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**THE HARMONIZATION AND EDUCATION:
SOME TENDENCIES OF THE EDUCATIONAL REFORM
IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA***

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Abstract. The Serbian society, as well as the majority of the societies in transition, show complete “openness” for globalizing influences, which, at a practical level, is realized by the implementation of the harmonization with the so-called European space. Therefore, the total developmental policy is perceived as exclusively the process of accelerated adjustment to international standards. The educational policies are just a part of the total developmental policy and follow the same developmental logic: they accept trans-national standards. The educational policies, however, even in the context of harmonization may establish the balance between the growing external requests and own educational tradition if they use the harmonization as an incentive for the actual modernization of education. The paper presents individual tendencies of the reform of education in the Republic of Serbia after 2000. The descriptive-analytical method was used in the paper.

Key words: harmonization; education; reform; educational policies; Republic of Serbia.

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**СОГЛАСОВАНИЕ И ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ:
НЕКОТОРЫЕ ТЕНДЕНЦИИ РЕФОРМЫ ОБРАЗОВАНИЯ
В РЕСПУБЛИКЕ СЕРБИЯ**

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Аннотация. Сербское общество, как и большинство переходных обществ, демонстрирует полную «открытость» для глобализирующих влияний, что на практическом уровне демонстрируется реализацией согласования с так называемым «Европейским пространством». Поэтому общая политика развития воспринимается исключительно как процесс ускоренной адаптации к международным стандартам. Политика в области образования является лишь частью общей политики

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развития и придерживается той же логики развития: принятие транснациональных стандартов. Однако политика в области образования, даже в контексте согласования, может установить и баланс между растущими внешними требованиями и собственной образовательной традицией, если они используют согласование в качестве стимула для реальной модернизации образования.

В статье представлены некоторые тенденции реформы образования в Республике Сербия после 2000 года. В работе были использованы описательно-аналитические методы.

Ключевые слова: согласование; образование; реформа; политика в области образования; Республика Сербия.

Introduction. The establishment of the so-called global society which differs at local levels only in the level of dedication to specific practices of the imposition of established values and the implementation of the adopted ideological concept, resulted in the collapse of a whole series of orders, which from the aspect of humanity, sustainability, and righteousness represented a higher level of the reached quality of life from the civilizational aspect.

Economic principles were transmitted to the sphere of education and *profitability* becomes the basic criterion of the “successful” functioning of the educational system. The economic postulates are declared as universal values which, according to the new-age ideologists enable the survival of the humanity. But what kind of humanity?

The fundament of the global order is based on the making of profit: the humanity is fit into criteria emerging from the economic sphere. Under the influence of super-national power centers, which use as instruments for governing of the mankind the states in the political and military sphere and in the economic sphere international corporations –“the fundamental goal of the existence” is to increase the profit. Humanistic ideas and goals whose realization would result in the transformation of the existing dominant socioeconomic order which self-reproduces an entire range of inequalities a) are limited by a whole range of regulations which establish the existing order and b) are expelled from the public discourse as unacceptable relicts of the past. The provision of the realization of the interests which are in function of the general wellbeing is in so-called contemporary societies by the powerful

corporative world delegitimized as “unprofitable action”, since their only concern is – the concern how to make profit.

The sector of education is nowadays observed as the space which should be taken from the state since it provides the opportunity of profit-making and the opportunity of the spreading of the ideological narrative which suits the interests of the capital. The entrance into the institutionalized education enables the participants of the educational process the preparation for life and work, however, in a less visible, the educational institutions participate in the realization of primary goals of so-called power centers: (a) the reproduction of the ruling ideology, (b) self-reproduction of the governing structures, (c) profit.

The old notion of education as the manner of knowing the world and of the preparation for its progressive change apparently belongs to the forgotten ideas of Enlightenment. Nowadays it is replaced by the postmodern representation of education as the manner of training for the performance of certain tasks which provide the opportunity to the individual to participate in the competition at the labor market.

Research results and discussion.

The European integrations and educational reform. The nineties of the twentieth century represented a challenge for societies with far better orders than the former Yugoslav society, which went through the experience of war, collapse of the unique state space and the creation of isolated post-socialist entities which tended to establish the new system based on neoliberalism via long-term transition. The transition, which was the name of the

transitional period from the socialist into capitalist system, went from the late eighties until today through various stages which completely changed its economy, politics and culture, mostly by devastating the resource which were at the disposal of the society (Mitrovic, 2009: 263). For the reasons of the introduction of the system with multiple parties or, as this process was popularly called, *the import of democracy* and “the installation” of the free market as the highest regulatory system, the Serbian society went through privatization of the economic complexes, deindustrialization, liberalization and monetization, whose ultimate outcome was the reduction of the social product, which was close to the level of 70 percent of the social product before 1989, huge percentage of the unemployed population and among them the group of age between 18 and 35 as the most unemployed, dramatic increase of the percentage of the population living below the so-called poverty line or at the very lower limit, restrictive social politics which reduced the grants to socially endangered categories of the population and continual reduction of the public consumption which pushed beyond all endurance the health, educational and other great systems. In the social structure there was regrouping of the population in two great groups or classes, one small group of the newly rich and enormous group of the impoverished population, since the transitional changes “melted down” the middle class. There is, of course, the so-called political class, which owing to the positioning within the structures which make decisions and participate in the creation of developmental policies under the patronage of external factors such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Union and other, provide themselves with the beneficial position of the transitional winners and privilege users. It is exactly the members of the political class who are engaged in the re-design of the old structures and subsystems, including education, with the aim of their harmonization with the desired super-national structures. In the field of education in the Serbian society since 2000 there are reform processes with the purpose of the harmonization of the

Serbian educational space with so-called European educational space: at all levels of education the complex changes are undertaken and they fundamentally changed the spirit of the former education, its goals, effects, strategy, etc. The initiated processes represent multidimensional and deep processes whose effects have not reached the awareness of the public exhausted by the long-term transition and there is no serious intention to critically estimate the results of the reform of the education so far and insisting on its European dimension, whatever it represents for the political class. On the other hand, the tendencies representing the discontinuities in the development of the Serbian education are noticeable. There are many of them, but in this paper the emphasis is placed on: 1) fundamental tendencies at the level of primary and secondary education; 2) fundamental tendencies at the level of higher education; 3) alterations referring to the status of employees in the institutionalized education.

Add.1 Correlation between the European integrations and educational reforms in the Republic of Serbia. The educational policies in the European Union (EU) influence the educational policies of the national educational systems of the countries with the aim of accession to it (Pak, 2011: 198). The pre-accession processes for each country wanting to become a part of this integration represent a great challenge because it is necessary to implement many legal norms, binding for the EU, into the national legal systems. The procedure of the accession due to its duration may cause a certain *fatigue* so the Board for education and culture of the European Parliament implemented the idea to open educational programs of the EU for the third countries with the perspective of the accession so as to make them closer in the field of education to the EU. Education obtained the role of *the integration contribution within the process of accession to the EU* (Pak, 2011: 198). The creation of new educational policies and educational programs in these countries is financially supported by the EU. Therefore, the educational reforms in the member states of the EU and the states with the intention of accession to this integration are the

expression of the political will of the ruling groups of the neoliberal orientation.

Add.2 Results of the educational reform after 2000. The most visible alterations of so-called educational reforms with the European course in the Republic of Serbia are: the implementation of the preparatory preschool program for all children old enough to be included in the primary education; inclusive education of primarily children with special needs and children members of the Romani ethnicity (which has all the features of positive discrimination, i.e. affirmation in comparison to majority and other groups of population); introduction of final exams (testing) after the eighth grade which selects the primary school students in the entrance to high school; the application of the declaration of Bologna in the higher education, as well as the series of alterations referring to new roles of the educational participants (teachers, students, university students), organization of education, educational programs, social position of the employees in this sector, etc. The educational reform is implemented as a part of “the package” of the overall social changes and the changes are implemented “from above” as an expression of the political will. The legal changes in the sphere of education were proposed and created from the top political state structures, whose fundamental feature in the primary and secondary education was “to increase the efficiency of education” (Jerkovic, 2011: 182), which resulted in the emergence of the need for the critical evaluation of the educational concept in Serbia (Avramovic, 2003: 254).

By signing of the Declaration of Bologna (2006) the Republic of Serbia initiated the reform of the higher education. The fundamental reform principles are: mobility of students and teachers, efficiency of the studies, permanent evaluation, provision of the higher education quality, the university autonomy. The formal adjustment of the national higher education institution legal regulation with the European (establishment of the comparable academic titles and the implementation of the diploma supplements, the adoption of the three-level

system of studies, the acceptance of the comparable point system, adjustment of the national quality standards with the European), however, did not provide the success of the initiated reform. The Law on the higher education (2005) brought the university into a new market position (apart from the state faculties there are also private faculties), enabled significant autonomy of the higher-education institutions and the freedom in the creation of the programs of study, the Law prevented the separation into fractions of the university and its integrative functions were established (determination of unique standards of operation of all services and units, quality assurance, passing of programs of study, etc.). Institutional efforts were made to establish the so-called quality culture (The Law on higher education, 2005), (The Law on the amendments to the Law on higher education, 2010) – the National council for higher education, the Commission for accreditation and quality control, the Conference of the universities of Serbia were established. The application of the process of Bologna accomplished some positive changes (Djukic, 2006; Jerkovic, 2011). However, there are also some critical evaluations of the range of so-called Bologna heading toward the narrowing of the theoretical knowledge: “Observed from one world-historical or civilizational level, Bologna represents two steps back in comparison to the university education of the university is the community of research work and education, all with the aim of increasing the knowledge” (Markovic, 2004: 86).

Add.3 The alterations referring to the status of employees in the institutionalized education. It is noticed that in this sector the number of employees on a temporary basis is growing. The noticed tendency of the increase of the number of employees for definite period of time in education emphasizes the basic direction of the transition of the society in neoliberalism, which, as it proved globally, is deeply unjust and inhumane: it grants the legitimism to the socially created inequalities and stark polarized differentiation among the population into a small group of “winners” and vast majority of “losers”. According to the data of the

Republic Statistical Office (2011) in the Republic of Serbia during the 2011/12 school year, when it comes to the teaching staff, there were over 100,000 teachers employed in the primary, secondary and higher education. About 54 percent of all employed teachers work in the primary, approximately 31 percent in the secondary and about 15 percent in the higher education. Out of all teachers employed in the primary education, 60 percent work full working hours. In the secondary education 56 percent of teachers work full working hours and in the higher education this percentage amounts to 89 percent of teachers and associates (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia, 2012: 77-89). Teachers with different positions in education, since they are related to the collective identity “are encouraged to behave in a structural manner which leads to the cohesion within the group and the manner of establishment of the relation with others” (Nojman, 2011: 11), which results also in their mutual competition. In the sector of education the same relation is developed between employers and employees as in production: on the one hand of the barrier, there is so-called private capital (and less the state) with its needs, interest and real power to impose the corresponding education organization and on the other, the employees, who are divided into permanently employed and ever increasing group of temporarily employed (employees for a definite period of time) whose interests do not match. From this fact of the conflict of interests of two groups of employees, who are also the bearers of different identities, the creators of educational policies draw the support for “their” reforms.

The educational reform and the Finnish experience. The story about the reform of the national education in the Republic of Serbia in one part always touches upon the experience of Finland which is known as the role model in the sphere of the institutionalized education in the European Union. It is believed that Finland managed by its unique educational policy to transform itself from the country of average academic results into a country of *outstanding* educational results. The interest of the

educational experts and creators of educational policies in the Republic of Serbia for *the Finnish lessons* in the sphere of educational reforms indicate that the borrowing of someone else’s experience does not always lead to the accomplishment of the same effects. P. Sahlberg (2013) emphasizes that the success of the Finnish system of education is based on: (a) *the construction of the quality primary school* for all children financed by the public funds and it is within the competence of the local authority; (b) *the manner in which Finland received advice from the outside* with regards to its legacy in the sphere of education, which is reflected in the preservation of the good tradition, best practice and their connection with new ideas taken from others; (c) *systemic development of appropriate and incentive work conditions for teachers and directors* of the Finnish schools. What makes the key difference between the experience of Finland and other countries, as emphasized by Sahlberg, are not the programs of the teaching education of the world quality and good salary of teachers (many others have that, too), but “the fact that teachers in Finland may apply freely and without limitations their professional knowledge and judgment in their work, they have supervision over the curriculum, student knowledge assessment, teaching improvement and connection to the community” (Sahlberg, 2013: 28-29). The educational reform in the Republic of Serbia did not reach in any of the stated segments the so-called Finnish role model, on the contrary, it shows the tendency of the rejection of its own educational tradition and uncritical adoption of foreign ideas in the educational sector.

The successful Finnish educational reforms indicate the shortcomings of the reforms whose basic criteria are the market, competition, standardization, testing, more unique and faster entrance into the teaching profession, closing of schools with less success, layoff of teachers and directors without results, etc. (Hargreaves, 2013). The countries of so-called Western cultural scope implement reforms of education moving toward centralization in education creating the context in which the man-

agement structures (representatives of authorities) decide what and how will be learned and what should be taught at schools. Standardized reforms of education in the function of the market emphasize the need for reaching the same goals regardless of the culture and society in which they are implemented and they are directed primarily to the “raising of the threshold and reduction of the differences in success so as to enhance the test results in literacy and mathematics” and secondarily to the development of abilities which “do not refer to helping people reach their own goal but preparing for the realization of goals of the educational policy” (Hargreaves, 2013: 12). The Finnish educational reform on the contrary is, according to the estimation provided by Hargreaves (2013), based on the following premises: (a) Finland has its own view of the change of the education and society, it did not “borrow” the standardized vision adopted somewhere else; (b) it relies on the qualities of teachers with excellent university qualifications who are attracted by this occupation for the purposes of the social mission; (c) it has the strategy of education of students with special educational needs which is inclusive and via which almost half of the students in the country receives special help in learning at the level of the primary education; (d) it develops the awareness of teachers about the collective responsibility and common planning of the curriculum and not about the application of the prescribed curricula and the preparation of students for standardized tests prepared by the central authority; (e) it creates the connection between the educational reform, economic competition and social development – the development of the *inclusivity* (inclusion of an individual and groups into the main streams of the social life – V. T.) and *commonality*. It may be concluded that the orientation toward such educational reform is a strong support to the formation and preservation of the identity of all the participants in education. As it may also be concluded, many societies in transition, like the Serbian society, miss the opportunity to transform the harmonization of education into its actual modernization.

Conclusions. The efficient transfer of the economic logic to the area of education and acceptance of ready reform solutions characteristic for Anglo-Saxon educational policies, to be more specific, their “copying” are the landmarks which create the educational reform in the Republic of Serbia. The reform introduced many changes at different levels of education, especially in higher education, however, the quality assessment of those changes and their ultimate effects requires a more detailed continual analysis. The real estimation of the reform range requires: (a) understanding of the connection between the social context and actual educational reform; (b) critical review of the predominant orientation toward the establishment of the market regulation of education which creates the normative frame in which the *education* as a *common good* boils down to *educational policies*, i.e. the political will of the interested groups with the power to impose their personal or partial interests as general; (c) the establishment of *the conflict practice* of the characteristics of transnational educational strategies and the characteristics of the national educational strategies so as to create qualitatively *new* strategy of education – turned to a man and creation of a good spot for his life.

The idea of the common European education has fundamentally declarative request for the respect for diversity of the European societies and cultures including the specific features of their education. In the realization of this idea, the EU, however, creates the outlines of the transnational education which, by harmonization and strict regulation of educational processes relativizes the respect for diversity. If they were to “defend” the authentic European request for the respect for diversity, the reformers of the education in Serbia would have to keep the specific good characteristics of the national education emerged as the expression of a specific historical experience and educational tradition and to look for the European community on these grounds.

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