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**INTEGRATION INTO THE EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM:
STUDENTS' AND TEACHERS' MOBILITY AND HIGHER EDUCATION
REFORM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**

The Republic of Macedonia has been undergoing a period of transition striving after successful overcoming of existing difficulties in all spheres of social living. This is one of the most important targets the country has set up in its determination to approach developed and less developed countries in Europe, but this would be very difficult to achieve with the existing higher education system and organization. It means that this issue requires deep changes and transformation that would be compatible with the reform processes in the EU countries. In order to achieve this the Republic of Macedonia is aiming at introducing high quality, modern and flexible education, driven by capable human force and potential, prepared for creative changes and challenges, bringing up new quality and skills in education.

For this purpose on the 19th of September 2003 the Republic of Macedonia signed the Bologna Declaration, committing itself to achieving the objectives set out in the Declaration, aiming at constructing an Integral European Area of higher education, its main target being harmonization and gradual adjustment of all countries' higher education institutions into an integral one.

The Ministry of Education and Science has constituted a Monitoring Group for Implementation of the Bologna Process, consisting of representatives from all the universities in the Republic of Macedonia, students' organizations, and the Ministry. The Group works on preparation of the National Report for implementation of Bologna Process for the period 2004-2005. Harmonization of the existing higher education system into two cycles is the key element of the reforms.

The Republic of Macedonia pays special attention to the credit transfer system, harmonized with the ECTS. Application of ECTS should provide for greater mobility of students at widest level, national, regional and international. The free movement of

student so far has been reduced to local level, within state universities only, due to the lack of one integrated University that would enable and coordinate these activities.

Questions related to student's mobility are a matter of interest in the educational systems throughout the states of the South-East Europe. Macedonia is not an exception in this terms and it is therefore necessary to pay special attention to this issue in the region.

Republic of Macedonia understands the importance of EU programs (Tempus, the sixth's framework program), COST and the bilateral cooperation, as instruments for increasing student's as well as employee's mobility.

Very important for the mobility in the EU countries is the mobility of the students in the region of KARDS.

The intensive mobility in direction south-west and west-south is one of the qualities of the Tempus program in Republic of Macedonia.

Regardless the project type, whether is about south-west or west-south mobility intensive mobility of academic, administrative staff in the frames of Joint European as well as Compact Measure Projects and Structural and Complementary Measures Projects, since 1996 Tempus provides over 230 grants for academic, administrative staff and for the employees of the ministries.

The realised project for master studies in the field of seismic engineering and engineering seismology, which involved students from Macedonia, Albania and Croatia is the best illustration for reinforcement of mobility of young people and academic staff in the KARDS region. The students have achieved excellent results: they have passed a large number of the anticipated examinations, while the best among them are already completing their master theses. At the same time, the professors who have been involved in the teaching process have shown a highly professional level in each respect, including the preparation of the lectures through the elaboration of the notes, holding the lectures, the organization of the examinations, and last but not least in the establishment of decent and friendly relations with the students.

Certain synergism is achieved by the project for master studies financed by DAAD. This project involved students from the above mentioned countries and students from Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro.

Participation of students in the Joint European projects and promotion of the student's mobility is going to be a priority in the Tempus program in the incoming years.

It should be mentioned that by year 2002 there is an opportunity which provides representatives of Student organisation to obtain an Individual mobility grant.

Republic of Macedonia is going to continue with its support in order to intensify the mobility of High education.

In March 2005, Republic of Macedonia became member of CEEPUS network, which provides mobility of students and academic staff among the institutions for high education in the countries of Central and East Europe.

Republic of Macedonia is going to continue to negotiate with the EU countries, with the candidate's countries and with many other countries in order to eliminate the formal obstacles of mobility (for ex. Visa regime).

The mobility promotes one of the European dimensions of high education. It offers opportunities for continuous flow of people on international, regional and international level, focused on the exchange of ideas and cooperation in the field of educational and scientific work.

On the other side the mobility offers opportunity for development new capabilities for cooperation with new cultures and educational environments. This leads to improvement of the knowledge about the other cultures around us.

It is an effort for creation of the European region for high education in which, as it is emphasized by the participants of Sorbone declaration, "the national identities and common interesses may coexist for Europe, her students and all citizens".

Accomplishment of mobility's goal means free movement, especially of: Students: chance to study, to allow the access to their studies and relevant services Teachers, scientists and administrative personal: to take in consideration the time spent educational work in Europe without prejudicing of their statute rights.

As well students as active factors and equal partners in the academic media can significantly influence the overall development of higher education particularly matters dealing with students mobility.

Mobility involves both students who come into the country, and those who go out of it. All participants in higher education in the region of South East Europe have foreseen the importance of encouraging and attracting students and teachers to spend certain period of time in another country at another university. Having foreign students and teachers at higher education institutions brings about creating international spirit in the institutions themselves and acts as an incentive and positive challenge for both students and teachers. The region of South East Europe is at the very bottom of the list of countries which attract foreign students and teachers. At this moment we cannot expect that they would take advantage of using foreign students and teachers potential in developing higher education in their host institutions. In order to achieve this a lot of academic and social conditions should be fulfilled first. Information services should be opened and made available at any time, necessary structures should be integrated at all levels to make foreign students and teachers stay easy and attractive.

The problem doesn't exist only in this direction. These countries also face great problems and difficulties when domestic students and teachers want to go abroad. So it would be necessary to put a lot of efforts in overcoming existing obstacles and provide a free flow of people and ideas.

Financial and administrative obstacles are on the top of the scale which both foreign and domestic students and teachers face with regard to mobility. Visa issues, residence permit, work permit, health insurance, high living expenses and particularly high tuition fees, which are usually higher for foreigners, border our students and teachers. On the other hand there are also significant social obstacles in the process of integration in the new circumstances. One of the greatest difficulties for foreign students coming to the countries of the South East Region is language. Languages spoken in these countries are of local character and there is generally poor offer of free specially designed courses for foreigners. It is rather an exception than a rule.

Creation and development of the European region of high education depends from the last accomplishment of the taken responsibilities by the high educational institutions. Their clear politics of internationalisation should take in consider the following measures

- Strengthen of the educational staff with international experience;
- Creation of students programs, which are going to be realized on one of the world languages
- Creation of study programs which are going to provide transfer of credits for the domestic and foreign students
- Development of information centres which are going to offer clear and transparent information for the students in relation with the international possibilities
- Strengthening of students scholarships
- Building mechanisms which are going to improve the transfer of scholarships and credits
- Overcoming of the mobility barriers by better and easier mechanisms for obtaining visas

Students unions should also play key role in dissemination of information related to mobility programmes. Governments of the South East countries should support students' unions in their activities not only financially but in all other terms as well.

They should pay special attention to the following aspects:

- a. increase funds for students' mobility and its promotion;
- b. stimulate intra-university agreements including and promoting mobility
- c. include South East countries into their mobility programmes;
- d. adjust national regulation and provide equal opportunities for foreign students in higher education as for the domestic ones;
- e. provide possibilities for transfer of students grants and credits;
- f. issue visas and work permits for foreign students automatically upon their entry at a university and faculty;
- g. make language control tests free