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Adaptation of Education Policy in CEE Countries to Western Standards. the Case of Poland

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the adaptation of education policy in Poland to Western standards, especially to the EU education standards and to evaluate the impact of adjustment processes on the development of the Polish economy. Poland experienced systemic transformation of all spheres of its economy and social life during the last decade. Poland, as other East European countries, is a new member of the European Union. Adjustment processes to the requirements of the membership have taken place not only in economy but also in other fields. Education and training are examples of such fields that are influenced both by systemic transformation and integration processes.

The changes in Polish education system have the qualitative and quantitative character. Non only the number of students has increased, but also the quality of education has much improved. Nevertheless, the education system seems to be not adapted to the current situation in the labour market. This requires further changes in the education policy in Poland according to the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy.

Introduction

In the nineties, Eastern Europe experienced systemic transformation of all spheres of its economy and social life. Poland, as other East European countries, is a new member of the European Union. Adjustment processes to the requirements of the membership have taking place not only in economy but also

in other fields. Education and training are examples of such a field that are influenced both by systemic transformation and integration processes.

The aim of this paper is to examine the adaptation of education policy in Poland to Western standards, especially to the EU education standards and to evaluate the impact of adjustment processes on the development of the Polish economy during the transformation period.

1. Education Policy in the European Union

Education is a primary government concern in all European countries, but the structures of education systems differ considerably, both within and between countries (*Education...*, www.europa.eu.int). The European Union is a forum for the exchange of ideas and good practice. It does not have a common education policy, on the contrary, its role is to create a system of cooperation between Member States by preserving the rights of each Member States in terms of the content and organisation of its education and training systems. Under the principle of subsidiarity every Member State of the European Union retains full responsibility for the content of teaching and organisation of its own education system. In accordance with Articles 149 and 150 of the Treaty, the Community's role is to contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action. The main purpose of this is to develop the European dimension in education, encourage mobility and promote cooperation between schools and universities. European Union has specific ways of promoting cooperation in the field of education through actions at European level. These are:

- Community action programmes like SOCRATES or LEONARDO DA VINCI;
- Community legislation promoting cooperation between the member States on policy issues, such as recommendations, communications, working documents, pilot projects.

The new strategic goal for the European Union, which was set out at the Lisbon European Council of 23 and 24 March 2000, is to 'become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge – based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion (*Concrete future...*, www.europa.eu.int; Communication from the Commission, 2003).

On the basis of a proposal from the Commission and contributions from the Member States, the Council adopted the „Report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems” on 12 February 2001. This is the first

document which outlines a comprehensive and consistent approach for national policies on education in the context of the European Union. The approach is based on three objectives:

- improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems in the EU;
- facilitating the access of all to „lifelong” education and training;
- opening up education and training system to the world (*Concrete future...*, p. 2; *Strengthening cooperation...* www.europa.eu.int).

On the basis of the Member States’ contributions, the Commission and the Council set out a number of joint objectives for the future and defined how education and training systems should contribute to achieving the strategic goal set in Lisbon. The Council focused its attention on the free objectives below, from a set of five concrete objectives, that had been identified by the Commission:

- 1) improving the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems with special reference to ensuring access to ICT for everyone,
- 2) facilitating the access of all to education and training systems by making learning more attractive,
- 3) opening up education and training systems to the wider world, with special reference to strengthening European cooperation and increasing mobility and exchange (*Strengthening cooperation...*, p. 3–10).

In spring 2003, the Council made statements on moving towards the Lisbon objectives, and reiterated the need to implement the detailed work programme following up the objectives of education and training systems in Europe (*General Report 2003...*). It introduced a series of benchmarks for European average performance, to be achieved by 2010. The European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions endorsed the Commission’s initiative seeking to establish European benchmarks for education and training systems. On 11 November 2003, the Commission adopted a communication taking stock of the situation in the education and training fields from the point of view of the Lisbon objectives and the five benchmarks set by the Council, and identifying the measures needed to attain these goals by 2010. As part of the implementation of the Lisbon strategy and pursuit of the strategic objectives of a knowledge – based society and economy, the Commission also called for substantially increased investment in education and training, in the current and enlarged Union (*General Report 2003...*).

In order for European universities to play a key role in achieving the goal set at the Lisbon European Council, a debate on the role of European universities in the knowledge society and economy has been started. European universities are

characterized by a high degree of heterogeneity, which is reflected in organisation, governance and operating conditions.

There are some 3 300 higher education establishments in the European Union and approximately 4 000 in Europe as a whole, including the other countries of Western Europe and the new members of the EU. They employ 34% of the total number of researchers in Europe, with significant variations from the Member State to another, 26% in Germany; 55% in Spain and over 70% in Greece (*The role of universities...*, www.europa.eu.int). The EU funds a variety of initiatives to promote research, education and training at both European and international levels, with special reference to such programmes as: ERASMUS, SOCRATES, LEONARDO, TEMPUS.

On 27 February 2003, the European Parliament and the Council amended the annex to Decision No 253/2000/EC establishing the second phase of SOCRATES programme, with a view to reducing the administrative burden on beneficiaries (*General Report 2003...*). The Commission proposed also a Community action programme for 2004–2006, providing for the award of grants to bodies active at European level to promote and support specific activities in the field of education and training. On 5 December, The European Parliament and the Council decided to establish the multiannual (2004–2008) ‘ERASMUS MUNDUS’ programme aimed at improving the quality of higher education and promoting intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries. The financial framework for the period from 1 January 2004 to 31 December 2008 is set at EUR 230 million. The programme is designed to enhance the mobility of students, particularly at postgraduate level, and teachers from third countries, by provision grants and by the creation of 90 inter-university networks. It also seeks encourage the mobility of European Students and academics in the direction of third countries (*General Report 2003...*). The ERASMUS MUNDUS programme is being implemented by means of the following five actions (*Erasmus Mundus...*, www.europa.eu.int):

- Erasmus Mundus masters courses;
- Scholarships;
- Partnerships with third country higher education institutions;
- Promotional activities;
- Technical support measures.

Erasmus Mundus is aimed in particular at higher education institutions, students having obtained a first degree from a higher education institution, scholars or professionals who teach or conduct research, staff directly involved in higher education, other public or private bodies active in the field of higher education.

General Report on activities of the European Union's activities shows that EU programmes influence all stages of European education, i.e. school education, higher education, adult education and other educational pathways (*General Report 2003...*).

In school education (COMENIUS strand of the SOCRATES programme), more than 10 thousands schools were involved in partnership, with some 25 thousands pupils and 35 thousands teachers benefiting from mobility. More than 5 thousands language teachers were able to enhance their skills through Europe-wide mobility, with 43 new transnational cooperation projects being selected for Community funding. The COMENIUS Network action gave rise to the selection of seven new projects. Within the framework of the ARION action, the Commission awarded 1 750 mobility grants to education specialists and decision-makers from 31 countries, enabling them to participate in one of the 165 study visits covering 22 themes of the programme, connected with the development of education policies in the Member States and acceding States.

In the higher education field (ERASMUS strand of the SOCRATES programme), financial assistance for the organisation of transnational mobility was granted to 1 982 higher education establishments for the 2003/04 academic year. At the same time, 262 joint syllabus development projects (including 50 programmes and 13 European modules) and 199 intensive programmes qualified for financial support. Moreover, 14 new thematic network projects (bringing together faculties, departments, associations and socioeconomic partners from all the participating countries) were given financial assistance, while 21 thematic network projects were renewed for a second year of activity and three of the networks received funding to disseminate and exploit the key results obtained at the end of a three – year cycle of activity. Under Action 1, ERASMUS provided additional aid for 11 development projects. The Commission also gave its support to the European network for quality assurance in higher education, set up in 2000 pursuant to Council Recommendation 98/561/EC.

In the sphere of adult education and other educational pathways (GRUNDTVIG strand of the SOCRATES programme), over 40 new cooperation projects involving more than 300 organisations throughout Europe were financed under GRUNDTVIG 1, together with five new large-scale European networks encompassing more than 70 participating organisations under GRUNDTVIG 4. A total of 243 learning partnerships were set up under GRUNDTVIG 2, involving 1 168 organisations across 30 European countries. In addition, more than a thousand members of adult education staff (both teaching and administrative) received GRUNDTVIG 3 grants.

Under the MINERVA strand of the SOCRATES programme, more than 40 transnational projects bringing together key players in the new technologies sector in Europe, including all the European universities, encompassing open and distance learning, were financed in 2003. This action provides a basis for the eLearning programme tying in with SOCRATES.

Within the framework of the SOCRATES action plan for equal opportunities, the Commission supported the dissemination and research activities of the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. In this connection, a public hearing for young people with special educational needs from 22 European countries took place in the European Parliament.

In the course of 2003, the EURYDICE network proceeded with the annual update of Eurybase, its database on the 30 education systems covered by the network (*General Report 2003...*).

In spite of the data mentioned above, according to some evaluations student mobility is still marginal in Europe. In 2000, a mere 2,3% of European students were pursuing their studies in another European country (*The role of universities...*, www.europa.eu.int). Researcher mobility is also relatively low in Europe, with the exception of Italian scientists emigrating for many years to the United Kingdom (Ackers 2003). It may be also awaited the new process of scientists' migration in Europe after the recent enlargement of the EU.

New initiative of the European Union concerning higher education is a programme to promote bodies active at European level and support specific activities in the field of education and training¹. The programme is open to independent and non-profit-making legal entities primarily active in the field of education and training, with an objective aimed at the public good. Entities must have been legally established for more than two years. The programme embraces three main action areas, i.e. support for:

- specified institutions active in the field of education, namely the College of Europe in Bruges and Natolin, the European University Institute in Florence, the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht etc.;
- European associations active in the field of education or training, with members in at least 12 EU Member States; associations may be national, regional or local and must undertake the majority of their activities in the Member States ;

¹ Decision No 791/2004/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 21 April 2004 establishing a Community action programme to promote bodies active at European level and support activities in the field of education and training, Official Journal L138 of 30.04.2004; Programme to promote bodies active at European level and support specific activities, Activities of the European Union, <http://www.europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11069>.

- activities in the field of higher education concerning European integration, including Jean Monnet chairs, contributing to the achievement of the future objectives of education and training systems in Europe and contributing to the training of national judges in the field of European law and to the activities of organisations for judicial cooperation. The financial framework is EUR 77 million for the period 2004–2008.

2. Education policy in Poland

Poland has started the adaptation to Western education standards since the beginning of the transformation processes. The Polish education policy and system have been also adjusted to the European Union requirements under the Europe Agreement. The most successful achievements of the above mentioned processes are as follows:

- 1) the share of youth completing the upper secondary education increased from 21% to 35%.
- 2) the number of students increased almost 4-times and amounted to 1,7million persons in the year 2002, (it gives the index of scholarisation at the level of 33%, similar as the average achieved in Western Europe). The number of students per 100 000 inhabitants increased from 1101 in the year 1989 to 4 000 in the year 2002.
- 3) the role of non-public higher education increased considerably: (the number of non-public high schools increased from 6 at the beginning of the transformation period to 248 in the year 2002; about 400 000 students are studying now in these schools),
- 4) the number of public universities and high schools is stable and remains at the level of 114 (Pawłowski 2002);
- 5) it is observed the strong competition between the public and non-public education sectors.

Statistical data on changes of some characteristics of the Polish education system are presented in the Table 1. It includes data on number of schools at different education levels and number of pupils and students in 1995–2002.

In order to prepare the Polish education system to the membership in the EU the new development strategy for higher education sector has been launched. The main objectives are as follows (*The Strategy of Higher Education...*, www.men.gov.pl):

- ensuring and strengthening access to higher education;

- improving quality and efficiency of higher education system;
- adaptation of higher education to the needs of labour market;
- development of skills of academic staff, and improvement of academic careers opportunities;
- improving of high schools' infrastructure and access to the Internet;
- permanent training and e-education;
- harmonization within the European Higher Education Area (involvement of Poland into the European Programmes: E-Europe, E-Learning, E-Content).

The achievement of the above mentioned goals requires new investment in the higher education sector.

Table 1. Education in Poland – aggregate data, 1995–2003

Schools, pupils and students (in thousands)	1995/1996	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003
primary	19,8	16,7	15,8	15,6
	5104,2	3220,6	3105,1	2983,0
lower secondary	-	6,3	6,4	6,6
	-	1189,9	1743,1	1709,0
upper secondary (post-primary)	9,1	10,5	10,6	3,7
	2251,3	2452,1	1852,9	1249,6
upper secondary	-	-	-	7,5
	-	-	-	576,1
post-secondary	1,4	2,6	2,6	2,9
	161,0	200,1	211,0	236,5
tertiary	0,179	0,310	0,344	0,377
	794,6	1584,8	1718,7	1800,5
for adults	1,9	2,9	3,1	3,4
	263,7	341,7	362,9	369,5

Source: on the base of Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, Warsaw 2003.

3. Education systems and the economic development in Poland

During the transformation process the Polish economy achieved the relatively high but not sustainable economic growth. The growth rates have been

changing from – 13% in the year 1990, up to 7% in the year 1996 and to 1% in the year 2000. The economic recovery process has been started in the year 2001 and in the year 2003 the GDP growth rate achieved the level of 3,5%. At the same time the unemployment rate was relatively high and has increased up to 18% in the year 2003 (See Table 2). The growing unemployment rate among educated young people has been also observed. It allows to suppose that education system in Poland is not fully adapted to the current situation in the labour market.

Table 2. Unemployment rate in Poland, 1990-2003^a

Years	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
1990	0,3	0,8	1,5	1,9	2,4	3,1	3,8	4,5	5	5,5	5,9	6,5
1991	6,6	6,8	7,1	7,3	7,7	8,4	9,4	9,8	10,5	10,8	11,1	12,2
1992	12,1	12,4	12,1	12,2	12,3	12,6	13,1	13,4	13,6	13,5	13,5	14,3
1993	14,2	14,4	14,4	14,4	14,3	14,8	15,4	15,4	15,4	15,3	15,5	16,4
1994	16,7	16,8	16,7	16,4	16,2	16,6	16,9	16,8	16,5	16,2	16,1	16
1995	16,1	15,9	15,5	15,2	14,8	15,2	15,3	15,2	15	14,7	14,7	14,9
1996	15,4	15,5	15,4	15,1	14,7	14,3	14,1	13,8	13,5	13,2	13,3	13,2
1997	13,1	13	12,6	12,1	11,7	11,6	11,3	11,0	10,6	10,3	10,3	10,3
1998	10,7	10,6	10,4	10,0	9,7	9,6	9,6	9,5	9,6	9,7	9,9	10,4
1999	11,4	11,9	12,0	11,8	11,6	11,6	11,8	11,9	12,1	12,2	12,5	13,1
2000	13,7	14,0	14,0	13,8	13,6	13,6	13,8	13,9	14,0	14,1	14,5	15,1
2001	15,7	15,9	16,1	16,0	15,9	15,9	16,0	16,2	16,3	16,4	16,8	17,5
2002	18,1	18,2	18,2	17,9	17,3	17,4	17,5	17,5	17,6	17,5	17,8	18,0
2003	18,6	18,7	18,6	18,3	17,9	17,7	17,7	17,6	17,5	17,4	17,6	18,0

^a – Registered unemployment.

Source: Polish Public Statistics, GUS, www.stat.gov.pl

The inflow of FDI to Poland is treated as one of instruments solving this difficult problem of the labour market. Poland was the attractive host country for foreign direct investment, among others things, because of highly educated labour force. Poland has attracted almost a half of FDI stock located in the EEC – countries (it means about USD 70 billions). Firms with foreign ownership have created about 1 million jobs in Poland. Table 3 presents data on branch structure of employed persons in firms with foreign ownership.

Table 3. Structure of employed persons in firms with foreign ownership, by sections and divisions, 2002

Specification	Number of employed persons in firms with foreign ownership		Share in total number of employed persons in sections and divisions of the Polish economy
	in thousands	%	
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing	5,4	0,5	0,2
Industry:	568,7	57,2	19,7
– mining and quarrying	3,4	0,3	1,6
– manufacturing	547,6	55,1	22,4
– electricity, gas and water supply	17,6	1,8	7,4
Construction	24,5	2,5	3,6
Trade and repair	208,9	21,0	10,5
Hotels and restaurants	24,9	2,5	11,8
Transport, storage and communication	80,4	8,1	11,1
Financial intermediation	18,4	1,9	6,3
Real estate, renting and business activities	51,1	5,1	5,7
Education	0,8	0,08	0,09
Health and social work	2,6	0,3	0,3
Other community, social and personal service activities	8,1	0,8	2,2
Total	993,6	100	7,8

Source: GUS data and own calculations.

Foreign affiliates are also very active in Polish foreign trade. Their share in the total Polish export amounted to about 57% and in import about 64% in the year 2002 (*Inwestycje zagraniczne*, 2003). It has been observed also the positive impact of FDI on the export structure. The foreign affiliates export more

capital and skill-labour intensive goods, than domestic ones (Witkowska, Wysokińska 2003). Foreign direct investors as the net-importers strengthen inward internationalization of the Polish economy which is already opened. This may have positive implications for the future development of Poland.

Conclusions

1. Poland has undertaken the big effort in the process of the adaptation of its education policy and system to Western standards, with special reference to the EU requirements.
2. Poland with other new members has been involved in both: the European Education and European Research Area.
3. The changes in the Polish education system have the qualitative and quantitative character. Non only the number of students has increased, but also the quality of education has much improved.
4. Nevertheless, the education system seems to be not adapted to the current situation in the labour market. This requires more changes in the education policy in Poland according to the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy.

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