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The Importance of Education in Social Reconstruction

**Six Years of the *Enhanced Graz Process*:
Developments, Current Status and Future Prospects
of Education in South-east Europe**

**A Report on the Contribution of the Task Force Education and Youth/Enhanced
Graz Process to the Development of Education in South-east Europe
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Content

Sonja Licht, Introduction 5

1. Enhanced Graz Process: the context of the late nineties 7

2. Activities and developments 15

3. The Enhanced Graz Process: six years after 42

4. Conclusion: the prospects 54

Bibliography 59

Abbreviations 64

Sonja Licht

INTRODUCTION

The Enhanced Graz Process celebrates its sixth anniversary. This is an important occasion since the Graz Process, which has subsequently been incorporated in the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe as the Enhanced Graz Process, has been one of the first signs that the European Union considers South Eastern European countries as future members of the integrated European family. Proclaimed focus on the capacity building, on strengthening social capital of each and every country in this region through strengthening its educational system and especially the potential to cooperate and learn from others, has announced a new stage in the type of assistance that the EU provided to the entire SEE.

The high level international conference on ***European Educational Cooperation for Peace, Stability and Democracy*** (Graz, November 14-16, 1998) organised during the Austrian Presidency of the EU, marked the beginning of several important developments: a more coordinated, better organised support of the EU and its member states to the educational reforms in SEE countries; an enhanced cooperation between the Ministries of Education and other governmental and non-governmental actors within the SEE region, as well as building foundations for peace, stability and democracy in this part of Europe through local empowerment and better mutual understanding. This is an appropriate occasion to stress that the permanent commitment of the Austrian Government, its Ministry of Education and Kultur Kontakt has been the corner stone of this entire effort. The new Graz conference, the leadership which the Austrian Ministry of Education has provided to the Education and Youth Task Force within the Stability Pact for SEE, all prove the same – if a country is truly committed to the programme it has launched, if it remains persistent and combines political will and relevant resources, it can make a difference.

And the Enhanced Graz Process has made a real difference. Education and culture were almost completely neglected in the original documents announcing the establishment of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. In this situation, many wondered whether this project aimed at achieving a long lasting peace and stability in this region actually ignored the need to transform the existing values and empower its citizens to develop a genuine sense of

belonging to Europe. Not to mention the fact that the very essence of development and sustainability in the region would be missing without serious reforms and investment in education, thus leaving most of these countries, to linger on the periphery of the integrated Europe. The inclusion of the Enhanced Graz Process in the Working Table I of the Stability Pact, and the fact that it reminded the European Council, the European Commission and all other relevant decision makers about the crucial importance of education, contributed to the prevention of such a dangerous development.

The excellent overview of the most important actions and accomplishments of the Enhanced Graz Process, prepared by Mr. Pavel Zgaga, provides a significant reminder of the main steps done in the field of education – from the OECD thematic reviews toward comprehensive education reforms to the inclusion of this region in the most important European educational programs, such as the Bologna Process, which represents the leading instrument toward the common European Higher Education Area.

Although it is encouraging to see what has been achieved so far, we remain much aware of issues that require our utmost attention in the future. Many of the SEE countries still struggle with wide-spread poverty, unemployment, slow growth, alarming brain drain. Most of these problems are so difficult and urgent to deal with that the ministries in charge of economy and finances often tend to neglect the need to invest more in education. Unfortunately, the same is true for some major donors and international financial institutions. It is our duty to permanently remind them that without placing the education at the very top of the priority list, the countries of South Eastern Europe will not be able to cope with the challenges of the 21st century.

1. Enhanced Graz Process: the context of the late 1990s

The start of the last decade of the 20th century was very turbulent in Europe. After having been split into two parts for many decades it was suddenly confronted by the earlier unimaginable fall of the Berlin Wall and turbulent events which finally resulted in the rapid oblivion of Checkpoint Charlie. After having been divided up into so many entities, nation-states and adverse alliances for many centuries, Europe was abruptly challenged by the idea of broad integration within previously unimaginable boundaries.

The enlargement process of the European Union mostly posed a challenge to countries on the western side of the former divisions; the so-called 'transition' chiefly remained a challenge to countries on the eastern side. The transition has involved much more than just a complex social process. It has seen the reconstruction of democracy, the economy and civil society-enhancing conditions for sustainable social development. It has also been a painful process that has not avoided political and social conflicts and the search for compromise. However, for some countries sooner or later it resulted in achieving the main goals: democracy and the rule of law; a revived economy and civil society inclined towards inclusion and tolerance. Yet some other countries were not so lucky for their transition path took them through the disasters of war and created waves of refugees which made reconciliation and fresh development extremely difficult.

In the second half of the 1990s, the region of South-east Europe (SEE) seemed to have passed through its most difficult period. On one hand, the war in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina had finished, on the other Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria were already associated with the European Union and had started negotiations for accession in the near, or at least in the tangible, future. Despite persistent problems at various levels, it was a time of growing hope in the region along with the broader European and international communities. The huge economic and social problems, conflicts and even atrocities of past years were not just a regional trauma, they also became European problems and tested the new idea of an integrated European continent based on cultural differences yet belonging to a common civilisation. It was obviously the time to put SEE on the EU's agenda.

1.1 In the 1990s, the EU's agenda was experiencing its own important changes. An important shift occurred with the *Treaty on the European Union (Maastricht Treaty)* of 1992.

While originally the European Community dealt mainly with economic and trade matters, the Maastricht Treaty made it clear that besides co-operation in the economy, politics and security European nations also need to co-operate in the area of education. The well-known Articles 126 and 127 of that Treaty aimed to improve ‘initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market’ while ‘developing the European dimension in education’, ‘encouraging mobility of students and teachers’ and fostering ‘co-operation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the field of education’ etc. but ‘excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States’. The two respective articles (149 and 150) of the subsequent *Amsterdam Treaty* of 1999 only confirmed these emphases.

In spring 1997, the European Commission organised for the first time a conference of education ministers from EU member-states and PHARE¹ countries (the associate-member countries of that time as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia also attended). Held in Warsaw, the conference’s title was ‘*Towards a European common house of Education – from assistance to co-operation*’. It introduced a new political approach to education topics between different countries. Indeed, a sub-title was added to this major theme: ‘*from assistance to co-operation*’. The main issue broadly discussed at the conference examined whether it was possible to draw up an agenda that would allow the construction of ***a common European house of education?*** Roberto Carneiro provided a background study for the conference and answered this very affirmatively: ‘The new cycle of European integration calls very specifically for a strategic conception of education, in which governments, peoples and cultures must act together with conviction to make it a reality. [...] education is both the driving force and the ultimate objective of development’ (Carneiro, pp. 5, 7).

Countries from South-east Europe which had sought assistance and co-operation at this meeting were not all in the same position since the then circumstances meant that not all of them were even present. For some, the meeting already meant the transfer from e.g. the PHARE-supported Tempus programme to Socrates and Leonardo, whereas for others it provided the encouragement and motivation to strengthen their efforts to renew their own

¹ The EU-PHARE programme was originally created in 1989 to assist Poland and Hungary in their transition; it was later expanded to 10 countries: the 8 new EU member-states (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) as well as Bulgaria and Romania. By 2000 some countries of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and the FYR of Macedonia) were also beneficiaries of Phare. As of 2001 the EU-CARDS programme (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stability in the Balkans) has provided financial assistance to these countries.

'homes of education' and to make them more European. In addition, the European solidarity expressed at the meeting made these efforts more realistic.

1.2 In this context, one year later an international conference on ***European Educational Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy*** was organised in Graz (14-16 November 1998), during the Austrian Presidency of the European Union.² It was a high-level meeting that had a huge impact on educational renewal in SEE countries. Two realities emerged at the meeting: at the global level the need for further European integration, not just in the fields of the economy and security and, at the regional level, the need to stop conflicts, start reconciliation and normalise overall social life.

'The whole region is clearly split into many divided selves', noted Mr. Dizdar from the University of Sarajevo, who then asked: 'Can we attempt to re-unite its many divided selves?' His answer was: 'Education can never replace the role of politics in contemporary society, but it can help a great deal to bring that politics closer to the real needs of humankind' (*Austrian Presidency, 1998, pp. 62-63*). Mr. Busek, the co-ordinator of the South-east European Co-operation Initiative, drew attention to the immense challenge of 'living together' in an all-European perspective, learning about our different values, developing tolerance and mutual trust. 'So the mission is to muster the people of Europe to take on one of the greatest challenges of all time: to construct a greater Europe within a continent that is characterised by cultural differences, differing economic approaches and varying natural environments, but which is also united by a feeling of belonging to a common civilisation. For the first time, European integration will not be the result of political or military hegemony imposed by a dominating power. Rather, it will be the outcome of the steady progress of democratic decision-making processes' (*Austrian Presidency, 1998, p. 52*).

The Graz conference on European Educational Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy gathered together a broad circle of government representatives from SEE and other European countries, representatives of international organisations, NGOs, donors and, last but not least, regional and international education experts. Thus, participants at this conference established the most relevant platform to discuss the importance of education as regards the political situation in South-east Europe. Their discussions were not only important for the better understanding of the various dimensions of the key issue but also to find concrete ways and arrangements for the improved co-operation of existing initiatives and aid programmes in the region.

² See Austrian Presidency of the European Union. *European Educational Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy*. Documentation of the Presidency Conference on Southeast Europe. Graz, Austria, 14-16 November, 1998.

The results of the conference were obvious. Participants highly appreciated the joint meeting and agreed on the *final recommendations* (Austrian Presidency, 1998, pp. 15-18). First of all, they stressed the key significance of education for the region's peaceful and prosperous development and recommended support for educational policies and concrete practices contributing to the aims of stronger democracy, peace and stability in the region. They tried to identify specific needs, including for particular educational sectors such as e.g. vocational education and training, higher education, education for democratic citizenship, history teaching and education policies.

In the collaborative spirit of the conference, an *Action Plan* (Austrian Presidency, 1998, pp. 19-24) was also prepared encompassing specific follow-up activities at three levels: the short, medium and long term. Numerous proposals on specific projects and measures were put forward by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the European Training Foundation (ETF) and UNESCO as well as by individual participants to support actions leading in the direction of the identified basic needs. Among non-governmental initiatives, there was the invaluable contribution of the Open Society Foundation. It was obvious that such a mixed circle of initiatives would require a good central point for co-ordination and management.

As the most important proposal within short-term activities, an international Task Force (TF) was very quickly launched under the well-known label of the *Graz Process*. The TF started to improve the co-ordination of the various educational co-operation initiatives and to support regional empowerment. In a relatively short time it created a network of regional and international key players who could provide the necessary assistance much more effectively. Later, a home page³ was also created which later became one of most highly visited Internet sources on educational co-operation in SEE.

1.3 However, the subsequent flow of events in the region showed that the period of conflict was not entirely over. The escalation of the Kosovo crisis seen in the first half of 1999 led to fresh fears and pain for people in the region as well as new and serious concerns for the international community. As a reaction to this, an idea which arose in late 1998 found the political context to have been effectively realised. On 10 June 1999, on the EU's initiative and

³ The *South East European Education Co-operation Network* (SEE ECN; <http://www.see-educoop.net>) was launched in 1999 by KuturKontakt Austria; since 2000 it has been carried on jointly by KuturKontakt Austria and CEPS – Centre for Educational Policy Studies from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Also see p. 19 and p. 32 herein.

under Germany's EU Presidency, the **Stability Pact for South-east Europe** was adopted in Cologne.

The Pact was reaffirmed at a summit meeting in Sarajevo held on 30 July 1999. This was a serious attempt by the international community to replace the previous, reactive crisis-intervention policy in SEE with a comprehensive, long-term conflict prevention strategy. In the founding document, the more than 40 partner-countries and organisations agreed to strengthen the countries of SEE in their efforts to achieve democracy and stability in the whole region. For that reason, the founding document undertook to draw SEE closer to the idea of full integration with EU structures, including eventual full membership after meeting the so-called Copenhagen criteria of the European Council of 1993.

Organisationally speaking, the Stability Pact relies on the Special Co-ordinator, first Mr. Bodo Hombach and then Mr. Erhard Busek and the team. The Special Co-ordinator co-ordinates existing and new initiatives in the region and chairs the most important political instrument of the Stability Pact, the Regional Table, which is subdivided into three Working Tables (WT): WT I on Democratisation and Human Rights; WT II on Economic Reconstruction, Co-operation and Development; and WT III on Security Issues. Education and Youth are included, among other priority areas,⁴ in WT I. Thus, education and training were not only recognised as the key to sustainable development, peace and stability within and among countries, but also as an indispensable way to help SEE on its path to full European integration.

1.4 While organising the task forces within different areas of the Stability Pact (as 'coalitions of the willing') at the first meeting of the WT I in Geneva (18-19 October 1999), the existing instrument of the *Graz Process* was put in charge of co-ordination of the Task Force Education and Youth (TFEY).⁵ Since new countries and organisations had joined the Graz Process after 1998, it evolved into the **Enhanced Graz Process (EGP)**. The *Task Force on Education and Youth – Enhanced Graz process* was primarily established to support the

⁴ Other task forces are: Media, Local Democracy and Cross-Border Co-operation, Parliamentary Co-operation and Gender Issues. See <http://www.stabilitypact.org/wt1/> (01.12.2004).

⁵ 'Recognising that accelerated economic, political and social transitions in South Eastern Europe have placed great and varied strains on education systems, the Table agreed to formulate a co-ordinated, concrete programme of educational reforms within an enhanced 'Graz Process'. Contributors will confer with a wide range of social partners from the region as well as the World Bank, Council of Europe, United Nations and OECD and give special consideration to the teaching of history throughout the region. Proposals are expected by the 15th of November. The Table requested the 'enhanced Graz process' to consider youth issues, with a view to making a proposal on how the process could include these issues in its proceedings.' Working Table 1. Geneva, 18-19 October 1999. Conclusions by the Chairman Max van der Stoel. See <http://www.stabilitypact.org/wt1/991019-geneva.html> (also in *International Conference on SEE*, 1999, pp. 170-173).

SEE to approach and link up with education trends in other European countries and to promote this goal through regional co-operation and networking as instruments for wider participation in European initiatives. It is a network of regional and international key actors in education and youth; its membership includes all SEE countries, chiefly represented by ministries of education, international institutions and donor countries.⁶ The whole network currently draws over 800 key actors together; it builds on the existing institutional frameworks and expertise as well as on regional ownership and an inclusive approach.

Two weeks later, a constitutive meeting of the **Task Force Education and Youth-EGP** took place in Brussels (2 November 1999).⁷ The TFEY with some 40 members, including European and international institutions and organisations, overviewed the running of activities based on the Action Plan of the 1998 Graz Conference and discussed preparatory activities for new work plans. Also on its first agenda was the forthcoming Sofia Conference, namely the first major event at which more detailed objectives, principles and action plans were to be developed along with new recommendations and an action plan as the basis for the overall strategy in the education sector within the framework of the Stability Pact.

The *Sofia Conference* (12-14 November 1999)⁸ again gathered a large number of partners (over 150) who already knew the scope of the problem as well as each other much better. The Conference relied on the good results of previous activities in the framework of the Graz Process after November 1998: from July to October 1999 several seminars were organised in the broader region which gave rise to a set of excellent ideas on education and its role for the development of civil society, history and history teaching, education for democratic citizenship, education for the management of diversity and vocational education and its role in the development of civil society. The six workshops at the Sofia Conference relied on the findings of these seminars and extended them during the discussions. As a result, the

⁶ *Countries* represented in the Task Force (in alphabetical order): Austria (lead country), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Finland, France, FYR of Macedonia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania (co-chair), Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, USA; *institutions* (in alphabetical order): Council of Europe, ESIB, EUA, European Commission, ETF, OECD, OSEP SEE, Stability Pact, UNDP, UNESCO, UNESCO CEPES, UNICEF, UNMIK, U.S. Aid, World Bank.

⁷ The TFEY was assisted from the beginning by the *Technical Committee*, mostly in preparing decisions and co-ordinating the overall work. On the other hand, the *Board for Excellence* took care of the balance between policy and expertise and acted as an arbitrator in the evaluation of projects. Further progress had later dictated changes and an upgrade of this organisational structure; see pp. 44-45.

⁸ For conference proceedings, see: International Conference on SEE. *Educational Co-operation for Peace, Stability and Democracy*. Expert Conference in the Framework of the Enhanced Graz Process. Stability Pact for SEE-WT 1. Sofia, Bulgaria, 12-14 November 1999 [in the text referred to as the *International Conference on SEE*, 1999].

conference adopted a set of *recommendations* and a new *Action Plan* (*International Conference on SEE*, 1999, pp. 15-28). Thus, firm foundations for specific activities were established and work in the many proposed and anticipated projects could start.

In his closing speech and on behalf of the ministers of education from SEE countries, Vesselin Metodiev the Bulgarian Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, expressed his hope that ‘we’ll be able to single out a packet of necessary measures to encourage the initiative ‘from below’ and look for possibilities of mobilising all financial resources on national level for its practical realisation’ (*International Conference on SEE*, 1999, p. 110).

After the Sofia Conference the main activities focused on the setting up of a working structure encompassing all actors from both the region and the international arena. The six thematic blocks identified and confirmed at the conference resulted in a division into **six TFEY–EGP Working Groups**. Each group was chaired by a leading international institution from the field; in each of them half the members were from SEE countries. Working groups supported the work of the TF EY–EGP in co-ordinating and promoting co-operation between initiatives from the region and international institutions and experts, developing and implementing an action plan, evaluating projects and helping in the overall development of projects. These six groups were as follows:

- WG 1: *Policy Development and System Improvement*; co-ordinating institution Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);
- WG 2: *History and History Teaching*; co-ordinating institution Council of Europe;
- WG 3: *Higher Education*; co-ordinating institution European University Association (EUA);
- WG 4: *Vocational Education and Training*; co-ordinating institution European Training Foundation (ETF);
- WG 5: *Education for Democratic Citizenship and Management of Diversity*; co-ordinating institution Council of Europe; and
- WG 6: *Young People*; co-ordinating institution Council of Europe.

Five years later we can easily ascertain that a huge amount of work has been done within a model partnership. This not only recognises years of co-operation and hard work but links them with the changed circumstances and the new, yet still complex, political situation in the South-east Europe of today. Yet, it is also a good time to ask ourselves about where are we five years later and where we are a decade and a half after the key changes in Europe?

1.5 Education systems in the region have undertaken important developments and the international partners in the EGP, each of them in their own specific area and all of them in terms of improved co-operation, have achieved considerable shifts in their effectiveness. However, within the framework of this survey it is simply impossible to make a complete overview of the many individual initiatives and concrete projects and a comprehensive assessment of their results. In the following two chapters, our focus will be more general and concentrate mainly on recent developments and the current status of education in SEE countries.

2. Activities and developments

This chapter aims principally to present the activities and developments undertaken as part of the Enhanced Graz Process 1999-2004. Several aspects overlap in this presentation. First of all, important education reforms have been implemented in the national systems of SEE countries, modernising education and training structures and governance as well as providing new concrete school practices and an overall new level of regard for education. Secondly, these changes have been appearing in the context of regional and European educational co-operation and networking which has thus introduced common concerns regarding education and training as well as the need for some common strategies and solutions. This co-operation and networking has crucially depended on contributions by the international community: capacity-building, analytical reviews and the numerous specific programmes would simply be impossible without financial, political and technical help from the outside. Changes in education have also been closely connected to political developments in relation to the European Union and in particular to its tools of assistance (e.g. SAP, CARDS, TEMPUS etc.). Last but not least, these developments in SEE have been connected to the broader framework of European and global developments in education and training which characterise the contemporary world of education. Indeed, the Enhanced Graz Process has more modest dimensions than 'Education for All' (UNESCO), the Bologna and/or Copenhagen Process, the dynamism of 'Education and Training 2010' although it shares the same spirit and forms an integral part of them.

It is important to note at the outset of this chapter that the assessment of the true weight of the EGP – looking from the five-year perspective – could be endangered by two opposing (wrong) interpretations. Namely, every 'insider' knows very well that the Process is far from being the only lever or vehicle for reforming practices in the SEE region. These practices have, first of all, been a result of national endeavours as well as national political, social, economic etc. frictions; they have also been the result of complex – sometimes successful, sometimes failed – communication between the realities of the national levels and the international (educational) community, sometimes muddled at the beginning.

After six years, the positive influence of co-operation on the overall dynamics in education systems in SEE countries is obvious. However, any exaggerating of the role of the Process

as being the only context for reforms in SEE countries could on one hand produce the opposite interpretation on the other hand, namely: 'has the Process itself any weight at all?'

This should be clarified: the EGP was established in the context defined by huge national needs, a great lack of resources (material and human) and a variety of forms of international help. We hope the following presentation succeeds in revealing at least the main features of its *indispensable and productive role during the last five years*: being a co-ordinator, a catalyst and a lobbying instrument of or within international fora, a growing network of governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as individual experts who have aimed at realising joint activities, particularly in the initial phases of reconstructing SEE education systems.

2.1 The approach: understanding regional diversity

The Graz Conference of 1998 and the Sofia Conference of 1999 provided a sound basis for a general action plan in the SEE region; they also provided a co-ordination framework and information structures in the EGP. The action plan was basically focused on a regional approach, regional ownership, building on existing expertise and networks thus providing added value with regard to the existing programmes. Concrete operative work always demands a detailed methodology but introducing the details usually brings about new problems and additional questions. *What is a regional approach? How do we support real regional ownership?*

The success of the international co-operation programme for SEE depended greatly on ***understanding the regional diversities***: in terms of languages, ethnicity and religion but also the entire cultural and geo-political history. As noted in another place,⁹ the perception of the region during the second half of the 20th century as a homogenous unit in a political or ideological sense was only an illusion. Former Yugoslavia, as 'neither an Eastern – nor a Western' country, was highly decentralised and diverse in itself. At least since the mid-1960s it was more connected to the West (with one million workers living abroad) than with the East. Albania to the south-west side of the peninsula was an isolated country up until the late 1980s, while Bulgaria and Romania belonged to the 'Eastern bloc' and Moldova was an integral part of the Soviet Union. To the south of the Balkans, Greece was politically speaking the next frontier to the West.

⁹ See OECD, *Thematic Review of National Policies for Education. Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. Table 1: Task Force on Education. Regional Overview*. Paris: OECD, 2002.

At the end of the 1990s, it was not only that SEE countries needed contact with good practices from other European countries and globally and to (re)enter co-operation programmes in order to compete with the extreme challenges of the time, but European countries and the international community in general also had to learn a lot about the region and from the region in order to properly manage their co-operation and assistance. They had to learn not only about regional diversities in general but also about specific educational contexts. After World War II, all SEE countries changed their education systems whereby the most common aims were the elimination of illiteracy and extension of basic education from 4 years to 8 years. They were relatively successful in doing so; access to education was greatly expanded during the next few decades. However, it is a fact that these systems were highly ideological and at least three distinctive types could be observed: the Albanian; the Soviet; and the Yugoslav. Education systems developed parallel to oscillations in political and economic power. There was the rapid development of 4-year secondary technical schools, while vocational education and training was linked to the socialist industrial complex organised in different ways from one 'distinctive type' to another. At the end of the 1980s education systems in most of these countries were relatively well-developed; problems arising during the turbulent transitional period should therefore be seen as a 'retrogression' from previous times and not as the 'natural' state of education and culture. When considering the severe problems from the perspective of the late 1990s it is very important to take this reality into account.

From this viewpoint, the Klagenfurt meeting for preparation of the *Sofia Conference* already stated that 'the concept of 'South-east Europe' is a construction referring to very diverse realities' and that the management of diversity is crucial to the success of international support to SEE countries (*International Conference on SEE*, 1999, p. 147).¹⁰ Important statements were also made at the Sofia Conference by regional representatives. Ms. Madlen Serban, after stating firmly that 'this region belongs to a continent', drew attention to a vulnerable yet very important dimension: 'On one hand, people living in this region might take the attention they are subject to as pointing to some heading plan. So much focusing on the region might give feeling of artificial treatment like some poor and problematic relative, but

¹⁰ 'If one looks at the education systems of South Eastern European countries, one has to differentiate between post-war countries and their particular problems such as traumatization and segregating societies on the one hand, and countries which have not gone through that misery on the other hand. Therefore concepts developed for one particular situation cannot mechanically be transferred to another one within the region. Especially with view to the management of diversity this is of crucial importance.' Education and the Management of Diversity. Klagenfurt meeting for the preparation of the Sofia Conference, 17-19 September 1999 (*International Conference on SEE*, 1999, pp. 147-151).

never as a member of the family. It looks like the “Berlin wall” was moved somewhere in the South-East’ (*International Conference on SEE*, 1999, pp. 57-58).

In a similar way, Ms. Sonja Licht noted that the international co-operation expected in the EGP framework would involve ‘an important step in strengthening the status of education’ and admonished those ‘people who believe that the Balkans have to become part and parcel of a united Europe and who have been strong opposition to authoritarian, nationalist, autistic policies often advocated by the majority of their national elites’ (*International Conference on SEE*, 1999, pp. 89-90).

2.2 The beginning: Quick Start Projects and the Strategy 2001

Today, when re-reading the rich documentation from the very start of the EGP programmes for SEE one can see that the **status of education**, the **pivotal role of education** in the reconciliation processes is stressed very often. In the context of regional diversities these accents function as a real ‘*file rouge*’.¹¹ In the given context of fundamental changes and social transition it was obvious that sustainable development and social cohesion depend critically on the educational achievements of the entire population, and on their competencies understood broadly as covering knowledge and skills, attitudes and values. The social and political regard for education and its (new) positioning in the network of re-establishing social subsystems is decisive for overall national development and cross-border relations. The emphasis given to the role of education is organically linked to the idea of *strengthened regional co-operation* as an instrument to make full use of potential, networks, partnerships and projects within the EGP framework and to strengthen the process of gradual European integration. The philosophy had been established; it was time to start working.

The early phase of implementing the TFEY–EGP Action Plan through specific activities involved the so-called **Quick Start Projects (QSPs)**,¹² importantly and decisively supported

¹¹ E.g.: ‘Increased investment in the development of formal and non-formal education is a prerequisite for facilitating the political, economic and social integration of the countries of the region into the European mainstream. It also contributes substantially to the reconciliation process. While countries and education systems in the region vary greatly, they share the common challenge of having to respond quickly and flexibly to fundamental democratic, economic and social transition processes in difficult financial and political situations’ (*TFEY Strategic Framework*, 2001, p. 4).

¹² QSPs were basically prepared as a ‘promotion of a flow of information among the various actors and identification of possible synergies to enhance the overall impact of these projects platforms for regional strategy development’ (*TFEY Progress Report...*, April 2002, p. 5).

by the regional funding conferences of the Stability Pact.¹³ In its first round, 44 projects in the field of education and youth – all areas of the six Working Groups being included – received sufficient funding to ensure that the large circle of regional and international institutions and experts started contributing to the promotion of regional co-operation and the formation of regional networks.¹⁴

On this basis and in consultation with members of the Working Group on Policy Development and System Improvement, the Technical Committee and the TFEY, the '**Strategy 2001**' was developed and endorsed in January 2001. The strategy aimed at mid- and long-term system development supported by comprehensive advocacy for education and youth issues; it also provided a dual focus on national and regional reform activities to ensure the identification of those areas where the compatibility between national and regional aspects could provide clear added value. With the additional pledges from the international community and individual donors, co-operation started to increase very quickly. In the limited framework of this survey it is only possible to reflect on the main streams of activities; concrete projects are mentioned here only as examples of good practice.

Two important steps were taken in this context. On one hand, the **South-east European Educational Co-operation Network (SEE ECN)**¹⁵ finally went online (after a preparatory phase the site was opened to visitors on 15 February 2001) providing a broad information and communication base (databases on projects, experts, various events in the educational area) as well as a gradually growing virtual library featuring key educational documents (e.g. policy papers, legislation, reviews and reports, curricula, various expertise). The network with its 'hub' in Ljubljana and ten country 'nodes' in SEE invited all kind of regional and international institutions to join in as SEE ECN members and view the network as a platform for strengthening their bilateral or multilateral co-operation. In the four years of operating the network has aimed at developing networking structures based on the use of ICT, providing comprehensive information on overall activities in the EGP as well as organising specialised

¹³ In this regard, the following two meetings were particularly important: 'Education and the Stability Pact: Priorities, Funding and Partnerships in South Eastern Europe'; Extended TF Meeting of the EGP, Graz, 9-10 March 2000; and Sectoral Donors' Meeting: Education and Youth, Brussels, 27 September, 2001. The overall Quick Start Projects had a budget of about EUR 16.4 million; the average duration of projects lasted until early 2002.

¹⁴ The QSPs aimed mostly at establishing sustainable cross-border networks, either for collecting, disseminating and exchanging information or for capacity-building and establishing cross-border co-operation between key actors in the respective field. (For details, see TF EY, *Progress Report, Quick Start Projects*, 2002). The experience gained in the 44 projects of the first phase provided the basis for the next phase. In the area of Policy Development and System Improvement, the OECD Country Reviews (see 2.3.1) were successfully followed-up in the ETF Peer Reviews in VET (see 2.3.2). In the area of higher education, endeavours were mostly directed towards the Bologna Process (see 2.3.3). New priority projects were also identified in the areas of EDC (11 projects; see 2.4.2), Young People (9 projects; see 2.4.3), History (7 projects; see 2.4.1) with an overall financial level of EUR 8.5 million. (See TFEY, *Priority Projects...*, 2002.)

¹⁵ The SEE ECN was one of the quick start projects. Also see p. 10, note 3, and p. 48.

project work and seminars thereby invigorating regional potential, institution- and capacity-building and the sustainability of co-operation.

On the other hand, various **stocktaking analyses** were also launched as part of the QSPs, e.g. education for democratic citizenship (EDC) and the management of diversity (MoD) stocktaking research (carried out by the Council of Europe), a comparative study on the initial teacher training of history teachers in the region (carried out by the Council of Europe and the University of Vienna), a report on the access of Roma and Traveller children to education (Save the Children Fund UK), later followed by broad stocktaking in the area of vocational education and training (carried out by the European Training Foundation - ETF). Of these, the set of *Thematic Country Reviews* – the key element of the *Strategy 2001* – was particularly important. Country reviews were carried out in the 2000-2002 period, covering education systems in all SEE countries and focusing on early childhood, the school curriculum, teacher training, governance and management of education etc. This demanding and comprehensive project was organised by the OECD in order to analyse the status quo of education and to provide specific help in the process of drafting education reforms in the region.¹⁶

2.3 From Thematic Reviews towards comprehensive education reforms

There were many individual initiatives, often at the very specific levels of schools and local areas or in the form of concrete educational contents, from international players in the region in the second half of the 1990s. Their soothing and remedial role cannot be denied; they came at the right time. However, after the end of the first phase it became obvious to national and international representatives that this type of co-operation needed ‘to bring together all those active in this field to exchange experiences and ideas on their work and to concentrate activities’ as Anton Dobart had stressed at the Graz 1998 Conference (*Austrian Presidency, 1998, p. 259*). Educational co-operation, as he stressed: ‘*in and with South Eastern Europe*’ needs co-ordination to be effective and sustainable.

An important issue was identified: international assistance and co-operation should lead towards comprehensive educational reforms that are efficient in the long run. For that

¹⁶ It is important to note that the OECD has for several years been the best source of this type of analyses. The OECD has experience not only in reviewing education systems in OECD member-countries; in the 1990s reviews in Central and Eastern European countries were also carried out. The SEE Thematic Reviews were a special challenge in terms of their extent (ten countries at the same time) and their complexity.

reason, detailed analyses of existing ***national policies for education*** as well as capacity-building in this area and the preparation of comprehensive measures to implement new solutions in education systems were recognised as being *vital for overall sustainable development* in the region. From this point, the proposed reviews of education policies could play an important role in order to start an inclusive consultation process among key actors in education on respective reform priorities and for identifying ways of funding their implementation. The consultation process should aim at linking education policies to national, regional and European economic and social issues and supporting national authorities on the domestic level in their reform efforts. At various working meetings of that time reviews of national policies were confirmed as being the basis of the ‘Strategy 2001’.

2.3.1 OECD Thematic Reviews of Education Policies

The idea of a strategic approach to educational reforms in the SEE region was put on the table from the beginning of the EGP and was, in particular, a central task of the TFEY WG on Policy Development and System Improvement. At a seminar on ‘Strategies of Educational Reform in South-east European Countries’ (Bled, 8-10 June 2000),¹⁷ involving a representative circle of regional and international experts and decision-makers, Mr. Ian Whitman presented the proposed outline for the OECD Thematic Reviews of Education Policies in SEE countries¹⁸ which was later discussed in the workshops. Soon everything was ready to enable the start of the most comprehensive Quick Start Project.

Reviews of 10 education systems in the region were carried out in teams of 5-7 experts; they visited policy-makers, institutions concerned with education and training (teacher training in particular), schools and their staff, NGOs working in the area of education, local businesses, other stakeholders and parents. Field work focused on legal and policy contexts, financing, school organisation, curriculum, teacher training, statistics and indicators etc. A particular emphasis was given to quality assurance in education: attention was paid to developing regular, reliable, policy relevant indicators of pupil/student achievements and to assess the knowledge, skills and competencies embedded in the content domains. No less attention was paid to the available educational provision for students with disabilities and for children at risk of failing or dropping out of school (social exclusion).

¹⁷ The Seminar was jointly organised by the Council of Europe, the Open Society Institute and the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia in the EGP framework and as a follow-up activity to the Sophia Conference.

¹⁸ See Windham, D.M., ‘The OECD Thematic Review of Education Policy in South Eastern Europe’; in: Gabrscek S., Dimc N., *Strategies...*, Ljubljana 2000, pp. 33-52.

One by one, the country reviews appeared in the public, first on the Internet and later in printed versions.¹⁹ A regional overview with conclusions and recommendations was also produced.²⁰ Based on thematic reviews from ten countries it offered a regional perspective of educational developments and analysed common problems and reform needs in all countries. Although no general regional solutions for national education reform challenges could be given, regional consultation processes in the targeted areas substantially supported the development and implementation of reform strategies at national levels.

Based on these reviews a series of conferences was planned in the region for 2002; initially in those countries where the review processes had finished earlier. These conferences included an element of the national dissemination of the state of affairs in education in respective host countries; they aimed at presenting analytical reports and policy recommendations to governments and donors as well as to the wider public, but also at deepening consultation processes regarding national and regional education reform strategies and promoting co-operation networks. The TFEY, as a co-organiser, emphasised the need to involve key policy-makers from the SEE region in all conferences as well as to attract both the donor community and the media.

The main organisers of these events were the national ministries of education, in co-operation with the TFEY, the OECD, the ETF and other organisations. The first seminar for national dissemination took place in Serbia (Belgrade, 16-17 January 2002), followed by another one in Montenegro (Podgorica, 18 January 2002), Croatia (Zagreb, 24-25 May 2002) and Kosovo (Pristina, 10-11 June 2002). The launching conference in Croatia also provided an opportunity to present the EDC stocktaking research. Similar activities were planned in other countries but, due to their complex political situations, they have not been realised as soon as was wished. With quite a delay, the dissemination seminar in Moldova was implemented only half a year ago (Chisinau, 14-15 June 2004).²¹ A little different was the situation in Romania and Bulgaria: in both countries the OECD carried out – almost parallel

¹⁹ OECD Thematic reviews were finalised as follows: Albania, 2002; Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2001; Bulgaria, 2002; Croatia, 2001; Kosovo, 2001; FYR Macedonia, 2001; Montenegro, 2001; Moldova, 2002; Romania, 2001; Serbia, 2001. Printed versions (English, French and native languages) were published in separate parts by the OECD as individual country reports were finished; Internet editions at the <http://www.see-educoop.net> were made available in even more languages to enable experts from the region to study not only their national but also their neighbours' reviews. In December 2003 a new, two-volume edition was published. For details, see Bibliography.

²⁰ OECD *Thematic review of national policies for education. Regional overview*. 2002.

²¹ International Conference on Education 'Developments in the Education Sector in Moldova – future steps'. Organised by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Moldova in co-operation with the TFEY, OECD, ETF and United Nations Moldova. Chisinau, 14-15 June 2004. For the agenda of the conference, see http://www.see-educoop.net/graz_2003/index.htm → 14-15/6/2004.

to the SEE Thematic Reviews – ‘the usual’ OECD review of national policies for education, like e.g. in the case of Central and Eastern European countries in the 1990s.

The dissemination conferences in Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and Kosovo were very well attended (altogether involving about 2000 participants) and proved the growing interest of the key stakeholders in education. Media coverage was well prepared and echoes in the broad public were also important, in particular as awareness-raising events. Conferences provided platforms for a wide range of stakeholders to discuss educational development priorities and confirmed the weight of input the recommendations provide for the formulation of respective national policy documents. The active presence of regional and international participants also gave an opportunity to explore possible areas for future cross-border co-operation in education reforms.

In order to further promote these national and regional consultation processes, TFEY initiated and supported also other regional events on targeted areas. The first one was the conference entitled ‘Education Reform in the Republic of Serbia: The First Steps and the Forthcoming Challenges’ (Belgrade, 5-7 September 2002), organised by the Serbian Ministry of Education and Sports which just started to implement important changes in the national education system. It was a resounding event: around 1000 participants, domestic and foreign guests attended the Conference. The main aim was to inform a broad circle of representatives of the national education system as well as the donor community on the progress achieved within the past months and to check the soundness and relevance of the first reform steps. The conference was an important step towards ensuring the transparency of the education reform and providing for the information-based involvement of all stakeholders in education.

2.3.2 Modernising vocational education and training (VET)

The Thematic Reviews 2000-2002 were aimed at national education systems in the broadest sense but important issues were also to be addressed at particular levels, especially in the area of vocational education and training (VET). In June 2000, the TFEY WG on VET (WG 4; co-ordinated by the ETF) was established to promote skills and employability as the key concern for the SEE region in its efforts to meet new market demands and evolving competitive pressures at local and regional levels. Within the Stability Pact structures, the working group contributed to both Table I (vocational education policy reform, and wider education/youth concerns) and Table II (privatisation and infrastructure development) dialogues, reform recommendations and monitoring of the first-round Quick Start Projects. The main priorities at this stage were strengthening regional co-operation in policy

development involving key stakeholders, capacity-building for future participation in the EU employment strategy, improvement of youth employability through modernised youth training and the development of ICT skills.

At the Second Informal Conference of Ministers from SEE²² special attention was paid to the 'brain drain' problem. Discussions here confirmed that countries should start gearing their education systems more closely to their employment needs although their economic difficulties were clearly the main source of the problem. There were also some international initiatives already in place: at the beginning of the decade reform dialogue and measures supported by the EU Phare programme were already established in some countries (Albania, Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia, Romania) while initial steps at reforming vocational education were being taken in Croatia supported by the CARDS programme with the prospect of expanding this support to other countries as well. Based on results and developments of the QSPs, in particular on the results of the OECD Thematic Reviews, and taking into account discussions in international fora, the European Training Foundation took the initiative of carrying out peer reviews focused on reform policies in VET which were already under preparation at this time.²³ From the start it was considered that the results of peer reviews could contribute significantly to the European Commission assistance under the CARDS programme for each country within a common regional framework.

The VET Reform Policy Peer Reviews began in 2002 with fieldwork in Albania, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia (the Western Balkans).²⁴ The project aimed at providing an external assessment and policy recommendations in VET but also at increasing the national capacities for vocational education and training reform policy analysis and at improving mutual understanding of the VET system and developments in the region and promoting the regional networking of experts and policy-makers. The composition of the Peer Review teams differed slightly from the OECD teams in the Thematic Reviews project: they consisted of experts from the ETF (the co-ordinating institution), EU member-states, EU candidate-countries and the SEE region, thus providing well-balanced European and regional expertise.

²² The future of education reforms and the obstacles facing them - from the brain drain to brain gain; Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 19-20 November 2001. As a follow-up to the Ministerial Conference, the UNESCO CEPES study on brain drain should be mentioned: Brain Drain and the Academic and Intellectual Market in South East Europe (international meetings 25 February 2002, 18-19 June 2004); see <http://www.cepes.ro/hed/policy/braindrain/default.htm> (01.12.2004).

²³ The Peer Review exercise was discussed during the meeting of the ETF Advisory Forum in September 2001 and then launched during a workshop in Ljubljana in March 2002.

²⁴ Bosnia and Herzegovina joined the project in 2003 along with Bulgaria, the FYR Macedonia, Romania and Turkey.

According to a common methodology, the peer review teams first agreed on a specific review topic (also evident in the report headings; see note 25), they then studied background materials prepared by both the host country and the ETF while, finally, they visited the country involved. On this basis a public review report was formulated and circulated. As a follow-up to the national reviews the ETF organised specific staff development activities as well as regional dissemination events, similarly as in the case of the OECD Thematic Reviews. These reviews put a clear focus on assessing where the country stood in terms of meeting its requirements from the Stabilisation and Association Agreement. On the basis of the country missions five reports by international review teams were prepared in 2002-2003 and discussed with the education community in the respective countries in 2003-2004.²⁵

The ETF VET Reform Policy Peer Reviews have been shown to have multiple positive effects. First of all, they supported the development of VET policy analysis capacities in the respective countries; in comparison to general education this has been a weaker area almost everywhere in the region. Further on, the reviews supported regional co-operation in an area where education, training, employment and the economy overlap. They promoted the importance of policy learning processes among national stakeholders. They also set a clear focus on EU integration. Together with OECD Thematic Reviews they are probably the most effective support from the international community for establishing modern national strategies in education and training and to foster the entering of the common European area of education and training. The ETF Peer Reviews are also a cornerstone for future co-operation within the so-called Copenhagen Process: a similar process in European VET systems as with the Bologna Process in European higher education systems.

2.3.3 Higher Education on the path to the European Higher Education Area

The 1990s brought new challenges to all European higher education systems: student enrolments were increasing everywhere, European integration processes started encouraging and facilitating the mobility of students, graduates and professors, the need for

²⁵ VET Reform Policy Review Albania. Report by the International Peer Review Team. Torino: ETF, February 2003.

Decentralisation of the Vocational Education and Training System in the Republic of Serbia. Report by the International Peer Review Team. Torino: ETF, March 2003.

Employability in Kosovo – Assessment and Options for Development. Report by the International Peer Review Team. Torino: ETF, April 2003.

The State of Implementation of Reforms in Vocational Education and Training in Montenegro. Report by the International Peer Review Team. Torino: ETF, May 2003.

Continuing Vocational Training in the Context of Lifelong Learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Torino: ETF, October 2003. Dissemination events of peer review in Bosnia-Herzegovina: 'Continuing Vocational Training in a Lifelong Learning Context' took place in Sarajevo, Mostar, Banja Luka and

increased co-operation among countries and institutions was felt while global competition in higher education services also emerged. This was the context which initiated the broadest higher education transformation since the birth of the European University centuries ago: the *Bologna Process*. The Process got its first impulse from the *Sorbonne Declaration* (Paris, May 1998) and found its cornerstone in the *Bologna Declaration* (Bologna, June 1999) signed by ministers from 29 European countries. It should not be overlooked that the first steps in the *Bologna process* ran wholly parallel to the first steps of the *Enhanced Graz Process*.

Despite the different circumstances found in SEE countries, main concerns of the TFEY WG on Higher Education as well as policy-makers in SEE countries were at least indirectly linked to the same general agenda for higher education. The main difference was that large parts of the region needed serious reconstruction of the whole tertiary education system before entering the Bologna Process, leading towards a common European Higher Education Area by 2010 (EHEA) as its final objective. In a series of working meetings held in the framework of the EGP, the following more or less common priorities in the region were identified:²⁶ a need for new legislation; consideration of reforming university structures (with faculties as constituent parts of one legal institution – the ‘re-integrated’ university); the urgent development of quality assurance mechanisms; the introduction of ECTS; and ethical standards and transparency in higher education. Using the ‘Bologna language’, these priorities are all part of the *public responsibility for higher education*. The public responsibility for higher education is an important guiding principle in general but even more so in those countries needing the fast and efficient reconstruction of the whole tertiary education system.

Higher education is a particularly important part of the education system of a country in transition. It plays a vital part in the development of civil society, in the resuscitation of economic, social, cultural and political life and in the promotion of equal opportunities. It can also play a significant role in supporting the development of a climate of co-operation and mutual understanding at national and regional levels. However, at a time when European higher education systems had decided to lower the fences between them or to eliminate them, certain parts of the Balkans were encountering new borders not known before. Even though this is a fact today, it should not deter students and professors from mobility and co-operation as seen elsewhere in Europe. An important number of cross-border activities and the networking of projects and exchange programmes has been established or still growing. Therefore, the ‘Bologna idea’ had a clear SEE regional dimension from the beginning.

Brcko, 14-18 February 2004.

²⁶ See *Final Report*. Higher Education WG extended meeting, 21 March 2002.

The introductory part of the *Bologna Declaration* (1999) stresses that the Europe of Knowledge is now a widely recognised and irreplaceable factor in social and human growth: it fosters European citizenship, empowers citizens with the necessary competencies for working together and with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space. In the next paragraph the Declaration says: 'The importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies is universally acknowledged as paramount, the more so in view of the situation in South East Europe' (*Bologna Declaration*, 1999, p. 1).

Despite circumstances differing in most SEE countries at the end of the 1990s, contact with the new European higher education policy was not interrupted; on the contrary, the Declaration made a distinct and affirmative reference to them. Some countries from the broader region had already attended the initial ministerial Bologna Conference in June 1999 (Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia) and joined the Process from the beginning, while Croatia joined at the Prague Conference in May 2001. The Berlin Conference in September 2003 accepted requests for membership from seven new countries, including four from the SEE: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the FYR of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro. With these new members the Bologna Process expanded to 40 European countries and all SEE countries finally became associated with the Process, except for Moldova which applied for membership at the 2005 Bergen Conference.²⁷

The road to the 'Bologna club' was not easy. From the outset, however, it was not just a governmental concern: in the circumstances of their necessary reform and adapting to the new conditions institutions themselves very quickly understood that they needed direct contacts and co-operation with other European institutions. It was also clear that a new regional initiative was necessary. An interesting regional event took place in August 2002, supported by the Croatian Ministry of Science and Technology: university rectors from all SEE countries met at the Inter-University Centre (IUC) in Dubrovnik for the first time after a decade of conflict in the region to discuss international processes in higher education from a regional point of view. In their final Statement they appealed 'to the European institutions immediately to admit the regional universities within the Erasmus and Socrates programs, i.e., to facilitate the mobility and exchange of students and faculty from the region'.²⁸

²⁷ However, the special status of Kosovo/Kosova should not be forgotten in this context.

²⁸ Statement from the Dubrovnik Meeting of University Rectors of SEE Countries. Dubrovnik, 23 August 2002. See http://www.see-educoop.net/portal/id_bologna.htm (01.12. 2004).

On the other hand, in the preparation process for the accession of new countries to the Bologna Process (2002-2003), an event of key importance to the SEE region was the conference on 'The External Dimension of the Bologna Process: South-East European Higher Education and the European Higher Education Area in a Global World' organised jointly by UNESCO-CEPES and the EUA (Bucharest, 6-8 March, 2003). It relied on the EGP Project *Regional University Network of Governance and Management of Higher Education in South East Europe*, supported by the European Commission within the CARDS Programme. The project provided rich analytical material on the reform processes at nine selected SEE universities.²⁹ Experience in this project demonstrated that those responsible for higher education in SEE countries had already used the provisions of the *Bologna Declaration* and the *Prague Communiqué* as a reference framework for their own reform initiatives. There was clear evidence of a strong commitment to achieving the Bologna process objectives elsewhere in the region.

The accession of SEE countries to the European Higher Education Area certainly represents important progress and an achievement from the EGP's point of view. SEE countries have taken the largest step towards European development precisely in the area of higher education; today they are *full members of the 'Bologna club'*. However, entering this club simultaneously involves a promise and a problem. In order to help new members of the Bologna Process accommodate the new demands, the Council of Europe organised a well-attended Conference on Implementation of the Bologna Process in South-east Europe (Strasbourg, 2-3 December 2003).³⁰ The conference confirmed that all countries could obtain advantages from Bologna membership. This is particularly the case with regard to national and institutional policy development as well as *bilateral activities* in the region, with neighbouring and other countries (e.g. sharing good practices etc.). Membership also offers better chances for improving international co-operation between institutions: the EC-TEMPUS programme is now widespread across the region.

In May 2005, all 40 member-countries will again gather at the ministerial conference in Bergen (Norway) to present progress made during the third biannual phase of the Bologna

²⁹ Case studies from the universities of Zagreb and Split (Croatia), Banja Luka (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Montenegro (Montenegro), Novi Sad and Niš (Serbia), Pristina (Kosovo), Tirana (Albania) and Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje (FYR of Macedonia) are available at http://www.see-educoop.net/portal/id_bologna.htm (01.12.2004).

³⁰ In the preparatory phase for the conference (November 2003), the SEE ECN carried out a short survey on implementation of the Bologna Process at universities and other higher education institutions in four SEE countries – new parties to the Bologna Process. Results of this survey and background materials are available at http://www.see-educoop.net/portal/id_workshop_bologna.htm (01.12.2004).

follow-up. This will be an important opportunity to assess developments in higher education and to settle the new higher education agenda, including for the SEE region.

2.3.4 A conclusion: examples of national strategic documents

Intensive international co-operation and a lot of specific work in the area of drafting national policies for education and training have resulted in several important national strategic documents. These documents mainly provided firm foundations for preparing new national legislation; in those environments where it has been already approved and implemented in educational practice they also mark an important landmark in the social transition. Here, we briefly refer to some key examples from that part of the region referred to as the Western Balkans (in alphabetic order).

The most important achievements in the area of policy development in *Bosnia and Herzegovina* are the Green and White Papers on Education, adopted by all education authorities (cantons, entities) in the country.³¹ The Council of Europe has been providing systemic support for preparing a new framework law on higher education (not yet adopted) and for preparing a new framework university statute for the higher education sector in the whole country.

The *Croatian* White Paper was prepared within the framework of a comprehensive Government Development Strategy in 2001; a year later the concept of changes was also ready³² but the draft reform later failed to be passed by parliament. Nevertheless, in 2003 a new Law on Higher Education based on the modern 'Bologna' premises was approved and gave the legislative framework for the development of tertiary education in the country.

International support and experts working with national experts helped *Kosovo* take some more important steps in the area of policy documents. The concept for changes to the education system was prepared back in 2001 and new curricula have gradually been

³¹ Green Paper. Reform of Primary and General Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Produced by the BIH Educational Authorities Assisted by the EC-TAER Programme. Funded by the European Union. Sarajevo, Spring 2003.

White Paper. Shared Modernization Strategy for Primary and General Secondary Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Produced by the BIH educational authorities assisted by the EC-TAER Programme. funded by the European Union. Sarajevo, October 2003.

³² White Paper on Croatian Education. Strategy for the Development of the Republic of Croatia. Croatia in 21st Century. Office for the Strategy of the Development of the Republic of Croatia. Zagreb, September, 2001

Concept of changes to the education system in the Republic of Croatia. Ministry of Education and Sport. Zagreb, 2002 (in Croatian).

implemented. It is extremely important that serious work has also been done in other parts of the education system, e.g. in vocational education and adult education.³³

The key policy document in *Montenegro* is the 'Book of Changes', adopted at the end of 2001 as the basis for fast development (legislation, curricular reform, teacher training etc.) observed in the next few years. Besides education as the central part of policy development endeavours, it should be mentioned that the government also adopted an important policy document in the field of youth, more precisely, in the prevention of drug addiction.³⁴

In the 2001-2004 period *Serbia* also took a huge step forward in the area of policy documents, such as in the field of general education (with the adoption of new legislation) and in higher education (where the new concept has unfortunately not yet been codified in new legislation). In addition, the policy document on Roma education from 2003 is also a good example of a successful policy development process in Serbia in the last few years.³⁵

2.4 Respect for human rights, cultural diversity and individuals

In the previous subchapter the focus was mostly on systemic issues and educational policy development in general. Yet, there were also 'softer issues' in the TFEY-EGP work plan: curricular development, in particular in education for democratic citizenship (EDC) and history, as well as youth issues which are usually treated as part of the non-education sphere but highly relevant to and connected with education. These issues were also addressed through QSPs and three working groups (WG 2, WG 4 and WG 6, all of them co-ordinated by the Council of Europe, the leading organisation in promoting human rights, the rule of law and pluralist democracy) were engaged in these areas.

³³ Strategy for the Development of Vocational Education in Kosovo. Project for implementing Capacity building - Vocational Model Schools. Strategy for the time period 2003-2008. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Pristina, April 2003.

Mainstreaming with Europe: an adult learning strategy for Kosovo (2005-2015). Employment and Skills Observatory of Kosova. Supported by the ETF. Pristina, April 2004.

³⁴ Book of changes. Ministry of Education and Science. Podgorica, December 2001 (in Montenegrin). Action Plan on the Prevention of Narcotism in Children and Youth in Montenegro. Government of the Republic of Montenegro. Podgorica, April 2003 (in Montenegrin).

The Strategic Plan of Education Reform for the Period of 2003-2004. The Republic of Montenegro, Ministry of Education and Science. Podgorica 2003.

³⁵ Quality Education for All. Challenges to Education Reform in Serbia. Ministry of Education and Sport. Belgrade, 2004.

Higher Education in Serbia – Reform Strategy. Ministry of Education and Sport. Belgrade, 2003. The Strategy for Improving Roma Education in the Republic of Serbia. Ministry of Education and Sport. Belgrade, June 2003.

2.4.1 History and history teaching is a very detailed issue but also very important in the context of regional reconciliation. Removing stereotypes from education in history, encouraging young people to respect the cultural diversity of their region, enhancing knowledge of national history and the histories of neighbouring countries are some of the key objectives in educational renewal.

Based on the recommendations of the Sofia Conference, the *WG History and History Teaching* (WG 2) prepared a programme of activities which mainly focused on specific aims of creating better mutual understanding and tolerance, disseminating knowledge of the history of South-east Europe as a region and ensuring that a wider range of perspectives is included in textbooks and the teaching of both national and regional history.³⁶ In the first year and a half much of the work concentrated on the initial and in-service training of history teachers, young historians and history textbooks; an important part of the work was carried out within the framework of the QSP.³⁷ As in other thematic areas, regional networks and exchange programmes of teachers, students and pupils were also established here.

Initiatives from this working area have been particularly useful in the general renewal of school curricula. Stocktaking of history curricula in the region as well as activities to improve the initial and in-service training of history teachers was helpful in the overall process of new curricula design and preparation of textbooks. The international co-operation in this area also resulted in the development of new teaching resources for history. On the other hand, linkages were created between higher education and the school level: higher education is not only responsible for training future history teachers but is encountering – inter alia in history departments – the challenge of (re)discovering the past.

³⁶ As an event in the framework of QSP a special conference was organised on 'The Initial and In-service Training of History Teachers in SEE' (Athens, September 2000). Donors for this event were the Council of Europe and Greece.

³⁷ The following projects were realised: 'Board of Eminent Historians', implemented by the Association for Democracy in the Balkans, CDRSEE, donor: USA; 'Comparative Study on Initial Teaching Training', implemented by Council of Europe, University of Vienna, donor: Austria; 'National / Regional History Teacher Training', implemented by Council of Europe, donors: Austria, Switzerland; 'History Teachers' Education Project', implemented by the Association for Democracy in the Balkans, CDRSEE, donors: Austria, Norway, Switzerland; 'Joint Teaching Materials', implemented by the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research, donor: Germany; 'Creating Additional Teaching Material', implemented by University of Belgrade, University of Graz, South-Western University of Blagoevgrad, donors: Austria, University of Graz, OSCE; 'Multi-authored book on the 20th century', implemented by the Central European University, Open Society Archives, donor: Open Society Institute, USA; 'Development of History Curricula', implemented by the Council of Europe, donor: Switzerland.

Meetings of the working group, consisting of experts and governmental representatives, brought an excellent opportunity to more closely examine specific details of history teaching in the region that were not known before. As we can read in one report, ‘one great value of such a meeting was in this exchange of information across the region. Issues were raised such as how to fit in regional history, or whether national history should be taught separately or in a context of regional, European or world history. Experience in the different countries was shared and compared. It was agreed that it was often difficult to get information on regional history, especially if basic documents were wanted which meant translation and language problems’.³⁸

2.4.2 Similarly as in the WG 2, but in a broader context, the *WG Education for Democratic Citizenship and Management of Diversity* (WG 4) aimed at promoting a culture of human rights, democratic principles and citizens’ participation and responsibilities. Education for democratic citizenship has an important role in modern school curricula. On the other hand, it is not merely part of curricula but also a guiding principle in education.

There were three main activities in this area: stocktaking research on policies for EDC and MoD in SEE, a survey on the educational rights of Roma children (under the heading ‘Denied a Future?’) and a monitoring report on the related QSP. The stocktaking research (nine country reports and a regional synthesis) showed a high level of complementarity with the OECD Thematic Reviews: it provided evidence of the relatively satisfactory policy frameworks and texts for EDC, particularly in relation to the curriculum and teacher training, less so for lifelong learning and research aspects. Further on, by setting and studying 9 indicators of policy implementation the research highlighted substantial weaknesses in terms of coherent implementation measures. These findings raised key questions about democratic policy-making processes (e.g. coherent and known strategy documents, dialogue with practitioners), accountability and the monitoring of policy implementation and outcomes.

The target group of the ‘Denied a Future?’ project was the educationally most disadvantaged group in the SEE region: namely, Roma children. The study undertook a benchmarking exercise between 2000 and 2001 on legislation, policies and practices, measuring them against international standards, and producing country reports and recommendations for future steps. The study highlighted the roots of exclusion outside the education system (e.g. poverty), systemic barriers within the education system, the existence of good policies, good practice implemented by NGOs (OSI activity has been particularly important) and the lack of government-funded good practice, the need for grassroots practice to be scaled up and for

³⁸ Report. The 4th Meeting of the WG on History and History Teaching. Tirana, 21-22 November 2002.

the education system to learn from them, the lack of monitoring of learning outcomes, the need to develop teacher training and build confidence in education and in the benefits of education within Roma communities (see *Denied a Future?*, 2001).

Besides these two main projects, there were a lot of other activities in the framework of the QSP³⁹ and a special report on their realisation was prepared for the working group. It underlined the need for developing an evaluation culture, providing opportunities for enhanced co-operation between projects and for mainstreaming EDC in all educational reforms. In a discussion it was also noted that EDC, on one hand, needs to be integrated into general education reforms while, on the other hand, top-down and bottom-up initiatives also need to be integrated. The reforms with regard to EDC should be understood as leading to innovations in education and educational policy-making as a whole.

In its conclusions, the WG 4 'underlined the importance of evaluation, monitoring and quality assurance of practices and policies for strengthening and developing EDC and MoD and for bridging the identified compliance gap between policies and practices. The focus on these issues was also seen as a progression in the working group's discussions which had, since its first meeting in January 2000, moved through the following steps: agreement on the principles of EDC and management of diversity, identification of needs, priorities and strategies, monitoring of quick start projects, identification of existing policies, evidence for the gap between policies and practices'.⁴⁰ This was also a message for further activities in this area.

2.4.3 The *WG Young People* (WG 6) decided at the beginning of its work to unite all forces active in the field of work with young people within a single common approach: the

³⁹ Altogether, the following QS projects were realised: 'EDC Stocktaking Research', implemented by the Council of Europe, donors: Austria, Switzerland; 'Twinning of 'Sites of Citizenship'', implemented by the Council of Europe, donors: Austria, Switzerland; 'The Right of Education of Roma Children', implemented by the Save the Children Fund UK, donors: Austria, the Save the Children Fund, Switzerland, USA; 'Democratic School Development in Croatia', implemented by KulturKontakt Austria, the Croatian Ministry of Education and Science; donors: Austria, Croatia; 'Active Democratic Citizenship in Montenegro', implemented by KulturKontakt Austria, the University of Montenegro, donors: Austria, Montenegro, Switzerland; 'Co-existence with Differences', implemented by KulturKontakt Austria, the University of Montenegro, donor: Austria; 'Children, Theatre, Education', implemented by the Children's Theatre Centre, the Open Society Institute Macedonia; donors: Austria, the Open Society Institute, Switzerland; 'Classrooms across Borders', implemented by Bistra and the Galina Foundation, the Bulgarian National Committee for the European Year of Languages, the Open Society Club of Smoljan, the School Association SAGE, donors: Bistra and the Galina Foundation, Bulgaria, the European Youth Foundation, Switzerland; 'BANNET – Banat Network for Intercultural Citizenship', implemented by Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, donor: USA; 'Improving Education for Roma', implemented by Center Education 2000+ (Romania), KulturKontakt Austria, donors: Austria, Center Education 2000+, the Open Society Foundation, Switzerland.

⁴⁰ Report. The 4th Meeting of the WG on EDC and MoD. Ljubljana, 22-23 February 2002.

traditionally separate 'youth' and 'childhood' agendas were integrated into one 'young people' agenda while those in early adolescence, 12-16 year olds, were seen as the focus group of the strategy. There were three main priorities in this area: youth policy development; institution-building with a special focus on NGOs; and tolerance education. These priorities were also reflected in the framework of the Quick Start Projects where EUR 1.6 million was allocated during the first round alone.⁴¹

The Youth Sector of the TFEY-EGP has proved to be an advocacy forum and youth lobby in the region. It has aimed primarily at strengthening civil society through the promotion of active life and youth participation. In the given circumstances of the time an important task was to assist local capacity-building and to help stabilising existing networks for youth and student organisations and the inclusion of young people from the SEE region in existing European youth and cultural exchange programmes. These programmes have been an important vehicle for combating racism, intolerance and ethnic nationalism as well as for promoting non-formal education in close co-operation with the formal education sector.

The promotion and implementation of National Action Plans on Youth was seen as the main target. Here, the working group made an appreciated contribution while transferring the white paper process experiences and practices from EU countries to the countries of the SEE region. Through specific projects, this was also a contribution to connecting young people in a European context.

The WG 6 at its last meeting (6 November 2002, Thessalonica) stressed: 'All in all the activities of the Group have nowhere come to an end. Regional co-operation has well started off, National Action Plans (with new ones coming up in Croatia, BIH, Serbia and the Kosovo region) are becoming a widely used practice and the planned activities on training and Intercultural Learning are spreading, mainly within activities of the Council of Europe and projects of the European Commission. The UNICEF based promotion of healthy life-styles and youth participation also needs continuation and amplification and other items have not even been treated yet such as refugee children and employment.'⁴²

⁴¹ The following projects were realised: 'Democratic Youth Camps', implemented by the Council of Europe, ESIB, the Hungarian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, donors: ESIB, European Youth Centre Budapest, Freedom House Budapest, the Friedrich Neumann Foundation, Hungary; 'Nashe Maalo', implemented by the Children's TV Series, Search for Common Ground, donors: Mott Foundation, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, UNESCO, USA; 'Youth Leadership Programme', implemented by the International Debate Education Association, the Open Society Institute, donor: USA; 'YouthNET', implemented by Interkulturelles Zentrum Vienna; donor: Austria.

⁴² TFWG Young People. Meeting of Wednesday, Thessalonica, 6 November [2002].

2.5 Capacity-building and the EGP Follow-up Seminars

The presentation of the main activities and developments in the EGP, albeit reduced given the limited framework of this survey, would be incomplete if systemically targeted so-called *capacity-building and expert seminars* were not considered. These events were not the primary task of the WG 1-6 but their members have often been included in specific seminar work. They have been organised mostly as specialised activities; at an earlier stage as events within the 'Strategy 2001' and later, from 2003 on, within the Education Reform Initiative (ERI SEE), an initiative jointly developed by the TFEY and education ministries of SEE (see pp. 47-53 herein). All events have been organised in the TFEY-EGP framework, with significant support from donors (mainly from the Austrian Ministry for Foreign Affairs and in co-operation with the Austrian Ministry of Education Science and Culture along with the Open Society Institute; support from other donors will be mentioned later relative to individual events).

These capacity-building and expert seminars have almost spontaneously led to a series of important events which we could call, borrowing a label from the Bologna Process, the *EGP Follow-up Seminars*. Not all of them can be mentioned here⁴³ and a few of them have already been mentioned⁴⁴, but a dozen of them, namely the most important and influential ones could demonstrate the main focuses and outcomes.

2.5.1 Modern Technologies in Education and Training. In the early phase of the EGP, soon after the Sofia Conference, an interesting event was the conference entitled 'New Modern Technologies and their impact on Education and Training in South-east Europe' (Sinaia, Romania, 3-5 December 2000). This conference was jointly organised by the Romanian Ministry of National Education, the French EU Presidency and a number of international partners represented in the TFEY-EGP. It was dedicated to the fundamental transformation of modern times, namely from the industrial society to the information society. The rapid development of information and communication technologies (ICT) have also placed new

⁴³ A long list of study visits, seminars, surveys and other capacity-building events, which were organised by the CEPS in co-operation with the SEE ECN country nodes in 2003-2004 is also available at http://www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/study-visits-about-us.pdf (17.12.2004). Most of these study visits were organised in the framework of an agreement between the CEPS and the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia which donated to the SEE-ECN 150 Experts Days (i.e., working days of experts from public institutions in Slovenia; material expenses included). This agreement allowed the CEPS to engage Slovenian experts free of charge in capacity-building activities.

⁴⁴ E.g. 'Strategies of Educational Reform in SEE' (Bled, Slovenia, 8-10 June 2000); see p. 21. For the seminar portal, see http://www.see-educoop.net/portal/id_regio.htm (01.12.2004).

challenges on education and training; these challenges have been put very high on the European agenda. The organisers of the conference asked: 'Is the topic unrealistic for the Stability Pact objectives?' and answered: 'Absolutely not!' ICT in education and training should also be regarded as a challenge in the SEE region; the region should not be excluded from developments in ICT.

The Conference dealt successfully with examining existing and potential modern technologies investments and with their impact on education and training from two perspectives: in relation to employability, new qualifications and labour market development (new competencies, social and organisational transformations etc.) as well as in relation to the democratisation of education and training (lifelong learning, schools and universities as resource centres etc.). The conference also provided an opportunity for education and business to meet at a common forum: the first day started with a view of the world of work introduced by means of an exhibition and company presentations and debates then examined the world of education and training.⁴⁵ As a direct impact of the conference, within Stability Pact work the cross-table co-operation of the TFEY EGP with the e-SEE Initiative⁴⁶ of Working Table II was organised.

2.5.2 Drafting New Legislation. At a time when OECD Thematic Reviews were already at the halfway point and when growing interest in the 'translation' of educational policy principles into legislation was noted elsewhere in the region, the OSI organised an interesting capacity-building seminar under the heading 'Drafting Education Legislation - Art or Craft?' (Bled, 27-29 September 2001). The seminar aimed at the exchange of know-how relevant to the preparation of legislation in education at national levels and human resource development. A rich collection of materials on education legislation from SEE countries as well as other parts of Europe was gathered prior to the workshop.⁴⁷ Experiences in law-making in education were presented through country case studies (e.g. Slovenia, Denmark, Ireland), and described by lawyers and education officials from these countries. Workshop sessions focused on certain aspects and common topics of legislative drafting in education (such as principles and rights, public and private education, education financing mechanisms, governance and institutional structures, minorities education, special needs education).

⁴⁵ Contributions from a number of companies enabled the conference to be broadcast on the Internet. See the homepage (still active): <http://www.e-education.wht.ro> (01.12.2004).

⁴⁶ The e-SEE Agenda for Development of the Information Society signed by the ICT ministers of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia on 29 October 2002 in Belgrade associates the Signatories with the objectives of the e-Europe and e-Europe+ processes. See <http://www.stabilitypact.org/e-see/default.asp> (01.12.2004)

⁴⁷ Materials in the languages of the SEE region and in English, French or German are accessible at <http://www.osepsee.net/> and <http://www.see-educoop.net/> (01.12.2004).

2.5.3 Drafting New Curricula. In spring 2002, an international 'Drafting New Curricula' seminar was organised (Bohinj, Slovenia, 26-28 April 2002)⁴⁸ shifting attention away from policy and legislation issues to the problems of curricular reforms. This seminar was the SEE ECN's main contribution to human resource development and capacity-building in SEE countries in the field of curriculum development. Thematic reviews of education in SEE countries highlighted the importance of curricular change in the envisaged education reforms. In this process, it is essential that education experts and decision-makers find a common language and constructive approach to their work. The Bohinj seminar offered an opportunity for discussions among distinguished regional and international experts: with those from neighbouring countries that have already achieved curricular change as well as with those from other world regions and comparative situations (e.g. Lebanon). The interregional approach to this seminar involved the special added value of the IBE UNESCO. Prior to the seminar, materials on curriculum development were gathered from SEE countries and from other countries or international organisations. The seminar targeted pre-school and primary education curricula, literacy and languages, mathematics, social sciences, early childhood, minorities in education, and teacher education in curricular change. Critical reflections of recent curricular change were presented through country case studies on: one EU associate-country, one EU member-state, and one non-European country. The seminar also provided regional participants with a collection of curricular materials translated into local languages and available on the Internet. After the seminar, the IBE UNESCO published seminar proceedings that were distributed regionally (see Rozemeijer, 2003).

2.5.4 Education Reforms and the Media. In early spring 2003, the OSEP SEE organised another specialised regional training course to help ministries of education, policy institutes and various educational NGOs to improve public communications and media relations in education reform (Zagreb, 27 February - 1 March 2003). A separate training module was made available for news reporters covering education and which can be reached through country-level workshops.⁴⁹ This was a unique event aimed at improving the transfer between policy and decision-makers and the media. Media coverage has been often a weak point in promoting education reforms in the region; therefore this area should see some follow-up.

⁴⁸ It was organised jointly by the IBE UNESCO and CEPS - the University of Ljubljana; it was cosponsored by the Office of the Slovenian National Commission for UNESCO and the OSEP SEE). For background materials and other information, see http://www.see-educoop.net/portal/id_workshop_bohinj.htm and http://www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/background_material.htm (01.12.2004).

⁴⁹ See the virtual resource centre at <http://www.osi.hu.esp/resource>, enter the Learning Community Web Page, click preview, and go to Communicating Education Reform Resource Pack (01.12.2004).

Within the SEE ECN a survey was also made on existing communication practice in education reforms in SEE; the results of the survey will be published in early 2005.

2.5.5. Monitoring Education and Educational Changes. A new regional capacity-building seminar on 'Reconstructing Middle-Level Education Organisations' (Belgrade, March 17-19, 2003) was organised to address for the first time in the EGP framework school inspectors from the SEE region. It provided a profound insight into the various patterns of functions of education inspectors in European countries and deepened the participants' knowledge of various aspects of the evaluation of primary and secondary schools and regional boards. It also showed the very strong link between the political, systemic and managerial characteristics of certain national education systems and elaborated the concept 'from inspection toward assessment'. The seminar also investigated ways to use the presented elements and methodology in situations in South-east European countries.⁵⁰ It was carried out with the financial support of the TFEY, the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) and the OSEP SEE while the SICI (the Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education) provided free expert support.

2.5.6 The Disabled and Students at Risk. Based on its twenty years of experience and work in special needs education, the OECD is carrying out a project on 'Education Development for the Disabled and At-Risk Students'. With financial support from Norway, the World Bank and the Flemish Community, the Belgian OECD is now extending these activities to the SEE region. The decision was made on the basis of information gathered during the course of Thematic Reviews and inspired by the idea of Education for All (*Dakar Framework for Action*, 2000). A kick-off meeting was organised by the OECD and the Austrian Ministry of Education, Science and Culture not only to present the project but also to address this important issue of access to quality education as one of the priority areas of the ERI SEE (Vienna, 25-28 September 2003).⁵¹ Two vulnerable groups should be especially addressed in this context: those with disabilities as well as those 'at risk' (children and youth with learning disabilities, those failing at school, the unemployed). While children and youth 'at risk' are considered, the project aims to clarify conceptual issues and develop practical solutions followed by an expansion of work supporting the need to more effectively co-ordinate the respective services to meet the needs of these students as well as their families. The work

⁵⁰ For the seminar portal, see http://www.see-educoop.net/portal/id_reconstructing_ml_org.htm (01.12.2004).

⁵¹ See http://www.see-educoop.net/graz_2003/index.htm → 25-28/09/2003 for the seminar's Final Report. Also see http://www.oecd.org/document/33/0,2340,en_2649_33925_31452769_1_1_1_1,00.html (01.12.2004).

on disability is focussed on the transition to employment and on the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream schools and post-compulsory provision.

2.5.7 Teacher Training. Within the growing framework of the ERI SEE and after discussions at the working meeting of senior officials (the so-called SOM; see p. 49 herein) the TFEY organised the first 'Expert Seminar' on teacher training (Graz, Austria, 24-25 November, 2003).⁵² There had been several proposals for such seminars but this one received unanimous support since it was obvious that teacher education is becoming decisive in the further modernisation of education. The support for ongoing education reforms in SEE have been constantly linked with European trends and developments, in particular with the EU's 'Objectives 2010' strategy. In the related EU documents,⁵³ highest priority was given to teacher training and this decision should also be considered within the EGP and its support of education reforms in the SEE region. The seminar concluded with some important agreements. Pre-service teacher education needs substantial improvement and support and, for that reason, a range of educational institutions – schools, faculties of education and universities – should be better interconnected. A shift from the formal teacher-training system to a more practically-oriented and competencies-based system is also needed. The theme should clearly be systemically elaborated in its particular dimensions during the next period.

2.5.8 Open Access to ICT. A few days later and again within the framework of the ERI SEE, the TFEY organised a second expert seminar, this time on ensuring access to ICT for everyone (Graz, Austria, 27-28 November, 2003).⁵⁴ The primary objective of the seminar was to support national education reforms in the specific area of modern technologies, in particular with regard to ongoing European trends in ICT. Another objective was to contribute to regional co-operation at system and expert levels and to support the stabilisation and association process in the field of education. Presentations and discussions at the seminar showed that each country has a different level of ICT. Therefore, it was recommended that improvements to the monitoring, assessment and quality assurance system could be very helpful. Participants expressed a great need for technical aid that could be conducted through public and private partnerships. Further, they emphasised the need for Centres of

⁵² See http://www.see-educoop.net/graz_2003/index.htm → 24-25/11/2003 for the seminar's Final Report and background material (01.12.2004).

⁵³ 'Teachers and trainers are therefore key actors in any strategies targeted at stimulating the development of society and the economy.' See the strategic objective 1, point 1.1 of the 'Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe', Council of European Union. Brussels, 20 February 2002.

⁵⁴ See http://www.see-educoop.net/graz_2003/index.htm → 27-28/11/2003 for the seminar's Final Report and background material (01.12.2004).

Excellence and specialised training centres in order to share information on the ever changing ICT world and to help bridge the digital divide between the SEE region and the EU.

2.5.9 Decentralisation in Education. The decentralisation issue has been always high on the TFEY's agenda but the regional capacity-building seminar on 'Decentralisation in Education' (Bucharest, Romania, 6-7 February 2004) was the first event systemically devoted to the decentralisation of education systems in SEE. The seminar was organised by the TFEY, SEE ECN and the Institute for Educational Sciences in Bucharest. It aimed at supporting the decentralisation process already started by some SEE countries and developing the capacity of SEE countries in decentralisation issues. The seminar intended to give policy-makers first-hand insights into regional and European experiences of decentralisation and provide a menu of options addressing this issue (de-concentration vs. decentralisation; sharing responsibilities; financing of education; human resources management; decentralised curriculum; strategies for evaluation and quality assurance). The seminar website⁵⁵ was created by the SEE-ECN team and offers an important and useful tool for those interested in decentralisation issues.

2.5.10 Lifelong Learning Strategies. As a preparatory regional event for the 8th Conference of European Ministers of Education an expert seminar 'Towards the Creation of Strategies for Lifelong Learning in Europe' was organised by the TFEY within the framework of the ERI SEE (Vienna, 7-8 May, 2004). Lifelong learning is the basic principle of modern education policies intended to lead to an economically efficient and socially inclusive 'knowledge society'; therefore, this area surely belongs to those in Europe and particularly in the SEE region calling for much more attention in the future. The Recommendations seminar stressed the need to develop comprehensive lifelong learning (LLL) strategies by 2006 at national, regional and local levels in an inclusive consultation process including all relevant stakeholders. This would be impossible without capacity-building measures, raising awareness, enhancing partnerships and, in particular, without more and better investments in human capital. For that reason, increasing the responsiveness to the needs of learners, the labour market and civil society, ensuring access to quality LLL for all and making the provision of education and training attractive is strategically important.⁵⁶

2.5.11 Human Rights Education. As a follow-up to the various TFEY-EGP activities on human rights education (HRE) and education for democratic citizenship (EDC) in both formal

⁵⁵ For the seminar portal, see http://www.see-educoop.net/portal/id_workshop_bukaresta.htm (01.12.2004).

⁵⁶ See http://www.see-educoop.net/graz_2003/index.htm → 07-08/05/2004 for the seminar's Recommendations and background material (01.12.2004).

and non-formal education programmes a new 'Expert Seminar on Human Rights' was organised (Graz, 18-20 November 2004); this time in the framework of the growing ERI SEE. The seminar aimed at providing a platform for the exchange of information on the latest developments in HRE and EDC and further enhancing the integration of HRE and EDC in education policies and practices as well as the further facilitation of co-operation and exchange of people, programmes and initiatives in this field. The seminar's recommendations proposed a review of policy priorities at different levels of decision-making with a view to standardise policy concepts and to make policy decisions and commitments known to all educational actors in order to focus their attention on shared European values and priorities as part of the Lisbon process and the Council of Europe's recommendations and programmes.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ See http://www.see-educoop.net/graz_2003/index.htm → 18-20/11/2004 for the seminar's Final Report and background material (01.12.2004).

3. The Enhanced Graz Process: six years after

In general, there are certain problems with processes: it is always difficult to first establish a real process and to then let it run. When established, it moves towards meeting the stated objectives, sooner or later leading to tiresome questions: Are the objectives being achieved? And, (if) they are achieved, when does the process end? Theory distinguishes between a *process* and a *state*; however, it also teaches how complex and difficult the relationship between the two can be.

What is the state of the Enhanced Graz Process today? At the beginning of the previous chapter we noted it is very difficult to measure its effects precisely, e.g. in terms of concrete achievements with an identified 'copyright'. Changes in education and education systems have always been a result of complex circumstances: national, local, regional and international. In fact, changes have occurred somewhere at their crossroads; steps forward have been taken here but – as always – some steps backwards could also appear. The fact that the EGP-TFEY has contributed much to changing education in the SEE region is obvious; however, which substantial element(s) can clearly be identified as the particular EGP contribution?

3.1 Seeing the Process from the perspective of six years later, the main answer could be: raising the status of education in SEE countries and the region as a whole, ***emphasising the importance of education in social reconstruction.***

At the dawn of the Process – at the Sofia Conference in 1999 – Mr. Slavko Gaber directly addressed the audience in his keynote speech (*Education as Key Element of Stability*): 'Declaring that "we will strive to achieve the objective of lasting peace, prosperity and stability for South Eastern Europe" means, between the lines, that we are supposed to re-think the place and space of Education in the activities of the Pact. If the Stability Pact is going to strengthen "countries in South Eastern Europe in their efforts to foster peace, democracy, respect for human rights and economic prosperity", like it or not, for the sake of its own success it should put additional importance on education' (*International Conference on SEE*, 1999, pp. 46-48).

In this period of time additional importance has been assigned to education. Of course, one could ask if *enough importance* has been put on education, and thereby start a debate. In

such a debate much could be argued: there have been some clear achievements as well as some troubles and standstills.

All countries have established and strengthened the development of education policy. Important national strategies have been prepared (in some cases excellent teams have done a really good job even in an international, not only a regional, perspective) and new legislation has been drafted but the sustainability of these efforts has not always been proved. Curricula have been modernised and new textbooks prepared in all countries. Teachers themselves have also been significantly engaged in modernising teaching methods and improvements have been undertaken in in-service training, mostly in a decentralised way with the help of international donors. Material conditions have elsewhere been improved a little but the needs remain huge, particularly in those areas affected by war. The average public expenditure on education is now almost over 4.0% in all countries, with only Albania and Serbia falling below that level (Bassler, [in print, 2005])⁵⁸ but it is still below many other countries in Europe. Important international financial help has also been given to SEE countries (from EU and individual European and other countries and, last but not least, private foundations – the OSI being the best example) and almost all of them have succeeded to negotiate favourable arrangements for national education development plans with the World Bank and other international institutions.

The processes of the last few years have been difficult. Not only is the SEE region not 'homogenous' (as seen in the previous chapter) but the problems of particular countries have not emerged or been solved 'parallel' one to another. For instance, countries that experienced the atrocities of war encountered similar problems in the reconstruction of their national education systems but when e.g. Croatia and later Bosnia and Herzegovina launched reconstruction programmes military conflict had not even started in Kosovo. On the other hand, Romania and Bulgaria started the negotiation process for EU accession in the second half of the 1990s and Croatia will reach this position in spring 2005, whereas for other countries at various stages of the stabilisation and association process this is probably still a matter of the more distant future. This '*non-parallelism*' should be taken into account when evaluating the overall results of the EGP and when discussing further plans. It should be regarded as a fact and not as an obstacle to strengthening regional co-operation. On the contrary, under the specific light of 'non-parallelism' good regional practices could be even more transparent and useful for both neighbours and the international community.

⁵⁸ An overview of these issues will be given in Bassler [in print, 2005] (see Bibliography). The author of this report thanks the editor for the opportunity to use her manuscript. – In 2000 and 2001, CEPS carried out a survey of statistical data in SEE countries in support of the OECD Thematic Reviews (see Bibliography); at that time for some countries it was not even possible to get reliable data on this issue.

In these six years, not only SEE countries but also *the wider region has changed significantly*. Since the EU's enlargement in May 2004 Slovenia and Hungary (in the past it was only Greece, and Italy over the Adriatic) have helped bring the EU's external borders closer to SEE countries. Together with Croatia, Turkey recently also got the 'green light' to start negotiations on EU accession. What will the new relations be like? What will the new borders bring? One thing is for sure: the recent developments should make the overall regard for education in SEE countries even more important. If the new borders are going to be a point of connection, strengthened co-operation and the gradual integration of new national education systems with the European education area then increased investment in the development of education is a real prerequisite.

3.2 It is not only the SEE countries and their broader context that have changed but so too have the *interactions of the TFEY with the Stability Pact*, while *developments within the Stability Pact* have also experienced important shifts. At the December 2002 SP Regional Table it was noted: 'Along with complementing the EU's Accession and Stabilisation and Association Processes, an underlying tenet of the Stability Pact should be to move steadily toward a leadership role for South Eastern Europe, by strongly promoting regional ownership of the activities within the Stability Pact'.⁵⁹ These new trends and developments have demanded some shifts in priorities as well as a certain reconstruction of organisation in order to achieve greater effectiveness.

According to the Chairman's Conclusions from the Thessalonica Regional Table Meeting, 'the Table confirmed the Pact's commitment to coherence as well as mutual and complementary support to both the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) and the accession process for candidate countries in South Eastern Europe. It encouraged the EU to continue, in line with the conclusions of the 1999 EU Cologne Council and in view of the Thessalonica summit in June 2003, to exercise the leading role in the Pact in consultation with the OSCE and other participants. In this context, the work of the Informal Consultative Committee (ICC) is highly appreciated, particularly in assuring close co-ordination and complementarity with EU processes'.⁵⁹

On the organisational side, it was stressed that the resources of the secretariat, working tables and task forces need to be realigned to make progress towards the key objectives and that Working Table Chairs should engage in regular cross-table co-ordination. Larger

⁵⁹ See Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for SEE. Regional Table. Chairman's Conclusions. Thessalonica, 16 December 2002.

emphasis should also be given to increased regional leadership in planning and hosting key events and in promoting core objectives while Task Force work should be targeted to support this thematic orientation. On the content side, the revised SP priorities highly emphasise the need 'to enhance economic convergence, social cohesion and reconciliation, as well as local democracy and stability'.⁵⁹ The potential of education and education systems obviously corresponds to the areas of 'Local democracy and cross-border co-operation' as well as to 'Reconciliation' as two outstanding SP priority areas.

The TFEY reflected on its major strategic developments at its autumn meeting in 2002.⁶⁰ The Director of the SP WT 1, Mr. Robert Zeldenrust, outlined the three new strategic objectives of the Stability Pact: enhanced complementarity with the SAP, regional co-operation and a global approach to addressing specific issues in greater detail. In this context, the TFEY proposed to launch an initiative in order to strengthen the European dimension in education reform processes in SEE as well as to increase the region's ownership of these processes; this initiative has become known as the ERI SEE (see pp. 47-53). In view of the new strategic focus and in order to achieve greater coherence and better co-ordination, some changes in the TFEY's working structure have also been suggested: to replace the Technical Committee of the TFEY with an enlarged Working Group on General Education, Policy Development and System Improvement as the main strategic body by involving the existing networks in all priority areas (Working Groups 1-6).

All these developments prove that **the *Enlarged Graz Process has not exhausted its potential in six years*** of supporting the SEE region to leave behind the serious situations of the 1990s; today, its ambitions should be higher. The achievements of the last six years have built up the present state which provides a good basis for the advanced stage of the Process and for the advanced networking of the key players in the region and at the European level. Awareness-raising and lobbying for the further development of education and training systems should continue at the national, regional and European levels but should be based on new objectives and new methods. It is time to launch more activities to move even closer to the common European area of education.

3.3 Here, **the role of the European Union**, its institutions and instruments of assistance is enormous. In 1999 the EU proposed a new Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) for five countries of SEE (the Western Balkans) which had hitherto no contractual relationship with the EU. The SAP is a framework in which various instruments (CARDS as an assistance programme, technical advice, trade preferences, co-operation in certain fields, and political

⁶⁰ Report on the Meeting of the Task Force Education and Youth. Zagreb, October 25, 2002.

dialogue) help countries to undergo a political and economic transition. On this basis, Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA) were set up⁶¹ as a contribution to the Stability Pact, as a necessary step towards closer association with the EU and as a promise of gradual integration with EU structures. 2001 was the first year of the new CARDS programme specifically designed for the SAP countries; it replaced the previous Phare and Obnova programmes for those countries.⁶² The CARDS programme also brought important initiatives to education.

One of the best known education initiatives is the EU *Tempus programme*. Tempus belongs to a number of European Community programmes designed to help the process of social and economic reform and development in the EU partner-countries. It was established in 1990 to respond to the need for higher education reforms in Central and Eastern European countries (Tempus I; 1990-1993). It proved to be a real 'success story' in the context of the social transformations of the time: after two renewals during the 1990s (Tempus II and Tempus II-bis) Tempus III was established for the 2000-2006 period giving an excellent opportunity for strengthening higher education international co-operation with a growing circle of SEE countries of partner-countries: they currently include the Western Balkan countries as well as the Eastern European and Central Asian countries and the Mediterranean partners.

Over the years, Tempus has grown to embrace 43 countries. Tempus and other EU assistance and mobility programmes show very well the overall dynamics of the relationship between the EU and the SEE region. The increasing co-operation not only improves the individual mobility of students and staff but also encourages specific co-operation between educational institutions at various levels. In this context, the inclination to connect ongoing SEE education reforms at national level and European trends in education is only a logical consequence of these dynamics.

Central and Eastern European countries benefited from Tempus first, already in the 1990s; at the end of the 1990s they became eligible for 'regular' EU programmes like Socrates and Leonardo. They started new activities e.g. in the Socrates/Erasmus framework for (higher) education, in Leonardo for VET and in Youth for youth issues. Tempus remained only a (pleasant) memory. During the period up until May 2004, these countries in principle could co-operate in Tempus but without EU financial support (Phare) since their status in relation to

⁶¹ The EU signed the first SAA agreement with FYR Macedonia in April 2001. Differently to other countries of the Western Balkans, it became eligible for funding under the EU Phare programme already in 1996.

⁶² In 2001 over EUR 845 million was made available for the programmes Phare, Obnova and CARDS.

the EU changed importantly (from associate-countries to candidate-countries). This change also comprised a commitment to paying for the 'entry ticket' to Socrates and Leonardo programmes; as a result there were no interest to pay for another 're-entry ticket' to Tempus.

Fortunately, these circumstances lasted only for a few years. Since May 2004, the ten new EU members are eligible for Tempus in the same way as the fifteen old EU members. In the near future this seems very important: their experiences, not only in the Tempus co-operation (as aid receivers in the previous decade) but also in education reforms in general and in overall related developments, can offer an important extra dimension to the ongoing projects of older EU members and SEE countries. We should remind ourselves again of the decision on establishing Tempus III (29 April 1999): 'co-operation on higher education strengthens and deepens the whole fabric of relations existing between the peoples of Europe, brings out common cultural values, allows fruitful exchanges of views to take place and facilitates multinational activities in the scientific, cultural, artistic, economic and social spheres'.⁶³

The EU aid programmes as well as the aid given by a number of governments and NGOs represent a long-term commitment to peace, stability and prosperity in SEE. However, the international aid programmes are designed to encourage and support the domestic reform processes that these countries have embarked upon; it is obvious that the key to success lies with the countries of the region themselves. In this context, the 'European perspective' has been more and more relevant for the SAP countries; their education reform should even more strongly take into account European trends and developments since meeting the evolving common standards in education will be a precondition for inclusion into the wider European area of education. This principle not only applies to individual countries but, at least indirectly, also to the region as a whole. Taking the 'European perspective' of any country into account means that regional co-operation should also be strengthened. By far the most important step in this regard has been ***the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe*** (ERI SEE).

3.4 In support of the inclusion of SEE countries in the wider European area of education, the TFEY-EGP launched the South-east European Education Reform Initiative in late 2002.⁶⁴ The initiative has a relatively long prehistory. Already at the Graz 1998 conference, the European Commission expressed its willingness to launch a feasibility study to examine how

⁶³ See http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/tempus/index_en.html (01.12.2004).

⁶⁴ See Report on the Meeting of the Task Force Education and Youth, Zagreb, October 25, 2002 and the Report on the 1st Working Meeting of Senior Officials From Southeast Europe: Southeast European Education Reform Implementation Initiative in View of the Accession and the Stabilisation and Association Processes, Vienna, 5-7 December 2002.

a regional resource centre could work alongside the idea of an Open College for SEE which could support individual education needs and promote (higher) education co-operation within the region and with other European countries. The European Commission later commissioned a feasibility study on the 'South-east European Educational Co-operation Centre' (SEE ECC) under its OBNOVA programme of that time. The SEE ECC was foreseen primarily as a relatively light-structured institute which could facilitate the process of networking in the region, as a resource centre which could respond flexibly and rapidly to the regional and/or local needs and as a mediator between grass-roots initiatives and local decision-makers on one hand, and donor organisations on the other.

These considerations and proposals partly resulted in the South-east European Educational Co-operation Network (also see p. 10, note 3 and p. 19). Today, the SEE ECN is the most comprehensive virtual educational network in the broader SEE region. At the end of 2004, its membership included around 260 institutions (schools, universities, public organisations and NGOs etc.) and 140 individual experts predominately from the region. Its 'nodes' in ten countries of the region (established in autumn and winter 2001/2002) together with its 'co-ordination hub' in Ljubljana facilitate the network, spread information, search for new materials, translate them and organise seminars and study visits etc. In November 2004 visits to the website reached their highest level so far of 18,957 hits per month. Most of documents and events referred to in this report can be found there. The most valuable result of four years' work is the multi-lingual (mainly in languages of the region and English) free virtual library with 2,500 documents. Unfortunately, its sustainability is not fully guaranteed and activities within the library have recently been partly reduced. Support for further operations in 2005 was given in November 2004 by the OSI (a specialised project on improving teacher education in SEE).

On the other hand, even the early idea of an 'Educational Co-operation Centre' had a broader scope. Support for networking between educational institutions as well as for developing educational expertise in an international co-operation were – and still are – vital for preparing and implementing educational reforms in each particular country. However, parallel to progressing towards the early stated objectives a growing need for political commitment has been noted as well as the need for co-ordinating instruments in the region. As we have already seen above, the TFEY-EGP set two objectives building upon the 'Strategy 2001': to continue the *systemic support of national education reform efforts in the perspective of EU integration* and to *promote regional co-operation at various levels*. Reflecting on the success achieved in the first two or three years it was necessary to take a further ambitious step. Based on the idea of strengthening regional ownership, the ERI SEE

appeared as an initiative jointly developed by the TFEY and the education ministries of SEE aiming at supporting ongoing educational reforms and linking them with European trends and developments as outlined in the EU's Detailed Work Programme of the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe.

3.4.1 As an early step, so-called **SOM meetings** (Working Meetings of Senior Officials of Education Ministries from SEE countries) were established in the framework of the TFEY-EGP at the end of 2002. At the meeting of the Working Table 1 (Istanbul, 12-13 June 2002), a new plan was announced 'to hold a meeting of senior officials of Ministries of Education from SEE countries together with EU member-states and representatives of the European Commission. The aim of the meeting would be to discuss regional education reform priorities in SEE countries on the basis of the OECD Thematic Reviews as well as effects of EU Working Programme on the Objectives of an education policy reform in SEE countries.'⁶⁵ The first SOM was held in Vienna (5-7 December 2002) and it decided to organise regular meetings with representatives from SEE and other European countries in order to exchange experiences made in the reform implementation, to foster support partnerships, to discuss issues of regional concern and to formulate common positions on education reform.⁶⁶

The second SOM meeting in March 2003 proved that this new type of co-operation was really needed. Participants were updated on developments within the EU Objective Report and the Copenhagen process, discussed and endorsed the Action Plan and, in this context, further steps of implementation of the ERI SEE including the Terms of Reference for the foreseeing regional ERI SEE Secretariat.⁶⁷ The next SOM meetings made important concrete

⁶⁵ TFEY *Activity Report 2002*, pp. 3-4. Only a few days later the 6th Conference of European Ministers took place. In their *Final Communiqué*, the ministers addressed European political co-operation on the future objectives of education and training systems in Europe and noted with special regard to SEE countries: 'The Ministers welcome the achievements of the Enhanced Graz Process - Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and its strategy for future activities, which contributes to the implementation of the Objectives of Education and training, especially in terms of establishing a more structured process on perspectives for mid to long-term co-operation between the countries of the European Union and the Accession / Stabilisation / Association Process countries The Ministers see this as a further step for integrating South East European countries into the European area of Education.' *Final Communiqué* of the 6th Conference of European Ministers of Education 'Education in the New Millennium' (Bratislava, Slovak Republic, 16-18 June 2002), point 11.

⁶⁶ Five meetings were organised by the end of 2004: Second Meeting on 29-31 May, 2003 (Predeal, Romania), Third Meeting on 8-9 December 2003 (Belgrade, Serbia), Fourth Meeting on 21-22 May 2004 (Zagreb, Croatia), Fifth Meeting on 26 November 2004 (Zagreb, Croatia). Detailed information is available at http://www.see-educoop.net/graz_2003/index.htm (17.12.2004).

⁶⁷ The action plan of the ERI SEE, identifying 9 priority areas for educational reform, was endorsed during the Predeal meeting. ERI SEE priorities comprise a broad range as e.g. reviewing of existing national legal frameworks in line with ongoing European developments, curricular reform, the development of opportunities for lifelong learning etc. The Predeal meeting also envisaged the ERI SEE organisational structure. *The Governing Board* (GB) is composed of one representative of each signatory ministry of the Memorandum of Understanding while the TFEY-EGP is represented by the

contributions towards this end. But another important issue was discussed at the second meeting: the draft ***Memorandum of Understanding of Ministers of SEE***.

3.4.2 The *Memorandum* was soon ready to sign. By signing this document ministers launched a new phase in national, regional and international efforts to develop quality education for all and to contribute to peace, stability and progress in the SEE region. In the introductory paragraph, they stated that ‘South Eastern Europe being part of the evolving wider European area of education, they strongly underline the importance of sufficient investment in education to achieve the strategic goals as laid down in the Lisbon European Council conclusions aiming at the establishment of a knowledge based society throughout Europe’ and then continued: ‘Recognising the achievements of the enhanced Graz Process / Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the efforts undertaken so far by international institutions and individual countries they hereby affirm their strong support for the “South Eastern European Education Reform Initiative”.’ Thus, the ERI SEE was conceptualised to serve as an interface between ongoing SEE education reforms at national levels and European trends in order to promote common European standards in education: ‘South Eastern European countries need to be included in the implementation process of the “Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe” and the Copenhagen Declaration’ (*Memorandum*, 2003).

On the occasion of the 7th Conference of European Ministers of Education (Nicosia, Cyprus, 28 June), ministers of education and higher education of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, FYR of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia signed the Memorandum; Mr. Erhard Busek signed it on behalf of the Stability Pact for SEE and Mr. Anton Dobard on behalf of the TFEY-EGP. The *Final Communiqué* of the Conference sincerely welcomed their decision: ‘The Ministers welcome the achievements of the Enhanced Graz Process / Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact for the South Eastern Europe and its strategy for future activities. They also welcome the joint memorandum of understanding of the Ministers of Education and Higher Education of South Eastern Europe and its Action Plan which is

Chair. The GB meets twice a year on the occasion of SOM meetings. *The Consultative Body* is a board with an advisory character and consists of representatives of the co-ordinating institutions of the (former) TFEY Working Groups (see above, p. 13), European Commission, EU member-states (Education Ministries), donor countries and institutions and education experts. *The Secretariat* is responsible for implementation of the annual programmes adopted by the GB within the overall objective of integrating SEE countries into the evolving Wider European Area of Education through the networking, organisation and delivery of seminars, training, workshops etc. For details, see *Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe* (ERI SEE); a report presented on the occasion of the 8th Conference of European Ministers of Education. Oslo, 24-25 June 2004.

expected to strengthen the co-operation with regard to ongoing reform processes of the education systems.’⁶⁸

Other SEE countries were invited to join and sign the common document. With a touch of symbolism, all of them signed the Memorandum in the period between the 7th and 8th Conferences of European Ministers of Education.⁶⁹ In 2004, the Norwegian Ministry of Education hosted the 8th Conference, organised jointly by the European Commission and the Irish Presidency. The conference focused on lifelong learning, thus contributing to the goals of the Lisbon Strategy. It followed the inclusive approach of previous conferences of also inviting ministers from non-member-countries. In its *Final Communiqué* clear political support for new trends in SEE is given shown: ‘Ministers noted the importance of efforts to encourage dialogue, the exchange of experiences and practices at the broader European level as a means to strengthen co-operation and the connection between policy and practice. They welcomed the achievements of the Enhanced Graz Process/Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and its activities within the Education Reform Initiative of Southeast Europe (ERI SEE). They noted in particular the statement from the Ministers concerned and look forward to enhanced co-operation at the European level on lifelong learning.’⁷⁰

The title of the Oslo Ministerial Conference was ‘Lifelong Learning, from rhetoric to reality’. This important issue of the path towards the Knowledge Society has also been taken into account in the SEE region. Thus, discussions at the International Conference ‘Lifelong Learning, Adult Education and Employability’ resulted in another joint declaration by the SEE ministers where they stated: ‘South Eastern Europe being part of the evolving wider area of education, it requires particularly rapid development in the adult education sector since the economic problems facing the population in societies in transition in South Eastern Europe can only be resolved through improved education. The increased pace of change in the world of work, the complete transformation of some job profiles and the political demands made on enfranchised persons call for new approaches in education policy. Lifelong

⁶⁸ *Final Communiqué* of the 7th Conference of European Ministers of Education ‘Quality in Education and Active Citizenship’ (Nicosia, Cyprus, 27-28 June 2003), point 9. The conference was organised with the support of the European Commission and under the Greek EU Presidency.

⁶⁹ Other ministers from some SEE education ministries joined the Memorandum by signing Protocols: on 5 December 2003: Albania, Moldova (on the occasion of the Regional Table of the Stability Pact); - in January 2004 in Pristina: Kosovo; - on 25 April 2004: Croatia (on the occasion of the 3rd Informal Conference of Ministers of Education of SEE, Istanbul, 25 April 2004); - on 24 June 2004: Romania (on the occasion of the 8th Conference of European Ministers of Education).

⁷⁰ *Final Communiqué* of the 8th Conference of European Ministers of Education ‘Lifelong learning, from rhetoric to reality’ (Oslo, 24-25 June 2004), last paragraph.

Learning is the appropriate response to the constant growth in human knowledge and the speed of the information flow, and is of direct benefit to people, helping to turn them into a skilled and flexible workforce.⁷¹

3.4.3 Lifelong Learning as the underlying principle of contemporary education policies was emphasised in the process of setting priorities for the ERI SEE (first) working plan for 2005: preparations for access to the EU's Integrated Lifelong Learning Programmes⁷² through the development and implementation of appropriate training measures is one of the clearly stated activities planned for the near future. With the signing by all parties of the *Memorandum of Understanding of Ministers of SEE* activities to establish formal structures of the ERI SEE have been strengthened. Supporting the idea of regional ownership, overall co-ordination of the ERI SEE has gradually been transferred to the region through the establishment of a regional co-ordination office. In this process, the SOM meetings have been of important help.

The 5th SOM meeting (26 November 2004, Zagreb) was in a way the turning point. It took note of the voting for the Executive Director and on the Secretariat establishment process since the previous meeting (SOM 4) and then concentrated on further topics of substantial relevance for elaboration of the ERI SEE. The next day (27 November 2004), the first and constituting session of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body took place.⁷³ The appointed members of the Governing Board and Consultative Body elected the Chair (Mr. Radovan Fuchs; Croatia) and two Vice-chairs (Ms. Ivana Petricevic; Montenegro; Mr. Gerhard Kowar; TFEY) and appointed the first Executive Director of the ERI SEE Secretariat (Ms. Luminita Matei; Romania). The Secretariat shall be operating in the legal framework of a governmental agency in Croatia with members of the Governing Board acting as the steering board and the Executive Director as manager. At the meeting, members discussed

⁷¹ *Declaration* by the Ministers of Education and Higher Education of SEE on the occasion of the International Conference 'Lifelong Learning, Adult Education and Employability'. Skopje, 16-17 October 2003.

⁷² In spring 2004 the Commission adopted a Communication on 'The new generation of Community education and training programmes after 2006'. Two major new Community programmes are foreseen in the field of education and training: an *Integrated Programme in Lifelong Learning* (IPLL), for mobility and co-operation between the EU, EEA/EFTA and candidate-countries, which will subsume the existing Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes, and a *Tempus Plus* programme, for the countries neighbouring the EU and for the existing Tempus countries, which will focus on co-operation and development in higher (university-level) education, vocational training, school and adult education. See http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/newprog_en.html (17.12.2004)

⁷³ First Session of the ERI SEE Governing Board and Consultative Body. Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe. Zagreb, November 27, 2004. For the organisation structure, also see note 67.

elaboration of the working plan for 2005 which not only leads to the next steps of the ERI SEE initiative but probably also a new era in regional co-operation in education.

Thus, at the end of 2004, the *state* of educational co-operation in the SEE region speaks firmly in favour of continuing the *process* – *the Enhanced Graz Process*. The widespread national, cross-border, regional and international networking, political will and understanding within the region and clear Europe-wide support and development of new regional instruments promise a solid future, in particular with regard to the emerging common European area of education.

4. Conclusion: the prospects

The Enhanced Graz Process is today encountering new challenges. One of the main questions is how to promote the advanced networking of all key players in order to *strengthen the role and position of education in overall development* at local, national and regional levels. In fact, this is not a new question; it is an organic continuation of its former stages and it is a region-specific answer to European and global developments.

4.1 Actually, there are not many variants to choose from. Since 'this region belong to the continent' (see above, p. 17) and since the continent is taking – within a common agenda for the first time in its long history – important steps towards the Knowledge Society, the main direction is clear: ***SEE countries need to further improve their education and training systems.*** The question is merciless, almost Shakespearian: either towards the Knowledge Society or towards the world's margins. Both the achievements of the past few years as well as the remaining persistent problems should be seen as a strong reason to start a new cycle of activity.

Much remains to be done: not only to improve the provision of quality education but – to reiterate – to *enhance the role of education in the development of societies in SEE*. Education should not be treated as 'social consumption' as it was often and popularly viewed in the past few decades; ***education should be treated as the most important investment in the future.*** Of course, this does not involve the education sector alone, isolated from other social subsystems, for building a common European area of education can only enjoy success as a joint national, regional and European strategy. All governmental departments – Education, Science, Finance, Economics, European Integration, Labour and Social Affairs etc. – should strive for cohesion in this project. This cohesion will be higher the more a national consensus is achieved in a given society that the true development of education and governance of the education system should be independent of any political schisms and frequent changes in the leading positions. This requires capacity-building, team-work and professionalism; last but not least, it depends greatly on participatory processes in and public support for education reforms and, therefore, on the media.

International support (political, expert, financial, lobbying etc.) remains crucial. There are instruments to undertake new tasks: both existing (TFEY-EHP) and new ones (ERI SEE).

It is the right time to reconsider the work already done during past stages and to update the overall strategy: the new conference 'for sustainable development' in Graz (January 2005) seems an excellent opportunity to do just that. The updating should be approached from two perspectives: the challenges of the future and lessons from the past. This survey has aimed at the latter, not ignoring that understanding lessons from the past always leads to an agenda for the future.

4.2 Instead of a formal conclusion, we will now try to make a few comments and draft some options on the future tasks and perspectives of the Process.

4.2.1 Large rivers. From our point of view, there are at least three general education streams in Europe today which determine the emerging common European education area: the so-called *EU-Objectives Process*, *the Copenhagen Process* and the *Bologna Process*. At the birth of the Graz Process in 1998 not one of them was in place. The character of the Enhanced Graz Process is different; it should cross them transversely and link all three together, taking into account the particular circumstances of the SEE. This is an ambitious demand yet totally in line with the ambitious ERI SEE action plans: supporting the implementation of education reform in SEE reflecting both country-specific needs and demands in education reform as well as present trends in the development of the emerging European area of education, the European Higher Education and the European Research Area.

4.2.2 Quality education for all. The key task in the region is still the provision of open and quality education; that is, issues of widening access and ensuring equal opportunities. Participation rates should be improved in certain environments, in particular with regard to the gender aspect, Roma population, minorities and various disadvantaged groups in both rural and urban areas. Drop-outs and irregular attendance during compulsory schooling should receive much higher attention. From this point of view, the OECD project on 'Education development for the disabled and at-risk students' is vital. Last but not least, education for human rights and democratic citizenship as well as youth issues related to both formal and informal education (but not only) should find an appropriate position on the EGP agenda and at the national and local levels.

Pre-primary education should receive more attention; in recent reforms, it has often undeservedly been put in the shadow of primary and secondary education. Primary education still needs modernised curricula and new teaching and learning strategies oriented toward key competencies and quality. The huge population mobility of the last decade shook

or even destroyed the school network; this issue should be approached from the perspective of this decade. The transition from obligatory (now in many cases already nine-year) education to upper-secondary education marks the next important task of policy-makers: it is not only important to increase the share of the population which take more than nine years of schooling but to guarantee them an upper-secondary qualification allowing for employment as well as for continuing study at the tertiary level. It is recommended to take part in international studies of learning skills (e.g. PISA, TIMSS); the results of these studies are often painful for many countries, however, they should be observed and interpreted for the sake of improving national systems and not for creating scandals in the media.

4.2.3 Vocational Education and Training. The VET sector is a particularly vulnerable segment of SEE education systems. In the given economic circumstances characterised by huge unemployment rates and fundamental changes to the industrial structure, it is really difficult to promote education for employment. Therefore, reforms of education systems should integrate the reform of VET with a lifelong learning perspective, involving the entire education system. Education, employment and economic strategies should be linked to provide young people with the skills and capacities necessary for the mid- and long-term requirements of the labour market. Second-chance VET programmes for young people not participating in VET should be given higher priority. In general, the need for better national systems for qualifications remains a major problem. SEE countries should be directly and actively involved in the Copenhagen Process. Only recently the European Training Foundation with the financial support of Italy proposed a project on disseminating the Copenhagen Process to SEE; this idea should get full support at national and European levels.

4.2.4 Higher Education. Since 2003, nine SEE countries have been members of the Bologna Process. Full support should also be given to Moldova if it applies for membership in Bergen in May 2005. This development gives an ample opportunity to SEE countries for the further modernisation of their higher education systems and to join the common European Higher Education Area until 2010 as traced in the Bologna Declaration and the subsequent ministerial Communiqués. Comprehensive follow-up activities are now needed for the *successful preparation and implementation of further higher education reforms*. The urgent key areas are: providing the legal and institutional basis for an efficient quality assurance system, implementation of two-cycle system (with emphasis also given to the third – doctoral – cycle) and promoting the recognition of degrees and periods of study. As the Bologna Process will soon provide a common framework for qualifications of the EHEA, a growing number of European countries have already started working on the national framework for

higher education qualifications. This is also a challenge for SEE countries and their institutions. They should make the best use of the EU programmes for co-operation in higher education. The proposed extension of the well-known Erasmus-funded project TUNING to SEE universities should be offered full support as providing powerful assistance to the modernisation of studies at SEE universities.

4.2.5 Teacher Education and Training. While it is strange most surveys show that teacher education and training remains mostly obsolete in the region. Almost as a rule they belong to tertiary (university) education, but it seems that they are condemned to live in the shadow of 'more important and older disciplines'. There will be no Knowledge Society without considerable improvements to teacher education and training systems. In the framework of the Objectives 2010 the European Commission has already started an initiative to establish common European principles for teacher and trainer competences and qualifications. SEE countries and their respective institutions should get in contact with these endeavours and the EGP and ERI SEE are the right place to continue this debate, already opened at a seminar one year ago. A proposal of a European Teacher Education Network towards 2010 (TEN-10) has been prepared as an Erasmus application (also covering the SEE region), on the other side a regional project (supported by the OSI) on 'Enhancing the Professional Development of Education Practitioners and Teaching/Learning Practices in SEE Countries' will be launched in early 2005. In short, there are ample chances to move this important sector forward and connect it with European trends.

4.2.6 Lifelong Learning. The transition to knowledge-based societies has accelerated the need for a higher level competencies for all. The *lifelong learning perspective* has proved crucial for the policy goals of equity in access to education, attainment and achievement, and developing individual competencies after entry to the workforce as necessary investments to ensure economic progress and sustainable development. There are several specific aspects which can be dealt within the same perspective: using ICT; learning foreign languages; education for democratic citizenship; stimulating non-traditional learning paths; the recognition of informal learning etc. These are also particularly important tasks for the countries of SEE.

4.2.7 Public Responsibility for Education. Recent discussions have dealt broadly with the issue of *education as a public responsibility and a public good*; these discussions should be addressed from specific regional points of view. There is an obvious need to focus attention on the responsibility of public authorities for education: the adjustment of national legal frameworks; decentralisation of education; quality assurance mechanisms; educational

services and support etc. All authorities in the region find themselves in the tough dilemma of coping with the consequences of *accepting public responsibility for education* (i.e., the challenges of supporting a system ensuring equity and equal access for all according to merit, and the high quality of provision) at a time of serious economic problems and strictly limited national budgets. Further investigations of various governance and funding models of education systems, taking into consideration the growing competitiveness in the emerging European area of education where sustainable levels of excellence are a prerequisite, would significantly assist and support authorities in more efficiently accepting their public responsibility.

In closing this report, we might repeat a sentence from Minister Gehrler made in her opening address at the first Graz conference in 1998: 'We can only be realistic about our objectives if we are prepared to put in much effort' (*Austrian Presidency, 1998, p. 31*).

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B. EGP – TFEY documents

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C. Other related documents

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D. Internet

A comprehensive collection of useful links on EGP (SEE and other countries, international organizations, NGOs, institutions etc.): http://www.see-educoop.net/portal/id_links.htm

Austrian Institute of East and Southeast European Studies, Vienna
<http://www.osi.ac.at>

Bologna Process
<http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no>

Bruges-Copenhagen Process
http://europa.eu.int/com/education/copenhagen/index_en.html

CEPS - Centre for Educational Policy Studies (University of Ljubljana)
<http://ceps.pef.uni-lj.si/>

Council of Europe – Education for Europe
<http://www.coe.int/T/E/Cultural%5FCo%2Doperation/education/>

Economic Reconstruction and Development in South East Europe (EU / WB)
<http://www.seerecon.org/>

EGP – Enhanced Graz Process
http://www.see-educoop.net/graz_2003/index.htm

ESIB - The National Union of Students in Europe
<http://www.esib.org>

ETF – European Training Foundation
<http://www.etf.eu.int/>

EUA – European University Association
<http://www.eua.be/eua/index.jsp>

European Commission, DG Education and Culture
http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/education_culture/

European Union – Education, Training, Youth
http://www.europa.eu.int/pol/educ/index_en.htm

→ Education and Training 2010: Diverse Systems, shared Goals
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html

→ The European Union's relations with South Eastern Europe
http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/see/index.htm

EURYDICE – The information network on education in Europe
<http://www.eurydice.org/>

IBE - International Bureau of Education
<http://www.ibe.unesco.org>

KulturKontakt Austria
<http://www.kulturkontakt.or.at>

OECD – Directorate for Education
http://www.oecd.org/department/0,2688,en_2649_33723_1_1_1_1_1,00.html

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<http://www.osce.org/>

OSI – Open Society Institute
<http://www.soros.org/>

OSEP SEE – Open Society Education Programs South East Europe
<http://www.osepsee.net/>

SEE ECN - South East European Educational Co-operation Network
<http://www.see-educoop.net>

Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe
<http://www.stabilitypact.org/>

TEMPUS (EU)
http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/tempus/index_en.html

TEMPUS (ETF)
<http://www.etf.eu.int/tempus>

UNESCO – Education
<http://www.unesco.org/education>

UNESCO-CEPES (European Centre for Higher Education)
<http://www.cepes.ro/>

Uni-Adriatic / Adriatic-Ionian Initiative
<http://www.uniadriatic.net>

Abbreviations

CARDS – Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation
CDR SEE – Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in SEE
CEPES UNESCO – UNESCO European Centre for Higher Education, Bucharest
CEPS – Centre for Educational Policy Studies, Ljubljana
EAE – European Area of Education
ECTS – European Credit Transfer System
EDC and MoD - Education for Democratic Citizenship and Management of Diversity
EGP – Enhanced Graz Process
EHEA – European Higher Education Area
ERA – European Research Area
ERI SEE - Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe
e-SEE - Agenda for the Development of Information Society in SEE
ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe
ETF – European Training Foundation
EUA – European University Association
HRE – Human Rights Education
IBE UNESCO – International Bureau for Education UNESCO, Geneva
ICT – Information and Communication Technology
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
QSP – Quick Start Projects
OSEP SEE – Open Society Education Programs South East Europe, Ljubljana
OSI – Open Society Institute
SAA – Stabilisation and Association Agreements
SAP – Stabilisation and Association Process
SDC – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SEE – South Eastern Europe
SEE ECN – South East European Education Cooperation Network
SP – Stability pact
SICI – Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education
SOM – Meetings of Senior Officials of Ministries of Education in SEE
TFEY – Task Force Education and Youth
VET – Vocational Education and Training
WT – Working Table