



## **Report on findings of Survey on Communicating Education Situation**

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*The basis for a survey was a questionnaire, developed by Mrs. Teja Rek (OSEP-SEE) and Mr. Nebojsa Radic (seminar facilitator). Questionnaire was completed by SEE ECN country nodes in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia, and by OSI Foundation in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Objective of the survey was to obtain the information on communicating education reform in SEE, or even more precisely:*

- a. To obtain information about public support to the education reform in respective country,*
- b. To obtain information communication effectiveness and capacity, and*
- c. To learn something about Stakeholders' habits and existing media market.*

### **SUMMARY**

#### ***a. Research data on Public Support to education Reform***

The first set of questions focused on somewhat general information concerning Public Support to education reform in particular countries of the region. It was a bit surprisingly to learn that only three out of nine respondents are aware of a research showing public opinion about education reform in their country. Results are implying that this kind of a research was never done in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia.

#### ***b. Communications Effectiveness and Capacity***

Next, respondents were asked to provide information concerning communication effectiveness and capacity in their country. Some of the questions were additionally divided into two thematically separated clusters – first, asking about the communication effectiveness and capacity of the respective Ministry of Education, and the second, asking the same questions for education NGOs.

According to the answers, in general, communications of the reform aims, achievements and problems everywhere in SEE played more or less important role in creation of the public perception about the reform, except in Albania and Serbia. But, notably, only Moldavian respondent estimated that education reform communication has been successful, while Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Kosovar and Serbian explicitly denied that.

In this regard, analysis has shown that in all countries, with exception of Bulgaria, reform wasn't well explained particularly to parents. Somewhat better situation is with teachers' reform understanding, but it seems that only Kosovar teachers fully understand educational reform process in their country. Apparently, the reform was appropriately explained in plain and understandable language only in Albania and Montenegro, while it definitely wasn't in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo and Serbia. The rest estimated that it was neither well nor bad, but somewhere in between.

Although we were asking respondents to identify main weaknesses and strengths of this communication, almost all focused on, and stressed only weaknesses, which is saying a lot for it self. Most common weaknesses listed here were:

- Public campaign does not provide different sorts of information to different groups in the audience, for example, parents, teachers, students, etc.
- There is confusion and lack of understanding of the substantial issues and concepts in the reform. Very often public focuses on only one aspect of education reform, while the key themes such as framework curriculum, evaluation, etc. are not recognizable at all in media coverage.
- Lack of specialized TV or radio shows and newspaper supplements which cover educational reform.
- Insufficient level of news reporters' understanding of education reform.
- Teachers, parents and general public are not actively involved into the reform – in the best case they are just being informed about the changes.

Next set of questions examined MOEs communication effectiveness and capacity. First we wanted to know, do SEE Ministries of Education have a professional communicator? It turned out that only Bosnian, Moldavian, Montenegrin and Serbian Ministry of Education do not have it, whereas the rest of the Ministries do have it, but his or her title varies from country to country – most often title is *Public relations person or officer*, but it could be also *Head of Information Division, Advisor in the Communication Department* and similar.

Then we invited respondents to estimate how difficult or easy one can obtain information from a Ministry. Evidently, asking for information from a MoE as a citizen is quite difficult in all examined countries, especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Moldova, Romania and Serbia. For a journalist or a researcher it is much easier, except again in Moldova, where this is apparently still difficult. Usually, the best way to obtain information is by telephone or by e-mail, while seeking information from an information office apparently is not so efficient. In fact, some of the respondents stated that the information office doesn't even exist in their country.

Respondents confirmed that majority of Ministries have a website, the exceptions are Albanian, Bosnian, Kosovar and Moldavian Ministry. These websites, although usually intended for teachers, pupils, parents, researchers and journalists, are however not updated very frequently, with the exception of Croatian website, which is updated daily. We tried to find out somewhat more detailed information concerning the content they offer, so we asked respondents to estimate what portion of the website (in percentage) is devoted to *Public Information (information that taxpayers have right to know)* and what portion to *News about the education issues, reform, achievements, problems, innovation, etc.* Unfortunately, we didn't find any pattern in answers, as they varied greatly. However, if we combine the results into one average ratio, we can discover that the latter segment in average represents 75 % of MOEs websites. In addition respondents assured us that the Ministries generally do use other tools in communicating educational reform, such as organization of conferences and round tables, developing manuals, bulletins, billboards, etc. However, at the same time some of the respondents noted that these conferences and round tables do not seem to have much of effect, because in the best case the information gets through to only a small part of teachers.

Interestingly enough, there are great differences in given answers to questions concerning education NGOs in the region. Apparently, Bosnian, Croatian and Montenegrin education NGOs do not communicate very effectively, whereas our respondents from Bulgaria, Kosovo, Moldova, Romania and Serbia like to think education NGOs in their country do practice effective communication. These answers correlate greatly with the answers to the next question, whether NGOs in general have a communicator – PR person? Common sense suggest that effective communicating goes hand in hand with PR person, so it is no surprise that we found almost the same distribution of answers as on previous question: NGOs in Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania and Serbia usually have PR person, while this is not true for the rest of countries.

We wanted to know, how hard it is to get the information from an NGO working in a field of education. Even the superficial reading of results clearly points out first conclusion: it seems that it is

certainly much easier to obtain information from an NGO than from the Ministry. (Of course, one might quickly point out that results would be diametrically opposite if the Ministries would complete the questionnaires, and whether I like it or not, I have to allow that possibility too.) Be that as it may, if we examine the answers closer, we can see that obtaining information from an educational NGO is usually somewhat harder if one presents himself as a citizen, in contrast to a researcher or journalist.

Table 1: **How difficult/easy is it to obtain information from an NGO?**  
(1 – very difficult, 5 – very easy):

	<i>For a Citizen</i>	<i>For a Journalist</i>	<i>For a Researcher</i>	<i>Average</i>	
				<i>NGOs:</i>	<i>MoE:</i>
Albania	3	4	4	3,66	2,66
Bosnia-Herz.	4	4	4	4,00	1,66
Bulgaria	4	4	4	4,00	4,00
Croatia	3	4	4	3,66	3,66
Kosovo	4	5	4	4,33	2,66
Moldova	5	5	3	4,33	1,33
Montenegro	1	4	3	2,66	3,00
Romania	4	4	4	4,00	2,33
Serbia	4	5	5	4,66	2,00
<b>Average</b>	<b>3,6</b>	<b>3,9</b>	<b>4,3</b>	<b>3,9</b>	<b>2,6</b>

Educational NGOs in SEE in general have their own websites. According to gathered answers it is also clear that NGOs update their websites much more regularly than Ministries. With regards to the content of these websites, we found out that most of them share the same topics: basic information about the organization, programs, news, projects, etc. Except in case of Croatia, education NGOs from the region, much like the MoEs, usually use other tools (such as organizing conferences, round tables, etc.) in communicating the educational reform.

### ***c. Stakeholders' Habits and Existing Media Market***

The last set of questions starts with most interesting table. We listed five different categories of sources of information: (1) Mainstream media (daily/weekly press, TV, radio), (2) specialized, so called "trade press" (educators journals, bulletins issued by scientific or research institutes, etc), (3) conferences and round tables with domestic / or with international participants, (4) visits of neighboring or western countries, and (5) other. Then we asked our respondents to rank the sources of information that influence the opinion of main education change stakeholders by their importance.

**Table 2:** How the respondents ranked the sources of information that influence the opinion of main education stakeholders by their importance (scale from 1 – most important to 5 – least important)

	Mainstream media	Specialized, so called "trade press"	Conferences and round tables	Visits	Other
ALBANIA	1	3	2	4	5
BOSNIA-HERZ.	1	4	2	3	5
BULGARIA	3	2	1	4	5
CROATIA	4	5	1	2	3
KOSOVO	1	3	2	4	5
MONTENEGRO	1	4	2	3	5
MOLDOVA	4	3	1	2	5
SERBIA	1	2	3	4	5
ROMANIA	2	4	1	3	5
<b>Average</b>	<b>2,00</b>	<b>3,33</b>	<b>1,67</b>	<b>3,22</b>	<b>4,78</b>

According to results, mainstream media and in particularly conferences and round tables are by far most important source of information that influence the opinion of main education change stakeholders. Mainstream media is the most important source in Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, while conferences and round tables are the most important source in Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova and Romania. Interestingly, besides these two, no other source of information was marked as most important in any country. Further investigation of sources of information revealed that Kosovo and Serbia do not have any regular TV or radio show that have an in-depth coverage of education issues. Further more, according to the survey, in Croatia, Moldova and Serbia there is none newspaper that have regular educational supplements at least once a week or once a month.

It was interesting to see how our respondents estimated work of media and reporters, who cover educational issues, especially because insufficient knowledge of reporters was one of the main weaknesses of communication stated by respondents. In line with this assumption, respondents estimated that media have mainly weak understanding of the issues surrounding the education reform. The situation is a much better with specialized educational media, as more than half of our respondents estimated that they have good or at least average understanding of the same issues. However, asking about the reporters' experience in covering educational issues, vast majority of respondents evaluated it as unsatisfactory or weak. Further more, every single one of our respondents stated that reporters need further training and resources.

At the end of questionnaire, when asked to add a comment, suggestion or recommendation, which they think could be useful to know about the education reform communications in their country, majority of respondents expressed they wish the Ministry would develop more open culture and transparency policy making.