

Data di pubblicazione: 24 giugno 2022

ERIONA ÇELA¹

*A summary of the national plan for european integration related
with the developments of education system in Albania during
2020-2021*

1. Introduction

As a candidate country of European Union, Albania has faced a lot of challenges in adapting the European standards in the field of education. The Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania and its institutions are continuously undertaking fundamental reforms in order to improve the quality of education in the country.

The Albanian's obligation to undertake political, legal, institutional and financial initiatives derive from the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) between Albania and European Union. The pillars of cooperation between the two countries relate with different fields like scientific research and technological development as well as to increase mutual understanding and mutual respect between individuals, community and people.

¹ Eriona Cela is PhD, teaches English, she is employee of Ministry of Education and Sports of Albania, eriona.cela@gmail.com

2. The points of the reform.

During this period, Albania has made little development in fulfilling the reforms due to COVID 19 situation which affected every field of the society. Despite the difficulties and small steps taken in this aspect, Albania is making progress in improving the online application of the recognition of diploma process, the curricular framework for preschool education and development and learning standards for children aged 3 to 6, and the monitoring process of the framework for the assessment in preschool education.

Regarding the automatic recognition of diplomas, Albania is committed to integrating and implementing the recognition of academic qualifications in the Western Balkans and improving the quality of recognition of academic qualifications in the region, in line with the acquis, as part of its regional integration agenda, namely the plan of the Common Regional Market (CRM) 2021-2024, adopted by the six Western Balkan countries in November 2020.

Specifically, in this context, the countries of the region (Western Balkans), with the support of the Secretariats of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), have held technical level meetings by representatives of each country to draft the Western Balkans Agreement for the recognition of qualifications in higher education". During 2021, at the technical level, 8 meetings of the Lead Negotiators were organized at the level of the Working Group for the Agreement for the Recognition of Academic Qualifications.

The Working Group mandate to negotiate the Agreement on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications has finished but there are still some issues left, outside the mandate of the Working Group, to harmonize into a higher political one.

Regarding the Bologna Process, as part of the EHEA and the Bologna Process since 2003, Albania is very committed to fulfilling all the commitments of the Bologna Process. The focus of the request for Albania's support in the BFUG in the coming years should be the following indicators: implementation of learning outcomes in curricula; distribution of ECTS according to learning outcomes; fostering and encouraging student assessment based on learning outcomes; adapting measures to support students to ensure representation of underrepresented groups; graduate survey; calculation and monitoring of those who do not complete higher studies.

Based on the "European Union Progress Report for Albania" of 2020, Albania was given recommendations related with the increase of the investments in research according to the ERA's commitments and priorities, progress in developing the Smart Specialization Strategy and ensuring higher participation in Horizon 2020. In this regard, during 2019-2020, progress has been made especially on drafting the Smart Specialization Strategy which started in 2017 under the leadership of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, in cooperation with the European Commission. Also with the support of the project "EU for Innovation" in 2020 the qualitative analysis, has been completed.

3. An innovative approach.

As part of the European Commission's Cohesion Policy, the Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) is an innovative approach that aims to boost economic growth and jobs, enabling each region of a country to identify and develop its own competitive advantages. Through partnership and bottom-up approach, the smart specialization strategy brings together local authorities, academia, business and civil society to collaborate on the implementation of long-term growth strategies.

Also, during the same period, the monitoring and evaluation process of the implementation of the national strategy for scientific research, technology and innovation 2017-2022, has continued. The main recommendations included conducting a review of resources planned in the draft medium-term budget plan 2021-2023 to increase funding on ongoing research, up to 2% of GDP by 2023.

The Law "On the Academy of Sciences in the Republic of Albania" was approved in September 2019. It regulates the functioning of the Academy of Sciences, the Academy of Youth and aims to increase the integrity of the scientific research system.

In the field of research and in terms of EU framework programs, is also worth mentioning the fact that Albania participates in Horizon 2020 as an associated country. Its participation in Horizon 2020 has significantly improved and exerts a good development ahead for 2020. Albania's participation in Horizon 2020 has improved and achieved satisfactory

results, with participation in 53 Horizon 2020 actions, benefiting 5.82 million euros of direct EU contribution. The success rate of proposals with Albanian participation is 8.7% (from 7.8% since last year) compared to the 12.1% success rate of countries in Horizon 2020.

4. The forms of learning.

Regarding this objective, beyond the highest participation in Horizon 2020, in the future it is necessary to prioritize participation in the Horizon Europe program. During 2021 the negotiations for the new Horizon Europe Agreement were completed, and the relevant agreement was reached.

The education system in pre-education institutions faced difficulties as well due to the challenges with which Albania was faced because of COVID-19. In pre-education system started to be used three forms of distance learning, based on the best practices of the European countries, like:

- Lessons filmed and broadcast on Albanian Radio Television (ART). These lessons were attended by 78.9% of students, 79.9% of parents and 96.4% of teachers. Students who could not watch the broadcasts, were able to watch the videos on the MES YouTube channel, or
- Communication between students and teachers through social networks or through various platforms that enabled the creation

A summary of the national plan for european integration related with the developments of education system in Albania during 2020-2021

of virtual classrooms (Google classroom, Google hangout, Edmodo, zoom, etc.). A very significant number of students, parents and teachers engaged in online lessons: 96.8% of students, 95.3% of parents and 98.7% of teachers,

- The online platform akademi.al, provides students and teachers with free use of the online teaching platform, which is based on the pre-university education curriculum.

Even during this school year 2021-2022, schools will be supported through the provision of lessons filmed and broadcasted on the TV channel "RTSH Shkolla" and the official YouTube channel of MES, providing the Akademi.al platform for online learning, training for the development of teachers' digital skills, etc.

During the situation created by the COVID 19 pandemic, in order to help teachers, students and parents, there were compiled and made available to the public, a series of guidelines and documents on home teaching; for the realization of the subject program and the evaluation of students during home teaching; on the Supplementary Teaching Program in Albanian language and mathematics for grades 1-5 with students who presented difficulties during the lesson conducted at home (online); for students who did not have online access during the closure of schools in the period March-May 2020; provided possible scenarios for the development of the teaching - learning process in the conditions created by the COVID pandemic 19.

In the framework of professional development of teachers, the training of teachers for their professional development has continued, including the needs of teachers in the situation created by the COVID pandemic 19. Also, during this period, the functioning of professional networks of teachers according to profiles has continued, relevant or according to the roles of teachers in the school. Priority for the school year 2020-2021 has been the training of teachers of natural sciences (Biology, Chemistry, and Physics). The training consists of preparing students with questions of the PISA international exam format. Trainings continue during the school year 2021-2022.

At the end of the school year 2020 -2021, there were conducted tests to students in all grades of pre-university education. The results of these tests were valuable to guide teachers in identifying the needs of students to improve their knowledge as a result of the situation created by COVID -19. In this context, the Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ASCAP) has drafted orientation topics for all classes according to the respective subjects, which were addressed during the period 1-27 September 2021.

5. Supplementary education.

In the period 1-24 September 2021, supplementary education was held in all pre-university education institutions, in compliance with the AQAPE guideline "On improving student achievement as a result of the situation

created by the COVID-19 pandemic", in order to strengthen and improve student outcomes related to deficiencies identified during the previous school year. The schools also implemented a comprehensive program of entertaining and sportive activities for students.

During the supplementary lesson, maximum support was given to students with disabilities (CA). In the school year 2020-2021, in the pre-university education system attended education in public and private educational institutions starting from preschool education, 4672 students with disabilities (CA). The ratio of students with disabilities attending inclusive education to special education has improved from 75% in 2014 to about 90% in 2020-2021. In the same school year, about 1300 assistant teachers were employed in the public and private pre-university education system. The ratio of children with disabilities / assistant teachers this year is about 3.7.

In addition to the above, the return of special schools to resource centers is defined as one of the priorities of the National Strategy for Education 2021-2026. A Working Group has been set up at the MES, which has started working on the evaluation and definition of the resource center model for students with disabilities. Also continues the work on the measures envisaged in the 2019-2023 action plan for deaf children by approving the new curriculum and starting the drafting of a new curriculum for basic education; intensified the preparation of modules for the training of teachers of the Institute of Deaf Students and assistant teachers in the Albanian sign language for students who do not listen in mainstream schools.

One of the main achievements of MES this year is the approval in October 2021 of the National Education Strategy for the period 2021 - 2026 with the Decision of the Council of Ministers no. 621, dated 22.10.2021. The adoption of the Strategy marks a fulfilled commitment to the EC recommendation in the 2021 Report on Albania: 'to adopt the new strategy for education, covering all levels and providing adequate financial protection as well as targeted public spending for people affected by the COVID-19 earthquake and pandemic. '

Pursuant to the new education strategy and in the context of plurilingualism, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MES) introduced English as a compulsory subject in the first grade. In this context, MES revised the teaching plan and the Agency for Quality Assurance of Pre-University Education (AQAPE) drafted English language curricula for the first and second grade. Once they have identified and analyzed the needs of first grade English teachers for their professional development, MES and AQAPE will hold workshops focusing on teaching methodology, pedagogy for very young students, and assessment during the first half of the year. 2022. Also, MES and AQAPE will develop during the first half of 2022 a training manual in support of English teachers: "English teaching methodology for young students". Beyond this initiative, MES is currently working on the implementation of the 'Arts and Crafts' program in schools.

Following the provision of free textbooks in the school year 2021-2022, this reform was extended from grade I to grade IX, directly affecting the reduction of the financial burden of Albanian families. For the school

A summary of the national plan for european integration related with the developments of education system in Albania during 2020-2021

year 2021-2022 there are about 280,000 students from grades 1-9, including 16 special categories from grades 1-12, who have received free textbooks.

Another innovation in the field of pre-university education is the establishment of the National Council of Parents (NCP), as an independent advisory body, which represents the interests of parents at the national level. The NCP is the main mechanism of communication and counseling between MES and parents.

Another achievement in the framework of cooperation with the diaspora is the adoption of a joint text with Kosovo that will be used to teach the Albanian language to children in the diaspora for level I from the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo: "Albanian language and culture" the level.

Vocational education and training are also worth mentioning regarding the development of the education system during this period. Currently, the National Agency for Employment and Skills as well as the National Agency for Education, Vocational Training and Qualifications (NAEVTQ), are being supplemented with human resources and work is being done to increase their capacities.

About 4,500 students are enrolled in the first years of vocational schools, for the academic year 2021-2022. In total, the number of students attending vocational schools reaches about 17,000 students. The number of girls attending vocational schools is about 3,000 students.

Also in the school year 2020-20201, 616 students from the Roma and Egyptian communities attended vocational schools. Also the number of students with disabilities was 153 students.

The trend of registrations continues to be constant in recent years. We clarify that referring to statistical data according to INSTAT, the number of students who finish 9th grade from year to year decreases, this according to demographic problems, free movement of people, etc.

Initial training and continuous professional development of teachers / instructors continued during 2020 even though this was difficult after the COVID-19 situation.

An additional step towards quality assurance is the self-assessment process which is already a process that takes place every year in all VET providers.

In accordance with the needs of the labor market for qualified employees, in 2020 were drafted 18 descriptions / standards of professional qualification 2 new skeleton curricula were drafted and 19 skeletal curricula were revised in accordance with levels 2-4 of the ACC.

In April 2021, the National Catalog of Professional Qualifications was approved with 122 qualifications for levels 2-5 of the ACC.

The process of setting up the first sectorial committee is one of the new developments in VET in Albania. Based on the point 1, of DCM no. 426, dated 26.06.2019, "On the manner of organization, functioning, criteria for selection of members of sectorial committees and the manner of their remuneration", as well as the joint order of the Ministry of Finance and Economy and the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth,

A summary of the national plan for european integration related with the developments of education system in Albania during 2020-2021

no. 64 dated 30.03.2021 is defined the IT sector for the establishment of the first sectorial Committee. We are working to institutionalize this Committee as well as to establish a second sectorial committee in the field of tourism.

Vocational training centers are offered through public vocational training centers according to the requirements of the labor market. For the period January-August 2021, 6,246 persons were registered, of which 2,747 were female, while about 2,614 persons were certified, of which 1,157 were female.

6. CONCLUSION

According to the report for Albania of 2020 as well as that of 2021, Albania is considered as moderately prepared in the field of education. Both reports recommend the adoption of a new education strategy, 'covering all levels and providing adequate financial protection as well as targeted public spending on people affected by the COVID-19 earthquake and pandemic.' This recommendation has been met regarding the adoption of the National Strategy for Education which covers all levels. In this regard, Albania still has to undertake reforms in the field of education in order to improve its performance and adopt the standards of European Union.

Some of the priorities identified even in the Progress Report 2021 for both chapters, Chapter 25 “Science and Research” and Chapter 26 “Education and Culture”, are as follows:

- Complete the legislation implementing the law on VET and implement the Optimization Plan until 2022 to develop services and competencies in accordance with the needs of the private sector at the local level
- Provide adequate financial protection as well as targeted public spending for persons affected by the COVID-19 earthquake and pandemic;
- Digitalization in education and development and strengthening of digital competencies;
- Learning English from the first grade of basic education;
- Education for crafts and arts in pre-university education;
- Addition of profiled sports classes;
- Improving the service for students with different abilities, turning special schools into resource centers;
- Internationalization of Higher Education for the opening of branches of foreign universities as well as for joint and dual study programs with them, as well as supporting the opening of programs in English;
- Infrastructure investments both on campuses and investments in laboratories for scientific research and ensuring the academic and scientific integrity of universities in order to improve the quality of the university product;

A summary of the national plan for european integration related with the developments of education system in Albania during 2020-2021

- Monitoring process of the National Strategy for Scientific Research, Technology and Innovation 2017-2022 and drafting the Monitoring Report within 2021.
- Drafting the strategy "For scientific research 2022-2026", within 2023.
- Reforming and improving the legal and institutional system of scientific research. In this context, in the Plan for European Integration we have planned that within 2023, the "Law on Science" will be approved.
- Ensuring participation in Horizon Europe
- Building Capacity of NCPs, in order to increase the level of participation and success in EU Framework Programs, especially that of Horizon Europe.
- Drafting the national methodology for investing funds for research and science.
- Increasing funding at the national level for science and development, which is also foreseen in the medium-term budget of MES.
- Promoting the triple government-academy-business cooperation (Triple Helix), as well as facing and solving the socio-economic challenges of the country through a high quality scientific research.
- Deepening international cooperation in the field of science and research, both regionally and internationally.

- The inclusion and implementation of the principles of the European Research Area (ERA)
- Approving the Smart Specialization Strategy within 2023.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- National Plan for European Integration, 2022 – 2024, Chapter 25 “Science ad Scientific Research”.
- National Plan for European Integration, 2022 – 2024, Chapter 26 “Education and Culture”.
- National Plan for European Integration, 2021 – 2023, Chapter 25 “Science ad Scientific Research”.
- National Plan for European Integration, 2021 – 2023, Chapter 26 “Education and Culture”.
- European Union Progress Report 2020 on Chapter 25 “Science ad Scientific Research”.
- European Union Progress Report 2020 on Chapter 26 “Education and Culture”.
- European Union Progress Report 2021 on Chapter 25 “Science ad Scientific Research”.
- European Union Progress Report 2021 on Chapter 26 “Education and Culture”.
- Albanian compliance table “On some additions and changes to decision no. 109, dated 15.2.2017, of the Council of Ministers "On the organization and functioning of the Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education and the Accreditation Board and on setting tariffs for quality assurance processes in Higher Education", as amended.

A summary of the national plan for European integration related with the developments of education system in Albania during 2020-2021

- 12th Meeting of the Subcommittee Innovation, Information Society, Social Policies January 28, 2021.