

# **Greek Education Policy and the Challenge of Migration: An Intercultural View of Assimilation.**

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## **1. Introduction**

Education is an instrument of social integration and a means through which to construct identity. Access to information and knowledge influences access to employment, socio-economic integration and development. At the same time, education is also a tool through which identity, perceptions and understandings, real or imagined, are developed. The way that the dominant cultural majority frames the educational system and the values that it propagates through schooling (methods, curricula, etc), expresses and determines perceptions of own identity and understandings of the 'other.' Just as it can be inclusive, and a vehicle through which to promote principles of social cohesion, solidarity, and equality, it can equally propagate prejudice, stereotypes, perceptions of cultural confrontation, superiority, or discrimination. Thus, the challenge for a heterogeneous society is to meet raised expectations for educational policies that are able to respond to the needs of the entire student population. In short, for educational policies that are culturally sensitive, that enhance educational, socialization and personal development opportunities for students of all communities.

The last two decades of immigration have significantly, and irreversibly, altered the social, cultural, economic, ethnic, racial and religious characteristics of the population residing within Greece. In this paper, explore educational challenges posed by migration-related diversity in Greece. Faced with increasing and changing diversity as a result of immigration, Greek society and the state have been called to respond, adapt and formulate adequate policies through which to manage these transformations. The education sector is probably one of the most sensitive and politically charged areas of public policy because of its determining role in identity formation, national cohesion and national consciousness. It is equally one of the most important sectors in socio-economic terms since it determines access to the job market, personal and economic development.

Against this background, the core questions that we explore are: how has inter-cultural education been designed in Greece in response to growing immigration? How is it perceived to relate to Greek identity? What are the main objectives of Greek educational policy as regards contemporary Greek society overall and the immigrant population in particular? Are these changing, and if so in what direction? Are there differences in perception on the part of the various stakeholders? In addition to these core questions, we also consider the European dimension in order to explore to what extent, if at all, it has been relevant in the development of an intercultural/multicultural approach in education?

This paper starts with a brief discussion of the Greek educational system and the most recent efforts to reform it. This presents the wider context within which intercultural education has developed and where provisions for non-mother tongue students have been adopted. In section 3 we briefly present the migrant and co ethnic school population in Greece reviewing the major problems of the system, as these are explored and discussed in the existing literature in Greece. Section 4 concentrates on the field research conducted in the context of the EMILIE project and discusses our main findings. In the concluding section, we highlight the policy relevance of our findings and put forward some ideas for the reform of the existing system and for the introduction of an intercultural approach in the Greek education system.

## **2. The Greek educational system: New pedagogical orientations since the 1980s**

The Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs is responsible for the Greek education system, its administration and its policies. This is complemented by the Primary and Secondary Education Directorates at the Regional Level and the Offices at the Prefectural Regional Level. The current educational system and policy was set up by the 1976 educational policy that was introduced with the new Constitution, and by a series of reforms during the 1980s aimed at, among other priorities, modernizing the curricula and the textbooks and introducing foreign language lessons from primary school level. The Greek education system is highly centralized with the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute responsible for the curriculum, the school timetable and distribution of classes, the material and textbooks and the employment of teachers.

The educational system has suffered from chronic under-funding, and has been described as having a history of ‘educational conservatism’ due to the country’s nation-building effort and the primary role of education in political socialization and the formulation of a solid, common identity (Dimitrakopoulos 2004: 11). Since the 1980s there has been extensive discussion both through debates in the public (media, press) and the political (Parliamentary debates, and within the Ministry of Education) spheres, of the need to reform the educational system. Discussions have concentrated not only on the need to reform the institutional framework and relevant legislation, but equally to review and revise the dominant approach to education. Particularly since the mid 1990s, the discourse has been phrased in terms of needing to change the ‘educational philosophy’ in order for Greek students (a) to be able to compete in an increasingly globalised and competitive environment; and (b) to be able to successfully integrate within the European Union. These arguments have been expressed by representatives and politicians from across the political spectrum suggesting a consensus on the need to reform and to benefit from access to EU community funds to financially support the costs associated with reform. Moreover, academics and researchers in the field of education have extensively argued for the current assimilative educational policies to be replaced by an educational system more appropriate and better suited to the changing environment. The arguments essentially concentrate on: a system that will be less ethnocentric than the current one; that would enable the recognition and communication with other cultures and civilizations; and that will be able to promote respect for diversity avoid stereotypes and prejudice (see Paleologou 2004 for more)

The intention has been there to modernize the framework and to adapt it to the changing international environment. How has this translated in practice?

The first dimension has involved the structures and methods of the educational system. Laws 2525/97 and 2640/98 reformed the educational system in Greece in 1997-1998. The former concentrated on the Comprehensive Lykeio (High School),<sup>1</sup> the establishment of day-long pre- and elementary school, ‘second’ opportunity schools, the enrolment list of teachers to be appointed, the modernization of the Pedagogical Institute, a system with which to evaluate educational achievement and educators, the creation of an Open University, and the enrichment of curricula and departments of Universities (see Bouzakis & Koustourakis 2002: 158). The latter,

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<sup>1</sup> Secondary education is separated in two autonomous three-year cycles Gymnasium and Lyceum. Compulsory education is nine years, ie. until the end of Gymnasium.

concentrated on Secondary Technical-Vocational education through institutionalizing Technical-Vocational Schools.

The second dimension has involved the development of intercultural education. There are two components within this. One has to do with the need to respond to and address the educational, cultural, linguistic needs principally of the Greek Muslim minority mainly concentrated in the north-east of the country, and to a lesser degree of the Roma population.<sup>2</sup> These initiatives fall outside the scope of this paper. The other component has to do with the need to respond to and address the educational, cultural, and linguistic needs of the new arrivals; in short, of the repatriates and their descendants, and of the foreign nationals who have been arriving and settling in Greece since the early 1990s. These needs were mainly addressed through the creation of reception classes. Reception classes were first set up in gymnasiums and lyceums in the 1980s, particularly in the Thessaloniki area for the children of Greek returnees (Markou 1993). It was not until the mid 1990s that a more comprehensive legislative framework was developed with the aim to respond to the changing educational needs of contemporary Greek society. Law 2416/96 set the foundations for intercultural education in Greece. It established nineteen intercultural schools as a special category of schools and institute reception classes for students with little or no knowledge of Greek (Paleologou 2004). The section below discusses the approach to inter-cultural education in Greece and the main axes of its development.

### **3. Greece's immigrant school population**

Greek educational policy is based on the principles enshrined in the Greek Constitution, the international (UNESCO) and regional (European) conventions on the rights of children, the principles of non-discrimination and the right to an education. The legislative framework guarantees schooling for all children, citizen or foreign, from the age of 6 to the age of 15. This compulsory education is applicable to all children regardless of the status of legality or illegality of the parents. Art 40 of the 2910/2001 law stipulates that all children born to third-country nationals living in Greece are obliged and have the right to this compulsory education. In fact, school authorities should enroll foreign students even if they do not have the necessary documents, such as school certificates required for enrollment. This law also provides for the possibility of offering mother-tongue learning in addition to the core curriculum – on the basis of an Interministerial decision to be issued by the Ministries of Interior and Education – albeit this provision of the law has not been implemented.

According to data provided by the Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies (IPODE)<sup>3</sup> in 2006, 138,193 students fell in the categories

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<sup>2</sup> The Greek-Turkish Protocols of 1954 and 1968 and Law 19 of 1972 set the framework for bilingual education for the Muslim minority in Thrace. Since 1997, the Ministry of Education has invested significant funds, personnel and programmes in improving the standards and methods of the education provided to the Muslim youths in the north-east while trying to address the challenges of encouraging intercultural education and avoiding effective segregation between the majority and minority populations in these regions, (Damanakis 2005, also <http://www.museduc.gr/index.php> ).

<sup>3</sup> According to law 2413/1996, article 5, IPODE's objective is to conduct research and studies on educational issues pertaining to Greek education abroad and intercultural schools in Greece. It has been responsible for collecting data relevant to expatriated Greek pupils and foreign/ repatriated students in Greece since 2001.

foreign or co-ethnics and returnees. This translates into 9,5% of the total school population.

**Table 1. Breakdown of foreign, repatriated and native pupils in Greece during the academic year 2004-05 (Source: IPODE 2007)**

Schooling level	Foreign pupils	Repatriated (Coethnic and returnees) pupils	SUBTOTAL of immigrant (foreign and repatriated) pupils (and as a % of total)	TOTAL of all (including Greek) students
Kindergarten	9,503	1,580	11,083 (8%)	138,304
Primary	59,334	8,405	67,739 (10,6%)	638,550
Gymnasium	29,170	7,217	36,387 (10,9%)	333,989
Lyceum	15,456	7,528	22,984 (6,8%)	338,189
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,3463</b>	<b>24,730</b>	<b>138,193 (9,5%)</b>	<b>1,449,032</b>

Source: IPODE. Data available for 2005-06 and 2006-07 include only pupils of public schools as data for private schools have at the time of writing (October 2007) not yet been processed.

In this study we look at both foreign students (i.e. children of foreign nationality whose parents are immigrants in Greece) and co-ethnic returnee students, that is students whose parents came to Greece as co-ethnic returnees. The second category are Greek citizens but Greek is not their mother-tongue and they face problems of school failure, and higher drop out rates than native Greeks.

According to data from the Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies (IPODE, <http://www.ipode.gr/>), 42.7% of foreign pupils have been living in Greece during the past six years, while 57.3% have been living in Greece for under five years (Hellenic Regional Development Centre 2007: 55). Regarding the distribution of foreign students in Greek schools, 35.6% of schools in Greece have no foreign pupils enrolled. By contrast, the highest concentration of immigrant students is found in the Athens metropolitan area where immigrant and co-ethnic students are about 12 % of the total school population (op.cit.: 56). A recent study (Voulalas 2007) has shown that although overall completion of the lower secondary education level has steadily increased during the last twenty years, the overall completion percentage in Greece remains low (below 85%) if compared with other European countries. Moreover, the difference between the graduation rates of Greeks and immigrants was found to be higher than 20% in the lower secondary level and higher than 40% in the higher secondary level.

#### **4. Research Design and Methodology**

The research for this paper was conducted in the context of WP3 of the EMILIE project. A literature review of primary and secondary sources in Greek and English

was conducted by the authors followed by a four-month period of fieldwork during the months April-July 2007.

We conducted a literature review of articles, books and papers written in Greek and English on the Greek educational system, its approaches and the development of its intercultural dimension. We also looked at articles and opinions that have been published on websites of research institutes and civil society associations, and in mainstream newspapers. We used the on-line archives of four mainstream newspapers (*Kathimerini*, *Ta Nea*, *Eleftherotypia*, *Rizospastis*) to identify articles published since 2004 on intercultural education and the challenges faced by immigrant students in Greek schools. We have extensively referred to relevant research published by the Hellenic Migration Policy Institute (IMEPO) and to the publications and statistics published by IPODE. Finally, we consulted samples of the school manuals and textbooks that have been produced by the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute in the context of the inter-cultural education programmes (EPEAK) mentioned above.

With regard to the empirical research, this included: qualitative interviews with policy makers and teachers; informal discussions with actors involved in or having a stake in intercultural education; and two discussion groups.

Interviews with policy makers were conducted on the basis of an interview guide that was drafted by the EMILIE team and subsequently translated into Greek (see Annex II). These interviews were conducted by the authors either together or individually and each lasted between 45 minutes and 75 minutes approximately. The scope of the research project and reason for the interview was presented by the authors from the start and all interviews were taped with the interviewees' permission. The taping was subsequently transcribed and analysed. Some officials interviewed were not comfortable with the tape-recorded so in three interviews a tape recorded was not used and only notes by the interviewers were taken. A total of 14 interviews (9 of which were taped) were conducted in this context and a detailed list is included in Annex I.

In order to explore this project's core focus, namely how difference is understood, defined and catered for in the education policy domain we first of all sought interviews with policy makers directly involved with education policy. We thus interviewed four high-ranking officials from the headquarters of the Ministry of Education (the Director of Primary School Education, the Director of Secondary School Education, the Head (*Proistameni*) of Secondary School Education; and the Director for European Affairs). We also interviewed two officials from IPODE (the Director of Research and a Research Associate) and a School Counsellor who is an expert in Intercultural Education from the Pedagogical Institute (the independent institution that oversees the drafting and revisions of all education materials for primary and secondary education). We interviewed the heads of two District Offices (for reasons of anonymity, the numbers of these offices are withheld) of the First Directorate of the Athens metropolitan area, who are responsible for secondary education in central neighbourhoods of Athens with a high concentration of immigrant students. The Ministry directorate for secondary education is divided into regional directorates which in turn are divided into district offices. These district offices are responsible for the implementation of the legislation regarding the creation of support classes. By contrast, prefectures have been entrusted with the task of organising the teaching of the culture and language of origin.

Our aim in these interviews has been to get a deeper understanding of how the policy is administered in practice. While our research does not look at the school

level, it does take into account the ways in which middle and high rank officials understand the current situation of an important ethnic and cultural diversity within the Greek school population. It also examines how they interpret the law and the related objectives of Greek secondary education policy with regard to dealing with this diversity, and last but not least, whether and how they take steps to make sure that these objectives are achieved.

The interview material was complemented by insightful interviews with the president of the Research Centre (KEMETE) of the Federation of State School Teachers in Secondary Education (OLME), and the headmistress of an Intercultural Gymnasium in the Athens. Two University professors (one from Athens and one from Thessaloniki) who hold important positions in the national action programmes for intercultural education (EPEAK) were also interviewed.

The interview guide was used flexibly. Each interviewee was asked to comment on the following issues in relation to her/his tasks and experience:

- a) their definition and understanding of the school population, how it has changed and in what ways initiatives taken under the heading of ‘intercultural education’ respond to these changes;
- b) the aims of intercultural education;
- c) their overall understanding of integration through education (in this context, definitions of ‘difference’, ‘national identity’, ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’ were considered in more detail);
- d) the performance of intercultural schools;
- e) the scope and nature of the educational material and teacher training initiatives that have been developed by the special programmes on intercultural education;
- f) the aims of reception and tutorial classes, their organization and methods;
- g) their views on language as a tool for social integration;
- h) the future development of educational policy and its intercultural dimension, as well as an assessment of its successes and failures.

We also conducted several informal discussions with a view to mapping the education policy field and understanding who were the appropriate informants for the scope of our study. These discussions included phone or email exchanges with policy actors, teachers, researchers, migrant activists.

Lastly, two discussion groups were organized in June 2007, one with teachers and staff of intercultural schools and one with immigrant students enrolled in intercultural schools. These discussion groups were organized in the form of a half day event on intercultural education under the initiative and with the joint effort of the ELIAMEP team and a small group of high school teachers of the Intercultural Gymnasium of Athens (2<sup>nd</sup> Gymnasium of Athens). The workshop was entitled “*Multicultural Education: Educational and Teaching Experiences*” and was aimed at exchanging experiences between teachers involved in intercultural education, identifying best-practices and challenges commonly faced.<sup>4</sup> The entire workshop was taped and the discussions were transcribed and subsequently analysed.

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<sup>4</sup> The programme of the workshop and the minutes are available at the EMILIE web site:

## 5. Findings

Our empirical research aimed to generate primary material which would help us better understand the educational challenges posed by migration related diversity in Greece. We also aimed at studying the policy measures adopted in this context and the related debates, in order to assess the extent to which these measures have responded to the changing needs of the Greek school population. We questioned how concepts such as ‘intercultural education’, ‘diversity’, ‘identity’, ‘culture’ and ‘integration’ were interpreted by policy makers and educators. In the first part of this section we discuss the origins and development of intercultural education policy in Greece. In the section that follows we discuss the meaning of the term intercultural and the ways in which it is implemented in Greek education policy. In other words we seek to provide some insight into the different strands of the ‘intercultural’ in Greece which range between a dialogue between cultures and a full assimilation perspective while generally ideas of political multiculturalism are rejected (Modood 2006). To conclude, we put forward a critical assessment of the tools and methods used to address the challenges of migration-related cultural diversity in Greek schools and present proposals for future policies.

### 5.1 Intercultural education policy: origins and development

During the 1970s and 1980s, intercultural education was developed primarily with the intention to integrate the children of repatriates mainly from Germany, and also from the USA, Canada, Australia and South Africa. As mentioned above, this mainly took the form of facilitating their grading (average grade was calculated out of 8 and not 10/10), reception classes and tutorial/support classes.

Over the 1980s this repatriation trickled down in intensity and was replaced by repatriation of ethnic Greeks and immigrants from Southeast Europe and the former Soviet Republics (Damanakis 2005). Law 1894/1990 revised the 1404/1983 legislation on reception classes, incorporated these classes in the mainstream public school system<sup>5</sup> and focused on Greek language, culture and history courses for pupils who did not have Greek as their mother-tongue. The initial priority of integrating co-ethnics and returnees was impregnated by an underlying logic of re-integration and thus of assimilation (since it was perceived to be directed towards returning Greeks), particularly through the teaching of the Greek language. Moreover, the fact that in their overwhelming majority, the returnees from the ex-Soviet Union and Albania rejected the linguistic and cultural elements that they brought with them in order to integrate into Greek society further legitimized the dominant assimilatory approach

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<sup>5</sup> There are two categories of reception classes. The first type includes groups of students who are taught Greek language and some core other classes and who are joined with the other classes for gymnastics, music and foreign language courses. The maximum period during which a student can be enrolled in these reception courses is two years and the decision to enrol a child in these classes is taken by the school in collaboration with the parents. For the academic year 2002-2003, 548 reception classes of this type were organised with 7,863 foreign students enrolled. 39.05% of these were organised in the Athens metropolitan area and 27.4% were organised in the region of Central Macedonia. The second type does not involve separate classes but takes the form of support classes and tutorials on the part of teachers who give special attention to foreign students, thus permitting them to follow class with the rest of the pupils. For the same academic year, 127 support classes catered to the needs of 1,663 students with the highest rates in Central Macedonia (35.4%), Attica (15%), and the southern Aegean and Crete with about 11% (Hellenic Regional Development Centre 2007: 59-60).

(Markou 1993). As this study suggests, the assimilation approach of the early phases continues to define Greek educational policy today even though the overwhelming majority of the immigrant population in Greece does not fall within the co-ethnic, returnee category (Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2007).

The increase of immigration from the former Soviet republics (Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine and Russia) and Southeast Europe (especially Albania and Bulgaria), required new legislation and ministerial acts in order to organize appropriate primary and secondary schooling units. In 1999 a Ministerial Act (Ministry of Education) adopted new provisions regarding reception and support classes in order to respond to increasing schooling needs. Such classes are organized in schools with at least nine pupils with no or a limited knowledge of the Greek language. Both reception and support classes form part of public schools, the former operate in parallel with normal teaching hours, and concentrate on the teaching of Greek as a foreign language. Reception classes can only last for two years. At the end of this period, children are integrated into the mainstream classes. Support classes can last for longer and they are aimed to cater for the needs of children who did not benefit from reception classes or who did benefit from reception classes but still face problems related to their poor level of Greek. The organization and evaluation of these classes is well spelled out in the Act and there is a provision that in the absence of Greek teachers, foreign teachers can teach them.

The same Act leaves the initiative to organise mother-tongue classes to the prefectures. The Act does not define the budget line that prefectures would utilize to pay for such classes and to the best of our knowledge no such initiative has been taken by prefectures. By contrast, our fieldwork has revealed that there have been sporadic initiatives by teachers and parents to organise classes of Albanian, Ukrainian and Arabic language in downtown Athens high schools. However, such classes have usually lasted for a couple of years (some did not even go beyond a few meetings) because of the practical problems (they operated unofficially in the evening in public high schools) as well as because the immigrant parents' working hours were such that they could not bring their children to the classes, outside the normal school hours.

The 1996 legislation (2413/1996) was the first institutional measure taken in the direction of inter-cultural education. The legislation referred to the establishment of inter-cultural schools for the education of 'pupils with special educational, social, and cultural needs'. It also established (part B, art.5) IPODE, the Institute for the Education of Co-Ethnic Returnees and for Intercultural Education (*Ινστιτούτο Παιδείας Ομογενών και Διαπολιτισμικής Εκπαίδευσης*) as a semi-autonomous institute within the Ministry of Education. It is worth noting that the tasks and resources entrusted to IPODE have more to do with the education of Greeks abroad than with providing for the needs of immigrant children<sup>6</sup> in Greece. However, IPODE together with the Pedagogical Institute are responsible for issuing textbooks and other

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<sup>6</sup> In this paper we use the terms foreign pupils/students, immigrant pupils/students and non-Greek mother tongue pupils interchangeably although these terms are not completely synonymous. In terms of educational policies and needs, the term adopted is non-Greek mother tongue pupils which includes children who are Greek citizens from co-ethnic returnee families and children of foreign citizenship. The terms immigrant and foreign students are still used as roughly synonymous in Greece since there as yet no provisions for the second generation to acquire Greek citizenship through a preferential path. Thus both children who came with their families and children who were born in Greece of foreign parents are categorised legally as foreigners and immigrants. The colloquial term used is immigrant rather than foreign children though while the term non-Greek mother tongue pupils is confined to the research and educators' community jargon.

educational materials to be used in intercultural schools as well as in reception and support classes.

Since 1996, a total of 26 inter-cultural (also referred to as cross-cultural) schools have been established across Greece. Thirteen are primary schools, nine are junior high schools and four are senior high schools. Out of a total of 15,174 state schools (from pre- to high school), these inter-cultural schools correspond to about 0.17% of the total. By contrast, the percentage of non Greek mother tongue pupils in Greek schools has reached the level of 9.5%.

Though this legislation indicates the government recognition of the specific educational needs of different communities, a decade later, it remains rather general and vague as to the specific objectives of inter-cultural education. Law 2413/1996, article 34 (as cited in the Greek Ministry's 2006 EURYDICE report, section 5.20.3) stipulates that:

“The aim of Intercultural Education is to organize and enable primary and secondary education schools to offer education to young people with educational, social and cultural particularities. [...] In *Diapolitismika Scholeia* (Intercultural Education Schools) the curriculum of their counterpart state schools is applied, adapted to the particular educational, social and cultural needs of their pupils.”

Intercultural schools in principle follow the curriculum and annual study programme of mainstream schools. However, in line with law 2413/1996, they benefit from a significant degree of autonomy in order to respond to the special needs of the foreign student population. This autonomy in practice consists in not being obliged to cover the entire curriculum as other schools are expected to with a view to paying more attention to Greek language learning and the overall process of smooth integration of foreign pupils to the school environment. By law these schools *may* have special educational materials. Specific supporting educational programmes (see EPEAK below) implemented by the Capodistrian University of Athens initially (1997-2001) and later by the Aristotle University of Thessalonike (2001-2004 and 2004-2007) have provided for books and audiovisual support materials aimed initially at intercultural schools only but later diffused to a large number of mainstream schools who responded to the call for participating in the programme. However, these books are discontinued in their production during the last couple of years. During the previous academic year (2006-07), teachers at intercultural schools (15) would photocopy at the school's expense the intercultural educational material that is out of print in order to provide for the students' needs.

In addition to the standard curriculum, intercultural schools can provide courses on the language and culture of the country of origin of the foreign students up to 4 hours per week. They may also teach Greek to the students' parents, inform them about the Greek educational system, and encourage their participation in school activities in order to further integrate foreign students in the school and wider community life (Hellenic Regional Development Centre 2007: 62-63). Student festivals, plays, events, and awards particularly themed on human rights, non-discrimination, equality (gender and other) and the fight against exclusion, racism and xenophobia are also organized and supported by the state authorities through funding.

Concomitantly to the above legislative framework, three large scale educational programmes were launched during the period 1997-2004 in collaboration with Greek universities and financially supported by the European Commission. These programmes referred to through their acronym EPEAK (*Επιχειρησιακό*

*Πρόγραμμα Εκπαίδευσης και Αρχικής Κατάρτισης – ΕΠΕΑΚ*)<sup>7</sup> related to three different sets of students: pupils belonging to the Muslim minority, Roma pupils and repatriated and foreign students. These ΕΠΕΑΚ were conceived in order to develop an intercultural dimension within the educational system; provide the pupils falling within these categories with the opportunity to benefit from education, participate more actively in society while maintaining their cultural specificities; and promote exchange among students and interaction between their cultural backgrounds (see the relevant website: [http://www.epeak.gr/epeak/el/a\\_2\\_1.html](http://www.epeak.gr/epeak/el/a_2_1.html); and Paleologou 2004: 323).

It goes without saying that these 26 intercultural schools do not meet the current needs of foreign pupils that account for approximately a tenth of the school population (see table 1 below for more details). For one, this foreign student population is dispersed across the country in both urban and rural areas; therefore, only a very small portion of it is enrolled in the intercultural schools. The remaining majority is enrolled and attends mainstream primary and secondary schools (gymnasium and lyceum) creating a *de facto* multicultural school population in schools.<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that for a school to be identified as an inter-cultural one, at least 45% of its student body must be non-Greek, however not all schools with at least 45% of immigrant students are identified as intercultural.

The above described situation has resulted in a number of mutually reinforcing consequences in Greek schools, intercultural or mainstream. First, teachers and school staff have seen their work become more difficult. They have been in many cases unable to respond to the educational, cultural, linguistic, religious or ethnic specificities and needs of their class due to lack of training, material or support from the Ministerial authorities (DG1). They have also felt the quality of the teaching deteriorate and school conditions degrade not least due to the ‘flight’ of Greek students away from schools where percentages of immigrant students enrolled have increased, and towards private schools or public schools in neighbourhoods with lower immigrant populations. In effect, although some schools situated in neighbourhoods with high immigrant populations (such as in downtown Athens in the districts of Gazi, Vathi square, Kypseli, Petralona) surpass the 45% threshold of foreign students, nevertheless, there is no initiative to characterize additional schools as intercultural mainly because of a concern that it will lead to an even larger fall in attendance of Greek pupils (*Kathimerini* 31/3/2007).

Recent studies show that a large number of immigrant students experience school failure and other school-related problems (Nicolaou 2000). Also, a disproportionate number of immigrant students fail to complete the lower high school grade (gymnasium) and even more numerous fail to complete the upper high school grade (lyceum) (Voulalas 2007). School principals interviewed in the late 1990s (Bombas 1996; 2001) reported the students’ lack of language fluency and their general cultural adaptation problems as the main issues. Bombas (op.cit.) and Dimakos and Tasiopoulou (2003) as well as our own interviews (I3) show that

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<sup>7</sup> These programmes were initially conceived for the period 1997-2001 and were renewed in 2002.

<sup>8</sup> There are also a number of foreign schools in Greece that operate on the basis of bilateral treaties and in their majority, though not exclusively, enrol children of embassy and corporate personnel (for example there is the French Lyceum, German High School, Japanese school, etc). The Filipino and Polish schools were created by Filipino and Polish immigrants respectively who came to Greece on guest worker schemes in the 1980s and the Inter-Cultural Day Care Centre was set up by immigrants from Sierra Leone in order to assist African immigrant families who cannot afford day-care (see Dimitrakopoulos 2004: 35-36).

attitudes of students and school principals towards immigrant pupils are at best neutral and more often negative. Our fieldwork (I6) suggests that school teachers consider that immigrant pupils contribute to decreasing the overall educational attainment of schools and occasions were noted when some principals even obstructed the enrolment of immigrant pupils in their schools with formal excuses in order to prevent the 'degradation' of their school's educational reputation.

This leads to the second reality, that of a growing number of parents belonging to the majority population becoming increasingly uneasy with the falling standards of schooling<sup>9</sup> in public schools in areas with high immigrant populations. The result is that Greek students are either sent to private schools that immigrants cannot afford or are moved to public schools of nearby neighbourhoods creating a noticeable line of ethnic division within the school system between 'majority-Greek' and 'majority-foreign' schools. Some immigrant parents also resent sending their children to majority-foreign schools for two reasons. First, because they too fear that these schools fair worse than majority-Greek ones thereby not offering their children better long-term opportunities, and second, they do not wish to see their children ghettoized. At the same time some of the 'inter-cultural schools' have become all-foreigner schools since Greek parents and pupils quickly abandoned them.<sup>10</sup> These developments are not constructive for the promotion of an intercultural approach to education. Moreover, this risks in increasing the discomfort of low-income Greek parents, or parents who live in areas with significant immigrant populations who are concerned of the potential consequences of deteriorating education for their children's future, leading them to an overall discomfort with immigration and multicultural societies (Ankara Paper 14). Our fieldwork (DG1 and DG2, see also <http://6dim-diap-elfth.thess.sch.gr/main.htm>) has shown though that in some cases, schools have been able to invert such a trend and keep or even increase the number of their Greek pupils while also catering for the needs of non Greek mother tongue students. These, however, should be seen as an exception that confirms the rule.

Third, intercultural education becomes in a sense distinguished from the mainstream educational system. As Damanakis noted already a decade ago (1997: 85) the logic of intercultural education in Greece has been that of *separation* rather than of catering to the special needs of the students as the law purports. The existence of a specific number of intercultural schools is an insufficient measure towards promoting an intercultural curriculum that is relevant for the entire school population in Greece (including the majority Greek pupils). It makes inter-cultural education formally relevant only for the 26 schools that are identified as such, and not for the remaining 99.8% of the schooling units. Given that school is a socializing institution that prepares youths for their integration in the wider society, the absence of a more comprehensive intercultural dimension in all mainstream schooling units is problematic. It is problematic for longer term social cohesion and, it does little to further a shift in perceptions among the majority population in seeing Greek society as more diverse, multicultural and inclusive. Tellingly, during our fieldwork preparation phase, when making contacts with the Ministry of Education and its

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<sup>9</sup> Lack of knowledge of the Greek language, or arrivals and enrollments at different times within the school year on the part of the immigrant students has led to delays and disruptions of classes and curricula taught, leading many parents to feel concerned about their children's education and decide to pull them out and invest in private education establishments.

<sup>10</sup> Intercultural schools in Thessalonike have a mixed population with Greek pupils being the majority while intercultural schools in the Athens metropolitan area have an overwhelming majority of non Greek mother tongue pupils (Trouki and Panagopoulos 2006).

district branches to talk about the intercultural dimension of Greek education policy and practice, the first reaction of most officials was that this was not part of their responsibility and that we had to talk to IPODE only or mainly (I7, I8, and I9).

In this rather gloomy assessment of the intercultural dimension in Greek education, we need to acknowledge the work accomplished during the last decade by the National Action programmes (EPEAK) supporting the intercultural dimension of education in mainstream schools. The EPEAK programme has involved 188 schools as official partners to the programme (recruited through an open call for expression of interest). The University professor responsible for the project (I4) however notes that probably as many as 300 schools have got in touch with the programme through the spontaneous participation of teachers from non-affiliated schools to the training seminars<sup>11</sup> organized by the programme. However as she (I4) noted special programmes cannot be a long term solution – their aim is targeted to exploring, testing and developing appropriate policy proposals (I7) that should then be adopted by the Ministry as mainstream policy approaches.

A final dimension of intercultural education that needs to be considered in this context is the European one. In the latter half of the twentieth century, educational policy reforms added the European level to the dominant Greek narrative through the European Union (EU). The European dimension is formally based on the following core EEC/EU acts and legislation: the 1986 Single Act; the resolution on the European dimension in education (24 May 1988); the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 (and in particular art 126 and 127); the 1993 Green Bible on the EU dimension in education and the 1995 White Paper on education and vocational training (see Damanakis 2005). Moreover, Greece is bound to EU directive 77/486/EEC regarding the education of students of another EU member state and the obligation to provide immigrant students with mother-tongue classes in addition to the main curriculum.

Although the formal framework is there, empirical research and surveys have indicated that until the late 1990s, the EU and core political and economic issues of European integration were very much absent from the school curricula. In fact, research on the subject concluded that concepts, attitudes and expectations of younger generations of Greeks regarding the EU had been formulated *in spite of* the absence of relevant material, information and analysis in the textbooks (Kontogiannopoulou-Polydorides et al 2000: 290). Over the past decade, however, Greece has significantly extended and expanded its participation in EU educational programmes in primary and secondary education, education cooperation and teacher exchange schemes, and transnational projects of placement and exchange concerning vocational training (for example, SOCRATES, LEONARDO, LINGUA, COMENIUS, ARION, etc). This participation has contributed to the development of a European dimension in Greek education and of a European layer as part of Greek identity in a positive manner. Nonetheless, its potential is considered to have been restricted by the inflexibility of school curricula and the educational system overall (Diamantopoulou 2006: 139).

In 2003, the Ministry of Education integrated intercultural and European dimensions in its mainstream educational programme. The principles of “Enhancing cultural and linguistic identity within a multicultural society” were published in the Government Gazette (II, 303/13303). This initiative concentrated on further promoting mutual understanding and cooperation with other European societies, enriching the Greek and other European societies with the integration of individuals and groups of other cultures (in order to expand cultural diversity). It also aimed at

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<sup>11</sup> For more information see: <http://web.auth.gr/eppas/>.

promoting the respect for and development of cultural and linguistic diversity along with the respect for national and cultural identity. The adoption of an intercultural approach led the Ministry to encourage multi-disciplinary methodologies to be adopted in the teaching of history, geography, literature, second and third foreign language classes in secondary schools (and in part in primary schools), and an optional study programme of two hours weekly for general debates on subjects including European identity, globalization and multiculturalism (Hellenic Regional Development Centre 2007: 64). These efforts appear to have gained rather restricted ground at the level of day-to-day implementation of the school curricula as they are often used to complement missed hours of teaching mainstream courses.

In the course of the interviews conducted, when discussing the relationship between European and intercultural dimensions in education policy or practice, none of the interviewees considered the two as somehow related. It was clear to most of our interviewees from the different branches of the Ministry of Education (I1, I2, I3, I4, I5, I6, I12) that the intercultural dimension – referring specifically to the successful integration into the school system of children whose parents are economic immigrants or coethnic returnees from former Soviet Republics or Albania – is a big challenge for the Greek education policy today. On the contrary, none of our interviewees perceived the European dimension as a challenge. Rather, this was seen as a *fait accompli*: Greece belongs to the EU since 1981, it adopts the EU directives, it shares values, laws and policies with other EU countries. Hence, it was underlined that there is no contradiction between European and Greek values, nor were there any tensions perceived in educating young adolescents into becoming both Greek and European citizens.

When further tried by our question about whether students from the new member states are perceived as more or less European than students from old member states, most of the interviewees admitted that the stereotypical perception of the EU included still only western Europe. This is relevant in the Greek context given that a sizeable portion of the immigrant population is from newer EU Member States.

To our surprise our interviewees from the headquarters of the Ministry (I7, I8, I9, I10, I11) did not perceive the intercultural education as a major challenge either. They argued that the Greek state protects all children regardless of their parents' legal status (which is indeed true) and provides for their schooling with simplified registration procedures (i.e. a child can be enrolled even if the parents do not provide the school with a home address, and missing or incomplete identity documents may be presented to the school as late as the following academic year). Our informants noted that the state guarantees the students' equality at school by accepting each child regardless of their and their family's formal or legal status into the free public education system. For these interviewees, the intercultural dimension was not an issue because in their opinion the aim of public schooling – and indeed a worthy and desirable aim in their view – is that foreign students are assimilated into Greek culture and society (I8).

The background of Greek national identity formation and the dominant nationalism discourses still relevant to this day (Triandafyllidou 2007) make for a rather set mono-ethnic understanding of identity and, the dimensions outlined above are fundamental components of the Greek educational system. Consequently, attempts to engage in reforms have to address rather strong institutional and normative resistance to change. This explains why efforts to manage and integrate migration-related diversity in education are essentially understood in fairly assimilationist terms. In the following section we shall critically discuss the use of the term 'inter-cultural'

in education research and policy discourses in Greece as well as how the policies described above are interpreted by policy makers and actors on the ground.

## **5.2 Assessing the methods and tools of intercultural education**

Turning to the methods and tools of intercultural education, our research highlighted the following core issues:

First, mother-tongue learning has been rather restricted so far. The subject of teaching the mother-tongue language or the culture of origin to foreign pupils, has not been considered to be a priority since learning Greek is considered as the key vehicle to integration. Knowledge of the language of their country of residence is fundamental in avoiding social exclusion first of all, and consequently exclusion from the job market or other opportunities for professional and personal development after school. However, in agreement with much of the literature on intercultural education (Paleologou 2004), teachers interviewed supported mother-tongue learning and the development of corresponding instruction material as a valuable learning method. They also note that children who know their mother tongue well have a solid basis for learning quickly and correctly the Greek language as the main language of reference for educational purposes. By contrast, students who have no solid knowledge of any language but rather familiarity with both the language of their parents and the language of the reception society face more difficulties at school.

Second, intercultural education requires acknowledgement of the difference that exists within the immigrant school population. This has not been fully the case in Greece, not least because intercultural education was framed in relation to the needs of returning Greeks. Intercultural education initiatives have until recently ignored the diversity within the linguistic background of the foreign student population and the ensuing linguistic needs in how to learn Greek. Currently there are special requirements that need to be fulfilled for teachers to be transferred to an Intercultural School (including previous experience and training in teaching Greek as a foreign language as well as knowledge of one of the languages of the major immigrant groups, i.e. Albanian or Russian, see Ministry of Education, Decision of 17 November 2003) or to teach in the special Greek language support classes organized within the context of EPEAK (see <http://web.auth.gr/eppas/doc/news/kritiriamoriodotisis.doc> ). Unfortunately, there are neither requirements nor a special selection mechanism for teachers who ask to be transferred to ‘mainstream’ schools with large immigrant pupil percentages.

Third, the intercultural dimension does not yet transcend all aspects of the Greek educational system, nor is it considered relevant by all actors of the educational system. As an example, it is relevant to point to the case of one Director from the prefecture level who was interviewed. He considered a discussion on intercultural education irrelevant to his area since there are no officially designated intercultural schools in his district (I7). Even though he did recognize that many of the schools in his area of responsibility included up to 80 % of pupils of immigrant parents (hence significantly above even the official threshold that is required for a school to be designated intercultural), he considered that intercultural education was not pertinent to the schools in his jurisdiction.

Fourth, individual initiative remains the most important factor and motor of intercultural education in Greece. The private initiative, preparedness to ‘go the extra mile’ outside the scope of their professional duties, investment of personal time and

resources on the part of teachers and school principals was underlined by all parties (by the teachers, the immigrant associations and the students) as the key factor making a difference in the way and extent to which education incorporates an intercultural dimension/intercultural sensitivities. In effect, it was underlined on numerous occasions that the initiative of a teacher and of a school director to: request or insist for assistance from the Ministry for instance to employ bilingual teachers; to receive adequate teaching material; to collaborate closely with the social services to identify whether some immigrant pupils might have learning or other disabilities; to obtain the financial and human resources to set up reception and support classes; to provide a venue within which immigrant associations could informally organize mother-tongue classes for their children; etc, were what made a positive or negative difference (I1, I3, I4, I14 and informal discussions).

As regards teachers and people involved in intercultural education (DG1, DG2, I5), it is necessary to underline that in the sample that we came into contact with during our fieldwork, all demonstrated a very committed effort to make the schools a venue in which immigrant children would not feel as a minority, or excluded. Emphasis is placed on anti-racist messages, equality and learning about each other's country and culture of origin. 'Friendship days' where the traditions, history and culture of various students' country of origin are celebrated are organized, while many classes include projects and presentations based on themes that refer to the history, geography, culture of the students' countries of origin. At the same time, great pride was taken in showing the impressive progress accomplished on the part of immigrant children in their aptitude and speed to learn Greek and to become accustomed with Greek literature, poetry, culture, mythology.

Fifth, the gap that may exist with regard to interculturalism as it is defined in the policy and how it is implemented in practice also has to do with the fact that information does not trickle up from the schools to the Ministry. Bureaucratic hurdles and lack of funds render the situation more challenging. In many cases, Ministry officials appeared to not be aware of challenges faced by teachers and schools regarding the overall integration of immigrant students in the classrooms. For instance, they did not seem to be aware of the difficulties frequently faced by teachers who may have one or two foreign students who speak no Greek in integrating these students into the curriculum and the classroom. In rural areas where there is no easily available support system, or no provisions for reception or tutorial classes or Greek language classes, and no bilingual educational material and textbooks to assist the teaching the difficulties become even more significant. In such instances, the teacher is faced with the following options: tutoring the student individually, either by dedicating his/her free time after or during school; attributing extra attention to the student during class hours at the expense of delaying the rest of the class; or leaving the student to his/her own devices at the risk of socially excluding the student further. At the same time, teachers and staff from the intercultural schools we came into contact with expressed a deep frustration with the long bureaucratic delays, the lack of available resources (in terms of material and textbooks, bilingual teachers, additional staff to run the reception and support classes, etc.), and the frequent lack of interest in supporting their efforts.

Finally, an additional finding that may be discerned from our interviews is that the European dimension in education is largely irrelevant. It appeared to not be an issue for education policy in general because it is considered as integrated within the Greek dimension. In short, the arguments presented can be summarized in that Greece is an EU Member State, Greece's history and civilization is the cradle of European

civilization, Greek and European values are fully compatible. There is limited awareness of EU directives that may affect Greek curricula or the Greek education system with the exception of the Directorate on European Affairs at the Ministry. The main subjects raised in regard to the EU dimension was that Greece was in full compliance with the EU priority of learning at least one foreign language and indeed the emphasis on one or more foreign language classes in schools was underlined; and the student and teacher exchange programmes that encouraged mobility across the EU. There was thus no perception that ‘Europe,’ its internal diversity or the set of values that it represents were posing challenges that required Greece to reassess its educational system. Rather, it was seen as inherent and as a wider framework of cooperation with other EU Member States to support the development of European citizens able to function to an international, increasingly competitive and connected environment.

### **5.3 The meanings and practices of inter-cultural education in Greece**

Greek terminology refers to ‘inter-cultural’ (*διαπολιτισμική diapolitismiki*) and not to ‘multi-cultural’ (*πολυπολιτισμική polypolitismiki*) education. In the Greek academic discourse, intercultural education and interculturalism (*διαπολιτισμική εκπαίδευση, διαπολιτισμικότητα*) are normative concepts. They prescribe a desired state of affairs and a prescriptive approach to the goals of education. By contrast, multiculturalism and multicultural societies (*πολυπολιτισμικότητα, πολυπολιτισμική κοινωνία*) are mainly seen as descriptive terms. They refer to a state of affairs, notably the coexistence of different cultures and ethnic or national groups within one society, where society is understood as a state. Multiculturalism is seen as a dominant feature of late modern societies and is not vested with a value connotation (Damanakis 1997; Markou 1996, Paleologou and Evagelou 2003; Skourtou et al. 2004). An emphasis is placed on intercultural education as an ideological perspective that combats any form of discrimination within the educational process where discrimination may refer to gender, race, religion, distinction between good and bad pupils and generally anything that creates closed categories within the educational practice (Androusou 2000).

The intercultural approach is predicated on dialogue and actual engagement with other individuals and other cultures. In this context, the role of the school is twofold. It is both an arena of intercultural practice and an educational institution that prepares children to live in a multicultural society. The students of the intercultural school get to know one another’s culture and ways of thinking and exchange views and appreciate each other’s specificity. They also learn to live in a society based on mutual communication and understanding of the various groups and communities within it (Bereris 2001, Damanakis 2005). The objective is to support cultural enrichment, increased understanding and tolerance of the ‘other,’ reject racist discrimination and exclusion, and thereby accept society’s multicultural composition (Skourtou et al. 2004; Bereris 2001, Damanakis 2005).

Paleologou and Evagelou (2003: 69-70) note that we need to distinguish between culture and civilisation (in Greek both terms can be referred to with the word *πολιτισμός –politismos*). They define civilisation as a societal system of values while culture is seen as the codified system by which people make sense of the world and orient themselves within it. It is unclear often in the literature on education whether the terms intercultural and multicultural refer to civilizations or cultures. In reality this distinction is blurred in much of the literature as culture (*κουλτούρα –kouloura*) is

taken to mean a relatively stable set of values and mores (i.e. a concept that fits more with what Paleologou and Evagelou define as civilisation) (Bereris 2001; Skourtou et al. 200, for instance).

Indeed in our view the main drawback with the intercultural perspective in education is that it tends to see cultures as closed units that interact. Thus, pupils and teachers are seen as carriers of a specific culture who learn to interact and be open to one another in the intercultural education setting. In other words, the normative aspect of the approach (interculturalism) is predicated on the ontological aspect (that multiculturalism means a multitude of cultures but not a pluralized society) neglecting the fluidity of social reality. Children and teachers need not identify with a specific culture and the content of a specific culture, for instance the Greek or British culture, may be a contested issue. This perspective overlooks the fact that immigrant minorities may demand a stake in the definition of the 'national' culture. They may demand the re-definition of the national culture in ways that incorporate their specificity and the diversity of the multicultural society (see also Modood 1997). This possibility appears to be overlooked in the intercultural education perspective.

Govaris (2001: 77-78) notes that there are three distinct approaches to intercultural education. The first is based on the theory of cultural universalism and seeks to underline the common ground between cultures. The second approach emphasizes cultural relativism and underscores the differences between cultures. The third view is based on an ethics of justice and aims at providing for the conditions for equal social participation in a multicultural society. It is probably only the third variety of intercultural education that responds to the request for redefining the national self in ways that recognise its diversity.

Some of the Greek academics working on intercultural education have had a chance to influence policy making and, according to some of our interviewees (I3, I14) they were the ones who promoted and partly drafted the policy provisions introduced in 1996. The law of 1996 defined intercultural education as an approach that 'embraces all the student groups who are vulnerable to educational exclusion and the indigenous student population' ([www.ipode.gr](http://www.ipode.gr)). The definition of intercultural education presented thus by the Ministry of Education (and IPODE within it) is not assimilationist. It rather 'opens the educational process across all school levels and disciplines in order to integrate difference and specificities as a source of knowledge and personal development' ([www.ipode.gr](http://www.ipode.gr)).

The objectives of intercultural education have been defined as: knowledge, acceptance and respect of diversity; mutual understanding and dialogue between different civilizations; rejection of stereotypes and prejudice; equal and constructive co-existence within a multicultural society. In his recent work (2005), one of the main experts of intercultural education in Greece, Michalis Damanakis has argued that the Ministry of Education has undertaken a series of initiatives since 1996 to address the shortcomings of the educational system in the field of interculturalism, and notably to shift from the notion of 'deficit' to 'difference' and from 'foreigners' education' to 'intercultural education.' He has argued that the Ministry has legislated and financed educational programmes and has encouraged intercultural practices, but that there exists a resistance to these on the part of parents, teachers and educational administrators. This, he has concluded, suggests a paradoxical situation where the Ministry of Education is more forward thinking than society that remains more conservative (2005: 81-82).

Our research suggests a more diversified situation within the Ministry and the educators' community in general. Within the education policy community and within

the Ministry itself and its different levels of policy implementation there are actors and units with very different understandings of intercultural education. We have identified three main ‘philosophies’ of intercultural education among our interviewees.

First a philosophy of *equality before the law*: all children have a right and an obligation to attend compulsory education. This provision, which is included in the Greek Constitution, is implemented without regard to the parents’ legal or undocumented immigrant status. This view is dominant among the policy officials of the Ministry headquarters.

[the main objective is] to integrate them in the education system so that they also have the possibility of equal opportunity to access the education. (...) this is the main objective. To limit school abandonment. (I8)<sup>12</sup>

The needs of life and of society (...) are always varied. Which means that today as citizens, us too, of the EU we see things different. And the needs of education are also larger. Because here we have the human right to education, regardless of gender, nationality, besides the Constitution foresees that and gives the right to all children (...) that all people can take part in Hellenic education regardless of their country of origin, gender or religion. Very important. (...) the experience of a country and the understanding of the problems of one country gives us the opportunity and the possibility to understand what happens in the wider space, in Europe, and perhaps in the entire world, where there are people with the same needs. Education is a, as they all agree, a good, an irreplaceable good. (I8)

Our education is anthropocentric. Its centre is the person, the human factor. (...) [It] has humanist values and it has never separated these children [the foreign children from other children]. Sometimes those [teachers] who are older see things differently. But understanding and tolerance exist in the field of education. Well if we are to look at exceptions... exceptions do not invalidate the rule! (I8)

In this view, intercultural education means that all children have access to the national education system which is assumed to be open to their cultural diversity and special needs because it is based on the principles of human rights, equality, the humanist tradition, liberty of consciousness and freedom of religion (I8, I9). However there is no understanding that such educational principles may need to be revised so as to accommodate, integrate and valorise the cultural and social capital of children of an immigrant background. ‘Hellenic education,’ as an echo of ‘hellenic culture’ which probably makes an implicit reference to the Greek classical culture, is thus seen as a universal framework that can embrace all children and their cultures. There is no understanding in this view that children may themselves be the bearers of a mixed cultural capital, that cultures (and not only life as I8 argues) are in evolution and are not static units and that this universal framework may need some re-adjustment to appraise and integrate non-EU cultural diversity. Moreover, the bottom line of this view is the principles of ‘understanding and tolerance’. In other words, cultural diversity needs to be understood and tolerated, not valued nor should it lead us to reconsider our own conceptions and educational principles.

While this view is theoretically open to cultural and religious diversity (which I8 and I9 argue is clearly enshrined and guaranteed by the Greek Constitution) in

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<sup>12</sup> All excerpts are taken from our interviews and have been translated from Greek into English by the authors of the report.

reality it involves a static view of culture and a very limited notion of intercultural dialogue, only at the level of individuals and within a set framework and context dominated by the 'host' country and its culture.

While several interviewees acknowledge the possibility of children not to attend religion classes (I3, I5, I8, I9) one interviewee (I1) strongly criticises the relevant legal provisions pointing to contradictory provisions in the law and the Constitution:

On one hand [the Constitution] says that there is freedom of religion in our country and on the other hand it says that the prevailing religion is the Christian Orthodox, which means that there is an area of contradictions here, within the legal system and in law 1566. This law that says that education should be based on the genuine elements of the Christian Orthodox tradition at the same time says that children should [learn] to respect all civilisations and the works of all peoples. Within this area of contradictions, any policy can move with great comfort, calling to one or other element. (I1)

This contradiction is also noted by Interviewee I4, who favours the secularization of schooling and the restriction of catechism to religious institutions. Interestingly I4 notes that this so-called freedom of education guaranteed by the Greek Constitution and Greek law in schools is 'no big deal' since it does not answer to any claim of children (or their families), who are of a non-Christian Orthodox religion, it only allows them to be exempted from the religion class. She also notes however that there has been no name-calling reported in Greek schools related to religious belief issues. This passive tolerance of diversity is to be attributed in her view to the 'dignified stance of school teachers'. In our view, this attitude of the teachers finds its roots in a longer tradition of tolerance towards religious minority children in Greek schools such as Jehova witnesses who were otherwise stigmatized in society.

Some of our interviewees (I11, I2, I3) also reported incidents of assimilation where school teachers actively encourage the conversion of children to the Christian Orthodox religion and become their godparents or where children are indirectly encouraged to change their first names into Greek names. One interviewee (I11) reports the christening initiatives as an instance of integration while two interviewees (I2, I3) note that encouraging children to adopt Greek names or become Christian Orthodox is clearly an assimilationist perspective. In line with I11's view of 'integration', interviewees I8 and I9 note that intercultural education involves inviting foreigners – that in this context are clearly labelled as different and alien to the local culture – to "promote their civilisation", an action in which "they may be supported by their parents. That is why we have days, let's say days of Friendship that the school organises" (I8).

The second philosophy of intercultural education identified in our research is sustained mainly by education practitioners. We define education practitioners as those who are involved in the everyday reality of schools as teachers or as heads of districts, notably those who belong to the ground and the intermediate level of education policy implementation. Their views show more *appreciation of intercultural dialogue* but there is an *implicit assimilation perspective* subtly inherent to these views. Their view is that schools should accommodate diversity, be inviting and encouraging towards immigrant children who face important hardship both for being foreigners and for coming from generally a lower socio-economic background than the average Greek student. However, it is implicitly clear for them that if these

immigrant families and their children chose to come to this country, they should adapt to the local reality and the national culture. Their culture and country of origin here becomes less relevant, particularly in the everyday reality.

Within this limited view of intercultural education, there is on the one hand a high support of special measures to cater for the educational needs of foreign pupils not only in the officially designed intercultural schools but also in the mainstream schools that are *de facto* intercultural. On the other hand, intercultural education from this perspective does not involve an opening up of the national culture to cultural and religious diversity. Typically, the participation of foreign pupils in national commemorations is heralded as a sign of integration and of non-discrimination.

Question: the school, through its educational programme but also through other activities like national celebrations teaches some values, these values are....

Answer: The non-Greek mother tongue pupils are among the best in reciting their poems, dancing the Greek traditional dances etc. They participate!! (I6)

I would say that the first thing that [a school does] is to try and confer values for live. For socialization, for integration in the societal whole, so that children learn to live independently, to stand on their own feet, and then to be able to understand the place in which they live, to love the country in which they live, to learn the way of thinking of the country in which they live, so that they can integrate more comfortably or if they wish [that they can] leave, but most importantly to love the country in which they live. To live the country and this takes place only through learning its history, its language, its mentality [only in this way] they will be able to achieve it. How else could they [live the country]? (I5)

The above views are expressed by educators that are actively involved in their daily work in intercultural schools (official or *de facto* ones). These are ground-level or intermediate level educators who organise extra-curricular activities, make all possible efforts to ensure that support and reception classes are adequately staffed, that school counsellors support actively mainstream schools with high percentages of immigrant pupils, that additional educational material is made available to students who need it. In other words, these are the forefront practitioners who support the effective implementation of intercultural education principles. Albeit their view of intercultural exchange, dialogue, recognition and acceptance of diversity is predicated on a mono-cultural understanding of Greek society. Greek society and culture are seen as static and cohesive units that host these foreign elements and the scope of the education system is to embrace, accept them but also gradually assimilate them into its culture, language and mores. There is little interest for the maintenance of the language and culture of origin or for pluralising the classroom through the effective appreciation of different value systems and the recognition that the Greek value system and tradition is also gradually changing and becoming more plural.

A third type of intercultural education understanding was also identified through our empirical research. We consider this approach as one that satisfies the basic features of the concept as this is defined in the relevant academic literature. This understanding is put forward by the specialised educators at the intermediate level of the Ministry and by the secondary education teachers' association. It is worth noting that the specialised educators interviewed have not only a policy but also a research orientation in their training. Their views point to the ideal that characterises the intercultural approach and also an appreciation of what is happening actually in Greek schools.

We try to open up the school, for all. For native students too, these are our objectives. In conferences and workshops, the main statement from which we start is that intercultural education concerns native students too. Now the practice is much more difficult (..) while interaction may help the educational attainment of both foreign and native pupils if in a classroom you have pupils, in elementary or high school, who speak no Greek at all, naturally the emphasis for a time will be on language learning. But the objective should not be to convert them as much as possible into Greeks, from a linguistic and a cultural point of view. Of course I [the educator] can also take elements from these pupils. (I3)

The principles of *intercultural education in this approach involve not only intercultural exchange and knowledge of other cultures but also a reconsideration of the ingroup culture through the interaction with culturally diverse pupils*. The individual and the collective realities of cultural and religious diversity are also acknowledged in this view. As is the fact that not only does the host society culture and tradition change, but also that immigrant children are bearers of mixed cultural influences leading to a new synthesis that incorporates the diversity of society.

In our view, education is still based on the same principles and values. The way in which we shall implement these principles and values have changed. That is notions like equality, differentiation in learning, respect for the personality of the child take a different connotation with the cultural diversification of the school population. (..) because the fact that each child has a different cultural root makes us consider more the cultural diversity within our country, right? (..) the horizon has opened and made us more sensitive to the variety of differences and deviation. Many educators are not prepared for this role because [until recently] there was no course on intercultural or anti racist education, so to speak, in the main education training curricula. So that intensive seminars were necessary to cover some gaps and this is where we played a role to use programmes to train educators and sensitise them (I1)

It is difficult to say [whether immigrant students have special needs]. (...) when we speak of diversified teaching and learning we have to take into account the specificity of the child (..) which is partly determined by his cultural roots but it would be wrong to speak of collective pedagogy that targets a group because within a group, children differ. It is not enough that they have a common cultural root or a common language. Their individual differences sometimes bring them in contrast to their cultural root. (I1)

At the policy level it is obvious that the cultural specificities of the child are not respected and specially his educational capital, that he brings from his country is not valorised in the school context. Nor is his language or his attitudes... it is left to the sensitive education to promote and valorise in the classroom this element [of plurality] rather than leaving the mono cultural curriculum to walk calmly the road of tradition, of Greek tradition. (..) it is necessary to note that the children of migrants do not bring with them exclusively the experience from their parents' country. Most children (..) have a mixed cultural background which does not fit either with their parents' background or with that of the receiving country. This specificity should be taken into account by the education system. (..) besides as long as nationalist views remain dominant and are even reinforced, the position of immigrant children will become more difficult (I1).

This third philosophy of intercultural education among the Greek policy practitioners is the only one that fully conforms with the scholarly definitions of intercultural education and which reconciles interculturalism with multiculturalism in the Greek education policy and reality. Although educators who spoke in favour of this view did not mention the term multiculturalism, it is clear that their view of intercultural education involves the pluralisation of the national identity and recognises the dynamic character of culture. It thus avoids reifying cultures as containers and perceiving intercultural dialogue as the interaction of stable and cohesive units which mutually accept and appreciate one another but which remain closed to mutual influences

## **6. Concluding remarks and policy recommendations**

To conclude, migration and the need to accommodate and respond to the challenges arising from the current diversity within Greek society is fully acknowledged by the Greek authorities. Particularly in the past decade, the institutional and legislative system has incorporated an intercultural dimension in Greek education. However, until recently the provisions mainly consisted of measures relevant for the immigrant school population only, and these measures were part of an implicit assimilationist approach. In more recent years, there has been a persistent pressure on the part of the academic community and educators involved in intercultural education to engage in a wider debate on the subject of intercultural education and to redefine the objectives, methods and approaches of educational policy. From this perspective, the intercultural dimension ought to transcend all aspects, levels and disciplines of the educational system since it is equally relevant for the immigrant and the majority student populations.

Teachers and staff in the field of education underlined that existing practices and provisions for intercultural education are inadequate. Their underlying orientation towards assimilation is being questioned by educators concerned with the longer term needs to integrate foreign and Greek pupils in a multicultural society and a wider multicultural environment. Although there was no mention of overt cases of discrimination, racism and xenophobia in schools, the need to promote initiatives that will facilitate communication between different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups, and **tap into the cultural capital of foreign students** were highlighted as issues requiring the attention of policy makers. In this context, **mother tongue courses and classes on history and culture of country of origin are valuable assets** in intercultural education.

Continued and consistent training and support to educators and teachers in the field of multicultural education is required. As one of our middle rank officials of the Ministry interviewed (I6) noted, there is a need for additional screening of teachers who offer to serve in schools with a high percentage of non Greek mother tongue pupils with a view to ensuring that people with expertise on the subject and/or motivated to tackle the challenge of cultural diversity would be appointed. Another measure proposed by this interviewee that we endorse is a special provision that schools with a high percentage of non-Greek mother tongue pupils are enabled to have smaller classes (about half the size of the standard class size, i.e. 15 instead of 30 students per class). The smaller class-size would facilitate learning as well as class cohesion while making these schools attractive to Greek mother tongue pupils and

their parents, thus also preventing the ghettoisation of some neighbourhood schools in central Athens.

It is necessary to underline that intercultural education is a cross cutting dimension in education that should not be confined to ‘special’ schools. Rather, it is a dimension that ought to transcend the Greek education system from pre-school to secondary education embracing all schools, curricula, school programming, disciplines and materials. Moreover, its objective ought not only be to integrate foreign pupils, but equally to expose majority students to other cultures and thereby substantially engage in an intercultural dialogue and substantive exchange and understanding of diversity and own identity.

In this context, we propose a substantial reform of law 2413/1996 with a view to expand and complement the scope and means of intercultural education in Greece. In particular we propose that

- The meaning and scope of the intercultural dimension in education needs to be clearly stated in a new law.
- We put forward the following definition of intercultural education: *intercultural education involves not only intercultural exchange and knowledge of other cultures but also a reconsideration of the ingroup culture through the integration of culturally diverse pupils into a cohesive societal whole.*
- The new law should also state clearly the measures that need to be taken to implement the intercultural dimension in education.
- In our view such measures include: the continuation of reception and support classes for non Greek mother tongue pupils; the promotion of the teaching of the language and culture of the main countries of origin in optional courses during afternoon hours for all students; further revisions in school curricula and textbooks with a view to acknowledging and celebrating the plural character of Greek society and culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century;
- Curricula and textbooks, especially of history, civic education and geography, should also be checked with a view to eliminating attitudes and interpretations of events that present hierarchies of civilizations or that include – implicitly or explicitly – racist/discriminatory content.

Finally, contrary to what has been common practice so far, intercultural education should be vested with appropriate resources rather than being left to the initiative and conscience (*φιλότημο* - *filotimo*) of teachers and school principals.

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**ANNEXES**

**Annex I: List of interviews**

No.	Function	Organisation	Gender	Date of interview
I1	President of the Centre for Documentation and Study (KETEME)	Association of Secondary Education Teachers (OLME)	M	29 May 2007
I2	Research Associate and Secondary School Teacher	Institute for the Greek Diaspora Education and Intercultural Studies (IPODE)	F	24 May 2007
I3	Director of Research	IPODE	F	24 May 2007
I4	Head of KEDA (Centre for Intercultural Education), and former coordinator of an EPEAK programme	University of Athens	F	25 May 2007
I5	Headmistress	Intercultural Gymnasium of Athens	F	18 June 2007
I6	Head of XX Office of Secondary Education	First Directorate, Athens Region, Ministry of Education	M	6 June 2007
I7	Head of XX Office of Secondary Education	First Directorate, Athens Region, Ministry of Education	M	6 June 2007, not taped
I8	Director of Primary Education department	Ministry of Education	F	5 June 2007
I9	Director of Secondary Education	Ministry of Education	M	5 June 2007

I10	Head of Secondary Education	Ministry of Education	F	5 June 2007
I11	Director of EU Affairs department	Ministry of Education	F	5 June 2007
I12	Professor	University of Thessalonik, EPEAK Programme	F	27 June 2007 (phone interview)
I13	President	Hellenic Forum of Migrants	M	9 May 2007 (not taped)
I14	Expert Counselor	Primary Education, Pedagogical Institute,	M	21 September 2007 (not taped)

**Discussion group: Meeting with teachers, headmasters, researchers and students on intercultural education in Greece**

Venue: First Intercultural Gymnasium of Athens, 20 June 2007.

**Morning session: DG1**

Chairperson: S. V. Georgatsou, director of the Multicultural Education Gymnasium of Athens  
*The role of the educator in the multicultural school*, Z. Papanoum, Professor, Aristotle University of Thessalonike.

*The profile of the Multicultural High-School of Acharnes*, Ch. Karanikos director of the Multicultural Education Gymnasium of Acharnes.

*Reception classes and integration of foreign students: The experience of our School*, M. Veltsista, director of the Multicultural Education Gymnasium of Elliniko

*The efforts for the integration of foreign students in the 45<sup>th</sup> High-School of Athens*, D. Spagopoulou director of the 45<sup>th</sup> Gymnasium of Athens.

*Cultural diversity and Greek education policy*, R. Gropas Researcher, ELIAMEP

*Multicultural Integration*, G. Tsimouris, Assistant Professor, Panteion University

*The instruction of Greek language in the Arsakeio College of Tirana*, Ch. Makridou, substitute Coordinator-Consultant of primary education of the Filekpaideutiki Etaireia.

European Culture, A. Mauroeidi, literature teacher of the 1<sup>st</sup> Tositsio Lyceum of the Filekpaideutiki Etaireia, in Ekali

*The experiences drawn from the effort of training Educators of all sectors in Multicultural Education. A perspective for the formation of the school of Tomorrow*, E. Dafni, Physics teacher

**Afternoon session: DG2**

**The Multicultural liveliness in action. Programs and Participating Activities.**

Coordinator: D. Samiou, literature teacher, Multicultural Education Gymnasium of Athens.

*Reception classes: Instruction of the Greek language, description of the lesson, remarks*, B. Dimopoulou, literature teacher

*History and information technology*, E. Mpourouni, M Tentzeraki

*School Events*, D. Samiou, E. Kontogoula

**Short presentation of the programs of the Multicultural Education Gymnasium of Athens. Informal forms of teaching and evaluation of multicultural activities.**

*The sensitization of educators on the promotion of equality of the two sexes*, A. Gkouti, D. Samiou

*Sea and life*, E. Zapkadi, M. Drimaliti, E. Stamatiadou, M. Tentzeraki

*Art and Natural Sciences*, P. Bokou, G. Aldouchova, M. Vasilakou  
*The tales of the world*, P. Bokou, G. Aldouchova, M. Vasilakou, E. Kontogoula  
*I learn how to get information by exploring the profession I am interested in*, Ch. Aristovoulidou, M. Drimaliti  
*Program of electronic twinning (e-twinning)*, E. Stamatiadou, E. Zarkadi, M. Drimaliti, M. Tentzeraki

**Discussion:** Exchange of knowledge and experience through the everyday educational activity (teaching, programs) in the multicultural school. Open discussion with the participation of teachers-students and scientists with a view to recording experiences.

## **Annex II: Interview guide**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE - POLICY MAKERS, GREECE, EMILIE**

**Final outline: 24 April 2007**

**Outline in English (the guide is also available in Greek, please write to the first author)**

#### **Introduction:**

1. What is your main task in the Ministry/Pedagogical Institute/IPODE?
2. How long have you been in this position and how has your work evolved during this time? What are the main challenges in your work today?

#### **Migration-related cultural diversity:**

3. How would you describe the school population in this country?  
*Prompts:* ethno-cultural composition
4. What are, in your opinion, the main policy measures taken by the state to address the increasing ethnic and cultural diversity in schools today?  
*Prompts:* the presence of Muslim students
5. To what extent have these measures succeeded? What are their major strengths and weaknesses?  
*Prompts:* how to improve the current situation / how to define intercultural education and intercultural schools
6. How do you see schools evolving in the next ten years, with special reference to ethno-cultural and religious diversity?
7. Have the main objectives of education changed in recent years because of the presence of immigrant and co-ethnic returnee students in schools? In what ways?
8. Do immigrant and co-ethnic returnee students have special educational needs and what are these needs in your opinion and how have these been addressed?  
*Prompts:* implementation of Article 72 of 2005 Immigration Law

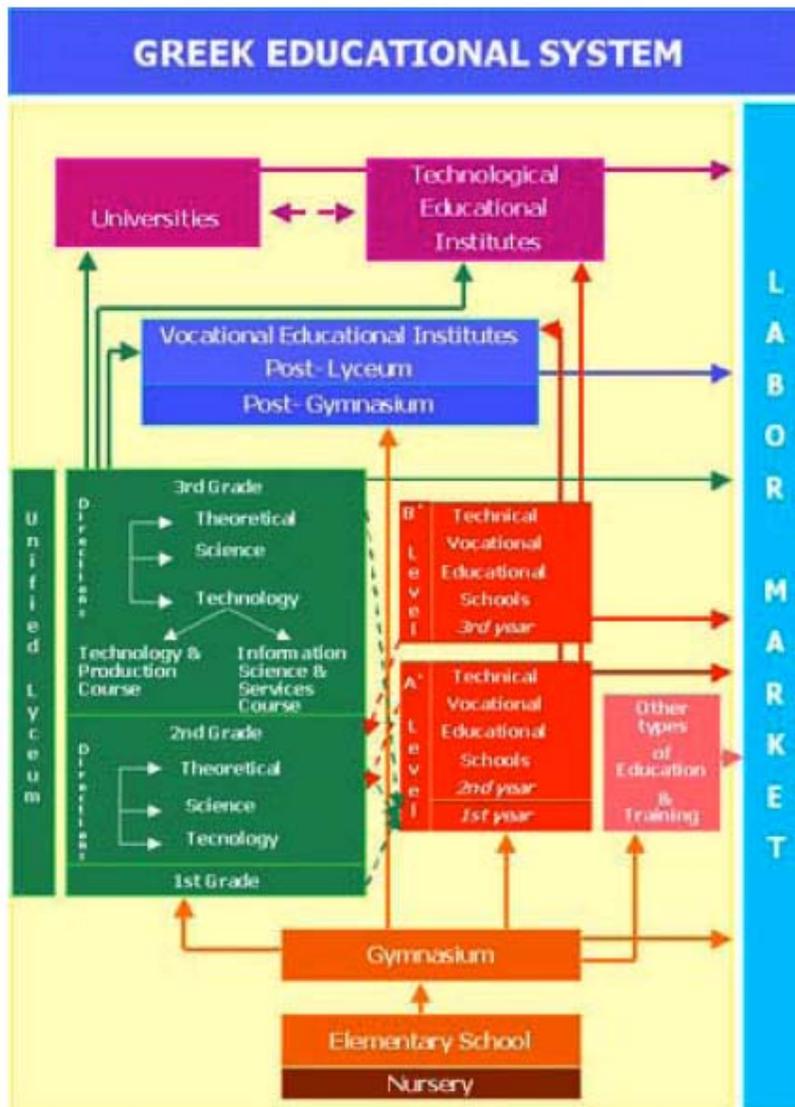
#### **Europe:**

9. How important do you think a European dimension in education is?  
*Prompts:* how to define Europe / European dimension
10. Should schools promote national and/or European values? Can you give me examples of such values that are important in the curriculum?  
*Prompts:* compatibility of these sets of values / how are they taught in schools
11. 'Teaching/education should include both a European and an intercultural dimension'. What do you make of this statement?  
*Prompts:* is this addressed in current curricula / how to address this ideally
12. What do you think about the current attention given to European issues compared with national and/or multicultural issues in the curriculum and textbooks?  
*Prompts:* policy, curriculum strategies if any / are you getting the balance right
13. Which of these three issues/dimensions/identities (i.e. national, multicultural, European) would you say the curriculum should promote and why?  
*Prompts:* in which school subjects / why one or two or all three
14. How should schools respond to the presence of students from diverse (ethno-cultural and religious) backgrounds, European and non-European?  
*Prompts:* strategies you suggest / does it matter where pupils come from

**Civic cohesion and identity:**

15. How do you define citizenship and what sort of citizens do you think schools should aim to create?  
*Prompts:* how to define Greekness / inclusive or exclusive model, multicultural citizenship / has view changed over past decades
16. How can schools today respect cultural and religious diversity among students and at the same time promote a common bond within school and society at large?  
*Prompts:* how problematic are the terms ‘foreigner’ and ‘alien’ / role of religion in schools and education today / role of language learning to create cohesion
17. Is there anything you would like to add to our discussion?

**Annex III: Overview of the Greek Education system**



Source: Dimitrakopoulos 2004: 65