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## **6. EDUCATION**

Based on the analytical matrix for performance monitoring, research and interviews conducted with the competent institutions, it could be said that this 2009 year was marked as turbulent in the education field. Namely, some of these turbulences did take place as indirect outcome of the financial crisis and, at the same time, of the replacement of the competent minister in this field – the Minister of Education.

### **6.1. Planned and implemented activities of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia in the reporting period**

With regard to the initiatives of laws in this period, one could note certain changes and steps forward. The Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, during the last 9 months, adopted several education laws, among which is the Law on amending the law on higher education. This amended law precisely defines the engagement of a full-time university professor who has less than 5 years to retire. Namely, this law regulates the right of such professor to teach at a higher-education institution for one academic year, if no candidate, who meets the required conditions, applies for the post after a vacancy notice has been posted in accordance with the law.

The Law on amending the law on textbooks for primary and secondary education was also adopted. This amended law gives exact definition of the use of professional and vocational literature and magazines for children in the primary and secondary schools. Inter alia, the amended law also regulates the procedure for writing and preparation of a script for future textbook.

The Law on amending the law on establishment of the IT University provides precise definition of the terms of the various departments and schools established at this IT University. Then the newly enacted Law on primary and secondary education textbooks provides, as of the 2009/2010 academic year, that all textbooks used in first, second, third, and fourth grade in the primary schools should be distributed free of charge for all pupils. Each complete set of textbooks for primary school grade instruction (1-4 grades) will be used by two generations of pupils; it is planned that every set of textbooks to be used in individual subject instruction in higher grades (5-8) of the primary education and in the secondary education will be used by three generations of pupils. Namely, in the last 11 years reforms have been made only in the system of the 4-year secondary vocational education, but not in the system of the 3-year secondary vocational education. Pupils in the 3-year secondary vocational school use textbooks approved by the local school PTA or hand-made scripts. Indeed, the Ministry of Education and Science should announce a public tender for the preparation and printing of the required textbooks; however since there is new concept of the 4-year secondary education, there is need to prepare new curricula, syllabuses and even new textbooks as such. Some of the textbooks which were supposed to be distributed came out very later and so the pupils had to start the new school year without the necessary textbooks. New IT University was opened in the town of Ohrid. It is expected that the University would be one of the few

specialized IT schools in SEE (South East Europe) and the best in the Balkans. The Boston University, the 4<sup>th</sup> biggest private university in the USA and in the top 50 in the world, will open on 25 January 2010, for the first time in Macedonia, IT postgraduate studies. In 2009, 113 schools were reconstructed costing more than 600 million denar. Construction was started of 7 new schools, while 5 newly built schools were opened. The Project for school reconstruction and building new sports halls continues. In order to provide more foreign books translated in Macedonian, the Government has started a project to make translation of 500 professional and science books for higher education, books written and used by the best and most eminent universities in the USA, the UK (United Kingdom), France, and Germany. The project has been implemented with rather good pace. The translated books have been distributed to all public institutions, libraries, schools and universities in the country. At the same time, the Ministry of Education and Science continues its process of higher education dispersion, thus making the higher education become closer to all students. Namely, in the analyzed period the Government opened an Electrical Engineering Faculties in Radovis and Sveti Nikole (as well as Faculty of Agriculture), all being part of the University in Stip. Additionally, IT studies have been opened in the town of Kriva Palanka, as part of the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics of the Skopje University 'Cyril and Methodius'. The Faculty of Agriculture in Skopje opened its first dispersed studies of tobacco production and processing in the premises of the Tobacco Institute in Prilep. For the economic studies in the town of Struga, where only 25 applicants have been enrolled, the necessary minimum quota was not met. Therefore, because of the low number of enrolled students, the financial management studies did not start at all. The enrolled students therefore started their studies in Skopje. Even the Tetovo University opened its dispersed classes in other towns such as Kumanovo, Gostivar, Struga, Kicevo, and Skopje. However, the Government failed to provide on time the premises, teaching aides, as well as the minimum staff to support these dispersed university classes. Furthermore, not all necessary university teachers have been hired to deliver the necessary lectures. While the very idea to disperse the university studies and classes from being over-concentrated in the capital city of Skopje and enabling mobility and economic activity in other towns in the Republic of Macedonia and assisting students who do not reside in Skopje is good per se, the implementation of such idea has not followed the projected track. For the first time, the Republic of Macedonia, following the example of all EU member states, has got its own National Agency for European Programs and Mobility for managing the funds of the programs: 'Lifelong Learning' and 'Youth in Action'. The Agency is a public institution established by law passed in the Macedonian Parliament. The goal of the Agency is promoting and implementing the European education programs in the Republic of Macedonia. Beneficiary of the programs can be: pupils, university students, teachers, professors, trainers, and other staff who are involved in any segment of the education process, then companies and other legal entities, chambers of commerce, business associations, RD ('Research & Development') centers, as well as associations of citizens and foundations. The programs, appropriate for the beneficiaries, are as follows: 'Comenius' – for primary and secondary schools, 'Leonardo da Vinci' – for secondary vocational schools, 'Erasmus' – for universities, 'Grundvig' – for all adults who have incomplete education and are willing to continue it. Namely, this year donation was made of the first 7 grants to the beneficiaries of the grants program. Financial support of 70000

euro was provided for these grants for pilot projects in the program 'Youth in Action'. Jan Figel, Commissioner for Education, Training, Culture and Youth in the EC, provided the funds.

### **6.2. What remains to be implemented (not yet implemented or not yet finished) in the analyzed period**

The activities that marked this year also involved the introduction of religious instruction as facultative subject in the primary schools. The Government of the Republic of Macedonia introduced religious instruction in the 2008-2012 programs as part of the tools for modernization of the curricula. This was supposed to be a facultative subject intended to help the process of building true values. However, the Macedonian Constitutional Court suspended the provision which allowed organizing religious instruction in primary schools. The Court gave explanation that this was contrary to the Constitution which clearly provides for the separation between the state and the religious communities, i.e., that this violated the right and freedom of religion of the citizens. On the other hand, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia discontinued the campaign to grant vouchers as part of the project 'Macedonia – Country of IT Professionals'. In the last two years, university senior students who would enroll by 15 November in the last year of study were given by the Government vouchers to buy computers. Vouchers were distributed to full-time students at state and private universities in Macedonia. In 2008, the Government spent 2.5 million euro for this purpose, since vouchers worth 250 euro each were donated to 10,200 university senior students. In 2007, the said project involved the distribution of 12,222 vouchers, while a single voucher was worth 12,300 MKD. The cancellation of this segment of the project 'Macedonia – Country of IT Professionals' was explained by the Government on grounds of the economic crisis and the redistribution of the funds from the national budget. The students showed their anger by staging public protests. What also made commotions in the education system in the Republic of Macedonia were the dismissals of many primary and secondary school teachers. It concerned part-time teachers whose service contracts were not renewed. Namely, only those teachers with less than 5 years of work experience were to be dismissed, since their contracts ended and there was no need to re-hire them. This problem also involves the issue of school decentralization and school finance (budgets), however this should not be reason for involvement of politics and partisanship in the educational system. The introduction of free-of-charge Internet access in students' dormitories is a project to be carried out by the Education and IT Ministries. The implementation of this project has been postponed for the next year.

### **6.3. Evaluation of potential risks from (non)implementation or from (non)quality implementation of activities**

The vary facts shown in this Report indicate that the state university education is threatened by dangerous quality decline – by the fact that in the future there will be graduated people who finished their studies at universities and faculties lacking quality instruction. Namely after opening all those dispersed studies, there are not enough professors, so professors from the existing state universities in Skopje and Bitila mostly

will be used to do the teaching in Kicevo, Gostivar, Berovo, Kriva Palanka, etc. This will also bring the risk of lowering the instruction quality even at the existing or other faculties. In connection with this, the private universities reacted by claiming that suppression was made of the private educational sector since the new state universities and faculties will offer places for future students far more than the annual number of high school graduates in Macedonia, while professors at the state universities may not teach at the same time also at private universities.

Some of the risks and influence by these dispersed studies are:

- If sufficient number of potential students fail to apply, then there is risk for these dispersed studies to ultimately get closed while enrolled students will be left with uncertainty where and how to continue the concrete studies.
- The small number of students bears the risk that the costs per enrolled student would be too high in order to have any economic justification for such dispersed studies.
- The inadequate teaching staff would reduce the quality of the studies.
- The inadequate equipping and incomplete infrastructure (lack of administration, proper premises, teachers, teaching aides and equipment, Internet connection, computers, etc.) can have serious consequences on the quality of these dispersed studies.
- Students from Skopje or Tetovo, cities that already have universities, will enroll at the new, dispersed faculties in other towns because of smaller level of completion and there will be lower probability that all quotas offered for new students will be filled .

In spite of the initiatives for reforming the curricula pursuant to the principles of the so-called Bologna Process, the general impression is that the quality of the initial education is still at low level and is not adjusted to the needs of the new competences. Inadequate education and insufficient practical work at such faculties produces insufficiently qualified teachers and professors; this in turn later has a counter effect and is then reflected through low quality in the education system. The insufficient implementation of the Bologna Process can lead to confusion and unwanted consequences in course of the next few years. The case of appointing an acting rector at the Tetovo University shows us that partisanship and politics have deeply penetrated into the field of education and universities which are institutions with guaranteed autonomy. Namely, one can conclude from recent events that the State University in Tetovo serves as some kind of battleground for the struggles among the political parties. Among other things, the mass dismissals of teachers at the very start of the school year evidenced the political manipulations done by the political parties. Manipulation done by both the ruling and opposition parties and mutual accusations do not serve the interests of the dismissed teachers, their pupils, and the education process in general. The government measure to provide all primary and secondary pupils with free-of-charge textbooks, as of the 2009/2010 school year pursuant to the Law on textbooks, should be commended; however, it is recommended that this measure be implemented consistently and efficiently. Otherwise, there is high risk as to the quality of education given to the pupils who spend mostly their classes in copying or dictation done by their teacher.

#### **6.4. Overall evaluation by the expert on implemented activities for the reporting period**

The Government should undertake urgent steps to create the necessary conditions for normal functioning of the dispersed studies with all the required standards. This will help achieve the set goal that 'the professor goes to the student, and not the student to the professor', which directly or indirectly will motivate the interest of the young people to enroll at universities. Highly educated young people should become, in time, a comparative advantage for the country in order to draw FDI and so reduce the unemployment rate and increase the growth rate. The new curricula and syllabuses for the lower grades in the primary education were prepared late, with very short deadlines, and started slowly to be implemented. Conclusions point out that the implementation of the new concept of the primary education has started without adequate preparation and so this concept has caused confusion in schools, with the teachers and pupils. It is necessary to have fast and efficient dealing with all inconsistencies of the new curricula and their good-quality realization. The experience from other countries shows that preparation of such projects lasts very long, that it costs a lot of money and requires a clear strategy and strategic leadership based on sustainable studies.

Financing remains to be the major obstacle to the modernization of the Macedonian (higher) education. The Macedonian higher education seriously suffers from small investment from the private sector, which in turn restricts the prospects for development of the universities. Revenues of higher education institutions from donations, grants, private companies, business, or associations are very low and insignificant. Most of these revenues actually do come from the tuition fees paid by the students. There is need for more scholarships from the private companies, then to have more internship programs, and to continue building partnership between the Macedonian and foreign universities. Stronger efforts must be made to completely root out all political influence on the education system and any partisanship of the professors and other university staff. It is also important to raise the level of the very professors, i.e., their professional and academic specialization, to provide opportunities for academic upgrading, professional further training, attending international conferences and workshops, and regular publication of their works in domestic and foreign academic, and science magazines.