



Republic of Bulgaria
ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

OPINION
OF
THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL
ON
“BULGARIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM – PROBLEMS AND NECESSARY
REFORMS”
(developed on its own initiative)

The Economic and Social Council included in the Plan for its activity for 2009 the development of an opinion on its own initiative on the topic:

“Bulgarian Educational System – Problems and Necessary Reforms”.

The Opinion was assigned for development to the Standing Committee on Social Policy.

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At a meeting held on 20.01.2009 the Commission on Social Policy approved a draft opinion.

At its Plenary Session, held on 30.01.2009 the Economic and Social Council adopted the following opinion.

ACRONYMS

EA	-Employment Agency
SER	-State Educational Requirements
EQF	- European Qualification Framework
ESCC	-European Economic and Social Committee
EU	-European Union
LES	-Law on Employment Stimulation
LPE	-Law on Public Education
LVET	-Law on Vocational Education and Training
LEDGEMC	-Law on Educational Degrees, General Education Minimum and Curriculum
ICT	-Information and Communication Technology
ESC	-Economic and Social Council
CLC	-Collective Labour Contract
MES	-Ministry of Education and Science
CM	-Council of Ministers
NEAA	-National Evaluation and Accreditation Agency
NAVET	-National Agency on Vocational Education and Training
NPEA	-National Plan on Employment Activity
NPSPET	-National Programme for Schooling and Pre-school Education and Training
NQF	-National Qualification Framework
VET	-Vocational Education and Training
FVE	-Further Vocational Education
REI	-Regional Educational Inspectorate
LPVET	-List of Professions for Vocational Education and Training
LLL	-Life Long Learning
SPET	-Schooling and Preschool Education and Training
VEC	-Vocational Education Centre

I. Introduction

The problems related to improving the quality and efficiency of education in Bulgaria, restructuring and modernizing the educational system in such a way as to meet the European standards and criteria, have been especially topical for Bulgaria over the past years.

The start of the reforms in the educational system coincides with the social, economic and value crisis, which is accompanying the social reorientation. The crisis impeded the entire development of Bulgaria, set a decline in the quality of education and a decreasing financial and social support for it.

The changes in education, which were introduced during certain periods, have not always been successful, some of them came late, others failed. The explanation, most probably, lies in the fact that education is a relatively conservative system resisting all rash, insufficiently considered and imposed from outside matrices. It is also a fact that there is no uniform European or American educational model which can successfully be applied in Bulgaria too. That is why there is a continuous, insufficiently coordinated and quite often painful process of changing from centralized to modern democratic educational system which can guarantee high quality of Bulgarian education.

Provoked by the teachers' strikes, by the discontent among citizens, parents and students, a number of activities undertaken by the educational system have attracted serious social attention and have become the topic of a broad social debate over the past years. In their essence these problems belong both to the existing social and economic conditions and difficulties in Bulgaria and to the necessity to find new decisions in the field of demographic, economic and social development of our country.

The reforms in education and the educational system in Bulgaria cannot be isolated from the country's prospects for development within the European Union, for its successful realization as a full member of the Community, of the revised Lisbon Strategy. It is the educational system that has been assigned the extremely important task to prepare the society for 'the knowledge economy' – a tool and aim of the Lisbon Strategy. Education and science are an indisputable priority in the Lisbon Strategy and the course undertaken by united Europe in 21st century.

Taking into consideration the extreme importance of the problems in education, the Economic and Social Council expressing the interests of the organized society has always focused its attention and activities on these. As

early as November 2005 ESC adopted a special opinion on “The problems of vocational education and training in Bulgaria” and made a number of concrete proposals for reforming the system. The proposals concerning this matter are included in a number of other adopted by the ESC opinions, such as “The family, good parenting and equal opportunities for the two sexes” (May 2007), “The national strategy on migration and integration” (July 2008).

The national priorities for more active continuation of the policies on improving the quality and efficiency of education and educational system, for continuing the undertaken changes, for achieving social consensus on reforms in the educational system resulted in ESC’s decision to develop, adopt and provide to all interested state and civil structures an opinion on the problems and the necessary reforms in the educational system of the Republic of Bulgaria.

ESC developed on its own initiative the current opinion taking into consideration the discrepancy between the state of the educational system in Bulgaria and the new realities resulting from the revised Lisbon Strategy (2008 – 2010) on economic growth and employment. The General Report of the European Economic and Social Committee to the European Union on the revised Lisbon Strategy (2008 – 2010) and on the role of the organized civil society is under discussion too.

Some of the reasons determining the topical character of such an opinion now are the worsened demographic situation in the country, the requirements towards the human resources for achieving higher competitiveness, speeding up and stabilizing the Bulgarian economy and social development as well as the necessity for connecting the educational system with science and research and development, and the business and the social practice.

ESC takes into consideration the fact that the world financial and economic crisis seriously affects the economic and social development of Europe and Bulgaria. Urgent counter measures are required in the field of education, which is the foundation of modern ‘knowledge economy’.

The Economic and Social Council defends the position that the reform in Bulgarian education and science has no alternative. It is the strategic lever for quick and stable socio-economic progress in Bulgaria.

ESC underlines the necessity and readiness of the organized civil society to act as an active partner of the state in the process of accelerated development and high efficiency of Bulgarian education and science.

ESC's opinion aims at attracting to these problems the attention of the society, the bodies of legislative, executive and local authority, Bulgarian schools, scientific institutes and units, civil organizations, parents, university students, lecturers and research scholars. The aim is to propose adequate measures for solving these problems, for accelerated modernization of the system of Bulgarian education and science.

II. **System of schooling and preschool education and training**

1. **Basic characteristics of the system of school education and preschool education and training**

- 1.1. A clear social order has been addressed to the system of school education – to prepare young people for life in a constantly complicating system of social relations, restored international communication, market competition, to create cultural, educational models for the most important sphere of spiritual activity, for socializing and integrating in the society, for the adequate development of man. Reform intentions have been publicly announced – democratizing secondary education on the principles of management decentralization, autonomy and self-government of educational entities.

In 2006 the National Assembly outlined the national goals, formulated in the National programme for development of school education and preschool education and training, which defines the main principles and measures for development of the system over the next 10 years.

It was in 2007 for the first time, and then in 2008 that as a result of achieved economies MES financed special programmes in the field of school education without increasing the educational budget as a percentage of GDP. The implementation of the special programmes is carried out on a project principle – schools apply with special projects and receive finance for the development of activities which would be hard to implement with funds they get as an allowance subsidy.

The Economic and Social Council believes that despite the achieved results, the social, political and economic transformations

in the Bulgarian society over the last 18 years and the expressed will in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (1991) to build a modern democratic state with a rule of law principle, civil society and market-oriented economy **did not find an adequate expression in the system of school education.**

1.2. Until now a number of measures to improve the system of school education in the following respects were undertaken:

1.2.1. Improving the mechanisms of financing school education as follows:

- ✓ Introducing a unified standard – from the start of 2007 all state and municipal schools, kindergartens and administrative units have been financed on grounds of a unified expenditure standard.
- ✓ Introducing the system of delegated budgets – in 2007 the system was voluntarily applied, but as of 1.01.2008 the system was introduced in all 3062 state and municipal schools.
- ✓ Securing a transitional residual – in accordance with the agreements signed with the social partners during the teachers strike it was agreed that for 2008 the state and municipal schools can keep and include in their budgets for the next year the excess of funds they have at the end of the preceding budget year.
- ✓ Programme financing of the system of school education – in 2007 171 million levs were put aside for financing programmes in the field of school education, and in 2008 the funds for national programmes for development of school education were increased to 221 million levs.

1.2.2. In the period 2005 – 2007 the first components of the national system for external assessment were introduced: national external assessment of students from IV and V grade; state final exams; tests for accepting student after VII grade; assessment of foreign language skills after VIII grade.

- 1.2.3. Two of the main measures against dropping out of students have been applied over the past years: providing free access to textbooks and providing free transport.
- 1.2.4. Between 2006 – 2008 efforts were made to introduce broadly the information and communication technologies in schools.
- 1.2.5. A number of measures were undertaken to improve the respect to and social status of teachers through:
 - ✓ Developing and introducing a model of differentiated payment;
 - ✓ Developing a model for career development of teachers;
 - ✓ Decentralized fixing of payment;
 - ✓ Conducting qualification activities.
- 1.2.6. In relation to improving the management competence of headmasters the National institute for education of headmasters started working in 2006 and the implementation of a programme for qualification of headmasters was initiated.
- 1.2.7. In order to optimize the school network and build central and protected schools the school network was restructured, a mechanism for financing central schools was introduced and a concept for protected schools was adopted.
- 1.2.8. Special attention has been paid to the possibilities for integration of children with special educational needs and children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian.

The Economic and Social Council believes that education has not been considered as a real government priority, it has not been significantly financially guaranteed, the legal and other changes have been delayed or they are fragmented, not interrelated ; social mechanisms for control of education have not been created.

2. The main problems in the field of school education and preschool education and training have several aspects:

2.1. The system of administration, management and organization of the activity of schools and kindergartens, which is highly centralized and hierarchical does not provide a satisfactory solution to the problem of autonomy and the rights they are given to take decisions on their own are still insufficient. The existing problems can be laid out as:

- ✓ Lack of sufficient legal and actual coordination between the local and central authority, which affects the problem solving both locally and nationally.
- ✓ The optimization of the school network has become a topic in most reports. However, in practice changes are carried out without having a thoroughly built system, without the corresponding plans at national and municipal level, mainly for demographic reasons.
- ✓ The career orientation system and the one of extracurricula activities do not function. The incidental activities in this respect over the past years have been sporadic and unrelated thus being unable to have a positive effect on the grater part of students. In fact there is no barrier between the school and the street.
- ✓ The state educational requirements for content, on the bases of which curricula for high schools are worked out and textbooks approved, have been applied for 8 years now without studying and analyzing the effect of their application and whether and in which school subjects the set goals and tasks are achieved.
- ✓ A centralized, extremely hierarchical system of compulsory subjects for all educational degrees exists.
- ✓ The controlling function of the educational administration is directed at the entry and the process of meeting the formal central requirement and regulations. There is no efficient control at the exit of school education, though there has been significant progress over the past few years. There are no reliable indicators referring to the objective character of the results of the school activities. As a whole no regular assessment of the quality and efficiency, the achievements,

knowledge and skills acquired by students is carried out when they leave school. Management of the quality of the educational process is carried out mainly through instructive (permission-prohibition) and prescribing in detail the content and activities approaches.

- ✓ As a result of excessive centralization and prescriptive controlling activity there is no flexibility and adaptability to the great variety of conditions, possibility to determine the school content at local and school level, teachers are not given opportunities to be creative. This approach leads to inactivity of teachers, desire to preserve the status quo, fear of taking personal responsibility and risk, suppressing the innovative process from bottom to top and inability of education and schools to adapt to the changing social reality and the specific character of local conditions.
- ✓ Not enough information has been provided to the public related to the analysis of processes in the educational system, although there has been an exceptionally rich data base on the education of all children and schoolchildren, as well as information about the educational process at school for some years now. It is true that MES's information system provides certain level of access to individual information. However, there are no analyses and forecasts about the development and improvement of the system.
- ✓ There is no system of evaluation of the efficiency of the educational system. Studies, representative for the whole country, have not been carried out for decades. The lack of such information leads to subjectivism in the management of education, to incorrect and inefficient decisions.
- ✓ The educational process is dominated by lessons and lecturing methods, 'announcing' the information. Hierarchical communication from teacher to student, and quite rarely vice versa. There is no group work. The purposeful non-hierarchical communication is not stimulated. Students are expected to listen, remember and reproduce the information they have been told, i.e. they are assigned a passive and reproductive role.

- ✓ The education of students in the studied subjects does not develop sufficiently the ability for independent thinking and the ability to solve practical problems.
- ✓ Issues related to foreign language learning have not been successfully sorted out.
- ✓ The quality of textbooks still meets with strong disapproval from parents, society and many teachers. The main criticism is both in terms of the language (academic, inaccurate notions), and inconsistency and 'lack of organization' of the content.

2.2. The indisputable advantages of the set of undertaken measures in the field of financing are accompanied by problems:

- ✓ The financing model is still 'cost-covering', not 'goal-oriented' (despite the special national programmes over the last two years which have been financed with money from achieved economies). Preliminary accepted items of expenditure are financed instead of trying to achieve a final result (i.e. students should have the necessary knowledge 'at the exit', when finishing school) using minimum funds.
- ✓ The uniform expenditure standards, used to finance all state and municipal schools, kindergartens and administrative units, have been evaluated not in terms of demand, but rather in accordance with the state budget. The methodology of calculating the funding per student is not publicly known. For 2007 it was 988 levs, for 2008 – 1157 levs, and in 2009 it is expected to reach 1400 levs if the funds for education approved in the budget allow that.
- ✓ Prevails the opinion that financing education is structured and in compliance with the expenditure pillars, i.e. buildings, teachers, allowance, and then come results, i.e. acquiring knowledge by students.
- ✓ The low levels of general costs on education often lead to prioritizing the solution of problems with equipment. These are for example, heating, lighting, sewage in schools and so on, the lack of which might endanger students' and teachers'

health, This, however, undermines the demand for and achievement of real quality of the educational service.

- ✓ The application of a system of delegated budgets is very difficult both for the financing bodies and for headmasters. In many schools the 'delegated budget' is excuse used as an to cover teacher lay-offs and especially lay-offs of staff not directly involved in the educational process, terminating activities with students, refusal to modernize the equipment etc. The attitude to introducing delegated budgets among teachers and employees is in many cases negative since they are not aware of the possible positive effects.

2.3. Unstable legal framework of SPSET. The main reasons for frequent changes are: it is impossible for the legal framework to bring the system of SPSET in compliance with the quick development of social relations and the change in the economic sphere with the development in technology as well as with the introduction of European criteria in education; the lack of clear idea for the development of the system of SPSET; the lack of relation and interest in the demands and requirements which the society and the labour market have to high education; the frequent changes of leading teams in MES hinders the application of the regularly declared strategies for development of Bulgarian education and the processes which have already started stop or start afresh.

Some specific problems ,which result from or have not been precisely defined by the current legal framework, refer to:

- ✓ Continuous education, the so called right to LLL, defined as a key element of the Lisbon Strategy, does not have an adequate and encompassing method of application.
- ✓ Secular education and providing the possibility to study religion – there are controversies in the regulation of the legal acts. To this aim the place of religion as a school subject has to be clarified without violating the 'secular education' principle.
- ✓ Bulgarian language being the official one and providing the opportunity to study the mother tongue – there are discrepancies between the legal acts related to studying the

mother tongue and the protection and control of this study have not been sufficiently regulated.

- ✓ Compulsory schooling until 16 years of age – although regulated as a principle, compulsory education does not happen in practice as there is lack of necessary juridical and other guarantees for that; it is not related to finishing a certain educational degree or receiving the respective diploma.
- ✓ Free education – free activities and those for which certain fees are paid have been inadequately regulated since SER refers to the entire range of curricula and extracurricula activities.
- ✓ Organizational structure – imprecise criteria have been used when dividing kindergartens and schools into state and municipal. This leads to inaccurate implementation of these criteria. For example, there are vocational high schools which are municipal and accept students from different regions as well as state vocational high schools which accept students only from the region where they were founded. The criterion which has been chosen - 'financing'- is inaccurate – state and municipal schools have been financed by the state budget; it is not clear why there cannot be private secondary units.
- ✓ Forms of education – the forms of education have been determined by by-laws and the legal framework does not contain definitions and the most general conditions for using them. The procedure for organizing the forms of education (by by-laws) is not clear enough, it is not comprehensive and does not encompass all different practical hypotheses.
- ✓ The educational methods have not been regulated by the legal framework , thus not providing for the modernization of the educational process and the improvement of its efficiency.
- ✓ Movement of children and schoolchildren – the basic conditions related to the movement of children and schoolchildren have not been regulated in depth by legal

acts; regulations require supplements for solving problems related to movement which result from the modern conditions and taking into consideration the dynamism and mobility within the educational system.

- 2.4. Insufficiently developed infrastructure of the educational system with respects to the ongoing processes in education.

The material and technical equipment in schools was built in accordance with the demands in each region but under different economic circumstances. The unspecified prospects for development of many municipalities hinders the regional utilization of the school technical equipment. This is one of the reasons why schools in small villages near towns, near borders and mountainous villages become depopulated. Part of the technical equipment is obsolete. Some school buildings have been used for more than 100 years without being regularly renovated in compliance with modern requirements.

- 2.5. Problems of children and schoolchildren with specific educational needs have already been noticed by the society and attempts have been made to implement integrated and inclusive (incorporating) education. Issues related to securing access to educational environment, assistance for achieving good school results and others have not been solved. As a result the situation and the prospects for tens of thousands of young people with social and educational needs, future citizens of Bulgaria have not been changed sufficiently.
- 2.6. Under the current conditions teachers fight for survival, lose orientation and prospects, educational might, social prestige and get poorer instead of using their energy to develop and turn themselves into a leading power of changes.
- 2.7. The family has been disorganized in terms of its educational functions. Considering the unspecified character and the contradictions in the ongoing processes, it is not capable of exerting effective control over children.
- 2.8. There is evidence that the drop out from school phenomenon has become an integral part of the educational system. It is mainly based on the insufficient attractiveness, mobility and role of the

school. The school does not always satisfy students' interests and meet their expectations. It is not in a position to bring into compliance its specific aims with the even more specific abilities and concrete educational needs of students.

The school does not fulfill successfully its educational functions, does not provide the necessary conditions for effective civil education.

The lack of interest which many students show is an indicator both for the quality of education and for the level of satisfaction with the studied subjects. This requires **a radical change in the gnomic strategies, the methodology and technique of educating students, which should take into consideration, stimulate and utilize the functional capacity of cognitive interests in students.**

3. Main conclusions and recommendations with respect to the system of schooling and preschool education and training

- 3.1. ESC believes that a need has arisen for achieving social consensus about changes in education at all levels, structuring the social educational context, uniting social groups, institutions and structures, which demand and show interest in change, institutionalizing the civil society as a factor for changes.
- 3.2. ESC focuses on increasing the opportunities of social partners and of the organized civil society to influence the policy on VET and to assist its implementation in order to build a knowledge society, achieving social cohesion and high standard of living based on high employment. To this aim it is necessary:
 - ✓ To establish effective inter-institutional relations between partners on the market of educational services, the labour market and employers.
 - ✓ The social dialogue should be developed in specific fields of VET problems which are given high priority in accordance with the concept for life-long learning.
 - ✓ To establish and implement effective forms of bilateral cooperation between educational institutions and business/employers communities.

- ✓ To achieve active participation of the social partners – employers and trade unions, with specific rights and obligations in the VET process.
 - ✓ To improve the social dialogue through collective bargaining, especially in enterprises, in order to come closer to the European indicators for involving those participating in the forms of LLL.
 - ✓ To provide the necessary information for effective participation of the social partners in the management of VET.
- 3.3. ESC insists on publishing the bill of the new Law on School Education and organizing a large-scale discussion and then the bill should be introduced and passed in the National Assembly.
- 3.4. ESC recommends that the legal framework in the field of school education be brought into compliance with the following principles and priorities:
- ✓ Improving the quality and efficiency of teaching and education in schools;
 - ✓ Improving resource management;
 - ✓ Bringing general education in comprehensive schools in compliance with the current state of science, technics and technology, with the social needs of society and the requirements of the labour market;
 - ✓ Creating conditions for matching the quality of education and training in our country with European educational standards;
 - ✓ Implementing at national level the common European priorities, related to providing equal opportunities and equal access to education, taking into consideration the requirements of the organized civil society;
 - ✓ Foreign language education and information technologies should be given priority;
 - ✓ Considering the needs of disabled children by making changes in the regulation for education of children with special educational needs and/or chronic diseases.
- 3.5. Taking into consideration the analysis of past activities on restructuring the school network, it is important to outline long-term measures which

will contribute to the development of school education and achieving quality which matches the European standards.

- 3.6. ESC focuses on the development and improvement of the model for financing school education in order to achieve financial decentralization and higher efficiency of educational expenses towards:
 - ✓ Development and improvement of the introduced uniform standard for financing per student;
 - ✓ Improving the methods for determining the number of employees and the main indicator should be the correlation: number of students per teacher;
 - ✓ Development of the system of headmaster education in the area of implementing delegated budgets; creating conditions for teachers to become active participants in creating, implementing and controlling the delegated budgets;
 - ✓ Development of a system for differentiated motivation of teachers based on grading their work performance.
- 3.7. ESC insists on adopting measures for overcoming the results of the financial and economic crisis; establishing an updated, differentiated according to educational degrees and types of schools uniform cost standard per student, the amount of which should match the new conditions.
- 3.8. ESC expresses its position that it is necessary to develop a long-term programme for improving the education and qualification of teachers by stimulating them not only to acquire new knowledge but also to constantly develop it. It is important to provide high quality initial education and constant professional development which will maintain the required teachers' competence.
- 3.9. The improvement of the educational system is related to modernizing the material equipment of SPSET and VET to create a stimulating educational environment for education and training of students and adults by providing adequate infrastructure and equipment for VET, progress in terms of securing access to ICT and Internet should be accelerated because these are a key factor in the modern labour market.
- 3.10. Placing social expectations from education into the focus of educational innovations and novelty. Objective approach to gauging and assessing students' achievements in terms of acquiring knowledge and skills. Guaranteeing adequate education and literacy of students, quality and efficiency of educational system.

- 3.11. It is necessary to update SER with the help of all interested parties (students, teachers, parents etc), from the point of view of NQF and further updating of SER.
- 3.12. Modernizing sports equipment and facilities; outlining measures for improving the conditions for sport in schools and bringing them in accordance with the European standards,
- 3.13. Adopting a legal framework, guaranteeing the minimal norms for providing the necessary and accessible social infrastructure for children, including disabled children.

III. System of vocational education and training

1. Basic characteristics of the system of vocational education and training

- 1.1. In order to improve the business environment and enlarge the possibilities for providing high quality vocational education in competitive environment, an analysis of the Law on vocational education and training was carried out in 2008. A number of changes were proposed by the tripartite managing board of NAVET, related to introducing programme accreditation, easing the procedure for licensing the centers for vocational education, improving the organization of PET etc.

In order to provide high quality vocational education and training and aiming it at the demands of the labour market, the following measures were undertaken:

- 1.2. SER's framework for acquiring vocational qualification has been refocused by NAVET on the results of education, in accordance with the recommendation of the European Parliament and the European Council, outlined in the European Qualification Framework.
- 1.3. SER have been worked out for acquiring qualification in over 150 professions; curricula of new professions for acquiring vocational education and training and providing educational documentation for XII and XIII grades in professions which are already taught.
- 1.4. In relation to educating teachers to implement new technologies in 2008 was carried out training of 400 teachers in implementing new technologies in different sectors and activities. Educational and training firms were established and are now functioning in 95

vocational high schools with the purpose to create entrepreneurial skills, team work skills, risk taking, developing creativity.

- 1.5. In order to stimulate interest in vocational education and training, national competitions in professions were held in 12 professional fields with the participation of sector organizations, employers etc. National competitions were organized in mechanical drawing and an international fair of educational and training firms.
- 1.6. 12 percent of pedagogical advisers were trained in professional counselling, consulting and career development. Modules on early professional orientation and on orientation in high school were introduced.
- 1.7. Life long strategy was developed which includes vocational education and training too – a Life-long education national strategy has been adopted. The aim is to provide broader access to high quality vocational education and training as well as more opportunities for secure employment.
- 1.8. In order to fulfill the recommendation of the European Parliament and the Educational Council of 23 April 2008 for creating EQF for life long learning, a number of activities have been carried out in Bulgaria. The government has already declared that it is working for the development of NQF which will provide opportunities for including branch qualifications in the general policy on LLL and stimulating the participation of business in the educational and training processes. In this way conditions will be provided for, on the one hand, giving useful information and consultation when choosing a career, and on the other – providing education in real conditions and in response to actual demands.

2. The main problems in the area of vocational education and training are in several fields:

- 2.1. In the system of administration, management and organization of the System of vocational education and training:
 - ✓ Insufficiently effective relation between employers and teaching institutions, which renders it impossible to create modern professional skills in practice. As a result all participants in the educational process are

to a certain extent unsatisfied – employers, students and teaching institutions.

- ✓ The state has not defined the content of the requirements for quality and set of instruments for assessing VET (well-judged so that they do not hinder innovation).
- ✓ A system of indicators used to assess the state, functioning, dynamics and efficiency of VET has not been established.
- ✓ The national examination programmes in professions have not been developed for all professions from the current LPVET and they do not correspond to SER sufficiently.
- ✓ Although it was specified in the legal acts, in fact VET lacks a working mechanism which can be used to validate the knowledge and skills (competences) acquired. For this reason the education is based on topics which have already been covered informally or within another education (education is being financed twice).
- ✓ The required conditions for equality of all forms of LLL have not been provided – formal and informal education and independent learning.
- ✓ The functions and range of activities of institutions engaged in LLL have not been clearly differentiated with legal acts. This created difficulties for achieving efficiency of interrelation between them.

2.2. There are a number of unresolved issues in the legal framework related to LLL concerning:

- ✓ regulation of education within the different educational degrees;
- ✓ the relation between literacy, level of education and the degree of vocational qualification;
- ✓ the relation between the quality of the results of education and the social and economic efficiency;
- ✓ including employers in the development of the curricula, the assessment of the results of education, the evaluation of the demands for vocational education;
- ✓ methodological issues concerning adult education;

- ✓ updating the legal framework in accordance with the development and implementation of the Lisbon Strategy, the European indicators and EQF for LLL;
- ✓ the range, content and concrete indicators for legal regulation of LLL;
- ✓ the existing legal base does not stimulate the participation of employers in the process of modernizing the infrastructure of the LLL institutions.

2.3. The main difficulties that institutions encounter in terms of LLL are related to shortage of funds for modernizing the material and technical equipment, shortage of modern teaching and reference literature, shortage of methodological preparation of teachers and lecturers who can teach adults, shortage of funds for improving the qualification of lecturers especially in real production conditions, insufficiently effective dialogue with employers and slight interest on their part in participation in the process of LLL. Along with that:

- ✓ The equipment in the institutions for LLL is obsolete. The investments that the state makes in this area are insufficient. This affects the quality of LLL and gives graduates unequal start on the labour market. There is inconformity between the existing material equipment in the teaching institutions and the new equipment and modern technology used by the firms and manufacturing companies.
- ✓ The educational and technical equipment in CVE is in most cases rented or is provided with framework contracts for each separate course. This is a prerequisite for greater flexibility in providing equipment for conducting the education and an opportunity for students to become acquainted with the new technical equipment. There is a positive tendency for these centres to develop their own equipment. With FVE the practical education of employed people is carried out at their work place in the enterprise they work for which is of very great importance to the education and career development of students.
- ✓ The requirements towards the educational and technical equipment for conducting the respective professional education are outlined in each SER for acquiring vocational education. However, there is lack of scientific research referring to European standards for equipment so that a comparison cannot be made.

- 2.4. The education of employed people is insufficiently developed. Although the prevailing part of CLC contain agreements about education, many enterprises do not consider staff education their priority. A combination of several factors provide an explanation of this fact: generally tough financial situation of the enterprise and lack of funds for education; lack of stimulating mechanisms for employers; the fact that employers do not see vocational education as an investment and a real prerequisite for competitiveness; inability to define correctly the need for education etc.
- 2.5. The relations with enterprises are not sufficiently active. As a result of that there are considerable difficulties in conducting the practical education in real conditions and in securing the technical equipment required for the process of practical education.
- 2.6. The infrastructure of many of the institutions for VET does not facilitate the access to professional training of disabled people.
- 2.7. Difficulties arise in terms of conditions for access to FVE. These are poverty and social isolation of a big part of the Bulgarian population – people’s inability to finance their qualification themselves, inability to travel to places where training is conducted, lack of access to information, lack of motivation, serious social isolation.

The outlined problems give reasons for drawing the conclusion that **the vocational training at school is made more expensive as a result of inefficient use of material equipment and personnel, which is the result of lack of thorough analysis of the national network of professional schools and possibility and measures for its optimization.**

3. Main conclusions and recommendations with respect to the system of vocational education and training

- 3.1. It is of great importance to improving the system of vocational education and training to update the textbook content and the methods of vocational education by including in the training process elements which provide preparation for working in small and medium enterprises, for starting one’s own business, for setting up enterprises and active labour market participation.
- 3.2. An important element is to strengthen the practical training and bringing it closer to the field of employment. The educational process

should be modeled in such a way as to imitate to the highest possible degree the complex and intricate economic and social reality. The extensive presence of practical education can facilitate the quick and efficient professional and labour adaptation of students.

- 3.3. Creating legal and supportive conditions for conducting practical education in real working environment in cooperation with employers for acquiring professional competence and gradual introduction of a system for research, observation and identification of employers' demands and workers' professional education.
- 3.4. Creating and developing a national information system about demand and supply for primary and further vocational education by creating a national data base which gives the opportunity to follow the future realization of students, the relation between the individual subsystems for VET and an assessment of the input.
- 3.5. Creating a system for introducing the European tools for recognizing and evaluating qualification in order to provide conditions for comparing knowledge and professional qualification of individual workers and employees who take the further vocational education.
- 3.6. It is necessary to approve a National qualification framework in accordance with EQF and secure transparency, publicity and large scale participation of all interested parties.
- 3.7. It is of very great importance to create conditions for introducing the approaches, guiding criteria and indicators of the Common European Framework on VET quality.
- 3.8. It is necessary to introduce in short terms the system of transfer and accumulation of credits in the system of VET, providing the possibility to acknowledge the results from different forms of successful education, conducted in any of the EU member countries. Promoting the opportunities and implementing the European passport (EUROPASS).
- 3.9. The Council insists on analyzing and reevaluating VET financing and updating the procedure for financing by increasing cost efficiency on the one hand and on the other – sources of VET financing.

- 3.10. Developing electronic education as a way to facilitate LLL and improving the access to FVE. It is necessary to work out materials, methodology, assessment and certificate procedures.
- 3.11. An important step is the introduction of standardized methodology for planning demand for qualified labour force, in compliance with the official vision for development of the economy (National plan for economic development, National programme for pursuing the aims set out in the Lisbon Strategy).
- 3.12. Of great importance to the development of the system is defining specific requirements for professional qualification and competence of students with the active participation of business (big employers associations, branch organization etc.) The following should be done in this respect:
- ✓ Legal regulation and effective implementation of coordination between institutions related to FVE and orientation;
 - ✓ Stimulation of cooperation between teaching institutions and business through developing , complementing and improving the legal framework in its part on practical education and traineeship.
- 3.13. Stimulating companies to conduct purposeful policy on qualification and education of work force and developing specific programmes for its implementation.
- 3.14. Stimulating entrepreneurship and scientific research; securing a relationship between entrepreneurial activity, research and implementation.

The Economic and Social Council believes that the VET policy and activities should be implemented in close cooperation with the social partners. This activity should be directed towards important issues such as employers' attitude to education, lack of funds and incentives for employers and workers.

IV. System of higher education and science

1. Main characteristics of the system of higher education and science

Over the past years a number of steps were undertaken towards improving the system of university education in the following fields:

- 1.1. Changes in the Law on higher education with respect to:
 - ✓ Changes in the higher education financing model – increasing the number of new entrants in universities, granting higher schools rights to set their tuition fees, subsidizing on grounds of actually accepted students;
 - ✓ Changes related to institutions which can provide higher education – introducing an explicit prohibition for conducting education outside the main units and branches of the higher institutes established in accordance with the legal regulations;
 - ✓ Changes related to management of higher schools;
 - ✓ Changes related to accreditation and the system of control of quality of education.
- 1.2. Creating appropriate environment for modernizing the system of higher education in accordance with the demands of society and business. Over the last years in almost 70 percent of universities in Bulgaria, centres for career orientation and development were founded as a mechanism to accelerate the dialogue between educational and business institutions. The career centers facilitate the processes of selection of students for trainee positions and vacancies, cooperate for securing feedback between interested parties.
- 1.3. Policy for bringing closer academic and business interests. A new element in this policy is the founding of a Board of Trustees at each state university.
- 1.4. Financial strengthening of university structures. Over the last years some cases of good practices have been studied and spread around, opportunities for introducing new managerial models related to the implementation of modern forms of management have been studied.
- 1.5. Providing information to universities. An information system was created before 2008 which contains a register of universities, register of academic staff, register of current and suspended students and doctoral students by educational degree and by professional field, as well as a register of graduates and doctoral students.

- 1.6. Granting credits to students and doctoral students. In July 2008 the National Assembly passed a Law on granting credits to students and doctoral students.
- 1.7. Accreditation and quality management in the system of Bulgarian higher education. The improvement of the activity of the National Agency on Assessment and Accreditation (NAAA) has been going on in compliance with the requirements of the Law on Higher Education and the “Standards and directions for securing the quality of higher education in the European environment”. The recommendations of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) have been adopted. NAAA is a member of the Central European Network of agencies providing quality of education and a candidate member of ENQA which proves its increased international prestige.
- 1.8. Developing a strategy for the development of higher education. Discussions with representatives of the academic society, employers, trade unions and other interested parties are held in order to determine the focus points in the future strategy.
- 1.9. Conducting other priority activities concerning:
 - ✓ Improving the conditions for equal access to higher education – through tuition fees in state higher education institutions amounting to 30 percent of the allowance for each student; fees should not exceed the double rate of the minimal salary for the country.
 - ✓ Securing student and academic mobility through introducing new forms of education and assessment.
 - ✓ Improving the intra-university systems for securing and supporting the quality of education and that of academic staff.
 - ✓ Developing a National Qualification Framework for higher education in accordance with the Qualifications Framework in the European educational environment.
- 1.10. Development of the strategy for life-long learning which should encompass higher education too – a National strategy for life-long learning has been developed. The aim is to secure unrestricted access to high quality education and training as well as more opportunities for stable employment.

- 1.11. Increasing the share of programme financing of scientific research and innovation – through increased rate of programme financing of scientific research from the “Scientific research” Fund. Strengthening the competition principle, putting into practice international grades etc.
- 1.12. Improving efficiency, monitoring and accountability of scientific and research activity – regulations on the organization and performance of the system for observation and assessment of the results of the scientific and research activity have been introduced.
- 1.13. Development of scientific research and innovation –a National strategy for scientific research which should be enacted in 2009 has been developed.
- 1.14. Stimulating young people to start or continue their scientific and teaching career.
- 1.15. Work on building modern institutional and infrastructural equipment for conducting high quality scientific research and studies.

2. Main problems in the field of higher education and science

The main problems in the field of higher education and science occur in several areas.

- 2.1. Lack of initially developed economic strategy and policy which can be used to form a strategy for development of higher education and a strategy for development of scientific research means that Bulgarian universities will “produce” highly skilled specialists who will be unaware of the realities and perspectives in the economic and technological reality.
- 2.2. The studies of the temporary situation on the labour market is for the time being the only mechanism for receiving true information which can be used by universities to determine the number of new students and specialties. These studies are to a great extent only informative. Without having a preliminary developed economic strategy and policy, the fixed number of new students based on the current state does not mean that there will be demand for these young specialists in 4 – 5 or more years, when they will have already finished their higher education.

- 2.3. A critical issue resulting from the insufficient financing of higher education and science is the fact that its scientific and teaching potential is not capable of reproduction. If no changes are made in the way higher education is financed, the time will come when universities and scientific institutes will start closing down for purely biological reasons.
- 2.4. Undoubtedly the economic reasons are of greatest importance to the motivation of young specialists whether to leave the country or to come back. Along with them, however, very great importance acquire problems like the educational role of Bulgarian education, organization and culture of Bulgarian society, opportunities for adequate professional realization and career development, social conditions for work and living, quality of life, personal security, security of ownership and business, the future of young families and children etc.

In this respect the responsibilities of the state , the social partners and the organized civil society become extremely important.

- 2.5. Determining the demand for young specialists with different professions and specialties is insufficiently grounded. It has to be based on preliminary developed economic policy of the state with clearly defined strategic fields for development.
- 2.6. A problem of strategic importance to Bulgaria is the insufficiently close relations between the educational and training institutions and the science and research sector and business.

Especially critical issues are: providing high quality professional preparation in real working conditions for university students; facilitating the transition from universities to the working place with the active role of university career centers and improving the successful realization on the labour market; building stable partnerships between educational and teaching institutions and business; higher education institutions should actively participate in fully using the opportunities for studying and applying the good European and world practices for free financial help and support from EU.

- 2.7. In the conditions of world economic crisis a serious problem is posed by the quality of investments and spending and the reasonable use of

budget funds to support growth. This also means more investments in infrastructure, education and qualification.

- 2.8. Investments in education and qualification made by the state and the business are insufficient. In both areas Bulgaria has an unenviable position both in the world and in Europe.
- 2.9. Bulgaria is considerably lagging behind in terms of life-long learning, including learning after graduating higher education. According to statistical data at the moment 1.33 percent of the population in Bulgaria over 25 years of age takes part in life-long learning which is more than 7 times lower than in the countries in the European Union (9.7percent). The possibilities for studying at any age are not used – not only through traditional forms at institutes for education and training but at the work place, at home and in the free time. The opportunities that distance learning offers in terms of secondary and higher education, are also underestimated.
- 2.10. The property of higher education institutions is not protected from restitution. For two decades the state has had an irresponsible attitude towards the future of this property and its use in the interest of society.

3. Main conclusions and recommendations with respect to the system of higher education and science

The development and implementation of a strategy for development of higher education and a strategy for development of scientific research in Bulgaria, including in higher education institutions, should reflect the new Bulgarian and European realities and the spirit of the revised Lisbon Strategy.

The Economic and Social Council believes that the scientifically substantiated defining of demand for young specialists with different professions and specialties should be based on preliminary developed economic policy of the state with clearly defined strategic fields for development.

- 3.1. The Council emphasizes the strategic importance for Bulgaria of the consistent strengthening of the relations between the institutions for education and training, scientific and research sector and business. Of great importance is the solution of the questions about:

- ✓ Providing high quality vocational education in real working conditions for students;
- ✓ Facilitating the transition from the institutions of higher education to the working place with the active participation of university career centers and increasing the successful realization on the labour market;
- ✓ Building stable partnerships between the educational and teaching institutions and the business;
- ✓ The opportunities for free financial help and support from the EU should be fully utilized with the active project participation of institutions of higher education.

3.2. **Accelerated investments in education and science and in their infrastructure are one of the major policies** which can be successfully used to counter economic crisis by stimulating demand and providing highly qualified specialists, services, activities and technologies. In the conditions of world economic crisis it is necessary to improve the quality and quantity of investments and expenses which should be related to reasonable use of budget funds to support growth. This means more investments in education, qualification and in respective infrastructure.

3.3. The funds required for making investments in education and qualification should to a very high degree come from the state as well as from business and they should correspond to the levels achieved in the other European countries. In this relation:

- ✓ It is reasonable for institutions of higher education and business to sign contracts for educating company staff at bachelor and master degree.
- ✓ Business should have the possibility, should it wish, to provide education for its staff based on signed contracts, to set down certain requirements to the content of the educational process, to have the possibility to participate with its leading specialists in the education, in conducting traineeships etc. This can be put into practice by providing paid education, including in state schools, in addition to the state quota. The existence of this state quota secures the social aspect for accepting candidate-students with lower incomes.

- 3.4. **Turning institutions of higher education into integral centers for education, science and entrepreneurship** requires that we focus on three things:
- 3.4.1. Turning the role of higher education and science into a general strategy for development of the country.
 - 3.4.2. Significant improvement of financing higher education and science both by the state and by the business.
 - 3.4.3. Emphasizing the role of the human factor for the development of higher education and science, including
 - ✓ Measures for improving the social status and strengthening the motivation of the scientific and teaching staff for career development;
 - ✓ Developing an attractive social package for young lecturers and research workers;
 - ✓ Building an academic residential area for young lecturers and research workers and their families.

According to the Economic and Social Council the timely creation of all necessary conditions for strengthening the role of the state, higher education, science and business in making real steps towards building an information society and knowledge economy is of great importance.

- 3.5. To improve and develop the process of accreditation of institutions of higher education. With regard to this both Bulgarian and foreign positive experience should be summarized by:
- ✓ Adopting only one accreditation – the institutional with elements of curricula accreditation;
 - ✓ Shortening the accreditation procedure;
 - ✓ Using the internationally recognized experience for assessing the quality of education;
 - ✓ Accepting clear and imperative stimulating and approving functions of the National Agency on Assessment and Accreditation (NAAA) concerning institutions of higher education, when receiving higher or lower accreditation grades.

- 3.6. To legally settle the possibility to open branches of state and private institutions of higher education abroad.
- 3.7. To restore paid higher education in the state universities with the highest accreditation grade “very good”.

In order to protect the social element in accepting candidate students with lower incomes as part of the state quota, paid education should be in addition to the state quota but within the set by the NAAA institutional capacity for acceptance in institutions of higher education.

- 3.8. **State financing of institutions of higher education should be directly related to the quality of education and the results from their accreditation.** The amount of state financing should be a direct function of the received accreditation grade.
- 3.9. To introduce a regulated voucher system in the state institutions of higher education (money should follow the students) and the money from the state paid for the allowance of one student directly depend on the accreditation grade of the institution of higher education where the student studies, too.
- 3.10. To increase significantly the legal requirements and restrict the possibility for opening new universities in Bulgaria, which do not meet the high criteria of the strategy for development of higher education.
- 3.11. To restrict the practice of the so called “lecturers tourism”. In this respect it should be legally regulated that one lecturer can have only one main labour contract under the Law on Higher Education .
- 3.12. To regulate legally the system of students’ credits by making it part of the entire logic of the educational process and the different forms of student mobility, including mobility to universities in different countries in the European Union.
- 3.13. To create favourable organizational, economic and social conditions for stimulating scientific research and innovation in universities, including through binding curricula with research activities and with favourable social and living conditions and benefits for young lecturers and research workers and their families.

According to the ESC coordinated activities on the part of the state, the organized civil society, the Bulgarian academic and research circles and the business community are required to strengthen the scientific research and innovation at universities to improve knowledge and education.

The Economic and Social Council believes that the main challenge that Bulgaria faces is not simply to increase the funds for scientific research and innovation in order to overcome the lagging behind the EU in terms of average indicators. The most important thing is to introduce such a model of financing which through cost efficiency will stimulate competition between universities and other scientific institutions and thus lead to an improvement in the quality of education and science.

- 3.14. The Council expresses its position that the structure of the Bulgarian economy, comprising a considerable number of SME with limited potential for scientific and research activity as well as the expectations for economic development of the country in the next years presupposes that the state should preserve its leading role in the process of securing funds for the development of science, university research science included. At the same time it is necessary to put great efforts into stimulating business to invest commensurate with the state in scientific research and innovation in the next years.
- 3.15. **The financial funds which have to be distributed on a project (programme) principle should constantly grow** and in the next years they should be not less than 50 percent of the total budget spending. In the next period they should exceed the size of institutional financing from the total public spending through increased spending on financing scientific projects.
- 3.16. The amount of institutional financing of scientific units, universities included, should depend on scientific results. It is expedient to perform purposeful policy for development of research capacity of universities through concentrating funds in institutions of higher education which have serious scientific and research potential and have achieved significant scientific results.
- 3.17. To enlarge the practice of holding information campaigns, with the participation of universities, to increase the capacity of scientific teams for absorbing the funds from national and European programmes,

including framework programmes for scientific research and EU structural funds.

- 3.18. To stimulate the creation and strengthen the positions of scientific and research institutes, structures and networks which have the capacity to conduct scientific research and innovate at European and world level. The creation of stable institutional relations between universities and other scientific units should be financially and organizationally assisted through establishing university scientific and research centers and other joint structures.
- 3.19. To continue stimulating using the tools of programme financing the founding of joint scientific teams between scientists from different universities and scientific organizations. Using the tools of programme financing it should continue stimulating the joint participation in projects of scientists, university lecturers, and leading specialists and business leaders.
- 3.20. Serious attention should be paid to the creation and development of national scientific networks with the participation of universities where the scientific information, knowledge and technology should freely circulate. The national scientific networks should gradually become part of European and world scientific networks.
- 3.21. To undertake steps towards certain decentralization of financing scientific and research activity at universities and other scientific organisations in terms of providing more opportunities for development of scientific research and finding ways for market realization of the achieved results.
- 3.22. The state should provide aid for securing modern infrastructure and scientific equipment in the leading institutions of higher education and other scientific units which work on developing prioritized scientific fields, including the practical education of students and doctoral students. To guarantee access of universities and other scientific organizations to electronic data base, including world electronic data base for scientific information.
- 3.23. **It is necessary to have highly qualified and motivated scientists and lecturers who will secure the performance of highly qualified scientific and research activity and innovation in compliance with the respective EU standards, at universities included.** The increase in

the total number of research workers, lecturers at universities included, should reach over a short period of time the average European levels. This requires a more precise national methodology for determining the number of research workers at universities.

- 3.24. University research workers, members of scientific teams, should get additional incentives such as giving them the opportunity to receive payment from the finance of projects they have won, including the participation of doctoral students and young scientists – lecturers.
- 3.25. The state should financially stimulate the institutions of higher education, introducing good practices for accelerated vocational development and high remuneration for its lecturers and scientists – ‘PhDs’
- 3.26. In order to improve the innovative capacity of business, project schemes should be created to stimulate receiving scientific degrees by leading specialists and leaders in business. To create favourable environment, stimulating the scientific and educational activity at universities on the part of business.
- 3.27. In order to overcome the effect of the world economic crisis on the increasing unemployment in Bulgaria, the motivation for receiving higher education and the opportunities for professional career it is expedient to increase by another 10 – 15 percent the annual state quota for new students in universities during the next few years. The aim is to reduce the expected increase in percentage of unemployed in Bulgaria by increasing the number of students who will receive higher education in this country.

The accelerated investments in education and science and in their infrastructure are one of the main policies which can be used to counter the economic crisis by stimulating demand and supply of highly qualified specialists, services, activities and technologies.

- 3.28. The social side of university education requires that three type of questions be solved positively and in close interrelation: about granting loans to students, students residential halls and cafeterias and about suitable jobs for students. In this respect it is reasonable to work out a relieved organization of students labour by securing adequate jobs – for example, in residential halls and cafeterias, part-time jobs etc.

Students should get the opportunity to work in order to support themselves but only if that gives them the chance to attend lectures.

3.29. To protect the property of institutions of higher education from restitution. The issues concerning university property and restitution claims should be clearly solved in favour of public interest. To this purpose it is good:

- ✓ To have a legal prohibition under which educational sites which are state property or public municipal property can be restituted.
- ✓ Already restituted property – educational sites for which there is no enacted change in the detailed lay-out plan, it should not be changed without the consent of the minister for education and science for each individual case.
- ✓ For restituted property – educational sites for which there is changed detailed lay-out plan, but construction work has not started, the state has the possibility to initiate a procedure for property expropriation

The Economic and Social Council expresses its position that the accelerated development of higher education and science and the existence of real economy, based on knowledge are the grounds for higher productivity and labour competitiveness, high incomes and high quality of life of Bulgarians. With the limited resource potential, this is the best and most successful alternative for the accelerated development of Bulgaria.

V. Conclusion

The Economic and Social Council expresses its position on the necessity for achieving national consensus on the prioritized position of education in our development today and the introduction of education as a global development indicator, as a correcting mechanism in all development plans and concepts, and on taking into consideration the educational criteria in each and every political decision.

The Economic and Social Council insists on:

- ✓ Channeling the necessary funds towards the normal functioning of the educational system and for carrying out all necessary changes;
- ✓ Change in the attitude towards education – developing programmes for development of SPSET (following the National programme from 2006, adopted by the National Assembly) at all levels;
- ✓ Giving priority to the problems young people have and their reflection in the state's policy on providing conditions for development of infrastructure, directed at young people.

1. The Economic and Social Council believes that the improvement of the level of Bulgarian education system and the quality of education should be carried out in compliance with the revised Lisbon Strategy of the European Union 2008 – 2010.

In this respect reforms are needed in the strategy and legislature of the Bulgaria education.

1.1. In the field of schooling, preschool education and training and vocational education and training

- ✓ Passing and successful implementation of a new Law in the field of school education.
- ✓ Introducing a system for career development of teachers.
- ✓ Introducing a system for differentiated payment.
- ✓ Adopting the National qualification framework in line with the leading criteria and indicators of the EQF, by securing transparency, publicity and active participation of all interested parties.

1.2. In the field of higher education and science

- ✓ Working out a strategy for the development of higher education.
- ✓ Passing and successful implementation of a new Law on higher education.
- ✓ Successful implementation of a strategy for development of scientific research in Bulgaria, universities included.

- ✓ Passing and successful implementation of a new Law of academic degrees and ranks (titles).
 - ✓ Successful implementation of the National strategy for life-long learning, developing and implementing specific action plans.
2. **The Economic and Social Council considers it appropriate that the organized civil society be included as an active partner in the entire process of conducting the necessary reforms in the Bulgarian educational system.**

The aim is to engage the social partners and the organized civil society in the work on formulating and implementing a strategy for development of the educational system in Bulgaria for the period after 2008 – 2010.

This strategy should be based on the systematic approach, on the accelerated investments in knowledge and innovation, on the successful professional career, on economic growth, on high employment, on narrowing social differences and sustainable growth in conformity with the modern European requirements and practice.

3. **The Economic and Social Council believes that the exchange of opinions, strategic ideas and practices between the governments of the EU members, the national ESC and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in reference with the development of the national educational systems, in the context of the revised Lisbon Strategy and the role of the organized civil society, could be of great help.**
4. **The Economic and Social Council believes that providing conditions for equal access and receiving high quality secondary and higher education for all young people up to 24 years of age is a key priority for reforming the educational system in Bulgaria.**
5. **The Economic and Social Council believes that the implementation of the National Strategy for Life-Long Learning at regional and local level should be supported by the measures outlined in the regional plans for economic development, the plans for development of municipalities over the period 2007 – 2013. The integrated programme for life-long learning and the operational programmes “Development of human resources”, “Competitiveness” and “Regional Development”.**

The goal is at least 5 percent of the people above 25 years of age should participate in the life-long learning process in 2013.

6. **The Economic and Social Council believes that the fulfillment of the strategy for reforms in the Bulgarian educational system, life-long learning included, should be reported through a system of indicators among which:**
 - ✓ Participation in preschool training (percentage share of children enrolled in the kindergartens compared to the number of children at the same age);
 - ✓ Level of reading literacy;
 - ✓ Drop-outs from school;
 - ✓ Children who have received high education;
 - ✓ Those who have received higher education in mathematics, natural and technical sciences etc.;
 - ✓ International mobility of students and doctoral students;
 - ✓ The share of people up to 24 years of age participating in the educational process;
 - ✓ Share of people above 25 years of age participating in the process of education all their lives;
 - ✓ Educational structure of the population;
 - ✓ Investments in education and teaching;
 - ✓ Share of expenses on education of GDP;
 - ✓ Share of expenses on scientific research and innovation of GDP;
 - ✓ Ratio between the number of students and the number of computers in the system of secondary and higher education etc.
7. **The Economic and Social Council believes that active participation on the part of the civil society and every citizen and every institution - state, municipal, employers, trade unionist, student, non-governmental – is required for the achievement of the strategic goals of the Bulgarian educational system.**

The Economic and Social Council will put in considerable efforts to develop a favourable social climate and environment of active social support as well as to develop mechanisms for efficient civil control over the activity of the Bulgarian educational system.

8. **The Economic and Social Council believes that urgent measures should be undertaken aiming at creating the necessary legal and organizational prerequisites for fulfilling Bulgaria's obligations on prioritized areas for investment and development of human capital, modernizing the labour market; investing in knowledge and innovation in accordance with the revised Lisbon Strategy.**
9. **The Economic and Social Council believes that the conduct of substantiated and significant reforms should start by coordinating activities and uniting all interested parties with reference to the most urgent steps related to:**
 - ✓ Reaching national consensus for changes which should involve participation and control both on the part of the state and of the civil society;
 - ✓ Turning education into a leading strategic national priority;
 - ✓ Overcoming the tendency towards increasing initial illiteracy and creating conditions for limiting secondary illiteracy, also among active population;
 - ✓ Developing internal structure of educational system for providing high quality education
 - ✓ Development of school autonomy and turning schools into the centre of development of the educational system;
 - ✓ Achieving resource security matching the modern European requirements and standards.

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