



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Ministerial Conference

Education as an Investment into the Future

Tashkent, 5 April 2004

Chairman's Conclusions

The OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Minister Passy, underlined the key role of education in building security, ensuring political stability and reducing poverty. By prioritizing education, the Bulgarian Chairmanship intended to mobilize national and international political attention to the issue, as well as to activate additional resources, through developing further synergies with relevant partners and raising donor interest. The Chairman-in-Office stressed the importance of involving civil society and non-governmental organizations in the education reform process. He offered to follow up this initiative at a future event in Bulgaria, on the invitation of the Bulgarian Minister of Education.

Mr. Abdujabar Abduvakhitov, State Advisor to the President, delivered a welcoming message on behalf of the President of Uzbekistan, expressing his strong support for the Conference.

Recognizing that modern education systems with high standards could help foster security and stability in the region, Central Asian Ministers described the achievements in their respective countries and identified areas for further international cooperation. Training human capacity would be instrumental in overcoming conflicts and ensuring the stable democratic and economic development of society. National objectives put forward by the Ministers included decentralization of education, improved access to education (specifically in rural areas), and better quality of the curricula in line with international standards. This implied improving the training of teachers, developing new textbooks and improving infrastructures. Understanding that education starts at the age of birth, training of the under-aged was highlighted as a priority. During the discussions, governments raised the problem of limited financial resources as one of the main challenges, which required to make difficult choices when prioritizing investments. The need to increase regional cooperation was highlighted by some, including a proposal to set up a regional organization under the auspices of the OSCE to address education issues with the aim of addressing new challenges such as fundamentalism, terrorism and trafficking.

Representatives of international organizations shared their experiences in providing technical assistance and implementing education programmes in Central Asia. Successful practical initiatives included school and classroom management training, improving the hygienic environment and providing clean drinking water to rural schools. International Organizations and academic institutions identified the gap between the needs of the economy and the skills taught at school as a key challenge, leading to unemployment and labour migration. Another challenge was that education was often considered less important to income-generating activities, thus leading to high drop-out rates.

Among practical ideas for the development of the education sector, the following suggestions were mentioned for further consideration:

- The internationalization of education systems
- The need to address global challenges, such as peace, human rights, environment
- Achieving quality education for all – boys and girls, and national minorities
- Introducing interactive, participatory learning processes, with skilled teachers
- Providing higher salaries to teachers, in view of eliminating illegal practices such as "examination fees"
- Strengthening vocational training - taking into consideration Uzbekistan's experience with its national training programme - as well as adult education, with a view to raising the skills of the workforce in line with the new demands of the economy
- Increasing the relevance and flexibility of education to local conditions and needs
- Training staff at the ministries of education and the regional and district education units
- Awareness-raising activities, focused on gender issues and human trafficking
- Improvement of governance and financial management
- An education financing framework, based on medium-term targets and on associated costs of inputs
- Developing ideas for regional cooperation, such as the OSCE Academy and the Central Asia Network of the Asian Development Bank
- Developing youth initiatives, including in the area of sports

These conclusions can serve as generic guidelines towards the further development of the education sector in Central Asian States and increased cooperation among Central Asian States as well as among international organizations and institutions active in the region. They may serve as terms of reference for follow-on activities in the context of a process of increased dialogue and cooperation in the region, including as the result of initiatives such as the meeting proposed by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.