



THE CULTURE OF PLURALISM AND INCLUSION IN EDUCATION

The integration of European values in the Albanian educational system

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Komisioni Kombëtar i Edukimit Katolik Shqiptar



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KOMISIONI KOMBËTAR I EDUKIMIT KATOLIK SHQIPTAR

The Culture of Pluralism and Inclusion in Education

The integration of European values in the Albanian educational system

- Monsignor Arjan Dodaj, Archbishop of The Archdiocese Tirana-Durres
- Mrs. Lindita Nikolla, Chairwoman of the Parliament of Albania
- Sister Teuta Buka, National Coordinator of Albanian Catholic Education

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Monsignor Arjan Dodaj

Archbishop of The Archdiocese Tirana-Durrës

Catholic educational institutions have had an important role in the history of Albanian education, since the establishment of the first schools. With the courage of the intellectual status and with the love and strength in religion, they have always had an innovative role in important moments of turning points and developments of society. In this vision comes this conference organized by the National Commission of Albanian Catholic Education.

[Video](#)

Pluralism is not simple coexistence, but is reflected through the action of particular persons to make society as inclusive as possible. Adolescence is a very important period for the individual and ethnic development of the person. Education helps us to know ourselves and the community we live in, so we need a broad alliance to reach a fraternal humanity.

**Greetings from Monsignor Arjan DODAJ Sacerdotal Fraternity "Figli della Croce"
Archbishop of Tirana-Durrës Metropole**

Honoured Mrs. Lindita Nikolla, Speaker of the Assembly of the Republic of Albania.

Honoured Monsignor Mr. Angelo Massafra O.F.M. President of the Episcopal Conference of Albania.

Honoured sister Teuta Buka F.M.A. National Coordinator of Albanian Catholic Education.

Dear friends, academics, and distinguished guests,

One of the greatest current challenges for educational systems is the rise of pluralism, caused by the fragmentation of the cultural framework in which socialization is rooted until late modernity. As the socialization process becomes more polycentric, serious problems arise in the management of diversity. Pluralism represents not only a characteristic of any social system because of its complexity, but also a principle of “democratic combination” among diversity. So, it is not a simple coexistence of pluralities, but also a given option for the integration of plurality, which means overcoming any kind of “monism” (monopole) that leads people towards assimilation or rampant individualization.

Pluralism in education is related to: 1) the action of different subjects (single or collective agents); 2) the possibility of combining different cognitive frameworks (interpretation keys, languages), and 3) the free expression of different sets of values (ideologies, ways of thinking, beliefs, and religions) within a unitary framework.

It is natural for me to say that our schools, from their genesis, are born inclusive for the fact that our society favours an atmosphere of coexistence among religions. But, we can't be satisfied with that. Schools are a key context for academic and socio-emotional development, but also an important acculturative context. This is especially the case in adolescence, which is a critical period for the development of a social and ethnic identity, as well as for moral reasoning and intergroup attitudes. Therefore, the way schools approach issues of cultural diversity is likely to influence these developmental and cultural processes, and adaptation outcomes.

In these years, Europe has received an almost unprecedented number of migrants, mainly refugees from devastated war zones, with global issues such as climate change. What we continue to see might be only the beginning of a new era of mass migration, which will further increase the diversification of European societies and our Albanian society.



Monsignor Arjan Dodaj

Archbishop of The Archdiocese Tirana-Durres

For this reason we are convinced that education is fundamental to building a society capable of being inclusive. It takes courage because it is an inclusion that goes towards all the excluded! As never before, we need to unite efforts in a broad Educational Alliance to train people capable of overcoming fragmentation and conflict, for a more fraternal humanity, able to listen patiently. It takes courage to achieve these objectives, the courage to put the person at the centre. The courage to invest our best energies. The courage to train people willing to put themselves at the service of the community.

Education should aim at bringing the individual to know himself and the common home in which he decides to live, and above all, to discover fraternity as a relationship that produces the multicultural composition of humanity, a source of mutual enrichment.

For us as a Catholic Church, this is an integral part of the joyful message of the Gospel, where Jesus tells us that he has come to serve! Today it is necessary to accelerate this inclusive educational movement to curb the “culture of waste” (Francis). "Inclusion is manifested in opening our arms to welcome, without exclusion, “says Pope Francis; "without segregating on the basis of social conditions, language, race, culture, and religion. There is only one person in front of us. Let's love him as God loves him”.

Congratulating the Albanian National Commission for Catholic Education for initiating this conference on this special and actual topic, I wish you all good works on this beautiful day marked by the celebration of St. Nicholas, the protector of children.



Mrs. Lindita Nikolla

Chairwoman of the Parliament of Albania

After World War II, cultural and spiritual revitalism was a necessity for the recovery of nations. Thus, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe began work on preserving heritage. But the preservation of inheritance is not the worship of grace, it is keeping the fire burning, as our arbrësh prof. Francesco Altimari. Our expectations for our parliamentarians are very high, which is affirmed today through the presence of the Speaker of Parliament, Mrs. Linda Nikola, who now has the pleasure to invite her to keep her greetings.

[Video](#)

The contribution of the Catholic Church's educational institutions has always been distinguished for a strong devotion to civic and democratic education. The inclusive character of education precedes an inclusive society. We are now back to our European roots.

The Parliament has its attention to be as open as possible to young people, which is driven by the process of Europeanism itself, which is not enough to obtain scientific knowledge, but requires their actualization.

Speech to the National Conference

*Honoured Monsignor Arjan Dodaj,
Honoured Monsignor Angelo Massafra,
Dear guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

Thank you for inviting me to participate to this National Conference to discuss on the role of pluralist culture and the inclusive character in upgrading the education quality in Albania, based on European experience of the Catholic education network.

At first, I would like to emphasize that school education in Albania should be and is a part of the process of education with European values.

This dimension, or better this fundamental element of the education process, is not an external or conjunctural demand, nor a pragmatic standard that stems from the process of accession of Albania to EU.

European education stems from the roots of Albanians and their European identity. As such, this education stems from the internal needs of the system. This education is and will continue to be a component of the schooling and civic education, even after our accession to the European family.

I greatly appreciate the initiative of the National Commission for Catholic Education and Albanian Commission for Catholic Education to address this issue, as one of the meeting points of the society with faith, and of the religious education with schooling and civic education.

To my appreciation, the contribution of religious institutions and values to the education process helps in internalizing civic and democratic knowledge, values, and standards to young people personality.

This contribution gives also a more pronounced moral and human dimension to the school education and is also an added motivation for civic and democratic education.

The synergy between pluralist and democratic culture and civic education is not something new for Albanian society. Half a century of the totalitarian regime and one-dimensional education endured by the Albanian society was only an interruption, although not short in time, in the democratic culture of Albanians, in their European values, in accepting the other and the neighbor, and in the exchanges with other people's culture.



Mrs. Lindita Nikolla

Chairwoman of the Parliament of Albania

We are already back not only to the political pluralism, to the economy of market, but also to our European roots. The culture of political pluralism is "nurtured", but also "nurtures" our European identity.

And, when this synergy begins to be realised from the earliest stages of education, this entails a guarantee for the solid character and sustainability of the cultural formation of boys and girls of Albania, especially for their political socialisation.

The civic and democratic education is not an aim in itself, but an integral part of the participation and contribution of citizens in a democratic society.

In this context, the inclusive character of education precedes and supports the inclusive character of citizen's participation, especially youth participation, to democratic and societal processes.

The fact is that not only in Albania, but generally in Western democratic societies, is being observed a kind of coolness and distancing of young people interest from political processes and institutions.

This is also a result of the conflictual nature of the political life, the low productivity of political activity and low credibility of democratic institutions.

But it happens also because of the refractory character of our institutions and inertias that prevent us from finding the political and parliamentary path, forms, and instruments that bring us closer to boys and girls of Albania.

I would like to inform you that at the Assembly of Albania, in these recent times, we are reflecting to attract more young people to the parliamentary process and other activities of the Assembly. The Parliamentary Institute, the Centre for Civic Education and "Punishtja e demokracisë", with their interesting activities, during this year have attracted nearly 5,000 school students, thus making the Assembly a more open and more influential institution for citizens and youth.

The Europeanisation of the Albanian education system has several dimensions and European values are an important dimension of them. But the process is complex. Europeanisation presupposes and requires the actualisation of scientific knowledge, and technical and technological skills, which are taught and moulded in our universities.

Modernisation, quality increase, internationalisation and school exchanges, especially between Albanian universities and European and Western institutions constitute further challenges that the schooling and education are faced with in Albania.

I would like to thank once again the National Commission for Catholic Education and Albanian Commission for Catholic Education for their attention towards this important matter of the democratic education and society participation to the democratic society.

Thank you and good work.



Sister Teuta Buka

National Coordinator of Albanian Catholic Education

During the dictatorship the working class was driven to invention and rationalization, while intellectuals often conformed to "adaptation" for fear of free thought. This orientation increased scientific production, but hindered the development of free scientific thought, curbed Albanian contribution to world thought. We seemed to be locked in collective thought.

On the 50th anniversary of the European Convention on Culture, the Director General for Education, Culture, Heritage, Youth and Sport, wrote at the CoE " So culture is not only one of many areas of institutional interest, it permeates, or should, ever, permeate all aspects of life in society. It is no wonder that totalitarian regimes use culture as a means of praising their leaders and for invisible benefits. There is always a danger, even in democracy. Here, here is the integrity of the person in institutional status, as we have the luck to have Sister Teuta Buka, the National Coordinator.

[Video](#)

Welcoming speech

Sister Teuta Buka National Coordinator of NCCE

Dear participants

Honored Speaker of Parliament, Mrs. Nikolla, honored Excellency Apostolic Nuncio, Honored Monsignor. Angelo Massafra and Monsignor Arjan Dodaj. Dear friends of European Catholic education, and of European networks, dear Prof. Jan de Groof, heads and teachers of schools of our network and any other institution, representatives of non-governmental organizations, I am pleased to welcome you to this conference, as the National Coordinator of National Commission for Catholic Education of Albania - NCCE- a body of the Catholic Church in Albania .

The NCCE's network gathers 45 Catholic educational institutions in pre-university education, so entities founded by the Catholic Church, and mainly conducts supporting, formative and promotional activities for them, and also at the national level gives its contribution for the good of education in Albania like the organization of today's meeting.

The mission of NCCE as an organization is to promote the effective fulfilment of the freedom of education as a fundamental condition for the functioning of a democratic society, in accordance with the fundamental human rights and freedoms provided for in the Constitution of the Republic of Albania, in declarations, conventions and protocols ratified by the Albanian State.

And precisely in the fulfilment of this mission that we have already undertaken, as a tradition, the realization of round-tables like today's Conference where this year, we decided to focus on "Culture of pluralism and inclusion in education", because we think it is also in line with the path that Albania is making towards Europe. This table also has its genesis in two simple and solid truths: DIALOGUE and CARE for the man and the human that as a Church we hold so dear and that stem from the life example of Jesus Christ.

These values are both at the heart of the Church's work and of course in all matters of Education. The very existence of NCCE it is the concrete response of the Church in Albania to today's need for education. This way, the Church renders concrete its care, by creating the opportunity for our service in the field of education, alongside parents, to be not only a qualitative and long-term service, but also open and contributive to the quality and educational attention to our young generation, for our country.



Sister Teuta Buka

National Coordinator of Albanian Catholic Education

Pope Francis himself in his invitation for inclusion in a new Global Educational Pact invites us to be active in education and not to remain indifferent:

“It is necessary to unite efforts, to create an educational pact to form mature people, able to live in society and for society. There is an African saying that "it takes a village to educate a child". But, we need to build this village. All together, to educate the children, to educate the future. We must ensure that education creates peace, justice, hospitality among all people of the human family, and dialogue between religions.”

In this space, firstly we want to speak in freedom and to listen to different experiences and perspectives like the European ones from our guests as well as the perspectives and contributions that each of you will bring, and personally I really invite to intervene in large numbers.

Secondly, we hope to be heard in the our goodwill proposals, to the benefit of education, convinced that our vision, our values and our educational tradition are available to our country.

I therefore renew my gratitude for your participation and for the valuable contribution that each of you gives and will give to an Albania that wants to live with a European perspective by making concrete steps in its policies and path towards the total adherence to these values.

I wish you good work!



Mr. José María Alvira

President of the European Catholic Education Commission

Established in 1974 as the regional secretariat of the International Catholic Education Office, the European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC) is today an International Association within which 29 Catholic educational networks in 27 countries in Central, Eastern and Western Europe cooperate, CEEC is a meeting place for the leaders of these networks, but also a center of study and information. In addition, the commission assumes the role of free Catholic education promoter with various European authorities. Thus, CEEC represents more than 35,000 schools and about 8 million students.

[Video](#)

Catholic school in Europe of freedom and pluralism: Freedom is among the fundamental rights of the state. The state guarantees schooling, but this process is not the state's exclusive. The state must guarantee the school's educational project.

The church is present in different parts of Europe. with non-profit educational institutions, being coherent with its principles.

France, where secularism constitutes a republican value, is also the country where the greatest support for non-state educational institutions is offered.

What is the Catholic school's identity and what does it bring? It guides young people to free thinking, through dialogue on culture, faith, life without indoctrinating them. The Catholic school brings freedom, equality, guarantees and harmonizes freedom, quality, coherent educational project, with a high academic level, cares for the weakest, creates community, to be citizens. The Catholic school constitutes a complete institution in the service of society, its emancipation and not only the church.

The Catholic School in the Europe of Freedom and Pluralism Tirana (6/12/2023)

Good morning everyone.

I greet the civil, political and ecclesial authorities present.

I extend a special greeting to the organizer of this meeting, the Albanian Commission for Catholic Education, and, in a very special and cordial way, to Mother Teuta, whom I have known for a long time in the field of Catholic education in Europe.

I am grateful to have been invited to participate in this meeting. It is a privilege and a pleasure to visit your country again. It's not the first time I've done this.

As President of the European Committee for Catholic Education (CEEC) I have also visited many countries in Europe. These visits, together with the meetings and talks with the representatives of all the European countries, have allowed me to get to know the reality of education in general in those countries and, in particular, that of Catholic schools.

Europe is the cradle of freedom, democracy and social pluralism as a value and a source of wealth. In the countries of our continent these values are still valid: freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of trade unions, freedom of politics... and also teaching. These are rights recognized by the Constitutions or Fundamental Laws of these countries. The State guarantees them and, in addition, undertakes to promote and facilitate them.

In fact, freedom of education could not be absent from all rights and freedoms. How do the different European countries interpret it? Although there is some diversity in some practical and concrete aspects, there is agreement on the fundamentals:



Mr. José María Alvira

President of the European Catholic Education Commission

- The universal right to education is recognized in all countries, which means that the state guarantees schooling to all children and young people.

- The state guarantees education for all, but does not take on this task exclusively. Freedom of education means recognizing the right of natural or legal persons (i.e. different social groups) to establish and operate educational institutions.

- Managing an educational center means equipping these centers with their own educational project (obviously respectful of the fundamental rights and duties enshrined in the democratic Constitution). This freedom to found and direct educational centers is a sign of respect for social plurality, where people and groups with different visions of the person, society and the world coexist.

- The public authorities of these countries are committed to making freedom of education effective. What? Helping to eliminate or reduce obstacles, especially economic ones, that make it impracticable in practice. To this end, agreements are concluded between the public authorities and the free schools; agreements providing for the disbursement of public funds to the centers.

Well, among those social groups that promote educational centers with their own project, there is the Church. The Catholic Church is present in the educational world of the various European countries, in a variable proportion that depends, fundamentally, on the roots and presence of the Church in each society.

The school belongs to the sphere of civil society. But it is an area in which the Church is rightfully inserted. It does so with respect for the secularity of the school, with respect for the established rules of the democratic game. It is not a question of claiming privileges, but of being consistent with the principle of freedom of education and respect for social pluralism. In other words, the question of the legitimacy of the Church's presence in schools arises in the field of civil rights (the example of France).

In democratic societies, all choices – starting with the most fundamental ones – can be lived and expressed as long as they respect others. There the Christian school can take its place. It must do so precisely by virtue of the diversity of a plural society, open to all interpretations of reality and all ethical proposals.

I am convinced that every country must have a quality public school, with the necessary personal and material resources. But I also believe that the network of public schools should be complemented at the same level by another network, that of private schools with their own educational projects, duly subsidised by the public authorities, because free education is essential for equality for all.



Mr. José María Alvira

President of the European Catholic Education Commission

What is the identity of the Catholic school that proposes to act within civil society? Like all the others, the Christian school pursues the human formation of children and young people and transmits a culture to them. In doing so, he starts from a vision of reality – of the person, of the world – founded on his faith, founded on the Gospel. It promotes, for the good of all, dialogue between faith, culture and life. And it does so, it must always do so, with the utmost respect for the personal choices of each student, of each family, without indoctrination, but without renouncing one's own identity.

We might ask ourselves: what is the contribution of Catholic schools to society?

It brings freedom (implementing the principle of freedom of education) and equity (it is open to everyone equally, which is possible thanks to the economic subsidies it receives from the state). In other words, it harmonizes the two great principles: liberty and equality. It also provides quality: pedagogical quality and coherent educational projects of Catholic inspiration, without hiding what its principles are; attention to the weakest; an internal climate that fosters a true educational community; innovation and creativity.

And for all this, it needs a wide margin of autonomy, as a condition and cause of the institutional strength of Catholic centers and as a condition for developing all their creativity and capacity for innovation.

Catholic schools prepare young people to be responsible citizens. For this reason, he takes care of their cultural, intellectual and academic formation; but also human and spiritual. In other words, a comprehensive education. For this reason, the school is not primarily at the service of the Church, but above all at the service of society.

I conclude with these words of the Belgian Bishops:

Like any school organized or subsidized by public authorities, the Catholic school wants to be at the service of children and young people. It seeks to respond to the right of society, students and parents to teaching and education that promote the development of the person and the citizen, as well as the social emancipation of all.

José María Alvira
December 6, 2023



Mr. Ignasi Grau

General Manager of OIDEL

Objektivi parësor i OIDEL është promovimi i të drejtës për arsimim si një e drejtë themelore e njeriut. Një e drejtë e tillë nuk mund të ekzistojë pa praninë e përfitimeve shtetërore dhe mbrojtjen e lirive individuale. Veprimi i OIDEL bazohet kryesisht në nenin 26 të Deklaratës Universale të të Drejtave të Njeriut dhe nenin 13 të Paktit Ndërkombëtar për të Drejtat Ekonomike, Sociale dhe Kulturore. Duke pasur përvojë të fortë në lirinë e arsimimit, jemi të bindur se do të ketë një kontribut të rëndësishëm në konferencën tonë

[Video](#)

Konventat mbi të drejtat për edukim sigurojnë mundësinë e zgjedhjes së lirë. Por shpesh vendimin e familjes e kushtëzon gjendja ekonomike dhe nuk lë hapësirë për zgjedhje, pavarësisht se kjo është një e drejtë themelore kushtetuese.

Ka vende si Holanda, që mbështesin arsimin jopublik, p.sh. me mbi 78% të pagave të mësuesve të shkollave jopublike.

Vetëm Greqia, ndër vendet e BE-së nuk mbështet arsimin jopublik. Në të gjitha vendet e tjera shkon drejt rritjes dhe, po ashtu, rritet numri i nxënësve të tyre.

Nëse demokracia i beson qytetarët, nuk ka pse të veprojë ndryshe me institucionet e edukimit.

Educational Pluralism in Europe: an indicator of education for all.

Freedom of education and what it enables, educational pluralism, is strongly recognized in the main human rights international instruments.

BIG CONSENSUS:

Art. 26.3 UDHR:

Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

Art. 13 ICESCR

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

4. No part of this article shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in paragraph 1 of this article and to the requirement that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Also, we could say the same about regional instruments such as the 14.3 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the article 2 of the Protocol 1 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

It exists an unequivocal consensus about the human rights nature of freedom of education.

Yet, when this topic descends into its practical exercise or into political arenas this has become an increasingly polarized topic. One of the main reasons to justify these reticences for the full legal development of this freedom it is its supposed side effect on social cohesion.



Mr. Ignasi Grau

General Manager of OIDEL

A quantitative argument: Freedom of education is contrary to social cohesion .

If the argument that freedom of education is contrary to social cohesion, in the countries with more freedom of education there should be more social segregation. Yet when we cross data on freedom of education and social segregation we cannot find any sort of relation.

The positive relationship between income distribution and freedom of education is verified if we use another representative indicator of the first variable, that is, the percentage of the population's income that possesses a certain level of education. another representative indicator of the first variable, such as the percentage of income held by the richest 10% of the population.

Effects on educational equity and economic inequalities. This study has shown that there is a direct relationship between educational freedom and equity. Public financing of non-state schools is the best way for the administration to guarantee equality of educational opportunities, social mobility, and a greater equitable distribution of income. Several studies have shown that non-state education is associated with better labor market insertion and higher wages (Green et al. 2017), even controlling for the effect derived from the higher socioeconomic status of families (Moulin, 2023; Sass et al. 2016).

Hence the desirability of making such schools available to low-income families to enhance equity. On the other hand, the countries with the best results in international knowledge tests are those with the least inequality, suggesting the existence of a virtuous circle between equity and efficiency in the improvement of educational outcomes

A qualitative argument: “There is no link between quality of education and freedom of education”

There is no quality education without freedom of education.

The concept of these 4 As was developed by the

- Former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, Katarina Tomasevski,***
- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and it is one of the best ways to assess and act upon the situation. Later it was developed by the***
- Acceptability - the form and substance of education, including curricula and teaching methods, have to be acceptable (e.g. relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality) to students and, in appropriate cases, parents; this is subject to the educational objectives required by article 13 (1) and such minimum educational standards as may be approved by the State (see art. 13 (3) and (4));***
- Adaptability - education has to be flexible so it can adapt to the needs of changing societies and communities and respond to the needs of students within their diverse social and cultural settings.***

Ignasi Grau

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Mr. Ezio Delfino

President of Di.S.A.L.

DiSAL brings together leaders of autonomous and free schools. Its president Ezio Delfino has previously presented the main issues that affect the profiles of the school manager, who is increasingly called to develop high-profile planning and management skills and innovations in organizational systems. What are the elements for building a vision of policies designed for the future of the head of the school, without whose active protagonism sustainable reforms or innovations cannot be achieved. And remembering the words of St. Ambrose, he affirmed that "These are times that require the recovery of the model of authentic cultural leadership - which places at the center 'who is man', a question that emphasizes the person and the reality.

[Video](#)

Through education, society ensures progress towards its destination. Education is a generative act, it cannot be educated without freedom. The development of the young is determined by freedom, but freedom must be educated, as a basic, essential value. Therefore, the possibility of choice in education must be ensured. This should also be clarified in the terminology used. In Italy the public system, which is at the service of the public, includes state and non-state institutions. The choice is based on three different starting points: The pragmatist ideal; The conservative ideal; The libertarian ideal. Education is not just training. Freedom is the ability to achieve wholeness.

**Freedom: a dimension for education and culture.
Ezio Delfino - President of Di.S.A.L.**

Why is it worth educating?

Education is a natural and fundamental act through which man communicates himself and accompanies his children on the adventure of knowledge and on the journey of life. Therefore, educating is a generative act that engages the adult in the exercise of responsibility.

To educate means to help the soul of man to enter into the totality of reality. One can only educate by addressing the freedom of the child, calling it to responsibility and action. In fact, the "I" of the boy is defined by freedom: it is already all present when the young person says "I", it is all in his saying "I". But freedom is also what the person must be educated in, while many think that freedom is an absence of ties and that, therefore, it should not be educated.

Freedom of education

Freedom of education is a fundamental and non-negotiable value, because it is constitutive of human nature. It is an inviolable human right, clearly enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 26): "Parents have the right of priority in the choice of the kind of education to be given to their children", by the European Convention on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 14), "The State, in the field of education and teaching, must respect the right of parents to provide according to their religious and philosophical convictions".

Freedom of education is one of the principal anthropological values implied by the Christian faith, as such fully shared by all, which the then Cardinal Ratzinger, in the Note of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of 24 November 2002, defined as "fundamental and inalienable ethical requirements" (n. 4), not because they are "confessional", but because they are "rooted in the human being" and belong "to the natural moral law" (n. 5).

Freedom of education in Italy

In Italy, too, "freedom of education" is a principle laid down by the Constitution, which recognizes only parents "the right and duty to educate their children" (art. 30), closely linked to freedom of thought and conscience.



Mr. Ezio Delfino

President of Di.S.A.L.

Article 33 of the Italian Constitution states: "Art and science are free and their teaching is free". It states that 'bodies and individuals have the right to establish schools and educational establishments' and states that 'the law, in laying down the rights and obligations of non-State schools seeking equality, must ensure that they have full freedom and that their pupils are treated at school in a manner equivalent to that of pupils in State schools'.

According to the Constitution, the education system in Italy is a state system. Private and public entities can set up schools at no additional cost to the state. Schools established in this way may, in the presence of specific conditions established by the laws of the State, request and obtain parity with State schools (Constitution, art. 33). The requirements for applying for parity are defined by Law 62/2000, while Legislative Decree 250/2005 established that there can only be two types of non-state schools: private schools, which have applied for and obtained parity, and non-parity schools. However, non-state schools are not obliged to apply for parity.

Is it right for parents to be able to choose the school for their children?

Many think not, for two reasons that lead several scholarly analysts to argue that schools should tend to be run by the state.

a) The first reason is linked to the possibility of the "risk of social and cultural segmentation": since only the parents of the most advantaged families have the economic, cultural and social means to be able to decide freely and constructively about the school, if freedom of choice were left, first and second class schools would be created.

b) The second reason is linked to what is defined as the "overall inability" of parents to choose the best for their children, i.e. the possibility for families to exercise freedom of choice in the wrong way, ideologically relying on a religious belief, on an affinity of the school with its own reference of values or letting themselves be attracted by the beauty of the physical spaces and classrooms or by the scholastic performances of the students of a certain school.

To avoid these problems, experts who have this cultural setting usually suggest assigning school to students on the basis of their geographical residence - neglecting the fact that this is also segmented - preventing parents from making discretionary choices. According to these two positions, free schools should obviously not exist, whatever cultural offerings they offer.

This vision, dominated by statist planning of the educational experience, is opposed by those who promote freedom of educational choice as the inspiring principle of educational systems. In support of this position, three main types of reasons are given:

- **The "progressive ideal": Choosing the best school for my children can help free me from the social condition I am in.**
- **the "conservative ideal" that focuses on the family as the most adequate, just social subject for deciding the educational choices for one's children.**
- **the "liberal ideal" which basically maintains that each individual should be free to do what he or she considers most appropriate for himself and especially for his or her children and there should be no interference by anyone in this choice. It is, in a way, the ideal of man as the architect of his own future, who knows for himself what is good and what is evil, and who chooses according to this knowledge.**



Mr. Ezio Delfino
President of Di.S.A.L.

Partial Positions

These are three positions that develop interesting elements in the debate on freedom of education, but they still express a vision that does not fully develop the value of freedom and true freedom of educational choice. In these three positions, the school to be chosen is based on the ability to form robust skills in literature, mathematics, science - all fundamental things - but which still say nothing about the value of freedom as a criterion of choice. In our conferences we talk about inclusion, reducing gaps, equal opportunities, digital skills, critical thinking, but in the end the criterion for evaluating families always risks coinciding with the idea that learning is a matter of technique, skills, performance. The pleasure for studying and learning for one's life seem impossible and don't matter. And the value of freedom of choice would only coincide in the possibility of choosing the school that best achieves those learning and outcome objectives.

What is the reason for defending freedom of educational choice and therefore educational pluralism?

On the other hand, there are two reasons that enhance the value of freedom of educational choice as the most suitable model.

a) The Community dimension as a context of education for choice

The first element is that of the community dimension of the individual's life and therefore of his choices and his freedom. The person is not an individual who in an individualistic way realizes his or her own path of life and education: if this were the case, the exercise of the freedom to choose the school and to live the educational adventure in a certain way would not be complete. "To educate a child you need a village" says an African proverb: it is necessary to put the community dimension of education at the center and therefore recognize the possibility for families and associations of parents and teachers to support and help each other in the educational choices for their children.

There are many associations and networks, for example, also in Italy and in Europe, which help each other in a secular way or in the light of faith on many decisions and choices in a concrete and operational way. The community is formed around an ideal, such as the Christian outlook on life. A community of people and therefore the possibility of an educational community is always generated around an ideal: what kind of education do I want to give to my child? How do I want my child to be looked at, loved, accompanied? Which school can help me to continue the path of life and the ideal of life to which we have introduced our children during my studies?

b) Freedom as a striving for totality and fulfilment *The second element takes into account the profound meaning of the term freedom, which has to do with the heart of the person and not only as the possibility of choosing. Fr. Luigi Giussani - an Italian Christian educator - in his text "The Religious Sense" writes that "we experimentally feel free for the satisfaction of a desire. Freedom announces itself as an experience in our existence, as the fulfilment of a need and the fulfilment of an aspiration as fulfilment. But not being free for a weekend for an evening, not just being free on 100, 200, 1000 occasions, but always." That is to say, freedom is the capacity of the end, it is the capacity of totality, it is the experience of a living relationship between one's own experience and the infinite.*



Mr. Ezio Delfino

President of Di.S.A.L.

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The freedom of educational choice of families, understood in this perspective, cannot be just a small fragment of a decision that leads to choosing a good school capable of performing our children, but has to do with the path of total happiness of us adults and our children.

What seriousness, then, is needed on this issue on the part of those who deal with it from a technical point of view and on those who are called upon to make decisions on the issues of education from a political point of view!

Conclusions

To conclude, the themes of the community dimension of freedom and freedom as a continuous tension towards total happiness introduce into the freedom of educational choice the dimension of a greater good, not only utilitarian and individualistic, a good that cannot coincide with a more or less intelligent social design.

What, then, is ultimately the good for which to choose school for one's children and therefore to claim this freedom of choice?

The criterion that must guide a choice in the educational field can only be the fact that the experience that a certain school offers is a full life experience for the children, a path that develops an opening of their heart and mind, that supports a step towards their own path of growth and fullness, An aid on the path to one's destiny. And that it does so by enhancing the family and social tradition from which the children come.

It is very interesting, then, that schools compete precisely in showing how they intend to contribute to the positive and beautiful path for our children, to which path they want to educate and that they highlight how through rigor, excellence, the enhancement of talents in disciplines and activities they intend to promote and enhance the path of our children, teach them the sense of beauty, of truth, of the taste of discovering reality or how they want to design initiatives to stimulate participation in creativity. The theme, therefore, is not the marketing of schools, but the awareness of the contribution that the educational experience can have on the life journey of the children and families who participate in it.

That schools, teachers, directors accept this educational challenge and not only the educational challenge is the prerequisite for there to be true educational pluralism and not just an education market. And so the freedom of choice of families will be exercised within a high and culturally winning perspective - which I love for my children - and not downwards in search only of the school that best trains the student for the work of tomorrow.



Mrs. Nina Guga

Deputy Minister of Education

When the draft budget for the year 1921-22 was being prepared, Father Gjergj Fishta prepared a lecture on the educational reform in Albania, which he could not deliver after the parliament was dissolved, but it was published in Hyllin e Drita. Among other things, he emphasizes that among civilized nations, the school, the municipality and the temple constitute the epic trilogy of civilization and social progress. School, as a representative of the individual and collective perfection of man, an expression of all his moral and material progress.

Even the recommendations of chapter 26, now that the screening process has begun, aim, among other things, to promote cooperation within the framework of common policies such as increasing the quality of education, cultural dialogue, preserving cultural wealth, common cultural heritage and to strengthen and support cooperation activities between member states.

[Video](#)

The Albanian government, even within the negotiation process, prioritizes education and inclusiveness in education. For this, a number of strategies have been drawn up, such as the national education strategy, the employment strategy, the youth strategy, the sports strategy, the internationalization strategy, etc.

The steps that Albania has taken and is taking in relation to accession negotiations, Chapter 26 "Education and Culture"

Greetings honored Monsignor Angelo Massafra,

Dear Prof. Dr. Jan De Groof,

Dear sister Teuta,

Dear participants,

It is a pleasure to be part of your conference today "Culture of pluralism and inclusiveness in education", as part of panel 2 where we will discuss "The role of cultural pluralism in building the European identity of Albania". As a representative of the Ministry of Education and Sports and in the role of negotiator for chapter 26 "Education and Culture", my speech refers to the steps that Albania has taken and is taking in relation to this chapter.

Currently, our country is at a very important moment and is working to become part of the big European family. All members of the working groups and contributing institutions have worked and continue to work to fulfil all EC recommendations/requirements in order to become part of the EU as soon as possible.

In October 2022, an explanatory screening meeting was held for chapter 26 "Education and Culture" where representatives of this chapter received instructions from EC experts on the EU acquis and its alignment with Albanian legislation.

After this meeting, intensive work was done to prepare the bilateral meeting, which was one of the most important meetings, where our institution explained in detail all the work that has been done in the last 5 years in the field of education, sports, vocational education, youth, and culture. For the bilateral meeting, which was held on April 27, 2023, contributions were prepared for 54 questions received from the EC according to specific areas, and 11 presentations were prepared, with the following topics:

1.Albania's policies in the field of culture

2.Policies and education system in Albania

3.Albanian primary and secondary education

4.Albanian higher education



Mrs. Nina Guga

Deputy Minister of Education

- 5. Policies for access to education and equal treatment**
- 6. VET policies and systems in Albania**
- 7. Albania's national qualifications framework**
- 8. Cooperation in EU Programs in support of Education and VET ERASMUS+**
- 9. Youth policies and systems in Albania**
- 10. Albania's policies in the field of sports**
- 11. Anti-corruption in education, youth, sport, and culture**

At the end of the meeting, EC experts evaluated the work done by the Albanian delegation, emphasizing that the efforts and achievements in these fields are in the right direction, in alignment with the EU acquis. We are currently waiting for the EC report on the presentation of the chapter in the bilateral meeting to see the recommendations with which we should work in the future.

I want to emphasize that Albania has made important steps in aligning legislation with EU standards, in all areas of responsibility for Chapter 26: education, sports, professional education, culture, and youth.

Let me dwell more specifically on some of the major achievements that have been made in the framework of Chapter 26.

Based on the recommendations of the EC, the following strategies have been approved and are being implemented:

- National Education Strategy 2021-2026 and its Action Plan;*
- The National Employment and Skills Strategy 2023-2030 and the Action Plan for its implementation as well as the 2023-2024 Youth Guarantee implementation plan;*
- National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 and its Action Plan;*
- National Culture Strategy 2019-2025 and its Action Plan.*

In the field of higher education, one of the priorities of MES is the internationalization of Higher Education, within which the College of Europe was opened for the first time in our country. This is a great achievement in this process and aims to increase the quality in education, as well as to support the process of Albania's integration into the EU.

In the focus of MES policies is the European agenda 2021-2030, which sets contemporary priorities for the global changes taking place such as:

- 1. Improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education and training;*
- 2. Lifelong learning and mobility for all;*
- 3. Increasing competencies and motivation in the education profession;*
- 4. Strengthening European higher education;*
- 5. Supporting the green transition and digitalization through education and training*

Recently, the progress report was published, which comes every year from the EC with recommendations and achievements for Chapter 26.



Mrs. Nina Guga

Deputy Minister of Education

Briefly, based on this progress report, I would like to emphasize that Chapter 26 has made achievements in:

- anti-corruption policy*
- inclusive education, the increase in the enrolment of children with disabilities*
- approval of the law on pre-university education, including provisions for students with disabilities and for the conversion of special schools into resource centres*
- increasing the participation of Roma and Egyptian children in pre-university education*
- approval of the National Youth Strategy 2022-2029 in October 2022, etc.*

Of course, there are still policies to be improved in fulfilling the incoming recommendations such as:

- 1. optimization of the VET system in accordance with the workforce needs of the market;
Work which started as a collaboration between MES-MFE - the guidance for career counseling for 6 and 9 classes has been drawn up and the VET promotional campaign "Choose a Craft" is still running.*
- 2. improving the professional development and training of teachers and trainers, with a focus on pedagogical skills related to the implementation of the comprehensive approach, based on competences and digitalization from elementary to university level, including VET education;
MES focuses on a national training of teachers in STEM (digital competences) and their preparation for international tests.*
- 3. approval of implementing legislation for the Law on Cultural Heritage and Museums.*

The European Commission provides support for Chapter 26 with various projects such as:

- EU for social inclusion & EU for teaching - In the framework of the two projects, awareness workshops for inclusiveness, support in terms of improving the physical infrastructures of social workers, trainings, support for resource centres were carried out.*
- EU for social inclusion: Technical assistance - A report on the reform of the Multidisciplinary Commissions was carried out*
- EU for Social inclusion budget support - MES regularly reports on the indicators related to the number of psychologists and social workers and students with disabilities*
- Erasmus - Networking meetings, study visits, exchange of experiences and good practices, education-business partnerships, professional training, creation of environmentally sustainable communities*

Also, with the support of Albanian American Development Foundation, 100 SmartLabs have been built in 100 schools, and this year, with the support of the World Bank, 216 SmartLabs are being built in 200 schools. This project will be expanded to 500 more schools with the support of Council of Europe Development Bank.

Our work will continue to achieve what is not only the goal of MES but of all Albanians, the goal of the EU integration of our country. By becoming part of the big European family, we will contribute with our culture and national identity as an added value in the field of education.



Monsignor Angelo Massafra

President of KKEKSH

Whenever we talk about the history of Albanian culture and literature, we cannot help but refer to the fundamental contribution of the Catholic clergy, from the first documentation of the Albanian language, to continuing with the first Albanian book and up to the establishment of authentic Albanian literary schools. . As Saint Thomas Aquinas said: "Footprints are what people leave when they walk on the paths, while deeds are the paths that God opens", as we find it documented by the writings of Father Donat Kurti and Benedikt Dema, and many others.

[Video](#)

Since the forest lands, the institutions of the Catholic Church have had a great role in education. European values were educated through them. It is enough to remember the Saverian and Illyricum Colleges in Shkodër. But the communist dictatorship cut off the European approach. In communism, the work of the Catholic fathers was used, but not cited and not respecting intellectual property rights. In the statement "Gravissimum Educationis" it is stated that education is a fundamental right and is the duty of parents. But parents need support, so the call for decision-making institutions is to provide financial support. The Catholic school has the characteristic of giving life to a school community, which helps to know oneself and the world. Today is the time of an educational disaster, while education is the primary dimension to get closer to Europe. The Pope has said that to educate means to humanize and this is an important social work that must be done with passion and love.

CONTRIBUTION TO CATHOLIC EDUCATION, FORERUNNER OF EUROPEAN VALUES IN ALBANIA MONSIGNOR ANGELO MASSAFRA OFM

Since the establishment of the first educational institutions by various Catholic congregations, in the Albanian lands, back then occupied by the Ottoman Empire, arrived for the first time the school literature of European countries. The Xaverian college, through Albanian and foreign professors who had completed their studies abroad, in Italy and Austria-Hungary mainly and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, brought and translated their study texts for the Albanian students. With the subsequent implementation of the typography of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception the mass printing and distribution of these texts was made possible, which created for the first time a convergence with the Europe of the time, whose values had begun to crystallize on the basic principles that only after World War II would serve as the foundation of the European Union. It should not be forgotten how the concept of patriotism in schools came as a direct contribution of father Gjergj Fishta, when as director of the Illyricum gymnasium, he established Albanian as the basic language of education.

But if we go back, when the concept of a united Europe did not exist, in the early and later Middle Ages, we will see that what was considered a school in developed countries, cities, states and kingdoms of the time, had sisters in our lands, near the parish cells. For example in Pllana, since XVII century, there was such a structure of education and training for the inhabitants of the area. Even in Shtuble (Kosovo) there is evidence in the sixteenth century.

Even humanists like Gazulli or Maruli, Beçikemi or Barleti were formed in Catholic educational institutions, the only ones existing at the time. Thus, some of them like Barleti, gave their contribution to what served as the sole foundation to the European Renaissance, without forgetting for a moment their motherland.

After listing these historical facts, the main but not the only ones, we come to the conclusion on the earliest connections between Albania and Europe. The first channels through which Europe communicated its values to Albanians or Albanians contributed to the creation of European values, happened thanks to, through or via Catholic education. Because thanks to this education, it was not intended then as it is not intended now only to transmit or acquire knowledge, but also to build an environment where everyone is fulfilled, as requires the essence of the educational values that Europe proposes.



Monsignor Angelo Massafra
President of KKEKSH

A space where this environment was best built remains Saverian College, the forerunner of many innovations in Albania, among which sports (connecting for the first-time physical education with education as a whole, just like other countries with consolidated education systems) or experimental and research laboratories. Under this light, the opportunities for the recognition of European values were expanding and the students, having recognized these values, absorbed, owned, wanted to implement them, but communism stopped this initiative which would have changed the fate and face of Albania forever. In many writings that father Fishta, father Harapi or the beatified dom Lazer Shantoja wrote in "Hylli i dritës" (The gleam of light), The post of Albania etc., they argued with the state institutions precisely to create the possibility of a more European approach to education.

During 45 years of communism, the scientific product of Catholic schools was used, never cited, often as plagiarism, for the establishment of several scientific disciplines. The system, despite leaving them at a lower rank than its trustees, was obliged to occasionally invite students from these schools, now men and women, to give their opinion on new initiatives, but when noticed that they would be against policies for the cult of the individual, the regime removed and stripped them of any right to have a public voice on these issues or any other issue.

After the advent of democracy, the remaining priests and sisters sought to reconnect the broken thread of Catholic Education. They invited the brothers from the congregation who had been expelled to return, new congregations came, and Catholic education was reborn, as was religion, because people loved it, had sought it for 45 years... And it happened! Catholic educational institutions have been re-established, even stronger than before, and still today they continue to keep that line of communication open with Europe, just as in decades, if not centuries ago.

The missionaries who founded Catholic schools in Albania have entirely based their work on the document of the Second Vatican Council "Gravissimum Educationis". In this document, the Council Fathers provided some basic directions-guidelines, which I like to summarize. In the above document, after establishing the principle that education is a fundamental right for all people, it goes on to describe the nature of the formation of a Christian as a human being, who reflects the evangelical values, through which the individual qualifies his commitment to human society. The document, before addressing formative typologies, represents the primary task that parents have in the education of their children, by addressing directly to institutions that, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity, should side with parents and families in this educational mission.

In just a second step, Gravissimum Educationis considers formative agencies, such as the school, which "matures intellectual abilities, develops judgement skills, places in contact with the cultural heritage received from previous generations, promotes understanding of values, prepares for professional life, gives birth to a bond of friendship between students with different social characters and conditions, favouring mutual understanding " (GE 5). In this case, the call to institutions is strong, in particular with regard to fair subsidies in assistance to families and in respecting the freedom of choice in the education of children; and in ensuring for believers of every religion a fair and appropriate education that does not affect their faith. As for the Catholic school, the document reads: "like other schools, it follows the typical cultural finality of the school and the human formation of young people.



Monsignor Angelo Massafra

President of KKEKSH

But its most characteristic element is to give life to a community school environment, permeated by the evangelical spirit of freedom and divine love, to assist adolescents so, in the development of their personalities, they can grow together as new creatures made by the Christening, and to coordinate the entire human culture with a message of redemption, so that the knowledge of the world, life and the person, which the student slowly acquires, may be enlightened by faith” (GE 8).

At this time, when Society presents new challenges at the speed of the light and expects new solutions from schools, Catholic education continues to stand at the forefront of the fastest response, following the best European examples, inspired by the Gospel, and guided by the Global Education Pact promulgated by Pope Francis. Pope Francis has pointed out that today is a time of educational disaster and, as such, can leave no one indifferent. Our adherence as a church, and in particular to Catholic Education in the actualization of this pact, is continuous and this becomes concrete, not only in the efforts to increase the school communities (staff, parents of students) in terms of professionalism or in their ethical and spiritual formation but also in the increased commitment of our institutions to work in a network, to involve the family and institutions in the process of education that is much more than that of schooling.

Therefore, we see inclusion in the freedom to choose among the plurality of educational offerings, not as the realization of something possible, but as the realization of something necessary that can draw closer to Europe, in whose charter of principles this freedom stands.

Dear participants! Catholic Education has been the bridge of communication of European values in the Albanian society since the beginning, and I do not exaggerate if I say that when the nation did not exist as an idea, thanks to Catholic education, awareness about the belonging of everyone in this society was built. Therefore, this meeting today, and the earlier and later activities that the Albanian Commission for Catholic Education in cooperation with schools, kindergartens and gymnasiums realizes, are bricks in the tower of a sustainable education in front of everything and accessible to everyone.

I like to end with the words of Pope Francis:

“To educate is to humanize, is to make a Man a Fully Human... Therefore, the work of educating a child is a real social work, because it means to form it in relation to others, in respect for others, in cooperation for a common purpose, to form the person with responsibility, with a sense of duty, with the value of sacrifice for the common good... it is to form free and compassionate people... and to transmit to young people a positive education about emotions and affective lives; to protect them from threats such as bullying, alcohol, tobacco, pornography, violent video games, gambling, and drugs.”

Thank you.

+ ANGELO MASSAFRA OFM (Order of Friars Minor)
Metropolitan Archbishop of Shkodra-Pult
President of the Episcopal Conference of Albania
President of the National Commission for Catholic Education



Prof. Dr. Jan De Groof

Founder and Chairman of ELA

The European Association for Education Legislation and Policy aims to encourage progress in educational rights by promoting the right to education as a right, elaborating education law as a discipline and actively supporting any serious efforts made towards the gradual and progressive codification of educational rights and educational legislation.

We are honored to have among us today a professor and expert who has dedicated his academic and professional career to education rights, education policies and governance, the legislative framework of education, international and European law, constitutional law, fundamental rights in the field of religion, culture and ethics. He has been elected Vice Chairman of the Complaints Committee of the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) and as a full member of the Club of Rome – EU Chapter (CoR-EU); has been appointed (2016) by Pope Francis as Consultant for Education. We therefore look forward to his analysis and suggestions for our legal framework.

[Video](#)

If we analyze the results of the Western Balkans Eurobarometer, but also the progress report, Albania shows modest progress in the implementation of inclusiveness, leadership development, etc. On the other hand, in the percentage of GDP dedicated to education, we see that it goes down (2022 – 3.2%; 2023 – 3.1%; 2024 – 2.9%; 2025 – 2.8%). Referring to the Balkan Barometer, Albania is perceived as a country with high corruption in education, political interference in education, etc.

Everything must be seen with a different mindset, from the organization of policies, subsidiarity in decision-making. Freedom of choice in education, pluralism in education, diversity, inclusion, freedom in curricula must be ensured. The child does not belong to the state, but education is the most important competence of the state. The state must focus on the fundamental issues to ensure the right to freedom of choice in education, through fiscal incentives and support of families.

THE INTEGRATION OF EUROES IN THE ALBANIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION OF EDUCATION AND EDUCATION PLURALISM: TARGET FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE EUROPEAN IDENTITY OF ALBANIA

PART ONE

1.Introduction: Why is Albania a quite interesting ‘case’ – My involvement since the 1990s

“If you are searching for the European identity, go to Albania...!”

This is the key message written by an Austrian most talented author, Robert MENASSE, in his last novel ‘Die Erweiterung’ (“The Enlargement”), published hardly a few months ago, at the very moment of securing the entry of Albania to the European Union. Those who visited the country are convinced of the huge historic and cultural heritage of Albania and of the commitment of the citizens, especially the youth, to European values.

Since the early nineties of last century I had the opportunity to be involved in the reflection on the future education and research systems, organized by academia and by public leadership. On several occasions, I have advocated for the concept and implementation of subsidiarity and democratic leadership, accountability and transparency, steering from distance formula, professionalization of institutional governance.

Repeatedly I argued against the bureaucratic approaches of public authorities, the existing room for politization in education and research, and in the higher education domain, the risks of restricting autonomy: the reference to ‘create a unified and standardized system’ has to be replaced by ‘create a comprehensive, flexible and transparent system’ with the rationale: ‘a unified and standardized system’ will stifle innovation and performances and will not make Albanian (higher) education ready for the future.



Prof. Dr. Jan De Groof

Founder and Chairman of ELA

For a long-time, no mention was made of the ‘European Research Area’; learning outcomes of all cycles and programmes of studies should take into account the ‘European Qualification Framework’, etc. Is progress made since a decade... ?

2. Positive evolutions since 30 years in education: Referring to the international reports and documents: what went positive in education policy and outcomes ?

Consulting European ‘Barometers’ : the good news is that ‘Education’ remains one of the most ‘trusted entities’ in society, that youngsters have the most confidence in ‘the Family’ and in ‘the School’, and that, focusing on the Western Balkans, the opinion “Better education is the most vital condition for jobs and civic participation” scores quite high.

As argued by Nobel Prize winner for Economics, Amartya SEN: ‘Development’ is understood as expanding substantive freedoms. These include political and socio-economic-cultural freedoms. The evaluative reason: assessment of progress has to be done primarily in terms of whether the freedoms that people have are enhanced. The effectiveness reason: achievement of development is thoroughly dependent on the free agency of people. Conclusion: long term investment in education (and health) are the best predictors for development!

Preparing this Conference, I collected and analysed the reports on Albania from the leading international and multilateral organizations, from authoritative (international) NGO’s... Most relevant of course is the European Commission ‘Albania 2023 Report’, November 2023, and the 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement policy... Especially ‘Cluster 1: The Fundamentals of the Accession Process’ and ‘Cluster 3: Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth’, with ‘Chapter 25: Science and research’ and ‘Chapter 26: Education and culture’ needs accurate reading. The overriding conclusion is as follows: ‘Albania is moderately prepared in the field of education and culture’. “Some progress” was made. The reports refer to some improvements related to several National Agencies (Employment and Skills, Education), the 2023-2030 national strategy, the 2022-2029 national youth strategy. But “many further efforts are required”...

3. Concerns: What went wrong and what are the most significant failures ?

-The PISA results, published yesterday, demonstrated the dramatic status of the education system, also comparing with all other partner countries (students in Albania scored significantly lower than the OECD average in reading, maths and science and the 2023 results are even historically worsening). Further efforts are required to strengthen the quality and inclusiveness of education, while appropriate resources should be allocated to ensure that the new policy reforms are implemented. Other main concerns: improvement of the professional development and training of teachers and trainers, VET and early childhood education, the increased use of digital technology, updating curricula, governance.

-The EC pays also particular attention to anti-corruption policy and requires more efficient management of the resources offered by donors and funding from the state budget. Previous EU reports reminded us that education is an area at high risk of corruption: “the transparency and inclusiveness of the recruitment procedure of teachers and school directors needs to be improved” (Council of the European Union, 2022).



Prof. Dr. Jan De Groof

Founder and Chairman of ELA

According to the ‘Global Corruption Index’ – ‘Balkan Barometer’ Albania is ranked as the country with the highest level of perception of corruption in the region. The barometer indicated “concerns over education are especially stressing for Albania, also related to the perception that the education system has not adequately prepared the young people for the workplace.” Council of Europe and UNESCO reports had already identified the problem of political interference and corruption in employment decisions. Research analysed in a convincing and recently updated manner the ‘forms’ and ‘areas’ of corruption in schools; the legal framework in force (Ethics and Conduct Commission; Normative Provisions in pre-University Education; Code of Ethics) has to be completed and accompanied by the establishment of effective mechanisms.

-UNESCO mentioned already that funding is not targeted toward tackling disparities and that spending (a.o. on capital investment in and around schools) is most inadequate. But there is more. The Ministry of Education and Science reported that public spending on education represented 3.2% of GDP in 2022, while the forecast for 2023 and 2024 is 2.9% and 2.8% respectively, considerably lower than the EU average of 5%. My contacts with academia and experts showed that even those percentages are not reached. In the meeting we had the day before the Conference with the Vice-Chair, she argued that reconstruction of the educational facilities damaged by the 2019 earthquake hindered a more solid investment in education. But I answered that in my meeting with the minister and deputy-ministers of Education in Ukraine, hardly a month ago, the government confirmed his strong commitment and determined will to hold on to the 5% norm, ‘despite the special circumstances since the Russian invasion, February 24, 2022’...

Unfortunately, same or similar findings were made at the occasion of the previous Council of the European Union conclusions on the ‘Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process’ of previous years!

-Critical reports from OECD, UNESCO and World Bank focused also on governance and structure of the education system: the Pre-University Education Strategy sets policy priorities, but planning and implementation capacity are weak and this counts also for self-evaluation procedures. (...)

4. The missed dimensions: No progress on pluralism and hardly on civil society. Missed opportunities on positive Church-State relations

Besides the repeatedly mentioned ‘concerns’, I have to articulate the missed dimensions, vital for the future of the overall education system and the fulfilment of education rights, and thus of societal progress, - especially since they are intrinsically linked to the so-called Fundamentals of the Accession Procedure to the EU: the concept and implementation of ‘Education Pluralism’ and of ‘Civil Society’. It goes without saying, but also long standing research and comparative studies underpinned their mutual interconnectedness.

The November 2023 ‘European Commission Staff Working Document: Albania 2023 Report’ on the EU Enlargement policy dealing with Albania, concluded firmly: “The role of civil society should be further strengthened”. The structures in place need to be reinforced and become fully operational. There has been no progress in implementing the roadmap on an enabling environment for civil society. The basic statement goes as follows: “An empowered civil society is a key component of any democratic system and Albania’s legal and regulatory framework on rights and freedoms...”.



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This is particularly the case in Education.

The EC report referred explicitly to the field of VAT refund, in order to allow tax exemptions for CSOs. But implementation has not started yet: Albania still does not have tax incentives. The non-state education sector, and particularly the catholic representatives, urged the government to shape a positive fiscal regime for not for profit organisations, working in the public interest, without an affirmative response until now.

‘Pluralism’, – the translation of the plurality of philosophical, religious and ideological convictions through sustainable structures and programs, especially in the domain of education, health, social welfare, research and culture, and the articulation and fulfilment of individual and collective fundamental rights and freedoms -, shapes civil society in many ways. Pluralism is considered as one of the main constitutional principles of the European Union. This remains a missed opportunity for Development and Democracy in Albania and this brings us to the second part of my contribution.

I will focus later on another missed opportunity of Albania after 1990, i.e. the elaboration of a constructive dialogue and effective collaboration between ‘Church’ and ‘State’, to be defined as a specific characteristic of modern society in Europe, even in the rather ‘secular’ states in Europe.

PART TWO

I spent a huge part of my academic, professional and international ‘activist’ career on the following three perspectives for Society and Life: Europe, Pluralism and Confessional Education.

5. The European dimension in Education Policy and Law Universal Values

They are articulated in the broad international framework dealing with education. Albania is partner to and ratified most international treaties and they have to be executed; they are predominant, in case of conflict with domestic law. The European Union reiterated in the mentioned November 2023 report on the Accession Procedure the attention to the ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: the ratification should be beneficial for the rights of the child.

The legal and policy framework on the rights of the child ‘increasingly’ reflects international standards and EU requirement, but “coordination mechanisms need to be significantly improved to ensure full implementation of the legal framework in several areas and to the right to education.”

European Values and Democratic Culture

The core values form the heart of the European Union; they are embedded in the European Treaties: ‘Freedom, Human Dignity, Equality, Rule of Law, Human Rights’. I lived an exciting moment when all ministers of education of the Member-States to the EU and the Council of Europe signed in Brussels the ‘Competences for Democratic Culture. Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies’ (2016). It forms the conceptual model of the competences which need to be acquired by learners if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and peacefully living together throughout Europe.



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The 20 competences included in the model were articulated as ‘Values’, ‘Attitudes’, ‘Skills’ and ‘Knowledge and critical understanding’. They form the core of the education process and should be defined and determined as ‘outcomes’ and not as ‘objectives’, what unfortunately is still the case in the Albanian education system. The curricula should be updated, however.

At the Conference at the occasion of the 30st anniversary of the ‘European Association for Education Law and Policy’, which I have founded, I welcomed Prof. Koen Lenaerts, the President of the European Court of Justice. He was also present at the first ELA conference in Antwerp. In his inauguration speech, he introduced European Citizenship Education as a common constitutional duty for all Member-States.

The EU ‘Acquis Communautaire’

The founding fathers of the ‘European Community’ repeatedly said: ‘If we had to start again, we would not opt for coal and steel, but for education’ ! But in the meantime, the education acquis Communautaire is quite impressive. There is no longer any question of a purely national education policy, due to the effect of international and European hard law and soft law.

At the moment of the accession procedure of Albania, European Union law will have an even more penetrating effect, certainly in the field of non-discrimination and mobility. The ‘European dimension’ will continue to gain further depth, for example in the for Albania critical fields of key competences, digital skills, promoting common values (following the Götenberg Social Summit), citizenship and respect for rights and freedoms.

The EU accession procedure report expressed concerns about minority rights; Albania has still to sign the for education quite relevant European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, - the 25th Anniversary Conference in Budapest the week before this Conference - showed the empty place of Albania in the Western Balkan region...

The common constitutional principles and traditions of European Member-States

The so-called ‘common constitutional traditions’, as they result from the constitutions of the EU Member-States, are a part of the basic principles of the legislative actions of the Union. International cooperation in the field of education is necessary in view of the requirements of the Single European Market. The ‘common constitutional principles’ in education create a coherent legal environment and guarantee a European understanding of education rights and freedom, relevant as a touchstone for possible dramatic changes in the Albanian legal and education culture of the future.

The neutrality of State education, - or call it ‘intern pluralism’ -, the parental responsibilities for the upbringing of the children, - in line with universal fundamental rights -, the freedom of education for non-State actors, - call it ‘extern pluralism’ -, the role of the State promoting rights and freedoms, are considered as the most prominent common constitutional principles. The State should ‘respect, protect, promote and fulfil’ education rights and freedoms. ‘Fulfil’ means: ‘provide’ – initiating State schools -, or ‘facilitate’, thus supporting non-State providers. In almost all countries, the non-State school is partly or fully supported by the public authorities.



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In my comparative research, the models of support and funding systems are described and detected, with their similarities and dissimilarities. The positive recognition of the role of private but not for profit actors by the State is a common principle and practice, in contrast with the current situation in Albania. These ‘civil society education initiatives’ are – throughout Europe - mostly rooted in a religious concept of life and in confessional ethical values. ‘Freedom of religion’ and ‘Freedom of education’ are ranked by legal philosophers as prior fundamental rights; they are inherent in the European education systems.

In conclusion

*In continuation of the principle of the promotion of ‘European dimension of education’, according to art. 165 and 166 of the European Treaty, a wide volume of norms, principles, values, standards, frameworks, processes, programs, ...,- on all levels of the learning process -, complemented the *acquis Communautaire*. They impact deeply and consistently national education policy and legislation. Education, culture and research became a specific competence of the EU, taking into account the subsidiarity rules.*

The pursuit of the belonging to the common ‘European Education and Research Area’ requires the credible and sustainable implementation of the European Education legal principles and education norms and standards.

This requires also a ‘sense of urgency’, still absent in Albania concerning Education, a fortiori when the missing dimension of pluralism contradicts European realities.

1. The overall principle of Pluralism of and in Education

Another domain of my research in 30 years is dedicated to the concept and implementation of Pluralism, as most steering and inspirational for the organisation of societal and personal development.

Concept and Frameworks

Pluralism in European countries is the last 80 years embedded in the structure and organisation of culture and media, health and social welfare, Church-state relationship and the law on religions, and, definitely, in... Education. The common practices throughout Europe are principled in the legal framework. However, national articulation differs from one country to another, but these differences do not mask the overall question how vibrant civil society is evolved. ‘Civil society’ as the third domain, between State and Person (and to some extent: the market). And how public policy and social inclusion are compatible with the pluralistic format of society. Pluralism is intrinsically associated with Diversity and Inclusion. I should refer to some of my writings. Given some heterogeneity, education pluralism will also boost schooling and learning. Concentration in education provision may be detrimental to school choice as well as educational outcomes.

However, education pluralism does not share always in Europe the same ‘prestige’ in law and policy or is even under attack: parental rights, religious education, curricular freedom, school choice, funding of NGO schools, home education are debated and questioned.



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Nevertheless, the lawmaker and the public authorities should remind that education pluralism is a human right, for the right 'to be different', and a vital tool for social inclusion.

Comparative constitutional and education law proved that Pluralism and Freedom are always at stake in time of transition. This was and remains the case in Western democracies, in the CIS-countries, South Africa and... Albania. What is the role of the State in education ? According to the European concept, education occupies an intermediate position where government and civil society must cooperate. It is in defining the forms and extent of this cooperation that debates and even conflicts arise.

Leading jurisprudence explained worldwide that 'the child does not belong to the State' ! Breaking down education monopolies remains always the prerequisite for education quality and equality, as proved by wide research. 'Homo Sovieticus' was legitimated in name of social justice and peace, but is a fundamental denial of human dignity.

In conclusion:

Parental rights and pluralism are the counterweight to the imposition of a uniform State education system. They are most vital for a living democracy. European identity opts for a pluralist understanding of the political and social order, which recognizes the important role of faith communities and associations alongside other forms of voluntary organizations, in maintaining society and transmitting values, which sustain it.

It is of the essence of a free and democratic society within Europe that government does not claim absolute sovereignty; it fulfils its duties and exercises its authority within a context which it does not create itself. The key end is the creation of a social space within which autonomous individuals and groups can freely pursue their distinctive visions of what gives meaning and worth to human existence...

Common Practices throughout Europe - Legal implementation

The common practices dealing with pluralism focus particularly on:

- School choice, Parental involvement and institutional diversity of schools;*
- The concept of 'Partnership' in Education and common responsibilities;*
- Institutional autonomy of schools in Policy and Law;*
- The 'ethos' and ideological characteristic of the State-school: 'neutral', 'secular', 'laicism', 'pluralistic, in positive or negative sense', etc.;*
- The meaning and realisation of Inclusive education in Policy and Law, as the core issue in Sustainable Development Goal 4, in national principles and policies, with a focus on Roma children and children with disabilities.*

Special focus on the positive impact and the status of the non-State school, expression of freedom and societal responsibility

Euridice, the official Documentation Centre of the EU, informed the interested European citizen on different aspects of the legal framework of the 'private but not for profit' schools in Europe.



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In the margin: the meaning of 'private' varies a great deal. The assumption behind the term 'private' is that all such schools are profit-making while most are not. The classification developed by UNESCO divides schools by the criterion of their management, by the State or private. Government aided schools are considered private if they are privately managed. Differently, f.e.g. English courts have classified schools into State (public) and private by the criterion of funding. If a school's funding comes out of public revenue, it is defined as a State school regardless of how it is managed. Broad research based argumentation (UNESCO, OECD, World Bank, Council of Europe) proved the positive impact of plural education systems: increasing availability and accessibility, increasing educational choice, increasing parental and societal participation, quality improvement, innovative curricular approaches,... 'PiSA in Focus': Students, who attend private schools, tend to perform significantly better in the PISA-assessments than students who attend public schools. "Around one-tenth of this private school advantage is the result of competition and the higher levels of autonomy in defining the curriculum and allocating resources that private schools enjoy."

Moreover, research based evidence is shown, including my own publications, on the leading legal principles: the freedom to found non-State schools grounded on a specific mission, the official status (effectus civilis) of diplomas issued by recognised schools, free recruitment of personnel, autonomy of the approach taken to curriculum and school programs, religious instruction, appropriate inspection reflecting the distinctive character of the school. This reasoning should keep in mind, when the Albanian legislator finally will oversee the legal status, but art. 42.4 and 42.5 of the Law on Pre-University Education system in the Republic of Albania 69/12 as amended is quite problematic: the schools founded or administered by religious communities 'are opened and closed by decision of the Council of Ministers. The criteria and procedures for their opening are determined by the decision of the Council of Ministers'.

Problematic is also the (non-) funding.

In the countries of the EU, except in Greece (close to the national Orthodox Church), funding is awarded to non-State ('grant-aided private) schools: costs linked to the staff, operational costs and those linked to capital (purchase, rental and maintenance of buildings), or the full combination of all three categories, possibly at the same level as State schools (Belgium, the Netherlands).

What a contrast with the current situation in Albania :

-Legislation in Europe overwhelmingly ensures public funding for 'private not for profit' education sector, but Albanian State law supports only public schools. Art. 39 on 'Financial support for the private pre-university education' of the Law on Pre-University Education System in the Republic of Albania' remains hypothetical in its implementation,- in addition to the critical reading of the economics and formulation of the article itself. The Ministry can financially support local private education institutions which are not for profit and have been operating for at least five years, based on its opportunities and approved programs. The provision has not yet been implemented due to budget constraints.

-It has to be noticed at the opposite: from 2009 quite modest funds are provided for schools established by religious communities to assist in the payment of some salaries.

-No fiscal incentives are provided. Neither an assistance to families (by exception: textbooks in compulsory education).



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In conclusion

Public spending on education is low (and inadequate), as mentioned earlier. But, at the contrary, private funding of education is increasing... OECD reviews reveal that while “there has been no public spending on private education, private spending by individuals and households has increased in recent years, from a level of 0.8% of GDP in 2009 to 0.9% of GDP in 2017 to 1% in 2022”; “Public spending decreased over the same period...”. The conclusion by the OECD, formulated in diplomatic terms, reads as follows: “This raises equity concerns.”

The public support of non-State schools seems a testcase by excellence to check the willingness of Albanian authorities to be in line with European practices and common principles and with the concept of education pluralism. The sense of urgency cannot be denied due to the negative financial status of non-State schools, which nevertheless demonstrate a high level of quality and inclusiveness.

1. The role of the confessional school in contemporary society

The role of Churches in education in Europe – the case of Albania

Church education in Europe was determining during centuries. The historic impact of confessional schools in Europe is well documented and remains still quite significant in most European societies.

At the opposite: no other Eastern European country acted in such a radical way towards religion as Albania. The country experienced a long period of religious persecution after World War II, of attacks on religion and religious institutions. Young Albanians had to be ‘liberated from religious ideologies’. In 1967, the remaining religious institutions were destroyed or converted to other types of institutions. In the same year, the regime completely banned religion in Albania, declaring it to be the ‘only atheist country in the world’. Late November 1990, after the collapse of the USSR and the fall of communism, some signs announced the beginning of religious freedom. Since 1993, the Catholic Church reopened the first schools, particularly in regions with a high level of poverty, unemployment, psycho-social problems and where access to quality education was quite limited.

The November 1998 Constitution, art. 10, guarantees religious freedom and proclaimed that the State and the religious communities mutually respect the independence of one another and “work together for the good of each and all.” Art. 24 sanctions the freedom of religion or belief through education. Both constitutional norms reflect the European cooperative model.

The discussion about the relevancy of religion in education focused chiefly on the overall debate about religious symbols in school. Rather slowly, ‘religious education’ as such has been dealt with, while respecting the secular concept of the education system. Confessional schools have also the obligation to respect the rights of learners with regard to their religious beliefs. Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Muslim schools are open for learners of different faiths. This norm does not cause tensions with the Catholic doctrine or with the practice of the Catholic schools in Albania.

Several challenges in the ‘Church-State relations’ have still to be answered. Despite the State allocation of EUR 1.05 million to the Catholic, Sunni Muslim, Orthodox and Bektashi communities for the administrative functioning of the communities and religious education in 2023 (same amount as previous years), the November 2023 EU Report on the Accession Procedure for Albania mentioned explicitly: “The restitution of properties belonging to religious groups that were expropriated during the communist era remains an unresolved issue”.



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Already in the Venice Commission ('European Commission for Democracy through Law, Council of Europe) Opinion on the 'Draft Law on Freedom of religion, religious organizations and mutual relations with the State of Albania', 17 December 2007, some concerns were expressed on the autonomy issue of religious institutions. Suggestions were made by elaborating on the differences between 'religious organizations' and 'religious communities' and "by clarifying vague and inconsistent provisions that might be interpreted as limiting the freedom of religion in undue manner."

Catholic education and their contribution for inclusive education

The Catholic Church plays - as the largest non-State provider of education in the World – a significant role in the fulfilment of the right to education and in efforts to achieve SDG 4. The enrolment in schools from kindergarten to the 12th grade has more than doubled; most of the growth was concentrated in Africa due to high rates of population growth and gains in educational attainment over time, but growth rates were also high in Asia. In Europe, trends differ according to regions and countries.

The aims of Christian, and especially Catholic schools are well defined in the (Catholic) doctrine. In a contribution for UNESCO's Futures of Education Commission they are listed and commented; 'care for students', 'equity in education', 'social justice and preferential option for the poor' are regarded among the first core values.

In many parts of Post-Reformation Europe, Catholic schools were often founded with the purpose to educate the poor: to provide some basic skills in literacy and numeracy, to provide a possibility of escaping poverty and to educate them in the Christian faith. This service or 'mission' to the poor, was understood to be a manifestation of the Christian (and Jewish) tradition of care for the poor and the marginalized. Some of the best known examples of initiatives for educating the poor can be traced in the histories of numerous congregations and networks.

The preferential option for the poor can manifestly be understood to be a fundamental principle of contemporary Catholic Social Teaching in the post-Conciliar period. The contemporary documents on Catholic education begin with Gravissimum Educationis Momentum (1965). Most recently, the 2022 document The Identity of the Catholic School for a Culture of Dialogue (Congregation for Catholic Education) refers explicitly to the care for the poor in section 22: "A distinctive feature of its ecclesial nature is that it is a school for all, especially the weakest. This is testified to by the establishment of the majority of Catholic educational institutions, in response to the needs of the socially and economically disadvantaged. It is no novelty to affirm that Catholic schools have their origin in a deep concern for the education of children and young people left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling....".

In a report to the UN, Geneva, at the occasion of the recent anniversary of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, I analysed the several components of Law and Policy dealing with Educational Inclusiveness. Catholic schools pursue those aims in almost all regions of the world.



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The 2022 Vatican document I just quoted, opted also frankly for the ‘School of Dialogue’: “The history of Catholic schools is characterised by welcoming pupils from different cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations.” The document explains quite well the principles and practices of such an approach. But the consistent reading of the Dialogue seem to be far reaching. A 2018 study by Pew Research Centre found that ‘Western Europeans, who followed religious education, are less likely than others to say they would not accept Jews or Muslims in their family, or to say their culture is superior to others’.

PART THREE

1. Critical reading of the Law on Pre-University Education, as recently amended Law and Policy shaping national identities

I had the opportunity to focus in my writings extensively on the role of Law and Policy shaping – throughout the history of the country – national ‘identity’ or ‘identities’.

Through laws and policies, governments have employed schooling for nation-building. In such cases as Germany, the UK, Canada and the Scandinavian countries, the respective educational goals of governments and churches involved generally fruitful collaboration.

Elsewhere, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Mexico, Spain and Portugal, periods of intense conflict were followed by compromise (‘pacification protocols’ or ‘Pacts’). In yet other countries, such as France and the US, deeply ideological differences over schooling led to continuing political and legal conflicts and recent efforts to find ground for principled pluralism in education. A basic constitutional text in France, the so-called most secular state worldwide, acknowledged however the role of the confessional school in the education system and the law foresee different forms or ‘associations’ between the Church and the State.

Overall assessment

I formulated already several critical comments on the existing legislation in previous paragraphs. At earlier occasions I expressed basic concerns:

- quite hierarchical approaches; the top down concepts;*
- lack of school autonomy and room for differentiation or innovation;*
- lack of independency of the Inspectorate vis-à-vis the Minister and the Ministry;*
- many purely procedural and overdetailed proscriptions;*
- lack of clarity what items should be covered by ‘law’ or by ‘regulations’, ‘bylaws’ (‘instructions’, ‘orders’,...), relevant for the (constitutional) principle of Legality in education;*
- unclear mutual division of powers of local agencies;*
- lack of clarity whether legislation applies ‘ne varietur’ to private schools, among other issues on evaluation of school performances, review of syllabi, role of the school board, appointment and evaluation of principals and teachers, inspection,... Are norms of NLC, NIPE, PAAHE to some extent ‘prohibitive’ for non-State schools?*



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A review of the legislative framework on conformity with European standards is warmly recommended. It's not just dealing with the logistics and the formulation of the norm, but about the philosophy behind it (cfr. learning 'objectives' should be replaced by learning 'outcomes', as mentioned supra). Same remark concerns the coherency and consistency of the Law, also related to other legislation.

Comments, article by article

On earlier occasions, I took the opportunity to deliver comments on the opening and closing down of education institutions (art. 41, 42), licensing (art. 42, 43, 70), finance (art. 39), governance (art. 34), teachers (art.2.14, 56), students (art. 61),...

1. Conclusions and Proposals

Let me be short in my final conclusion

First. At an international conference in Johannesburg, I asked the Chief Justices and Presidents of Constitutional Courts, present in the auditorium, to select the case law, the landmark decision most decisive for education and education rights, in the 20st century. Unanimity existed: without any doubt Brown versus Board of Education (US Supreme Court, 1953) has to be ranked as the very prior Court Case.

Well, one of the core sentences of that very Judgment goes as follows: 'Education is probably the most important responsibility of the State'!

Doubts exist on the lack of priority of Albanian authorities for Education, in contradiction with firm convictions within civil society.

Second. The future of modern society, especially concerning education, depends on a) a long term vision and strategy, b) appropriate legislation and good governance. This axiom suggests close cooperation between State representatives and credible and responsible actors in civil society. The European Union can strongly be linked to this Plan.

An overall proposal : the organization of a Task Force, in charge of analyzing the existing Law nr. 69/72 and also the Law on Universities. The composition should contain national and European leading capacity on Education Law and multidisciplinary expertise on Education Policy.

We know that this critical capacity is available and ready to focus on Albania as a very relevant case for Europe.



Mrs. Ermelinda Gjocaj

Head of Education at UNICEF

Albania is a Member State of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols. UNICEF helps the government and development partners to understand the obligations arising from the ratification of these treaties and to translate them into legislation, policies and national programs, especially at the time of Albania's European journey.

[Video](#)

The Convention on the Rights of Children with Disabilities obliges us to adapt environments to the needs of children. We must be clear about concepts such as "inclusive education", as used in treaties and conventions, as a process to limit exclusion. Therefore, expert training is important to identify these children and to support them so that they do not risk dropping out of school.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS A RIGHT

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) emphasizes that “Every child has the right to education”. The CRPD stresses as well that inclusive education is a fundamental human right for every child with a disability. An inclusive education system is one that accommodates all students whatever their abilities or requirements, and at all levels – pre-school, primary, secondary, tertiary, vocational and life-long learning. Albania has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) on February 11, 2013.

In September 2016, the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) adopted and published General Comment No. 4 (2016) on Article 24: "Right to inclusive education." The General Comment provides a clear and detailed definition of inclusive education, and all States Parties are expected to progress in the implementation of Article 24. It clarifies that all children with disabilities must be educated in inclusive environments, and it is the government's responsibility to adapt the education system to accommodate the needs of all students, regardless of abilities and impairments, within inclusive environments.

INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AS A RIGHT

This right to Inclusive Education has been recognized also by other international policies that aim the Education for all.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;

The Convention on the Rights of the Child;

The Salamanca Statement;

The Dakar Framework for Action: “Education for All”

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 4th goal refers to: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.

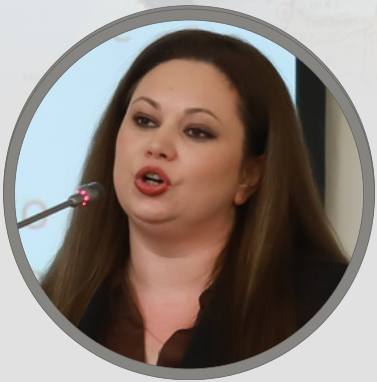
- These documents speak of guaranteeing education to all those who due to different situations are excluded from schools, such as “the most vulnerable ones, including poor and more disadvantaged children, children that work, children in remote rural areas, ethnic and linguistic minorities, children affected by conflicts, children with HIV/AIDS, those that are hungry or have health issues, as well as those with disabilities.

•UNICEF KEY ACHIEVEMENTS WITH REGARD TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

•ALBANIA CONTEXT AND POLICY FRAMEWORK RELATED TO IE

•ALBANIA CONTEXT AND POLICY FRAMEWORK RELATED TO IE

•IE POLICIES AND UNICEF SUPPORT



Mrs. Ermelinda Gjocaj

Head of Education at UNICEF

•ALBANIA CONTEXT

•DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINING MODULES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDUCATION STAFF

- UNICEF in collaboration with the “Zurich University of Teacher Education” has developed various training modules for teacher training that have been as well used in the other regional countries.

-In collaboration with ASCAP modules have been adapted into the Albanian context and school staff from various regions has been trained.

-More than 2000 teachers and other school staff have been trained with this training module during (2018-2023)

-700 leaders of the professional network trained (2020-2021)

Module 1 – Introduction to Inclusive Education

Module 2 – IE: Vision, Theory and Concepts

Module 3 – Working together to create inclusive schools

Module 4 – Enabling environments for individualized learning

•DEVELOPMENT OF TRAINING MODULES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE EDUCATION STAFF

-UNICEF with the technical support of the best international experts in the field of Inclusive Education has developed other teacher training modules: “Strengthening the Role and Skills of Assistant Teachers in Albania”.

-625 assistant teachers were trained with this training module at compulsory education

-Around 600 preschool teachers trained

-The aim of this training module is to support the assistant teachers learn:

-about key theories, concepts and principles in inclusive education;

-roles and the responsibilities of the assistant and general teachers and their collaboration;

-child and family Support Plan;

-help them link these to their current practice and start introducing small changes in their teaching;

-introduction to the rights-based approach to inclusive education,

-the social model of disability,

-child-centered pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning.

-strategies on implementing inclusive education at the classroom level

•ALBANIA CONTEXT: What is new?

•ALBANIA CONTEXT: Challenges

•WAY FORWARD

•WAY FORWARD

•Support MOES in the shift from the special schools to resource centers in collaboration with other actors.

•Continuous Capacity Development of school staff starting from preschool.

•Support the implementation of the Law of Education/ amendment with the lenses of IE.

•Documentation successful initiatives / good practices – Special Schools Transformation research.

•Contribute to the development of partnerships and alliances on Inclusive Education.



MSc. FJHM (Eric) Bloemkolk

Executive Director of SOFT Tulip

As a network of dedicated care service providers in the Netherlands, SOFT tulip is active abroad to improve the quality of life of people with special needs. They work for an inclusive society in accordance with the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Rights of the Child.

We help partners abroad to structurally increase the quality of life of people with special needs in their country, through training programs and knowledge exchange, stimulating the creation of networks of partners who lobby for the interests of people with special needs. In doing so, we are driving policy change to support the development of an inclusive society.

Expert for international cooperation; multi-stakeholder networks; lobby & advocacy; focus on Ukraine and building early childhood intervention.

[Video](#)

Educational institutions must ensure pluralism, diversity, inclusiveness of all students. The school is not just a place, but the whole society, as an expression of the cultural model. Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Children with Disabilities emphasizes the provision of equal opportunities for all. These children have dreams and want to fly away. It is the duty of society to enable them to do this. It is not the children who must adapt to the environment, but the environment must adapt to them, starting from the preschool cycle, which constitutes the most important years of the child's formation.

Pluralism and inclusion in education

Involvement in education of children with disabilities in the EU, challenges, and care

Pluralism; Diversity; Inclusion

Inclusion: What does it mean? All people should be valued for their unique abilities and included as essential members of society. Inclusion is not a place or practice: it is about the whole society. Inclusion requires embracing diversity.

The first principle of the European Pillar of social rights.

Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labor market.

European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) framework.

To promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, education should promote intercultural competences, democratic values and respect for fundamental rights, prevent and combat all forms of discrimination and racism, and equip children, young people and adults to interact positively with their peers from diverse backgrounds.

Inclusive education is a human right

The UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has clearly defined inclusive education as a Fundamental human right of all persons, including persons with disabilities.

The UNCRPD: Article 24 – Education

1. States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education. With a view to realizing this right without discrimination and on the basis of equal opportunity, States Parties shall ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning directed to:

- The full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity;**
- The development by persons with disabilities of their personality, talents and creativity, as well as their mental and physical abilities, to their fullest potential;**
- Enabling persons with disabilities to participate effectively in a free society.**

Children with disabilities 10 – 15% of children



MSc. FJHM (Eric) Bloemkolk

Executive Director of SOFT Tulip

More than 50% being left outside society, not being part of a social group, and have no access to school.

Inclusion: What does it mean?

Is an enabling environment where everyone should be able to use the same facilities, take part in the same activities, and enjoy the same experiences, including people who have a disability or other disadvantage.

Dreams of children with different abilities about their future in Albania: the importance of inclusive education.

Different approaches: integration and inclusion in school

Integration/participation in school

Focus on developing individual capacities

Training of / support (e.g., personal assistance) to the child to be able to participate in school

One curriculum and end terms for all

Technological adaptations

Inclusion in schools

Focus on the environment in the school:

Changing the environment (e.g., accessible school, transportation)

Training / capacity building for managers, teachers, school psychologists, assistant teachers, and parents

Support to the management, teachers and assistant teachers from experts

Individualized educational goal setting

Technological adaptations

Inclusion is not an end in itself

Inclusion is about wellbeing! For all! 8 domains of Quality of Life (QoL)

Quality of Life Supports Model (QOLSM) (Schalock et. al)

Inclusive schools benefit all children!

Recommendations:

1. shared definition of inclusive education needed

2. inclusive education should reflect the needs of all children... but, especially children with mental disabilities do need special attention, expertise and support

3. focus needs to shift from adapting the child with a disability to the school environment, to adapt the environment to the child

4. training for school managers, teachers, assistant teachers, psychologists

5. extend mandate for Inclusive Resource Centers to provide services to children aged 0 – 3

Thank you!

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Mr. Ermal Hasimja

Representative of the Albanian Private School Network

In the history of Albanian education, it has not always been easy for non-state educational institutions, and in some periods it has even been prohibited. But these institutions serve the best completion of the educational framework in the country, as Koliqi said, the stones of a mosaic, in function of inclusiveness and the best possible formation of young people.

[Video](#)

The challenges of inclusive and pluralistic education in the current context.

Education has almost never in the history of mankind been an objective instrument of conveying technical knowledge to posterity. Together with knowledge, societies and States have tried to convey, openly or indirectly, the basic principles and values of the specific context.

Thus, in the form of public education, the school served the French Revolution to spread its ideas, while totalitarian regimes to root out fascist or communist propaganda. Before you began to learn the sciences in our schools during communism, you would learn what Comrade Enver had said about them. The truth of the party was even more important than the scientific truth.

Nowadays, democracy offers the clash of different value alternatives. But of course political pluralism does not necessarily guarantee the objective quality of the values taught through school. Because there is no values hierarchy. In fact, pluralism simply guarantees the predominance of political or social ideology with more influence.

In my presentation I have chosen to elaborate on some of the main cultural and ideological influences in today's education as well as the problems associated with them.

My first finding relates to the strong tendency to use the school as a psycho-guaranteeing instrument. Most parents of today judge that schools so far are too stressful and that their children should grow up in a psychologically protected, stress-free environment and almost in conditions of an institutional democracy where the needs, but also the views of the child should be central. At its extremes this trend aims to put the evaluation process through the grade in function of a declarative fiction that is supposed to create and strengthen the child's self-confidence. Three questions are asked here:

Is this the right way to build a child's self-esteem?

Is a high self-esteem built on fiction healthy?

Does such a school educate individuals capable of facing the reality we live?

There is a simple way to answer the first question: it is enough to make a comparison between the characteristics and ethos of new generations newly introduced to the labour market and previous generations. Beyond the centuries-old grievance of one generation to its successor, it seems that today's young people are less psychologically prepared and less equipped with the values of work than previous generations. A simple fact: while the labour market in Albania is in crisis for employees and the educational level of Albanians grows steadily youth unemployment has risen by 8% in the last year alone. Remember the typical phrase that many of us educators have heard hundreds of times from parents : "it's important to me that the child feels good," implying that knowledge has a secondary, if not lower, function. Of course, there is no parent who does not want knowledge, but when it comes to choosing between working knowledge and comfortable self-esteem, the latter obviously wins.

This approach is made possible, even imposed through voting, by generations of parents who exploit the democratization of the school and the devaluation of the technical and moral authority of the teacher. Political decision-makers are completely influenced by parents/voters rather than by teachers, included on State payrolls at the end of the month. Thus, the State eases school programs, ignores fictitiousness in public schools, students are granted the highest grades in the graduation and maturity exams.



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While grades in Albania have never been this high, our students perform almost as functionally illiterate in PISA tests. Seen in this regard, the involvement of the parent and his views in the education system is the most destructive factor for our schools. It's like letting patients determine their own diagnoses and treatments.

Egalitarianism is the other ideological challenge that pluralism brings. 3-4 years ago, the former French minister of Education declared that grades are unfair and harmful because they lower students' self-esteem and reflect the different opportunities of parents to deal with their children. The minister's goal was to eliminate the differences between the rich and the others by equalizing everyone from below. Wouldn't it be more beneficial for society to try to equalize everyone from above? That is, to try to make the disadvantaged children progress the same as those who come from wealthier families? Again in France a major reform of 2023 aims to get rid of the country's best schools (Grandes Ecoles), because they are regarded as the creators of an aristocracy of technocrats. Let us recall here the well-known anecdote attributed to Milton Friedman during his visit to China.

The third challenge of ideological intervention in education is identity policy. Previously these were suffused with ethnic or religious identities, and today it is gender identities that dominate the agenda of "inclusiveness". This great movement has not yet found a foothold in Albania, in our beloved country, where today biology teachers skip chapters on Human Reproduction. But the seeds are planted. Again the school is seen as an instrument of an unofficial prevailing ideology. Gender pluralism is considered and will be regarded much more in the future not as a natural and legitimate finding of individual sexuality, but almost as an object of pride to be vigorously sought because of the presumption that it has been hindered by an underdeveloped society.

Is there a correct and useful way to manage inclusiveness and pluralism in school? The answer is impossible in the absence of a metaphysical or political agreement on the values system. But if we find, as I find, problems with the "opening" of the school, then solutions exist. First, by giving teachers technical and moral authority in school. The school can't do anything without a supportive parent, but in the same way the school can't do anything with a disruptive parent. In the process of learning it is the teacher who leads, not the parent. As in the treatment process where it is the doctor who leads and not the patient.

Independence of education from politics is also a measure as useful as it is impossible. 8-9 years ago almost half of the graduates failed the Matura exam in mathematics. There is hardly a teacher who does not see this result as realistic. But the result was never repeated. In recent years, only 1% of the graduates have failed. And certainly not on their own merits.

Independence of education from politics may, though not necessarily, lead to a return to the principles of meritocracy and a new healthy work ethic in schools. In short: the student who gets a 10 grade is distinguished from the one who gets 9 or 8 or 7. And if one intends to fight inequality, let him fight by working harder rather than by liberalizing the value of the grade.

Regarding the influences of ideological identity expected in the years to come, they may be restrained the same way as political or religious beliefs are restrained within the private sphere.

Said in 1 sentence: let the school be a school, not an ideological instrument.



Sister Teuta Buka

KKEKSH National Coordinator

Equal access to high-quality learning opportunities is a fundamental human right for all and a cornerstone of social cohesion. Educational programs under the European Cultural Conventions are increasingly required to address the challenges of social inclusion for vulnerable groups and building democracy together, prosperous, stable, tolerant and cohesive societies. The main goal of future education programs in both formal and informal learning contexts will be the development of educational policies, standards and practices for quality lifelong learning, with a particular focus on values, as well as attitudes, knowledge and the necessary skills for an inclusive, responsible and active social citizenship with a democratic culture

[Video](#)

Our approach: dialogue and care for each person, through accompanying children and families. We are based on gospel values: human dignity, respect, honesty, justice...

Our schools are always looking for new methodologies for a complete formation of the child, bearing in mind that education is a public good.

We aim to change the mindset of educational institutions that will also lead to legal changes, focusing on the person, values, educational approach, motivated and trained teachers with personal and professional ethics. In order to avoid uniformity and to ensure the possibility of choice in education, a new legal framework with a new vision for education is also needed.

Pluralism as a guarantee for a better education and for all in Albania.

Introduction

As I mentioned in my opening speech Dialogue and care there are two ways in which we see our presence in the field of Education as well as alongside parents and families in the well-being of children and young people of the country. Precisely these guiding values have driven us that on one side to be present where it comes to education, actively participating in all institutional roundtables, those of the Ministry of Education and Sports and not only, and particularly in the platform of the partnership for European integration in the roundtables that the Ministry has called to discuss and address various issues. In these fora we have continued to offer suggestions on solving problems; making ourselves available to the reality of all schools in the country and to the policy and procedures for the protection of minors as an internal system of protection in schools, which we have been building for 5 years that we operate as a network....

On the other hand, these two values have inspired us to become initiators of round tables as this conference today, where different actors can give their contribution together with us, which proves our concrete desire for a dialogue. This dialogue is understood and lived as an opportunity to enrich ourselves with freedom, with our specific characteristics and with our vision and holistic approach to children's education.

Starting from the above, let me briefly bring, on behalf of the network of our institutions, the contribution of our opinion in this accession process for a qualitative development in the field of education.

1. Catholic school and the values it transmits.

Like the Universal Declaration of human rights, Gravissimum Educationis, the document of the Second Vatican Council concerning education, establishes the principle that education is a fundamental right for all people.

The schools that ecclesiastical entities, religious congregations, or parishes have founded, as is the nature of the school, fulfill the cultural finality that characterizes it together with human formation of young people.

In addition, these schools, even if not religious schools they aim to give life to a school community environment permeated by the evangelical spirit of freedom and divine love.



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The values they promote emanating from the Gospel are in fact universal values, such as human life and dignity, truth and love, respect and dialogue, honesty and justice, family, work and the common good, peace, etc. In other words, in such an educational environment, the care for the person, as a whole, is realized by accompanying young people in their spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and social maturation. These dimensions correspond to the concept of person according to Christian anthropology, where the human is considered capable and able to enter in a dialogue with the world, with others, with himself and with God.

Of course, every Catholic school, first of all, is conscious for his own serving and complementary / supportive role, at the side of the family that is the main protagonist in the education of the respective children, and not the other way around. It is clear in the value that it transmits; a constant search for new methods in order to make possible a complete education of children and shares with the educational community its vision of the person and the values that inspire him.

2. The view of Catholic schools on education in Albania today

a. Education as a public good

As stated, and argued by previous interventions, many European countries have a clear awareness of being at the service of the family as a support. As a consequence, these countries have consolidated the concept that education is a public good, that is, it belongs to the whole society and of course it is not a monopoly of the State nor only of formal educational institutions. The prosperity of a nation, its future and the vitality of every society lie upon the ensuring of this good, upon the education of the young generation.

b. Before legal amendments, a new pedagogy and anthropology

Knowing closely the challenges of education and schools in our country, we think that before Albania adapts to the laws of Europe, as a society in our entirety, we should deepen and agree on the view of the person, on the values and the educational approach which, today more than ever, are in crisis and the time is urging us to change. Moreover, in Albania, state bodies that care about education should be freed from the fear of change, because only by being open and ready for dialogue with everyone, especially the family, can we show our responsibility towards the next generation.

It is no longer the time, nor the need, to crystallize in education every procedure, every external or internal evaluation process in school, to repeat cliches which, deprived of context and human creativity, risk becoming barriers to moving forward. It is time to research, to move towards the principles, to a holistic and critical thinking of teachers first of all, as they are the ones in contact with young people. Teachers need to have the freedom and enthusiasm to experiment, as they are the ones who give worthy answers to the needs of our young people today. Our country must take this courage starting with the formation of the teachers and strengthen them in their continuous training. We need to analyze the numbers of teachers and children; shortages in the system, first numerical shortages of new teachers. The problems and difficulties of education today should not leave us indifferent, we have to have the courage to discontinue with the implementation of overlapping innovations, without making serious analysis on the results of piloting, without predicting in detail the impact they can have on the growth of the younger generation and on the quality of life of teaching staff.



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This courage will enlighten us to understand which things we should give importance to: principles or forms, educational needs or subject programs. What is missing from the formative curricula of teachers today if not a reflection on Anthropology and pedagogy, on the formation of the person and on Ethics which are unfortunately insufficiently articulated terms in the curricula of the formation of our teachers in Albania and therefore in our entire educational system.

Pluralism in education

In our country there is a great risk of a barren bureaucratization and a uniformity of the education system, and this is not in favor of the future.

As the new generation presents us with urgent and more educational and formative tasks, rather than just the cognitive sphere, it seems that we are increasingly hiding behind bureaucracies. Maybe with the desire to arrange things and to feel sure that we are doing something, but in fact we are not developing human capacities of pedagogy experts, who know how to get to the core of problems in education, but often stop at the consequences. It should also be noted that in the field of education. This expertise should be decisive and guiding for the political choices that should be made in the field of education (and not vice versa). Continuous standardization, the ready-made provision of instruments with definite steps to achieve a "school model", do not serve education. In this aspect, our efforts as a network of Catholic schools to make a sincere contribution to this journey often fall on deaf ears. The different experiences that we can bring, of course not only us, but also the new methodologies we are implementing, the more flexible managing models with which we move our schools forward, would help in the challenges of education throughout our country. For this to happen, line ministries need to promote real spaces and dialogue.

Inclusion in education

Albania in our view is a bit late in understanding the institutions as ministerial servants. In this phase of transition, it is now understood that the transition from a nationalization and the former ideologic nature education towards an open promotional and creative system is not easy. Our society still feels the impact of a past that, in 4-5 decades of dictatorship, has left deep traces. These processes take time, but I think now is the time to make qualitative changes on the eve of our efforts to access European Union, starting with the involvement of all stakeholders that contribute to the public good, that is education. Before implementing policies, we need to work together with all stakeholders.

Inclusion of European civilization as a value must begin from being open to accepting and supporting actors who contribute to it, making possible the improvement of educational quality, which always remains an objective to be achieved. From this first step, and other steps will be articulated, including the involvement of all in education, attention to children with disabilities, non-discrimination, etc.

Effective guarantee of a right by the State

Another element related to education as a common good is the fact that different actors should live together as partners. Moreover, the State should take into account the fact that the constitutional right to choose education gets a real answer if families are really offered different and varied educational proposals, to respond to the values and needs of communities, of course always according to the principles of the Constitution.



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As a conclusion

The experience of European countries tells that in contexts where a pluralism of opportunities and different approaches to education have flourished, this has produced quality, freedom and enthusiasm, both among children and teachers, bringing the school closer to the real life and responsible choices of individuals, who have entered the world of work not only with the appropriate knowledge but also with their human richness and the values that characterize them.

Nothing like this is happening in Albania yet. We think that in addition to reflecting on Anthropology and pedagogy there should happen also amendments in legislation, as we have proposed several times to the Ministry of Education. Where the expression of educational pluralism is clearly regulated, where Catholic schools have a special place by defining the range of definitions such as private non-profit schools or better yet public schools not managed by the state, they are public because they serve the public good: education of the young generation.

It is not enough. We think that the benefit of families who choose these schools from public funded should be guaranteed by the state, i.e. part of the budget, within the principle of freedom of education which is the key point of the right to freely choose education. This freedom is interpreted in two directions, the right of the State to organize education and the right of parents to freely choose the education they wish for their child, unconditioned by the economic criteria. This means that if parents are not in conditions of equal opportunity to pay for the education they choose for their children, they should be supported by providing their children access to schools that practice non-profit educational activities.

The possibility of having a specific legal provision for the State to support these schools arises as a need to respect the principle of secularism of the school, the right of parents as taxpayers to choose a public service which in itself increases the individual development potential of each child in favour of its highest interest.

Thank you for your attention!

Sister Teuta Buka



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