguistic and cultural tolerance; it helps speed up the development of metalinguistic competences as well as the overall cognitive development. According to Baker (2006, p. 217), only "strong" bilingual educational programs actually lead to additive bilingualism, biculturalism and functional literacy in two or more languages. For a critical review of bilingual educational policies in Serbia, see Vučo (2007).

[13] *OECD Programme for International Student Assessment*

home are about a year behind…. Not surprisingly, these students are at even greater disadvantage when it comes to reading. (Christensen & Stanat, 2007, p. 3)

The survey has brought about the following results. In the participating countries, the following situations were encountered:

1. Minority students' inclusion into the mainstream education system without language support
2. Minority students' inclusion with a systemic language support (students enter the majority language classrooms, with additional L2 classes)
3. Minority students' inclusion with a preparatory phase (L2 instruction precedes instruction in L2)
4. Maintenance bilingual programs

As could be expected, countries that provide systemic language support have higher success rates among students from minority groups. Furthermore, a conclusion was drawn that the majority of countries that participated in the survey do not have explicit curricular frameworks or language education policies aimed at children from minority groups speaking minority languages as L1.

According to Churchill (1986, p. 120, as cited in May, 2008, pp. 169-170), the OECD (*Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development*) identified six major language education policies as responses to challenges that minority children are presented with in mainstream educational settings in different countries:

1. Stage 1 (*Learning Deficit*), in which the use of minority language is viewed as the main reason for academic failure of minority children. Consequently, a rapid transition to education in a majority language is viewed as a prerogative.
2. Stage 2 (*Socially Linked Learning Deficit*), which often establishes a correlation between the use of a minority language and the family structure of minority children and advocates a quick assimilation to the mainstream social order of minority families.
3. Stage 3 (*Learning Deficit from Social/Cultural Differences*), where multilingual education is already put in motion, but the majority community and its educational and other institutions are incapable of recognizing and putting positive value to ethnolinguistic and cultural differences between minority and majority cultures
4. Stage 4 (*Learning Deficit from Mother Tongue Deprivation*), in which the education in a minority language is recognized and supported to a certain extent, but with an obvious need to provide some type of transitional bilingual integrative educational program (which would improve the minority children's competences in the majority language which is still the dominant vehicle of communication in academic, professional and public domains).
5. Stage 5 (*Private Use of Language Maintenance*), which allows for bilingual education in which minority groups are ensured their right to maintain and develop their L1 and their ethnolinguistic culture, which is still, however, not publicly recognized by the majority population in everyday communication in public and professional domains.
6. Stage 6 (*Language Equality*), which allows for and actually opens adequate space for the recognition of a minority language as one of the national languages, used in all life domains.

In light of Christiansen and Stanat's (2007) results, and taking into account the past, present and the possible future of language education policies in Serbia, the model designed for Romani children aims at defining a well-rounded language education policy geared specifically towards the education of minorities (Roma in particular, but applicable to other minorities as well). This model could be further developed into a generic program of language inclusion for all minorities and other school children in need of improving their proficiency in the majority language as the language of education in the neighboring countries (unofficial contacts with the representatives of the Slovenian and Hungarian governments indicate that these countries need similar programs for their minority groups as well). Bearing in mind the political and socio-economic pressures that the country has faced over the last couple of decades, as well as a particular tradition and history of minority language education

in Serbia (which emphasizes a practically monolingual education in languages of the officially recognized minority groups, thus opening up the gateway to subtractive bilingualism and social, educational and professional ghettoization of the members of those groups; for further discussion, see Filipović, Vučo & Djurić, 2007), we believe that we shall have reached our goal if our educational model yields results which would match the Stage 4 of the OECD scale set up a couple of decades ago.

4. Stereotypes and negative attitudes towards Roma and their consequences

High poverty rates, high unemployment rate, low levels of parental formal education and traditional cultural models within Romani communities are most commonly cited as the principal causes of unsuccessful integration of these minority children into larger communities all over Europe and world-wide (see Hancock 1999; Leseman 2007). On the other hand, racism, xenophobia, and negative stereotypes have all led to an almost complete segregation and ghettoization of Romani communities by majority populations in the host countries. Even when they enter the school system, they are again discriminated against, and the deficiency theory is commonly used to account for their low academic achievement. All of the above makes Romani children feel uncomfortable and unwanted in the mainstream classrooms.

In Serbia, the situation is not much different: *total immersion* or *sink-or-swim* programs have been applied to the education of Roma for the longest time (unlike most national minorities who were, at least formally, given the opportunity to chose bilingual or education in their L1, the Roma were not recognized by the Constitution as a national community until a few years ago, so they had no choice but to enter the educational system as complete outsiders; see also Filipović 2009; Filipović et al. 2007). Consequently, the Roma represent a segment of Serbian population with the highest rate of school drop-outs, very low percentages of high school graduates and those with university education. In Serbia, according to data from 2006, about 62% of Romani children were without a grade school diploma and only 9.2% had any education above the elementary school level. Furthermore, between 50% and 85% of Romani children attended "special schools," for children with special educational needs (Centar za prava manjina, 2006). When it comes to Romani returnees and internally displaced Roma, low enrollment rates are further inflated by financial and administrative problems (e.g., lack of documents, slow administrative procedures, complicated degree, and diploma verification process),

Overall, reports from the Serbian Ministry of Education, the Romani, relevant NGOs, and other ogranizations indicate low levels of proficiency in Serbian as one of the main problems for the integration of Romani children into the school system in Serbia.

5. A model of language support for Serbian as the language of education for Romani children

Romani children, returning from the countries of the European Union in accordance with the agreement on readmission, and children coming from internally displaced Romani families represent the target population of the model of language support for Serbian as the language of education. These children come from different European educational settings (according to some unofficial[14] data, over 90% of Romani children returning to Serbia over the last seven years come from the German speaking countries), or internally displaced Romani children primarily from Kosovo and Metohija. Therefore, their linguistic profiles are extremely different: some are competent users of their languages of former education, some speak a dialect of Romani which is used as a language of family communication, others may have more or less limited competence in Serbian, or, as is to be expected in the majority of cases, they are complete beginners when it comes to the majority population language (i.e., Serbian).

The right to education is one of the basic human rights; every child, regardless of citizenship or native tongue has the right of access to the formal educational institutions in Serbia. Consequently, and as prescribed by Serbian legislature, all children should have at least compulsory education. This

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[14] There is practically no reliable information from relevant institutions of the state regarding their exact numbers and the host countries they come from.

children's right is one of the principal moral as well as legal obligations of all adults in Serbia. Therefore, Romani children, just as children belonging to any other ethnic majority or minority group in Serbia, should have open and easy access to education in this country. In light of the fact that the standardization of Romani which could be used as the language of education for Romani children has not yet been completed, and, consequently, that there are very few trained teachers who could perform the educational process in Romani, it is postulated herein that all Romani children should be given a sufficient number of opportunities to develop their competences in Serbian as the language of education. If they are competent users of Serbian, they would have easier access to different types of information in different formats (textbook, books, electronic media, etc.), which would enable them to strive for excellence in their academic endeavors. Furthermore, as academic competence is viewed as a much larger spectrum of competences and skills than sheer linguistic competence, this model also aims at providing educational support for the Romani children. In other words, the language and education support model should capacitate the Romani children to develop overall cognitive and learning strategies as well as the age-appropriate encyclopedic knowledge that is easily accessible to their peers from the majority population (e.g., fairy tales, cartoons, comics, book characters). The lack of this type of social and cultural knowledge is one of the first markers of their status as outsiders in the larger community of their peers. On the other hand, the model recognizes the necessity for the minority children to sustain their ethnolinguistic identity, as well as the need for the majority children to learn about the Romani culture (e.g., its language and traditions) in order to be able to appreciate its value in light of its difference from the mainstream culture. Moreover, Romani children should encounter an educational setting which would motivate them not only to acquire Serbian as the language of education, but also to formalize their competences in Romani and/or continue learning and using their previous languages of education (e.g., German). This is why we talk about a two-way process in which language support classes should provide the majority children with the opportunity to learn about Romani culture and language, as well as about cultures and languages of other countries these Romani children come from. Mixed classrooms in which children from different ethnic backgrounds study together are no novelty within the Serbian educational system. What needs to be further improved is the insistence on the value of difference, tolerance and equality both in and outside of school. In order to achieve this, a model of language support needs to be nurtured in an academic environment that provides a long-term expert educational and pedagogical support. The educational system in Serbia already has a very well developed network of resources which may make this achievable: schools and school authorities work very closely together with local communities in Serbia. What needs to be further developed is the optimalized and systemic support from the Ministry of Education, which has so far recognized the gravity of this problem,[15] but has been rather slow in implementing the designed new curricula.

In conclusion, the model of language support developed for Romani children presupposes that equal access and equal opportunity should be the keystones of the Serbian educational system. In addition, the model argues for the development of an intercultural perspective within the Serbian educational system (i.e., for the promotion of a dialogue and understanding among students of all social and ethnic backgrounds). The main objective of the model is not to limit itself to "fixing" the problems of returnee and internally displaced Romani children, but to open a new educational and cultural space that would allow for a dynamic and pluralistic understanding of all kinds of differences encountered in our society.

5.1. Proposed curricular framework for Serbian as the language of education for Romani children in Serbia

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[15] "The question of Roma education is not an exclusively Romani problem, as is most commonly believed, but rather an issue which affects the society at large, due to the fact that the Romani quality of life does not speak only about them, but about the quality of the overall society. (...) By providing access to education to Romani children we will help develop not only the Romani communities, but the society at large, especially civil society and its democracy. By investing into the Romani education, we are improving our overall educational and cultural status and increasing our economic power." (Ministarstvo prosvete Srbije (*Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia*) working paper, 2007, p. 1)

The present curricular framework is geared toward Romani students between the ages of 6 and 16 (those enrolled in elementary education programs), with a rationale that the application of the language support model would ensure their easy entrance into the formal education system as well as an easy transition from primary to secondary education. The model can be defined as an *inclusion program with language support*, which means that Romani children enter the mainstream classroom and attend classes in Serbian, while at the same time receiving additional instruction in Serbian as the language of education. This particular educational model allows for the psychological, emotional and cognitive development of each Romani child who can, if guided properly, expand his or her concept of the "ideal self" or the "ought-to self" as defined by Dörnyei (2005), in which the proficiency in Serbian as their L2 would contribute to an important aspect of their desired identity: "…if proficiency in the target language is part and parcel of one's *ideal* or *ought-to self*, this will serve as a powerful motivator to learn the language because of our psychological desire to reduce the discrepancy between our current and possible future selves" (Ushioda & Dörnyei, 2009, p. 4). Consequently, the integration of Romani children into the majority community might be made much easier if the motivation for acquiring the majority language is placed in a proper communicative and socio-cultural context (not as contrasting with their L1, but rather as complementing all their previous linguistic and communicative competences, as we will discuss). The instruction has two different language modules:

   1) Serbian as language of basic communication and
   2) Serbian as language of academic achievement (language of education)[16]

The linguistic outcomes of the language support system are measured in accordance with the descriptors for the overall competence levels of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, and it is expected that after a two-year support program, all students should reach the B1 (*Threshold*) level in Serbian. Furthermore, the program calls for the creation of a whole new set of descriptors for Serbian as the language of education, again for levels A1, A2, and B1 of the *Common European Framework*. In addition, the development of at least a basic level of intercultural competence needs to accompany this endeavor, in order for the Romani children to recognize and appreciate elements of their own and Serbian cultures and to be able to compare and contextualize them within the framework of cultures of European countries they come from. The inclusion of educational contents in Romani, about Romani language and culture, as well as in and about any previous languages of education aims at strengthening the intercultural and democratic nature of the process of social and cultural integration of Romani children in Serbia.

Therefore, the overall program outcomes should include recognition, connection and application of the relationship between language learning and language use in school and everyday life for the Romani children in Serbia.

Once again, as we are fully aware of the fact that anything but language equality in the educational system falls far short of our optimistic goals, we must remind our readers that in light of the fact that there is no standardized variety of Romani (agreed upon by the various Romani communities in Serbia) which could at this time be used in the written medium, along with the fact that there are very few trained teachers of Romani as either L1 or L2, we are forced to set our present goals much lower on the success rate scale of attempts at reviving and including this minority language into the mainstream Serbian classroom as one of the linguistic varieties eligible to take part in integrative bilingual educational programs. However, there are some strong indications that this state of affairs is about to change for the better in the near future. As of fall 2009, Serbia has joined the QUALIROM international project (*Quality Education in Romani for Europe*), which aims at integrating the Romani language into the mainstream curriculum in Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, and Serbia (project

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[16] In line with a number of research papers, primarily from the US educational settings (e.g., Collier, 1987; Cummins 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1984; Lewelling, 1991; Saville-Troike, 1984, 1991; Short & Spanos, 1989;) which make a difference between the rate of acquisition of language used for everyday communication and language used in academic settings. This is what Cummins labels *BICS: basic interpersonal communication skills* and *CALP cognitive academic language proficiency*.

coordinated by the Austrian *Zentrum für Sprache, Plurilingualismus und Fachdidaktik (Centre for Language, Plurilingualism and Language teaching),* and with the participation of the University of Graz, the European Centre for Modern Languages, Charles University, Prague, University of Belgrade and University of Helsinki. This pilot project incorporates guidelines from the Council of Europe's *Common European Curriculum Framework for Romani language* and uses the *European Language Portfolio (ELP) for Romani*[17] (levels A1-B2) for young children and younger adolescents (ages 6-16). Hopefully, this will present a step in the right direction in terms of assuring better conditions for functional, additive bilingual education of Romani children in Serbia (as well as in other countries taking part in this project).

The language support in the pilot project is carried out at the following levels:

1) Individual support: during which specially trained language support teachers work one-on one with their students helping them reach academic proficiency in Serbian as L2, up to B1 level at least, with elements of Serbian as L1 found in a curriculum for a given grade, as well as ensuring access to academic information in Serbian regarding other content areas (e.g., history, math, biology, art) and development of learning strategies, acquisition of specific terminologies, and other skills

2) Group support: language support classes organized on a weekly basis, using a specially designed space with technological support and library containing books in Romani, Serbian and the languages of former schooling for children coming back from the countries of the European Union.

3) Family support: this is of crucial importance in this case, as all field research indicates that there exists a strong negative attitude among Romani parents regarding their children's integration in the mainstream classroom, regardless of the fact that they recognize the necessity of integration into the larger community. The main reason for this negative attitude is their fear of losing the Romani way of life in the generations to come. Therefore, the program calls for a creation of a new profession, that of *cultural mediators,* people coming primarily from the Romani communities, who receive special training in intercultural competence, and mediating skills in order to bring closer the Romani community and the school authorities, as well as the larger local communities in Serbia.

5.2. Administrative validation of Romani and languages of former education as part of the language support model

As already pointed out, motivation is one of the key factors in everyone's process of self-formation and self-growth. When it comes to Romani children, their motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is significantly impacted by their social position and isolation within a larger community, which, as already mentioned, makes them the most likely candidates to leave school (taught in a majority language) at a very early age. As Nortona nd Toohey, explain:

When a language learner interacts with a member of the target language group, he is not only searching for words, phrases, and idiomatic expressions; he is asking to what extent he will be able to impose reception on his interlocutor…. Language learning engages the identities of learners because language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined in part *by the value an meaning ascribed to the person who speaks*. (p. 115; italics added).

Consequently, the self-validation of one's identity, perceived as a multidimensional, multifaceted set of ideologies and cultural models, can significantly boost or hinder any L2 learning process. If L2

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[17] Incidentally, the ELP for Romani was developed along the same lines as the ELP for Serbian as the language of education for Romani children we design in the pilot project outlined in this paper.

language learners feel that they are undermined, stigmatized or underrated by the members of the majority speech community, it is to be expected that their achievements in L2 would fall far behind their optimal cognitive and learning capacities. As we repeatedly pointed out, Romani communities are among the most culturally and socially stigmatized groups in all countries they live in. For that reason, Romani identity developed by the Roma themselves is often pregnant with negative attitudes and depreciation of their own ethnicity. Furthermore, this depreciation is frequently accompanied by a significant lack of appreciation for their own cognitive capacities. These social challenges put the Roma at a significant disadvantage when interacting with members of majority communities. Consequently, the validation of their competences in their native tongue, as well as in their languages of former education (especially for children returning from the countries of the European Union, where practically all of them attended school at one point in time or another), and the provision for continuous learning of those languages once they enter the Serbian educational system is of crucial importance for their individual and group affirmation in this new social and educational environment. It is a way to work with Romani children in developing a new cultural and social identity in order to define a new "ideal" self that would contain elements from a number of ethnolinguistic cultures they have already experienced.

The language support model offers a possibility for these children to receive academic credit even for knowing languages which are not offered in the formal education system in Serbia, thanks to close cooperation with the School of Philology, University of Belgrade, where these competences can be objectively evaluated in accordance with the general foreign language requirements in the languages already existing in the system (again, in accordance with the levels suggested by the *Common European Framework*). In addition, local communities, NGOs and private and state institutions dedicated to foreign language teaching are called upon to organize specialized courses which could be attended by Romani children in order to help them maintain and improve their levels of communicative competence above those required by the primary and secondary education foreign language curricula both in Romani and/or in other foreign and or regional languages.

5.3. *The roles of language support teacher and cultural mediator*

The language support model assumes a two-year program of individual and group work with Romani children carried out by specially trained language support teachers and cultural mediators. The language support teachers will initially be drafted from teachers teaching grades 1–4 in primary schools. They are considered to be an excellent target group to be trained for teaching the two language modules, for working towards the development of intercultural competence among students and their co-workers (teaching staff and school administration), as well as cooperating with the Romani cultural mediators who will be drafted directly from the pool of the former Romani assistants.[18] The Romani assistants have already undergone extensive training programs in Romani, and have developed intercultural competence and communicative strategies needed to successfully interact with members of both majority and minority groups in different educational and domestic settings. Previous projects involving the presence of Romani assistants in Serbian classrooms indicate that grade school teachers are willing and capable of accommodating their teaching techniques and classroom activities in order to work closely with Romani assistants/cultural mediators in order to open channels of communication with the members of the Romani communities.

The primary role of the language support teacher is to provide the Romani students with adequate conditions to develop communicative and academic competences in Serbian as the language of education which would gradually help them become autonomous learners of both Serbian and other school subjects prescribed by the official curriculum. In that sense, the key activities of the language support teachers are:

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[18] For more detailed information on the role, activity and visibility of the Romani assistants in educational systems of Eastern and Central European countries, see Rus (2006).

- Cooperation with kindergarten teachers, elementary teachers (grades 1–4) and teachers of mathematics, history, geography, chemistry, etc. in grades 5–8 of grade school, with an objective to define reasonable and attainable academic objectives for each Romani student
- Continuous capacitating of Romani students for (initially partial, and as a final result complete) independent and direct access to teaching materials in Serbian
- Development of learning techniques and strategies, introduction to new technologies used in order to facilitate access to knowledge (electronic media, Internet, e-mail, etc.)
- Development of students' overall communicative strategies in order to improve communication with their peers, their teachers and school administrative staff, as well as with the members of the local community outside of school
- Interaction with non-Romani students in mixed classrooms in order to raise their awareness regarding the importance of recognizing the positive aspects of cultural diversity
- Interaction with and strategic support for Romani cultural mediators in the process of developing, reassuring and enhancing the Romani ethnolinguistic identity of Romani children

5.4. Principal outcomes to be expected from the implementation of the model

- Achieving the level B1 of the CEF (in terms of both academic and communicative competence in Serbian as the language of education)
- Maintenance and further development of the children's competences in Romani
- Maintenance and further improvement of the children's competences in previous languages of education
- Material design and evaluation: the European Language Portfolio for Serbian as the language of education; a detailed list of descriptors for levels A1-B1 in different language domains
- Administrative validation of the competences in previous languages of education (even if they are not officially offered within the Serbian educational system)
- Development of new professional profiles (M.A. programs at the School of Philology, University of Belgrade are being designed for future language support teachers and cultural mediators)
- Development of basic intercultural competence among the majority and minority children, teaching staff and school administration in the targeted school centers
- The model should be applicable to other minorities in Serbia and easily adjustable to the needs of other educational systems in the region of South-East Europe

6. Conclusions

As can clearly be seen from this paper, the language support model described herein is in it its initial stage of implementation. Therefore, it would be difficult to predict its true impact and objective outcomes. Its authors are fully aware of the fact cited by a number of language policy and planning theorists that language policy and planning have to be viewed and analyzed within a framework of specific socio-political, scientific and cultural circumstances of a particular state, region or a local community. These, in turn, directly imply that implicit and explicit objectives as well as planned (and/or achieved albeit unexpected) outcomes of a specific language policy and planning vary significantly in accordance with the socio-political, epistemological and strategic attitudes of the language planners in different socio-political and cultural contexts around the world (Filipović, 2009; Filipović et al. 2007; Ricento, 2000; 2006). In addition, we are fully aware of the fact that concept of plurilingualism in education and communication (as proposed by the Council of Europe in its latest documents, e.g., the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*) remains an idealistic construct in many European societies as long as issues related to political and socio-economic power of languages are not recognized and seriously taken into account.

This situation is not unlike that of many other parts of the world, post-colonial countries included, where language teaching is "generally the quest for power that enters into the equation whether people demand to learn a language or whether some powerful entity, such as the state, makes policies to teach it" (Rahman, 2001, p. 56). In this sense, an attempt to provide the Romani children with formal

education using Serbian as the vehicular language will be seen by many (e.g., Skutnabb-Kangas 2004, 2006) as a direct threat to the vitality of this particular ethnic minority. Skutnabb-Kangas (2006, p. 273) defines the concept of linguistic human rights as "those (and only those) linguistic rights that, first, are necessary to fulfill people's basic needs and for them to live a dignified life, and, second, that therefore are so basic, so fundamental, that no state (or individual or group) is supposed to violate them" fervently argues against state policies which reject a sustainable implementation of education geared toward functional literacy, creativity and opportunity for self-growth and self-affirmation of each student in her/his native tongue. Consequently, this language support model by no means satisfies even the basic criteria of linguistic ecology and linguistic human rights understood as a right to education in one's L1 regardless of the social and economic power of a given community or a number of the particular minority language speakers. However, as we stated earlier, the model attempts to develop a new psycho-cognitive space for Romani children that would allow them to recognize and validate their own ethnolinguistic identity while at the same time learning how to be competent members of the majority community of their peers within the formal educational system. This is presently viewed as a sole opportunity for Romani children in Serbia to be drawn into or back to school with even a minimal prospect of successful integration into a larger age-adequate educational community, which in turn is viewed as a possible step towards a more successful integration of adult Roma into the spheres of professional and public life in Serbia. As it has been shown many times before, only those who make themselves visible in the public eye can actually make a difference in their existence, in the existence of their fellow members of the same ethnic group as well as in the existence of other ethnic minority and majority groups.

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