



THE ROLE OF EDUCATION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF REGIONS IN BULGARIA

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Today more than ever, when we are creating a United Europe, Europe of knowledge and high technologies, it is necessary to achieve a mutual awareness of the different cultures and traditions. This is a prerequisite for tolerance between nations. Education plays important role in the process of mutual understanding. The competitive and dynamic economy plays important role for the development of the regions but such an economy supposes a flexible educational system which is able to respond to the challenges of the contemporary economic and social development. The quality of education and its territorial disposal has a direct influence on the business and the regions in Bulgaria.

In the fast- changing reality of the contemporary world, there is a new concept for education which defines new educational objectives and policies. There is a new conceptual understanding for education as a factor in the social and cultural cohesion and as an economic potential. This understanding derives from the strategic objective of the European Union- its transformation into the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world, based on knowledge.

The Lisbon strategy specifies this objective in improvement of the quality and effectiveness of education, the provision of ubiquitous access to education and opening of the educational systems towards the world¹. The action frame from Dakar² defines education as a process orientated to the practice which continues for a lifetime and is deeply connected with the qualities that the individual possesses. With the strategy “Education for all”, the main stress is put on accessibility and projects the opening of the educational systems towards diverse cognitive necessities and

“users” of knowledge. This framework foresees the provision of qualified primary education for children from unequal social strata and ethnical minorities until 2015 as well as decrease in illiteracy by 50 % and provision of equal educational opportunities for both genders. The framework interprets the accessibility as an opportunity for everyone to achieve valid and measurable educational results and to satisfy his educational necessities throughout his life.

The new concept for education requires positive changes in some areas:

- management of the education – decentralization and guaranteed participation of the civil society in the elaboration, application, and monitoring of the strategies for development of education; planning and provision of enough resources for education;
- Educational environment – establishment of tolerant, healthy and secure educational environment stimulating the development of the individuals, clearly defined obligatory minimum of knowledge and competences, practically oriented educational content, attractive forms of education that make the educational content understandable, measurable educational results, wider implementation of the new information technologies.
- Monitoring- creation of systems for effective measurement of the educational achievements and systems for monitoring of teachers’ activities in the schools. For improvement of the quality of education, decentralization and alternative resources as key challenges are of utmost importance. Decentralization puts requirements difficult to be compatible: to encourage the diversity of educational programs and at the same time to provide education of good quality for all. The alternative resources at disposal of the

educational system do not grow up with the speed at which increase the educational necessities of the population: cheaper alternatives

The alternative resources on which the educational system counts do not grow with the speed by which the educational necessities of the population increase /more and more people take part in it for a longer period of time/: cheaper alternatives of the expensive institutional practices and more flexible forms of educational services. These are areas that need changes in quality. The incessant tendency for decrease in the number of the learners in Bulgaria /the total number of learners' decreases by 230 thousand people for the last 10 years/. Only for the school year 1998/1999 there is an increase in the number of students mainly because of the free paid access to university. The per cent of the students studying at private universities is about 10 %. The per cent of the students at private professional schools is 1 % and of those at private institutions is 7 % from the total number for the country. As a result of the transformation of the network of educational institutions and the demographic tendencies, in the last ten years the number of schools for general education decreased by 627 or by more than 15 % /a similar process is also forthcoming in the field of the professional education/. One of the important ways for synchronizing the professional education in accordance with the necessities of the labor market is the increase in the flexibility of the schools. This objective can be achieved by a bigger representation of employers in the school trustees in the process of practical preparation, during the exams and even in the update of the school programs.

There is a decrease in the whole number of students during the last years and at the same time there is an increase in the number of the PhDs. /the biggest part of the people who follow university education is in the fields of business administration, administration, and technical sciences while the biggest number of PhDs are in Law and pedagogy. The biggest decrease of students is in the fields of mathematics, physics, journalism, social services, pedagogy. There is an increase in the university programs for informatics and science. There is a decrease lower than the average in programs like technical sciences, architecture, and construction. The programs

from the scientific- technical part which more often take part in the international statistics for quality evaluation, the number of students either increases or slightly decreases. However the increase in the number of PhDs is lower than the average index, except for those in the fields of production and manufacturing and architecture and construction/.

The problems for the educational institutions are connected with financial restrictions, the existing structure, the specialization in the professional fields and the presence of a teaching staff with a certain qualification, the lack of contacts with employers, lack of information concerning the demand of the labor market, lack of registers for the graduating students and technical equipment. There are also problems on behalf of the employers for example lack of connections with the educational institutions, lack of information concerning the learning process and the students' skills, lack of interest and incentives for providing practices. There educational, legislation and financial challenges that education nowadays faces. The biggest problem concerning the efficiency of the working and adequacy of the restructuring of the educational system lies in the lack of a complete framework and strategy for development and alignment with the new needs of the economy. This strategy should be synchronized with and based on the national and regional strategies for social-economic development and should also be a result of a wide social consensus. The Bulgarian national plan for economic development gives a certain direction and defines the national priorities. These priorities should be objectified for the needs of the educational system and should find their reflection in the list of the national professions and the united national system of standards for professional qualification.

The elaboration of adequate mechanisms for application of the legislation is also necessary for the exact definition of the responsibilities of all parties that take part in this field. The calculations show that the quantity of production is the leading factor in the dynamics concerning the labor productivity. In this sense the changes carried out in the quantity of manufacture regarding prices, markets, currency rates and other factors have important influence on the competitiveness of manufacture. The instability in the dynamics of manufacture makes the labor productivity very

sensitive to the changes in the employment levels. It is evident that there is a lack of stability in manufacture which can allow increase in the employment in the process of increase of the labour productivity.

There is a decrease in the demand for unqualified workforce which should be noted as a positive tendency.

There is a need for the elaboration of mechanisms for integration between necessities and demand regarding the qualifications and professions. There is also need for the establishment of synchronized system for decrease of the quality disproportions – including by means of stimulation of the employers in the process of quality restructure of the workforce, new definition of the role of the country in this process, stimulation of the workforce to offer better quality/that's why a good system for information and wide network of possibilities for education and prequalification is also indispensable/.

A system for supervision and control and flexible reorientation according to the structural changes is lacking as well.

Significant structural transformations in the economy of the country during the last years lead to significant changes in the demands for workforce including according to professions and specialties. In spite of the positive lead of adaptation, the systems of education and professional education adapt with difficulty to the new demands of economy and labor market.

The main problems in the process of adaptation lie in the shortcomings in the normative, administrative and financial legislation as well as in the lack of coordination in the activity of the organs and organizations on different levels, the shortcomings in the social dialogue, the lack of appropriate incentives and mechanisms as well as the lack of monitoring of the real needs of the labor market. The starting point for dealing with these problems is in the identification of the problem and in a wide social discussion for further improvement of the professional qualification and education for the achievement of a matching with the labor market demands. The achievement of this objective will have however a positive effect

on the improvement of the competitiveness of the Bulgarian industry.

According to the Lisbon strategy Europe must have “the most dynamic and competitive economy based on knowledge.” That is why the stress is put on the opening of more workplaces. The investment in human capital has been declared as main policy of the European Union for the achievement of competitiveness and economic productivity. The Bologna strategy for a united European Higher Education Area indicates some main activities for the achievement of this objective. One of the main activities is the evaluation of the quality of higher education. Quality is a condition for the establishment of mobility, comparability, attractiveness. The Bulgarian higher education has been put in accordance with the European one during the last few years. But in a number of cases this alignment has been carried out formally without any real change in the existing university practices. Thus is also due to the fact that the system for quality control of universities is not put into practice yet.

In order to respond to the European standards and to the proper labor market demands, the schools for high education must overcome the classical methodology of teaching and reproduction of knowledge and facts. Because knowledge is an incessant development and it must be acquired throughout continuous learning. Knowledge and information are easily accessible nowadays but they are not limitless and can not be mastered. The schools for high education mustn't set such tasks. The task of the universities must be to teach students how they should learn by themselves, how to search for information using the methods of the modern high technologies. It is necessary that they have their own way of thinking, a creative one and to make the right decisions. Universities must develop and enlarge knowledge, competences and thinking applied on the knowledge. Education will have significant influence on the development of regions.

In the recent two decades and especially after the accession of Bulgaria as a full-right member to the European Union (01.01.2007), regional development, regional politics, and local self- government became of a supreme importance. This is easily explicable and

imposed from the complete democratization of social and political life in the country.

After 2007 Bulgaria starts to effectuate the regional politics under the influence of new possibilities but it also imposes new imperatives and limits. Because of this, regional politics have clear above institutional character. By means of regional politics the separate policies in the different territorial units are harmonized between themselves. That's way the solution of separate institutional problems like the restructure of the branches and activities mustn't be seen only as a prerogative of the ministries. These functions must be seen as an element and instrument of the complete regional politics in the country.

For example the restructure of the educational network in the country is not and mustn't be institutional policy only of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. The decisions concerning this policy must be taken above institutionally with active participation of the local governments and the governors as they have a clearest idea concerning the effects these restructures have on the regions.

An important priority and objective of the European regional politics is the development of the rural areas. This objective is of highest importance especially for Bulgaria as the social-economical disproportions "town-village" and "rural regions- urbanized territories" deepen critically. It must be taken into account that 23 % of the 264 municipalities in Bulgaria are considered "rural".

An important priority for the common European regional politics is the stimulation of the local and average businesses through investments in small and average enterprises on local level.

There is a deepening and accelerated process of demographic collapse in the country. According to preliminary census results carried out in February 2011 by the National Institute for Statistics only in the period from 2001 to 2011 the population of Bulgaria has decrease by 600 000 people or 60 000 people per year, which is a city with the demographic rank of Veliko Tarnovo. If this tendency continues during this decade as well in 2020 Bulgaria **will be deprived of the most important of all factors for social-economic development**

/both on national and regional level/- **the human capital.**

There is deepening of the social proportions on the territory of the country. At present approximately 30 % of country's national territory is strongly depopulated. Another 20 % of the country's territory is in a process of strong depopulation as well. If an effective local politics of incentives and economic stimuli isn't carried out in the following 5-10 years, it will be too late after that.

The social-economic disproportions in the country deepen as well. There are several areas of a relative economic growth /relative because it is compared to the economic development of other regions of the country/. These areas of relative growth are Sofia, the contact economic zone on the Black Sea, Plovdiv, and Stara Zagora. At the same time, the other regions suffer an accelerated economic decline. This effect can't be attributed to the negative effects of the world economic and financial crises from 2008-2009 as the interconnection of the Bulgarian economy with the world one is not that strong.

There was social and media publicity for the results of a scientific research carried out by Institute for demographic issues at the Bulgarian Academy of Science according to which in the following 50 years /approximately in 2060/, the Bulgarian village will disappear completely from the map of the country. Nevertheless, these conclusions are disputable from scientific point of view; with the present demographic tendencies these conclusions can come true.

The tendency for deterioration of the educational and professional characteristics of the labor capital in the country deepens sharply. The thesis for a cheap work force in Bulgaria as a factor for increase of the investment attractiveness of the country and of different parts of the territory lacks in content. It makes part of a serious problem that the social- economic development of the country faces as according to data of the National Institute for Statistics in the last 10 years /2000-2010/ every year 25 % of the young people that are subject of education drop off the educational system. The problem of young people subject to primary education who drop off is another that deserves serious consideration. It must be also mentioned the deterioration of the quality characteristics of

the educational system itself. If this tendency is not surmounted in the near future, the economy of the country will be deprived of one of its bigger factors for development- the qualified workforce. The bigger part of the regions in Bulgaria /except for Sofia, Varna, Plovdiv, Burgas/ diminish continuously their demographic potential. This tendency influences mainly the present workforce- which is the main factor that guarantees investments.

The present territorial scope of the regions of Bulgaria is too limited and can not be a sustainable territorial basis for partnership within the frameworks of the pan European regions for interstate regional cooperation. There is often need for the establishment of interregional councils /temporary structures/ on the basis of definite problems concerning the fulfillment of regional planning. Apart from being ineffective regarding the operative decision- taking, these activities lead also to an additional burden for the Republican budget and ineffective public spending. Because of the limited territorial scope of the present regions, there is also a limited application of the

geographical approach in the process of regional planning.

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