

The Situation of Education in the SEE region

Final Content Report on the Project *Support in OECD Thematic Review of Educational Policy in South Eastern Europe*

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1. Introduction

In autumn 2000 and in 2001 the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS, University of Ljubljana) carried out the project *Support in OECD Thematic Review of Educational Policy in South Eastern Europe* on the basis of an agreement with European Training Foundation and as part of OECD Thematic Review of Educational Policy. The study (reports from 11 countries altogether) was produced jointly by the researchers from CEPS and the experts from all the countries¹ involved in OECD thematic reviews: Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina (two reports: Federation BH and the Republic of Srpska), Albania, FYR of Macedonia, Bulgaria, Croatia and Montenegro, later also Romania, Serbia and Moldova.

Since the first thematic reviews were already in progress, there was only a limited time period available for extensive methodological preparations. Bearing in mind specific contexts of the region, a questionnaire was designed (partly improved during the first two months of work) and sent to country experts. The work was carried out mostly by means of virtual communication; research group at CEPS was in permanent contact with the country experts. When an individual report was finished it was forwarded to OECD thematic review teams immediately (in principle before the team visited this country). CEPS provided additional support to review teams also during their site visits and later while they drafted reports, mostly by searching for additional data and information or checking them again. As country reports were finished they also appeared on the *South East European Education Cooperation*

¹ Researches in these countries are: Dr. Dukagjin Pupovci (Kosovo), Suada Numić (BH - Federation of Bosnia & Herzegovina), Aleksandra Gaković (BH – the Republic of Srpska), Pavli Kisi (Albania), Blagica Novkovska (FYR of Macedonia), Iskra Petrova (Bulgaria), Mag. Senka Bosner (Croatia), Nataša Živković (Montenegro), Liliana Preoteasa (Romania), Gordana Zindović Vukadinović (Serbia) and Dr. Anatol Gremalschi (Moldova). See <http://pef.pef.uni-lj.si/ceps/> for details.

Network web page (www.see-educoop.net). At the end of the work reports were checked again.

The research group encountered several *difficulties in the process of obtaining data* and analysing them. Many data were not available for various reasons; most often being due to the transitional conception of societies. In some countries of the region, particularly in those affected by wars, the ruined institutional framework or lack of such network was the main obstacle. Changes in population and huge migrations as well as destroyed archives sometimes even made parts of research impossible. For reasons of thorough political and social changes long-scale comparability of data (e.g. 2000 vs. 1991) is at least questionable in some cases. The former political and/or ideological barriers to monitoring should be also taken into account while considering the context of such a monitoring study.

In general, *human resources in this field are scarce and insufficient* everywhere in the region and in most cases there no appropriate continuous training has been provided for a long time. Also methodology and terminology caused several problems; e.g. criteria have changed since 1990 very much and today there is an obvious need for harmonisation in this field. ETF National Observatories are helpful in most countries from this aspect, they do not, however, cover all parts of the educational vertical (e.g. early childhood, general education, partly higher education). Considering the experience gathered in the framework of this study we strongly recommend a support programme for developing the monitoring capacity in all countries of the region. Such a support programme can be more effective if it is linked with governmental institutions (e.g. offices of statistics) or some NGOs, which have already launched important national projects in this direction.

2. A survey of historical background

In general, at the end of the eighties the educational level in most countries of the region was quite developed, therefore problems which appeared during the turbulent transitional period should be considered from this particular perspective: as a retrogression. The fact that a *relatively efficient educational system* was experienced, also defines any possible approach to today's problems. These are by no means countries without educational traditions and expertise; nevertheless, they are countries which face serious problems and huge tasks in transitional period and therefore need support.

There is another characteristic, which should be taken into consideration very seriously while approaching the region and its (not only educational) problems, i.e. the *regional diversity*. It does not apply only to languages, religion and ethnicity; moreover, it was present through the entire history. This region witnessed the division of the Eastern and the Western Roman Empire long time ago, this has always been an area where different imperia encountered, e.g. Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman. It has been a region of divisions and unifications, yet always a diverse region. The perception of the region during the second half of XX century as a homogenous unit in a political or ideological sense can hardly be anything else, but a mistake based on ignorance. During the last half of the century, all the main global borders crossed the Balkans again. The former Yugoslavia as a “neither an eastern – nor a western” country was highly decentralised and diverse in itself. At least since the mid-sixties it was more connected with the West (with one million of workers abroad) than with the East. Albania to the southwest side of the peninsula was an isolated area until the late eighties while Bulgaria and Romania belonged to “Eastern

block” and Moldova was an integral part of the Soviet Union. To the south of the Balkans, Greece was the next frontier to the West in political sense of the word. It would not be easy to find similar diversity anywhere else on such a limited area.

Therefore – and particularly if we wish to define clear future orientation and feasible future tasks – it is necessary to start with recognizing the fact that there are *particular situations in every individual country of the region*. It is not possible to achieve simple common solutions, at least not when we discuss details and not general philosophic issues. Even if experts or politicians agree on certain general features or principles it is still necessary to understand these features and to implement these principles in a particular context of a particular country. The ignorance of this fact has caused many troubles in the region, including economic disasters and wars, but its recognition can base a solid ground not only for the national recovery, but also for renewed regional co-operation and progress in the countries of the region.

After Second World War in all countries drastic changes of educational systems were introduced; the most common characteristic was the elimination of illiteracy and reforms from 4 years to 8 years of basic education. It is an undeniable fact that these systems were highly ideological, of which at least three distinctive types were observed: the Albanian, the Soviet and the Yugoslavian one. The educational systems developed parallel to oscillations in political and economic powers. There was a fast development of 4-year technical schools, while vocational education and training was linked to the socialist industrial complex, organized in a different way from one “block” to another.

In former Yugoslavia the eighties were marked by an educational reform of a specific type, which has left its trace until the present time. The so-called *Career Oriented Education* from the turn of seventies into eighties faced a double task: to answer political challenges of liberalism and civil society movements (like students’ movement) of the seventies and at the same time to adjust education to the “needs of society” (that is: modernisation). This modernization was understood in the context of the socialism “with a human face” and in the framework of specific terminology: pluralism of interests, self-government, socialist market economy, etc. However, this discussion continued beyond the inherent tensions and conflicts which characterised all the after war period. As the ideological dimension was also part of the reform – as an answer to intellectual opposition at universities and in civil society – it was only a question of time when open criticisms would erupt. It happened – among other topics – during the process of drafting a new common core curriculum: in a multi-ethnic society the centralist powers demanded stronger “harmonisation” of mother tongue and literature, history etc. across the entire federation – a demand which provoked fierce revolt. At least in Slovenia this was an important lever of revival of the civil society and gradual democratisation leading towards the independence of the country.

The reform in the early eighties brought about a system of 8-year basic education followed by a “career oriented education”: a vertical composed of cascade of programmes leading up to higher education. Higher education was not regulated as a special sub-system any more; universities were atomised into numerous highly independent faculties. The basic idea of the reform was “to join a school and a factory”, to adjust education to self-governmental interests and to socialist market economy. It was also based on the belief that further development of economy and society could be forecasted in a firm way and that the enrolment into upper secondary and tertiary education could be rationally planned. In fact, school network and development of curricula were conditioned by political power games and wishes of

predominantly local authorities. As a result, this educational reform led to non-adequate human resource development and even a stagnation of educational structure of the population. General education was disregarded; traditional *gimnazija* (grammar school) was abolished and university autonomy declined.

The turn of the eighties to nineties should be a time of “re-reforming” in former Yugoslavia even in case where no profound political changes and conflicts were anticipated. Unfortunately, they did appear; in some places in most terrible forms, which prevented any form of educational improvement for a long time. Problems arising in educational systems of today are sometimes also due to the fact that it was not possible to reform the system anew at an earlier period.

3. Main findings of the study

The data gathered for each country report were structured into seven clusters as follows: general data, participation in education, enrolment patterns and the numbers of institutions, curriculum, administration in primary and secondary education, facilities and equipment, cost and financing. Accordingly, the main findings of the study are presented below following that structure.

3.1. General data

Data from all countries show changes in population. There were mostly huge migrations during the nineties. In general, they were due to economic reasons; however, in some countries they were also a tragic result of wars and ethnic conflicts. Flows of refugees during the periods of conflicts established parallel or temporary – mostly improvised – school networks, but many children also remained without any systemic education for a certain period of time. Migrations in these parts of the region comprehended sometimes such a great extent that the traditional school network could not even meet the basic educational needs any more. It is still a task of national statistical offices to explain these movements and to make population trends and structures more transparent and reliable.

Another common feature is a prevailing *mixed ethnic composition* in the countries of the region. Ethnic minorities are an important issue also in education. The ethnic composition of population varies from country to country: the majority of ethnic groups in individual countries varies e.g. from Montenegro with 62% or Moldova with 64% to Albania with nearly 98%. It is obvious that each of the countries has to deal with ethnic issues. However, it is not easy to get a clear statistic picture today. In Bulgaria, the new Statistical Law does not allow data gathering according to ethnic origin. In the Republic of Srpska it was not possible to gather these data at all. It should not be forgotten that this issue is still a vulnerable one. Even from the technical point of view methodology of data collecting should be improved. Therefore, the data presented in the study are to be treated carefully.

As in other parts of the world, these countries encounter *the falling birth rate*. Actually, in this aspect there are huge differences in the region. While e.g. Croatia encounters one of the *lowest* birth rates (9.9 in 1999), Kosovo (21.3 in 1995) and Albania (17.2 in 1989) are amongst countries with the *highest* birth rate in Europe.

The data exhibit predominantly *low educational attainment* of (active) population, particularly with middle and older generations. In some parts affected by conflicts during the last decade this could also present a problem with young people. In this regard some social groups are particularly marginalized: mostly women or some ethnic groups (e.g. Roma) and older people. Unfortunately, with some exceptions labour market effective measures are either inadequate or not introduced at all. At the same time the unemployment rate is on the increase, particularly among young people and among those with incomplete education or only with primary education, but also among those with secondary education (inappropriate qualifications). The structure of the employed in economic sections has changed very much in last ten years and it is still going to change in future, most likely presenting further threats to the unemployment rate, particularly if educational structures do not change much. Therefore, all these trends should be carefully considered in future processes of developing educational policies.

3.2. Participation in education

In most countries the structures of today's *educational systems* are more or less inherited from the past. During the nineties there were systemic changes e.g. in Romania, but most countries have been planning broader and more carefully considered reforms only in last year or two. The existing educational systems and patterns obstruct effective further acquiring of access to education and an improved participation in education at various levels. Today, only Romania and Moldova practice 9 years of compulsory schooling, all other countries remain at traditional 8 years, but they plan changes. The average number of years of schooling is low (mostly it does not exceed 8 years, below average in Bulgaria and Moldova; some countries even reported that these data could not be gathered.)

Participation in pre-school education is low and it is particularly alarming in the Western Balkans (Romania and Bulgaria come up with better results). In the Western Balkans, Croatia and Albania with approximately 35% of children included in pre-school education report the best participation while Kosovo with only 3% (an estimation) reports the worst situation in the region. It seems that the predominant form of pre-school education is a traditional one. During the transitional period the costs of pre-school education turned over progressively to parents; this is probably also the main reason for decrease in participation.

In *basic education* all countries report on *high participation* (but they mention some problems in methodology of collecting data). It should be born in mind that participation in basic education has traditionally been high in these countries and it seems that despite the conflicts and huge migrations in some parts of the region all those countries succeeded in preserving the basic obligatory education network. It is difficult to make conclusions on the basis of the collected data, but problems may arise in participation in rural parts (Roma children; girls). In general, countries do not report on alarming drop-out from the basic education; however, the quality of education could be questionable (particularly in passive regions) since no appropriate mechanisms of quality assessment are implemented. Assessment could be a problem in general; some figures simply give too pleasing results. In absolute figures, participation in basic education is decreasing as a consequence of decrease in population (with an exception of Albania and Kosovo). This trend is important for school network planning and particularly for the adoption of teacher training measures.

In *upper secondary education* countries report on *increasing participation*. However, particularly in the Western Balkans the situation is not comparable with other countries in a period of transition. Considerable parts of the population which finish 8 years of basic education do not continue in upper secondary education. Serbia reports on highest share of age cohort continuing in upper secondary education (78.3%; over three times more in VET than in general education – a consequence of “career oriented education” of the eighties?), followed by Romania (69.4%), Bulgaria (67%), Macedonia (65.08%) and Croatia (63%). There are no such data available for Montenegro but it is estimated to be in this category as well. Federation BH reports on more than one half of age cohort in upper secondary education (56.67%; there are no data for the Republic of Srpska, but the proportion could even be lower). Data are not available for Kosovo, either; according to rough estimation its proportion should be close to the Federation BH. Albania (41%) and Moldova (39%; almost all population in general education, only 9% in VET!) are at the end of this scale. When examining the *school leavers* (graduates), no extensive changes were introduced during the last decade. Between 1991 and 1999 (2000) at the level of ISCED 3 a growth of one fifth is the highest (Serbia 120, Croatia 113, Montenegro 108), while some countries registered even fewer school leavers (Macedonia 0.97, Bulgaria 0.88).

It is characteristic for most countries that the proportion of students in *general education* is *low* and that it is *high in VET* (Moldova which was once part of former Soviet educational system is an exception). It is necessary to point out once again, that in countries of the former Yugoslavia, which have not changed their educational systems so far, this fact should be considered in a particular context of the so called “career oriented education” of the eighties. The upper secondary general education (*gimnazija*) was abolished at the beginning of the eighties (all upper secondary education then became “vocationally oriented”) and it was partly reconstructed only at the beginning of the nineties, while VET mostly still consists of study programmes rooted in the eighties.

In general, the proportion of *female students* to *male students* is quite equal. There are no data on participation by gender available at Kosovo, but the share of the female students is probably lower than in other countries. There is only a notice of greater participation of the female students in the drop-out from secondary education in the Kosovo report. *Overall drop-out* seems to be a serious problem. All country experts reported that a systemic measurement of drop-outs from basic and upper secondary education were non-existent in most cases. Therefore, the methodology of calculating drop-out was simply based on the number of students who did not complete the school year in relation to the total number of students. There has also been no systemic resistance against drop-out; in this respect the traditional culture like “it’s normal to drop out” or “s/he’s not smart” is probably very much present. On the other hand, some official figures, as we already mentioned, show very good results (average grades), particularly in basic education. It is clear that *assessment* should present an important issue in the process of reforming the educational systems.

There are similar trends in *tertiary education*. All countries report on highly *increasing participation* in this area as well. At the turn of millennium 35.0% of age cohort (age 19-24) were students in Bulgaria, 31,3% (age 20-24) in Croatia, 29.0 (age 19-22) in Moldova, 28.0 (age 19-23) in Romania, 22.63% (age 18-24) in Serbia, Federation BH 21.6 (age 19-25), Macedonia 21.5 (age 19-23), in Albania 15% (age 18-23) while for some countries the corresponding data are not available. When the *graduates* are examined, there were no evident positive changes during the last decade. Between 1991 and 1999 (2000) at the level of ISCED

5 the highest growth was registered in Romania, followed by Croatia (Croatia also registered the highest proportion of graduates in relation to graduates at ISCED 3 level), while Bulgaria registered a small decrease in number of graduates:

- Romania 213 (24% of graduates at ISCED 3),
- Montenegro 170 (but only 9% of graduates at ISCED 3; in absolute figure: 649 graduates),
- Croatia 143 (26% of graduates at ISCED 3),
- Macedonia 110 (18% of graduates at ISCED 3),
- Serbia 103 (19% of graduates at ISCED 3),
- Bulgaria 91 (43% of graduates at ISCED 3).

3.3. Enrolment patterns and the number of institutions

The third chapter of the questionnaire deals with more detailed issues of enrolment and institutions, which we briefly mentioned above. There, we draw attention to some details of school network and similar issues linked with the already described ones.

School network, number of institutions. Generally, in the countries of the region school networks have traditionally been well developed. There is no evidence of any radical closing of institutions, although some countries obviously encounter severe problems with an extremely low enrolment in rural parts or in some types of institutions. The size of institutions differs very much: there are many institutions with less than 50 pupils or even only a few pupils while on the other hand – particularly in urban centres – huge institutions are still frequent, which is the other extreme. An average pupil–teacher ratio in most cases does not seem to be very problematic: in kindergartens it differs from 7.76 (the Republic of Srpska) to 20.73 (Montenegro), in primary schools from 12 (Bulgaria) to 21 (Federation of BH), in general secondary schools from 11.0/11.8 (Federation of BH, Croatia) to 19 (Kosovo; Serbian schools excluded), in VET schools from 6.5 (Moldova) to 21 (Federation of BH), at universities from 10 (Bulgaria) to 20 (Kosovo) and in non-university higher education institutions from 8.0/8.8 (Bulgaria, Moldova) to 68.0/32.18 (Romania, Serbia). However, this is an average situation only. In some cases institutions come across difficult problems at both extremes. VET schools and non-university institutions represent the highest extremes within the region. The situation calls for reconsideration of both, public as well as private school network.

In most countries the subsystem of *private kindergartens and schools* is not much developed. In some countries there are no such institutions in pre-school and basic education at all (Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro), in some other countries there are only few (Federation of BH, the Republic of Srpska, Kosovo). If there are private institutions, then by rule they are not supported from the national budget. In the category of private institutions there are mostly private kindergartens (124 in Croatia, 70 in Romania, 41 in Moldova, 28 in Albania, 18 in Bulgaria), but also primary schools (28 in Albania, 25 in Bulgaria, 24 in Moldova, 6 in Croatia) and schools of general upper secondary education (56 in Bulgaria, 30 in Romania, 26 in Croatia, 21 in Moldova, 18 in Albania), as well as institutions of higher education, whereas private initiatives in VET are almost totally absent in the Western Balkans (there are 35 VET schools in Bulgaria, 22 in Romania, 3 in Moldova). It is difficult to answer what really launches initiatives for the establishment of private institutions. Partly, these institutions could be an alternative to the existing public education (with all its problems and limits), partly they could also be an answer

to insufficient public financing of education. In some countries private kindergartens and schools (not in VET) are primarily confessional.

Adult education is mostly a non-recognized problem in all the countries of the region! The former system of adult education mostly ceased to exist and in most cases no new development is foreseen. This part of educational system is put into the shade of well-known problems in the field of education of youth; however, it should be brought forward and should by no means be forgotten. Since there is no relevant monitoring of this sub-system, there is a desperate lack of data, which makes a detailed and correct diagnosis actually impossible. Countries usually report only on weak structures or public institutions. Private institutions have been established in most countries, yet in general they are not part of the system of public education, they are not well regulated or supported from the budget, either. As the educational structure of population aged over 30 is poor and many employment problems are experienced, *adult education should be recognized among the main national priorities everywhere*. Special attention should be paid to programmes of (re)training and to the promotion of Life Long Learning philosophy.

3.4. Curriculum

Only in some countries – by rule only since late nineties – new curricula have been approved of and implemented in basic education, general secondary education, and at least for some professions in VET (Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania). Parallel to this, teachers have been trained but in most cases their training seems to have been insufficient, sometimes lacking appropriate new instructional materials. In other countries, there were only some slight changes in the curricula during the last decade.

For the countries of the Western Balkans *a comprehensive curricular reform* should be top priority.

3.5. Administration in primary and secondary education

From the point of view of human resource development the *school administration* is disregarded. There is almost no systematic training for school principals. In general, teacher training remains a traditional, under-estimated activity. Due to circumstances, teachers regressed in professional sense during the crisis and they need more support today. In-service teacher training is mostly insufficient (almost absent in some countries), while pre-service training needs modernisation, a particularly modernised institutional basis, which could provide their graduates with better pedagogical competences. This is particularly important for (future) teachers in VET.

Qualifications of educators and teachers. In most cases there are no evident data on qualifications of teachers and educators. Taking into account the absence of data, it seems that regulations on teaching qualifications are flabby, neither comparable nor very reliable. In the countries, in which data reports are available (one half of the countries only!) under- or unqualified teachers and educators can be mostly found in pre-school education (30% in Macedonia, 21% in Romania and Croatia) and basic education (19% in Romania and Federation BH, 13.5% in Kosovo). The ratio of under- or unqualified teachers is surprisingly

high in VET schools in Moldova (46%) and Romania (13%) as well as in non-university higher education institutions in Romania (33%). Again, these data are not very reliable. It is necessary to *reconsider the system of teachers' and educators' qualifications*.

3.6. Facilities and equipment

Taking into account the economic and political circumstances of the nineties it is not surprising that all countries report on *severe problems with facilities and equipment*. The situation is most severe in the countries affected by wars, particularly in Kosovo. The restoration of the educational facilities is an extremely difficult project for these countries, which could be launched only with the *help of international organizations*. Country reports show that in most countries there is a *lack of data* on facilities and equipment. Therefore, endeavours to get a clear and fair presentation of most necessary interventions should be supported. Severe problems in restoration of the educational facilities and modernization of the equipment should be linked with the development of comprehensive educational policy (particularly the issues of school network).

3.7. Costs and financing

This was the *most difficult part of the study*. Data on educational costs and financing are mostly missing and the research team had to pay particular attention to collecting data and analysing them. Almost in every country it was necessary to use different methodologies. There are several technical reasons for the lack of data, which are mostly due to transitional nature of societies: frequent changes of legislation, inflation, absence of monitoring, etc. In Kosovo, there has existed no country budget so far; education has been financed from the so-called consolidated budget, which has mainly been supported from international sources. Pre-school education is self-financed in most cases.

In general, *public financing of education* is rather poor: *on average 3-4% GDP*, sometimes even below 3%. Foreign aid is not always sufficiently organized, nor is it properly coordinated, further, it is not always aimed at sustainability either, etc. In the overall budget, nearly all the resources available are allocated to salaries (almost all in pre-university education in Romania, 90% or more in Croatia, Montenegro, Federation of BH). Funds for school equipment (2% or even less in Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania) and investments (3% or even less in Montenegro, Macedonia, the Republic of Srpska, Romania, Serbia) are very poor. There are no realistic possibilities for *educational development* in the framework of a national budget of this type; *international support* should be considered in this connection. Again, it was impossible to get comparable data from all the countries. In some countries, a slightly better structure of the budget (lower share in salaries, higher share in investments and equipment) is to be observed in higher education (Romania, Montenegro, Croatia).

4. Some recommendations and conclusions

As it can be seen from this study – as well as from reviews and reports collected in the framework of the SEE ECN – there are more or less clear findings on which future orientations and the next goals in *improving particular parts of the educational vertical* should be based. In this place, I would only try to summarize some of the most common findings and recommendations.

In general, countries of the region have encountered a decrease or at least stagnation of the proportion of children included in *pre-primary education*. Economic situation is to be viewed as the main reason for the present situation, yet, the cultural aspect should also be considered within this context. As it holds true that an improvement could be expected parallel to the economic growth, this statement could still not be a reasonable position of *educational* policy in the present circumstances. Pre-primary education should gain in importance in educational policy today. Mere waiting for economic boom would only mean inactivity for another period of time. On the other hand, pre-primary education is closely linked with some other policy areas, for example demography, social and gender issues, family, etc. that do not allow for waiting.

Elementary education is probably that part of the educational vertical, to which most attention is being paid to on a national level, but, on the other hand, it is also the area which has to cope with most severe problems. Dimensions of this part of educational system are immense: the majority of public funds is allocated to elementary education, yet the lack of sufficient funding usually affects this part of the system most. We should leave out (but not forget!) serious problems of premises and equipment in order to stress renewal of curricula and implementation of new teaching/learning methods that seem to be also in a closer link with future regional co-operation in education. All countries of the region have reached the level, when *compulsory* elementary education is not the prior issue, but *quality* elementary education *for all* is the real task that every country aims at. Differentiation at school, individualization of compulsory pedagogical standard, improvement of monitoring and assessment, optional subjects, decentralization of curricula, etc. - all these issues together with particular aspects of education of marginal groups, minorities and children with special needs, etc. should receive more systemic support in future: more *developmental projects* should be launched in this area and their better implementation should be aimed at. On the content level a need to continue with well-rooted projects in developing civic education, improving history teaching, language learning etc. (not only in basic education) is still prevalent and needs a solid follow-up.

Most of what has just been said holds true also in case of *upper secondary education*. However, general upper secondary education today seems to occupy a better position than vocational education and training in most countries of the region. Again, the reasons can be attributed to economic situation and transition processes in society. But, as in the case of pre-primary education above, passive waiting for economic boom would not make a firm basis for educational policy. Ten or even more consecutive age cohorts without a possibility of a systemic *vocational education and training* are not only problematic and expensive from the point of view of national economy and labour market; they are also very problematic – and expensive – from the point of view of the expected consolidated structure of upper secondary education. Schools of *general secondary education* (gymnasiums, lyceums, etc.) have to deal with the situation that is quite different from some other countries: they do not only offer general education, but many times they also play a role of a substitute for the lack of vocational schools. This problem is reflected in questions of access, equity, etc., but also in transfer to tertiary education.

In fact, at least in some countries of the region the term *tertiary education* would call for earnest discussion. Mostly, a traditional model of university education is still in force and the existing universities – confronted with many problems that cannot be discussed into details here – have to cope with a similar situation as some gymnasiums or lyceums, however on a “higher level”: they have to resist the pressure of young unemployed people. Unfortunately, questions of access, equity, quality etc. only evade sharper this way. In order to provide greater access, to assure the quality of university study, to strengthen links with industry and promote employment – but also to influence processes at lower educational stages – attempts to develop diversified systems of tertiary education, which are in progress in some countries, could make effective steps forward. These steps could also be strengthened by means of regional and international cooperation.

Finally and again, *Adult Education* is a problem *per se*. In a situation when the key effort of national education policy is put into hard endeavours to stop impending processes and to guarantee quality education for all young people who will sooner or later have to cope with economic and political reality, the education of adults seems to be marginalized. The problem is even sharper: during the last decade the increasing rate of unemployment was amongst the main characteristics of the region, the structure of industry today is totally different, new skills are demanded on labour market. *The age cohort between 35 and 50 years is probably most affected* by the lack of educational and training opportunities. In addition, public funds have mostly been abolished from this area of education, while most of the new (re)privatised companies have not developed any interest in financial support of this form of education and training so far. Endeavours that aim at promoting lifelong learning strategies usually meet high obstacles at this very point. However, this could again be an important point on the agenda of regional co-operation and international help.

Because of the internal limitations of this report and according to the above comments to segmented parts of the educational vertical we can allow only for a brief additional remark on *teachers' education and training*: it needs radical modernisation in its pre-service as well as in its in-service forms. The entire region needs modern institutions in this area, not only (1) as a place of quality teachers' education and training, but also (2) as a place of substantial educational research, particularly in policy studies, as well as in pedagogical methods and didactics which should be moved out of their traditional and outmoded forms, and (3) as a place of support for further educational renewal and curricular development in each country. Since teacher education and training is traditionally primarily understood with regard to basic education or general education, the importance of pedagogical competences of teachers in VET schools and adult learning should be emphasized, neither should this issue be neglected in pre-primary education.

This is the point, which can help us draw a conclusion. Countries of the region – meeting so many serious challenges to their educational systems – received an important expert help from international community during the last years. They achieved visible success, but their needs are still immense. Efficient meeting these needs by all means demands *sustainable resources and expertise*.

As various forms of help from international community have been extremely valuable and mostly timely for countries of the region, intrinsic imbalance has often been present within those countries. Sometimes this was due to the lack of understanding of particular situations in each country of the region. It was also a result of separate bilateral co-operation schemes of individual countries without appropriate international co-ordination. What does it mean? There were

certain projects aiming at helping all countries in implementing novelties into education (e.g. “Step by Step”), taking into account a *particular country situation* seriously. There were also bilateral (or even unilateral) projects: definitely an expression of sincere solidarity, but they produced sometimes structures that only deepened the existing differences within the region. We should not forget that *accession to Europe* means also *compatibility within the region*. First of all, it is the region, which is predominant.

Today it is widely accepted that a region, any region, needs certain compatibility, certain similar structures of the system in order to strengthen mutual co-operation, to enhance exchange, etc. Troubles just mentioned are mostly results of decreasing or hindered regional co-operation in the past (at this place we cannot discuss the reasons) and an increasing bilateral co-operation with sometimes “very distant” countries. These troubles can be avoided and bilateral co-operation added value can be strengthened if reasonable co-operation and co-ordination is promoted *inside the region* and strengthened in the frames of greater international co-operation.

Last but not least: in order to strengthen national educational reforms it is necessary to *improve the image of education in societies of the region*. As it was obvious from this study, the overall position of education in societies of the region is still weak. The share of GDP spent on education is everywhere lower – sometimes critically lower! – than it is recommended by international organizations. As a consequence, the social status of teachers is rather weak, their working conditions are poor and their readiness to engage in educational renewal is questionable. Of course, in such a situation, Minister’s first priority is to guarantee a routine work of the system; for her/him it is extremely difficult to launch the expected renewal projects. In such conditions international expert co-operation is helpful and worthy, but one should not forget that budgetary problems are still to be solved in the home country.

An important point that can help strengthen the general position of education in society is presented in *public values* and *public opinion*. Renewal of (national) education is always linked with a change of public values and public opinion. Democratic and open societies are based upon individuals, who should be able to compete with their everyday problems and to co-operate with others on the basis of equal rights, solidarity and similar values. To live in a democratic society, to take individual part in economy and political life, to pay individual contribution to the values of open society – all these aims are based on *quality education for all*. These aims can be seriously obstructed if education in public opinion means ruined schools without basic equipment, low paid and poorly trained teachers, outmoded curricula. However, these aims can also be fostered if the key national priority is given (also) to education and if certain school improvement is approved of quickly in the society. It is obvious that this is the very point in which a country could easily fall into *circulus vitiosus*, an enchanted circle. The worst thing is when public opinion loses any trust and turns away from education as a chance for an individual (*carpe diem!*) and substitutes it with day-to-day survival. This is the most expensive scenario from the point of view of the country as a whole, not only in terms of its (educational) budget.

Therefore, at the end of this report a plea should be made for a national, regional and international *campaign intended to improve the position and the esteem of education in societies of the region*. Various activities could be launched: public appearance of - regionally and internationally - distinguished personalities drawing attention to education as a tool of individual promotion and national prosperity, but also promotions of successful economic - or cultural - activities based on new knowledge and skills, etc.

The foreseen peer reviews in the countries of the region seem to recognize some important potential in this direction, too.