

UN-FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES
15/16 December 2008, Geneva

Austrian Statement, Tuesday 16 December 2008:
Mag. Edith Mühlgaszner, MAS

VI) The relationship between de-segregation strategies, cultural autonomy and integration in the quest for social cohesion:

To the 5th and 6th recommendation under this item, dealing with opportunities for learning minority languages as well as minority languages in different stages of education for children, we would like to explain the situation in Austria.

MINORITY PUBLIC EDUCATION IN AUSTRIA

The minority public education in the provinces of Burgenland and in Carinthia with the natural bilingualness has a tradition for many decades. The legal regulation makes possible that today each pupil living here can learn the Croatian, Slovenian or Hungarian language beside the German from kindergarten until high school degree. In practice, the system is not fully in place in all regions as depending on the parents' interest for their children the practical implementation of the legislative framework can only be realised step by step. In Vienna also, there lives a large percentage with Czech or Slovak mother tongue and for them the same legislation applies. They also have the possibility to give their children school education in their language. In Austria Roma-people also are recognized as a minority. In the province of Burgenland they have the possibility for education in their own mother tongue at school at all grades.

The tradition for many decades of the bilingual public education in the autochthonous settlement area of the Burgenland-Croats, Burgenland-Hungarian and Slovenian people in Carinthia led to the fact that there can be found structures of a natural bilingualness. These regions were historically seen always as two and/or multilingual areas.

Actual situation in Burgenland as an example

The situation in the autochthonous area shows that children's mother tongue can be German, the minority language or both of them and in the kindergarten they are naturally educated in two languages and at school they learn two languages from the beginning – speaking, reading and writing. The development of the last decades brought new challenges for the educators in kindergarten and the teachers.

At the regional level, the kindergarten law of 1995 was the first important step for the promotion of bilinguality. The new federal Minorities School Act of Burgenland in the year 1994 brought some fundamental changes. The new law gave persons with Hungarian mother tongue the same rights as the Croatian minority group already had in Burgenland and the Slovenians in Carinthia and Styria since the Austrian State Treaty from 1955. Primary schools in this area are bilingual.

As an example in Burgenland, today around 20% of all children in compulsory schools learn a minority language.

Instruction for children from the Roma and Sinti minority group

For the Roma children there existed a special “roma school” from 1924 – 1938. After the Second World War the Roma children were integrated in the schools where they were living. After recognizing the Roma as a minority group in the year 1993 the Minorities School Act 1994 opened the basis for offering their language at school. Since 1997 pupils have the opportunity to learn Roma-language called “Roman” in Burgenland. These are small groups of children, sometimes there are learning groups combined of pupils and adults.

The province of Burgenland is an example of multilingualness in society and education. With a continuous engagement for multilingualness in schools and in the adult education we are confident that in future as an example in Burgenland every person will have a basic knowledge in understanding of and speaking all three languages used in the province.