

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

between the Ministers of Education and Higher Education of South Eastern  
Europe,

meeting at Nicosia, Cyprus

on the occasion of the Seventh Conference of European Ministers of Education  
convened under the Greek Presidency on 27 - 28 June 2003

within the context of the Enhanced Graz Process/Task Force Education and  
Youth of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

The Ministers convene to agree on concrete actions to strengthen co-operation with regard to ongoing reform processes of the education systems. South Eastern Europe being part of the evolving wider European area of education, they strongly underline the importance of sufficient investment in education to achieve the strategic goals as laid down in the Lisbon European Council conclusions aiming at the establishment of a knowledge based society throughout Europe.

Recognizing the achievements of the Enhanced Graz Process/Task Force Education and Youth of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the efforts undertaken so far by international institutions and individual countries they hereby affirm their strong support for the "South Eastern European Education Reform Initiative".

As noted by the Council of the European Union "strategic co-operation with the accession countries as well as with the countries of South-East Europe should build foundations for the development of a European society". In order to do so, South Eastern European countries need to be included in the implementation process of the "Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe" and the

“Copenhagen Declaration”, by ensuring appropriate mechanisms, including involvement of participants from the region in the relevant European working groups.

Taking note of the conclusions of the Working Meeting of Senior Officials from South Eastern Europe, held in Vienna from December 5 - 7, 2002, they fully support the Action Plan of the “South Eastern European Education Reform Initiative”, endorsed by the Second Working Meeting of Senior Officials from South East Europe, held in Predeal/Romania from May 29 - 31, 2003.


Within this framework, they declare their intention to commit themselves to the following ongoing European initiatives:

- the implementation of the "Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe";
- the implementation of the objectives of the “Bologna Declaration” aiming at a European higher education area, especially the establishment of the necessary legal framework;
- the signing and ratification of the “Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region”;
- the implementation of the objectives of the “Copenhagen Declaration”.

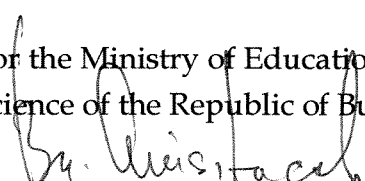
In view of the specific educational needs of the countries of the region, they invite all European countries, the European Commission and other organizations to support the implementation of the “South Eastern European Education Reform Initiative” by fully integrating the region into European processes, and by investing into the human potential in South Eastern Europe.

Nicosia, 28 June 2003

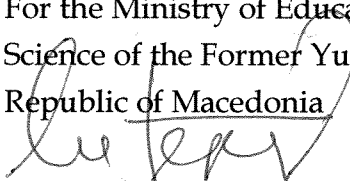
For the Council of Ministers of  
Bosnia and Herzegovina

  
Mr. Srdjan Ljubojevic  
Ambassador


For the Ministry of Education and  
Science of the Republic of Bulgaria

  
Mr. Vladimir Atanasov  
Minister

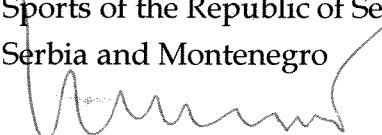
For the Ministry of Education and  
Science of the Former Yugoslav  
Republic of Macedonia

  
Mr. Tale Geramitcioski  
Deputy Minister

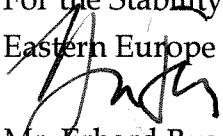
For the Ministry of Education and  
Science of the Republic of  
Montenegro, Serbia and  
Montenegro

  
Mr. Slobodan Backovic  
Minister

For the Ministry of Education and  
Sports of the Republic of Serbia,  
Serbia and Montenegro

  
Ms. Tünde Kovac-Cerovic  
Deputy Minister

For the Stability Pact for South  
Eastern Europe

  
Mr. Erhard Busek  
Special Co-ordinator

For the Enhanced Graz  
Process/Task Force Education  
and Youth

  
Mr. Anton Dobart  
Chair

## **South Eastern European Education Reform Initiative ACTION PLAN**

endorsed by the Second Working Meeting of Senior Officials from South Eastern Europe, held in Predeal/Romania from May 29 - 31, 2003

The Working Meeting of Senior Officials from South Eastern Europe (Vienna, December 5 - 7, 2002) identified the following **priority areas for education development and reform:**

1. Adjustment and review of existing national legal frameworks in line with ongoing European developments and national reform priorities;
2. Decentralisation of education management and administration, with a focus on quality enhancement and accountability;
3. Development of education management information systems and quality assurance mechanisms
4. Curriculum reform in line with European trends and developments
5. Widening access to quality education and ensuring equal opportunities - taking account of gender equality - for national minorities, especially Roma communities, and other disadvantaged groups including members of low income groups, people with disabilities, citizens from isolated rural communities, etc.
6. Promotion of education for democratic citizenship in both formal and non-formal education programmes
7. Ensuring access to, and effective use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
8. Development of opportunities for lifelong learning as a key means to stimulate economic regeneration in the region

9. VET, especially establishing links between education and labour market;

These priorities specifically address the most important educational needs in the region. They are fully in line with the three strategic goals identified by the European Commission for the "Detailed Work Programme on the Follow-up of the Objectives of Education and Training Systems in Europe" as well as the Copenhagen Declaration.

Priorities 1 - 4 and 9 fall within Strategic Objective 1: Improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems; priorities 5 - 7 and 9 are in line with Strategic Objective 2: Facilitating the access of all to education and training systems; priorities 8 and 9 are covered by Strategic Objective 3: Opening up education and training systems to the wider world.

The Senior Officials also emphasized the relevance of all 13 objectives and 42 key issues within the work programme to the development of quality education provision in the region. In this context, they highlighted the importance of the following issues if long-term success is to be achieved:

- Securing sufficient funding for sustainable educational development
- Ensuring general public support for education reform
- Developing improved channels for communication between institutions and governments both within the countries of the region, and at European and international level
- Developing human resources and institutional capacity

This South Eastern European Education Reform Initiative aims to contribute to the overall objective of educational development in the region through focusing upon improvement of structured communication, and development of institutional capacity.

**The following instruments are envisaged to facilitate implementation:**

- Regular meetings (twice a year) in the region of Senior Officials from Ministries of Education and Higher Education from South Eastern Europe and other European countries including representatives of the civil society within the framework of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Task Force Education and Youth. These meetings will serve as a forum to exchange experience made in the reform implementation, to foster support partnerships, to discuss issues of regional concern and to formulate joint recommendations on education reform and on concrete action plans and timetables. This forum of Senior Officials will also review the overall implementation of the "South Eastern European Education Reform Initiative".
- To further enhance regional ownership, a secretariat in the region will be set up to provide a support structure for the initiative.
- Peer reviews for the participating South Eastern European countries drawing on expertise from organisations such as OECD, ETF, EUA, Council of Europe, World Bank, NGOs and other independent actors in this field to review achievements and provide recommendations in the respective educational development processes
- Build capacity in key areas of educational reform
- Mapping and setting up a database of good practice examples in the region in the framework of the South Eastern European Educational Co-operation Network
- Support through existing networks (e.g. the South Eastern European Educational Co-operation Network and its nodes) to build capacity and to strengthen the dissemination of information on education development and reform both in South Eastern European countries and on a wider European level.
- Twinning of institutions, and development of institutional and academic partnerships