

# **Mission Report**

(by Christine Stromberger)

**“EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT FOR DISABLED AND AT RISK STUDENTS”**  
An OECD project carried out in South Eastern Europe.

**Co-organised by the OECD and the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture  
with the support of the Task Force Education and Youth**

**Vienna, 25 – 28 September 2003**  
**Peter Evans, Christine Stromberger**

## **General Remarks**

The situation in the countries of South East Europe is at all levels still very difficult. Working conditions, standard of living, communication technology, availability of technical equipment, public transport, language barriers, travel restrictions – all of these, including different cultural standards, require a certain flexibility and openness to sometimes unconventional procedures in, for example, organising a meeting. (For instance, the Austrian authorities, quite exceptionally, made it possible to provide 4 participants with visas for Austria within a few days. (A process that normally takes at least 2 weeks).

Experience of having worked and travelled in the region helps to understand and to support colleagues from SEE in their efforts to participate in conferences, meetings abroad and in projects initiated by international organisations and other key players in the context of the Stability Pact or other initiatives. In the specific case of this meeting in Vienna it was very difficult to bring together participants from 8 countries (out of ten) within a short period of time; difficulties did not arise from lack of interest but because of the conditions mentioned above, including some changes of education ministers and other decision makers with short notice.

The success of the meeting, making for an excellent start of this important project, reflects not only the efforts and flexibility of those involved in organising the meeting in Vienna but also at OECD.

### ***1. Background of the project:***

Based on OECD’s experience and work in special needs education, the proposed work in SEE countries is an extension of the effort to support development of education for children and students at risk and with special needs, regarding the goal of ‘education for all’. Based on already available information gathered during the course of policy reviews in all SEE countries and on OECD’s role as co-ordinator for general education within the Stability Pact for SEE, the project “Education Development for Disabled and At Risk Students” will be carried out in the region.

Countries/Ministers of Education, have been invited to nominate experts and responsible persons; the project was introduced first at a meeting of senior officials from education ministries, organised by the “Task Force Education and Youth” in Romania last May.

***2. The purpose of the meeting*** was to inform participants about OECD’s work in this field, to introduce the project which will be initiated in SEE, to give participants the opportunity of presenting the activities

and policies in special needs education in their countries; to discuss further work which they are expected to carry out in order to develop and establish policies as well as gather statistics and indicators and setting up a data base; to present an outline of the country reports which have to be prepared, to discuss the time frame.

### **3. Participants:**

#### **South East Europe:**

**BOSNIA-HERCEGOVINA:** Maja Mesanovic; **BULGARIA:** Peshka Korkinova, Greta Gancheva; **CROATIA:** Edita Ruzic; **KOSOVO:** Feride Aliu, Enver Mekolli; **MACEDONIA:** Desenka Ugrinovska **MOLDOVA:** Victoria Isac, Tatiana Tintiuc; **MONTENEGRO:** Tamara Milic; **SERBIA:** Gordana Nikolic.

**NORWAY (Donor):** Ellen Lange and Marit Hognestad (Ministry of Education and Research)

**UNICEF :** Svetlana Marojevic/Unicef Belgrade

#### **AUSTRIA**

Representatives from the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, the Austrian Education Board and the Task Force Education and Youth/KulturKontakt Austria:

**4. *The first day of the meeting*** was dedicated to visits to schools with special needs education in Vienna. The participants were divided into three groups each group visiting either a primary, a secondary or a special needs school with integration classes. This programme was organised by the Austrian Education Board and included an introduction into the system of special needs education in Austria. In the afternoon the participants were invited by the Vienna City Administration to learn about ‘Out of school activities for children and young people’, including integration work with various kinds of problematic groups.

**5. *On the second day*** the meeting was opened by the Chair of the Task Force Education and Youth, *Anton Dobart*; followed by an introduction by *Peter Evans* on ‘*OECD’s work in Special Needs Education*’ and to the project ‘*Education Development for disabled and at Risk Students*’.

**6. *The two representatives from Norway (Donor)*** gave a presentation on “Education Sector Planning for Children with Special Needs – Norwegian Experiences and Challenges”; the representative from UNICEF/Belgrade repeated the interest of UNICEF in this OECD project and confirmed the support of their network and office staff in the region.

**7. *Presentation and review of the situation in the participating countries*** with regard to disabled and at risk students, current policies, activities, strategies and projects by the government gave an interesting insight and initiated a fruitful discussion. The exchange of national policies within an open discussion forum is a very important contribution to the regional approach of all Stability Pact Activities, therefore this meeting and the participation of 8 countries was very useful and makes for a promising start for the project.

**8. *Developing an outline of a National Report*** was the main topic for the afternoon. This report, which has to be prepared by the countries, should focus on 7 main issues: legal framework, policy review focusing on special groups, statistics and indicators, school organisation, curriculum, pedagogy, teacher training. This issue was introduced by the OECD Secretariat.

**9. A time frame for the next steps** was set. Country representatives are required to report back to their authorities, to comment on the OECD background paper, invited to ask questions, clarify open issues etc. within 2 weeks. After having taken into account this input, a modified version of the paper will be prepared at OECD and returned to the countries. This paper will be the basis for further work, will provide the framework for the national reports which should be prepared by all participating countries by April 2004. A discussion of the reports will be held at the next meeting, envisaged for early summer 2004. A provisional invitation to organise this meeting was made by the representative of Montenegro.