

ERI SEE

EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

REPORT on the ERI SEE expert seminar

“Investing Efficiently in Education”

Ohrid, Macedonia, 24-25 November 2005

Background and Justification

In accordance with the *Memorandum of Understanding* signed by the SEE ministers of education and higher education, the Secretariat of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) has included in the 2005 working programme, a thematic seminar with the topic of “*Investing efficiently in education*”, taking into consideration the recommendations made by the ministries of education from the region. There have been undertaken a lot of work in this field within the European Union and by the international organisations such as OECD, UNESCO or EUA.

Preparation of the seminar

Objectives of the seminar

1. To offer the framework for discussion the policies applied in European Union and countries from the SEE; are the objectives established at European level common for the SEE countries?
2. To disseminate best results, experiences and best practices, to discuss the relevance of transferring at regional level the best practice registered at national level
3. Make recommendations for policy makers

Expected outcomes

1. Presentations of the latest developments at European level
2. Examples of best practices, practical examples of success stories relevant for the SEE countries
3. Recommendations for the ministries of education and finances from the region
4. Creation of a network of experts

Agenda

The agenda of the workshop included inputs dedicated to the European context and perspectives: key issues under debate at European level, indicators, strategies, recommendations of the experts, presentations made by the experts from Macedonia on their experience in the process of decentralisation,

financing of higher education as well as brain drain. We also benefited by the input from Norway and the Netherlands.

In the Annex 1- please find the agenda of the seminar.

Organizers

The workshop has been organised by the ERI SEE Secretariat with the support of the Task Force Education and Youth and the Macedonian Ministry of Education and Science.

Target group/participants

Invitations have been addressed by the ERI SEE Secretariat to all the ministries of education from the SEE (signatory of the Memorandum of Understanding) to nominate two experts.

Organisational details

The ERI SEE Secretariat has supported the cost of participation for 2 representatives of the ministries of education signatory of the Memorandum, respectively: international transport at, accommodation, meals and per diems and visa costs. The Macedonian Ministry of Education and Science has covered the expenses related to internal transfers and an official dinner.

Activities performed during the seminar

Participants

A number of 33 experts, representing ministries of education from Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro- Rep of Serbia, Serbia and Montenegro- Rep. of Montenegro and Kosovo have attended the meeting. We have also benefited from the experience of invited experts from the European Training Foundation, the Netherlands and Norway who had an input during the seminar as well as from Bureau Cross-the Netherlands, Kulturkontakt-Austria, OECD and Stability Pact.

Ministries of Education from Bulgaria and Moldova have not been represented at the seminar. In the Annex 2 - the list of participants

Language of the workshop

The working language was **English**.

Topics

- A. Investing efficiently in education and training: an imperative for Europe**
- B. Decentralisation of the education system**
- C. Financing of Higher education**
- D. Brain drain**

- A. Investing efficiently in education and training: an imperative for Europe**

Mr. Jean Raymond Masson, on behalf of the European Training Foundation has highlighted the work that has been done at European level-the general context and political commitment of the European leaders for ensuring a substantial increase in investing in education and training, the work of the experts under the coordination of the European Commission that produced a Tool Box of Policy Measures, statistics and relevant web links.

The experts from the region have indicated that they are facing the same challenges as in the European Union and the measures included in the report are also valid for the educational and training systems from the SEE.

As regards the messages and recommendations included in the European document, the experts participating to the seminar have endorsed the approach, completing the text of message one as following: *„To improve the governance of European education and training systems, reforms should concern both changes in the administrative structure of the educational institutions, the development of combined public-private initiatives **and the support of the local authorities.**“*

The experts from Norway and the Netherlands have presented their case studies on vocational tertiary education (NO) and public-private partnership in education (NL).

B. Decentralisation

The experts from the Macedonian Ministry of Education presented as case study the process of decentralisation in Macedonia: objectives, results and challenges. The process of decentralisation is part of the educational reform in all the countries from the region, ministries of education being in different stages of implementation.

The process itself is a complex and challenging one and involves two dimensions: political and financial. The experts participating to the seminar have agreed that without the political support and willingness of the Governments and local authorities, the process of decentralisation cannot be promoted. In several cases, the local authorities empowered through legislation to deal with the financial aspects of the education process, have asked for support, on almost all the issues, to the central governments due to the lack of capacity or un-trained human resources. For these reasons it is very important to combine decentralisation of the educational system with the reform of administration at local and national level. It is also important to work hard for changing mentalities and training of human resources involved in the process.

From the educational side, decentralisation is important for school development, supports curriculum flexibility and financial incentives of the teachers and managers. This process gives roles to the parents and local communities including private companies. There are several issues that are important to be tackled during the implementation: training of managers and local authorities, development and implementation of the quality assurance mechanisms, re-defining the roles and responsibilities of the ministries of education, teacher training.

As a conclusion, the decentralisation process is a complex process that has been included in the political agenda of almost all the ministries of education from the South Eastern Europe. The implementation process is at different stages in each country, but there are some key issues that need to be followed and cooperation could be developed at regional level, such as: training strategies for managers, teachers and local authorities, development of the financial mechanisms as well as a quality assurance system.

C. Financing of higher education

Higher education sector is under-financed in the region, a case study of the Macedonian as well as inputs on Romanian and Serbian situation have been presented. There are significant differences in financing between the subject areas of study, with a better financing for humanities and economics.

Fragmentation of the higher education institutions and autonomy of faculties are problems the ministries of education from the Western Balkans are facing. TEMPUS programme represents an important tool for modernisation of the management of institutions, curriculum changes and development as well as for aligning to the Bologna follow up objectives.

The new LLL Community programme to be developed at European level will be a challenge for the region, having in mind the changes in roles: from an assistance programme to a participative programme. There have been identified some obstacles for mobility in the region and European mobility: the legislative framework (autonomy of faculties, financing of educational programme, rules applied by ministries of finance), the administrative services of the faculties/universities are not prepared to handle the issue, the curriculum for some subjects not benefiting of TEMPUS projects, application of ECTS.

D. Brain drain

Brain drain is an important issue in the region, several surveys and studies indicated the degree of the problem in several countries. The educational system has its role in combating the brain drain process. The Macedonian Ministry of Education has presented the results of a survey and alternatives identified for intervention. Economic development, incentives offered to young scientist and graduates as well as supporting scientific projects and implementation of innovative measures together with the involvement of private sector are seen as tools for reducing the brain drain in the region.

General Outcomes of the seminar

- Information on the current status quo of the decentralisation strategies in the region
- Identification of the areas for regional cooperation
- Active participation of the experts
- Best practices and experiences shared
- Endorsed recommendations issued by the European experts for policy makers in education in SEE

Recommendations for ERI SEE

- ERI SEE to continue to develop regional meetings on the topic related to education reform
- Support for getting relevant information on decentralisation, financing or reform project, on the European developments and studies published on these topics