

Results of Public Opinion Poll and Review of International Practice

About the draft law on Vocational Education

(December 2006)

1.1 Focus group analysis¹

From October through November 2006 Transparency International Georgia (TI Georgia), with financial assistance from the Swiss Development and Collaboration Agency held focus groups on the draft law of Georgia on Vocational Education in Gori, Kutaisi, Ozurgeti, and Bolnisi.

Representatives of local governments, the staff of educational resource centers (units of the Ministry of Education and Science), staff of educational institutions of primary, secondary, and higher education, representatives of mass media and local NGOs, and other interested people participated in the focus groups. From 12 to 14 people participated in each meeting, resulting in a total of 54 participants in each town.

A special questionnaire was prepared by TI Georgia, which, together with the draft, was dispersed among the participants in advance. As a result, each participant had the opportunity to become familiar with the draft and to form his/her viewpoint and approach to the draft beforehand.

Opinions expressed by the participants of the focus groups

The main positive sides of the law

Participants positively assessed the main objective of the draft and noted that the current rate of high unemployment means that rehabilitation and development of the vocational education system and bringing it in line with European standards should be one of the main priorities of government policy.

Participants had positive comments on the following topics:

1. The assurance of competitiveness of vocational education implied in the law, which, in the future, will ensure the further improvement of qualifications in the unified Bologna space;
2. The differentiation of professional education into the following steps: vocational education, higher education, and informal education;
3. The connection of the professional education system with the labor market, namely, involving employers in the elaboration of educational policy and in forming professional standards, which will guarantee the effectiveness of vocational education and, consequently, increase the perspective of job placement for skilled workers.
4. The acknowledgement of informal education, which will assist in job placement of those people who gained professional skills individually and not in the educational institutions.

At the meetings it was underscored that the existing educational system cannot meet the demands of the labor market. It is not able to provide the labor market with highly qualified staff and, as a result, the system is useless and does not have any social prestige.

According to the participants' opinions, the new law must provide (a) a solution for the unemployment problem by preparing highly qualified personnel and (b) the formation of educational institutions with specified programs for the sectoral development of regions.

¹ The focus group report represents only the ideas of the participants. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily represent position of TI Georgia or the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

Comments on the Draft

During the focus group sessions, participants also pointed out the disadvantages of the draft. They expressed their dissatisfaction with the following topics:

1. The complicated language of the draft: according to participants, the chapter defining terminology needs further refinement. Also, the general language of the draft should be simplified in order to make it more clear and comprehensible;
2. The lack of detailed regulation of professional education system: there is no detailed enumeration of mechanisms to regulate professional education in the draft. According to the draft, ministerial orders should be used to resolve different issues;
3. The vagueness in some chapters of the draft: a number of statements are not appropriately formulated, making them unclear and ambiguous, which will lead to serious problems in the future;
4. The removal of certain components of secondary education in professional education institutions: according to the participants, the acquisition of general knowledge is necessary in professional institutions to give students the opportunity to decide if they proceed with their studies in this direction or choose higher education. The government must be interested in raising the level of general knowledge of the population in order to further strengthen the state.
5. The obligations set for vocational schools: the draft obliges extant vocational schools to acquire a license before the start of the academic year 2008-2009 in order to continue their activities.

Additional viewpoints were expressed on the following issues:

a) State control of the professional education system

The opinion of the participants on the state control of professional education system differed. Some of them supposed that the involvement of different governmental bodies in the controlling process promoted effective mutual control and limited the opportunity to violate the law. Others argued against the scheme presented in the draft and noted that in the supervision process only the Ministry of Education and Science should participate with the help of its territorial units (educational resource centers), which have quite sufficient resources to fulfill this obligation. In their view, this kind of control will be more flexible and accordingly more effective.

During the discussion, some of the participants were dissatisfied with the prerogative of the Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Affairs to conduct state control on Legal Entities under Public Law (national professional agencies) and noted that the Ministry of Education and Science should take part in this process.

b) Accreditation and financing of vocational schools

The position of the participants on the accreditation and financing of vocational schools corresponded. They agreed that all vocational schools must be obliged to undergo institutional as well as programmatic certification. They pointed out that the financing of vocational education must be conducted totally by the state by a voucher system.

According to the participants, programmatic certification will improve the quality of training and retraining of vocational schools, will promote competitiveness among these schools, and, consequently, will ensure that they will prepare skilled workers. Difficult socio-economic conditions prevent a large part of the population from financing their education and, participants

believe, vocational schools will have no influence in reducing the level of unemployment in the country unless professional education is financed by the state.

c) *Lack of skilled personnel*

At almost all the meetings the participants underlined the lack of highly qualified personnel in the Georgian labor market and even the non-existence of skilled workers in a number of spheres. They expressed their hope that the new legislation would solve this problem by establishing effective vocational education.

d) *Sphere of governmental control*

According to the draft, the government, with the help of the Ministry of Education and Science, will control the professional education system as well as detailed inspection in a number of cases. Some opinions were expressed in regard to this issue. The participants considered that the draft must contain a detailed description of the rules according to which the ministry will conduct these functions and how it will be possible to avoid the abuse of power. According to the viewpoints of some participants, institutions of professional education should enjoy academic independence and the right to introduce different European trainings and retraining programs.

e) *Effectiveness and expected results of activities considered in the draft*

The participants noted the need to evaluate the effectiveness of the activities considered in the draft. At this stage, the population fears that introducing a new system of vocational education will present certain difficulties and will take a considerable amount of time.

1.2. Review of European Models of Professional Education

The united European Policy and European conception of nostrification² means that the models of vocational education in different European countries are almost the same. Georgia's desire to become a part of the European education sphere makes it very important to become familiar with the experience of European countries. TI Georgia's review thus considers the vocational education systems in European countries. The experience of the Baltic States in vocational education and the models of this system together with the educational models of Germany and France have been considered in the review.

Vocational education in the Baltic States (Lithuania and Latvia) is regulated by two important Laws:

- The Law on Education
- The Law on Vocational Education

Baltic legislation on professional education has been formed in accordance with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISDED), which was adopted at UNESCO's general conference in 1997. There are three levels of education according to this model:

- Primary
- Secondary
- Higher

Regarding the Lithuanian law on vocational education, these different levels of professional qualification give a theoretical and practical foundation for conducting a certain amount of complex work.

² Nostrification means the acceptance of foreign university degrees as equal with native.

According to the above-mentioned law, primary vocational education and training is a basic step of education, representing the first level of professional qualification. Secondary vocational education and training is a 4-year study program and is intended for those students who have already successfully completed compulsory education in vocational schools. After fulfillment of this program, students have the opportunity to proceed to the third level.

Two or three-year programs of vocational education are intended for those students who have completed the general education program. They are able to gain the second level of professional qualification. The studying process might last for two years and result in awarding the third level qualification or it might last from one to two years and result in awarding a diploma of secondary education.

General programs of vocational education and retraining last three years and are intended for those students who have no basic education (after finishing 7th forms but until the age 15). In addition to acquiring the first and second level of vocational education, students have the opportunity to finish general education.

Despite the vocational education program, all pupils are obliged to pass a final exam, only after which a pupil receives the following types of diploma:

- Diploma of secondary vocational education and training;
- Certificate of general vocational education and training;
- Certificate of primary vocational education and training.

Pupils who are awarded secondary vocational education diplomas have the right to continue their studies in institutions of higher education.

In the Baltic States there is a level of vocational education that follows secondary vocational education (the fourth level of ISCED). Continual and job placement-oriented vocational education comes under this category. The duration of this program is from one to two years. Also professional retraining and development programs exist (their duration is not more than 160 academic hours).

The aim of the above-mentioned program is to gain certain types of skills. The academic process is identical to the academic process of secondary vocational education and training.

State regulation of the above-mentioned sphere is conducted by the Ministry of Education and its subordinate, the Center of Vocational Education and Retraining. These two bodies ensure the implementation of state policy in the spheres of primary, general, secondary, continuous, and job placement-oriented vocational education.

The experience of Germany in the sphere of vocational education is also very interesting and important, especially the achievements of the reform which recently occurred in this sphere. The Law on Vocational Education was adopted by the Bundestag in April 1, 2005 and then ratified by Bundesrat.

The main advantage of the given law is considered to be the correspondence of a professional education and training system with modern requirements. One major change was the introduction of a multi-stage system of final exams. Establishing of a system of nostrification for professional education and training implemented outside the country is also an issue of great importance.

The new concept distinguishes professional education and professional training. All the schools of professional training (X/XI forms) enable the students to gain a certificate of general education. As a rule, professional training is considered to be of a higher level than secondary education and lasts for two or three years after graduation from school. A student can choose to continue studies at an institution of higher education or at a school of professional education.

Along with general secondary schools there are special schools for students with certain physical or mental defects within the system of professional education. There also exist full-time and part-time schools (primarily for X/XI forms). Professional schools may have different names such as a public school, vocational school, etc.

Professional training constitutes two parallel systems:

- Professional training system regulated by the state;
- Local commercial system of professional training.

Professional training regulated by the state is conducted at special state schools of professional training and aims to provide students with the theoretical education and professional experience necessary for obtaining a certain job. Immediately after finishing the program a certificate in accordance with the student's attendance and level is issued. The given system functions according to certain peculiarities of administrative units.

There is an interesting model of professional education in France. Due to a number of reforms, France has developed a different concept of professional education based on the students' abilities.

In France the system of higher (secondary) education is divided into two stages. Since 1975 the so called Unified College System has existed in France. According to this system, students between 11 and 15 years of age study together for three years. From the third year they are split into different groups according to the general, professional, and technical features. A differentiation like this gives the students the opportunity to prepare for the entrance exams for a bachelor's degree. Usually, students take the above-mentioned exam as soon as they are 18 years old.

In France general management of professional schools is conducted by the Ministry of Education, while the Ministry of Health administers special professional educational centers for students with mental or physical defects.

Apart from general professional schools tending to prepare students for particular work positions, there are centers of specialized professional training. Students can apply to such schools from the age of 16.

France possesses interesting experience in connection with professional education and training in the form of special professional training classes (often programs) that are integrated into the educational system of high schools. Professional programs like these are classes such as CLIS, SEGPA, and CAP, which enable youth dismissed from a high school to gain basic skills in different professional fields.

Professional Education Funding System

Statistics on the demand for professional education

Governing Bodies of Professional Education and Distribution of Functions

Funding of vocational education in the Baltic States is determined according to the vocational education curriculum and the number of students. Schools of professional education are mainly funded by the state budget. Additional financial sources consist of adults' fee for studying and money received due to the training of the unemployed. According to the example of Latvia 6.8% of the country's Gross National Product was spent on the sphere of general education, 0.7% of which was spent on professional education.

The Ministry of Education is the responsible body for professional education and training and, accordingly, it is in charge of distributing finances among the schools of professional education. According to the statistics, 97% of the budget allotted for professional training is used for teachers' salaries and school supplies, and the remaining 3% is meant for innovations in the sphere of vocational education.

Additional financing for professional education comes through special programs of the European Union in the Baltic countries, such as:

- Aid (assistance) program for professional training for the countries of Central Europe – 1,500,000 dollars;
- Leonardo De Vinci program of the European Union – 1,150,000 dollars;
- Financing by the training fund of Europe – 1,500,000 dollars.

As for the popularity of professional education in Latvia, in 2001 and 2002 38.8% of high school students were studying in institutes of professional education. At the same time in Lithuania, 32.2% of the student population was earning a professional education degree.

In Latvia there are three ministries responsible for professional education: the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Social Insurance and Culture. The Ministry of Education is responsible for creating and implementing a concept of professional education. It also initiates a number of legislative acts in the sphere of professional education. The same ministry is in charge of overseeing the designing of training program. The Ministry of Health takes over the sphere of professional training, while the Ministry of Agriculture manages subordinate professional schools.

In Lithuania, professional education is financed from the state budget. Financing of professional education constituted 1.8% of the state budget, 1.3% of which is designated for college-type schools. 10.92% of the funds allotted for general education are spent on professional education. Large sums of money are spent on professional training as well. According to the data from 2001, 46.6% of expenses initially assigned for determining the policy of the current labor Market was spent on training and retraining programs.

The additional funding allocated from the EU financial sources is also very important. In projects on professional and higher education, so-called "Tempus," the sum dedicated to vocational education exceeded 25 million.

In Germany the system of professional education is popular. The students applying to professional education after graduating from schools (basically from 16 to 19 years of age) constitute 70% of the total number of students. Only 10% of students apply to professional education while studying at school. Statistics related to university students getting a professional education is interesting as well. In Germany, 30% of the total number of students have gained a

dual degree in professional education that means professional education plus specialized practical courses. All the above mentioned enables a student to be competitive in the labor market after getting an education.

There are two sources of financing for education in Germany: federal and local. Federal funds are allocated from the central budget of Germany and on the local level by the local budget of administrative units. Sums allotted for professional education and training from the federal budget are 5-10% more than local sources. Special dues and fees contributed by taxpayers from their salaries compose 1% of the sum needed for vocational education. In Germany international donations also serve as financial sources of professional education.

In Germany several bodies participate in administering professional education:

- The Federal Ministry of Economics;
- The Federal Ministry of Education and Science;
- The Federal Institute of Professional Education.

The above-mentioned Federal Institute of Professional Education aims to define the basic policy in the field of professional education. The Institute is an independent body governed by a special council consisting of the representatives of the federal government, administrative units, professional unions, and associations. This institution determines the whole statistics of professional education, including the curriculum standard for various levels of professional education, the number of people with professional education needed for the labor market of Germany, etc.

An example of Moldova should be paid proper attention as several years ago a reform of professional education was carried out in Moldova within the project "TACIS" of the European Union. Major changes took place with regard to decentralization. Self-government units were empowered to administer schools of professional education. General administration as well as execution and implementation of policy in this sphere remained within the competence of the Ministry of Education. A special department was established in this Ministry to govern the sphere of professional education and training. The source of financing is the state budget in this case as well, and in 2000 0.6% of the Gross National Product was invested in professional education. According to the statistics from 2001 concerning the popularity of professional education, the number of students having received professional education composed 35% of the total number of high school graduates.