

Report:
Extended Working Group Meeting on Policy Development and System Improvement
(Ljubljana, February 21, 2001)
Task Force Education and Youth – Enhanced Graz Process

This meeting follows discussions and recommendations of previous meetings of the Working Group in Bled (2000), Vienna (May 8, 2001) and a WG core experts meeting on July 9, 2001 in Vienna.

28 participants with strong involvement of ministry representatives and other experts from Southeast Europe discussed necessary elements and procedures to support regional co-operation with respect to current and future activities of the Working Group (cf. participant's list, agenda).

1. Special attention was given to the following issues:

• **Progress Report on the Activities of the Task Force Education and Youth:**

Mr. Dobart made reference to the ongoing efforts of the Task Force to lobby for education and youth issues both in the framework of the Stability Pact and on the European level. During the meeting of Working Table I in Skopje (December 17-18, 2001), which intensively discussed the process of decentralisation and the potential role of local communities in strengthening inter-ethnic relations, the crucial importance of education and youth was emphasised. Furthermore, on the occasion of the Second Informal Conference of Ministers of Education from Southeast Europe (Council of Europe) Ministers were informed about the work of the Task Force and the progress made with respect to the OECD led Thematic Reviews and the Southeast European Co-operation Network. In the final declaration, Ministers from Southeast Europe pointed out the crucial role of the Enhanced Graz Process for the co-ordination of respective measures, the definition of medium term strategies and the support for the continuous development of educational networks. With respect to the upcoming Conference of European Ministers of Education in Bratislava (June 2002) the Chair reported on ongoing efforts to support a co-ordinated effort of the Ministers for Southeast Europe with respect to a stronger involvement of the region in a wider European area for education.

Based on the results of the Quick Start Projects, the TF has developed a systematic approach to support both, national policy development and regional co-operation and follows closely the objectives of the so called "Strategy 2001/2002". For concrete activities see below.

Following a Sectorial Donors Meeting in Brussels, (Brussels, December 2001) a new call for proposals in targeted priority areas was launched in early 2002. Respective calls for proposals have been launched in the following working groups: Education for Democratic Citizenship/Management of Diversity, History and History Teaching as well as Young People. The screening of submitted projects (to take place end of February/mid of March 2002) will identify activities with a clear cut regional approach and mid term impact; respective contacts with interested donors on basis of the Sectorial Donor's Meeting mentioned above will follow in the first half of 2002.

- **Status quo and further development of the so called Quick Start Projects monitored by the Working Group (PISA, South East European Co-operation Network - SEE-ECN, Kosovo Education Centre - KEC), OECD Thematic Reviews)**

PISA (Input by Ms. Stromberger, OECD):

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) aims to develop regular, reliable, policy relevant indicators on student achievement; to assess knowledge skills and competencies embedded in the context of important content domains such as literacy, mathematics and sciences. PISA provides a new basis for policy dialogue and collaboration in defining and operationalising educational goals.

To implement PISA in South East Europe is one of the OECD activities within the Working Group General Education. Countries already participating in PISA Plus (PISA 2000 with a delayed timeline): Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania. These countries are implementing the main study and the results should be released at the end of 2002, beginning 2003. Serbia is participating in PISA 2003. Under discussion: Montenegro and Croatia. For Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo seminars in statistics, traineeships, secondments with member countries and capacity building activities will be carried out. Moldova is not yet under discussion.

PISA in SEE is funded by Finland, Austria, OECD; the national costs have to be covered by the countries themselves, which is one of the problems for the not yet participating countries (see above).

KEC (Input by Mr. Pupovci):

KEC started operation in May 2000 as one of the Stability Pact Quick Start Package Projects with generous support of several donors: Soros Foundation, Federal Ministry for Education-Austria, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and United Kingdom Jewish Aid and Development (UKJAID). Main objective of the foundation is contribute actively to the construction of a modern education system in Kosova by helping educators to enhance their activity, by facilitating the influx of relevant experience from other countries, by providing comprehensive, up-to-date and reliable information and reports on the education system, and by organising a variety of initiatives and events to these ends.

For KEC year 2000 was a year of building internal, organisational and program structure, whereas year 2001 was a year for testing the capacity of the institution to fulfil its mission. Apart from helping the education authorities in Kosovo to set up the infrastructure for teacher training in form of the didactic centres located in bigger towns, KEC, in co-operation with partners, has developed a number of in-service teacher training programs and has managed to raise funding to deliver them to a considerable number of teachers. KEC has published several books on teaching methodologies and education system and has organised a number of debates and round-table discussions on issues of importance for education in Kosovo.

SEE – ECN (Input by Mr. Zgaga):

The ECN is the most comprehensive educational information network in South Eastern Europe. Membership currently (February 15, 2002) includes 150 institutions predominately from the region. Nodes in all countries of the region together with a co-ordination hub in Ljubljana facilitate the network, which was established in October 2000 under the umbrella of the Enhanced Graz Process (EGP)/Task Force Education and Youth/Stability Pact for SEE. The communication platform for this network is a multi-lingual homepage with a special focus on the languages of the region - www.see-educoop.net. Via its regional network the ECN collects and constantly updates information on educational reform processes in South Eastern Europe: 1007 key documents (strategy papers, legislation, reports, curricula etc.) are collected in a virtual library and available in 12 languages. An expert data base has been established to provide information on available expertise in various areas. A calendar of events provides a regular overview of activities in SEE (workshops, conferences, meetings, etc.). In areas of common interest relevant documents on education reform in the wider European context are collected.

Starting in May/June 2001 special emphasis was put on the establishment of the so called "country nodes", which serve as contact points in the region not only to deliver substantial input to the work of the SEE-ECN but also increasingly raise awareness for the importance of education in the region. Starting from the recommendations of a first country nodes meeting in Bucharest (held from February 9 – 10, 2002) the nodes will deliver substantial contributions to the next phase of the SEE-ECN.

Thematic Reviews (Input by Ms. Stromberger)

The OECD reviews have been carried out in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, FYR Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia. They provide information and serve as a knowledge base for developing further projects and for continuing the reform process in education in SEE. Capacity building with the aim to establishing a master plan on education policy, empowerment of local people, creating sustainable networks, further development and assessment of the education system throughout the region are the main objectives of this project. The written reports (and included recommendations) focus on early childhood, teacher/teacher training, curriculum and governance, but cover the whole education system.

Over the last months work was focussed on the finalisation of the reports, which are now available (except Moldova, in printing, and Albania in finalisation).

The reports are available in printed versions in English and French and are/will be translated into the national languages. They can be found on various web-sites (OECD, CEPS, ETF, Stability Pact, SEE-ECN, and some of the regional ministries).

In the second phase of this OECD project now the focus is on launching and disseminating events in the SEE to discuss recommendations and to initiate concrete projects in the respective countries and in the region. These launches will offer opportunity for an inclusive consultative process among key actors on respective reform priorities and the identification of options for funding their implementation.

- **The role of various stocktaking analysis carried out by OECD, Council of Europe, the European Training Foundation and other institutions for strengthening networking and co-operation and for promoting sustainable educational reform in the region;**

Thematic Reviews (Input Ms. Stromberger):

Already during the finalisation of the reviews, activities have been started for the launch of the reviews and to initiate dissemination and implementation of recommendations and projects.

All donors have expressed their interest in the activity of the working group "General Education Policy and System Improvement", which covers the entire education system. Efforts are being and will be taken to organise workshops, seminars and other events in the region to discuss the recommendations of the reviews. They will include general overall issues of education policy and on the status quo of the education system. Another approach will be to support education authorities and national experts through discussions on specific issues in conjunction with partners involved in carrying out the reviews such as UNICEF, ETF, WB and SOROS.

The first 2 conferences where the reviews have been discussed took place in Serbia and Montenegro in January 2002; another launch of the reviews will be done at the Conference in Zagreb (24 and 25 May). In discussion is a similar event in Kosovo, first half of June.

Stocktaking analysis of the Council of Europe (Input by Ms. Cecchini, Mr. Harrison):

The Council of Europe's stocktaking research on policies of education for democratic citizenship in Southeast Europe has been carried out in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, FRY (Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo), Romania, and Slovenia. In addition to the nine country reports a regional analysis and recommendations for further development of EDC policies is available. One of the main conclusions of the stocktaking is that, although the content of EDC policies is, in most countries, already well developed, the problem often lies with the lack of planning the implementation of EDC policies, which holds especially for the field of teacher training. On the basis of the stocktaking reports and the recommendations the Working Group on Education for Democratic Citizenship/Management of Diversity will further discuss the development of priorities in EDC policies and practices and identify next steps.

2. Participants emphasised the need for enhanced regional co-operation to be linked closely to national policy development and voiced strong support for the following activities in 2002:

- **Launch of the OECD Reviews in the framework of an International Conference on National Policy Reform organised by the Croatian Ministry of Education and Sports (May 25 – 26, 2002 in Zagreb):**

Ms. Nada Jakir (Task Force Member Croatia) gave a short outline of the envisaged conference which will aim at foreseen changes of the Croatian education system as a part of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). The following issues will be covered by the conference: methodology of curriculum development, teacher training, monitoring and assessment of the education system, Education for Democratic Citizenship, changes in Higher Education and partnership in VET reform. Though this conference mainly aims at the education community of Croatia it is intended not only to open up the conference for experts from international organisations and EU Member States, but also for observers from Ministries of Education in the region. The conference will be co-organised by the Task Force Education and Youth, the OECD and the Council of Europe.

On this occasion Mr. Josip Milat gave a short overview on the latest trends of education reform in Croatia with respect to pre university education.

- **The promotion of further dissemination workshops in other SEE countries, which have not organised a launch yet:**

Negotiations are currently under way on similar activities with other Ministries of education in the region. The Task Force education and Youth will support these activities both in an organisational and financial terms (e.g. via its Strategy 2002 funds) if wished. It is evident that the concrete outline of such conferences should make reference to national policy recommendations, the recommendations of the respective OECD Thematic Review and results of other relevant analyses of international partners.

- **The ETF VET Reform Policy Peer Reviews in the Western Balkans, to be organised in the following months:**

Due to the fact that Mr. Grootings was not able to attend the meeting, Mr. Kowar gave a short overview on the envisaged VET Reform Policy Peer Reviews. The Reviews will take place in all educational systems of the Western Balkans, namely Albania, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo, final results are to be expected in early 2003. Due to its specific character the peer review teams will consist of educational experts of the ETF, EU, CEE and SEE countries with additional support by the national observatories. Specific topics of these Peer Reviews will be identified in close co-operation with respective Ministries of Education, the European Training Foundation and the Peer Review Team members. It is expected that recommendations of these Reviews will provide substantial input to the terms of references of the respective CARDS programming in the field of Vocational Education and Training in the upcoming years. A first meeting was held on February 28 – March 3, 2002 in Ljubljana, which identified the composition of teams, time schedule, next steps and topics.

- **Further development of the Southeast European Education Co-operation Network (SEE-ECN: <http://www.see-educoop.net>) with special attention to the already existing nodes in the region:**

As outlined before, the results of the SEE ECN are promising with respect to the further enlargement of the network. Therefore in October 2001 the Austrian and Slovene Ministries of Education have set up a bi-lateral working group in charge of giving practical support to such an information and training network. First contacts with the donor community (e.g. Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland and the Open Society Institute) have signalled promising support with respect to organisational and financial support of this network. The already existing nodes in the region will play a substantial role within this network. In close co-operation with the hub in Ljubljana their current profiles will be expanded also corresponding to the demands of the educational systems in the region.

- **Organisation of a regional workshop on "Inspection/Evaluation of Schools" offered by the Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education (SICI):**

Mr. Van Bruggen presented a concrete proposal of SICI to organise a seminar/workshop for school inspectors from Southeast Europe. The aim of such a seminar would be to inform participants about the tasks and positions of inspectorates in selected member countries of SICI, of their practical work with respect to quality control and quality improvement in schools (cf. Ideas for a workshop). Such an activity could be in line with the general objective of providing a forum for experts from SEE Ministries to discuss cross cutting issues of regional co-operation as already provided by CEPS in the field of school legislation and curriculum development. The Task Force will put forward such an idea to education authorities in the region and facilitate possible organisation of such an event, which could take place in the second half of 2002.

- **A regional seminar on a targeted topic of education reform with key actors in education to take place in autumn 2002.**

Based on the OECD recommendations on regional co-operation, which is actually finalised in the framework of the OECD Thematic Reviews, a regional seminar for senior officials from Education Ministries in SEE will be organised by the Task Force in autumn 2002. It will serve as substantial

input for future activities in this field with special attention paid not only to the Stabilisation and Association Process but also to ongoing activities in the EU Member States, e.g. the objective report.

*For the report:
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