



---

**Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” Skopje**

---

**Political analysis 01/07**

***Mandatory secondary school education:  
how to get from a good idea to good implementation***

**Dane Taleski**

**Marko Trosanovski**

**Summary**

On 10 April 2007, with the enactment of changes in the Law for Secondary School Education, mandatory secondary school education was introduced. This political decision has a strong capacity to initiate reforms to the secondary school system. However it is not and cannot be a goal on its own. The conditions in Republics of Macedonia show that the present performances of the secondary school system are not satisfactory. A comparison with other countries in the region, in the EU and beyond shows that Macedonia is on a lower level concerning the percentage of people who have completed secondary school education and the structure of the secondary schools themselves. The units of local self-government cannot respond to the challenges of implementing mandatory secondary school education on their own. If additional resources and capacities for the local self-government units are not provided, a process of cyclical “re-centralisation” in the area of education may occur. Substantial reforms to secondary school education are required with a greater participation of local self-government and private initiatives from the business sector

Contents:

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. The state of secondary school education in Republic of Macedonia         | 2  |
| 2. World, European and regional trends                                      | 3  |
| 3. Introduction of mandatory secondary school education                     | 7  |
| 4. Implications of the introduction of mandatory secondary school education | 8  |
| 5. Conclusion   | 10 |
| 6. Recommendations  | 11 |

## 1. The state of secondary school education in the Republic of Macedonia

Within the framework of the existing educational network of the Republic of Macedonia, there are 101 functioning secondary schools comprising of 93,908 students and 6,136 teachers, out of which 5 are private schools with 1,031 students and 145 teachers. The interest of the students is larger for gymnasiums and for vocational schools with a four-year program, thus 40.2% are in programs for gymnasium education, 51,5% in the vocational secondary school education, while in the three-year secondary school programs there are 8.2%. In special secondary school education (for students with development obstacles) there are four schools comprising of 317 students and 79 teachers.<sup>1</sup>

The statistical data shows that 49.39% of individuals above 15 years of age do not possess or are in possession of a very low level of education (illiterate or having not completed primary or secondary school education). This will drastically reflect the future economic and social development of the country. From the total number of students who have completed the eighth grade in 2005/06 (28,280 students) 26,043 were enrolled in public schools, that is, 7% did not continue with secondary school education. There is no data on how many students gave up their education after the first year of education, which is a very important indicator that reflects the state of secondary school education.<sup>2</sup>

With the Law on the Alteration and Supplementation of the Law for Secondary School education published in the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia* no. 67/04 on 04.10.2004, it was determined that secondary school education will be realised in secondary schools organised as public secondary schools (municipal secondary school, that is, secondary school of the city of Skopje and state secondary school) and private secondary schools. With the process of decentralisation, a state school is established by the Government of Republic of Macedonia, while the municipality, that is, secondary school of the City of Skopje can be established by a unit of local self-government.<sup>3</sup> The decision for establishment is made by the Municipal Council after previously having gained the opinion of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Proposal for Law for Alteration and Supplementation of the Law for Secondary School Education with proposed law, Government of the Republic of Macedonia (21.03.2007).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Law for Secondary School Education, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 67/04, act 5 from 04.10.2004.

The structure of secondary school vocational education (3 years) is 55% theory and 45% training and practice. The structure of the directed secondary school education (4 years) is 35-40% theory, 60-65% vocational subjects and 10% practice.<sup>4</sup> The syllabuses are graded as rigid, formulated exclusively at central level by the Bureau for Educational Development in the Ministry of Education and Science. The study of a foreign language is on a relatively high level, but a program for a second foreign language study is almost non-existent. Teaching methods are outdated and grading is subjective. For example, in 1994/95 35% of the students had excellent grades, while in 2000/01 that percentage grew to 45%. In mid-April 2007, front page articles in daily newspapers expressed suspicions that the grades in secondary school education have drastically changed in the last months of the school year, in a period of two months, more with outside interventions rather than on the basis of an improvement in the knowledge and performance of students.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. World, European and regional trends**

In the study entitled “Trends in the International Studies of Mathematics and Natural Sciences”, conducted in the Sector of Education in the US State Department, Macedonia has demonstrated very poor results.<sup>6</sup> It was a very complex study conducted in 1995, 1999 and 2003 through diverse countries from the whole world on a set of questions that grade the capacities of the schools and teachers, as well as the performances of the students. The examined students were in the eighth grade, which means that they are ready to commence secondary school education. The 2003 results show that in according to knowledge of mathematics, the students in Macedonia are rated lowest of all countries in Europe participating in the research. The situation is very similar in relation to the knowledge of natural sciences. We are again in the lowest rank from all countries in Europe. In relation to both categories, worse results than Macedonia are founded in African countries and in some Asian countries. The review of the ranking of some of the countries is given in Table 1.

The comparative results, created on basis of the cumulative indicators, show that knowledge of mathematics and natural sciences of students in Macedonia decreased between 1999 and 2003. During these four years, our average in both fields diminished by 10%.

---

<sup>4</sup> "Labour Market Review of Macedonia", European Training Foundation, February 2005, page 18-21.

<sup>5</sup> See for more “A “D” in March becomes an “A” in May”, *Дневник*, April 18<sup>th</sup> 2007 г.

<sup>6</sup> Complete and detailed data available at <http://nces.ed.gov/timss>.

Table 1. Results form TIMSS study in 2003, excerpts for several countries only

| Rank | Mathematics | Rank | Natural sciences |
|------|-------------|------|------------------|
| 1    | Singapore   | 1    | Singapore        |
| 5    | Japan       | 5    | Estonia          |
| 7    | Netherlands | 9    | USA              |
| 15   | USA         | 15   | Slovakia         |
| 22   | Italy       | 22   | Italy            |
| 25   | Bulgaria    | 24   | Bulgaria         |
| 30   | Macedonia   | 31   | Macedonia        |
| 33   | Iran        | 35   | Egypt            |
| 41   | Philippines | 41   | Lebanon          |
| 44   | Ghana       | 44   | Ghana            |

Source: Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Institute of education and Science, U.S. Department of Education, <<<http://nces.ed.gov/timss>>>

The stagnancy in the development of the educational quality is even greater if a comparative analysis is made on the conditions in Macedonia and the level of the EU. According to the Lisbon Declaration, “by 2010 the EU wants to accomplish the most competitive and most dynamic economy based on knowledge in the world” The focus put on knowledge means securing a quality and effective educational system that offers education and qualification training for all ages. Generally taken, the EU’s goals in the area of education are<sup>7</sup>:

1. Decreasing illiteracy;
2. Higher level of completed secondary school education;
3. Decrease in uncompleted education;
4. Increase in the number of graduates;
5. Larger participation in qualification training.

According to Eurostat, in 2005 in the EU, 61.1% of citizens between 25 and 64 years of age had completed secondary school education. In 2004, 77% of citizens between 25 and 34 years of age had at least completed secondary school education. In comparison with 1999, the number of citizens with a completed secondary school education at the EU level increased by 10%. Also, an interesting trend in the EU is that 56% of all students in

---

<sup>7</sup> “EU integration seen through statistics” 2006 edition, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

secondary schools were enrolled in vocational secondary school education. Studying a foreign language is mandatory in secondary school education, no matter what kind. The most common foreign language studied is English, but more and more present is the trend of introducing a second mandatory foreign language, German or French.

According the registration conducted in Croatia in 2001, 58.9% of the population completed at least secondary school education and the larger part of them completed vocational school lasting from one to three.<sup>8</sup> In 2004/05, in Croatia, there were 679 secondary schools and 70 institutions for adult education. There were 70 private secondary schools and 17 of them were gymnasiums, eleven vocational education secondary schools, one was a technical vocational school and one was artistic. In Croatia in 2004/05 there were 46 educational institutions offering education for adults and 24 of them were privately owned.

In Bulgaria 2005/06 83.4% of all citizens between the ages of 15 and 18 were enrolled in the secondary school educational system, while 34% of those between 19 and 23 years of age were enrolled in the system of secondary education.<sup>9</sup> In 2005/06 in Bulgaria there were 1,196 institutions offering secondary school education and qualification training. There were 495 schools for vocational and professional development out of which 73 were private, while 114 offered education for adults of which 102 were private.

According to registration in 2002, in Macedonia 46.9% of the population completed secondary school education.<sup>10</sup> In 2005/06 60% of young people between 15 and 19 years of age were enrolled in the secondary school education system. In the same year in Macedonia there were 101 institutions offering secondary school education and only five of them were private. The number of institutions offering education for adults is not available by the State Bureau of Statistics of Macedonia, but according to Eurostat, in 2003 only 2% of individuals between 25 and 64 participated in qualification training. The comparative results are shown below in relation to the indicators in Macedonia and those of the EU and the region.

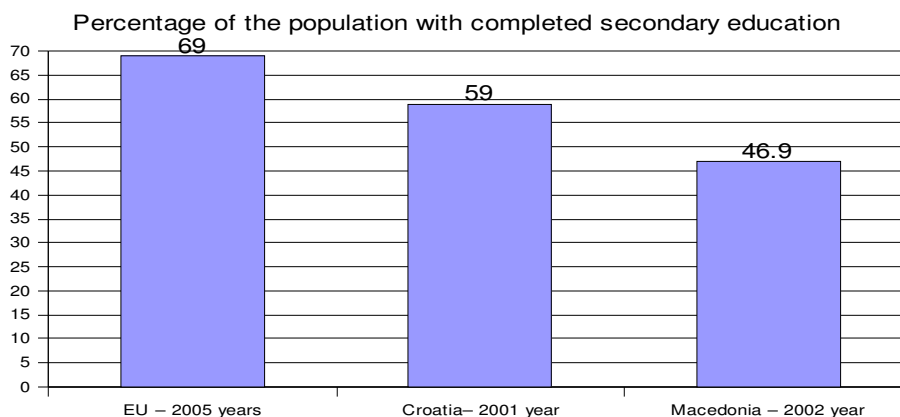
---

<sup>8</sup> For more information see <<<http://www.dzs.hr>>>

<sup>9</sup> For more information see <<<http://www.nsi.bg>>>

<sup>10</sup> For more information see <<<http://www.stat.gov.mk>>>

Graph 1. Percentage of completed secondary school education: EU, Croatia and Macedonia



Sources: Eurostat, the State Bureau of Statistics of Croatia and the State Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Macedonia

According to the data from the graph, it is clearly seen that Macedonia is below the EU average of population with a completed secondary school education and also below the Croatian one. At the same time, the comparison with Bulgaria, as shown in Table 2, shows that the percentage of population which should be part of the secondary school education system in the last year is significantly lower than that in Bulgaria.

Table 2. Percent of population from 15 to 19 years of age enrolled in secondary school education system, Bulgaria and Macedonia in 2005/06

|  | Bulgaria | Macedonia |
|--|----------|-----------|
| Percent of population from 15 to 19 years of age enrolled in the secondary school education system | 83       | 60        |

Sources the State Bureau of Statistics of Croatia and the State Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Macedonia

One of the biggest differences is the number and structure of the ownership of secondary schools. Bulgaria has 1,196 high schools, Croatia 749 and Macedonia 101. Bulgaria has 175 private high schools, Croatia 54 and Macedonia 5. Because of the size and the diverse socio-economics characteristics of the three countries the conditions cannot be directly compared, but the differences in relation to the total number of secondary schools is significant, in particularly the differences between the private and public secondary schools in Bulgaria, Croatia and Macedonia. In that manner, while 14.6% of the total secondary school educational institutions in Bulgaria are private, in Croatia the percentage is only 7.2% and 4.9% in Macedonia. One third of the secondary schools in Macedonia are gymnasiums and the larger part from the ones on vocational, directed and technical education often share

infrastructure.

### **3. Introduction of mandatory secondary school education**

Based on UNESCO's program, *EDUCATION FOR ALL*, on 21 March 2007, the government proposed a short procedure for changes and supplements to the Law for Secondary Education with which the *existing right of Macedonian citizens, under equal conditions, to gain a secondary school education is now also their obligation*, but at the same time it is the state's commitment that it is provided free of charge. The changes in the law were voted on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2007.

The financial sanctions envisaged for not respecting this duty is €1,000 expressed in Denars for the parents/guardians of secondary school students under the age of 18 if they have not enrolled their child in a secondary school or have permitted only part-time presence in school. For a student above the age of 18 who is not present in school, the penalty is €800 expressed in Denars. The articles of this law will be implemented at the start of the 2008/09 school year.

The present public secondary schools in the Republic of Macedonia continue to function as municipal schools or schools of the City of Skopje, after the consultation of the municipal councils and the Council of the City of Skopje and election of mayors. The municipality and the City of Skopje have the establishment rights and become secondary school founders. Part 3 of the Law for Secondary School Education guarantees the right of secondary school education with equal conditions for all. This has the goal to abolish discrimination based on race, sex, skin color, national and social background, political and religious beliefs, and financial and social positions.

#### *Financing secondary school education*

The financing of public secondary school education comes from the state budget, allocated through the Ministry of Education. The Ministry possesses, manages and delegates the means for public secondary school education. With fiscal decentralisation, the municipalities with a special regulation voted by the institution responsible for local self-government units, re-divides the money in accordance with the expenditures they have according to the functioning of the municipal schools. The school boards of municipal

secondary schools and the ones in City of Skopje, propose a yearly financial plan and final accounts to the founder and in the case of the public ones, they are proposed to the Ministry.

In additions to the resources from the budget, public schools can gain resources by: selling products and services resulting the completing basic activities, projects approved by Minister, interest and dividends of products, gifts, donations est. With the changes in the new law they cannot gain resources through the participation of the service users.

The resources for financing a public secondary school is secured with the Law for Budgets of Republic of Macedonia, the Law for the Execution of the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia and the Law for Financing Local Self-government Units.<sup>11</sup> The resources are given to the municipality via several donations and referred donations and the municipality divides them to the secondary schools in its territory. The decision is made based on a formula deduced primarily from the number of students on this region, but it can be affected by other factors.<sup>12</sup> The municipality can supplement the dotation with means from its own sources, except for employees' wages.

#### **4. Implications of the introduction of mandatory secondary school education**

Even though the basic infrastructural conditions are satisfied and the number of students needed to be integrated into the secondary school education system is minimal (around 7 percent if the total number of students complete only primary school), the implementation of this law in practice is problematic. Previous experience has shown that besides the additional financial problems that will be created with the introduction of mandatory secondary school education, municipalities had problems with schools. The tendency to “re-centralise” secondary education (although only for a year) can become a magic cycle. Namely, according to the law, if the municipalities and the City of Skopje do not secure conditions for the smooth introduction of secondary school education, the authority to conducting affairs is taken from them by the Ministry of Education and at the expense of the Municipality. The problems with unqualified human capital, the old educational programs and the need for the re-qualification of the teaching personnel are aspects that should be the subject of further research into this question.

---

<sup>11</sup> Law on changing and supplementing secondary education, article 48, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, no. 67/04 of 04.10.2004

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



The total fiscal implications of this law, according to the calculations of the Ministry of Education, needed for securing additional conditions for free secondary school education, are about 2,700,000 Denars for technical aids (annually), about 7,900,000 Denars for wages, rent and personnel allowances (for three months) as well as 5,200,000 Denars for the technical maintenance of the secondary schools (annual level). The cost of accommodation in student homes and transportation of secondary school students have not been calculated in these figures. The first impression gained of the analysis of the report for financial overload by this law is that it lacks a more thorough projection of the expenditures which will anticipate eventual problems and will construct a strategy for surpassing them. Another flaw of these calculations is that they are done without taking into consideration the fiscal decentralisation and the capacity of the municipality to service the needs of the secondary schools for which they are directly responsible. The fiscal argumentation starts with the former centralised division of financial means.

In addition, a deep analysis for student preferences has not been made, nor has an analysis of the needs of the labour business based on which vocational high schools will be open which makes the expectations of the gains from this law relative. Also, the changes in the law do not leave room for adjustments to the curriculum and to the needs of the local environment, that is, they do not presume utilisation of the local experiences or knowledge. This has a particular significance in connecting secondary school education, especially the directed and the vocational, with the local labor market and the local economy. In the changes of the law, EU parameters are not taken into consideration, particularly in the part of life-long education programs for adult education.

## **5. Conclusion**

It can be concluded that in Macedonia there is a great need for reforms to the secondary school education system. The indicators for a comparison of the Macedonian education in world, European and regional framework show that our performances are rather poor. The mandatory secondary school education policy has established a goal to introduce changes, but it can not be a goal on its own because of several reasons. The primary goal of that policy is to increase the percentage of the population that will complete secondary school. In order to reach that goal, the students should be provided with a flexible, interdisciplinary educational system which will prepare them for the challenges of the economy and the labour market. Only 7 percent of young people that have completed primary school do not continue on into secondary school, but the number of students that have enrolled in secondary school but have not completed it, is unknown. The reforms to secondary school education, besides keeping the students in class until the educational cycle is completed, should find a way to attract citizens with an underdeveloped level of education, that is, citizens who have not finished an appropriate degree or want to gain re-qualification.

Furthermore, in a given moment, the commitments created by the new law fall, to a large extent, on the shoulders of the local self-government units, although it is a government proposal enacted by the Parliament. Decentralisation's functionality can be disturbed by the flow of inherencies which are not competently followed by stronger recourses. Different regions and communities in Macedonia have their specific micro-economies and develop specific industries. These processes should be reflected in the education system, especially in secondary school education. The syllabus in secondary school education, especially in vocational and technical ones, should reflect the needs as well as the experiences of the local environment. This will create interests for the incorporation of private initiatives, which should be accepted as a necessary partner in implementation of mandatory secondary school education policy.

Introducing a mandatory secondary school education is a good idea and a good decision, but in order for the usefulness of that policy to be seen, the same should be well implemented. The ultimate goal to be reached is reforms in the secondary school education system, which must be in compliance with EU standards.

## 6. Recommendations

- The curriculum and the syllabus should be flexible, adjusted to the local environment, with a strong focus on entrepreneurial skills.
- Local self-government and private actors should have the opportunity to supplement the curriculum of the vocational and directed secondary school education studied in their environment. The Ministry of Education should only offer the basic curriculum with few mandatory subjects in all schools.
- Interactive methods of teaching and practice should be introduced, especially for the vocational and directed high school education, oriented towards stimulating the active participation of students and the use of information technology.
- Introducing multidegree, composite system of grading where the grade will be built according to different criteria.
- Improvement of technical and computer recourses in existing high schools, as is the UNESCO requirement.
- The introduction of qualification trainings and education of adults, in which, besides the themes of technical and vocational secondary school education, a focus will be put on management and entrepreneurship.
- Promotion of a larger incorporation of private initiatives in the secondary school education system as partner and in the creation of the syllabus and in the consignment of their contents.
- The donations from the state budget should be predicted for the private secondary schools as well, especially for the vocational ones. It cannot be expected that units of local self-government can manage alone the financial expense of the mandatory secondary school education and it is not realistic to expect benevolent support from the business community to come on its own.

© Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” Skopje

bul “Partizanski odredi” br. 4/2-22,  
1000 Skopje, Republic of Macedonia  
Tel: + 389 (02) 3217 080  
www.idscs.org.mk  
contact@idscs.org.mk