



Local Government
and Public Service
Reform Initiative

Decentralization and the Governance of Education

The State of Education Systems in Bosnia
and Herzegovina, Poland and Romania

EDITED BY

PÉTER RADÓ



LGI
FELLOWSHIP
SERIES



DECENTRALIZATION AND THE GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATION

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Poland and Romania

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Fellowship
Series

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First published in 2004
by Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute–Budapest

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OPEN SOCIETY INSTITUTE

ISSN: 1586 4499

ISBN: 963 9419 78 8

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Copyeditors: Rachel Ambrose and James Grellier

Cover photo: © Poppy Szaybo

Cover design: © Tom Bass

Printed in Budapest, Hungary, November 2004.

Design & Layout by Createch Ltd.

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Preface

Over the last fifteen years, Central and Eastern Europe has seen a revival of political life as a result of the demolition of *ancien régimes* and its historical transition to democracy. What was once perceived as a homogenous bloc of centralized communist states is now thankfully considered diverse. In this context very few studies have analyzed contemporary educational reforms in transition countries as a basis to ascertain what will come next for education in the region.

This is particularly true where the decentralization of education in the transition states of Central and Eastern Europe is at stake. Decentralization of the educational systems of traditional democracies are considered a normal step toward strengthening democratic governance and social cohesion. In the transition states, however, this issue is controversial and relates directly to the debate over the shape of democracy and the (re)establishment of civil society.

Central and South Eastern European government systems rub against the agenda of contemporary decentralization of education in a challenging and often frustrating way, especially when burdened by historical perspective.

After World War II drastic changes were introduced to the educational systems in all these countries. The most common characteristic of these changes was the elimination of illiteracy and eight mandatory years of basic education. But it is undeniable that these systems were highly ideological, of which at least three distinctive types could be observed: the Soviet (centralized), the Yugoslavian (decentralized but fragmented) and the Albanian (isolated) systems. The educational systems developed parallel to oscillations in ideological, political and economic powers of that period. As a general trend, there was fast-paced development of four-year technical schools parallel to traditional upper-secondary schools (gymnasias) and a “modernized” type of general education. Vocational education and training were linked to the socialist industrial complex, organized in different ways from one “bloc” to another.

Under communism there was little place for decentralization of education as an idea that had been promoted in postwar western societies and rapidly established itself in post-industrial, post-modern and multicultural societies at the end of the century. It was far too different and totally opposed to the political philosophies of the time. Despite this opposition, the educational level in most countries was well developed by the end of the eighties. Problems that appeared during the turbulent period of political and economic transition could be considered regressive. But relatively efficient educational systems and traditions still determine approaches to today’s topics and issues, at least in part.

Keeping these factors in mind, it is of little surprise that the issue of decentralization came to the fore of educational reforms in all transition countries immediately after the political changes of the past decade and a half. By default, education became an important element of the new democratic process.

Each country moved to develop different practices and study different experiences, albeit with little success. The decentralization of education created several dilemmas for policymakers. Some central governments found decentralization a good tool for lowering their budget costs and competing with the political rhetoric of the provinces. Local governments, meanwhile, often set their priorities without properly considering education and thus inadvertently returned the ball to the central authorities responsible for “the success of national education.” There were—and still are—many other cases, and this study is an attempt to fill part of the gap.

Decentralization and the Transformation of the Governance of Education offers three case studies on the development of education systems in Poland, Romania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, Poland is among the countries that recently joined the European Union; Romania is a candidate country for accession; and Bosnia and Herzegovina is still overcoming a divisive war despite a great deal of attention from the interna-

tional community. As representative cases, their different backgrounds, problems and needs cross one another and allow for some broader considerations of the state of the decentralization of education in the region.

In order to strengthen national educational reforms it is necessary, first of all, to improve the image of education in (post) transitional societies. The overall position of education in these countries is rather weak. The share of GDP spent on education is lower everywhere—sometimes critically lower—than the re-commendations of international organizations. As a consequence, the social status of teachers is weak, their working conditions are poor and their readiness to engage in educational renewal is questionable. In such a situation, an education minister's first priority is to guarantee routine functioning of the system. It is then extremely difficult for him or her to launch the expected renewal projects even if the specific political context—often the worst possible factor for reform—is ignored. In such conditions international cooperation and help is worthy, but budgetary problems are usually a threat to any reform's sustainability.

Public values and opinion are vital in helping to strengthen the general position of education in society. Renewal of national education is always linked with a change of public values and public opinion. Democratic and open societies are based upon individuals, who should be able to compete with their everyday problems and to cooperate with others on the basis of equal rights, solidarity and similar values. To live in a democratic society, to take part in the economy and political life and to

contribute to the values of open society—all these aims are based on quality education for all. These aims can be seriously obstructed if the public's opinion of education connotes old schools without basic equipment, underpaid and poorly-trained teachers, and outmoded curricula. However, these aims can also be fostered if education is made a key national priority and if the public recognizes the inherent value of the improvement of schools. Nonetheless, having reached this consensus between public and political will, any country can easily fall into *circulus vitiosus*, an enchanted circle—which is extremely dangerous for its development plans—if, due to inaction or poor results, public opinion loses trust and turns away from education. The state's chance to facilitate individuals (*carpe diem!*) via education should not be substituted with mere day-to-day survival. This is the most expensive scenario for the country as a whole, not only its educational budget.

Decentralization of education inevitably creates hard choices, but it is a principle appropriate to (post) transition societies. Reflecting upon and analyzing these choices are of the utmost importance.

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January 31, 2004

DECENTRALIZATION AND THE GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATION

Péter Radó

An Introductory Summary



THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN BiH, POLAND AND ROMANIA

Decentralization and the Governance of Education

An Introductory Summary

Péter Radó

THE LGI PROJECT ON DECENTRALIZATION AND EDUCATIONAL GOVERNANCE

The LGI policy fellowship project on decentralization in education was launched in 2002 with the purpose of addressing a policy problem that is highly relevant in most Central and Southeastern European Countries. The policy fellows participating in the project were selected in an open and competitive procedure. The purpose of the development of policy studies in this field was manifold:

- to identify and analyze the implications of decentralization for the role of central educational governance;
- to determine the conditions that enable the agencies of central educational governance to replace the former, essentially regulatory and administrative tools with rather indirect means of steering and policymaking; and
- to formulate recommendations for each of the individual countries for the improvement of such capacities.

ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM

Since 1989 most Central and Eastern European countries initiated major systemic reforms in their education systems. Almost nothing was left untouched: the structure of service delivery, the content (curricula, examinations and qualification requirements), the financing and governance of education, and initial and in-service teacher training.

The result was a shift from a centrally managed (“political-administrative”) management system to a rather decentralized system. The professional and institutional autonomy of schools was strengthened and

ownership and major decision-making competencies were deployed to local and regional authorities.

In general, the region’s educational systems are moving from centralization to decentralization, from separation to integrated management settings and from control to liberal, market-based governance. To a great extent, this process is predetermined by the characteristics and overall direction of public administration reform. The cultural context also plays a role, as do politics. Although the legacy of previous regimes and the problems these countries face are similar, individual solutions and features do characterize this new governance.

Coinciding with changes in post-communist states, developed countries started to build public administration systems in compliance with the requirements of “New Public Management” (NPM). A comparative study during the mid-nineties proved that western-style innovations in organizational structures, financial management, human resource management and public service delivery will remain irrelevant in Eastern Europe as long as certain structural problems remain unresolved.

This study focuses on problems: fragmentation; the lack of coordination, continuity, and policy-making capacities; and weakness of accountability systems.¹ In practice, decentralization “liberated or intends to liberate” the agencies of central educational governance from the burden of a huge proportion of daily administrative tasks. But this is not matched with the further steps of building and improving the quality and structure of central governance. This drives our attention to two inherent contradictions of the decentralization process in the region:

1. Huge resources were invested in capacity-building and other programs to enable the actors at the school, local and regional levels to cope with,

and adjust to, their changing roles and responsibilities; however, the adjustment of the role of central governance (strategy and policy) was ignored in almost all of the countries.

2. As a consequence, decentralization did not necessarily improve the incremental problem-solving capacity of central educational governance that NPM-type reforms emphasize. Therefore these governments failed to improve the quality and effectiveness of educational services. Their realignment is one of the most important conditions of the overall transition process.

THE RELEVANCE OF THE PROBLEM

The three studies in this volume on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Poland, and Romania approach the problems described above. The studies on Romania and Poland provide the reader with a sophisticated system analysis. The Romanian case focuses on the changing role of different actors and the changing relationships among them. In the study on Poland there is an emphasis on the perception by the players of their own roles and the discrepancy between their formal assignments and informal power. Both studies identify several sources of dysfunction that allow for deliberate policy planning in order to overcome these shortcomings.

The study on Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) drives our attention to an exciting paradox. It might happen that constitutional centralization, that is, overcoming the fragmentation of Bosnian “federalism,” is a precondition before even considering systemic changes that may lead to decentralization and the improvement of governance and management. The study focuses on state-level curriculum policy that is considered to be the point of departure for the unification of the governance of education in the country.

Disregarding the very special case of BiH, the direction is forward, and the process of change itself drives more and more attention to the matters of effective central governance. The clash of the lack of policy planning and implementation capacities, the lack of empowered local actors and the lack of a decent system of information exchange may endanger the success of the whole realignment of educational services. The studies on the three countries allows for identifying

certain key aspects that are—or will be very soon—on the policy agenda of the ministries of education.

MID-WAY DECENTRALIZATION AND FRAGMENTATION

Decentralization of education management systems is a common feature of the countries of the region.

Serious measures were taken in Romania and Poland in this direction. County inspectorates in Romania and regional superintendents’ offices (*kuratoria*) in Poland acted as agents of the ministries of education. Although the responsibility of local and regional self-governments was increased in Poland and Romania, the unbalanced and dysfunctional management cancelled the results of many decentralization measures.

Bosnia and Herzegovina represents a fragmented system in which each regional body runs highly centralized management structures. The constitutional structure of BiH (“Republika Srpska,” the Federation composed of ten cantons, and the District of Brcko) does not allow for building a state-level governance and management system. Thus a highly centralized former-Yugoslav management system prevails in all of these administrative units.

In all countries, consistent decentralization is endangered by the “stop and go” nature of governance; any new government completely reconsiders the measures of the previous one. In BiH education reform became the “hostage” of the nationalism of those ethnic groups who rule the different “Entities” of the country.

Fragmentation of governance and management are present in Romania and Poland too. There they refer to the extent to which different strands of management (decision-making on financing, curriculum and program type, hiring of staff, in-service training, etc.) and quality assurance mechanisms are connected—for example, the relationship between local self-governments and the regional *kuratoria* (regional education authorities).

DIVERSIFICATION OF FUNCTIONS

In centralized education systems governed mainly by regulation and bureaucratic administrative management, there is a strong tendency to integrate

management, quality assurance and professional support mechanisms into a single subordinated line of governance and management. This integration then damages each of these functions.

At the national level remarkable efforts were made in Poland and Romania to separate central governance and some professional regulatory and support functions. National agencies were established for these purposes, such as centers and/or councils for assessment, curriculum and teacher training. Institutionalization is far from being complete in many post-communist states and the stability of the already existing agencies is not ensured.

Regional services—in spite of major reorganizations—are much less developed. For example, in Romania the portfolio of inspectorates in the *judets* (counties) still combine genuine management-type functions (such as the appointment of directors) with quality assurance of certain services provided to schools (such as the approval of training programs for teachers) and external quality control of schools.

MULTILEVEL SYSTEM OF PLANNING AND POLICYMAKING

One of the *sine qua non* conditions of effective governance is a multilevel system of planning and development. The first step in this direction—with the exception of BiH—is institutional and professional autonomy. However, this autonomy is not completely matched with a well-functioning, school-level planning procedure. Although this mandate was given to schools in Romania, the conditions and prerequisites of quality planning are lacking and disconnected from regional and national levels. This is symptomatic of the region.

The weak policy-planning capacity of central government agencies is also common. Policy analysis is often done in independent workshops having a very limited impact on actual policy decisions.

Policymaking is also not open to innovation from the bottom-up. The involvement of relevant stakeholders in decision-making procedures has not been taken advantage of, and has been much less institutionalized. The lack of open, institutionalized and transparent policy consultation procedures results in the overwhelming weight of politics on educational policies.

FINANCING: THE USE OF INCENTIVES

In BiH the old financing system remains untouched. The system of allocation of financial resources is highly centralized and is based on the pure funding of the operation of schools. This system has several consequences:

- Education service specifications (tasks) and financing are not connected.
- There is no space for incentives or disincentives, that is, one of the most important tools of policy-making is lacking.
- All services that schools consume are supplied by the state, and these services are funded in the same way (i.e., the operation of the supplier is financed regardless of the need for or relevance of such services).
- Since the system of allocation is hardly adjusted to specific costs, all educational-need student groups are streamed to separate schools.
- The space within which actors at lower levels may consider their own priorities is extremely small.
- The professional autonomy of schools is an illusion.

Romania and Poland moved to an allocation system based on the number of students enrolled. Both countries created a rather complicated mechanism to adjust central budget support to certain service specifications: school-type, program-type (profile and specific additional tasks, such as the education of special needs children) and other educational services. The role of local self-governments in financing certain recurrent costs is also increasing. However, a common perception in both countries is that the education systems are under-funded, and the theoretical and technical possibilities to use built-in incentives for policy purposes are limited. Consonant with this, the flow of financial resources is not transparent.

FOUR POINTS OF DEPARTURE (CONCLUDING REMARKS)

These recommendations hope to go beyond their relevance to the three countries that are represented in this volume. These policies might impose a “pulling impact” on the entire system of educational

governance, and are important points of departure. The four common recommendations are the following:

- Fine-tune the system of allocating financial resources to education service providers. An allocation system that allows for the use of financial incentives and disincentives (i.e., in order to influence enrollment patterns in different strands of upper-secondary education) is the precondition of a successful strategy.
- Develop capacity-building for management at all levels. The typical pattern of decentralization is “throwing the ball ahead” and the players catch up later. Instead, a mechanism that offers in-service trainings for school managers and the staff of local and regional educational authorities should be in place.
- Develop education management information systems. The supply and quality of information (indicators, benchmarks) should be easy to use and accessible.
- Reorganize institutions based on the separation and diversification of different administrative and professional support functions and ensure their built-in quality assurance.

ANNEX: METHODOLOGY

The development of the country case studies was designed as an iterative process, in which the participating policy fellows and their mentor were to work together as a team, while taking advantage of the experience and intellectual capacities of the whole group.

Therefore, intensive group work played a very important role in the project at three stages of the process:

- in the clarification of key concepts and in the development of a common analytical framework that was designed to allow for comparison at the beginning of the project;
- in a two day intensive mid-way workshop of the participating researchers when five draft studies² were discussed and recommendations were developed for each study;
- at the final stage of the project, when the results were presented, and the studies were finalized by incorporating the recommendations of the reviewer.³

The analytical framework for the project was based on already existing knowledge that was accumulated by different comparative studies on the topic (see the Selected Bibliography) and was designed to be operational enough for each of the case studies, while allowing for comparison and generalization. The purpose of the individual case studies was to support the understanding of the contexts; to map out the systemic conditions of governance and those of informed and open policymaking; to identify specific obstacles and to develop recommendations in order to influence the discourse within the policy community in each of the countries. Due to limited resources and time, the development of the country case studies was based on rather soft research methods, such as literature review, consultations with local experts in the field, interviews with the actors of the governance of education and with their key partners.

NOTES

¹ Verheijen, Tony 1996. “The Relevance of ‘Western’ Public Management Reforms for Central and Eastern European Countries.” *Public Management Forum*, Vol. II, No. 4.

² Apart from the three completed studies that are published in this volume two other case studies were developed in the project: Aliis Liin: Decentralization and the Transformation of the Governance of Education in Estonia, and Aleksandar Bauca: The Decentralization–Centralization Pendulum in Serbian Education: Governance Embedded into the Social and Cultural Context.

³ Zgaga, Pavel. Peer review on the report “*Decentralization of Education in the Transition States of Central Eastern Europe*.”

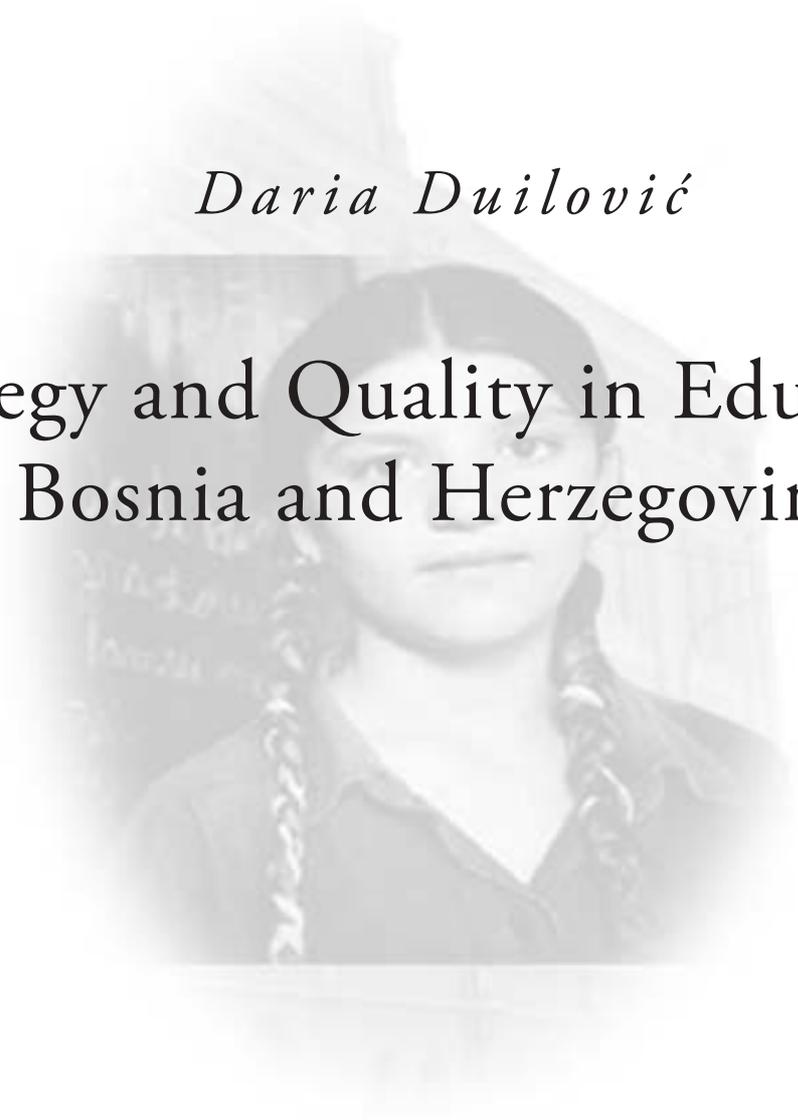
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DECENTRALIZATION AND THE GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATION

Daria Duilović

Strategy and Quality in Education:
Bosnia and Herzegovina



THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN BiH, POLAND AND ROMANIA

Strategy and Quality in Education: Bosnia and Herzegovina

Daria Duilović

1. INTRODUCTION

The main goal of this paper is to offer an overview of the existing practices and conditions of governance and policymaking within the education sector of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). This will be achieved through a comparison of BiH's current standards of governance with international standards of good practice and quality in education. The paper will also identify the main obstacles on the path to education reform and provide recommendations to strengthen BiH's existing system.

Given the specific and unique circumstances of post-war BiH, it is important to introduce the constitutional and political landscape of the country before addressing educational governance and current issues.

1.1 Preface

Eight years after the war, Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face enormous political, social and economic challenges, and remains deeply divided in terms of ethnic and geographic affiliation.

As a result of four years of conflict from 1991–95, BiH's population has decreased by 25 percent. Most of this exodus has been composed of young people. The population has since stabilized at 3.5 million, with close to one million refugees abroad and an equal number of internally displaced persons. The war, or at least large-scale hostilities, ended with the General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH, later known as the Dayton Peace Agreement (DPA), signed in December 1995. Post-Dayton BiH consists of two entities and one independent district. It allocates 51 percent of Bosnian territory to the joint Federation and leaves the remaining 49 percent to the Serbian entity, Republika Srpska (RS).

The Federation of BiH (FBiH) is divided into 10 ethnically diverse federal cantons, populated by Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks (Muslims). Unlike the Federation, which, under the federal umbrella, consists of three tiers of governance—entity, canton, and municipality—Republika Srpska is highly centralized and very homogenous in ethnic composition. The third entity, the Independent District of Brcko, was created after international arbitration. Brcko is a small area in northeast BiH that is neither territorially nor administratively incorporated into either of the above entities.

BiH is still recovering from the war in two major and somewhat conflicting processes: reconstruction and transition. BiH is also trying to move from a state-planned to a free market economy, from recent nationalistic totalitarianism to pluralistic democracy, and from a divided to an open society. As was the case with the Socialist Federal Republics of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and its republics, BiH's prewar social indicators were above average for Central and Eastern Europe. The BiH prewar education system was also considered to be above average.

The reality of the present is that both the human and the material resources necessary for substantive progress are limited, and donations from the International Community (IC) and the rate of return of refugees to BiH continue to decrease. With poor political and economic prospects and scarce job opportunities, it is not surprising that only the elderly are returning to BiH. As a consequence, the "brain drain" that took place in BiH during the war is only deepening: this has been confirmed by the sobering findings of UNDP annual surveys from 2000 to 2003. Namely, two-thirds of the younger population want to leave BiH—not surprising in light of growing poverty (61% of the population live below the poverty line) and unemployment (37%) rates

that now correspond to the levels immediately after the war.¹

BiH's education system is both a mirror and influence upon political, social and economic trends, which can all currently be described as negative. Therefore the systemic and effective reform and strengthening of the BiH education sector is one of the key components of the successful re-establishment of a modern European country based on the principles of democracy, rule of law, human rights and a market economy.

1.2 Political and Educational Context in BiH

Due to its unique and rather controversial constitutional organization, it is necessary to point out BiH's main characteristics as they influence every aspect of contemporary life, including education. In spite of the highly complex and fragmented organization of BiH as a state, and of education in the country in general, the existing systems still strongly reflect their common *ancient regime* heritage.

The RS, the ten cantons within FBiH and the District of Brcko all operate as highly centralized administrations within their respective boundaries. Each of these administrative units has full responsibility for all levels of education that, as a rule, results in over-centralization and, at the same time, over-fragmentation of this sector. Keeping in mind that each administration is responsible for passing its own legislation, budget and policy, it is not surprising that there are numerous—however, for the most part, minor—variations in education practice throughout BiH.

Until recently there was only very limited coordination on education between the Entities and the Federation and cantons, not to mention the cantons themselves. The only permanent fora for communication and coordination were the regular monthly meetings of the Entity Ministers of Education (MoE), which were co-chaired by the Office of the High Representative (OHR), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). These meetings were also attended by other International Community representatives, and were supplemented by even fewer regular meetings between the federation MoE and the cantonal MoE.

The attempted decentralizing, but in reality fragmenting, of the logic of the DPA (Dayton Peace Accord), through the uneven, mainly ethnic distribution of decision-making competencies between the administrative units of different levels, has made education a hostage to nationalism in BiH. Politically, over the last decade of the past century, education has been seen as a vehicle for creating three separate ethnic systems, including three separate religions, histories, languages and cultures, and not at all as a tool for development of a common (BiH) identity. And although there are still very few substantial differences in education policy or practice across BiH, the politics of separation and segregation still make coordination and cooperation extremely difficult. More than seven years after the end of the war, it still seems premature for some local authorities to agree on “systemic” education reform when there is no agreement on what the “system” is.

However the first attempts to reform the old communist education system, which was completely nationalized (i.e., ethnicized) rather than modernized during the nineties, started at the level of Entities in early 1999. The first inter-Entity agreement, brokered by the Office of the High Representative in order to harmonize their reform efforts, was signed in May 2000. However, it dealt with education rather as a basic human right—insisting on the removal of all forms of segregation and discrimination that had been spread systematically during the war, at all levels and aspects of education—than with real education reform and modernization.

But what was and still is really needed was a reform of education as a large-scale modification of the education system and a shift of the basic education paradigm to learning outcomes. Such a reform would require primarily political support and good will at all levels; followed by more “basic” requirements such as professional knowledge and skills, and a new management style. This should all be based on the inter-connectedness of the various elements of education and other social sectors, involving not only the typical “education world” (policymakers, experts, advisors, teachers, trade unions and parents), but all other interested parties as well (for instance, private businesses and local communities).

In the absence of a state-level authority in education in the years following the DPA, that role was to

some extent assumed by the International Community present in BiH, who provided minimum coordination, cooperation and harmonization. Due to the streamlining or profiling of the IC presence in BiH, as agreed by all IC major donors and players in the summer 2002, that role was officially taken over by the OSCE mission to BiH. Although the role is really limited to cooperation, this was rather difficult to understand and accept for many local and international stakeholders in education due to two major realities; first that the OSCE as “the” Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe did not have the original mandate in education, and second, it did not have the capacity or properly trained staff necessary to fulfill such an enormous task.²

1.3 Setting the Scene for “Real” Education Reform

In the second half of 2002, the OSCE, acting as a kind of state-level education secretariat, did play a constructive role by bringing together different local and international stakeholders and coordinating the demanding exercise of producing the first comprehensive education reform strategy paper “Five Pledges on Education” was presented to the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) for BiH in Brussels in November 2002.³

Although in real terms it looks more like a wish list than a serious strategy plan, the importance of this document is manifold: it contains measures and activities that apply to the entire country; it is mainly produced by local experts⁴ and it represents a formal commitment of the local education authorities at all levels to the BiH public and the IC. Furthermore, future international donations for the education sector will depend on the progress of implementing the pledges.

The other major development in 2002 in the education sector was the development of a statewide law on primary and secondary education, in accordance with the post-accession requirements of the Council of Europe after BiH became its 44th member earlier that year. This framework law contains the main principles on education and protection of human rights, and it is the basis for the future development of more detailed entity and cantonal

legislation on education. However, it also contains some very specific and detailed measures, in that it stipulates the development of the **common core curriculum** for primary and general secondary education in BiH, as well as the establishment of a body to oversee that process.

This measure is primarily seen as a key for the reintegration and harmonization of the existing education system and a tool that would enhance the return of refugees and displaced persons, and enable the general mobility of students and teachers. As there is no state-level Ministry of Education in BiH, the law was originally developed under the leadership of the BiH Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees (MoHR/R). However, just after the last general elections in October 2002, the BiH Parliament adopted the new Law on (state-level) Ministries, and decided to shift the portfolio of education together with all other soft-sectors⁵ from MoHR/R to the newly established Ministry of Civil Affairs (MoCA). This meant another missed opportunity to create a state-level MoE.

The last factor that influenced the BiH education scene as of the beginning of 2003 was the gradual transfer of all governmental financial transactions of the budgetary users (including education) to the treasury system in order to ensure transparency and accountability for all activities listed under public expenditure. This is an important part of a much wider public administration reform, led by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund missions in BiH.

Among other things, the education stage in BiH is marked significantly by the non-existence of an appropriate state-level authority, institutions or legislation on education, although one may argue that BiH is currently in the process of addressing most of these issues, at least to a certain degree. Namely, the adoption by the BiH Parliament in June 2003 of the state-level Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education, and a newly established MoCA, in spite of its limited capacity and rather unclear mandate in the field of education, have both played a very constructive role in the whole process, with the latter in partnership with the IC. However, one must note that this is mainly due to the fact that the current BiH Minister of CA—being a university professor and Sarajevo Canton Minister of Education in one of his previous mandates—made education his

top priority. Sadly, although it worked very well, it only confirmed the fact that in BiH everything is still down to the level of a particular individual, and not a position or an institution. Therefore keeping all these facts in mind, addressing any education issue in BiH from the perspectives of central level government or decentralization as the agreed point of departure of this paper, is likely to offer only indications of possible future developments or, in the best case scenario, incomplete answers.

2. THE TOOLS AND CONDITIONS OF STRATEGIC STEERING

As is the case elsewhere, the governance of education in BiH is not any different than governance in the rest of the public sector, which means that it can still be described as over-politicized, controlled, fragmented but centralized, and in dire need of reform that is yet to come.

Modern, high quality governance in education in well-developed EU countries is based on professionalism, and embodies principles of democratic pluralism, human rights and the rule of law. From this broad approach, BiH faces a serious challenge in governance in general, and in education governance in particular. In brief, these challenges are related to the overall process of transition and of the postwar reconstruction of a state and society, and can be grouped as political, institutional and financial.

2.1 Financial Incentives and Disincentives

The extremely fragmented education system in BiH—not to mention the absurdity and cost of having 13 education ministers/ministries in one small, poor country—is very expensive and inefficient in terms of unit costs, and most inequitable in terms of who benefits from the public funding. High costs continue to lead to the breakdown of the education system, with teachers' strikes happening regularly throughout BiH regardless of entity, cantonal or ethnic boundaries, and to mounting arrears.

At the level of the state, despite high spending, education outcomes in the sense of relevancy of what

children learn, and outputs in terms of labor market requirements are thought to be less than satisfactory.

Public spending on education as a share of GDP⁶ (6.9%) is very high in BiH, especially so in FBiH, as compared to average spending in other transition or EU countries.

According to the macroeconomic framework agreed with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the current stand-by arrangement, recurrent public spending in BiH will not increase over the next four years (and even after that period it can only increase in the case of evident economic growth). It is obvious that, in the best case scenario, the present level of public expenditure on education in BiH will not decrease in the medium term, and therefore it becomes a most urgent imperative for the education authorities to increase efficiency through prioritization and re-orientation of education spending in order to increase the quality of education and produce better education outcomes.

The main problem in education financing, as one of the very significant remnants of the previous system, is input-based funding (focusing primarily on the number of teachers). This should be urgently replaced by a simple per-student-based formula at all levels in order to provide an incentive to use all available resources more efficiently.

The focus on the number of teachers, instead of on the number of students, results in a series of negative outcomes. Salaries are low and at the same time they are crowding out all other spending (the proportion of the budget spent on wages and salaries varies from about 75% in Sarajevo Canton to about 93% in Una-Sana Canton⁷). Capital investment in education simply does not exist. Over 95% of the building of new schools and the reconstruction of old ones in the postwar period was financed by international donations, but as donors are pulling out of BiH this will no longer be the case. Furthermore, the education funds which remain are often not sufficient to cover school maintenance and utilities costs. The student-teacher ratio is also too low (compared with the average in CSEE and EU countries) and, most importantly, exclusively territorial-based spending creates additional inequity at all levels (from the level of school to the level of entity).

Therefore some kind of equalization scheme at the level of BiH is a necessary priority if BiH wants, as

claimed in the Education Reform Strategy, to properly address the quality, equity and cost-effectiveness of education.

Room for maneuver is very limited especially considering that education, together with other public sectors, is financed through the treasury system in order to improve transparency and accountability of public expenditure. Very strict control over flow of public finances means that only expenses that have been budgeted for can be paid, and it is easy to predict that this first year of the treasury system will be extremely difficult for all public fund users. As one of the first direct consequences of this new, and not sufficiently elaborated measure, teachers' salaries are being delayed. As has often been the practice in BiH, implementation of the treasury system is currently being stretched to the point of absurdity, including not only budgetary allocations for education, but individual revenues of schools and faculties. This may seem like a punishment of those who up until now have managed to earn additional income and improve their financial situation. But even before this latest development, the very concept of financial incentives and disincentives was foreign to the education system in BiH, and merit or exceptional skills were never rewarded with extra pay. Teachers are paid on the basis of a strict scale that takes their work experience and workload into consideration, but not the quality of their teaching. Financing is almost totally centralized at the level of entity in the case of RS, and on the level of canton in FBiH, leaving practically no room for incentives or disincentives within specific administrative areas or units.

Salaries vary to the highest degree depending on the territory in which a certain school is located. The differences are huge: a primary school teacher in Sarajevo (FBiH, Canton Sarajevo) earns almost twice as much as her/his colleague in Srpsko Sarajevo (RS),⁸ which is, in some cases, just one street away. The same has up until recently applied in so-called cantons with a "mixed regime."⁹ In Mostar East and Mostar West—where both municipalities of the divided city of Mostar are located next to each other within one Hercegovina-Neretva Canton—for many years Croat teachers were receiving substantive additional pay from more or less non-transparent sources.¹⁰

The consequences of the application of a treasury system for education in BiH remain to be seen, but

at least in the initial period (2003) they were rather limiting and even damaging, as many things were left out and overlooked when making the 2003 annual budget. According to the school principals interviewed, restrictions imposed by the treasury system meant that as banal a problem as replacing a broken window made the daily running of schools almost impossible if such a problem was not planned and budgeted for. Even the schools and faculties that could earlier generate additional income (i.e., their own revenues), are now afraid that they will lose it due to the very strict application of the treasury system. This has resulted in a closure of their own accounts (even the opening of sub-accounts for these institutions—for their own revenues—was initially not allowed by the Ministries of Finance at any level, but this will no doubt have to change sooner rather than later).

Furthermore, public resources for education will not increase in the next medium-term period, and therefore any improvement of the sector can only be achieved through careful rationalization and redirecting of education spending. But, as pointed out by Péter Radó,¹¹ the cost of rationalization is immediate and high, which leaves us with a rather bitter taste in our mouths, as BiH at this moment cannot afford any short-term investment in order to produce a long-term reduction in costs.

One opportunity remains, however unlikely, for immediate financial and administrative improvement in the education sector. As the sector was one of the first victims of the DPA, it could also be one of the first to benefit if this peace agreement is to be amended in the near future, and the original organization of the country replaced with more rational constitutive, legal and administrative organization.

2.2 Targeted Development Programs

Local authorities are more active in RS, while local and international NGOs are more active in the Federation and its cantons. However, thanks to the huge presence of different international organizations and their respective programs and funding, there are numerous examples of target development programs throughout BiH. One developed by CIVITAS BiH (containing the most important elements of a civic

and human rights education) as a pilot program for a limited number of schools in both Entities and all three ethnic communities, ended up as a new mandatory subject in the third grade of all secondary schools in BiH. The major elements of the program were also incorporated into the Common Core Curriculum (CCC), to which we will later return in Chapter 3.

However, the only example of good cooperation between the IC and local authorities—the OSCE and MoHR/R—is a program for Roma children that had a special impact in the Sarajevo Region. The program was aimed not only at increasing Roma primary school enrollment, but also at reducing the dropout rate, aiming to encourage the full integration of Roma children and their families into the broader school community and everyday life. It is worth noting that similar programs targeting Roma children were developed and implemented by the OSCE and their local partners in a few other countries in transition.

Another important and potentially far-reaching target-development program, called EMIS (Education Ministries Information System), was initiated and financed by the World Bank. It provided for the establishment of an education database and a framework for information exchange between education ministries. Unfortunately, it did not cover the whole territory of BiH, but only two cantons and a part of RS, yet it was still declared very useful by all those who had a chance to make use of it.

2.3 Empowerment of Actors and Capacity-building

When speaking about such an important feature of contemporary education systems as empowerment, it is rather sobering to find that very little has been done in BiH in this field since the end of the war. For more than seven years now, no institutionalized, consistent or structured program for empowering and building the capacity of teachers exists. Everything is still done on an *ad hoc* basis, rather chaotically and offered mainly by different NGOs and the IC. These programs are sometimes very relevant, in the case of “Step by Step” and UNICEF, and sometimes in rather narrow “politically correct” fields like civic education, or human rights education.

The first organized attempt to address the growing need of capacity-building across BiH appeared only recently¹² in the chapter, “Capacity: Teacher and management development” of the Green Paper: *Reform of primary and general secondary education in BiH*, produced in cooperation with BiH education authorities and EC technical support for education reform. Apart from proposed changes in initial and in-service teacher training aiming at improved, inclusive and democratic school organization and its greater autonomy, the Green Paper also emphasizes the need for the establishment of professional associations and networks to systemically foster appropriate professional development standards of teachers and managers.

But before all this is developed into a White Paper and eventually implemented, the main problem in this area still remains rather poor, old-fashioned and completely outdated pre-service teacher training that has not changed over the last 12 years. To get into a teaching position up until now, one had to complete a two-year program in the pedagogical academy that qualifies her or him to teach in the early grades of primary school (1–4) or a four-year program in the pedagogical academy or at the university. In the future to get into a teaching position, be it in primary or secondary education, it will require a four-year university education, offered either by the pedagogical academies and/or faculties (in all cases, one can enroll after a four-year secondary school and an entrance exam).

Pre-service teacher training throughout this period also remained subject-based and essentially theoretical, not taking into account the necessary development of the specific professional skills that make a good teacher. Teaching methods, pedagogy, classroom control, didactic, education foundation and teaching practice amount to only about 10% of the pre-service teacher training, compared to about 50% in EU countries.¹³

An additional problem that occurred during and due to the war was that many teachers left their jobs for different reasons, and in many cases were replaced by insufficiently educated, qualified or mature personnel (secondary teacher-training schools reopened in some parts of BiH during the war in order to address teacher shortages). This still presents one of the key problems in BiH schools

where between 20 to 25% of teachers do not have the qualifications required by law.

As is the case with literally everything concerning education at the state level, it is not surprising that there is no in-service teacher training offered at the state level, not counting some programs offered by different NGOs and the IC. What is really surprising is the lack of institutionalized programs offered at the level of the two entities and nine out of 10 cantons.

The only exception in this regard is Tuzla Canton, where the Ministry of Education and the Pedagogical Institute, supported by the Open Society Fund BiH, officially opened a center for training and development of teachers in October 2002. Though still not operational, the center will serve as one of the units of the Pedagogical Institute that will cooperate not only with schools and universities, but also with NGOs, the private sector and other education stakeholders. Although there is no single institution in the whole of BiH specializing exclusively in in-service teacher training, the situation is slightly better in RS. Here the Pedagogical Institute, as one of the organizational units of the MoE and the only service provider, offers unified and mandatory in-service teacher training programs across the entity. Of course, all teachers cannot be included, and for those who are, it clearly presents a somewhat symbolic incentive. It is meant for the best teachers, who are normally appointed by school principals, and although it has no direct impact on their salaries, it has influence over their reputation and position within the school and local community. Quite often the first to be “trained” become trainers themselves, which has recently happened with teachers who received early training and practical experience in interactive teaching and learning. This process is now being gradually implemented in primary schools throughout RS.

Within the Federation something similar exists only in the cantons with a Croat majority, which throughout the war and over the following years developed something that could—to a certain degree—be called a common education policy and practice. This included in-service teacher training organized by the Pedagogical Institute, located in Mostar West and servicing the Croat educational community in BiH.

Given the new financial constraints imposed on the whole public sector in accordance with BiH’s current stand-by arrangement with the IMF and the financing of education through the treasury system, it is unlikely that the situation will change in the medium term unless the authorities decide to redirect current education spending. Keeping in mind the size of BiH and its population, it is imperative for the existing pedagogical institutes, regardless of where their seats are and what ethnic community they have served until now, to update and start specializing their services (for example, in foreign languages, information technology and some of the sciences). Given increasing resource constraints, no single institute will be able to properly cover all functions and competencies.

In this regard it is necessary to mention another almost completely missing component of empowerment and capacity-building, and that is the non-existence of special training in education management for present and future school principals. Such training would include development of the very specific skills required for those sensitive positions that should be purely professional but which in reality remain mainly political appointments. Again, the only exception that could be found is Tuzla Canton, where 20 school principals participated in a one-year training program in school management, conducted by the Slovenian National Leadership School, and financed by Open Society Fund BiH. This initiative to involve a foreign service provider, but from the more advanced neighboring or regional country (which guaranteed the common heritage, experience and mutual understanding) could serve as a useful interim measure before BiH can develop capacity to train its own professionals in their own language. This is an important issue also addressed in the Green Paper.

The same that was said with regard to training school principals can be said when addressing the ministries of education, where the strengthening of their capacities must focus on the personal responsibility of individual decision-makers, and the increase of the technical and managerial capacity of the system. The development of modern public administration skills is still lacking and is urgently needed if BiH wants to create a modern, professional and de-politicized public education system. Ministries should become policy-oriented institutions, focusing

on analysis, advice and strategy, and concentrating on capacity-building for public and education administration, quality control and evaluation, and devolving the actual implementation of programs to schools and/or municipalities.

To conclude, capacity-building of education actors and institutions through initial and in-service teacher training, followed by the improvement of school organization and autonomy, as well as management training at the level of schools, education institutions and ministries remains a basic pre-condition of successful education reform.

According to the Green Paper, capacity-building of teachers and school management should be based on principles of continued development with appropriate organizational support. Also, capacity-building requires an adequate time frame, material resources for both initial and in-service training, and shared responsibility. Here, shared responsibility has a contemporary meaning of democratic participation, not the old communist principle of collective responsibility where no one was really responsible. Quality at the level of schools must be agreed upon by all involved parties: management, experts, teachers, other school staff, students, parents, the local community and education authorities. The current organizational, personnel and financial structure of those very few education institutions that survived the war in BiH cannot correspond to the changes and challenges of the upcoming education reform. Although there is also an agreement at the state level that new institutions for education development are a necessity if BiH is to move forward, there is no agreement as to at what level—state, entity or canton—they should be established; not to mention what the structure, conditions for establishment, competencies, area of responsibility and financing methods should be.

2.3.1 *School Autonomy vs. Centralized (Micro)Management*

Paradoxically enough, in spite of all that has been said above, schools—and especially school principals—as a rule have a high degree of autonomy, at least in some aspects. Despite the very complicated administrative structure of the Federation of BiH and the rather simple one in Republika Srpska, it is important to

point out that actual practice nevertheless varies very little when describing the major elements of school autonomy.

After a certain position is approved by the responsible ministry, the teacher-hiring process, for example, is handled exclusively by the school boards and ultimately by principals. There are, prescribed qualification requirements, but as long as they are fulfilled it is up to the school to make a final decision as to whom it will employ.

The role of a principal is rather important, and setting aside service specifications that come from the responsible ministry and present a given framework for school activities, in day-to-day management of the school she or he has almost complete free reign. Thus, we can discuss the institutional, professional and even curricular content (a degree of freedom of choice within the prescribed curriculum) dimension of school autonomy, while financial autonomy was extinguished by the presently draconian way of financing education through the treasury system.

In spite of the obvious lack of structural capacity and autonomy, at the functional level these elements do exist, at least to a certain degree. However, in order to be able to reform BiH's education system and to bring it closer to the education systems in other countries in transition and reach European standards in this area, capacity-building must become a structural feature of education reform.

2.4 (Multilevel) Planning

We have to start by pointing out that the two key elements of good planning are seriously missing in BiH in all sectors (except maybe in politics), including education, where there is a significant lack of *reliable data* and *professional analysis* of that data.

There is a persistent and serious problem in obtaining accurate information about anything in BiH, and the state-level statistics bureau has only recently been established by the law imposed by the High Representative for BiH, as the BiH Parliament had failed to adopt it for many years. However, it is understandable why this occurred if one keeps in mind that non-existent statistical data was a good excuse for, for example, poor results in return and reconstruction processes in BiH and all sorts of poli-

tical gerrymandering. Therefore in BiH, in a situation where the relevant data is still missing, we can still only generally talk about political planning, or manipulation (perhaps to use a more appropriate word), but not about real education planning.

Due to destroyed, missing or incomplete data, too many elections, short terms in office and lengthy processes of establishment of each government, medium- and long-term planning in education were practically impossible and the MoE normally produced only annual plans.

But for the first time after the war, the current situation looks different for several reasons: the IC-brokered education reform strategy from November 2002 offers at least a frame for medium-term planning. The new mandate of authorities at all levels is for four years and the recently adopted state-level framework law, when implemented, should provide the minimum rules and standards that would apply throughout BiH. Finally, the general public is not only ready but demands urgent changes in education in order to bring it closer to European standards and to offer adequate responses to the requirements of a constantly changing society and economy.

Therefore, what is needed most is a conscious change of the main paradigm when it comes to planning in education. Thus a move from a supply to a demand-driven education system, accordingly with an overall shift in planning and financing of the system is necessary.

Change is most urgently needed in reorganizing financing of education at all levels so that it follows the basic rule of “per student” funding, taking into account existing disparities (i.e., urban/rural). The introduction of this type of funding would contribute greatly to transparency in terms of allocation of resources. It would also, some argue, directly influence and increase the student-teacher ratio,¹⁴ which is too low by the standards of CEE, SEE and EU countries.

To give just a few examples, planning in education should also contribute to:

- cutting down the number of subjects being taught in the higher grades of primary and general secondary education (up to 17 subjects in the third year of *gymnasium*);
- widening the competencies of so-called subject-teachers, as many of them are now qualified to teach only one to two subjects while their future

competencies should cover clusters of similar disciplines;

- reducing the existing number of more than three hundred vocational programs (with very expensive unit costs) which must be replaced gradually with more general programs. These 3-year programs now include almost 75% of secondary school students and in many cases present a dead-end street for students as they do not enable them to enroll in universities or find jobs easily.

Furthermore, all VET (vocational education and training) profiles that are not needed on the labor market must be eliminated and urgently replaced with the relevant ones.

Also, keeping the actual political circumstances of postwar BiH in mind, it was not always only due to the fact that there was no proper educational planning and/or coordination that the IC in many cases rebuilt or built new multimillion dollar schools in places where there was no need, and wasted money desperately needed elsewhere. Unfortunately, in at least half of the cases, it happened thanks to careful local political planning to maintain the ethnic segregation of schools.

Now when the donors’ interest and financial contributions to BiH are decreasing, planning, cooperation and coordination at regional and/or territorial levels of cross-constituent units (cantons within FBiH, entities within BiH) become much more important than before. And it does not apply to education only, but requires serious cross-sectoral harmonization of, for example, education development plans with overall national development planning.

Although this paper is mainly limited to primary and general secondary education, higher education and VET (vocational education and training) are identified as the levels where rationalization is most urgently needed. The increase from four prewar to seven postwar universities in BiH, with a decline in population size close to one million, can only be attributed to purely nationalistic and political planning. The increase in the number of universities goes against all modern education principles of cost-efficiency, quality and equity. As a result, these small, poor and understaffed universities offer neither good quality education, nor degrees or diplomas recognized outside of the specific canton or entity.

Especially dramatic and totally absurd examples are the existence of the two parallel universities in Sarajevo and Mostar. Thus, there is one university in Sarajevo (FBiH) and in Srpsko Sarajevo (RS), though they are only a couple of kilometers apart. In Mostar, there is one each in the so-called “West” and “East,” on each side of the River Neretva in a canton with just under 250,000 citizens. Both universities are in the town of Mostar, but one is in the municipality with the Croat majority, and the other is in the municipality with the Bosniak majority, despite the fact that they are only a couple hundred meters away from each other! Almost every single canton in the FBiH at some stage after the war attempted to create its own university, but most of the attempts were stopped by direct intervention of the IC. And the situation is rather similar when it comes to VET (vocational education and training). Sadly enough, seven years after the war, the willingness to pay the cost of parallelism is still evident with the majority of the political authorities on all sides.

This extremely expensive nonsense could be addressed by decreasing the number of universities to at least its prewar number, but a country as small and as poor as BiH would benefit most by creating real centers of excellence at the state-level, so that, for example, in BiH there could be just one medical faculty in Banja Luka, just one faculty of law in Sarajevo, just one faculty of philosophy in Mostar and so on. Speaking of higher education, the additional problem to address is its fragmentation to 102 faculties that exist as separate legal bodies within the seven universities (with the only exception being Tuzla University), that are still being organized as a very loose association of the independent faculties.

Due to the constant decline of international funding and scarcity of public resources, if BiH as a whole and/or its constituent units wants to survive and eventually become self-sustainable, the sector of education, together with so many others, has to be reorganized and adjusted to the specific needs and conditions of BiH.

In sum, when it comes to education, it is high time to switch from political to professional planning, from a political-administrative system to a more flexible and more inclusive system where professionals and all stakeholders in education would have a say.

Achievement of real decentralization of the education sector, in its true meaning of devolution of decision-making competencies to the lower levels, looks, in the case of postwar BiH, still far away. This is especially true when we are confronted with the over-politicization and fragmentation that exists in reality. **The issue of decentralization should only be discussed after basic principles and standards of education are applied throughout the country.** This is something that many hope will be done through consistent implementation of the newly adopted state-level framework law on primary and secondary education, or only after a portion of the successful centralization of the sector is completed. The sector must be connected with developmental, economic, social and labor/employment policies; and democratized and liberalized through the participation of different stakeholders and a combination of the top-down and bottom-up approaches. Even if we agree that a functionally decentralized education system is a preferred solution compared to a centralized one, the point is that decentralization by itself does not automatically promote efficiency and equity. Thus, in countries like BiH, where not even equal access to education has yet been achieved, it is probably wiser to first achieve a degree of centralization of the national education system. Therefore, the standards in the field of education must be leveled before decentralization and subsidization of the sector is even attempted.

3. THE TOOLS AND CONDITIONS OF POLICYMAKING: THE CASE OF THE COMMON CORE CURRICULUM

“Nothing is as political as education,” claimed Dr. Ulf P. Lundgren from Sweden at the 2001 Open Society Institute conference on “Governance for Quality of Education,” and there is arguably no other European country where that statement is more applicable than in BiH. **Policy here simply equals politics**, and it is not only due to linguistic constraints that both notions really mean the same (in Serbo-Croat-Bosnian “politika” can mean both politics and policy!). Through the political fight for re- or disintegration of education across or along ethnic lines, for reconciliation versus segregation and division, one can follow

and see the real nature of different options present at the BiH political scene, i.e., if and how nationalistic, destructive or separatist they really are.

Under enormous pressure by the IC, emerging civil society and most of the education clientele, education was put on the top of the reform agenda for BiH in November 2002. It was positioned as the third priority agreed by the state and the IC, following reform of the economy and the justice system. The basic point of departure, before real reform can actually take place, was an understanding that central, i.e., state-level government, must have a say and responsibility in the area of education. Thus there is “the need for national government to ensure some degree of equality in access to education and some degree of uniformity of content and minimum standards can scarcely be denied.”¹⁵

Although one may argue that the role of curricula is too often overestimated within the overall education reform, all interested parties in BiH had to agree that a **Common Core Curriculum (CCC)** offers all of the things referred to earlier—with some degree of equality in access, uniformity of content and minimum standards. Therefore, the introduction of the CCC and the establishment of a permanent body that will oversee it in the future, holds a very prominent place in the framework state-level Law on Primary and Secondary Education in BiH and the BiH Education Reform Strategy.

Politically, before we can even start discussing it at the level of the education reform, the introduction of the CCC in BiH means a fulfillment of the important CoE post-accession requirements for BiH in the area of education. This would mean the end of discrimination and segregation in BiH’s schools, by ensuring the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their prewar homes, and enabling horizontal and vertical mobility of students and teachers throughout the country. It is seen as an important element for re-integration of the presently still ethnically divided education system/s and as a key feature of the emerging national education framework. It primarily aims to address the so-called “national group of subjects” that includes the humanities (history, language and literature and even geography!) and which was systematically used by the nationalistic forces to promote ethnic and religious division and segregation from the

level of the classroom and school and throughout the whole education system. In order to prevent situations in which teaching geography and history was equal to teaching “political” or “nationalistic” or “ethnic” geography and history in the future, the CCC is meant to ensure that, for example, a Muslim student whose family was expelled during the war, with some members possibly injured or even killed, would not face any disadvantages when his or her family decides to come back to its prewar home in the town where the majority of the population are Serbs. The returnee family would no longer have to face a situation in which their children are discriminated against when coming back to the places where they are no longer a national majority. It is believed that this problem can be addressed adequately through a CCC, common for every school, student and teacher in BiH.

In brief, depending on the grade and subject, the CCC should cover at least 75% of the curriculum. It is important that this is reflected in the new textbooks, as in the past 10 years the old textbooks were systematically used as a very powerful weapon to insult, discriminate and divide different ethnic groups.

This rather long introduction should serve as an explanation as to why the case of the CCC is a useful example when describing the tools and conditions of policymaking within the education sector of BiH.

3.1 The Non-existent Policymaking Circle in BiH

Again we must start by pointing out that a basic component of any serious policymaking—**systemic conditions for evidence-based policymaking**—is completely missing in contemporary BiH, or it is in the best or the worst case scenario “confused” by most of the local authorities with politics-making. There are two main problems in this regard, the first of which is the non-existence of reliable education information systems at any level, from state to municipality. Also, ministries of education at any level, as is the case with the state-level Ministry of Civil Affairs, do not have a policy or a strategy planning unit and staff with the capacity for policymaking and analysis.

Therefore, it is again the international community, through the various organizations involved

in the education reform in BiH, that have tried to bridge this gap, if not by creating the appropriate mechanism, then by temporarily shaping conditions of policymaking at the level of the country. However, this is the reason why some local authorities complain that BiH education policy, like in so many other vital fields for the reconstruction and development of BiH, is not developed locally, but rather outside BiH in places like Brussels, Washington or even Tehran. According to them, this “policy” does not correspond to the real needs and conditions of BiH, and is therefore doomed to failure.

Although different international organizations have different agendas to fulfill, public as well as hidden ones, in the case of the CCC they all had a common position. In this regard they were backing as well as were being backed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs, in a lengthy and stormy parliamentary process of adopting the state-level law on education. Symbolically, the adoption of this law was seen as a true beginning of a BiH-wide education reform. And although it will not automatically solve a single problem related to education in BiH, it represents a vital, key policy action tool in the field of education, and as such it will make creation and implementation of the CCC not only possible but mandatory throughout BiH.

The final aim of the CCC is to facilitate that all children in BiH, regardless of their ethnic, national or religious background, should again be able to go to school together—as was the case until 1991—under the same conditions. This did not require any additional elaboration, as the general public fully understands that it is at the same time a tool for rationalization of the existing primary and general secondary education at the state level, as well as a tool against any discrimination and/or segregation in education.

Long before the law was finally adopted in late June 2003, the IC (especially the OSCE, the CoE and the OHR) was instrumental in the establishment of an *ad hoc* expert body earlier in 2003. This was the Common Core Curriculum Steering Board, tasked with the harmonization of the three ethnic curricula into one common BiH-wide core curriculum for the beginning of the 2003–2004 school year, including all subjects taught in primary and general secondary schools throughout BiH. Although an enormous task, one must remember that in all so-called “non-nation-

al” subjects, children are taught the same things in the same grades at the same age, simply because they are still taught on the basis of the former Yugoslav curriculum. The subject-specific working groups for these subjects—working under the instruction and supervision of the CCC Steering Board—did not have a lot to do in order to harmonize the three existing curricula. This is due to the fact that they, in some cases with amazement, discovered that the three curricula are already almost identical—up to 95 percent.

As the IC has heavily invested in the sustainable reconstruction and development of BiH since the end of the war, the attempt to produce and later on implement the CCC throughout BiH should be placed and analyzed primarily in that context—or more precisely, in the context of sustainable return of families to their prewar homes rather than in the context of real education reform.

But before this exercise even started, it was generally acknowledged and accepted by all local and international education stakeholders that “real education reform” can and should only happen in the schools previously “cleared” of any and all forms of segregation or discrimination. Therefore, as an example, an extension of the primary school from 8 to 9 years that is stipulated by law is planned as of September 2004, by which time the CCC should be fully introduced and implemented throughout BiH. This first step towards the structural modernization of the BiH education system is to be organized into three three-year cycles to match the cycles of a child’s development, as introduced by the Green Paper.

The often-mentioned Green Paper (presented to the public as a set of policy recommendations for further consultations and improvement) offers basic information on the future modernization of primary and general secondary education in BiH, as it was agreed by all interested parties. These recommendations should be developed into a White Paper (defined as a consistent and endorsed policy and strategy) by the end of 2003, covering the same areas as the Green Paper such as content (curriculum development, certification and qualifications, standards and assessment), capacity (teacher and management development), institutional support to the development of education and harmonization of legislation and finance. As indicated earlier, the Green Paper

remains mainly concerned with the structural aspects of education reform, presumably leaving it to the later stage of the White Paper to deal with its functional aspects.

What is normally understood and accepted under **policy-planning capacity**, as another key component of any policymaking circle, does not exist in the context of postwar BiH in general, or in education in particular. Again, the international community tried to fill this role, and as usual managed to do it to a certain degree, leaving it to the local authorities and future generations to do it properly.

Although a concrete and detailed agreement on this matter by the political players involved has yet to emerge, the education experts from all levels of government and its constituents agree that the first priority should be the creation of a small education policy-planning body, whether as an independent expert body or as a unit within the BiH Ministry of Civil Affairs. The ministry would serve as a focal point at the state level, in order to plan, harmonize and coordinate education activities at the lower levels within as well as outside BiH. Namely, this state-level body should also be instrumental in the lengthy and demanding process of integrating BiH education policy and research activities into international, primarily European frameworks.

In the transitional period, before BiH finally has a single Ministry of Education as the state-level institution with the appropriate mandate, two complementary bodies/units at the entity level might also be necessary in order to develop policy-planning capacities, connecting specific local/regional interests with the overall direction of state-level education development, that should be based on generally accepted principles of feasibility, efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Keeping in mind that many of the usual tools of policymaking still do not exist in BiH, heavy **stakeholders' involvement** in the process of introduction and articulation of a CCC may come as a surprise, especially in light of the fact that neither the Ministry of Civil Affairs, nor the Ministries of Education at any level have a PR department, unit or even a single person dealing specifically with this issue!

The IC initiated and financed the public campaign on the CCC, but all media and different stakeholders at different levels were very keen to participate and/or give their contribution. The OSCE played an

indispensable role in the organization of the public debate, through the organization and financing of events such as education forums and education roundtables across BiH. The OSCE also set up consultations, inviting and including various representatives of education authorities and clientele. Although the first television programs were paid for by the IC, the numerous programs which followed came as the response to public demand, and all stakeholders became familiar with the CCC, which was of the utmost importance and interest for returnee families. There is even some evidence, presented by the media, that the promised introduction of the CCC, as of September 2003, in all primary and general secondary schools in BiH in some cases was the principal pre-condition for the decision to return to their prewar homes for quite a number of refugee and displaced families with school-aged children.

Judging by the response of the media, education stakeholders and the general public, *the public campaign on the CCC was very successful and should be used in the future as an example for all education reform related activities and programs that need public endorsement*. Institutionalized policy consultation and bargaining were not a formalized part of this exercise, but should be developed and included in future similar activities.

The next steps of the policy circle, **policy implementation** and **policy evaluation capacities**—although not completely missing in postwar BiH—are inadequate or irrelevant.

As already indicated, the old prewar education institutions, even in the places and in the cases in which they have survived, can no longer respond to the new realities and requirements that similar institutions in other countries in transition fulfill. Namely, in the case of a few pedagogical institutes that survived the war, be it on the level of RS or cantons in FBiH, they are, as a rule, understaffed, under-financed, without a clear mandate and with employees who still carry on with their job on the basis of the prewar terms of reference. *In a relatively small and very poor country such as BiH, with its constitutional complications aside, the only way forward is an overall restructuring and streamlining of the existing pedagogical institutes at the regional as well as the portfolio level, so that each of these institutions cover certain areas, but also specialize in a certain aspect of education development*. Again, the

establishment of small state-level education institution/s to deal with policy, strategy, planning and analysis seems to be unavoidable if BiH wants to catch up with its immediate neighbors, other countries in transition and eventually Europe.

Very similar words could be used to describe the situation with regards to the education policy (external) evaluation capacity in BiH, with the only, although significant, difference being the fact that it did not exist before and, with only one exception, it does not exist now.

The only current exception is the Standards and Assessment Agency (SAA), that covers the whole territory of BiH—officially the SAA of Republika Srpska and Federation BiH. The agency was established with a loan and technical assistance from the World Bank and has a very limited mandate in evaluation of competencies of pupils in the fourth and the eighth (final) grades of primary school in mathematics, literature and grammar. However, due to the political as well as the financial reality of BiH, it seems that it would be easier to extend its staff and mandate to include a policy evaluation component rather than to establish a new institution. Some ideas suggest that this agency could (politically speaking) relatively more easily extend or be transferred into something like a state-level Education Agency, with units specialized in different aspects of governance and policymaking of education rather than establishing and placing these units within MoCA. However, the possible benefits of both solutions, as well as the concrete proposal, will probably be offered in the White Paper.

Finally, when discussing policymaking “BiH style,” one notices that everything happening in education suffers not just from a top-down approach, but also from an “**outside–inside**” approach. This is probably the only realistic way to describe heavy IC involvement, quite often without sufficient understanding, analysis and sensitivity for the local reality. Unfortunately, quite similar to the behavior of some local education authorities, IC involvement is also often characterized by a lack of transparency and accountability for its actions and programs.

Instead of this direct involvement, the IC should in the future in BiH resume the role it normally plays in other countries. For example it should give technical assistance, and concentrate on the professional and institutional development of the local education

players. When it comes to the external evaluation that is an integral part of some international programs, especially those financed by the European Commission, in future it should be used as an opportunity to train local education partners, showing them how and what needs to be done with concrete examples. Again, with regards to education development in BiH, local and international education stakeholders fully agree that the number one priority area should be capacity-building in policymaking and education management and governance.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS: OBSTACLES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To sum up, the obstacles identified in this paper can be overcome by *improving strategic steering and quality policymaking in the field of education in BiH*.

Education in BiH is facing the same obstacles found in many other areas of contemporary life, and they can be grouped into political, professional and economic categories.

In spite of serious restrictions imposed by objective professional and economic obstacles, such as the lack of properly educated and trained staff in teaching, managerial and policy-related positions in education, as well as serious financial and budgetary constraints, *the main obstacle for education development in BiH is still of a purely political nature*. Even a very limited number of the internationally well-trained and experienced professionals have difficulties in finding proper jobs, as the first pre-condition for employment is still ethnic and/or party affiliations. For example, the SAA, as the only education agency currently covering the whole of BiH, is staffed by an equal number of the BiH constituent peoples: Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats, and one may legitimately fear that politicians would insist on the application of the same principle if they were to agree either to expand its terms of reference, or to establish an education directorate/department within the MoCA. In the case of the SAA, especially as it was established in 1999 when the interest of the IC in BiH was much higher than today, it did not present an insurmountable problem, as all staff employed in managerial positions received appropriate training before assuming those positions. But as a rule this ethnic principle

is totally unacceptable, as BiH needs true professionals in each and every field if it ever wants to successfully turn to the future.

BiH is currently undergoing the major exercise of making a self-sustainable state out of itself, in the development of a free economy and democracy, getting closer to European integration and—to a lesser degree—national identity, in which education has a very prominent place. As concluded earlier, when it comes to education, at the state-level BiH must adopt at least some common principles, goals, evaluation methods and standards that would be compatible with contemporary European education schemes.

In this regard the recently adopted first education law at the state-level and the CCC present fundamental policy tools, and contain more or less all of the above mentioned minimum requirements for the development of a BiH-wide education system. In order to keep politics and politicians out of education, at least a minimum number of state-level key education institutions with clear mandates and terms of reference should be established without any further delay, in light of the fact that education reform is a permanent process, requiring permanent expert bodies to develop, monitor and evaluate it. *BiH can no longer depend exclusively on the IC in order to address essential education issues such as national standards, national internal and external evaluation, national examinations (matura, or other types of school leaving exams), or the development of the new curricula defined in terms of learning outcomes.*

The need for appropriate and constant capacity- and institution-building of different actors within the education sector can simply not be overestimated, in order to come closer and eventually achieve informed, open and quality strategic steering and policymaking in education.

First and foremost, a **new financing scheme for education**, based on a simple per student basis, at the level of BiH and all levels of education, is a necessary priority if BiH wants, as claimed in the Education Reform Strategy, to address quality, equity and cost-effectiveness of education properly. In this way it would at the same time be possible to finally eliminate existing discrimination and segregation from the education system and prevent further waste of public resources through financing of parallel educational institutions.

Only after the same basic financing scheme is applied throughout BiH, would it also be possible to achieve the same basic principles and standards of education throughout the country, which would then create conditions for future discussion of the issue of decentralization in education. As pointed out earlier, the eventual decentralization of the education sector must be connected with developmental, economic, labor and social decentralization; with full participation of different stakeholders; and a combination of the top-down and bottom-up approaches. *A functionally decentralized education system in a place like contemporary BiH can only be achieved after or even via previous centralization of some key elements of the system.* Areas like education financing, standards and outcomes must be leveled and solved at the level of the state before any decentralization and subsidization of the sector is even attempted.

However, the only—however unlikely—opportunity for immediate financial and administrative reform in BiH, and not only in the education sector, would be if the present complicated, fragmented and extremely expensive constitutional organization of BiH, in accordance with the Dayton Peace Agreement, is amended in the near future.

Paradoxically, most BiH citizens agree that the present organization of the country must be urgently replaced with something more rational, especially when it comes to its constitutional and legal organization, not to mention the political, regional or administrative aspects. Yet this is something that can only be achieved with the consensus of all three constituent peoples of BiH: Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. Unfortunately, BiH is still far away from such a consensus. It seems that updating Dayton still depends more on the willingness of the IC to push and carry on this fundamental change forward, than on the will of the citizens of BiH. In this light, it does not seem surprising that the very recent international initiative to amend the DPA in order to reorganize BiH for the first time into a rational, functional and self-sustainable country might be taken seriously by BiH politicians.¹⁶ It will at least lead to a serious parliamentary debate, which—many hope—could be the first step in a much-needed revision of the DPA.

To end less dramatically and more realistically, one must note that stable and significant progress can still be made by a consistent, incremental approach

toward reform, including that of education. It will, however, take much more time, and as is the case with so many other things in BiH, time is a resource that is also lacking if this country seriously wants to take its rightful place among its neighbors in the

region and ultimately Europe. The most fruitful alternative would be a simultaneous incremental reform of education along with the constitutional and legal changes at the state level which are so desperately needed.

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

This paper drew heavily from the following sources of information:

1. Existing documents produced for and/or by international organizations, such as “Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Governance, Finance and Administration” (1999), a report by the Council of Europe for the World Bank; “Thematic Review of National Policies for Education—Bosnia and Herzegovina” (2001) by the OECD; and “Bosnia and Herzegovina: From Donors’ Dependence to Fiscal Sustainability: Public Expenditure and Institutions Review” (2002) by the World Bank.
2. Official BiH education reform strategy paper “Five Pledges on Education” (November 2002), “Green Paper: Reform of Primary and General Secondary Education in BiH” (Spring 2003), and PRSP¹⁷ Development Strategy for BiH by BiH Council of Ministers (manuscript of working version).
3. Existing and draft legislation (including the state-level Framework law on primary and secondary education in BiH, as well as FBiH/RS Law on Treasury, and Entity/Cantonal/District of Brcko laws on primary and secondary education).
4. Interviews with education and fiscal/financial officials, both from the decision-making and expert level, at various levels of government and the IC organizations involved in the education sector in BiH.

NOTES

- ¹ World Bank, “Bosnia and Herzegovina: From Donors’ Dependence to Fiscal Sustainability: Public Expenditure and Institutions Review” (2002).
- ² PIC is a main international forum tasked with the reconstruction, development and transition of BiH, and composed of donors and major international organizations from 15 countries.
- ³ Namely, 80% of all members of the six working groups dealing with six different aspects of education were locals.
- ⁴ Labor and employment; research; sports; culture; social, health and pension insurance; national heritage; personal records/ documents of citizens; etc.
- ⁵ “Public Expenditure and Institutions Review in BiH.” Sarajevo: The World Bank, 2002.
- ⁶ “Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Governance, Finance and Administration.” CoE/WB report, 1999.
- ⁷ 300 versus 150 Euro/month!
- ⁸ Central Bosnia and Herzegovina—Neretva cantons since the DPA until the end of 2002 were cantons with a “mixed regime,” meaning not only with a mixed population of Bosniaks and Croats, but also with two separate budgets!
- ⁹ It was never publicly admitted if the additional pay was coming from Croatia, i.e., Croat taxpayers, or from the parallel “Croat” vs. “Bosniak” component of the HNC budget.
- ¹⁰ Péter Radó. “Myth or Reality? High Quality Education in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Local Government Brief*, Fall 2001. Budapest: Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute—Budapest, 2001.
- ¹¹ Spring 2003.
- ¹² WB/CoE report.

- ¹³ 15–18.
- ¹⁴ Kenneth Davey. “Does Decentralization Make a Difference?” *Local Government Brief*, Fall 2002. Budapest: Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute–Budapest, 2002.
- ¹⁵ This measure came from a small but very prominent group of European parliamentarians.
- ¹⁶ Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.
- ¹⁷ Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

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DECENTRALIZATION AND THE GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATION

Grzegorz Mazurkiewicz

Strategy and Quality in Education:
Poland



THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN BiH, POLAND AND ROMANIA

Strategy and Quality in Education: Poland

Grzegorz Mazurkiewicz

1. INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE REFORM

Education has any number of forms. It might resemble a regular gathering around the campfire where elders tell stories or an apprenticeship model of building skills; it also might be organized in a sophisticated system with exams, standards and regulations. This choice depends on a society's context and needs, and its culture, history and environment.

Polish educational reform began immediately after 1989 and coincided with the reform of the state. A number of goals were met. Schools achieved independence and teachers were encouraged to be creative. Old inspectorates were closed and new curricula were introduced. Importantly, secondary and university education did become more accessible, with better quality teaching and learning.¹ Strategic changes in the practice of how the central government functions supported these goals.

Despite this relative success, this paper highlights the major obstacles to come in the Polish education system. It makes the following policy recommendations:

- *create higher criteria for the promotion of teachers and strictly adhere to them;*
- *decrease the number of teachers according to the level of professional competency; and*
- *increase the attractiveness of the profession.*

1.1 Decentralization of the Polish Educational System

Some of this region's specific problems have come from the necessity of dealing with the consequences of the transformation from a central planning economy to

a market economy and from an authoritarian system to democracy. The results have been strengthened by shifts in the world power structure, not to mention the process of globalization, the technological revolution and the revolution of "total" communication. Schools had to operate in a suddenly changed and complex world. It was obvious that new schools were needed, which meant a new curriculum, new methods of teaching and also a new vision of how an educational system should be managed. Polish schools needed reform and the demand for change was very strong.

Before 1989 the educational system operated under total state control and was completely centralized. It was characterized by bureaucracy and a lack of participation on the part of parents, the local community and local government. The permanent economic crisis of the eighties led to severe under investment in schools. This had an effect not only on school infrastructure, but also resulted in the neglect of teaching materials, hiring practices for teachers and overall school operations.

At the end of the eighties only 30% of children between the ages of three and five attended kindergarten. In opposition to many developed countries, Polish children had always begun their education rather late—at the age of seven—with compulsory education lasting only eight years. The flaws within the structure of secondary schools is evidenced by the fact that 54% of primary school graduates continued their education in vocational schools, while only 20% went on to study in academic high schools. Finally in 1989 only 10% of 19-year-olds were studying at university level (one-third less than at the end of the seventies). In the eighties the gap between young people from cities and villages also deepened—students from rural areas made up only 8% of students in academic high schools.²

The most significant change caused by the transformation happened in the power structure, in the

process of decision-making and in the division of responsibilities among authorities.

Between the years 1989 and 2002, Polish authorities transferred the responsibility for the management of almost all preschools, primary schools and secondary schools to local governments. At the same time, the structure of the educational system together with financing procedures has been radically changed. It is important to mention that significant (or even revolutionary) changes in the content and style of teaching were also introduced. In turn, it was unclear to the broad public exactly what kind of power or role the Ministry of Education (MEN) had reserved for itself. During the years since the reform started the idea of a place for the central office in the system had been changed numerous times and still exists amidst doubts.

A vision of change in education began to gradually take shape after the political transformation of 1989. At first, the most important goals in reformers' minds were the deconstruction of the state monopoly in the educational system and revamping the style of educational management.³ Popular tasks were demopolization, decentralization and creation of private schools, followed by new rules of approving and using textbooks and curricula.

1.2 Stages of the Reform

Over the past 14 years of system transformation, the development of the Polish educational system can be broken down into a few distinct periods where attempts were made to reform its management. The first period, between 1989 and 1993, can be characterized by attempts to liquidate the limitations which remained as part of the legacy of the communist system, which led to the deconstruction of the state monopoly in school management, textbook publishing and the creation and development of new curricula.⁴ The critical point of this deconstruction was the establishment of the Education Act in July 1991. This act was perceived as a temporary frame for action rather than a stable model. It encouraged movement/focus away from the tradition of Polish schools and the reality of the educational laws of the sixties and supported construction of a new reality. Three main points of this period may be described

as the liquidation of the state monopoly in the process of establishing schools: the decentralization of the process of writing and establishing curricula and textbooks; the decentralization of the system through the strengthening of principals' roles (for example, assigning the right to hire personnel to this position) and the empowerment of local governments. Thus, on a practical level, local governments became responsible for financing, hiring principals, establishing schools and quality monitoring.⁵

The whole process of change in the management system began with a confusing result of dialogue between reformers, central government and self-governments about the responsibility of local governments and the reform of education. It was a set of legal compromises⁶ when the local government law made preschool and primary education the *gmina's*⁷ own responsibility. Passing this function to the local governments was connected with a transfer of financial responsibility and ownership of material assets of schools. Due to fear and resistance among a majority of local governments, the shifting of legal obligation for primary schools was postponed until 1993. It was unclear how *gminas* should finance operation and maintenance costs of schools. The *Gmina* Income Law guaranteed transfers of support for primary and secondary schools—if the *gmina* wanted to take on this responsibility—but did not mention preschools.

Shifting responsibilities for schools from state to local governments was not an easy process. Some local governments did not take over schools until the year 1994 when it became obligatory (the deadline was moved later to the year 1996). Numerous schools had significant doubts as to the success of such a transfer, which also led to reluctance among *gminas*. Strong resistance to proposed changes could be seen within the teachers' trade union (ZNP⁸) that fought for the guarantee coming from The Teachers Charter, an act that describes teachers' rights and obligations. During this first period of change, when the deconstruction of the system had begun, the process was stalled due to lack of a clear vision and the absence of communication among the actors involved. Among obstacles one may list economic difficulties among other problems that caused a decrease in teachers' salaries and cuts in extracurricular activities in schools.

A second period in the transformation of the Polish educational system can be observed between

the years 1994 and 1997. The general mood was influenced by ambiguity about the concept of the educational system as a whole. There were significant ideological differences between different forces and systemic weaknesses, for instance, economically. The minister of education introduced his vision of the educational policy in 1994, taking into consideration the new status of teachers and principals; better description of competencies of local governments and the quality monitoring system (*kuratorium*); the increasing autonomy of schools themselves; and changes in the Teachers' Charter. Due to the change in position of the Minister of Education (the all too common political game of a governing coalition), work on the reform of the educational system and basic issues of the state's educational policy were forced to start again from the beginning in 1996. A few priorities were established, including the construction of a basic minimum curriculum and a new system of evaluation and examination; reform of primary education; reform of vocational education; reform of teachers' preparation; and changes in teachers' salaries (encouraging the disbursement of salaries to correspond with the quality of the work). There was an evident proposal for decreasing state impact on the educational system and increasing the meaning of social (parental) influence and the role of local government. This project was not warmly welcomed by teachers' influential groups (specifically the teachers' trade union ZNP). The main threat pointed out by opponents was the opportunity of control being seized by incompetent people or groups. Generally, despite setbacks, opposition and numerous political changes, the decentralization process has continued.

The ministry tried to strengthen its control over *kuratoria* by taking them out of the hands of the regional *voivods*. It also reaffirmed the power of *kuratoria* to inspect school conditions, analyze teaching effectiveness and issue directives to school directors. *Kuratoria* were empowered to issue directives also to local governments if they felt the local government was not operating in accordance with the law.⁹

The *Gmina* Income and Educational System laws guaranteed that the national government would provide local governments with the "financial resources necessary to realize their responsibilities in education, including teachers' pay and the maintenance of

schools." This was a potential and practical cause of conflict because without the specification as to how "responsibilities" should be interpreted, this guarantee became unconditional. Later this declaration was changed, a fact which led to local government protests. Eventually, the obligations of the government were changed, but not in a way that was acceptable to local governments.

In the fall of 1997 a new team¹⁰ in the Ministry of Education analyzed what had thus far been completed, and at the beginning of 1998 promoted their own version of the reform that included all ideas brought to the public to this point. It was the beginning of the third period in the reforming of the Polish educational system. A few conditions provided for how action should be taken: conviction that the reform of the educational system is needed; the reform would be provided in the situation of the lack of financial support; planned reform of the state administration system would influence the educational reform; and the vision of the Polish accession to the EU shaped the general way of thinking about education.¹¹

The action plan stipulated three major goals: popularization of secondary and higher education, improvement of the situation within the area of equal opportunities and improvement of the quality of education. To achieve these goals, the following actions were planned: a change in the structure of the educational system (for example, instead of primary and high schools, a new system was introduced that included primary, middle and high schools); rules of management and financing of education; curricula reform; a new examination system and changes in teachers' status (fewer hours, introduction of a new system of professional promotion, changes in the disbursement of salaries). The greatest threats to the success of these proposed changes were the lack of support from teachers, deficiency in financing capacity, and putting organizational reform before more important curricula reform. On January 1, 1999 the new administrative organization of the state was introduced. At the same time, new local and regional governments started to take control of secondary schools. It was a very ambitious plan to launch four very important reforms at once: state administration, medical care, social insurance and education. This effort would be to blame a few years

later for political failure and disaster for the coalition parties ruling Poland at the time.

1.3 Lessons from the Past —The Current Situation

An important vacuum within the educational sector is the lack of professional research on the educational system. Each statistical channel of information is inefficient and sometimes produces invalid or irrelevant data. To discuss the results of the decade of reform it is necessary to support one's opinion with data. Unfortunately it is very difficult to do so.

The main indicator of the quality of actions committed by different governments over the last few years is the number of students enrolled at different levels of the educational system and in different types of schools. We are able to gather this information and because of this, it is possible to observe a significant trend in the growing popularity of academic high schools and education at the higher level. For example, the number of students in different institutions of higher education was two times higher in 1999 in comparison to 1991. This phenomenon created changes in the educational market and in the educational structure—the number of academic high schools and colleges have continued to increase at a consistent pace (although the demographic shortage in the near future will cause serious problems for some schools). At the same time, we still do not have a working system for monitoring the quality of learning. We have just started with external exams in primary and middle schools. Few seem to take advantage of the opportunity to access international PISA reports. In addition to a shortage of data, the current government has to manage the situation in the face of low investment in the educational system, resistance of teachers (to a certain extent) and demographic changes. The new majority in the Parliament and the new government established in 2001 learned at least one lesson: forcing through a difficult reform and trying to fulfill ambitious goals may cause a decrease in the popularity of the party. On the one hand, it was obvious that the new minister would not support the most difficult, critical points in the reform, planned by the former minister. Thus some of the ideas became

“frozen” for awhile—nothing was officially cancelled but some things were postponed (for example, a new model for the final high school exam—*matura*) and others were transformed (for example, the structure of the system of secondary schools). On the other hand, the school system needed time to mature. The ministry also declared that its priority for now is European education, and minimizing the gap between the rich and the poor. Unfortunately, equal opportunity is still only a declaration in Poland.

These proposed changes impacted the complicated system of education on different levels and in different ways (both qualitatively and quantitatively) and the long-term consequences are still unknown. However, some attempts to evaluate potential results—usually focused (quite correctly) on students and teachers, school work organization or local governments' efficacy—were committed; however, no one tries to answer the question of the role of the central administration in such a radically changed, decentralized system.

1.4 Complicated Context of Educational System Management

To define the policy problem, it is critical to understand the magnitude of the efforts that were carried out in almost every country of the post-communist world. A great deal of time, money and energy have been spent on improving the educational system. Nowadays when investment in education has an impact on the future of nations and educational background creates better opportunities for individuals, few would claim that it is not an important and critical issue in social life. However, a problem exists when all actions undertaken within this sector of social life are highly ideological and political and there is no common agreement on how action should be taken. In every society there are different interest groups and different ideological factions. Paradoxically, together with decentralization and empowerment of local communities, there is an increasing need for the central government to take action. To assure the quality of education and the effective work of schools in a decentralized environment, central control or a monitoring system is needed. An

important issue is that the new reality and new conditions call for a new mode of operation and at this time we stand in front of a wall of questions: are our governments able to operate in this new reality, do they know what to do and is there any established way of dealing with new problems?

It is a difficult task to answer these questions. They invite very broad discussions about what the word “school” means and how it should be in practice. Should schools fulfill the traditional goal of transferring knowledge, social order and stratification focusing on certain groups, or should they prepare for a future that is still unknown? How might schools face those challenges if the administration is always standing behind trying to use outdated knowledge and experience to manage and control the schools of the future?

There are two main issues that should be addressed: (1) the implications of decentralization for the role of central educational governance; and (2) the conditions that enable agencies of central educational governance to replace the former mostly regulatory and administrative tools with rather indirect means of steering and policymaking. With these issues in mind, recommendations can be made for improving the effectiveness of the central government within the educational system.

In order to get a basic sense of the environment in which governance of the educational system is operating, a series of conversations were conducted with employees of the Ministry of Education and Sports¹² in Poland, *kuratorium*¹³ employees, local self-government representatives responsible for the regional educational system,¹⁴ and experts. In this way information about different aspects of the role of the ministry and its influence on the educational system was gathered and later compared with legal documents and existing literature. Two basic legal documents were the Educational Act¹⁵ and the Teachers’ Charter.¹⁶

The main aim of this paper is to identify the mechanisms as well as the context in which tools for strategic steering of the educational system in Poland have been developed. In addition, this paper will also describe the conditions under which particular policy decisions become practice in the governance of the Polish school system.

2. THE TOOLS AND CONDITIONS OF STRATEGIC STEERING

2.1 Financial Incentives and Disincentives

One of the main factors influencing the conditions of schools is the amount of money invested in the educational system. The total input within the education system includes means from three different sources: the state budget, local budgets and private spending. Since 1989 the state’s contribution has been gradually decreasing (83% at the beginning of the nineties to 75% in 1997).

During the first half of the nineties there was a regular decrease in the amount of money spent on education. Thanks to the involvement of local governments, the amount of money invested in education in 1995 was equal to the amount spent in the year 1990 and later started to grow gradually but steadily. Unfortunately, permanent economic difficulties made the financing of schools frustrating. The level of capital investment in education is evidenced by the disturbing fact that 93–95% of the educational budget is spent on current expenses (80% of which are salaries). Small investments do not allow radical improvement of learning conditions. The majority of educational expenses are derived from state educational subvention (that is, a part of general subvention to local governments) and this mechanism will be described below.

2.1.1 *System of School Financing*

The amount of money for education in the general subvention is based on statistical data from the Main Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny—GUS). The educational part of the general subvention is devoted to financing the educational tasks of local governments specifically described by law. It is difficult to make clear any distinction between the educational part and the rest of the general subvention—this educational part is described in the Budget Act every year.

- In general those tasks described by the ministry as “school tasks” are the following: managing primary, middle, upper, special schools, life long learning centers, vocational education centers and in-service teacher centers. However, institutions for economic and administrative service for schools as well as schools operating in hospitals and spas are also included.
- “Out of school tasks” are as follows: managing certain educational institutions (e.g., special kindergartens, counseling centers), financial help for students, managing hostels and dormitories, schools’ hostels and professional development for teachers.

The beginning of the Education Act describes how educational tasks of *gminas* are recognized and defined. It goes on to describe in the second paragraph that the educational part of the general subvention is devoted to the realization of those tasks described in the first paragraph, in particular: current spending of schools (including teachers’ salaries), supporting certain schools (non-public), supporting creation of a school network, supporting professional development of teachers, supporting students with special needs (individual path of teaching), financing early retirement for teachers, financing a fourth hour of physical education and supporting the education of non-Polish citizens. The educational parts of all subventions in Poland should, according to the law, be equal to 12.8% of planned state income. The decision about the total amount of the subvention is made by the Ministry of Finance, for every *gmina* in Poland, before the budgetary year. This ministry passes 1/13 of the whole amount for the year to the *gmina’s* account every month. When state financial involvement in the educational system is presented, three kinds of such involvement should be mentioned: subvention already presented, money from direct income taxes (different exemptions for investment in education) and donations of *voivodships* funded from their budgets for regional tasks.

The overwhelming feeling among people working in and for the educational system is an impression of under-investment in schools. That creates a situation in which local governments have to invest their own capital in public schools. On one hand, it is judged as a positive result of the reform: local governments

know best what their schools need and are better able to support their work. On the other hand, it has led to frustration among local government representatives, who claim that the central government has merely saddled them with a responsibility that should be carried out by the central government. It is possible to track the pace of changes in the law that has steadily been transforming a rather clear situation into a blurred one. Originally, decentralization in the educational system was planned as a process that was equally focused on both management and financing of schools; now decentralization has ended in terms of sharing responsibilities (management), but the ministry has monopolized financial decisions. Moreover, the ministry obligations have become quite unclear. The sources of income for local governments are: general subvention, local taxes, income from local charges, income from *gmina* businesses, donations, endowments and dividends from enterprises owned by *gminas*.

The act that defines a framework for a financial relationship between central and local governments has been changed several times over the last few years. The Education Act in 1996 stated in article 5a: “to secure means for running schools managed by *gminas*¹⁷ (...) including salaries for teachers, is part of the responsibilities of the state. Those means will be passed to *gminas* in the form of subvention and donations.” The method of calculating the amount for this purpose is described in a separate act. However, the same act, after changes claims that: “the means needed for the realization of educational tasks of *gminas* (...) including teachers’ salaries and school maintenance and other educational institutions are guaranteed in local governments’ incomes.” It is obvious how the situation has changed. It is impossible to answer the question how and to what extent tasks of *gminas* and *poviats*¹⁸ are financed from the state budget. What kind of income, how much is guaranteed and to what extent? There are even more questions to which answers are practically impossible.

Another unclear issue is a standard ratio of spending per student. This figure was established to secure a minimum level of the financial means that should be spent yearly on the education of one person within the system. The set amount of the ratio is described every year by the Minister of Education and presently equals 2,530 PLN per student per year

(approximately 650 USD). Originally, according to assumptions made in the act, the ministry should describe how this amount ought to be spent, but this has not yet been done. With significant probability it is reasonable to claim that the standard is based not on the real needs of students, but on the information on how much is available to spend. As a result, as often occurs in other countries, this is not a demand, but a supply-driven system of educational budget construction.

In the current Polish system of financing of schools, it is possible to find the following decisions:

- a clear description of local government responsibilities (*gmina* and *powiat*);
- an unclear situation as to whose responsibility it is to find the financial means;
- a difficult but clear mechanism of money distribution (based on a per-student formula);
- a defined standard ratio of spending per student (with an unclear goal) and a completely unclear method of how it will be met.¹⁹

The mechanism of money distribution within the system is constructed in the following way: the ministry defines the educational spending ratio per student and uses a formula which takes into consideration the type of school.²⁰ Due to the ineffective system of data collection, there is a great deal of frustration when local governments are informed by the ministry about the number of students in their respective areas. In response to this frustration, the ministry began last year to send data about the number of students back to local governments for verification before the final count of the amount for subvention.

In general, the whole system of educational statistics is incoherent. The system of data gathering asks for information in a very unclear way and sometimes even asks questions that are impossible to answer. Information provided by this system is not reliable and not useful. There is a very serious concern when someone tries to use the statistical data for making strategic or political decisions.²¹ The most famous case happened when former Minister Mirosław Handke tried to keep his promise of raising salaries, which almost resulted in the collapse of the state budget, because there was no available data about the number of teachers.

To underline the most critical point in the system of financing it needs to be pointed out that everything depends on the quantity of the student ratio (created by the ministry). This number has an effect on how great the subvention will be (taking into consideration the number of students, kinds of schools and number and education level of teachers). The process of constructing the amount of the spending ratio per student in schools is being done within the ministry without any public consultation. There are two possible explanations for this situation. First, experts try to calculate how much the process of educating one student costs in reality, having access to all information about conditions of schools in small villages and big cities. Second, the ministry knows what amount of money may be spent for education this year (it depends on the state of the budget of the whole country) and divides it by the number of students to reach the economical standard. In the second case, it shows the state of the Polish economy rather than the amount of money needed for one student's education. Thus two different figures result—an official and an unofficial.

The whole system of financing the educational system is closely connected with the system of financing the local governments. Discussion about the need for reform has been going on for years in Poland, for now all incomes are gathered locally and sent to the central government where different actors divide it and share it between local governments. The needs and the accessible amount are evaluated by the central government. In this way the amount of general subvention is decided. Later, the central government distributes it and also tries to decide about a way of dividing it between different areas including education. The ministry is thus an unchecked ruler who decides in what way money is distributed.

2.1.2 *Distribution of Financial Means at the Local Level*

The next issue is the way in which money is used at the local level. While solely the ministry has the right to make decisions on the distribution of funding, on decisions on spending local governments enjoy full freedom. There is no way of monitoring how local governments fulfill their roles and responsibilities.

Once the subvention is in the local account, local authorities make the decisions. So-called “fixed expenses,” such as teachers’ salaries guaranteed by the Teachers’ Charter, limit local governments. For now the subvention is not always enough, but it may be a problem when there is more money within the educational system (for example, after EU accession). In a logical way it is connected with the idea of *gminas* enjoying independence in creating their own budgets and the conviction that the best way to manage is locally, but such an unclear situation could easily open the door to corruption.²²

Experience shows that local governments use different techniques for distributing their money. Sometimes the decision is based on completely unclear rules according to criteria they draw up themselves; other times they use plans prepared by principals of schools, or the money is distributed according to priorities delineated by members of the local board. Distribution may also be prepared by employees of the educational department. It is obvious that some of these solutions are better and others are worse, but such options have not been analyzed.²³

In general, the legal system requires local governments to fulfill very specific tasks and expectations. The central government creates financial criteria for actions (based on its own calculations) and in this way influences the educational budget. Part of local educational tasks is covered by money received from the central government and another part of those tasks, created by the central government, is paid from own sources of income of local governments. So we have a very rigid and inflexible system at the entry of cash flows (requirements and a certain amount of money), but later money from the ministry becomes a part of the whole general subvention, and there is no control over how it is spent. At the same time, it is impossible to run schools only on money from the educational part of the general subvention, so there is an expectation from the ministry’s side that the money sent to local governments is used to run schools.

The educational subvention is so low that it is extremely rare if governments have any money left, as those financial resources are so little that after paying teachers’ salaries and money for professional development and retirement, schools and local governments have to spend their own money to maintain the buildings.

This is quite a naive assumption on the part of the ministry, which has no method of monitoring or evaluating how the money is spent. The advantage of a decentralized system of school financing over a centralized one lies in the fact that in a decentralized system, the existing budget is a real budget, while in the centralized system, the budget was always constructed based on the previous year’s spending. Thus, in the latter case, it was rational to increase spending in order to get more money the following year. Efficient and rational management was punished because those who spent more were rewarded with more money the following year. In the decentralized system, local governments develop spending plans according to their needs. The only problem is that during depressions, resources are too little and the ministry creates formulas and economic standards according to the money available in the state budget, and not according to need.

Unfortunately, answering the question of how the educational budget is constructed, or rather, how the process is developed, is impossible. Furthermore, it is impossible to describe the model/structure of the educational budget at the beginning of the fiscal year. We can predict this structure based on the previous year’s budget, built *post facto*. Of course, like in the majority of poor countries, the highest amount is spent on current spending (mainly salaries). A representative of a local government explains the lack of specific criteria as a central government attempt to avoid responsibility.

A shortage in the state budget impacts the educational budget, which shapes conditions for the functioning of the system. This shortage is a final factor in the critical decision as to how the budget will be divided. With such insufficient means, the ministry usually tries to set minimum limits like in the case of teachers’ salaries. The ministry sets the minimum level of basic salaries, but all additional incomes for teachers (motivational benefit, insurance, benefits for extra work) are constructed by local governments. In some regions additional money is equal to 20–30% of a teacher’s salary, in others, 3%. There is strong action and pressure from teachers’ trade unions to convince the ministry that it should describe such additional income in more detail. For now, teachers’ trade unions revolt because those additional incomes depend on the wealth of governments and their willingness to reward teachers.

2.1.3 *Motivating Teachers with Higher Salaries*

Although the level of teachers' satisfaction with their salaries is extremely low, there are attempts to use teachers' salaries to differentiate this occupational group according to the level of education, experience and involvement of individuals. Since 2000 the system of determining salary levels has been tied to steps in professional development and career. Until now, the system has been markedly inflexible and frittered. A teacher's salary depends on her/his qualifications. A typical salary contains different elements: (1) basic salary, (2) supplements for years in occupation, motivational, for functions, work conditions, (3) salary for extra hours, (4) awards and other benefits, for example, separation pay. Basic salary is connected with the achieved level of career, qualifications and workload. The level of career is described in four categories: teacher probationer, contracted teacher, appointed teacher and teacher with a diploma.²⁴ Additional salary depends on the period of employment, and position in the school and conditions of work.

The Ministry of Education influences and controls the system of teachers' earnings because it is responsible for establishing a minimum salary scheme, a description of the positions that may be paid additionally and a description of general conditions for awarding teachers with motivational supplements.²⁵ Local governments, which manage schools in certain regions, decide on the overtime hourly wage and the amount of all additional salaries (motivational, functional and work conditions), as well as the regulations for awarding teachers with these additional salaries. This situation causes differences between richer and poorer regions because in some places local governments can afford higher additional salaries than in other places. Until now it has not caused teachers' migrations, but it may be a reason for the frustration among teachers from poor regions. Very often it happens that an excellent idea of rewarding better teachers with additional money is corrupted on the school level because principals are afraid of the decision-making process. The general mechanism is that the school does not have a flexible amount of money depending on need (number of good teachers that should be awarded) but only a fixed amount, so the principal has to make a decision on who will get the money and who will not. To avoid such an un-

comfortable situation, principals divide the amount equally among all teachers. This only serves to make the amount insubstantial and insignificant, and thus creates a situation in which poor teachers do not want to change their attitudes and good teachers are frustrated because nobody notices their work.

In the attempt to evaluate the motivational impact of the salary it is necessary to show that the system has a potential for development and that its construction is based on a solid foundation. The idea was to put an end to the corrupted mechanism "equally for everyone" that created the situation in which significant differences in the quality of work among teachers were not recognized. There was hope that it would allow an increase in the salaries of good teachers, and on this note, legislators have begun to secure a basic minimum salary for teachers. Unfortunately, the planning process was carried out in such a way that brought uncertainty and doubts about the possibility of achieving minimum payment for all teachers according to their education. Secondly, the decision about professional promotion caused an increase in the number of teachers with higher degrees, thus creating the danger of a deficit and, at the same time, easy access to promotion has decreased motivation and respect toward upward mobility.

2.2 Empowerment of Actors, Capacity-building

What is the role of schools in society? More importantly, what are the roles of teachers in schools? In the former authoritarian regime in Poland, completely different teachers were needed. Because of the dynamic changes that happened around the world, this is true for other countries as well (including those with longer democratic traditions), a new kind of teacher is needed everywhere. It is possible to accelerate and support the process of preparing new teachers not only in academia, but also through the creation of a suitable environment. Such an environment would allow the existence of two basic conditions: (1) sustainable capacity-building, meaning organized investment in the professional development of in-service teachers; and (2) the empowerment of teachers, by enabling them to commit independent decisions regarding instruction, resources and cur-

ricula. Those conditions should enable teachers to feel responsible for their work and their students. Although this process is difficult and painful it should be constructed and monitored, also by central institutions of the educational system (such as the ministry). The question arises as to whether the ministry is aware of how critical and delicate this issue is. No one should forget that those two conditions are possible to attain only when the system secures a regular inflow of qualified new teachers, which is only possible when the system for preparing them is working efficiently and the system for employing them is attractive.

In the process of empowering teachers in schools and building their capacity, it is possible to define a few major issues. These include the process of hiring teachers and requirements for educational staff, the training of future teachers, the system of motivation for professional development, the degree of responsibility for school and the influence on organization of school work.

2.2.1 *Requirements for Teachers and Hiring Process*

In the process of capacity-building in hiring policy, different levels should be distinguished. At the state level legal conditions are important factors. Competencies of potential hires are described in the Teachers' Charter (Article 9). In general terms, candidates must possess the following qualifications: possession of higher education and pedagogical training (with exceptions), accordance with basic moral values, and good health. For some kinds of schools (for example, fine arts) there are additional executive orders regulating the process of hiring. In Article 39 of the Educational System Act, legislators transfer authority for hiring teachers to the principal of the school, and Article 33 assigns the obligation of monitoring compliance with hiring requirements to the *kuratoria* heads. Thus legislators describe hiring conditions, while the final decisions depend on principals. In the case of conflicts, the solution is in the hands of the Labor Court.

At the level of schools the principal prepares an organizational work sheet (basis for constructing hiring policy) that has to be approved by the local govern-

ment (school managing institution) every year. Local governments rarely have a coherent and sustainable vision of the work force in their schools. More often they just look at the proposed number of teachers and teaching hours and check if there is enough money to cover it. Every principal is allowed to hire only those teachers who meet the legal requirements, but this is the only formal procedure applied for hiring teachers. There is an assumption that there will be an interview, that the principal will compare different candidates for the vacant position and finally that a hired person will fit in with the development plan of the school. In this way, the principal will choose the best candidate. Unfortunately, this is only an assumption, not a requirement. Principals are under significant pressure from their environments and local groups in times when in many places a teaching position is the only steady job and source of regular income. In a majority of schools it is impossible to talk about changes in personnel according to quality and needs; discussions are rather about trying to survive and maintain the status quo and safety of working teachers. According to a local government representative: "a principal should lead his or her own hiring strategy that should mirror the school's needs (hire only those who are needed and the best) but frankly, very often it is not like this." In reality no one questions principals' choices unless there is a complaint issued against the principal. The only perspective from which a principal is monitored is adequacy towards ministerial requirements; if formal conditions are met the principal is safe. There is no other actor in public schools—for example, a school board—that might have an influence on the hiring process.

In the ministry, they are aware of this situation and try to influence the quality of the candidates for teaching positions in other ways.

Among those improvements, the ministry wants to require that every teacher know a foreign language that would allow him or her to pass the international certification test. The next skill that they expect is the ability to use modern communication technologies. Finally, they want teachers to be under a six-month probation period prior to beginning their positions. The idea is that if a young teacher would go to school for six months, he or she would have an opportunity to become familiar with the pros and cons of being a teacher.²⁶

2.2.2 *Teachers and System of Promotion*

Another issue influencing building the capacity and empowerment of teachers is their impact on school life. No body resembling a teachers' self-government exists, thus teachers have no representation in the decision-making process on school organization, spending and policies affecting teachers. The only way to become involved is upon invitation for consultation by a principal. There is an official "body"—a teachers' board in every school—but in the majority of them it is merely a ritual with regular meetings organized by a principal as a means of communication rather than as a platform of negotiation of a vision for the school. There is a law that asks the principal to consult with a school board, parents and teachers included on his or her plans or actions (for example, hiring or evaluating teachers), but there is no formal obligation to follow the opinion of the school board. They may declare an opinion, but without any regular certainty that it will be considered. One of the strongest channels for hearing teachers' voices are trade unions, but unions are focused on other issues (mainly workers' rights), and this influence may be seen mainly on the central level, unfortunately not at the school level.

Another issue in the vast area of possible factors influencing the capacity-building and empowerment of teachers is teachers' professional development and career. Besides creating the legal requirements the ministry tries to influence the quality and capacity of educational personnel by creating standards of education of future teachers in teachers' colleges and universities. Using executive orders the ministry describes what educational institutions need to provide to students over the course of their studies to assure that graduates obtain the required skills, knowledge and pedagogical preparation. Unfortunately institutions preparing future teachers are perceived as inefficient, time-consuming and traditional (meaning not useful).

The reform of the educational system introduced a new system of professional promotion. There are more stages and different requirements than before. According to authors of this system new procedures free people's creativity and energy and they also support a job well-done. One of the biggest challenges is to self-plan professional development based on the needs

assessment and to be able to prove the pace of this development (certifications, student work, data from classrooms, etc.). There are four main stages: teacher probationer, contract teacher, appointed teacher and teacher with a diploma. A certain salary is attached to every stage, and differences between them are significant. Every stage lasts for some time during which teachers (together with their mentor during the first stage) are obligated to participate in some activities for their professional development. For the authors of this legislation it was obvious that if a teacher does not invest in him/herself and does not try to renew his/her knowledge, the knowledge he or she has gained is out of date within five years. This is not only a problem for teachers but also for his/her students, the whole system and society. It is clear that if teachers do not develop, schools will continue to prepare for the past instead of preparing for the future.

The introduction of the new system of the professional promotion was the most important modification of recent years in the practice within this occupational group. Before this, to be a teacher in one school did not mean exactly the same when one wanted to transfer to another building. The new system separates certification for teaching and the process of hiring. The job agreement is between teachers and employers (local government through principal), but the level of professional development for a particular teacher is decided in institutions outside the local school system. A principal hires a teacher, and a principal also participates in the meeting of a commission, which decides about a teacher's promotion—but rather as an ally or ambassador not as an evaluator. This new conception of promotion comes from the conviction that a system of salaries should motivate teachers to professional development.

The idea was to motivate teachers to professional development through financial incentives. The legal framework creates a positive environment: teachers need to work on their career to achieve the next step on the professional ladder, but unfortunately this process leads to a dead end. Once someone gets to the top of the ladder there is no incentive for him/her to invest further in his/her professional development. Another problem is how easy it is to get to the next level. The commission that decides about it consists of different members depending on which level of

development is being considered (always representatives of *kuratoria* and independent experts) but never invites representatives of the body that pays teachers' salaries. So in practice (without financial tension on the committee, because they will not pay for their decisions) in some places the career path and moving on to the next level of career development is reduced to a ritual collection of required documents. This practice threatens the quality of teachers' professional development. Every-one should remember that investment in teachers is not only to enable them to get better formal qualifications, but that real development supports critical reflection, discussions and thinking about everyday practice.

2.2.3 *In-service Training System*

Through the description of the desired and potential development of teachers' careers and connecting it to an increase in knowledge, experience and teaching skills, the ministry tries to influence the quality of the process of teaching and learning in schools. It is the element of the quality assurance system (with the weaknesses described above). The ministry tries to create the demand but also works on the supply side through accreditation of the in-service teachers' development institutions, managing its own institutions and through supporting this development financially.

The new law passed in 2001 creates new conditions for financing the in-service training system. It describes responsibilities of different levels of government and states that local governments ought to secure the amount of money that has to be spent on teachers' training and that it should be equal to 1% of teachers' annual salaries in certain regions. From this money local self-governments have to pay the salaries of local experts (hired there), finance conferences and seminars, prepare workshops, finance management of the training system and finally reimburse the individual teacher's educational initiatives. It is such a broad area that locally collected money is usually not sufficient, especially in small *gminas* that hire about one hundred teachers or less—1% of the salary is a completely insignificant amount. Because the system of in-service teachers' training had also been decentralized, the majority of educational centers for teach-

ers became ruled by voivodship governments or even at lower levels. The educational act enables *gminas* to provide training for their teachers (the most popular form is to hire so-called pedagogical and methodological advisers who are the best and most experienced teachers working in their region, and a part of their workload includes trainings and consultations with other teachers from the region). For the highest level of local government—*voivodship*—the Ministry also described required financial input in teacher training. Their responsibility is to secure an amount equal to 5,000 average monthly earnings of a beginner teacher that should be devoted to supporting teachers' training institutions, and particularly for teachers' education projects, financing involvement of higher education institutions in teacher training and participation in international programs. The ministry itself should provide this system with the same amount to support the central programs of teachers' education.

At the same time the ministry is preparing a new system of accreditation for training centers. It has not been implemented but has already awakened contradictory opinions. On one hand, it is reasonable for establishing minimum requirements; on the other hand, it may be a tool of punishment for those who will compete with the ministry.

The ministry tries to have a direct impact on teachers' development through its own teachers' training centers—there are still four state-governed centers for in-service teachers' training. Another way of having a direct impact is launching centrally governed training programs for teachers. In 2002 6.5 million PLN was spent on programs that are perceived by employees of the ministry as crucial for the quality of education (for example, foreign language courses for teachers).

There are also other ways to organize and manage central training programs, for example, to hire an institution of higher education and order specifically described training for teachers (for example, last year it was training for preschool education teachers). The ministry demonstrates quite visible activity in the area of teachers' education and professional development because in this way it tries to prepare conditions for new challenges and tasks that will appear for the educational system and teachers. When the ministry tries to change the reality, together with

legislation; it tries to have an impact on teachers' education: *when we plan to introduce certain changes and think that additional preparation would be required to fulfill the new expectations, we plan opportunities for teachers to gain new skills and knowledge.* This is the statement that may be heard from employees of the ministry. Unfortunately, one of the biggest obstacles and failures of the reform was, and still is, too little investment in teachers' development and their resistance to change. As it is appropriately recognized in the ministry offices, Polish teachers need more attention but they do not feel like they are getting it.

2.2.4 Quality Monitoring System

One of the strategies to build the capacity of the system and, at the same time, to leave independence for teachers is a decentralization of the quality monitoring system and passing the right to check the level of the fulfillment of educational standards to regional institutions. At the moment the monitoring system in Poland is decentralized and regional *kuratoria* create and control it. The contemporary system is a result of the conviction that the power in financial decision-making and management of schools should be separated from the quality monitoring system. Schools are owned by local self-governments and financed by the state (through subvention) together with local communities (through money from different sources). The focus on the quality of the teaching and learning process and results of this process are based in the *Kuratorium*. The *Kuratorium* is a regional institution that plays a crucial role in the functioning of the educational system. The Kurator, who is head of a *Kuratorium*, leads the educational policy in the region (*voivodship*) on behalf of the *voivod* (*wojewoda*). The Kurator is responsible for managing certain types of training institutions and the superintendence of the educational system. He/she decides about some issues (described in the educational act), organizes in-service training and cooperates with local governments. The *Kuratorium* is the state budget institution acting according to the rules established by the Minister of Education, but the Kurator is hired personally by the *voivod*²⁷ not by the Minister of Education (although through agreement with the ministry).

According to the legislation, the *Kuratorium* is an institution that plays a crucial role in the quality assurance system. It is a real challenge because of the scarcity of professionally prepared staff and lack of procedures for quality monitoring. The Educational Act describes the responsibility of the *Kuratorium* and gives a platform for its interpretation. Superintendence should be understood as the evaluation of conditions of the educational process, analyses and evaluation of the results of the educational process, supporting teachers and schools in their duties and as inspiring teachers to innovations. Those tasks include: control over the hiring process, control over the teaching process (ensuring that it follows according to national minimum curricula), control over the grading system and securing safety in schools. In case of any signs of disobedience the *kuratorium* informs the managing institution—the local self-government—if it is a private school or other leading institution. As far as quality of teaching and the learning process, there are two main directions of influence: model and control. National minimum curricula that should be included in every local or regional curriculum and a system of standards created in *kuratoria* as an example of how schools should work may be considered as models. In the second way of monitoring one may include the system of the external evaluation during which the inspector visits the school for a few days and using different tools, prepares the report. This visit (or inspection) may happen once every two to three years or even more rarely, so principals are strongly advised to prepare their own internal evaluation more often or even permanently. Of course, evaluation of schoolwork results is extremely difficult, thus *kuratoria* are intended to play the role of an advisory board for local governments and schools, rather than limit themselves to a controlling body.²⁸

There is a question of whether a *kuratorium* is prepared to do what has been added to its list of responsibilities. And also, if so, is there a chance for improving the process of learning how to support schools? Unfortunately *kuratoria* took over the practice of the ministry and continue to prepare standards and evaluation procedures behind closed doors, so the process of decentralization in reality means bringing the center closer to the periphery only in the geographical sense, without connecting it with a change of the dynamic of relations between schools

and their supervisors. Moreover, the process of creation of standards becomes more and more centralized. New plans aim to establish a list of national standards. It is questionable how influential and authentic standards will be if brought or sent from the capital, but in the ministry there are still optimists working:

in this moment the work, over-preparing the system of accountability for everybody, is proceeding—almost every voivodship has its own educational standards, we are currently preparing national standards of school work. To be able to compare certifications, standards should be the same in the whole country. A new system should be implemented by September 2003 and will be based in the new executive order focused on the quality control of the teachers' work by principals, control of the principal by kurator and monitoring the kurator's work by the minister. If we add all standards together there is a chance for the birth of a new quality assurance system.

2.2.5 Threats

One of the biggest problems of the Polish educational system that may do harm to the process of empowerment, is blurred moral rules and values within the occupational group of teachers. The official version is that it is not necessary to teach teachers those rules because they are obvious; unfortunately the real practice in schools is far from the desired one. Because of the lack of significant opinion-shaping institutions or actors in the sphere of education, there is no discussion about ethics in schools. Polish schools suffer from a cancer called “private lessons”—additional classes that are provided by teachers for students who want and will pay additionally for them (poor students and good students who think they work hard enough in school are left behind). So in the mornings the teacher teaches the same children in the class for the state salary and in the afternoon she or he teaches them for parents' money.

The role of the ministry in this area is limited to creating very general points in the Teachers' Charter, but unfortunately this act plays an important role in the tendency to overload teachers with work rather than in constructing positive images and visions

of the occupation. The ministry also tries to reach teachers' attention through different kinds of activities. For example, there is a competition for the best teacher in Poland during which students and their parents tell stories about the best teachers. This is an attempt to underline the desired characteristics of a good teacher and the way of rewarding those who really work hard, serving as a role model for others. This action, however, has only a minimal impact because there is no promotion of the competition, so teachers who win are not publicly recognized.

The process of capacity-building together with the process of empowerment is difficult to initiate, manage and influence. Besides structural and systematic conditions there are also emotional, ideological and psychological ones that overlap each other, but there is no option of return. To make modernization of Polish schools a reality the process needs to be continued.

Capacity-building is a multilayered and difficult process with numerous approaches to it. The Polish educational system suffers because the power of individual shareholders in the process of development is ignored. Only when all actors are authentically involved in the process of improving schools will it have a chance for success. The negative opinion coming from the conviction that the central government is losing human potential can only be decreased once we realize that this is the time to act, that we can awaken human potential and that we have numerous tools for doing so—whether it be better education and more efficient in-service teachers' training, helping principals in the hiring process, or a quality assurance system that will use close cooperation between teachers, schools and their evaluators. The tools exist, but they should be used correctly.

2.3 Planning and Cooperation Networks

The network for planning and cooperation in management of the educational system is quite complicated, but it is still in the process of development. As explained earlier, schools have two direct superiors: local self-government, which owns buildings and hires teachers (so-called *leading institutions*) and *kuratoria*, which support schools in providing edu-

cational services (so-called *quality assurance institutions*). This construction (dual responsibility) creates a situation in which somebody else is responsible for financial and administrative issues and for the quality of education. In an ideal world the management department (local government) cooperates with the quality department (*kuratorium*) smoothly; unfortunately, in the real world this scheme creates tension between these two entities. According to a legislator, a *kuratorium* is placed in the difficult position of an independent research institute, a center of educational policy and, additionally, as an office of the state administration.²⁹ Unfortunately, local governments do not see cooperation with *kuratoria* as a support for a rationale process of planning and managing the educational task, but rather as an additional burden. The conflict around power issues underlines the cooperation among those two institutions—a *kuratorium* tries to prove that it is the most appropriate organization in terms of expertise (although very often it does not have enough capital), and self-governments try to prove that they understand schools better. This tension results in the contradiction that those who make financial decisions, who decide about hiring and dismissing teachers and who pay for additional courses in schools have little information about the quality of teaching and the learning process in the context of external school evaluation. This painful process is changing slowly, but it is still possible to find regions where a *kuratorium* protests when the local government uses other experts than *kuratorium* ones to evaluate school work and places where the local government ignores the existence of a *kuratorium* as a valuable source of information. There is no other option than to believe that these two critical institutions for planning the quality of school work will develop an efficient and appropriate way of cooperation for the sake of schools.

Another important element that should be considered within the educational network is the Ministry of Education. The three main sources of power, expertise and impact on schools' operations are the ministry, local government and *kuratoria* (state office for quality monitoring). These agencies create the vertices of the triangle inside of which we may position every school. As it was stated in one interview, the dynamics of relations between these actors is a work in progress. There is plenty of experimentation,

but also a transfer of customs, habits and games. Managing and financing is based on survival when done without strategic planning, systematic solutions or cooperation. Monitoring quality is still the old game of "hide and seek," where a supervisor is looking for mistakes and schools are trying to hide them; making policy is rather creating orders than negotiation. The educational network is a dynamic, flexible structure, in which different actors try to win the best position and get the most channels of influence.

Since the transformation in 1989 it is possible to observe the process of constructing a new reality of the educational system (described in the introduction), but because of the lack of a clear and agreed upon vision of the Polish educational system, each new political power in government tries to create their own system, which is not completely in line with the previous educational policy and directions for change. This resulted in a system that has implemented inner obstacles for efficiency. One of the biggest is the unclear division of competencies and responsibilities. During the last decade there were waves of changes in the treatment of different actors' roles in the process of planning for the educational system. The spectrum of attitudes range from autonomy for local governments in planning work and managing schools to full dependency. There are no coherent plans connected from the top down or from the bottom up. There is a positive conviction that school, local, regional and state plans are intertwined and built in consideration of critical goals pointed out by the ministry and according to law, but there is no formal attempt to create order. For now one may see strong actors on both ends of the administrative ladder (the ministry and *gmina*) and a weak center to this ladder—the *voivodship*. In certain regions, like industrial Upper Silesia, there is an urgent need for regional planning in the *voivodships*. Because of the strong concentration of cities one planning system for schools should be created. Unfortunately, every *gmina* in this region plans separately.

This fragmentation is a quite natural result of a system of communication in which the partners and actors responsible for the educational system think in terms of "from task to task" and "from demand to demand." In this case there is no time or space for ra-

tional thinking or deeper communication, but only a hectic attempt to be “on time” with all requirements. Unfortunately, the dominant practice functions on the edge from one deadline to another, which does not support strategic planning, and certainly is not the environment in which different levels of the same system are encouraged to coordinate their planning processes and results of such processes. In response to the question about planning, together with other participants of the educational system, an employee of the ministry mentioned:

Yes, in general we have an influence and we try to coordinate it through minimum curricula, so yes, in general, we do it. There are no formal procedures for coordinating planning, but I do not see any serious differences. However, the ministry really should not intervene in local and regional plans, it should stay in the position of the legislator who pushes direct operators of schools to plan.

It is obvious that every region may have different priorities, so the biggest challenge here is to try to secure state policy goals from being crossed off the list of regional priorities. This, together with encouraging cooperation in constructing plans, should be the main focus of the central government.

For now there is a significant tendency in educational policy processes to withdraw from broad and long-term strategies and plans and instead focus on development of survival techniques. Sadly, this kind of behavior is supported by a difficult economic situation, decreased trust in authority and the lack of ownership within local governments caused by actions of the ministry that support the position of *kuratoria* instead of local governments.

2.4 Targeted Development Program

Targeted programs are connected with general goals and political priorities. Lately, two of the priorities are particularly visible: new technologies and equal opportunities. Decisions about what is on the priority list are made directly in the ministry and are not discussed with other stakeholders. The ministry could expect very small protests because nobody would protest or give other suggestions on how to invest money

that is used for such important goals as providing computer labs to all Polish middle schools, providing some local governments with buses for students from villages, supporting meals for poor children or providing poor students with textbooks, teaching materials and school supplies.

Targeted programs are, according to the ministry employee:

...extorted by life because the majority of them are focused on equalizing opportunities and this is not only the task of the ministry but also the task of the whole government and society. When we want to introduce a change we need to secure conditions for operation. By changing the network of schools, we created a situation in which a lot of children had to take buses to get to school so we started to buy buses for the most in need.

It is very difficult to monitor targeted programs, especially because a majority of them consist of the distribution of certain goods unconditionally: computers, buses, books, food and money. Only some of them assume participation of local governments or schools (like in the program *My school on the Internet*). Kurators monitor those programs only while monitoring school quality so the picture is very fragmented. Some information may be gathered directly from local governments but one of the strategies in reporting is making many complaints because in this way it is possible to get more from the targeted program.

Targeted programs might be used by the minister as a tool for direct change in a particular area. Unfortunately, because of inappropriate preparation and the lack of explanation of goals, those programs are perceived by teachers and the general community as political actions run in a very chaotic way. So instead of investment in the educational system, those programs stir up emotions and deepen differences even further.

3. TOOLS AND CONDITIONS OF POLICYMAKING

The Educational Act of September 7, 1991 provides the framework for the current legal rules affecting education. The status of teachers is described in the Teachers' Charter enacted in 1982 with the

last modification having been in 1996. The entire educational management and policymaking model includes different elements, among which the main key actors may be defined. The first is the central government: the Ministry of Education and Sports operating on the legislative level. As it is stated in the Educational Act: “the Ministry coordinates and realizes educational state policy and cooperates with *voivods* and other agencies and institutions important for the functioning of the educational system.” The assumption can be made that the educational policy exists and operates. However, the question about how it is created and who is involved is much more difficult to answer. In further points describing the many responsibilities, duties and obligations of the Ministry, there is no single point suggesting its involvement in the creation of the state educational policy.³⁰

According to ministry employees there is no institution (besides the ministry) that should or may have real influence in certain areas. The ministry has three main tasks which were consistently verbalized by its employees during interviews: the creation of the state educational policy (although this is overlooked in the Act); creation of conditions for operation of schools and other educational institutions through the creation of educational law; and assurance that the education of future teachers will be of high quality and help to prepare teachers to fulfill the expectations and requirements of the ministry. Those tasks may be achieved without serious financial investment, crucial in the deficiency of state resources. One of the biggest advantages of decentralization that the ministry sees is giving away responsibility for managing schools to local governments. The general opinion was that it created a positive change of material conditions for the operation of schools.

The second important actor is the *kuratorium*, which is situated in a rather precarious position. It serves as a kind of regional ministry or representative of the ministry in the *voivodship*, an institution whose main task is to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and also to monitor the legal situation of schools. The head of a *kuratorium*—the *kurator*—is responsible for quality monitoring or superintendence of pedagogical aspects of school work through evaluating conditions of the process of teaching and learning, analyzing results of the

didactic activity of teachers, supporting schools in their work and inspiring teachers. A *kuratorium* is in a strange position: it is a part of the state regional system of administration and is supervised and established by a *voivodship* (as a regional office), but operates on the conditions of the ministry, in accordance with the goals and tasks developed by the ministry. This situation sometimes creates confusion in understanding the position of *kuratoria*, particularly during the last decade when several different ideas defining the operation of a *kuratorium* and its position in the educational structure were tried. For a while it was directly under the ministry’s management. For now it is under *voivodship* jurisdiction, but as mentioned above, it is obligated to follow the ministry’s ideas within the educational system.

The third actor is local government, which is responsible for managing schools on the local level rather than the central one. According to the law, the so-called school managing agency (local government) is responsible for superintendence of school activity within the areas of finance and administration and is allowed to approach schools and *kuratoria* with conclusions or recommendations concerning educational issues. The principal or kurator has to answer the question within 14 days. There is a constant struggle between local governments and the first element of the system (the ministry) because the ministry tries to creatively construct the reality of schools and local governments have to pay for the ministry’s visions. At the same time this situation results in a strong feeling that the independence of the local governments in committing autonomous decisions is radically reduced. The disturbing tendency over the last few years has been to decrease the role of the local government and forbid it to undertake any initiatives that would touch the area concerning the quality of education. This situation causes frustration among local governments, which either do not have money to fulfill all requirements or if they want to do something more, they face negative reactions from the ministry or *kuratorium*. One of the conditions of policymaking opened the platform for consultation, negotiation and discussion among those critical actors on the scene, but in reality negotiation and consultation transformed into a struggle about power over schools.

The fourth element of the policymaking system is schools and their local human capital. A majority of schools have no influence or voice in the policymaking process, but some pressure groups have managed to attain stronger positions in the system. Among them are private schools. These are usually the most famous public schools or schools that have been lucky enough to have the active involvement of the local community, parents and teachers. For sure, the position of principal is stronger than in the past. Although principals still do not use the whole spectrum of their rights, he or she could become a very important player with a central office. The important, new element of the system is a separation of quality monitoring from managing—it is a controversial idea with many pros and cons at the same time.

NGOs and parents responded first to opportunities to contribute to the educational system, but this has tapered off since the early nineties. Officially (read, legally) they gained significant influence over school activities, but in practice they were diminished to the role of support staff during school holidays, trips and an additional source of money. And in private schools, parents do not participate in any kinds of activities that would have any reflection on curriculum, hiring teachers, textbooks or even teaching modes in the schools which their children attend. There are two main obstacles: consciousness and awareness of people and knowledge. They do not feel like they are responsible and when they feel like this they have rejected it by saying that they do not have the appropriate knowledge to make the right decisions. By seeing it as a process (involvement of different actors in policymaking and influencing the ministry), it is possible to state that conditions for this participation exist, but they are not used widely enough. There is an obvious absence of influential lobbying groups, interest groups or other actors that would want and have enough power to include themselves in the discourse about priorities in education. There is no such discourse even in the core of the educational environment in schools and at universities. Trade unions are concentrated on workers' rights and think tanks or research institutions reach only very narrow groups, usually political dissidents or other experts and researchers within education, not the broad public or even educational personnel.

Policymaking is a game that is taking place within a very small group of ministry employees and hired experts. As it was stated:

...if something is not like we [in the ministry] would like it to be, the decision is made [in the ministry] and we start the legislation process. We manage using the legislation, nothing is done like in the past by direct orders. We analyze the current situation, sometimes using independent, outside expertise and when the situation needs it we change it.

Thus political decisions are made by a narrow group, and even after the decision is made there are no attempts to consult or explain this decision through systematic and regular actions (like promotion through media or meetings).

3.1 Policymaking in the Polish Reality

It is difficult to describe educational policy under permanent change and reform. Sometimes it is impossible to decide which part of the observed action is a result of the policy of official governing bodies and which part of those activities is a result of institutional improvisation of different actors within the system. While it is obvious that policy is a form of governance that is constantly negotiated and reorganized in the ongoing flow of institutional life,³¹ it also seems to be true that it exists in Poland only partially. Educational policy in Poland is more monologue than discourse. Because policy is highly political, educational policy is present in all programs of political parties, and it exists as a vivid and important part of declarations for the social order of political parties. Unfortunately, in practice, educational policy is more important and useful at campaign time. The process of policy formation should occur across many contexts of social life. Regional bodies that are responsible for formulation and implementation of state and regional policies together follow the example of the central government and avoid the attempt to coordinate goals and tasks from different levels of policymaking, which sometimes results in contradictory decisions. According to Colebatch, policy rests on three assumed characteristics of organized action:

coherence, hierarchy and instrumentality.³² Looking from outside at the system of policymaking in Poland, it is difficult to find the first characteristic—coherence. The channel of communication that should allow fitting all bits of action together and forming it into an organized and single system is closed, even at the beginning—employees of the ministry have pieces of information and are not able to speak about the ministry's policy. One may point to the main values that should create the official policy, but there is no coherent system for its understanding. In the next paragraphs the most important issues that create a framework for policymaking will be described, supported with examples of those issues. The picture is fragmented, but those examples should point at the most important elements.

3.1.1 Policy Formulation

Often difficult and sometimes artificial, we will try to separate the formulation and implementation processes that have happened in Poland. The policy formulation process has been driven by both the need for the adjustment of Polish schools to the demands of the new reality and the desire to maintain traditions.

In the first area one may define a few main forces: European integration and the need to be in line with European priorities in educational policy. One of the most important elements here is the policy of equal opportunity. Polish politicians added this value to their priority lists quite early. Aside from declarations there has been no real action in Poland in this area. Paradoxically, a conviction can be observed that inequality and the results of social stratification are inevitable and natural. This conviction results in the situation that on the level of declaration equality and equal access to education are important goals. However, in reality there are no signs that something has been done. Children from villages are in an even more difficult situation after the very reform designed to make their access easier. This is also true in terms of gender equality. It seems that in the process of policy formulation politicians take labels from attractive trends but with no will to continue the process of policy implementation—there is an agreement that some things are inevitable, so we may explain

our failure by natural causes. The central government shows that it recognizes this and tries to do something, and regional actors try to avoid the problem by not addressing it, while those who are affected usually have little strength to do something about it. Thus there is little impact.

The next important issue within the first sector is a change of labor market and demand for a new type of employee—flexible, able to learn, proficient in foreign languages and able to work in a diverse environment and solve problems. In a similar way, as with European value priorities, this issue is also vivid and present in political discussions. To make it real, the whole school network should be changed in a very significant way. One may notice a few different attitudes towards this system. Some want to change everything, some a few things, some nothing. There is serious conflict around the question of how the school network should be changed. The former ministry tried to make large-scale changes, and the current ministry partially stopped this process. Yes, the pyramid of high schools has been changed for now—the majority of them are academic high schools that prepare students for university studies. Twelve years ago it was only 20%. But still there is a significant number of schools that are dead-end schools—there is no possibility to go further on the educational ladder after these occupational schools. Moreover, a majority of them prepare beneficiaries of the social security system because they teach skills that are no longer useful on the employment market.

The quality of education may be seen as the next critical issue influencing the policy formulation process. There is a strong conviction carried mainly by people who work for the educational system that Polish schools provide a solid, traditional education. There are numerous stories and anecdotes about Polish students being the best in the group when they studied abroad. Unfortunately, stories about Polish workers and scientists are not so popular. International exams (like PISA) also do not support this popular feeling about the high quality of education in Polish schools. This issue is more difficult to analyze on the level of policy formulation than previous ones—it is more controversial and it is difficult to explain by external causes (like changes in the labor market). This aside, it is almost dangerous to

officially claim that Polish schools do not do the best job. The whole community of scholars and educators are aware of problems but are not willing to define reasons and change them, so there are no attempts to make serious changes that might improve the quality of education.

The last issue that is defined in this paper as a factor influencing the policymaking process is the political change in the administration system and transferring responsibility for schools to local governments. This allowed introducing more actors in the process of decision-making, especially policy formulation and creation of recommendations. Unfortunately the majority of those actors still do not use their rights to participate in this process. Local governments have still not defined themselves as important actors in this process and rather take the role of observers trying to fulfill the ministry's expectations. In some regions local governments try to take a more active position which very often causes conflicts with local *kuratoria*.

A second factor influencing policy formulation and the beginning of the adoption process may be described as trying to save what we already have. During a transformation, some valuable mechanisms are very often destroyed. Coming from this conviction there are groups that "defend" the Polish system. When we defend something we do not always see and act rationally. Furthermore, we do not analyze the different issues; we stand up for our values and do not change. This is a primary mistake of those who come from the rational conviction that there are elements that should be saved, but are unable to think in an objective way. Among those are teachers who officially follow requirements of reform but unofficially claim that it is not true that everyone can learn or that it is not true that everyone needs to know foreign languages. There is a strange situation in the Polish educational system where double reality and double morality are present.

In reality, framed by those issues, there is one more important factor influencing the process of policy formulation, the structure of actors involved in it. One might define a few important groups. The first one consists of clearly political parties which put education into their programs and discuss it during campaigns. The importance of education is understood as an important political vehicle that helps to get votes

but not as a priority while in office. Even parties that are perceived as parties connected with universities and schools personally (by politicians) were not focused on education as a priority. The only government that made this mistake and tried to reconstruct the educational system paid for it with disappearance from the political scene.³³ Such an important group that uses educational policy, but does not make it is politicians. The second group that participates in the policy formulation is teachers and schools administrators (and also other employees of the educational system—e.g., university professors). Some of them are involved directly while in parliament or in local power structures, and others indirectly through contacts with those within the power structures. This group is extremely interesting because they are moved by two contradictory demands: one is to make the system better, the second is to secure the *status quo* in the number of people employed. When the number of students is decreasing it is next to impossible, but it is being done. These kinds of miracles will not allow real changes, so this group creates artificial changes and ideas that will not support a more innovative school system in Poland. The third group mentioned already includes representatives of local governments. The fourth group is the media. Finally, the last one is stakeholders—parents and students. This group is important mainly in the private schooling sector, but as there is a connection between the public and private sector, their role in the policy formulation process must be recognized as well.

3.1.2 Policy Implementation

The most important issue in the implementation of educational policy is a permanent impression of unclear and blurred policy priorities. The process of formulation without clear statements and defined priorities seems to be continuing. This creates a situation where it is difficult to evaluate the process of implementation. Frequent changes in decisions caused by frequent changes of governments and the lack of continuity of previous policies and of support for declared actions all shape the unstable and blurred situation in the educational system. It is possible and it sometimes happens that there are decisions of the ministry that are impossible to follow (like, for example, a decision

about additional hours of physical education that was not connected with information about where the money for this would come from.) There are decisions that are changed after a while (like the new Matura exam and the attempt to make it an external exam that was stopped by the new minister), or information from the ministry received in the middle of the school year (like a decision announced in April 2003 that grades for the second foreign language will not be included in the average grade on the certificate).

So, as it can be seen, policy implementation is a hectic process influenced by obscured priorities and goals, as well as a number of actors overloaded with work and responsibilities. Colebatch states that policy is based on authority, implies expertise and is concerned with order. Those elements influence the Polish educational system as well and are present during the process of implementation. There is quite a clear authority structure, but there is no efficient channel of communication within it. There is a need for expertise, and this expertise is present, but it seems to be omitted by those with authority.

In this system, rational evaluation is impossible. Besides problems with statistical data gathering described earlier, there is also another problem: we do not know what to control, monitor and evaluate. When there are no clear goals, useful evaluation is impossible. Although the situation is difficult, elements of the evaluation system are gradually developing mainly in the area of student achievement: there is an external exam in primary and middle school, and possibly high school as well.

Central government in a decentralized system should play the role of motivator, where new and ambitious goals are constructed, and also the authority able to monitor the process of implementation of those ideas. However, democratization of social life should also lead to democratization of the policy process. The technocratic top-down practice will not bring us to a situation in which all stakeholders are willing and able to take part of the responsibility for the system. So, the policymaking process needs to be open to everybody. More importantly the invitation to participate is not enough—we need education on how to participate. This should be a challenge for the next generation of policymakers to prepare a constituency that will be able to co-create the educational policy.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The governance of the educational system in Poland is a complicated process influenced by two phenomena—systematic change of all state structures and institutions and organizational limitations coming from the heritage of the previous system. People who govern the current system struggle with change in the financing system, change in the status and system of preparing potential teachers, change of power structures within the system and finally change in the school system and methods of teaching.

Important changes took place because of the need to accommodate the new administrative structure of the state and new regional borders. The process of shifting the perception of the state as the only owner of the educational system and the sole decision-maker to a more democratic one has been slow. The willingness and ability of legislators to see things from a broader perspective are limited by a failure to use appropriately the opportunities provided for in the Educational Act and to see beyond its inherent weaknesses. The most important weakness that may be seen in every group with power in Poland is a tendency to monopolize the right to make important decisions and forcing the various sectors of education to capitulate.

The governance of education is influenced also by several more “objective” factors. These include low levels of education in society (54% of Poles are high school graduates, which is lower than the OECD average of 62%) and a high unemployment rate (18%, of which 70% or less have finished occupational school). In addition, only 13% of adults participate in life-long learning (compared to 31% in OECD countries). Other factors to consider are the lack of investment in education, and the low level of usage of new technologies in education.³⁴ Among the education goals which have been defined by the ministry and others, the most popular are:

- to bring schools up to speed in terms of recent technological and scientific innovations;
- to prepare for European integration and the process of globalization;
- to prepare for negative demographic processes;
- to help graduates to survive in the labor market; and

- to move towards educating students to be flexible entrepreneurs who are able to participate responsibly and rationally in social life in a democratic country.

There are different levels of potential actions for improvements. The proposed innovations should be based on strengths and should aim to remedy weaknesses.

4.1 Flow of Information

The first group of innovations may aim to improve the practice of communication within and outside the Ministry of Education. The current situation is characterized by segregation and obstacles in communication, both vertical and horizontal. The ministry needs to **improve internal communication procedures**. It should be followed by the development of better communication channels with *kuratoria* and local governments. There is a serious need for systematic practice and well-known and regular mechanisms of top-down and bottom-up communication. **Establishing the communication system with regional institutions responsible for the quality of the system** (self-governments and *kuratoria*) should be the next initiative. The final results of the ministry's requirements depend also on the efficacy of the cooperation between self-government (owner of the school) and *kuratoria* (responsible for ensuring the high quality of schooling in the region). **Clearer rules on the relationship between local self-governments and kuratoria need to be established.** One suggestion is that part of a *kuratorium's* income should be connected with the expertise which they provide to local governments, in this case a *kuratorium* would be placed in the position of the institution that has to deliver high quality service because otherwise it would suffer financially. Local governments would use a *kuratorium's* services more often if it had to pay its salary.

List of the simple recommendations within this sector:

- improvement of internal communication procedures;
- development of efficient communications channels with *kuratoria* and local governments; and

- establishment of the clear relations between self-government entities and *kuratoria*.

4.2 Financing the System

The second innovation group should be connected with the **reform of the state financial system**. Local governments should have their own money. The other innovation **should connect the process of decision making with the financial reality**, for it is impossible to fulfill tasks created by somebody who is not taking financial responsibility. For now the ministry creates tasks and does not support them with money, and *kuratoria* do not take responsibility for the financial results of their decisions—for example, *kuratoria* decide about teacher promotion but do not have to secure money for the promoted teachers. In an economic depression it is difficult to manage the educational system but it is not a good solution to cut down expenses and not to cut back on ambitious plans.

A list of the simple recommendations within this sector:

- reform of the state financial system and restructuring the local governments' income and task system; and
- connecting the process of decision-making about financial issues with reality and responsibility for decisions.

4.3 Building Capacity

The third group of innovations should be focused on teachers. Such an excellent idea as connecting the promotion of teachers with the level of income will not bring positive results as long as it is a promotion that remains only on paper. The proposed innovation **is to create higher criteria for promoting and following rules**. It should not be a punishment for teachers, but rather a system of standards that will prove real and significant development, not a ritual procedure of moving from one statistical group to another. Perhaps this will motivate good teachers to do even better work. Another innovation would be the attempt to **decrease the number of people who teach**. The teaching profession should not be a place for those who are

awaiting “better” opportunities. Teaching should attract the best and the brightest. So the next initiative should be increasing the attractiveness of this occupation. While increasing salaries is next to impossible for the moment, possibilities for rewarding teachers exist—**creating opportunities for life-long learning and gaining an attractive education** (languages, computer skills etc.), **creating opportunities for additional earnings through supporting schools in playing the role of local centers for adult learning** and finally **working on improving the perception of teachers in society**.

Policy recommendations:

- create higher criteria for the promotion of teachers and strictly adhere to them;
- decrease the number of teachers according to the level of professional competency; and
- increase the attractiveness of the profession.

These three actions may create a space for improvement. This is, however, not an exhaustive list. Other potential measures for improvement exist, and these were chosen carefully based on one important criterion: feasibility.

A very well-known rule says that the effectiveness of the system depends on the weakest element of the system. Communication is thus the weakest link in the chain when it comes to the Polish educational system and surprisingly, this is an element that has been paid very little attention. There is a chance for acceleration of the development of the educational system if communication channels can work sufficiently in every direction, both vertically and horizontally. The need for a financial restructuring of local government income has been discussed in Poland for a long time. This difficult task must be considered as Poland now stands at the gates of the challenging reform of its state financing system as a now member of the European Union. Finally, investment in teachers will always bring positive results, while at the same time making it possible to make this workforce better adjusted to societal needs by ensuring that qualification standards and hiring numbers are high.

It is not an easy process but other alternatives remain scarce. It is obvious that those countries which do not provide effective education cannot efficiently participate in a global economy, and are not able to create a stable and democratic system, and thus will not be awarded with abundance or respect.

NOTES

- ¹ K. Konarzewski, “Program badawczy, Monitorowanie reformy systemu oświaty: cele i metody,” in K. Konarzewski (ed.), *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty* (Warsaw: Instytut Spraw Publicznych, 2001).
- ² M. Zahorska, “Zmiany w oświacie—konceptje i uwarunkowania,” in L. Kolarska-Bobińska (ed.), *Druga fala polskich reform* (Instytut Spraw Publicznych, 1999).
- ³ M. Zahorska, “Zmiany w oświacie—konceptje i uwarunkowania,” in L. Kolarska-Bobińska (ed.), *Druga fala polskich reform* (Instytut Spraw Publicznych, 1999).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Kuratorium—office of regional superintendent responsible for quality monitoring.
- ⁶ J. Herczyński and T. Levitas, “Decentralization, Local Governments and Education Reform in Post-communist Poland,” in: K. Davey (ed.), *Balancing National and Local Responsibilities. Education Management and Finance in Four Central European Countries* (Budapest: Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute–Budapest, 2002), 123.
- ⁷ A *gmina* is the smallest body of local self-governments in Poland. Every *gmina* has its board elected in a general election. The board of a *gmina* chooses the head of its administration (president or wójt).
- ⁸ The Union of Polish Teachers (Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego, ZNP) is a trade union which has existed since communism and is seen very often as a site of resistance to change and support for the left wing of the political scene. There is a second union called Teachers’ Solidarity which is seen as an equalizer to ZNP.
- ⁹ J. Herczyński and T. Levitas, 123.
- ¹⁰ In 1997 a broad coalition of the right united once more under the Solidarity label. Akcja Wyborcza Solidarność won back the majority in parliament from the post-communists.

- ¹¹ M. Zahorska.
- ¹² For years, as described in the first chapter, the name of the ministry was the Ministry of Education (MEN). The name was recently changed to Ministry of Education and Sport—MENIS, so both names are used in this paper. When something refers to the past, the old name is used.
- ¹³ Regional superintendent offices responsible for quality assurance and monitoring.
- ¹⁴ In 1999 a new, three-stage territorial division of the state was introduced. The main elements of self-governments are: *gmina*, *powiat* and 16 *voivodships*. Boards of *gmina* or *powiat* and the parliament of *voivodships* are governing bodies that make decisions concerning their region. Boards create local law, construct budgets and set local taxes. Board members are elected in general elections.
- ¹⁵ Educational Act, September 7, 1991 (with amendments).
- ¹⁶ The Teachers' Charter, January 26, 1982 (with amendments).
- ¹⁷ Form of the local self-government.
- ¹⁸ There are two parallel streams in the power structure in Poland: bodies of self-governments in regions: in a *gmina*—board of the *gmina*, in a *powiat*, which may contain a few *gminas*—board of the *powiat*, in a *voivodship* (województwo) which contains a few *poviats*—parliament of the *voivodship* and bodies of the central government: central government and regional governments in *voivodships*—voivodship office (urzędy wojewódzkie) and their head voivods (województwo).
- ¹⁹ According to the opinion of a local representative responsible for education (head of the department of education in a *gmina*)—"A law constructing a framework for financing the educational system is unclear on purpose, because at this moment we do not have the possibility to go to a court to fight against the government. Every court will reject the case because we have no chance to prove that the government failed in any situation. Last year (2002) the Union of Polish Cities made an attempt to accuse the government of not paying the whole amount from the educational subvention and the case was dismissed because the court claimed we do not have a legal basis for this!"
- ²⁰ The standard is an average, and the cost of education is different depending on the school, so in certain schools students get more than the standard, and in others, less. For example, in special schools, the standard is multiplied by 3; in schools for adults by 0.7. In addition, the number of students in schools is evaluated based on reports from the Main Statistical Office (Główny Urząd Statystyczny—GUS).
- ²¹ M. Tobor, Jakie pytanie—taka odpowiedź. Rozważania o statystyce oświatowej, in: Dyrektor Szkoły. Miesięcznik Kadry Oświatowej, nr 2, February 2003.
- ²² The Ministry does not control it but there is the state system of the monitoring of local spending through regional accounting chambers (*regionalne izby obrachunkowe*). Accountability of this system is questionable.
- ²³ A. Jeżowski, *Finansowanie publicznej oświaty samorządowej*, in: Zarządzanie oświatą—poradnik dla gmin, School of Education, University of Birmingham 1999.
- ²⁴ This system is further described later on in this paper.
- ²⁵ Additional salary is a certain amount of money added to the basic salary according to teacher evaluation by the principal.
- ²⁶ Ministry.
- ²⁷ Voivods are heads of the lowest central government branches that govern voivodships (region)
- ²⁸ K. Konarzewski, *Reforma nadzoru pedagogicznego*. In: *Szkolnictwo w pierwszym roku reformy systemu oświaty*, K. Konarzewski (ed.), Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warszawa 2001.
- ²⁹ K. Konarzewski, *Reforma nadzoru...*
- ³⁰ Student enrollment, school operational rules, basic curricula standards, conditions and procedures for curricula improvement, rules for teacher evaluation, conditions for textbook improvement, and provision of appropriate documentation and other activities of the ministry are defined in the Educational Act, but there is nothing about an active role in educational policymaking.
- ³¹ B.A.U. Levinson & M. Sutton, *Policy as/in Practice—A Sociocultural Approach to the Study of Education Policy*. In: *Policy as/in Practice. Toward a Comparative Sociocultural Analysis of Educational Policy*, Ablex Publishing 2001.
- ³² H.K. Colebatch. *Policy*. Buckingham:Open University Press 1999.
- ³³ Of course it was not the only cause but Jerzy Buzek's government introduced four ambitious reforms (together with the educational one), and it is seen as one of the most important reasons for failure of this government.
- ³⁴ Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu, *strategia rozwoju kształcenia ustawicznego do roku 2010, (Projekt)—project of the strategy for lifelong learning created in the Ministry*, <http://www.men.waw.pl/>.

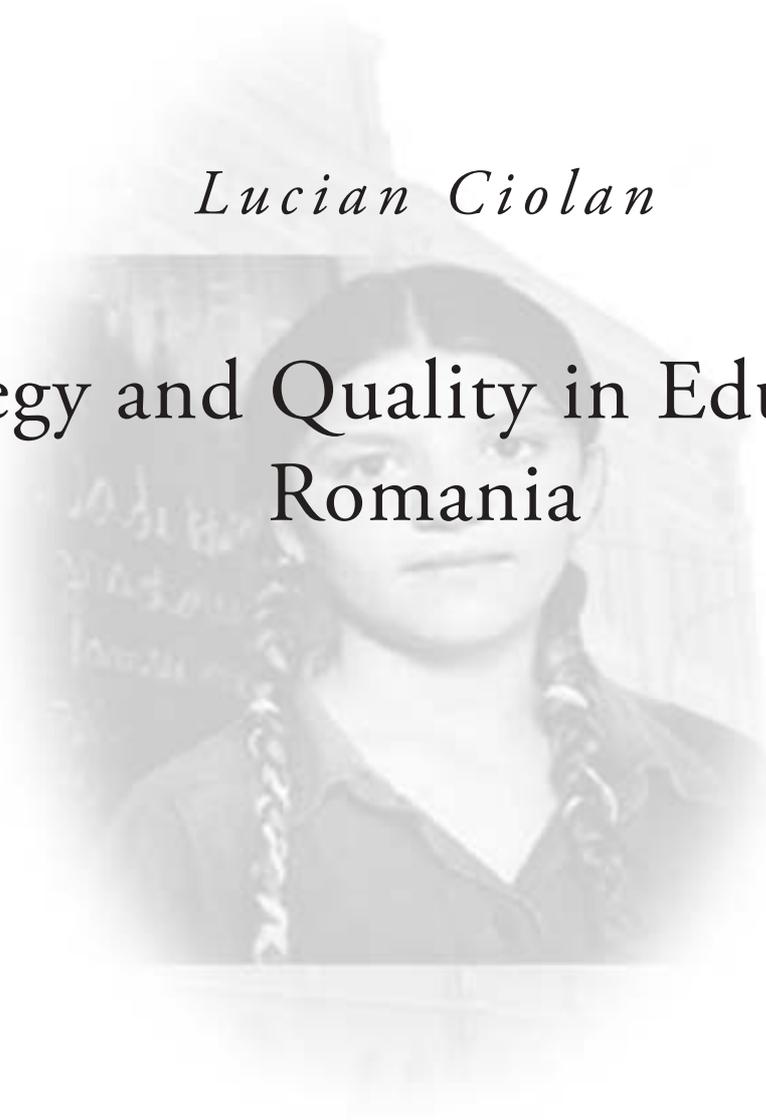
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DECENTRALIZATION AND THE GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATION

Lucian Ciolan

Strategy and Quality in Education:
Romania



THE STATE OF EDUCATION IN BiH, POLAND AND ROMANIA

Strategy and Quality in Education: Romania

Lucian Ciolan

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of Purpose

This policy study is an investigation of the systemic environment of educational governance and educational policymaking in Romania. The purpose of the investigation is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the way the central government is functioning and to set up a framework detailing the potential systemic conditions for strategic steering and quality policymaking in education.

The paper thus serves two purposes. First, it provides a diagnosis of the existing situation, through a literature review and recollection of the expert opinions of the actors involved. Second, the paper suggests measures to be taken in order to build a clear and coherent framework for quality governance and sound policymaking in education in Romania. The paper focuses in particular on pre-university education; references to higher education are sporadic and are inspired by examples or correlations made in the interviews.

1.2 Rationale

The tremendous changes registered in the last thirteen years at all levels and structures of the educational system in transition countries are accepted and assumed both internally and externally. While diverse in their aims and priorities, and different in magnitude and speed, educational reforms became a “moving target” for all governments and for many types of support programs from abroad.

The large majority of improvement efforts were directed towards schools and students, and towards

“decentralized structures.” In spite of a syncopated evolution, quite normal following a long period of a centralized and command-driven system, the lower level of the educational arena made significant progress. At the same time, the central level of educational management and administration was in a paradox: “involved” in all these development projects as the central decision-maker, but almost completely forgotten with regard to institutional capacity building and human resource development. In this way, the Ministry of Education and Research—in particular as the institution which approves and, most of the time, initiates changes and reforms—is left behind due to its conservatism and immobility.

The uncertain status of the direct employees of the ministry, in correlation with political pressures, had a paradoxical effect: on the one hand, resulting in tremendous mobility of personnel in these institutions, and on the other hand, in articulation and resistance of a “relative autonomy” of these bodies, having their own (shadowed) rules of functioning, beyond any external influence or change in management.

The policy environment of education displays yet simultaneously hides a diversity of organizational and individual, personal and professional behaviors.

The investigation of the central level of the capacity of educational decision-making to steer different types of resources and to produce and use policy studies and policy analyses for informed decision-making is indeed a fruitful endeavor. The policy recommendations put forth in this paper are made with regard to the question: *what systemic conditions are ensured and what systemic conditions need to be built in order to have a sound policy environment, supportive for strategic steering and quality policymaking in education?*

2. DECENTRALIZATION OF DECISION-MAKING IN EDUCATION

2.1 Milestones in Educational Reform

Different approaches and perspectives exist in the specialized literature regarding the key moments or “milestones” of educational reform in Romania. In order to have a clear picture of the evolution and transformation in the last 12 years, two perspectives will be reviewed which have particular relevance for the topic of this paper.

M. Badescu and C. Birzea¹ (1998) try to depict different stages of reform, which are further updated below. The three main steps they identify are:

- a) *De-structuring (1990)*. The main instruments of communist education (e.g., political indoctrination, over-centralization and abusive control of individuals and institutions) were removed. General objectives of education, and the structure of the education system, were reconsidered.
- b) *Stabilization (1991–92)*. Priority was given to defining a legal framework that would re-establish a coherent educational system, according to the new social, political and cultural values. The new constitution stipulates the right to education for all, free access to and diversification of education supply, equality of opportunities, additional private education provision and alternative schools.
- c) *Restructuring (1993–95)*. In this period important reform programs were launched in different sectors of education, with the financial and technical support of international organizations (World Bank, European Commission). In 1995 the Law of Education was adopted.

At least two stages could be added, according to the developments since 1995:

- d) *Comprehensive reform (1996–2000)*. Major changes are planned, coherent at the level of all components of the educational system (curriculum, management, evaluation, teacher training, etc.); the main intention was to move from sector/domain oriented reform to systemic reform.
- e) *“Reform of the reform” (2001–present)*. There are two components or directions to the educational

policy after the change of government in 2000. One is to strengthen the achievements of the previous team and to build upon previous experience. Another trend, however, is to re-think some of the important measures already under implementation. After a period of tremendous structural and systemic changes, in spite of the fact that the system became reluctant and willing to “take a break” in order to digest these novelties, the actual ministerial team continued the series of structural interventions. Some of these changes could be considered as “logical” and “normal,” but others could be described as just “changes of the changes,” predominantly justified by political reasons and not by evaluations of the policies in force.

Another perspective has tried to focus on key measures undertaken up to now that have a strong impact at the educational system level. D. Potolea and L. Ciolan² (2003) identified the following instances:

1. The enactment of the Law on Education (1995) and the Law Regarding the Statute of Teaching Staff (1997). The Law on Education was seriously revised in 1999, and both documents are presently under revision.
2. The initiation and implementation of the Pre-university Education Reform Project, co-financed by the Romanian Government and the World Bank. The project was completed in September–December 2001. The main goals of the project components were:
 - Development of a new curriculum;
 - Restructuring the teaching staff training system;
 - Elaboration of alternative textbooks;
 - Reform of the evaluation and examination system;
 - Educational management and financing reform; and
 - Defining new occupational standards through tripartite cooperation between government, employers and trade unions.
3. The beginning of a new phase in educational reform, at the end of 1998, when a reconstruction from the perspective of the concept of compre-

hensive reform started. The concept has been operationalized on six areas of measures to be taken:

- Curriculum reform: development of new curriculum frameworks/timetables, curricula, textbooks and ensuring the European compatibility of the national curriculum.
 - Moving from reproductive learning to problem solving and, at the same time, re-launching scientific research.
 - Establish new relations between schools, high schools and universities, on the one hand, and between these institutions and their cultural, economic and administrative environment, on the other hand.
 - Improvement of infrastructure and connection of educational institutions to the new electronic communication networks.
 - The reform of schools and university management through decentralization and institutional autonomy building.
 - The use of advanced means of international cooperation.
4. A new phase started together with the government change in late 2000. The main question is: are we going to assist a refinement and accelerated implementation of the reform or will there be a “reform of the reform”? This process has only just started and an ultimate judgment would be premature.

On the one hand, the new team in the Ministry of Education and Research has decided to include among its priorities some objectives that are a continuation of previous measures:

- To bring about reform and educational changes in each school and classroom through a more productive connection of educational policies and methodologies with educational practice;
- To extend the use of IT across all levels of the system;
- To rehabilitate schools in rural areas; and
- To restructure in-service and pre-service teacher education.

On the other hand, some recently promoted measures are different or even contradictory when compared with previous reform programs:

- amendment of the national curriculum, increasing the time devoted to the sciences and decreasing the number of hours for the school-based curriculum;
- limitation of the number of approved textbooks; and
- institutional changes: re-establishing pedagogical high schools for training of pre-primary and primary teachers and the abolishment of private college pre-primary and primary teachers, the change in duration of compulsory education to 10 years (starting school at age 6), etc.

From the point of view of an inspection of the status and prospects of current educational policies, it is clear that a number of future developments could affect the ongoing reform process and the basic conception and already established principles regarding at least curriculum and evaluation.

There is continuous movement in the official positions in the process of educational policymaking between the “local” political rationality and the trans-political orientations adopted as a result of the EU integration process. Major values and principles of educational policy are significantly embedded in the pre-accession conditions and in orientations adopted by EU member states. This reality is especially due to the fact that a significant number of experts from the Ministry of Education became members of different working groups of the European Commission, bringing to the attention of both colleagues and the public the priorities and trends of educational policy at the European level.

Meanwhile, how these principles are put into practice is very often subject to political and other interest group pressures at the local level.

For more than a decade since the end of the communist period, the governments in power have been unable to build a platform of functional trans-political agreement regarding the main actions and measures to be taken in education, regardless of the political configuration of power at a certain moment. The government simply declared that education is a national priority for future development. In spite of this fact, many of the failures of the educational reform are rooted in the political game, in the conviction held by every new team that the “real” reform starts with them.

2.2 Thirteen Years on and Looking toward the Future: Decentralization between Reality and Discourse

If we look at decentralization as a key issue throughout the reform process, it is rather difficult to offer a coherent view of it. This complexity emerges from several sources:

- There has been no clear educational policy regarding the decentralization of education. This reality is due to two main factors:
 - The incompleteness and incoherent character of the overall governmental policies in the field of public services. The reform of the public sector did not benefit (and, to a certain extent this is still the case) from a holistic approach that would ensure concerted action in different fields;
 - The low capacity of educational management at the central level to integrate the decentralization policy as a tool for accomplishment of better results in the fields of educational finance, efficiency and effectiveness, redistribution of political power, quality improvement and increased innovation.
- The responsible factors in the field of education are, most of the time, anchored in narrow or even incorrect conceptions or understandings of the decentralization process, such as:
 - decentralization of education means giving the power to make decisions to lower levels of education (here decentralization refers only to decision-making);
 - decentralization means to decentralize different responsibilities to the local level (without deploying the needed resources and power);
 - decentralization means to move the locus of control downwards;
 - decentralization is dangerous because it means a lack of control and thus a lack of individuals/institutions to blame in the case of failure.

In the last twelve years there has been no single minister, nor management team who has not set decentralization as a central point on the agenda. But the continuous presence of this issue at the level of political

discourse, as a condition of “democratic management,” is not a guarantee of real measures in practice. We faced a continuous and unpredictable balance between a large variety of measures, belonging to one of the following categories: coherent decentralization, chaotic and *ad-hoc* decentralization, re-centralization and maintenance of the *status quo*.

The absence of a clearly stated rationale for the decentralization process in education quite often produces a “fall” into ideology, according to which decentralization is a value in itself and does not need to be questioned and supported by arguments. Decentralization is actually taken for granted and viewed as a scope, not as a means to reach the envisaged outcomes in a more effective way.

The highly politicized character of educational policy becomes very visible when it comes to the sensitive issue of decentralization. The reason resides in the hidden fear of losing power and control. The fragile equilibrium between political, authoritative decisions and professional, informed decisions—weighted in favor of the first—has created a gap between discourse and reality. Bearing in mind that decentralization means, after all, redistribution of power, with not only huge political but also social impact, this apparently “blind” process of moving forward is understandable in the situation explained above.

In spite of the different internal and external difficulties encountered, the educational system tried—with more or less success—to have a constructive approach to its own contradictions, and to link policy tools to the systemic conditions under which they are used.

It would be difficult to depict “stages” of decentralization (as we tried before with stages of reform), but some events and processes directly related to our topic here could be identified. We will take into account two types of measures: legislative-financial and “educational” measures.

The reference points for the legislation related to decentralization (especially financial) are as follows:

1. The enactment of the first Constitution in 1991 could be considered a first (small) legislative step towards real decentralization measures. We have here references to the transfer of local affairs (including the first years of education) to local authorities. The legislative framework for this transfer was approved much later.

2. The Law of Education (1995) stipulated that all expenses related to maintenance in pre-university education are the direct responsibility of local authorities, while the administration and finance of all other *inputs* to the educational process (i.e., salaries, textbooks) remain centralized at the level of MoER or its regional “arms”: School Inspectorates.
3. The Law of Local Public Finance (1998) gave responsibility to local councils to finance the large majority of educational inputs in pre-university education (excepting salaries and other financial rights of teaching staff, textbooks and bursaries of students). Because of bureaucratic and heavy financing mechanisms at the local level, paralleled by a lack of transparency in the distribution of funds, important differences started to appear between schools.
4. Governmental Ordinance No. 32 (February 26, 2001) stated that the financing of all functional expenses of pre-university education is the responsibility of local councils. Only some exceptions were maintained: internationally financed projects, national exams, training of teaching staff, bursaries for foreign students and subventions for transportation of students. The methodological norms for enactment of this law were approved only in June and, because of the financial incapacity of local governments, the main expenditures for education needed to be financed by the collection of VAT (value added tax) at the local level, which normally has to be remitted to the state budget. In this way the financing of these expenses remained, in essence, centralized.
5. The new Law of Public Finance (August 2002) took a step backward by further limiting the already constrained financial autonomy of schools. According to this law the public institutions have to remit the extra-budgetary resources they may produce to the budget they are financed from. The limited capacity of schools to decide on their own financial situation is a controversial issue still on the agenda.

As far as educational measures are concerned, we will refer to only two of them here, with systemic impact and with significant contribution in the creation of a

“niche” both in the mentality of the public, as well as in the mentality of the teaching staff:

1. *The system of alternative textbooks.* This was one of the most important democratic achievements, promoted under the Pre-university Education Reform Project, co-financed by the Romanian government and the World Bank. The introduction of alternative textbooks and the conditions created for a free market in the field of educational materials produced significant changes in the mind and behavior of teaching staff, related to:
 - the idea itself that a textbook is not a “Bible,” that it should not be taught *ad literam* but as a resource package, designated to support, first of all, the student learning process. There is no single version of reality, of the “truth,” so the critical thinking of teachers and students is challenged;
 - the awareness of the responsibility they have in choosing the textbook that fits, at the same time, their teaching style and students’ needs and characteristics;
 - that quality is to decide what stays and what is removed from the market; evaluation criteria are needed for teachers; and, at the same time, the evaluation and examination system started to change dramatically from reproductive, content-based testing to competencies, performance-based assessment.

Continuous discussions of this issue, with *pros* and *cons* coming from different persons or institutions are not over yet. The MoER recently decided to limit the number of approved textbooks for the upper-secondary level and to regulate the market according especially to criteria related to price. This problem of an alternative textbook market is still under discussion and further changes are likely to take place.

2. *The school-based curriculum.* The structure of the new National Curriculum, its implementation starting in 1998, has two parts: the *core curriculum*, compulsory for all students at the respective level regardless of the school and local conditions (subject to national examinations) and *the school-based curriculum*, decided at the local level according to the specific needs and interests manifest within every individual learning community. This

was (and, to a certain extent, still is) a central tool of the freedom of schools. Some of the important effects of this decision are:

- A consolidation of the critical consciousness according to which the responsibility for what happens in schools is no longer merely “their business,” but is the business of everyone involved. Even the training of teachers for facing this new reality was not satisfactory—a breach had been created in their minds with respect to their position and the importance they have as decision-makers;
- an important change in the professional identity of teachers, enriched with new and difficult roles and responsibilities, such as curriculum development and needs assessment; and
- capacity of schools to adapt their educational offerings to the needs and characteristics of the local community, to support schools in addressing the requirements and challenges they face in the environment in which they function.

This measure was also “modified” by the current MoER team, reducing the number of hours per week allocated to a school-based curriculum. The arguments for this decision were the low capacity of teachers to perform the new roles, the “backwash” effects (i.e., “offering” the school-based curriculum hours to teachers in difficulty with completing their didactic norm or to the so-called “important” areas: languages, sciences).

2.3 Educational Management System: Levels and Roles

We will identify here the main actors in educational decision-making and briefly describe their roles and responsibilities, especially at the central level, which is the first goal of this study.

For a better understanding of the overall context, it is worth noting that:

Romania at present has a three tier system of public administration with one intermediate level between the national government and the local self-governments. At the intermedi-

ate level (judet or county) level—similarly to many other countries—there are both representative territorial bodies (county councils elected by the people) and de-concentrated state organs (controlled directly by the national government). A new regional level with planning and developmental responsibilities is also emerging, but the eight new regions, created by the 1998 Law on Regional Development and situated between the county and the national level, do not have administrative responsibilities.³

2.3.1 National Level

The management of education has traditionally been centralized. There have been measures of decentralization, with different magnitudes and impacts, but the general management of education at the national level is still provided by the Ministry of Education and Research. According to the Law of Education (1995, with all amendments) the MoER coordinates and controls the national education system, organizes the network of public education institutions and provides the government with suggestions on enrollment figures, approves the curricula and the textbooks, manages the in-service training of teachers and organizes the employment contests.

In the October 2002 report of the World Bank *Romania: Educational Policy Proposals* it is mentioned that the decentralization measures stipulated in the laws that we noted earlier did not affect the fundamental role of the MoER in the formulation of educational policy at the national level, in quality monitoring, evaluation and control. Therefore, the decision on the national curriculum, monitoring the performance of schools according to approved criteria and standards, approval of textbooks and accreditation of private education institutions are still responsibilities of the ministry, even the decision is based, sometimes, on the work of its specialized agencies (i.e., National Council for Curriculum, National Commission for Evaluation and Accreditation of Pre-university Education, etc.).

Also very important is the central role of the MoER in decisions related to management of teaching staff, including hiring, firing, evaluation and promotion of teachers, nomination of school directors, establishing

the minimum and maximum size of classrooms and teaching loads.

“In addition to these official roles of establishing the policy at the central level and employment of teachers at the school level, the MoER continues to ensure important educational inputs for pre-university education institutions. For example, the budget of the MoER for 2001 stipulated 200 mrd. ROL for equipment of primary and secondary schools with computers. (...) the MoER continues to manage, as well, the funds deployed from the state budget in order to support school buses for transportation of students (...)” and there are plans to bring again in the MoER the acquisition of textbooks⁴... (M. Mertaugh, pp.27–28).

An important part of the chain at the central level of educational management is represented by the MoER’s agencies. Most of them were established as a final and sustainable result of internationally funded projects (World Bank, Phare). The educational agencies of the Ministry of Education and Research now play an important role in the system. According to their birth process and the way the ministry empowered them with consistent roles and responsibilities, these agencies are quite different if we look at their visibility and decision-making power in the system. Roughly speaking, if we try to classify these agencies according to the criteria of their institutional maturity and stability in managing the specific domain for which they have been created, the following differentiations could be proposed:

a) Functional, mature agencies:

- *National Service for Evaluation and Assessment*: leading body in the field of national examinations, achievement standards setting, evaluation methodologies, created as a result of the World Bank pre-university education reform project.
- *National Center for Development of Vocational and Technical Education*: leading body in the field of pre-university technical and vocational education and training, created as a result of the first Phare program of vocational education and training reform.

These two institutions have a clear role and a consolidated institutional structure, recognized for their contributions both by the ministry and the target public.

b) Agencies “under construction,” with still unclear status and roles and/or low capacity to penetrate the interest of the public:

- National Council for Curriculum: supposed to be the main authority in the field of curriculum policy and curriculum development, which is still passing through the transformation process. After having a decisive and appreciated contribution during the World Bank project, gaining institutional autonomy proved to be a difficult process. Now the National Council for Curriculum has an unclear status, functioning under the umbrella of the Institute for Educational Sciences (research institute, funded also by MoER). The enormous amount of work in the field is confronted with low institutional capacity (financing, personnel, etc.) and with the unclear provisions of the Educational Law.
- The National Center for Training of Staff in Pre-university Education was launched through the assimilation of two agencies created at the end of the World Bank project: The National Center for Teacher Training and The National Center for Managers Training. The new institution works closely with the ministry and its roles are mainly related to accreditation of training programs for staff in pre-university education. Since not all the components of a free market in the field of training are set up, this center is still working toward gaining a powerful and insightful role in its field.

c) A different category is formed by the agencies established in cooperation with other ministries:

- The National Council for Training of Adults, a joint agency of the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor and Social Solidarity, is in the process of consolidation and clarification of roles and responsibilities, especially after approval of the Law of Continuous Training.
- The National Council for Occupational Standards and Assessment, an agency managed by a tripartite body, developed a number of occupational standards, used both by educational sectors and employers, but now there is a debate about assimilating this agency into the structure of the previous one.

The main contribution of these newly created agencies, being in different stages of development and structuring, was the introduction of professional rationality into the decision-making system. There is still a long way to go towards truly independent, professionally based agencies, able to significantly influence and impose decisions in their respective field. Probably one of the conditions for professional regulation of different domains of educational reform is empowerment and the strengthening of institutional capacity of these support agencies.

2.3.2 County/Territorial Level

At the county level, the pre-university education institutions are under the coordination of School Inspectorates, de-concentrated territorial-administrative units of the MoER, which operate in all counties and in Bucharest. The main functions of the School Inspectorates are:

- the inspection of individual teachers in different subject areas;
- pedagogical support and professional development offered to schools;
- coordination of employment and all personnel movements; and
- local education network planning and facilities management and financing.

In recent years, a movement can be observed aiming to shift the key role of these institutions from supervision and control to methodological support for renewing teaching and learning, according to reform principles.

The School Inspectorate plays a key role in the decentralization of the governance of the education system to the county level. It has the following competencies:

- The appointment and dismissal of school directors. Directors of upper secondary schools have to be confirmed by the Minister of Education, but are nominated by the inspectorate;
- The approval of the training programs to be offered in the school;

- The approval of the school-based curriculum.
- The approval and evaluation of the school development plans;
- The provision of advice on the teaching materials to be adopted in a school; and
- The evaluation of a school's performance.

The two-sided reality of the reform: decentralization and willingness to keep the power in key domains, transformed inspectorates into very strong power centers, probably the most powerful in the system from a certain point of view. They are usually part of "local alliances," incorporating an apparent obedience to the central power in order to gain sympathy and advantages and, at the same time, a transgression of the central level requirements in favor of local interests.

2.3.3 Local (Self-government) Level

Local governments started to play an increasing role in education, at first related only to the maintenance of schools, but more recently extending to finance, teacher salaries and overall school policy.

The awareness of their role in education and the effective participation of local governments in education are still objectives to be attained. There is very limited interest and capacity within local governments concerning their participation in education. The fragmented and uneven decentralization measures at play in public service, including education, contributed to the blockage of the local government in administrative and routine work, with very poor contributions to the policy development process at the local or regional level.

The ownership of schools was transferred to local authorities, attempting to create a sense of community development in which education is an important component.

2.3.4 Institutional (School) Level

The leadership provided at the school level involves the principal and his/her deputy(-ies), as well as the management board and the staff board, functioning on the basis of regulations approved by the MoER.

School directors have the following main responsibilities:

- The production of a school development plan;
- The administration of the school's allocation of the central budget;
- The management of extra-budgetary, school-generated income which can be used to cover recurrent costs, but not for capital expenditure;
- The appraisal of teaching and non-teaching staff. Teaching staff with positive appraisals may be given financial rewards, but only with the approval of the local school inspectorate;
- The delivery of the curriculum; and
- Development of the school-based curriculum in collaboration with personnel and local stakeholders and subject to the approval of the local school inspectorate.

Each school has an administrative council which includes representation by students, parents and teachers and is chaired by the school director. However, the functions of administrative councils are limited and they have no executive authority. A potential conflict of interest could be identified here since the administration council is chaired by the principal on one side, and this body is supposed to approve the decisions of the principal, on the other.

3. CONDITIONS FOR HIGH-QUALITY GOVERNANCE IN EDUCATION

3.1 Financial Incentives and Disincentives

3.1.1 *The Education Budget*

At the present time, the practice of constructing the budget of education is not based on a well-defined and well-known financing formula. There are two parallel procedures of calculation: one is based on costs per capita for students for the school year and the other one is based on the number of teachers and classes.

There are three types of financing for pre-university education, in the frame of the local budgets, differentiated according to the source of money:

- a) *Financing from the central budget* is offered for salaries and other financial rights of teachers and other categories of personnel in schools, for textbooks and students' bursaries. According to the law, the National Council for Financing of State Pre-university Education prepares an analysis on the estimated costs per student/per year, according to the levels and profiles of education and submits to the MoER criteria and standards for the proportional/per capita financing, negotiated afterwards with the trade unions. Based on this, the MoER calculates the average annual costs. School Inspectorates use this estimation in order to calculate the necessary funds for the proportional financing (annual cost per student for each school). The proportional financing of the above mentioned three categories of expenses is ensured through retention of a percentage from VAT collected at the local level.
- b) *Complementary financing* is ensured for didactic materials other than textbooks and for what we generically refer to as maintenance costs (maintenance, rehabilitation and repair, utilities, etc.). This part of financing comes from the budget of local administrations. They have to make special provisions in their budget for these expenditures.
- c) *Self-financing*. Every school can produce additional resources and are allowed to spend them *if* the respective expenses are part of the approved school budget. Schools have to anticipate both income-producing activities and expected activities for which they will spend money, since both categories have to be included in the budget proposal of each school.

Teachers' salaries represent more than 80% of educational expenditures. It is easy to notice that what is left is not that much. In order to have a picture of the type of expenditures we reproduce a table of main categories and amounts (WB, 2002: 32).⁵

Tabel 1.
Expenditures for Education from All Sources, by Category, 1998–2000 [USD Million]

Category of Expenditure	1998	1999	2000
State budget (by expense category)	1,217.0	912.8	930.0
Personnel expenses	911.6	682.1	668.6
Material expenses	157.6	55.9	55.0
Textbooks	8.6	5.3	8.3
Subventions	12.9	10.7	21.6
Transfers	46.5	144.1	167.2
Bursaries	44.7	28.5	33.2
Capital expenditures	87.1	16.8	12.8
Reimbursement of external credits	1.3	3.1	4.8

The central role in deciding on the type of expenditures and criteria for allocation is held by the MoER or its territorial de-concentrated units.

Transparency and accountability are, in our view, among the most critical problems of educational financing. The sub-financing of the educational sector (around 3.5% of GDP) is not a justification for discretionary behavior of central authorities in financial management decisions or for the lack of functional and permanent financial reporting mechanisms at all levels. The multiplication of financial control mechanisms and instances is not an effective way to achieve transparency and responsibility. Public reporting on the ways in which money for education is spent is “covered” by the continuous lamentation that the education sector is sub-financed. The reality of underfinancing of education is accompanied by the effort to obtain more money from the state budget. We very rarely hear of a preoccupation with how to spend the money in a more efficient way, in order to make the best use of the limited resources available.

3.1.2 Teacher Salaries

One of the problems of the actual financing formula is that the mechanism for establishing/calculating teacher’s salaries is very rigid and almost completely centralized.

When your salary is almost entirely decided at the center, the ownership and the motivation to perform at the grassroots level is obviously low. I visited two schools in order to conduct interviews with the prin-

cipals. I took this opportunity to ask teachers: *Who is your employer? Who pays you?* Of course, all teachers have the same status from the point of view of their employment, but the answers were very different: the Town Hall, the School, the Ministry of Education, the School Inspectorate. In addition, the salaries of teachers are low in comparison with the large majority of the professions requiring higher education, as well as compared with other budgetary professional categories.

Teachers’ salaries are calculated at a level of 18 teaching hours per week but, formally, they are asked to provide 40 hours of activity. Only teachers with a First Degree are allowed to teach just 16 hours per week. They can transform this privilege into a financial incentive: they can teach 18 (or more) hours, but with an increase of 12% of their basic salary.

In comparison with other countries, the effective teaching load is very low in Romania and the requested number of activity hours per week is very high. But since nobody is seriously monitoring the number of teacher’s activity hours beyond the teaching ones, this is a comfortable situation for teaching staff, obliged, most of the time, to perform some other income-producing activities to bring their earnings up to a decent level.

The salary scale is not significantly differentiated and it has too few steps. “The legal provisions referring to salaries of teaching staff in 2001 show with clarity that the salary scale depends more on length of teaching career, qualifications obtained and development of extra-curricular and administrative duties, than on pedagogical qualities and performances of teachers in the classroom.” (WB, 2002: 61).⁶

There is no real space for financial incentives to stimulate teachers. After a period of dramatic systemic changes in education, the focus of financing efforts on action-research types of programs, innovation at the grass-roots and peer learning would have encouraged the development of two dimensions of the professional ethos of teachers, very much damaged during communist times: cooperation and reflective practice.

The deficiencies of the salary system are based on the deficiencies of the teaching evaluation system, which is based too heavily on administrative and formal criteria. The main problems relating to teaching evaluation are:

- Lack of incentives for development of professional performance in teaching;
- Lack of correlation between teachers' professional development needs and results of the evaluation; and
- The exclusive orientation towards the past ("what has been done up to now" by the respective teacher) and lack of stimulus for further development.

Nowadays there are attempts to correlate two essential aspects of the teaching profession:

- in-service training; and
- career advancement.

The result of these attempts would be a more diverse career path for teachers, with more steps and possibilities to advance based on results and performance. At the same time, a diverse and functional system of in-service training is created and the accumulation of training would be converted into career progress.

Motivation for employment and retention of high-quality teachers in the system is a huge challenge that could be addressed also through this correlation. If economic development offers limited hopes for a significant raise in teacher's salaries, complementary incentives and disincentives should be generated, according to performance management and not to administrative criteria.

3.2 Targeted Development Programs

The last few years have been, obviously, years marked by systemic changes and comprehensive reform meas-

ures. There is no doubt about the necessity of these reforms, most of them undertaken with financial and methodological support from international donors (WB, EU), especially for the re-shaping and democratization of the old system. After a long period of efforts directed toward systemic/system scale changes (i.e., curriculum change, new textbooks development, new evaluation and assessment systems, etc.), these types of problems, even not entirely solved, started to function under the new conditions. Other types of problems, somehow neglected until now because of their lower magnitude, arise and bring new challenges to education. They are more narrow and focused with regard to the population affected, specific in their nature, but with a strong impact at the "local" level. By "local" we refer both to regional and to sector-type problems.

There is a wide range of problems of this type; we will try to offer some illustrative examples. Namely:

- problems raised by the development of education in rural areas or in industrial restructuring areas;
- specific problems of national minorities and especially of the Roma population;
- quality of teaching staff and the need to increase their stature;
- lack of correlation between initial teacher training and the requirements of the reform in the fields of curriculum, evaluation and management;
- capacity of teachers to use new teaching methodologies and to organize learning on competencies achievement and not on information transmittal; and
- development of vocational and technical education as a tool for reaching social and economic cohesion.

From the information we gained through the interviews conducted with specialists from the MoER, its agencies and other educational organizations, we tried, amongst other things, to provide an answer to the following question: *Are targeted development programs a constant method of working/solving problems in the MoER?* We have to recognize that we are not in a position to formulate a unique and simple answer to this question.

There are targeted development programs developed and performed at the request of—or having as their direct or indirect beneficiary—the MoER. The

problem is that most of them are based on external funding (i.e., PHARE programs) and we can recall two of these cases as illustrative: one is the PHARE Social and Economic Cohesion—TVET⁷ component and the other is the PHARE Improvement of Educational Situation of Roma. These programs, and others like them, respect the exigencies of a targeted development program—they try to solve a specific problem of the system, they have their own PMUs and PIUs,⁸ ensuring planning, management and internal evaluation, while benefiting from a certain autonomy under the support of the MoER. These programs, according to EU procedures, are subject to external evaluation not only during the activities, but also a long time after the completion of the project.

So, the answer is easy when it comes to targeted development programs with external financing. One of the interviewees called these programs “the oxygen” of the system, not only from a financial point of view, but also regarding the transfer of good practices. This transfer from international donor-supported programs to the level of the whole educational system has been a difficult process; the good results achieved in the pilot schools directly involved in the project were eventually “generalized” through political decision, but with limited methodological support. The assimilation of the new educational reality produced by these programs was not even and sometimes discrepancies among schools appeared in the short term.

There are also successful examples of this type of program developed as local/national initiatives. One such program is Education for a Second Chance—built on the successful experience of a small pilot project, implemented in cooperation with the nonprofit sector⁹ and transformed afterwards into a national strategic action for reducing drop-out rates and for reintegration of drop-outs. The evolution of this program is interesting, because it started as a targeted development program, showing encouraging results and now having a different identity: it is one of the educational improvement measures coordinated by the MoER and supervised by County School Inspectorates. Monies are deployed to the schools implementing this program as a result of their request and approved by the Inspectorate. The decisions and the legal and methodological framework were the subject of a ministerial order. If we now look to this initiative, we find that it is only a halfway targeted development program.

The current institutional structure of the MoER is a mixture between old administrative and bureaucratic organization and strategic development programs’ criteria, resulting in the same chaotic organization, with difficult and slow circulation of information, lack of data for decision-making, lack of coordination among different sectors and immobility. Annex 1 provides an image of the organizational structure of the MoER, showing a rather bureaucratic, “industrial” organization.

The gate was opened for the appropriate environment for targeted development programs when the MoER started to do its strategic planning according to priority programs, focused on special problems, with special actions and measures to be undertaken and then evaluated from the perspective of their impact. This open gate was not yet exploited in a dynamic and efficient manner mainly because there is still an obvious gap between planning documents and everyday activity in the ministry. The reactive management and the lack of policy vision make the MoER a rather old-fashioned organization, very visible, even obtrusive, but not in the modern and efficient way specific to targeted development programs.

If we look to the typical actions undertaken at the MoER level, they are not predominantly *problem-oriented*, but system-oriented, maintaining the “revolutionary” approach focused on changing the system in favor of genuine educational development and attempting to adapt the system to developmental goals. Insofar as the *continuous transition* and the state of uncertainty is maintained by this orientation, the main problem here is that commitment and support of the teachers for the reform measures are seriously jeopardized.

Another impediment to development of targeted development programs as a regular problem solving strategy in the MoER comes from the cultural field. There is a problem that may be observed at the social level, consisting of a very limited preoccupation with evaluation. The underdevelopment of an *evaluation culture*, focused on performance and achievement of results, allowed for the extension of a *contemplative culture*, focused mainly on inputs and designing and re-designing the system.

The Ministry of Education is now in the process of restructuring and it seems that one of the criteria is to create a more flexible and responsive framework, able to cope with the complex and dynamic challenges of

the educational field. The previous integration of research with education will be followed by assimilation of youth and sports.

3.3 Professional Self-regulation

“The important distinction between the Political Legitimacy and Professional Expertise basis for decentralization is not whether the government is democratic or not, but whether governance is legitimated by expertise or by political right. (...) Proposals to shift from professional to political control of education signals a loss of public confidence in professional expertise.”¹⁰ We opened the discussion here with this statement not because we would like to go deeper into the debate about political legitimacy versus professional legitimacy in decentralization of education, but because it is interesting to look at it from the perspective of the situation in Romania. Because political legitimacy repeatedly produced failures and unpleasant perceptions from the public, there is a request (not only in education, but also in other sectors) for “technicians”—highly qualified professionals capable of taking the appropriate decisions in order to solve the problems.

The need for professional legitimacy is correlated with the need for professional efficiency: palpable and clear, measurable results. It is also true that many stakeholders started to understand that professional expertise requires the support of the political power for successful implementation of the proposed solutions.

This is the general context in which we will approach the situation of professional self-regulation. The most important initiatives leading to professional self-regulation structures in the Romanian educational system have their origin in the external support programs for the reform. The different agencies, approached earlier, are important actors in this field.

In agreement with the World Bank, it was stipulated that an agency for assessment and evaluation was to be created. The National Service for Evaluation and Assessment was therefore set up as a specialized, professional institution, financed by and working at the demand of the MoER.

The PHARE VET RO 9405 program, focused on reform of vocational education, generated the National Center for Development of Vocational and Technical

Education, in charge of the methodological coordination of the VET sector.

Both institutions have almost the same status: mainly the MoER finances them and they report to the ministry. Their autonomy is limited from this perspective, but they (and especially NCDVET) enjoy considerable autonomy in priority-setting and in establishing their own work plan. They are juridical entities, set up by the government.

Other agencies were created afterwards, and even though they do not have the same level of institutional maturity, they started to play a very important role in their fields. A special case is that of the National Council for Curriculum (NCC). This institution could also be considered as proof of the sustainability of the World Bank project (Curriculum Development Component). In spite of the sinuous institutional evolution and ambiguous situation it is in at the moment, the National Council for Curriculum managed to continue the effective and successful activity performed between 1996–2001.

The key role the NCC played in the curriculum reform made it the most visible institution of its type, considered by many actors to be the most efficient and innovative one. The decision-making in the field of curriculum was always subject to negotiation between political factors and professional expertise, on the one side, and between professional expertise and public opinion, on the other.

Other agencies were also created: the National Center for Training of Pre-university Education Staff (teachers and managers training), and the National Center for Recognition and Equivalence of Diplomas (cross-country recognition of studies and titles, transparency of qualifications). The latter is functioning as part of the European network of recognition centers.

Another two agencies with very unclear status and low visibility in the educational arena at the moment are: National Council for Approval of Textbooks and National Council for Standards and Assessment.

As we attempt to underline, some centers/agencies managed to consolidate their institutional structure, as well as their role in the specific field for which they were created. They provide useful and professional services to the MoER as the central decision-maker and to their specific target audience. This support structure, professionally based and focused on specific fields/problems of

education, started to play an important role in proposing and documenting decisions, but all decisions are supervised/approved at the ministry level.

3.4 Empowerment and Capacity-building

The education reform process brought a wide range of challenges for the professional identity of teachers. A new type of professionalism is emerging, based on the new roles of schools, teachers and in the changed context created by the reform. As shown by D. Potolea & L. Ciolan,¹¹ among these new roles we can find:

- a) The new roles of teachers according to changes in education and in society:
 - Curriculum design and development
 - Textbook evaluation and choice
 - Management of cross-curricular and interdisciplinary activities
 - Counselor (i.e., curriculum, career)
 - Facilitator (i.e., use of IT in education)
 - Mediator (e.g., school-community, learner-knowledge, learning-daily life)
 - Actor in cross-border/international projects
 - Management of diversity (intercultural learning environments, European dimension of education)
 - Self-management (career management, professional flexibility)
- b) New roles of schools:
 - Community resource center
 - Training provider (e.g., mentoring for beginners, peer training, training stages at request of companies)
 - Center of knowledge production and distribution (research, multi-functionality)
 - Center of political socialization (“teaching democracy”)

The question is to what extent the provision of pre-service and in-service teacher training programs respond to these changes. There is wide agreement, even among specialists in teacher training departments

of universities, that the current structure and content of initial teacher education is obsolete and inconsistent.

As far as in-service training is concerned, from the perspective of its contribution to the implementation and consolidation of reform principles, there are some encouraging evolutions and achievements.

- The development, at ministry level, of a new and modern strategy for in-service teacher training, based on credit points and a reshaping of the evolution of a teaching career.
- The consolidation of the actions of the National Center for Training of Staff from Pre-university Education. They developed a methodology for accreditation of teacher training courses, offered by different providers. In the name of the MoER, specialized commissions of independent experts were established at the level of this center and they will evaluate the training offers on the market. In this way important premises were achieved for building an open and competitive market of training services for teachers.

In the hiring process of directors and inspectors (managerial positions) there is a visible trend to move away from administrative criteria and procedures to professional ones. The written examinations started to disappear and to be replaced with evaluation of portfolios, interviews or even practical testing. The problem is that, for instance, for inspectors in the ministry, the practical testing consists of performing a teaching hour in his/her subject of specialization. What the relevance of such testing is for future managerial positions in the ministry is not very clear.

There is a growing interest in evaluation based on competencies. The process is in its beginning stages and is clearer in theory, because in practice a serious syncope is created by the lack of national, operational standards for inspectors and directors, which could make this procedure transparent and correct.

There has been a lot of debate recently regarding opportunities for professionalizing a management career in education. The practical results are still limited: every educational manager, being a director of a school or an inspector, is supposed to complete a management course on education, but the formal requirements remain broad and parallel with management competencies.

The types of requirements for the teaching profession are even more irrelevant since the competition for a teaching position is based only on written examinations, on the specialization subject matter and methodology and pedagogy. No practical testing system is in place. Interviewing for teaching positions is organized at the county level and the schools do not have any say regarding their future employees. The labor market of teachers is completely controlled and centralized.

The exams for career advancement also consist of written examinations, but are accompanied by an oral exam. All these exams are organized and evaluated by universities and are preceded by special inspections, supposedly to evaluate the practical competencies of teachers and to issue an evaluation report. Teaching competencies are poorly evaluated and the examination is not yet entirely based on professional requirements. Formal career advancement is also a process in which schools have a very limited role.

Autonomy of schools in the field of human resources management and development is restricted and this situation impacts very heavily on institutional capacity-building. There is a clear contradiction here between the requirements for professional managers and the real power and competencies at the disposal of school directors. The limited attributions in financial and human resource management confer very limited autonomy on the school itself.

3.5 Planning and Development

The planning tool normally used at the school level is the so-called *school development plan* or *institutional development project*. This document should state the strategy for development for the medium and long term at the school level and should be the result of the cooperation between all stakeholders at that level. The administration council of the school adopts this plan and subsequently coordinates its accomplishment. These documents are revised and adapted every year, according to the changes in the education system or in the external conditions of the environment. We identified the following necessary conditions for high quality planning at school level:

- trained capacity to develop micro-policies at the school level;

- strategic vision at school level about the roles and mission of schools in the local community and in the wider context;
- capacity for strategic steering of available resources as well as capacity for fundraising;
- participation and cooperation culture at school level; and
- interest and motivation for school development and school improvement.

Bearing in mind the above mentioned conditions and looking at what is going on in the everyday life of the school, we notice important discrepancies and a lot of room for further improvement. Because of this reason, many of these institutional development projects look only like plans of activities. These projects lack any strategic dimension, any clear and coherent policy at school level, articulated around a shared vision, mission and strategic targets, known and accepted not only by the school principal and eventually the administration council, but also at the wider level of the whole school community.

The institutional development project is in the position of becoming a bureaucratic paper, which needs to be shown during school inspections and ignored in the daily life of the school. Some reasons for this risk are found at the school level, some of them are caused by external conditions in the environment, and others are the result of the educational policies at the national level. We will try to give some relevant examples:

- the impossibility to predict with accuracy the human and material resources available in the future (unpredictable evolution of the external environment);
- the fragmentary culture at the school level, still dominated by individualism and discipline, by traditional distribution of power and responsibilities; ownership of teachers, parents and students of the school and its actions is still a goal to be reached;
- the insufficient human capacity due to lack of adequate training in the field of strategic planning and institutional development; school managers are not real professional managers and often do not receive consistent training for this job; and

- the restricted competencies of the school (the low institutional autonomy) especially regarding human resources management and expenditures; a “dependency culture” is perpetuated, and the schools, even though they have the power and the responsibility to make decisions, start asking for approval or “indications” from superior levels.

The most sensitive problem related to planning at the school level identified by the specialists interviewed is inefficient cooperation with the local authorities. The new regulations in the field issued in the last years tried to mobilize and involve the local community and the local self-governments in educational planning. With notable exceptions in the VET sector, there is very little capacity or interest at the level of local authorities for participation in this process.

The regional level could be assimilated, at least for now, at the local/county level, since the regional development policies are rather new in Romania and the educational sector is not yet at the top of regional agendas. Again, an exception should be mentioned for the new PHARE Social and Economic Cohesion project, a component for technical and vocational education and training. Within the framework of this project, in each of the eight development regions of Romania, regional consortia were created, including members from the Regional Development Agency, local (County) committees for social partnership development in VET, county councils and county school inspectorates. This consultative structure of the project has the following tasks:

- selection of VET pilot schools and resource centers which will take part in the project;
- identification of training relevant for regional development;
- selection of qualifications that will be developed in the project;
- identification of occupational equipment to enable training relevant for regional development; and
- provision of technical assistance to support social partnership in education.

In this specific case, the regional level represents a concerted action of different key actors in order to maintain the coherence of VET within the regional

development policy. This is the first time when a project of this magnitude is running in a concerted way, in different fields of activity (regional policy development and implementation, tourism sector, SME development and vocational and technical education) and involving all the above mentioned institutions.

It was not very easy to make these consortia start working, but at this moment they function well and are expected to play a major role throughout the whole duration of the project and to make a valuable contribution to its implementation. The successful experience with these consortia could lead to a new (enriched) regional structure, which would take specific responsibilities in the field of VET, but also in general, in the whole educational system of the region, especially concerning the planning of educational supply.

The most important educational institution at regional/county level is still the county School Inspectorate, which is an administrative decentralized structure of the Ministry of Education and Research for pre-university education. The main responsibilities of the school inspectorates are:

- to ensure the appropriate application of educational policy in its territory;
- to ensure the quality of the educational process and accomplishment of national standards, through school inspection;
- to manage financial operations of pre-university educational systems in the area;
- to coordinate all admission and final exams;
- to approve the school-based curriculum proposed by each school and to ensure the application of the national core curriculum; and
- to coordinate and approve the school network structure every year (configuration of educational supply).

As shown in an OECD report¹² “at pre-university level, the school inspectorate has important responsibilities regarding curricular inspection, human resources, performances of teachers and financial resources.” The same report does, however, warn: “the power of school inspectorates is one of the most unproductive contradictions of the educational management system, together with the lack of responsibility to civil society and the discrepancy between the authority and responsibilities at the local level.”¹³

At the central level, in the structure of the MoER, the responsibility for planning for development belongs to the Directorate for Evaluation, Prognosis and Development. This directorate is composed of four specialized services:

- a) school networks and institutional prognosis;
- b) management, resources and school institutions;
- c) institutional programs and professional development; and
- d) private and alternative education.

The planning process at this level is very much based on the annual reports developed by each school inspectorate: *The State of Education in...* (name of the county). A synthesis of these reports is compiled for public information and for submission to the Parliament (educational commission).

4. THE TOOLS AND CONDITIONS FOR HIGH-QUALITY POLICYMAKING

4.1 Setting the Agenda

There is no single procedure according to which a certain problem permeates the agenda of the ministry. We will try to identify some pathways to the educational agenda and to explain how they function.

- a) The educational agenda of the ministry is mainly based on official documents, setting the priorities for the next period. Starting from the Governing Program, the MoER developed a document called *The Strategy for Development of Pre-university Education 2001–2004* where we can find the directions for action. The elaboration of this strategy was a joint effort of different departments in the MoER, the specialized agencies described above, and the Institute of Educational Sciences. A process of consultation, especially with trade unions followed.
- b) Another entry “gate” for issues on the educational agenda is the pressure of different external influential factors. The status of our country, being in the process of negotiation for accession to the European Union, brings different types

of requirements and conditions, imposed by EU institutions or adopted through the country’s own will, as a strategic measure for future alignment. There are two interesting phenomena related to this factor of pressure:

- overuse and exaggeration of EU pressure (i.e., *acquis communautaire*) in order to legitimate an unpopular decision. Arguments like “we have to do this because it is a common feature in all EU countries and we have to align our system” are sometimes heard as an uncontested reason for taking a respective measure;
 - the role of the specialists from the MoER and related institutions, recently included as members in different working groups at the European Commission. They started to play an important role in adjusting the agenda to EU policies and envisaged directions for development.
- c) The counselors/advisors of the minister can place an issue, at the request of an interest group, on the agenda. This is not an official mechanism, but most of the time is one of the most efficient. As we will show later, it also proved its effectiveness in convincing the minister to adopt a decision.
 - d) The feedback collected from across the country, especially related to policy implementation. The inspectorates in each county have the key role in this process. Sometimes this feedback is requested by the MoER, while at other times it is a result of the imperative problems that appear at the grass-roots level.
 - e) The media are another pressure factor for the educational agenda. The politicians are always sensitive about their image, so they have to take into account the reactions and the criticisms of the media. Combating corruption is one of the issues which reached the agenda as the result of interventions and pressure made by the mass media. The attention recently paid to reactions of the media was exaggerated. One of the interviewees mentioned: “*sometimes I have the feeling that the whole system is managed in dependence on media messages and not in correlation with our strategies.*”¹⁴

As a conclusion concerning agenda setting and review, we could say that there is no coherent mechanism in place and, furthermore, there is no awareness at the level of the MoER that such a mechanism is needed. This situation is a normal effect of several realities:

- The educational agenda is sometimes unclear, at least for the wider audience, and the problems there are not regularly based on analysis and studies, but on forced reactions to different emergencies of the system. There is a group of persons, rather informal than formal, around the minister, informed about the agenda and with an important role in managing the problems facing it, but for the others the access is often limited. The process of setting up the agenda has two sides: a coherent one, based on policy analysis and priorities in the policy documents, but also an *ad-hoc* one, based on the reactive management type prevalent at the level of this institution.
- The current understanding about the role and visibility of the agenda: not only the ministry and its agencies should be involved and aware of it, but also other stakeholders, like parents, teachers, professional organizations and NGOs.
- The assertive internal organizational structure of the MoER generates a privilege for some influential top-level positions in setting and modifying the agenda. The input coming from the identified and documented needs of the system is minimized.
- We could risk stating that there is no single agenda, but three, sometimes parallel agendas:
 - The “real agenda”: what decision-makers and stakeholders establish as priorities and action to be taken;
 - The “hidden agenda”: the rationale behind some decisions is not always explicit. Sometimes the image game prevails on the real interests and needs of the system; and
 - The “declared agenda”: different priorities are ranked as top ones, but limited action is taken in that direction. Sometimes problems are officially put on the agenda just to please a pressure group or another actor for a certain period of time.

4.2 Policy Formulation and Adoption

Opening the discussion about policy formulation and adoption with the interviewed specialists was not an easy task. First, because important decisions are to be taken in a short time, i.e., the structure of the pre-university education system in the new context of extending compulsory school up to 10 years. The discussions around this issue are controversial and sometimes there are different kinds of pressure coming from different interest groups. Second, because the deliberation and concentration on the policymaking process is not exactly a daily routine in the MoER, which in charge of overall organization and operation of education.

As one of the persons interviewed underlined:

the MoER, from the perspective of policy formulation and policy adoption is somehow missing flexibility; and this process of ankylose happens like in biology, to the bodies or organs not appropriately using or not using at all certain functions... The rudimentary understanding of what policy is comes from mixing it up with politics, with politics of a certain party or just understanding educational policy only as a process of decision-making.¹⁵

Recently, for important decisions (often controversial) policy analyses have been ordered to have both a scientific rationale behind a decision, but also to legitimate it through professional expertise. As an example here we can bring up once more the extension of compulsory education where, even if there is no definitive decision at this moment, comprehensive and consistent policy studies and analyses have been made. Policy options have been formulated and the final decision will come out soon, as a result of the negotiation processes between stakeholders.

One problem is that sometimes policy analysis results are ignored, in spite of the great amount of valuable information and proposals they can provide. A good example of this is the impact study on results of implementation of the new national curriculum—*School at a Crossroads: Change and Continuity in Curriculum for Compulsory Education* (published in 2002)¹⁶—an evaluative analysis ordered by the ministry, but completely ignored until now in the curriculum revision process. A huge amount of research was conducted, combining quantitative and qualitative

methods, and policy options were formulated based on empirical data obtained. This is still a source to be used, especially if we take into account that it is one of the few policy evaluation undertakings in pre-university education (together with evaluations of the PHARE VET program).

The policy studies or policy analyses are elaborated especially by the established, specialized agencies or the Institute of Educational Sciences or by working groups articulated around one of these institutions. A new practice has recently made itself known—working groups on different problems appointed directly by the ministry. The representatives are not selected following a clear procedure; they become members at the invitation of the MoER and participate in analysis and discussion on the specific problem. They might be professionals/representatives of the agencies, county school inspectors, independent specialists, school directors of professors, etc., accompanied by employees of the ministry. The questionable issue here is that the functioning of this group, constituted *ad-hoc* as a reaction to external pressures or to an imminent problem, cannot be very effective since it is completely fluid and artificial, aimed at solving existing problems and not at applying a strategic approach.

We will come back to the critical problem of this process, as we could depict it from the interviews with our subjects: assimilation of policymaking and policy adoption with decision-making and decision adoption. The main components of this structural problem, impeding the realization of the whole policy cycle, are described below:

- There is no known system of decision-making in place. Theoretically, the minister makes all decisions. The minister or the secretaries of state (deputy-ministers) have to put their signature on any document with the value of a decision at the system level.

*The procedure is unclear... Documents, analyses or proposals are requested from the different departments in the ministry. There is also another possibility, which avoids the typical hierarchy: proposals are directly submitted to advisors and, based on their expert agreement, the decision is promoted forward to the minister or his/her.*¹⁷

- The educational policy process is reduced to a decision-making process. In this “simplified” ver-

sion, the wide processes of consultation, negotiation, reaching consensus, debate, etc., involving all the stakeholders are often skipped or, if implemented, have a formal character and ignore many of the voices that should be heard:

*As far as I can see, we are often missing the **process** and what is left is the formal **procedure**. In this way we don't have, for a decision, all needed data and all relevant opinions and, further to that, we will not have strong support for implementation.*¹⁸

- The reductionism in vision about the policy-making process and the narrow understanding of policy as politics or as decision-making have oriented the use of policy tools towards mandate and, sometimes, to the use of support agencies. One of the instruments seriously neglected and with a high potential in this context is persuasion; but a high professionalism in the public relations area is needed in this case—a situation not currently observed in the MoER. Decisions are not clearly explained to the public or to different target audiences according to their interest. Public relations does not mean only monitoring the media and answering letters. This could become a department with a key role in the success of some important decisions.

Formally speaking, we can find a public relations department in a composite articulation within the structure of the MoER. One of the general directorates is called the General Directorate for Information, Public Relations, Administration and Personnel. The services allocated to this directorate are:

- a) Service for databases;
- b) Service for procurement;
- c) RoEduNet service;
- d) Service for public relations; and
- e) Service for mass media.

The last three departments/services play an important role in information and communication management, as well as in the relations of the MoER with the external environment. The RoEduNet department is in charge of the electronic communications of the ministry with local structures (school inspectorates)

through the Intranet and, in general, with communication and information provision through the Internet. The department for public relations is specialized in organizing and managing events, and in developing and implementing the public relations strategy of the MoER. The department for relations with mass media is in charge of informing all means of media communication accredited at the MoER about public policies and activities of the MoER. They also have the role of informing MoER employees about the way their work is reflected in the media.

As shown above, the formal structure is in place in spite of its combination with administration and personnel departments. The problem is the commitment to transparency and the accountability of the MoER to the wider public. Too many problems are considered “closed,” or “internal” and this attitude may reduce public support in implementing some measures. A concrete and recent example is the extension of compulsory education to 10 years and beginning of school at the age of six. Lack of concrete and structured information, accessible to the wider public, produced adverse reactions from parents.

Another obstacle in the formal process of policy adoption stems from two problems:

- Specialists from MoER or specialized agencies must elaborate any decision that they want to promote in a juridical form: either a Ministerial Order or a Notification. They lose important time doing a specialized job for which they have to train themselves in a “learning by doing” way, while the legislative department in the ministry only carries out a final check and, if necessary, returns documents to its authors for revisions.
- The future official document containing a proposed decision follows a complicated hierarchical chain, with the last link ending up at the Cabinet of the Minister. Most of the time this is a place where many important decisions have to wait for the formal last approval for months. In order to resolve an urgent problem lobbying is normally started to speed things up.

4.3 Policy Implementation and Assessment

Once adopted at the central level, the typical route followed by a decision is in concordance with the bureaucratic organization of a three-tiered administrative system. The ministry communicates the decision to school inspectorates in each county and they are in charge of dissemination at the local level, in each school (or in each institution subject to the implementation of the respective decision).

Very often, there are serious communication problems between these levels and sometimes even inside one of these levels.

The circulation of information is not efficient some-times, even between different departments in the MoER: it happens that they send notifications in the system, focused on their area of responsibility, in contradiction with those sent by other departments. This fact creates confusion and instability in the system. Accompanied by the all-too-frequent change of the rules, this generates prejudice at the local level such that a new decision announced to be implemented, or a new requirement of the central authority, doesn't have to be taken too seriously and immediately put into practice. The principle according to which ‘a wonder lasts for a maximum of three days’ becomes an excuse for doing nothing or for undermining the authority.¹⁹

The implementation of the systemic policies is coordinated, according to the case, by the General Directorates in the MoER (what we refer to as *departments*) or by the specialized agencies. The responsible authority at the local level is the county school inspectorate and, sometimes, other support institutions active at the county level: house of teachers (CCDs)—in-service teacher training institutions of the MoER, county centers for psycho-pedagogical counseling (school and career guidance and counseling institutions).

The main dysfunction, which impacted on efficiency of the implementation of important measures, is the preparation of the implementation process, and all its aspects: legislation, institutional capacity, financing, training of human resources, public awareness, etc. A clear example in this direction are the teacher training

activities as support for the other reform initiatives. “The teacher-training sector registered a slower development, a certain discrepancy of rhythm and efficacy compared with the other components of reform: curriculum and instruction, evaluation, management.”²⁰

As we mentioned before, serious weaknesses can be observed at the level of communication; because of this, the process of collecting data, and analyzing and providing feedback during the implementation process of a specific policy, are slow processes with reduced efficiency. In 2001, a new department was created in the MoER: the General Directorate for Evaluation, Prognosis and Development, seen as a link between policymakers and implementers of policies. The collection, administration and interpretation of accurate data in support of policymaking and improvement of the implementation process were started, but the task seems to be very demanding and not easy to accomplish in a short time.

In the field of policy evaluation what is missing is the orientation towards transparency and accountability. “Evaluation” means very often “control” at the grass-roots level and the control is very often bureaucratic—administrative and not professional. The reminders of the old type of school inspection are visible, in spite of the new model for organization and development of school inspection, focused on quality assurance, advice and support offered to schools.

Since targeted development programs are not exactly common practice in the MoER, external evaluations take place only for the programs with external financial support or, from time to time, as a result of participation in international programs (TIMSS, PISA) or in international studies (OECD, World Bank). A growing concern for self-assessment at the school level can be observed and professional self-assessment tools can be tested. As far as the learning outcomes of students are concerned, in direct relation to quality of educational provisions, the system is still under construction. The school is not responsible on a constant basis for the results of all students; the critical moment when they have to assume (at least partially) this responsibility is at the time of national examinations. In the near future an important role here will probably be played by the national standards of achievement defined in terms of learning outcomes. The National Service for Examination and Assessment started to work on this issue, and the new standards

will be implemented starting with the new school year for compulsory education.

The development of a coherent and functional assessment system, focused on quality of education and efficiency in using public resources is a required condition for completing the whole policy cycle. Otherwise the bureaucratic implementation will prevail and, as a consequence, the continuum of quality policymaking in education will be affected.

5. SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy study tried to follow some basic principles using the following methodology:

- A balanced view in emphasizing strengths and weaknesses;
- A positive approach, starting from the assumption that the first step in improving or solving a problematic situation is to recognize its existence and to analyze it;
- A commitment to discretion, especially concerning the persons interviewed during the empirical research process, many of them holding important positions in the governance of education; and
- An open manner in approaching the problems which articulate the outline of this paper: we tried to look at the conditions and systemic aspects rather than concentrate on specific problems and functional discrepancies.

If we look back to the main aims of the study, namely:

- To identify strengths and weaknesses in the central governance of education in Romania; and
- To suggest improvements in ensuring conditions for strategic steering and quality policymaking,

It would be worthwhile to mention in synthesis the main findings of our research and analysis:

- **Heavy circulation of information and low capacity to manage educational information;**
- **Rigid/ineffective financial mechanisms** (reduced use of incentives, low accountability, unclear reporting mechanisms);

- **Prevalence of administrative–bureaucratic management** (limited targeted development programs, capacity for policymaking, coordination among sectors and institutions);
- **A two-sided reality of the reform.** The discrepancies between what is said and what is implemented in practice are still significant. The discourse about reform is not “covered” completely with measures in the reality of the educational system;
- **Neglected/ignored areas of intervention** (competency-based evaluation, problem-oriented management, institutional capacity-building, human resource training and development, policy analysis, quality assurance);
- **Gap between the structural–systemic changes and the implementation and evaluation processes;** and
- **Discrepancy between roles and responsibilities deployed to actors and tools at their disposal to fulfill these new roles.**

Starting from these findings the main recommendations that I tried to emphasize throughout this paper are concentrated on two areas of intervention:

A. Systemic conditions for strategic steering and quality policymaking:

- **Correlation** of decentralization in education with other public sector reforms (i.e., public administration);

- **Trans-political agreement** regarding the main objectives and structure of the educational system; and
- Creation of a **self-evaluation and external evaluation system**, with a clear public reporting mechanism, for ensuring transparency and accountability.

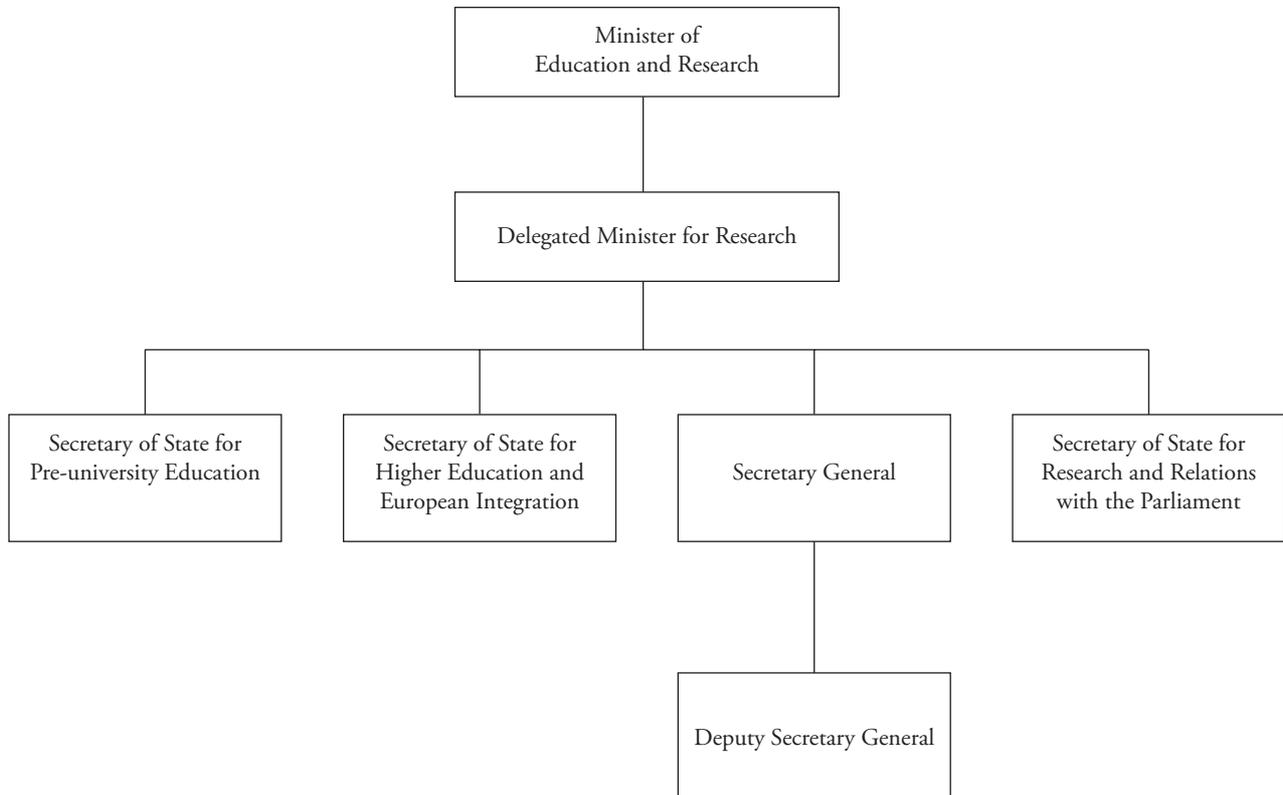
B. Capacity-building for good governance of education:

- To offer **agencies** a more powerful professional role in supporting the decision-making process;
- Strengthen the capacity of **local governments** to fulfill the educational functions they are responsible for (i.e., creating non-elected positions for specialists in education); and
- Focus future innovation/reform projects on the functioning and fine-tuning of the **process at the school level** (small-scale development projects, promoting reflective practice, cooperation and peer learning).

Bearing these ideas in mind, this study may prove its utility in establishing the framework in which systemic conditions for strategic steering and quality policymaking in education should be further analyzed and developed.

ANNEX

Organization Chart of the Ministry of Education and Research (at the date of completion of the research)



Minister of Education and Research

- General Directorate for Relations with Trade Unions and Employer Organizations
- General Directorate Budget and Financing
- General Directorate Juridical, Audit and Control

Secretary of State for Pre-university Education

- General Directorate for Pre-university Education
- General Directorate for Evaluation, Prognosis and Development
- General Directorate for Learning in Minority Languages
- General Directorate for Extracurricular Activities

Secretary of State for Higher Education and European Integration

- General Directorate for Coordination of Higher Education
- General Directorate for Continuing Education and Teacher Training
- General Directorate for European Integration and International Relations
- General Directorate for Patrimonies and Investments

Secretary of State for Research and Relations with the Parliament

- National Agency for Atomic Energy
- General Directorate for Technological Transfer and Innovation
- General Directorate for Research Policies, Strategies and National Planning
- General Directorate for Institutional Development

Secretary General

- General Directorate for Information, Public Relations, Administration and Personnel

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This policy study is based on four main sources of information:

- Existing educational policy and administration documents, stating the roles and responsibilities of different institutions and bodies, actions to be undertaken (ministerial orders), official methodologies for implementation of different measures;
- Existing/published written reports and studies, realized for/under the coordination of prestigious international organizations (The World Bank, OECD, UNESCO, etc.) and focusing on different aspects of the Romanian educational system;
- Evaluation or impact studies realized at the national level, focusing on different sectors of the educational system (i.e., reform of vocational and technical education) or various domains of systemic change (i.e., curriculum reform in pre-university education);
- Empirical qualitative research, realized through a set of in-depth interviews with two categories of persons:
 - decision-makers working in different structures of the central level of educational management (Ministry of Education and Research, specialized agencies)—directly involved in the “official structure” of educational administration
 - key professionals in education, not directly related to decision-making and the “official system” (independent experts), but working in education and being respected and recognized for their professionalism.

NOTES

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- ⁷ TVET = Technical and Vocational Education and Training (Phare RO 0108.01 and 0108.03).
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July 2004

Decentralization of the educational systems of traditional democracies is considered a normal step toward strengthening democratic governance and social cohesion. In transition states like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Poland and Romania, however, this issue is controversial and relates directly to the debate over the shape of democracy and the (re)establishment of civil society.

The overall position of education in (post) transitional countries is poor. The share of GDP spent on education is lower everywhere—sometimes critically lower—than the recommendations of international organizations. The social status of teachers is weak, their working conditions are bad and their readiness to engage in educational renewal is questionable. Guaranteeing a routine functioning system is already a problem and long-range renewal plans are deferred. A lack of funds usually threatens any worthy long-term international cooperation and help.

Quality education is the basis of how to live in a democratic society, how to take part in the economy and political life and how to contribute to the values of open society. If the public's opinion of education connotes old schools without basic equipment, underpaid and poorly-trained teachers, and outmoded curricula is poor, then these aims can be seriously obstructed. Education should be made a key national priority if communities are to recognize the inherent value of the improvement of schools for the long run.

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