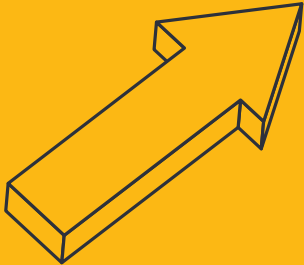




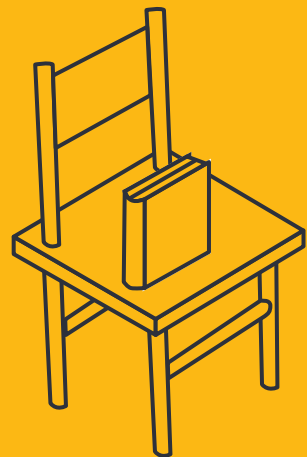
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TOWARD A NATIONAL EDUCATION PLAN

Making Education the
Number One Priority
in Kosovo

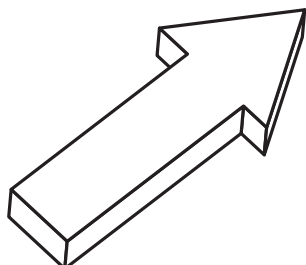
BESA SHAHINI



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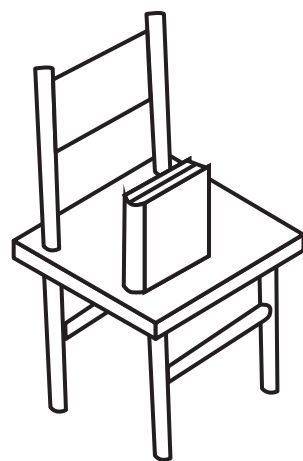
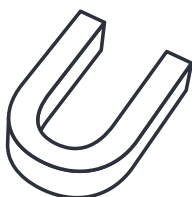
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The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS)

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INTRODUCTION

In December 2016, OECD published the results of the 2015 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)¹. Kosovo scored shockingly low: close to 80 percent of Kosovo's 15 year olds turned out to be functionally illiterate. This means that they can read and write but have serious difficulty with reading comprehension. Students struggle to understand and discern meaning from the texts they read. Considering how much information is communicated through the written text, anything from instructions on how to use the washing machine or administering medicines, to the daily news or philosophical concepts, being able to comprehend texts is an essential part of learning, enjoying childhood and preparing for adult life. Students who have not mastered basic reading comprehension skills fall behind their peers in school and have trouble in their professional or social lives later on as adults.

Similarly poor results were obtained in mathematics and natural sciences. What this data shows is that Kosovo's education system is struggling to offer its students the basic skills

necessary for learning and life. While the entire Balkan region is performing relatively poorly compared to the rest of Europe, the situation in Kosovo is especially dire. To put this in a regional context, while close to 80 percent of Kosovo's 15 year olds are struggling to read at "baseline performance level", in Albania this student percentage drops down to 50 and in Slovenia only 15 percent of 15-year olds struggle at this level. Slovenia's levels of functional illiteracy are what the rest of the EU is aiming to achieve by 2020.²

1 Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD), Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 Results: Excellence and Equity in Education, 2016.

2 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), Kosovo Education Strategy Plan (KESP) 2017-2021, 2016, p.11



TABLE 1: Percentage of students performing below baseline level of proficiency, Level 2* (2015)

	Reading ³	Mathematics ⁴	Science ⁵
Kosovo	77	78	68
Macedonia	71	70	63
Albania	50	53	42
Croatia	20	32	25
Slovenia	15	16	15

*Level 2 can be considered a baseline level of proficiency at which students begin to demonstrate the reading, mathematics and science skills that will enable them to participate effectively and productively in life or engage in science-related issues as a critical and informed citizen. There are seven levels of proficiency as measured by PISA, 1a, 1b, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. For more on this see PISA 2015 Volume 1, pp.72, 164 and 191.

3 OECD, PISA 2015 Results, Volume 1, p.163, reading statlink: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933432569>

4 OECD, PISA 2015 Results, Volume 1, p. 192, math statlink: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933432665>

5 OECD, PISA 2015, Volume 1, p. 71, science statlink: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933432072>



What is more, there is no big difference in performance between students who come from advantaged or disadvantaged socio economic settings at home, or between students who attend advantaged or disadvantaged schools.⁶ All Kosovo students, be they rich or poor, performed badly on the PISA test and no students were among the top performers. In most other countries, a low effect of socio economic differences on student performance indicates equality in the country. However in Kosovo, considering the overall poor results, it indicates that the education system is failing everyone. Even parents who have the means to take their children to private schools or pay for extra private classes for their children, are failing to find education services that would put their children among the top performers in reading, mathematics or science.

The basic skills that PISA measures are of course not the only skills that the education system should provide. They are however the key skills each student must have and provide the basis for all other learning. This is true even if we look at education only as a function of the economy and labor market. A recent World Bank report on “learning” explained that: “the skills needed in labor markets are multidimensional, so systems need to equip students with far more than just reading, writing, and math—but students

cannot leapfrog these foundational skills.”⁷ Therefore, it is of tremendous concern that the education system in Kosovo is failing to provide these “foundational” skills.

But what happens to students after the age of 15 – is Kosovo providing them with better education? The answer is no. After the age of 15, around half the students continue studying in vocational or professional schools⁸ and the other half attend general high schools (so called gymnasias) that focus more on academia. While the gymnasias students tend to continue on an academic track in university, the vocational school students are expected to be ready to join the labor market upon graduation. However, the links between the vocational school programs and the job market are weak and students are struggling to find jobs after graduation. A report evaluating Kosovo’s education strategy for 2011–2016 has assessed vocational education and training (VET) to be a “challenge that needs immediate attention.”⁹ In the same spirit, the new Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) education strategy for 2017–2021 underlines that in VET “major challenges remain for the development of capacities for the analysis of skills needs and capacities for estimation, the limited number of occupational standards, revision and development of curricula based on occupational standards, the training of teachers and instructors, equipping the cabinets...”¹⁰

6 OECD, Education GPS, Kosovo Students Performance PISA 2015,

7 World Bank, World Development Report 2018, Learning: To Realize Education’s Promise, 2017, p.29, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/wdr2018>

8 MEST, Raport Vleresimi i Planit Strategjik te Arsimit te Kosoves 2014-2016, 2015, p. 15

9 *ibid.*

10 MEST, Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021, 2016, p.81 <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/02/20161006-kesp-2017-2021.pdf>



A large number of students continue to study in university after graduating from high school. In fact, Kosovo has the highest per-capita number in Europe of students enrolled in higher education. There are currently close to 6,700 students per 100,000 inhabitants in Kosovo, which is “nearly double the EU average.”¹¹ Today there are 39 higher education institutions of which 30 are private. The number of students tripled in a course of a decade. Most of these institutions – including the public ones – were established in the last 10 years, increasing the demand for teaching staff to the point of overstretching more experienced professors by hiring them in many different institutions at the same time. In addition, a lot more inexperienced teaching staff was hired very quickly and without well-established criteria. This inevitably led to a decrease in quality of education.

Rapidly increasing the number of higher education providers was not just a poorly made decision implemented badly. This was a deliberate populist and political move by the party in power, in charge of education, the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK). There were two aims behind this decision. One was to offer a buffer for unemployed youth and quash potential social unrest. In Kosovo, less than 10 percent of youth (ages 15 to 25) are employed.¹² Providing youth with access to university offers them a feeling that even

though they are not working now, they are investing in their future careers. The issue with this is that upon graduation they will be joining a very narrow labour market, with less than 30 percent of the working age population actually employed. Many university graduates remain unemployed for years after graduation.

The second reason for the rapid increase of universities was to provide employment for party members and supporters who have worked tirelessly to help the party come to power, so they needed to be rewarded somehow. For a long time, new rectors, deans and teaching staff in universities came almost exclusively from the party ranks of the PDK, regardless of merit. Even the National Accreditation Agency (NAA)¹³ which checks the quality of the university programs and accredits them, was staffed mainly by PDK affiliates. This changed recently with a decision of the new prime minister of Kosovo, who comes from a different political party, namely the Alliance for Kosovo’s Future (AAK), and who in a rush and without much research sacked the entire NAA staff, leaving Kosovo without a functioning NAA.

While there is a lot of political party interest in higher education, it is the opposite with early childhood education. Traditionally there was very little investment in kindergartens in Kosovo. Participation of children in pre-

11 *ibid*, p.27

12 International Organization for Labour (ILO), Results of the Kosovo 2015 Labour Force Survey, 2016, p.11 <http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/1687/results-of-the-kosovo-2015-labour-force-survey.pdf>

13 NAA website, <http://www.akreditimi-ks.org/new/index.php/sq/>



A combination of factors brought Kosovo to this point. From unfavourable legacy to inadequate planning to lack of public financial resources committed to education – all share part of the blame. But Kosovo does not have time to lose.

school institutions is very low, despite the importance of early childhood education in children's development and in women's labour force participation. Only 3.5 percent of all children of ages 0 to 5 attend pre-school institutions, be they private or public. The only age group with better participation rate are five year olds who have obligatory attendance of pre-primary school and in 2015/16 school year their participation reached 81%.¹⁴

that everyone is on board with the difficult but necessary reforms that must take place.

A combination of factors brought Kosovo to this point. From unfavourable legacy to inadequate planning to lack of public financial resources committed to education – all share part of the blame. But Kosovo does not have time to lose. The time is ripe to make education the number one priority in Kosovo and start overcoming the challenges that are holding back Kosovo's education system. For this to happen, Kosovo needs a series of public discussions and debates among professionals and legislators and policy makers and teacher's unions and parents and students, which would lead to a robust and clear National Education Plan. National consensus must be reached across political parties so

¹⁴ MEST, Annual Statistical Report with Education Indicators, 2015/2016, 2016, pp. 77 and 78, <http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/01/raport-vjetor-statistikor-me-tregues-arsimore-2015-16.pdf>



PROBLEMS OF LEGACY:

There is no denying that Kosovo had a late and a rough start in education. It was only in 1945 that the first schools in the Albanian language were established in Kosovo, which at the time was a province in Yugoslavia. More schools opened in the next two decades. The aim of the initial education system was to root out illiteracy, which was everywhere in Kosovo. School attendance became obligatory and an increasing number of students attended the newly opened schools. In the same period, more responsibilities in the field of education were devolved from the central government to the “provincial authorities in Prishtina.”¹⁵ By 1970s, Kosovo became an autonomous province with executive and legislative powers, which were most prominent in the field of education. The power to design the curricula, produce textbooks, hire teachers – all in line with Yugoslav education vision but including particular Kosovo elements, was the key feature of the autonomy that Kosovo received. For the first time, higher education was provided in the Albanian language also.

All this came to a sudden halt in 1989. As Yugoslavia started falling apart and the onset of conflict was obvious throughout the federation, Kosovo saw its autonomy abrogated. With it Kosovo lost all legislative and executive powers related to education. Decisions on curricula, textbooks and other didactic materials would no longer be made in Prishtina but in Belgrade. References to Albanian culture, literature and history, were removed and replaced by Slavic or Serbian cultural references. This persistent cultural genocide¹⁶ pushed the Albanian education out of the public schools and into the underground. Lessons were held in private homes and basements, and teachers worked for free. While this was an amazing feat to keep the Albanian language and culture alive, and prevent the population from falling into illiteracy, it damaged the quality of education tremendously. A large number of students and teachers left the system all together, by migrating abroad or just dropping out of school.¹⁷ The 2011 census in Kosovo showed that two thirds of women ages 25 to 39 –

15 Interview with Dukagjin Pupovci, Director of Kosovo Education Center (KEC), August 2017.

16 Term used in the discourse on universal human rights to describe the non physical destruction of a nation. See Besa Shahini, Lessons in Resistance: Kosovo's Parallel Education System in the 1990s, 2016 Prishtina Insight <http://prishtinainsight.com/lessons-resistance-kosovos-parallel-education-system-1990s-mag/>

17 Tim Judah, Kosovo: War and Revenge, 2002, p. 81



women of school age in the 1990s - have finished only primary school or less¹⁸ and are unemployable today.

With the end of the war in 1999, tremendous efforts were undertaken to restart school on time that September. Kosovo was placed under international administration, run by the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). In the education sector, UNMIK decided to undertake drastic education reform, to remedy the damage that the 1990s did to the quality of education. A report by UNESCO describes the restart of school by the international administration in Kosovo: “dramatic reform... became the order of the day. Michael Daxner [Head of the UN Department of Education in Kosovo] inspired an impressive level of donor funding for education in Kosovo, obtained, in his own view and that of others, a near-free hand from the United Nations’ superiors to assert his vision on to the education system, recruited a largely hand-picked team of international educators, and assigned established international agencies core tasks within the education system.”¹⁹

While Daxner’s international team worked to design a new modern curriculum for Kosovo, “Daxner had to open schools, hire teachers, and approve textbooks. He could not train 20,000 new teachers and draft hundreds of

books over night, so he re-hired all of the ones who worked in the 1990s and approved all the books used in the 1990s.”²⁰ As ESI wrote in 2014: “the teachers who started to teach in late 1999 – with their strengths and weaknesses, skills and deficiencies – were largely those who had taught before.”²¹

International community was attempting a “revolution” in education policy through a modern curriculum, while ensuring full continuance of the 1990s educational practice. And this is the biggest damage that international administration caused to the education system in Kosovo: they installed a practice of designing very ambitious and cutting edge policies, that are so far removed from the reality on the ground that they cannot achieve improvement of the education system. This approach has been fully taken on board by the Kosovo institutions, who have become notorious for producing ambitious strategies and modern curricula that can simply not be implemented in Kosovo.

18 Besa Shahini, Lessons in Resistance: Kosovo’s Parallel Education System in the 1990s, 2016 Prishtina Insight <http://prishtinainsight.com/lessons-resistance-kosovos-parallel-education-system-1990s-mag/>

19 UNESCO, Parallel Worlds: Rebuilding the education system in Kosovo, 2004, http://www.seeeducoop.net/education_in/pdf/building-kosovo-ed.pdf

20 Besa Shahini, Why did Kosovo perform so poorly in PISA?, Prishtina Insight, 2016, <http://prishtinainsight.com/functionally-il-literate-kosovo-perform-poorly-pisa/>

21 European Stability Initiative (ESI), Books and Teachers: The Great Debate on Education Kosovo Needs in 2015, 2014, p.4 <http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/ESI%20-%20Kosovo%20-%20books%20and%20teachers%20-%2022%20Dec%202014.pdf>



REDUNDANT STRATEGIES AND INADEQUATE PLANNING:

There is a well-known mantra in the policy community in Kosovo that “Kosovo produces good laws and strategies, but it fails to implement them.” This applies too well to the education sector. Laws and strategies designed to improve the quality of education in Kosovo find poor implementation or no implementation at all. The reason for this is often bad planning: inadequate financial resources are committed to strategies and action plans or the implementing tools are not well developed to enable implementation.

This is the fate of the most important education reform that the government undertook this past decade, namely the curricular reform for pre university education. The idea that Kosovo needed a new curriculum came from MEST in 2007 and was backed by the European Commission (EC) ever since. This was the time that the PDK – after having

spent years in opposition – won the election and formed the government. They declared Education to be one of their priorities and decided that to address low quality, Kosovo needed a new modern curriculum for pre university education. This decision was contrary to the opinion of hired experts who evaluated the curriculum designed by Daxner’s team, which was only recently put in use. The Institute of Education of the University of London concluded that Kosovo had a good curriculum, all it needed was to develop better subject curricula and textbooks, which would enable the implementation of the existing curriculum in Kosovo schools.²²

The minister ignored this advice and composed a team of professionals, from outside the Ministry, who with funding from the European Commission finished drafting a new curriculum framework by 2009. Public



presentations and consultations took place and the final document was ready by 2011.

²³The core feature of the new curriculum framework was the concept of “competencies” that the education system must build in students throughout the learning process. Competences include communication competence, thinking competence, learning competence and so on.

While the new Curriculum Framework introduced curious concepts to the education debates in Kosovo, it was unclear how it would be implemented in schools. What does “thinking competence” mean concretely and how can teachers achieve it with their students? The Curriculum documents were laden with education jargon and concepts too abstract for teachers and students to understand.²⁴ Regardless of the confusion this caused in schools, the ministry decided to pilot it²⁵ as it was, without the subject curricula or textbooks that would break down the abstract “competences” into concrete actions that teachers and students can take to reach there.

The ministry refused to develop subject curricula because it foresaw that teachers would do it in each school for their students. The ministry also refused to develop new textbooks because it insisted that the new curricula gives more independence to teachers

to use recourses “beyond textbooks” and available online. When these ideas were challenged by teachers and critics, who pointed out that teachers in Kosovo lack the resources and training to develop subject curricula, while there is a clear lack of online resources in Albanian, the ministry did not budge. The Ministry organised trainings for teachers to explain some of the changes that the curricula brings to education process, such as merging few subjects (Biology, Chemistry and Physics) into one “subject field” (ie. Sciences) or changing the grading scheme from numerical to letter based. The trainings however, did not address subject content, leaving teachers to teach content from the existing poor-quality books.

This plan was bound to fail. There are no known cases in the world that a curricular reform was successfully implemented without new textbooks that provide the content for the new curricula and help teachers navigate the new concepts and methodologies. Interviews conducted with departments of education in Ontario (Canada), Zurich (Switzerland) and Kyrgistan²⁶ all showed that a new curriculum is only piloted once the new textbooks are out. “Teachers have difficulties translating the competence based curricula into their day to day work in the classroom. They ask “OK but when do I teach the French Revolution?’

23 MEST, Curriculum Framework for Pre University Education in the Republic of Kosovo, 2011, http://www.ibe.unesco.org/curricula/kosovo/kv_alfw_2011_eng.pdf

24 MEST, Curriculum Framework for Pre University Education in the Republic of Kosovo; Three Core Curricula for different stages or pre-university education; Guidelines for Implementing the New Curricula – last revised in August 2016 – can be found here: <http://masht.rks-gov.net/arsimi-parauniversitar>

25 MEST, Administrative Instruction, Piloting of the curriculum framework and the core curricula, 2013, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDocumentDetail.aspx?ActID=10152>

26 The author of this paper has conducted interviews in Canada, Switzerland and with Kirgiz officials, as she was researching education policy and practice between 2014 and 2017.



This is why we create textbooks which break down content in the way that it helps teachers gradually build the competences that the curriculum foresees for students.”²⁷

In 2014 and 2015, three assessments²⁸ were conducted of the piloting process that revealed the impossibility of implementing the new curricula without the necessary tools, namely textbooks, computers and other infrastructure as well as adequate teacher training. In September 2017, despite all the difficulties with piloting, despite the lack of textbooks, the Ministry decided to roll out the curriculum in all schools for certain grades. Ministry organised trainings for teachers that were short and superficial²⁹ that have left teachers frustrated and improvising in their classroom.

A recent study conducted by EdGuard Institute³⁰ evaluated the curriculum training provided by the ministry in summer 2017. The findings are really discouraging, even though expected: 76 percent of teachers participating in this training are not aware of the basic concepts in the new curricula and two thirds of teachers gave a very negative evaluation of the training provided by the Ministry. In addition, out of the schools that implement the new curricula, in 87 percent of them there is no difference in teaching from when they were using the existing curricula.

The government decided to ‘fix something that isn’t broken’ by developing a new curriculum when all they needed to do was develop better books for the existing one. Now it is refusing to at least implement this properly. The government is failing to assist teachers with implementation by providing them with the proper support in the form of training and textbooks to enable teaching and learning in class. The fear is that this badly designed and executed project will have actually damaged the education system further, instead of addressing quality, as it claimed it would.

This is not limited to the curriculum, however. There is a new teacher professional development policy, developed over the last few years and passed in 2017, which cannot be implemented because it requires inspectors to be more involved in monitoring teachers as they move up in their careers.³¹ Yet the law on inspection is stuck in the Ministry and the parliament. New textbooks will not be produced because the law on textbooks is also stuck in the ministry and parliament. Also, few financial resources are put aside for the implementation of these policies, which means that even if the necessary laws are passed and the reform process is unlocked, these policies will not be implemented well or at all.

27 Interviews with officials in the public publishing house in Zurich, “Lehrmittelverlag zürich” 2014.

28 Three assessment reports: 1) Instituti Pedagogjik i Kosoves (IPK), Draft report analyzing the assessment of schools piloting the new curricula (2015); 2) Jyri Manninen, East Finland University, Twinning Project KS11 IB OT 02, Assessment Report (2014); 3) MEST, Division for Curricula and Textbooks, Working Report on the implementation of the Kosovo Curriculum Framework and Core Curricula in all levels of education (2015).

29 Interview with Rinor Qehaja, director of EdGuard Institute, 2017.

30 EdGuard Institute, Assessment of Teacher Training Programs for the Implementation of the New Curriculum Framework and Core Curricula in Kosovo Schools, October 2017 (upcoming).

31 MEST, Teacher Professional Development and Licensing Package, 2017, <http://masht.rks-gov.net/udhezimet-administrative-2017>



Ministry decided to roll out the curriculum in all schools for certain grades. Ministry organised trainings for teachers that were short and superficial that have left teachers frustrated and improvising in their classroom

All these strategies were supported with big donor money. European Commission, the World Bank, USAID, GIZ – to mention a few – have all been involved in the education sector in Kosovo. But due to the lack of strong guidance from the ministry and lack of familiarity with the local context, this support was mainly geared toward producing more documents (strategies and action plans) than implementation.

Interviews in Canada with the Department of Education in the province of Ontario³² showed that even well established and well-financed education systems such as the one in Ontario could not handle too many reforms at the same time. “One big reform at a time, every so many years” said the official from the Ontario Education Department. On the other hand, the education system Kosovo in the past 17 years never stopped reforming. The rollercoaster of education reforms included going from four years of primary school to five. Introducing grade 9. Introducing and then abolishing grade 13. Introducing the “matura” test for students who graduate from high school and want to go to university. Introducing teacher licensing

and teacher development policies. Introducing new reforms in the Faculties of Education and changing the rules for universities that provide teacher education. Introducing new pre-university education curricula. And so on. None of the head-spinning reforms though are seen through to the end so students and teachers end up discouraged, confused and unmotivated.

32 According to PISA test results, Ontario has one of the best education systems in the world. See PISA 2015.



FINANCING AND DECENTRALISING EDUCATION:

One of the key impediments to successful reform in Kosovo is that Kosovo does not spend enough on education. In 2014, the total spending was 262 million Euro, of which over 70 percent went to salaries of teachers. In comparison, Slovenia, a country with a similar student population, spends nearly ten times that, close to 2 billion Euro.³³

Of course, comparative spending in education is calculated in proportion to country GDP. Public spending in the education sector in Kosovo reached 4.7% of GDP in 2014 “which makes Kosovo comparable to other countries in the Region.”³⁴ However Kosovo lags behind other countries in terms of student per-capita spending. “Per capita spending in the Pre-University Education 2014 was 477 EUR (or 16.1 % of per-capita GDP), whereas in Higher Education – 703 EUR (or 23.8 % of per-capita GDP).

In OECD countries, expenditure per student by educational institutions averages 21% of GDP per capita at the primary level, 26% at the secondary level and 41% at the tertiary level.”³⁵

Linked to spending and budgets is the issue of decentralisation in education which has not fully taken place. While most education management responsibilities were transferred from the national to the municipal level, and a lot from municipalities to schools, budgets are still tightly controlled by the central government or municipalities and do not allow for flexibility in spending to match the needs of different schools located in different municipalities.

Decentralisation of education in Kosovo was designed initially as a means for Serb majority municipalities³⁶ to keep their educa-

33 European Commission, Education and Training Monitor 2015, Slovenia, 2015 p.3 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/tools/docs/2015/monitor2015-slovenia_en.pdf

34 MEST, Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021, 2016, p.81 <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/02/20161006-kesp-2017-2021.pdf>, p.29

35 ibid

36 Serbian population in Kosovo is between 5-7 percent yet they control 10 out of 38 municipalities. In 1999 the Serbian community refused to participate in the education system that was being established in Kosovo and kept the curricula and textbooks produced in Serbia. To this day Serbia invests close to 300 million Euros to support education, health and other areas for Serbs in Kosovo.



The curricula and books cannot incite hate, have to comply with notions of multi-ethnicity and must respect the official name of the Republic of Kosovo.

tion system intact and not have to integrate with the rest of Kosovo. There are close to 20,000 Serb students in primary and secondary schools in Kosovo. The law on education in the municipalities of Kosovo³⁷ foresees that “Serbs are allowed to use the curricula and textbooks produced in the Republic of Serbia, for as long as they do not contain any items that are not in compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo.”³⁸ The curricula and books cannot incite hate, have to comply with notions of multi-ethnicity and must respect the official name of the Republic of Kosovo. In addition, an Independent Commission had to be established to determine if the books and curricula from Serbia comply with these demands.

The Independent Commission was established in 2010 and issued a report noting many irregularities but the most important one being that Serbian curricula and textbooks treat Kosovo as a province of Serbia.³⁹ Therefore Serb students in Kosovo learn

that they still live in Serbia, with the biggest repercussion from this being their lack of willingness to integrate with the rest of the society in Kosovo. Decentralization of education ensured the creation of a new parallel system of education, keeping once again Albanian and Serb students. It undermines the future of the country and the wellbeing of Kosovo’s citizens.

37 Parliament of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Education in the Municipalities in the Republic of Kosovo, 2008, http://www.kuvendikosoves.org/common/docs/ligjet/2008_03-L068_en.pdf

38 Besa Shahini, What do serbs learn? Prishtina Insight, 2016, <http://prishtinainsight.com/what-do-serbs-learn/>

39 MEST, Independent Commission for the Review of Serbian Language Teaching Materials, 2010, <http://www.erisee.org/sites/default/files/-%20Comprehensive%20Report%20of%20Independent%20Commission%20for%20the%20review%20of%20serbian%20language%20teaching%20materials.pdf>



PRIORITISING EDUCATION TODAY:

Kosovo is a poor country with very few resources that can jumpstart its economy. The main resource in Kosovo is its people. Close to half the population are 25 years old and younger. A well-designed and developed education system that can prepare Kosovo's youth for the social, economic and political challenges of the 21st century can turn Kosovo's development around by breaking the cycle of poverty. However education has become the Achilles heel in Kosovo's development. So much depends on it yet it has remained Kosovo's most vulnerable point.

Political parties in power since the end of the war have prided themselves in having achieved near 100 percent inclusion of students in pre-university education and tripling the number of students in higher education. But "schooling is not the same as learning" – as the World Development Report 2018 rightly points out. Top Kosovo students have performed lower in PISA than some of the worse performers in OECD countries. School attendance can address absolute illiteracy, but just going to school is not enough to prepare students for the life and work challenges they will face as adults.

Kosovo is experiencing the biggest education crisis since the establishment of the education system after the World War II. It is time to act. All stakeholders in education must do their part. Be they teachers, parents or students. But most importantly, policy makers must meet and debate ways forward.

A lot is wrong in the education sector but not all can be addressed at once. Other countries that have overcome their education crises teach us about the importance of defining fewer priorities and implementing them well for longer. Clear national priorities must be set and they have to go back to the basics. Literacy, numeracy and science for basic education; improved VET programs that connect students better to the labor market; transparency and high standards in promotion of teaching staff in universities – should be the three main goals of the education reform in Kosovo, included in a comprehensive and inclusive National Education Plan. Budget must be allocated appropriately and implementation must begin today.

