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CHANGES IN COMPULSORY EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA¹

The paper analyses the problem of the compulsory education in the Republic of Serbia (1992-2003) from the point of view of the interpretative paradigm, and based upon the comparative approach. In that sense, the field of compulsory education, the same as the state itself, permeate through the processes of transition, modernization and reform. Since the compulsory education represents a base for development of every individual and a society in the whole, the authors of the paper tends to objectively introspect the situation of the compulsory education system in the Republic of Serbia, as well as the moments necessary for the process of creation of its reform: previously acquired experiences, experiences from other countries, needs of the individual and a community, as well as the national interests.

Keyword: school, compulsory education, changes, development

INTRODUCTION

The countries in the process of transition lived through numerous dynamic and dramatic events in first half of the nineties of the last century. Transition from a totalitarian to a democratic social system included the whole range of political, economic, social and demographic changes, which had their implications to education.

Comparative data on political dynamics of those changes show that after the initial transition period, some common trends have been noticed in almost all the countries of Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe, such as: adoption of new constitutions, destruction of one-party system monopoly, emergence of a big number of new political parties and movements, substantial changes in parliamentary and

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presidential level which usually result in frequent elections, repeated changes of governments which lead to inconsistency both in the state policy and definition of ownership and phenomena of nationalistic tendencies. In addition to those common trends, it is evident that there have been certain differences concerning the policy dynamics within the countries of the focused region. Some of the most explicit differences are the following: differences in an actual beginning of transitional changes, different tempo of a democratization process, absence of political consensus on the most important problems for the national development and existence of different administration models.

Such a political portrait would not have influenced the nature of the transitional changes by itself, if it had not been followed by new, different economic trends. Those trends were dramatic in the most cases, taking into consideration unpreparedness of both the countries and the population for their resultants. Finally, all those substantial political, economic, social and demographic changes, emerging in the countries in transition since 1990, influenced both the education field and its direct and indirect actors.

In that period, the Republic of Serbia brought the Law on Compulsory Education, which was adopted in 1992. Activities related to a serious reform of educational system, based on the principles of European education, have started in 2001. Two years later, in 2003, there was brought a new (umbrella) Law on Basis of the Education System, which globally and integrally regulates the fields of pre-school, elementary-school and secondary-school education for the first time. The reform has been still in progress, since it is a process with ups and downs, a process without limits and time-frames. The compulsory education has been supplemented with a zero grade, a secondary school reform process has been delayed waiting for the sub-legal acts to be brought, and the Bologna process has been introduced into the universities in Serbia in 2006.

Integrative processes, actually aspiration for accession of the Republic of Serbia to EU countries, certainly imply a need to coordinate the national educational policy with *a common and unique concept of European educational policy*, which has been directed to the realization of three strategic aims, as follows:

1. Individual development – personal realization and achievement of individual existential aims through life-long learning:

2. Society development – by qualifying citizens for active citizenship, strengthening the social cohesion (establishment of the European identity based on the respect for human rights, tolerance, multi-culture, and other principles of European education), decreasing the social exclusion, what should contribute to decreasing of social differences and disparities among social groups and individuals;
3. Economy development – by decreasing the unemployment, qualifying active population for permanent employability and simple finding a new job, what implies a compatibility of capacities (knowledge, skills, and abilities) of every individual with the labor market, needs of employers and the business world, what together contributes to strengthening of the competitiveness of the European economy in globalization conditions.

LAWS ON EDUCATION

Principles of European concept of education have found their place in the education reform processes which take place in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In the Republic of Serbia, an existence of principles of the European concept of education has been primarily reflected in the aims of education which may be recognized the best in the normative-legal documents.

In the transition period, the first law in the field of education was the *Law on Elementary School*, which came into effect in 1992. Adoption of this law was an effect of the then social events to a great extent; the break of former Yugoslavia and creation of a new Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). Modest adjustments with the aims of the compulsory education in some European countries have been noticed in the mentioned Law. Thus, in the Law on Elementary School from 1992, the Article 2 stipulated that: The aim of the elementary education is to acquire a general education, and harmonious personality development. However, without going into a detailed explication, it could be concluded the following:

- The Law on Elementary School from 1992 contained a minimal implementation of principles of the European education concept, which reflected in the preparation for life, work and continuous education and self-education, creative spending of one's free time etc.
- The Law on Elementary School from 1992 did not emphasize that the

education should be equal for everybody. This provision of the European concept of education was a fundamental one, and it was only partially implemented in the then Law on Elementary School.

In order to make it contemporary, overcome deficiencies of the initiated reform, and create a education concept, the Law on Elementary School from 1992 was amended in 1993, 1994, 2002 and 2003. Some Articles of the Law ceased to be valid, and the education field was regulated by bringing an umbrella *Law on Fundamentals of the Education System* in 2003.

The Law has emerged primarily in order to build a new, contemporary education system, which would be compatible with the legal system of European Union, and, at the same time, which should contribute to creation of a democratic, economically prosperous society based on the rule of law, understanding and tolerance. The Law on Fundamentals of the Education System regulates the aims and tasks of education in its Article 3, applying to the following:

1. Developing the intellectual capacities and knowledge of children and pupils, which are necessary for understanding the nature, the society, themselves and the world in which they live, according to their developmental needs, possibilities and interests;
2. Supporting and developing physical and health capacities of children and pupils;
3. Qualifying them for work, continuous education and independent learning, according to the principles of continuous training and life-long learning;
4. Qualifying them for independent and responsible decision-making related to their own development and future life;
5. developing an awareness of a state and national affiliation, nurturing the Serbian tradition and culture, as well as tradition and culture of national minorities;
6. Enabling them to be involved in the processes of both the European and the international relations;
7. Developing the awareness of the importance for protection and preservation of nature and the environment;
8. Adopting, understanding and developing basic social and moral values of democratic, human and tolerant society;

9. Respecting pluralism of values and enabling a construction of one's own system of values and value premises based on the principles of diversity and well-being for everybody;
10. Respecting the children's rights, human and civil rights and fundamental freedoms, and developing competencies to live in a democratic society;
11. Developing curiosity and openness for cultures of traditional churches and religious communities, as well as the ethnic and religious tolerance, strengthening confidence among children and pupils and preventing types of behavior that jeopardize the exercise of a right to diversity;
12. Developing and nurturing fellowship and friendship, adopting the values of joint life and supporting an individual responsibility.

The analysis of previously stated aims of education point to the fact that principles of European concept of education have been incorporated in the valid Law on Fundamentals of Education System to a great extent. The Law was subsequently amended during the reform process in 2003, 2004, and 2005.

It is necessary to emphasize that the Law on Fundamentals of Education System from 2003 guarantees the following:

- Equal rights to compulsory, free elementary education;
- Safety and security of every participant in the education process;
- Rights and obligations of a child and a pupil according to the international agreements.

Accordingly, it is obvious that the valid Law on Fundamentals of Education System has introduced positive changes in comparison to the Law on Elementary School from 1992. Towards the new European concept of education, it is foreseen to have an additional engagement of pupils in the school life and work, via organization of the pupils' parliament. Pupils have been enabled to get introduced to their rights and become full participants in creation and development of a civil society, what is especially implemented in the civic education teaching.

Therefore, a comparison of aims of education in the Republic of Serbia with EU countries clearly points to the presence of European dimensions of education in normative-legal acts regulating the field of education in the Republic of Serbia. An intention to access the Republic of Serbia to EU has been explicitly expressed in the aims of education, what is especially seen in the Article 3, paragraph 2, point

6, which states the following: Enabling involvement in the processes of European accession. However, the fact is that all those provisions of the Law must not remain only declarative, but they should be practically implemented in a real life and work of the school with intensive engagement, in order to realize a unique education system which is equally accessible to all the citizens.

MANAGEMENT

Two dominant models in education management distinguish the following in practice:

1. *Democratic-political system of management.* The emphasis is on a political legitimacy of management and a significant role of local bodies, especially in the pre-school and elementary school education, which delegates have been elected via institution of elections.
2. *Administrative-professional system of management.* The emphasis is on a role of experts or expert teams. The decisions have been mostly made by inspectors or various bodies such as ‘the education council’, ‘the curricula council’, etc.

Still, the fact is that it is difficult to speak about ‘pure’ models. In some countries, such as our country, there is present combination of those two models. Bringing the Law on Fundamentals of Education System in 2003, the Republic of Serbia defined the following: rights, obligations and responsibilities of all the subjects which provide the system of education.

Also, the valid Laws prescribe the establishment of different types and range of work and composition of councils, bureaus and centers, in the following levels of management:

- a) National/state level of management,
 - b) Regional level of management,
 - c) Municipal level of management, and
 - d) School level of management.
- a) National/state level of management

National/state level of management is the highest level, consisted of the Assembly and the Government of the Republic of Serbia, which have the competence

over the Ministry of Education and other ministries important for the field of education (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Science, etc.).

The Assembly of the Republic of Serbia brings the laws regulating the field of education. It also looks over the reports of the government, and documents related to the implementation of the laws and decisions in the field of education. Accordingly, it adopts the conclusions which are mandatory for levels of management.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia proposes the laws to the Assembly for the adoption. It looks over the reports of the respective ministers (Ministry of Education) on the situation and problems in the domain of education, bringing decisions on the basis of that. In order to monitor, enable development and improve the quality of education, the Law prescribes that the Government of the Republic of Serbia establishes:

- National Education Council
- Bureau for Promotion of Education
- Bureau for Assessment of Education Quality
- Ministry of Education (Government sector)

b) Regional level of management

A regional level of management of the compulsory education has been conditioned with the decision related to the country rationalization policy. Accordingly, it is possible to distinguish the following:

- *School administrations* – organizational units for performing the activities outside the seat of the Ministry, in charge for carrying out the expert-educational supervision, supporting the developmental planning and providing the quality of work of institutions, as well as performing the other activities stipulated by the law.
- *Provincial Secretariat for Education* (Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina). In February 2002, according to the regionalization policy, the Law on Determination of Competencies of the Autonomous Province was brought. Also, the Chapter XII, Article 149 of the Law on Fundamentals of Education System stipulates the range of committed jobs from the state administration to the

Autonomous Province in the field of education.

c) Municipal level of management

Municipal level of compulsory education management has been also defined by the Law on Fundamentals of Education System, and it applies to providing the funds from the budget of a local self-government unit in order to implement the activities of pre-school education (half-a-day, and full-day stay, food, care and preventive health protection of pre-school children), amounted to 80% of the average price per child, including the funds for salaries, benefits and other incomes, social contributions paid by the employers, tax on the income fund, severance pays and benefits to the employees in kindergartens, and other regular expenses; professional training of employees; building and crucial maintenance of buildings and other premises, and project planning; equipping the kindergartens.

d) School level of management

The existing legal framework enables educational institutions to have their managing bodies, administration, expert and advisory bodies. Within the national regulations, the school independently plan and organize their work and development, cooperate with local social community, according to the needs and interests of pupils, teachers and parents. However, the most explicit limit of the school autonomy has been found in the prescribed curricula, which bringing is still in the central level. The management bodies in this level are the following: a school board, a principal, expert school bodies, parents' council, and students' parliament.

FINANCING OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION

One of the most important segments of the educational system is its financing. The field of financing is an indicator of the overall social organization, its level of democratization, complex-bureaucratic or simplified-democratic way of functioning, or, as it is the case with the countries in the process of transition, and thus the combination of those two models in the Republic of Serbia as well. The extent to which the central government handles budget actually indicates how the educational system is empowered for a creative resolving and overcoming the problems which emerge within the system or in relation to closer and/or wider social community.

After finalized social changes and initiated democratization processes

of Serbian society, which characterize bringing of the Law on Education System in 2003, in the field of compulsory education, the finance domain has not been significantly changed. The inherited model from 1992 remained almost intact, what explains that the proposer of the law and the legislator have assessed that they are not ready to decentralize the system of financing, actually that the social community is not convenient to do it radically. It is also supported by the fact that funds for planned reforms in the field of compulsory education have not been centrally planned to the greatest extent, but the proposer significantly relies on the funds from the local-self-government without taking into serious consideration concrete possibilities of every individual region. Therefore, the ranges and the results of the initiated reform have been seriously jeopardized.

As an illustration, a total input of funds planned for education in a gross national income of the Republic of Serbia amounted to 3.8% in 2001, 4.0% in 2002, 3.5% in 2003, 3.7% in 2004, 3.8% in 2005, what quite illustratively shows an unfavourable financial base which is a base for the process of complying our educational system with the countries of European Union.

Funds provided from the Republic budget have been assigned for financing of the following:

- salaries and allowances employed in elementary and secondary schools, social contributions, tax on income funds, terminal wages, and financial aids;
- work of exclusive schools and schools of special interest for the Republic, determined by the Government;
- developmental programs and projects of institutions according to the criteria prescribed by the minister.

Funds provided from the budget of local-self-government have been assigned for financing of the following:

- building and capital maintenance of buildings and premises
- professional training of employees
- transportation of employees
- transportation of pupils who live further than four kilometres from the seat of the school.
- equipping the schools
- other running costs

In the field of education financing, the legislator does not recognize expenses paid by parents, such as: textbooks, school accessories, extra-curricular activities (excursions, open-air school, etc.), expenses for food (snack), sports equipment, pupils insurance etc. In that sense, in addition to the implemented deregulation in the field of textbook usage (several publishers), which has been still paid by parents in a full price, the legislator foresees neither tax exemption, nor some other financial exemptions for parents who pay all the obligations, further stating that the compulsory education is free of charge.

In that sense, basic problems in the field of financing the compulsory education in Serbia are the following:

1. *Financing schools based on the number of school-classes, and not according to the number of pupils.* Thus, for example, a number of pupils per teacher declined from 31 (in early sixties) to 16 (in 2000), what resulted in doubling the price of education per pupil.
2. *Irrational, outdated network of elementary schools* which is not in compliance with demographic changes. The provincial schools represent 60% out of total number of schools, but they are attended only by 10% of total pupils' population. More than 1.000 elementary schools have less than 20 pupils, and they have been located mainly in the central Serbia.
3. *Secondary school educational system is expensive, inefficient, and irrational* due to existence of vocations which correspond more to the past than to the needs of contemporary society. There have been financed both classes and teachers in a great number of vocational schools which structure is opened to serve the previous economy, and which are over- dimensioned and not adjusted to the needs of society and economy, being extremely unattractive for pupils.
4. *Budgetary and school year do not overlap in timing* what additionally complicates the work of schools, which are obliged to finalize the financial year without any money on the account. It means that it is not possible to transfer funds in the next financial year.

Therefore, planning of the development and planned fund disbursement, especially in the domain of the investment maintenance, material costs and purchase of the teaching equipment and devices, becomes more difficult. In that sense, the

network of schools should correspond to the demographic situation, as well as to the demographic, economic and social trends; It would be necessary to do the following: to extend the educational function of schools (adults, children with special needs, and pre-school children, etc.); to reform schools into multi-functional centres (besides primary-educational ones to transfer them into the cultural, social-communal centres, etc.); to intensify the interaction between schools and closer local community in order to transfer the small provincial communities into the development centres; to connect the education sector with the other sectors (health, culture, communal services) in order to rationally use the premises.

EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL STRUCTURE AND ORGANIZATION OF COMPULSORY EDUCATION

According to the international standard classification (ISCED, 1997), education in Serbia is organized in three levels: primary, secondary and tertiary, what does not completely comply with the previous division into elementary, secondary and higher education. The division of education on the basis of the levels has been carried out most often according to the content complexity criterion, as follows:

- Zero level- pre-primary, pre-school education;
- Level 1- primary education, initial elementary education;
- Level 2- lower secondary education, the second degree (cycle) of elementary education or lower secondary education;
- Level 3- advanced secondary education;
- Level 4- education after the secondary education which is not tertiary;
- Level 5- the first phase of tertiary education, vocational studies leading to the scientific level, and
- Level 6- the second phase of tertiary education, academic studies leading to the scientific level.

Compulsory education applies to the legislative obligation to attend the institutional education, which is the school education by rule, in a particular time period, in order to acquire basic knowledge and skills. It is not only compulsory, but also free of charge, i.e. financed from the state budget. In almost all EU countries, there has been supported a freedom of choice of a school, as well as a free competition of private schools (which financing can be also partially provided from the state

budget), what has not been achieved in Serbia by now.

In the Republic of Serbia, the compulsory education has been extended from eight to nine years since the school year 2006/2007. The first grade of elementary school has been enrolled by the children who are at least six and a half, and the most seven and a half by the beginning of the school year, and who attended a compulsory preparation pre-school program before enrolling the school. The law prescribes that duration of the 'zero' grade, i.e. the preparation pre-school program, is four hours per day, for six months at least, representing a segment of the compulsory education with the nine-year duration.

In the Republic of Serbia, the notions *compulsory* and *elementary school* are not totally placed in the same level. As it has been already mentioned, the compulsory education starts with the 'zero grade', i.e. with the compulsory pre-school program, which can be organized within the pre-school or elementary school institutions. The notion *elementary school* is a common synonym for the compulsory school. However, this notion also implies activities of non-compulsory nature. Namely, the elementary school implements the school curriculum, and it can also implement the following: an adjusted school curriculum for pupils and adults with developmental disorder, a special school curriculum for music and ballet education, a special school curriculum for adult education, etc.

The Republic of Serbia enables the exercise of citizens' rights of common interest in the elementary education, such as the following:

1. elementary education of children with eight-year duration;
2. elementary adult education, i.e. education for persons who are older than fifteen, and who have not acquired a basic literacy and a full elementary education. The adult elementary education is organized from the 1st to the 8th grade and its duration is four years;
3. elementary music and ballet education;
4. supplementary elementary education of children who are citizens of the Republic of Serbia living abroad;

The compulsory, elementary education lasts eight years (preceded by the preparation pre-school program), and it has been implemented in two educational cycles. The first cycle includes the education from the first to the fourth grade, organized as the class instruction. Extraordinary, the foreign language instruction and

the instruction in elective subjects can be organized as a subject instruction, according to the curriculum. The second cycle includes the instruction from the fifth to the eighth grade, with the organized subject instruction, according to the curriculum.

In the Republic of Serbia, the instruction has been implemented in the course of the school year, which starts on 1 September and ends on 31 August of the following year. The instruction has been organized during 180 teaching weeks in the course of the school year, split into two semesters. Between the semesters, pupils have the school vacation. Timing and duration of the school vacation has been determined in the school calendar prescribed by the minister/provincial secretary by 1 June.

A pupil attending the class instruction has 20 school hours of instruction per week, i.e. up to four school hours of instruction per day, while a pupil attending the subject instruction has up to 25 school hours per week, i.e. up to five school hours of the instruction per day. A pupil attending the in-class instruction in a minority language has up to 23 school hours per week, and 28 school hours per week in the subject instruction. Duration of a school hour is 45 minutes.

It is interesting that pupils in the Republic of Serbia spend the least time at school (180 minutes per day) in comparison to their coevals from the EU countries. However, the time spent at school has not been proportional yet with the pupils' achievement. Thus, for example, the pupils' time spent at school in Finland (200 minutes per day) is below the average European level, but the pupils' educational achievements are the best in Europe, what has been confirmed with PISA tests. In Italy, however, pupils spend the most time at school (324/270 minutes per day), but their educational achievements are far below the OECD average. Hence, there is a fact that a school day may be organized in different ways, but it certainly crucially influences the quality of educational outcomes, besides the teaching contents.

Elementary, compulsory schools in the Republic of Serbia organize their work in two, even three shifts. In the morning hours, the instruction usually starts at 8:00 hrs. According to the *Overall Analysis of the Elementary Education System in Serbia*, which was carried out in 2000 and 2001, about 65% of the school buildings provided less space than the guaranteed minimum is per pupil (3m²), primarily in the city/urban areas. Also, it has been concluded that many 'small' schools do not adjust their organization to the existential needs of population, which means that the schools

continue to work according to the established scheme, only in the morning hours, while they are closed in the afternoon and during the weekends.

Complicating circumstance is the fact that the school buildings are old (in FRY, 22% of the buildings were built before the Second World War, and 4.2% of them were built already in the 19th century). Also, 80% of schools have a school kitchen, but only 20% of schools have kitchens in function due to a lack of equipment and dilapidated capacities.

In some elementary schools in the Republic of Serbia, there have been organized a daily stay for children, but it is foreseen only for junior school children, due to already mentioned reasons. Lately, the reform processes encroaches upon this issue of education. Some schools have already managed to organize their work according to the model of a full-time instruction. Also, there has been started an initiative, a pilot project, of the Provincial Secretariat for Education, to organize the school work in one shift (the full-time instruction).

TEACHING PROCESS AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

In the Republic of Serbia, the elementary school curricula has been brought by the Minister, on the basis of the proposals of the National Educational Council. Since February 2002, after bringing the Law on Establishment of Respective Competence of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the Provincial Secretariat for Education gives an opinion on the procedure for adoption of new curriculum. The legislative regulation especially regulates participation of the provincial bodies and the National Council of national minorities concerning adoption of new curricula and textbooks from particular subjects of interest for the national minorities (music, history, a language of a national minority). Still, it can be certainly concluded that our curricula is not sufficiently European (open, flexible, inclusive, etc.). Namely, bringing the new curricula has been still centralized to a great extent, and the law does not prescribe a long-promised school autonomy concerning the curricula.

Concretely, teachers are allowed to organize the implementation of teaching contents on their own. However, due to their rigidity, actually insufficient flexibility and wide-range, they do not have too much possibility to innovate their work. The experience shows that if the teachers would have an opportunity to skip or elaborate particular parts of the content, in order to be helpful to the pupils with different

abilities, it would be disabling due to a linear composition of the curriculum. It is actually a clear and precise adding of the teaching contents with one another. Namely, pupils who do not sufficiently master the teaching content of previous lessons are not capable to follow the instruction in the following grade. Certainly, it is not good, if Serbia wants to go abreast with Europe and fulfil requirements related to the inclusive model of teaching, which implies the involvement of pupils with developmental disabilities into learning in regular classes.

Also, the obstacle is in too large classes, especially in urban areas, since possibilities for the individual approach in teaching to a great number of pupils are decreased. Most elementary schools in the territory of the Republic of Serbia are not properly equipped with the teaching devices and educational technology. Programmed instruction is rarely implemented, while traditional instruction dominates. In traditional instruction a teacher teaches and pupils listen, i.e. the instruction has been still oriented mostly to the content than to the pupils.

Tables 1 and 2 show the curricula for the first and second cycle of elementary education, on the basis of which it is noticed that the weekly fund of classes increased from the minimal 20 to 21, what clearly points to the increased load of pupils. Still, it is necessary to point to a positive side of mentioned changes. Namely, introduction of elective subjects, such as Fundamentals of informatics and Computing, or From Toys to Computers, strengthens work concerning technological and computing literacy of pupils, what is especially important for pupils who do not have computers and Internet access at home. However, the question remains if all the schools are appropriately equipped with computers, i.e. if they have a computer classroom where every pupil has available computer during the instruction.

Table 1. Curriculum for the first cycle of elementary education

Ord. no.	A.Compulsory teaching subjects	I grade		II grade		III grade		IV grade	
		week	week	week	week	week	week	week	week
1.	Serbian language/ mother tongue	5	180	5	180	5	180	5	180
2.	Serbian as a non- mother tongue	2	72	2	72	3	108	3	108
3.	Foreign language	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72

4.	Mathematics	5	180	5	180	5	180	5	180
5.	The World around us	2	72	2	72	-	-	-	-
6.	Nature and society	-	-	-	-	2	72	2	72
7.	Art culture	1	36	2	72	2	72	2	72
8.	Music culture	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36
9.	Physical training	3	108	3	108	3	108	3	108
TOTAL: (Compulsory teaching subjects)		19-21	684-756	20-22	720-792	20-23	720-828	20-23	720-828
Red. br.	B.Elective curricula								
1.	Religious classes/civic education	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36
2.	National tradition	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36
3.	Hands in the dough-discovering the world	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36
4.	Keepers of nature	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36
5.	Neat handwriting	1	36	-	-	-	-	-	-
6.	From a toy to a computer	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	36
7.	Mother tongue/ a speech with the elements of a national culture	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	72
TOTAL: B.(Elective curriculum)		2-3	72-108	2-3	72-108	2-3	72-108	2-3	72-108
TOTAL: A+B		21-24	756-864	22-25	792-900	22-26	792-936	22-26	792-936

Table 2. Curriculum for the second cycle of elementary education

Ord. no.	A.Compulsory teaching subjects	V grade		VI grade		VII grade		VIII grade	
		week	week	week	week	week	week	week	week
1.	Serbian/mother tongue	5	180	4	144	4	144	4	136
2.	Serbian as non-mother tongue	3	108	3	108	3	108	2	68
3.	Foreign language	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	68
4.	Mathematics	4	144	4	144	4	144	4	136
5.	History	1	36	2	72	2	72	2	68
6.	Geography	1	36	2	72	2	72	2	68
7.	Physics	-	-	2	72	2	72	2	68

8.	Biology	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	68
9.	Chemistry	-	-	-	-	2	72	2	68
10.	Art culture	2	72	1	36	1	36	1	34
11.	Technical and computing education	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	68
12.	Musical culture	2	72	1	36	1	36	1	34
13.	Physical education	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	68
TOTAL: A		23-26	828-936	24-27	864-972	26-29	936-1044	26-28	884-952
Ord. no.	B.Compulsory elective teaching subjects								
1.	Religious classes/civic education	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	34
2.	Foreign language	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	68
3.	Physical education – elective subjects/sports	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	34
TOTAL: B		4	144	4	144	4	144	4	136
TOTAL: A+B		21-24	756-864	22-25	792-900	22-26	792-936	22-26	792-936
Ord. no.	V.Elective Teaching subjects								
1.	Keepers of nature	1	36	1	36	-	-	-	-
2.	Everyday life in past	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	34
3.	Drawing, painting and sculpturing	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	34
4.	Chorus and orchestra	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	34
5.	Informatics and computing	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	34
6.	Mother tongue/ a speech with the elements of a national culture	2	72	2	72	2	72	2	68
7.	Chess	1	36	1	36	1	36	1	34
8.	Household	-	-	-	-	1	36	1	34
TOTAL: V		1-2	36-72	1-2	36-72	1-2	36-72	1-2	34-68
TOTAL: A+B+V		28-31	1008-1116	29-32	1044-1152	31-34	1116-1224	31-33	1054-1122

However, previous reforms have not managed to completely modernize the teaching contents. Thus, for example, on the basis of verbal conversation with

teachers, there is an impression that children today do not stay enough outdoors, they are not occupied with physical activities, and they need much more time to understand some teaching contents than it was the case with the previous generations. Also, conditions of contemporary life impose a need to introduce new contents related to the traffic safety culture, so that children can learn how to responsibly and independently behave in traffic, at home, at city squares, etc.

Finally, it is necessary to add the instruction in our schools is organized according to the teaching subjects, and not, as it is the case in majority of European countries, according to the teaching fields. If we want that knowledge acquired by our pupils has greater transfer value, it is necessary to think over how to increase correlation among teaching subjects, increase the instruction efficiency, raise pupils' interest, and reduce their overburdening. Also, during the basic education, it is necessary to continuously develop awareness on educational and functional tasks of teaching contents of every teaching class both among teachers and pupils. This provides balancing and curriculum equation concerning significance of all the segments in education (knowledge, skills, abilities, values, etc.), what at the same time represents a leading idea throughout the entire reform, in which all the actors of the school life and work should equally participate, contributing to better and faster prosperity of both individuals and society in that way.

DISCUSSION

Since the education is a vital part of a society, it cannot be observed without the social context. It means that our education is in the period of transition and modernization, exactly the same as the very state of Serbia. Therefore, the national objectives, manifested in legal documents which regulate the field of education and which apply to the international integration and accession to the EU countries, should be transfigured to realistic, realizable, and applicable in practice.

European educational standards are mainly included in the educational objectives in the Republic of Serbia, what is logical since exactly those objectives represent basic value orientation in the field of education. However, any further analysis of our system of compulsory education, and especially the comparison with the European educational concept, clearly shows that it would be necessary to put additional efforts for the implementation of set objectives (and expectations

of a society). Also, it has been noticed that ‘non-educational’ factors (politics, law, economy), which appeared to be insufficiently efficient in our social context, influence on creation and implementation of the educational reform to a great extent. It is also supported by the fact that pedagogical factors (e.g. professional teachers’ training) are often less problematic in comparison to the economic (e.g. school financing based on the number of classes, instead of the number of pupils), and legal factors (untimely bringing of the sub-legal acts).

The European context or European dimensions in education have been clearly and explicitly stipulated in the existing law. More precisely, bringing of the Law on Fundamentals of Education System in 2003, for the first time generally and distinctively arranged the fields of pre-school, elementary school and secondary school education. Concretely, the European dimensions have been noticed in the existing system of compulsory education in the Republic of Serbia, as follows:

- in possibility to *establish* educational institutions by national or foreign, private legal or physical persons, what enables higher level of democratization, depolitization, participation and decentralization in the field of education.

- in the *aims* of education: development of intellectual, health, physical, and other pupil’s abilities, qualifying them for independent learning, responsible decision-making, adoption of democratic values and tolerance, development of friendship and enabling them to be included into the processes of the European and international relations.

- In the *right to education*: regardless of sex, race, national, religious, linguistic affiliation, physical and psychological constitution, social and cultural heritage.

- In the *extended duration* of compulsory education from eight to nine years, introduction of the ‘zero’ grade, i.e. in the compulsory preparation pre-school program.

- In *changes of curriculum* and introduction of new, elective teaching contents: religious classes and civic education, another foreign language, chess, computer classes, national tradition, keepers of nature, etc., as well as in canceling the monopoly for issuing the textbooks.

- In *professional development and specialized advanced teacher training*: compulsory attending specialized seminars, possibility of hierarchical advancement and acquiring the international experience, one-year stay abroad, establishment of the

Centre for professional development of employees etc.

- In *evaluation and supervision*: by establishing the national Bureau for evaluation of education quality, by supporting and encouraging schools to elaborate the school developmental plan and carry out self-valuation, by participation in the international evaluation programs (Pavlović-Babić, Baucal i Kuzmanović, 2009).

However, the compatibility of our system of compulsory education with the European one has been still discussed for the several reasons, such as:

- The *sub-legal acts*, which would regulate in details e.g. the right to education of children with the developmental disturbances in regular schools, have not been brought yet.

- *Insufficient school autonomy* concerning the school calendar, which is brought in the regional and national level, disposition of property in the school level, etc.

- *Insufficient participation*, which reflects in parents' participation in the school management (they participate only in the school level and not in higher instances, the same as representatives of economy, bureau for unemployment and other groups of interest.

- *Insufficiently flexible and open curriculum*, as well as insufficiently clearly connected pre-school preparation program with the elementary school teaching programs. The contents are taught according to the teaching subjects, instead of the teaching areas.

- *Outdated network of educational institutions*, which is not adjusted to the demographic changes.

- A complex system of *financial relations among different levels of authorities and insufficient investment in education*. E.g. how to enable equal chances for everybody, if education is financed by local-self-governments which are developed quite unequally!?

However, it should be added that our education system has some European dimensions emerged already in the pre-reform phase, such as, for example, education of pupils who are members of a national minority in their mother tongue. Equally so, it is important to note that particular segments of the reform have been already implemented in practice: for example, an extended duration of a general education in so called 'vocational' education. The reform was ongoing in seventies and eighties

of the past century, and although it did not appear sufficiently efficient, it represented a valuable experience for future reforms and organization of the education system.

In the atmosphere of continuous changes, and, sometimes, in the atmosphere of uncertainty, the educational systems of Balkan countries must function and cooperate with each other. Results of this cooperation could help many people to differently arrange the strategy for implementation of changes in education, as well as to avoid the 'vagueness', which often follows this process. It is certain that the Balkan countries have different approaches to the changes in education, but the base they start from and aspirations they prefer are distinctive for them: a new vision and a paradigm of a pupil-oriented education, readiness for deep changes in the field of education, and the open-approach strategies in the education process of various teachers' profiles.

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ПРОМЕНЕ У ОБАВЕЗНОМ ОБРАЗОВАЊУ У РЕПУБЛИЦИ СРБИЈИ

У раду се из угла интерпретативне парадигме а на темељу компаративног приступа анализира проблем обавезног образовања у Републици Србији у периоду од 1992-2003. године. У том смислу, подручје обавезног образовања, као и сама држава, прожет је процесима транзиције, модернизације и реформе. Полазећи од тога да обавезно образовање представља основу развоја сваког појединца али и друштва у целини, аутори рада настоје да објективно преиспитају положај система обавезног образовања у Републици Србији, као и моменте неопходне за процес креирања његове даље реформе: претходно стечена искуства, искуства других земаља, потребе појединца и заједнице, као и националне интересе.

Кључне речи: школа, обавезно образовање, промене, развој