

***ON THE WAY TO EUROPEAN UNION.
CHANGES IN THE CZECH EDUCATIONAL
SYSTEM DURING THE LAST
FIFTEEN YEARS***

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to describe the changes in the educational system in the Czech Republic that have taken place from the beginning of the 1990's up to the present. The first part includes a brief characterisation of the initial situation typical of the socialist model of education. It also describes those areas of education that were viewed sceptically or critically after the «velvet revolution» in 1989, and that have been identified as areas where a change is desirable.

Next part of the paper describes the course of changes and reforms of education in subsequent years. Periodization of reforms is carried out on the basis of a general model that has been created, as one of possible approaches, for post-socialist countries in transformation. Each part of the model, i.e. the corrective reforms, modernization reforms, structural reforms and system reforms, contains an outline of the respective individual changes that took place in the Czech Republic in the course of the last, almost fifteen years, and the changes are critically evaluated.

The documents (e.g. the Czech «White Paper») that are of essential importance to the recent and current development in the Czech educational system because they create basic visions and orientation but also a strategy of future changes, are treated in the next section of the present text. It is followed by a brief analysis of the current situation of the Czech educational system, namely as

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regards the educational opportunities and participation in education, structure and network of schools, financing of the Czech educational system, and finally the school leavers' prospects at the labour market.

The last part of the paper deals with the outlooks of further development of the Czech educational system in connection with the entry into the European Union, and a conclusion is drawn that it involves mutual convergence of problems caused by global economic and social forces that also leads to mutual convergence of their optimal solutions, namely not only within the EU member states.

I. SITUATION IN THE EARLY NINETIES – CHARACTERISATION OF THE SYSTEM

The Czech, or former Czechoslovak, educational¹ system entered into the process of political and social changes following the «velvet revolution» in November 1989 as a **stable system** with a number of characteristics that corresponded to the socialist model of society. There was and still is² in effect, though with many amendments and modifications, the School Act of 1984. Another essential law was the Law on State Administration and Self-Government in Education of 1990 and Higher Education Act which was published in 1991 and then replaced in 1998. These acts and amendments have created a framework for the current functioning of the educational system and for a whole range of concrete changes.

One of the system's merits was the fact that it provided basic education free of charge universally to everybody, and thanks to it illiteracy virtually did not exist and as regards functional literacy, it was also found³ relatively high. The knowledge level of Czech pupils and students was high, as was demonstrated by

¹ The split-up of Czechoslovakia into Czech Republic and Slovak Republic took place in January 2003.

² At the present time, there is a bill at the stage of second reading in the Czech Parliament, and it is the first bill – after many efforts in the course of recent years and after an extensive political discussion and many compromise modifications – that has a chance to be passed. It has been set before the Parliament by the social democratic Government.

³ It was proved by the results of testing of functional literacy of Czech adult population within the scope of the IALS project (International Adult Literacy Survey) in 1997 (see more in Rabu_íková, 2002).

a number of international comparative studies⁴. Also the qualification level of the population was rated as very good. Even the discrepancy between the educational offering and the orientation of study branches on the one hand, and the demand of the economy for certain types of workers and their qualification on the other hand, did not make itself felt markedly. Traditionally highly valued were some specific areas and stages of the educational system, such as the area of pre-primary education (accessibility and quality of care at kindergartens), the area of the special education system (system of special schools existing in parallel) and the area of basic art schools (so-called People's Art Schools). Also the prevailing higher (university) education of teachers and perhaps also the moral responsibility of most of them proved to be a good potential for a future development. Generally it is true to say that in the Czech context education always represented an appreciated value and counted among individual priorities of people.

And yet it became apparent in the early nineties⁵ that there are many areas in the Czech educational system that are ripe for a change and that in fact also many of the above mentioned merits can be perceived and viewed sceptically. Criticism, as a starting point of anticipated changes, was aimed particularly at the following areas:

- The form of the educational system is so «fixed and stable» that positive results cannot be expected without a considerable support of the mechanisms of innovation and change.
- Education is not perceived as a political priority of decisive importance to the transformation of both the economy and the whole society.

⁴ Until 1989, Czechoslovakia did not join in international efforts to measure results of education, e.g. those initiated by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement – IEA. The CR joined in these activities in the first half of the 90's within the scope of several studies, for example TIMMS.

⁵ It does not mean that there were no individual critical voices protesting against a number of circumstances of the functioning of educational system already in the past, especially in the 80's and especially from independent intellectuals and some teachers, but only the changes at the end of 1989 made it possible for them to be heard loud and straight.

- For many years the educational system at all its levels was subject to centralised and directive management the consequences of which are markedly reflected also in the fixed behaviour of people.
- Transmissive nature of instruction: it is based on transmission of knowledge, memorising, on verbal methods and frontal type of instruction).
- Although pupils and students have relatively extensive knowledge they have only a little ability to use it.
- Because of economic reasons a part of competent teachers leave their jobs and there is not sufficient number of new teachers coming to schools, which results in an unbalanced age structure of teaching staff.
- The quality of training of teachers is unsatisfactory, namely both at the pre-graduate and especially in-service levels, a system of in-service training of teachers is almost lacking.
- Compared with other countries, the participation in tertiary education is low in the Czech Republic and there has been a low number of university graduates in the population⁶ for many years.

A complete list of critical comments cannot be given here, alone because they came from very diverse intellectual backgrounds and in some cases⁷ they were even contradictory in a way. It is important that this criticism was very soon

⁶ Even now (data valid for the academic year 2002/03) the higher education institutions are able to meet only app. 56 % of applications – due to the growing interest of applicants and despite permanent increase in the number of applicants admitted. Only about 36 % of the population of 19-year-olds enter institutions of higher education.

⁷ Suggestions coming from the circle of the Union of Czech Mathematicians and Physicists can serve as an illustrative example. Their suggestions complained about the children's low level of knowledge in the field of natural sciences and called for differentiated education for children with various level of gift, as compared with the suggestions of the NEMES association (Independent Interdisciplinary Group) that, on the contrary, pointed out the intolerable overburden of children and called for humanisation of school and «friendly» pedagogy concentrated on child.

followed by another one that commented on a number of changes carried out rapidly immediately after 1989 and regarded them as non-conceptual, ill-considered or even unmethodical and lacking necessary directions. Controversial re-establishment of multi-year secondary general schools (*gymnázium*) can serve as an example (see below).

II. EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN THE POST-SOCIALIST COUNTRIES IN THE NINETIES

A number of authors (Birzea, 1996, Halasz, Altrichter, 1999, Kotásek, 1997, Koucký, 1996) deal with the subjects of changes or reforms⁸ in the educational systems in the post-socialist countries – considered both as a whole and in their individual aspects (management, teachers, financing, etc.) – from the beginning of the nineties up to the present. It's not to be wondered at – the situation in these countries could in many respects be termed as a «social and economic laboratory» of its kind. From the point of view of their further development, it is essential to understand the mechanisms these countries are going through.

Educational reforms that took and are taking place are reforms of very different natures: they differ in their place of origin (are they initiated from above or from below, are they coming from the outside or is it an inner initiative), they differ in their orientation on contents or structure, in the extent and profundity, in the levels they involve, in the areas they cover, in their duration, etc.

Obviously it is essential, what is the attitude of a given reform towards the initial situation:

- Does it have a tendency to break with the past radically or rather to maintain a continuity?
- Does it have a tendency rather to stabilise the situation or to bring about a change?

⁸ Birzea (1996), for example, says that there is a difference between Western and Eastern Europe alone in the interpretation and particularly in the use of the terms «change» and «reform». The East more or less inclines to the more radical term «reforms».

On the basis of these two dimensions (continuity versus making a break with the past, and stability versus change) Birzea considers (1996) four types of reforms which the educational systems in post-socialist countries have gone and are going through – to a different extent and in different periodization. The following reforms are concerned:

Corrective reforms: They are mostly spontaneous reactions to the old system of education that are characterized by prevailing **negation and dismantlement** of the existing state, they are aimed at a remedy of the most flagrant features and manifestations of the socialist educational system.

Modernisation reforms: They particularly concern the **innovations** of curricula and methodological approaches within the framework of the educational process, and they also concern the innovations in the training of teachers and in the organisation of the learning process.

Structural reforms: They focus on **changes in the structure** of the educational system as a whole, but rather in its individual parts and levels. Consequences of these changes are reflected in the need to reform e.g. the financing, methods of management and administration of schools, and they necessitate a new legislative framework for the new arrangement.

System reforms: This kind of reform is characterised by changes in both the contents, methods and in the particular approaches, and in the whole structure at all levels. It should be a reform that changes the entire existing system **in a radical way** that can also be termed as a change of the paradigm.

Now let's have a look into the concrete development the Czech Republic and its educational system have gone and still are going through, namely on the basis of the above mentioned characteristics of the individual types of educational reforms.

III. PERIODIZATION OF CHANGES AND REFORMS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The first steps taken and changes carried out virtually immediately after the events taking place at the end of 1989, but basically in the course of the year 1990, can be quite exactly characterised as **corrective reforms**. They involved in the first place a declarative refusal of the state ideology of Marxism-Leninism as the sole ideological basis of the instruction at all levels of the educational system, which resulted in cancellation of some concrete subjects (e.g. Marxist-Leninist philosophy and economy, «scientific communism») and in radical alterations in the curricula of other subjects (e.g. history, civics). Besides, teaching of Russian as a foreign language was decisively cut down and the vacant room was used to extend teaching of other foreign languages⁹ (particularly English and German). Along with the departure from the military —political rhetoric— «readiness of the population for country defence against external enemy», also the lessons of so-called civil defence were cancelled and civil defence elements ceased to be part of physical training. Academic freedom of the universities has been restored.

Kotásek (1997:12) says the following: «Immediately after the political changes in November 1989, a policy was applied of a resolute refusal of the then existing state of the educational system marked with the forty years' application of political, ideological, organizational-administrative and educational principles of the Czechoslovak and Soviet communist parties. Programmatic intention was to remove the deficiencies in education caused by the totalitarian regime and to restore the state that characterised the Czech educational system in the conditions of pre-war democratic Czechoslovakia i.e. before the year 1939. The line of negation of the past and *restoration of the status quo ante* did not have —especially in the political circles and in the academic community— the dimension of a thorough knowledge of the development of educational policy in Western Europe and in the world, nor a perspective and constructive orientation.»

⁹ This change, as it became apparent later, was very controversial, especially from the point of view of the teachers themselves who simply lacked the necessary professional training to be able to change from Russian teachers into English teachers in a short time – the quality of language instruction decreased rapidly. Even the young volunteers coming to the Czech Republic to teach English under the name «Peace Corps» could not improve it. Systematic support in the form of language courses and the possibility of re-training of teachers came only slowly.

Almost simultaneously with the above-mentioned changes, consideration began to be given to further changes in the content and methodology of instruction at all levels of the system, but particularly in the compulsory education. The focus of these changes was seen in an internal reform of school life and greater autonomy of schools, especially in the pedagogic sphere. There were calls for a lesser degree of encyclopaedism, for a constructive school instead of a transmissive one, for more attention paid to building up of social climate in the school and in the class and partnership of all persons involved in the educational process (i.e. mutual relations between children or young people, relations between teachers and their pupils and students, between parents and teachers, etc.). A specific feature was the revival of some professional and special-interest associations from the period of pre-war democratic Czechoslovakia (e.g. Union of Czech Mathematicians and Physicists), a number of new associations were established (e.g. NEMES – Independent Interdisciplinary Group, or PAU —Friends of Committed Teaching). And at the same time, a lot of stimuli from abroad were falling on a well-prepared, open and receptive ground (during the first years especially the Steiner’s pedagogy, but also Montessori and others). It really was a process that could be termed as a „ferment of thoughts» in which various political, social, professional and special-interest groups took part, and that, in addition, was often based on initiatives «from below»— from ordinary teachers, psychologists, specialists in pedagogy etc. In my opinion, this period that was limited approximately to the first half of the 90’s can be reliably classified as a period of **modernization reforms**.

One could say that this period, so greatly devoted to discussions about new – modern curricula and new —modern educational and didactic approaches, was round off with the creation of new— and perhaps at least at that time modern curricular documents that, for the first time in the long history of the Czech compulsory education, were not uniform, but existed simultaneously¹⁰ side by side.

But at the same time a whole range of other changes began to emerge, this time initiated for the most part by the central authorities, i.e. by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (hereinafter MEYS). Their list is long, as

¹⁰ They included the educational programmes General School (1993) and Civic School (1994, since 1997 unified under the heading General School), Basic School (1996) and National School (1997), all of them at the level of the primary and lower secondary stage, i.e. at the level of the compulsory school attendance.

well as would be the list of their positive —expected and, on the other hand, negative— unexpected consequences. They were changes that concerned both the whole structure of the Czech educational system and its individual parts and can be termed as so-called **structural reforms**. They were limited to the second half of the 90's. In terms of basic ideas they were based on several Czech documents (Quality and Responsibility – Programme of Development of the Educational System in the CR, issued by MEYS CR, 1995, and the project Strategy of Development of Human Resources in the CR at the EU entry, 1998, Concept of Education and Development of the Educational System in the Czech Republic approved by the Government in 1999) and in particular a series of foreign experts' recommendations¹¹ (OECD's analytical and assessment report on the educational system in the CR, additional studies by OECD examiners dealing with particular areas, e.g. pre-primary education, 2000).

Concrete changes concerned the following areas:

- Three basic principles were introduced into the management of the educational system: subsidiarity principle (decision-making at the lowest level possible that secures discharge of the function), participation principle (those who are directly concerned by the decisions participate in the decision-making) and deregulation principle (a higher level authority demands a result and checks its fulfilment, while the responsibility for the solution and way of implementation is left to those who make the decision)¹².

¹¹ These studies, performed in the years 1995–1996, resulted in eleven essential recommendations: (1) to develop tools for assessment of educational achievements of pupils at the basic schools, (2) to encourage development of schools with wider profile at the level of the second stage of basic schools and lower grades of multi-year secondary general schools /*gymnázia*/, (3) to increase the numbers of students at secondary schools providing general education, (4) to standardise and differentiate the final secondary leaving examinations /*maturitní zkoušky*/, (5) to establish National Curricular Council, (6) to establish Agency for curriculum, standards and certification in technical education, (7) to enact tax allowances for enterprises investing in technical and vocational education, (8) to establish education administration at the middle – regional level, (9) to strengthen monitoring and evaluation – the role of school inspectorate, (10) to interconnect training of teachers with the development of school and improvement of their professional prospects, (11) to establish to full extent school council to strengthen relations between schools and municipalities. Implementation of these recommendations was then subject to evaluation in 1999. The implementation, however, was not completed and it might be discussed whether some of the suggested changes would not have taken place «anyway».

¹² Many people see these principles at the level of will rather than of real implementation.

- Three relatively independent lines of management of schools have been clearly defined (state administration – MEYS, local authorities – municipalities and their councils and newly self-government— Committee of the Assembly of Deputies of the Parliament of the CR for science, education and culture, school councils and school committees).
- In connection with the general reform of the state administration and with the new territorial division into fourteen regions, education departments have been established in the regions as part of the regional administration (middle level of self-government).
- The Czech School Inspectorate became an independent control body.
- School councils have been established (the first councils were established in 1991 in the form of advisory bodies of school heads, in 1993 in the form of experimental verification, in 1995 they already had been anchored in the legislation) as an expression of the effort to strengthen the social partnership of schools¹³.
- A new method of financing of schools, based on a normative principle, was implemented at all levels.
- State schools were given greater autonomy and the schools gained the so-called legal subjectivity.
- Already before that, establishment of non-state¹⁴ schools had been made possible: private and denominational schools.

¹³ School councils, however, did not meet with due response at the schools and so at the present time they are established at only 4 % of schools. It is supposed that the School Act, that is being prepared, will set the duty to establish the school councils (according to the recommendation of the OECD experts). For further information on the process of origin and development of school councils in the CR see in Pol, Rabusicová, 1996).

¹⁴ Non-state schools were supposed to be in „healthy competition» with the state schools, and so in the beginning they were supported also with state financial resources. But as regards their expansion they play a rather marginal role. In the basic education in the school year 2002/03 the share of private and denominational schools amounted to 1.4 %, the number of their pupils represents 0.6

- As a parallel option, the so-called alternative schools (Waldorf schools, Montessori schools, Dalton schools) began to be established, both state and private ones.
- In addition to basic schools, as the main type of schools within the framework of the compulsory education, multi-year grammar schools (*gymnasium*)¹⁵ were established.
- A completely new type of schools was established at the level of tertiary education: higher vocational schools¹⁶ as part of tertiary education, they are intended to extend the educational opportunities for the upper secondary school leavers.

It can be said that initiation of all these changes was based on the effort to make a critical assessment of the Czech situation and to bring it nearer to the general trends in the development of educational systems in developed democratic countries. The entry of the Czech Republic into OECD, membership in the Council of Europe, and collaboration with foreign experts on analyses of the state of the Czech education system and their recommendations concerning the education policy played an important role in this respect.

In spite of the fact that, as mentioned by Birzea (1996:12), «after the events of the year 1989, most of the Central and East European countries declared system

% of the total number of pupils, while denominational schools represent two fifths. From the total number of secondary schools, private and denominational schools amount to 22 %, and 14.4 % of pupils study at these schools. Also here the private schools prevail, denominational schools have won a position only among secondary general schools /*gymnázia*/.

¹⁵ Establishment of the multi-year secondary general schools /*gymnázia*/ was based on the initial idea of restoration of traditional educational institutions for intellectual and social elites on the pattern of *gymnázia* in the pre-war Czechoslovakia that were characterized by early selection. At the present time, however, app. 15–20 % of pupils from basic schools enter the secondary general schools, and the local school administration authorities try to set a limit e.g. 10 %. In any case, the multi-year secondary general schools are subjects for many – rather political than professional and matter-of-fact discussions.

¹⁶ The establishment of tertiary technical schools was enacted in 1995. Their origin and development was accompanied by a number of controversies (see more in Rabušicová, Pol,

1999).

reforms, in reality, the wishes and the projects connected with them had to be put off.» The reasons for it were the circumstances that accompanied the transformation and that made system changes in education impossible. They included political instability, the fact that effects of reforms in other areas (especially economic reforms) made themselves felt only slowly, lack of consensus between the participating persons and institutions, and lack of necessary resources (especially financial resources). Due to it basic conditions of a **system reform** cannot be met, namely to start a wide mobilization of all resources, to incorporate them into a long-term plan and to ensure harmonization of the educational reform with reforms in other areas (Birzea, 1996).

I believe that also the situation in the Czech Republic, where the endeavour at a comprehensive, profound and irreversible solution of educational reform did not come until the turn of the century, corresponds exactly to this characterisation. An important role in this process plays the long-time effort of the Government¹⁷ to find a consensual support for a system reform of education —and they have succeeded to a certain extent. It has resulted, among others, in the approval of the significant document— the National Programme of Education Development in the Czech Republic, the so-called White Paper that contains the long-term vision bearing a «paradigmatic change», and at the same time it synthesises the positive changes resulting from previous development. But only when the new school act codifying the programme of the White Paper has passed we will be able to say that the system reform has really begun. It has not been the case yet. But there are new impulses that might contribute to positive changes.

IV. KEY DOCUMENTS OF RECENT PERIOD

The key documents of recent years forming the current and the anticipated development of the Czech educational system include, as mentioned above, documents of Czech provenance (particularly the White Paper, 2001, and Long-term Policy of Development of Education and Education System in the Czech

¹⁷ It is a social democratic government in its second term of office (in 1998 it was a minority government).

Republic, 2002) and, of course, supranational documents —EU documents— that are being put through with growing emphasis. Among them, the documents of the «Lisbon process» are the most significant ones.

IV.1. White Paper

The White Paper is widely considered the first truly thorough document of the previous decade, analysing profoundly the contemporary situation and formulating a clear vision of Czech education on a mid-term scale (Pol, Rabusicova, IPCOnline, 2001).

The document¹⁸ observes the educational system as a whole and, subsequently, describes the details of particular education areas and school types. Based on the current situation, the White Paper outlines important targets and gives recommendations to proceed and achieve them.

It is accentuated that, on one hand, variety is what deserves respect as an important quality, but on the other hand, differences in education contribute to social disparities. The general goal is lifelong learning, throughout the society. Consequently, school education must be understood in a new way, the main tasks being the creation of the necessary groundwork for lifelong learning, the introduction of a sophisticated relationship between learning and work, the updated delimitation of responsibilities at all levels of the educational system, and the encouragement for investments in human resources.

The authors of the White Paper explicitly profess some basic principles of the educational policy, such as equitable access to education opportunities and the concern for the development of each individual's potential. The main strategic lines of the Czech education policy are defined by the White Paper as follows:

- From centralised control to the responsibility of joint decision-making;

¹⁸ The description of the document in the following passages is based on a paper available at ICP Online by Pol and Rabušicová (2001).

- Lifelong learning for everybody;
- Adaptability of the contents of learning to the society's educational needs;
- Exploration and evaluation of educational quality and efficiency;
- Support to internal transformation and openness of schools; and,
- Increase of the quality and professional prospects of teachers.

What Exactly Does the White Paper Recommend? The suggestions of the White Paper are divided into three main sections: regional, tertiary, and adult education. For all three, the White Paper gives the main strategic lines of the Czech educational policy and recommends various tools of its materialisation.

Concerning regional education, which includes pre-school, basic, and secondary education, the analysis is obviously the deepest and the recommendations the most numerous. First, changes are mainly urged in the curricular policy, within all stages of education. The need for a state programme of education is mentioned. There should be some new or strengthened features of the curriculum. Tools of transformation of the encyclopedic approach to teaching are called for. The suitability of some active forms of teaching is underlined, as well as the interdisciplinary integration, and the integration of in-class and out-of-class activities. New areas of the curriculum should keep in mind the European dimension and consider questions of multicultural education, environmental education, democratic citizenship, business and economy, support of professional orientation, information and communication technologies, healthy lifestyle, etc. Also, the curriculum should comprise two foreign languages, one starting from the 3rd grade, and the other from the beginning of the upper basic school stage (mostly at the age of 11).

As for tertiary education, the objective is a diversified tertiary sector, transitive and flexible, so that changes or continuation of the study are possible at any age. By the year 2005, half of the population of 19-year-olds should have the opportunity to start some form of higher education, bachelor, master, or any other form of study. The authors of the White Paper, however, do not impel radical changes, but rather a re-shaping of the potential of tertiary education and a clarification of goals.

As for the adult education, the White Paper takes into consideration all three major parts thereof: programmes aimed at gaining a certain degree of education, further professional education, and adult education courses. The authors warn that the development of adult education is slower in the Czech Republic than anywhere else. The actual key problems are uncertain competence, lack of motivation, and the absence of a systematic approach to adult education.

The White Paper undoubtedly comes up with a series of suggestions and recommendations that are new and helpful in the context of Czech education. Schools should be gradually transformed into institutions prompting people to build their abilities, and strengthen their willingness and concern for lifelong learning – and the White Paper should be understood as a good tool of such a transformation.

IV.2. Long-term Policy of Development of Education and Education System in the Czech Republic

A major step in the direction of realisation of the visions stated in the White Paper represents the Long-term Policy of Development of Education and Education System in the Czech Republic (2002). It proceeds from its fundamental ideas and is based on its basic principles. It contains an overall summary of the conception lines, defines the basic goals of development in the field of education and, particularly, the interest of the State in their realisation, as well as the extent and form of the intended support.

On the basis of the goals set by the National Programme of Development of Education and of an analysis of the current situation and awareness of real possibilities of implementation, development priorities have been specified for the coming years in eight basic strategic directions:

1. Reform and modernisation of the goals and contents of education.
2. Reform of ways of completion of secondary education.
3. Attention to quality, monitoring and assessment of results of education.
4. Development of an integrated diagnostic, information and counselling system in the field of education.

5. Optimisation of educational offering and institutional structure of regional educational system.
6. Improvement in the quality of working conditions for teaching and managerial staff of schools.
7. Establishment of public higher education institutions of non-university type and development of other forms of tertiary education.
8. Development of further education as part of lifelong learning.

The document considers realisation of these priorities in the perspective of the end of the current decade – i.e. by the end of 2010, which is a time horizon identical with the horizon stated also in the documents of the Lisbon process.

IV.3. The Lisbon process

The Czech Republic joined the Lisbon process, together with other accessing countries, at the beginning of 2003. Therefore it can be said that the strategic goal that should be achieved by the year 2010 applies both to the CR and to other EU member states, and the goal was formulated in Lisbon as follows:

«To become the most competitive and dynamic economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth, creating more and better jobs and greater social cohesion.»

Also three strategic goals elaborated by the Council for Education apply to the CR, they outline a comprehensive and coherent European approach to the national policies of the EU countries in the field of education and vocational training:

- To improve the quality and efficiency of the systems of education and vocational training in the EU,
- To ensure access to education and vocational training for everybody,

- To open the systems of education and vocational training to the outside world.

It is well-known that the Lisbon process employs method of setting of concrete indicators that should show the quality (level) in individual areas of functioning of educational systems.

From the point of view of the indicators showing the education level of the population, the CR is relatively successful in that it has a high percentage of population with completed full secondary education and a low proportion of population with only basic education. In addition, it has a high proportion of students in mathematical and technical branches and natural sciences. On the other hand, we can talk about lack of success in connection with the fact that the CR has a very low participation in lifelong education and a low participation in tertiary education.

A number of institutions (Institute for Information on Education, National Institute of Technical and Vocational Education), ministries (Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of Informatics) and Government Council for Human Resources Development (including councils at regional level) are involved in the process of implementation of the Lisbon conclusions in the CR. It was caused by the fact that the initial idea of educational changes is based on lifelong learning in the conditions of an information society (knowledge-based society) and development of human resources. It is obvious that such conception exceeds by far the possibilities of a single sector – the education sector. But at the present time the coordination between individual institutions and individual levels of administration (state, regions, local authorities), where a meaningful implementation should be carried out, seems to be problematic.

An example illustrating the necessity of an appropriate coordination is e.g. the possibility of utilization of the resources of the European Social Fund as one of the four structural funds of the EU. It is well-known that its priorities include (1) active employment policy, (2) social integration and equity of educational opportunities, (3) adaptability and entrepreneurship and (4) development of lifelong learning. In the case of the Czech Republic the first three priorities are guaranteed by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, while the last – fourth priority comes under the competence of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. Linking together of the individual measures with which the above mentioned priorities are fulfilled proved to be absolutely essential.

V. CURRENT SITUATION

A detailed description of the current educational system in the Czech Republic is provided by the EURYDICE network ([odkaz na web](#)) and attached to this paper you will find a chart giving a picture of the organisational structure of the Czech educational system. For the purposes of the present paper I have chosen only some basic characteristics from the individual levels of the system. The characteristics are based on the quantitative indicators¹⁹ that are typical of the Czech educational system and its demographic, social and economic context and, at the same time, they are constant topics for discussions and a possible solution.

V.1. Educational opportunities and participation in education

The Czech Republic together with some other new EU member states (Hungary and Poland) count among those countries where the participation in education is higher than would correspond to their economic level. Particularly from the example of the Czech development it is obvious that in the last decades the level of development of the educational system was slightly above the level of the economic development in the Czech Republic, including the period of the nineties when the economic development took a very uneven course. In any case, it is obvious that the level of development of the Czech educational system is comparatively good considering the economic level of the country.

From the point of view of the demographic context, that is essential for the development of educational system in every country and in a given period, it must be pointed out that practically for the most part of the 90's an extraordinarily numerous age-group²⁰ born in the seventies²¹ was going through the decisive

¹⁹ The data are based on an appendix to the Long-term Policy of Development of Education and Education System in the Czech Republic (2002).

²⁰ As regards the rate of participation in education it particularly involves a cohort of people aged 15-29 years (especially a narrower group of those aged 20-24) that reflects the quantitative ratios at secondary schools and higher education institutions most distinctly.

²¹ It was a population wave intentionally encouraged by the then government. The generation of these large age-groups call themselves «Husák's children» after Gustáv Husák, the President of Czechoslovakia at that time.

period of their education in the CR. This fact alone made the real extent of the educational system appear smaller. Since the nineties a marked demographic decline has been taking place and so at the present time —on the contrary— small age-groups are entering the system of basic and upper secondary schools, which leads to an optical „enlargement» of the extent of the educational system.

Thus the development of the demographic situation in the Czech Republic in the nineties contributed, for example, to it that particularly in the first half of the nineties a markedly lower rate of growth of the average duration of education was reported in the CR than in the EU countries (increase in the average duration of education app. by 0.9 month per year in the CR compared with almost 2.5 months per year as an average in the EU countries). In the Czech Republic, the average duration of education and the participation in education (i.e. the percentage of persons of a certain age who are enrolled for some form of education and study) in the course of the nineties (from 1990 to 1999) increased by only 1.2 year (from 13.9 to 15.1 years) while in the EU countries in the same period the average (mean) duration of education increased by 1.9 year (from 15.4 to 17.3 years) and so at the end of the 90's the Czech Republic fell behind the EU average value by 2.2 years. Besides, in 1999 the CR found itself not only behind all EU countries and other Western European countries but also behind some other countries that entered the EU together with the CR (Hungary or Poland). This fact has been frequently and by right criticized in the recent years.

After 1995, the dynamics of the Czech data kept up with the average in the EU countries (in both cases the extension of the average duration of education exceeded 2.5 months per year). It means that in the year 2002 the Czech Republic reaches an average duration of education of 16.4 years.

The average duration of education in the Czech Republic is likely to exceed 17 years in 2005. Most probably it will have reached a level of about 18 years by the year 2010. That, of course, will mean further significant changes especially in the structure of the secondary and tertiary education. In any case, it is necessary to discuss very seriously all possible relations and consequences of the continuing quantitative expansion.

V.2. Structure and network of schools

The network of educational institutions in the Czech Republic was created in the course of a long historical development in connection with the dominating educational concept. After 1990, when marked changes in the network of schools began to take place in connection with the transformation of the educational system, the starting-point was a network of «socialist» educational institutions from the year 1989. In the sphere of kindergartens and primary and basic schools it was dimensioned for a comparatively high numbers of pupils, in the secondary education it was dimensioned for a major proportion of pupils attending vocational schools providing different vocational courses (60 %), with a low percentage of pupils attending schools ending with final secondary leaving examination (maturita) (40 %), particularly schools providing secondary general education (gymnázia – 15 %). In the sphere of higher education, on the other hand, the network was under-dimensioned in view of the low percentage of young people who were allowed to enter the higher education. The ratios of pupils in the individual categories of education and consequently also the corresponding numbers of schools were subject to planning mechanisms based on the perception of education as a training of labour force while the interests of pupils and their parents were not of importance in the planning.

After 1990, the most significant changes became evident particularly in the secondary education system. Namely, the educational offering began to respond to the demand for education because the target-figures system was cancelled (according to the system it was set that 60 % of pupils shall be trained in vocational schools, 25 % of pupils at schools providing technical and vocational education ending with final secondary leaving examination, and only 15 % of pupils at secondary general schools /gymnázia/) and it was made possible to establish private schools that promptly responded to the demand for education. In the course of several years fundamental changes gradually took place in the ratios in the individual categories of the upper secondary education, i.e. increase in the percentage of pupils in education ending with final secondary leaving examination to 60 % (40 % in secondary technical schools, almost 20 % in secondary general schools /gymnázia/) and decrease to 40 % in vocational schools. But there were also changes in the proportions of professions (decrease in technical branches, growth in branches concerning social sciences, especially economic and social-service branches).

Thus the number of pupils in educational programmes ending with final secondary leaving examination went up gradually. But compared with the developed countries, the Czech educational system is still atypical considering the low percentage of pupils in secondary general schools /gymnázia/, i.e. the sector providing general education at the upper secondary level.

In the academic years 1989/90 – 2000/2001 the total number of students at the tertiary level was growing and almost doubled. Students of higher education institutions represent the major part (88 %) of students in the tertiary education. Non-university education amounts to 12 % of the total number of the students and it concerns especially the higher vocational schools. The percentage of those admitted to the higher vocational schools in the academic year 1999/2000 was 22 % (17 % in the year 2000/01), to the higher education institutions 78 % (83 % in the year 2000/01). The number of students at higher education institutions has grown by 68 % and it continues growing. In spite of it, the percentage of young people involved in study at tertiary level in the Czech Republic is still regarded, quite rightly, as one of the neuralgic points of the whole educational system. It is particularly caused by the demand still enormously exceeding the supply: approximately one half of applicants interested in higher education are turned down every year.

V.3. Financing of educational system

A marked increase in expenses on education took place in the Czech Republic in mid-nineties, and so the portion of GNP allocated to education reached a proportion that got near to the average value in the OECD countries (in 1995 it amounted to 5.38 % of GNP of the CR). Then a substantial reduction of expenses on education took place due to difficulties in the economic sphere, and the Czech position fell to the lowest proportions of expenses on education among the OECD countries (in 1998, it amounted to 4.4 % in the CR and 5.7 % in the OECD). The situation has not improved very much since, and the percentage of 4.6 % in 2000 keeps the Czech Republic at the very bottom of the rating list of the OECD countries. Similar data have also resulted from the comparison with the EU countries (6 %). But looking for ways of restriction of the growth of public expenditures on education and for possibilities of multi-resource financing are general trends in the developed countries, because many phenomena – such as the growth of participation in education, growing educational activities of people of

all age-groups or greater emphasis laid on acquisition of real skills, namely with new, more expensive methods in the educational process – bring about a pressure on a growth of expenses.

Unfortunately, the Czech Republic was not a country that – as was the case in some other countries – would stake on education in times of economic problems and strengthen its financing. Also now, in time of economic recovery it is difficult to secure higher resources for the under-financed areas of the Czech educational system. In addition to other reasons, the cause may lie in the fact that the opinion «Our educational system is not that bad, is it?» still prevails and that there are sectors where the situation is more urgent and therefore they are given precedence in allocation of public funds.

V.4. Outlooks of school leavers at the labour market

The main characteristic of the current situation at the labour market world-wide is the insecurity and instability of jobs. The situation in the CR is even more complicated due to the incomplete economic restructuring, difficult identification of the most important sectors and technological changes, estimate of foreign investments, etc. In general terms it means that two basic long-term tendencies are beyond dispute: drop in the number of workers in the productive sector and future growth of the number of workers in the quaternary sector. It will necessarily lead to worse outlooks of unqualified workers and those trained in professions for industrial sector, and it will give better chances to those who received education at schools ending with final secondary leaving examination /maturita/ and at schools of higher level. Insecurity and instability of jobs necessarily lead also in the education to a more general orientation of vocational training: pupils are trained for a wider range of occupations, narrow specialisation of professional training is being abandoned, and development of general education and transferable skills (key competences) is being encouraged.

The growth of the necessary qualification level and qualification requirements is indicated by the fact that the percentage of workers with basic education is decreasing and the percentage of people with education at the level ending with final secondary leaving examination and higher education is increasing. Workers

with the lowest level of education often become unemployed. If we compare the prospects of school leavers at the labour market from the point of view of their education level, it is obvious that an indirect proportion between the level of the education attained and the school leavers' prospects repeatedly becomes evident, namely the unemployment rate decreases with the growing education level. In spring 2001, the unemployment rate with people trained in vocational courses at secondary vocational schools amounted to 32.7 %, with leavers of secondary vocational schools ending with final examination it did not exceed 19 %, with leavers of secondary technical schools ending with final examination it amounted to 15.9 %, with higher vocational school leavers to only 8 % and with university graduates it amounted to 5 %.

The basic problem resulting from the situation at labour market in relation to the educational system is the necessity to secure information about future development at the labour market and about the development of the structure of professions (especially from the quantitative point of view), so that it may be obvious in what way the structure of pupils prepared in the Czech educational system should be developed. With the changing situation at the labour market the structure of the professions present at the labour market is changing, as well. The change concerns even the very existence of particular professions - some professions cease to exist and some new professions emerge at the labour market. Contents of the professions remaining at the labour market are changing, as well, and they differ from the contents known in the past.

It is obvious that it is not possible to start only from the current situation at the labour market and on the basis of it to propose the usefulness of professions, but that it is necessary to bear the long-term trends in mind. It seems advisable to minimize the only too concrete connections between the training branches and the particular occupations, and to aim at preparation of adaptable and flexible school leavers at higher levels of education. But it is a matter of the content of education, its conception and the nature of the competences provided. Therefore the following key competences are accentuated at present: communication skills, development of the ability to learn, teamwork, solving of problems, numerical applications and information technologies.

VI. CONCLUSIONS: PROSPECTS OF FURTHER DEVELOPMENT IN CONNECTION WITH THE EU ENTRY

As follows from a number of documents, lifelong learning principle is considered as the starting point for the development of Czech educational system and the development of educational level of people²² in general. Arguments for utilisation of the lifelong learning concept are arguments of two types. On the one hand the social ones – innovation, competitiveness and growth together with social cohesion, support of community involvement and development of social capital, on the other hand, the individual ones – employment, higher incomes and standard of living together with development of personal life, lifestyle and overall contentment.

Both the current and the perspective expectations in relation to the educational policy measures often go far beyond the scope of the educational sphere because it is expected that it will be effective particularly in the field of employment promotion, solving of problems of the family, it is seen as an economic stimulus and as a social mediator aimed at social consensus. As regards the above situation, the Czech Republic does not represent a unique case, the same conclusions we can see also in the European documents on development of education. But, like in other countries, it becomes apparent that it is the connection and mutual influence between the system and quality of education and the economic development of the country that is perceived most intensely in the decision-making spheres, and therefore it is also the main argument for the orientation of the educational policy and for the investments in its implementation (Pot??ek, 1995).

Many people do not find this argumentation good, but as it seems, its results will exercise influence on the Czech educational system also in the near future. Probably the biggest problem of the educational policy is the fact that its effects usually show themselves in the order of decades – and, logically, this also applies to the investments in education. The current formulation of educational policy should

²² A draft bill on lifelong education is being prepared, but it has not been debated by the Government nor by the Parliament yet. There is not, and never was, even a law in the Czech Republic that would specifically cover the adult education.

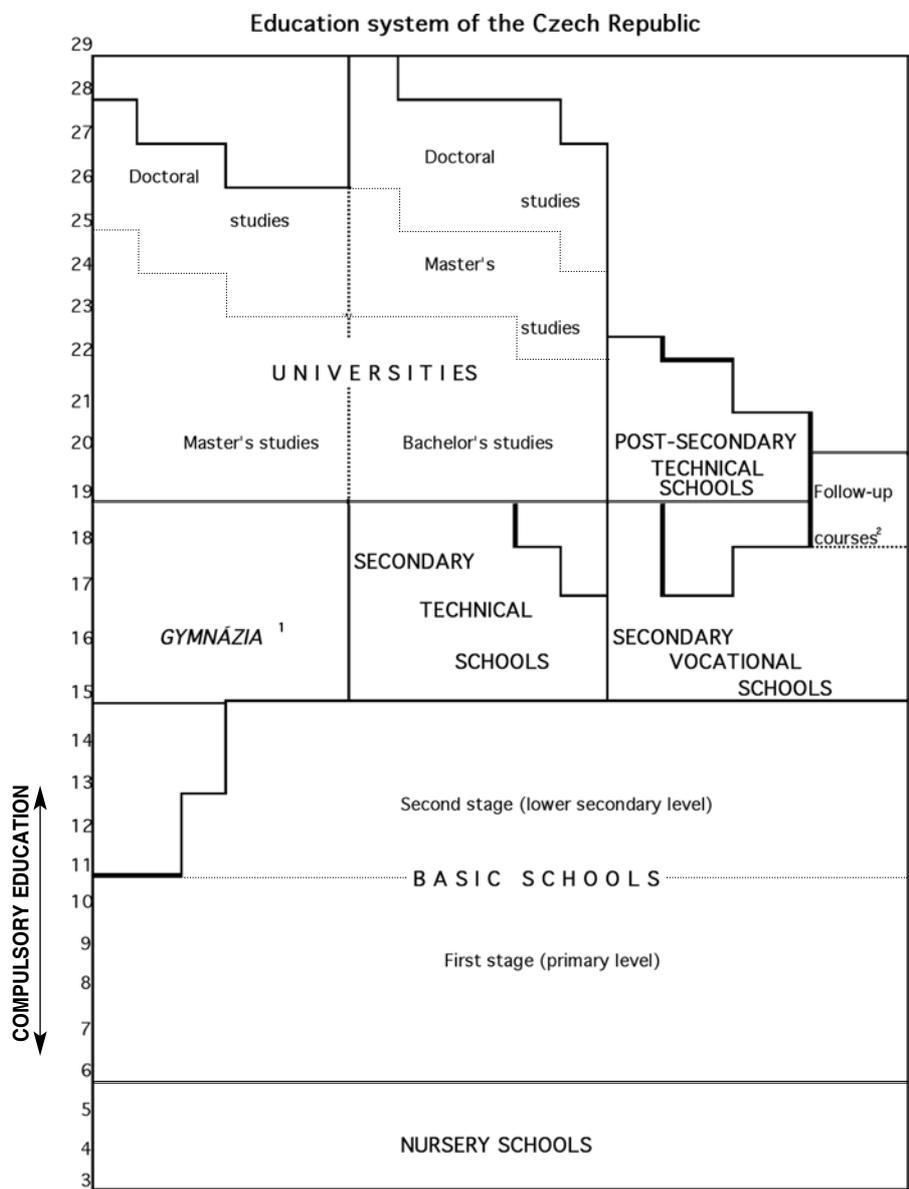
respond to the anticipated future needs and these include, in particular, the social and economic changes oriented to a knowledge-based society (information society).

Therefore the necessity of implementation of the basic principles of educational policy in a democratic and open environment is not so much caused by the entry of a country, in this case the Czech Republic, into EU, but rather by the general requirements of the contemporary world which every country has to cope with successfully. These requirements are requirements of a society at the beginning of a new millennium. A society that can be characterised as a post-industrial, information society, learning society, knowledge-based society, civic society and maybe a post-material society.

It is quite clear that the transformation of the Czech school and the Czech education as a whole does not take place in isolation only in the national sphere; it is a process with wide international connections, at the present time connected most closely with the entry of the Czech Republic into the European Union. One can agree with the internationally widely accepted idea (Kotásek, 2001) that as a result of the current economic, political and cultural globalisation of the contemporary world, the internationalisation of the educational sphere and the universalisation of the comparative approach are taking place more quickly than in the past, both in relation to the research of basic problems of school and education and particularly in relation to the formulation of goals and means of educational policy. It is based on the assumption that, in spite of the continuing divergence of the national educational systems, convergence is gaining ground in the basic lines of adaptation of the educational system to the new social and economic conditions of post-industrial society.

As the comparatistic theory of convergence (Halls, 1990) puts it: there is mutual convergence of problems caused by global economic and social forces that leads to mutual convergence of their optimal solutions – though the ways may vary in individual cases: In my opinion, exactly in this context the Czech Republic is looking for its way in the field of outlining concepts of educational policy and development of educational system.

ANEXO



1/ Compulsory education lasts nine years. The majority of pupils accomplish it at basic schools. Pupils who study at a multi-year *gymnázium* accomplish it in relevant years *gymnázium*

2/ A follow-up study is designed for graduates of three-year courses of secondary vocational schools. It gives them the opportunity to improve their qualification and *maturská zkouška* which opens the access to university studies.

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RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar una descripción de los cambios que han tenido lugar en la República Checa desde el inicio de la década de los años 90 hasta el presente. Ha sido un período trascendental en la historia de la República Checa. La caída del muro de Berlín en 1989, y todo lo que supuso para los países del Este de Europa que orbitaban bajo la influencia soviética, trajo entre otras consecuencias la división de Checoslovaquia en la República Checa y Eslovaquia. Desde entonces, la República Checa ha situado en su agenda de política exterior el ingreso en la Unión Europea (UE), hecho que se ha producido en mayo de 2004. Su deseo de integración en la UE ha desembocado en profundas transformaciones sociales políticas y económicas. Pero el horizonte europeo ha obligado también a cambios de rumbo en el campo de la educación.

La primera parte del artículo se inicia con una breve semblanza sobre la situación educativa en esos momentos iniciales del cambio; situación que la autora define como la típica situación de un modelo socialista de educación. Continúa después esa parte con una especificación tanto de los aspectos educativos más criticados en aquel momento como de las áreas consideradas susceptibles de una mejora y, por tanto, sobre las que se hacían unas mayores demandas de cambio.

A continuación el artículo se detiene en la evolución de los cambios y de las reformas educativas en los años siguientes. Se lleva a cabo, además una interesante periodización de dichas reformas sobre la base de una propuesta de modelo que se ha creado como un enfoque posible para los países ex-socialistas en transición. El modelo supone una categorización que habla de «reformas correctivas», «reformas modernizadoras», «reformas estructurales» y «reformas de sistema». Para cada uno de esos componentes del modelo la autora respasa las reformas de la República Checa de los últimos 15 años desde una evaluación crítica de dichas reformas.

El análisis de la autora tiene en cuenta también una serie de documentos (entre los que destaca el «Libro Blanco») que resultan esenciales para comprender el pasado reciente y la situación actual de las reformas educativas checas y del sistema educativo al que han dado lugar. La importancia de esos documentos radica, por una parte, en que han generado una serie de visiones básicas sobre la

educación y unas orientaciones fundamentales al respecto y, por otra, en que han sido capaces de diseñar una estrategia para las reformas futuras.

Tras la presentación de esos documentos se describe el sistema educativo checo tal y como se configura actualmente tras haber implantado las reformas de los últimos años. Dicha configuración se aborda a partir de las oportunidades educativas y la participación en la educación, la estructura del sistema y la red escolar, la financiación del sistema educativo checo y, por último, las perspectivas de los egresados escolares ante el mercado de trabajo.

El epígrafe final del artículo aborda las perspectivas del desarrollo futuro del sistema educativo checo ante la reciente entrada en la Unión Europea. Las conclusiones que cierran el artículo enfatizan la importancia de la confluencia recíproca de problemas derivados de la economía global y de las fuerzas sociales propias, que obliga a buscar convergencias sobre soluciones óptimas no sólo en el seno de la Unión Europea.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Política Educativa. Sistema educativo en la república Checa. Unión Europea y Educación.

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is to describe the changes in the educational system in the Czech Republic that have taken place from the beginning of the 1990's up to the present. The first part includes a brief characterisation of the initial situation typical of the socialist model of education and a specification of those areas that were viewed sceptically or critically after the „velvet revolution» in 1989, and that have been identified as areas where a change is desirable.

Next part of the paper describes the course of changes and reforms of education in subsequent years. Periodisation of reforms is carried out on the basis of a general model that has been created, as one of possible approaches, for post-socialist countries in transformation. Each part of the model, i.e. the corrective reforms, modernization reforms, structural reforms and system reforms, contains an outline of the respective individual changes that took place in the Czech

Republic in the course of the last, almost fifteen years, and the changes are critically evaluated.

There are some documents (e.g. the Czech «White Paper») that are of essential importance to the recent and current situation in the Czech educational system because they create basic visions and orientation but also a strategy of future changes. The documents are treated in the next section of the present text. It is followed by a brief analysis of the current situation of the Czech educational system, namely as regards the educational opportunities and participation in education, structure and network of schools, financing of the Czech educational system, and finally the school leavers' prospects at the labour market.

The last part of the paper deals with the outlooks of further development of the Czech educational system in connection with the entry into the European Union, and a conclusion is drawn that it involves mutual convergence of problems caused by global economic and social forces that also leads to mutual convergence of their optimal solutions, namely not only within the EU member states.

KEY WORDS: Educational policy. Educational system in Czech republic. Education in European Union.