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**CENTRE FOR CO-OPERATION WITH NON-MEMBERS
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THEMATIC REVIEW OF NATIONAL POLICIES FOR EDUCATION - REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

Table 1 - Task Force on Education

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FOREWORD

This regional overview on education in South East Europe has been prepared within the framework of the Centre for Co-operation with Non-Members (CCNM) of the OECD as part of its programme of co-operation with the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The Secretariat, as Co-ordinator for General Education Policy and System Change of the Task Force for Education on Table 1 of the Stability Pact, has carried out a Thematic Review of Education Policy of the region with sections on Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, FYROM, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia. The themes covered are teachers, curriculum, governance, and early childhood education and care. Each report provides an overview of the education system, issues and barriers to reform, and country specific recommendations. The Regional Overview focuses on common findings and provides general recommendations and conclusions for education reform in the region. These recommendations are designed to be of use for policy makers and to assist Stability Pact donor countries and institutions target regional assistance.

The transition of the region towards a pluralistic democracy and a market economy has been marked by economic, social and political changes of extraordinary breadth and depth. The talents, skills and knowledge of the population are crucial in this process; hence the ambitious scale and urgency of the reforms being advanced for education which led the members of Table 1 of the Stability Pact to designate education as one of the four priority areas.

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The opinions expressed and arguments employed in this report are the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the governments of the respective countries, the OECD or the governments of its Member countries.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Introduction

The Balkan peninsula in South East Europe is one of the world's most complex areas in terms of ethnicity, language and religion. Nation states mean less, generally speaking, than ethnic allegiances that cross borders: there are Albanians in Macedonia, Macedonians in Bulgaria, Croats in Bosnia, and Serbs in Croatia – the mix is often uneasy, and in recent times has been explosive (*e.g.* Kosovo, Bosnia). It can be argued that as there is no majority ethnic group in SEE as a whole; all are, in some sense, minorities, and should be regarded as such.

This *regional diversity* does not apply only to languages, religion and ethnicity – it permeates the entire geo-political history of SEE, preceding even the division of the Eastern and the Western Roman Empire. Later, the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires affected most parts of the region with divisions, (re-) unifications, shifting allegiances and diversity. The perception of the region during the second half of the 20th century as a homogenous unit in a political or ideological sense is “a mistake based on ignorance”. The former Yugoslavia, as a “neither an Eastern – nor a Western” country, was highly decentralised and diverse in itself. Since the mid-1960s it was more connected with the West (with one million workers abroad) than with the East. Albania to the south west side of the peninsula was isolated until the late 1980s, while Bulgaria and Romania belonged to the “Eastern bloc” and Moldova was an integral part of the Soviet Union. To the south of the Balkans, Greece was the next frontier to the West, politically speaking.

At the same time, it is important – in terms of longer-term policy and strategy – to “*think synoptically about the Southern Balkans as a whole*”.¹ It does not help to approach each country's interests piecemeal, in isolation from any other. It does not help to try and placate every country or ethnic group by encouraging it to achieve *all* of its constitutional and territorial ambitions, as these tend to be mutually exclusive – and as one set of problems is resolved, another one is created. For example, Kosovo cannot be considered as an isolated issue or territory: crucial links (with Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania, for example, must be taken into account.

Equally, it is naïve simply to *assert* the right of every Balkan child to an education of acceptable quality and duration. Access, equity, language of instruction, quality – *all must be negotiated* sensitively, patiently and with a deep understanding of how each community has been shaped by its (often painful and bloody) history.

¹ Katarina Tomasevski (UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education). The Right to Education. Preliminary Report submitted to the UN Commission on Human Rights, 1999.

Education in SEE

Analysing the state of education in countries undergoing economical and political transformation is a sensitive exercise. First, it is easy to identify issues and dilemmas that are universal and relevant almost everywhere, and do not bring any added value to previous reviews of the education system. Second, most of the changes needed to improve the system are so costly that they are not feasible in present circumstances. It is therefore paramount to make only recommendations and suggestions that are within each country's existing resources and structures.

The main message that emerges from the 10 studies is that *some problems are common* across the region (low share of GDP for education; low teacher salaries; child poverty; overloaded curricula; deteriorating material base etc.), but that there are *no common solutions to these problems*. The diversity among and within the systems is too great. Some that are closely linked by language, history or culture (Romania, Moldova) can and do find ways to work together across borders, but no easy assumptions of "regional policy" should be made.

In general, at the end of the 1980s the education systems in most SEE countries were well developed: therefore, problems that arose during the turbulent transitional period should be seen as a "retrogression" from an *essentially sound* starting point. These are by no means countries without educational traditions and expertise; but they face serious problems, and therefore need support.

After World War II, all SEE countries changed their education systems, mostly (but not completely) due to Soviet influence. The most common aims were the elimination of illiteracy and the extension of basic education from 4 to 8 years. Undeniably, the new systems were highly ideological. At least three distinctive types emerged: the Albanian, the Soviet and the Yugoslavian. Four-year technical schools became common, while vocational education and training were linked to the socialist industrial complex, organised differently in each of the three types.²

The Thematic Surveys

The reviews of the 10 education systems participating in the OECD study were "thematic" in the sense that they focussed on certain themes. These were (1) the current status of the system – its governance, administration, financing, and the main reforms; (2) equity and access issues; (3) early childhood education and care; (4) quality issues, in relation to standards, curriculum, teaching and learning methods, textbooks and materials, and learning outcomes. Each review covers these four main themes and gives country specific recommendations. However, in the course of gathering and analysing the material for the reviews, a wide range of important issues emerged that needed to be included. Therefore most reviews also cover vocational education, higher education, and the education of children with special needs.

These thematic reviews are *not* intended to be full-scale OECD reviews of education policy such as have been carried out in many countries. They are meant to be of use to policy makers involved in the

² See Pavel Zgaga, *op. cit.*, for details about the introduction of Career Oriented Education in Yugoslavia, 1970s and 1980s. General education was disregarded, and the traditional *gimnazija* (grammar schools) were abolished.

work of the Stability Pact, and to the wider education community for discussion, debate, and possible co-operation.³

The Four A's

Any education system can be described and, to some extent, evaluated in terms of four main characteristics: the availability of education (provision, resources, school network); its accessibility (and equity of opportunity); its acceptability, in terms of culture and quality; and its adaptability to changing circumstances and individual needs.⁴ These four characteristics are considered below with regard to the 10 education systems included in the OECD's Thematic Reviews.

Is Education Available?

In general, the answer here is "yes". A high percentage of the compulsory schooling age cohort is in school; there is, if anything, an *over*-supply of qualified teachers with low pupil-teacher ratios (P:TR can be as low as 10:1); and the school network, despite the ravages of war, time and lack of maintenance, is generally in place. In other words, nearly every child of compulsory school age can find a place in a school not too far from her/his home, and find a teacher there who is qualified to teach and has some supply of books and materials.

But the picture is not uniform. Resources are scarce because (again in general) the share of education as a percentage of GDP is well below the OECD average. Some schools are so small they are not viable as birth rates continue to fall. At the same time, due to employment patterns and "urban drift", many urban schools are over-crowded, and forced to work on two or even three shifts.⁵ As a result, instructional time and "opportunity to learn" are seriously eroded, at a time when new curricula and more demanding standards require the opposite. The infrastructure (buildings, books, materials, equipment, heating in winter) is often poor, especially in rural areas. Decentralisation and finance reform have not always resulted in more resources being available to local schools, and their accountability for delivering high-quality education is weak.

Is Education Accessible?

Again in general, the answer is a cautious "yes".⁶ The following observations can be made, however:

- *Participation* (enrolment, attendance, continuity) is not what it ought to be, especially at post-compulsory (upper secondary) and pre-school levels. Percentages here have been dropping, perhaps not dramatically (except in pre-school) but steadily, even at compulsory schooling age. What are the barriers here? The possibility of early "push-out" by increased selection cannot be ruled out.

³ The thematic reviews are available on www.oecd.org/els/emerging/education. Click on "Documentation" and then on "Working Papers".

⁴ See Tomasevski, *op. cit.*, for a more extensive analysis.

⁵ One school visited in Serbia was on *four* shifts because of the language mix and high refugee population.

⁶ Each of the 10 reviews covers access and equity issues in some depth, and should be consulted.

- *Survival*: more children leave school early. Drop out and irregular attendance during compulsory schooling are becoming a problem, and secondary school coverage is falling behind OECD countries.
- Enrolment rates at upper secondary and tertiary levels are strongly and positively related to *family income*. Access to better-quality schools and universities increasingly depends on paying “informal” fees and bribes.
- In terms of *gender*, the balance is generally even (a legacy from the previous system); in higher education, some countries show more female than male students in some subjects. In our surveys, however, two *minorities* are consistently at the bottom of the social and educational scale:
 - First, the *Roma (Gypsy)* population. Not only do they face the typical problems of any ethnic minority, they are often a focus for deliberate unequal treatment, injustice, exclusion and violence, even where they constitute a large minority such as in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania.
 - Second, children and young people with *special educational needs*. The term “defectology”, traditionally used in SEE in relation to educational provision for special-needs children, clearly reflects a tendency to focus on the “defect” (which can be “fixed”) rather than on the child and his or her value as a human being. Fortunately, fewer children than before are now institutionalised,⁷ and the OECD team noted a growing awareness of the need to integrate special-needs children as much as possible in mainstream schooling. However, much remains to be done in terms of teacher training and public acceptance, and it is certainly our recommendation that this be done *as a matter of priority*. International experience can help.
- The team noted more emphasis on policies of *selection* (especially for the more prestigious schools) than on the principle of *education for all*. There is an understandable pride in setting high entrance & performance standards, but too little attention is paid to what happens to youngsters who are not lucky enough, or clever enough, or rich enough, to be “selected” into high-quality schools. These schools also tend to be in urban areas, raising concern about the realities of access for children from rural areas.
- Access to *jobs and university places* is also unequal, and weighted against those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Payment for education, especially at tertiary level, is becoming prevalent and obviously creates inequities.

Is Education Acceptable?

Education quality, which used to be high and well respected, has suffered over the past decade. Chronic under-funding, as well as disruption and conflicts in the region, have taken their toll. The disparities between “good” and “poor” schools are increasing, not helped by a post-1990 rush to decentralise and devolve responsibility for education to the local level. Clearly, some localities are better

⁷ This is not universally so. UNICEF notes that in some countries *more* children are now in public care than used to be the case before 1990. See *Education for All?*, UNICEF-ICDC, MONEE Report No. 5. Florence: 1998.

able to provide quality schooling than others, making quality a matter of geographical accident rather than an entitlement for all.

- Most systems adjust in *ad hoc* ways to funding shortfalls. The most common responses are (1) closing schools in winter for lack of heating; (2) deferring maintenance and major repairs; (3) running up large arrears (for example, in payment of teacher salaries, or utility bills); (4) reducing instructional hours, to well below OECD averages; and (5) shifting costs to families, formally or informally, without regard to equity for all.
- Additional quality issues are (1) the quality of the curriculum, which remains overloaded and too “heavy” for most students; (2) rigid approaches to teaching and learning, with emphasis on the acquisition of large amounts of factual knowledge rather than competence; (3) lack of high-quality learning materials, such as books and supplementary materials *linked to standards*; (4) insufficient in-service development of teachers, for example in standards-linked teaching and learning, and in supporting special-needs children in regular classrooms.

Quality monitoring systems are inadequate or simply lacking. At best, teachers see their jobs as “teaching the content of the curriculum in the time available on the timetable”; very little attention is paid to what students actually learn and can do. A fundamental shift from a “teaching” to a “learning” view of education is needed. A comprehensive, standards-based quality monitoring *system* is lacking. A revitalised system of school support and inspection, as well as standards-based *assessment of learning outcomes*, are needed urgently.

Is Education Adaptable?

All countries surveyed have undergone profound social, economic and political changes in the past decade, and many are still struggling in an unsteady and volatile political climate. Moreover, the “material base” of the education system is poor *and deteriorating*, with little prospect of improvement in the short term.

How does an education system “adapt” to changed circumstances, particularly when resources are scarce? How can it serve new generations of children whose futures will be completely different from their parents’?

Overall, the reviews show that SEE’s education systems are making admirable efforts, but that *they lack a coherent **strategy** to tackle the new demands they face*. These include:

- Changes in population and employment structures, and therefore in the demand for certain types of education rather than others (this is especially a problem in VET and adult education);
- Decentralisation and equity issues, for example the newly affirmed rights of *all* children (special needs, minorities) to an equal level of education;
- Relevance to, and links with, the labour market; vocational and adult education and (re-) training;
- Wider access to early childhood care and development, especially for disadvantaged populations so that any difficulties can be spotted and remedied early;

- Greater understanding of the human value and rights of children with special educational needs;
- Greater expectations of (and demand for) upper secondary and tertiary education, and life-long learning.

Several countries surveyed are now formulating longer-term strategies to deal with these and other issues. “White papers” and “Strategy papers” are being prepared, and in a sense the OECD Thematic Reviews seek to contribute to their formulation by bringing cross-country comparisons to bear on the debate.

Main findings of the CEPS study

*Data*⁸

In autumn 2000 and in 2001, the Centre for Educational Policy Studies (CEPS, University of Ljubljana) carried out the project *Support to OECD Thematic Reviews of Educational Policy in South Eastern Europe*, on the basis of an agreement with European Training Foundation and as part of OECD Thematic Reviews of Educational Policy. The CEPS study (11 reports in total) was produced jointly by researchers from CEPS and experts from each education system⁹ covered by the OECD reviews.

Obtaining data presented a number of problems. In some countries of the region – particularly in those affected by wars, ruined institutional networks, changes in population, huge migrations as well as destroyed archives reliable data were difficult or even impossible to obtain. Moreover, *human resources* in data gathering and analysis are scarce, and in most cases no appropriate training has been provided for a long time.

Based on the CEPS experience, therefore, there is a clear need for a support programme to develop the data gathering and 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.* statistical offices), or some NGOs that have already launched important national projects in this direction.

The data gathered for each country report were structured into seven clusters:

- general data,
- participation in education,

⁸ See Pavel Zgaga, “The Situation of Education in the SEE Region: Final Content Report on the Project ‘Support to OECD Thematic Review of Education Policy in South Eastern Europe’”. (Report prepared for the European Training Foundation, Turin.) Ljubljana: Centre for Education Policy Studies, University of Ljubljana. March 2002. All CEPS Project documents are available on web site <http://www.see-educoop.net>.

⁹ Researchers include: 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), Senka Bosner (Croatia), Nataša Živković (Montenegro), Liliana Preoteasa (Romania), Gordana Zindović Vukadinović (Serbia) and Anatol Gremalschi (Moldova). See <http://pef.pef.uni-lj.si/ceps/> for details.

- enrolment patterns and numbers of institutions,
- curriculum,
- administration in primary and secondary education,
- facilities and equipment, cost and financing,
- cost and financing.

Demographics

Migration

Data from all countries surveyed by CEPS show significant changes in population, often due to large migrations both within (*e.g.* urban drift) and among countries, sometimes due to economic circumstances but often also to ethnic conflict and war. Flows of refugees during periods of conflict resulted in parallel or temporary – mostly improvised – school networks, but many children also missed out on education for some time.

The projections of both the OECD's and the UN's population statistics indicate a continuing fall in European birth rates, and on the economic growth that continues to make the EU attractive to migrant labour. But at the heart of the migration debate lies the issue of development – of how disadvantaged economies can get themselves into some sort of alignment with wealthier ones.

It remains the case that few of the world's 6 billion people migrate: according to the International Organisation for Migration, only about 200 million people (3.3%) live outside their country of origin. But those from disadvantaged economies who manage to do so, or are forced to do so, are 'ferryman of wealth and aspiration' for many others. Often one migrant from a poor country represents a huge investment on the part of his relatives. The global figure for remittances in 1998 was estimated at USD 52.8 billion, significantly *higher* than official aid flows from donor organisations. In some SEE countries (Albania, Moldova) remittances from migrant workers are a significant factor in the national economy.

Remittances, like aid, can be divisive and can create conflict and envy in local communities. Unlike aid, however, they tend to hit the mark and are less vulnerable to plunder by corrupt governments. Either way, it is obvious that migrants play a far greater role in the transfer of wealth than anything Western governments can hope to contribute. This is a serious point for those involved in setting or revising migration policy.

The down side of migration, of course, is "brain drain" especially at a time when birth rates are falling dramatically in many SEE countries and their resource starved education systems struggle to build the kind of home grown human capital they will need for their nations' future. The review teams heard some cynics say that the purpose of education in some Balkan countries is "to provide a trained work force for the West" – this cannot be in anyone's long-term interests. As populations shrink, SEE countries will need to build strategies to retain their "best and brightest" by making it possible for them to support their families as well as their own countries.

Declining birth rates

While the general trend for the SEE region is downward, there are large differences, *e.g.* Croatia has one of the *lowest* birth rates 9.9 % (per 1000 inhabitants) in 1999, Kosovo 21.3 % in 1995 and Albania 17.2 % in 1989 are amongst countries with the *highest* birth rates in Europe.

Mixed ethnic composition of populations

Ethnic minorities are an important issue, also in education. Ethnic majorities vary, *e.g.* from Montenegro (62% ethnic Montenegrin) or Moldova (64%) to Albania with nearly 98%. However, it is not easy to get a clear statistical picture. 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. In many cases data that *are* available are not always reliable.

Poverty

Increasing numbers of households in the region are living in poverty, especially households with children. The direct relationship between poverty and educational attainment is well documented. The poor face three specific problems in education (1) in an inefficient system, the poor suffer most because scarce resources are less likely to be spent on them; (2) the cost of education takes a larger share of (low) family income, especially in larger families; and (3) the perceived benefits of education – in terms of access to jobs, or escape from poverty – are low. Poor families see little evidence that the sacrifices they make to send children to school will lead to a better life.

Participation in education

Low educational attainment of the (active) population, particularly in mid-life and older generations although in areas affected by conflicts during the last decade this may also be true of young people. Girls, women, older people and some ethnic groups (*e.g.* Roma) are particularly marginalised. Unemployment rates are high, especially among young people. All too often, schools do not prepare students for the radically changed labour market, so that even those with qualifications cannot find jobs.

Structure. Only Romania and Moldova (2002) have 9 years of compulsory schooling; all other SEE countries still offer the traditional 8 years, although changes are planned. 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 particularly alarming in the Western Balkans (Romania and Bulgaria do better). 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.

In basic education all countries report high participation. It has traditionally been high; and, despite conflicts and huge migrations in some parts of the region, the basic obligatory education network seems to have been preserved. In general, there are no reports of alarming dropout from basic education; however, the *quality* of education could be questionable. In some countries girls are more at risk of not being enrolled at all or dropping out, especially in rural areas.

In upper secondary education, participation has increased. However, particularly in the Western Balkans, the situation is not comparable with other transition countries. Considerable numbers of students who finish basic education do not continue in upper secondary education. Serbia reports the highest share of the age cohort continuing in upper secondary education (78.3%; over three times more in VET than in general education), followed by Romania (69.4%), Bulgaria (67%), Macedonia (65.08%) and Croatia (63%). There are no data available for Montenegro, but it is estimated to be in this category as well. Bosnia and Herzegovina reports only half of the 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 Bosnia-Herzegovina. Albania (41%) and Moldova (39% with almost all the population in general education and only 9% in VET!) are at the end of this scale.

It is characteristic for most SEE countries that the proportion of students in general education is lower than it is in VET (Moldova, which was once part of the former Soviet educational system, is an exception).

In general, the proportion of female students to male students is equal. There are no data on participation by gender available for Kosovo, but the share of female students is probably lower than in other countries. At post-compulsory level, dropout seems to be an increasingly serious problem.¹⁰

For tertiary education, all countries report greatly increased participation. Studying in tertiary institutions at the turn of the millennium:

- Bulgaria 35.0% of the age cohort (19-24),
- Croatia 31.3% (age 20-24),
- Moldova 29.0% (age 19-22),
- Romania 28.0% (age 19-23),
- Serbia 22.63% (age 18-24),
- Federation Bosnia-Herzegovina 21.6% (age 19-25),
- Macedonia 21.5% (age 19-23),
- Albania 15% (age 18-23).

For some countries the corresponding data are not available.

Enrolment patterns and number of institutions

School network, number of institutions. School networks have traditionally been well developed. There is no evidence of any radical closing of institutions, although some countries obviously encounter

¹⁰ All country experts reported a lack of reliable data on dropouts from basic and upper secondary education. Therefore, the methodology of calculating dropout was simply based on the number of students who did not complete the school year in relation to the total number of students registered and does not take into account those who were never in the system.

severe problems with an extremely low enrolment in rural areas or in some types of institutions. The size of institutions differs greatly: there are many institutions with fewer than 50 pupils or even only a few pupils while on the other hand – particularly in urban centres – huge institutions and frequent. The average Pupil:Teacher ratio in most cases is low. In pre-schools, it differs from 7.76 (Republic of Srpska) to 20.73 (Montenegro), in primary schools from 12 (Bulgaria) to 21 (Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina), in general secondary schools from 11.0:11.8 (Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia) to 19 (Kosovo; Serbian schools excluded), in VET schools from 6.5 (Moldova) to 21 (Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina), 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, these are only averages. VET schools and non-university institutions represent the highest extremes within the region.

The subsystem of *private kindergartens and schools* is not very 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 Bosnia-Herzegovina, Republic of Srpska, Kosovo).

Adult education is mostly an un-recognised problem in all SEE countries. The former system of adult education has disappeared, and in most cases no new development is taking place. Since there is no relevant monitoring of adult education, there is a total lack of data, which makes a detailed and correct diagnosis impossible.

Curriculum

Only in some countries – and only since the late 1990s – new curricula have been approved and implemented in basic education, general secondary education, and for at least 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, often limited to deleting ideological content from textbooks.

For the countries of the Western Balkans, *a comprehensive reform* of the curriculum should now be top priority. Note that this reform should focus on the curriculum *framework as a whole*, rather than on piecemeal changes in subject syllabuses.

Administration and teaching in primary and secondary education

School administration is generally neglected as a profession; there is almost no systematic training for school principals.

In general, initial teacher training remains traditional and unsatisfactory. Teachers, however, need more support today than they did in previous times. In-service teacher training is almost absent in some countries; what is offered tends to be haphazard and insufficiently related to education reforms. This is particularly important for (future) teachers in VET.

Under – or unqualified teachers and educators are mostly found in pre-school education (30% in Macedonia, 21% in Romania and Croatia) and basic education (19% in Romania and Federation Bosnia-Herzegovina 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%).

Facilities and equipment

Not surprisingly, all SEE countries report *severe problems with facilities and equipment*. The situation is most severe in these areas affected by war, particularly in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. Restoration of buildings and modernisation of equipment should be linked with the development of a comprehensive education reform strategy (particularly with regard to rationalisation of the school network).

Costs and financing

This was the most difficult part of the CEPS study. Reliable data on education costs and financing are scarce, and the research team had difficulty in collecting and analysing them. It was necessary to use a different methodology in each country. In Kosovo, for example, there has so far not been an education budget as such; 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 organised, nor is it properly co-ordinated or sustainable.

Nearly all resources available are allocated to salaries (almost all in pre-university education in Romania, 90% or more in Croatia, Montenegro, Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina). Funds for school equipment (2% or even less in Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania) and investments (3% or even less in Montenegro, Macedonia, Republic of Srpska, Romania, Serbia) are very poor. Chronic under-funding erodes the quality of education, especially in education systems that were clearly designed for a much higher level of public financing.

Some conclusions arising from the CEPS study

- *Pre-primary education must receive more attention*, in policy as well as in financial support. Simply waiting for an “economic boom” will only prolong the present inertia. Moreover, as birth rates fall and the numbers of children in pre-schools decline, new opportunities appear to improve provision and quality of early childhood care and development.
- *Elementary education* probably receives the most attention and funding, but it also has to cope with the most severe problems. All SEE countries have reached a level where access to basic education is not the main issue, but *quality elementary education for all* – including rural children, children of minorities, children with special needs, and children who are socially or emotionally at-risk – is the real task..
- *General upper secondary* education today seems to occupy a better position than vocational education and training, in most SEE countries. At the same time, schools of *general secondary education* (gymnasias, lycea, etc.) in this region are faced with a situation quite different from some other countries: not only do they offer general education, often they are also expected to be a substitute for the lack (or low status and quality) of *vocational schools*. This problem is reflected in issues of access and equity, but also in the transfer to tertiary education institutions.

- *The term “tertiary education” deserves more attention and debate.* Mostly, a traditional model of university education is still in force, and the existing universities – confronted with serious problems – often become the last refuge for young unemployed people. Unfortunately, this only sharpens questions of access, equity, and quality. The development of a diversified system of tertiary education could be an effective step forward.
- *Adult education* and life-long learning seem to be under-valued. High unemployment and a completely altered structure of industry demand the development of a labour force that has different, broader work skills. The age group between 35 and 50 years is probably most affected by the lack of educational and training opportunities. Public funds have nearly dried up, and most new (re)privatised companies have neither the interest nor the financial resources to support training and staff development efforts.
- *Teachers’ education and development* need radical modernisation, both in its pre-service and in-service forms. The entire region needs modern institutions in this area, not only:
- *The image of education in society* must be improved. The share of GDP spent on education in all systems is lower – sometimes critically lower! – than is recommended by international organisations. In consequence, the social status of teachers is weak, their working conditions poor, and their readiness to engage in educational renewal questionable. But apart from improving the material base for education, it is also necessary to link renewal of (national) education to a change of public values and public opinion. Democratic and open societies are based upon individuals who should support equal rights, solidarity with others, and similar values, including quality education for all. These aims cannot be achieved if education (in public opinion) means ruined schools without basic equipment, poorly paid and poorly trained teachers, outmoded curricula, passive learning of facts, and poor prospects for employment.
- *A national, regional and international campaign is needed* to improve the position and esteem of education in societies throughout the region. Various activities could be launched: public appearances 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 planned peer reviews in SEE countries could play an important role here for the VET sector, but the other sections of the system also need attention.
- *External involvement* (from international and bilateral donors, and from NGOs) is essential in the Balkans for a number of reasons. Obviously, resources (both financial and human) are needed to repair the ravages of war and years of under-resourcing under previous regimes. More than that, however, is the need for *external mediators*, people who can bring others together, work towards consensus, defuse confrontations, and help to focus on long-term common interests rather than short-term disagreements. This is often best done not by large international organisations but by smaller NGOs working directly with people in the community. Naturally, NGO activity needs to be co-ordinated and monitored with care, and integrated into the larger development strategy for the region.

Principal regional recommendations

Keeping in mind the observation – that while there are many common problems across the region, there are few common solutions – some general recommendations can nevertheless be made.

- *Make concerted, strong efforts to increase the share for education* in national and local budgets. Reform of the financing of the education system is an essential precondition for further progress on education reform at all levels. Additional investment in education is needed. This is linked to overall economic growth, but problems in financing education also appear to be related to the structure and management of current policies.
- *Redefine the responsibilities and strengthen capabilities* of the ministries of education and shift the role of ministries from “micro-managing the system” to setting policy and monitoring quality linked to explicit standards. Increase efforts and capacities of ministries for policy analysis, research and evaluation of policy implementation.
- *Develop a comprehensive strategy for the entire education system*, based on a philosophy of *learning for all*. This includes children across the ability range, children with special needs, and those from minority ethnic or linguistic backgrounds or from poor families. Pay attention to rural development issues and narrow the disparities between rural and urban areas.
- *Related to this is the need to increase management and leadership skills* and continue to realign the role and responsibility at all levels of the education system to support a more decentralised, responsive and accountable school and institutional network. It is also necessary to improve the co-ordination between the ministries and institutions concerned.
- *Pay more attention to the emotional needs of children* (and their teachers!) who have been traumatised by war, conflict, displacement, and family breakdown. No community can be expected to function normally in abnormal conditions; expert help may be needed.
- *Renew and slim down curricula*, emphasise integrated and cross-curricular teaching and training. Reform both vocational education and general secondary education to ensure that all students completing secondary education gain the core knowledge and skills to be competitive in the labour market and to counter serious problems of school leavers (dropouts) with no useable qualification. In developing national standards and curricula for general secondary education, the core knowledge and skills graduates will need to be successful in a changing labour market should be emphasised.
- *Improve the formal professional qualifications of teachers* and their on-going qualification by improving and intensifying pre-service and in-service training. Improve teacher status and pay greater attention to their development. Make every effort to raise the level of teachers pay. Low salaries and poor career prospects have serious consequences for educational quality. Evaluate performance, and ensure that teachers and schools are held accountable for the quality they provide.
- *Develop a coherent national policy for the social and educational protection of children*, including fair and transparent procedures and decisions in the school career of the child or student. Children and their parents should be helped to obtain information about educational and social opportunities suitable to them. Every effort should be taken to avoid any exclusion based on social, ethnic, gender or religious reasons and focus on the principle *education for all*.

- *Develop programmes to identify and diagnose children having special needs* and ensure that adequate educational possibilities are provided, wherever the child may be, at home or in a regular school or in a special needs educational institution. Provide teacher training for children with special needs and target social support to at-risk children and families.