



THE ENHANCED GRAZ PROCESS  
TASK FORCE EDUCATION AND YOUTH  
Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

**International Conference**  
**“Governance and Education for Sustainable Development and**  
**European Integration.”**  
**Graz, 27 – 29 January 2005**

**Conference Report by Madlen SERBAN:**  
**Priorities in Education and Training: Challenges for the Future**

“Without education nothing is possible” – could be read as

- The most wanted conclusion of the conference,
- A common way of thinking if associated to the declared role of education, **but**
- It is not yet a proven and shared opinion. A subsequent action of decision makers from inside and outside world of education is needed.

Evidence in this respect comes from the value of investments in education and training and research in the European Union compared to those in USA and Asia before 2000 (Lisbon objectives). With regards to the SEE countries the situation requests for immediate reflection and action instead of postponing in favour of other priorities.

Low investment rates in education and training and research could be justified by overloaded agenda, lack of coordination and conflicting priorities, as well as by a lack of determined political action.

We can agree that education in SEE is now on the political agenda of European institutions due to the Enhanced Graz process actions, supported by various actors of the Stability Pact. Nevertheless there is still much to be done at European level and at national one.

“Let’s come together” represents one of the conference objectives which addresses various actors from education and from outside education. The aim is to make the objectives more persuasive and successful in giving visibility to education, training and research based on increased budget allocations.

This conference has the merit of putting together decision makers from Ministries of Education, Finance, Economy, European Integration, Labour and Social Affairs from SEE, parliamentarians from the region involved in education issues, representatives

from European institutions and international organizations, Stability Pact Co-ordinators, education experts and representatives from medi, thus creating a wide platform for informed dialogue and experience sharing on the topic of raising awareness about investing in human capital development.

“If education is expensive, try ignorance “ could be a way of living, and we should not forget that in SEE ignoring people was the scope of former political regimes which we pretend having been replaced in the last decade of the past century. If so, let’s prove changed attitudes!

The Conference addresses the importance of the value of money invested in education and training, calling for **efficient and effective governance** mechanisms as a practice of the **participative democracy**.

The role of civil society and social partnership in decision-making grows. **Civic partnership** is the organisational setting based on collaboration and sponsorship. Actually, civic partnership means a long-lasting agreement based on a common mission and shared responsibilities.

If education is contributing to welfare, this is not automatically guaranteed out of a system of shared responsibilities.

***What is possible to achieve through efficient education? Which kind of learning are we looking for in terms of impact on the sustainable development of our knowledge based society/ies?***

“First the novelties that this society brings are the following:

- Ø Values and processes of learning are placed at the centre of the policy;
- Ø There is a large supply of education including non-conventional forms through informal learning and virtual institutions;
- Ø Society becomes a huge learning community, united by common moral and civic values;
- Ø Learning is the main criterion of social and professional promotion;
- Ø The “self” is viewed as an agent in both personal development and active participation within the public domain;
- Ø The learner is considered as a person in relation to others, which presupposes co-citizenship, shared responsibility, mutual understanding, co-operation and deliberative decision-making.

The role of expertise and knowledge would increase to such an extent that the democracy will become a knowledge society.

The above mentioned novelties as such are not new. Their meaning is one of contributing to a better world. The working society tends to become a learning society, the interpretation of which refers to:

- Ø A new utopia;
- Ø A modern myth;
- Ø A new educational paradigm<sup>1</sup>.”

Unlike previous utopias, which were centred on manipulation or social control, the Learning Society is the first utopia that takes into account the learning potential. From

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<sup>1</sup> Birzea, C., Education for democratic citizenship: a lifelong learning perspective, Council of Europe , 2000

this point of view, lifelong learning becomes a normative concept, a fundamental principle or an ideology. What interests us most in the context of the present conference is the perspective of Learning Society as a new educational paradigm representing a shift from reactive learning to self-directed learning, which gives priority to ownership, assumed responsibilities, empowerment, self-awareness, creativity and motivation for continuing learning.

The Learning Society consists in a social organisation favourable to learning and personal development, based on the equation:

**Learning Society = social capital + human capital = economic prosperity<sup>2</sup>.**

How learning can contribute to the economic prosperity was addressed by the working group on: **Education for economic development.**

The assumption that research provides the key foundations for innovation which directly contributes to improved economic growth, productivity and quality of life achievable, was addressed in the conference working group on **Education for innovation and research.** Role of universities in SEE in producing knowledge in closed partnership with the world of business as well as possibilities of investing in academic research and innovation were the topics addressed by the participants.

Learning Society represents a new type of society, in which **citizenship learning and learning to live together** play a major role.

Compared to human capital, which measures outputs in terms of individual income or productivity levels, the social capital is expressed in terms of social well-being<sup>3</sup>. Contributors to the plenary sessions of the conference emphasized on social capital elements as tolerance, trust and solidarity which should be carefully observed in fragmented societies as those in SEE.

We have been introduced through graphic illustration based on PISA results in 2003 to the high performance and social equity aspects of education systems. Combating social segregation the social cohesion<sup>4</sup> has been addressed by the conference in one of the working groups as a priority objective of educational policies in Europe, namely by the working group on **Education for Social Cohesion.**

Within these perspectives, the conference reflected not only the new political situation in a Europe of twenty five but also took into account ongoing discussions and perspectives of the Lisbon strategy and growing engagement of the countries of SEE in a wider European area of education and research.

Education and training systems have a key role in the European integration process.

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<sup>2</sup> Sh. Riddell, S. Baron, K. Stalker, H. Wilkinson, The Concept of the Learning Society for Adults with Learning Difficulties: Human and Social Capital Perspectives. *Journal of Education Policy*, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> S. Baron, J. Field, T. Schuller (eds.) *Social Capital. Critical Perspectives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000

<sup>4</sup> We should add that even though they are almost synonyms, social cohesion is typically a European concept, while social capital is its North-American equivalent.

Political developments worldwide, in Europe and on regional level have led to an economic, social and cultural environment, in which education and training play an even greater role in responding to the challenges of globalization, added to the ones above mentioned in relation to knowledge societies.

If by globalization we understand only global finance, global production and global exchanges (of services, goods, know-how, ideas, people) things seem simple. Nonetheless, this type of simplification risks:

- Encouraging homogenisation;
- Limiting everything to the economic dimension;
- Promoting an exaggerated political optimism.

What is new in our days is the **culture of globalization**, which means *inter alia*:

- Linguistic, cultural and ideological convergence versus increased cultural diversity of society;
- 'Universalisation' of particularism;
- Think globally and act locally;
- Intercultural learning;
- Global identification.

During the past decade diversity issues have gained growing attention by policy makers and also by education policy makers. The time was characterized by increasingly diverse societies (migration, labour mobility, globalization), as well as by rising conflicts within ethnically/culturally mixed societies on the one hand and by a greater awareness of the relation between diversity and social cohesion (understood not only in socio-economic but also in cultural and other terms) on the other. Making from diversity an asset instead of an obstacle is representing a future challenge for the education and training. **Education for culture and diversity** has been addressed by other working group of the conference.

Education developments in SEE vary greatly: over the last years valuable reform efforts were undertaken by the respective education ministries and education institutions with the political, financial and know-how support of other key players of reform. Substantial progress has been achieved. "Recuperative reforms" in education contributed to democracy recuperation and society modernization when synchronised with other sectors restructuring measures within a long term perspective.

However, the development processes have also faced various challenges and limitations. Postponed reforms or abandoned ones combined with populist democracy generated delays, and unsustainable results. Future is dependant on a cultural understanding of Europe as well as on a commitment to foster education towards achievement of democratic values. Ethical values in education have to be incorporated and ethics in universities have to be carefully observed.

Governance having the meanings of networking, corporatism, pluralism in participation and democratic control will contribute to improving education quality which for the time being does not allow any of the education institutions in SEE to be listed between the performing ones internationally or in Europe.

Above all, the role of education and training as an integral factor for economic development, social cohesion, innovation and cultural diversity is still not fully acknowledged by political leadership and the general public, thus failing to provide a sufficient range of concrete measures and support for education development on

national and European levels. On the other hand European initiatives such as the Bologna process and the Barcelona and Copenhagen processes, known as “Education and training 2010”, have not only generated considerable interest in SEE, but have increased influence on education systems in the region.

There is still long way to achieve an effective support for SEE education but through the Parliamentary cooperation, as already proved by including education on the political agenda, lobbying can contribute to the access of the region to the EU programmes. National efforts should also be considered in order to give education a real priority, keeping in mind the two approaches are only efficient together. They mutually complete and sustain each other in the difficult mission of convincing about investing in education that shows its returns only in the long run, usually longer than the mandate of a Government or Parliament.

The above mentioned working groups contribution to the conference expected outcomes is the following:

### **Working Group 1 - Education for Economic Development**

Economic development will benefit from education if increased effectiveness of the educational system will be reached. That can be achieved by focused reforms introduced at macro and micro levels ensuring:

- (1) Development of the educational system to become an integral part of the economic model of the country. The educational system is effective if it aids capacity building for all sectors of society and is based on participatory methods involving stakeholders on a continuous basis.
- (2) Establishment of a new governance structure for the educational system and institutions that includes:
  - well defined objectives;
  - improved management;
  - schools and HEIs becoming learning institutions responding to the needs of the economy and society
- (3) Development of a quality assurance system to ensure high standards of education and training:  
“Volume is good but quality is even more important”

### **Working Group 2 - Education and Social Cohesion**

#### ***Main issues***

1. Joblessness, low skill jobs, informal sector, low educational attainment structure, bridging different population groups, citizenship education (which will contribute to reduce crime)
2. The strategies and legal framework is already done but there is a problem of implementation.

#### ***Gaps***

Flaws in the value system  
Low completion rates and low education attainment in comparison to the education and training goals 2010  
Lack of labour market data

Lack of learning culture  
Lessons learned from pilot projects not embedded in national policies.

### **Priorities**

- Raising of awareness of the benefit of education role in achieving social cohesion
- Transition from input based to outcomes based education
- Developing a competence based national qualifications framework based on reliable labour market data and associated quality assurance system
- Providing adequate financial resources for education and training and developing human resources (TT, School management) and decentralising their management
- Co-operation and partnership at international (cross countries sharing knowledge and expertise), national and regional levels; create synergy of different projects and actions
- Encourage adults to participate in learning

### **Working Group 3 - Education for Innovation and Research**

#### **Key challenges**

1. How to overcome paradox that research and innovation is the key for the region to develop away from the current marginalised situation, **but** there is a clear lack of capacity to develop infrastructure (which has been destroyed or is outdated.)
  - Ø Researchers leave.
  - Ø Investment in research has a low priority
  - Ø Very poor GDP investment.
  - \* Without research infrastructure can't do much...
2. Be proactive and grasp the nettle for reform and strategic development within countries and universities.
  - \* Learn to prioritise in the university and in government – including funding - and develop strategy to get assistance tailored to needs.
3. Examine clearly the “cruel reality” of research in the region. Hold up a mirror through addressing lack of reliable data, undertaking benchmarking and evaluation. Be prepared to work differently - with industry and society, and not clinging to old research myths of excellence
4. Strengthen doctoral training & truly reform post-graduate studies. Address careers of future Phds
  - \* Invest in young people/researchers.
  - \* lobby for infrastructure development, healthy mobility (including addressing visa regulations).
5. Focusing on needs in the region (holistic look), develop **regional institutional cooperation** but with competitive funding... and building in incentives such as tax reductions for R&D

### **Working Group 4 - Education for Culture and Diversity**

Diversities are considered as an asset for a society, but also they may provoke new breaches, cleavages and fragmentations if they are not paid due attention when all

social groups are not participating in public and political life of one society. That is why addressing diversity through education is important. Dealing with diversities in order to manage them in a proper way, facilitate their expression at the benefit of an individual and a society contributes to sustainable democratic development and strengthening of social cohesion. These are two important prerequisites for the economic development as well. In that respect education for culture and diversity is as important as a computer literacy.

Education for democratic citizenship (EDC) proved to be a powerful instrument in dealing with diversities both through formal education and various forms of non-formal and informal education.

In EDC various tools to support educational policies for culture and diversity has been developed, as well as teaching material, textbooks....In such circumstances international organizations such as CoE, UNESCO and alike should increase mutual cooperation in order to create a synergy in promoting and strengthening the importance of EDC.

Also the international organizations should interact with local actors, especially belonging to the civil society, to ensure sustainability of achieved results in SEE when governments changed, due to the fact that there is no continuity of education policies.

Also, building coalitions between education institutions and other institution dealing with diversity is what could make education for diversity more efficient.

In EDC various tools, as above mentioned, have already been developed and their full potential should be used instead of developing new ones.

In practical terms priorities would be teacher training, building of various schemes of mobility for teachers involved in EDC, exchange of experience, enable school to build partnership with local communities and civil sector, development of various schemes for students facilitating practice of EDC.

Dissemination campaigns and promotion of EDC in the SEE region will take place within the CoE "2005 as a Year of Citizenship through education " framework.

### **Common Issues of the Working Groups and the Plenary Sessions**

The participants stressed on enhanced cooperation and better coordination at all decision making levels advocating with "a solid common voice" for education contribution to the modernization of our societies. In the same time education was mentioned as a tool for cooperation which is so much needed in Europe and especially in the SEE region.

Initiatives such as the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) clearly indicate the growing willingness to co-operate in this respect on both the regional and European levels. In this way ERI SEE emphasises the importance of regional ownership and leadership as targeted by the Stability Pact of South Eastern Europe.