



Network of Education Policy Centers

Divided Education, Divided Citizens?
Citizenship-related Attitudes in Segregated Schools
in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania

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About NEPC

The mission of NEPC is promoting flexible, participatory, evidence-based, transparent education policies reflecting open society values, which mean proactive policy initiatives as well as advocacy and monitoring activities of governments and national education systems.

The Education Policy Centers in the network have addressed the need for independent and information-based policy analysis, advocacy for equity, and effective, sustainable solutions in education policy processes.

NEPC currently has **23 institutional members in 20 countries** and 6 individual members.

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Executive Summary

The Network of Education Policy Centres (NEPC) conducted an international comparative study about citizenship-related attitudes among students and teachers in countries where ethnic minorities are educated in separate schools. The study was conducted in 4 EU countries – Estonia, Latvia, Romania and Slovakia.¹

The results of the study reveal a number of problems with citizenship attitudes in schools in all of the above countries.

In mainstream (majority) schools, a substantial part of fifteen-year-old students believe that participation of minority representatives in government is bad. In Slovakia, as many as 41% of students believe that participation of Hungarians in government is bad. Majority school students often see history curriculum as a source of legitimacy for limiting the role of minority in today's politics.

On the other hand, teachers in minority schools in 3 EU countries included in the study believe that national curriculum includes visible ethnic stereotypes (as many as 77% of minority school teachers in Estonia and 60% of minority school teachers in Latvia think so). Minority school teachers think that especially History curriculum is not fair towards ethnic minorities. As a result of resentment towards official curriculum, teachers in minority schools often resort to a 'secret' or 'hidden' curriculum (about 56% of teachers in Latvia reported that they use textbooks from Russia).

Survey data also shows that minority school students in Estonia and Latvia tend to feel less politically empowered than majority students: they do not believe that their actions can influence government policy. Teachers in Russian minority schools in both countries share the same attitude of political disenfranchisement.

There is a need to reconsider the ways in which state schools in Eastern and Central Europe teach young citizens about participation and living together with the others in a democratic society. Minority school teachers and students in particular feel disenfranchised and demonstrate distrust towards official national curriculum, believing that it contains ethnic stereotypes. The findings show that students in schools for ethnic minorities in several EU countries may stand a greater risk of 'citizenship deficit' due to an education situation that does not give them confidence in equal and effective political participation in their countries.

European Institutions can remedy this situation through actions promoting youth participation, by including specific measures targeting 1) the promotion of a more equitable understanding of citizenship in education and 2) civic empowerment of youth in ethnic minority schools.

¹ Technical parameters of the study are described in Appendix 2. Non-EU countries covered in the study (not included in this Policy Brief) are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The summary report on the international study including data from all countries can be found at <http://www.edupolicy.net/images/doc/dedc/dedcinternationalreport.pdf>

Introduction: The status of minority schools in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania

The system of separate schooling of major ethnic/linguistic groups in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania is a historic phenomenon. Nevertheless, in the 1990s the paradigm within which minority schools exist in these countries has been changed to reflect the recommendations of international organizations concerned with the situation of ethnic minorities in Eastern Europe. Minority schools are seen by governments and policy makers as symbols of state support for the preservation of minority languages and cultural identity in accordance with international agreements, especially Framework Convention on National (see e.g. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, 2010).

In Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania, students in ethnic minority schools study according to the same curriculum as their peers in mainstream (ethnic majority) schools. According to education policy makers and national policy documents, the only difference between majority and minority schools is the language of instruction and the presence of curriculum subjects linked to ethnic/ cultural identity. In Latvia, instruction in minority language is limited to 40% in secondary schools, and is offered in schools catering to the ethnic minority communities.

The choice of minority school is not imposed by the state on minority students. The degree to which minority students are concentrated in ethnic minority schools differs from country to country – however, assessment of available data on national school systems shows that the majority of school-age students from biggest ethnic minorities in each country attend ethnic minority schools.

In all of the four countries, special support (in-service training) is available to teachers from minority schools. In Slovakia, there are special regulations allowing minority schools to receive funding with a smaller number of students than would be permissible for mainstream schools. It can be said that government education policy in all four countries supports the continued existence of separate schools for minorities.

The Findings I: Lack of openness towards ethnic minorities among part of students of mainstream (majority) schools

Focus groups with fifteen-year-old students and a survey of teachers and students conducted by Network of Education Policy Centres in 2008 demonstrate that students in mainstream (majority) schools often express intolerance and distrust towards ethnic minorities in their country and part of students do not support equal political participation of minorities.

A substantial part of students in majority schools believe that participation of minority representatives in government is bad: 26% of students in Estonian majority schools in Estonia and as many as 41% of students in Slovak schools in Slovakia think that participation of members of the largest ethnic minority in their country in government is bad (see Appendix 1, Figure 1).

Students in ethnic majority schools often see history curriculum as a source of legitimacy for limiting the presence of minority in today's politics and society:

"We learn that we were oppressed by Hungarians during the age of the Hungarian/ Habsburg monarchy. It means we were oppressed by Hungarians, who are a national minority in Slovakia today. And I think they want to oppress us again." (student, Slovak majority school, Slovakia)

"I don't know if they (Hungarians) have done something for the history of Romania. I don't know if there is something like this in the textbook." (student, Romanian majority school, Romania)

"They (Hungarians) did nothing related to our history. If they did, they would have deserved to be there. Or maybe they did something, but that was not important." (student, Romanian majority school, Romania)

"There should be less information about them (Russians) in history textbooks. It is the history of Latvia, this means, it is the history of Latvians."(student, Latvian majority school, Latvia).

Findings II: Ethnic minority school teachers believe that national curriculum is biased and contains ethnic stereotypes

During the survey, the teachers of majority and minority schools were asked to assess the presence of ethnic stereotypes in the curriculum in general, and the fairness of representation of minority and majority groups in History curriculum in particular. In Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia, more than 50% of minority school teachers perceive ethnic stereotypes in the way major ethnic groups are represented in the textbooks (see Appendix 1, Figure 2). In mainstream (majority) schools, the percentage of teachers who have the same opinion is significantly lower.

History curriculum, in particular, is a battlefield of ethnic political claims in all 4 countries. While for Romania only focus group data are available, in the 3 EU countries where the questionnaire survey was conducted (Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia) the survey answers demonstrate that History curriculum has a serious ethnically polarizing potential. Minority school teachers do not see History curriculum as fair towards all ethnic groups.

In Slovakia, only about 6% of teachers in Hungarian minority schools believe that the representation of Slovaks and Hungarians in History textbooks is balanced and fair. In Estonia and Latvia, teachers working in Russian minority schools also believe that ethnic groups are not represented equitably in History textbooks: only 12% of teachers in 'Russian' schools in Estonia and 5% of their colleagues in Latvia agree with the statement 'The representation of minority (translated as 'Russian speakers') and majority (translated as 'Estonians' or 'Latvians') in History textbooks is balanced and fair'.

These data should be seen in the context of recent attempts by policy-makers to enhance the 'loyalty' of ethnic minority students by strengthening the emphasis on the nation-state narrative in history teaching and by passing binding legislation regarding expressions of patriotism in schools. In 2010, political actions aimed at imposing nationalist agenda on the school continue in Latvia and Slovakia: in Latvia, the Minister of Education has declared that history of Latvia will be taught separately from world history from September 2010; in Slovakia, the Law on Patriotism, passed in 2010, foresees a special role for schools in imposing a unified vision of Slovak history and statehood.

As a result of resentment towards official curriculum, teachers in minority schools often resort to 'hidden' curriculum, using textbooks from the country of ethnic minority origin. About 56% of minority school teachers in Latvia and 40 % of minority school teachers in Estonia reported that they use textbooks from Russia. In Slovakia, about 77% of teachers in Hungarian minority schools use textbooks from Hungary. Teachers also tell their students that the official History curriculum does not represent the role of their minority objectively: about 42% of students in Russian minority schools in Estonia and 48% of students in Hungarian minority schools in Slovakia have said that their teachers make such statements.

Findings III: Students and teachers in ethnic minority schools in Estonia and Latvia share a sense of political disenfranchisement

Survey results in Estonia and Latvia show that students and teachers in Russian minority schools tend to feel less politically empowered than students and teachers in mainstream (ethnic majority) schools. When asked whether they agree with the statement 'My participation cannot change anything in the policies of the government', students in Russian minority schools in Estonia are about twice more likely to agree than their peers in Estonian majority schools. The students' sense of disenfranchisement (powerlessness to influence political life of the country) is similar to the teachers' attitude: also teachers in Russian minority schools in Latvia and Estonia feel much less politically empowered than their colleagues in majority schools (see Appendix 1, Figure 4).

Conclusions

By adopting common objectives for youth participation, EU Member States have committed to increase the participation by young people in the civic life of their community and in the system of representative democracy. The EU White Paper on Youth (2001) speaks of ‘the widening gap between young people and public affairs at national, European and international levels, with the attendant risk of a “citizenship deficit”’. The findings of the study conducted by Network of Education Policy Centres show that students in schools for ethnic minorities in several EU countries may stand a greater risk of ‘citizenship deficit’ due to a climate of intolerance and an education situation that does not give them confidence in equal and effective political participation in their countries.

While many students in mainstream (majority) schools show intolerant attitudes towards equal political participation of minorities in their countries, students in minority schools feel disenfranchised (less politically empowered) than their peers in majority schools. The sense of political inequality is particularly strong among minority school students and teachers in Estonia and Latvia.

History curriculum in all four countries plays a divisive role. While some students in mainstream (majority) schools see history as a basis for excluding the minority from equal political participation, teachers in ethnic minority schools believe that history curriculum is unfair towards the minority.

A segregated school system, seen as a guarantee of preserving minority identity in the 4 EU countries included in this study, fails to build bridges between young people of different ethnic communities and to foster democratic citizenship attitudes in an open and enabling educational environment free of ethnic prejudices. The citizenship-related attitudes revealed by the study differ vastly from the principles espoused by the EU in its citizenship and youth participation policy and by the Council of Europe in its policies on education for democratic citizenship (EDC).

Recommendations:

For the European Commission

Common objectives for youth participation adopted by EU Member States imply that participation by young people in the civic life of their community and in the system of representative democracy has to be increased. In order to overcome the negative tendencies of ethnic prejudice, isolation and disenfranchisement in ethnic minority schools, it is necessary to adopt special measures targeting the promotion of a more equitable understanding of citizenship in education in EU Member states.

- **By adopting specific measures targeting the promotion of an equitable understanding of citizenship rooted in intercultural dialogue in school environment, European Commission can assist member States to overcome the negative effects of school segregation on EU citizenship.**
- **Special target measures are needed to promote civic empowerment of youth in schools where many students of minority and migrant background are concentrated.**

For the Council of Europe

According to the Council of Europe Recommendation Rec (2002) 12 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on education for democratic citizenship (EDC), 'paying particular attention to the acquisition of the attitudes necessary for life in multicultural societies' is crucial for the general aims of education for democratic citizenship.

School linking projects, centred on democratic Education and democratic school governance, could reduce the risk of isolation and disenfranchisement among students and teachers and could enable cooperation between schools of ethnic majority and minority. Joint activities for students and teachers of ethnic majority and minority schools based in the same local community can help to overcome ethnic prejudices.

- **There is a need to promote school linking projects and joint trainings on democratic school governance for teachers and students of majority and minority schools.**

The teaching of separate subjects, such as History, cannot be taken out of the general context of education policy and should not work against the goals of education for democratic citizenship. History teaching in Europe, including the four countries included in this policy brief, should not produce resentment and sense of unfairness among minority students and teachers. Rather than impose a sense of historical justice espoused by ethnic majority, the teaching of history should enhance democratic values and support equal citizenship and intercultural dialogue.

- **There is a need to assist the member states to adopt a more open and democratic approach to curriculum development (including History curriculum development) in line with EDC principles, involving teachers and experts from majority and minority communities.**

In view of the alarming tendencies revealed by this study, it would also be appropriate for Directorate General of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport to undertake special monitoring of implementation of EDC/HRE principles in schools in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia and Romania.

Appendix 1

Charts and tables

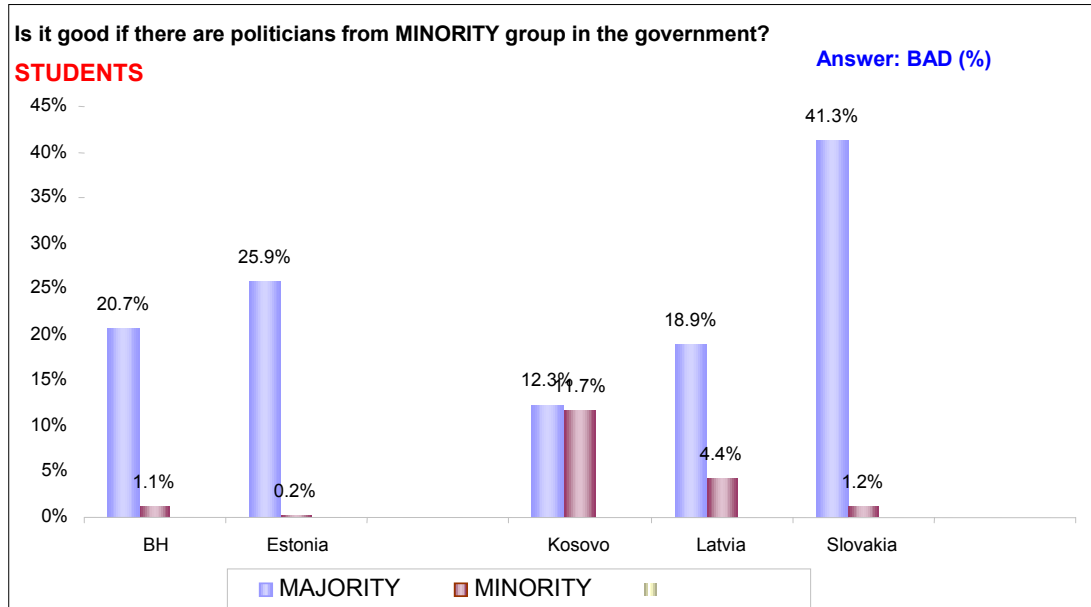


Figure 1 Percentage of students in mainstream (majority) and minority schools who believe that participation of ethnic minority politicians in government is bad. For the sake of comparative context, data from Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia is presented next to data from post-conflict countries of the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo).

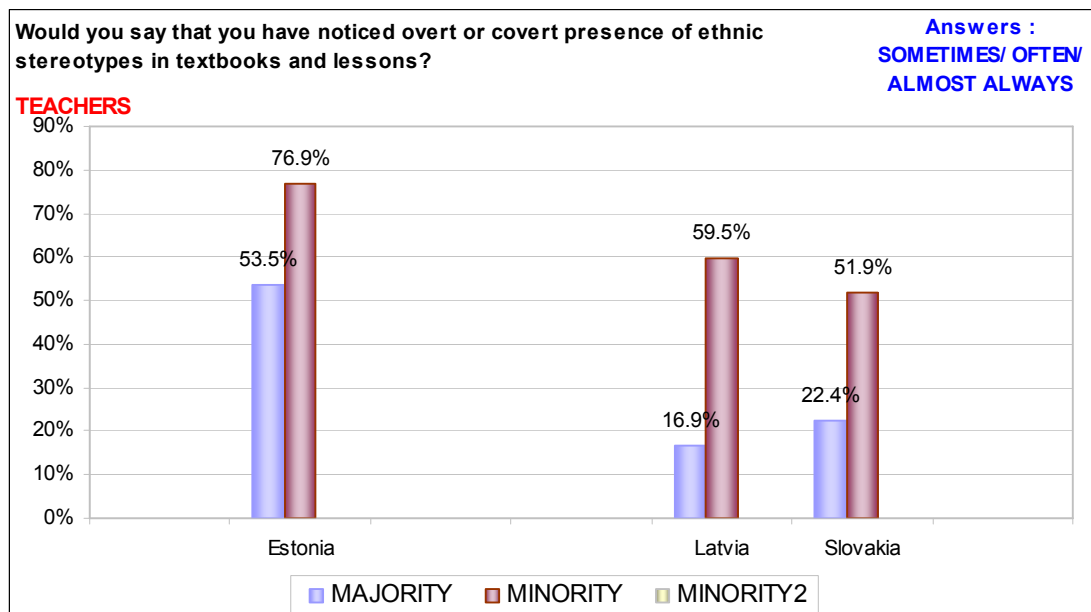


Figure 2 Percentage of teachers in mainstream (majority) and minority schools who say they have noticed the presence of ethnic stereotypes in textbooks and curriculum.

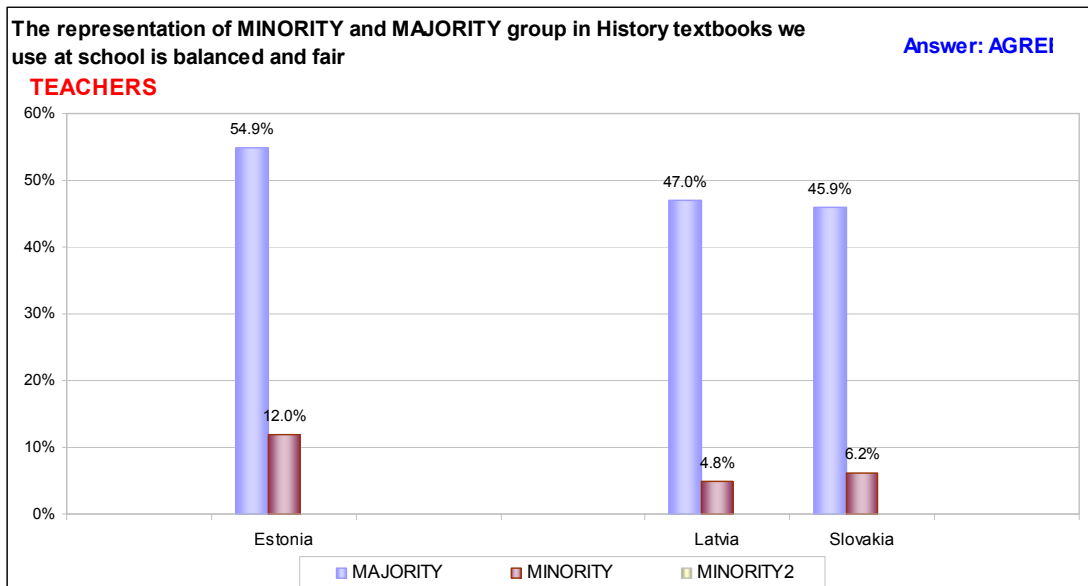


Figure 3 Percentage of teachers in mainstream (majority) and minority schools who believe that the representation of majority and minority ethnic groups in History textbooks is balanced and fair.

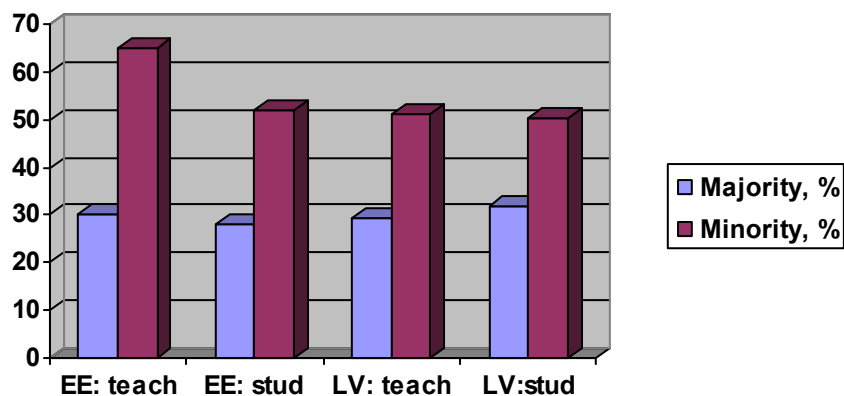


Figure 4: Percentage of teachers and students in Estonia and Latvia who agree with the statement 'My participation cannot change anything in the policies of the government'

Appendix 2

Technical parameters of the study

The study was conducted in 2008 and 2009 and included three stages: a preliminary analysis of government policies regarding citizenship education and the status of separate schools for ethnic/ linguistic minorities; interviews with policy makers and focus groups with teachers and students; questionnaire survey in schools. In Romania, only interviews and focus groups were conducted (Ministry of Education forbade questionnaire survey in schools). A representative survey of teachers and students was conducted in schools in Estonia, Latvia, and Slovakia.

The focus groups

The survey included schools with both ethnic majority (Estonian, Latvian, and Slovak) and minority (Russian, Russian, and Hungarian, respectively) languages of instruction. Schools were representatively sampled. Estonia was represented by 26 majority (433 students, 144 teachers) and 19 minority (402 students, 108 teachers) schools sampled in all major geographical areas, Latvia by 18 majority (402 students, 183 teachers) and 19 minority (501 students, 126 teachers) schools in all major geographical areas, and Slovakia by 12 majority (305 students, 98 teachers) and 19 minority (345 students, 129 teachers) schools in areas of the country where majority and/ or minority schools could be commonly found. Both students and teachers were surveyed. The students were ninth graders (on average 15 years old), the ninth grade being the last year of compulsory education in all three countries (and thus representing the last year of school where the results of civil enculturation of almost entire student body of respective year can be sampled).