

International Organizations and their Contribution to the School Development and Contemporary Education in Albania

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Abstract: *This theme is related to the enriched activity of pedagogical education in Albania during the 1990's of the 20th century till present. The heading organization on the field is UNESCO but there are still others in the game like OECD, UNICEF, International Bureau of Education, Council of Europe or other organizations and educational institutions. International organizations have influenced upon international cooperation in educational area. Projects, studies and other means have been employed on planning stages of educational reforms on educational HR, improvement of teaching program, teaching methods issues and perfecting adult education foundations. Such organizations proposed and prepared concrete programs for dissemination of illiteracy. These are just some of the main issues tackled by such organizations in joint forces with educational institutions of Albania during these two last decades. Beside other, a considerable number of documents of these organizations show how much is studied and implemented regarding forms and educational levels for all nations and minorities and simultaneously advance in cultural development.*

Key words: *Education, school, cooperation, international organization, Albania.*

1. Introduction

By International Organizations we mean a group of countries based on common goals, dealing with politics, development, programming and reform of education. Thus, within the United Nations operates UNESC

O, while on continental level countries unite and establish special organizations, such as the region of Europe: Council of Europe (Council of Europe), EU (European Union) and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). On the European continent, one of the best known and very important in order of importance is the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). For Asian countries the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and for countries from North to South America operates Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization of African Union (OAU).

Also, despite these organizations, there operate some international non-governmental organizations such as World Association for School as Instrument of Peace (SIP), the International Consortium for Civic Education (CIVITAS), International Organization for Development of the Freedom in Education and many other organizations and associations.

In this study we will stick to the organizations or foreign associations, which during the last 20 years given their contributions and impact on education and school development in our country.

2. Albania's Cooperation with the International Organizations in projects of reform and democratization of education, after 1990's.

Transformations in the educational system in the last 20 years, we can consider the future design of European education in Albania. After 1992, more than ever, experts of education were faced with the need to make decisions that will fundamentally affect the future of education in Albanian. Albania's openness and participation in many international organizations and forums, the signing of memorandums of understanding and the need of approximation Albanian school and the wider European brought to the attention of the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) and a variety of institutions the need to change the way of making decisions in this area.

In this context, decentralization and school autonomy would constitute the most controversial issues in the field of education. This refers to the fact that these processes are considered as two basic pillars of democratic reform in Albanian schools. Looking once again at the first transition, we would note that we inherited an extreme centralization in education, as in many other areas of the economy. The transition from dictatorship to democracy would necessarily be

accompanied not only by modification of the power ash, mentalities and attitudes, but also a fruitful cooperation with international organizations.

A special value in the history of education in Albania had the *project "Excellence and Equity in Education" (CBA)*, financially supported by the state budget (30 million USD) and World Bank loans, the European Investment Bank and the Bank of European Council for Development (45 million USD) a 75 million USD in total) With the help of World Bank experts it was possible that this process could achieve the final objective, "Policy development and decision making at all levels based on search-based and data-oriented approach" (Taks Force Tirana 2002). The "Excellence and Equity in Education" was envisioned to be implemented in the period 2006 - 2010, the Albanian Government adopted the Council of Ministers Decision (CMD) 234 on April 26th, 2006 compiled with the technical assistance and financial support of the World Bank, which marks a major objective related to reform of the education system in our country (Memushi 2004)

In Albania, the coordination of other International Organizations in the past five years, has been on decentralization and increased autonomy of schools supported by other strategic documents, which are: *The "Millennium Development Goals"* of the United Nations (UN), which aimed "the achievements of objectives for Development Goals adopted at the international level", and "towards the implementation of the *program "Education for All " (EFA / FTI) ; "National Strategy for Development and Integration 2007 - 2013"*, which crystallizes the medium and long term vision of national development based on an open and transparent process and aimed at returning our country to a country with high living standards, integrated into European and Euro-Atlantic integration, democratic freedoms and guarantees fundamental human rights and "*Stabilization and Association Pact*" and "*National Plan for Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Pact*", which aimed to integrate Albania into EU are other important documents for international cooperation.

All round changes and especially social and economic situation in the Albanian society had made school curricula implemented by the year 1991 to be old and worn out. In particular, given the legacy of Soviet-type school, the curriculum lines were overloaded with a broad academic sense, which hindered the formation of technical and practical skills of students oriented to everyday life. In essence, the development of this curriculum framework would be guided by the idea "society changes, schools need to change" to review and improve the school curriculum, to prepare them better for future citizens, to understand and solve increasingly complex problems that they have to face in their lives.

Discussions initiated by education specialists at *the National Conference on "Pre-university Education Strategy"*, developed in January 2004 and later attempts to draft *Curriculum Framework* that would serve as a basis for analyzing the state of secondary education. This was carried out working closely with 144 teachers and lecturers from the best in the respective areas. Also, during a month in 2007 at the Institute of Curriculum and Training (ICT) subject groups exchanged ideas and experiences with foreign specialists in the area of curriculum development. Specialists contracted were representatives of a British Company "*European International Partners*". Training was also conducted at the *National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)* in Ireland and "*Trinity College*" University. What played a positive role in this process were the establishment of 17 local networks with representatives from 37 RED (Regional Education Department) / EO (Education Offices), which enabled the preparation of 680 local trainers on various issues of curriculum, who carried out further training to all educational staff of high schools in the respective regions, under the monitoring of ICT specialists. Given the short time of implementation of the high school curriculum and results still not fully revealed, we believe that comprehensive reform of school curricula will remain part of an ongoing process. It should be noted that school curricula approved by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) finds itself "in ratio of 81% basic curricula and 19% elective curricula". This has provided "that only about 20% of it is to be managed autonomously, remaining again in the monopoly of (MES)".

Regarding the evaluation of education, there exist many forms which, though different from each other, have a common characteristic, that of collecting information. They may be quantitative or qualitative, reserved for administrative use or to distribute to the public. In any case, information is more helpful to judge and types of methods of analysis and presentation affect decision. In OECD member countries the use of indicators for assessment is widespread through national control mechanisms or regional opinion polls, surveys by inspectors and the usual collection of statistics, etc.

One of the documents relating to school and institutional activity towards scientific research activity and education is the "Normative Provisions for Public Schools" which entered into force in the academic year 1996 -1997, based on Law no. 7952, dated 21.06.1995. In the 25th article special attention is given to assessment of student knowledge and behavior, quote: "Assessing the level of knowledge, skills and practical skills to students is an important and fundamental issue of the whole teaching and educational work in school. Assessment is made by note or phrase. Such assessment is made by the teacher".

On institutional framework regarding evaluation, after 1992, there were some positive developments with the support of international organizations in the field of education. Thus, initially it was established the Design Centre Examinations and Assessment (QHVP), at ISP in 1994, with a personnel up to two or three specialists. This was a project

funded by World Bank on equipment and training of its expert staff. Key staff of the Centre was trained abroad, in ETS (USA), CITO (the Netherlands), UCLES (United Kingdom) and the National Service for Evaluation and Examination (NAES) in Romania. There were also some workshop and training seminars within the country which enabled the Centre staff, specialists and teachers to be trained on issues of evaluation, thus building capacity for the future.

At the end of first decade, supported by the European education policy, MES had the task of establishing a National Education Evaluation. The creation of this center is estimated at the National Education Strategy 2004-2015, as one of the two important institutional reforms of the second decade of Albanian education transformations. Its establishment will mark the beginning of the institutionalization of evaluative institutions.

Albania's participation in "PISA 2000" study was another international assessment of the project OECD, aimed at generating international indicators on knowledge and skills that students possess at 15 years of age, highlighting the extent to which students who complete the cycle of compulsory education have acquired some knowledge and skills that are important for an active participation in society. In Albania, this project was implemented in partnership with "Soros" Foundation with MES. 1012 students participated in the pilot phase of the 30 selected schools and nearly 5300 students participated in the main phase of the 174 high and 8-year schools gathering information according to geographical distribution, rural and urban areas and type of school and curriculum. Testing PISA, or Program for International Assessment of Students, done once in three years, by mutual agreement of the Ministry of Education and Science with the OECD, signed by former Minister of Education, Et'hem Ruka, in August 2000. Testing of the year 2000 marked the first time in the history of Albanian education that Albania was participating in an international study in the field of educational assessment. After the agreement with our state, testing was financed by local education offices, "Soros" Foundation and UNESCO. Despite the results achieved, what it can be said is that the project served as a positive experience for our country, because it introduced the concept of standardized assessment.

Training teachers on the job. In Albania, the structures of teacher training on the job have been and remain subject to ongoing multilateral dilemmas and conflicts. Generally these structures are set up with difficulty and are easily suppressed. So remember that the system of teacher training on the job rose in the early 1950's, when Pedagogical Cabinets were founded according to districts and the "House Master" in Tirana. In 1988, the IPS (Institute of Pedagogical Studies) structures established the Teacher Training Department and Directors, who covered the training of teachers on the job until the establishment of the Center for Training and Qualification in Education (QTKA).

Officially, QTKA began to function as a separate institution, on 01.02.2005. The idea of creating a center for teacher training has been early thought. Since December 1993, the Ministry of Education approved the establishment of this center, but the draft failed to go to the Council of Ministers and be approved for causes that have remained unexplained.

Since 1992 under the proposals made in the *project "RIEDEA"* was launched the idea of establishing the system of national coaches, who must be selected and sent abroad for training, a proposal that was not implemented. A new experience would born Albania in 1995, through the *Project-pilot "Teacher Training in Distance"* ("KUALIDA"). This project was originally named "TV for teachers". The object was the training of school teachers of 8 - year system (grades 5-8) in four districts of Albania, Elbasan, Shkodra, Gjirokastra and Tepelena. In implementing this project, it was decided to fit a distance training program with the expertise of the Open University in Britain, but to develop it entirely in Albania. The project involved 815 teachers who were divided into groups of 25 subjects in each group under the direction of formators* of the subject taught.

The "KUALIDA" underwent an external evaluation in its first phase, which was conducted by two independent groups of foreign experts. It was quite positive, so this project was extended to the case of "Citizens Education." Also, the activities of "KUALIDA", associated with real examples of the class television program that provided successful models for teacher's to acquire new practice methods.

Teachers training on the job suffered many changes in the decade 1990-2000. The Ministry of Education launched a new program to train teachers on the job in 1998. This program was supported by *Program "Albanian Education Development" (AEDP)*, funded by "Soros" Foundation assessing the effectiveness of this new program approaches related to teaching quality issues, training needs and content training.

* Formator. Person that used to be a teacher based in DN, had half of teaching hours and qualified teachers in different districts of Albania.

3. Role of International Organizations for the training of children with special educational needs, social problems and those at risk

Legally, the Albanian legislation guarantees the right to education for children and youth with disabilities, the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, Law no. 7952 dated. 06/21/1995 (amended) "For Pre-University Education System", "Normative Disposition for the education of children in need (For public schools) ", Law no. 8872 dated 29.03.2002 (as amended) "On the education and training in the Republic of Albania", as well as political and strategic documents that act in this area. But according to the thematic report on "National Education Policy" in July 2002, no children with special educational needs seem to be integrated into mainstream public schools. Those who follow any kind of educations are in special schools. These schools are specialized for caring for those blind or visually impaired, deaf or those with hearing impairments and children with mental disabilities. Under the "Annual Report 1998" of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, in 1999 seven centers operated for children in mental and physical development. They serve to children aged 6-14 years but some may remain in the center until the age of 18.

The first project entitled "Helping the Mentally Disabled" was another project that was implemented by Education Directory of the District of Tirana, during the 1994-1995 school year. Partner and major supporter of this project, was the *British organization "Feed the Children"*, which aimed at integration of several children with disabilities in some schools and kindergartens of the capital. The project was expanded to Librazhd district, where eight children with mental disabilities were integrated into a mainstream school. Following this initiative, funded by *UNICEF*, starting in 2000, 33 schools in the country were engaged in a number of initiatives for integrating children with disabilities in mainstream schools.

Another category of children who have shown a significant needs for education are children with social problems. For this category, in Albania there has been created over the years a number of residential institutions, which up to July 2002, were approximately 595. In fact, for the education of this category there have been contributions of foreign NGOs by establishing some smaller institutions for these children. The concept of "children with problems" has recently changed. Previously it meant orphans or children born outside marriages and socio-economic problems that have emerged in Albania after 1990s - this category includes poor children with two living parents.

International organizations observers repeatedly report to the Albanian government, after 1990s that a number of children and youth of school age live in the streets of cities without parental care and control. After the 1997 crisis, in Albania, where hundreds of thousands of weapons were looted from warehouses, such children were at risk to engage in serious criminal activities, including armed robberies, drug trafficking and prostitution. Especially in the south and near borders with neighboring countries, boys who had left school considered smuggling as an easy way to make money and drug use is on the increase. Parents often expressed their fear for safety of their children not just on the street but even in schools.

Besides *AEDP ("Soros" Foundation)* and *UNICEF*, according to the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs in 1998, a number of international donors operate in institutions for children with social problems. Among them are the *Danish Red Barnet (Save the Children)* and *Mission "Mother Teresa"* and bilateral projects in cooperation with *Swiss funding, Austrian, and British. National NGOs* are concentrated not only in Tirana but have lifted their distribution in major cities. Their main purpose is to help to create better opportunities for children, especially in more vulnerable sectors of society, like children with disabilities, homeless children, Roma children, and other minorities. These organizations also work for children's rights. Other organizations and individuals are organized in the Children Alliance Forum, which is an open forum for all children of Albania.

4. Financing of Education in Post-communist era

Forced by the pressing needs and lack of financial resources to create conditions that will ensure the continuity of the education process, the Albanian Ministry of Education and Sports will direct to aiding donors. Thus, in 1994, it would begin the implementation of the *project "Schools Rehabilitation and Reform"* financed by *IDA credit*. Within 4 years, it was planned to build 38 schools with 200 classes or 10% of needs in the country, as well as rehabilitating 237 schools with 1630 classes as planned by the loan of 960 million lek. In the same year, it would start its activity in Albania the philanthropist George Soros through his foundation. With this foundation funds were available, reconstruction and equipment with necessary teaching tools of 51 schools and 7 kindergartens were possible.

With the Albania's commitment to Council of Europe, the latter would interfere in the field of education through *PROGRAM "PHARE with a Grand"* of 10.3 million ECU. PHARE program project, *"Emergency Rehabilitation of Schools"* marked until 1996 the building 13 new schools with 140 classrooms and renovation of 12 schools, 173 classes.

There is no doubt that the lack of financial resources in basic education in Albania (primary and secondary), led to demand for education. However, private benefits (the benefit of the individual) of basic education are much higher than the benefit from pre and post- basic. For Albania, the benefit levels are calculated to be 13 to 16% for basic education and 2 to 4% for secondary education. Thus, external financing of vocational education within the PROGRAM "CARDS" released investment costs provided by the public education budget. In addition, the government planned to reduce costs in secondary education by introducing models of users for a fee. Costs for secondary education in this period are 4.07 times higher than the OECD average, which are 2.52. The government also planned to encourage more private investment in secondary education. To help the government to improve educational quality and opportunity for all its citizens, repeatedly withdrew from the project "Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Many bilateral and multilateral agencies would contribute to various aspects of educational reform process in the country. Much of this investment was assigned to the equipment and building of schools.

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