

Albanian Education in Transition: Teachers as Change Agents

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INTRODUCTION: OVERALL CONTEXTS IN ALBANIA

Albania is in the midst of a Copernican "revolution" taking it from the most repressive and isolated country among Central and Eastern Europe's Marxist-Leninist states to a democratic and market-oriented open society. Its isolation policy since 1978 made the country bankrupt in 10 years. It was rather a natural ending, taking into account the contemporary inter-dependence in the international community. Following the collapse of communism in the Soviet bloc at the end of the 1980s, Albania changed its direction. In a desperate survival, the Albanian government sought a relationship with the West. Albania accepted West-based policies in return for accepting Western aid. The education sector was not an exception in this shift. Private schools were allowed to operate. The revision of the curriculum and textbooks started on the basis of democratic governance and market-economy mechanisms. Teachers today are in the process of adjusting themselves to this fundamental change.

This case study attempts to explore what kind of education aid and what kind of modality would be the most appropriate option for this country. In this paper, first, overall contexts surrounding education will be described. Second, educational development will be examined. Third, the existing education projects by international donors will be investigated. Fourth and lastly, a plan of action will be formulated and evaluated, taking into account all the information available.

In the next three sections, overall contexts (socio-cultural, political and economic) will be described. The information in these sections relies heavily on *Albania: A country study* (Library of Congress, 1994).

Socio-cultural Context

Most of Albania's 3.3 million population live in rural areas. There are two culturally distinct groups called Gegs and Tosks who speak different languages. The Gegs live in the North and the Tosks reside in the South. The Gegs are socially organized according to clans, and are primarily loyal to their clans. They adopt an extended family system; they are mainly Roman Catholic. On the contrary, the Tosks are more outward-oriented than the Gegs, and their tribal/clan orientation was eliminated over time. They are largely an Orthodox Christian minority, and most susceptible to foreign influences (mostly from Greek and Italian). They have emigrated to Italy and the United States on a large scale. Enver Hoxha, the long-time chief of the communist regime, favored Tosks because of his Tosk origin. Minority groups in Albania include Greeks, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Serbs.

Political Context

Albanian history has always been within the context of relationships with other countries. From the Ottoman Empire, to Italy, Germany and Yugoslavia during the second World War, to the USSR and China after the war. When Albanians could not find a foreign partner, they closed the country completely. This all-or-nothing attitude may indicate something about the country's future.

After having been a territory of the Ottoman Empire for almost 530 years (1385-1912), Albania declared its independence in 1912. The new state was prone to internal difficulties and outside manipulation, especially from neighboring Italy. During W.W.II, Albania was annexed by Italy and later occupied by

Germany. The most effective (anti-fascism) resistance movement against Italy and Germany was organized by the communist-led National Liberation Front, which took power in 1944 under the leadership of Enver Hoxha. This resistance was backed by Yugoslavia's communists, and armed with British and U.S. (Allies) weaponry. In 1946, Albania declared its real independence. Hoxha became President.

After independence, Albania maintained close links with Yugoslavia that assisted Albania in expelling Italy and Germany during the war period. However, this relationship was broken off after the USSR expelled Yugoslavia from the Cominform¹ which was controlled by the Soviet Union. In addition, Albania's ruling communist party confronted the U.S. and Britain who were anti-communist and who demanded Albania hold democratic elections. Albania refused the American and British demands, continuing to be dependent on Soviet aid (since 1948). However, again, mainly due to ideological conflict at this time, Albania broke away from the USSR in 1961, and forged links with the People's Republic of China. In 1968, it formally withdrew from the Warsaw Pact² in protest of the Pact's military intervention in Czechoslovakia, and in 1978, Albania severed economic and political links with China. Its main reason was the establishment of China's diplomatic relations with the West, especially with the U.S., which Albania had opposed.

After its break-up with China, Albania had no foreign protector. Accordingly, it chose a "self-reliance" or "autarky" policy. To maintain this policy, Hoxha repressed the people and political opponents, and strictly prohibited freedoms of movement, speech and the press. Because of ailing health, Hoxha gave de facto leadership to Ramiz Alia in 1980. Alia immediately started policy

1 International organization of communist parties.

2 Political and military alliance founded by the USSR in 1955 as a counterweight to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

reforms with a gradual relaxation of Hoxha's extreme isolationist policies (e. g. illegality of the acceptance of foreign credits). Hoxha died in 1985, leaving Albania a legacy of repression, technological "backwardness," isolation, and fear of the outside world. Alia's relaxation policies resulted in the exodus of Albanian people across the borders in the late 1980s.

In March 1991, Albania held its first multiparty elections in more than two generations. However, the elections were flawed by instances of harassment and intimidation of the opposition. The communist claimed a victory, but with little popular support. The communist then gave away the administration to a mixed unity government and then to a caretaker government by the end of 1991. The March 1992 elections resulted in a landslide victory for President Sali Berisha and his Democratic Party. This time elections were considered fair and free by international observers. However, the unexpected defeat of a nationwide referendum on a new constitution in November 1994 was a setback to the Berisha government.

Observance of human rights improved significantly after the collapse of the communist regime. Political prisoners were freed by the summer of 1991. Workers won the right to associate freely. Restriction on the freedom of movement within the country was dropped. Regulations on foreign travel and emigration were brought into accord with international norms. Freedom of religion was established in law and practice. However, the judiciary is still subject to political pressure. The Albanian government adopted a law that bars a broad range of communist-era officials from public office until 2002. However, police beatings of citizens, occasional restrictions of freedom of speech and the press, discrimination and violence against women still continue. While much democratic progress has occurred since 1992, there have been increasing characterizations of the Albanian government as incompetent and corrupt (United States Agency for International Development, 1996b).

The ethnic Greek community continued to express dissatisfaction with education, public employment and the government's failure to return some religious property expropriated by the communist regime (United States Agency for International Development, 1996a). In addition, Kosovo³ remains the potential risk factor in the Balkans after the Bosnian situation has been stabilized. The potential spillover of the conflict in former Yugoslavia into Albania in the form of refugees from Kosovo (or, worse, engagement of Albanian and Serb military forces in Kosovo or Albania) would devastate Albania's development process (United States Agency for International Development, 1996b).

Economic Context

Albania faces all the challenges of an economy in transition from an authoritarian, command-driven one to a democratic and market-oriented one (United States Agency for International Development, 1996a). As of 1995, Albania's per capita income was US\$580, the lowest in Europe.

Looking at history, a unified economy did not exist in this country before the early 1920s. A succession of foreign patrons impeded its economic development. Its post-war economic history has been one dependent on foreign countries: First, Yugoslavia, the USSR, then China in pursuit of a partner in imposing a Marxist-Leninist economic system. After separating from China, during the self-reliance period until 1991, Hoxha and his protégés used economic policy primarily to maintain political power and only secondarily to stimulate growth. They insisted on rigid centralization and forced industrialization despite Albania's small size and the lack of skilled workers, able administrators, and farmers capable of producing key raw materials and enough grain to feed the population. The autarky policy after 1978 was coupled with galloping population growth and lagging farm output,

³ Autonomous state in the territory of former Yugoslavia. The 90 percent of the population is Albanian. The Kosovo Albanians keep their Albanian nationality.

which rendered the policy and the regime bankrupt. The government delayed substantial economic reform until public discontent spilled onto the streets in 1990.

As a consequence, by 1991, supply shortfalls had paralyzed the entire system. The economy suffered a 50 percent decline in real output during the 1990-91 period, which included a 70 percent drop in industrial production and a 30 percent drop in agricultural output.

The democratically elected government which assumed office in April 1992 launched an ambitious economic reform program to halt economic deterioration and to put the country on the path toward a market economy. Key elements included: price and exchange system liberalization, fiscal consolidation, monetary restraint, and firm income policy. These policies were complemented by a comprehensive package of structural adjustment program (by International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) which included privatization, enterprise and fiscal sector reform, and creation of the legal framework for a market economy and private sector activities. Price liberalization reached at or near international levels. Most agriculture, state housing, and small industry have been privatized. Progress has continued in the privatization of transport, services, and small and medium enterprises. Although the unemployment level peaked at 40 percent in 1993, it dropped to the level of 20-25 percent in 1994. Much of the economic collapse, which Albania experienced after the change of its economic policies, is attributed to supply and transport bottlenecks associated with the collapse of the central planning system and to the disruption associated with the spontaneous mass privatization and fragmentation of land (United States Agency for International Development, 1994). The good news is that, according to the United Nations, Albania led Eastern European nations in economic growth hitting a peak of 13.5 percent in 1995, while the average economic growth in the region was 6 percent ("Albania's economic growth," 1996).

Overseas remittance from about 6 million Albanians living outside Albania constitutes about 15 percent of the GNP in 1994. In addition, foreign aid plays a

significant role in keeping the economy running. Yet, the Kosovo conflict still constrain international investor interest in the country (United States Agency for International Development, 1996b).

EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ALBANIA

According to Albania: A country study (Library of Congress, 1994), educational development in Albania is described below:

Education in Pre-communist Era (- 1946)

Because schools using the Albanian language did not practically exist in the country before its first declaration of independence in 1912, about 85 percent of the population was illiterate in 1946. Until the mid-19th century, the Ottoman rulers prohibited the use of Albanian at schools. Soon after the establishment of a national government in 1920, primary schools using Albanian were established. Italian and French schools, which had already existed, were expanded, and American schools were newly opened. These foreign schools played a significant role in introducing Western educational methods and principles. In addition, these foreign schools produced leaders and elites. For example, President Hoxha graduated from a French school, and former prime minister Mehmet Shehu went to an American vocational school.

In the 1920s, considerable development was made towards a "genuine" Albanian education system. In 1933, the Constitution stipulated that education was the right of citizens. At the same time, almost all foreign language schools were either closed or nationalized, mainly in order to prevent the Italian penetration into Albania through sponsoring Catholic schools in Albania. In 1934, a compulsory education system was introduced for the ages of 4 to 14, and the secondary level

education (mainly vocational) was expanded. Teacher training was accelerated and expanded as well. However, these movements did not reach the rural areas due to the lack of demand and supply in education there. During the Italian occupation from 1939 to 1944 and the following German invasion, all school systems became paralyzed and schools were closed.

Education under Communism (1946 - 1991)

After the real independence in 1946, Albania's communist regime gave highest priority to reopening schools and communized the whole education system and educational philosophy. The new government aimed at eradicating illiteracy and exposing people to communism. All schools were under state management, thus no private schools were allowed to exist. The 1946 Education Reform Law stipulated a 7-year obligatory and free primary school and a 4-year secondary school. Teacher training schools were also opened. In the 1950's, reflecting Albania's association with the USSR, the school system adopted communist ideological propaganda and a central government control system. In 1951, three universities, which were the first higher education institutions in Albanian history, were established, adopting the Soviet model.

In 1960, because of the break-up of the Albania-USSR relationship, the entire school system was dismantled again, extracting all Soviet factors from the system. The subsequent education reform divided the system into four general categories: preschool, general 8-year primary, secondary, and higher education. Primary education was designed to provide pupils with the elements of ideological, political, moral, aesthetic, and military education. The secondary school system included two types of education: general and vocational. The tertiary level, with free tuition, emphasized the education of industry and military personnel.

In the late 1980s, illiteracy was virtually eliminated.⁴ Total enrollment at all levels grew from 60,000 in 1939 to 750,000 in 1987. In the 1980s, there were

more than 40,000 teachers in the country, and the male-female ratio was 53:47. The entrants to any kind of secondary schools almost doubled from 39 percent in 1980 to 73 percent in 1990. However, during the political and economic turmoil begun in 1991, the school system was paralyzed: by September of that year, one-third of the 2,500 primary and secondary schools had been ransacked and 15 schools buildings razed. Many teachers relocated from rural to urban areas, leaving village schools understaffed and joining the unemployment population in cities: about 2,000 teachers fled the country.

Education in Post-communist Era (1991 -)

Status of Education System and Early Reconstruction Efforts

Enrollment has declined at all but the university levels. Rural enrollment markedly lags urban enrollments at preschool and secondary levels, but are about the same at primary level. Girls' enrollment is about the same as boys. In terms of infrastructure, a survey of the 1992-1993 physical plan shows that the infrastructure deteriorated to the point where it impedes learning. Regarding financing, the share for the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the state's total FY 1993 budget was 8.4 percent. While non-governmental (especially parochial) schools are emerging, the percentage of education costs financed privately is still negligible. Teacher salaries and benefits represent 67 percent of the total MOE budget. With regard to reconstruction effort, MOE decided to form a Council on Education Reform and Management comprised of directors of MOE and the Pedagogic Institute (PI) and advisors from outside MOE, to help better integrate

4 UNESCO (1995) reports a varying degree of illiteracy rates in Eastern Europe from 0.3 percent in Estonia to 7.3 percent in former Yugoslavia. However, UNESCO suggests that these figures may not reflect the real extent of illiteracy. For example, UNESCO estimates that 15 percent of the Romanian population is functionally illiterate and 25 percent of the Hungarian adult population cannot read or write. This may be explained by the increasing level of measuring literacy because the living environment is getting complex.

and advance sector reconstructing efforts.

At preschool level, enrollment has increased 40 percent from 1980-1990, but was only 88 percent of 1980 levels by 1992. The 94 percent of preschool teachers have only a high school degree.

At primary level, enrollment has decreased from 100 percent in 1990 to 98 percent in 1991, and to 94 percent in 1992.⁵ About half of primary teachers have only a high school degree. It seems that primary teachers with only a high school degree do not meet the MOE's current requirement of a college degree from a pedagogic program. About 81 percent of junior primary teachers (grades 1-4) and 30 percent of senior primary teachers (grades 5-8) have only a high school degree. Concerning reconstruction efforts, MOE has been removing the ideological influence on the content of education by organizing "emergency" rewriting of texts, especially in the social sciences, largely within the existing curriculum framework. MOE and PI envision completion in 1996 of a revised curricular framework that will facilitate production of textbooks and teacher guides, along with teacher retraining to introduce instruction that is more child-centered and to acquaint teachers with the new curricula.

At secondary level, enrollment at secondary vocational education has decreased 32 percent from 1980-1990. These vocational losses are rational individual and institutional responses to major shifts in the Albanian economy. The July 1993 school examinations show systematically higher failure rates, at all grades, than in 1992. About 94 percent of secondary teachers has a university degree and 4.6 percent of them has only a high school degree. Among them, only an estimated two-thirds has the required degree in subject matter, the remainder having a pedagogical degree. Reconstruction efforts include increasing the number of 4-year secondary vocational schools (general education) from 60 to 150,

5 UNESCO (1995) reports that the number of children not attending primary school has substantially grown (15 percent) in Albania.

shifting resources from vocational to academic components of the system.

At preschool, primary, and secondly levels, there is a severe lack of basic textbooks which interpret the national curricular requirements, as a result of paper shortages and rising costs of inputs, as well as transitional difficulties in shifting responsibilities and textbook financing among the Ministries of Industry, Culture and Education in publishing, printing, and distributing textbooks. MOE is now the sole administrator of the textbook subsidy and is increasingly organizing textbook provision on a contractual basis with publishers and printers, including state-owned, private, and about-to-be-privatized enterprises. There are few libraries in schools; facilities that existed for this purpose are often empty or contain unusable materials. At post-secondary level, Albania has now 7 universities and 2 institutions. Universities enroll only 7 percent of the age-relevant group. Access is being expanded by increasing student intake. National university entrance examination was just introduced. Universities are rethinking their curriculum and faculty structures, especially in economics and law where there is a greatly increased demand, and in other programs requiring substantial updating.

Sector Governance

There are six levels from the top to the bottom: MOE, prefectures, MOE's district-level agents (Department of Education and Economic Center), District Councils, urban municipalities and rural communities, and schools. MOE currently maintains substantial control over universities and institutes. School headmasters and teachers seem to have virtually no decision-making powers. MOE is a structurally central figure in the system. MOE's role in the new system is to design strategy, set priorities, establish standards for the performance of the system and assure their achievement, and to ensure access to education under the law. PI is responsible for national curricular and teacher retraining. It aims at broadening its current technical functions to assume responsibility to: 1) develop

modern curricular frameworks through a multiyear process of designing curriculum that reflects current knowledge and best pedagogic practice; 2) start designing national assessments of learning in the context of a national discussion about education standards; 3) design credentialing process of teachers, administrators and school inspectors; and 4) design in-service training programs for teachers, administrators and school inspectors, in which trainees' knowledge and practice will be altered.

National Priorities and Strategies

According to the World Bank (1994), the Albanian Ministry of Education is beginning to move beyond "coping" with transition to a more strategic approach to management of sector resources and setting of priorities for the short, medium, and long-term. The following sector priorities are described as an outcome of the dialogue between the Albanian government and the International Development Association (IDA), one of the World Bank group agencies (World Bank, 1994):

Primary Schools

- Give priority to the rehabilitation of school facilities to primary schools, ⁶ which is the base, with stable enrollment and a good program. Rehabilitation in secondary and higher education would follow; and
- Adjust the size and the structure of teachers to the large enrollment losses.

Quality Assurance

- Albania's education system has few well-developed, formal mechanisms and very limited up-to-date professional experience for assessing and assuring the quality of its education system. MOE and PI are expected to develop and refine quality assurance mechanisms under the new curriculum framework for medium and long-term plans.

Professional Development at MOE and PI

6 The government allocated almost 60 percent of its education budget into primary and preschool in 1992-93.

- Along with occurring decentralization and restructuring in educational administration, the MOE staff needs to have exposure and practical experience with mechanisms for democratic consultation, consensus-building, policy analysis, and other features of management in a more decentralized system; and
- PI is the key institution supporting educational reform through curriculum development, teacher training, training of educational administrators, development of teacher credentialing, and learning assessments.

Governance Streamlining

- Optimal allocation of functional authority among levels to meet the system's goals, role of the private sector in the delivery of education services.

Development of International Funding

- MOE needs to act on clear immediate, medium and long-term priorities; to quickly develop effective structures for managing donors' assistance; to establish high standards and transparent, impartial and enforced processes for purchasing goods and services with donor grants and loans.

Regional Trends of Education in Eastern Europe

The current educational transitions in the Eastern European countries are indicative to Albania because all of them are moving from the centrally planned governing system and strong ideology of communism to the democratic governance and market-oriented economy. The lessons from this region may help Albania choose the best options in successfully transforming its education system.

The World Bank (1995a) lists the educational achievements of the communist period of Eastern and Central Europe: high enrollment ratio at primary and secondary levels; almost universal adult literacy; high average levels of educational attainment; significant reduction of unequal access associated with gender, ethnicity, rural residence, and socio-economic status; provision of high quality compulsory education; establishment of a large network of preschools; international excellence in advanced scientific training and research. At the same

time, the Bank points out the educational problems: overspecialization in vocational, technical, and higher education institutions because a centrally planned economy required labor with specialized professional, technical and vocational skills; studies in social sciences and humanities were discouraged; teaching and learning practices allowed relatively little scope for independent studies or for development of critical thinking skills. The Bank suggests that many of these impressive educational legacies are now threatened by austerity, uncertainty, and a too slow a response of the education system to political and economic changes. As for future priorities, the Bank indicates that at both the primary and secondary levels adjustments must be made to meet the needs of a market economy, particularly through 1) maintaining the funding levels for compulsory (primary and secondary) education, 2) shifting away from overspecialization in vocational, technical, and higher education institutions, and 3) reforming the governance and financing of higher education. As United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (1995) indicates, under these conditions, many countries in Central and Eastern Europe embarked on education reform by abandoning communism in the late 1980s, many countries focused on overhauling out-dated curricula, de-ideologizing civic education, revising history books, and strengthening the study of foreign languages, ethnic issues and religions.

However, UNESCO (1995) views the change as too slow. In Romania and Russia, for example, as of 1993, the most pupils attend the same educational institutions, use the same textbooks, and learn by the same teaching methods. In Russia today, a bus driver earns twice as much as a university professor; many teachers at all levels leave for better jobs in other sectors or in private schools as a result. Those who remain in state schools have to contend with erratic funding.

EDUCATION PROJECTS IN ALBANIA BY INTERNATIONAL DONORS

It has been just a few years since Albania opened its door to international (Western) donors. The dominant proportion of education aid comes from Western countries and international agencies. The major donors in the area of education are the World Bank group and the Soros Foundation. Other bi- and multilateral organizations also provide a wide variety of education aid to Albania. The following is a summary of the existing internationally-assisted programs and projects which were identified in the research process for this paper. It should be noted that there are unidentified education programs and projects which are assisted by other agencies and donors.

World Bank Group

The World Bank's 1994 Staff Appraisal Report indicates the following project (which actually started by IDA⁷ in 1994):

School Rehabilitation And Capacity Building Project⁸

Goals

- To help the Government of Albania to sustain the delivery of basic education services during Albania's difficult economic transition; and
- To build institutional capacity for planning, management and quality assurance of education in an increasingly decentralized system.

7 Albania is only qualified to IDA loans among the options of the World Bank group's assistance, due to its poverty level (1994 GNP per capita at US\$360) and the level of credits.

8 US\$9.6 million for 4-year period (1994-1998). Within the total cost of US\$11.3 million including contingencies, IDA provides US\$9.6 million and the Albanian government spends US\$1.7 million.

Specific Objectives⁹

- To accelerate rehabilitation of damaged and dilapidated school facilities (8.7 million), with the distribution of 65 percent for school repair and 35 percent for replacement; and
- To build the capacity of key sector institutions to stimulate the efficient use of fiscal resources and to assure quality of learning outcomes (0.9 million). This part provides training, technical assistance, and equipment to assist the Ministry of (MOE) and the Pedagogic Institute (PI) in: 1) developing planning and management capability through computerization of education information in 3 pilot districts and training of MOE staff; 2) developing quality assurance functions of PI by building a local knowledge base on learning assessment, teacher credentialing and approaches to improving learning outcomes; and 3) beginning a process of textbook quality improvement by developing a policy that will facilitate private sector involvement in textbook provision and providing training in publishing and financial management.

Soros Foundation¹⁰

According to the Open Society Institute (1995), the Soros Foundation provides Albania with the following educational assistance:

Albania Education Development Project¹¹Goal

- To accelerate the development of the Albanian education system as it recovers from years of neglect, low financing, and harsh state controls during the Hoxha regime.

Special objectives

- Be a partner in Albania's national effort to repair, reconstruct, and improve the maintenance of school buildings;
- Improve the quality of curricula, learning material, and teaching in Albanian

schools;

- Increase opportunities for innovations in education;
- Support local initiatives for educational improvement; and
- Help restore involvement of Albania communities in their schools.

First Phase, 1994

- Urgent repair of 19 schools in 3 of 37 districts in Albania, which would benefit over 8,000 pupils in about 200 classrooms and laboratories;
- Consultation with various education stakeholders; and
- Community liaison.

Second Phase, 1995

- Improve the quality of what is learned in Albanian schools in terms of curriculum, learning assessment, learning material, and teacher training ;
- Expand building rehabilitation assistance to a second set of clusters in 3 districts;
- Bring together the infrastructure and "software" parts of the projects, a cluster of schools will be identified and supported in locally led efforts which would improve school management, quality of teaching, community involvement, physical conditions for schooling; and
- Encourage a public dialogue about education and to support small-scale, school-based initiatives.

In addition to the country projects in Albania, Soros implements regional

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- 9 The World Bank (1994) lists possible benefits and risks that this project might have. Benefits: improved facilities will remove a major obstacle for school attendance and to teaching and learning. Risks: (a) severely handicapped transport, communications, and banking infrastructure, and center v. local administration friction, and (b) rehabilitated buildings could fall prey to pilfering and neglect in the past.
 - 10 Founded by Hungarian-American philanthropist George Soros in New York in 1979. Currently operates with 50 international offices, 1,000 staff worldwide and spends about US\$300 million a year for the development of open societies. Soros provided Albania with US\$1.3 million for education projects in 1994.
 - 11 US\$9 million for 1994 -. Open Society Institute (1995, 147).

education programs for Eastern Europe, including the following:

East-East Program¹²

- Encourage the exchange of ideas and open dialogue among institutions and individuals in Eastern Europe to share and mutually learn from experiences in the post-communist transformation.
- Focus on developing skills for addressing the problems common to post-communist societies;
- Provide ongoing and often new channels of communication;
- Establish and sustain relations among individuals and institutions; and
- Select areas of wide public interest and practical influence (identified areas: infrastructure, NGO¹³ sector, ethnic diversity and human rights, culture and cultural relations) with long-term rather than one-time events;
- Support the creation and development of an open and civil society and well-informed public community;
- Benefit both societies and individuals of Eastern Europe; and
- Methods: seminars, roundtable discussions, research working groups, and exchange visits.

Central European University (CEU) ¹⁴

- An international institution for post-graduate study and research, founded in 1991. CEU promotes educational development and policy making throughout Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. CEU has a provisional charter from the state of New York and is recognized as a foreign educational institution in Hungary and Poland.

Higher Education Support Program¹⁵

- Reorganize the humanities courses, substituting contemporary texts and curricula for the ideological texts of the Marxists-Leninist school of teaching.

12 Open Society Institute (1995, 26).

13 Non-governmental organization.

United States Agency for International Development

University of Tirana Master of Business Administration Project¹⁶

- A program to institutionalize an MBA program at the University of Tirana, the country's largest university, through the cooperation with the University of Nebraska, Lincoln by mutual faculty exchange. Tirana business faculty members visit Nebraska to observe the MBA education while Nebraska faculties serve as guest lecturers at Tirana, with an eye towards developing business curriculum and promoting small business center's outreach activities at the local level outside Tirana.

Other Donors

UNICEF

Repair of pre-school buildings (amount unknown)

European Union

ECU6.0 million (US\$4.8 million) for school rehabilitation in 1994-95;
ECU10 million (US\$8.0 million) for 23 schools in 1996-.

UK Know-How Fund

Support the development of textbook policy and publisher training (amount unknown).

Switzerland

Technical assistance and external training for planning the restructuring of secondary education (US\$260,000).

Japan

Assist MOE in 1) establishing a data base on school rehabilitation requirement, 2) setting up an implementation mechanism for school rehabilitation,

14 Open Society Institute (1995, 163).

15 Open Society Institute (1995, 113).

16 Contracted to the University of Nebraska. Approximately US\$0.9 million.

and 3) launching the capacity building activities.

Italy

Emergency aid (food, fuels, etc.), mainly with an intention to stop the influx of refugees or job seekers to Italy from Albania.

Summary and Analysis

Judging from available information, the large portion of aid moneys is for physical repair and construction of schools which were seriously damaged during the chaos at the end of communism. As a first step of educational reconstruction, this "hard" maintenance seems to be a logical, rational, and natural choice. In addition to the physical reconstruction efforts, the World Bank group has been implementing a project to strengthen institutional capacity at the governmental level. However, the World Bank does not pay attention to the nonformal education sector or the local level; it only looks at the formal and mainstream sector. The Bank's views and analyses in the report do not include political, cultural or social dimensions. United States Agency for International Development funds an MBA project to help the country develop a market economy, as part of the American agenda. Other various agencies and donors fund part of the school reconstruction efforts.

Only Soros covers all areas of education, starting from school repair and construction in 1994, moving to the quality part of management--teacher training, curriculum and textbook--as well as encouraging local-level initiatives. Especially with the Soros' special focus on the Eastern Europe, the East-East Program is unique because it takes advantages of the similar features in Eastern European countries, while all of other education programs/projects in Albania are oriented to learning from the West. However, unfortunately, the East-East Program does not contain specific educational components.

A PROPOSED PLAN OF ACTION FOR EDUCATIONAL RECONSTRUCTION IN ALBANIA

Generating A Plan of Action

When determining a plan of action, two ways of thinking apply: one is to aim at solving a problem, and the other is to aim at reinforcing a strength. As indicated above, Albania certainly has many strengths in education: a high literacy rate and universal primary education, for example. However, for Albania in its drastic transition period, solving problems would be far more important than reinforcing strengths. Therefore, in generating a plan of action in this case, a most urgent but underserved problem area is identified and a plan of action as a solution of the problem is formulated and evaluated.

In terms of the process for generating options, the policy cycle suggested by Haddad (1994, 10-11) seems to be somewhat redundant. In his framework, after analyzing situations, some policy options are generated, and then the options are evaluated in terms of desirability, affordability and feasibility. Generating options and evaluating the options seem to be doing the same thing at different times. Instead, I would incorporate the part of the evaluation of options into the process of identifying a single option. In the following section, the formulation of an option starts by a chain of my judgments in identifying a most urgent but untouched problem area, which will be followed by the evaluation of the option using the five criteria of desirability, affordability, feasibility, impact and sustainability.

Identification of Most Urgent but Underserved Need

To identify the most urgent but underserved educational need in Albania, it is necessary to take into account three factors: existing educational conditions, national priorities/strategies, and the past and current international educational

assistance. First, in terms of the existing educational conditions, the Albanian education system is currently suffering from "the lack of everything" syndrome: from the lack of schools, textbooks, paper, and equipment to the lack of quality in education, qualified teachers, and good governance. Almost all aspects look desperately in need of urgent help. At this point, it is difficult to pinpoint a specific area.

Second, regarding national priorities and strategies, the government's approach is very top-down: curriculum reform, production of new textbooks, teacher (re)training, institutional capacity building, all start with the government, seemingly reflecting the long-standing central planning tradition. However, as the experiences in Russia, Romania and other transitional economies suggest, it takes considerable time, energy and pain to generate change in education in the classroom, despite the policy changes at the government level. This may imply that there is a lot of opportunity to identify local needs, especially in schools. Judging from the information available for this paper, direct assistance to the local level seems to be necessary in parallel to the support to the government.

Third, among international educational assistance programs and projects, school building rehabilitation is in full swing and on a large scale, but the "soft" part of education, i.e., teacher and curriculum issues, seem to need more assistance. So far, the potential areas for a proposed plan of action would be in this "soft" arena at the local level.

Although educational data on the local level in Albania is very scarce compared to the data on the government, Kloep and Tarifa (1994, 170) describe what is happening to Albanian teachers. Kloep and Tarifa indicate that teachers have always been regarded as symbols of independence, freedom and progress in Albania where successive foreign invasions prevented people for centuries from getting education in their native language. The survey by Kloep and Tarifa suggested that despite overwhelming hardships at schools, teachers seem to be

satisfied with their job, probably because they are basically free to experiment and innovate in their instruction. In addition, Kloep and Tarifa indicate that teachers are very well integrated in community social life, and it is a privilege to be a teacher. However, the World Bank (1994) points out that school headmasters and teachers seem to have virtually no decision-making powers. It is not clear whether or not these seemingly contradictory statements refer to different dimensions. Thus, it is likely that teachers are the best target group among underserved groups at the local level, and the most crucial group who would have the potentially most urgent educational need, as part of soft aspects of the education system.

Then, among teachers in various subject areas, teachers in social studies seem to be more affected by the current educational change than teachers in mathematics or science. This is simply because the current educational reform is about ideological change (from communism to capitalism and from dictatorship to democracy), in which the subject of social studies plays a key role. As indicated in the previous sections, studies in social sciences and humanities have been greatly discouraged or manipulated by the government's ideology under communism; however, nowadays, it is assumed that this area of study should be in the forefront to promote market-economy and democracy. In fact, other former Soviet bloc countries have been expanding civic education with an eye toward creating an open society. This idea is also endorsed by Mansaku¹⁷ (1996).

Thus, teachers in social studies have been identified as a target group with an urgent need of successfully reforming their subject area. Then, if the target group can be further specified, which level of teachers are the appropriate candidates--primary, secondary or tertiary ? It seems that secondary teachers should be considered. Because secondary education, containing both vocational and general courses, plays a central role in preparing students for the labor market, and since 94 percent of secondary teachers have a university degree (World Bank, 1994), it is likely that secondary teachers would have more motivation and impact more

widely than primary teachers. In addition, taking into account that Glegs have a narrower life scope than Tosks, it might be relevant to target Geg teachers. The next question is: what kind of direct assistance do Geg teachers in social studies need? Direct assistance means not the assistance trickling down from the government, but the one directly involving them.

It is assumed that the struggle of secondary teachers in teaching social science under the current drastic ideological and philosophical change is common among former communist countries. Therefore, it is suggested that these teachers need exposure to other country conditions. So far, Albania has been reforming its education system by integrating models of Western countries such as the US, Switzerland, Austria, Germany (Mansaku, 1996), having introduced Western educational methods and principles through foreign schools in Albania in the 1920s. From the current outlook, it looks like that Albanians are not much interested in the Eastern European countries. This is natural because Albania is trying to transform itself to the market-oriented and democratic society, using the West as a model. However, Vass¹⁸ (1996) has a view that Albania should go back to its "original and natural" place (i. e., Eastern Europe) in terms of historical, ethnic and cultural aspects, and that the importation of ideas from the West may have a limit in its adaptation. Also, the Soros Foundation's East-East Program includes Albania as one of the Eastern European countries that have a common situation and problems. Therefore, a general plan of action is proposed that secondary Geg teachers in social studies visit other countries in Eastern Europe to learn from their experiences in adjusting the study of social studies to a democratic and market-driven society.

This plan of action was proposed on the basis of a set of assumptions from a limited amount of information. A different set of information and materials may

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have led me to a different conclusion. In any case, in order to make the plan of action fit the reality as closely as possible, it is necessary to validate these assumptions. The five criteria of desirability, affordability, feasibility, impact and sustainability will be applied to the proposed action.

Desirability, Feasibility and Affordability

Desirability

To analyze the desirability of the proposed action, the impact of the proposed action on various stakeholders will be discussed. Who would benefit ? Who would be threatened ? How would potential losers be compensated ? (Haddad, 1994, 23). First, Geg teachers who participate can directly benefit themselves and their students. Second, teachers will share their experiences with peer teachers and other community members. However, because the teachers are located at the bottom of the strict hierarchy of the Albanian school system, officials at the top and middle level (including school headmasters) may feel threatened. Officials may fear that the teacher who comes back from overseas may challenge government policies. However, the officials, who may be seen as the losers, will be compensated in the form of the teachers' direct or indirect contribution to the educational reform as a whole, which is on the top of the agenda of the officials as well. Meanwhile, the government officials, especially at the national level, receive a variety of assistance from international donors. Therefore, it is presumed that government officials would also have opportunities themselves to observe overseas within the assistance programs. Furthermore, considering the difference between the GEGs and the Tosks, it may be necessary to include Tosks as another stakeholder.

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Feasibility

Feasibility means whether the resources of personnel and time are adequate to implement the proposal (Haddad, 1994, 24). A set of questions within Albania: Will MOE allow teachers to visit other countries ? If there is a need to organize an in-country seminar or workshop, will the existing staff be sufficient ? Will teachers have time to go to other countries ? These questions can be answered only by speculation at this point due to the lack of information. The feasibility of the project in the countries to be visited will be another issue. Will other countries, or institutions, in other countries be willing to do and be capable of hosting Albanian teachers for a certain period of time, openly exposing them to the educational contexts the visiting Albanians wish to see ? Countries lacking a good political relationship with Albania should be excluded.

Affordability

This criterion requires looking at costs in several senses: monetary, opportunity, and political (Haddad, 1994, 23). In terms of the monetary, the proposed plan of action is assumed to be funded by external donors. The countries in Eastern Europe are financially very limited, so it is crucial to fund all activities outside Albania. The Albanian government should share minimum costs to a certain extent to generate a sense of ownership, for the sake of sustainability. Regarding the opportunity costs, Mansaku (1996) suggests organizing in-country seminars, inviting experts and teachers from overseas so that a wider impact can be expected. Certainly this looks more cost-effective, but it remains important for Albanian teachers to observe other countries in person. In terms of political costs, as mentioned above, there may be tradeoffs between those who benefit and those who feel threatened. However, in a desperate country like Albania which closed itself off for more than 10 years, such threats will be overridden by the benefits. The first thing would be to know what is occurring in the outside world.

Impact and Sustainability

Impact

As mentioned above, the impact of teacher visits to other countries will have varying impact depending on the device used to disseminate their experiences. To increase this impact, returning teachers should spend time reporting to the government (central and local), share their experience in the school and the community, incorporate their experience in real classroom teaching, and contribute to the improvement of curriculum and textbook. In this sense, it would be ideal to combine the study visit and the organization of seminars and workshops in order to maximize the impact. Returning teachers and foreign experts from Eastern Europe would serve as resource persons in the seminars and workshops held at each school district.

Sustainability

To ensure sustainability, it would be necessary to consider both domestic and external aspects. In terms of domestic aspects, it is important to establish a mechanism to maximize and institutionalize the benefits of the study visits, and a mechanism to make the project popular among teachers. Sustainability would be achieved as far as returning teachers can contribute their experiences to the education reform as a whole. In this context, an established mechanism of assessment, feedback and modifications will contribute to sustainability. With regard to external aspects, it seems to be appropriate to build on the Soros projects, especially on the East-East Program, in implementing the proposed action. By becoming part of this program, the teacher visit project will be sustained and integrated within the mechanisms of East-East cooperation. In addition, teachers have been one of the areas in internationally-funded projects (especially those by the World Bank and Soros) in the forms of in-service training, improvement of teacher credential process or teaching methods. In this sense, the proposed plan of

action would supplement the existing externally-funded programs and projects; thus, the possibility of sustainability would increase.

Furthermore, with regard to the sustainability of funding, external assistance is indispensable to fund the visits in the early stage of the project; however, in the later stage, depending on the development of communication in the country, more inexpensive methods such as Internet or CD-ROM may be explored.

Implementation

To increase the possibility of success, it would be necessary and important to establish an implementation mechanism with low complexity and high support (Herschbach, 1993). In the selection process of teachers who are going to go overseas, those who have high support from all stakeholders including peer teachers should get priority. To avoid high (and medium) complexity, the activities can be that 10 teachers visit 2-3 countries in Eastern Europe for one month to observe the reform of curriculum, teaching methods and textbooks.

CONCLUSION

The most difficult part of the Albania case study will be to collect as much accurate information as possible. Since all documents on Albanian education reflect secondary information, they may not depict the exact reality. Even though some insiders' views were gathered, it was not possible to sufficiently validate all assumptions used to formulate the plan of action. In formulating the plan of action, I tended to assume rational thinking would work, a presumption because contrary information is not available. I feel that I was relying on assumptions with a naive and optimistic attitude. To recommend a certain action as a development consultant is a struggle with assumptions. Certainly, insiders' views and foreigners' views do not match, which implies that foreign consultant assumptions

must become "facts" at a certain point, otherwise, projects can never be available.

Historically, education in Albania has been treated as a tool of political manipulation. Albanian teachers have experienced many drastic changes in the education system in the past 100 years. It is uncertain whether teachers see the current change as the most enduring--final change in history which will not be reversed--or just as another phase which may disappear later. Considering this unstable context of Albania, the fact that teachers are regarded as a symbol of independence would indicate that it will be very important to enable teachers to play a key role in the current educational reform.

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