

Task Force Education and Youth

Enhanced Graz Process

Working Table 1 Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe



Expert seminar:

Ensuring access to ICT for everyone

Graz, November 27 and 28, 2003

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

The seminar on ICT was organized by the Task Force Education and Youth / Enhanced Graz Process with financial support of Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and in cooperation with Austrian Ministry of Education Science and Culture. It took place within the framework of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), initiative jointly developed by the TFEY and Education Ministries of SEE aiming at supporting ongoing educational reforms and linking them with European trends and developments as outlined in the EU Work Detailed Programme of the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe.

The primary objective of the seminar was to support national reform in a specific area by bringing experts together to exchange views on implementing strategies with regard to ongoing European trends in ICT. It should furthermore contribute to regional co-operation at system and expert level to support the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) in the field of education and add to the ongoing process of capacity building in the respective reform areas.

In all 28 participants including representatives of Education Ministries from SEE, EU, Accession countries as well as representatives from the public and private sector attended the seminar.

Proceedings of the seminar

The Head of the Task Force Education and Youth, Ms. Kanita Kovacevic welcomed the participants and highlighted the framework and importance of this seminar. Participants were also welcomed by Mr. Adrian Butler, the Executive Director of European Center for Modern Languages where the seminar was held. Mr. Dorninger from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture presented the two-day Programme and outlined the aim of the seminar.

Mr. Rudolf Apflauer, from the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture provided an overview of the project eFit strategy presented in the EU Working Group C: "Ensuring access to ICT to everyone" within the EU Detailed Work Programme of the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe. The Austrian eFit strategy consists of several projects, each of them focusing on different area such as training, research, culture, administration etc. The participants were given a short presentation about the ongoing discussion within the EU working group on ICT and were also informed that the next meeting of this group would take place on 8. December 2003.

Mr. Igor Njegovan, from the Open University Zagreb presented the Croatian strategy of ICT and the project focused on teacher training. Participants were given a short overview of Croatian school system and were also informed that the ICT compulsory education in Croatia starts in 5th class, including 72 hours a week and that there is still a great need for in-service teacher training and better motivation of teachers. The presented strategy includes phased approach, several levels of knowledge and teaching staff. The testing phase is considered important for identification of possible shortfalls and problems. The project is funded by the state.

Discussion:

Presentations were followed by discussion around issues of standards and procedure of their identification, connection of schools to the Internet, administration of school networks, lack of equipment, training and EU standards.

Participants were informed that Croatia and Austria, as well as Germany and Switzerland have agreements with respective Telecom companies, which provide Internet connection for schools. Every school in Croatia has two ISDN connections and is connected through Croatian academic network, which is a state institution funded by the state and including all primary, high schools and universities. Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture covers the costs of Internet connection (1 MB) for all schools. VET schools receive 2-4 MB and primary schools ISDN connections. Every Austrian province has a focal point and already 30% schools are connected to ECDL. All primary and secondary schools in Austria are the part of the same academic network (AC-net) and are connected to universities through this network. Austrian underlined the importance of EU strategy for the success of Austrian ICT strategy.

Participants also discussed the issue of the lack of equipment in most of the SEE countries e.g. Montenegro with only one computer on 174 students in primary schools, Kosovo with 10 computers per each secondary school, in Bosnia only 4% of elementary schools and around 10% secondary schools are sufficiently equipped etc. However there was a mutual agreement that training is a top priority for all countries.

Macedonia informed about the ongoing World Bank Project "Modernizing of Education" and other projects and grants granted to Macedonia e.g. EU project "Sirena", providing support with regard to connecting schools into a network.

Mr. Christian Dorninger, Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture presented the project "eEducation" within the eFit Strategy of Austria aiming at introduction of new media both in general and VET schools. He presented EU Benchmarks for education and objectives of

the eFit initiative. Participants were given a short overview of Austrian school system as well as various sub-projects of e-Learning such as electronic learning platforms, notebook classes and online courses, so called regional e-learning clusters (network of schools working together and offering additional certificates), content providing etc. He also stressed the importance of public-private partnerships with regard to internationally acknowledged certificates.

Ms. Andrea Karpati, from the Eötvös University, Budapest provided an insight into ICT implementation strategy from an accession country also included into group C within the EU Detailed Work Programme. Ms. Karpati gave an overview on the ongoing reform in ICT education, which is compulsory from age 10 to 17. Participants were informed about the project called "Schoolnet Express" aiming at increasing the number of Internet connections in Hungarian schools and also increasing the number of computers in homes through tax deductions on ICT equipment. Another activity concerns Internet content and making it more balanced and democratic. In Hungary ICT has proven to be a catalyst for educational reforms and computer use also helps close gender and social gaps as it has been showed by the Gypsy School ICT project. Teachers of all disciplines are encouraged to use ICT and are being rewarded for it in different forms. Content provision is facilitated through distribution of teacher's manuals made in cooperation with 50 best schools, whose best teachers developed curricula for various subjects and videotaping their classes. Manuals with CDs were then distributed to other schools. The issue of Teacher Training in ICT is a top priority in Hungary, as well as in Austria and Croatia.

Discussion:

Participants discussed the issue of teacher training and "awarding" teachers for using ICT and presented experiences in their countries.

It was stated that schools in Hungary get a lump sum for ICT training enabling every teacher to apply for getting support to visit IT classes provided by accredited schools. In Hungary 27% teachers use computers for tests, 16% of them regularly.

Croatian representative explained that Croatian Ministry of Education pays directly to provider and that this free training can be seen as a form of reward for teachers. Open University Zagreb is major provider of training with a regional education center only in Zagreb. Furthermore he informed the participants that Croatia also carried out an equity project including 300 Romani children.

Serbian representative stated that teachers using ICT have better chances for career advancement and that this is a form of awarding them for their efforts.

On the second day of the seminar participant had a chance to hear about the curriculum reform in Kosovo and also about various case studies.

Mr. Arbnor Pajaziti, University of Prishtina provided a short overview of overall aims of the ongoing curricula reform in Kosovo and the White book defining mission of the schools, objectives of education etc. stressing the importance of European standards and international cooperation. Experts from United Kingdom, Scotland and Slovenia supported curricula reform in Kosovo by providing training for local expert. ICT education in Kosovo is compulsory from 9th grade with tests for both students and teachers.

Mr. Gerald Futschek, Austrian computer society and Technical University Vienna talked about Austrian experience with ECDL and gave a short overview of its history in Austria, structure, achievements and future goals. Since its introduction in Austria the number of candidates as well as license holders increased. He also explained an authorization procedure for a country beginning with applying to ECDL and submitting a business plan. Overview of the ECDL pricing system was also provided stating that test centers collect fees for performing tests as well as for skills card.

Mr. Ernst Karner, Society of e-learning Austria presented the Society of "ECDL in schools", which is a non-profit organization and part of the ICT initiative of the Austrian government. Its aim is the promotion of ECDL in schools as well as ECDL training in authorized test centers.

Mr. Manfred Brandner, Bitmedia Graz, informed about the history of the company focusing on adult training and presented its partners. He also provided an overview of Bitmedia products with regard to learning management systems, ECDL and language learning and content creation. He furthermore presented projects carried out in cooperation with the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

Discussion:

Mr. Dorninger mentioned that basic skills are crucial for closing the digital divide. He stressed the need to apply already existing international standards. Austrian strategy is based on the EU, used as best practice example and adopted to Austrian needs and priorities. He suggested the similar for SEE countries. He also underlined the importance of ECDL, as it can be found everywhere in Europe.

Some SEE countries stressed the problem stemming from the lack of funding necessary for basic activities with regard to applying European standards in ICT. Participants were informed that Croatia planned to establish a methodological center on the Adriatic coast for children from all over Europe to be used as a summer camp for learning both language and computer skills. A very successful example in this regard was the summer camp organized in cooperation with van Hagen Kolleg in Germany.

There was discussion with regard contracting procedure and Austrian stated that there were no exclusive agreements with any company and that each company could make a bid and offer better conditions and price.

Mr. Wolfgang Fasching, from CISCO Austria outlined the history of CISCO Austria and its Networking Academy program which is a public, private, partnership between Cisco, Governments, Education Institutions, NGO's and industry created to teach students how to design, build and maintain computer networks and providing them with basic to advance networking skills.

Ms. Michalina Fraczek, IBM Central and Eastern Europe gave a short overview of educational projects of IBM and explained the IBM approach to education including infrastructure, learning technologies and professional development. She also informed the participants about the fund for CEE countries and its application procedure via Slovenian IBM branch.

Austrian representatives stated that IBM solutions are very global and that some country would most probably need only some parts of the offered products.

Mr. Thomas Kendöl, Kendöl & Parnter presented various e-levo products aimed at different tasks such as correspondence, process-oriented school administration including teacher, student and partner administration, instructional planner, support for teaching process, content management etc.

Participants discussed the issue of data protection with regard to various products and school administration as well as other issues such as time-consuming maintenance and the possibility of using only some modules of the offered software solutions.

General conclusions and recommendations

Participants discussed the issues of decentralization vs. centralization as well as the importance of co-operation in terms of sharing experiences and best practices as well as importance of applying international standards.

There was a mutual agreement that common standards of knowledge should be identified on the EU level but that curricula/syllabus should stay national. In other words output needs to be international, but input like curricula should remain national. In addition to this participants stated that it is important to have one strategy and external support in defining the final goal but "decentralized" implementation. Schools have to be provided with more autonomy in decision-making process but state however should be responsible for standards and should provide for infrastructure.

Some participants noted that a centralized approach might be better for smaller countries in terms of costs and transparency but therefore even greater need for cooperation and integration into the European mainstream as not to be isolated and left behind.

As this seminar clearly showed that each country has a different level of IT technology, it was stated that assessment/quality assurance system and statistics could be helpful. Participants expressed a great need for technical aid that could be conducted through public-private partnerships. Participants furthermore emphasized the need for Centers of Excellence and training centers in order to share information on changing ICT world and help bridge the digital divide between SEE and EU. This would support their policy makers and would have a substantial impact on reform efforts.

It was furthermore suggested that further expert seminars should be organized in order to stay informed on latest developments within EU and to bring experts together and share valuable experience. Good policy examples should be made more visible and disseminated among the SEE countries. The Task Force Education and Youth/Enhanced Graz Process homepage www.see-educoop.org already offers a library of key EU documents but it will soon offer a collection of best practice examples on various topics and among them also on ICT.