



# 4 Bulgaria

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## 4.1 Linguistic Situation and Legislation

By constitution in Bulgaria the official language is Bulgarian. According to the National Statistical Institution, on 1 March 2001 the population of Bulgaria was 7,928,901, and of these, 6 697,158 (84.46%) declared Bulgarian to be their mother tongue. The mother tongues of the rest were Turkish, Roma, Armenian, Hebrew, etc. At school, students study in Bulgarian, but where there is a need to learn the mother tongue the school provides appropriate lessons at primary level. There are also textbooks in these languages, which are officially recognised and approved by the Ministry of Education.

As Bulgarian is not a widely spoken language, but one of the 'well-hidden' ones, study of foreign languages (FLs) is a long tradition in the country. Initially, after liberation in 1878, with French being spoken in the latter years, English and other languages also became popular. Education through foreign languages started before the Second World War. It was mainly carried out in colleges run by various countries (e.g. Germany, France, Italy, America) and most of the teachers were native speakers. After the war there were only a few schools dealing with subjects taught in a FL and the teachers were Bulgarians who had graduated in particular subjects and who were proficient in the target language. The schools were considered to be 'elite'. Students sat exams to be able to study in these schools. Some of them were boarding schools and use of the FL was obligatory in communication when on school premises.

After 1989 (the transition period) previously existing schools became 'best' and these and many other schools started to introduce CLIL in order to attract more students and be 'up-to-date'. This caused some problems: insufficient teachers, training, books and other material, etc.

Education in these schools (in Bulgaria known as Language Schools) is carried out according to an Instruction for secondary schools with an intensive foreign language learning profile/specialisation, and each Language School can choose its own school plan. In the plan the variations concern the number of periods per week for different subjects considered non-compulsory. In this Instruction it is mentioned that there should be at least 3 subjects taught in a FL in the second year, 2 in the third and 1 in the fourth in order for the school to be recognized as a Language School. Unfortunately, apart from the good schools there is no strict control on how the schools follow these instructions.

According to tradition, in order to get into these schools, students aged 13 sit exams (either Bulgarian or Maths) and according to the mark obtained they choose the school. There, during the first year they have 18–20 hours per week of the target language and usually have an exam at the end of the school year. After that they start studying all subjects in the target FL (e.g. History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry, Physics; all the others – if and when teachers are available). Only during the last year of studying the subject is it taught in Bulgarian, because the exams students sit for universities are in Bulgarian. Usually this transition from the FL into the first language does not cause problems.

In relation to the primary level we cannot really speak about CLIL in practical terms. It is implemented only when during language lessons it is necessary to deal with low level 'scientific' matters – the human body, environmental issues, animals, plants, etc. However, during the last few years some 'content-based' language education projects have appeared and some primary schools have started developing the approach of content-oriented language learning along with the start of early language learning.

There are also some vocational schools with intensive language teaching/learning but usually there are no subjects taught in a FL. Recently they have been developing 'FLs for their profession'. Speaking about tertiary level, there are some universities around the country with education based on a FL, or special attention paid to LSP (Language for Specific Purposes, military, marine, police, medical, etc).

In the tables below some data about Language Schools in Bulgaria are provided.

*Number of schools with an intensive language profile*

Foreign Language	Schools	Secondary schools	Vocational/ professional schools
French	27	38	34
Spanish	19	14	2
Italian	9	3	4
Russian	6	3	1
English	179	100	174
German	49	63	92

*Number of students in first year*

French	3,392
Spanish	1,220
Italian	646
Russian	381
English	15,827
German	4,996

*Number of students in second to fifth year*

French	9,287
Spanish	2,720
Italian	1,345
Russian	1,070
English	44,849
German	12,182

As can be seen, the most popular language is English, but French keeps its strong position, followed by German and Spanish. There are single schools with Greek, Japanese, Slavic languages, etc. as targets. There is no data available as regards private schools, but they are much less common than public ones and the number of students will not significantly change the figures.

**4.2 Teacher Training and Development**

Where subjects are taught in a foreign language, the aims remain content-oriented. Practically nobody emphasizes the language, as it is considered that subject teachers, not being philologists, do not have the right to deal with language or are not confident enough with it. In addition, although the subject is taught in a FL the teacher has to follow the subject curriculum.

All subjects could involve some teaching in a FL, depending upon teachers' availability, according to the Instruction for secondary schools with an intensive foreign language learning profile. The content follows the Bulgarian national curriculum, but in a FL. There are neither specific aims nor recommendations about focusing on language along with the subject.

The target languages are practically all well-known and widely spoken ones: English, German, Spanish, French, Italian and Russian, but Japanese, Greek and Slavic languages are also involved. As can be seen from the statistics, English is the most popular and represents the 'lingua franca'. In recent years it has also been suggested that everybody should know at least some English and that a second or third language is a must. Hence, languages different from English have become more and more popular, but most of the students who study these, study English in addition (through private schools or courses).

As a rule, subject teachers usually teach in CLIL classes. Until very recently there was no training for them – the belief was that if you 'know/speak' a FL you can teach your subject in it. In recent years many subject teachers have started studying FL philology in order to have a language qualification, and more opportunities for work. Knowledge of the FL involved in CLIL is practically non-controlled. As a consequence, with different approaches

in the classroom, there is 10 to 100% usage of the FL. Some teachers deal with language exercises based on subject matter, others just introduce specific terminology but speak in Bulgarian. Some teachers use linguistic approaches in subject lessons but the usual situation is to follow the subject methodology only.

For about six years now we have provided training courses at three universities around the country for pre-service and in-service trainees. We have trained trainers how to teach subjects in a FL with focus both on content and language. Now we are planning to start at two more universities with those trained trainers. No native speakers to teach subjects – it is a great occasion. This all resulted in a course for training teachers which is published and used in all the universities where training is taking place. This course was created by collaborative work of Subject and Language people including help from and consultation with native speakers.

#### 4.3 Process and Examinations

There are no specific examinations for pupils in CLIL classes and schools. The diploma that students obtain upon graduation complies with Bulgarian national law. The status of the school (Language) is mentioned, but otherwise it is equal to other diplomas. Students sit the general exams for universities. The results reflect the quality of these schools – more than 90% of the students get to university. Some Language Schools have agreements with their respective countries and students may apply directly to universities there, taking exams in Bulgaria or abroad.

After entering the Language Schools students have one year of the target language. In this year they also have some lessons weekly in Maths, Music, Art, Bulgarian, etc. Language lessons continue in the following years, and during the last two years they study the literature of the target language. There is no special curriculum for CLIL – it is Bulgarian National with no changes, but followed in a FL. There is no obvious specific attention given to the European/international dimension. In addition, starting in the second year the students have a second foreign language as part of the curriculum.

The materials used are usually Bulgarian textbooks translated into a FL (mainly English, Spanish, French and German). In recent years publishers have started to prepare additional/ supplementary booklets in order to help both students and teachers, but their quality is unsatisfactory or is at an inappropriate language level. Teachers could use/develop other materials from original sources if they suit the National Curriculum.

In cases in which the school would like to become a Language School the main task is to find teachers. Sometimes school authorities try to find appropriate materials, but it is not obligatory. When teachers start teaching in a FL they have to prepare terminology, materials, lesson plans, etc., practically without being controlled or helped. Teachers are

paid a small amount of extra money for teaching a subject in a FL.

Cooperation between teachers depends mainly on their wishes, although there are relevant professional organizations (NGOs). Within schools there are thematic groups, but their successful function is sometimes doubtful. Recently many non-formal groups of subject and language teachers (after being trained or having attended workshops and seminars in the field of CLIL) have started functioning, both benefiting. This is one of the important things – after being in a group for training it becomes clear that looking for language help is not a dirty job but a very important part of personal development. Training gives confidence and teachers usually stop being ashamed of the level of their language.

The students in Language Schools are selected. They sit exams in Bulgarian language and/or Maths (see above) and are accepted according to their exam marks. There is also competition between schools based on the quality of teaching in a FL. Among the most important reasons to choose Language Schools are: a FL is a must; these schools are prestigious and well known for their quality of teaching and learning; students find better work and have improved prospects afterwards in foreign countries and in Bulgaria; good traditions; and good contacts and culture.

Concerning the expectations related to Language Schools – here are some quotes:  
“...could not choose a profession – better a FL and after that a profession.”  
“...in these schools everything is studied – you can choose after graduating.”  
“A FL is a necessity...prestige...advantage.”  
“A FL opens many doors.”  
“Without a FL one is nothing.”  
“...looks very well on a business card.”

A common word mentioned by teachers about their choice to work in a FL is 'challenge', but they also mention 'interesting', 'good students', 'practice of the FL', 'linguistic culture', 'contacts', etc.

#### 4.4 Research

There are not many research studies on CLIL in Bulgaria. There is one PhD thesis on Geography in English, and some theses concerning teachers' qualifications: Biology in German, Physics in Spanish, and Biology in English. They are dedicated mainly to the development of good quality materials. There is one investigation in French (Swiss-BG SCALA Project; second phase ongoing) on developing self-evaluation and evaluation tools for subjects in French. Recently, many teachers have started to develop materials and to carry out small-scale research in the field of CLIL. Many publications and presentations have resulted.

Students' outcomes are not monitored, but many students graduating from Language Schools go on to study abroad or in Bulgarian universities. Of all graduated students, more than 90% become university students, but there is no official data on how many go to study abroad. There is no quality assurance system in schools specific to CLIL.

Some weaknesses should be mentioned: many schools develop CLIL, but there are not enough qualified teachers and not enough materials – and if there are, the books are literally translated and the language is difficult for both students and teachers. Among the threats is the possible transformation of the schools. Finally – and probably this is the main characteristic of Bulgarian CLIL – there are controversies: there have been many years of teaching subjects in a FL/CLIL but no training for teachers, and there are few studies on the subject, or they have started only recently.

In my opinion, specific future developments concern widening the training system for teachers and improving the quality of teaching and learning, as well as that of materials development. There should be development and application of specific CLIL criteria along with good practice.