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Contents

9.1	History and Social Parameters of the Education System	141
9.2	Fundamentals, Organization, and Governance of the Education System	144
9.2.1	Current Educational Policy and Goals of the Education System	144
9.2.2	Legal Framework	145
9.2.3	Governance of the Education System	145
9.2.4	Funding the Education System	146
9.2.5	Relationship Between the Public and Private Sectors	146
9.2.6	Quality Management	147
9.3	Overview of the Structure of the Education System	147
9.3.1	Preprimary Education (Detska Gradina)	147
9.3.2	Primary Education (Osnovno Učilište)	148
9.3.3	Lower Secondary Education (Progimnazija)	148
9.3.4	Special Schools (Specialno Učilište)	149
9.3.5	Upper Secondary Education (Obštobrazovatelno Sredno Učilište, Gimnazija)	149
9.3.6	Postsecondary Educational Facilities (Profesionalno Učilište, Profesionalna Gimnazija)	150
9.3.7	Tertiary Education (Vishe Učilište, Kolež, Universitet)	150
9.4	Developments in the Current School System	151
9.5	New Developments	152
	References	154

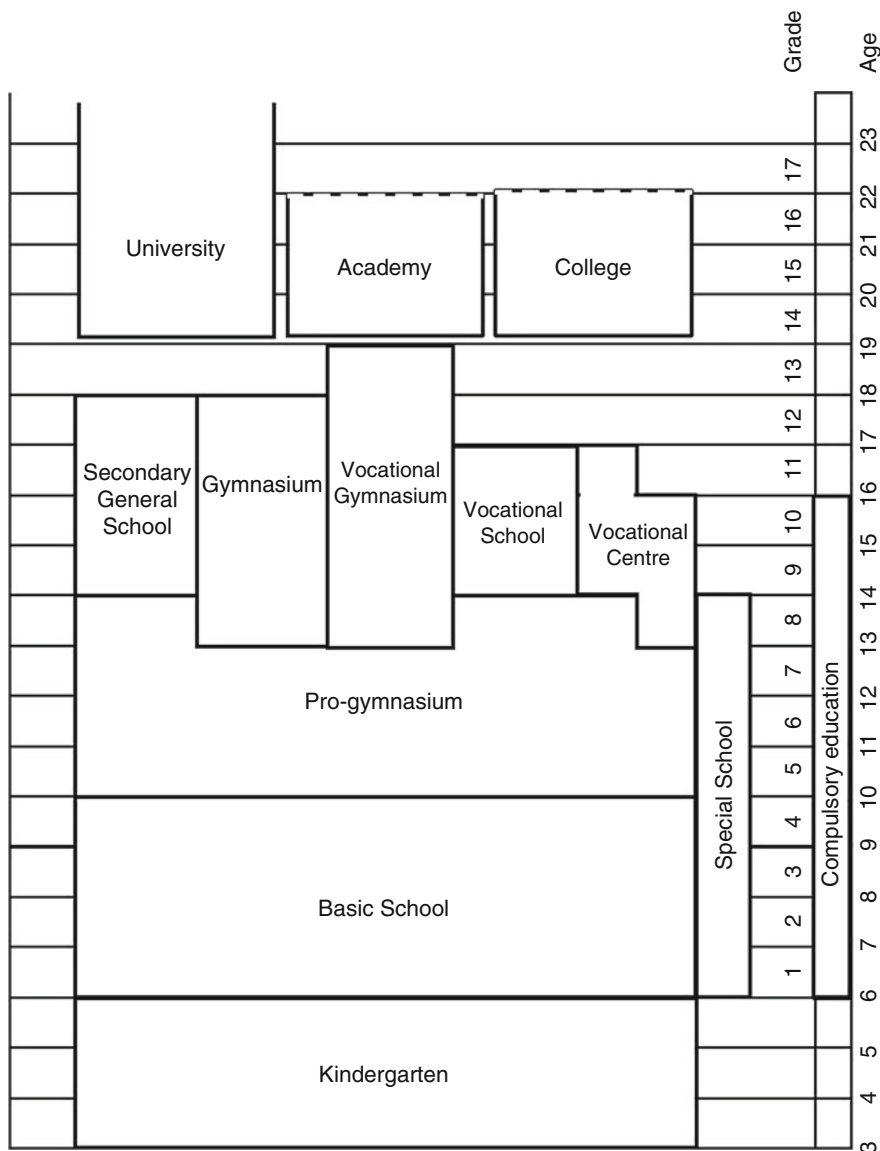
9.1 History and Social Parameters of the Education System

The country's education system was set up in the age of Bulgarian national renaissance in the nineteenth century, an age characterized by European democratic and humanistic values. It was radically transformed following 9 September 1944

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and subject to the objectives of “socialist construction” symbolized through nationalization, centralization, uniformity, ideology, and an alignment toward a planned economy. Especially in the early stages, the Bulgarian Communist Party tried to destroy the stable Bulgarian educational tradition and introduce the Soviet system of “command pedagogy.”

Bulgaria



The Law on National Education of 1948 created a uniform, national education system headed by the Ministry of National Education. Curricula were reformed founded on Marxist ideology and elevated to a “scientific philosophy”. Objectives targeted the “education of stalwart builders of socialism” implemented by uniform schools.

However, the destruction of Bulgarian traditions was never completed, and step by step from 1956, the education system has regained independence. In the 1960s and 1970s, the old cultural tradition was revitalized and elements of European educational models were integrated. In 1974 the then British minister of education, Margaret Thatcher, visited Bulgaria. Impressed by what she saw, she declared, “Bulgarians have two religions, orthodoxy and the education system.”

From 1975, Ljudmila Živkova, chair of the Committee of Culture, exerted considerable influence on the education system, which becomes stronger in 1980–1981 when she was appointed as head of the newly founded central Communist committee for education, science, and culture. On her initiative, aesthetic education gained prominence in schools and was supplemented by a national program for aesthetics in all aspects of society. This led to Bulgaria assuming a leading role among Comecon countries.

The Bulgarian Turks, an ethnic minority that accounts for roughly 8.5 % of the population, originally had their own school system. However, from 1958, this was gradually integrated in the general Bulgarian school system. Between 1984 and 1989, attempts were made to fully assimilate the minority by changing names.

In the course of its 45-year existence, the People’s Republic of Bulgaria has eradicated illiteracy and constantly increased the number of students, rising from 26,000 in 1944/1945 to 120,000 in 1988/1989. In comparison to other Comecon countries, Bulgaria was able to measure itself against leading nations at the end of the 1980s. With 124 students per 10,000 people, it was only second to the USSR.

Following the overthrow of Todor Živkov on 10 November 1989, effectively carried out by a group from the central committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party supported by the Soviets, there was a radical rethinking of the education system that aimed to denationalize the system and liberate it from ideology. The state’s monopoly of education was abolished, the Marxist educational goals and content were removed, and the new system democratically anchored in law.

The fundamental laws that have formed the legal framework for educational reform in Bulgaria since 1989 include:

- The Law on National Education, passed on 1 October 1991 under pressure from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) just a few days after its first reading in parliament against the will of the Union of Democratic Forces (SDS)
- The Law on Higher Education passed on 12 December 1995 and voted in by the BSP against the SDS
- The amendment to the Law on National Education enacted on 18 March 1998 with the votes of SDS against the will of the BSP

The “Support for East European Democracies Act” (SEED) program instigated by the US Congress in 1989 and administered by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) granted Bulgaria 290 million dollars by 1999. It focused primarily on supporting the market economy, providing humanitarian aid, and on the transfer toward a sustainable, democratic society. Significant influence was exerted by “Open Society,” a foundation established by US multimillionaire George Soros. Supported by the state Department, the foundation encouraged the younger generation to embrace Euro-Atlantic values.

The Union of Democratic Forces government under Ivan Kostov came to power in 1997 heralding a new, radical phase in educational politics. Whereas previous governments had tended to take a middle line, trying to blend old and new elements, also in education, the new government broke completely with the past, with the legacy of state socialism, turning instead exclusively to the West and the USA.

This has led to the introduction of market principles not only in economics but also in education. Local authorities have become responsible for maintaining public schools. Schools maintained by private bodies have also been allowed to develop, charging fees to enable them to offer better salaries to teachers. International schools maintained by Western organizations were also established. This Anglo-American model was introduced in the education system supported by financial instruments provided by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

9.2 Fundamentals, Organization, and Governance of the Education System

9.2.1 Current Educational Policy and Goals of the Education System

The Laws on National Education from 1 October 1991 and 18 March 1998 gave all Bulgarian citizens a fundamental right to education, preparing individuals for responsible citizenship in a democratic society. With this goal in mind, education seeks to provide basic skills and general education for all citizens from the age of 6 to 16 years, to create strong ties between in-school instruction and preparation for life outside the classroom, and to encourage a sense of responsible citizenship and sensitivity to global issues. Educational reform has been based on the following principles:

- Guaranteeing a level playing field through the provision of general education, compulsory schooling, and secondary education for all citizens
- Free education at state-funded schools and local authority schools
- Coeducation for boys and girls
- Creating ties between general and vocational education and between theory and practice
- Effectively combining mandatory and elective subjects and combining, classwork, group work, and individual-based study

- Involving parents and the community in school activities
- Providing options for continued education without restrictions regarding age through various types of instruction and qualification

Given its legal basis, the aims of the present Bulgarian school system are to develop the intellectual potential of each and every pupil; to foster individuality, independence, and the desire for continued learning; to develop a national, cultural, and historical awareness; to guarantee general and vocational education; and to promote independent learning and the requirement to take part in public life conditioned by market economics.

9.2.2 Legal Framework

The legal framework of the education system is provided by the following laws: the Law on National Education (1991); the Amendment to the Law on National Education (1998); the Law on the Level of Education, the General Education Minimum, and the Curriculum (1999); the Ordinance No. 4 on the General Education Minimum and the Length of Lessons (1999); the Law on Vocational Education and Training (1999); Ordinance No. 2 on the Curriculum 2000; the National Programme on the Development of Pre-school Education and the Education System; and the Programme for the Development of Education, Science, and Youth Politics (2009–2013).

9.2.3 Governance of the Education System

Preschool education is managed by the state, the region (oblast), the municipality, and the school. Governance of the school system is performed at three levels: national, regional, and school. The following institutions are responsible for the governance processes of preprimary and school education:

- At national level – the Ministry of Education and Science
- At regional level – regional inspectorates of education
- At municipal level – educational departments of municipal administrations
- At school level – head teachers and relevant school councils

The Ministry of Education and Science (*ministerstvo na obrazovaniето i naukata*, MON) is a specialized body of the Councils of Ministers (the government) responsible for defining and implementing government policy in the field of education and science. The MON:

- Plans activities connected with the development of education in long-term programs, organizes and coordinates the work of the administrative units and educational institutions, and exercises control over the work of all types and levels of school and kindergarten in the country

- Participates in the formation of national strategy and priorities in the development of education and science
- Approves educational documentation and the educational network and supervises the introduction of innovations, the supply of textbooks and manuals, and teaching staff
- Conducts international activities in the field of education and science
- Defines uniform state educational standards
- Organizes publishing activities in the field of education
- Makes proposal and offers suggestions to the government on education and science financing
- Establishes, transforms, and closes state and municipal schools, and approves the establishment of private schools and kindergartens
- Appoints the heads of the inspectorates of education

9.2.4 Funding the Education System

The main source of education funding is the state budget. Each year the National Assembly (parliament) approves the government budget, which includes education funding. Education funds are sent to kindergartens and to about 90 % of schools (primary, basic, and secondary levels) via the local budgets of the municipal administrations. Thus, these institutions are called municipal schools. About 10 % of schools (special, vocational, and some subject-specific schools) are funded directly from the budget of the Ministry of Education and Science.

Private schools are funded by private associations, foundations, churches, and by international organizations. Expenditure on private educational facilities – kindergartens, schools, and universities – rose from 82 million € in 2000 to 230 million € in 2013.

9.2.5 Relationship Between the Public and Private Sectors

In addition to the institutions in the public sector, there were 532 private educational facilities in 2012/2013, of which 65 were kindergartens, 69 general and special schools, and 16 institutes of higher education (seven independent colleges and nine universities). In 2012/2013, 6,510 pupils attended general education private schools and 2,800 pupils vocational schools. In Varna, the second center of education in the country besides Sofia, there are 12 private educational facilities (kindergartens, primary schools, and middle schools), whereas there are only one to two private educational facilities in each of the other regional capitals.

The private German, American, British, and French schools – which are usually headed by Bulgarian citizens – work together with international partner schools and employ international teachers. The American College in Sofia, organized wholly in terms of an American model, was established by an American association in 1992.

German-speaking schooling has a strong tradition in Bulgaria. Besides the 23 German-language state schools that stem mainly from the era of state socialism, there are many other German facilities which are supported by the German Central Office for Schools Abroad.

The Law on Religions adopted in 2003 allows religious institutions to establish church schools and upper schools with the approval of the minister to meet their own needs within the framework of the Law on National Education (1991), provided that these schools offer a quality of education equivalent to normal state schools. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church has kindergartens, general education schools, and spiritual seminars in Samokov, Sofia, and Plovdiv as well as a theological faculty in Sofia. In addition, Sunday schools, organized in parish churches, offer religious instruction, choral music, and iconographic painting. The Islamic Chief Muftiate has three private Turkish-Muslim middle schools approved by the Ministry: the spiritual middle schools (*medrese njuvvab*) in Šumen, Ruse, and Momčilgrad. The Ministry does not recognize school groups (*Koran schools*) attached to the mosques as schools.

9.2.6 Quality Management

Preservice teacher training is performed at:

- Three-year teacher colleges, which prepare teachers for kindergartens, primary, and basic schools
- Faculties of education at universities, which prepare teachers for all levels of education – from kindergartens to gymnasiums – and for all school subjects
- Departments of education at technical, business, and other specialized universities, which prepare teachers mostly for vocational education

A total of 13 universities have faculties of education and they are the most popular source of teaching qualifications. There are twelve teacher-training colleges. College graduates usually continue their studies in part-time short-term programs at university faculties or departments of education leading to bachelor's or master's degrees. In-service qualification of teachers is organized at university faculties of education and institutes (three in number) for improving teacher qualifications.

9.3 Overview of the Structure of the Education System

9.3.1 Preprimary Education (*Detska Gradina*)

The objective of preprimary education is to provide an environment conducive to the development of the child's abilities and to offer instruction which will prepare the child for formal education. The children, who are aged three through to 7 years,

are usually divided into three groups. The pedagogical process in kindergartens is aimed at the emotional, moral, aesthetic, intellectual, and physical development of the children. Attendance at kindergarten is not compulsory, but about 40 % of all children go to preschool. The number of children in the groups varies from 12 to 22. The average number of children in a group is 20.6. There are also private kindergartens, which in most cases provide half-day care with an emphasis on foreign languages, arts, and music. They make up less than 5 % of the total. From 1990 to 2012, the number of kindergartens fell from 8,755 to 2,070 and the number of children from 304,000 to 208,000. The number of teachers also fell to 20,015. There are 65 private kindergartens, with 1,100 children and 5,200 teachers. The dramatic decline in public kindergartens is partly due to the fall in the birthrate, partly also to economic reasons.

9.3.2 Primary Education (Osnovno Učilište)

Primary education is provided at the primary phase of basic schools and at the primary phase of secondary general schools. The school year begins on 15 September. Children have 33 compulsory hours a week in Years 1 and 2 and 25 in Years 3 and 4. Free-elective hours (4 a week) are also included in the primary school curriculum. Curricula for free-elective hours are prepared by teachers and are approved by head teachers after consultation with parents and municipal representatives. The number of pupils per class varies from 16 to 28, with an average of 21. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:17. From 1990/1991 to 2012/2013, the number of basic schools fell from 2,563 to 1,402 and the number of children from 342,000 to 252,372. The number of teachers also fell, from 21,459 to 14,224. There are 67 private schools with 2,011 pupils and 165 teachers.

Special interests of national minorities (especially the Turkish minority) are taken into consideration but restricted to lessons in their mother tongue (3 h per week) in Bulgarian schools. Article 8 of the Law on National Education (1991) states that “Students for whom the Bulgarian language is not their mother tongue, have the right to study their mother tongue in the public schools under the protection and control of the state.” The Council of Ministers resolved that the mother tongue can be taught as an elective 4 h per week in Years 3–8 at public schools. Following the political reforms of 1989, the government introduced Roma schools taught in the language of the Roma. However, these were not accepted by the Roma population and lessons are again given in Bulgarian.

9.3.3 Lower Secondary Education (Progimnazija)

The transition from the primary to lower secondary education – or the pro-gymnasium phase – follows after successful completion of Year 4. Pro-gymnasium education (Years 5 to 7–8) is provided at the pro-gymnasium phase of basic schools (osnovni učilišta) and at secondary general schools with

Years 5–12 (obštobrazovatelni učilišta). This phase comprises comprehensive instruction in all subjects of study and lays the foundations for studying the fundamentals of the different sciences. At the end of the school, pupils receive a school-leaving certificate. Pupils receive 30 compulsory hours a week in Years 5–8. The number of pupils per class varies from 14 to 27, with an average of 20.5. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:11. From 1990/1991 to 2012/2013, the number of pro-gymnasiums fell from 2,263 to 1,729 and the number of children from 633,000 to 217,000. The number of teachers also fell, from 40,000 to 18,782.

9.3.4 Special Schools (Specialno Učilište)

Special schools provide education, training, and rehabilitation for children with physical, mental, and emotional disabilities. Most of the schools (67) are for children with mental disabilities. The majority of special schools (95) are basic schools (Years 1–8). The teacher-pupil ratio is 1: 6.7. The MON favors integrating some pupils with special needs into general education schools in the hope that these children can be more easily integrated into society. The Ministries of Health Care and of Education oversee the admission of pupils in special schools. Education and instruction in special schools is carried out according to government-set educational norms. The number of special schools fell from 138 in 1990/1991 to 72 in 2012/2013.

9.3.5 Upper Secondary Education (Obštobrazovatelno Sredno Učilište, Gimnazija)

Secondary general education is provided at secondary general schools with Years 1–12 and with Years 5–12 and at gymnasiums. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:14. Almost all secondary general schools have subject-specific profiles in foreign languages, mathematics, chemistry, biology, or history. Transition to these classes occurs after Year 7 and proceeds on the basis of a national test and a subject exam. Subject-specific education lasts 5 years. Pupils obtain a basic general education in accordance with state educational standards. Pupils have 32 compulsory and four elective hours a week. Average class size is 22.5. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:14. From 1990/1991 to 2012/2013, the number of gymnasiums fell from 160 to 140 and the number of pupils in upper secondary education (Years 9–13) from 392,000 to 135,000. The number of teachers remained relatively constant at 12,000.

Gymnasiums are specialized, subject-specific schools. Transition to them occurs after Year 7 and requires a national test and an entrance examination. Schooling at the gymnasium lasts 5 years. Pupils obtain education at a higher level in a given field – foreign languages, natural sciences and mathematics, humanities and classics, sport, etc. Foreign language gymnasiums are the most prestigious secondary schools in Bulgaria. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:14. There are 35 Russian-language general education schools.

9.3.6 Postsecondary Educational Facilities (Profesionalno Učilište, Profesionalna Gimnazija)

The vocational education and training system comprises the following types of schools:

- Vocational gymnasium (profesionalna gimnazija), 4–6 years in duration, Years 8–9 to 12–13
- Vocational school (profesionalno uchilishte), 4 years in duration, Years 9–12
- Vocational centers (profesionalni centrove)

Pupils at vocational schools receive a general education and vocational training. Admission to the various types of vocational schools depends on school criteria. Admission to vocational gymnasiums occurs either after Year 7 or after Year 8. Entrance depends on passing admission examinations. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:10. Admission to vocational schools occurs after Year 8 and no examinations are required. Training leads to a certificate in a given profession. The teacher-pupil ratio is 1:16. Vocational centers offer preparatory courses of different duration and subject profile.

As recommended by the European Commission, Bulgaria began reforming the vocational education system in 1995, joining the EU programs Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates, and Youth. In 2008, this led to the closure of 30 specialist technical schools that had a long tradition in Bulgaria.

From 1990/1991 to 2012/2013, the number of vocational gymnasiums (profesionalni gimnazii, until 2002/2003: teknikumi und sredni profesionalno-techničeski učilišta, SPTU) fell from 473 to 388. This was only partially compensated for by the 20 vocational centers (centrove za profesionalno obučenie, until 2002/2003: profesionalno-techničeski učilišta, PTU).

9.3.7 Tertiary Education (Visše Učilište, Kolež, Universitet)

Higher education comprises universities, academies, and colleges. As a whole, entrance to the most prestigious universities and the most desired specializations is subject to entrance examinations. Today, vice-chancellors are appointed by the minister. The introduction of the bachelor's degree in line with the Bologna process has effectively reduced university study to 3 years. Supervisory councils of universities also accommodate representatives from business, a trend that has strengthened the market orientation of the universities.

From 1990 to 2012, the number of institutes of higher education (universities, academies, and colleges) fell from 84 (including ten independent colleges, 31 colleges attached to universities, and 43 universities and academies) to 53 and the number of teachers from 23,663 to 22,672. In contrast, the number of students rose

from 188,000 to 283,000 (14,600 of which studied at colleges and 263,000 at universities). At the same time, the number of PhD students rose from 5,026 to 5,370. There are 16 private institutes of higher education (nine independent colleges and seven universities). From 2000/2001 to 2012/2013, the number of students at private universities rose from 27,916 to 49,741 with the number of teachers rising to 2,672 (533 at colleges and 2,140 at universities).

The most renowned international university is the American University in Blagoevgrad which opened in 1991 with the support of the Soros Foundation and today accommodates 1,000 students from 25 countries. International students, primarily from the Balkans, make up about one-third of all students. There are about 70 professors and lecturers, usually on short-term assignment. There are also Bulgarian lecturers and their numbers are continually growing. In 1990, a faculty was established for German engineers and students of business administration at the Technical University of Sofia. The aim of the faculty is to train managers at university level. The faculty works closely with institutions from Karlsruhe, Magdeburg, Brunswick, and Essen. The Islamic University in Sofia, which is subordinated to the Grand Muftiate, provides a higher level of education over 3 years for hodjas, but does not count as part of the Bulgarian system of higher education. Professors and teaching materials come from Turkey.

9.4 Developments in the Current School System

When the Union of Democratic Forces took over power in 1997, there was a parallel reform in the content of the education system. A law on changes in the curriculum adopted in 1999 aimed at bringing the education system closer to Western standards. Bulgarian literature no longer held privilege over others and has since been treated as part of world literature. History also lost some of its significance and has since been treated as part of world history. The Open Society foundation funded new textbooks, in particular in social sciences. This was justified on the grounds that openness to more global values had reduced the dependency on Bulgarian literature classics and Bulgarian history.

Foreign languages have gained in importance significantly. Lessons have been mandatory since 2000/2001. The EU has recognized the equivalence of Bulgarian secondary school certificates. As part of this, obligatory matriculation examinations were introduced in accordance with the Amendment Law on the Law on National Education (1998). In 2008, a nationwide uniform matura was conducted for the first time with standardized questions.

The extracurricular activity of the institutions within the education system and the education of secondary school pupils that were important during the time of state socialism were abolished. However since then, young people have been put at risk with the first signs of alcoholism, drug addiction, and prostitution and the absence of any meaningful perspectives for leisure time activities now appearing.

The EU treaty with Bulgaria that came into force on 1 January 2007 when the country joined the Union regulated the education system and vocational education in law. This principally defined:

- The country's participation in the European education programs Leonardo da Vinci, Socrates, and Youth, which are the EU's main instruments for putting the integration between member states into practice
- The development of the European dimension in higher education based on the Bologna Declaration (1999)
- The development of a system of lifelong learning and continued education, aligned toward the goals of the Lisbon Strategy (2000)

Since the political turnaround of 1989, the Bulgarian education system has been suffering from negative demographic trends. From 1989 to 2012, the population shrunk from 8.9 to 6.9 million people, attributable in part to the fall in the birthrate from 1.8 to 1.4 and to the high level of emigration of highly qualified younger people. The proportion of adolescents below the age to work has fallen from 21.6 % to 14.5 %, and the number of pupils who fail to complete the basic school, the pro-gymnasium, the general education secondary school, or technical college has risen dramatically. Attendance at school is deteriorating and many children leave school early.

According to the information provided by school inspectors, about 20,000 of the 960,000 registered pupils dropped out of school in 2012/2013. About 100,000 children do not go to school at all. About one-quarter of pupils in compulsory schooling do not complete the last year of their school education. Teacher salaries are so low that they are forced to give private extra lessons to prepare pupils for an entrance examination at an elite school or at a university or to take on a second job. The current reform in the education system has led to Bulgaria falling from third place in tests of natural sciences to 42nd in the last study in 2007 in which 57 nations took part.

9.5 New Developments

The neoliberal model that has determined the education system since the political reform in 1989, and especially since the “blue revolution” on 1997, has been thrown into a crisis. A growing number of educationalists and intellectuals are questioning whether denationalization, decentralization, autonomy, and a market orientation of schools might be the solution to the problem. The liberal education reform has led to an ever-increasing gap between the losers of the reform – the majority of the population and the impoverished middle classes – on the one hand and the winner on the other hand, those who can send their children to urban elite schools and private colleges. Therefore, many schools are turning their backs on extreme liberalism and classes and are beginning to see a return toward greater discipline. In some case, poor behavior can lead to marks being reduced by 25 %.

The following issues are currently dominating discussions on education:

- Reducing the education budget: the overall expenditure on education fell from 4 % of GDP in 2009 to 3.5 % in 2013, or roughly 10 % of the national budget today. For the school system alone, Bulgaria spent 1.76 % of GDP, far below the EU average of 2.41 %. On a percentage basis, Bulgaria is therefore spending less than all other EU countries for its education system.
- Fall in pupil numbers: from 1990/1991 to 2012/2013, the number of pupils across all types of school fell from 1,950,000 to 758,000, i.e., by more than 10,000 per year. This trend is reflected in the drop in the numbers of schools and teachers.
- Discrepancy between the wishes of the government to expand the vocational sector and the opportunities these schools present in terms of equipment and material assets.
- The planned eradication of marks in the basic school in a new education bill.
- Increasing unemployment among teachers and the absence of any program to provide professional alternatives.
- Separating secondary education from a higher education that demands its own entrance examination.

The “Movement for the Defence of Science and the Education System,” a grassroots movement of university instructors born out of a strike in autumn 2007, is highly critical of current education politics and is demanding that the education system become a national priority.

On 29 May 2013, the European Commission issued a recommendation on Bulgaria’s national reform program 2012 and delivered an opinion of Bulgaria’s convergence program for 2012–2016, demanding a further alignment toward the Western education system: “Bulgaria is facing the challenge of improving the overall quality and efficiency of its education system. The final adoption of the School Education Act before the end of 2013 would provide a framework for progress on the necessary reforms, including modernising curricula and implementing improvements to teachers’ training and incentives. In higher education, reforms have made very limited progress. The existence of an important disparity between higher education outcomes and labour market demand worsens structural unemployment and hampers the development of high-value, innovative sectors. The poor performance of higher education is linked to a lack of incentives at institutional level as well as to the standard of individual researchers and teachers.” Subsequent to this recommendation, Minister President Plamen Orešarski who formed a new government following early general elections declared: “We have to build up an education system that better matches the labour market.” And the new education Minister Anelia Klisarova explained: “Vocational education is our priority and textbooks have to be coordinated in line with business.”

In all government declarations since 1989, the education system has been described as one of the decisive factors in a strategy to rebuild Bulgaria and a key mechanism in the development of Bulgarian society and culture. However,

since the political reform of 1989, international financial institutions have actually recommended cutting expenditure on education and transferring the maintenance of schools to the municipalities, which were less able to do so.

In view of the crisis in society, Bulgaria should not rush to throw its own educational tradition dating from the time of national renaissance in the nineteenth century overboard as redundant ballast as it did at the end of the 1940s. Instead, it should retain key elements of it, those that were marked by the enlightenment and humanistic education, and find syntheses to cope with the tasks of the twenty-first century.

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