

## Minority languages in Europe: Problems of Albanian as the second official language in North Macedonia

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### ABSTRACT

This study aimed at analyzing the status of Albanian as the second official language in North Macedonia, by firstly giving an overview of the language policy in the European Union (EU), its approach to multilingualism, stressing out the idea that a similar multilingual policy can be used as a model by other European countries. The study analysed the current situation regarding the use and application of the Albanian language in North Macedonia, by analyzing the law on languages and some issues regarding Albanian as the language of instruction. Qualitative methods were used for the aims of this study. The data was collected through document analysis for analyzing how the EU deals with multilingual issues; identify arising issues due to the use of Albanian as the second official language in North Macedonia and through semi-structured interviews with Albanian teachers from various schools to investigate their perceptions of the status of Albanian and about problems they face in their work routine. Teachers were posed five interview questions. After evaluating the data, some important issues were identified such as the need for further improvement to the law on languages, the need for opening more Albanian schools, and the need for continuous training for teachers.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate and use a language is one of the specifics that distinguish human beings. Every language manifests this universal capacity of humans, and linguistic diversity is a testimony of the world wealth expressed by the languages. This means that every language has its unique features, which play a significant role in the national and international identification of a society. When people use language, apart from communicating, they also establish relationships. Moreover, “languages are one of the traits that define a community, expressing and reinforcing their cultural identity. As vehicles of communication and complicity, they allow for contact and exchanges with other tongues and communities by strengthening cohesion within a community as well as contacts with other languages” [1]. However, although the function of languages is the same for all societies, their usage varies by domain. For various political or social reasons, there are languages that have a wider use, even at the international level, lingua franca, as there are other smaller languages that have a more limited use, national level, or languages protected by the state as official languages. Regardless of the oblique use of languages, we must emphasize that every language must enjoy the same status and prestige, be it lingua franca, regional or minority languages.

Based on the principle that each language is unique and has its features and characteristics, the European Union (EU) sees the use of languages, from the perspective of a particular policy [2]. This perspective indicates “a heightened awareness on the part of the European Commission of the increasing importance of the multilingual challenge for the European project” [3]. By considering multilingualism as one of the most distinctive features of the EU implying the harmonious co-existence and usage of official languages being spoken in EU member states, the EU recognizes the status of all languages spoken within the European territory. Moreover, for the EU multilingualism “is not only an expression of the EU countries’ cultural identities but it also helps preserve democracy, transparency and accountability” [4], which makes EU language policy even more comprehensive.

It is to be emphasized that since the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the EU has been continuously promoting the use of national languages and language learning among individuals, knowing that linguistic diversity is one of the cornerstones that constitute EU values. As noted, in the EU educational policy, the language policy is foreseen as highly inclusive promoting language learning from regional or minority languages to major languages. Moreover, the learning of foreign languages is no longer simply regarded as being beneficial to the individual citizen, but as being of special importance for the aims of economic growth and social cohesion [3].

It is a fact that the EU already enjoys multilingual unity and that the idea of learning languages from everyone residing within the EU it is for the most part of Europeans a reality. The Europeans and their Languages Eurobarometer Report [5] showed that 54% of Europeans were able to hold a conversation in a second language. This could be considered an advantage because knowing other languages make it easier to adapt in multilingual entities. However, although the EU is a model of the coexistence of many languages, and their official use, language conflicts still exist, especially due to the dominance of English not only in Europe, but also across the globe [6], which makes other languages less used and of a second importance.

Taking into consideration the language strategy plan of the EU where the emphasis is placed on each country language official use and implementation within the EU, there must be considered that in Europe there are other languages, spoken in certain territories, for which, if the principle that each language enjoys the same status and its used likewise, because it conveys the identity and values of a nation, they should thus enjoy their legitimate status within each territory where they are spoken. One such case is the Albanian language spoken in North Macedonia, now known as the second official language after the adoption of the law on the language in North Macedonia in 2019. This law defines the use of the Albanian language at the central and local level, respectively in all institutions of the legal system in Northern Macedonia. Also, the law determines it as a means of communication between citizens in administrative bodies, respectively by providing them the right to use it as an official language [7].

However, despite the positive results brought by the adoption of such a law, its implementation in practice presents problems. Even though there are several articles where this problem is discussed, it is mostly analyzed politically rather than in a linguistic/pedagogical perspective. Thus, the article is to analyze the problem in a different approach, by also presenting teachers’ views on the use of Albanian as the language of instruction in some pre-university institutions and the problems they face in their work routine.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

If the main function of language is related to communication, language is often considered as an indicator of a nation’s identity, as an expression of a country’s ethnic features or culture [8], [9]. Through language people build relationships and thus create a sense of community. Language, being culturally transmitting, carries special values for a certain society. It is not simply the sum of its constituent parts, but it is history, tradition, customs, and heritage. As such, language emerges as a spiritual, emotional, and cultural issue, through which generations transmit to future generations the values and traditions of a nation, causing its culture to continue to exist. EU gives particular importance to the issue of linguistic diversity.

The Council of Europe’s activities to promote linguistic diversity and language learning are carried out within the framework of the European Cultural Convention (1954). The Language Policy Program (Strasbourg) with the European Centre for Modern Languages and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages together “provide a common approach within the framework of the Council of Europe for dealing with language issues” [10]. The language policy program deals with developing policies and guidelines to promote linguistic diversity, also paying special attention to the languages of migrants and schooling. The European Centre for Modern Languages “encourages excellence and innovation in language teaching and to support its member states in the implementation of effective language education policies” [11]. While The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages [12] ensures the protection and promotion of languages used by minorities.

Although there are a lot of protection mechanisms for languages and for promoting multilingualism, the recent years have brought significant challenges to the European Union, especially in the relationship between European institutions and its citizens [13]. Recently, the EU has been focused on the further development and promotion of cultural diversity, as the only way to advance and make progress in its policies regarding multilingualism. Research suggests that both individuals and states benefit from multilingualism [14], [15]. Infants, when exposed to more languages are more open to learn other languages, than when they are exposed to monolingual settings [16]. The same occurs with adult learners. When they are exposed in the early childhood in multilingual environments, they acquire the ability to learn the grammar of a second language despite their age [17]. Meanwhile, positive policies of multilingualism can significantly improve the lives of citizens within a heterogeneous language territory.

The language situation in Europe (and beyond) is automatically moving towards multilingualism, especially given that a whole group of immigrants move freely around Europe, and they carry and transmit their language, culture and customs. Therefore, those states that fear the use of more than one language within their territory (especially in cases where there are national minorities in significant numbers within that state), should consider that being multilingual is the new norm. Researchers consider that being multilingual is a valuable advantage in today's global society [18]–[24] and that multilingualism has now evolved into a phenomenon of vital importance in terms of its role and impact on human civilization, as it is necessary for modern society's progress and survival [25]. Therefore, states not only should accept this new norm, but they should also find ways on promoting multilingualism.

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

Qualitative methods were used for the aims of this study. The data was collected through document analysis (legislation, strategies, regulations) for analyzing how the EU deals with multilingual issues; identifying issues arising due to the use of Albanian as the second official language in North Macedonia and through semi-structured interviews with Albanian teachers from various schools in North Macedonia for identifying their perceptions of the status of Albanian. The authors chose to interview only teachers (who teach Albanian language), as they are in close contact with the problems of Albanian schools in North Macedonia, as well as they are aware of the difficulties faced by Albanian students regarding learning in their mother tongue, as well as with the problems faced by the Albanian community for the preservation of their national identity. The authors focused only on interviews with teachers, also due to the fact that the status of the Albanian language in North Macedonia is not like that of a second official language [26], due to political problems in the country, but also because, according to the data from the Language Implementation Agency, (which is an institution under the Macedonian Government that deals with the implementation of the Albanian language in official institutions) no official document is signed in two languages (Macedonian and Albanian) by the part of the government of North Macedonia, so interviews with officials were intentionally avoided, for not politicizing the study.

Teachers were posed five interview questions, related to the law on languages, to the status of Albanian language in North Macedonia, to the importance for the Albanian students to get instruction in their mother tongue, to the problems Albanian teachers face in their school routine and the need for their continuous training and to the pressure and the neglect they might face from the part of Macedonian government. During the administration of the interview process, data collectors explained its purpose, and answered questions from the interviewees to better clarify all questions. The interviews were conducted during April 2022 in the premises of Language Implementation Agency, which is the Agency in charge of implementation of Albanian language in public institutions in North Macedonia. The interview questions were focused mainly on problems concerning teachers who teach in Albanian schools and in mixed schools (with Macedonian and Albanian students). The interviews were conducted in four days. The data are analyzed thematically and the analysis follows the order of the interview questions.

The sample includes 21 teachers from various Albanian schools in Skopje, in North Macedonia. There were 10 teachers of primary education and 11 high school teachers, while 20 of 21 were female respondents. The selection was made with the help of the officers who work at the Language Implementation Agency, who identified schools with Albanian students only, and mixed schools with both Albanian and Macedonian students. Experienced teachers were selected in both cases to discuss the status of the Albanian language before and after the adoption of the law on languages in 2019 and to shed light on the problems faced by the Albanian community in North Macedonia. There were 10 of the teachers were selected from six primary schools, with whom were discussed problems related to learning in mother tongue and the benefits to children of being educated in their native language. Another 11 teachers were selected from four secondary schools, with the aim of analyzing the status of the Albanian language in North Macedonia at all educational levels.

There may be some possible limitations in this study. These include using in-depth interviews only with teachers from schools in Skopje, which hampers the ability to generalize the data. Future studies carried out by us or other researchers can include more data even from schools in other towns in North Macedonia, where the Albanian community live, in order to have a broader perspective of the current situation of the Albanian language issues.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. The European Union approach to multilingualism

Languages are considered an asset to the European Union, as they are seen as an integral part of European identity, but also as a means of expressing the culture of nations, of economic development and growth. Multilingualism is at the heart of the European project and is envisaged as an important element in Europe's competitiveness. The principle that the EU is in favor of linguistic diversity is included in the EU charter for fundamental rights (article 22) [27], where it is stated that the Union shall respect cultural, religious and linguistic diversity" and prohibits discrimination on grounds of language (article 21) and in the treaty of European Union [28]. Language policy is the responsibility of EU member states, which should promote language diversity and encourage the implementation of a multilingual policy, with an emphasis on learning at least two languages in addition to the mother tongue [29]. The promotion of multilingualism and language education can also be considered as a democratic tool that contributes to the active participation of citizens in an intergovernmental forum such as the EU.

The range of languages spoken in the EU, considered as one of the most institutionally multilingual policies in the world [30], is not confined to the 24 national or official languages used in each of the 28 EU member states and recognized as official languages of the EU. In fact, there are over 60 indigenous, regional or minority languages being spoken, which enjoy an equal status. However, it is to be noted that among these languages there are some of them that "enjoy a higher standard" (English, French, and German), because of the fact that they are the procedural languages of the European Commission, and because they "are the languages of the strongest economies" [31].

In the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, it is clearly stipulated the protection and promotion of languages used by traditional minorities, which constitutes Council of Europe's commitment to the protection of national minorities, their heritage, culture, and language, which contribute at the same time for building of a Europe based on democracy and cultural diversity. Both these two important documents, together with international agreements in the field of human rights which, although not binding on the signatory states, advise the drafting of specific laws, where the focus should be to improve the legal framework and policies for protection of minorities. These policies should start with the protection of the language, as one of the most valuable resources through which the culture and traditions of a country are transmitted. If language is not preserved, a language dies out and future generations will lose connections with their roots. Therefore, policies to promote bi- and multilingualism are essential, especially for small languages, which are under the pressure of native languages (usually the first official language, which has a larger number of speakers) and are vulnerable to necessary language conservation policies.

### 4.2. The legal status of Albanian as the second official language in North Macedonia

In determining which languages are considered regional or minority languages, in the European Charter for Regional Languages one of the criteria relates to the number of speakers within a given territory of a state, which must be smaller than the rest of the population [32]. Such a criterion for certain languages may pave the way for arbitrary interpretations of a particular state. Such is the case of the Albanian language spoken in North Macedonia. Macedonian and Albanian are languages related to certain territories, but due to the smaller number of speakers (25.1%) Albanian is considered a minority language (compared to 66.5% of speakers who speak Macedonian). Memushaj stated that the numerical criterion cannot always be a determining criterion whether a language will be considered or not as a minority language [32]. According to the study, neither the UN Declaration, nor the Framework Convention, nor the European Charter set a satisfactory threshold for regional or national minority languages. This has led to the fact that the Albanian language in North Macedonia still has not been granted the status of the second official language, bringing up issues in implementing this law in practice.

Linguistic communities, however pure and unitary they may seem, are often bilingual or multilingual. The geographical position of a country directly affects the "distortion" of pure linguistic communities, due to the constant contact of the language with neighboring languages. Thus, the Albanian people for centuries reside on the Adriatic and Ionian coasts (near the Greeks and Romans, the Montenegrins in the north and northeast, and the Macedonians in the east), this close contact with these linguistic

communities would determine the historical destinies of its language and culture. However, with the creation of large Balkan states would come many disparities between ethnic and linguistic borders, leaving a large part of the Albanian population remaining in neighboring foreign countries, as it is the case of the Albanians residing in North Macedonia. In this community it is observed that Albanian is one of the communication languages which as a language is close to another language i.e., Macedonian. We can consider Albanian the first language (L1) and Macedonian second language (L2). Nevertheless, the Albanian language for this community enjoys a different status from the one it enjoys in Albania, even though in 2019 Albanian became the second official language in North Macedonia. Despite the positive achievements obtained by the adoption of the law on languages in North Macedonia, some issues are encountered in its implementation. Some of these limitations derive from the fact that, referring to this law, the linguistic rights are granted only where Albanians are not less than 20% in local government.

Unfortunately, despite the amendments to the Constitution, the Albanian language in the Republic of North Macedonia is not yet at a constitutional category, meaning that the government should review the content of the law on languages, and extend its implementation without deciding numerical restrictions as in the current law. As a country aiming for EU membership, North Macedonia should pay special attention to the issue of the Albanian language spoken within its territory. The promotion of linguistic diversity is at the core of the European project and as such should be considered by all countries aspiring to integrate into the EU, to comply with the European legislation.

Linguistic and cultural diversity is enshrined in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights, adopted by EU leaders in 2000. It covers not only the 24 official EU languages, but also many regional and minority languages spoken in segments of its population. There are still many cases in the region where there is a rejection of multilingualism, as there are cases when the minority languages are not considered as official ones. The resolution of the European Parliament (February 2018), on protection and non-discrimination concerning minorities in the EU Member States, states that the Member States should ensure that people enjoy the right to use a minority language, by also protecting the linguistic diversity within the Union. It advocates respect of linguistic rights in communities where there is more than one official language, and calls on the Commission to strengthen the promotion of the teaching and use of regional and minority languages [2]. This means that candidate countries for integration into the EU must not only respect the linguistic rights of communities, but must also promote the use of minority languages as a way to preserve their culture and identity which without language are destined to be lost. Because, when a language is lost a culture is lost too. This is the reason why in the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages it is stated that “special attention must be given to those minority languages that struggle to survive and need more support” (as in the case of Albanian language spoken in North Macedonia).

It is therefore important that governments and all other actors whose mission is to preserve the mother tongue, especially when its use is threatened by an assimilation policy, to properly address the issues related to the use of language in the way that speakers of a given language manage to enjoy a fundamental right: the right to language. The official use of the Albanian language in the Republic of North Macedonia, in addition to being considered as a fundamental right that should be enjoyed by all Albanians living there, it is also an obligation for both Albanians and Macedonians. Murati [33] stated that “North Macedonia is the country with the largest wealth of languages in Europe, but with the most underdeveloped linguistic democracy in Europe.” This means that the Macedonian state has treated the Albanian language with the status of a minority language (despite the fact that Albanians make up 25.1% of the population according to the 2002 census) and has always experimented with constitutional frameworks with their language rights, at a time when North Macedonia is not a homogeneous state union and as such cannot automatically represent the nation as a whole.

Sociologists and sociolinguists elaborate that those communities where 85% of the population speak a single mother tongue and when there is no significant linguistic minority, are deemed to be homogeneous. On the contrary, those state communities in which the remaining 15% include a significant linguistic minority are heterogeneous [34]. From this point of view, North Macedonia is included in the group of multi-ethnic states, linguistically heterogeneous (64.2% of its citizens are Macedonians), while Albanians exceed the threshold of 15%, constituting 25.1% of the population of this country in 2002 [35].

Memushaj [32] goes even further stating that “the status of the Albanians in North Macedonia (consequently the Albanian language) cannot be considered as that of a national minority”. This is because the Albanian population in North Macedonia is significant compared to other Turkish, Bosnian, Serbian, Aromanian and Roma populations. However, the Law on Languages of North Macedonia provides for an equal status of these languages, introducing them in the framework of regional languages, i.e., treating them as equal even though they are not numerically.

The use of the Albanian language as an official language, not only must be respected as a constitutional right, but further work must be done to explicitly define the Albanian language as an official language in North Macedonia, extending throughout the territory. At the moment, although Albanian has a

more advanced status compared to the past, it is still put in an unequal position with Macedonian. The final solution of this obstacle which is caused by the law on languages adopted in 2019, would affect the proper implementation and the use of Albanian as an official language in the Republic of North Macedonia.

### **4.3. Teachers' views on the status of Albanian in schools in North Macedonia**

As outlined, in order to explore teacher's perceptions of the status of Albanian language in North Macedonia a series of interviews were conducted. The interview questions were focused on the following aspects: i) The need for further improvement to the law on languages in North Macedonia; ii) The need for opening more Albanian schools in order for children to get instruction in their mother tongue and to preserve language, culture and identity; iii) The need for continuous training for teachers who teach Albanian; and iv) The need for a positive approach from the part of the North Macedonian government towards the use of Albanian in schools.

#### **4.3.1. The need for further improvement to the law on languages in North Macedonia**

The Law on Languages in North Macedonia provides for teaching in Albanian, and if the criterion regarding the percentage of the minority is not met, then the Albanians living in certain communities which have less than 20% Albanians, the children of the Albanian families are not entitled to an education in the mother tongue. This means that in those locations where there is an Albanian majority there are also schools where teaching is conducted in Albanian. However, precisely because of the heterogeneous distribution of Albanians in North Macedonia, it happens that in some areas there are more students. As a result, there should be more schools. However, when reviewing and analyzing teachers' answers, it turned out that they complain about overcrowded classrooms, and of being forced to teach in two and even in three shifts.

*"Part of the schools face lack of space, with teachers being forced to work even in three shifts and with overcrowded classrooms."* (N. D – elementary school teacher)

Teachers also say that their work is further complicated by the fact that schools do not have the right conditions for the quality of teaching.

According to them, it is important that the law on languages is not restrictive and the Government of North Macedonia should prepare an action plan, which should define the appropriate steps and dynamics towards the legal implementation of the Albanian language. The idea of preparing such a strategic document, as well as of revising the law on the use of languages, is supported by many scholars [36]–[39].

#### **4.3.2. The need for opening more Albanian schools in order for children to get instruction in their mother tongue and to preserve language, culture and identity**

The efforts of Albanians to open Albanian schools are well known in North Macedonia. These efforts in many cases have led to confrontations between the two ethnicities, the Albanian and the Macedonian. Asked if there is a positive tendency for the opening of Albanian schools in North Macedonia, the interviewed teachers emphasized that this remains a fundamental problem for the Albanian community. What is most noticeable is the lack of a positive approach to the opening of Albanian schools.

According to the interviewed teachers, the politics has a direct impact on the non-opening of Albanian schools and in some cases, it is the North Macedonian residents who oppose the opening of these schools. Teachers say that denial of learning in the mother tongue negatively affects the cognitive and linguistic development of the child.

*"In the elementary school 'Todor Janev' in the municipality of Cashka in Veles, teaching is conducted only in Macedonian. Meanwhile, there are 41 Albanian students in this school. Isn't this the denial of the right to education in the mother tongue?"* (L. R. – elementary school teacher)

According to them, the North Macedonian government must take concrete steps to ensure quality education in mother tongue, by also adopting a mother tongue approach to teaching without worrying that this could lead to national divisions. Another teacher states that

*"Despite the fact that Albanian is recognized as the second official language in North Macedonia, its status is not as such."* (M.A – teacher)



Based on the interview, remote areas are the most problematic ones where Albanian students take instruction only in Macedonian language. In these areas, the influence of politics is even more obvious, denying children learning in their mother tongue.

#### **4.3.3. The need for continuous training for teachers who teach Albanian**

Most of the interviewed teachers complain about the lack of quality teachers, which they correlate it to the wrong policies of admitting students to teaching program. According to them, unlike previous years, where teaching program absorbed the best students, nowadays there is a drastic decline in quality students. According to them, this also comes as a result of low salaries in education, making good students attend other study programs.

*“There is a degradation of the status of teachers in Macedonia. The entrance exam at the Faculty of Pedagogy has been removed and there is also no testing of the psycho-pedagogical aspect of teachers. These and other factors have brought education to this state, which affects especially the Albanian community in Northern Macedonia, which, among other things, has to face other problems, of a political nature.”* (N. M- high school teacher).

All teachers acknowledge the need for continuous training. According to them, the North Macedonia government should invest in teacher training in order for them to be updated and to successfully teach children.

#### **4.3.4. The need for a positive approach from the part of the North Macedonian government towards the use of Albanian in institutions and especially in schools**

The Albanian language in North Macedonia has the appropriate normative linguistic criteria, such as vocabulary, and grammar, to be considered as standard language. But there is another extra-linguistic factor that must be met in order for a language to be considered as such, related precisely to the obligation to implement the language norm. This second criterion, according to Bajrami and Azemi [37] leads to the fact that the status of language is not decided by linguists and language policy experts, but by politics. Even the interviewed teachers are of the opinion that politics has a direct impact on solving the problems that arise as a result of bilingualism. According to them, a more positive approach to the issue of the Albanian language, its use in institutions and especially in schools would enable the increase of the deserved prestige of Albanian in the territory of North Macedonia. On the other hand, the interviewed teachers state that it is important to acknowledge the positive effects of multilingualism in a given speaking community.

*“Knowledge of the mother language makes it possible to better and more deeply understand a particular study program. Students also tend to have a more positive attitude towards school, so it is very important that children speak their mother language before starting school in another language. Using unfamiliar languages in school, in addition to affecting school dropout, can ruin the chances of many children when they take exams. Often, children living in poor rural areas are most affected. We should be aware that when children are denied an education because of the language they speak, it makes them more conflicted.”* (R. Z – high school teacher).

## **5. DISCUSSION**

The use of the mother tongue is a natural right before being a legal right. Language is the human being himself, because, as Heidegger says, language highlights existence. A large number of world organizations support the campaign entitled “International Mother Language Day Campaign,” a European Union program focused on the implementation of multilingual education. This initiative is part of the Global Education Campaign to provide mother language education for all students. The campaign also holds governments accountable for improving mother language policies in schools.

However, the governments of developed countries have not always responded positively, due to the fact that in many cases, there is a shortage of teachers capable of teaching in minority languages. Some other governments’ concern is that multilingualism could affect the nation’s expansion. These claims, in fact, are in opposition to the research and studies, which have proven that language policies reduce dropout rates and promote academic achievement [40]. According to UNESCO statistics [41], 40% of school-age children do not have access to education in the language they speak or understand best. This not only hinders access to the heritage and culture of their country, but can also have negative consequences for their linguistic and cognitive development.

The findings of our study also emphasize the importance of language policies that favor multilingualism and the importance of learning in the mother tongue. According to a report of World Vision [42], mother tongue education does not only fosters respect for linguistic and cultural diversity, but also acts as a force for quality learning. In fact, a number of researches emphasize the benefits of learning in mother tongue, by also linking it to the academic achievements of students [43]–[45].

If we analyze the issue of using one or more languages as language of instruction, different countries implement different policies. However, there is increasing pressure on governments, especially in developing countries, to enable all students to use international languages for the global market. Given that we are living in the age of globalization, monolingualism cannot be considered an adaptable choice, at a time when the labor market needs people to have several skills at the same time. One of these skills is related to the mastery of languages, without the knowledge of which it is practically impossible to be integrated in different companies globally. On the other hand, other governments apply the principle of using only one national language with the claim that encouraging different minority languages can disintegrate the nation. In this case, it deserves attention the case of the Albanian language in North Macedonia, which although after many difficulties, it received the status of second official language though there are still problems related to the implementation of the law.

Charamba [46] presents various important issues regarding the use of mother languages, some of which for the reality of the Albanian language in North Macedonia are of a particular importance. These issues are related to the steps that governments must take to ensure quality education in mother language, by also adopting a mother language approach to teaching without worrying that this could lead to national divisions. Governments should also invest in teacher training.

It is understandable that addressing these issues correctly requires specific policies, time and global responses, but especially requires people who understand the tremendous importance of using mother language, because it facilitates the learning of other languages as well as helps the child to develop a personal, social and cultural identity. Also, learning the mother tongue makes children more social, increasing their self-esteem [47]–[49].

Respect for language rights must therefore be promoted and supported by long-term policies. The time has come for regional, minority languages to be given the status of national languages. If we want to empower the future of our children, we must give them the opportunity to communicate in their mother tongue, so that they do not feel deprived of this universal right, the right to use the language of the heart.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The language policy of the European Union is in favor of multilingualism. It is particularly important for the EU that all languages spoken within the bloc have the same status. In addition, the EU extends its language policy to regional or minority languages, emphasizing the preservation and protection of the heritage, culture and language of these minorities. According to this principle, all European countries, especially those aiming for integration in the European family, must adopt laws that are in favor of the protection of minorities and the preservation of their cultural and linguistic features. However, the approach of European countries towards these EU programs has not always been satisfactory. There are states, such as North Macedonia that despite the fact that the Albanian language is an official language within its territory, it still does not enjoy this status. The study recommends North Macedonia to recognize the use of the Albanian language throughout the state; regardless of whether in some municipalities they are less or more than 20% of Albanians. Moreover, if the conditions set at the law on Pre-University Education in North Macedonia regarding the teaching in Albanian language are met then using the Albanian language should be allowed regardless of whether or not the numerical criterion of 20% is met in that municipality.

North Macedonia, like other aspiring countries for European Union integration, must comply with the requirements and standards set by the EU, especially in the context of the implementation of human rights. They must promote and use the Albanian language in Macedonian schools, in order for all students to have the right to education in their mother language.

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