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CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

EDUCATION CHALLENGES IN MULTICULTURAL CENTRAL ASIA

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 28-29 March 2016

An international conference organised by the French Institute for Central Asian Studies (IFEAC) in partnership with UNICEF, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and UN Women, with the support of Institut Français in Paris.

Rationale of the Conference

In post-Soviet Central Asia, the sector of education has been exposed to many challenges. On one hand, newly independent States had to administer a population divided along geographic, social, cultural, ethnic, religious and language lines and an education system ensuring the right of every citizen to be instructed in his mother tongue. In 1991, there were not less than 7 tuition languages in Uzbekistan, 5 in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and 4 in Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. On the other hand, these countries have reinforced their national building to secure the unity of the nation and reinforce the sovereignty of the State. School appears as a key institution to educate new generations of citizens and instil values required for the nation-building process. This international conference addresses challenges that education has been facing in Central Asia over the last two decades to cope with these Soviet legacies.

Objectives

The conference has two main objectives:

First, to gather scholars and practitioners from the field of education (school personnel, representatives of education administrations, international organisations, NGOs and grass-root associations working on education issues) to share knowledge and practices and spur cooperation and mutual research. If the conference is geographically focused on Central Asia, it also aims at sharing experiences in a comparative perspective with other areas dealing with similar issues (Russia, Caucasus, Baltic region, Central Europe).

Secondly, to serve as a platform to provide understandings and possible solutions for a better social, cultural and economic integration of Central Asia's ethnic minorities through school. Scholars from different disciplines – anthropology, sociology, political sciences, public administration, education sciences, etc. – and experts working in past and present education projects in Central Asia will contribute in a joint effort to address the challenges of education in a multicultural and multilingual context.

Main Topics of the Conference

The conference will address the following themes, though not exclusively:

- *The challenge of cultural pluralism in the provision of education services:*

Given the extremely intricate and costly system of education inherited from the Soviet federal organisation, Central Asian States have developed different strategies to cope with their cultural and language pluralism, from a conservative perpetuation of the Soviet schooling model to a liberalisation of education practices. How State authorities have included cultural and language differences in their education policies? How do they deal with all forms of exclusion from education, due to either social, gender, ethnic, religious or language differences?
- *The effect of language politics and policies on education:*

Since the adoption in 1989 of language laws in all Central Asian republics, the symbolic role and actual use of State- and official languages have improved in all sectors of society, including at school. How the introduction and development of compulsory classes of State- and official languages have impacted on the education curricula of minority language schools? What methodological tools and pedagogical material have been developed to enhance a better knowledge of State- and official languages among school children? In a region still in close political and economic relation with Russia, what is the place of Russian language in post-Soviet Central Asia's education system?
- *The school as a tool to integrate ethnic minorities:*

State- and official language schools represent the overwhelming majority of education entities in Central Asia. Yet minority language schools continue to instruct most ethnic minorities and are therefore a key institution through which State authorities can foster common values to these ethnically diverse young generations. How do these schools work in a multilingual and multicultural environment? How textbooks and pedagogical material are developed to better address the cultural and language differences of school children? How training and recycling of minority language teachers are guaranteed by education administrations? And which initiatives have been launched to promote intercultural dialogue and improve the knowledge of State- and official languages among ethnic minority youth (multi-language and multicultural education projects)?
- *The role of civil society in supporting equity to education:*

Beside the public education system, there is an increasing number of private institutions providing education, starting from local private schools to international lyceums. How do these schools address the challenges of education in a multicultural society? In schools where the conditions of education has declined, how do non-governmental structures – parents' associations, youth clubs, ethnic organisations, etc. – respond to this worsening? Which form do social mobilisations (if any) take in their claim for equal education?

- *What after school? Vocational and higher education in a multicultural context:*

If school can be perceived as a powerful tool of social, cultural and economic integration, there is still a gap between the end of the school and the start of a professional career. How vocational schools and universities provide services to students coming from a different cultural or language background? In communities where girls are not encouraged to continue education after school, what are the alternative forms of vocational training for young women, including those belonging to ethnic minorities? And in countries where the majority of young men head for labour work abroad, what are their expectations from the school in terms of skills development and language mastering.

Technical details

The working language will be English and Russian.

There is no fee to attend the conference. Coffee breaks and meals will be covered for all participants.

Travel expenses and accommodation will be covered fully or in part in the limit of available funds.

Application procedure

Send a 500-word abstract and the application form to ifeacd@gmail.com

Accepted languages: English and Russian.

Submission deadline: 1st December 2015.

Authors will be informed of the selection results by 20 December 2015.

Selected participants will be required to send full papers (app. 5,000 words) by 9 March 2016.

Best papers will be selected for publication in a peer-reviewed collective book.

Programme Committee

Olivier FERRANDO, Director of the French Institute for Central Asian Studies (IFEAC)

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